



The hydropolitical Cold War: The Indus Waters Treaty and state formation in Pakistan



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ABSTRACT

This paper develops the framework of the “developmentalist passive revolution” to analyze the politics of water development during the Cold War. This framework is developed by drawing on Marxist geopolitics and critical water geography, and is offered as a way to facilitate comparative analysis of engineering and nationalism in the context of Cold War hydropolitics. The concrete historical engagements of the paper relate to the signing of The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 between Pakistan and India and the associated Indus Basin Plan to transform the Pakistani waterscape. What historical and geopolitical-economic conditions enabled the signing of the IWT? What legacies did the IWT have for state formation in Pakistan? Drawing on the negotiation records of the IWT, archival materials relating to Pakistani river development during the 1960s, and fieldwork conducted in Pakistan in 2012, this paper argues that Cold War hydropolitics are best analyzed through the cultural and economic interactions of asymmetrically empowered developmentalist state elites at multiple scales.

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Pakistan and India appeared to be on the brink of war over the Indus river system for more than a decade after formal independence of both states from British rule in 1947. The crises seemed averted when the World Bank (the Bank) mediated the signing of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in Karachi on September 19, 1960. Remarkably, the IWT has governed Indus waters sharing between rivals Pakistan and India for over half a century without interruption. While the treaty is often analyzed for insights on inter-state conflict and cooperation (Alam, 2002; Salman, 2008; Wolf, 2007; Zawahri, 2009) its significance should be examined at multiple and interconnected scales (Haines, 2014b; Mustafa, 2013). On the global scale, the IWT emerged out of a context of the Cold War, uneven geographical development, and rapid decolonization. What specific geopolitical and geoeconomic conditions enabled the IWT? Along with allocating Indus waters between Pakistan and India, the treaty also paved the way for the large-scale development and technological transformation of the Indus rivers in Pakistan under a plan called the Indus Basin Plan (IBP). The IBP, and the rhetoric of the ruling military dictatorship that accompanied it, had transformative social, environmental, and political effects in Pakistan during the decade of the 1960s. But Pakistan's so-called “decade of

development”, during which the IBP projects were built and promoted in nationalist rhetoric, imploded under the pressure of popular revolt in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This revolt eventually toppled military rule and ended with the bloody secession of the nation's most populous region. How did the IWT and its associated river development program shape state formation in Pakistan, and what have been the cultural and ideological legacies for water development in the country?

This paper develops the theoretical framework of the “developmentalist passive revolution” to approach these questions. The framework responds to a more general question: how should the complex geopolitical, economic, and ideological causes and effects of Cold War hydropolitics (Ekbladh, 2010; Sneedon & Fox, 2006, 2011; Sneedon, 2012) be theorized and narrated by geographers and historians? This paper argues that Cold War hydropolitics, the term I use for the numerous geopolitical conflicts and contradictions catalyzed by modernizing hydraulic infrastructural projects during the third quarter of the 20th century, are best analyzed through a framework that links the geopolitical economy of the Cold War with the process of state formation in the postcolonial context. My sources include the negotiation records of the IWT (located in the World Bank Archives in Washington, D.C.), archival materials relating to Pakistani river development in the 1960s and fieldwork conducted in Pakistan in 2012. While the IWT negotiation records have been analyzed in the literature (Alam, 2002), they

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are approached from a novel theoretical perspective in this paper. Drawing on critical water geography and the Marxist geopolitical concept of the passive revolution, the paper provides scalar sensitivity to the analysis of uneven development, nationalism, and water development. I offer the framework of the developmentalist passive revolution as a way to enable comparative analysis of Cold War hydropolitics and to facilitate the theorization of the connections between hydraulic engineering and nationalism in the context of Cold War hydropolitics.

In what follows, the paper's theoretical contributions are situated at the intersection of critical water geography and Marxist geopolitics. Drawing on Gramscian approaches to international relations, this first section develops the framework of the developmentalist passive revolution. Next, I detail the historical and geopolitical-economic conditions of the IWT by reading the negotiation history of the IWT with special reference to the Cold War calculations of diplomatic elites. The third section interrogates the history of Pakistani economic development in the 1960s through an examination of projects funded as supplements to the IWT. Next I discuss the ambivalent after-lives of Cold War developmentalist nationalism as it coalesces as an ideology of water development in current-day Pakistan. I conclude by suggesting that theorizing engineers and technocrats as agents of developmentalist passive revolution deepens understandings of the geopolitics of water and provides a framework to enable comparative analyses of the hydropolitical Cold War.

