

THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION OF RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS AGAINST DAMS¹

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Introduction

Resistance movements against dams are struggles that oppose the disappearance of villages and rivers and all that is implied, for those who live in the areas affected, by the possibility of being displaced and losing, among other things, their land, houses, lifestyles, social relations and community fabric. For local populations, which are often rural and peripheral, facing up to the state to defend their right to keep living in their area becomes a moment of rupture in their daily lives.

A dam represents a threat for local populations and produces emotional responses in the inhabitants, which influence their response to the threat. For this reason, in order to understand these experiences, we must comprehend how they perceive the threat and what drives them to fight for defending their territories.

The framework and analytical guidance of the research is the literature on emotion and social movements (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2000, 2001, 2004; Jasper 1997, 1998, 2006a, 2006b, 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2018; Flam 2000, 2005; Flam and King 2005; Della Porta 2008; Gould 2004, 2009), which over the past twenty years has demonstrated that “emotions are part of all action, good and bad, successful and unseccessful. They are a normal part of action” (Jasper 2018, p. 11) and “are relevant to every phase of mobilization: recruitment, consolidation and dissolution” (Flam 2014, p. 315).

That emotions in sociology are understood as social, cultural and political constructs is a Hochschild’s legacy (1979, 1983), which has influenced authors such as James M. Jasper and Helena Flam. While Flam (2005), proposed a macro-political framework, Jasper (1997, 1998, 2006a, 2011, 2018) proposed a micro-political framework in order to understand protest and social movements. Following the author’s proposals, in the research I have applied several concepts belonging from Jasper’s works, such as the ‘moral shock’ (Jasper and Poulse 1995; Jasper 1997, 1998, 2006b, 2011, 2014b); and the categories of ‘moral emotions’, ‘moods’ and ‘affective commitments’ (Jasper 2011, p. 287; Jasper 2018, p. 13).

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The aim of the paper is to provide knowledge on resistance movements against dams from the point of view of ordinary people who self-organize in order to defend their territory. The analysis of the emotional dimension of the resistance allows to understand why people fight to defend their territory since people's feelings influence their thoughts and actions.

The analysis is based on in-depth interviews carried out with inhabitants of three villages who defended their territories in Spain and Mexico, in order to compare the emotional processes that characterize the resistance movements.

To analyze the emotional dimension of resistance movements against dams does not mean describing which emotions people feel, but rather discussing the role emotions play in protest and how they interact among each other. In this paper I will analyze two aspects in particular: the role of place attachment, which is a particular bond that helps us understand environmental struggles; and the role of the injustice frame and moral emotions, which lead people to fight even in these cases.

Data and methods

The research (Poma, 2017) is based on fifty in-depth interviews, most of which were individual. Ten of them were carried out with activists (specialists or local journalists have been used expressly to understand the contexts), while the other forty are focused on the experiences of inhabitants who resisted against dams (23 men and 17 women). The interviewees were selected by snowballing and with the help of other interviewees during the exploratory fieldwork when I collected data about the cases studied and carried out some interviews in order to verify the initial hypothesis and improve the questionnaires. In all three cases, the interviewees are inhabitants of the threatened territories who decided to self-organize to resist the dams. In San Gaspar de los Reyes (Jalisco, Mexico), inhabitants organized themselves as a *Comité*, in Coín (Andalusia, Spain) as a Platform, and in Riaño (Leon, Spain) they were organized as groups of friends from the same generation during the resistance and now (since 2007) as an association. Most of them had only occasionally participated in protests, and only in one case (Coín) was there an independent local environmental group, called Jara (which expressly does not work with political parties), that started to inform and support the inhabitants.

The three cases that support this research are: the fight against the Riaño reservoir in the north of Spain (1986-1987) and the current movement for the recovery of the valley (2007 to present); the defense of the Grande River (Río Grande) from the viewpoint of affected villagers in Coín (Malaga) in the south of Spain (2006-2007); and the resistance against the San Nicolás dam (2004-2005) from the perspective of those affected in the Mexican village of San Gaspar de los Reyes and some other people belonging to the area.

