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Territorial pluralism: water users' multi-scalar struggles against state ordering in Ecuador's highlands

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ABSTRACT

Ecuadorian state policies and institutional reforms have territorialized water since the 1960s. Peasant and indigenous communities have challenged this ordering locally since the 1990s by creating multi-scalar federations and networks. These enable marginalized water users to defend their water, autonomy and voice at broader scales. Analysis of these processes shows that water governance takes shape in contexts of territorial pluralism centred on the interplay of divergent interests in defining, constructing and representing hydrosocial territory. Here, state and nonstate hydro-social territories refer to interlinked scales that contest and recreate each other and through which actors advance their water control interests.

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Introduction

The 2008 Constitution of Ecuador is seen by many as one of the most progressive constitutions worldwide in terms of water (Harris & Roa-García, 2013; Hoogesteger, 2015a; Roa-García, Urteaga Crovetto, & Bustamante Zenteno, 2013). Its content reflects the remarkable political agency that the peasant and indigenous-based water users movement of Ecuador developed in the mid-2000s in opposition to a state that tries to control water in its territory through various legal and institutional arrangements. In Ecuador, in the early 2000s, following the massive indigenous uprisings of the 1990s, local autonomous water user organizations consolidated several user-based provincial and national federations and networks as a strategy to defend their interests by bridging the divide between state-led interventions, management and control on the one hand, and autonomous, user-based local organizations and governance on the other (Boelens, 2008). The article uses the concept of 'hydrosocial territories' to analyze these grass-roots organizations, their achievements and their relationship to the Ecuadorian state and its policies. Through it we examine the relations between processes of state territorial ordering, scale, and water users' struggles to defend their water, autonomy and voice.

The article is structured as follows. It first explores how hydrosocial territories at different scales are conceived, arranged and (re)created by actors as a means to gain

influence over or contest water control. Second, it examines how and why the Ecuadorian state has territorialized water since the 1960s through a series of policy and institutional reforms. Third, it shows how peasant and indigenous water users structure their irrigation systems as specific hydrosocial territories and how these water users have created provincial and national federations and networks through which they demand voice and authority vis-à-vis different state and international actors. A concluding section reflects on these multi-scalar territorial (re)configurations.

This article is based on field research conducted in Ecuador (2008–2014) and ongoing involvement in the field of Ecuadorian water governance and politics over the last two decades. The research consisted of participant observation and action-research. Additionally, extensive and recurrent semi-structured interviews were held with the members and leaders of water user organizations, as well as with state officials, policy makers and NGO staff who were involved in supporting water user organizations. The field data collected were triangulated to obtain consistency and representation.

Hydrosocial territories, scale and ‘territories-in-territory’

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2012), in ecological terms a territory can be defined as an area defended by an organism or a group of similar organisms for a specific purpose. This definition provides a starting point for analyzing hydrosocial territories, as they too are created by actors who in view of a specific purpose (e.g. political control, conservation, natural resources use, or production) claim and defend authority over a specific space and the related social group(s), resources, technologies and ecological environment in which they exist. Autonomy and self-governance by the specific group that defines/defends a territory (based on ethnicity, language, religion or the use of a natural resource) is quintessential (Simeon, 2015). A territory can therefore be constructed only in relation to other actors (Barth, 1969) and humans’ alignment with ‘the natural’ and ‘the built’. In other words, it is based on subjects’ strategies and powers to persuade or force others to accept the importance (and consequences) of consolidating a specific territorial arrangement. In this sense, territories determine how space is organized politically by interweaving its biophysical and social qualities (e.g. Baletti, 2012; Bridge, 2014; Meehan, 2013).

Scale, defined as a ‘socio-spatial level of analysis’ (Perreault, 2003, p. 98), is an important element of territories and how they are understood. This results from the fact that territories are spatially organized at different interrelated and often overlapping levels, such as the national, regional and local. These different nested levels are mutually constitutive even though their boundaries and content are far from neutral or fixed (Howitt, 2007; McCarthy, 2005). Understanding territories and their constitution therefore necessarily also implies understanding their scalar dimensions and interrelations.

