



Eco-governmentality revisited: Mapping divergent subjectivities among Integrated Water Resource Management experts in Paraguay

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I adopt Q methodology to engage critically, constructively, and empirically with Michael Goldman's (2004, 185) thesis that the introduction of standardized models of environmental governance inscribes on developing county officials an "eco-governmentality" that is both "hegemonic" and "neoliberal". In particular, I ask what it is that people trained in one of the more pervasive models of market-oriented environmental rule-making – Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) – believe in when they indicate that they support an "integrated" approach to water management. More specifically, I am interested in what it means to IWRM experts in Paraguay to be involved in a policy and planning environment in which it is virtually impossible to avoid entanglement with discourses and technologies of neoliberal rule. The combination of Q method with semi-structured interviews and participant observation techniques permits an empirical examination of the processes of ecogovernmental transformation at multiple scales – from patterns of convergence and divergence in the conceptual mappings of local officials, to coping strategies that individuals adopt in order to sustain themselves and their projects in the face of changing (ecogovernmentalizing) institutional and political contexts, to transformations in regulatory regimes.

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1. Introduction

In this paper I adopt Q methodology to engage critically, constructively, and empirically with Michael Goldman's (2004, 185) thesis that the introduction of standardized models of environmental governance inscribes on developing county officials an "eco-governmentality" that is both "hegemonic" and "neoliberal" (see also Agrawal, 2005a). In particular, I ask what it is that people trained in one of the more pervasive models of market-oriented environmental governance – Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) – believe in when they indicate that they support an "integrated" approach to water management. To address this question, I use the findings from a Q study and semi-structured interviews conducted with 24 Paraguayan state, NGO, and civil society actors who have been trained in the IWRM approach (see Stephenson, 1935a, 1935b; Brown, 1980; Robbins and Krueger, 2000 on Q method; see UNCED, 1992 on IWRM).¹

Geographers have been at the forefront of efforts to use grounded case studies to make sense of the procedures and pathways through which fragments of market-discipline infiltrate landscapes and governmental practices across the globe (McCarthy and

Prudham, 2004, e.g. Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Valdivia, 2005; Bakker, 2007; Himley, 2008; see Brenner et al., 2010a for summaries). A recent turn in such scholarship is the repositioning of neoliberalism as an ongoing, messy and, hence, perpetually unfinished process of regulatory reform versus a coherent style of government (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck and Theodore, 2012; Ong, 2006; Himley, 2008; Brenner et al., 2010a; Bakker, 2010). The gist of this 'neoliberalization approach' is that the ways that neoliberal projects of rule unfold in different places is a function of (a) ideologically pure yet operationally vague projects which aim to integrate market-discipline and environmental governance; (b) the sui generis socio-natural and political economic attributes of the different sites where these projects touch down; (c) the experimental translation work that specific sociopolitical actors must do to produce, modify, and cope with the terms of these market-oriented rule-making regimes (Bakker, 2005; Ong, 2006; Himley, 2008; Brenner et al., 2010a). One of the main themes of these studies is that much can be learned about both neoliberalization processes and the "geographical nature of environmental governance itself" by examining the practices and logics that guide this translation work (Himley, 2008, 446; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Goldman, 2004; Bakker, 2007).

IWRM professionals are especially productive targets for such an investigation because by design these actors play crucial roles in shaping the endless cycles of translation, destruction and adjust-

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¹ Hereafter these individuals are referred to as "IWRM professionals", "IWRM experts", and "IWRM actors".

ment that accompany neoliberal reform projects like IWRM (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Bakker, 2007; Peck and Theodore, 2012; Brenner et al., 2010a). The drive to train Paraguayan IWRM professionals is motivated by international efforts to rationalize the management and development of two related trans-boundary water systems: (1) The Pilcamayo, Paraguay, and Parana rivers, which define Paraguay's borders on three sides and converge in its southwest corner to form the La Plata River; (2) the Guaraní aquifer, one of the world's biggest reservoirs of fresh water, which underlies much of eastern Paraguay and significant parts of Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina (GEF, 2001, 2004a; AlterVida, 2002). Not only are IWRM experts those actors in whom one would most expect to see evidence of Goldman's "eco-governmentalities", then, they are also those charged with translating the IWRM policy model into a coherent, Paraguay-appropriate set of environmental policies and practices.