Table 1. Cases studied.

	Riaño	Coín	San Gaspar
Country	Spain	Spain	Mexico
Conflict period	1986-1987	2005-2006	2004-2005
Conflict duration	2 years	9 months	9 months
Scale of the dam	90m tall	7m tall	65m tall
Reservoir	664 hm ³ of water	8.4 hm ³ of water	800 hm ³
Use of the dam	Hydro-electric plant and irrigation	Water transfer	Water transfer and irrigation
Impact	8 villages and fertile lands flooded	No villages, but fertile lands flooded and river channeled	2 villages and fertile land and farms flooded
Affected inhabitants	Around 10 thousand, 3 thousand still living there in 1986	Around 20 thousand	10 thousand for the Committee, 3 thousand for the Government
Conclusion	Defeat	Victory	Victory
Union of affected people	No	Yes	Yes
State violence	Yes, several injured and arrested during evictions.	Threats and intimidations.	Threats and intimidations.
Promoter	State	State	State
Position of local authorities	Pro-project. Then anti-dam people won local elections	Pro-project at the beginning. Against at the final stand	Pro-project
Social Networks	Created during mobilization	Present before mobilization	Created during mobilization
Who started the protest?	Worried and affected inhabitants	Local environmental group with affected people	Worried and affected inhabitants

Source: Author

In the latter two cases (southern Spain and Mexico), the population was able to stop the project, while in the case of Riaño, eight villages in the valley were flooded. The two conflicts where the villagers managed to interrupt the project took place at similar times and had similar durations (9 months). Riaño has a longer history: the villages were

evicted in the eighties, but in 2007 an association was created to demand the recuperation of the valley.

The impact was also different. In San Gaspar and Riaño, there was a heavy impact on the territory because two villages and fertile land were flooded, affecting thousands of people, while in Coín what would disappear were vegetable gardens, a few houses and the river, which supplies water for irrigation and human use to Coín, Cerralba and Pizarra municipalities (around 30 thousand inhabitants) and recreational services. Analyzing these experiences with Coín, where no villages were flooded, allowed me to confirm the relevance of place attachment in these struggles, as will be seen throughout this analysis, regardless of the magnitude of physical loss. Moreover, the lower impact and the presence of a local environmental association in Coín (Jara) explain why in this case the discourse and practice is more environmental than in the other two cases. Another feature found in both Coín and San Gaspar is that the vast majority of inhabitants fought against the dams, while only a minority was silent. In Riaño, however, where the expropriations were carried out during a time when families could not oppose them (the Francoist dictatorship in the 1970s), only a few hundred people – most of them young people in their twenties and thirties – remained in their homes until the end and physically resisted eviction by the military police.

The choice of three struggles that differ in time, space, culture, and material impact, and whose only similarity was the threat of a dam aims to verify the hypothesis that claims that there are processes at micro level – which are similar in different contexts – that can be analyzed while incorporating the emotional dimension.

Finally, the analysis presented in this paper has a “from below” focus (Poma 2014; Poma y Gravante, 2015) that involves studying the protest at micro level, from the viewpoint of the inhabitants who decided to self-organize to defend their territory. It also involves studying protest as a moment of rupture from everyday life, since *“it is the daily experience of people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points out the targets of their anger”* (Piven and Cloward 1977, p. 20-21).

Focusing the analysis on the micro level of the protest is essential in order to understand the protest experience, because it is the only way to comprehend what happens when people protest and to understand the impact the same protest has on people. The next two issues are dedicated to exploring the role of emotions in people’s participation in the resistance movements against dams.

Place attachment as mobilizing bond

Resistance movements against dams are characterized by their direct implications for daily life. Self-organizing and resisting against the construction of a dam imply that what it is at stake is the place where people live and with which *“people develop complex and important emotional connections”* (Fullilove 2014, p. 142). For this reason, in this section I will show the role of place attachment as a mobilizing bond.