Territories, in terms of their discursive and material properties (resources, technologies, boundaries, relationships, objectives), are disputed from ‘within’ and from ‘the outside’ as diverse subjects aim to shape territory according to their own interests (Boelens, Hoogesteger, Swyngedouw, Vos, & Wester, 2016). Disputes arise from competing territorial projects, images and interests that aim to consolidate boundaries, socio-natural organization and control for a specific purpose at a specific spatial scale

(Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015). The resulting (often conflicting) material and discursive practices and interventions constitute the politics of territorialization and imply processes of empowerment and domination, and of inclusion and exclusion in decision making (Swyngedouw, 2014; Zimmerer, 2000). Therefore, what territory 'is' and what it 'should be' are strongly determined by class, gender, ethnic or institutional interests, and power relations (see Bebbington, Humphreys Bebbington, & Bury, 2010; Boelens, 2014; Castro, 2008). These are closely related to legitimacy and authority, which are often invoked through claims on knowledge (scientific, indigenous/vernacular) (Boelens & Seemann, 2014), and social organization and order (bureaucratic, market, community, associational). It follows that hydrosocial territories are constructed through discourses and practices that shape the interactions, alliances and power struggles in spatially bounded socio-natural networks. How hydrosocial territories are structured can be understood by studying their contents (water control), their size and boundary arrangements (definitions of place, space and socio-natural boundaries as they relate to water), and their relations (ties in and among different actors, resources and natural environments at different scales) (cf. Lynch, 2006; Marston, 2000).

Divergent views, interests and powers over how specific territories are or should be shaped lead to the coexistence of multiple territorial notions and contested construction processes. We use the term 'territorial pluralism' to point out the fact that diverse territories are overlapping, interacting and conflicting in one and the same geographical-political space.¹ These 'territories-in-territory' have partially different, partially similar building blocks, but these are patterned in different and sometimes opposing ways, configurations and meanings (e.g. 'water' as physical-chemical H₂O, as a commoditized resource, or as a sacred being; 'water users' as servants of the nation-state, as clients, or as socio-nature's caretakers). Therefore, different 'territories-in-territory' are structured by different rules and normative frameworks, sources of legitimacy, forms of authority and related discourses. Once a territory (or a particular 'territory-in-territory') is constituted, it becomes an organizing element of human/nonhuman interactions, influencing both nature and society.

When analyzing irrigation systems through the lens of hydrosocial territories, they appear as spatially bound socio-material constructs in which water is controlled by interrelated physical elements (e.g. water sources and flows; hydraulic infrastructure to divert, conduct and distribute water; water provision places), normative elements (rules, rights and obligations regarding access to water and related resources), organizational elements (human organization to operate/sustain the system; capacities and knowledge of the art of irrigation) and financial and agro-productive elements (soil, crops, technology, capital, labour force). These are embedded in cultural and political traditions and powers at different yet interrelated scales (Boelens, 2014; Perramond, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2009). Consequently, in irrigation systems a fundamental interdependence exists among infrastructural, normative and organizational components within the spatial boundaries that are marked by the command area of the system.

State (re)territorialization of water governance

Disengagement from governmental systems is today well-nigh impossible. (Giddens, 1990, p. 91)

State territorialization takes place on different spatial scales and is usually hierarchically organized in a top-down manner in conformity with administrative boundaries (nation, province, municipality, irrigation system) and procedures. These are enforced through hierarchically organized institutions in charge of managing water affairs (for instance, the Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, or Ministry of Energy). The state ‘steers water society’ and consolidates its grip depending greatly on its techniques of territorial water governance. Formal mechanisms include water use infrastructure construction and control, water use permit administration and water allocation, legal frameworks, and control over investment programmes in the water sector (Wester, Rap, & Vargas-Velásquez, 2009). This coordinated control over delimited territories is intended to achieve administrative coordination, supported by an apparatus of direct or indirect surveillance (Giddens, 1990). More informal and indirect ones consist of technical assistance and social and political programmes and interventions.

