



## Negotiating hydro-scales, forging states: Comparison of the upper Tigris/Euphrates and Jordan River basins

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### A B S T R A C T

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In this comparative study of two water basins in the Middle East, we examine the hydro-political construction of scale as central to state and nation building, and their territorial consolidation. We argue that scalar negotiations and constructions of freshwater became central to the very consolidation of both Turkey and Israel. The examples we offer also illustrate the usefulness of a performative approach to scale, benefiting from but moving beyond a politics of scale approach. The comparative focus on hydro-scalar politics and performativities in relation to state and nation building offered a) lends to an enriched understanding of water politics in these two contested river basins, b) enables fuller understanding of how water becomes central to the processes by which nations, states, and territories are consolidated in this region, and c) contributes to recent debates in political geography by demonstrating the value of scalar and performative approaches. Underscoring these linkages, the analysis differs from many works on water in the Middle East, contributes to studies of state and nation building as contested processes, and avoids the assumption of state or national scales as ontological pre-givens.

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### Introduction: water scales and critical hydro-politics

In justifying Turkish state led damming and development of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Upper Mesopotamia, planners are quick to note that the twin rivers represent over one quarter of Turkey's freshwater resources and a similar percentage of Turkey's hydroelectric potential. During the first decade of the Israeli state, 1948–1959, water experts strongly disagreed over the estimates of water potential and the most appropriate institutional and technical apparatuses to utilize that potential (Alatout, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b). To date, many investigations of water politics or state building in the Middle East have largely ignored the tight link, implicit in both cases, between hydro-politics, technical and political constructions of scale, and state and nation building. Here, we extend insights from other studies (e.g., Giglioli & Swyngedouw, 2008 for Sicily; Swyngedouw, 1999 for Spain) by investigating these linkages in two Middle Eastern contexts. Drawing on the contemporary example of Turkey and the historical example of Israel, we find that the scalar and technical constructions of hydrologic geographies have been

enrolled in the service of defining and consolidating the national–territorial spaces of both Turkey and Israel, as well as in supporting state-building projects—understood as the construction of an administrative framework that lays claim to those territories.

Conceptually, we argue that a scalar perspective is crucial to debates about water resources (consistent with earlier work by Alatout, 2008a; Feitelson & Fishhendler, 2009; Harris, 2002; Sneddon & Fox, 2006; Sneddon, Harris, Dimitrov, & Özsmi, 2002; Swyngedouw, 1999). We also push this further to show that attention to scalar constructions of water, in particular, is crucial to understand processes related to state and nation building, be those contemporary or historical (Swyngedouw, 1999; see also the call in Kuus & Agnew, 2008 to examine states as processes, rather than as pre-existing entities).

Toward this end, we find that analytics offered by recent discussions on the performativities of scale (Kaiser & Nikiforova, 2008) are particularly fruitful. While sharing many elements of politics of scale approaches, performative approaches place emphasis on the iterative and contested dynamics of scalar constructions. Performative approaches also emphasize the maintenance of scalar notions through focus on the necessity of iterative citation to lend the *appearance* of scalar fixity. The performative analytic also leaves open the possibility for shifts of constructions over time and in response to particular contestations.

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We begin by providing a brief conceptual discussion of the politics and performativities of scale in relation to broader debates in geography. We then use this framework to explore hydro-geographies of Turkey and Israel. There are numerous reasons why the comparison between the contemporary example of Turkey and the historic example of Israel is compelling and informative. Most importantly, a focus on scalar hydro-politics is central in both cases for the consolidation and maintenance of strong, centralized states. Further, while the literature on water politics in the region is vast, only a handful of scholars have made explicit connections between scalar constructions of water, state building, and territorial consolidation (Alatout, 2008a; Feitelson & Fishhendler, 2009; Harris, 2002). We conclude by synthesizing major themes of the paper and underscoring the mutual constitution of techno-political processes, hydrologic scalar constructions, and geopolitical considerations (Alatout, 2008b; McCarthy, 2005; Sneddon & Fox, 2006; Swyngedouw, 1999).

