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## **The Dual Nature of Displacement: Dam-induced Displacement in Southeastern Turkey**

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The Dual Nature of Displacement: Dam-induced Displacement in Southeastern Turkey

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## I Abstract

Dam-induced displacement is a formidable practical and theoretical challenge for development projects and their proponents. The development projects contained within the Southeastern Anatolia Project in Turkey are debated widely in academic literature because of the factor of human displacement from large dam projects. A key dichotomy in the debate is about whether human displacement ought to be treated as an incidental harm to be mitigated, or as an illustration of a development project's misguided purpose. In this thesis I examine how Turkish authorities approached human displacement in two dam projects: the Atatürk and Ilisu Dams. These case studies demonstrate how displacement is a core tenet of the Southeastern Anatolia Project. The processes of land expropriation, compensation, and resettlement indicate how the affected Kurdish minority are removed from their land in a way that is reminiscent of the Turkish state's century-long history of attempts to scatter and assimilate Kurdish identity. In this context, displacement is an intentional act of destruction in the name of rebuilding for state interest.

## II Introduction

Displacement is increasingly used as an integrative force in a globalized world. Yet in the field of development, this systematic uprooting of people is pushed into an awkward position in discourse. We can recognize the tragedy of the forced movement of people, but we do not consistently recognize our complicity in these tragedies when we view displacement as an unsavory consequence of the greater good of development. Displacement is a means to an end—a violence declared necessary in the name of people's interests. But what are claimed as these interests are abstractly or ignorantly formed illusions of the powerful states, companies, and organizations that rule over development projects.

The relationship between development and displacement can be analyzed through a study of dam projects such as those contained in the Southeastern Anatolia Project (i.e., GAP, derived from its Turkish name, Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi). This is an integrated regional development project in the Southeast of Turkey that centers around the construction of hydroelectric dams on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The dams constructed by the Turkish state have resulted in the displacement of large numbers of the region's inhabitants, many of whom are of the Kurdish minority.

The building of a dam, and the consequential inundation of a populated area, creates a unique moment in which destruction and creation are simultaneous elements of one act of development. Studying this moment is an opportunity to better understand what development stands for when its key component is a destructive flood. Inversely, it is important to understand how human displacement functions within the greater process of development.

Much of the scholarly research into GAP focuses on the successes and failures of the projects, coming from both technocratic and humanitarian perspectives. It is an open question whether new settlements with modern institutions, employment opportunities, and so on, will constitute a gain or a loss for the Kurdish people. But trying to study the *undefined* gains and losses, improvements and harms, or benefits and liabilities, is consistently a limited scope of analysis, and will not lead to a more useful understanding of the value of Turkish development policies on the large scale. GAP, among many dam projects around the world, is an interesting phenomenon of development, given that its promised benefits aimed at local populations are woven into a fabric of loss. Is losing land and livelihood a failure of development, when a development project itself seeks to systematically uproot and replant minds and bodies into a new, state-defined order? This question cannot be answered through pure quantitative analysis—it must be answered with a qualitative approach to understanding how displacement functions in a system of development. Displacement cannot simultaneously be a planned, central force of development, and also be considered a liability. This formulation is dishonest. Displacement must be considered solely as the former, providing the basis for an inherently destructive project of development.

Displacement encompasses two meanings. It includes a literal meaning—how populations are evicted from the places they live. Secondly, it includes a metaphorical meaning—how minds and bodies are removed from one social context and integrated into another—in this case a state-governed, ethnocentric, capitalist society.

These meanings are mirrored by evidence gathered in my research of GAP. This paper analyzes the compensation and resettlement policies of two of GAP's largest and most studied dam projects, the Atatürk and Ilisu Dams. These case studies present the failures of

compensation policy and the undefined “successes” of resettlement programs; in turn these two factors constitute the duality of displacement as a whole concept. We cannot separate these often-diverging effects based on notions of intentionality of the government, or through project management paradigms based on minimizing risks and damages. I argue that the displacement of local populations from GAP is *not* an incidental harm associated with means of development—displacement in the dual sense is a direct means of GAP.

### III Literature Review

This section presents a review of literature on the topic of development, human displacement, and the issues and politics surrounding large dam projects. The scholars are divided into two groups based on their method of study: first, theorists of strategy and approach, and second, theorists of discourse. The work done by the scholars in these groups is not limited to these broad categories, but this division is helpful for a few reasons. Primarily, there is a difference in how knowledge is used to address the issues surrounding dam projects in southeastern Turkey and elsewhere. The arguments made in the field do not neatly fall into pro-dam and anti-dam categories, and therefore support and caution are both heard from the biggest proponents of development projects.

The theorists of strategy and approach are the closest thing to *supporters* of development projects. They advocate for projects not by denying problems and dangers, but rather by carefully developing methods of engagement with problems. They see problems, whether technical or humanitarian, that ought to be improved upon to produce more beneficial results for the world, nations, groups, and individuals.

The theorists of discourse take an approach of analyzing how governments, scholars, and others approach development. This usually leads to a more critical or cynical perspective on development projects as compared to the theorists on strategy and approach. They do not necessarily advocate against projects, but they question motives and methods, often finding incongruity, ignorance, or deception in the discourse of all types of development advocates.

### **Theorists of strategy and approach**

Many of the ideas associated with the strategy and approach school of thought originate from international development institutions such as the World Bank. This approach is a more thoughtful and human centered approach to development but is still embedded in pro-development World Bank ideas. Michael Cernea (1988) recognizes the propensity of involuntary resettlement projects to disrupt and impoverish societies, but balances this recognition with the belief that the projects can still be critical for development. In 2006, Cernea composed a paper of formal comments on the resettlement plan for the Ilisu project. This paper contains criticism of the plan (particularly of legal frameworks of the resettlement), and of the potential dangers for those affected. However, a central argument of the paper contends that resettlement needs to be treated as a full-scale development project itself—with a level of investment on par with the technical side of the dam project. This assertion is antithetical to my argument, and closer examination of this dichotomy will be presented in the analysis section.

