

## Water and counter-hegemony: Kurdish struggle in the Tigris and Euphrates in Turkey

Agua y contra-hegemonía: la lucha kurda en el Tigris y Éufrates en Turquía

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### Abstract

Water issues are often related to general questions of justice. This article discusses Tigris and Euphrates water issues from the point of view of Kurds in Turkey. The goal here is not to discuss the entire landscape of power relations and interests in the recent history of these rivers inside the country or across borders, but to understand how opposition Kurds view the way in which Turkish authorities manage water resources, policies and politics within the basins, affecting local society and the environment. It has been found that beyond establishing hydro-hegemony over co-riparian states along the Tigris and Euphrates (Syria and Iraq), the Turkish state has sought to deploy its soft and hard power over Kurds. The opposition Kurdish movement has responded by developing its own counter-hegemonic measures. Their proposals seem to aim at winning over Kurds, but also Turks and other peoples. Their framing of a different type of stakeholder participation in decision-making calls for a model of direct democracy covering different aspects of life, including water management and environmental soundness. The research is based on academic and government literature and a number of semi-structured interviews with Kurdish municipal officials, faculty and activists.

Keywords: Dam projects; Hydro-hegemony; Kurds; PKK; Water Justice

### Resumen

El tema del agua afecta otros asuntos de justicia. En el artículo se discute del agua del Tigris y Éufrates desde puntos de vista kurdos en Turquía. No se aborda todo el entramado de relaciones de poder e intereses en la historia de estos ríos dentro del país o a través de las fronteras, sino cómo los opositores kurdos perciben cómo las autoridades turcas manejan los recursos hídricos y su política en la cuenca, afectando a la población y al medio ambiente. Se argumenta que el Estado, más allá de establecer su hidro-hegemonía sobre los países corribereños (Siria e Iraq), ha intentado proyectar su poder blando y duro sobre los kurdos. El movimiento kurdo opositor ha respondido estableciendo sus propias medidas contra-hegemónicas. Sus propuestas parecen buscar ganar a los kurdos, pero también a los turcos y a otras poblaciones. Su propuesta de participación social en la toma de decisiones es una propuesta de democracia directa que incluye el manejo del agua y preocupaciones ambientales. La investigación se basa en el estudio de bibliografía académica, documentos oficiales turcos y una serie de entrevistas semiestructuradas con funcionarios municipales, profesores universitarios y activistas kurdos.

Palabras clave: Hidro-hegemonía; kurdos; PKK; Justicia del agua; proyectos de presas

## 1. Introduction

This article discusses Tigris and Euphrates water issues related to Kurds in Turkey. The goal here is not to discuss the entire landscape of power relations and interests in the recent history of these rivers inside the country or across borders, but to understand how opposition Kurds challenge the way in which Turkish authorities manage water resources, policies and politics within the basins. The argument states that, beyond establishing hydro-hegemony over co-riparian states along the Tigris and Euphrates (Syria and Iraq), the Turkish state has sought to deploy its soft and hard power in relation to Water over Kurds, affecting local society and the environment. The opposition Kurdish movement has responded by developing its own counter-hegemonic measures in terms of water justice. They have expressed strong opposition to dam building and the overall state water policy in East and South-East Anatolia as part of their fight against the denial of rights to the Kurds but also setting forth an overall opposition stance in the country and beyond, in which they also frame environmental issues. This has played a role in developing a comprehensive political alternative to the government and mainstream political currents in Turkey.

Since the 1990s, pro-Kurdish legal parties, as well as the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) insurgent movement, have sought to supplant the Turkish-Kurdish war with a political game, which requires that opposition Kurds conquer and maintain leadership in East and South-East Anatolia (and that they develop their movement in other areas where Kurds live, such as the rest of Turkey, in Syria, Iraq, Iran and Western Europe). This contention builds upon the Gramscian theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Dominant groups in society, in Turkey and elsewhere, develop a framework of leadership and coercion that helps them keep subaltern groups under control, but if one of the latter seeks to radically change the power structure, it must develop a counter-hegemony in which a large section of the subaltern follow their lead. For opposition Kurds in Turkey, water and the environment are part and parcel of the struggle over hegemony.

