

INTRODUCTION



In the dark times,
will there also be singing?
Yes, there will be singing
about the dark times.

— Bertolt Brecht, “Motto”

Politics in a Resource Frontier, Interrupted

Starting from the end of the 2000s, Turkey’s countryside began to grab the headlines with reports on protests against resource extraction and infrastructural development projects. The planning and construction of hydroelectric, thermal, geothermal, and coal-burning plants, electricity transmission lines and mining facilities were being met with fierce opposition by rural communities across the country. Protest actions where men and women, old and young, and farmers and pensioners together clashed with the police and gendarmerie for hours were not rare. Occasionally, company meetings were disrupted, and construction vehicles were damaged or set on fire. Soon, they were joined by leftwing activists, journalists, lawyers, artists, and academics from urban centers who were at once intrigued and inspired by the intensity and prevalence of these struggles. This time they were ready to invest their political hopes on “peasants.”

I jumped on this bandwagon at the end of 2011 when I traveled for two weeks in the eastern Black Sea region (see Map 0.1). This part of Turkey had by then already become a hotbed of activism especially against the construction of small-scale run-of-the-river-type hydroelectric power plants (HEPPs).¹ In the coastal towns, I spoke to one village community after another about the court cases they had brought against private companies who were preparing to build tens of HEPPs on virtually every single river and rivulet crossing their

valleys. Socialist activists in Hopa and Fındıklı explained that the state had leased the use rights of river sections to these corporations for energy production for forty-nine years, thus setting in motion the commodification and loss of water, and the destruction of land. In the regional capital Artvin, I witnessed residents reviving their successful fight of the previous decade against the renewed plans for gold mining in a nearby hilltop called Cerrattepe. A new company, this time a domestic one strongly backed by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), was once again pushing for the opening of pits against residents' strong opposition that would eventually snowball into a city-wide confrontation with the gendarmerie.²

Located further south, about one and a half hours away from Artvin by bus (provided that the road is not closed or did not collapse), the political mood in and around the town of Yusufeli, by contrast, was congruent with its fate, which was by then more or less sealed: submergence of the entire town and its seventeen villages, displacement of thousands of people, and the destruction of nearly all agricultural land with the coming construction of the Yusufeli Dam³—the tallest of ten large dams planned or already completed on the Çoruh River as part of the Çoruh Energy Plan (see Map 0.2). My earliest interlocutors, too, were of an antipodean ideological disposition, veering toward ultra-nationalism and conservatism. I was struck, if not startled, by their politics, the scale of destruction awaiting Yusufeli and its surroundings, and how little attention all this was receiving among the activists from the region, let alone the general public.

Not long after, I would be astounded to find out as well that roughly for a decade Yusufeli's residents had in fact succeeded in preventing the start of the project. When the beginning of construction by an international consortium was unceremoniously announced in 1997, they quickly mobilized around a cultural association to launch a powerful anti-displacement campaign.⁴ On the local level, demonstrations were held to protest against state agencies and regional governors, and court cases were brought against various ministries and administrative bodies. On the international level, there was a concerted effort in collaboration with European NGOs to dissuade export credit agencies (ECAs) from providing loans to construction companies involved in the project. To this end, activists utilized international standards and guidelines on resettlement and scandalized the absence of an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report. As a result, the realization of the project was deferred as one international consortium was compelled to withdraw after another.

After the Turkish state officially announced in 2010 that it would finance the project exclusively however, the earlier activist energy in the town fizzled out to be eventually replaced by negotiating with the state as the dominant form of collective action. Locals intermittently continued in the following years to resort to legal means to oppose the HEPPs planned in their villages, as in other parts of the region. The cultural association, which had by then been reduced to a handful of activists, even continued to try bringing new court cases to the Constitutional Court of Turkey and the European Court of Human Rights for the cancellation of the Yusufeli Dam project. The primary concern for the majority of residents however has become the tireless bargaining over the worth of: a two-story house, a fruit orchard, the business relations of a shop owner who has spent his entire life in the town center, or the loyalty to the state of an entire community planned to be sacrificed for energy production.

This book then is about politics in a resource frontier, on its formations and blockage at the intersections of infrastructure, economy, and identity. By politics, I understand, following Antonio Gramsci (1971), first and foremost the capacity to engage in critical thought and action in the practices of everyday life. Embedded in the common sense in incoherent and contradictory ways, this embryonic form of critique could become historically effective, according to him, only if it is rendered visible and societal forces are connected with one another. Gramsci's anthropologist readers (Smith 1999; Crehan 2002; Li 2007, 2019) have argued, and in different ways demonstrated, that an ethnography of politics necessarily requires both the study of this work of organization and articulation, and the conditions for its interruption. Following them, my first aim in this book is to examine how everyday forms of discontent come to be contained and rendered ineffective even after they consistently become the content for an effective political intervention. I am interested in understanding why this semirural community gradually began to give consent and take part in a project that would result in its economic dispossession and involuntary displacement. To this end, I explore the circumstances and forces that first enabled and then hindered its members' capacity to forge connections and to make explicit their critical challenge against the infrastructure's injuries and injustices.

By resource frontier, I refer not only to those sites where the state and private companies carry out or facilitate the appropriation of natural resources but more broadly make a gesture towards an entire web where the logic of assigning monetary values to things and relations proliferate and seep into other spheres of life under capitalist

development.⁵ My ethnographic research has shown that dam constructions along the Çoruh River fueled the residents' aspirations to pursue different kinds of value formation including but not limited to employment, conspicuous consumption, and speculation. Later, I will address in more detail these practices and imaginaries that exceed yet emerge in relation to the state's and capital's extraction of value from land and water. By invoking them here, I simply intend to counter a narrative inspired by James Scott's seminal work *Seeing Like a State* (1998) that still continues to prevail the thinking behind much of the literature on large infrastructural projects: grand schemas of improvement sever local people from everyday forms of knowing and doing that have been central to their survival for centuries. Contrary to those accounts that merely pit high modernist schemas such as mega dams and their promises of progress against the figure of "surplus people" or "uninhabitants" often marked by self-contained or Indigenous ways of living, my second aim in the book is to show that capitalist development instead works on and through the desires of its target communities (Li 2005).

Through what mediums and linkages do people's aspirations encounter the logics and operations of the state and capital? And what does subscribing to capitalist development actually do to its target communities? This book makes two related claims. First, I argue that destruction itself becomes the conduit for realizing economic and political desires when the infrastructural technologies deployed in the name of development demand the large-scale demolition or outright obliteration of the built environment. My ethnographic research in and around Yusufeli found that the town's residents tried to become not only wage-laborers as construction workers, drivers, or security personnel in one of the innumerable dam, road, and tunnel projects that mushroomed in the Çoruh Valley especially after 2010. Many of them also sought to tap into their surroundings' devastation in order to bring to life their own visions of accumulation and commodification. For some, this meant investing in or creating property with the purpose of making a profit out of the not-as-yet fully fixed compensation economy. Others opted for, and are still busy with, turning the artifacts and representations of the vanishing present, as well as the emotions they elicit, into commodity forms for future consumption. To these residents, the predicament to survive the worst effects of dispossession and displacement became less and less distinguishable from the desire to speculate on the valley's submergence.

