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## CHAPTER 9

# FROM SHINING ICONS OF PROGRESS TO CONTESTED INFRASTRUCTURES: “DAMMING” THE MUNZUR VALLEY IN EASTERN TURKEY

*Laurent Dissard*

*Once upon a time, dazzling marvels of infrastructural engineering were of course publicly celebrated. But in the eyes of literature and of literary criticism, the narrative of progress based on bridges, tunnels, sewers, railways, gas lines, electrification, and so on almost immediately came to seem naïve and misguided.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Dams were once symbols of modernity for “emerging” countries, the material manifestation of progress and the technological achievement that best expressed the power of the nation. In the opening quote, Bruce Robbins points to a shift occurring across the globe in the perception of such infrastructures. Once celebratory totems raised by engineers hired by the state to glorify the nation, the status of Turkish dams has moved from shining icons of progress to contested infrastructures wreaking havoc and destruction. These engineering projects no longer easily take part in the utopian fantasies of nation-state building.<sup>2</sup> Attempts are still made to celebrate them of course, and they are still inaugurated festively now and then, sometimes even placed on commemorative stamps. But the heart is no longer there. Once proud providers of water and electricity to all, dams today have become questioned, challenged and disputed across Turkey.

43 Since its inception in 1923, the Turkish state has built more than 800 dams  
 44 within its borders to regulate floods, provide water and produce electricity.  
 45 Signs of their time, these “marvels of infrastructural engineering,” I argue, serve  
 46 as remarkable chronological markers of Turkey’s recent political, economic and  
 47 cultural history. The “turning point” from *celebrated* to *contested* is difficult to  
 48 isolate precisely. And this is not the paper’s aim. Rather, I simply narrate in its  
 49 first part, *Shining Icons of Progress*, how Turkish dams, these immobile and silent  
 50 infrastructures, have witnessed the demise of an empire, helped to build a  
 51 nation, and fought in the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Here, I can only start to trace the change  
 52 in Turkish public opinion of these technological masterpieces from the late  
 53 nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. What can be ascertained now  
 54 is that, at the start of the twenty-first century, these same dams are being  
 55 perceived very differently, and opposed vehemently across the nation.

56 This is precisely the focus of the paper’s second part: *Contested Infrastructures*  
 57 brings the reader to Eastern Turkey’s district of Tunceli, known as Dersim<sup>4</sup> by  
 58 Turkey’s Kurdish Alevi minority, and to a particularly disputed set of dams built  
 59 (or planned) in the *Munzur Vadisi Milli Parkı* (Munzur Valley National Park).  
 60 In essence, this other half of the article presents some of the results of my  
 61 ethnographic fieldwork in the region.<sup>5</sup> It describes the (failed) transformation  
 62 of a social space through Turkish neoliberal policies, recent state institutional  
 63 involvement and military intervention, as well as massive infrastructural  
 64 development. It also focuses on environmental protests against the intrusion of  
 65 Hydro-Electric Power Plants (hereafter HEPP) financed by the state and built by  
 66 private firms under neoliberal arrangements. This anti-dam activism in Dersim,  
 67 I then conclude, reveals more than a fight to protect nature however, going  
 68 beyond the shift, in this particular contested landscape, from “Red” (leftist) to  
 69 “Green” (environmentalist) political activism, and testifying instead to a larger  
 70 discontent of citizens across Turkey against state-imposed and profit-driven  
 71 engineering projects of a neoliberal nature.

## 72 73 74 **Shining Icons of Progress**

### 75 *Dams as Signs of their Time in Turkey*

76 In Science and Technology Studies, infrastructures are noted for their lack of  
 77 visibility, including small things like pipes and wires, larger engineering feats  
 78 such as roads and bridges, as well as more abstract techniques like computer  
 79 protocols. All these remain largely unnoticed in our everyday lives. Pipes in a  
 80 city are laid underground out of people’s sight; wires of a computer are hidden  
 81 behind its outer case; and rail tracks that enable trains to move are rarely the  
 82 subject of travelers’ conversation. Unless it is broken, one also rarely thinks  
 83 about the plumbing that brings water to homes. Hence, while infrastructures  
 84 enable people, objects, resources and information to transit, they remain largely

85 concealed, unnoticed and taken for granted. Small or large, abstract or concrete,  
86 oftentimes immobile and invisible, the pipes, wires, roads, bridges and  
87 protocols work so that other human activities can be performed. As a part of the  
88 urban background, infrastructures only become visible during moments of  
89 crisis.<sup>6</sup>

90 Unlike other types of infrastructures, dams are too large to be concealed.  
91 These towering walls of stone or concrete are difficult to ignore in the natural  
92 landscape. On maps the stretched-out arms of their water reservoirs resemble  
93 the younger siblings of seas and lakes. Dams are not buried underground  
94 like pipes nor are they as discreet as wires. But more visible than other  
95 infrastructures, dams are nevertheless removed. Most often, as a large part of the  
96 rural infrastructure that caters to the needs of cities, dams are away from the  
97 urban gaze. Dams provide water and produce electricity while simultaneously,  
98 silently perhaps but not innocuously, disturbing the countryside, nature and its  
99 wildlife, rural and nomadic lifestyles. Most of the time quiet and serene, dams  
100 and their associated reservoirs begin to make a loud growling public noise, in  
101 the process transforming themselves into contested infrastructures, when they  
102 spark social or political problems that humans have to deal with.

103 A total of eight dams were built outside İstanbul between the seventeenth  
104 and nineteenth centuries to provide water for the city, including the Sultan  
105 Mahmut Dam in 1839, hidden today amongst the trees of the Belgrade Forest.  
106 Removed from the center and thus less visible, this dam nevertheless exhibits  
107 the style and design characteristic of the time. The shape of Sultan Mahmut  
108 Dam itself resembles other masonry gravity arched dams built contempor-  
109 aneously in Western Europe. A room built like a shrine inside its walls around  
110 the water valve serves both a technical and aesthetic purpose. Roman columns,  
111 tulip-shaped gargoyles, and an oval shaped medallion with a radiating sun also  
112 adorn the dam's exterior. The assorted mix of Baroque, Rococo, Neo-Classical  
113 and Empire style is typical of Ottoman architecture during this period of  
114 westernization. Like many other monuments in the city built during the  
115 nineteenth century, European architectural forms and designs reveal the larger  
116 social and economic changes witnessed throughout the empire.<sup>7</sup>

117 The Sultan Mahmut Dam was constructed to reinforce the already existing  
118 Taksim water conveyance system serving the growing westernized, non-  
119 Muslim, upper-class population of Beyoğlu. As the rest of the city lagged behind  
120 in the nineteenth century, this neighborhood, where banks and foreign  
121 embassies bordered the mansions of wealthy families, had access to electricity,  
122 telephone lines and a tram system. Beyoğlu is also home to the world's second  
123 underground subway (Tünel), built in 1875. Scrutinizing infrastructural  
124 development alerts us to the profound social inequalities embedded in the  
125 urban fabric. I am not ascertaining here a one-to-one correlation between  
126 wealth or class and access to public amenities, but infrastructures do force us to

127 ask, who benefits the most from them? Who is included and excluded from the  
128 water and electricity grids? How are cities and countries imagined and what  
129 social, historical, economic, as well as technological factors determine  
130 privileges?<sup>8</sup> Again while one part of İstanbul profited from all sorts of public  
131 works to develop a modern lifestyle, other parts would have to wait their turn to  
132 benefit fully from modernity's advantages. A more thorough historical study of  
133 infrastructures in İstanbul would indeed reveal that entrance into modernity  
134 does happen at disparate speed.

135 Like archaeological artifacts, dams are signs of their time. Not only do they  
136 constitute interesting chronological markers, they are also indicative of larger  
137 processes like the structures built around Ottoman İstanbul that follow the  
138 empire's social and economic transformation. Dams seen as materialized forms  
139 of ideology narrate the stories of empires and nations, which, over the  
140 centuries, have been built both ideologically, and just as significantly,  
141 materially. "Bridges, factories, radio networks, and railways", Brian Larkin  
142 writing about Nigeria explains, "are as much objects of fantasy and imagination  
143 as are forms of fashion, literature, and film. [Their] building . . . is nothing if not  
144 an aesthetic form that tells us as much about the melodrama of Nigerian politics  
145 as it does about production and economics. All over the world, highway  
146 projects, corporate headquarters, and the laying of fiber optic cable networks  
147 occupy that messy conceptual boundary where the economic and rational meet  
148 the symbolic and fantastic."<sup>9</sup> Public works are entangled in a larger web  
149 composed of politics and technology, nature and science, institutions and  
150 people; a complex network of human and non-human actors which  
151 disentangled can tell us about the dreams and fears of states, the fulfilled and  
152 failed promises of governments, as well as the more personal hopes and  
153 fantasies of individuals. Indeed, the core of nation-building projects consists,  
154 more often than not, in the building of infrastructural projects.