The research is based on academic literature, official Turkish documents and a number of semi-structured interviews conducted between May and June 2013 in East and South-east Anatolia with Kurdish municipal officials, including Abdullah Demirbaş (BDP), Mayor of Diyarbakir Sur Municipality, the directors of the Diyarbakir (DISKI) and Batman (BASKI) water and sanitation municipal administrations, members of history, international relations, biology and engineering faculties in various universities and with a leading environmentalist activist in Tuncelli, as well as with individual citizens of these regions.

In the following section, some theoretical aspects of water justice, hydro-hegemony, hegemony and counter-hegemony are considered, as well as how hydro-hegemony theorists have dealt with Tigris and Euphrates waters. In the next section, a brief description is made of frames produced by the Turkish state of the Kurdish question and water management along the Tigris and Euphrates and their tributaries. The following section presents opposition Kurdish frames concerning dams and water.

## 2. Approach

Although the conception of hegemony by Gramsci can be and has been understood in different ways in relation to water management and water justice (Davidson-Harden *et al.*, 2007), this article uses it to explain how a specific subaltern anti-capitalist movement, the Kurdish opposition movement, has been waging a long-term struggle, among other things, to advance a ‘conception of water as both a fundamental human right and part of the ‘global commons’ over and against neoliberal definitions of water as a commodity’, to use the words of Davidson-Harden *et al.* (2007).

This is in line with what other authors also have concluded in analyzing how communities and social movements mobilize against projects, such as large dams, that affect the availability and quality of local water in what constitutes a fight for environmental, social and water justice (Martínez-Labajos and Martínez-Alier, 2015).

Through different social and political expressions, opposition Kurds in Turkey and beyond fight for a broad program that includes environmental, gender, class, ethnic and national demands. As it shall become evident in this text, they have framed their views on water in the Tigris and Euphrates basins in terms of justice, rights to water and human rights expressed in ways that challenge neoliberal understandings. The municipalities that they govern in Turkey, for example, distribute water for free even though the Turkish central government requires municipalities and end users to pay for the liquid. This engages a topic discussed in European institutions (Koff and Maganda, 2016), that the Turkish government has often sought to please. The Kurdish opposition movement seems to be developing a struggle of positions (as opposed to a war of movements) to broaden their leadership among different sectors of society to establish a counter-hegemonic historical block alternative to the one led by the Turkish state and corporations. One could wonder if this conflict is capable of opening roads towards a paradigm of peace (Jiménez y Rueda, 2012).

As Neal (Patrik) *et al.* (2014) contend, there is more than one way to conceive the most ‘just’ policies in relation to water resources. They summarize the justice philosophies that can be appealed to when prioritizing water uses and values: Virtue Theory, Prior Rights, Intergenerational Justice, Environmental Rights, Property Rights, Economic Good, Utilitarian Theories, Moral Imperative. Davidson-Harden *et al.* (2007) are right when they see that social movements on a world scale dealing with the right to water have been establishing a counter-hegemony around the human right to water. Similarly, De Sousa Santos and Rodríguez Garavito (2005) argue that counterhegemonic movements are active in the global arena that challenge the institutions that support the neoliberal globalization. The Kurdish opposition movement is part of this global trend.

Many issues discussed in the water justice literature appear in the opposition Kurdish discourse on water. For example, they deal with several topics raised in the review by Krishnan and George (2014). As it might have become obvious from previous paragraphs, opposition Kurds view their struggle for water justice separate from other socio-political rights, but interacting with them. In practice, they fight for an understanding of the hu-

man right to water in broad social and political terms, not only as access to basic water and sanitation services. Their understanding of the human right to water is conceived as inseparable from water conservation and protection, challenging the goals of states, industry and corporations. They also have expressed their concern for the right of downstream riparian countries and their populations to sufficient water even though they might wield less power than Turkey (a point raised by Zeitoun *et al.*, 2014). In sum, it becomes obvious that water injustices are not fought in 'narrow domains relating only to water [...] when water wrongs are essentially complex and riveted in nested political, social, economic injustices' (Joshi, 2015).

The importance of power in relations over water in international watersheds has been established by the London Water Study Group, drawing upon previous scholarship (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006; Zeitoun, 2011; Warner, 2010). Most studies on the politics of Tigris and Euphrates waters, however, focus on relations among state actors. This is a normal outcome of the importance of the outstanding conflict between Turkey, Syria and Iraq for the resources of these rivers, which has dragged along since the 1950s and has been quite explosive at times (Conde, 2014) although it also has gone through important lapses of negotiations and cooperation (Conde, 2017). These processes have been studied both from the point of view of power relations (see among others Naff and Matson, 1984; Shapland, 1997; Ayeb, 1998; Daoudy, 2005, 2009; Warner, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012) and from that of international-regime theory (see, for example, Kibaroglu, 2002; Kibaroglu and Scheumann, 2011; Kibaroglu *et al.*, 2011).