The construction of the three large projects located in the middle part of the Çoruh Valley—the Deriner, Artvin, and Yusufeli Dams—

commenced several years apart. After long delays, the first two dam projects were completed in 2012 and 2016, respectively, and the latter could officially begin in early 2013. The more or less consecutive damming in this section of the river, followed by the start of countless road, tunnel, and viaduct projects, offered the possibility to find construction jobs whereas the payment of compensation to those villagers who lost their properties to dam lakes and building sites created new opportunities for investment. At the same time, local residents' participation in the creative destruction of land became conditional on their active engagement with how the demise of built environment and its surroundings spatially and temporally unfolded. Residents often needed to estimate the time span from the completion of one project to the start of another so that they could time their investments, for example, getting in or out of the booming real estate market in the Yusufeli town center. This made the temporal and spatial structures of destruction become co-extensive with those visions and projects of investment to elicit powerful meanings, uses, and evocations in the valley. My intention in this book, then, is to build on the recent anthropological interest in ruination (Navaro-Yashin 2012; Stoler 2013; Gordillo 2014; Tsing 2015), to ask under which conditions it is articulated with the strategies of accumulation and commodification, and to outline what sort of politics these two movements produce and help to make visible on the local level.

Second, and related to this point, hegemony is made and unmade in these efforts to prepare for and chart the uncertain future in monetary terms. I argue that the success of conservative-nationalist political projects based on economies of construction and destruction relies partly on the management of ordinary residents' attempts to endure and make a profit out of capitalist development's effects of destruction. Although the strategies and visions for remaining viable after the submergence emerged for the most part from below in Yusufeli, they operated and flourished strictly under the patronage of a political party; that is, the AKP, which has increasingly come to represent the state on the local level in the past ten years. As we will see, unlike other parts of Turkey where force is routinely deployed to dispossess and displace especially ethnically and politically marginalized groups, here municipal party networks, in coordination with prominent figures from the party, become instrumental in securing and advancing the investments of those residents loyal to the party and its politics. Such interventions constitute a relation of consent different from the one often discussed in the context of redistributive welfare measures such as social assistance programs or cash trans-

fers that aim to garner political support among the poor.⁶ They rather suppose and embody the figure of an entrepreneurial subject consolidated at the juncture where the intimate bonds of community, co-locality, and nation meet the productive use of legal ambiguities and exceptions for creating economic incentives.

Thus, this book argues that strategies of accumulation and commodification, made possible by the temporalities and spatialities of infrastructural development and orchestrated through the interventions of the party-state, are what is behind the interruption of politics in a resource frontier. Interruption of politics means something different than the exhaustion or suspension of the political. It describes the constant movement by which the embryonic form of critique transforms into political organization and articulation to once again crumble back into contradictory ways of feeling and thinking. Tracing the patterns of motion between critique and consent in its different guises in the following chapters will help us to better understand what relations and structures are put in place in order to govern people without resorting to violence.

In each chapter of this book, I lay out another piece crucial to completing the puzzle of why Yusufeli's residents shifted from opposing capitalist development's effects of dispossession and displacement to, what Rosalind Morris (2008) describes in another context as, "accommodating to ruination through investment." This shift, along with the tensions and contradictions it reveals, took place under the specific circumstances by which the "capital-nation-state" assemblage (Karatani 2014)⁷ behind extractive projects and logics has undergone important transformations in Turkey, as elsewhere, in the past two decades. It is this context to which I now turn to conceptually expand on the aims and arguments introduced in this section.

Bulldozer Capitalism in the National-Local Nexus

I propose a term to describe the system of power, profit, and hegemony that comes to be formed and reproduced through the destruction and recomposition of the physical environment. I call it "bulldozer capitalism."⁸ I invoke the figure of a bulldozer as a metaphor slightly unconventionally here to draw attention not only to what vanishes but also to the forces and processes that connect it with what is built and created. After all, the function of a bulldozer is not limited to demolishing things. This vehicle, as I observed many times during my fieldwork research, is also used to prepare the ground for

construction, opening roads blocked by landslides, or transferring sand and building equipment from one place to another. By stressing on the relationality between the bulldozer's twin uses, my intention is to recognize destruction and construction, and annihilation and accumulation as mutually constitutive processes. This dialectic perspective, I argue, can help us see both the negative and affirmative forces that constantly shift and transmute the borders and content of politics under contemporary capitalism.

Bulldozer capitalism is of course not new in Turkey. The first substantial highway networks were built and the tourism industry developed during the Cold War after the country was picked as one of the laboratories for the testing and implementation of the US-style modernization theories (Adalet 2018). Around the same time, the first large dams such as the Sarıyar and Seyhan projects were completed by the General Directorate of the State Hydraulic Works (DSI), with the technical support and financial aid they received from the World Bank increasing in the following years (Dissard 2017). With the liberalization of the Turkish economy in the aftermath of the military coup in 1980, construction projects gained pace especially in big cities such as Istanbul which were then getting closely integrated into world markets (Keyder and Öncü 1994). The export-oriented growth strategy adopted to produce cheap consumer goods for the global North, accompanied by short-term capital flows that rose steeply thanks to the early financialization of the economy, transformed cityscapes in drastic ways (Keyder 2005, 2010). Loans made available through international agencies to large municipalities in the 1990s were used to provide an infrastructural basis for the expanding managerial and entrepreneurial classes, and their nascent consumption patterns. Older and poorer neighborhoods were either demolished to open space for new roads or fell under the sway of waves of gentrification as shopping malls, gated communities, and financial districts began to dot the map to facilitate and reflect deepening class inequalities.

AKP came to power for the first time shortly after an economic meltdown, prompted by a banking crisis in 2001, brought an end to Turkey's first wave of neoliberalization. Emerging out of a crisis within political Islam itself, which was resolved by the adoption of the new party's protagonists of a market-oriented and pro-NATO outlook in place of their earlier partially anti-systemic views (Tuğal 2009), it quickly filled the political vacuum formed after center-right and center-left parties were electorally punished for their austerity politics. AKP no doubt went further than any other political party in the country's history in implementing a program of economic lib-

eralization that included the privatization of state enterprises, flexibilization of labor markets, lifting of agricultural subsidies, and the implementation of a tight monetary policy. Yet, its effects of indebtedness, precarious work conditions, stagnant real wages, and the weakening of working-class organizations could be softened and masked through a dual strategy (Akçay 2018). On the one hand, the party's championing of democratic reforms in its early years against the Kemalist establishment within the army and the judiciary, crystallized in the opening of official negotiations for Turkey's full membership in the European Union in 2005, found support among liberal and left-liberal middle classes, and ethnic and religious minorities. On the other hand, its expansion of a series of populist welfare measures including state-provided health, insurance, and retirement benefits consolidated its power on poor and lower-middle class groups. Reinvigorating the Turkish right's deeply seated neo-Ottomanist colonial ambitions in the region in the aftermath of the Arab Revolutions and utilizing its Sunni-Turkish ideological kernel to build new alliances with ultra-nationalists and Kemalists in the domestic political scene, it gradually built after 2011 a party-state that forcefully punishes any kind of dissent in the country.