Thayer Scudder (1973) writes about stresses and damages caused by dams, describing them as a form of “ecosystem modification” that can extensively affect human behavior. He sees

resettlement plans containing radical transformation of life as dangerous, and advocates for utilizing simplicity and familiarity when resettling populations.

Agreeing with the approaches of Cernea and Scudder, anthropologist William L. Partridge (1989) celebrates how anthropological knowledge has been increasingly utilized by the World Bank. Guidelines set in the 1980s by people like Cernea had paid much more attention to the adverse effects of involuntary displacement from development. Partridge has the opinion that egregious errors have been solved by this newfound anthropological approach, but finer tuning is needed. As of 2019, the reasonable satisfaction with an approach defined by harm mitigation is still relevant. Stephen R. Munzer (2019) uses a Cernea-influenced method of creating a set of six guidelines to limit the negative effects of displacement. The guidelines proposed involve both ethics and methods of compensation and government assistance that are derived from past research. The argument that harm should be balanced by compensation or benefit is reinforced.

Not included as a case study, but as a referential topic, is the displacement of Nubians caused by the construction of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt. Anthropologist Robert A. Fernea studied the Nubian society on the brink of resettlement (1973). His focus is not on the dam, but on the Nubian culture and how it responds to radical change. Fernea notes how drastically economic and ceremonial life would change in a new settlement—but he also describes the ways in which Nubian culture persists through things like art and architecture. Hussein M. Fahim follows up Fernea's work with a more comprehensive book on the long-term effects of the displacement and resettlement (1983). Nubians are described as being caught in a state of hopeless ambivalence about their condition. Their attitude mirrors the discourse on development projects like the Aswan High Dam, and the Atatürk and Ilısu Dams—weighing the opportunities and advancements of the project but fearful of consequential cultural and environmental harm.

Among scholars focusing on GAP project in southeastern Turkey, Emrah Yalcin and Sahnaz Tigrek (2016) propose an alternative plan for the Ilisu Dam that would avoid the inundation of the valuable historical town of Hasankeyf, notably at the same cost and with the same development benefits. This plan includes building five smaller dams instead of one larger one. The original plan for one large dam proceeded, but their paper offers a unique technical approach to the Strategy and Approach school of thought.

Also utilizing expertise in engineering, Mehmet Berkun (2010) compares the hydroelectric potentials of the GAP project with its sister project in the northeast valleys of the country. He outlines the great possibility of environmental harm from reservoir creation and irrigated farming. Despite identifying these harms, he confirms GAP's success as a rapid development project that has achieved its objectives. The claims of "objectives" is a peek through the door at the theorists on discourse, who analyze claims such as this.

Erhan Akça, Ryo Fujikura, and Çiğdem Sabbağ (2013) provide an in-depth study of the resettlement process from the Atatürk Dam. This paper, along with further information from a 2017 paper by Erhan Akça, Daisuke Sasaki, and Ryo Fujikura, offers an analysis of compensation procedures, resettlement sites, and follow up research on the futures of people resettled by the Atatürk Dam project. These studies pay close attention to prior inequalities and issues among residents and finds both successes and failures resulting from how these small-scale issues are addressed within large-scale projects.

Leila M. Harris (2008) examines localized issues as well. Her research has specific overlaps with the studies on Atatürk Dam resettlement, but she studies water use issues primarily. She identifies groups such as women, the landless, and people involved in animal husbandry, as having enhanced vulnerabilities to a switch to irrigated farming. Her paper is an

intersectional analysis of water issues, and she argues that more attention ought to be paid to these vulnerabilities exposed by rapid transformation of land and society.

### **Theorists of discourse**

Like Michael M. Cernea, Arturo Escobar is a highly influential thinker who is still very relevant in policy and debate. However, Escobar's 1995 seminal text *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* is in great opposition to the approach of Cernea and his tree of descendants. Escobar argues that development is inherently an ethnocentric and technocratic approach that is only successful in that it integrates, controls, and manages populations. Escobar basically calls for context and local organization to counteract the existing regime of representation. He criticizes states and organizations like the World Bank that problematize and seek to transform the rural poor. In a 2004 article, Escobar speaks directly about displacement, a term that can be defined in the Marxist sense (transplanting people into capitalist systems), or as caused by political violence, or in the case of my paper, due to inundation from dam projects. In the Pacific region of Colombia, where Escobar does his research, local groups call for return rights, peace, early warning of displacement, and respect for culture. There is ample room for comparison between this context and that of southeastern Turkey. What is consistent between different instances of displacement, whether it be Egypt, Colombia, or Turkey, is a forced eviction, as well as the second element of transplantation into new settlements, economies, and social contexts.

Writing specifically about dams, Julian Kirchherr, Mats-Philip Ahrenshop, and Katrina Charles (2019) composed a very recent study on resettlement data from 29 large dam projects

across many regions. They looked at the how data represented reality throughout project cycles, and found that regimes, stakeholders, activists, and academics influenced dispersal of resettlement figures. They attributed errors like underestimates of population numbers to be not mistakes but strategic misrepresentations—lies, as they call them. Data is as much a part of discourse as objectives and claims of development and rights. Ceren Belge, who specifically studies the Kurdish southeast of Turkey, agrees that statist literature constructs authority through its technocratic claims about development. She argues that states like Turkey overestimate their capacity to transform their subjects—therefore leading to development failure as a result of kinship networks functioning as a refuge of identity and resistance among Kurds.

Arda Bilgen (2017) analyzes the debate about GAP's true relationship to the Kurdish conflict. He contends that it is impossible to make definite claims about the aim of GAP in relation to security in the southeast of Turkey. The project is certainly one of homogenization and nationalist integration, but there is no direct link between, say, debate in the Turkish national assembly and the mythical "true" reason for the project. This paper contributes to the theme of vagueness of development objectives. Behrooz Morvaridi (2004) contributes to this theme as well, arguing that the risk mitigation measures of resettlement do not consider underlying structural problems in targeted societies.