Nonetheless, the importance of some non-state actors in Tigris and Euphrates water issues has been substantiated or at least suggested by various authors. Two sets of non-state actors have been identified: Kurds and several local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most authors who discuss Tigris and Euphrates water issues at least mention the Kurds (including for instance Kolars and Mitchell, 1991) and some have written about their importance not only in the interstate conflict over water, but also in Turkish domestic affairs (most notably Warner, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012).

As for cooperation over water, since the early 2000s, several of these authors have shown the limitations of debates on water wars and cooperation, stressing that water conflicts co-exist with cooperation. Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008) show that cooperation is more complex than generally admitted, as it can even reinforce conflict. This is particularly so in cases in which parties get involved in a negotiation process through negative or neutral forms of participation, such as token cooperation. Zeitoun *et al.* (2011) show that the more powerful party on a basin commonly will seek to employ soft-power to induce cooperation settlements that perpetuate asymmetric relations over water resources. Elsewhere, these authors put it more bluntly, 'Some kind of legitimacy and consent is needed to perpetuate any unequal power relation' (Warner *et al.*, 2013).

The soft power of hegemony complements the hard power of domination in conflicts over water. Indeed, in line with the Gramscian concept of hegemony, a distinction should be made between coercion and consent (Gramsci, 1971). In Hydro-hegemony, powerful riparian states simultaneously put hard power, bargaining power and ideational power at

work to establish their upper hand in controlling water resources in their interaction with other states (Zeitoun, 2011).

However, the process occurs in a multilayered fashion, involving domestic, international and transnational actors which also holds for the Tigris and Euphrates (Warner, 2010, 2012; Warner and Zawahri, 2012). Given its economic, diplomatic and military might, its upper-riparian position, and its ideational power, Turkey has managed to deploy its hydro-hegemony over Syria and Iraq (Warner, 2004, 2005). This has not gone unchallenged, as the lower-riparian states, together with non-state actors (Kurds in and outside Turkey, as well as Turkish and international NGOs) have managed to set forth counter-hegemonic mechanisms with different degrees of efficiency, which have pushed the Turkish state to negotiate and make compromises with lower riparian states (Daoudy, 2005, 2009; Warner, 2008, 2012).

A Gramscian approach to questions of water justice adds to debates around water justice and equity in several ways, even beyond what Davidson-Harden *et al.* (2007) and the London Water Study Group already have proposed. Zeitoun *et al.* (2016) have sought to systematize the dialectic range of counter-hegemonic measures and strategies that states tend to use in transboundary water settings.

This article argues that a subaltern group can and does take in questions of water justice as part of their overall struggle for justice in societal and political terms. However, as shall be seen further on, Kurds in general and those called Opposition Kurds in this article are themselves non-state and transboundary subjects/actors throughout the Tigris and Euphrates watershed and they have become important players in water conflicts in the area.

Seldom are struggles over water only about water. They often also revolve around other resources, legitimacy and power (Boelens *et al.*, 2010). While undoubtedly dams in international watercourses are built for their stated purposes and allow for important profits to the financial and construction sectors, their political implications are such that they also enter the political game both at the transnational and domestic level. Therefore, to understand water politics among two or more actors it is necessary to understand their overall interactive politics (Conde, 2010).

### 3. Turkey, the Kurds and the Dams

In this section, the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) and how the Turkish government frames it are summarized.<sup>1</sup> Although dams also have been built outside the GAP area—on the Tigris, the Euphrates and their tributaries—government statements on the usefulness of these structures follows similar lines to those that are part of the GAP. Also, the Kurdish

1. The information regarding the framing activity carried out by the Turkish government is basically drawn from the official GAP internet site, <http://www.gap.gov.tr/english>, publications by GAP Administration officials or sympathizing academics.

presence in the basins and the evolution of the Turkish government fight with Kurds and the PKK are briefly described.