### Politics and performativities of scale

There has been a flurry of debate in recent years on the value of scalar analytics for understanding socio-natural processes (Kaiser & Nikiforova, 2008; Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008; Moore, 2008). Marston, Jones, and Woodward (2005) suggest that it might be better to abandon 'scale' altogether given key ambiguities and conceptual traps associated with the term (e.g., hierarchical understandings). While we find such cautions useful, we defer to several thoughtful responses to their work (Kaiser & Nikiforova, 2008; Leitner & Miller, 2007), and argue that continuing attention to scalar processes, discourses, and practices is crucial for understanding socio-political and nature–society relations (see also Boyle, 2002; Neumann, 2009; Paasi, 2004). Among those demonstrating the usefulness of these approaches, some have emphasized the political construction of scale, i.e., the ways scales are framed, consolidated, and invoked for political ends (Delaney & Leitner, 1997; Swyngedouw, 1999). Others have analyzed 'scale frames' and 'scalar narratives' invoked by certain actors or encoded in laws and institutions (Alatout, 2007a; González, 2006; Kurtz, 2003; McCarthy, 2005; Taylor & Buttel, 1992). With attention to scale, a range of interesting questions are brought to the fore: How and why are certain 'scales' invoked in relation to political discourses, and what influence might this have? What does framing an issue as a 'local', 'regional', 'national', or 'global' concern mean for enabling or curtailing potential responses? Or, how might activists seek to strategically deploy notions of 'global human rights', 'global environmental responsibility', or other scalar constructions to push a particular agenda? Scholars have also asked how and why certain 'scales' are constructed in relation to different political-economic projects (e.g., 'local knowledges' in the case of indigenous rights, or devolution trajectories vis-à-vis neoliberalism)? One of the important insights that emerge from this literature is that scales themselves should not be understood as pre-given, but rather as the outcomes of, or as constituted through, discourse and practice.

In studies focused on nature–society relations, several contributions have highlighted scale as key to contextualizing recent socio-natural and institutional shifts (Mansfield, 2001; McCarthy, 2005; Neumann, 2009). Among them, Boyle (2002) suggests that the scaling of environmental governance makes a difference for the kinds of transformations of nature that are possible. Drawing on the case of waste governance in Ireland, he argues that ecological projects are both produced by, and implicated in, the structuration of scale. Together with Neumann (2009) these authors argue for closer engagement between political ecology and scale discussions in geography. For Boyle, this opens up a host of interesting issues for analysis, including power discussions in terms of who is able to define the scalar scaffolding against which solutions to ecological

problems are framed, or in terms of how scale might be central to supporting or limiting particular political-economic accumulation strategies. Neumann (2009) identifies still other themes to advance a political ecology of scale, including the possibility of more focused attention on the state, and its ability to recalibrate scales, particularly to consolidate authority. These are precisely the types of questions we take up here, with the specific aim to illustrate, and understand, linkages between hydro-politics, scale, and state and nation building in our two case studies.

While our analysis is consistent with the politics of scale approaches, we also wish to push these discussions further by engaging recent literature on 'performativities of scale' as outlined by Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008). These authors argue that we need to be *attentive to the iterative processes and practices through which scales become (seemingly) fixed and naturalized, and to what effects*. As they write,

"The performativity of scale focuses attention not on the production of scales and scalar hierarchies as end products of social construction, but on 'the reiterative and citational practices by which discourse produces the effect' of scale. Instead of treating scales as things in the world that (inter)act ... performativity approaches (seek to understand) scale as a naturalized way of seeing the world, and *explore the enacted discourses that over time work to produce 'scale effects'* (543, emphasis added)"

The approach is thus responsive to Marston et al.'s (2005) critique that some works on scale are problematic to the extent that scales are taken as fixed, pre-given, or hierarchical. Indeed the challenge of a performative approach is precisely to analyze the very practices by which scales *seemingly* become fixed or naturalized. Responding directly to Marston et al. (2005), Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008) argue to write 'scale' out of the geography and social science lexicon would work precisely to hide the processes, discourses, and practices through which scales are constructed, thus obscuring important power dynamics that rely on 'scale effects' (see also Jonas, 2006; Leitner & Miller, 2007).

With a performative approach to scale, a key question becomes: What are the iterative and citational discourses and practices that work to stabilize particular scalar categories and what are the effects of these materializations over time? This approach thus differs slightly from other constructivist approaches in that we are not interested in excavating an originary moment of scale construction, but underscoring the iterative practices that are necessary to maintain particular scalar effects (cf. González, 2006). Further, a performative approach accentuates the possibility that scalar discourses and practices necessarily shift (with citationality, meaning is constantly shifting even when producing sedimented understandings).

Before turning to the case studies, it is worth mentioning that several previous studies have highlighted political constructions of scale in relation to water resources (Alatout, 2008a, 2008b; Bakker, 2003; Biro, 2007; Harris, 2002; Sneddon, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1999). These works have collectively made the case that scalar practices are central to understanding water resources and hydro-geographies. Indeed, Sneddon and Fox (2006) argue that a scalar focus is foundational to a critical hydro-politics. Other key contributions include that offered by Swyngedouw (1999) on shifting scales of water governance in relation to Spanish state and nation building, or that offered by Biro (2007) with interest in exploring the effects of naturalizing particular scales of water issues (e.g., what does it mean to speak of a global water crisis, or to naturalize local scales of governance?). Consistent with studies of this type and politics of scale approaches we ask: What are the political effects of techno-scientific or policy constructions of scale in relation to water resource issues in the Tigris–Euphrates and Jordan basins, both contemporary and historical? How do states or other actors

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