

Towards a New Hydro-social Contract in Turkey: Analysing Evolution of Environmental Activism in Water Resources Development

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Abstract

Environmental activism is on the rise in Turkey with the growing involvement of civil society networks acting at local, national and international levels. In this respect, anti-dam activist networks focusing on adverse environmental effects of large and small scale dams constitute one of the most important components of environmental movements in Turkey. Yet, there have been limited scholarly works analysing different aspects of anti-dam activism in Turkey in the light of theoretical frameworks developed in literature. Informed by deep investigation of empirical case studies across Turkey, this paper analyses how environmental activism in water resources development has increased recently. Drawing upon the “Hydro-social Contract Theory” accompanied by the conceptual frameworks regarding water resources management paradigms, the paper argues that there has been an ongoing evolution from the Hobbesian forms of hydro-social contract to the Lockean form of hydro-social contract between state and society relations. This transition has enabled environmental discourse on water resources development more salient and it has provided a conducive environment for civil society to influence in decision making processes.

Key words: Environmental Activism, Turkey, Civil Society, Water

1. Introduction

The salience of environmental politics has gradually increased recently and growing number of civil society networks both within and outside of Turkey sought to influence decision-making with respect to environmental issues. Particularly, grass roots movements were established at local scales on certain issues by mid 1990s and onwards [1, 2]. The campaigns waged against gold mining with cyanide in Bergama in late 1990s or the campaign waged against the coal power plant in Gerze in 2000s are typical examples of local environmental movements which also became part of domestic political agenda in Turkey [3, 4]. More recently, environmentally driven protests also triggered broader public demonstrations and protests. Considering the Gezi Park demonstrations, which is considered to be one of the most important events in recent history in Turkey, the initial demonstrations started as environmentally driven protests, which turned into a nation-wide protests and demonstrations against the government [5]. Water, in fact, constitutes one of the most important aspects of environmentalism in Turkey. There are numbers of campaigns waged against large and small scale dams across the country. According to the database prepared by environmentalist networks, it is illustrated that there are more than 50 environmental conflicts related with hydraulic development across the country [6]. This paper seeks to question how this

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¹ The HSCT (Hydro-social Contract Theory) will be used as an acronym throughout paper to refer the framework of Hydro-social Contract.

pattern can be conceptualized considering the scholarly works regarding state-society relations in the context of water resources development. The study shows the HSCT developed by Anthony Turton and Richard Meissner [7], provides an explanatory conceptual tool in understanding state-society relations with respect water issues. The study argues that growing environmental activism across Turkey against large and small scale dams and hydropower plants (HPPs) shows there is an ongoing change from the Hobbesian form of hydro-social order to the Lockean form of hydro-social order in state-society relations in Turkey. The structure of the paper will be as follows. In the first part, the paper will briefly provide a literature review regarding the key concepts developed in the context of the HSCT. In the second part, the paper will discuss under what socio-political circumstances, the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract was established in state-society relations in Turkey. In the final part, the paper will analyse the transition from the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract to the Lockean form of hydro-social contract in state-society relations.

2. The Framework of Hydro-Social Contract Theory: Key Concepts

Humankind has sought to develop water resources by building primitive or complex hydraulic infrastructure such as dams, irrigation systems, HPPs since the ancient times [8]. In his seminal work, *Oriental Despotism*, Karl Wittfogel describes the city states established in Mesopotamia as ‘*hydraulic civilizations*’ due to their ability to establish complex hydraulic projects [9]. However, in spite of complex hydraulic development attempts made by great powers, water resources development had largely remained in community level until the industrial revolution in 17th and 18th century. It was after the industrial revolution, water resources have been extensively exploited with the introduction of extensive hydraulic development projects conducted by states [8]. In understanding the relations between state and society in the context of extensive hydraulic development, the HSCT provides a comprehensive theoretical framework.