Turkey has been building large and very large dams on the Tigris and Euphrates since the 1960s for irrigation and hydro-electric power generation. In the 1980s, the plans drawn for the Southeast Anatolia region were merged into the GAP, turning them into an overall development plan, which included 22 dams, of which 19 for hydro-electric power generation. When completed, the authorities expect the project to allow for the reclamation of 1.7 million ha of irrigated land and the annual production of 27 billion kWh of hydro-electric power (Ünver, 1997). Upstream, within the same currents and those of their tributaries, other plans were merged into the East Anatolian Project. Although in a lesser scale, these plans had similar features to those of GAP. The plan is managed under the authority of the Turkish Republic Waterworks Administration (DSI).

Naturally, bringing to completion the sum of these programs implies submerging thousands of square kilometers of land under the ensuing artificial lakes. Dozens, if not hundreds, of towns, together with ecosystems, high-quality agricultural lands and dozens of sites of upper Mesopotamian archaeological value were to be sacrificed in the altar of economic and technical progress.<sup>2</sup>

Berkun (2010) has found that multi-dam projects such as GAP have multiple adverse environmental effects. The resettlement of many thousands of people leads to accelerated urbanization and industrialization that cause increased pollution and water degradation. Large-scale irrigation generate salinization and soil erosion. The reservoirs themselves are sources of pollution and greenhouse gases. The changes in the use of land could deprive plants and animals from their natural habitat. However, Scheumann *et al.* (2011), considers that hydropower generation is more environmentally friendly than fossil fuel plants, although they recognize that dams interrupt river flows, affect wetlands and wildlife habitats. They conclude that if Turkey did more to comply with international standards, dams in South-east Anatolia could be more acceptable from an environmental point of view. Kolars (1994) frames it differently, stating that rivers as such have rights as well.

It also turns out that the basins of the Tigris and Euphrates and their tributaries is where most Kurds live. By the 1970s and early 1980s, several groups of radicalized Kurds were demanding rights for their ethnic group, which, for the most part, lived in the countryside and under dire economic conditions. Some were not Sunni Muslims, the form of Islamic faith professed by the majority of people in Turkey. One of these groups, the PKK, considered terrorist by the Turkish government, took up arms in 1984 against the Turkish state for Kurdish national rights. While setting up camps in Syria, Lebanon and, later, Iraq, the guerrillas managed to gain a quite important following in the East and Southeast of the country.

Indeed, many Kurds have felt as outcasts of the Turkish polity as their very existence and identity was denied by Turkish authorities from the mid-1920s to the 1990s (Yegen, 2011). It is well known that Kurds were framed as mountain Turks and their language

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2. The lake under Atatürk Dam alone drowned over 100 villages (Haberman, 1990).

as a dialect of Turkish. Such feeling of exclusion was underscored by the poverty under which most Kurds lived.

Since the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, the main leader of the PKK, in 1999, the radical Kurdish movement has changed its strategy to fight more on the political arena than with bullets. According to Van Bruinessen (2000), Öcalan had been seeking a negotiated settlement since the early 1990s in the hope of turning the guerrilla into a primarily political movement. In the first volume of his *Prison Writings*, Öcalan (2007) explained the motivation behind this change: 'History is full of communities and organisations that failed because they lacked [...] strategy and leadership. In short, strategy is the art of effective leadership.' Therefore, the challenge was not as much about winning gun battles as about winning leadership. This, as will be seen, includes the water issue.

The overall PKK struggle has evolved over the decades. Seeking to represent Kurds, it transitioned from a program of independence and socialism, in the 1980s and 1990s, to one of autonomy, cultural rights and democracy, from the 1990s onward. The form of the struggle has also changed over time. While, in the first period, the accent was put on guerrilla warfare, in the second, it has turned to prioritize a solution of the conflict without aiming at forming a separate Kurdish state. This has implied a combination of legal and non-legal activities (Öcalan, 2007). Thus, the Kurdish struggle by and large has moved from the terrain of hard-power politics to that of a sustained campaign for political leadership (from a war of maneuver to a struggle of positions, to use terms closer to Gramsci's vocabulary). For Gramsci (1971: 180-182 y 275-276), counter-hegemonic strategies not only aim at improving the lot of the subaltern group that deploys them, but at gaining a position of leadership within society and eventually putting an end to their subaltern condition.

In the political, counter-hegemonic, endeavor in Turkey, the role of legal political parties has been paramount. Indeed, a series of pro-Kurdish parties have succeeded one another—usually after their successive banning by the state—since the 1990s that have contested and won elections at different levels (Watts, 1999; Çakir, 2010). The BDP, the last in the series by the time of fieldwork, in 2013, had elected members to the Turkish parliament and mayors in numerous cities of East and Southeast Anatolia. It should be said that, in spite of how it has been framed by opponents, its constituency cannot be outright assimilated as sympathizers of the PKK.

