

“Primitive Accumulation” in the Turkish Countryside: The Case of Hydroelectric Power Plants

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Since the mid-2000s, Turkey has witnessed an increasing establishment of hydroelectric power plants (HPPs). This issue has been largely discussed in the literature from various perspectives, e.g. social movements and commodification of nature/livelihoods. In this paper, I argue that the mushrooming of HPPs needs to be located within a broader framework, i.e. the consolidation of capitalist relations in rural Turkey. Moreover, I argue that mass anti-HPP activism at both local and national levels, being too much preoccupied with “civil society” concerns, is necessarily prone to failure and unable to plan alternative political economic strategies.

The first part of this paper discusses the privatization of rivers -which are not “literally sold” but rented by capitalist cooperations- with reference to the ongoing processes of “primitive accumulation” and “proletarianization” in the Turkish countryside. This theoretical discussion intends to address Turkish state’s specific role in the consolidation of capitalist relations in rural Turkey. Specifically, I will explore the privatization of public lands and rivers in the rural areas within the macro-level transformation of agricultural land use in the Turkish countryside.

The second part, underlying the serious neglect of class content in the capitalist transformation of agriculture, intends to criticize the literature on social movements and commodification of nature which speaks to and within the framework of “civil society” politics. I argue that the radical threats to the livelihoods of rural community cannot be grasped without taking into account the ongoing proletarianization process in the Turkish countryside. Here, at the abstract level, I will discuss the organic link between the struggles against “primitive accumulation” (as expansion of wage labor) and the struggles of working class. Setting out from this abstract level, I will elaborate on possible practical and concrete alternative economic strategies to unite these fragmented movements against capitalist relations of production as a whole.