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Constructing an Environmental State: Eco-Governmentality and Other Transnational Practices of a 'Green' World Bank

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Abstract

This article contends that the debates on the effects of "globalization" on states and state power could be enhanced by focusing on new global regulatory regimes for the environment, especially those that have recently been designed and operationalized by the World Bank in its borrowing countries. The article concentrates on both the changing structural relations within and among states, which has led to the construction of transnationalized environmental states, and the changing nature of the 'art of government,' in the Foucauldian sense. I utilize the example of World Bank interventions in the Mekong region to demonstrate how these two new dimensions of power operate. Based on ethnographic research, I argue that the World Bank's latest actions effectively target resource-based populations, account for them and the qualities of their environments through new discourses of ecological improvement, and compel them to participate in the new neoliberal process of eco-government. The science of judging these populations' needs and deficiencies becomes critical to the World Bank's interventions and investments, and gets refracted through new environmental state institutions and foreign investments designed for borrowing countries. In this way, the art of eco-government circulates and expands through multiple sites of encounter (e.g., beyond and below the nation-state) and leads to new forms of capitalist expansion and new modalities of power/knowledge.

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