It was the global economic conjuncture of the 2000s, however, that arguably more than anything else became conducive to the AKP's political and electoral success in making possible a regime of accumulation built almost exclusively around energy, infrastructure, and real estate projects. Already after the 2001 dotcom crisis, the US Federal Reserve's decision to cut interest rates had resulted in boosting the inflow of foreign capital to "emerging markets" such as Turkey where the return of investment was much higher than in the North. Its injection of large quantities of money into global markets through three rounds of "quantitative easing" following the 2008 subprime crisis further expanded the availability of global liquidity. Even if these capital flows became increasingly short-term especially after 2008, they nonetheless allowed national governments from the global South to embark on large-scale construction projects thanks to the appreciation of national currencies, the upsurge of foreign reserves, and the decline of borrowing costs. Based on these observations, Yahya Madra and Ceren Özselçuk (2019) make the compelling argument that the financial internationalization of the 2000s provided a fertile ground for nation-states such as Turkey to entrench their sovereignties by actively intervening in and managing the economic domain through major infrastructure projects. They give the name "sovereign corporation" to those meta-market actors, such as Turkey under

Erdoğan, India under Modi, or the Philippines under Duterte, who unleash the legal and extra-legal capacities and powers of the nation-state to facilitate the extraction of surplus value, especially from land and natural resources.⁹ The use of sovereign exceptions by the government, the ruling party or its leader for capital accumulation as such entails running the state like a corporation, directly deciding on which factions of capital will have the privilege to appropriate nature, resources, or labor power. The global financial expansion of the 2000s, in that sense, was not simply about finding a spatial fix for the overaccumulation crisis witnessed in the global North since the 1970s (Harvey 1982, 2010). It also paradoxically created the conditions for the spread around the globe of a political form often referred to as authoritarian capitalism, neoliberal populism, or illiberal democracy but which perhaps can also be understood as “neo-mercantilism” (Moore 2015; Madra 2017).

This is the context—the systemic crises of the US economy, the availability of liquidity that the efforts to save the US economy from falling into depression afforded to the global South, and a powerful capital-nation-state assemblage that these interventions helped to consolidate—that explains why bulldozer capitalism in its latest incarnation became the primary model of economic growth and the background against which new hierarchies and injustices, along with new needs and interests, proliferated in Turkey, as elsewhere, in the early twenty-first century. What this account overlooks however, at least in the context of large dams, is that the shift to an accumulation model under which “capital’s sovereign exceptions” (Madra and Özselçuk 2019) has increasingly become commonplace is, at least in part, an outcome of transnational struggles of the previous decades. The active opposition by local communities in the global South and their allies in the North to the construction of mega-dam projects built and funded by international consortiums and organizations in different parts of the world compelled the withdrawal of international capital and the partial transition to a national regime of dam planning, finance, and construction. In Chapter 1, I recount this turbulent history of global anti-dam struggle in the 1990s and its partial success in holding international donors such as the World Bank accountable to show its implications for the rise and decline of the campaign against the Yusufeli Dam project, and the new conditions under which this project has been revived.

Anthropologists writing on capitalism and capitalist development in the past two decades have prioritized the study of those settings where transnational organizations, corporations, and NGOs come

to supplant the capacities of the nation-state, inspiring phrases such as “transnational governmentality” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) or “graduated sovereignty” (Ong 2000). Similarly, the “global-local nexus” has been proposed as the essential scalar constant through which one can make sense of the uneven, messy, and patchy character of contemporary processes of accumulation, and the social and cultural antagonisms that they make visible. Indeed, coming from different methodological and theoretical backgrounds, Anna Tsing (2005) and Don Kalb (2017), for example, seem to agree that “frictions” that arise out of international capital’s interactions with the situated experiences, desires, or fears of people provide a fertile ground for ethnographically exploring the arrangements of power, class, and identity. I do not disagree with them. But I suggest that other scalar constructs deserve our anthropological attention as well. The “national” and the effects that it produces at the local level constitute a crucial scalar construct that enables accounting for the everyday social and political changes that take shape under the economies of construction and destruction that I investigate in this book.

This does not mean to imply that global flows of capital, knowledge, and politics have ceased to influence the forms of capitalism that we live with in Turkey. Nor do I suggest that we are back in the time of import-substitution driven national developmentalism. Rather, I propose to focus on a contemporary historical tendency by which “the national” in its economic, social, and ideological inflections reemerges as a powerful outcome of global fluctuations and their forces and tensions. It is more than a mere coincidence that a widely repeated slogan that the AKP chose to accompany a broader ideological offensive launched in the early 2010s precisely captures this tendency: “national and native/local” (*milli ve yerli*).¹⁰

Seen through the prism of this “national-local” nexus, bulldozer capitalism should be recognized as a combined and uneven model of development. Massive real estate and infrastructural projects planned and implemented both in urban and rural settings since the AKP’s meteoric rise to power in 2002 are contingent in particular on spatial and regional variations marked by differences of class and ethnicity, and historical legacies of violence. For example, in big cities such as Istanbul, several lower-class neighborhoods were systematically reduced to rubble and then rebuilt as luxurious sites for housing and consumption as part of urban regeneration schemes undertaken by the Mass Housing and Public Administration (TOKI). While the predominantly Kurdish, Alevi, or Roma residents of these neighborhoods were resettled in TOKI-built houses in urban peripheries to

be turned into debt-encumbered homeowners through long-term mortgage arrangements, wealthy individuals, companies, and foundations, several of which have close ties to the AKP and the Erdoğan family, made fortunes. Initially established as an administrative unit with a mission to provide housing for poor families, TOKI thus became the main instrument under the AKP regime by which profits were squeezed out of former squats and shanties, and suspicious or unruly communities are governed through indebtedness (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010; Glastonbury and Kadioğlu 2016). Around the same time, many middle-class homeowners of Istanbul participated in this real estate bubble by buying second or third homes in one of the recently built gated communities or handing their properties to private contractors with the intention of erecting fancier apartment buildings, even if they continued to be politically critical of the AKP governments (Bayurgil 2019). In several Kurdish cities and towns, by contrast, it was a counterinsurgency campaign launched by the Turkish state in 2015, after it terminated its negotiations with the Kurdish political movement,¹¹ which brought about a severe ruination in terms of its human toll and the scale of material devastation. In addition to about two hundred lives, including those of civilians, which perished during the clashes, entire settlements such as Diyarbakır's historical Sur district were nearly erased from the map within weeks. This unprecedented wave of destruction was quickly followed by an announcement that a TOKI-led construction and regeneration project would immediately commence in these areas. After urgent expropriation orders were issued for the remaining buildings, their surviving residents were pressured to either sell their houses below market prices or to purchase a new home with mortgage payments in one of the new mass housing complexes (Glastonbury and Kadioğlu 2016; Şen 2017).

Governing along the Çoruh Valley

In the eastern Black Sea region where I conducted my research, bulldozer capitalism essentially unfolded through what can be best described as a cement-megawatt complex historically rooted in the state elites' unyielding but never entirely satisfied desire to exploit "unused" water resources.¹² Readily subscribing to a vision of "full colonization," in the words of one early observer of Turkey's hydropower potential (Nestmann 1960), while addressing the more recent problem of reducing the country's growing current account deficit exac-

erbated by Turkey's dependence on energy imports such as oil and natural gas, the AKP embarked on establishing a large network of hydroenergy infrastructure aimed at harnessing the entire water system of the region for electricity production. The rush to energy in the form of small-scale HEPP constructions, which gained pace by the end of the 2000s, became central to the AKP's hegemonic strategy of tailoring an image as "an able service provider, chaser of energy independence and a business-friendly sovereign" (Erensü 2018: 33). It also served to render a faction of capital subservient to the authority of the party and its leader by providing lucrative investment opportunities through a series of legal changes enacted to further liberalize the production, provisioning, and distribution of energy. When faced with resistance from local communities, the party sought to remove the barriers in front of this accumulation model by resorting to a rarely used legal procedure called "urgent expropriation" (*acele kamulaştırma*). Initially agreed upon by the cabinet of ministers and then solely left to the hands of the president after the constitutional reforms of 2017, the decisions concerning the expropriation of land planned to be used for the construction of the HEPP projects gradually became the most important strategic tool in cases of energy-related investments (Alp Kaya 2016; Erensü 2018).¹³



Figure 0.1. View of the Yusufeli town center, 2013. © Erdem Evren.