Place attachment is the affective bond between people and places (Low and Altman 1992). Despite still suffering a lack of theory development (Manzo and Devine-Wright

2014; Hidalgo 1998, 2000; Hidalgo and Hernández 2001; Giuliani 2004), this concept – which has been applied in a study focused on local attitudes toward a dam project by Vorkinn and Riese (2001), without incorporating emotions – is useful to understanding grassroots environmental struggles since, as demonstrated by Devine-Wright (2014), “individuals holding strong attachments to a place affected by proposal for change would be more likely to attend to and respond to such changes” (p. 171). Although modernity is characterized by a “sense of atopia” (Escobar 2001), which stems from high mobility and a functionalistic relationship with place (Giuliani 2004), as Escobar (2001) puts it: “place continues to be important in the lives of many people” (p. 140).

The aim of this section is to show how place attachment makes it possible to understand why the construction of dams, which cause villages and rivers to disappear under the water, produces emotions such as grief, fear, anxiety and anger, emotions that when they are not associated with resignation and helplessness can lead to collective action. Let us begin by showing how place attachment arises in the cases studied.

The analysis of the three resistance movements highlights that people are defending places for which they feel intense emotions such as an “endless love” (I.Ri.1) that expresses an interviewee from Riaño. These emotions move people to oppose to projects that threaten these places because, as one Mexican interviewee says:

You feel like they're taking something away from you... something that you love... even though what you see is a dusty, ugly farm... but that's where you've built your life...so you really love it. (I.Sg.7)

When place attachment occurs, as in the cases studied, the territory becomes something greater than just a physical space: it represents roots, memories, the efforts of a lifetime, human relationships, and identity. As one Mexican woman mentioned:

Here it was more about feelings, it wasn't what they could give us...we thought about all that, but especially about what we had already been through (...) if you go somewhere else you're no one, you're like a bird that passes by; anyway, here we are someone to our people. (I.Sg.5)

This extract confirms that place attachment is not only the relationship with the place, but also the relationship with the people living in the area. As Low and Altman (1992) write, “places are repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community and cultural relationships occur, and it is to those social relationships, not just to the place qua place, that people are attached” (p. 7). In fact, as I have observed in the fieldwork conducted, the threat linked to the loss of the community is felt to be as terrible as the loss of the physical space. For both Mexican and Spanish women, for instance, the idea of leaving the village and moving to another place is traumatic because, as they said, “to our people we are something” (I.Sg.5) but “thereⁱ we are no one” (I.Ri.5). The analysis of a case in which the village disappeared and its inhabitants had to leave, and other cases where this did not happen despite the threat, shows that the impact of dam is not limited to the projects carried out, since the emotional impact also occurs in cases where the infrastructure is not built.

The research shows that the inhabitants of the three villages are strongly attached to their places because the village and river are strongly connected to their identity (place identity) and everyday lives. Even in Coín, where the village was not at risk, the possibility of losing the river was unbearable because, as one man explained: “if the river had disappeared, no one would have been the same” (I.Co.7).

The main difference between Coín and the other two cases is that while in Coin people would continue to live in the area, although it would be deeply changed by the channeling of the river, both San Gaspar and Riaño’s inhabitants were forced to find another place to live. The disappearance of villages produces fear and anxiety because they are also linked to solidarity and security, as these extracts show:

There is always someone who comes with a pitcher of water or simply to visit you if you are ill. (I.Sg.5)
 Here, I’m not scared... Why? If I run into someone, they are known to me, there’s no way they’ll do me harm. (I.Sg.10)

Place attachment is strongly linked to security and solidarity, above all among the most vulnerable subjects, such as housewives, children and the elderly, those to whom the village means the world. For those who emigrate, it represents the only place they feel they belong and that they want to return to, and that explains why in all those cases there has been solidarity and support (both economically and in terms of visibility) from “hijos ausentes” [lit. absent sons], i.e. people born in the villages who then emigrated – to the United States in the Mexican case studied and to other cities in Spain and Europe in the Spanish cases studied.