The term Hydro-Social Contract is defined as “.... *Unwritten contract that exists between the public and government that comes into existence when the individual is no longer capable of mobilizing sufficient water for their own personal survival, and that acts as a mandate by which government ultimately takes on executes this responsibility [7]*” The HSCT argues that state-society relations with respect to water issues occur at two transition periods. Accordingly, the first transition occurs when water resources become scarce so that states intervene to tackle with scarcity problem. Number of events such as droughts, rapid population growth, industrialization, urbanization might trigger the first transition. The distinguished feature of the first transition is that communities no longer tackle with water related problems. Therefore, states have become prominent actors in water resources management and development. Water resources development is also strongly related with state-making and nation-making processes [10, 11]. Therefore, dramatic increase in numbers newly founded nation-states during 20th century also resulted in growing intervention of nation states in water resources development across the world. Here, hydraulic mission becomes a prevailing paradigm in water resources management [12]. Hydraulic mission refers to strong conviction of states to utilize every drop of available water for welfare and socio-economic development. It can be considered as a form of ideology that informs states’ desire to conduct hydraulic development projects. It results foundation of strong bureaucratic bodies, which is also labelled as hydrocracies, and it acts as a sanctioned discourse legitimizing states’ actions [13, 14]. The Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract is the main result of interaction in the first transition. The Hobbesian form of hydro-social

contract refers to bipolar dichotomy between the state, as a developer, and the society, as a water consumer. There are highly asymmetrical power configurations between the state and society, favouring the former in the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract. The second transition occurs when supply sided solutions such as building dams, irrigation systems, regularities or HPPs to tackle with water issues can no longer deal with water issues. Society begins to consider these projects are too costly or environmentally problematic. A great deal of changes in domestic level might help shift from the first to the second transition. These domestic factors are peculiar to each empirical contexts. The Lockean form of hydro-social contract is the main result of second transition. It refers to triangular power configurations between state, society and special interest groups such as NGOs, private sector. In the Lockean form of hydro-social contract, while state retains its primary position, its sanctioned discourse is challenged by civil society on environmental and social basis. Moreover, private sector also involves in decision-making processes. Therefore, on the one hand, there is less power asymmetry between the state and other actors, on the other hand, there are variety of interactions among these stakeholders [7].

3. The First Transition: The Hobbesian Hydro-social Contract in Turkey

The aim of this section is to analyse the way in which the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract was established in state-society relations in the context of Turkey. The extensive hydraulic endeavours conducted by the Turkish government show that the Turkish discursive elites considered water resources development as vital for socio-economic development and modernisation of the country since its foundation. Water resources development was considered as a vital issue that the state must deal with it. Therefore, supply-sided approach that includes construction of dams, HPPs, ponds, regulatory infrastructures was adopted by the state elites, which led to the first transition and creation of Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract in state-state society relations. In the similar line with the rest of the world, this mentality has led to birth of hydraulic mission as a sanctioned discourse and creation of strong institutionalization in water sector since the early period of the republic.

Turkey is one of the leading countries in the world, which is fully engaged in its hydraulic mission very extensively. The birth of hydraulic mission can be traced back to late period of the Ottoman Empire. In this regard, attempts were made to restore ancient irrigation systems of Mesopotamia and irrigation projects were introduced in the central Anatolia. El-Hindiye dam, which was the first modern hydraulic infrastructure in the Euphrates and Tigris basin, were completed in the late period of the Ottoman Empire [15, 16]. After the foundation of republic of Turkey in 1923, the state gave a particular priority to water resources development and water issues were considered as matters that the state must deal with it. This conviction of the state was followed by initial institutionalization in water sector in the early periods of the republic. In this regard, Ataturk, the founder of the republic of Turkey, highlights that *“scientific ability and power of hydraulic works institution must be strong so it would be one of important measures for our economic life [Author’s own translation]”*. This was also an official order for establishment of the General Hydraulic Works Institute founded in 1929. [15]. Numbers of hydraulic works such as irrigation systems, HPPs and dams were built by the General Hydraulic Works during the early period of the republic. Thereafter, the institute constituted the roots of the State Hydraulic Works (DSI-Turkish Acronym). Since its foundation in 1954, the DSI has completed a great deal of hydraulic works

such as giant dams, HPPs, irrigation systems, ponds, regulatory infrastructures and so on all around the country. It established a strong bureaucratic structure with 26 regional directories across the country. According to official figures, the DSI used roughly one third of Turkey's entire investment budget in the period between 1980 and 2009 [17]. With almost 3.7 billion dollars budget and 20.000 personnel, the DSI continues to be one of the strongest public institutions and it still uses a considerable part of government's investment expenditures [18].