A key takeaway of Morvaridi's study of the Ilisu Dam resettlement process is that development practices can be hindered by a limited view of disparities. If the framework of development is founded on macroscopic disparities between countries and regions, there can be an ignorance of microscopic disparities within a region or town. An economic history written by Paul J. White (1998) is useful for identifying and contextualizing the economic disparities that exist historically in southeastern Turkey among the Kurdish population. He argues that there is a

multilayered disparity between Turkey and the West, western Turkey and eastern Turkey, and among rich Kurds and poorer Kurds. Economic liberalization of the country has not resolved these disparities.

Şevket Ökten (2017) asks a similar question to what is asked by theorists of strategy and approach: who pays the costs and who reaps the benefits of GAP? He answers in opposition to Berkun, arguing that GAP has not achieved its target because of the inequality of distribution of the benefits. From this conclusion he questions the objectives set out in the first place by dam proponents and proposes land reforms as a needed prerequisite.

The final two papers are written by Geographers Lena Hommes, Rutgerd Boelens, and Harro Maat, and by Gilberto Conde. They analyze the claims and counterclaims made by the Turkish authorities, and local Kurds and their international allies. They discuss the linking of social and cultural management to environmental hegemony on the part of the state. Conversely, Kurds link ethnic claims to claims of environmental rights. These fusions illustrate the complexity of human rights within contexts of environmental transformation, as well as cultural integration or domination.

### **Contribution to literature**

The argument of this paper specifically addresses the debate on how the factor of displacement fits into development projects. Theorists of strategy and approach may identify displacement as a risk of development projects that needs to be mitigated through careful study and policy. I argue against that paradigm, as the evidence is more closely aligned to theories of discourse that view displacement as a core tenet of development. My analysis of literal

displacement from dam-induced flooding elucidates how displacement can be an integral mechanism of development projects.

#### **IV Historical Overview and Case Studies**

##### **Overview of the Southeastern Anatolia Project**

The Southeastern Anatolia Project must be placed in the larger context of a currently unfolding scramble for water resources in the Middle East. Turkey is not alone in its desire to consolidate and regulate its precious water resources—and dams constructed for hydroelectricity and irrigation are being constructed all over the arid region. This point is necessary because Turkey's project of altering its geography, and therefore its population, is simultaneously a project of staking its claim to water in the region. There is only a finite amount of water to be secured in the Tigris-Euphrates river system, and due to the fact that dams increase evaporation (in addition to many other environmental impacts) claims have become rapid, assertive, and often destructive (Yalcin and Tigrek 2016).

GAP is an example of one of these assertive claims to water resources. The project area spans nine provinces: Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa and Şırnak, as these regions are home to the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which flow into Syria to the south, and Iraq to the southeast. These rivers have been declared Turkey's "sovereign national resources" by the Turkish government, and this idea has been normalized by the relative weakness of Iraq and Syria as co-riparian states (Hillel 1994; Hommes et al, 2016).

The region is home to approximately 10% of Turkey's population and has a high proportion of minorities—most notably Kurds. The area makes up around 10% of Turkey's total surface area, but this region contains 20% of the nation's irrigable land—therefore the region is often referred to as Turkey's breadbasket. The region holds 40% of Turkey's hydroelectric potential, and as of 2010, the nation gets 31% of its energy from hydroelectric sources (Berkun 2010).

The integrated regional development project consists of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power plants, along with significant infrastructure, irrigation, and institutional transformation. This results in a transformation of the landscape with cables, canals, and waterbodies (Hommes et al, 2016). Important to this paper, the construction of reservoirs results in the planned inundation of existing towns and villages—and the government directed resettlement of local populations.

The project is outlined by two published plans, which can be accessed in Turkish or English. The Master Plan (1989) is a comprehensive outline of the plans and objectives for the project. The Action Plan (2008) is an updated reevaluation, or fine tuning, of the later stages of socioeconomic programs and investment. There is deep debate among scholars, politicians, and Turkish citizens over the *real* purpose of GAP, and whether it was invented as an anti-Kurdish plot, a solution to the Kurdish conflict, or merely a politically neutral development project (Bilgen 2017). In 2014 the Action Plan, now implementing its second five-year plan, emphasized “Accelerating development, employment, national resource protection, environment, and cultural properties” (Ökten 2017). However, it is impossible to take any claims, from any source, at face value without analysis. The narrative I present does not corner itself into one of these camps. I attempt to frame GAP as its objectives and outcomes describe. One of many socioeconomic

goals of the project is to eliminate feudal land ownership structures and effectively combat land ownership inequality (Bilgen 2017). This goal is crucial to my analysis.

The local and international contexts surrounding GAP are crucial to interpreting and understanding the goals of the project and its consequences. The project centers on sustainability, which is crucial to Turkey's position in ongoing, but slow-moving negotiations to join the EU, and a world where carbon emissions are becoming increasingly unfashionable. Critics of the project bring up environmental and social issues that include salinization, soil erosion, degraded air and water, and pollution, as well as changes in land use, urbanization, and industrialization (Berkun 2010).

There have been many disputes between Turkey and its neighboring states that share the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Damming upriver in Turkey results in reduced flow to Syria and Iraq, who have their own dams and whose citizens depend on river water for agriculture and daily use (Hillel 1994; Issa et al, 2014). The international contestation of GAP is widespread and comes from state actors as well as from local and international activists. The Ilisu project in particular has been disrupted by foreign underwriting being pulled out—from pressure originating with international activism (Morvaridi 2004).

