Theorizing gender, ethnic difference, and inequality in relation to water access and politics in southeastern Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter makes two assertions. First, one cannot assess, and fully understand the politics of fresh water without attention to inequality, notably with respect to gender and other axes of difference. Second, water access and politics often play a central role in constituting key categories of difference and inequality. As such, these categories are not static, but shift and change in relation to the changing waterscape and associated environmental dynamics. In this chapter, I elaborate these assertions with examples based on earlier work examining complex waterscape changes underway in the upper Tigris-Euphrates basin, also highlighting key concepts from several decades of work in feminist political ecology.

To begin, I detail several contextual features of the context in southeastern Turkey. Next, I support the chapter's two opening assertions through empirical discussion. In the final section of the chapter, I consider these insights in relation to broader themes in feminist political ecology (FPE), particularly taking into account conceptual and empirical linkages between socio-political difference, inequality, and freshwater politics. This final section aims to more fully draw out what an FPE approach—focusing on gender and other intersectional differences—offers for understanding connections between the focal themes of this volume—notably, water access, conflict, and identity. As elements of this work have been published previously, relevant selections are cited and can be consulted directly for further elaboration.

CONTEXT OF GAP-RELATED WATERSCAPE CHANGES IN SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY

Southeastern Turkey is home to the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers—watercourses that hold historic importance for early Mesopotamian agricultural and urban settlements and that today provide key resources for agriculturalists and others throughout Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Anyone familiar with this basin knows it has been, and remains, a site of intense politics and conflict—from several Iraq wars, to longstanding Kurdish separatism and state response, to recent violence associated with the rise of the "Islamic State." Turkey, the basin's upstream neighbor, generally enjoys the most economic and political stability of its co-riparians and has long focused attention on its southeastern border as the country's most impoverished region—the site of frequent violent clashes between the military and the Kurdish Workers Party (the PKK, a Kurdish separatist movement that has operated with bases in the highlands of southeastern Anatolia and throughout the mountainous areas of bordering Syria and Iraq).

This region is the only one in Turkey dominated by the country's minority Kurdish-speaking population. (The southeast is also home to several other ethno-linguistic and religious minority populations, including Alevis, Arabs, Assyrians, Zazas, and Syriac Orthodox Christians). The southeastern region also stands out with respect to Turkey's long-term statist efforts to promote gender equity: basic statistics place natality in the southeastern Anatolia region at roughly double that of the country as a whole, while there is also high incidence of polygamy and domestic violence as well as relatively low rates of literacy among women (less than half of women in the region are considered formally literate, as compared with closer to 80 percent for Turkey on the whole. GAP-RDA).

This geography—of relative impoverishment, ongoing violent conflict, gender inequality, abundant water resources, and unequal power dynamics across the broader basin—sets the stage for GAP, the Southeastern Anatolia Project (or Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi in Turkish). The project involves massive state-led development of the upper basin centered on hydroelectricity generation, water diversion for irrigation, and socio-economic and infrastructural development. Specific efforts include women's centers, literacy campaigns, and health initiatives to combat malaria and other diseases expected to accompany dam building, and ongoing conversion from rain-fed to irrigated agriculture (see Ünver, 1997 or Çarkoglu & Eder, 1998 for an overview of the project).

Given conflict in the region, one way to understand massive state investment in GAP is to read it as a developmental alternative to the considerable military investment of the past several decades. At present, considerable investment—and change—is underway, centered on large-scale transformation of the upper Tigris-Euphrates basin. With the present investment—and large scale transformation of the basin comes new livelihoods, economies, and agro-ecological realities and identities. It is to these changes—and their relationship to the two primary assertions of this chapter—that I now turn.

ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DIFFERENCES: KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING FRESHWATER POLITICS

Reading Ethnicity: The Kurdish question and GAP development

Gender as well as other inequalities and socio-political differences matter to the freshwater politics of southeastern Turkey in manifold ways. First, from a geopolitical perspective and on a basin-wide scale, key inequalities between the countries are critical. Arguably, the GAP project could not move forward without relative inequalities between the basin countries, Turkey being both the most powerful and geopolitically connected of the three countries, in addition to its situation upstream, both are critical to the very ability to develop the rivers. (This position of power relative to downstream riparians is sometimes referred to as hydro-hegemony. see Zeitoun & Warner, 2006.) This unilateral development is often cited as a reason for the high likelihood of future water-related conflict in the basin, considered by many as a "hot zone." Indeed, the GAP's damming and diversion of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is commonly understood as aggravating an already difficult situation, given that planned uses of the rivers require an estimated 150 percent of available fresh water (Hillel, 1994). Clearly, key inequalities between the countries are central to understanding current geopolitical and intra-basin tensions, the unfolding transformation of the waterscape, as well as the potential for future conflict.

While the literature primarily approaches the topic of water and conflict at the state (or country) scale, considering multiscalar dimensions of water and conflict, including the relationship of GAP water development to past and ongoing conflicts, is essential (Harris, 2002). Consider, for instance, intras-state connections between waterscape changes and the Kurdish conflict that has long simmered in the region. Among the issues contributing to this conflict has been the question of cultural rights for Turkey's minority Kurdish population, including issues such as rights to school children in their native Kuridsh language (a sizeable population estimated at nearly 20 million in a country of nearly 75 million). The GAP region has long been the central node of this conflict, with violent outbreaks State forces have burned villages and forced the evacuation of rural communities. Under a long-term state of emergency in the region (lifted in the early 1990s), residents in the Southeast were banned from associationalism or congregation—effectively making cultural celebrations and political protests impossible.

Highlighting these concerns foregrounds the politics, history, and ongoing conflict surrounding Kurdish identity as key lenses through which to understand contemporary fresh water-related changes and supports this article's first point—that ethnicity and other socio-political differences are key to understanding freshwater politics. To provide a few additional examples, an analysis of state-led GAP development reveals that in part, the Kurdish conflict, and broader notions of "Kurdishness," are targeted through development of the twin-rivers. Low literacy rates are often cited to convey the region's "underdevelopment": overall literacy in the GAP region is 60 percent compared with 80 percent in Turkey as a whole. (Note the significant gender disparity: 1990 figures

suggest that in the southeastern region, 76 percent of men and nearly 45 percent of women are formally literate. GAP-RDA, 1998). Low rates of manufacturing and economic investment in the region along with related impoverishment also undoubtedly result (at least in part) from the long-standing conflict. These factors, combined with disruptions to local trading circuits, a concern aggravated by economic sanctions associated with the several Gulf Wars (see Yegen, 1996), reduce companies' interest and ability to invest in the region. This complicated context invites consideration of the ways in which the politics—and the conflict—associated with the Kurdish question has set the stage for current GAP water-related changes.

Understanding linkages between illiteracy and Kurdish ethnic identity and politics (and the Southeast's overall political economic situation) enables a different reading of the region's statistics. While arguing against literacy programs, particularly for women, may be difficult, contextualizing the situation is essential. Kurdish-language books, newspapers, and other print media were formally banned for several decades until the mid-1990s, Kurdish children were unable to attend primary school in their natal language, and long-term efforts to Turkify the population, including teaching Turkish throughout the region, have characterized life throughout the region. Indeed, the freedom to teach, write, and even speak Kurdish was long an impetus for ongoing Kurdish resistance, and violence, with the prospect of jail time for those infractions (a situation that has arguably seen some improvement in the past decade).

In sum, when we consider indicators of "underdevelopment" cited to justify GAP damming and development, it becomes imperative to contextualize these "realities," taking into account contestations and politics related to Kurdish identity and rights. This history and context also offers a critical backdrop against which to understand the potential implications of GAP development, including how residents in the region might respond to changes (See Harris, 2008b and 2002 for discussion of the GAP project in relation to the Kurdish issue; see Dahlman, 2002 for details on the political geography of the Southeast). Some claim that GAP changes may exacerbate political tensions in the Southeast, with references to the "theft of Kurdish waters" or citing the privileging of certain ethnic groups or livelihoods over others (See Harris, 2002, 2006). More generally, while reception to literacy and other social development programs is also possible, and there has been some evidence that GAP related changes and state interventions have been welcome for some in the region (Harris, 2012), the cultural and political overlay of such programs remains undeniable.

