Contested hydrosocial territories and disputed water governance: Struggles and competing claims over the Ilisu Dam development in southeastern Turkey

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Article history:
Received 3 July 2015
Received in revised form 11 February 2016
Accepted 14 February 2016

Keywords:
Hydrosocial territories
Water governance
Governmentality
Conflicts
Dams
Turkey

1. Introduction – Turkish dam development, GAP and the Kurdish question

Dam construction is a disputed issue worldwide, of high importance for governments, local people and the environment (e.g., Bijker, 2007; Boelens and Post Uiterweer, 2013; Kaika, 2006; Nixon, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2007). In Turkey, a country that has experienced enormous economic growth in recent years and plays a major regional role for both the Middle East and Europe, large dams have been planned and constructed across the country. A recent, highly controversial scheme is the Southeastern Anatolia Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, hereafter GAP) comprising 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power plants in the Euphrates and Tigris river basins (see Fig. 1 for an overview of the spatial reconfigurations imagined by GAP planners). Besides producing electricity, the dams deliver irrigation water to 1.7 million hectares of land, boosting agricultural production in the region (Yüksel, 2010). Beyond the massive barrier creating a huge water reservoir, these dams branch out in large grids of power cables and canals transforming landscapes, affecting communities in these areas, and mobilizing protest movements. Opposing stakeholders pick the scientific knowledge and technological capacity that supports their positions and meets their objectives. To explain the various linkages between state power, protest movements, the landscape, local people, science and technology, we engage with the concept of hydrosocial territories (Boelens et al., 2016). The concept is used to analyze the last dam of the GAP complex, currently under construction, the Ilisu Dam. The numbers, although contested, are impressive. The Ilisu Dam is designed to store 343.8 Mm³ of water, under which approximately two hundred towns and villages will disappear, affecting about 78,000 people, primarily Kurdish (see Fig. 2) (Ilisu Consortium, 2005; Ilhan, 2009; Ronayne, 2005).

Provisional plans for a dam on the Tigris River were formulated in the 1950s but it took until 1982 to make a project design (Setton and Drillisch, 2006). It took fifteen more years to find funding and investors, leading to an international consortium of companies to construct the dam (Banktrack, 2015). In subsequent years, the consortium’s membership changed frequently, as companies withdrew under national and international protests. The construction of the Ilisu Dam officially started in March 2007 and is, as of early 2016, at an advanced stage (Ayboga, 2015). Although the dam is nearly finished, it is unclear what the hydrosocial territories opened up by the Ilisu Dam will look like.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.02.015
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The GAP has a history of shifting objectives and realization, from the original focus (early 1980s) on hydroelectricity and irrigation, to an integrated regional development project. Additional objectives were formulated, for example replacing traditional social structures with "modern organizations and institutions" (GAP, 2013b: Objectives of GAP), reducing infant and child mortality, lowering fertility rates and creating permanent settlements for nomadic and semi-nomadic communities (GAP, 2013b). Accordingly, multiple social projects addressing, for example, women’s empowerment, education and entrepreneurship were planned and partly implemented within GAP. The integrated development program aimed to narrow the socio-economic gap between Western and Eastern Turkey (Carkog˘lu and Eder, 2001). Although couched in general development language, the ‘Kurdish question’ is inescapable in this area: the decades-old and still ongoing struggle between the Turkish government and Kurds living within Turkish national boundaries. Crucial issues involve recognition of Kurdish identity, language rights, equal status under law, and greater autonomy for the southeastern provinces (e.g., Harris, 2002; Warner, 2012). The GAP project, however, swamped issues of ownership and dependency, sovereignty and subordination by the socio-technical complexities of dam construction.

The regional context has led scholars to argue that GAP is a mechanism for the Turkish government to gain control and legitimacy in the southeastern regions in various ways (Carkog˘lu and Eder, 2001; Harris, 2002; Morvaridi, 2004). In a narrative considering the region’s low socio-economic development status as the root cause of the ‘Kurdish problem’, GAP is depicted as a way to pacify the region through economic development (Harris, 2008). Furthermore, GAP implies increased presence of state organizations, legitimizing state authority and thereby increasing local populations’ dependence on state institutions (Özok-Gündoğan, 2005; Harris, 2002; Jongerden, 2010; Warner, 2008). Such greater dependence on the Turkish state is expected to undermine the power of the Kurdish guerrilla group PKK (Kurdistan Worker’s Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)).
The transnational dimension of the GAP project is another related source of its (geo)political importance and sensitivity (Bağış, 1997; Harris, 2002; Warner, 2008, 2012). The Ilisu Dam is on the Tigris River, 40 km north of the Turkish–Syrian border and 90 km upstream from where the river enters Iraq. The three countries' national borders cut across the Kurdish region, providing a context in which politics and water are deeply intertwined and Turkey, controlling regional water resources, wields strategically important power in negotiations with neighboring countries. In 1987, for example, Turkey urged Syria to end PKK activities within Syrian borders in return for guaranteeing an annual minimum flow of water (Jongerden, 2010).

Regional developments, in particular the escalating conflicts in Syria, Iraq and other neighboring countries, add to the political dynamics. Turkey's upstream dam-building efforts fade into the Syrian, Iraq and other neighboring countries, add to the political and control water flows (Harris and Alatout, 2010; Warner et al., 2014). These rivers have gradually become 'normalized' in international discourse as a 'Turkish resource' providing the government with political leeway to materialize its hydrosocial territory and control water flows (Harris and Alatout, 2010; Warner et al., 2014).

This paper presents results from a study using multiple data sources among which academic literature, project reports, press releases and other media sources, semi-structured interviews conducted throughout 2013, with follow-up literature research and key informant interviews in 2014 and 2015. We developed a framework, derived from the emerging body of literature focusing on hydro-social territories, to analyze the intrinsically socio-technical relationships underlying and constituting the mega-hydraulic development of the Ilisu Dam. This approach pays specific attention to governmentality (Foucault, 1991, 2008). The Ilisu Dam, this paper argues, is not only an instrument for the Turkish government to govern water and to ‘govern people through water’ but is also used by protest groups to create a counterforce and alternative plans (Boelens, 2014; Bridge and Perreault, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2009). The Ilisu Dam and the discussions and struggles surrounding its hydrosocial patterning give insight into the multiplicity of actor coalitions involved and the diversity of regimes of representation (Escobar, 1995, 2006) and techno-political interpretations (Callon, 1992; Swyngedouw, 2007). The contested hydraulic configuration of the Ilisu Dam manifests the divergent dam imaginaries (Boelens et al., 2016; Jasanoff and Kim, 2013; Kaika, 2006; Swyngedouw and Williams, 2016), linking socio-economic, cultural and political facets in particular ways and showing the political nature of technology.