### **Economic disparities in Turkey**

Since the establishment of the Turkish state in 1923, the Turkish project of modernization has been a system of integration and homogenization (Bilgen 2017). From the founding president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan the Turkish state has consistently sought to configure its statehood and citizenry in ethnic and nationalist terms and

has attempted to physically transform and control a diverse population. GAP is only one of the latest political projects to try to physically reconfigure the Turkish population in accordance with nationalist standards.

Attempts at development must be contextualized by the disparities between eastern and western Turkey. Some of Turkey's poorest provinces are among the nine eastern regions encompassed by GAP. As of 2017, the GDP per capita in USD (PPP) for Turkey as a whole is \$27,220, while the province of Şanlıurfa in Southeastern Turkey has a figure of \$9,982 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2017). These disparities are defined by both economic inequality and political hegemony, in which the west holds power and dominion. However, these disparities are both tangible and found in ideas and discourse.

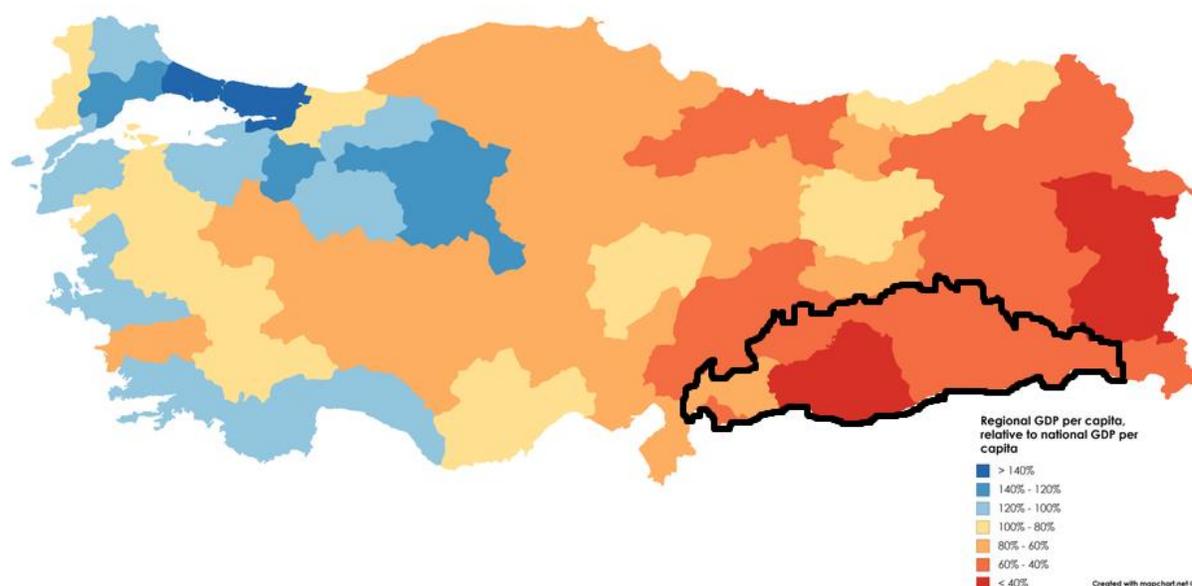


Figure 1. GDP per capita of GAP Region (outlined) relative to national GDP (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2014)

The idea that the east needs to catch up to the west is enveloped in imperialist systems of relations both within Turkey's borders, and between Turkey and wealthy nations in the European Union and North America. In the 1980s and 1990s, liberal economic reforms aimed at growing

the economy did not reach the country's southeast (White 1998). This only contributed to narratives of the region being "left behind." GAP's location in the southeast of Turkey frames the project as a direct engagement with these narratives.

### **Kurdish conflict**

Before the founding of the modern Turkish state, the Kurdish populations lived under Ottoman rule with a relative degree of autonomy. After 1923, the Kurds living within the borders of the newly defined state of Turkey were subjected to a new dominance of the ethnic category of "Turkishness" (Bilgen 2017). A 1934 Resettlement law paved the way for the relocation of Kurds to western Turkey and Turks to eastern Turkey—all without using the mention of the word "Kurd" in its text (Belge 2011). This law intended to forcefully assimilate Kurds and other minorities into an ethnically Turkish society. Following these events, wealthier landowners, including ağas (nobility/landowners), sheikhs, or tribal chiefs, purchased the resulting abandoned land at state auction. The actions of the Kurdish elite had a dual effect of protecting the Kurdish communities from the threat of Turks buying up Kurdish lands, but also a deepening of local inequalities (Belge 2011). By 1980, 11.6% of households owned 59.9% of the land in the Southeastern Region. Smaller landowners, equating to 56% of households, owned just 8.7% of land (Belge 2011). Policies like this were responsible for either constructing or solidifying the rural inequalities that have been often described by authorities and scholars as "feudal." Wealthy Kurds only consolidated land during times of eviction and violence (White 1998).

Revolts against this new ethno-state were common in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until a slight ease in violence emerged after democratization and liberalization efforts in the

1950s gave marginal room for Kurdish representation in multiparty politics (Bilgen 2017). These political conciliations proved to be thin and dishonest; to this day Kurds and Kurdish organizations are vilified and obstructed from power in local and national government. Violence escalated once again in the 1970s and onwards, after the rise of Abdullah Öcalan and his newly founded Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a separatist, anti-capitalist, Kurdish militant and political organization.

Repressive cultural and political policies from a post-coup junta in the 1980s and 1990s further inflamed conflict between state forces and the PKK (Bilgen 2017). This was only the latest phase in the state project of creating uniformity through cultural restrictions on language, clothes, and music, and the renaming of Kurdish towns. Cultural assimilation was a “core tenet” of state Kurdish policy until at least 1990 (Belge 2011).