Adding this understanding of the cultural and historical context, we are able to understand that massive state investment in damming, water diversion, and social development programs in the region (approximately $34 billion USD) is justified on a range of bases, from electricity needs to broader development goals. As well features of Kurdish culture, including the aşiret social structure, are also frequently labeled as targets for intervention and modernization. Speaking to this, interviews with state planners related to the establishment of water user groups in newly irrigated areas suggest that emergent "democratic" organizations could counter longstanding hierarchical relations in the region, including the "tribal" aşiret structure as well as aspects of gender inequality (Harris, 2005).

In an interview, one planner commented on Kurdish societal organization as a hurdle to progress: “The social structure in the region is problematic. Patriarchal, semi-feudal relationships are very dominant in the region, and this is an obstacle to development…Our social programs are primarily created to realize a vision of a participatory democratic individual, a modern individual.” A government report expresses similar hopes that water user groups and irrigation-related changes will transform social relations in the region: “Irrigation can be regarded as a powerful tool for transforming the social structure and habits of the rural population in addition to bringing about a direct increase in their agricultural productivity” (Halcrow-Dolsar-RWC, 1994, p. 1, both cited in Harris, 2005, p. 186). These examples illustrate the ways in which ethnicity and social difference discursively and materially intertwine with freshwater politics in Turkey’s contested border region.

Reading gender: Gender difference, inequality, and GAP development

Idea(l)s related to gender frequently surface as aspects of social and economic disarticulation that also justify massive state intervention in the region—including elements where gender intersects with ethnicity, rurality, and livelihoods. (See Radcliffe & Westwood 1996 for discussion of the ways in which indigenous women in the highlands of Ecuador are cast as “backward,” and Mayer 2000 for broader discussion of linkages between gender and nationalism). Recall, for instance, that among the important statistics used to justify GAP interventions are high natality rates (approximately double the national average), low literacy rates (particularly among women), and the ongoing practice of polygamy (Harris, 2008b). These gendered statistics and practices have become emblematic of southeastern Turkey’s underdevelopment. Gender is also central to the developmental ideal of what southeastern Turkey should become: GAP development explicitly targets women’s status, identities, and livelihoods in order to achieve “Western” or Kemalist, ideals. Women's centers, along with literacy and health initiatives, constitute perhaps the most visible of these efforts (Harris, 2008a; Harris & Atalan, 2002).

To historicize, and thereby better understand the focus on women as central to Turkish modernity and development, one only has to look at statements and policies dating to the country’s first president and founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Leading the new Republic in the 1920s and early 1930s, Atatürk often commented on the status of women, and famously suggested that it is impossible to allow one half of the population to improve and prosper, while ignoring the other half. Stemming from this position, the history of the Turkish Republic over the past ninety years has been associated with “state feminism.” The state has highlighted the situation of women and implemented a number of policies ostensibly targeting gender inequality, including the high-profile and controversial headscarf ban, cited as key to achieving modernity, (Saktanber, 2002; Harris, 2008b).

One straightforward point about the relationship between gender, inequality and freshwater changes relates to the differentiated effects on ongoing changes for various populations. In brief, difference and inequality are central to any reading of uneven distribution of and access to water resources. Consider, for instance, that with transition to irrigation (intended to be a major local benefit of the project), many residents of the

pilot irrigation areas in the Harran Plain, particularly women, the landless poor, and those who heavily engaged in animal husbandry, have experienced notable losses in addition to gains. For many, expenses have increased, outpacing income gains. For some, livelihood options have suffered constraints (pasture is no longer available for grazing of animal herds), and work burdens have increased dramatically with the introduction of irrigation and related crop changes (significantly the predominance of cotton, now reaching 90% of the crop pattern of the Harran Plain).

Survey data show that men and women understand irrigation-related shifts differently (Harris & Karahan Kara, 2001). The data also reveal that landless people, those who are impoverished, and those who depend on animal husbandry for their livelihood also understand irrigated-related shifts differently. While the majority of residents experiencing shifts in irrigated agriculture view changes positively (nearly three-fourths of all respondents), the picture is not so simple. Analyzing the data in terms of population segments reveals important complexities: men tend to perceive the shifts more positively than women, well-off residents tend to perceive the shifts more positively than impoverished residents, and landed residents tend to perceive the shifts more positively than the landless. Those indicating the least positive associations with irrigation-related changes are self-identified poor women (only 33 percent responded positively) and landless women (44 percent had a positive response).