Turkey's extensive hydraulic mission, led by the DSI and other governmental bodies, has received almost no challenges and opposition for decades in domestic level. It is safe to argue that state discursive elites have been able to impose their sanctioned discourses, which can be labelled as hydraulic mission, in domestic level. Here, the question that needs to be posed is how the state elites have been able to establish such a hegemonic order in domestic level with respect to water resources development and management. The combination of the following factors, outlined below, resulted in construction of such hegemonic order in state-society relations.

First, hydraulic mission, as a sanctioned discourse has been constituted the dominant view in water resources development until 1970s in the world. The concept has initially emerged in developed countries in the early 20th century and it has diffused though developing and under-developed countries in the following decades [12]. As a newly founded republic, Turkey has become one of the recipients of the hydraulic mission. The hydraulic mission as a, prevailing ideology has shaped the Turkish hydrocracy and it has informed interests of Turkish discursive elites. The similarities between the Tennessee Valley Project in the US and the Southeastern Anatolian Project (GAP-Turkish acronym) in terms of their logic of development exemplifies how international norms are diffused from the developed to developing countries. The hydraulic mission as a sanctioned discourse has remained unchallenged both in the world and in Turkey until 1970s. However, while new discourses in water resources development such as emphasizing environmental and socio-economic adverse effects of dams, HPPs and irrigation systems has challenged the dominant view in the developed countries since 1970s and onwards, the concept of hydraulic mission has largely remained intact in spite of criticisms and oppositions in many countries like Turkey even after emergence of new counter-sanctioned discourses in the developed countries. As a result which while state promotes the idea of extensive hydraulic development, other actors such as societal forces (NGOs, communities) acting within and outside of the country, intergovernmental organisations promote counter paradigms considering socio-environmental impacts of hydraulic infrastructures [19].

Second, the nature of state-society relations in Turkey has created a great power asymmetry between the state elites and the society, which favours the former. It is within this power asymmetry between the state elites and society, the former has been able to impose its sanctioned discourse over the latter. Regarding state-society relations in Turkey, the following features can be identified. The first characteristic of state-society relationship is the existence of military-bureaucratic ruling class, which is almost separated from the society and the 'modernization from above' mentality adopted by these discursive elites. Infrastructural modernization is an important aspect of Turkish modernization project since the foundation of republic of Turkey [20, 21]. Therefore, on the one hand, infrastructures such as motorways, railways or hydraulic infrastructures (dams, hydropower plants, irrigation systems ponds etc.) have been considered by the state elites as tools to overcome

socio-economic disparities between the centre and the periphery [22]; on the other hand military-bureaucratic elites have been able to gain legitimacy and power by portraying these projects as collective interests for the entire society [21]. Although other pillars of the regime such as secularism or unitary nationalism have been challenged by political movements, the developmentalist modernization project has remained unchallenged [23]. Mainstream political movements from different traditions have similar mentality in the issue of development in spite of their well-documented political divisions. It is within this structure that the discursive elites have been able to promote and impose their sanctioned discourses with lack of opposition. The second characteristic of the state-society relations is the paternalistic style of governance in state-society relations. The paternalistic character of state can be traced back to the period of Ottoman Empire. The Turkish bureaucratic-military ruling elite inherited a state, where there is no national bourgeoisie demanding political power. Within this context, the ruling elite could pursue its modernization project without facing any challenge from society [21]. The final characteristic of state-society relations is the salience of patron-client relationship between the state and society. These patron client networks serve as spaces for representation and tools that the state gain legitimacy and consent from the society. Here, it is worth noting that those demands, which are in line with Turkey's modernisation project, are met by the state, while others, potentially challenging the sanctioned discourse, are not taken into consideration. For example, when two competing demands, environmental protection and construction of a large-scale HPP, are at stake, it was the latter that is opted and prioritised by the state [21].

Finally, lack of powerful and autonomous civil society resulted in the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract. Until the military coup in 1980s, civil society had very limited role in domestic politics. This is particularly due to strong state tradition in Turkey and it is directly related with related with the nature of state-society relations summarized in the previous paragraph. The Turkish hydraulic mission was unilaterally introduced by the state discursive elites as part of Turkey's developmentalist modernisation project. It was not a product of collective interests of different stakeholders. Therefore, societal demands with respect to water resources development are taken into consideration as long as they are in the same line with this sanctioned discourse. Other demands, considered as direct or potential threats, are disregarded. [21]. Furthermore, while civil society creates the medium of relationship between state and society in the West, the patron-client networks constitutes the main medium for political representation in state-society relations in Turkey. This pattern can be seen in the relationship between state and civil society, which creates the main obstacle for autonomous civil society. Therefore, while counter sanctioned discourses in water resources management such as environmental discourse were promoted by civil society against hydraulic mission in the world since 1970s, these discourses have not been reflected in the Turkish context until 2000s.