My ethnographic material comes from the middle part of the Çoruh Valley, especially the town of Yusufeli and its villages, where I conducted fieldwork research for a total of twelve months between 2012 and 2018. It became clear during my initial visit in 2011 that the heavy damming of the Çoruh River since the early 1990s had given rise to a context markedly different from other parts of the region. The remarkable scale of material devastation and displacement authorized by its planners and the vicissitudes of planning and finance to which it became subject over decades had turned especially the Yusufeli Dam project at first sight into a peculiar example of infrastructural development. But while Yusufeli is distinct in many ways, it is however not an aberration. It should perhaps be seen as an “abnormally normal” (Ferme 1998) case that illustrates how sovereign exceptions can work both in constraining and productive ways to further the interests of capital and the state within the national-local nexus around which bulldozer capitalism has been reconstituted.

In Chapter 3, I discuss in detail how the planning of small-scale HEPP and mining projects and the implementation of cadastral surveys enabled the expropriation of private land and the enclosure of commonly used meadows and forests in this part of the valley as well. I explain that in some of the villages in Yusufeli, urgent expropriation orders were issued by the cabinet to bypass the popular opposition against the construction of a series of small hydropower projects. Similarly, I emphasize the role that legislative changes and presidential decrees played in keeping construction companies, including the domestic consortium behind the Yusufeli Dam project after 2010, financially buoyant by constantly feeding them with new tenders or periodically canceling their debts. At the same time, I observe a different modality of governing which can be considered productive insofar as it serves to enlist the local community to take part and speculate on the destruction of its built environment and ways of life. I found that the party-state, through its elected officials such as the mayor of Yusufeli and its local branch, deployed temporary and contextual legal arrangements, which Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2008) finds vital for the governing of the subaltern in the contemporary moment, to secure or advance the investments of especially those residents loyal to the party and its politics.

Chatterjee’s work is a contribution to an important debate among scholars writing on the fate of communities marginalized as a result of mega dams, special economic zones, and other extractive and infrastructural projects in India and it is therefore worth revisiting here in order to make sense of what is particularly novel about the nature

of the AKP's dealings with Yusufeli's residents. Building on Kalyan Sanyal's (2007) seminal work, Chatterjee (2008) argues that the normative commitment of the Indian state to rural communities necessitates the reversing of the effects of land grabs through the partial rehabilitation of its victims. This commitment stems from the reorganization of modern statecraft around the principle of legitimization attributed by him to the Indian nation-state's adoption of a democratic system based on universal suffrage. Because national political parties rely on the votes of the communities that they seek to displace, the use of force remains a limited option for governing rural populations. Instead of violence, he puts the emphasis on those procedures of governmentality that provide welfare and security to subaltern classes. Appealing to ties of moral solidarity, subaltern communities actively mobilize behind collective claims to influence the implementation of administrative policies especially concerning property relations. Many of these policies bend and stretch existing rules and regulations to make room for arrangements that benefit these communities. In place of popular sovereignty and its promises of equal citizenship epitomized by developmental interventions, Chatterjee (2004) therefore sees the mobilization of the dispossessed in the political society for some form of compensation or welfare benefit as the main mechanism through which the subaltern takes part in its governance at a time when they are increasingly stripped of their land and other means of subsistence.

Yusufeli's residents can be described neither as peasants nor subalterns. They do not easily fit into the categories of civil society comprised of an educated middle class or the political society formed by displaced rural residents and marginalized urban settlers either. More importantly, even if the locals' electoral power and conservative-nationalist convictions may have emboldened the party-state's normative commitments to address their grievances, as Chatterjee would argue, its use of paralegal arrangements around property does not by any means serve to reverse the effects of displacement and dispossession. As his critiques (Baviskar and Sundar 2008; Levien 2018) have also argued, these interventions did in effect more to enrich a handful of local politicians and property owners than to find actual solutions to the community's social and economic misfortunes.

In Chapters 2 and 4, I argue that it is the party-state's inculcation of expectations among residents to make deals over and capitalize on the land, property, and social relations made bound to disappear by the coming submergence that becomes crucial for building a relation of consent. Formal and informal forms of bargaining allowed

by local authorities opened the possibility of addressing, at least in rhetoric, the plethora of material and immaterial grievances facing the local community. Paralegal arrangements carefully worked out by the mayor and his office, on the other hand, mobilized them to tap into the destruction of their surroundings and livelihoods by creating economic incentives tied to the construction economy and the compensation schemas. I consider this powerful incitement to negotiate and invest in ruination an understudied yet crucial aspect of how authoritarian regimes continue to garner support among those communities on whose livelihoods they wreak social, economic, and environmental havoc. One polemical point that this book therefore intends to make against some of the recent ethnographies on Turkey is that it is not simply religion or nationalism but the material relations, interests, and needs woven around infrastructure, real estate, and resource extraction by conservative-nationalist regimes that underpin the making of hegemony. This, I argue, would not have been possible under the international regime of dam finance and construction under which multinational construction and energy companies operate.

Nor would it be conceivable in another place where such close ties between the local community and the national government are absent. One powerful myth that my interlocutors in Yusufeli repeated to me is that Yusufeli is the birthplace of the AKP. After completing his prison sentence for having read, in one of his political campaigns in 1997, a poem deemed incendiary by Kemalist judges, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to stay, according to this narrative, in the family house of Kadir Topbaş, the future mayor of Istanbul, in the neighboring Barhal Valley to start the preparations for launching his new party. Photos taken with Erdoğan himself around this time were still adorning more than a few shops that I frequented during my research. Similarly, the presence of cabinet ministers and high-ranking bureaucrats with ties to Yusufeli was regularly mentioned as a source of pride, as well as a marker of proximity to central power and authority, by the town's residents. Their affective investments in the real and imagined connections between the local and the national, mediated by politicians and administrators recognized as co-locals, were crucial in cultivating hopes for negotiating the terms and conditions of their displacement and dispossession. As one interlocutor, a young member of the cultural association, once told me: "Because of Kadir Bey and others, people thought their social and economic grievances would automatically be addressed, that they could talk through their issues, problems and expectations with them."

Governing in the interests of capital accumulation by appealing to sensibilities of community, nation, and co-locality attests to the significance of those material and immaterial bonds, imaginaries, and activities that sustain these relations. Taking my cue from political theorists who warn against the dangers of recognizing commons invariably as the locus of resistance against the state and capital—for example, David Harvey (2011) who reminds us that gated communities too are an example of commons or even Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009) who speak of the family, the corporation, and the nation as corrupt forms of the common—in this book I use the term “conservative commons.” My intention is to draw attention to the role that an assumed common identity, based on a shared past and place of origin, along with similar religious beliefs, ideological inclinations, and ways of life, plays in particular in fostering trust in the present and in building anticipation for the future. In some ways, conservative commons come close to describing those ties of moral solidarity to which subaltern communities, in Chatterjee’s (2008) formulation, appeal to make certain demands from the state. However, in the majority of situations described in this ethnography, such ties turn into the material of unfulfilled promises made by the party-state and its local representatives.