155 This has been the case for the Turkish Republic that emerged after the demise  
156 of the Ottoman Empire. The Çubuk-1 Dam, for instance, constructed just 12 km  
157 north of Ankara between 1930 and 1936 under the supervision of Tahsin  
158 Ibrahim, a graduate of İstanbul's School of Engineering, Walther Kunze and  
159 Heiden Berger of Germany, and a certain "Mösyö Sapot" of France, expresses  
160 the Turkish State's new faith in engineering and progress.<sup>10</sup> While the original  
161 plan called for a stone-fill construction, the more conventional method used in  
162 the old capital city İstanbul, "Mösyö Sapot" eventually convinced the other  
163 three men that concrete would avoid the high cost of transporting rocks from a  
164 quarry. At the time, it was also thought that this newer and supposedly more  
165 advanced technique would make for an overall better dam. Concrete was  
166 eventually chosen as the building material and imported by railway from  
167 Germany. Importing it from northern Europe, however, made the dam's overall  
168 price much higher and, in the end, more expensive than using stones from a

169 local quarry. Despite its high price, Çubuk-1 in Ankara became the first concrete  
 170 dam in Turkey, a building material that, at least visually, was more progressive  
 171 than the old stones of defunct Ottoman İstanbul.

172 Built to control floods and provide drinking water to the city, Çubuk-1 and its  
 173 concrete made a larger statement, a fashion statement one might say, that  
 174 followed global trends. Concrete, when manufactured locally, is in fact a cheaper  
 175 material than stone and had replaced it for the construction of dams across the  
 176 world. In the 1930s, it also seemed a better match for Ankara's new image.  
 177 Infrastructures, Susan Leigh Star explains, are materialized forms of ideology  
 178 inscribed within particular master narratives.<sup>11</sup> Choosing concrete both followed  
 179 a global technological trend and affirmed Ankara's new status proving, no matter  
 180 the cost, that the city was modern enough to be a capital on the one side, and that  
 181 it could gradually destabilize the dominance in the national imaginary of old  
 182 imperial İstanbul on the other. Thus, technologically at least, Ankara also rivaled  
 183 with other European cities. The dam and its reservoir came with newly created  
 184 republican spaces of a shoreline, beaches and green picnic areas. As such, it  
 185 helped the Turkish State bring a recreational space to the step(pe)s of the city.  
 186 With its own "Bosphorus," as some called it, Ankara could now compete with  
 187 İstanbul in engineering achievements as well as natural attractions and leisure  
 188 activities. Aslıhan Demirtaş describes how this double point of reference –  
 189 (Republican) Ankara surpassing (Ottoman) İstanbul while constantly making  
 190 reference to it – characterizes Turkey's newly found identity. Embarking upon the  
 191 road to progress, the Çubuk-1 Dam was celebrated as a technological achievement  
 192 opening wide open modernity's gates and permitting new Ankara to outdo old  
 193 İstanbul... without ever being able to completely free itself from it.<sup>12</sup>

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195

### *Hydro-Power*

196 If Çubuk-1 in Ankara, and other concrete dams elsewhere in Turkey, began  
 197 providing water for cities in western Anatolia during the first half of the  
 198 twentieth century, large dams designed to meet the country's rising energy  
 199 needs would only be built after World War II. Hydroelectricity in Turkey was  
 200 first produced at Tarsus as early as 1902 and other small Hydro-Electric Power  
 201 Plants (HEPP) would later be tested in İstanbul and other large cities. At the  
 202 establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, however, electricity was only  
 203 available in a very limited number of large cities and hydroelectricity only made  
 204 up 0.3 per cent of the 33 MW produced by the 38 electric power stations across  
 205 the country. An important turning point in energy production can be traced  
 206 specifically to the year 1956 and the construction of the Sarıyar and Seyhan  
 207 Dams, the country's earliest large HEPPs. Thanks to these and other large dams,  
 208 the part of hydroelectricity would go from 6 per cent (30 MW out of 500 MW) of  
 209 the country's total installed power in 1953 to 35 per cent (478 MW out of 1381  
 210 MW) ten years later.<sup>13</sup>

211 Often promoted as guarantees of a better future, infrastructures such as dams  
212 are full of promises made by states to their citizens. In post-World War II  
213 Turkey, the *Demokrat Parti* (DP), newly founded in 1946 to challenge the rule of  
214 the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* or Republican People's Party (CHP), made  
215 hydroelectricity part of its electoral promise. After its historic victory in 1950,  
216 which fully launched Turkey's era of multi-party rule, the building of roads,  
217 factories, and dams gave it the image of a party in action working for the good of  
218 its people. Geared towards helping landowners, the policies implemented by its  
219 leaders Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes gained wide support from the rural  
220 electorate. With the help of foreign credit, investing in public works made the  
221 DP popular during its first years of rule, and helped it again in 1954 to win the  
222 elections.<sup>14</sup> The newly elected government upheld this appearance of a party  
223 that cared about its rural constituencies by building, for instance, the Seyhan  
224 Dam between 1953 and 1956 just north of Adana in Southern Turkey. Designed  
225 to control floods and produce electricity, it also served as an electoral platform  
226 for the party.

227 The Seyhan Dam is significant in recent Turkish history for another reason.  
228 Like the concrete of the earlier Çubuk-1, the steel for the dam was manufactured  
229 in Germany. This time, however, thanks to American subsidies from the  
230 Marshall Plan, the material produced from the German mills did prove to be the  
231 most affordable option. Furthermore, the dam was designed by an American  
232 engineering company based in Athens already involved in construction  
233 projects in Greece. One of Turkey's first World Bank-financed projects, Seyhan  
234 thus marks the increasing importance of the United States into Turkish  
235 economy and society. In addition, and as a revealing side note, the dam was  
236 built 20 km from Adana's Incirlik Base of the US Air Force, another symbol of  
237 American involvement in Turkey. Today the Menderes Island, in reality a  
238 small peninsula protruding into the reservoir of the Seyhan Dam, is still  
239 called "Amerikan Adası," the island of the Americans, a souvenir of the time  
240 when GIs from the Incirlik Air Base would go for a swim during their days off.<sup>15</sup>

241 Besides serving as a chronological marker for the era of multi-party rule and  
242 the beginning of intense American imperial involvement in Turkey, the project  
243 holds another symbolic dimension as its head engineer was none other than the  
244 "King of Dams" himself, Süleyman Demirel, future Prime Minister and ninth  
245 President of Turkey. After studying Civil Engineering in İstanbul and the United  
246 States, Demirel was appointed in 1955, at the age of 31, Director General of the  
247 *Devlet Su İşleri* or State Hydraulic Works (hereafter DSİ).<sup>16</sup> Obsessed with  
248 building major public works, Demirel, during his rule as Prime Minister and  
249 President, was involved in the majority of Turkey's post-World War II dam  
250 constructions. His success in politics was based on his vision of a "Büyük  
251 Türkiye" (or Grand Turkey), which placed development and the provision of  
252 services on the forefront of any political decisions.



253 An engineer-turned-politician, Süleyman Demirel had dreams of large  
254 infrastructural projects for his “Grand Turkey.” He understood water as a resource  
255 to be tamed so that light could rescue Anatolia from obscurity. Infrastructures, as  
256 Larkin described above, are the objects of fantasy and imagination occupying the  
257 messy conceptual ground where science, economy and nature meet the dreams  
258 and hopes of individuals. Born a year after the foundation of the Turkish Republic  
259 in a rural and impoverished area of Southwestern Turkey, Demirel traces back to  
260 his childhood his dreams of progress and development and his goals to eliminate  
261 poverty and darkness. He states in an interview that “[i]n his village, he witnessed  
262 draught and villagers organizing communal prayers for rain; he recalled vividly  
263 how there was no electricity in İslamköy during his childhood and how the  
264 villagers would watch the lights of the city of Isparta, the provincial capital twenty  
265 kilometers away.”<sup>17</sup> His vision of building large dams also went back to his time as  
266 a student in the United States, when sitting on the walls of the Boulder Dam in  
267 Nevada, he imagined the day his own country would own such a monumental  
268 structure.<sup>18</sup> His dream would come true, first with Seyhan, a project for which he  
269 was head engineer and, later, during his first term as Prime Minister, with the even  
270 greater Keban Dam.