The conceptual notions of hydrosocial territoriality and governmentality will be discussed in the next section. The following sections give a reconstruction of the Turkish government's hydro-political imaginary, the coalitions of actors and the diversity of regimes of representation around the Ilisu Dam. Next, the hydro-political imaginaries of dam-opposing coalitions are analyzed. The penultimate section examines perceptions and responses of people living in dam-affected areas, and the final section discusses results and draws conclusions.

2. Hydrosocial territories, governmentality and contested techno-political imaginaries

Similar to experiences in other countries, dam development in southeastern Turkey is framed in a strongly de-politicized language of overall progress, sustainable, clean development and efficient, rational water management (Birkenholtz, 2016; Duarte-Abadia et al., 2015; Kaika, 2006; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; McCully, 1996; Sneddon and Fox, 2008). This disregards competing claims and conflicts over water, landscape and hydropower development and assorted interrelated struggles over socio-cultural issues, problem definitions, knowledge frameworks, ontological meanings, decision-making and preferred solutions. This array and ordering of issues is presented here as contested techno-political imaginaries, sustained by the notions of hydrosocial territoriality and governmentality. Viewing the Ilisu Dam in terms of hydrosocial territories and governmentality can enhance our understanding of how water control is embedded in the broader (multi-scale) political context of governance over and through socio-Natures.

The “hydrosocial territories” concept views water flows and management as physical, social, political and symbolic matters, entwining these domains in particular configurations, actively constructing and producing territoriality in techno-political and socio-ecological interactions (Boelens et al., 2016; Swyngedouw and Williams, 2016). This means that territories are not just geographical places but imagined spaces that model actively created places (cf. Agnew, 1994; Eidem, 2010; Baletti, 2012). Imagined spaces and the changing reality on the ground become a mixed zone, time- and location-specific, where rules about water management, decision-making, meanings and discourses are profoundly contested and negotiated. Rather than constituting separate entities that ‘interact’, humans and nature influence and produce each other in multiple ways and on multiple scales (Barnes and Alatout, 2012; Baviskar, 2007; Harris and Alatout, 2010; Jasanoff and Kim, 2013; Latour, 1994, 2000; Linton and Budds, 2014; Zwarteveen and Boelens, 2014). Boelens et al. (2016:2) conceptualize the hydrosocial territory notion as “the contested imaginary and socio-environmental materialization of a spatially bound multi-scalar network in which humans, water flows, ecological relations, hydraulic infrastructure, financial means, legal-administrative arrangements and cultural institutions and practices are interactively defined, aligned and mobilized through epistemological belief systems, political hierarchies and naturalizing discourses”.

Accordingly, so-called ‘integrated’ or ‘hydraulic’ projects are in fact means to configure and re-configure hydrosocial territories, altering the physical–ecological, socio-economic, cultural-symbolic and political spaces where they are realized. As a result, hydrosocial territories entail the impact of water flows through (mega)hydraulic artefacts with major effects for different user groups' physical and ecological environment, and also aim to modify the political order, worldviews, and ways in which people ‘naturally’ represent themselves and others in relation to ‘Nature’, as well as the ways in which these social–political norms, morals and hydro-cultural relations become ‘embedded’ and ‘concretized’ in hydraulics, artefacts and technological network relationships – i.e., the ‘moralization’ of (hydro-)territorial infrastructures (Anders, 1980; Foucault, 1975; Winner, 1986; Cf. Boelens, 2014; Dijk, 2000; Dixon and Whitehead, 2008; Verbeek, 2011).

Dominant hydrosocial configurations commonly entwine technological, industrial, state-administrative, and scientific knowledge networks that enhance local–global commodity transfers, resource extraction, and development/conservation responding to non-local economic and political interests. To do so, they commonly curtail local sovereignty and create a political order that makes these local spaces comprehensible, exploitable and controllable (see Büscher and Fletcher, 2014; Meehan and Moore, 2014; Rodríguez-de-Francisco and Boelens, 2016). Hydrosocial re-territorialisation, historically, has often been imposed top-down, explicitly manifesting the coercive forces of governments and dominant interest groups, for example by combining legal, military
and (extra-)economic compulsion, which Foucault (2008:313) calls “government according to sovereign power”, or by constructing dominant mythical-religious representations, termed “government according to truth”. Modern forms of government rationality aiming to control subject populations apply more subtle techniques of governance – such as moralizing-scientific “disciplinary governmentality” and market rationality-based “neoliberal governmentality” (Foucault, 2008: 313). They aim for ‘subjectification’ in which subjects come to adopt the dominant discourse and consequently turn themselves into self-disciplining, obedient citizens of the ruling system (Foucault, 1975, 1991; Cf. Dean, 1999; Escobar, 1995; Feindt and Oels, 2005).

In such moralized and moralizing techno-political geographies, ruling groups deploy, and subjugated groups gradually come to adopt, discourses that define and position social and material issues in a human-material-natural network that leaves the political order unchallenged and stabilizes ways of ‘conducting subject populations’ conduct’ (Foucault, 1991). Thus, the effort is to simultaneously govern water-through-mentality and mentality-through-water, rather than water as such, and by that to make people govern (‘correct’) themselves, in accordance with the socio-natural, hydro-territorial imaginaries of the ruling (see Duarte-Abadía and Boelens, 2016; Ioris, 2016; Melo Zurita et al., 2015; Perramond, 2016; Swyngedouw and Williams, 2016). Making such ‘new subjects’ requires these water users to frame their worldviews, needs, strategies and relationships differently, building and believing in new models of agency, causality, identity and responsibility (for Turkish governmentalization, see also Secor, 2007). Such frames also exclude other options and thus “delimit the universe of further scientific inquiry, political discourse, and possible policy options” (Jasanoff and Wynne, 1998:5).

