Multi-Scalar Politics and the New Geography of Turkey’s Kurdish Conflict
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This paper examines the use of scalar politics by actors in Turkey’s Kurdish conflict. Scale is a concept drawn from geography that refers to different levels or locations as measured by size, and can be understood as a category of analysis or as the location where particular phenomena take place – such as at the local, national or global scale. Conventionally, scales have been viewed as being nested within each other – for example, the “local” has been viewed as being defined by actual physical or geographic proximity, and existing within a hierarchy of nested scales that include the national and global. Yet this understanding of scale as being hierarchically nested is increasingly challenged. Greater levels of interconnectivity lead to a blurring or hybridization of different scales – a process that is important for understanding the dynamics of civil wars and violent conflict.

I examine how the PKK and related organizations operate at various scales beyond the national – including local, regional, and transnational. The paper will discuss the local manifestations of the conflict in Turkey, Syria and Europe, illustrating how disparate sites such as Diyarbakir, Marseilles, London and Kobane become tied together within a single “conflict assemblage.” The paper suggests the need for a “spatial turn” in the study of the Kurdish conflict. Parallels between the PKK’s use of multi-scalar politics and that of other insurgent organizations will be drawn. Historical comparisons will also be made with previous instances of Kurdish diaspora mobilization and contentious politics in Europe.