The Kurdish question has obsessed the Turkish security establishment for decades. The state leadership seeks to prevent a secession or even autonomy of East or Southeast Anatolia at any cost. It has invested heavily in trying to thwart Kurdish efforts at self-affirmation. This has taken forms as extreme as trying to prevent the reproduction of Kurdish culture. In general, the state had deployed an essentially hard-power strategy until the late 1990s.

Since then, however, this has evolved toward a mix of domination and diverse hegemony-oriented measures. In 2002, the AKP won the elections and introduced an important shift in policies, which allowed it to steadily increase its margins in following polls. By

2007, it had managed to attract many Kurdish votes in the South-east of the country (Larrabee and Tol, 2011).

This has had reverberations on the Turkish waterworks activity along the Tigris and Euphrates watercourse system. The leaders of the Turkish state saw in the development of water infrastructure the possibility of using geography and engineering in their favor. already in a 1993 top secret letter to then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, President Turgut Özal had wrote: 'With the evacuation of mountain settlements, the terrorist organization (PKK) will have been isolated. Security forces should immediately move in and completely control such areas. To prevent the locals' return to the region, the building of a large number of dams in appropriate places is an alternative' (cited in Jongerden, 2007: 46). It should be noted that both Özal and Demirel were engineers who had worked in the GAP administration.

Although the mentioned letter indicates that the Turkish state sought to use water in the Tigris and Euphrates basins for bare domination (hard power), the framing of these projects in documents intended for the public seems to show that the Turkish leadership also aimed at producing consent (soft power). The Turkish authorities have framed the multi-billion-dollar GAP as a project necessary for the development of Turkey and of Southeast Anatolia, given that irrigation plans should allow for the increase in crop production and hydro-power plants capable of at least partially making up for the lack of substantial amounts of oil and gas in the country. The entire scheme was also presented as seeking to alleviate poverty levels in the target region (GAP-BKIB, 2006).

Given that for long the region has ranked among the poorest in Turkey, it would make perfect sense to concerned authorities to push forward a sort of Keynesian development-oriented plan there, all the more so if an opposition guerrilla movement has taken root. A key element of the government frame has been that the project should have many benefits for the GAP area, which would aid in countering the rebel movement. As Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2008) has put it in his foreword to the 2008-2012 GAP Action Plan: 'Our basic objective [...] is to ensure economic growth, social development and employment creation in South-eastern [Anatolia] so as to enhance the level of welfare, peace and happiness of our citizens living in the region'. Similar statements have been articulated since the 1990s.

In 2008, four years after the PKK decided to take up arms again after a several-year suspension, Turkish officials were quoted by the press as saying that efforts to revivify GAP works sought to be part of an overall solution to the guerrilla movement (Yavuz, 2008).

Indeed, the Turkish government explains that social development goals are central to GAP. They include improving coverage and quality of education, health services, job availability, sports, culture and arts. The project provides for energy, agricultural, industrial and transportation development, support for the creation of small- and medium-size enterprises, technoparks, and growth poles. Equally important is the emphasis placed on local dynamics and participation of society and the private sector. These are, by the way, the two first principles stated in the GAP Action Plan (GAP-BKIB, 2008).

#### 4. The Kurds, Turkey and the dams

As seen in the previous section, the way in which the Turkish authorities picture the water development plans in areas densely inhabited by Kurds speaks both of an endeavor for profit-oriented projects and a campaign for the hearts and minds of people living in these areas. This section, in turn, is focused on how municipal opposition Kurdish authorities, as well as scholars, activists and common citizens, frame the dam-building activity of the state, including environmental concerns.

Most of those interviewed are convinced that waterworks on the Tigris, Euphrates and their tributaries are in fact part of an overall Turkish-government hard-power scheme to dominate the Kurdish population and quell the Kurdish rebellion. Some mainly in academe, however, consider that the declared purposes of the dams should not be understated. Dams also serve the economic purposes of hydro-electric power generation, irrigation for the expansion of the agricultural frontier and tourism.

The hard-power purpose of the dams is shown, Kurdish leaders say, by the very fact that literally hundreds of Kurdish towns have been drowned under the artificial lakes created. This has resulted in a very large Kurdish diaspora in Europe, in cities all over Turkey and, of course, in towns in East and Southeast Anatolia, such as Diyarbakir.