In the three situations, it can be observed that the attachment is rooted in everyday practice, which feeds memories that stir up many emotions and means that the place is transformed into something that not just belongs to you but is part of you. Place attachment is a sum of emotions, such as love or feeling good in a place; it is identity; it is relationships between people, those who are there and those who have left; and it is memories. This affective bond, together with feelings of injustice and moral emotions that will be analyzed later, is one of the biggest motivations for defending the territory, as we can read in these extracts from the three cases:

I was twenty-three years old when they came to throw me out, so that’s the reason [for the resistance], the children grew up and became adults, they laid down roots, many roots. Because Riaño was a very fertile place for people to grow sentimental roots (...) that was the main reason for the protest (I.Ri.1)
 We were defending our essence, that is, our community, because that’s what we are, because this is where we were born, where we grew up, where we have lived all our lives, we haven’t known any other way of life. (I.Sg.9)
 I was really interested because it’s something we carry inside ourselves, the idea of the river (...) I’ve always lived by the river, so we’ve always been very attached to the issue of water. (I.Co.7)

The analysis of the three resistance movements highlights that people, while defending their territory, are defending their identity, way of life, security and happiness, all of which are threatened along with the territory. Therefore, place attachment becomes a mobilizing bond because it influences how the threat is socially built and the emotional response to the consequences caused by the dam.

Similarly to what happens with attachment to people, individuals may become aware of the bond that links them to a place when it is put in danger or when they have to leave this place, especially if they are forced (Giuliani 2001, 2004). So the real and concrete possibility that their village, river, daily routine or way of life could disappear forever is one of the reasons that led people to fight and then develop “place-protective behaviours” (Devine-Wright 2009).

Moreover, analyzing the role of place attachment helps explain the intensity with which the affected people respond to the threat, defending their territory and their way of life wholeheartedly, regardless of the magnitude of the physical loss, because, as Fullilove (2014) states, “*affective engagement defies simple economic calculations*” (p. 147).

The research shows that the sense of threat felt by locals is not only related to the disappearance of villages, such as Riaño and San Gaspar, under the water and all the related losses in terms of social relations, economic support, identity, etc., but also the loss of natural, social and economic resources. In fact, in all three cases the dams would not only change their territory forever, but also put their way of life in danger, as this quote shows:

Río Grande isn't only a river; it is a way of life because you have a piece of land, a vegetable garden. (I.Co.2)

As this extract shows, the dam represents a threat to the security and way of life of the inhabitants, but also a threat to their dignity, as we can read in this statement:

There are things that aren't done for money... if we want to discuss economics, I don't have any more land than the earth stuck under my nails, but you do it anyway to defend your dignity (I.Sg.2)

The dignity of the inhabitants is threatened because they are stigmatized as villages that are “expendable” for progress. Defending their territory is defending their dignity, which is one of the emotional benefits of protest (Wood 2001).

As can be seen, the development of the threat is joined by a notable emotional intensity, which includes: dignity, pain and sadness for the loss of land that is dear to them, and the feeling of uncertainty linked to losing their lifestyle and the source of their livelihood. Furthermore, however, the threat also creates fear, anguish and anxiety, above all in cases where the impact involved the disappearance of the village, as we can see in this woman's statement:

It takes away your peace, even though you don't want it to, it takes away your peace and you're always thinking “What will happen if they really take us away from here, if this ends?” (I.Sg.6)

As Hidalgo confirms, place attachment “involves a feeling of security linked to closeness and contact, and losing that security produces fear and anguish” (1998, p. 53). Fear of losing the village or the river is the result of becoming aware of the importance of these elements in people’s lives. Fear, in this case, is connected to concern about what may happen if they have to leave the village that will disappear below the water, as this extract shows:

I didn’t even sleep, everyone was afraid and angry, afraid so we’d say
 “Where are we going? Where are they going to take us?” (I.Sg.13)