Time, Space, and Ruination

One key conceptual category that holds together the vexed relations articulated in this ethnography between ruination, accumulation, and dispossession is temporality. The spatial effects of infrastructural projects are partly contingent on the durations, tempos, and iterations with which the processes of construction and destruction unfold in any given location. As previous ethnographic works have shown, these temporal frames are crucial for how people materially and conceptually approach, emotionally experience, and politically respond to the changes in their surroundings and livelihoods (Abram and Weszkalyns 2011; Baxstrom 2011; Laszczkowski 2011). This book is foremost concerned with a situation in which several members of the target community endure infrastructural devastation and wait for their involuntary resettlement for almost their entire lives. This protracted ruination, I argue, is crucial for understanding the changing political responses to capitalist development first by intensifying the residents’ everyday forms of discontent towards dam constructions

and later constituting the ground upon which they seek to realize their own projects of accumulation and commodification.

While the building of almost all dams planned as part of the Çoruh Energy Plan had to be deferred either for financial or geostrategic reasons, it was the Yusufeli Dam project that witnessed the longest delay, not least as a result of the residents' own successful anti-dam/anti-displacement campaign for almost a decade. The repeated interruptions in the realization of this project gradually bolstered a shift in the dominant subject position in the town from resistance to resignation. Its residents increasingly assigned monetary value to the organic and inorganic life in the valley by making an effort "to estimate the likely time of its expiry" (Morris 2008: 205). This effort placed ruination in the same temporal structure with the strategies of accumulation to decisively defeat the earlier anti-displacement activism in the town and created the conditions of possibility for conceiving the past, present, and future in unusual constellations: creating property in the present to be able to profit from its demise in the future or turning the remnants of the past and the vanishing present into commodities with the intention of selling them in the future. In this unpredictably expansive resource frontier, it seems as if *time itself* becomes yet another resource that its residents attempt to appropriate from below.

In Chapters 2 and 4, I consider "looking forward," a term that came out of my conversations with my interlocutors, as the key temporal orientation that structures the social, economic, and political responses to the protracted nature of ruination. Rather than approaching it as a merely subjective sensibility concerning infrastructural transformation however, I stress that it took shape at a particular moment under the specific conditions of the Yusufeli Dam projects' renationalization and the AKP's victory in the municipal elections. "Looking forward" could begin to name the anticipations of the residents only after the party-state managed to steer the uncertainties growing out of the devastation of the valley and its residents' livelihoods. By delivering the old paternalist promises of employment through party networks, on the one hand, and by making paralegal interventions concerning resettlement and the future compensation economy, the AKP successfully turned some of bulldozer capitalism's victims into its laborers and entrepreneurs. This is then what essentially qualifies sovereign exceptions as a productive or enabling governing strategy: they target and manage people's sensibilities of time and temporality as opposed to securing their immediate exclusion from space.

Recent ethnographies (Harms 2013; Bear 2015) that follow the lives of ordinary people caught up in turmoil caused by large-scale infrastructural changes emphasize the emergence of entrepreneurial subjects. This figure is central for my work as well. Owing to the specific conditions rooted in the protracted nature of ruination and the power of intimate relations of community and co-locality, the strategies of Yusufeli's residents for surviving the worst effects of destruction and displacement gain a business-like quality as they make decisions about their lives based on cost-benefit analysis. This is as much true for ordinary workers who need to calculate how long they can continue to work at a particular building site and when they can begin a new job in another one, as for those residents who make or invest in property to make a profit out of the future compensation economy. But this entrepreneurial urge carries strong elements of speculation generated about the disappearance of land, community, and the past, which philosopher Michel Feher (2018) recognizes as a characteristic of subjects fashioned by financialized capitalism that he intentionally, and perhaps a bit too neatly, distinguishes from neoliberal subjectivity.

There is, however, another sense in which the residents are compelled to make calculations about the effects of destruction and expropriation across different temporalities and spaces in this resource frontier. In Chapter 3, I explain that as they continued to wait for the construction of the Yusufeli Dam project, Yusufeli's villagers also experienced the more or less simultaneous implementation of mining and HEPP projects, and cadastral surveys. Their effects of dispossession became spatially entangled with one another to give rise to different political responses: resistance against small hydropower projects, resignation towards the transfer of the commons and private property to the Treasury and the General Directorate of Forestry, and recognition of gold and copper mining as the only viable economic opportunity after the submergence.

The contrast between the desires and fears that different extractive technologies fuel in and around Yusufeli highlights that the hegemonic project by the party-state is never entirely complete. The embryonic critique embedded in the common sense continues to electrify new moments of struggle and protest, even if they once again become blocked or get interrupted. I therefore fix my ethnographic gaze also on the cracks, as much as on the connections, between the national and local scales to be able to understand some of the new social and political forces and conditions that still make opposing the party-state and private capital's projects of extraction possible.

Violence, Its Reverberations, and the Researcher

On the second day of Bayram (*Eid-ul Fitr*) in August 2012, Orhan, my occasional driver in the field, brought me to the villages half-flooded by the reservoir of the Deriner Dam, by then the most gargantuan project completed on the main tributary of the Çoruh River. On our way, he pointed out to me, one by one, the locations of a gas station, a school, a cemetery, and several olive groves, as well as the itinerary of the 1994 World Rafting Championship—all of which were now hardly discernable in the opacity of the river-cum-lake. The view from the hilltop where we parked our car was immediately breathtaking and disquieting at the same time. Two dozen houses scattered around the shades of green were disfigured, as ant-like shadows below us were industriously cutting, pilling, and loading stuff into trucks. The buzzing sound of chainsaws moving around the ruins made Orhan break into a laugh, an ironic one expressing not only sadness but also anger. “The villagers are removing the wooden parts of their houses before their village gets entirely flooded,” he explained. “It’s often juniper, very valuable.” He then slowly turned his eyes to the shores of the village, where the land was being swallowed bit by bit by cloudy wa-



Figure 0.2. The village of Sirya, Artvin, half-flooded by the Deriner Dam reservoir, 2013. © Erdem Evren.

ters and where the white minaret of the village mosque had already visibly shrunk. “Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers built this place,” he continued. “Now these men are taking everything with them, as if we’re at war. And they’re doing it on a religious day like this. This isn’t something to be done today.”

Twenty minutes later, we were driving back to Yusufeli, where Orhan was then working as a temporary rafting instructor and I was asking its inhabitants how they see their own approaching displacement or “coming annihilation” (*yaklaşmakta olan yokoluşumuz*), in the words of one interlocutor. Having retreated into my dreamy thoughts as we continued to traverse the valley, I recalled the scenic village in which Orhan had earlier hosted me in his small garden by the river. I asked him if he, too, just like the villagers that we just saw, was planning to sell the ruins of his house before its disappearance. “Yes,” he replied, abruptly and visibly uncomfortable. I thought I saw his body slightly twitch. “Yes. We’ll do the same thing.”

Orhan’s words and embodied reactions, or more precisely my ethnographic reconstruction of them here, reveal an evident tension between attachments to and commodification of the built environment amid its obliteration. I witnessed this tension under various guises in numerous other occasions in Yusufeli: its residents often spoke of the ceaseless material destruction in the valley as some kind of injury and explicitly named the scarring of their relation to the landscape and its past as suffering even though they try to make a profit out of this destruction or continue to attribute monetary values to its ruins. The demolition of a landmark such as a bridge or the submergence of a village in another part of the Çoruh Valley because of dam or road constructions caused genuine suffering for Yusufeli’s residents, foretelling the coming disappearance of their town and the dissolution of their community and ways of living. This tension continues to afflict social relations with affects such as disturbance and grief. In this book, I explore it as a generative force that embroils infrastructural violence in other social and political injuries—some immediate, others forgotten or disremembered.

