Countermovement to Marketization of Water (A comparative study between Iran and US)

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Introduction

- After 1970s: neoliberal policies in environment
- Environmental movements defined as a collective action, that focuses on the environment with the ideology of reconstruction, it constitutes a “collective protest to normative conceptions of obligation, right and reciprocity”.
Research Objective

- The comparative study of Iran with the US, one of the important centers of neoliberalism, will help reveal how these environmental movements work in two different contexts particularly in different political economies.
- The US has a democracy capitalism and Iran has a centralized state-based system
- TWO WATER TRANSFER PROJECTS
Research questions

- What are the environmental and socioeconomic reasons for the emergence of environmental movements in two different societies?
- What are the mechanisms of resistance or counter mobilization against water’s commodification in these different political economies?
Research Sites and Background

- **BATP**
  - One of the biggest water transfer projects in Iran. Designed to transfer water from Beheshtabad River to the center of Iran,
  - Includes a dam, water reservoirs, & tunnels for transferring water.
  - Proposed human consumption, agricultural development, & industrial use.
- **Ministry of Power**
- Protests & resistance (Khuzestan & Chaharmahal provinces); environmental, social, & economic threats. “Zagros e Mehraban= kind Zagros”, “Sound of Water Footsteps”
RESEARCH SITES AND BACKGROUND

- **NISP**
  - A water project which would funnel Poudre River & South Platte River water,
  - Includes dam, water reservoirs, & tunnels for transferring water.
  - Water community usage of 15 participants annually
  - Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern Water)

- Protests & resistances: “Save the Poudre” has been fighting NISP for some years: the project is seen as a threat to the environment & to water quality & quantity.
Polanyi's theory ([1942] 2001) of “double movements” societies’ resistance to liberal market in nature

- “Fictitious commodities”: labor, land, and money.
- Assignment of human life and environment to a market as commodities is tantamount to their destruction. So, society is responding to this destruction and this process is called the “double movement”.
- Countermovements are “movements for social protection”
Gramsci: social movements, hegemony and counter hegemony

“Hegemony”: the political economic and sociocultural forms: both “Consent” & “Coercion” (the dominant groups & the subordinate groups in the process of exercising power.)

The state has the legitimated tools

Two ideologies: ruling and the subordinate classes:

Counter hegemony: “war of positions” & “war of maneuver”
RESEARCH METHODS

- A comparative case study
- Qualitative methods: interview and secondary analysis of data/documents and reports on the projects
- *Data collection* (interviews & Secondary Analysis of Data: documentary study)
- Participant Selection: purposeful snowball sampling of environmentalists, stakeholders and local farmers, water and nature specialists, local managers, managers and experts who are working for project

NISP : 20 interviews
BATP: 26 interviews
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:
Environmental dislocations, the main loser doesn’t have a voice! (1of 7)

NISP
► _Environmental degradation
► _Socioeconomic problems
Shift and Shaft

BATP
► _Environmental degradation
► _Socioeconomic problems
Systematic dispossession and deprivation
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: Countermovement NISP (2of 7)

Forming protective countermovement

1. Creating counter discourse

- Enhancing public awareness
  - Public education and enhancing public awareness, letters and petitions, public meetings

“I do not necessary agree with everything that they [STP] say but I think it is important that they provide awareness of the problem by writing letters to the newspapers or showing up to public meetings and speaking about it. They just increase the knowledge of people. So, People can make up their own decision and be better informed”

Website: [http://www.savethepoudre.org/](http://www.savethepoudre.org/) what “the Dam truth”. The main slogan: “Frankly, my dear, I don’t want a dam”!
2. Practical challenge with power

- Using loud voices
- Using judicial system:

“here, in America, at least there is a process, you might even lose but at least there is a process”
3. Development ideology and resistance ideology

“there are billions of dollars on the table”

“we changed some parts of the project and it does the mitigation”

15 years delay!

“NISP is sort of like the big giant elephant in the room that has all the strength and power and I am trying to minimize how much damage that elephant is going to do”.

““They spent millions of dollars they've actually wasted millions of dollars by not doing good scientific analysis”.”
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: Countermovement, BATP (5of 7)

Forming protective countermovements

1. Creating counter discourse

- Enhancing public awareness

It has facilitated collective actions and information sharing.

“We do not talk just about negative impact of the project, we try to say people why they are doing this project. We talk about economic benefits that a specific group will get and their corruption in our economic system, we talk about private companies that getting advantages from this project and how for them Iranian society and environment are not important. We talk about political economic of this project”
2. Practical challenge with power

- Using loud voices,
- The judicial system
- Street protests

_Social protests: Street protests, Human chains around the Karun to support the river, (30,000)
3. Suppression ideology and resistance ideology

Concealment and lack of transparency/ Use of force/Suppression

Resistance to protect their life and natural resource / a national resistance: Country plunder, chanting “Backs to the enemy, face to the homeland” (Friday prayer)
**DISCUSSION: Forms of resistances—different wars with different neoliberal states**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political economies</th>
<th>Coercion</th>
<th>Co-optation</th>
<th>Consent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist democracy (US)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low/Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td>Centralized statist (Iran)</td>
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Figure 1. Mechanisms that capitalist democracy and centralized statist use for water projects
DISCUSSION: *Forms of resistances—different wars with different neoliberal states*

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<tr>
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<th>Mobilization beyond civil society</th>
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<td>Low/ Medium (Safeguards in Iran are in minimum)</td>
<td>High</td>
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</table>

*Figure 2. Mechanisms that countermovements use in two different political economies*
CONCLUSION

- Neoliberalism can involve different social groups in counter movements

the exploitation of nature and the destruction of social life/

- In Colorado: was successful to form a “war of position”

Challenging with dominant discourse

- In Iran: was successful to form a “war of position” and have potential to join to other social movements form a “war of maneuver”: Revolutionary face

similar to some environmental movements in Latino countries / social changes.
Thank you!

www.SaveThePoudre.org