Another example of differing responses to irrigation changes among varying segments of the population surfaces in the area of work burden. All respondents recognized the increase in work burden that changes represent, yet different groups read these changes in different ways: 78 percent of middle-income men interpreted increasing work responsibilities as a positive change, compared with 36 percent of middle-income women. Clearly, important mechanisms regarding gender, poverty, landlessness, and ethnicity help explain differentiated experiences of irrigation-related changes for different segments of the population (Harris, 2008a).

Gender, ethnicity, and other categories of social and spatial difference decidedly underwrite Turkish state damming and diversion of the upper Tigris-Euphrates basin (Harris 2008b). The examples above underscore the need to expressly consider gender, ethnicity, livelihoods, and other axes of difference as fundamental to understanding freshwater changes and politics—echoing and reinforcing broader themes in feminist political ecology (as highlighted in section IV).

FRESHWATER CHANGES AND POLITICS AS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE CONSTITUTION AND REMAKING OF GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND OTHER DIFFERENCES/INEQUALITIES

The discussion that follows draws on a 2006 publication, *Irrigation, Gender, and Social Geographies of Waterscape Evolution in Southeastern Turkey*, in which I employ Butlerian ideas of performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993) to suggest that gender and ethnicity matter not only for environmental changes (and diverse effects of changes, as with the above discussion), but that environmental changes, and specifically waterscape changes, matter for gender and ethnicity. In other words, it is in part through changing environmental and material conditions of the waterscape that gender, ethnicity, and other key notions of difference come to carry new and altered meaning and significance. Stated another way, as feminist political ecologists have long suggested, gender and other differences are central to conditioning resource access, management, and knowledges. Yet, here the discussion complements this analysis by also arguing on the other hand, that environmental considerations and outcomes are also critical to conditioning operations and understandings of gender (and ethnicity as well as other categories of difference).

As I trace in this chapter, the GAP project has resulted in men and women renegotiating their labor practices, livelihoods, and subjectivities as a result of altered economies, crops, and changing environmental conditions. As the examples below illustrate, irrigated agricultural practices and differential water-resource geographies have become central to defining and consolidating the very terms of difference in the region—whether those differences have to do with masculinity and femininity, Kurdishness and Arabness, or land-owning and landlessness. Once again, emphasizing an intersectional perspective is crucial (see section IV for a theoretical discussion of this concept). Speaking clearly to gender, but also linking to differences with respect to landholdings, ethnicity, and livelihoods, is of particular salience when attempting to understand ongoing social and political changes in the region.

Delivery of irrigation waters from the Euphrates River to the nearby Harran Plain, a pilot irrigation area near the border with Syria, has changed crop patterns, altered patterns of seasonal migration, and shifted labor expectations. Since the establishment of irrigation, growers have focused nearly exclusively on cash crops, with more than 90 percent of the cropping pattern eventually becoming dedicated to cotton. The movement to cash crops also involves a departure from the subsistence-based livelihoods that previously dominated the region, relying on rain-fed agriculture (primarily winter wheat, lentils, and other pulses, as well as livelihoods focused on the herding of sheep and goats). Now, with irrigation, there is full-year growing season, focus on cash cropping, and concurrently, less production of things that will be consumed directly by the household—instead cotton and other crops are now sold and food or other needs are then purchased on the market.