As this mechanism of “capillary/inclusive power” in water politics and natural resource governance is less visible but often extremely effective (Boelens, 2009:324; see also Bridge and Perreault, 2009; Büscher and Fletcher, 2014; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Vos and Boelens, 2014), its disclosure has strong relevance. In the GAP project, governmentality is central as Turkish state authorities aim to use water resources to irrigate and generate electricity and to shape the project region’s socio-economic and cultural territory according to a certain cultural-political imaginary. For example, presenting the GAP region as a place of agro-industrial potential, envisioning it as the Middle East’s ‘breadbasket’ and at the same time emphasizing the region’s low HDI, suggests that making people and their territory part of Turkey’s broader neoliberal project will bring wealth and development. Thus, people’s perceptions of what is morally ‘good’ and what ‘ought to be done’ (and what not) are formed to make them supporters of GAP – or at least non-opponents. At the same time, it adds to the project of nation-building, actively producing new citizens by altering hydrosocial territory (cf. Jessop, 2007), suggesting that as water is directed, channeled, piped and/or distributed it acts upon people and their relations (see Baviskar, 2007; Bijker, 2007; Ekers and Loftus, 2008; Meehan, 2013; Meehan and Moore, 2014; Mosse, 2008; Perreault, 2014; Perreault et al., 2011).

As Rodriguez-de-Francisco and Boelens (2015, 2016) and Seemann (2016) demonstrate, territorial governmentality projects do not necessarily aim to obliterate alternative territorialities. Most often, as in the Turkish case (see also Harris, 2012; Secor, 2007), modern territorialisation tactics aim to ‘recognize’, incorporate and discipline local territorialities, integrating local norms, practices, and discourses into its mainstream government rationality and its spatial/political organization. This subtle strategy to incorporate and marginalize locally existing territorialities in mainstream territorial projects makes use of ‘managed’ or ‘neoliberal multi-culturalism’ (Assies, 2010; Hale, 2004): through ‘inclusive’ strategies it recognizes the ‘convenient’ and sidelines ‘problematic’ water cultures and identities” (Boelens et al., 2016:7). Official and vernacular or customary water management strategies are deeply intertwined in a ‘shotgun marriage’ (Boelens, 2009:315): State and customary modes of territorial ordering depend on each other in complicated and often contentious ways. Unable to provide water for all societal sectors, the state relies on informal/illegal norms, infrastructures, and organizations that do have the capacity to provide water to the people. Incorporating or tacitly recognizing vernacular hydrosocial territoriality with its context-specific solutions then aims to guarantee the state’s legitimacy and stability. Commonly, some local rules, rights and illegal infrastructures are institutionalized, at the expense of most others and at the cost of intensifying repression by more contentious, defiant, and disloyal norms and hydrosocial territorial institutions (Boelens, 2014).

As a consequence, in everyday political practice, despite efforts by ruling groups to make one discourse and one techno-political imaginary hegemonic, it is common to find multiple competing territorial imaginaries and regimes of hydrosocial territorial representation dynamically taking shape within one and the same geographical-political space (Hoogesteger et al., 2016). Particular territorial imaginaries become contested and disputed by counter-imaginaries attempting to establish a different frame of meanings, problems, solutions and possibilities. “All of these compete, superimpose, and foster their territorial projects to strengthen their water control. These overlapping hydrosocial projects generate ‘territorial pluralism’ and continuously transform the water arena’s hydraulic grid, cultural reference frames, economic base structures, and political relationships” (Boelens et al., 2016:8). Building and materializing counter-imaginaries can take place in different ways, depending on the strategies deployed. Struggles for alternative territoriality often involve building and engaging in new multi-scale networks, which link local communities and territories with translocal actors, strategies and alliances (Boelens et al., 2015; Heynen and Swyngedouw, 2003; Hoogesteger et al., 2016; Marston, 2000; McCarthy, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2004; Swyngedouw and Williams, 2016). Alliances may form among actors who are not linked directly or materially through water flows but connect by constructing territories and imaginaries on extended scales (Budds and Hinojosa, 2012; Warner, 2012). Constructing imaginaries may often be strategized to reach desired goals, making their creation an instrument and/or a necessity for success rather than an evident course of action.

3. Opposing coalitions and diverging regimes of representation

3.1. The hydrosocial territory of Turkish state authorities

The Turkish Government’s determination to build the Ilisu Dam has been substantial from the start. Despite protests and difficulties to access financial resources from third parties, Veyes Erolçu, Minister of Forestry and Water Works, put it boldly: “we [the Turkish Government] do not need their money. We will construct this dam at any cost” (Eroğlu cited in Ilhan, 2012:5). The Ilisu Dam will complete the GAP project and is thus considered a national priority. The forms of governmentality, ranging from capillary to top-down strategies and techniques, are largely sustained by a positive, inclusive discourse portraying the dam as a “symbol of national pride” and a “vision of a ‘great’ Turkey” (Corkoğlu and Eder, 2001: 42 and 65).

The official narrative imagines numerous advantages the dam will bring for the Turkish nation, local people and even for neighboring countries. First and foremost, it emphasizes that the dam will help cover Turkey’s growing energy demand, decreasing dependence on energy imports (Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
This justification is backed by an imaginary of energy as scarce and water as relatively abundant, so that hydropower development seems ‘logical’ action to take. Furthermore, it claims the Ilisu Dam promotes local employment in construction, improved local availability of electricity, and better infrastructure such as roads. All this will kick-start local economic development (Ilisu Consortium, 2005). As Harris (2009) shows, given that southeastern Turkey was long ignored by public and private investment, many welcome state support for local economies. However, the GAP irrigation project discussed by Harris differs from the Ilisu Dam in this aspect of irrigation: many GAP dams are designed to facilitate irrigation to turn the region into a ‘bread basket’, but this aspect is largely missing from the Ilisu project, where the ‘water for energy’ imaginary prevails.

This imaginary is embedded in a wider vision of Ilisu being indispensable for national development. The fact that local benefits are actually marginal confirms what Nixon (2010:62) observes: that in order to construct mega dams, local communities are unimagined, thus excluded or shoved to the background of a broader but “highly selective discourse of national development”. Such imaginaries of benefits and development, which assign local communities a sacrificial role for the greater common good, are characteristic for hydraulic mega projects (see, for other examples, Duarte-Abadía et al., 2015; Kaika, 2006; Nixon, 2010). The subtle imposition of the dam-building coalition’s particular perspectives on the GAP and Ilisu hydrosocial territories constitute a politics of truth, legitimizing certain water knowledge, practices and governance forms while discrediting others. They separate ‘legitimate’ forms of hydraulic knowledge, territorial rights and people’s organization from ‘illegitimate’ forms (cf. Forsyth, 2003; Foucault, 2007). As a result, production of hydro-territorial knowledge and truths – and the ways these shape particular water artefacts, rules, rights and organizational structures – concentrates on aligning local villages and livelihoods with imagined multi-scale water-power hierarchies (Boelens, 2009, 2014).