Below, following brief reviews of IWRM and neoliberalization literature, I combine Q method-based mappings of IWRM experts' environmental subjectivities with interview data to intervene in ongoing debates regarding the governmentalizing effects of neoliberalization processes (Brenner et al., 2010a; Castree, 2008b). Star and Griesemer's (1989) concept of "boundary objects" – representational technologies that make it possible for social actors with heterogeneous interests and backgrounds to work together on projects – informs my interpretation of the results of factor and ethnographic analyses and my engagement with Goldman's arguments about eco-governmentality. Particularly in the Paraguayan case, where IWRM officials represent both the agencies of the "rolled-out" state and the organizations and interests supposed to fill the resulting regulatory void (NGOs and private actors), knowing what it means to these parties to be involved in IWRM projects can teach us important lessons about how individuals interact with and modify neoliberal programs (Ong, 2007; Li, 2007; Himley, 2008; Brenner et al., 2010a; Bakker, 2010). The point here is not to confirm or deny that the markets have "won the war" or to challenge Goldman's concept of "eco-governmentality". Rather it is to call attention to the different rationalities, interests, and technologies involved in making market-oriented governance schemes forceful – not necessarily "real" – in Paraguayan watersheds.

2. The IWRM policy model

Ineffective management of the world's watersheds is regarded as a grave threat to global biodiversity and human development (UNCED, 1992; World Bank, 1993, 1994; GEF, 2004a). Since the publication of Agenda 21, the so-called blueprint for global cooperation on social and environmental problems that emerged from the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, international efforts to promote sustainable development have become more and more focused on developing and disseminating governmental technologies that will improve how watersheds are governed. As multilateral finance institutions like the World Bank began to spin off environmentally-focused lending agencies like the Global Environment Facility (established in 1991) and the Global Water Partnership (established in 1996) throughout the 1990s, there arose a strong demand for management techniques, measurement tools, and discourses that could be applied in developing countries in order to "maximize... economic and social welfare without compromising the sustainability of vital environmental systems" (GWP, 2010). In this Post-Washington-Consensus context, IWRM has come to be regarded as the best approach to dealing with contemporary water management issues (UNCED, 1992; World Bank, 1993; GWP, 2010).

While the intent of introducing IWRM to a country like Paraguay is to generate specific economic outcomes – "maximization

of economic welfare" – IWRM is first and foremost an actionable rule-making model. Put simply, the IWRM model consists of a bundle of concepts and methods intended to make resource management and development planning more efficient, profitable, environmentally benign, and equitable. At the core of the IWRM concept-methods bundle is the assumption that projects to rule and improve the environment must focus on watershed-scale management and be science-based, market oriented, and participatory (UNCED, 1992, Ch. 18; GEF, 2004a, 2004b).

In practice, adoption of the IWRM model entails modifications to both the structure of existing governance arrangements and the attitudes and behaviors of a range of social actors (UNCED, 1992; GEF, 2004b; GWP, 2009, 2010). Perhaps the most significant of the structural modifications is the formal opening of governmental processes to new actors, such as NGOs, scientists, and local resource users, each of whom have unique and frequently conflicting political-economic and environmental interests. Formation of IWRM professionals is intended to reverse decades of politically-motivated rule-making and development planning in Paraguay and the other countries that share and rely on trans-boundary watersheds for multiple and often competing purposes – e.g. identity, drinking, industry, irrigation, hydroelectricity, and transport (Abbate, 2002; GEF, 2004a; World Bank, 2004). The imperative that IWRM training places on integrating market discipline into watershed-scale, multi-sectoral governance arrangements versus management according to political-administrative boundaries can be understood as an effort to work around the covetous ineptitude of state agencies and to neutralize the destabilizing effects that unexpected swings in political power have on environmental governance and development projects (World Bank, 2004; GWP, 2009; abcColor, 2012).

2.1. IWRM in Paraguay

For IWRM to take root in a Paraguay, a country whose name in the indigenous Guaraní language means "from the water", has required work on two related fronts: (1) introduction of new rules and planning regimes adapted from the IWRM-model; (2) training and experimentation with IWRM-based measurement and representational technologies. In 2002, the World Bank, GEF, and the UNDP, the UNDP and their regional and Paraguayan subsidiaries initiated the first in a series of projects designed to bring the management of Paraguayan watersheds into alignment with the core precepts of IWRM (GEF, 2001, 2004a). A key element of the GEF's project, known as the "Global Environmental Facility/Intergovernmental Commission for the La Plata River Basin" project, or the GEF/ICC initiative, was to train state, NGO, and civil society actors involved in development and environmental planning in Paraguay in the theory and methods of IWRM. Training included professional conferences and workshops focused on IWRM concepts and techniques, including a 2007 IWRM short course held in Luque, Paraguay, which I participated in as part of this study, collaborative work on GEF-funded reports about problems with existing watershed management arrangements (Abbate, 2002), and the preparation of studies that called for the adoption of IWRM-based political doctrines as the best way to secure a sustainable and prosperous future for Paraguay (GEF, 2004a, 2004b). The GEF/CIC initiative also provided funding streams to support the preparation of environmental zoning plans (POATs)² and educational materials aimed at municipal officials and Paraguayan citizens (AlterVida, 2002, 2005; Salas-Dueñas, 2003; SEAM, 2004).

² POAT stands for "Plan de Ordenamiento Ambiental Territorial" or "environmental zoning plan".

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