Developmentalist passive revolutions

Elites from decolonizing states engaged with development models, ideologies, and capital from industrialized capitalist states during the hydropolitical Cold War. Approaching the complexity of this situation requires an analytic framework that integrates the geopolitical analysis of global capitalism with the politics of river development. This section develops such a framework, the developmentalist passive revolution, by drawing on critical water geography and Marxist geopolitics. The following sections demonstrate and deepen the framework by explaining the Cold War context of Pakistani state formation and by drawing on the case study of the Indus Waters Treaty and the associated Indus Basin Plan.

Critical water geography understands rivers as complex socio-technical processes. Generative insights from the field include the notion of water development as a major symbolic, material, and technical aspect of modernization (Kaika, 2006; Swyngedouw, 1999), the scalar politics of water development projects and technical discourses (Bakker, 1999; Cohen & Bakker, 2014; Harris & Alatout, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2007), and the hybrid nature of waterscapes as a simultaneously ecological, economic, and technical process (Linton and Budds, 2014; Mustafa, 2013; Swyngedouw, 1999, 2007, 2013, 2014). Critical water geographers remind us that rivers, especially transboundary rivers, are not simply flows of water. Rather, as discursively constructed objects of development, they are made and remade through power-laden political and technical action. Rivers continue to be heavily targeted by development projects today. But the attention states and planners gave to rivers reached its historical height during the Cold War period, when many of the world's roughly 40,000 large dams were built (Conca, 2006).

Water geographers and historians have analyzed water development in the Cold War context in watersheds around the world, including in Southeast Asia (Sneddon, 2012), South Asia (Cullather, 2010; Ekbladh 2010; Klingensmith 2007), the Middle East (Alatout, 2011; Sneedon & Fox, 2011), and Europe (Kaika, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2007, 2014). This work constitutes a rich collection

of theoretically informed case studies. What is lacking, however, is a framework that allows us to see individual cases of hydro-development and hydropolitics as connected through the shared ideological, geopolitical, and geo-economic context of the Cold War. Antonio Gramsci's concept of the passive revolution, as it has been reworked by Marxist theorists of international relations, provides the elements of such a framework.

Gramsci's (1971) use of the term "passive revolution" shifted over time and in relation to the topic under inquiry. Gramsci deployed the concept as a "criterion of interpretation" and as a "necessary critical corollary" to the methodology developed by Karl Marx to analyze the dynamics and contradictions of capitalist accumulation (114). Rather than bracketing the question of how capitalist economic power attains political power and legitimacy, as Marx often did in his economic writings, Gramsci developed the concept of the passive revolution to analyze the role of state power in a capitalist society within an inter-state system. A passive revolution transforms the conditions of production "from above", even while neutralizing radical political opposition "from below". Gramsci (119–120) argued that

... there is a passive revolution involved in the fact that through the legislative intervention of the State, and by means of the corporative organization, relatively far-reaching modifications are being introduced into the country's economic structure in order to accentuate the "plan of production" element; in other words, that socialisation and cooperation in the sphere of production are being increased, without however touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and control of) individual and group appropriation of profit.

A passive revolution thus designates state intervention aimed at developing domestic productive forces *without* changing the composition of the state elite. Passive revolution is a "top-down" effort to advance a region economically while maintaining the political status quo. "Passive" in this context does *not* mean "inactive" or "non-violent". It refers instead to the muted quality of popular support enjoyed by state elites. What distinguishes passive revolution as a form of state formation is 1) intense state involvement in remaking what Gramsci referred to as the "world of production" and 2) that the direction and ideological justification of state involvement is carried out by traditional elites and "traditional intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971, *passim*). The framework of passive revolution thus examines capitalist accumulation as a necessarily historical and political process.

The concept of passive revolution is useful for the analysis of Cold War hydropolitics for three main reasons. First, it provides the conceptual grounds on which we can build "incorporated" or "relational" comparisons of Cold War hydropolitics. Incorporated or relational comparisons do not contrast case studies as discrete, atomistic entities, but rather as fragments that are produced by, and can reveal something about, a larger process or trend (Hart, 2014; McMichael, 1990). There are features of the Cold War period that justify analyzing individual cases of hydropolitics through a relational comparison. These features will be drawn out through an in-depth analysis of the IWT in the following section. Second, the Gramscian conceptualization of the state as a *node* embedded in the multi-scalar flows of global political economy, rather than as a hierarchical level, lends itself to a flexible multi-scaled theoretical framework that does not slip into methodological nationalism (Hart, 2014; Morton, 2010). The passive revolution enables analysis of state formation in the context of geographically uneven economic development at the global scale (e.g. Allinson & Anievas, 2010; Gray, 2011; Hart, 2014; Morton, 2007, 2010). Third, when deployed with a Gramscian sensibility, the passive revolution

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