Discussions and imaginaries concerning ‘civilization’ are essential. In the Ilisu Project, the state is depicted as the centre of expertise versus traditional, backward local people, needing modernization (Harris, 2008). The territorial governmentalization project will fundamentally alter local people’s identification with existing community and socio-cultural organization, in order to change how people belong and behave, according to new identity categories and hierarchies. This vision becomes clear in one target of the GAP Social Action Plan: “to enhance the presence and influence of modern organizations and institutions in order to remove those traditional ones that impede development” (GAP website, 2013: Objectives of GAP, Target 1). Likewise, GAP will bring “civilization back to Upper Mesopotamia” (GAP website, 2013: History of GAP). This vision is supported by demographic data portraying southeastern provinces as lagging behind other provinces socio-economically (GAP, 2013c). Calling the area backward devalues local knowledge and opinions and creates an imaginary portraying state culture as ‘progress’ and ‘development’. In this discourse, people ‘who want development’ must also become civilians of the Turkish state, creating a self-disciplining mentality.

The above cultural policies materialize in plans to resettle populations in centralized villages (see Fig. 2 for an overview of affected villages and Figs. 3 and 4 for examples of what resettlement sites look like). Governmental design choices are embedded in and justified by specific ideas about how ‘modern’ people should live and how state services can be delivered, namely in central villages. Dispersed rural settlements in the area are, by contrast, portrayed as difficult to control and as possible breeding-ground for...
social unrest. This imagines the area’s re-patterning through physical structures such as the dam and new houses and villages to reconfigure the region’s socio-cultural and economic makeup.

Socio-cultural and territorial re-patterning through specific resettlement designs was not originally part of the Ilisu Dam project but was included later, when European banks and companies got involved and applied for export credit guarantees in their respective home countries. For their applications, project-planning authorities were urged to prepare environmental impact assessments and resettlement plans, which then forced Turkish authorities to actually design resettlement sites such as “New Ilisu” and “New Hasankeyf”. Export credit agencies intended this to reduce the dam’s negative local effects, but these documents then materialized government authorities’ views and hydrosocial imaginaries about the region, the local population, the dam project and their future.

In the official narrative, however, resettlement plans merely ‘scientifically’ and ‘objectively’ support the previous idea that local people long for and need drastic change, which the Ilisu Dam project can bring. For example, in 2005 the State Water Works (DSI) and the Ilisu Consortium, then comprising German, Austrian, Swiss and Turkish investors, published a resettlement action plan with quotes local voices mostly in favor of the dam: “Yes, I really want the dam to be constructed”, “We have a terrible life here. In addition to this, new jobs will be created. Why wouldn’t we want it?” or “Let them [the Turkish government] save us from here, so that we will have civilization” (DSI and Ilisu Consortium, 2005:44). This builds a certain ‘truth’ and on-the-ground ‘reality’ supporting the state’s and consortium’s hydro-political imaginary, to help realize and materialize it. This is not to say that these accounts are invented. Geographer Leila Harris shows how many local population groups have high expectations for the region’s economic betterment through GAP (Harris, 2012). Building on hope, expectations and discursive inclusion engages local people in the narrative about a better future. Dam opponents, however, contest and criticize the creation of such hope and expectations, arguing that resettlement areas are unsuited for sustaining people’s agriculture-based livelihoods and that job creation will be marginal, if at all (CounterCurrent, 2011; Interview Doğa Derenği, 2013).

The above does not mean that the Turkish state is a hegemonic and homogenous power that simply desires to suppress or assimilate Kurdish populations through the project and specific resettlement designs. Rather, official state policies regarding the Kurdish issue have changed over time and have potentially moved away from straightforward assimilation policies. Instead, the current AKP Government embraces a multiculturalist discourse in which ethnic sub-identities are acknowledged and seen to be connected under an umbrella-like Turkish citizenship (Saracoglu, 2009). Such cultural policies of recognition are reflected in Government plans stating, for example, that there are “people of different ethnic origins in the region” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013: The Ilisu Dam) and that “local sub-culture elements may form a positive synthesis with the national culture” (GAP website, 2013: Objectives of GAP). Such acknowledgement is, however, highly selective; establishing what is the national culture and what are sub-ethnicities: a governmentality expression that deeply reflects the above-mentioned ‘managed multi-culturalism’ (see also Assies, 2010; Boelens, 2009; Hale, 2010). Furthermore, though this quote shows recognition of cultural and ethnic differences, relative numbers of present ethnic groups are not addressed (in the five provinces affected by the Ilisu Dam, ethnic Turks and Arab groups are much smaller in size than the Kurds (Morvaridi, 2004)). Thereby, the Kurdish issue is left out of the dam imaginary, ignoring claims by scholars or anti-dam campaigners that the Ilisu Dam is highly political because the area is mainly inhabited by Kurds

(see for example Bağs, 1997; Harris, 2002; Jongerden, 2010; Ronayne, 2005). The project’s political character is neutralized and instead portrayed as one-dimensional, generating energy and development. Excluding or including the dam’s Kurdish dimension in discussions can include or exclude population groups and potential dam opponents, as explained in the following section.

Another important aspect of Turkish state authorities’ hydrosocial territory and imaginaries associates the project area with notions of ‘insecurity’ and ‘threat’. This makes the Ilisu Dam part of a wider security imaginary and narrative that recurs throughout Turkish politics (Warner, 2012). The dam is imagined as a means to ensure Atatürk’s principle of ‘Peace at home, peace abroad’, referring to both the Kurdish problem and Turkey’s relations with its neighbors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013; GAP, 2013a) enhancing the area’s security in several ways: socio-economic improvements in the GAP region are expected to eradicate part of PKK’s support (Harris, 2002); expanding infrastructure while constructing the dam will make the area more accessible to government administration and military activity; and flooding the area would deprive PKK of important hide-outs (Jongerden, 2010). This could also be a reason why the Government chose to construct one huge dam instead of several smaller ones. However, the official design choice argument is that it is economically more efficient and profitable to build one single big dam (Ilisu Consortium, 2005). Within this (in)secure territory, water is imagined as an ‘actant’ (Callon, 1992; Latour, 1994) both as a border, aiding the Turkish state’s physical integrity, and as a point of access for military activity. Reconfiguring territory, here in spatial terms, is therefore a way of governing people through water and not just governing water itself.

The security discourse is also reflected by officially framing anti-dam struggles as ‘separatist’ or ‘terrorist’ (Eberlein et al., 2010; Ronayne, 2005). The terrorism discourse, shaping the normative divide between legitimate and illegitimate thinking and knowledge repertoires, runs throughout many other Turkish political discussions as well. Interestingly, people opposing the dam follow suit. For example, a resident cited in Ronayne (2005: 85) calls the authorities responsible for flooding Hasankeyf “terrorists of history.” Hence, the same vocabulary is used to contest the other’s imaginary, showing how different imaginaries within a single territory directly interact with each other.