De-escalation occurred in 1999 upon the capture of Öcalan, which continued until a collapse of the peace process in 2015. The conflict has caused over 40,000 deaths, 1-4 million displaced, and the destruction of around 4000 villages (Bilgen 2017). Conflict is ongoing today within Turkish borders, and also has spilled over into Kurdish regions of neighboring countries. It is noteworthy that both water issues and Kurdish issues are not limited within national boundaries. The extension of the Kurdish conflict between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq mirrors disputes over the water resources of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

## **History of the project**

Dam construction in Turkey has been a chief national interest for almost a century. In 1954, the Turkish Government established the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works

(DSİ) to harness the country's rich water resources. In 1958, the DSI acquired 520,000 hectares of private land and 200,000 hectares of government land to use for dam projects (Akça et al, 2012). Planning for GAP, one of multiple projects to come, spanned the second half of the century, but it was not until 1988 and 1989 that authorities fully formulated GAP as an integrated regional development project with profound social as well as economic objectives.

This new designation represents a turning point in the concept of GAP itself. A project that was once about hydroelectricity and irrigation became one deeply invested in modernizing social structures, mortality, fertility, and cultural change (Hommes et al, 2016).

The definitive link between the Kurdish conflict and GAP can be debated, and the purpose of this paper is not to extrapolate beyond an analysis of actions and consequences and the role of displacement in development. GAP could be analyzed as a remedy to grievances of the Kurdish population, or a clampdown of authority and hard power on a restive region, but between these perspectives there is the fact that the majority of 350,000 people displaced from GAP are of Kurdish origin (Morvaridi 2004). The task of this paper is distinctly not to argue a perspective on GAP's relation to the Kurdish conflict, but instead to elucidate the idea of displacement as an integral part of dam-centered development—which in the context of the Kurdish struggle evidently is a means of integration and a replanting of bodies and minds into the Turkish state and society.

## Case Studies (Atatürk Dam and Ilisu Dam)



Figure 2. Reservoirs of Atatürk and Ilisu (*Gegenstroemung and Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive*, 2009)

This section presents research into Turkey's management of two prominent dam projects within GAP: Atatürk Dam and Ilisu Dam. I have chosen these two projects to study due to their prominence in scale and in academic literature. The Atatürk and Ilisu projects are located on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, respectively, and are separated in time by roughly two decades. This separation in time allows me to analyze if and how Turkish procedures changed between the two projects. The purpose of this is to find whether lessons were learned, or more specifically, how resolute and embedded the process of displacement was within larger development goals. These two case studies will demonstrate that displacement and the practices used to minimize its negative effects, particularly land-value compensation, are not a system of risk and mitigation

but a foundational aspect of dam-centered development. Following a brief overview, for both dam projects I will explain the process of expropriation and compensation and the process of resettlement. From the conjoined acts of expropriation and resettlement, a dual but united image of dam-centered development emerges.

### Atatürk Dam



Figure 3. Atatürk Dam Flood Area (Karadede and Ünlü, 2000)

### Overview of Atatürk Project

Construction began on the Atatürk Dam in 1983, and its operation began in 1992. It is the second largest dam by body volume in the Middle East (after Aswan Dam) and it has a capacity of 2400 MW and an energy production of 8900 GWh /year. For irrigation, the land it feeds water

to, the Şanlıurfa-Harran Plain, contributes 50% of the nation's cotton production (Akça et al, 2017). Four towns and 90 villages were affected by inundation for the dam's reservoir. This amounted to 55,300 people (Akça et al, 2012). The dam did result in a net income for the region, as well as increased educational opportunities from a wide increase in institutions such as schools (Akça et al, 2012).

### **Expropriation and compensation**

Resettlement occurred in 1989-1991, the few years prior to opening of the dam. 55,300 people were displaced from four towns and 90 villages in the flood area. 19,264 of the former residents, slightly over one-third, moved to government sponsored resettlement areas, while the rest took cash compensation for their land and moved to nearby cities (Akça et al, 2012). The government sponsored resettlement areas were located in distant provinces to the west such as Aydın, while one was in the same province.

Compensation was done in cash, based on the value of land. This meant that well-off households had more compensation money, and therefore more options for resettlement. Households with less land tended to have to move to government resettlement areas. A majority of households indicated in a survey that they only accepted the compensation reluctantly (Akça et al, 2012).

Existing problems included an unequal distribution of land, with large tribal families of large holdings and the ubiquity of sharecropping (Ökten 2017). In the process of compensation for expropriated land in flooded areas, land ownership directly correlated to the amount of

compensation. Land reform was absent from the project, despite government reference to land issues as a reason for intervention (White 1998).

Adding to these deficiencies, compensation was less than the market value of the land, between \$8000 and \$13,000 USD per hectare, depending on the type of land. Ultimately this range of compensation was 40-60% less than expected by the locals (Akça et al, 2012).

### **Resettlement**

Additionally, the loss of social status as landowners is not insignificant in this cultural context (Akça et al, 2012). In their new environments, the displaced were often considered to be refugees by local Turkish populations of the areas they moved to. This erroneous belief by the Turkish public may be due to the prevalence of refugees from violent conflict in the region. But it is also clear that there is a distinct lack of understanding of how and why those displaced from dams are present in new areas.

Only 20% of landless people said they could easily find jobs after resettling (Ökten 2017). Occupation changes from farming resulted in many of the displaced hoping their children could become teachers or government officials instead of traditional farmers (Akça et al, 2012). Locals were not regularly employed in the construction of the dam. Instead, workers on the dam were not locals but miners imported from western Turkey, which led to a kind of infusion of ethnic Turks into the area (White 1998). This appears to not be a deliberate exclusion, but it is highly emblematic of a pervasive indifference to the local population. Furthermore, it is significant that there was no attempt to include local Kurds in employment related to dam

construction as much as there was an effort to bring in Turks from other regions of Turkey—which is reminiscent of assimilation policy like the Resettlement law of 1934.