271 The Seyhan Dam inaugurated more World Bank activities in Turkey. In 1967,  
272 for instance, the international institution provided Turkey with technical  
273 assistance for the reorganization of its electric power industry. Ankara also  
274 sought monetary loans from the World Bank, as well as from the United  
275 States and the European Economic Community (EEC), as early as 1961 for the  
276 construction of the Keban Dam near the city of Elazığ in Eastern Turkey.<sup>19</sup>  
277 While the European Investment Bank (the EEC’s loaning institution) funded  
278 the building of the infrastructure, the International Bank for Reconstruction  
279 and Development (the World Bank’s loaning institution) advanced Turkey \$25  
280 million for transmission lines sending electricity from Keban to Ankara and  
281 İstanbul.<sup>20</sup> These loans played an important role in the West’s diplomatic  
282 strategy in the Middle East during the Cold War years. Through investments in  
283 Turkey, a NATO member since 1952, the United States was strengthening its ties  
284 with a country bordering the Soviet Union and reinforcing its position against  
285 the Communist Bloc. Beginning in the 1950s, large immobile infrastructures  
286 seemed to move like concrete pawns across the Cold War chessboard.<sup>21</sup>

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### 288 *Mega-Dams and the Emergence of Concern over their Impact*

289 Sarıyar, Seyhan and other dams built after World War II announced many of  
290 Turkey’s impending political, economic and social changes. The postwar  
291 enthusiasm for dams would reach its apex with Keban, the largest built in  
292 Turkey at the time. Constructed between 1966 and 1975, and thus overlapping  
293 with Demirel’s first term as prime minister, Keban not only continued a period  
294 of intense investment in dams, but also marked a shift in their scale.



295 The earlier Sarıyar (160 MWh) and Seyhan (54 MWh) were no small matter  
296 of course. But the HEPP at Keban, less than 20 years later, with its yearly  
297 energy production as high as 1240 MWh, easily dwarfed both of them. The  
298 207 m high Keban Dam carried Turkey from the era of high dams (over 15 m)  
299 into the era of mega-dams (over 100 m). In his book *Silenced Rivers*,  
300 Patrick McCully explains how the benefits of hydroelectricity have been  
301 largely exaggerated over the years while its negative effects on nature and  
302 society downplayed.<sup>22</sup> A long-time director of the Non-Governmental  
303 Organization *International Rivers*, he argues that no large dam can be  
304 built without their negative impact outweighing their positive ones.  
305 In Turkey, as the size of dams increased, it also became more and more  
306 difficult for people to ignore their unwanted consequences. With a ten-fold  
307 increase in physical size and energy production from Seyhan to Keban, it is at  
308 this time that dams also began to occupy more room in the country's  
309 consciousness.

310 The Keban Dam was celebrated as an engineering feat, a shining icon of  
311 progress and, for Süleyman Demirel, a dream come true. When news of the  
312 dam reached the public, however, a handful of people were more concerned  
313 about the region's threatened cultural heritage. Kemal Kurdaş, president of  
314 Ankara's Middle East Technical University, and archaeologist Halet Çambel,  
315 met in 1966 to launch the "Committee for the Salvage of Cultural Property in  
316 the Keban Dam Area," which organized a rescue project to study the  
317 ancient monuments and archaeological sites threatened by the dam's rising  
318 waters.<sup>23</sup> Still, construction continued unabated. After the first surveys in the  
319 region, the newspaper *Milliyet* launched a national fundraiser to collect money  
320 for further scientific work. Money donated by Turkish banks and  
321 foreign corporations, as well as villagers and schoolchildren, helped to fully  
322 launch the international and multidisciplinary project at Keban during the  
323 summer of 1968. Over a period of eight years, its participants managed to  
324 record and protect some of the pre-history and history of an area now  
325 under water.

326 This was the first time in Turkey when researchers came together as a  
327 community to respond to the threat of dam construction. If the project's  
328 participants successfully fulfilled their scientific goals, needless to say, they were  
329 not what we could call today environmental activists. Behind the fundraiser  
330 and rescue project were archaeologists more concerned with ancient sites than  
331 with the preservation of nature. Their rescue efforts did not jeopardize, or even  
332 begin to put into question, the existence of dams itself. If the negative effects of  
333 dams do make a first public appearance on this occasion, anti-dam sentiments  
334 in Turkey would wait another 30 years to fully materialize.<sup>24</sup> Hydroelectricity  
335 production remained the Turkish national priority as defined by the state and  
336 any negative attitude towards dams was not expressed as such at the time.

337 If anything, this new public awareness represented only a small stain on their  
338 large, shiny concrete armors.

339 The Keban Dam paved the way for more constructions on the Tigris and  
340 Euphrates Rivers, the most renowned being the Atatürk Dam built during the  
341 1980s near Adiyaman.<sup>25</sup> Infrastructures, and more particularly dams, are  
342 often seen as necessary for the economic development of “impoverished”  
343 countries. In Turkey, a strong link indeed exists between their construction  
344 and the prevailing development ideology. The series of dams built in  
345 Southeastern Turkey after Keban is presented as the backbone of a larger plan  
346 to “develop” the region and with the intent of the state to solve the  
347 country’s “Kurdish Question.” Initiated in 1984, relatively soon after the  
348 emergence in Turkey of neoliberalism in the aftermath of the 1980 military  
349 coup,<sup>26</sup> the *Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi* or Southeastern Anatolian Project  
350 (hereafter GAP) has been contingent upon such infrastructural development  
351 in the Tigris-Euphrates River basin. Its goals in the underprivileged, mostly  
352 Kurdish, provinces of Southeastern Turkey have quickly moved beyond  
353 the provision of water and electricity, however, to now include an  
354 ambitious remodeling in the region of life itself, be it economic, political,  
355 cultural or social.

356 In her ethnographic work in Southeastern Turkey on the GAP, Leila Harris  
357 forces us to think beyond the positive or negative impact of dams and  
358 development, and consider instead the ways in which infrastructures  
359 participate in the different social reconfigurations of this predominantly  
360 Kurdish region. Just as importantly, her research also illustrates how not one  
361 aspect of this development project has remained unquestioned or  
362 unchallenged.<sup>27</sup> While dams in Eastern Turkey have been interpreted by  
363 some as symbols of a Republican attempt to modernize “backward” parts of the  
364 country, others have perceived them as unnecessary and unwanted interven-  
365 tions by the state into local affairs.

366 This last sentence is precisely the theme of the article’s second part. Thus  
367 far, I have illustrated how dams, these shining icons of progress, could signal  
368 some of Turkey’s political and economic, as well as social and cultural,  
369 changes over the last two centuries. Over the last 20 years or so, however,  
370 dams and HEPPs, in and out of Turkey’s southeastern Kurdish provinces, have  
371 become questioned and disputed by a wide range of social actors. I now shift  
372 to a discussion of the politics of hydropower in one particularly disputed  
373 area of Eastern Turkey, known locally as Dersim. I first consider the  
374 significance of the Munzur Valley for Alevi Kurds in this region in order to  
375 then discuss the specific political effects of dams on this contested  
376 geography, and later examine in more details the “Campaign to Save  
377 Munzur” led by local activists against these state-imposed and profit-driven  
378 infrastructural constructions.

## Contested Infrastructures

### *The Munzur Valley and Alevi Kurds in Turkey*

379  
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381  
382 The Munzur River finds its source near the town of Ovacık below the high peaks  
383 of the snowcapped Dersim Mountains in Eastern Turkey. It flows south to join  
384 the Pülümür River near the city of Tunceli and later meets the Murat River, one  
385 of the main branches of the Euphrates River, before reaching the Keban Dam.  
386 Hidden among high mountains, the Munzur Valley is composed of deep ravines  
387 and narrow gorges. Known for its unique and diverse fauna and flora, it was  
388 declared a national park in 1971 and placed under the supervision of Tunceli's  
389 Directorate of Environment and Forest. Over the past 40 years, the Munzur  
390 Valley National Park, to say the least, has not been well preserved. Some areas of  
391 the park have suffered from environmental degradation due to deliberate forest  
392 burning by the Turkish army, while in other parts of the district delineated as a  
393 natural reserve, villagers have been forced to resettle in order to rehabilitate this  
394 same forest.<sup>28</sup>

395 A perfect locale from an engineering perspective, the valley has not been left  
396 undamaged by the construction of dams. In 1983, almost a decade after the  
397 construction of the infrastructure at Keban and just before the start of the  
398 conflict between the Turkish army and the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdish  
399 Worker's Party, hereafter PKK), Turkey's DSİ included the construction of  
400 6 dams and 8 HEPPs in its master plan for the rivers of the Tunceli District;  
401 numbers that have since risen to 10 and 16 respectively. Eight of these projects  
402 are located on the 85 km-long Munzur River and its tributaries; six of which are  
403 within the borders of the national park itself.<sup>29</sup> With respect to these large  
404 infrastructures, the laws designed to protect the national park have been  
405 inefficient or simply ignored. Additionally, a recent 2004 amendment on the  
406 regulations for national parks now allows companies to lease for a period of  
407 49 years parcels of such protected zones for their damming and mining projects.  
408 As is often the case, these latest legal developments occurred with almost no  
409 public debate; the people most concerned having very little say in the future use  
410 of their land.<sup>30</sup>