Regarding ethnicity, important shifts have been observed. Among them,

narratives about the prioritization of Arabs over Kurdish farmers for water access, as well as shifting patterns of seasonal migration with new irrigated agriculture and associated seasonalities and cropping patterns. With respect to migration, it is important to note that by and large, areas having yet to directly benefit from irrigation—areas from which seasonal migrants hale—were primarily to the North of the Plain, including very near the Atatürk Dam reservoir, where the water originates). Meanwhile, the Harran Plain itself, to the southeast of the reservoir and just north of the Syrian border, is 80 percent Arabic speaking and 20 percent Kurdish speaking—making it an Arabic-speaking minority pocket within the broader Kurdish-dominated southeastern Anatolian region. The fact that areas remaining non-irrigated are predominantly Kurdish, while the initial irrigated areas are majority Arabic speaking is a coincidence of geography noted by some residents as evidence of inequities propagated by state agents. As expressed by a group of Kurdish seasonal migrant workers sitting around a fire after a day of work:

> *They gave Arabs the water first, but not to us, we are Kurdish. This is not life. We will work to pick 100 decars of cotton. In Bozova, we also own 100 decars, but since there is no irrigation, our pistachio and nut trees don't give fruit soon after we plant them so we came here to get some money. We don't think we will earn good money here either, but we are obligated to come pick cotton (field notes Sanliurfa, 2001; Harris, 2006, p. 193).*

As this statement illustrates, some Kurds feel they have been left out when it comes to the benefits associated with irrigated agriculture. These sentiments further reveal how changes in water-resource geography redefine meanings and associations attached to what it means to be Kurdish or Arab. Without oversimplifying the complex understandings and practices that constitute and maintain notions of ethnicity, in some ways Kurdish ethnicity is increasingly associated with seasonal workers (the numbers of Kurds in the Harran Plain swell during the harvest season), Arab ethnicity is increasingly associated with farmers who employ seasonal workers and enjoy privileged, or more immediate, access to water. Consequently, although one of the principal aims of GAP development is to overcome longstanding disparities between this region and the rest of the country, the emergent waterscape also appears to be creating new intraregional disparities, reinforcing a differentiated social geography whereby some Kurdish residents feel their interests have, once again, been overlooked.

As these examples make clear, terms of difference are taking on new meaning and importance in relation to the new water-resource geography. How residents understand themselves and each other as Kurdish or Arab is now necessarily read through experiences of water-resource access, use, and change.

On a more positive note, improved livelihoods and economic well-being associated with GAP development could potentially attenuate longstanding conflicts and even help diffuse contentious state-society politics in the region. Lending force to this possibility, research has suggested that GAP-related changes are read by some as responding to concerns frequently raised by Kurdish separatists, including the need to foster political and economic development and inclusion of the region within Turkey on the whole. economy and politics of Turkey. As such, there is evidence of heightened senses of state legitimacy as a function of irrigation access and other GAP services. For

instance, interviews in the region discursively connect shifting perceptions of the state with GAP developmental changes: "'At least the state turned its face towards us"'; "'The state thinks about us now";' or "We did not see any accomplishments of governments in the past we—we a little bit happy to see some now."' Or as summed up by another respondent: "Our view of the state changed positively…We had hatred before, but now they started investing in the southeast"' (All cited in Harris, 2009, pp. 10–-11).

While responses varied—and there certainly were very negative responses as well—it is still important to consider the ways in which state irrigation delivery and other services (e.g. electricity or drinking water) may increase state legitimacy—a particularly important consideration given long-term contestation and violence in the region. As such, it is possible that ethnicity, gender, and state-society relations will be recast and redefined in relation to irrigation and other waterscape changes in important ways (Harris 2009, 2012).

With regard to gender, the agro-ecological shifts in the Harran Plain, particularly the shift from subsistence agriculture to the near mono-cropping of cotton, has brought marked changes in how men and women are viewed to be contributing to the household. With previous livelihoods there would be herding of sheep and goats (with direct access to meat, dairy, and wool), as well as the growing of wheat, lentils and other staple crops. With this subsistence economy, women made beds from wool, prepared cheese from milk, and processed meat for family food. Now, with cotton and cash cropping, men are negotiating the sale of cotton, and travelling to urban markets to purchase household goods. This severing of women's direct household contributions is at times narrated as: "Women 'no longer contribute to the household." With men who now purchasing items for the household, their status has increased, as this is interpreted as the head of household providing for his family's needs.