The social and material designs and technical layouts of such hydro-territorial control systems are based on socio-political and normative notions that project specific power relations and related order (Gellert & Lynch, 2003; Saldías, Boelens, Wegerich, & Speelman, 2012; Warner, Wester, & Hoogesteger, 2014). Rationalizing water control in new ‘efficient forms of water governance’ guided by ‘expert knowledge’, ‘modern irrigation techniques’ and ‘water policy models’ is a fundamental cornerstone of the state’s project, which aims to rearrange local hydrosocial territories and their socio-cultural frameworks (cf. Duarte-Abadía & Boelens, 2016). These rearrangements thus take place through coercive forms of power, and the seductive power of expert-modernist norms, knowledge and organization, which naturalize state policy models and control and seek water users’ ‘self-correction’ (Boelens, Hoogesteger, & Baud, 2015; Foucault, 1978/1991; Swyngedouw, 2014). State institutions related to water thus constitute an important source of power and have the legal faculty to mediate amongst competing water claims and interests to ‘defend its population’ and ensure the greater societal good/benefit. State discourse presents this steering of society and the mediation of conflicts as its source of legitimacy to exercise authority, extract resources and generate income through the (re)arranging of territories and increased state control over local communities and their territories.²

Rearranging Ecuadorian water governance through (de)centralization

Decentralization ... may re-distribute decision-making geographically, but the way decisions are made remains hegemonic. (Nina Pacari, Interview, October 2004)

In Ecuador, as in many other Latin American countries, from the 1960s onwards water management was nationalized and centralized. National institutions were created to establish hierarchic control by implementing a water regulatory framework, allocating water concessions at the national level, and constructing and operating hydraulic infrastructure. In Ecuador, this resulted in the consolidation of the National Ecuadorian Water Resources Institute (INERHI) in 1966 and a National Water Law in 1972. INERHI was created at the ministerial level to centralize national water control. This meant control over the allocation of water rights, mediation of water conflicts, enforcement of legal norms, and the expansion and management of the irrigation

frontier. It was staffed mostly by civil and agricultural engineers. As a result, most funds were directed towards constructing and expanding the 79 state-managed irrigation systems (Hoogesteger, 2014). INERHI's strong involvement in resources administration, development and management principles profoundly imposed government rationality in local irrigation management.

This imposition of governmental order continued through the decentralization and privatization of the 1980s and 1990s (Boelens et al., 2015; Hoogesteger, 2013a). These were implemented under pressure from the World Bank and other bilateral funding agencies. The reforms aimed to decentralize governance powers to lower layers of government (provincial and municipal) and promote a greater involvement of both water users and the private sector in irrigation management tasks while attempting to introduce a neoliberal market rationality into local water management practices. In 1993, the Law of State Modernization, Privatization, and Provision of Public Services was enacted, opening the doors to far-reaching national water reforms and the privatization of water services. As part of this reform package in 1994, INERHI was replaced by the legally and institutionally weaker National Council of Water Resources (CNRH) and the delegation of irrigation responsibilities to the four existing and five newly created regional development corporations (RDCs) (Cremers, Ooijevaar, & Boelens, 2005). The highly understaffed CNRH was conceived as an inter-ministry council with limited budget and power to carry out policies, projects, or programmes. Its main responsibility was to administer water allocation by granting water use rights, mediating water conflicts and enforcing legal norms concerning water use in all water user systems of the nation through 12 regional water agencies. The RDCs were to coordinate at the regional level with the provincial governments and the other relevant ministries in the design and implementation of development programmes (Cremers et al., 2005). Nevertheless, in practice most RDCs limited their activities to the irrigation sector and especially the operation and management of state irrigation systems. This was done with limited funding from the central state and was largely ineffective, also because many provincial governments established their own irrigation support units. As part of the decentralization process, from 1995 to 2001 the Ecuadorian irrigation management transfer programme, which was financed through a World Bank loan, was implemented by the Executive Unit of the Technical Assistance Project (UEP-PAT).

