

Transnational strategies of the anti-dam movement in Brazil: Linking environmental problems with the human rights agenda

This paper focuses on protests against the exploitation of natural resources in Brazil. The expansion of energy production (both renewable energy and fossil fuels) for domestic consumption is a cornerstone of Brazil's development policy. The rationale for this strategy is the long-standing aim to decrease dependence on energy imports as well as facilitating regional integration through infrastructure and energy investment. The focus on renewable energy (hydro-electricity and bio-fuels) also supports the government's ambition to champion sustainable development internationally and export these methods and technologies to other developing countries. However, these policies have also generated opposition and protest as well as having mobilised people against, for example, the expansion of hydro-electric dams and amendments to the Forest Code (Código Florestal), which would dilute the protection of the Amazon rainforest against deforestation. With the government's strong and unrelenting emphasis on continuing natural resource exploitation, protestors have often decided to focus their protests at a local and international level, using transnational networks and strategies to raise awareness, thereby also challenging the government's environmental and human rights credentials. Through an analysis of recent environmental protests in Brazil with a particular focus on the anti-dam movement, this paper argues that together with environmental concerns protestors have effectively mobilised a human and indigenous rights agenda to challenge government energy policies. The examples demonstrate that actions and mobilisations focused on the local and international levels can challenge national government policy, particularly when activists appeal to a human and indigenous rights agenda.

Bio:

Marieke Riethof has a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Amsterdam and is a lecturer in Latin American Politics at the University of Liverpool. Her past research and publications focused on political strategies of the labour movement in Brazil, including the Latin American regional context. She is currently finishing a book manuscript on the trajectory of the Brazilian labour movement from a militant and progressive political actor to a more moderate player in the current Brazilian context. Her new research project focuses on Brazilian foreign policy in the context of international relations in Latin America. The project analyses non-traditional areas of foreign policy, including environmental politics and human rights, as part of Brazil's global agenda. Additionally, she is working on the role of transnational social movements and activism in Brazilian and Chilean politics.

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