The discounting of women's contribution was obvious in several encounters I witnessed. An older farmer near the Syrian border stated, "Women in this village do not do any work. They don't go [to] the fields. They just make bread" (Interview, September 24, 2001). As he spoke, a group of us were sitting and drinking tea while watching a young bride and her mother-in-law make bread over an outdoor fire. The young bride, who overhead the comment, responded, "We also work hard. Is this not work? I'll also go [to the fields] to pick cotton tomorrow" (ibid). Similar narratives were invoked repeatedly over the course of the nearly 60 interviews conducted throughout the Harran Plain, most often with husbands making claims that their wives do not work but "just sit." As well, women in rich families noted with pride that they do not work at all, only sit. Again, such erasures of women's domestic labor have the effect of enhancing men's status as providers for the household, as well as the status of those wives to do not have to work and can stay home with children.

The arrival of irrigation affected men and women's relative status in other ways as well. Responding to the question, *What has changed in your village since irrigation?*, rural residents frequently cited changing material conditions, noting the escalating number of cars, cell phones, and cement houses, as well as the ability of richer men to purchase second and third wives—all visible status items reflecting the success of male heads of household.

Particularly noteworthy in terms of gender dimensions is the increasing incidence of cars throughout the plain. In this region, cars are driven exclusively by men, affording men greater mobility, scales of interaction, and access to resources than women. One Arab man noted that since irrigation, "Life has become better, people live in luxury, the city is so close to us now'" (Harris & Karahan Kara, 2001, survey A15). The respondent directly references the ability to travel more easily, making the city "closer" for men, but not necessarily for women, who remain in the village. This gendered mobility gap effectively widens gender differentials between men and women in ways that parallel my arguments about redefinitions of Arabs and Kurds. In effect, the newly irrigated landscape recasts the experiences and subjectivities of men and women. Masculinity and femininity take on new meaning, as men may increasingly frequent coffee shops and urban markets, enjoying higher status as providers, while women remain in the village to pick cotton, even as their labor contributions are erased and devalued.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of how gender is recast in relation to the emergent waterscape is illustrated by the work category of `irrigator.' As widespread irrigation is recent in the plain, it is revealing that there is general agreement among residents of the plain that irrigation remains the domain of men, with over 90% of survey respondents noting irrigation as masculine labor. What explains the seemingly effortless and natural codification of irrigation work as male, rather than as shared or female work? When asked why women do not irrigate, respondents commonly cited the physical ardor (digging trenches requires considerable strength) as well as the schedule (irrigation operates on a 24-hour schedule, requiring farmers to work at night). If a woman were to engage in irrigation, her physical labor and unconventional working hours would call into question the integrity of her husband or male kin. The gendered nature of this work is so deeply embedded that even in cases where a woman is widowed, for instance, many insist that sons or even neighbors undertake irrigation on her behalf.

Several more stories illustrate the practices through which the difference between men and women with respect to irrigation is understood, cited, and made to appear as natural.. As one Arab farmer explained, women do not irrigate because they cannot do so physically. He continued with pride, "At least among us Arabs you will not find any women undertaking irrigation. Perhaps among the Kurds you will find a few, but *our women* would not do that" (emphasis added, Interview, October 17, 2001). Another Arab farmer, Emre, explained that women do not irrigate because it is "too difficult." Several minutes after he made this statement, I asked Emre what he thought was the most difficult job, and he responded, "picking the cotton, but women and children do that" (Interview, October 19, 2001).

The idea of a naturalized difference between men and women in terms of the ability to participate in irrigation is brought into question by these two examples. In the first example, it is not only a question of women not physically being able to engage in irrigation labor, as sometimes (as the farmer admits) Kurdish women do irrigate. He assures us that `Arab' women do not do that. He is clearly invoking notions of appropriate femininity, in this case articulated in relation to understandings of ethnic difference. In fact, in over sixty interviews and during several months of observation, I encountered only one woman (indeed Kurdish) who actively irrigates, sometimes with her husband and at other times alone. Rather than emphasizing the difficulty of

irrigation labor, she explains that since the arrival of irrigation, ``life is easier—all I have to do is put the siphon in the irrigation canal and the field gets the water itself … It is easy'' (Interview, September 28, 2001).