Another emotion that characterizes these experiences is the pain caused by loss, or by the idea of losing the place that is dear to them, which, as the case of Riaño shows, can be strong and alive, after almost thirty years:

It breaks your heart, you cry for two years... then after twenty it
 makes you a little sentimental, still... it’s there for your whole life
 until you die. (I.Ri.3)

Pain, anxiety, fear and anguish caused by losing the village can be considered emotions of trauma (Whittier 2001). In Coín, these emotions are less intense because the village was not going to disappear, and moral emotions stand out, such as indignation and outrage, which will be analyzed in the next paragraph. They are related to the sense of injustice triggered by the dams and the way that it is intended to be carried out, as we can see in this statement:

So of course it’s painful for me, it’s painful not because it’s mine or
 because it’s Coín, but any barbarity you hear about, all the time, is
 painful for me. (I.Co.6)

In Riaño and San Gaspar, emotions of trauma even affected health, as happened to some of the interviewees, who became depressed, and other people who, as the interviewees in Riaño and San Gaspar said, died from grief:

[There are] people who died, some say perhaps because of sadness,
 because all this was going to end, they got depressed, and there were
 people who passed away. (I.Sg.5)

Emotions of trauma could certainly demobilize people if joined by powerlessness and loneliness but, as observed in the struggles studied, that does not happen when people overcome those feelings and moods collectively through solidarity, unity, support, and other emotions of resistance (Whittier 2001), as we will see in the next sections.

To conclude, the threat to everyday life, ways of life and emotional ties to the place are key factors in understanding struggles to defend the territory because “*we are willing to fight for places that are central to our identities*” (Stedman 2002, p. 577). However, the

emotional dimension of resistance movements against dams includes other emotions that can explain what drives the inhabitants of the threatened territories to defend their land. The sense of threat that affected communities feel “*leads to moral outrage*” (Jasper 1997, p. 96), which is why in the next paragraph I will show the role of some emotions based on moral intuitions or principles (Jasper 2011) in these resistance movements.

Injustice and moral emotions: the fuel of resistance

Building a dam, causing rivers and villages to disappear, represents a moment of rupture in the lives of those who live in the areas under threat, so the subjects’ narratives are built around a “before” and “after” (Mairal 1993) the construction or threat to construct the dam.

This rupture often starts with a moral shock (Jasper and Poulse 1995; Jasper 1997, 1998, 2006b, 2011, 2013, 2014b), which is the emotional response to information or an event that people do not expect; this occurred in the cases studied when local inhabitants received the news about the dams that the government wished to build in their territories. The people interviewed first heard about the dam from newspapers and “rumors”, but it was when they received the letters of expropriation, like in Coín, or visits by government delegates, like in San Gaspar and Riaño, that they started to fear for their future, as this quote shows:

It was something that we didn’t expect... we were living very peacefully in San Gaspar... then rumors started and “special” people from the government began to visit us. (I.Sg.5)

Moral shock can trigger complex emotional responses that depend on the context. For instance, in the cases analyzed the inhabitants did not expect such a threat, and the fact that they did not expect it produces skepticism at the beginning. The moment they realized the threat was real, the people affected looked for the support of local authorities, but were unsuccessful, as this Mexican man declared:

It was surprising that we didn’t have the support of the municipal authority (...) we thought we could count on it (...) we thought we would be 100% supported. (I.Sg.14)

Local authorities are people who live in the territory, and the lack of support from these subjects produces indignation and a sense of betrayal. On the contrary, there were fewer expectations about national authorities, because no one expected them to defend a territory that they do not know. For this reason, the sense of betrayal toward them was smaller, except in Riaño where the expectations about the then-new democracy caused a complex emotional response toward authorities, which includes, among other things: indignation, outrage, moral anger and grief, letdown, disappointment, hatred, contempt and distrust. These emotions are still felt by the people affected:

A great deal of anger and resentment toward Spain, which was doing this, toward the state and everything represented by the corporation of a country, the political world, and I still think in the same way, I still think they are manipulators and crooks. (I.Ri.1)

While the emotions related to the threat posed to the land are specific to resistance against the dams and other environmental struggles, the emotions that emerge from moral shock, such as moral emotions and emotions toward authorities, are typical of different protest experiences, but are no less important to understanding these resistance movements. For example, what appeared as a central element in these resistance movements is the injustice attributed to construction of the dams, which are “*a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich*” (Roy 2015, p. 284).