An unexpected “success” of the resettlement process, in terms of economic prosperity, was the success of settlers to the western province of Aydın. Roughly one-third of the displaced Kurds moved to settlement areas in distant Aydın province, compared to the two-thirds who resettled themselves within the area in nearby towns such as Adıyaman and Kahta. The success in Aydın was due to the accident of fixed loan prices on new property, which remained stable against inflation of the Turkish Lira, and made the purchase of new property very advantageous to the settlers. The settlers attributed their success to the social relationships offered by their new community of displaced people, and the fact that their resettlement site was declared a tourist zone due to its ancient Greek archeological attractions, beaches, and resort culture. Living near a tourist hotspot created a market to sell goods, as well as more employment opportunities. However, these factors were not built into the resettlement plan; they were either coincidental, or the result of the resilience of the resettled (Akça et al, 2017).

After the resettlement process of Atatürk dam, the government has revised its strategy to encourage more people to resettle with government help, despite the fact that government assistance in the case of the Aydın resettlement was only accidentally beneficial. (Ökten 2017). Also, it is important to note that in development projects, “success” is always going to be defined by the governing power, and this definition will likely be shaped in a way to justify past actions and further control.

## Ilisu Dam

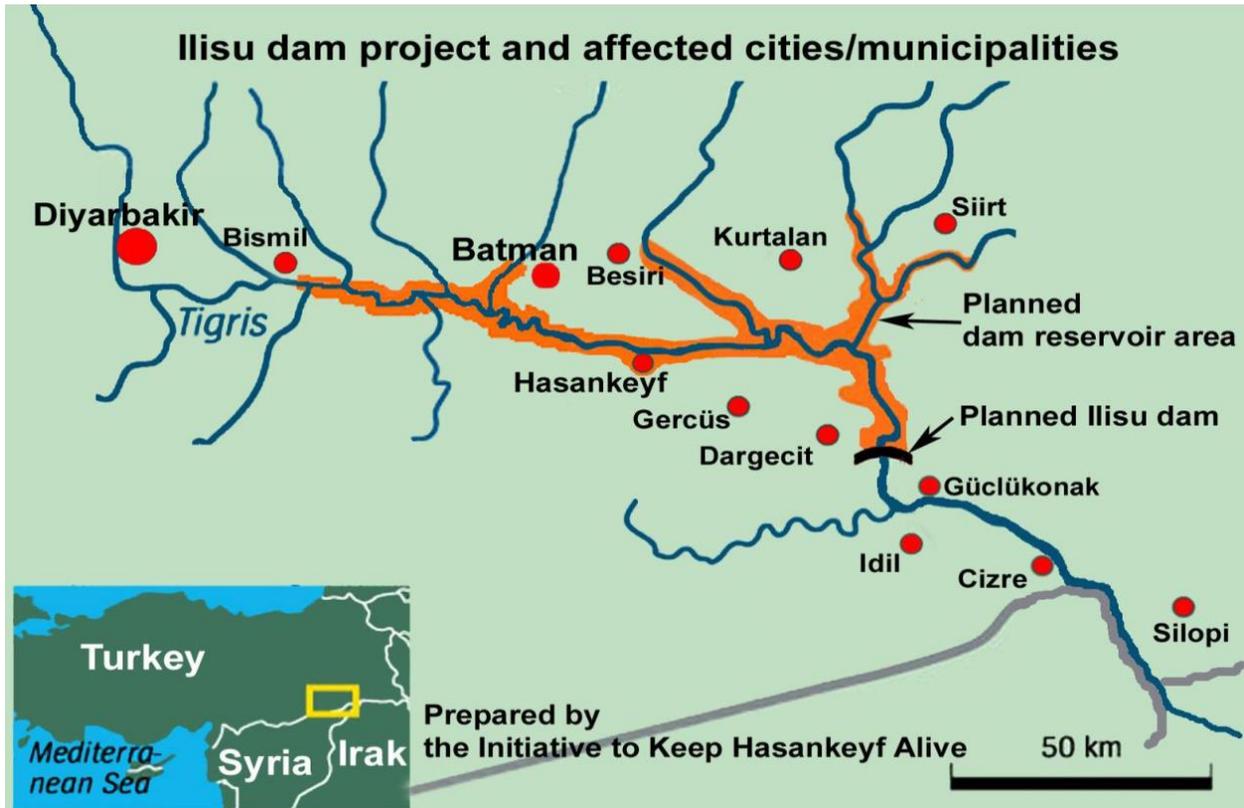


Figure 4. Affected area of Ilisu Dam (Gegenstroemung and Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, 2009)

### Overview of Ilisu Project

Plans for the Ilisu Dam date back to the 1950s, but construction was started in 2008; currently the process is in its advanced stages and its reservoir is being filled. In 1997 the DSI invited a Swiss firm to form a consortium of private companies from the EU and US; however, this consortium was disbanded in 2001 due to concerns over the “social and environmental impacts” of the projects (Morvaridi 2004). This problem put the entire Ilisu project on hold, which is one reason why it has taken two decades to complete the dam.

Ilisu is the most recent dam within the GAP project and it is the largest hydroelectric dam on the Tigris River. Construction was completed in 2019, and as of December 2019 the reservoir is currently being filled. It is 65km upstream from the border with Iraq and Syria, in the town of Ilisu between Mardin and Şırnak provinces. It is the second largest dam after the Atatürk dam by body filling volume and is the fourth largest in terms of power production at a capacity of 1200 MW and a production of 4120 GWh/year (DSI 2018). It is the largest dam on the Tigris River.

The impact area of the dam, meaning its area of influence for inundation, power, and irrigation, reaches over 3 million people, 90% of whom are ethnic Kurds (Morvaridi 2004). The Ilisu project will contribute 412 million USD a year to the Turkish economy through energy production alone (DSI 2018). From this measurement, the DSI argues that the dam will “bring prosperity to the region” and make it possible to construct the Cizre dam. One engineer suggests that “people will soon enjoy a coastline,” which as a statement is both descriptive as well as ominous in terms of consequences (DSI 2018).

