

„The Majesty of Concrete“: Hume Dam and the Australian Modernity

Daniel Rothenburg

In my graduate thesis, I have examined the ideologies behind the expansion of Australian irrigation in the 20th century. To do this, I studied the meanings attributed to the Hume Dam, built from 1919 to 1936. Hume, one of Australia's iconic dams, is useful to analyze the hopes, promises and fears invested in hydro-engineering in the heyday of Australian “Water Dreaming”. Water control, I propose, was both a nationalistic project designed to settle the land and a grand undertaking in the pursuit of modernity. It was a mean to liberate the forces of production and create a new, prosperous society free from the constraints of Australia's natural shortcomings. Thus, by embedding the Australian case in the worldwide pursuit for the control over water for irrigation via large-scale hydro-engineering, I offer a useful context to understand the appeal and fascination for irrigation.

Bio

Daniel Rothenburg is a research associate at the Collaborative Research Centre 923 “Threatened Order” at the University of Tübingen in Germany. He is working on his PhD dissertation about the adaption of rural irrigation communities in the Murray-Darling Basin in Australia to salinity, a project which he calls “Living with salt.” He is interested in how personal histories, ideologies and the social fabric of communities change in the face of ecological degradation.