4. The Second Transition: Evolution from the Hobbesian to the Lockean Form of Hydro-Social Contract in Turkey

This final section seeks to analyse the socio-political changes in Turkey, which has led to evolution from the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract to the Lockean hydro-social contract in state-society relations in Turkey. The HSCT suggests that there needs to be a 'trigger event' that would

lead to second transition in state-society relations. For instance, this ‘trigger event’ in the South African context, to which the HSCT is applied, is the first democratic elections held in 1994 [7]. Accordingly, in the post 1994 process, there has been numbers of legislative changes in water resources development and management that has paved way for the second transition and transformation from Hobbesian to the Lockean form of hydro-social contract in state society relations. It would be argued that the 1980 military coup d’état can be considered as a ‘trigger event’ in state-society relations with respect to water in Turkey. This study suggests that the following changes that has occurred since 1980 has led to evolution from the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract to the Lockean form of hydro-social contract in state-society relations.

First, while the role of civil society was very limited before 1980s, there is both qualitative and quantitative change in involvement of civil society in domestic politics in the post 1980 process [2, 24]. Keyman argues that economic and political liberalisation processes in the aftermath of 1980 has produced a conducive political environment for civil society to flourish. It follows that initially emergence of identity politics (the rise of political Islam and the Kurdish nationalism) and attempts to democratise state-society relations has resulted in increase in numbers of civil society in 1980s and 1990s, even though their impact has remained limited. With the European Union (EU) accession process in 2000s, civil society has also started to be more influential actors in political processes in various issues such as human rights, gender issues, and environmental issues and so on [25].

Second, the political and economic liberalization in the post-1980 have resulted in adoption of norms and principles with respect to environmental issues in domestic law. Growing salience of environmental issues were also followed by creation of public administrations to deal with environmental issues. Although the first reference to environmental issues in domestic law dates back to 1930s, environmental issues were first time extensively dealt with in 1970s. As Turkey became member of international institutions dealing with environmental issues and environmental conciseness have begun to gain currency in the world in 1970, reference to environmental issues in official documents has become more salient [26]. For instance in the third Five-year development program (1973-77), it was highlighted that economic development must take into consideration environmental issues. In the 1982 constitution, adopted after the 1980 military coup, it was clearly stated in article 56 that everybody has a right to live in balanced and healthy environment. The first comprehensive environmental law was enacted in 1983, which was further amended in 2006. The Turkish government has actively attended major international submits such as 1972 Stockholm, 1992 Rio, 2002 Johannesburg and it has ratified numbers of international conventions with respect to environmental issues [27]. Moreover, the EU accession process also strongly has influenced the legal context, environmental policies and administrative settings with respect to environmental issues [28]. Finally, one of the important developments regarding increasing involvement of environmental discourse in the Turkish legal order is adoption of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) directive, which came into force in 1993. The directive was further amended in 2009, 2011 and 2013 in the context of aligning the Turkish EIA Directive with the EU EIA directive. The EIA requires preparing an environmental impact assessment plan for any construction works with particular size. Therefore, with the enactment of the EIA, almost all hydraulic works are subject to have a proper EIA plan before proceeding for construction. The EIA has provided the civil society a considerable leverage to influence in decision-making

processes on hydraulic projects [29]. Thus the empirical evidence shows that anti-dam activist networks have frequently appealed to national courts to curb construction works on the basis that the EIA prepared for the project does not fulfill the environmental criteria. Often national courts have decided in favor of civil society group, which either curb or slow down the construction works. It is also worth noting that the temporal scope of the EIA directive became politically contested between the government and civil society. For instance, in spite of its size, the Ilisu dam project was immune to EIA since the master plan of the project was completed before 1993, which the EIA directive was not part of the Turkish legal order [22]. Whether such hydraulic development projects that are planned before the EIA directive must nevertheless require EIA process or not also has become an area of contestation between the state and civil society.