411 A large majority in the Munzur Valley is Alevi, a religious minority  
412 constituting more than 15 per cent of Turkey's population. These Alevis, on the  
413 one side, are related to their (Turkish-speaking) Alevi neighbors across the  
414 country through their very Anatolian form of Islam. In the Munzur Valley, a  
415 part of the Dersim, most Alevis speak different varieties of a northern Kurdish  
416 dialect called *Zazaki*, however. Alevi Kurds here are therefore, on the other side,  
417 related to their Kurdish-speaking neighbors living further south and east  
418 through their language. *Tuncelililer*, as Alevi Kurds from Tunceli are sometimes  
419 called, are related, on the first hand, to their Turkish Alevi neighbors through  
420 their religion and, on the second hand, to their Kurdish neighbors through

421 their language. On the third hand, however, they are both and neither of these.  
422 And as numerous examples across the world have already informed us, three-  
423 handed creatures seldom fare well in the purgative projects of ethnic purity  
424 adopted by the nation-states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.  
425 By simultaneously belonging to both minorities, Alevi Kurds, in the end,  
426 constitute a minority within minorities. Doubly rejected, they occupy the  
427 ambiguous place of a very contested identity in modern-day Turkish society.<sup>31</sup>

428 And for every contested identity, there exists a contested space. For the Alevi  
429 Kurds, the Munzur Valley occupies a large parcel of this disputed terrain.  
430 Difficult to access, it has sheltered over the years a population subsisting on  
431 animal herding and low-scale farming. Mostly rural, the largest city in the  
432 valley, Tunceli (formerly known as Dersim), has a population of only 32,000  
433 today. Alevi Kurds consider much of the tangible and intangible natural and  
434 cultural heritage of the Munzur Valley sacred. In fact, nature and culture seem  
435 to intermingle to the point of being indiscernible as trees, caves, rivers, springs,  
436 forests and cliffs, dispersed throughout the valley, act like small natural  
437 sanctuaries. During the Ottoman Period, tribes in the Dersim did not feel the  
438 need to pay taxes nor to provide soldiers to the army.<sup>32</sup> Subsequently, at the  
439 birth of the Turkish Republic, the region remained more or less autonomous  
440 from the centralized government.

441 In the 1930s, attempts by Ankara to reinforce its authority in the region  
442 brought some tribal leaders to resist and protest. These resistance movements  
443 were given a violent blow by the Turkish military in 1937 and 1938. Commonly  
444 referred to as the “Dersim Rebellion,” a phrase implying a pro-state  
445 historiographical bias, these events are commemorated locally as massacres,  
446 and interpreted by a few scholars as ethnic cleansing, mass extermination or  
447 attempted genocide.<sup>33</sup> The city of Dersim, renamed at this point in time  
448 Tunceli, subsequently became a hotbed for anti-government sympathizers; its  
449 mountains and valleys serving as a refuge for contested social identities and  
450 political ideologies in Turkey. Over the last decades, many *Tuncelililer* have in  
451 fact comprised the core of the Turkish Left and, until very recently, the TKP-ML  
452 (Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Turkey) had more influence in the  
453 Dersim than any Kurdish nationalist movement or groups like the PKK.

454 Scattered around the landscape are the traces of this continuous struggle  
455 between local politicized Alevi Kurds and the Turkish state. Unlike everywhere  
456 else in Anatolia, the flags, quotes, statues and other icons of Turkish  
457 nationalism act more like reminders of the failed attempts by the state to  
458 assimilate Dersim into the larger nation. Never entirely normalized in the  
459 minds of local people, the military presence in and near the city constitutes  
460 perhaps the most striking characteristic of this contested space. For instance,  
461 soldiers at checkpoints control every important crossroad in the district,  
462 including the entrance of the Munzur Valley itself. In the last couple of years,

463 these military barriers have somewhat faded away if not entirely disappeared,  
464 making room for more disguised stations built atop the region's high summits,  
465 and thus commanding highly strategic views of the surrounding valleys. With  
466 the assistance of helicopters roaring loudly above people's heads, this allows  
467 the army to not only "mark its territory" but also "keep an eye" on the  
468 population.

469 These attempts by the military to control the flow of people in and out of the  
470 region take part in the larger efforts by the state to mark its presence in a  
471 disputed zone that has witnessed since the mid-80s the undeclared civil war  
472 between the Turkish army, on the one side, and the PKK and other armed leftist  
473 organizations on the other. Now spanning more than three decades, the  
474 conflict reached a peak of violence in the Tunceli district during the years 1993  
475 and 1994. At that time, the army in its fight against "terror" systematically  
476 burned villages and deliberately displaced villagers suspected of collaborating  
477 with the "terrorists." More than 15,000 villagers were displaced, causing a  
478 drastic decrease in the population, so much that today the number of people  
479 living in the district is half of what it was in the 1970s.<sup>34</sup> This forced uprooting  
480 and resettling by the military has supplemented the successive waves of past  
481 emigration to the metropolitan centers of power in Turkey and Western Europe,  
482 creating an even larger urban diaspora of Alevi Kurds in and out of Turkey, and  
483 thus simultaneously reinforcing their politicization at the national and  
484 international level.

485 The Munzur Valley comprises a small, but nonetheless symbolically  
486 significant, part of the larger terrain in this dispute as both sides attempt to  
487 infiltrate and establish their sovereignty over the same space. Traces of the  
488 resistance against this appropriation of space by Republican Turkey and its  
489 army are omnipresent in the valley. The traumas associated with the military  
490 suppression of 1938, for instance, have materialized as "lieux de mémoire"  
491 scattered in the landscape. The caves, "castles," and other hideouts used by the  
492 local resistance at the time are well known by locals today and serve to  
493 commemorate the massacres perpetrated. The most famous example is the  
494 high cliffs of Halbori, located 20 km away from Tunceli's center, where,  
495 according to witnesses, rebels were cornered by the army and forced to  
496 surrender or jump to their death into the Munzur River (see Figure 9.1).  
497 A more recent attempt to memorialize these painful events include the "Wall  
498 of Dersim 1938," erected in 2013 by the Tunceli municipality along one of the  
499 main thoroughfares of the city, which displays black-and-white images of  
500 women and children refugees next to the photographs of the leaders killed  
501 during the rebellion. The village of Lirtik, the birthplace of Seyid Riza,  
502 executed in 1937, has also in recent years welcomed different ceremonies  
503 and tributes in memory of all those lost in the conflict against the army both  
504 then and now.



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526 **Figure 9.1** Munzur River from Halbori Cliffs, “lieu de mémoire” of 1938  
527 massacres. (Photograph taken by author in July 2014.)

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529 In *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Uğur Ümit Üngör illustrates how different  
530 institutions throughout the twentieth century have helped the Turkish State  
531 inscribe its particular vision of modernity into the contested geographies of  
532 Eastern Anatolia.<sup>35</sup> Alongside these institutions, it is the infrastructures  
533 themselves that have been the means by which the state has reinforced its  
534 sovereignty in its Kurdish regions. Material constructions have actively  
535 participated in Turkey’s bid to connect Dersim to the rest of the country, and  
536 consequently to the rest of the “civilized” world. A contested space in  
537 contemporary Turkey, the Dersim in general, and the Munzur Valley in  
538 particular, have been appropriated and re-appropriated through the building  
539 of roads, bridges, dams and other contested infrastructures that re-inscribe  
540 landscapes into politics. Built or planned, the dams in the Munzur Valley  
541 have also been incorporated within these particular discourses of assimilation  
542 and resistance. Perceived as more than merely symbols by local *Tuncelililer*,  
543 however, they have become instead the material manifestation of the state  
544 and the military in their attempts to appropriate the area, force people out  
545 of their homes into cities alongside the earlier village evacuations and  
546 submerge both their natural and cultural heritage.