Not only was the national state restructured and bypassed in this broad effort to 'decentralize' water control and neoliberalize local water territories; the representatives of organized water users, such as the national Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Inter-institutional Irrigation Forum (FIR), a broad water-user organization and NGO-based civil-society alliance, were sidelined and their proposals and demands ignored. Despite the fact that CONAIE had developed a solid proposal for a new water law and a corresponding institutional framework (CONAIE, 1996) and led the national indigenous movement to large-scale, nation-wide mobilizations and protests that paralyzed the country for weeks (Boelens, 2008), CONAIE was not considered a legitimate stakeholder in water affairs by national and international decision makers. Similarly, when the FIR presented a proposal for user empowerment and democracy in the irrigation sector, a proposal that was created by several of its member institutes (with grounded experience, knowledge and networks), their proposal was likewise ignored. Instead, UEP-PAT hired three international consultancy companies with no contextual knowledge of

irrigation to implement the irrigation management transfer programme. This programme consisted of (1) creating water user associations with the capacity to administer, operate, maintain and manage their irrigation systems; and (2) legally turning over the irrigation management responsibilities from the state agencies to the newly created water user associations. The programme boiled down to transferring irrigation systems administration, operation and maintenance tasks and related financial burdens to poorly prepared water user associations in 35 irrigation systems (Cremers et al., 2005; Moscoso, Nieto, Chimurriz, & Díaz, 2008).

Neoliberal 'modernization' dismantled not just the Ecuadorian state bureaucracy but also the institutional capacity to assist user organizations in managing their own water affairs (Cremers et al., 2005). This was clearly recognized by some leaders of social movements. Indigenous leader Nina Pacari (1998, pp. 279–282) observed: "The form of organization to administer irrigation currently proposed by the State destroys traditional forms of organization, generating conflicts and weakening decision-making." In the vacuum left by the understaffed national water institutions, the decentralized governments, the private sector, international donors, and NGOs, all newly empowered by the new legislation, took on greater roles in water project implementation, albeit with their own ideas and interests regarding the territorialization of water at different scales (Hoogesteger, 2013a, 2014, 2015b). This plurality, added to the fact that most of the country's irrigation systems were managed autonomously by landlords or user collectives with hardly any state intervention, importantly contributed to the deepening of territorial pluralism in Ecuadorian water governance in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Boelens, 2015).

In 2007, following President Rafael Correa's promises to the water user organizations which had helped to vote his 'Citizen Revolution' into power, the new left-wing government implemented a set of institutional reforms that aimed at re-establishing the national state, its rationality and control at the centre of water affairs. A National Water Secretariat (SENAGUA) was created as the 'sole governmental water authority', replacing CNRH. It was allocated a broad set of responsibilities in the water domain. A few months after its creation, SENAGUA switched from provincial administrative boundaries to a model based on nine river-basin management units (Warner et al., 2014). From 2007 to 2014, the number of SENAGUA offices increased from 12 to 43, organized hierarchically: 1 national secretariat, 9 river-basin management offices and 33 sub-basin management offices. Through this new bureaucratic structure SENAGUA aimed to 'guide', 'regulate' and 'coordinate' all water-related affairs in the country (Boelens et al., 2015). Next, SENAGUA began the construction of several large multi-purpose dams throughout the country (Hidalgo, Boelens, & Isch, 2014), destroying existing local, community-managed hydrosocial territories in the name of 'development'. Legal pluralism and local territorial autonomy are recognized and protected in the 2008 Constitution, but only as long as they do not interfere with 'national progress' and the 'well-being of all Ecuadorians'.

User-based counter-territories and the struggle for autonomy and voice

Existing legal frameworks are not appropriate for us, our own norms and wishes. (Carlos Oleas, irrigator and president of Interjuntas-Chimborazo, Interview June 2005)

The consolidation of irrigation systems as (semi)autonomous grass-roots hydrosocial territories lies at the heart of the development of the Ecuadorian water user movement. Therefore, to understand ‘the’ movement – its origins and demands – it is important to understand how, from the grass-roots perspective, hydrosocial territories are constituted from the bottom up at different interrelated scales. As explored below, local water-use territories form the basic building blocks around which broader grass-roots water territorialization takes place. Interlinking these local hydrosocial territories with broader spatial scales is crucial for water-centred social movements. It enables dispersed and often spatially and politically less powerful water user groups to develop regional and national political agency. Hydro-territorial organization, on scales where infrastructure and water flows do not physically bind with the social, consolidates around shared causes and builds on shared threats, claims and identities, as analyzed below.