Framing the construction of the dam as an injustice is a process that influences the motivation to act and reinforces the reasons to remain involved in defending the area. Believing that one is suffering an injustice legitimizes the struggle and makes it possible to overcome fear, as we can see in the words of this interviewee:

You feel afraid because you see so many police officers, so many grenadiers, but I think that defending a just cause makes us brave enough to face it. (I.Sg.1)

Injustice can also move people even when they do not believe that they could be successful. In all three cases, the majority of the interviewees stated that at the beginning they did not believe it was possible to beat the government, but at the same time they felt the need to fight, as this extract shows:

We were aware that this was a losing battle, but we couldn't help letting out what we had inside as the human beings we are: anger, rage, and rebellion against such a brutal injustice, which it really was. (I.Ri.1)

This example demonstrates that people fight against what they believe to be unjust, unfair or undeserved, even if they do not believe they can win. In this context, the injustice frame (Gamson 1992) is one of the most important processes because when people feel that what they are experiencing is unjust, they react beyond the cost-benefit assessment. Feeling “the injustice that rips you apart” (I.Co.8) is a relevant process of protest because “*people endure hardship more often than they protest it, and even extreme inequality does not necessarily lead people to see their circumstances as unjust*” (Piven 2006, p. 139).

In the cases studied, people framed their experiences as unjust for many reasons, for instance, they believe that the project is not designed for common good but for political interests, and in all three cases this feeling is also fed by a “hidden discourse” (Scott 1990) and an identity as second-class citizens. This process is fed by the experiences of other villages and communities that have suffered the same fate and with whom affected people empathize, as this extract shows:

How can you allow an injustice to occur? [There are] so many people whose houses, whose homes, have been taken away [by the state], whose rights have been trampled [by the state]... I say, if there are people who want to fight for it, I have to join them, and of course you have to defend them because it represents your dignity as well. (I.Sg.6)

Framing an experience as unjust causes indignation and outrage – also called moral emotions (Jasper 1998, 2006a, 2011, 2018; Goodwin et al. 2004) – which are the fuel of the protest, as the next extract shows:

When most people react it is for this reason, when they ride roughshod over your dignity. (I.Co.14)

As Cadena-Roa states, “*to be indignant it is necessary to recognize a given situation as unjust. (...) Indignation is provoked by the belief that some moral norm has been deliberately broken, and that harm and suffering are being inflicted upon undeserving people*” (2002, p. 212). In these case studies, people felt indignant when faced with the inability to exercise a right that they believed to be legitimate, such as the power to demonstrate peacefully to express their lack of agreement, as this statement shows:

That is when they start to deny you [the right to demonstrate], so if I can't even demonstrate, then what's going on? We were very indignant. (I.Co.1)
The Sub-delegation of the government forbade us the right to demonstrate (...) That, I believe, was a further impulse, people rebelled even more. (I.Co.2)

Indignation is also fed by the information that people manage to get, even though the authorities do not provide them with it, and it may mobilize people when they overcome feelings such as frustration, loneliness or powerlessness, as this interviewee says:

If you start to dig around a bit more, you start to feel indignation (...) People are indignant, they haven't become frustrated, that is why they have reacted; here we don't end up frustrated, we end up indignant. (I.Co.14)

In Riaño, for example, indignation was the response to the eviction and destruction of the villages, which is framed as an injustice:

A very bad moment was when I went to my house (...) and they were already demolishing it (...) It's like something terrible gets into you, so much indignation... and a lot of anger and powerlessness, but in huge amounts. (I.Ri.1)

As we can read in this extract, indignation may be accompanied by a matrix of feelings that can include anger or powerlessness, as in the case described above.