This brings me to the final, and in some ways the least expected finding, of this ethnography: while bulldozer capitalism in this part of Turkey operates predominantly as a relation of consent predicated on the incitement to negotiate and speculate on ruination, violence remains its invisible background condition and a force around which some of its contradictions become crystallized. I found that at least some of the property and agricultural land that the residents own and invest in to receive higher compensation payments once be-

longed to the Armenian residents of the valley who became subject to mass deportation and killings in 1915. In Chapter 5, I trace this partly forgotten and to this day vehemently denied regional episode of the Armenian Genocide in my conversations with the current residents, and in my review of historical records, survivor memoirs, and a small but representative cache of archival material that I serendipitously stumbled upon during my research. By bringing out this episode of destruction and dispossession, my aim is to highlight how large-scale expropriation of wealth in the past continues to reverberate in the present. The figure of the dead Armenian that the residents curiously invoke to make sense of the coming displacement of their community and the devastation of their built environment, I also show, permeates the relations between ruination and accumulation with unusual meanings and affects.

This book therefore proposes to go beyond the here-and-now of large-scale extraction of resources to shed light on in what ways this process is entangled with and embedded within previous acts of violent dispossession. Marx ([1887] 1977), as it is well known, devoted the last section of *Capital Volume I* to the study of “the so-called primitive accumulation” that provided the initial capital and labor power necessary for inaugurating the shift to the capitalist mode of production. While his vivid depictions of enclosures, mass murder, plunder of raw materials, and penalization and incarceration in England were meant to explain the originary process by which direct producers were forcefully divorced from their immediate means of production to fill in the factories as “free laborers,” these passages have received renewed attention in recent times to rethink the role extra-economic forces play in relation to and alongside capital accumulation under contemporary capitalism. David Harvey (2003), for example, coined the term “accumulation by dispossession” to mark how force is deployed to resolve the ongoing crisis of overaccumulation under the guises of financialization, urban renewal projects, and indebtedness. Other authors writing more directly on capital’s extractivist logics and operations (Fraser 2014; Moore 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson 2019) draw our attention to the disparate ways in which violence remains the connecting tissue between expropriation and exploitation.

In trying to understand why the target community of a mass political violence that took place more than a hundred years ago is remembered in the context of contemporary processes of resource extraction, displacement, and dispossession in the Çoruh Valley, my work follows Harry Harootunian’s (2019) recent intervention that urges us to consider primitive or originary accumulation not as a

one-time event but a process that continues to unfold across different spaces and temporalities down to our present. Mainly concerned with the tragic legacy of his own parents who as survivors established migrant livelihoods in the US while suppressing every trace of their previous lives in Anatolia and the memories of the genocide, Harootunian proposes to look at how the destruction of Armenian everyday life continues to reproduce the society in its different material and affective registers. Yet, this point seems to me as relevant for the Turkish-Sunni community of Yusufeli as for the Armenian diaspora in the US and elsewhere. Building on the various narratives of my interlocutors on the displacement of the valley's former Armenian residents and the expropriation of their property at a time when they face their own imminent resettlement and dispossession, I discuss the ways in which the speculative forms of accumulation in contemporary Yusufeli are materially and discursively shaped and complicated by the originary violence that occasioned the originary accumulation in the valley. In that sense, I intend to draw attention to another layer of the dialectic relation between destruction and construction, and annihilation and accumulation, which I argue gives bulldozer capitalism its defining character.

It would perhaps be helpful to remember here the original meaning of the word "bulldozer": "a person who intimidates with violence" (Bellér-Hahn 2014: 188).¹⁴ While I did not feel intimidated almost at any point during my research, my ethnography among the conservative and nationalist Sunni-Turkish residents of Yusufeli, and gradual understanding of their complicity, involvement, and complaisance of different instances and episodes of political violence requires me to reflect on my own positionality.

What brought me back to Yusufeli to conduct long-term ethnographic research was the desire to understand why its anti-dam/anti-displacement campaign gradually went into decline after successfully preventing the construction of the dam project for more than a decade. Perhaps more decisively though, I arrived with a sense of curiosity about what it means to lead a life in this piece of land squeezed between steep rocks and the river's tributaries without much arable land, yet still exuding abundance and charm thanks to its Mediterranean micro-climate, which had long ago been made destined to disappear by the state. The flat that I moved to with my partner and son in 2013 was a sublet from Ahsen;¹⁵ one of the two women based in Germany who got involved first in the Yusufeli campaign and later in the efforts to mobilize the villagers against the plans for the construction of HEPP projects. In our first meeting at a café in Ber-

lin, she carefully listened to my proposal to conduct long-term ethnographic research in Yusufeli and promised to inform her contacts in the town about my arrival. Her friend, Zeliha, was a key activist who coordinated the international part of the campaign for several years, closely researching the international construction consortiums showing an interest in the Yusufeli Dam project, and using her contacts from various European NGOs to put pressure on export credit agencies (ECAs) in order to prevent the release of funds. Zeliha remained in close contact with three key anti-dam activists from the town who, after some initial hesitation, allowed me to stay in the town as an ally of the struggles against hydropower projects.

The former head and lawyer of the local association, Ragıp Bey, was, at the start of my research, a member of and a local candidate from the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Muhsin Abi, the founder of the town's only photo studio, was a militant of the MHP's paramilitary wing, the Grey Wolves movement, in his youth and subsequently worked closely with the Grand Unity Party (BBP), which is an Islamist-leaning offshoot from the MHP. The leaders and militants of the Grey Wolves, and these two political parties in which they took part, have been directly responsible for killing hundreds of socialist activists and organizing pogroms against the Alevi minority in the 1970s.¹⁶ To this day, they remain as the most outspoken ultra-nationalist political forces in Turkey. After both MHP and BBP decided to support Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in all the crucial turning points in the most recent history of Turkey, including the referendum on the transition to a presidential system in 2017, and eventually formed electoral alliances with the AKP, Ragıp Bey and Muhsin Abi left to found the Yusufeli branch of the Good Party (İP), a new nationalist party catering to secular Turkish-Sunni vote disillusioned by these two parties' alliance with the AKP. Hikmet Abi, on the other hand, is a retired policeman who used to head an anti-terror unit in the neighboring city of Erzurum in the 1990s when systematic torture and extra-judicial killings of Kurdish and leftist activists reached its paramount. Visibly marginalized politically for having remained staunch opponents of the AKP at a time when the party was successfully swallowing a wide range of right-wing constituencies in Yusufeli as in other parts of the country, these activists continued to resort to a nationalist-conservative rhetoric in order to animate the earlier mobilization against the dam project in the town.

Within the local association and the core anti-dam group including Zeliha and Ahsen whose leftist politics posed a stark contrast to these activists' ultra-nationalist worldview, there was a general agreement

from early on to gloss over party politics and ideological differences to join forces for saving the town from being submerged by the Yusufeli Dam project and later to organize the residents against small hydropower projects. While this worked well for a long time, it nevertheless placed me in a tricky position. Because of my close relations with Muhsin Abi, whose photo studio became one of my primary sites of research where I spent countless hours catching up on the latest developments about the project and got to know several people from the town, I was instinctively perceived by some of the prominent figures in the town as part of the diminished anti-dam campaign. Some of the self-declared leftists and social democrats, on the other hand, initially kept their distance from me as they thought me as an odd-looking member of this ultra-nationalist circle. Leftist colleagues and friends from Turkey too expressed their discomfort about the presence of ultra-nationalist figures as anti-dam activists in my ethnographic account when they heard me presenting parts of my work over the years. A few of them even outright criticized me for “doing research with fascists.” Having grown up in a leftist family, I also found some of these intimate exchanges with my closest interlocutors emotionally challenging and confusing. I deeply cherished the father-son relation formed over the years between Muhsin Abi and myself as we smoked one cigarette after another in front of his photo studio, something that the conservative morals of the small town prevented him from doing with his own son, while chatting about the latest gossip in the town and politics in general. Other times, I felt a visceral revulsion by the sight of him or Hikmet Abi taking my son into their arms.