*“Damming” the Munzur Valley*

547 Under the supervision of the DSI and financed by various export credit agencies  
548 and national banks, private construction companies have been “damming” the  
549 rivers of the Dersim for more than 30 years now. But what exactly does it mean  
550 to “dam” a river? Rather than examining dams, these immobile engineering  
551 feats and taken-for-granted physical infrastructures as nouns, I want to open  
552 new avenues of inquiry in the second part of this article by considering the act  
553 of “damming” itself. Instead of thinking about immobile walls of concrete  
554 blocking the flows of rivers, this methodological shift to the verb “damming”  
555 lets us ask, for instance, who dams? What gets dammed? Who benefits from  
556 damming? It introduces a relation between subjects and objects allowing us to  
557 scrutinize, beyond the thing itself, those who construct, those who use, and  
558 those who are most affected by damming.<sup>36</sup> By considering the active process of  
559 damming, involving humans, nature and technology, we are brought closer to  
560 seeing the “hybrid subjectivities” of these seemingly immovable objects.  
561 In other words, infrastructures are transformed into “cyborgs” with a life of  
562 their own, and with more often than not unpredictable consequences that  
563 often escape human control.<sup>37</sup>

565 The environmental impact of damming has been detailed elsewhere more  
566 eloquently.<sup>38</sup> Suffice it to say here that “to dam” entails the fragmentation of a  
567 riverine ecosystem into two. Firstly, rivers are transformed *upstream* into lakes  
568 that inundate wildlife and forests. Locals in Tunceli have complained, for  
569 example, that the Uzunçayır Dam built in 2009 on the Munzur River has  
570 submerged a countless number of local plane and poplar trees, some of which  
571 were more than a hundred years old. Large water reservoirs also restrict the  
572 movement of animals, severely disturbing their migration patterns, and can  
573 also become important vectors for diseases. Secondly, dams decrease the quality  
574 of *downstream* river plains that are often home to very diverse ecosystems. Once  
575 built, natural flooding disappears as water is diverted from its users further  
576 along the river. Biodiversity is drastically reduced and fish habitats are  
577 significantly disturbed. The accumulation of silt behind a dam also alters a  
578 river’s ecology both up and downstream. In the end, damming deteriorates  
579 more than natural landscapes as it also disturbs the delicate balance between  
580 humans and animals.

581 Damming not only splits rivers into two; it also divides human lives into a  
582 before and after the dam. This before and after, more often than not,  
583 materializes into a here and there for the people displaced. Dams across the  
584 globe have moved a considerable number of individuals living and working in  
585 river valleys while simultaneously disregarding their rights. Water stored  
586 behind their walls usually benefits large-scale irrigation farming in the plains  
587 and the electricity produced by their HEPPs is transferred to industries in the  
588 lowlands or cities located even further away. In Turkey and elsewhere across the



589 world, the victims of dam construction are families usually living on  
590 subsistence agriculture and belonging to ethnic or religious minorities with  
591 very little political voice.<sup>39</sup> In the end, the accounts of dislocation and  
592 relocation caused by dams from the shores of the Euphrates and Tigris  
593 Rivers and their tributaries in Eastern Turkey to crowded cities in Western  
594 Turkey and their suburbs augment the larger story of the country's internally  
595 displaced population.<sup>40</sup>

596 In his urban ethnography of Johannesburg in South Africa, AbdouMaliq  
597 Simone characterizes cities by their "incessantly flexible, mobile, and  
598 provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated  
599 notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used."<sup>41</sup> Simone extends our  
600 understanding of infrastructures from physical objects directly to people's  
601 activities. He adds how the constantly moving flow of human beings who are in  
602 relation with one another becomes "a coherent platform for social transaction  
603 and livelihood."<sup>42</sup> It is this living social fabric of a city that Simone calls *people*  
604 *as infrastructure*. Despite being a rural and sparsely populated area, the Munzur  
605 Valley nonetheless possesses a similar resilient network of *people as*  
606 *infrastructure*. Damming not only raises troubling issues for the valley's ecology  
607 but also affects negatively these human intersections and social transactions.  
608 Building more dams in the valley would further isolate villages and villagers,  
609 disconnecting them from each other as well as from the center of Tunceli and,  
610 for instance, from emergency medical services. Activities that have sustained  
611 families for years such as animal herding or apiculture would also be rendered  
612 obsolete by more constructions. More damming, in the end, means more  
613 villagers leaving the valley, more communities broken apart and fewer chances  
614 for families displaced during village evictions by the military to return home.

615 If these large infrastructures are so harmful, not just to the natural  
616 environment, but to the social fabric of the valley itself, rendering  
617 dysfunctional its *people as infrastructure*, why then are they built in the first  
618 place? Damming the valley does not benefit local farmers since agriculture in  
619 this mountainous region of Turkey is negligible on the national scale and  
620 merely satisfies local needs. When considered as a whole the estimated  
621 production of the Munzur dams and HEPPs only constitutes a negligible  
622 fraction of the total installed power capacity of, for instance, the Keban, the  
623 Atatürk, or the yet-to-be-built Ilisu Dams. The sacrifice to nature seems too great  
624 for such a small amount of electricity that would only fulfill a minute  
625 percentage of the country's needs. But if the benefits to the local population are  
626 inexistent and the energy production is insignificant, the estimated cost of the  
627 dams put together, up to \$2 billion, is not.<sup>43</sup> Why then "dam" the Munzur  
628 Valley? The answer seems straightforward. "Damming," above everything else,  
629 profits financially private construction companies, in this case a consortium of  
630 Turkish, American and Austrian firms.

631 The failed attempts to build the Konaktepe Dam on the Munzur River will  
632 serve here to illustrate the broad network of engineering companies and  
633 construction firms that have been working on the rivers of Eastern Turkey with  
634 the blessing of various Turkish Ministries and Directorates.<sup>44</sup> It demonstrates  
635 how Turkish dams and HEPPs privilege above everything else both economic  
636 and political interests. Valued at the relatively small sum of \$10 million, the  
637 design and engineering phase, before the actual construction of the Konaktepe  
638 Dam, was undertaken by the project's principal contractor, Stone & Webster, an  
639 American engineering firm owned by the Shaw Group in Massachusetts.<sup>45</sup> Once  
640 this initial stage completed, Stone & Webster would have entered the project's  
641 building phase estimated at the larger sum of \$300 to \$400 million. This work  
642 would have been shared with the Austrian companies Strabag AG and VA Tech  
643 Hydro GmbH (the former responsible for the tunnel and surge chamber and the  
644 latter for supplying the hydro-mechanical and electrical equipment).<sup>46</sup>  
645 In addition, the Turkish companies Soyak Uluslararası İnşaat ve Yatırım A.Ş.  
646 and ATA İnşaat Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. would have also participated in this  
647 second phase of construction.<sup>47</sup> With the help of European and American  
648 export credit agencies, it is consortia of private firms like these, both Turkish  
649 and foreign, which are behind the damming of rivers all over Turkey.

650 In order to reach agreements, obtain deals and acquire funds to dam the  
651 valleys, this network of engineering firms relies on a larger web of public and  
652 governmental institutions. Again, the construction of the Konaktepe Dam was  
653 included as one of the many projects in a 1998 agreement signed between the  
654 United States' Department of Commerce and Turkey's Ministry of Energy and  
655 Natural Resources. This bilateral pact helped American companies acquire  
656 contracts for the building of 9 HEPPs in Turkey, while also securing the  
657 financing from the Ex-Im (Export-Import) Bank of the United States.<sup>48</sup> These  
658 types of arrangements, oftentimes involving the ministries and directorates  
659 supposedly responsible for preserving the country's environment, have led  
660 many to believe that successive governments in Turkey have simply acted as  
661 "clearing houses" for the private sector. Not seeing the benefits of "damming,"  
662 many local people feel that their rivers are being "sold" to the private sector  
663 purely for financial interests.

664 Of course, dams and HEPPs are being built today on practically every river in  
665 Turkey unbiased to the fact that these might "belong" to Turks, Kurds, Sunnis,  
666 Alevis or others. Considering the particularly contested geography of the  
667 Dersim, however, the dams on the Munzur River, without knowing whom they  
668 are providing service or inflicting harm to, have become highly discriminatory.  
669 Far from benefitting local people, "damming" the Munzur River profits Ankara  
670 and a small number of private firms located outside the valley. Consequently,  
671 dams have been resisted by *Tuncelililer*, not only because of the degradation  
672 they cause to the environment, but because they embody the new neoliberal

673 avatars of Dersim's traditional foes: centralized authority represented here by  
 674 the DSİ and global capital incarnated by a network of foreign and Turkish  
 675 construction companies.

676 It is to the different acts of resistance undertaken at the local level against the  
 677 construction of dams for the preservation of nature, as well as against the  
 678 commodification of rivers undertaken through the government's neoliberal  
 679 policies, that I now turn my attention to in the last part of this article.