To control irrigation systems, water users constantly adapt to arrange the interlinked social, political and natural domains according to their interests and beliefs. In this process agro-ecological properties, water flows and water-control infrastructure strongly determine how water-use systems function. Infrastructure enables water delivery to specific places and actors through canals, dams, division structures, pipes and outlets, which establish spatial and social boundaries. That is why infrastructure reflects and simultaneously embeds social norms (e.g. how to understand, operate and repair technologies, and who benefits, when, where and how much) and requires particular forms of human organization (Hoogesteger, 2013b).

Ecuadorian water user communities and associations tend to follow a different rationality of signifying and patterning these elements than, for example, state agencies or development institutions (see Boelens & Gelles, 2005; Hoogesteger, 2015b; Rodriguez de Francisco, Budds, & Boelens, 2013). The former’s rules, rights and obligations shape and are shaped by collective action and social organization around the joint creation and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure and water flows (Hoogesteger, 2013c). These relationships generate strong bonds of shared hydrosocial/territorial identity, linking users to their water sources, infrastructure, territory and user/community organizations.

Autonomous user-managed irrigation systems

In Ecuador, most irrigation systems are managed autonomously and cover areas of up to a few hundred hectares. There are no precise figures about these systems. National statistics show that a total of some 850,000 ha is irrigated. Approximately 200,000 ha is managed by systems officially labelled as ‘state-managed’ or recently ‘transferred’. Some 320,000 ha is under community control, managed by some 2000 common-property systems. The rest, which includes the most productive land, is under private control (Gaybor, 2011).

Community-governed irrigation systems are regulated by rules, obligations and rights that are locally defined. These vary from one irrigation system to another. In these irrigation systems especially strong processes of belonging and place-based identity creation develop around the collective creation and re-creation of infrastructure, local normative structures (rights and responsibilities) and organizational (community or supra-community) arrangements, many of which reach beyond the strict contours of

the irrigated area and its users. They sometimes include part of the upper catchment of the source from which water is taken, potential areas for the expansion of the irrigation system and aspirant water users (individuals, groups or communities). Thus, water and its flows are the uniting factor that delineates local hydrosocial territories. They may or may not follow the same social and material boundaries of what is usually defined as an irrigation system. These 'locally rooted' processes lead to water-centred territorialization and determine the organization of user groups. They also form the background of their defence of collective water rights against external actors. Local water user communities often try to use a strategic selection of state rules, resources and procedures in their own favour (Gelles, 2000). They consider formal institutions and structures both a threat to local autonomy and, at the same time, an opportunity and a defence mechanism for their water use and allocation.

For instance, in Gompuene, a customary irrigation system (50 hectares serviced by one main canal) in Chimborazo Province, the defence of water rights and access vis-à-vis state, hacienda and other power groups plays a key role in linking eight communities to each other and to the river and infrastructure and their spatial boundaries. The territory, however, is dynamic and changes over time. Gompuene's irrigation system was hydraulically, organizationally and politically linked to the new, larger Licto system in the late 1990s, incorporating a total of 1700 hectares, 20 communities, and a new (larger and more secure) water source. Jointly, Gompuene and Licto users shape the 'new' irrigation system, its 'territory' and its organization around the material base of water and hydraulic infrastructure. The mutual interdependence arises from the need to cooperate through collective action, which is crucial to construct, operate, maintain and defend the water-use systems. Its rights and property relations are now embedded in Gompuene and Licto user collectives' cultural, agro-ecological and political context. Their collective and individual water rights are literally inscribed in the infrastructure, contours and water flows of the irrigation system, which have been shaped by their specific histories of communitarian cooperation and fierce conflicts with external actors who threaten their access to water and self-governance autonomy (Boelens & Gelles, 2005).

A contrasting example is the neighbouring Chambo irrigation system, which had a long history of state management (Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015). As in most state systems, agency personnel designed, planned, constructed and managed the systems top-down, through the imposition of state-based normative frameworks in which users had few decision-making rights (Hoogesteger, 2015b). However, when the state ran out of funding for operational costs and personnel, and retreated, users started to organize to fill management gaps. They networked informally to find external allies to consolidate their organizations, infrastructure and technical skills. Through these processes, the water users discursively, socially and materially took possession of the irrigation system, its management, its water flows and the space that these occupy through a process of grass-roots reterritorialization. At present the water users are organized into 82 local management boards (which includes a management board of aspirant irrigators) and an overarching water user association. Though their organization and water distribution practices are greatly structured by state guidelines, the water users self-govern their irrigation system and advance their claims for water access, self-governance and voice in decision making beyond the irrigation system contours vis-

à-vis the state and other external actors by joining forces with Licto and Gompue, amongst others, on broader spatial scales (Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015).