Doing research in Yusufeli in close contact with these figures and many others proved to be a lonesome and challenging yet instructive experience. Whereas my own positionality as a male researcher prevented me, for the most part, to have meaningful interactions with women living in and around the town, the growing suspicions of some residents about the aims of my research at times blocked the possibility to continue conversations or build deeper relations. In the end, I found, just like some of my interlocutors did, a history of wreckage piled layer upon layer. Walter Benjamin (1968), as it is well-known, was a unique voice among the Marxists of his generation for critiquing the idea that accumulation is the motor engine of history conventionally understood to be progressing in a linear fashion. Against this tendency of “historicism,” he instead developed a sophisticated intellectual project that considers history to be based on the accumulation of the violence of the past, and the disruptive

entanglements of its ruins with the present. While *Bulldozer Capitalism* does not strive to become a theory book, by any means, thinking Benjamin's insights alongside Gramsci's formulations on the politics potentially takes us beyond the immediate settings of Yusufeli, the eastern Black Sea region, or Turkey. Viewing the contemporary moment from the vantage point of a dialectic relation between annihilation and accumulation may allow us to see better in what ways the relations between consent and violence facilitate and reproduce its conjunctures of economic, political, and ecological crisis.

I read and reread the works of these two revolutionary martyrs of fascism at a time when the uprisings and mass protests in Turkey were followed by countless bombing attacks, waves of prosecution and mass incarceration, a coup attempt, occupations and invasions by the Turkish army, and the rise of an oligarchic power structure becoming each day more ruthless and para-militarized. In their words I searched, I believe, for an intellectual and moral compass to navigate through these difficult times. In Brecht's "Motto," which I use as an epigraph to this introduction, I may have found a purpose, as well as a tonality, that I hope this book could at least try to do justice to.

Chapter Outlines

By situating the rise and decline of the Yusufeli campaign within the broader changes witnessed in the planning and construction of large dams in the past three decades, Chapter 1 makes the argument that the relative strength or weakness of struggles against large infrastructural projects is subordinated to the differential power of finance. Fixing its gaze on the conditions by which the work of articulation and organization against dam building unfolded in and beyond Yusufeli, this chapter describes two related processes that help us to make sense of why local campaigns from the global South failed to decisively impede construction: the detachment of dam capital from its transnational nexus as a result of the circulation of global norms and the dependent financialization of the 2000s. Locals' reflections on and recollections of their struggle and its aftermath recounted in this chapter help us to understand some of the circumstances under which the construction and financing of large dams began to be reconfigured around a capital-nation-state assemblage. They also reveal some of the new capacities that the end of the transnational regime of dam-building bestowed on the party-state for integrating

a community facing dispossession and displacement into its own vision of capitalist development.

Chapter 2 focuses on how the experiences of time and space at the local level becomes crucial for the implementation of this particular vision of capitalist development. It shows that the material expectations from and investments in a future to come, captured by the phrase “looking forward,” were controlled by the AKP networks to make the residents subscribe to the ruination of their lives and built environment. By putting this key future orientation at the center of analysis, this chapter intends to highlight the class dynamics behind the rise of the party-state and the consolidation of its hegemonic project. Especially local shop owners, who become involved in the party networks and construction businesses around the same, as well as national politicians with family connections to the town, help to channel and for the most part contain ordinary people’s desires and hopes regarding compensation, resettlement, and employment. These class relations illustrate the workings of a consensual political practice predicated on the capillary direction of the entire social fabric.

One of the striking features of damming in this part of Turkey is that it goes hand in hand with other extractive processes such as the implementation of prospective mining and cadastral surveying. One ethnographic issue that Chapter 3 grapples with is the residents’ varying political reactions to the different aspects of this expanding material destruction and dispossession. Looking at the responses of resignation, accommodation and protest in Yusufeli and its different villages, this chapter demonstrates that political agency in environmental and resource-based disputes is formed relationally, emerging out of people’s various considerations of what will be lost and what can be gained as different processes of destruction and expropriation become spatially and temporally linked. The political responses to entangled dispossessions in and around Yusufeli take shape against the background of two important developments: the convergence and divergence of a plethora of actors’ interests and fears and expectations, and the transformation of rural livelihoods as a result of the dissolution of rural life and the decline in agriculture as a viable economic activity. The chapter comments on how these developments help to sustain or alternatively open cracks within the party-state’s governing apparatus.

Chapter 4 continues to reflect on the cost-benefit analysis to which the residents render different aspects of their lives and built environment under the conditions of ruination, this time in the context

of the economies of construction and destruction flourishing in the town since the early 2010s. It chronicles those strategies and visions for capitalizing on the land, property, and social relations which are about to disappear with the completion of the Yusufeli Dam project. From buying or creating property with the purpose of receiving higher compensation payments to developing ambitious plans for selling artifacts bound to vanish with the submergence, Yusufeli's residents invest in the loss and destruction of things and ways of living as a source of valuation. The chapter discusses the new social and economic divisions and hierarchies engendered and reproduced as a result of these speculative ways of thinking and behaving, and points to precarity and indebtedness as the common outcomes of the broader entrepreneurial drive in the town.

But what does it mean to lead a life in anticipation of its demise? To be able to answer this question, Chapter 5 turns to those narratives and practices in which the residents employ the conceptual opposite of "looking forward," that is, "looking backward" and discovers that the disappearance of Armenian lives, and the destruction and plundering of their property more than a century ago continues to reverberate in the present. The deployment of violent processes (war, annihilation) as metaphors to describe the physical damaging of the valley in its different temporal registers and the ongoing search for Armenian treasures suggest that the originary violence and its effects of dispossession continue to be constitutive of the contemporary processes of accumulation. The ghosts of the past may have reappeared to make people "look backward," the chapter ultimately speculates, because there is no longer a political agency that can prevent the loss and injury caused by capitalist development in the present.

Notes

1. Similar to dams, HEPPs, also known as small hydropower plants or *hidroelektrik santralleri* (HES) in Turkish, exploit the vertical distance between two sections of a river or a stream to convert the kinetic energy of water into energy. There are two main differences from conventional dams however: first, they lack a reservoir in which water is collected; second, their install capacity usually does not exceed 10 MW, even though this threshold has been subject to several changes by the hydraulic authorities in Turkey in the past twenty years (Erensü 2016). If the quintessential image of a modern large dam is a massive concrete wall that dissects rivers into two parts, then for a small hydropower plant it would be kilometers-long pipes inside which water is captured and then released back to the riverbed after passing through the turbines within a powerhouse.