### **Expropriation and compensation**

Ilisu has expropriated 108 inhabited villages, and 42 hamlets have been affected by the filling of the reservoir, and from DSI data, an estimated 61,000 people would have to be displaced (Morvaridi 2004; DSI 2018). Hasankeyf is one town that has been the subject of much attention because of its historical and archeological value. It has Assyrian, Christian, Abbasid, Islamic, and Ottoman history. In 2005 a decision was made by authorities to lift its protected status (Berkun 2010). The town of Hasankeyf is to be flooded, but some of its archeological sites have been moved to new sites, such as the historical tomb of Zeynel Bey. Hasankeyf residents

have been or will be moved to Yeni Hasankeyf (“New” Hasankeyf), a newly constructed town designed and managed by Turkish authorities. In response to criticism over the flooding of the historical city, a statement from DSI engineers argues that “we have to think not terms not of a village or a district or a region, but the whole nation” (Morvaridi 2004).

Difficulties arise once again in the process of compensation. 50% of people in the area to be flooded do not have the means to prove ownership of their land. These are mostly small landowners without documentation, among other reasons (Morvaridi 2004). Not compensating for common property, prior displacement of many from their land, and policies aimed at dispersing Kurds all contribute to a broken system of compensation (Morvaridi 2004). The government learned from the Atatürk Dam resettlement process that government assistance was wanted and needed by those affected; despite this, fair compensation for those affected was not implemented.

The lack of land swaps or fair land evaluation was an obvious detriment from past projects, yet they were still absent at Ilisu. Land for land compensation could have been a fairer tool for administering expropriation. It would have mitigated the radical change imposed on the livelihoods of local Kurds. It was not used at either of the Dam projects studied in this paper.

## **Resettlement**

Yeni Hasankeyf (New Hasankeyf) has become a prominently advertised facet of the Ilisu project. The Directorates of State Hydraulic Works (DSI) has posted videos online showing off the new facilities and institutions of the new town. These videos are interestingly available in both Turkish and English—indicating the modern settlement is an important piece of public

relations internationally. Yeni Hasankeyf features a college, a cultural center, hospital, industrial park, commercial center, library, and other public institutions that are all prominently advertised (DSI 2018).

Only residents from the “old” Hasankeyf have been permitted to resettle in Yeni Hasankeyf. Those resettled in government areas such as Yeni Hasankeyf were offered 25-year mortgage plans, with no payback for the first 5 years (DSI 2018). This appears to be an adapted form of the mortgages from the Atatürk project, although the accidental success of stable mortgages from the past has been replaced with an intentional alternative plan.

The most recent deadline for evacuation of the “old” Hasankeyf was in October 2019, although this deadline was delayed by authorities as not everyone in the town had left. Delays such as this have become characteristic of the Ilısu project. The resettlement site of Yeni Hasankeyf is still under construction and mostly empty. Some locals and activists have complained that the new houses constructed there are made with poor materials, and that water and environmental quality in the new settlement is lacking (Kucukgocmen 2019). Time is needed to study this new town, but current indicators are worrying.

The Ilısu Dam reservoir has only begun filling in July of 2019, this means that long term effects of resettlement have yet to be studied.

## **V Analysis**

This section identifies and analyzes the displacement from the Atatürk and Ilısu Dam projects. The case studies outline two primary ways in which the government-managed processes of resettlement affected the Kurdish populations in the flooded reservoir areas. The first is the

means and consequences of compensation, designed to be a system of appropriation for what is being taken. The second is the means and consequences of the government building new lives for the displaced people.

The dual nature of displacement derives from these two systems of change. Both physical displacement and the programs of amelioration and development that come after are mechanisms of change that transplant human beings into new environmental contexts. Theoretically, the dual nature of displacement could be explained by applying the political economy approach as discussed by Escobar (2004), and the literal forced movement of people as a result of reservoir flooding. From the case studies we can see that resettlement is not a consequence of development—it is development.

The two sides of the argument that emerges from this agreed upon assertion come from Michael Cernea and Arturo Escobar. In his 2006 review of the Ilisu project, Cernea states

Conceived, planned, and financially resourced adequately, resettlement can help improve rather than only just dismantle affected people's livelihoods—that is can be made into a benefiting part, rather than a liability of, induced development.

The language itself reveals the flaws in this line of thinking. First, speaking in terms of benefit and liability assumes the objectivity of these terms, as nowhere in his paper, or in other papers of similar approach, is there an analysis of the needs and wants of the affected population. From this, and from the greater lack of specificity about the Kurdish population, we can infer the “dismantle”-“improve” logic of dam development is fixed upon generalized, outdated, and unfortunately ubiquitous ideas of Modernization.

## **Expropriation and compensation**

When the processes of compensation and expropriation for the two projects are compared, we can see a consistent incompatibility between the realities of the region and the policies of development. Across the board, Turkish state policies did not significantly adapt from the Atatürk project of the 90s to the Ilisu project of the 00s. Failures such as these represent the destructive elements of displacement and how these forces are not calculated risks but fully fused into the development project.

The question of what exactly is being compensated for is pertinent. Directly it is land, but given the bias of policies in both dam projects, the compensation functions like an organized eviction. Reluctantly accepting a price for one's land entails a surrender of ties to your land and an abandonment of a way of life. Land is reduced to a commodity and property—which directly contradicts standards of communal land or informal proof of ownership (both of which were neglected in policy).

Evidence suggests policies in neither dam project addressed inequalities of land ownership. In the Atatürk project, local elites were better informed to take best advantage of policies by optimizing land type and being better able to prove ownership of land. Many pieces of land in the GAP region are communally owned, and ultimately local elites, who had been entrenched by decades of conflict and eviction, were better positioned to benefit from compensation (if there was any) for these types of land (White 1998).

The Ilisu project was affected by a similar ignorance of local realities. Providing proof of land ownership was a persistent problem. Many Kurdish residents had been previously displaced

from their land due to the violent conflict between the state and the PKK. Sharecroppers were also a group that was excluded from compensation policies.