3.2. The emergence of opposing coalitions and diverging regimes of representation

The Ilisu Dam project and the dominant hydro-political imaginaries constructed around it by Turkish state authorities, trigger responses and counter-forces from a wide array of stakeholders. Symbolic-discursive pluralisms and materialized territorial imaginaries evolve through multiple socio-cultural, political and economic projects and projections within the dam’s territorial reconfiguration. This case has a particularly high diversity in regimes of representation mobilized by dam opponents, to challenge technocratic discourses portraying the dam as an undisputed necessity for Turkey’s energy policies. The main opposing imaginaries about hydrosocial territories are: Kurdish, environmentalist and international. This is not to say that, for example, all Kurds view the dam in the same way, but rather to point out how different dam dimensions such as the ‘Kurdish dimension’ (arising from the project region’s ethnic makeup) involve Kurdish stakeholders. While maintaining their own thematic focus toward the Ilisu Dam, the different Kurdish, environmentalist and international groups link up to form coalitions reinforcing their parallel (but not identical) struggles.

As with Ewen’s (2014) observation on the anti-dam campaign in Yusufeli, anti-Ilisu campaigns are highly dynamic, evolving,
3.2.1. Kurdish hydrosocial territory

The earliest opposition against the Ilisu Dam came, in the 1990s from Kurdish activists, academics and diaspora devoted to overall protection of Kurdish rights in the region, e.g., the UK-based Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP, 1999). Most dam-affected people are Kurds, so flooding the area is by some interpreted as deliberately erasing part of Kurdish history and culture (Aybog˘a, 2009): “Here is being drowned Kurds’ equivalent of national identity - their single most important deed to their native land” (Izady, 1996: 12). This image shows the enormous physical and symbolic power attributed to the dam and its water, to de-link the present from the past by re-configuring the environment and considerably altering people’s relationship to their territory, history and cultural background. Such a break with the past, ‘erasing’ the existing socio-environment to generate space for new, ‘pure and unspoiled’ territorial configurations, is part of wider utopia-inspired hydrosocial traditions (Achterhuis et al., 2010; Boelens and Post Uiterweer, 2013; Kaika, 2006). This, together with forced displacements and major conflicts in the 1960s and 1980s, makes this struggle even more essential for Kurdish rights groups. More than just hydraulic infrastructure, the dam is hydrosocial territory in which the Turkish state once again exerts physical, political, symbolic and discursive power over the dominated Kurdish regions.

However, claims about the area being inherently Kurdish are challenged by the Turkish government, and altered by some dam-opposing organizations. Turkish authorities have not yet acknowledged any specifically Kurdish cultural claims to Hasankeyf or the Ilisu project area but emphasize that different civilizations have lived in the Tigris Valley in the past (GAP, 2013a). Second, Turkish environmental organizations stress the area’s importance for the whole Muslim world rather than only for the Kurds because an important imam’s tomb is there (Interview Doğa Derneg˘i, 2013; Ronayne, 2005). Other international organizations, such as the Damocracy Movement, argue that Hasankeyf and the Tigris Valley hold value for the global community because of the ecosystem and archaeological sites documenting early human civilizations (e.g., Ahunbay and Balkiz, 2009; CounterCurrent, n. d.; Shoup, 2006). Their claims do not contradict each other, but emphasize different dimensions and characteristics of the dam’s hydrosocial territory, to reach a broader audience. Eberlein et al. (2010) confirm that Turkish and international celebrities (in the campaign from 2007 onwards) re-framed the dam project, de-emphasizing ‘Kurdish’ dam dimensions to get Turkish society as a whole involved. This move was tactically necessary since parts of Turkish society now recognize Kurds but exclude them from their conceptions of society (Saracoglu, 2009). Imaginaries are thus strategically constructed and instrumentalized so that respective constituencies can feel part of the hydrosocial territory and become involved.

Finally, rather than focusing on positivistic factual truth about the area’s historical relevance for different communities and cultures, it is fundamental to acknowledge that perceiving the area as Kurdish involves Kurdish stakeholders in the hydrosocial territory debate. Confronted with the threat of the Ilisu Dam, parts of the Kurdish community, although physically distant, feel strong belonging to the area and thus engage in anti-dam protests. Harris (2008) argued that state practices to unify and nationalize Turkish territory might encourage and reinforce Kurdish identity-formation. An apparent example of border-crossing Kurdish involvement in hydrosocial identity construction is the above-mentioned Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) (Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2009), defining the Ilisu Dam hydrosocial territory in terms of Kurdishness, justifying their involvement on grounds of territory and ethnicity. The Kurdish diaspora in the US and Western Europe also became involved, playing a crucial role in advancing scalar policies by setting up key alliances between local and global NGOs and raising awareness about the project globally (Ilhan, 2009).

3.2.2. Environmentalist hydrosocial territory

Following advocacy work by Kurdish human rights groups, an environmentalist perspective enlarged the Ilisu project hydrosocial territory, focusing the dam’s potential impacts essentially, though not exclusively, on negative environmental impacts. Destruction of 400 km of ecosystem, loss of endangered species, deteriorating water quality and increasing risks of diseases such as typhus and malaria are just a few named by different organizations (e.g., CounterCurrent, n.d.; Berne Declaration, 2001; Ahunbay and Balkiz, 2009; ECA Watch, 2009).

Many environmental organizations have included the Ilisu Dam in their broader campaigns: for example the Damocracy Movement took the Ilisu Dam into their political and symbolic–discursive struggle to challenge labeling of hydropower as “green” energy. A representative of Doğa Derneg˘i, one of the member organizations, explained that they chose two representative dams for their campaign: the Ilisu Dam and the Belo Monte Dam in the Brazilian Amazon (Interview Doğa Derneg˘i, 2013), illustrating how an organization embeds local struggles globally. Time wise, it is interesting that Doğa Derneg˘i, Bird Life International’s Turkish partner, joined the anti-dam struggle only in 2007, the year that the ECAs of Germany, Austria and Switzerland approved the project in principle. Considering that the anti-Ilisu struggle started in the 1990s, 2007 seems rather late. Thus, the dam’s environmental dimension was incorporated into struggles and alternative hydrosocial territory imaginaries much later than the Kurdish dimension.