2. In one of the earliest and long-lasting environmental struggles in Turkey, Artvin's residents organized around the Green Artvin Association (Yeşil Artvin Derneği) in 1995 to protest against the Canadian mining company Cominco and its Turkish subsidiary Inmet's plans to extract gold from Cerrattepe with the use of cyanide. After numerous demonstrations and court cases, Inmet's operating license was revoked in 2008 for environmental violations. A new bidding process that took place in 2011 however saw the deliverance of the tender to Özalın Company, which works on behalf of the notorious construction conglomerate Cengiz Holding. After another protracted legal struggle led by Green Artvin, Özalın's construction vehicles finally entered the Cerrattepe area in 2016 after the gendarmerie clashed for hours with thousands of people from the city and neighboring towns who had gathered to stop the project. I note this brief history of the Cerrattepe struggle here not only because Cengiz Holding later became part of the domestic consortium behind the construction of the Yusufeli Dam project, my main focus in this book, but also to draw attention to the fact that the shift from an international to a national regime of mining and its political effects in Cerrattepe are somewhat analogous to the developments in dam planning and building that I contextualize and discuss in the next sections and chapters.
3. In the course of my research, I have come across conflicting figures, even in official reports and interviews with DSI (General Directorate of the State Hydraulic Works) officials, as to the exact number of villages planned to be inundated and of people expected to be displaced with the completion of the Yusufeli Dam project. This confusion is in part related to the arbitrary decision to include or omit from the list those villages that will be partly affected. In addition to the town center and three villages that will be entirely submerged by the dam reservoir, fourteen other villages will either be half-flooded or partly bulldozed to build construction sites. Half-flooding is often an equally severe outcome of damming since the loss of agricultural land or parts of the settlement poses a serious threat to the already precarious rural existence in the villages. Even though it is claimed that twenty thousand people will become subject to displacement in most newspaper reports and official statements, I found that even the planners and local politicians are not exactly certain about this figure. Despite seasonal fluctuations, Yusufeli's total population, including the town center and the villages, did not exceed ten thousand people in the second half of the 2010s.
4. Throughout this book, I use "anti-dam" and "anti-displacement" either interchangeably or together with a slash in-between. Even though I am aware of the difference between the political positions that they imply, several of my interlocutors used both terms to express their opposition against the flooding of Yusufeli and its villages for the production of electricity. At the same time, local activists, especially during their early encounters with the state authorities and national politicians, strategically framed their campaign around the issue of displacement to avoid being criticized for opposing development—an almost sacrosanct discourse and practice that has taken both the political right and left under its spell for decades (Arsel 2016a).
5. The notion of frontier, especially in its usages by politicians and state elites, often invokes "backwardness" to legitimize technical solutions (Davis and Burke 2011). Equally importantly, the taming of "wilderness," as Dale Stahl (2019), among others, convincingly argues in his work on the Keban Dam project in Southeastern Turkey, goes hand in hand with the control, assimilation, and removal of people deemed nonmodern or dangerous. Environmental engineering and social reshaping, in other words, become deeply intertwined to enact the political and technological goals of the nation-state. While such imaginings were not entirely absent in the minds of those engineers and planners who made the decision in the early 1960s to dam the Çoruh River, my reference to resource frontier here simply intends to underscore the intensity of extraction in this particular geographical location. As it will become clear in

the next chapters, a certain reassessment of the value of rural life, along with the idea that natural resources are underutilized, continues to constitute the ideological background of the projects intended on producing economic value out of nature. But what I am also interested in understanding is how these visions come to shape the desires and expectations of ordinary people under conditions connected with the rise of the AKP.

6. For the changing welfare regime and its political effects under the AKP, see Buğra and Keyder (2006) and Yörük (2012).
7. Kojin Karatani uses the term “capital-nation-state” to study the history of social formations from the perspective of modes of exchange. Each element of this assemblage, according to him, has its own distinct logic and principles but they have become deeply enmeshed in one another to the extent that “capital” or “nation-state” in itself would have little explanatory power. I borrow the term here for the less ambitious purpose of contextualizing infrastructural projects such as the Yusufeli Dam project, and making sense of their politics in the light of the interconnectedness between these entities.
8. Inspiration for the terms comes from Lovering and Türkmen (2011), who describe the state-led real estate boom and the displacement of the urban poor in Istanbul as “bulldozer neoliberalism.” Adaman et al. (2014), Çavuşoğlu and Strutz (2014a, 2014b), and Eder (2015) also come close to invoking the term when they write about the speed of destruction or the coexistence of destruction with construction often in the context of urban regeneration projects in big cities.
9. Another closely related concept used to describe nation-states’ increasing role in developmental projects in Latin America in recent years is “sovereign development state” (cf. Mcneish 2013).
10. The phrase *milli ve yerli* and its other variations have frequently been invoked by Turkey’s leading conservative-nationalist and Islamist politicians and ideologues since the 1960s at least (Bora 2016). Its widespread recirculation under the AKP after 2015 coincided with the party’s adoption of an ultra-nationalist rhetoric. In this narrative, whereas the AKP is presented as the only political party that truly defends the “national interests” and represents the authentic “people’s will,” others, especially the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), are marked as “foreign,” “unpatriotic,” or “terrorist.” At the same time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other AKP politicians frequently deployed this expression as a discursive marker in the opening ceremonies of several flagship projects, thus, referring to *milli ve yerli* energy, automobile, and military technology.
11. Also known as the “peace process,” “solution process,” or the “Kurdish opening,” the negotiations that took place between 2013 and 2015 aimed to bring an end to the decades-long fight between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). After the HDP’s phenomenal success in June 2015 elections, which deprived the AKP of a majority in the parliament, Erdoğan made the decision to unilaterally end the negotiations, after which the clashes with the PKK guerillas and the large-scale attacks on Kurdish cities and towns resumed. Finding support from the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the AKP blocked the efforts for forming a coalition government and once again went to the elections in October 2015, after which it regained its majority.
12. Referring to “unused” or “wasted” resources to justify their extraction and expropriation is a powerful rhetorical device adopted also by the AKP politicians especially in connection with the construction of small dam projects. Thus, in a famous speech that he gave in December 2012, then Prime Minister Erdoğan announced: “We do not have the luxury to waste our time by merely watching our river, as the idiom ‘water flows, Turk watches’ (*su akar, Türk bakar*) indicates. We changed this idiom, now it is ‘water

- flows, Turk builds' (*su akar, Türk yapar*). We must use our limited resources in the most efficient way possible and turn them into energy" (mentioned in Eren and Büke 2016).
13. Alp Yücel Kaya (2016: 79–81) calculates that a total of 1801 urgent expropriation decisions were taken by the cabinet of ministers during the Republican era, the majority of which belong to the AKP governments. While 92 percent of them concerned the investments in the electricity market, 212 of them were directly related to HEPP projects. Kaya's list covers the period until 2014 and excludes the expropriation decisions implemented on behalf of the Ministry of Finance and through Presidential decrees after 2017.
 14. I would like to thank Moritz Roemer for bringing this to my attention.
 15. I changed the names of all my interlocutors in this ethnography, except for the past and current mayors of Yusufeli, but I keep the form in which I address them; thus, using the informal *Abi* (brother) and *Abla* (sister), and formal *Bey* (Mr.). I decided not to anonymize place names.
 16. Just to give two examples, before he created the BBP in 1993, the late Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, whose first name I am appropriately using as a pseudonym for my interlocutor, was charged and imprisoned for taking part in the murder of several leftists, including the seven university students and members of the socialist Turkish Workers' Party in Ankara in October 1978. Another cofounder of the party, Ökkeş Şendiller (Kenger) is widely considered to be one of the planners of the pogrom against the Alevi community in the city of Maraş in December 1978, resulting in the deaths of more than one hundred people.