Ultimately, greater amounts of compensation allow more options when relocating. Wealthier households could choose whether to move to nearby cities or take their chances with new government settlement areas. Poorer households were not afforded this choice, and more often had to put themselves into government hands (Akça et al, 2012). Results could be positive or negative for following either path, but that is not the point. The poor had to surrender themselves to state management and control. If this, in fact, is intended to be a mechanism of addressing inequalities, then it firmly establishes the process of forced displacement as a primary system of development.

Consistent incompatibilities between realities and policy demonstrate a greater focus of the state on moving people rather than addressing their problems. Even if giving the state's intentions the benefit of the doubt, development and social progress is aligned clearly to the transplanting bodies. Whether or not this can truly improve lives can be debated further, but it is difficult to be optimistic when the common denominator of policy is sharp increase in state control.

It is ironic that the grand project of GAP is aimed at interregional disparities, yet disparities within areas are apparently ignored from what we can see in actual policy. The compensation process more resembles a transplanting of communities more than a process of healing. If existing inequality is a social malaise, then displacement is not a targeted treatment but an amputation.

## Resettlement

After being faced with state expropriation policies that are unsympathetic to their social realities, displaced people are then faced with new environments that are unsympathetic to their present condition.

Finding good employment is one of the most difficult parts of resettlement. In the Atatürk resettlement process, a minority of affected people found an improvement in opportunities to make a living. This is influenced by both the difficulty of finding work and also the common culture shock of the new environment. Farmers cannot always continue to farm, and if they can, it is likely going to be with new techniques, new land, and new state intervention in their work. Finding jobs constructing the dam or operating it were not available for unknown reasons. However, this fact fits into the larger scheme of transplanting the local population. This process of development did not ultimately deliver employment opportunities. If the Ilisu project addresses this flaw, it might look something like the “success” of certain Atatürk project resettlements.

In the case of the Atatürk project, the most “successful” aspect of resettlement was the state-managed relocation of certain groups to western Turkey. “Success” must be put in quotes, because one of the main reasons for high satisfaction was beneficial accidents contained in the loan procedures for new houses. Furthermore, much of the “success” can be attributed to the resilience of the Kurdish people, who took advantage of the advantageous conditions they were set up in (a thriving tourist zone).

This isolated experiment prompted the government to put greater emphasis on state control of resettlement in the Ilisu project. However, the successes that can be attributed to

accidents in policy plus individual initiative were replaced by tighter state control. The fixed-loan price loophole was closed and replaced with an advantageous 25-year mortgage. It is strange that the conditions of the original “success” has essentially been deemed *too beneficial* by the state, as if displaced persons got more than they deserved. Financing can be tight, but it is absurd that benefits to affected people have to be scaled back when the explicit goal of development is to improve lives. This disconnect suggests that attempts to balance benefit and liability, as proposed by Cernea, and as evident in Turkish state policy, is insisting on the dismantle-improve paradigm that is uninterested, and irrelevant to what “beneficial” actually means.

Resettlement from the flooded Hasankeyf to Yeni (i.e., new) Hasankeyf is supported by the construction of schools, hospitals, and many other institutions. The importance of these institutions appears to be based more in appearance than in usefulness. The DSI videos posted online, which appear in both Turkish and English, look very much like advertisements. It is likely that these videos function as public relations tools, used to reinforce international support and investment. The actual effects of the institutions will need to be studied in the future, as Yeni Hasankeyf is still under construction and is not yet fully inhabited.

The relocation of historical sites from the old Hasankeyf is often celebrated, but the sites take on new meanings in Yeni Hasankeyf. They are described as opportunities for tourism in the new settlement—a way to bring money into the community (DSI 2018). It is as if the cultural value has been severed, and the site has been reimagined as a tool of development. This parallels how Kurds have been severed from their ancestral lands. The cultural bonds that ties them to their lands have been torn away and replaced with the prospect of an improved life. In this

system of development, benefit is derived from a sterilized objective context of Modernity and Progress.

While the failures of expropriation and compensation policy were rooted in an incompatibility to local lives, the failures of resettlement are rooted in blind belief in what constitutes benefit and improved lives. Both parts of the process are founded on a neglect of the cultural context from which people are displaced. Therefore, the only possible result is a destruction of cultural context and a simultaneous transplanting into a new one. The dual nature of displacement is a destruction and reconstruction, both physical and cultural. When development systems are constructed based on ideas of benefit and liability, these objective and irrelevant terms are precisely what are imposed on people.

## **VI Conclusion**

Within the dual nature of displacement, one half of the development process is much more obvious than the other. The colossal dams and reservoirs are of a scale that immediately gives pause. We can visually imagine how much space is swallowed by their construction — space that once was the space of people's daily lives. It is harder to comprehend the other half of the process, the kind of social displacement talked about by Arturo Escobar. Strangely, while Escobar speaks gravely about this destruction, development proponents cite this displacement as the end goal of their transformative projects. The Turkish state's project of Modernization has always been about dissolving differences and reconstructing identities—and this is not a radical claim. Scholars debate whether GAP is a calculated strike against Kurdish existence, but a better

understanding of GAP is to say that all the damning evidence on this count is found within development discourse.

The organized eviction and resettlement of populations in Southeastern Turkey is a dual process that removes people from their land, and subsequently transplants them into new settlements with new institutions, livelihoods, and social contexts. The physical displacement is crucial to achieve the latter objective, and hence it is a misrepresentation (intentional or ignorant) to treat displacement as an incidental harm to development as a whole.

More research is needed on the long-term effects of displacement. Too often authorities and scholars wait for undefined “successes,” only to pounce on evidence that arises only to define the entire project based on these limits. I suggest that the views of targeted groups such as the Kurds be given more weight in the inception of development projects, instead of only allowing input in the policies for mitigating harm. Whether local views can ever be free from the groupthink of development discourse is a problem in itself, however.

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