Along with indignation, outrage was another moral emotion that influenced the dynamics of the conflicts studied. Outrage is the emotional response to actions and declarations that are understood as insulting or offensive, and “*can be a powerful motivation for protest (...) It plays a significant role in the delegitimation of the polity and the engendering of collective action whenever state conduct is perceived as arbitrary*” (Reed 2004, p. 667). In all the cases, outrage is related to lies and feeling tricked by politicians:

[We mobilized] because there was so much trickery from the public administration. (I.Co.1)

Outrage and indignation are also connected to the state’s attitude, which discredits and undermines the land and its people, as can be seen in this statement:

They make us be seen as ignorant, [and they think] “these people know nothing”, and that also upsets you. (I.Sg.6)

Outrage also appears due to a lack of dialogue from the ruling classes, which is understood as a lack of respect for people:

At the time when the project was there, and they’d done it like they did it, and they hadn’t shared it with the village...what do you expect? (I.Co.3)

Outrage is also tied to the treatment received by those affected during the conflict, from repression to abuses during demonstrations and excessive responses from the state:

If there were four police officers per person, how do you expect us to feel? (I.Ri.3)

Finally, returning to the treatment suffered at the hands of the authorities, outrage also appears from the feeling that politicians treat people like animals. This very powerful metaphor is recurrent in the testimonies of the interviewees, such as the following:

When I thought they were going to make a dam, I said “this isn’t an animal pen where you can take some hens out of one and put them in another one”, but unfortunately the government doesn’t understand these things, and they never take people into consideration before drawing up their projects. (I.Sg.6)

To sum up, in all three cases studied, becoming aware of the real possibility that a dam would change their lives, and the way the authorities were doing that, awoke many emotions in the inhabitants of the threatened territories, such as fear, wrath, pain,

insecurity, disappointment, as well outrage and indignation. The emotional intensity of this experience, which people express as “my world fell apart” (I.Co.2), and framing the experience as an injustice, in addition to the threat to their beloved territory, is what moved people to fight.

Conclusions

Thanks to the fieldwork in three resistance movements against dams, and the analysis of the emotional dimension, the research shows people’s reasons for fighting against dams.

The research shows that place attachment is a mobilizing bond because it influences the construction of threat and triggers several emotions, such as the pain, sadness and fear of losing the territory and the insecurity related to losing a way of life. Although the bond with the place is central to understanding resistance against dams, other emotions (of resistance) that do not seem to have a particular connection to land are also relevant, because they legitimate the resistance and help overcome emotions of trauma. In fact, moral emotions, provide not only the energy to fight, but also the energy to keep developing environmental and social projects and to participate in other struggles or continue demanding justice, as in Riaño.

To conclude, the comparative analysis also highlights that people experience processes that are similar in different settings and essential to understanding resistance movements against dams, including moral shock and the injustice frame. These processes cannot be fully understood without incorporating the emotional dimension into the analysis, i.e. studying the role that different emotions play in protest.

Notes

i “There” means the place where she had to move after eviction from Riaño.