Similarly, as ecological conditions got environmentalists involved, the dam-affected area’s many archaeological sites involved archaeologists. In 2005, a fact-finding mission by the Kurdish Human Rights Project with Irish archaeologists clearly took a position against the dam (Ronayne, 2005). The archaeologists were involved by an earlier complaint against then of the dam at the 2001 World Archaeological Forum as “a form of ethnic cleansing in which governments and companies would have been complicit” (World Archaeological Forum, 2001:1). A clear politicization of archaeology indicates how science engages in politics and how discussions about technologies and their impacts are argumentative processes rather than simply ‘truthful scientific facts’. This also illustrates how the struggle for a certain hydrosocial territory (to preserve the place’s specific ecological and cultural richness) and against the configuration suggested by the government can connect actors with each other and to infrastructure, place and the Tigris River in networks that would not have emerged without the common struggle.

To counter the claim of losing valuable archaeology, the Turkish government claims that dam plans have in fact led to state-sponsored salvage excavations which would otherwise not have happened (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2013). Responding to critics, they maintain that many archaeological sites can be saved and rebuilt in the ‘New Hasankeyf Open-Air Cultural Park’ giving a place for archaeology (albeit relocated) in the new hydrosocial territory. Many dam-opponents argue that artefacts are difficult to transport, will lose their importance once detached from their natural environment and territory-of-belonging, and that the Cultural Park is not likely to attract many tourists (Shoup, 2006; Ilhan, 2009; CounterCurrent, 2011).
3.2.3. Integrating and up scaling hydrosocial territories

The capital- and knowledge-intensive nature of the Ilisu Dam urged the Turkish government to search for funding and expertise abroad, bringing together different consortia with construction companies and investors from, among others, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. This direct foreign involvement upcales and enlarges the Ilisu Dam’s hydrosocial territory, making new actors relevant and the dam debate international. Involving European companies coincided with Turkey’s acceptance as a European Union candidate in 1999. Although it is not clear how this accep-
tance helped unite European companies and the Turkish govern-
ment, the EU accession process reconfigured the Ilisu project’s hydro-politics in several ways.

Most importantly, foreign companies and investors applied for export credit guarantees from their respective national export credit agencies (ECAs) which brought European civil-society actors into the anti-dam campaign, especially to hold national companies and their ECAs accountable for investments and actions abroad. The Swiss Berne Declaration, the Austrian ECA and the German CounterCurrent are examples of NGOs that lobbied to cancel export credit guarantees, urging ECAs to demand compliance with international standards (Atzle, 2014; Eberlein et al., 2010). These international standards lifted Ilisu Dam construction hydro- and environmental policies from European to global levels. More specifically, though Turkey had officially rejected World Commis-
sion on Dams (WCD) recommendations published in 2000 (Fujikura and Nakayama, 2009) and disregards World Bank stan-
dards, this pressured to include them, at least partially, since Ger-
man and Swiss Governments welcomed WCD recommendations and World Bank standards, and took them into account to evaluate the Ilisu project (Eberlein et al., 2010). In effect, Turkish authorities published an environmental impact assessment (EIA) and resettle-
ment plan (RP) in 2005, both documents not required by Turkish law. The EIA and the RP reports were published just as European companies and ECAs got involved, and Turkey-EU accession nego-
tiations began officially, suggesting that Turkey’s aspiration to join the EU was a major incentive to align dam plans with European and international requirements.

Although the European companies finally withdrew and Turkey decided to self-finance the project (as also happened three years earlier for the Yusufeli Dam (Evren, 2014)), the international anti-Ilisu campaign attracted a lot of attention in Turkey and the contractor countries and temporarily succeeded in stopping Ilisu Dam construction, shaping the Ilisu Dam project considerably.

The increasingly international ‘arena of protest’ can, besides the involvement of European consortia, also be explained by the political climate in Turkey. For example, because of the state of emergency in southeastern Turkey until 2002, civil society organi-
izations and state authorities distrust each other, and freedom of expression and association are limited (Interview Ayboğa, 2013; Setton and Drillisch, 2006). This made it dangerous to criticize the project in Turkey, and the protest movement was often por-
trayed as ‘terrorist’ or ‘separatist’. Transnational alliances have pro-
vided the anti-dam protest movement with new powers and possibilities.

Such dam opposition coalitions are highly dynamic, using multi-scale, international politics and expanding the issue of dam development both geographically and in ‘issue reach’. Politics of scale are therefore not only about characteristics of the environ-
ment or resources that determine who is a relevant social actor but also about strategic framing of an issue according to particular scales so that power and authority are reconfigured (Cf. Budds and Hinojosa, 2012; Swyngedouw and Williams, 2016; Warner et al., 2014). Framing the Ilisu Dam’s hydrosocial territory on multiple issue scales involved Kurdish activists, environmentalists and others; involving European investors enabled anti-dam coalitions to frame dam development also as a European affair. Interestingly, the Turkish Government continued framing the Tigris’ manage-
ment as an exclusively national concern, depicting the river as being purely Turkish and disregarding its transnational flows or other supra-national dimensions (Warner et al., 2014). This would exclude certain actors from the relevant hydrosocial territory, to weaken international opposition claims. In frames constructed by the Turkish government and dam opposition coalitions, not only hydrological flows define who is in or out of the respective hydrosocial territory. Accordingly, scalar policies play a decisive role in negotiations and struggles surrounding Ilisu Dam develop-
ment and create diverging territorial imaginaries.

Although ignored by the nation-based discourse and imagined community constructed by the Turkish government, the diverse existing and newly forged local-national-regional scales become increasingly relevant and important. The transboundary nature of the Tigris and Euphrates river basin caused tensions among Iraq, Syria and Turkey, also leading international institutions (such as the World Bank) to refuse to fund dam construction (Harris, 2002). Tensions are about Turkey’s possibility to ‘turn off the tap’, expected negative impacts on downstream agricul-
tural activity as well as about politics concerning the Kurdish question. Turkish authorities, however, argue that the Ilisu Dam will not negatively affect water quality or quantity, as it is not constructed for consumption such as irrigation but rather for hydropower and drought and flood control (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

Interregional water dependence also links the anti-Ilisu Dam movement’s success with organizations in the region. In the 1990s and early 2000s, anti-dam protests found good allies in Syria and Iraq, but opposition became more difficult in 2006 when rela-
tions among the three countries improved (Warner, 2008). While later newly resurging regional instability and conflict severely changed high-level political relations once again, it remains as dif-
cult as ever for the anti-Ilisu Dam movement to find allies in the two neighboring states. Nevertheless, in the past ten years of strugg-
gle, the Turkish local level has been linked with the most affected area in Iraq, as both the Ilisu Dam project area and the marsh lands in Iraq are home to minorities. Marsh Arabs have, like the Kurds, experienced much oppression because of their ethnic identity in the past and now see their livelihoods threatened by the Ilisu Dam (Carkoğlu and Eder, 2001). Those factors, and efforts by organ-
izations to engage in scale politics and promote transnational soli-
darity, have led to joint efforts and actions. For example, in May 2012 marsh Arab tribal leaders traveled to Hasankeyf to announce their solidarity with the anti-dam struggle and jointly sign a decla-
ration against dam construction (Stop Ilisu, 2012). Furthermore, Iraqi environmental organizations participated in the ‘World River Conference’ (May 2013, Istanbul) organized by the Damocracy Movement.