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### *Saving the Munzur Valley*

682 When its supposedly protected status as a national park was not able to "save"  
 683 the Munzur Valley, local people felt it was their responsibility to do so. Today,  
 684 none of the dams in the Tunceli District have remained unchallenged.  
 685 To preserve the unique nature of the valley against the consortium of  
 686 engineering firms, state institutions and loaning agencies, local *Tuncelililer*  
 687 have joined forces with activists worldwide to lead the "Campaign to Save  
 688 Munzur." As an example, the point of confluence of the Munzur and  
 689 Pülümür Rivers near the city of Tunceli, known locally as the *Jara Gola Çetu*  
 690 and considered a sacred place by many Alevi Kurds, was first threatened by the  
 691 Uzunçayır Dam in 2009.<sup>49</sup> As water levels began to rise that year, more than  
 692 20,000 people gathered in the city center to march against its possible  
 693 inundation. At the time, construction companies had promised local  
 694 authorities that the reservoir would be kept low enough to keep the area  
 695 unharmed. In 2011, however, the Tunceli Municipality and its *Barış ve*  
 696 *Demokrasi Partisi*<sup>50</sup> or Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) mayor were  
 697 nonetheless sued by Turkey's DSİ and fined 2.2 million liras for having  
 698 transformed *Jara Gola Çetu* into a park. Sparked by a recent court decision to  
 699 demolish it, and the probable rise in water levels, the latest demonstrations  
 700 organized at *Jara Gola Çetu* by the "Campaign to Save Munzur" took place in  
 701 June 2013, not incidentally just as protests in İstanbul's Gezi Parkı began to  
 702 erupt, both of which were geared against environmental destruction but  
 703 expressed a deeper social anger and political will.

704 Protests in Tunceli against dams often take the form of collective marches  
 705 beginning in the city center and ending near the shores of the Munzur River  
 706 itself, a few kilometers upstream (see Figure 9.2). Large crowds gather and chant  
 707 in unison slogans like "Mun-zur Öz-gür A-ka-cak!" ("Munzur will flow freely!"),  
 708 as onlookers applaud in approval and drivers (despite being jammed in their  
 709 cars) honk in support. Anger that has accumulated over the years against state-  
 710 sponsored infrastructural development is voiced here within the confines of the  
 711 contested space, in a last cathartic attempt to save the valley from its fate.  
 712 Again, the *Jara Gola Çetu*, situated at the entrance of Tunceli, was the furthest  
 713 point affected by the reservoir of the Uzunçayır Dam. Faced with its possible  
 714 eradication, *Tuncelililer* also expressed their resentment for the many other plots



736 **Figure 9.2** Anti-dam protest march from center of Tunceli to shores of Munzur  
737 River (photograph taken by author in August 2014).

738  
739 of lands, roads and paths, trees and homes already inundated. In a way, the park  
740 served as a central nerve and as an ultimate advocate against the destruction of  
741 both local nature and culture.

742 The Munzur Valley does not have a world famous archaeological site like  
743 Hasankeyf to serve as the “spokesperson” of the campaign.<sup>51</sup> Instead, activists  
744 fighting for the preservation of the valley put forward its natural beauty,  
745 the spiritual significance of its rivers, trees, springs and cliffs, as well as the  
746 many places of pilgrimage for Alevis like the *Jara Gola Çetü*. Animated by  
747 lawyers, teachers and journalists at the local level, this core receives  
748 additional support from environmentalists, academics and members of  
749 human-rights associations supporting similar causes globally, as well as  
750 famous musicians like Aynur Doğan and Ferhat Tunç who have both sung for  
751 the valley.<sup>52</sup> In addition, other anti-dam activists in Turkey occupied with  
752 their own contested infrastructures at Yusufeli, Hasankeyf and Allianoi  
753 have provided their support over the years to the struggle in the Dersim.  
754 If the “Campaign to Save Munzur” borrows the methods and discourses of  
755 environmentalists across the globe, thus participating in the larger  
756 international movement against dams, it is also unique, as Marie Le Ray

757 argues, in the manner by which it calls upon a certain type of “distinct  
758 locality” to function.<sup>53</sup>

759 For instance, the *Munzur Doğa ve Kültür Festivali* (Munzur Nature and Culture  
760 Festival), held every August since 1999, constitutes an opportunity for activists  
761 to assemble, discuss and organize protests against the construction of dams,  
762 HEPPs and mines in the Dersim. Besides the well-attended concerts held in  
763 Tunceli’s *Atatürk Stadyumu* (renamed for the occasion the less Republican-  
764 sounding *Şehir Stadyumu* or City Stadium in the festival program), festivities are  
765 also held during four days in the district’s largest towns. The festival constitutes  
766 the ideal occasion for the “Campaign to Save Munzur” to rally people to its  
767 cause through roundtables, explain its actions in panels, make its voice heard  
768 during marches, as well as share the information it does have about future  
769 infrastructural projects to all. Attracting up to 20,000 people each year, the  
770 event also coincides with the return home of many emigrants from Western  
771 Europe and allows the campaign to gain an international stature.

772 Thanks to the festival and other happenings, the campaign has made an  
773 impact across borders, disseminating information about the region’s threa-  
774 tened ecology to the diaspora of Alevi Kurds that over the decades has woven  
775 strong political and economic ties across the world. Despite the distance  
776 separating them, members of this disjointed community have remained  
777 connected to their homeland – the springs, rivers, trees and cliffs of the Munzur  
778 Valley often providing the images bonding their different trajectories into one  
779 collective soul.<sup>54</sup> Many anti-dam activists also manage websites and blogs, own  
780 Facebook and Twitter accounts, in order to reach out to this resilient network of  
781 residents outside the Munzur Valley, who nonetheless remain concerned about  
782 its fate. Closer to home, other actions are taken by the campaign throughout  
783 the Tunceli District, away from the city center and deeper in the valleys,  
784 sometimes next to the dams and HEPPs themselves, in order to inform local  
785 people about diverse environmental threats. These panels and workshops also  
786 allow activists to remain connected at the grassroots level. In this manner, the  
787 campaign can more easily track down future projects hitherto undisclosed and  
788 ensure that villagers in the valley do not accept deals with public or private  
789 representatives promising to deliver them *cennet* (paradise) if they sell their  
790 lands for the construction of these infrastructures.

791 When marches, workshops, websites and other peaceful means to raise  
792 awareness and disseminate information remain unsuccessful, other strategies  
793 are adopted in an effort to stop the proliferation of unwanted dams in the  
794 region. One tactic has been to camp near the river as soon as construction work  
795 on a dam begins. Later, in an attempt to slow down the progress of workers,  
796 activists stand as a group in front of their drilling machines. As activists put  
797 their bodies on the line against dams, the state gendarmerie and private security  
798 companies try to stop these forms of civil disobedience; some confrontations

799 leading to violent clashes where gunshots are exchanged and some occasionally  
800 wounded.<sup>55</sup> Another tactic has been employed more recently against dams and  
801 HEPPs in the Dersim by members of the *Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu* (the  
802 Liberation Army of Turkey's Workers and Villagers), the guerilla arm of the TKP-  
803 ML better known as TIKKO. Over the past years, the partisans of this armed  
804 group have carried out "operations" at the Dinar HEPP in 2012 and Mercan  
805 Dam in 2014, placed bombs inside the control room of other HEPPs, and  
806 intimidated engineers and guards on-site, threatening to kill them if they  
807 continued working there.

808 Using more or less peaceful means, located in or out of the Dersim, belonging  
809 to the "Campaign to Save Munzur" itself or to armed groups like TIKKO, all of  
810 these anti-dam activists remain vigilant and more than ever organized in their  
811 efforts to stop unwanted infrastructural projects too often started without the  
812 prior notice of the DSİ, the Directorate of Forest and Environment, or  
813 the construction firms themselves. As a contested space in the political  
814 landscape of the Republic, the damming of the Munzur River has given the  
815 valley an additional dimension in the larger struggle of Alevi Kurds in  
816 contemporary Turkey. By actively resisting the construction of dams, members  
817 of the "Campaign to Save Munzur" are fighting against what they see as an  
818 encroachment of the state into their lands and into their lives. First instigated  
819 by citizens concerned about the valley's ecology, the campaign has grown to  
820 express a broader discontent of citizens in the ineffective management of the  
821 country's rivers by the state and the relentless march of destruction brought  
822 forth by top-down neoliberal projects, infrastructural and other, imposed by its  
823 successive governments.