Representing water users' interests at broader scales

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, in response to neoliberal reforms, water users in Chimborazo created the Provincial Water Users Federation, Interjuntas-Chimborazo, joining approximately 300 grass-roots irrigation and drinking-water organizations (Hoogesteger, 2012). This federation enabled them to voice their demands and participate in decision-making processes both provincially and nationally. By creating an extensive network of water user organizations, including not just community but also state-managed systems, Interjuntas-Chimborazo has been able to press for action to meet users' needs through lobbying, formal participation in decision making, and massive popular protest. They have challenged the territorial organization of the state in many ways: in terms of contents, rationality, legitimacy and strategies. As Interjuntas President Carlos Oleas explained:

We demanded recognition for our ambition to reunite all users in one organization, both for drinking water and irrigation. However, our wish was rejected by the authorities. We are not only cheap labour; we also want to make decisions! (Interview June 2005)

Interjuntas-Chimborazo's ability to mobilize thousands of water users in the province for popular street protests, as evidenced in 1997, 2005 and 2010, significantly legitimized its spatial and social extension. This street-gained legitimacy has also powerfully influenced the federation's position when pressing its claims and negotiating water users' demands with provincial and national state water agencies. At the same time, it has enabled the federation to attract allies to its network, establishing cooperation with nongovernmental and human rights organizations, indigenous federations, and donors, nationally and internationally.

A similar case is the Federation of Peasant Water User Groups of Cotopaxi (FEDURICC), originally formed in 1997 by six user organizations from the largest irrigation systems in Cotopaxi Province. Initially supported by local government, FEDURICC quickly increased its membership and now comprises over 330 grass-roots organizations. Like Interjuntas-Chimborazo, it has developed legitimacy and the capacity to mobilize its members for massive street protests throughout the province. As with Interjuntas, FEDURICC's demands have centred on respect for local autonomy and self-government, the recognition of its right to participate in state decision making concerning irrigation development, and defence of users' water rights. It is widely recognized that the water user federations' vigilance and social audit systems have enhanced the effectiveness of public investments in irrigation development, benefitting marginalized peasant and indigenous water user communities (Hoogesteger, 2014).

Both these federations have gained territorial legitimacy through their capacity to mobilize their constituents, due to their shared cultural identity and a shared cause. The success of both FEDURICC and Interjuntas-Chimborazo is therefore grounded in the effective creation and discursive mobilization of a 'provincial/territorial water identity'. In Chimborazo, the trigger that initially brought the province's water users together was the plan to close the provincial RDC and Water Agency in 1997 (Hoogesteger, 2012). Between 1997 and 2005 problems of corruption and discrimination against peasant/

indigenous water users at the provincial Water Agency increased dramatically. In reaction, user organizations started to work together, and in 2005 they massively mobilized in Riobamba's streets to demand a change of personnel. They occupied the Water Agency offices for 18 consecutive days until they were accepted as legitimate stakeholders and participants in the process of defining how and according to which procedures the new water agency director would be appointed and monitored by the organized water users. In Cotopaxi, continued corruption scandals in allocation of public funds to the irrigation sector (in both the RDC and the provincial government) brought user organizations together and enabled them to audit and oust two different directors of the irrigation agency. Finally they also forced their inclusion in the decision-making process, which led to the naming of a director they backed. In advancing their interests and claims, representatives of these federations strategically use such successes to discursively legitimize their demands and manifest their federative power within the provincial territorial confines.

Today, both FEDURICC and Interjuntas-Chimborazo play important roles in defending the interests of water users at the national level. They have extended their network through the national multi-stakeholder platform, the National Water Resources Forum (WRF), which brings together multi-ethnic groups, grass-roots organizations, individuals, NGOs, state institutions and academics from the whole country. In WRF, proposals in the national water governance arena are analyzed, debated and created. Through its active participation in national water policy debates since the early 2000s, WRF has become an important channel through which water users link to multi-scalar governance structures and national water legislation affecting their water access and rights and, with this, their local water territories and autonomy.