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List of cited interviews

Label	Experience	Gender	Country	Date of interview
I.Co.1	Grande River	M	Coín, Spain	March 2010
I.Co.2	Grande River	M	Coín, Spain	March 2010
I.Co.3	Grande River	F	Coín, Spain	May 2011
I.Co.6	Grande River	F	Coín, Spain	May 2010
I.Co.7	Grande River	M	Coín, Spain	May 2010
I.Co.8	Grande River	M	Coín, Spain	May 2011
I.Co.14	Grande River	M	Coín, Spain	May 2011
I.Sg.1	San Nicolas' dam	M	San Gaspar, Mexico	November 2010
I.Sg.2	San Nicolas' dam	F	San Gaspar, Mexico	November 2010
I.Sg.4	San Nicolas' dam	M	San Gaspar, Mexico	November 2010
I.Sg.5	San Nicolas' dam	F	San Gaspar, Mexico	November 2010
I.Sg.6	San Nicolas' dam	F	San Gaspar, Mexico	January 2011
I.Sg.7	San Nicolas' dam	M	Jalostotitlán, Mexico	January 2011
I.Sg.9	San Nicolas' dam	F	San Gaspar, Mexico	January 2011
I.Sg.10	San Nicolas' dam	F	San Gaspar, Mexico	January 2011
I.Sg.13	San Nicolas' dam	F	San Gaspar, Mexico	January 2011
I.Sg.14	San Nicolas' dam	M	San Gaspar, Mexico	November 2010
I.Ri.1	Riaño resistance	M	Riaño valley	August 2010

I.Ri.2	Riaño resistance	M	Riaño valley	August 2010
I.Ri.3	Riaño resistance	M	Riaño valley	August 2010
I.Ri.5	Riaño resistance	F	León, Spain	May 2011

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Original Article

THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION OF RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS AGAINST DAMS

Abstract: Resistances against dams are deeply emotional and transformative experiences, which have been often analyzed at macro and organizational level.

The aim of this paper is to present an analysis at micro level by analyzing the emotional dimension of these struggles in order to understand the viewpoint of inhabitants who defend their territories.

Based on the literature on emotion and social movements, and in-depth interviews with people who participated in three resistances against dams in Spain and Mexico, the analysis focuses on: 1) the role of place attachment, which is a particular bond that helps us understand environmental struggles, and 2) the role of the injustice frame and moral emotions, which lead people to fight even in these cases.

This article seeks to prove that the analysis of the emotional dimension is vital to understand the socio-cultural processes that lead people to defend their territories and how these experiences can be transformative.

Key words: Resistance movements against dams, grassroots environmental struggles, Emotions, Place attachment

Resumen: Las resistencias contra las presas son experiencias emocionales y transformativas, que han sido analizadas a menudo a un nivel macro y de organización.

El objetivo del artículo es presentar un análisis al nivel micro analizando la dimensión emocional para comprender la experiencia desde la perspectiva de los habitantes que defienden su territorio.

Apoyándome en la literatura sobre emociones y movimientos sociales, y entrevistas en profundidad con protagonistas de tres resistencias contra presas en España y México, el análisis se centrará en: 1) el papel del apego al lugar, que es un vínculo afectivo que nos permite comprender los conflictos socioambientales, y 2) el papel del *injustice frame* y de las emociones morales, que mueven la gente a luchar.

El artículo busca mostrar que el análisis de la dimensión emocional es central para comprender los procesos socio-culturales que mueven la gente a defender sus territorios y cómo estas experiencias pueden ser transformativas.

Palabras llave: Movimientos de resistencia contra presas, luchas socioambientales de base, emociones, apego al lugar.

Resumo: A resistência contra barragens representa experiências emocionais e transformadoras, que muitas vezes tem sido analisadas no nível macro e organizacional. O objetivo deste artigo é de apresentar uma análise no nível micro, por meio da dimensão emocional destas lutas no intuito de entender os pontos de vista dos moradores que defendem seus territórios. Tendo como referencia a literatura sobre emoção e movimentos sociais, e entrevistas em profundidade com pessoas que lutaram contra barragens na Espanha e no México, a análise foca em: 1) o papel do pertencimento ao lugar, que é elo relevante para entender as lutas ambientais e 2) no marco da injustiça e as emoções morais, que levam as pessoas a se envolver nestas lutas.

O artigo se propõe mostrar que a análise da dimensão emocional é essencial para entender os processos socioculturais que levam as pessoas a defender seus territórios, e como estas experiências podem ser transformadoras.

Palavras-chave: Resistência contra barragens, lutas ambientais, dimensão emocional, pertencimento ao lugar.