In short, a number of diverging imaginaries about hydrosocial territories encapsulate various constellations of actors, landscapes, science and technology. Certain coalitions engaged in the anti-dam struggle are united by a common goal. Yet, the common goal of preventing the Ilisu Dam is for each one of them part of a broader campaign, connected to divergent underlying interests, views and representations – for example, the misperception of dams being green energy, injustices inflicted on the Kurdish people, and privat-
ization policies in Turkey. This does not devalue the anti-dam struggle; rather, it shows how the multi-diimensionality of a hydro-political project unites groups and stakeholders from different backgrounds. It also shows that there is no simple ‘truth’ about the Ilisu Dam but that everybody constructs his or her own technopolitical and hydrosocial imaginary, shaped by the broader context, personal position and discourses about the region and dam development.
While previous sections have examined the different stakeholders opposing the dam, the following section will focus on the positions of local people. Representations from dam opposing organizations about the local population affected by the Ilisu Dam do not always cover actual views and identities of the people and their dam imaginaries. Rather, local engagement with dam opposition coalitions is ambiguous and has fluctuated with time, being sturdier at the beginning of the struggle and transforming into widespread resignation as years passed by. The following section will provide further detail, outlining how the Ilisu Dam is imagined to reconfigure the hydrosocial territory locally and then elaborating on actual local involvement in the anti-Dam struggle and engagement with associated imaginaries. Finally, a brief overview is provided of the dynamics evolving at the time of writing.

4. Local involvement and emerging dynamics

Non-governmental organizations estimate that there are around 78,000 people living in the area to be affected by dam construction (CounterCurrent, 2011). Several concerns exist regarding local impact of the project: compensation eligibility criteria, compensation sufficiency and disadvantages for women, landless people and people displaced by the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (Morvaridi, 2004; Ronayne, 2005; Cernea, 2006). The overall doubt is whether people will be enabled to restore their livelihoods after resettlement.

Accounts differ regarding local people’s own imaginaries about how the dam will reconfigure their territory as well as the degree to which their views were consulted and taken into account by decision-makers. Dam-opponents argue that there was no satisfactory consultation, while the government says there has been plenty of participation (DSI and Ilisu Consortium, 2005). Similarly, dam-opposing organizations agree that most local residents oppose the dam (Setton and Drillisch, 2006; ECA Watch, 2009) while the government’s resettlement plan states that people welcome the dam as an opportunity for new jobs and to escape poverty (DSI and Ilisu Consortium, 2005). Although such accounts must be viewed carefully, some local groups do directly profit from the dam. For example, owners of large estates are likely to get considerable expropriation money for their land, as will people owning land close to the construction site, where property values have increased considerably (Morvaridi, 2004; Interview Aybog˘a, 2013; Ronayne, 2005). Such a timely increase in land values, for better or for worse, has also been observed in other dam-affected areas (e.g., Evren, 2014).

Accounts about the local population’s involvement in struggles against the dam are ambiguous. Especially before the Ilisu project was nationalized in 2010, grassroots protest actions involved, for example, dam-affected people handing over 1500 signed letters to European embassies in Ankara (2008) or a local delegation meeting European ambassadors in person (2009). Schemann et al. (2014) also argue that people expressed their dam opposition by voting for dam-opposing parties (Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party) which, however, also represented other ‘Kurdish concerns’ beyond the dam issue. Nevertheless, some organizations also expressed their resentment about the sometimes missing preparedness of local inhabitants to actively participate in anti-dam protests (Interview Doğa Derneği, 2013; Interview Aybog˘a, 2013). This could, among other things, be due to the larger social context which makes that people who oppose the dam might be scared to openly express criticism, also considering the fact that anti-dam activists have been arrested in the past.

At the same time, Hasankeyf residents criticized organizations prioritizing environmental and archaeological issues over people and their poverty (Interview Hasankeyf resident, 2013) and Elma (2013: 4) notes that “arguments by […] activists […] are often situated at a stereotypical rhetoric level that seems out of touch with the local community’s fears and aspirations.” This suggests that local residents actively engage with the imaginaries employed by dam-opposing organizations, while they do not necessarily hold the same view or feel represented by them. In the mentioned interview and the evoked dam imaginary, for example, potential economic benefits prevailed over ecological threats or Kurdish rights concerns.

Time, with the Ilisu project hanging like a sword of Damocles over the area for decades now, can also change local attitudes and involvement: it leads to mental stress and to de-politicizing the project as the local population longs for certainty. This feeds acceptance and ‘de facto’ self-correction by the local population in accordance with rulers’ territorial construction interests. Actions by the anti-dam movement prolong waiting and uncertainty, eroding local support for the movement as local people have to cope with uncertainty every day. This happened with the anti-Yusufeli Dam campaign (Evren, 2014) and is also confirmed by several sources for the Ilisu case. For example, a Doğa Derneği representative said “They [the local people] are tired and bored now; they want a final decision” (Interview Doğa Derneği, 2013) and a newspaper article titled “ Hasankeyf locals stuck in limbo” cited a Hasankeyf resident: “The people here are tired. For decades, they heard there was going to be a dam […] They lost patience. Many of them have told me, ‘If we have to go, if we are going to lose this place, let’s do it as quickly as possible.’” (Today’s Zaman, 20 January 2013). At the same time, other people have been deeply convinced by GAP discourse or have actual hopes to benefit from the Ilisu Dam and the GAP program in general, through job creation and education opportunities (Harris, 2012). The web of power, territorial reality construction, and resistance is complex and ambivalent. This overlaps with Harris’ call to “move beyond simplistic associations of the southeast as ‘Kurdish’ or necessarily oppositional to the Turkish state” (Harris, 2009: 14).