WRF has contributed to some important changes in national water governance. In 2004, it presented a proposal for legal reforms to the National Congress (Hoogesteger, 2015a), starting a broad movement against the privatization of domestic water supply services in the country's urban areas. WRF publicly rejected the free-trade negotiations by the government, as they would significantly challenge national territorial water integrity and the poorest sectors' water security. In subsequent years, WRF presented new, amended proposals to the National Congress and published position papers to influence and shape public policies, including a fair legal framework for water.

There is no doubt that the most important success of WRF and its constituent organizations has been the inclusion of their demands in Ecuador's 2008 Constitution. In this Constitution, which, as we saw, is considered one of the world's most socially progressive, they managed to include fundamental issues such as recognition of water as a human right, water as a strategic national heritage for public use, recognition of water user organizations' autonomy, respect for their water-rights systems, prohibition of private water management, and user participation in water governance decision making. Another crucial issue was the Constitution's establishment of new allocation priorities: (1) human consumption; (2) irrigation for national food sovereignty; (3) ecological flows; and (4) productive uses. These constitutional changes give legal priority to livelihood needs. This breaks with the previous emphasis on production and modernization (for instance, lumping subsistence and export-oriented commercial agriculture in a single category). It also aims at prohibiting unlimited commercialization of water. Unlike the federations, which gained their legitimacy largely through

public protests, WRF has won national territorial representation and legitimacy based on its broad base of constituents, its lobbying activities and the quality of its proposals.

These user-based federations and multi-stakeholder platforms link local water user associations at broader scales and in doing so reaffirm the local hydrosocial territories they represent as well as their up-scaled territorial claims vis-à-vis external actors (provincial and national state agencies, NGOs, other user-based federations and networks, and donors). For instance, when relating to outside actors, Interjuntas leaders frame their demands in terms of ‘we, the water users of Chimborazo Province’ and highlight the large number of member organizations they represent in the province. Based on this broad constituency and its capacity to mobilize ‘the water users’ of the province, they claim the spatial boundaries of the province of Chimborazo as ‘their’ territory in terms of the representation of the water users’ interests. Similarly, to legitimize and re-create the WRF’s claim to represent water users’ interests at the national scale, its leaders repeatedly stress that representatives from water user organizations from all provinces of Ecuador actively participate in WRF. Through this discursive framing and claiming of memberships (cf. Baud & Rutten, 2004), interests and their belonging to a defined spatial entity (a region, a province, a country), these federations and multi-stakeholder platforms define and re-create the spatial contours of the ‘territory’ they represent.

Finally, there are three fundamental issues that stand out in the demands of these interlinked federations and networks: (1) their concern for the material interests of local user organizations, such as infrastructural investments, transparent resource distribution, and policy implementation for fairer distribution of water resources; (2) recognition of self-governance faculties and identities, with sufficient autonomy for user-based rule-making and enforcement; and (3) their concern to acquire a binding voice in water management decisions at different scales (national, provincial and in basin management units) to ensure that their demands are met. Especially this last point remains a delicate issue within the present government. Although the government has co-opted many grass-roots leaders into its political apparatus and has created formal spaces for water users’ participation on different scales, most leaders concur that these spaces represent mere lip service to long-standing grass-roots demands. To them, President Correa’s ‘Citizen Revolution’ is more a government-based ‘revolution for the citizens, not with the citizens’. The critical voices of social movements are muted time and again (Boelens et al., 2015). In practice, water-user participation is often limited to mere consultation, with no binding consequences (Hoogesteger, 2014). The government has tried to delegitimize many of these organizations by questioning their constituency and representativeness while repeatedly calling for ‘individualized’ rather than ‘representational’ participation by water users in these spaces. As a result, grass-roots federations and networks are currently struggling to sustain their territorial claims and legitimacy in relation to both their constituency and the state. In doing so, they are trying to hold on to the core of their three basic demands: redistribution for fair access to resources; recognition of local rule-making authority and management autonomy; and representational voice in decision making.