However, they add, dams also have served strategic purposes in purely military terms in the Turkish state war against Kurdish rebels. For one thing, militants cannot hide in hundreds of now disappeared villages. As important, however, is the severe hampering of their movement by these same lakes. While rivers or creeks can be crossed with relative ease, lakes impose an effective barrier to activists. As it can be easily imagined, beyond their effect on guerrillas, these obstacles also hinder the mobility of villagers, not to mention the fact that many are forced to sell their lands, when they own them.

This expresses, they assert, an act of ethnic discrimination against Kurds and pressure against minority religious groups, such as Alevis or Yazidis. The Turkish state, local authorities say, seeks to divide the populations along ethnic and religious lines. With dams, the Turkish state is changing the physical, not to mention human, geography of East and Southeast Anatolia. This not only goes against the ways of living of the affected populations, but seeks to destroy landscapes deeply tied to their culture. The Tigris and Euphrates, Mesopotamia as a whole, are seen by Kurds as their ancestral territory. Turkish authorities use projects such as GAP to divide them and ultimately destroy them.

Alevis, part of whom are Kurds, are being discriminated against and view dam building as part of this wrongdoing. In Eastern Anatolia, dam projects will destroy their holy sites. For these people, according to Alevis interviewed on the Munzur basin in and around Tuncelli, the rivers, trees, rocks, the environment as a whole, are sacred. The dams will take away from them a surrounding infinitely more valuable than whatever the central government authorities might plan to give in exchange. DSI built a small drinking-water fountain in the main downtown Tuncelli square, but locals systematically avoid drinking from it.

In relation to the government frame that the GAP would have many positive effects to improve the economic situation and standards of living in Southeast Anatolia, Kurds have a totally opposite take on how things have actually evolved. The government, disregarding local populations, municipal leaders say, seeks to appropriate and privatize all the valuable resources found in these regions, such as land, water and oil.

Even though the GAP has implied hiring thousands over the decades, with billions of dollars invested, Kurdish leaders are convinced that most of those hired are people brought in from the Western parts of Turkey. Moreover, they assert that poverty is on the rise and that Kurds have been forced to leave the region in search for jobs. In terms of land property and enabling for irrigation, Kurds perceive that the poor have been led to sell their lands, either to the GAP administration for impounding artificial lakes or to rich landowners.

As for other economic effects of the dams, they consider their outcome to have all but failed to benefit the region. The bulk of hydro-electric output, for example, is being sent to Western parts of Turkey for its commercialization. Investments end up in a few corporate accounts, and locals are not part of the construction efforts.

As for stakeholder participation, such as of small farmers and peasants in project planning, they say that meetings are organized so that participants validate what the administration has already decided. Only those who support the Turkish government get invited to a few meetings, where no criticism is allowed. Any ideas of having a democratic application of GAP are rejected offhandedly.

Kurdish municipal authorities and scholars believe that the dams have translated into terrible environmental damage. Abdullah Demirbaş (BDP), mayor of the Sur municipality of Diyarbakir, said 'The Euphrates cannot be called a river: there's virtually no water in it anymore.' Moreover, the best agricultural lands have been submerged under the lakes. Although pollution is still not an issue for the Tigris and Euphrates, this could change, given the lack of preventive measures and the expansion of the oil industry.

According to biologists carrying out research at Dicle University, dams along the Tigris have severely disrupted wildlife. Endemic species of fish and turtles risk extinction, because the habitat is turning from riverine to lacustrine. The introduction of exogenous and invasive species, such as carp, also has impacted many endogenous fish species, like the Tigris bass.

Officials at the Diyarbakir water administration (DISKI) said that the DSI sees nature only as an economic asset, which implies that the long-term effects of GAP will be more negative than positive, and money will be powerless to undo the damage on nature.

Another concern of Kurds is that the historical heritage of the region is being destroyed. The well-known Hasankeyf archaeological site will be flooded to a large extent in spite of the announced measures to move part of the site to higher grounds before impounding the Ilisu reservoir. Some of the structures are over 1000 years old. Whatever happens to Hasankeyf, many other sites already have been destroyed.

