

## TELLING TIMES: MEMORIES OF CULTURE, CULTURES OF MEMORY



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**ZEYNEP KEZER**  
(Newcastle University)

### AMBIVALENT INFRASTRUCTURES

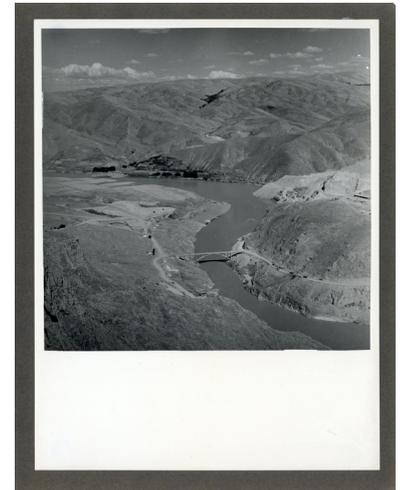
#### THE GEOLOGY AND GEOPOLITICS OF POWER IN THE UPPER EUPHRATES

This talk explores how Keban, the first in a system of 22 mega-dam projects built on Turkey’s Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, transformed the region’s cultural landscapes. Hydroelectric dams were heralded as visionary infrastructural projects and unprecedented engineering feats that would modernize the country with extensive irrigation to augment agricultural production and electricity production to mitigate energy rationing. When completed in 1981, Keban, would supply a quarter of Turkey’s electricity, regularize Euphrates’ flow, temper the climate, and introduce fisheries—a new industry.

But, Keban was a project with a dual purpose, serving both infrastructural needs and reinforcing national integration. Long before such technologies were available, Ottoman and, later, Republican officials had sought to sedentarize nomadic pastoralists and contain the semiautonomous Alevi-Kurdish populations who resisted central authority. In addition to forcing the involuntary resettlement of 25,000 people, Keban reconfigured the region’s physical geography, making the near far and the far near. It concretized the administrative separation of Elazığ and Dersim provinces on the banks of Euphrates, making transit dependent on ferries and destroying the livelihoods of many pastoral tribes. Electricity produced in Keban made it to major western cities in seconds, but the region’s inhabitants, whose loyalty to the state was considered suspect, remained in the dark well into the 1990s. Furthermore, Keban’s reservoir submerged the Upper Euphrates’ multi-ethnic history and sacred sites revered by Alevi Kurds. The construction of Keban Dam, together with other state penetration projects, including contemporary road construction and military installations, buttressed Elazığ’s position as a bastion of the central state, while marginalizing Dersim as the “uncivilized” other. I argue the dismantling of this landscape of resistance and subsistence is as central to the history infrastructure in Turkey as the fruits of modernity it ushered.

**Zeynep Kezer** is a Professor at the School of Architecture Planning at Newcastle University (UK) She is interested in examining how modern state-formation processes and nationalist ideologies play out in the built environment, informing everyday practices and identity formation. She has published in various academic and professional journals and is the author of "The Making of Modern Turkey: State, Space and Ideology in the Early Republic" (University of Pittsburgh Press,

2015). Her current work focuses on the violent transformation of Eastern Anatolia’s cultural landscapes during Turkey’s transition from empire to republic, especially as they affected the region’s Armenian and Kurdish populations. She is on the editorial boards of Architectural Research Quarterly (Cambridge), International Journal of Islamic Architecture (Ingenta), and will soon join The Commentaries (Taylor and Francis). She is also one of the founding editors of PLATFORM.



Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Hermann-Föge-Weg 11  
37073 Göttingen

[www.mmg.mpg.de](http://www.mmg.mpg.de)

Contact:

Dagmar Recke

Tel: +49 (551) 4956 - 106

[recke@mmg.mpg.de](mailto:recke@mmg.mpg.de)