The Ilisu Dam is expected to open late 2016 but discussions or protests have not stopped: different protest actions, such as bicycle rallies or gatherings in Hasankeyf, were organized in 2014 and 2015, and some political parties associated with the Kurdish people made the dam a campaign issue during the presidential elections in 2014. A court rule in July 2014 states that the Ilisu Dam cannot be exempted from the mandatory environmental impact assessment, reversing the Turkish Government’s earlier change of laws (Hürriyet Daily News, 7 July 2014). Furthermore, the PKK has called upon construction workers to resign, attacked machinery needed for dam construction and abducted two subcontractors (Dargecit Haber, 5 December 2014; Hürriyet Daily News, 18 August 2014). These developments, between August and December 2014, halted constructions, resumed only when workers from mainly non-Kurdish provinces were brought to work at the site (Interview Aybog˘a, 2015) under tight security measures, involving over 1000 soldiers and recruiting Kurdish village militia (Aybog˘a, 2015a). The situation remains tense as recent Ilisu construction site clashes show (June 2015, Aybog˘a, 2015b). Resurgence of tensions between the Turkish government and the PKK and the resulting dam area militarization also involve the Turkish government’s non-intervention to defend the Kurdish city of Kobane in Syria against the Islamic State, which sparked resentment among Kurds living in Turkey. Resettlement from Hasankeyf village has not yet happened, though construction of ‘New Hasankeyf’ is advancing.

Research activity in dam-affected areas seems limited. General academic interest in dam construction in Turkey is instead shifting to projects in the Black Sea region (e.g., Islar, 2012). Nevertheless, it remains crucial to investigate how the Ilisu Dam construction will ultimately re-configure hydrosocial territory and how building hydraulic infrastructure opposes, entwines with and/or changes
people’s imaginaries about themselves and their socio-economic, cultural, political and ecological environment. Future analysis of on-the-ground hybrid materialization of the GAP hydrosocial territory can significantly complement our paper’s insights and focus of first and foremost analyzing the diverging regimes of representing what the Ilisu Dam’s hydrosocial territory is or should be, according to different stakeholders and coalitions.

The Government’s hydro-political imaginary envisages a productive region through GAP and the Ilisu Dam: a ‘breadbasket’ and energy producer, fully enrolled (economically, spatially and socio-culturally) in the Turkish nation-state. This secure, reconfigured territory’s imagined inhabitants are controllable, ‘well integrated’ Turkish citizens on their way to ‘modernity’, prosperity and ‘civilisation’. This imaginary is challenged by regimes of representation defining the Ilisu Dam project area’s perceived environmental, cultural and social values, rather than its hydropower and purely economic potential. Hence, both the government and dam opponents (forming alliances of various issues and scales by defining a common goal and a common adversary) construct and promote their own imaginaries of the Ilisu Dam and its desired or feared impacts. The actual impacts and real-life consequences of GAP and the Ilisu Dam remain to be seen: who wins and who loses, or where and how territorial imaginaries and materializations will hybridize, a fundamental topic for future studies about hydrosocial territories in Turkey.

5. Conclusions

Ongoing planning and construction efforts, negotiation processes and struggles to stop dam building, in a context of tremendous political, economic and cultural sensitivities, make the Ilisu Dam project a very insightful case of a hydrosocial territory and its various imaginaries. Different stakeholders construct different socio-natural imaginaries and build multi-actor and multi-scale coalitions to justify or de-justify the Ilisu Dam according to their backgrounds and interests. Coalitions and their mobilized regimes of representation evolve and change over time, showing how highly dynamic these hydrosocial territories’ imaginaries often are. We have shown an overview of arguments by the Turkish government, and its alleged underlying interests, as contrasted and contradicted by the wide array of dam opponents. We discussed how such a massive infrastructure project has different effects for different people and ecologies, generating winners and losers with outcomes that are not yet clear. Therefore, impact analysis cannot be based on overall categorizations and generalizations but must scrutinize on-the-ground effects, considering highly divergent cultural, political, technological and ecological issues, and differentiate among a wide variety of nearby and distant places, peoples and livelihoods.

Our analytical focus combining hydrosocial territoriality and governmentality has shown how mega-hydraulic development projects make or imagine territorial re-configuration: hydrologically, physically, economically, socio-culturally and discursively, all at once and in entwined ways. The case study’s theoretical lens of hydrosocial territoriality showcases dam construction’s multi-dimensionality, including governmentality projects going far beyond ‘just’ water governance. Allegedly ‘neutral’, ‘technical’ hydro-infrastructure projects entail discourses implying concealed efforts to reconfigure existing socio-natural relationships and implant new meanings, values, distribution patterns and frames of rule-making and alignment; they aim to build profoundly new ‘territory’ matching powerful ruling group interests (in people and resources) to self-governing citizens.

Our engagement with the concept of hydro-social territories shows how it presents a theoretical innovation as compared to similar concepts such as, for example, those of waterscape and the hydro-social cycle (see, e.g. Baviskar, 2007; Boelens, 2014; Harris and Atalout, 2010; Linton and Budds, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2007, 2009), as it stresses the potential diversity of overlapping, simultaneously existing hydro-territorial regimes and imaginaries in one and the same geo-political location that result from multiscalar political geography shaped by water flows, technologies, institutions and power structures. Further, by incorporating the governmentality focus, the subtleties of the web of domination-resistance get important attention, whereby Foucault’s governmentality studies are reconsidered in terms of socionatural networks rather than as a sole matter of biopolitics. “Government is the right disposition of things . . .”, as Foucault himself states, “. . . what government has to do with is not territory but rather a sort of complex composed of men and things. The things with which in this sense government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of substance, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to that other kind of things, customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc. . . .” (Foucault 1991 (1978):93). In this Foucauldian conceptualization power is omnipresent (which is not the same as omnipotent, or hegemonic as in Gramscian conceptualization). In that sense, this paper demonstrated how power is not “in” or “possessed by” particular human groups, nor is it fixed in the technology. Power acts as a mediating force and is reshaped and redistributed through inter-human and human-nature-technology interaction. Accordingly, power and resistance are produced in action at every moment and not restricted to particular nodes or locations.

Finally, although dam opponents did not attain their goals, involving multiple organizations in the struggle stimulated debate about the dam and questioned dominant Turkish government discourses. Their actions have helped to attract national and international attention to injustices happening in the southeastern provinces – more of which will be needed. The dominant imaginary has now been deeply contested and cannot simply materialize as foreseen, in hegemonic territory. The near future will track these hydrosocial collisions and territorial struggles, in on-the-ground, plural, always-contested territorial imaginaries.

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