824 What might seem at times like a desperate struggle against the inevitable, the  
825 campaign has nonetheless been successful in slowing down the tide of  
826 construction in the valley. After a lawsuit filed at Turkey's Council of State by  
827 the lawyer Barış Yıldırım, the Konaktepe Dam, discussed earlier to illustrate the  
828 network of construction firms behind the "damming" of rivers in Eastern  
829 Turkey, was eventually cancelled in October 2010.<sup>56</sup> The latest judicial victory  
830 dates to November 2014 when the decision to effectively stop all ongoing  
831 constructions within the borders of the national park was taken. This is no small  
832 feat indeed and brings encouragement and hope to activists continuing the  
833 battle as new and supposedly more environmentally friendly dams are being  
834 prepared to replace the abandoned ones that lacked the appropriate  
835 Environmental Impact Statements. Finally, besides succeeding in halting the  
836 building of these particularly contested infrastructures, the recurring acts of  
837 resistance and ongoing legal battles against dams instigated by the "Campaign  
838 to Save Munzur" have raised awareness about their destructive effects across the  
839 country and encouraged a greater appreciation of natural and sacred places  
840 about to be submerged.



## Conclusion

841  
842  
843 In his ethnographic work on India, Anand describes how “(f)ederal, state and  
844 municipal governments have identified infrastructure to be a critical area of  
845 state intervention, and have been busy unrolling ambitious plans to construct  
846 highways, piped water networks and electricity plants in an effort to make  
847 Indian cities (and the nation) ‘world class’”.<sup>57</sup> As promises made to its people,  
848 governments understand the importance of building, and just as crucially  
849 maintaining, infrastructures. It is therefore no accident that election campaigns  
850 in Turkey are filled with promises of roads, bridges, metro lines and dams: each  
851 election cycle surpassing the previous one in terms of infrastructural promises.

852 For instance, highways, airports and bridges are built in İstanbul to  
853 transform the city into a cosmopolitan metropolis that will attract more and  
854 more foreign investments. A priority for states and municipalities, public works  
855 are also at the core of *Hedef 2023*, President Erdoğan’s vision for the Republic’s  
856 centennial anniversary, which, according to the official website of his *Adalet ve*  
857 *Kalkınma Partisi* or Justice and Development Party (AKP), aims to develop wind,  
858 geothermal and nuclear energy, build railways, highways and high-speed trains,  
859 design satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles, as well as possess one of the  
860 world’s largest seaports. Infrastructure, after all, is what makes a city, as well as a  
861 country, “world class.”

862 Opposed to this never-ending gluttony for infrastructural “development”  
863 and an insatiable appetite for monumental construction projects in Turkey,  
864 campaigns like the one in Munzur illustrate how people across the country  
865 are expressing their dissatisfaction in what successive waves of governments  
866 have called “progress.” No longer part of the utopian dreams of nations, and  
867 associated instead with the broken hopes of displaced people and the  
868 destruction of ecological habitats, dams and other such mega-infrastructures  
869 are now being incessantly questioned, disputed and opposed. Alevi Kurds have  
870 adopted the avatar of environmentalism in their efforts to protect their nature  
871 and their culture in the Munzur Valley, shifting ever so slightly the traditional  
872 leftist discourses of the Dersim from a socialist struggle against capitalism,  
873 imperialism and the state, to an ecological battle, oftentimes against the same  
874 foes, for the preservation of nature: in other words, a move for many *Tuncelililer*  
875 from “Red” to “Green” political activism.

876 The negative reaction to dams, however, underlines more than just a post-  
877 Cold War dissatisfaction in the building of contested infrastructures and  
878 destruction of natural habitats, highlighting in addition the manner in which  
879 citizens, with the escalation of identity politics in Turkey, have started to  
880 challenge top-down state projects by voicing their concerns and engaging in  
881 resistance in and out of the contested spaces themselves. Elsewhere in the  
882 country, other political actors like the anti-dam activists in Munzur have taken



883 up different social causes under different names. What unites them, however, is  
 884 surely to be found in the commonly shared discontent of neoliberal practices  
 885 and top-down decisions taken by the successive waves of governments in  
 886 Ankara in the name of its people, which over the past decades have materialized  
 887 as contested infrastructures inside Turkish cities as well as across the Anatolian  
 888 landscape.

### Notes

- 891
- 892 1. Bruce Robbins, "The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes toward an Archive", in  
 893 *Boundary 2* 34:1 (2007): 26.
  - 894 2. Nina Laurie, "Dams", in *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture*,  
 895 edited by Stephan Harrison, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (London: Reaktion Books  
 896 Ltd., 2004, 157–9).
  - 897 3. This first part thus summarizes, in essence, a larger project examining the social  
 898 history of dams in Turkey, which uses an understudied archive composed of files  
 899 from Ankara's *Devlet Su İşleri* or State Hydraulic Works (DSİ), documents from  
 900 the World Bank, Turkish and foreign newspaper articles, as well as oral histories  
 901 of engineers, politicians and the local people most affected by their  
 902 constructions.
  - 903 4. Dersim corresponds to a zone a little bit larger than the modern district  
 904 of Tunceli comprising areas populated by Alevi Kurds within the districts of  
 905 Tunceli, Bingöl, Erzincan and Elazığ.
  - 906 5. Information used to write this second part was gathered very differently from  
 907 the archive of part one. Leaving behind bureaucratic files and other greyish  
 908 literature, I have over the last ten years visited Dersim repeatedly, following  
 909 local lawyers, teachers and municipality representatives during the "Campaign  
 910 to Save Munzur," visiting the proposed sites of the future dams themselves and  
 911 recording, up and down the region's valleys and all around its reservoirs,  
 912 countless stories about dams.
  - 913 6. On infrastructures' supposed invisibility, see Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethno-  
 914 graphy of Infrastructure", in *American Behavioral Scientist* 43:3 (1999): 380; Susan  
 915 Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder, "Steps toward an Ecology of Infrastructure:  
 916 Design and Access for Large Information Spaces", in *Information Systems Research*  
 917 7:1 (1996): 111–34; Geoffrey C. Bowker, Karen Baker, Florence Millerand and  
 918 David Ribes, "Toward Information Infrastructure Studies: Ways of Knowing in a  
 919 Networked Environment", in *International Handbook of Internet Research*, eds  
 920 Jeremy Hunsinger, Lisbeth Klastrup and Matthew Allen (Dordrecht, Germany:  
 921 Springer, 2010), 97–118; Robbins, "Smell of Infrastructure", 33. For a differing  
 922 point of view, see the excellent article by Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics  
 923 of Infrastructure", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–43.
  - 924 7. Şükrü Sönmezer, "Comments on the Influence of the Western Architectural  
 Styles on the Ottoman Water Structures: Case Study Sultan Mahmud II Dam", in  
*Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Architecture and Urban Design,  
 19–21 April 2012* (Tirana, Albania: EPOKA University, Department of  
 Architecture, 2012, 947–58). Also located in the Belgrade Forest, the Valide  
 Sultan and Topuzlu Dams were built by Krikor Balyan, a member of the  
 Armenian family of architects responsible for, among many other monuments,

- 925 the Dolmabahçe Palace and the spread of this particularly eclectic architectural  
 926 style in Ottoman Istanbul. On Ottoman architecture in nineteenth-century  
 927 Istanbul, see Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in*  
 928 *the Nineteenth Century*, Publications on the Near East, University of Washington  
 929 Number 2 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986). On the particular  
 930 influence of Armenian architects, see Hasan Kuruyazıcı, ed., *Armenian Architects*  
 931 *of Istanbul in the Era of Westernization* (Istanbul: International Hrant Dink  
 932 Foundation Publications, 2010).
- 932 8. For a discussion of these questions, see for instance Stephen Graham and Simon  
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  - 935 9. Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*  
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  - 937 10. Fatma Aslıhan Demirtaş, "Artificial Nature: Water Infrastructure and its  
 938 Experience as Natural Space" (MS thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,  
 939 2000, 33–42).
  - 940 11. Star, "Ethnography of Infrastructure", 385.
  - 941 12. Demirtaş, "Artificial Nature", 38–41.
  - 942 13. Zehra Yumurtacı and Ercan Asmaz, "Electric Energy Demand of Turkey for the  
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  - 945 14. Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy: 1950–1975*, The Royal  
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 947 Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Political Parties in Republican Turkey", in *The*  
 948 *Cambridge History of Turkey Vol. 4: Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. Reşat Kasaba  
 949 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 236).
  - 950 15. If the US no longer builds dams at home, it exports its expertise abroad  
 951 once with the help of the World Bank and now with other loaning  
 952 institutions. Ties established during the Marshall Plan between Turkey  
 953 and the American government, private companies, and banks, are still  
 954 resilient as the dams later in this article illustrate. For a discussion of the  
 955 Incirlik air base's key role in Turkish-US relations, see Selin M. Bölme, "The  
 956 Politics of Incirlik Air Base", in *Insight Turkey* 9:3 (2007): 82–91. See also  
 957 Gingeras in this volume for another US-Turkey relations story during the  
 958 Cold War.
  - 959 16. Created in 1953, the DSİ, modeled on the United States Bureau of Reclamation,  
 960 is the government agency responsible for the oversight and administration of  
 961 Turkey's water resources in relation to energy, agriculture, services and the  
 962 environment.
  - 963 17. Yeşim Arat, "Süleyman Demirel: National Will and Beyond", in *Political Leaders*  
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 965 2002, 88).
  - 966 18. Süleyman Demirel and Aslıhan Demirtaş, "Süleyman Demirel ile Röportaj,  
 Interview with Süleyman Demirel", *Modern Essays* 5 Graft SALT Research,  
 accessed on February 17, 2014, <http://saltonline.org/en/623/modern-essays-5/>.
  19. Finished in 1974, the rising waters of the Keban Dam reservoir materialized the  
 "invisible line" mentioned in this volume's introduction by Göçek; it separated  
 Turkish, Sunni, "modern" and "developed" Elazığ to the south, and Kurdish,  
 Alevi, "rebellious" and "backward" Dersim to the north.