Third, it is argued by the HSCT that while the birth of environmental consciousness against hydraulic infrastructures is one aspect of the second transition, tackling with water issues through demand management is the other. As mentioned above, supply sided solutions led by the state are the main patterns, in the context of the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract, these solutions became insufficient given the rising population growth and increase in water pressure. Therefore, considering water as a commodity, marketization of water, privatization have become more important aspects of water resources development since 1980s across the world. This has led to growing involvement of private sector in water resources development. As neoliberal policies have been promoted in the post 1980 period in Turkey, there has been a growing privatization in water sector since 1980s. The initial steps of liberalization is introduction of new investment models in water resources development. Investment in hydraulic infrastructure used to be done by public spending. In some large-scale hydraulic projects the Turkish government also sought to mobilize funding from international donors such as the World Bank. While this traditional model of investment has remained intact, new investment models such as Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT), Build-Own-Operate (BOO) have become options for investment in water sector [29, 30]. This shift, which occurred in the 1980s, has resulted in involvement of private sector actors such as infrastructure Transnational Corporations (TNCs), nation-wide business, and private banks in decision making processes. Furthermore, the enactment of the Energy Market Law (EML), which came into force in 2003 and subsequently revised in 2004 and 2005, is another important development in privatization and marketization in water sector. With the EML adopted, the private sector actors have begun to apply to the DSI in order to sign Water Rights Agreements for producing electricity in the electricity market [30]. The recent data published by the DSI, shows that there has been increasing involvement of private sectors in hydropower generation [31]. The increasing involvement of the private sector in constructions of small and medium scale HPPs have become one of the core areas of environmental conflict across the country. Both local and nation-wide advocacy networks have been established to oppose these projects on the basis that they have adverse social and environmental impacts since 2000s.

Finally, as the HSCT rightly highlights that transitions in state-society relations do not occur in a vacuum. There are numbers of cases in which transnational, nation-wide and local advocacy networks have been established against hydraulic projects in order to prevent from being completed across the world. These conflicts also have also resulted in constructions of counter-sanctioned discourses, which seek to address social, political, cultural and environmental adverse impacts of these projects. These newly promoted sets of norms, principles and ideas have also influenced

behaviors of actors such as TNCs, Export Credit Agencies (ECAs), private creditors, and international donors. As a result, these actors have become obliged to follow certain criteria and they have demanded fulfillment of these criteria from the states [32, 33]. For instance, considering the Ilisu dam controversy, the ECAs demanded the Turkish government to fulfill certain environmental, cultural and social criteria to guarantee the finance of the project [22]. Informal alliances are established between these networks as in the case of the alliance between environmental activists of the Ilisu dam in Turkey and activists of Belo Monte Dam in Brazil [34, 35]. Involvement of infrastructure transnational corporations, private creditors, and ECAs of the third party governments in constructions of dams enables these advocacy networks spaces for influencing in decision-making processes. The recent controversy developed around the Ilisu dam in Turkey is a typical example how transnational advocacy networks have influenced in decision-making by engaging in these circles [22].

5. Conclusion

There has been a notable change in state society relations in Turkey since 1980. This shift in state-society relations were also reflected in domestic hydropolitical context in Turkey. Particularly, growing environmental conciseness on constructions of hydraulic infrastructures and growing influence of private sector clearly shows this pattern since late 1990s. The HSCT developed by Anthony Turton and Richard Meissner on the South African hydropolitical contexts provides a useful theoretical framework in understanding the evolution of state-society relations with respect to water issues in the Turkish context. Drawing upon the HSCT and being informed by empirical evidence, this study argued that the Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract in which the asymmetrical bipolar relations between the state and society regarding water issues was the main pattern until 1980. The paternalistic and patronage character of state-society relations, which was constructed in certain historical context, promotion of hydraulic mission as a sanctioned discourse by the state discursive elites, and lack of societal forces are the primary reasons, which led to Hobbesian form of hydro-social contract. However, notable changes have occurred in the post 1980s period, which have gradually changed the state-society relations in general and water related issues in particular. Therefore, recent empirical evidence regarding anti-dam activism and active involvement of private sector suggests that there has been an ongoing evolution from the Hobbesian form hydro-social contract to the Lockean form of hydro-social contract in the Turkish domestic hydropolitical context.

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