In the second example Emre's idea that irrigation is "too difficult," and therefore not the domain of women, provides an interesting contrast to the work of picking cotton under the hot sun, which is dominated by women and children and is broadly considered the most difficult of agricultural tasks. In our survey, 40 percent of the respondents singled out cotton harvesting as the most difficult task, while only about 5 percent considered irrigation the hardest task.

Changing geographies and environments are key to understanding differentiating labor practices, spaces of access, and influence, which in turn serve to cite and maintain sex-gender categories and other key social differences. Emergent irrigated waterscapes precipitate new labor, gender, and status geographies. Women increasingly move from work within and around the home to labor-intensive tasks in the cotton fields. With the shift from subsistence agriculture to cash cropping, men move from the village to urban networks and markets to purchase goods. The role of irrigator associated with the emergent agroeconomy is invoked as male and prestigious, while the role of harvester, conversely, invokes feminized labor, performed to a large degree by Kurdish migrant workers from the North (importantly intersecting gender with ethnic difference).

Masculinity and femininity, and the very notions of difference between men and women, are thus cited and sedimented in ways that reflect the new irrigation economy and ongoing waterscape changes. The categories of women and femininity take on a new meaning in terms of work obligations to the family as field laborers for the cotton harvest, while the categories of men and masculinity, similarly, take on a new meaning, and the masculine ideal becomes narrated as *he who is able to engage in prestigious work as irrigator, or who can control nature and manage water to produce crops and family income*. Articulated in relation to newly irrigated economies and ecologies, differences between male and female, or between Arabs and Kurds, are thus cited, maintained, and naturalized.

CONCLUSIONS: MOVING TOWARDS GENDER, FPE, AND INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES

The two assertions that form the foundation of this chapter are only subtly different. The first, that one cannot assess, and fully understand the politics of fresh water without attention to inequality, notably with respect to gender and other axes of difference, invites us to consider how differences matter for outcomes of the water-related changes. The second, that water access and politics often play a central role in constituting key categories of difference and inequality, invites us to consider how it is that the categories of Kurd or Arab, male and female are in part defined and understood in relation to water uses or management. Water uses (e.g. who irrigates) and management practices (who participates in management institutions; see Harris, 2005, 2006) are examples of the daily material practices through which the idea(l)s of sex difference and gender, come to make sense and hold meaning.

Much has been written on the importance of gender, inequality, and difference in the contexts of environmental change and management, as well as the contexts of freshwater changes and politics. In particular, considerable attention has been given to the ways that men and women are situated differentially with respect to environmental and resource knowledges, conditions, access, and management (e.g., studies by Agarwal, 1988; Carney, 1993; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wangari, 1996; Sundberg, 2004). This chapter has highlighted these dynamics, while also emphasizing the importance of intersectionality in relation to poverty, ethnicity, and landlessness (cf. Harris 2008a; Nightingale, 2011).

As noted by Hawkins and Ojeda (2011), deciphering how to implement a truly intersectional approach remains a key challenge, though a strong imperative for current and ongoing work nonetheless. While FPE scholarship has increasingly adopted intersectional approaches, progress is needed in this area, including better theorization and greater attention to processes of racialization, postcoloniality, and other uneven power dynamics (Mollett & Faria, 2013).

In closing, this chapter aims to highlight several important ways in which gender, ethnicity, and other aspects of social difference and inequality are linked to freshwater access, politics, and conflict. I have argued that attention to difference and inequality is crucial to understandings of freshwater politics. As well, I have suggested that freshwater access and changes can reconfigure and reinscribe the very categories and meanings of social and political difference. This chapter is only one example of the ways in which feminist theory in general and feminist political ecology in particular can contribute to the study of water access and politics—pushing the boundaries of what is meant by the terms *feminist, politics*, and *ecology* (Harris, 2015. See also entire volume by Buechler & Hanson, 2015). Further application of feminist theory to freshwater politics is possible, and is likely to be fruitful for ongoing work. For instance, a recent essay by Neimanis (2012) highlights possibilities for novel politics as a feminist politics "responsively attuned to other watery bodies both human and more-than-human within global flows of power." As these examples highlight, FPE holds considerable potential for advancing our understanding of the complex linkages between identity, conflict, and freshwater politics.

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