- 967 20. Documents concerning the Keban Transmission Line Projects (*Appraisal of the*  
 968 *Keban Transmission Line Project Turkey* and the *Report and Recommendation of the*  
 969 *President to the Executive Directors on a Proposed Loan to the Republic of Turkey for*  
 970 *the Keban Transmission Line Project* both dated to October 1968) are available on  
 971 the World Bank Group's website, accessed on February 17, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org>.
- 972 21. For another similar Cold War story, namely the Aswan High Dam constructed  
 973 on the Nile River in Egypt between 1960 and 1970, see Patrick McCully, *Silenced*  
 974 *Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams*: Enlarged and Updated Edition  
 975 (London: Zed Books, 2001, 238–9); Hussein M. Fahim, *Dams, People, and*  
 976 *Development: The Aswan High Dam Case* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981). For the  
 977 earlier Aswan Low Dam built in 1902, see Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts:*  
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 979 34–6).
- 980 22. McCully, *Silenced Rivers*.
- 981 23. Cevat Erder, "Lessons in Archaeological and Monument Salvage The Keban  
 982 Experience", *Monumentum* 17 (1978).
- 983 24. See McCully, *Silenced Rivers*, 281–311 and Laurie, "Dams", 157–9 for the  
 984 emergence of anti-dam activism across the world beginning in the 1980s. For a  
 985 broader discussion of environmental activism in Turkey beginning in the 1990s,  
 986 see Fikret Adaman and Murat Arsel, eds, *Environmentalism in Turkey: Between*  
 987 *Democracy and Development* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
- 988 25. Construction after Keban continued first on the Euphrates River with, among  
 989 others, the Karakaya, Atatürk and Birecik Dams, and later on the Tigris River  
 990 with the very contested Ilisu Dam. John F. Kolars and William A. Mitchell,  
 991 *The Euphrates River and the Southeast Anatolia Development Project* (Carbondale:  
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- 993 26. See Göçek in this volume's Introduction.
- 994 27. Leila Harris, "Modernizing the Nation: Postcolonialism, Postdevelopment, and  
 995 Ambivalent Spaces of Difference in Southeastern Turkey", in *Geoforum* 39 (2008):  
 996 1698–1708; "Irrigation, Gender, and Social Geographies of the Changing  
 997 Waterscape in Southeastern Anatolia", in *Environment and Planning D: Society and*  
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 1001 (2010): 151. For the connection between the Turkish state's war with the PKK and  
 1002 the function of the GAP, see also Aksoy in this volume.
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 1004 Satellite Images for Human Rights Monitoring in Turkish Kurdistan," *Disasters*  
 1005 32:3 (2008), 449–66; Martin van Bruinessen, "Forced Evacuations and  
 1006 Destruction of Villages in Dersim (Tunceli), and Western Bingöl, Turkish  
 1007 Kurdistan September–November 1994", in *Report by Stichting Nederland-*  
 1008 *Koerdistan* (1995): 15–6.
- 1009 29. As of August 2015, out of the 26 projects in the Tunceli district, four dams and  
 1010 two HEPPs have already been built while the rest are either under construction  
 1011 or in the planning stage. On the Munzur River itself, three projects out of eight  
 1012 (the Uzunçayır Dam in 2009, the Mercan HEPP in 2003, and the Dinar HEPP in  
 1013 2010) have already been put in operation. The other five have either been  
 1014 cancelled (the Bozkaya Dam and Konaktepe Dam and HEPP as I explain later) or

- 1009 are about to be (the Akyayik and Kaletepe Dams) because of their location  
 1010 within the Munzur Valley National Park itself. The status of these dams,  
 1011 however, is constantly changing.
- 1012 30. As such, the Munzur Valley constitutes another case-study of the dynamic  
 1013 relationship between state, society, and the environment in Turkey, as  
 1014 illustrated elsewhere in this volume by Soylu, Akbulut and Adaman.
- 1015 31. On the contested identity of Alevi Kurds in contemporary Turkey, see Martin  
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 1017 identity of the Kurdish Alevis", in *Working paper, Centre for the Study of Asia and*  
 1018 *the Middle East, Deakin University, Malvern, Victoria (Australia)* (1997); "Kurds,  
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- 1022 32. Van Bruinessen, "Forced Evacuations in Dersim", 13.
- 1023 33. For more details on the "rebellion" in Dersim, see the pioneering work by  
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 1030 Pennsylvania, 1994).
- 1031 34. Van Bruinessen, "Forced Evacuations in Dersim", 15.
- 1032 35. Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern*  
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- 1035 36. On infrastructures as a relation, see Star, "Ethnography of Infrastructure", 380,  
 1036 and Star and Ruhleder, "Ecology of Infrastructure."
- 1037 37. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist  
 1038 Feminism in the 1980s", in *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65–107; Constance  
 1039 Penley, Andrew Ross and Donna Haraway, "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with  
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- 1041 38. McCully, *Silenced Rivers*, 29–64.
- 1042 39. Cheril Payer, *The World Bank: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Monthly Review  
 1043 Press, 1982, 250–1).
- 1044 40. Van Bruinessen, "Forced Evacuations in Dersim", 35; Bilgin Ayata and Deniz  
 1045 Yüksek, "A Belated Awakening: National and International Responses to the  
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 1047 5–42.
- 1048 41. AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in  
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- 1050 42. *Ibid.*, 410. See also AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come* (Durham: Duke  
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43. Marie Le Ray, "Associations de Pays et Production de Locality: La 'Campagne  
 Munzur' contre les Barrages", in *European Journal of Turkish Studies, thematic issue*  
*n°2, Hometown Organisations in Turkey* (2005): 41, accessed on January 15, 2014,  
 url: <http://ejts.revues.org/370>.
44. The entire Konaktepe facility would have included a 100 m-high dam, a 15 km-  
 long tunnel and a powerhouse with two Francis turbines generating a total of

- 1051 180 MW of electricity. I explain later in the article how, after multiple protests  
 1052 and a lawsuit, its construction was stopped.
- 1053 45. According to their website, Stone & Webster was involved in installing the first  
 1054 transmission line across the Bosphorus in 1965. Over the last 30 years, it has  
 1055 undertaken at least 30 projects in Turkey. According to the European Rivers  
 1056 Network (<http://www.rivernet.org/> accessed on January 15, 2014), the company  
 1057 has also recently obtained the authorization to mine uranium in the region.
- 1058 46. VA Tech Hydro GmbH's work in Eastern Turkey also includes the Atatürk,  
 1059 Birecik and Ilisu Dams.
- 1060 47. ATA Holdings has been blamed for taking shortcuts to save money in the  
 1061 construction of the earlier Atatürk Dam. Maggie Ronayne, *The Cultural and  
 1062 Environmental Impact of Large Dams in Southeast Turkey* (London: KHRP and  
 1063 National University of Ireland, Galway, 2005, 48).
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- 1069 49. Ferit Demir, "Alevilerin kutsal mekanı için yıkım kararı," *Hürriyet*, June 22,  
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 1091 2 (2005) (English translation available on Jean-François Pérouse's academia.edu  
 1092 website) for a discussion of *hemşehri dernekleri* or hometown associations in  
 Istanbul, through which Alevi Kurds and others actively maintain social links  
 after migrating.
55. This extreme form of police brutality constitutes another grim example of what  
 Göçek refers to in this volume's introduction as the dark side of Turkish  
 neoliberalism.
56. Designed soon after the DSİ's master plan in 1983, the project at the time did  
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1093 the engineering firms by the country's Energy Market Regulatory Authority was  
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1096 57. Nikhil Anand, Johnathan Bach, Julia Elyachar and Daniel Mains, "Infrastruc-  
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