

Travelling models of water

Battlefields of knowledge and ideas of change in the Middle East

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Abstract

Development and modernization policies, as they have been posed and imposed in many contexts of the Southern World, represent strong evolutionary ideologies of how other cultures should change. Modernization of water in arid places all over the Middle East did not only transfer a culturally and historically construed notion of water as H₂O: it carried a project of society and a model of political and environmental relationships, which encountered other historical ideas of water/society relationship.

Departing from an ethnography of the local conflicts around water in Jordan Valley, historic cradle of irrigation and agriculture, we shall propose the analysis of such intense changes in terms of interpretation, grafting, selection and opposition among “traits” and cultural practices.

The seminar is part of CISEPS project “**The diffusion of cultural traits**”, aiming to trigger interdisciplinary debates, emphasizing common problems and peculiarities among economics, philosophy, anthropology, geography, history, biology and many more fields. Thinking in terms of cultural traits – i.e., characters depending in some way on social learning – doesn’t imply exhaustion of cultural processes; rather, it means thinking critically to scientific models and metaphors for studying culture.

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