Conclusions

Territorial pluralism, conceived as different notions of how and what hydrosocial territories are and should be in terms of organization and function, leads to processes

of struggle and negotiation that mould water governance and its outcomes at different scales. As the case of Ecuador shows, the multi-scaled territorial organization of the state is crucial for its objectives of ordering society but also influences the structuring of counter-movements and their territories. In Ecuador, as in most other Andean countries (Boelens, 2015), organized water users have created local hydrosocial territories by simultaneously evading and strategically using state ordering and its corresponding institutionality. In doing so they consolidate their access to water, technology and voice through forms of self-governance in the territories of self-determination delineated by irrigation systems. To defend their interests at broader scales, water user organizations 'jump scales' and have developed into a social movement with considerable political agency. These organizations have a clear public presence in national and provincial water governance arenas, and have become an important means for irrigators to defend their access to water, to maintain their autonomy and to struggle for a voice in decision making over issues that concern their water rights.

The analytical lens of hydrosocial territories is useful for understanding the relations and confrontations that exist between different notions of how water and its governance should be organized at different spatial scales. Its value lies in the focus on the importance of space and scale on the one hand, and on autonomy and self-determination in and over these specific socio-natural spaces on the other. In local water systems, water flows and infrastructure play a key role in the defence and delimitation of the spatial and social reach of their hydrosocial territories. At a broader scale, the state's organizational structure (e.g. provinces, river-basin management units and the nation) is important, both in terms of how it organizes control within the national territory and how water user collectives try to challenge and influence this system. Therefore, the state's territorial organization has direct bearing on how and on what scales water users create counter-territories to claim their demands.

In spite of the continuous efforts of the state to territorialize water and users according to its rationale, autonomous water users manage to defend their territorial autonomy and practices. They do so by reconstructing local water management practices, but at the same time organizing in provincial and national water user movement organizations. Thus, Ecuador's national water user movement is comprised of linkages and interactions among place-based multi-scalar water user organizations. This movement has been able to resignify the meanings of political representation and participation in Ecuadorian water governance. It has done so through struggles that address different but interlinked fields of water justice, such as transparency in resource allocations and equity in water distribution; recognition of water users' rights and forms of self-governance; and participation and democracy in decision-making processes.

This analysis of the Ecuadorian peasant and indigenous irrigators brings to the fore that movement activities by water justice groups and movements, though often stressing issues of identity and autonomy, seldom concentrate exclusively on identity itself (Baud, 2010; Castro, 2008; Gelles, 2010; Romano, 2012; Terhorst, Olivera, & Dwinell, 2013). The movement organizations presented here highlight the relationship between territory, identity and ethnic discrimination on the one hand, and political exclusion and unequal resource distribution on the other. Rather than demanding to be yet another influential actor in the hegemonic game of water allocation, they demand an alternative governance perspective, one that guarantees grass-roots families a fair share

in the distribution of water and water-based resources (socio-economic justice), and recognition of their autonomy and ways of managing water territories (cultural justice). They have made clear that this can only be accomplished if they can take part in decision making over water governance (political or ‘representational’ justice; see also Perreault, 2014; Schlosberg, 2004; Zwarteveen & Boelens, 2014). Therefore, claims for representational justice combine with demands for redistribution of resources and recognition of water-based territorial identities and rights. These crucially involve sharing in authority on different scales.

Notes

1. This refers both to the existence and interaction, in one particular spatial location, of actors and networks with different objectives and interests (e.g., superimposing mining territory, indigenous territory and State administrative territory), and of actors and networks with similar water-use purposes but with diverging/conflicting conceptions of ‘territoriality’ (e.g. superimposed formal, State-structured irrigation systems and informal, vernacular community-based irrigation territories).
2. Underlying formal discourses on national progress, efficient resource governance, and overall citizens’ well-being, states often reassign water allocations to meet the needs of strong political and economic sectors and actors (e.g. mining, forestry or agri-business corporations, and hydropower development) or to gain control over the surplus produced by community systems – either for the state administrative body or for particular rent-seeking factions within the state (Baud, 2010; Baud, de Castro, & Hogenboom, 2011; Lynch, 2012).

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