The BDP-governed municipalities have turned into autonomous spaces that develop counter-hegemonic practices in relation to urban water services. The city water manage-

ment councils at Diyarbakir (DISKI) and Batman (BASKI), for example, have virtually no relation with DSI. While DSI wants municipalities to charge users for water services, DISKI and BASKI consider this to go against the human right to water. The local administrations refuse to accept water from DSI, and prefer pumping it from the Tigris or underground reservoirs.

Basically, only two alternatives exist, according to Mayor Demirbaş. The Turkish government one is characterized by the absence of true democracy and leads to dictatorial control—in which a few appropriate the resources—and further conflicts. With this course of action, capitalism and imperialism destroy the environment, while the wealthy local and foreign interests seek to benefit from the resources of the region and spur conflicts by using water against locals and against neighboring countries, Syria and Iraq.

The alternative that his movement puts forward is presented as one of distributing resources to all. This requires resisting the central government designs by pushing for equal rights in sharing resources and benefiting from them. For this to work, Demirbaş said, democracy and equal rights are essential. Only thus will it be possible to have a system friendly with the environment.

This frame is put forward as part of an overall counter-hegemonic project. Peace along with the solution to the conflicts over water, as well as to many other conflicts in the Region, could come about by establishing a regional confederation of peoples that comprises Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The very concept of a nation-state, Kurdish or other, and of borders has proven extremely problematic in the region. In a supranational confederation, diverse ethnic and religious groups could live together in peace among themselves. The same goes for the relation between people and nature, which could also live at peace with each other.

## 5. Conclusions

Hegemonic strategies not only target other states, they are aimed at non-state actors as well. Conversely, non-state actors also carry out counter-hegemonic actions and strategies. One of the findings of this article is that opposition Kurds in East and Southeast Anatolia frame Turkish dam-building projects in ways in which the Turkish state and water authorities are pictured as not only seeking to dominate Syria and Iraq on water issues, but the Kurds as well. At least since the late 1980s, the Turkish state has built dams along the Tigris and Euphrates with multiple goals that include complementing its strategy of establishing hegemony and domination over Kurds (foremost but not only in Turkey). As it might be expected, the counter-frame produced by the Turkish authorities goes against such a picture. In other words, states are important, but studies of power politics around water should account for other actors as well.

The case of Euphrates and Tigris water mega projects show that the hydro-hegemonic goals of the most powerful state in a cross-border watercourse can themselves be multi-layered. The target of its policies may be, as well as other states, minorities and/or

the poor within its own borders. If these minorities, such as opposition Kurds in Turkey, organize in a counter-hegemonic movement, dams, water and other resources are likely to become part of the strategy both of the state and of its opponents in the conflict.

The Kurdish opposition movement itself is not only political and grass-rooted, but cross-border, which could make it, at least for the time being, a quite exceptional phenomenon in transboundary hydro-political settings. The movement represents a minority within the hegemonic state, holding a revolutionary program. It wields a complex counter-hegemonic strategy and is formed by a large number of different organizations, some involved in electoral politics and others in the armed struggle. Some of its members are located and have been harbored by Kurds in other countries and have related with other state actors in the basin.

In the face of the hydro-hegemonic power deployed by Turkey in East and Southeast Anatolia, the opposition Kurdish movement has responded with several counter-hegemonic measures. The Kurdish movement in Turkey has framed the waterworks and water policy in the region as antagonistic to Kurds, but also to the poor, whether Kurdish or not, religious minorities, neighbouring states and peoples, and the environment. In this way, they have linked their ethnic claims to broader debates related to water rights, successfully framing water disputes within the framework of water justice, as broadly defined above.

Kurds view the conflict over water as multi-layered, inside Turkey, in the region and globally. Most importantly, however, they frame it as part of a wider set of issues. For them, the question of water also has to do with their struggle for peace and justice, defined as peace in conditions in which ethnic rights are recognized, Kurds enjoy an important degree of autonomy and their movement can participate more thoroughly in the democratic process.

The way in which they frame the water issues, seems to show that opposition Kurds are also participating in different arenas at the same time. Their proposals seem to aim at winning over Kurds, but also Turks and other peoples concerned with water justice in the region. Their framing of a different type of stakeholder participation in decision-making calls for a model of direct democracy covering different aspects of life, including water management, which could lead to a greater concern for nature. Their idea of autonomy and supra-state and supra-national confederations challenges the current conceptions of the state and of existing borders, but moves a peace proposal that builds on the precepts of functionalism, with a special kind of international regime, but the success of which is conditioned on the practice of alternative, inclusive and direct, forms of democracy.

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