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# Ecological Catastrophe

Nature Talks Back

Pelşin Tolhildan

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Would a human being set fire to their own house? Yes, they would! Would a human cut the tree branch they sit on? Yes, indeed! Would humanity, as often repeated in Yasar Kemal's novel "Ince Memed", pull a knife on the table they eat on? Oh yes! Would a human being grow up to call the mother womb that gave birth to them "savage"? Definitely! Until that fire comes to surround them, until that branch falls on their head, until that knife touches their bone, until that nest completely closes to them so that they are left breathless, human beings would, have done, and unfortunately still continue to do all of the aforementioned things. Of course not all of a sudden, but every since they became victims of human-made mentalities and systems. Now we can call it the "ecology issue" or we can call it nature teaching us a lesson, in any case we are paying the price for our betrayal on nature.

Every phenomenon whose value we do not appreciate makes us pay the price. The bigger the value whose value we do not recognize, the bigger the price we pay for betraying it. If it is our own nature whose value we do not appreciate, the nature into which we are born, this price will turn into global

warming and burn us, it will become a forest fire and roast us, it will become a flood and drown us, it will turn into ice and freeze us, it will become contamination and poison us. And for every day that we ignore nature's calls to solve the problem, death will hit us even harder. But has it always been the case that we did not recognize the importance of nature? Is this how we developed? How could we become the enemies and killers of the oceans, forests, lands, and air that have given birth to us? And how could the same nature, which is our birth nest, turn into fire raining down on us, into flood, and into poison that throws up on us? Life is still in nature's hands, just like death. But when and why did nature's start proving to its own children, who kill life, its own ability to kill? Does nature have a mind that makes fun of our mind which considers itself as the supreme one among "God's highest creations"? Our soul creates disasters when being hurt and it is a part that comes from this nature – so perhaps, when we hurt this nature's soul, it takes revenge by destroying! But why? And how? These are now questions that no human who lives on this world can escape from any longer. Understanding where, when and how this harm and the resulting process of having to pay the price for it, have begun, must be the responsibility of every human who wants to live in freedom. So in order to understand the issue, let's start at the roots. Let us have a look at what kind of mentality the mentality was that we have lost and how it related to nature:

*"Natural society's mentality world relies on an animated understanding of nature. It believes that every phenomenon in nature has a spirit. Spirits are understood as features that secure aliveness. In the totemic religions the concept of an external, ruling deity apart from the self is not yet developed. Great effort is made to be in harmony with nature's spirits. Failure to do so is similar to death. When this is the fundamental perspective on nature, an extraordinary need for harmony emerges. According to the most fundamental principle of ecology, we are face to face*

*with life. Effort is made to avoid societal life from going against the natural forces. When constructing religions and ethics, the most fundamental principle is the harmony with the environment and the natural forces. This principle is so deeply rooted in the mentality that it is valued as a religious and moral tradition. In fact, this is the principle of life's natural flow manifesting itself in the human society. There is no being that does not consider its environment. Short-term deviations are overcome in a stream within external and internal conditions; otherwise, by being completely left out of the system, they cease their existence. The importance of the principle of ecology for human society derives from this fundamental feature of nature.*

*In natural society, all members of the sociality organically participate in the entirety of life. Everyone is a genuine, essential part of society. Belief and perceptions are common. The concepts of lying and cheating have not yet developed. It is as though they speak the same childish language with nature. To dominate nature, to abuse it is the biggest sin, taboo, and evil against their ethics and beliefs, their newly developed societal rules. What was turned upside down in the slave-holding statist society is this religious and ethical fundamental principle”.*

However, humanity increasingly lost touch with this ethical understanding:

*The rise of the slave-holding statist society constitutes a fundamental break with this vital principle. The development of the environmental, ecological question along with this particular direction that society has taken is thus fundamentally linked to the beginning of civilization. The civilization of classed society is a society at conflict with nature. The main reason for this phenomenal question has to do with the counterrevolutionary slaveholding mentality paradigm of this new society”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> – Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, *Bir Halkı Savunmak, Devletçi Toplum –Köle Toplumun Oluşumu*, p.33

Indeed, the break from natural society and the transition to the slaver mentality-paradigm have come at a heavy price. Once the world's ties were loosened and removed, the bonds between nature and social life transformed from a harmonic, mutually nourishing relationship to a subject-object relation. The image of a mother-woman, who feeds a child with one breast and an animal cub with the other breast has become laughable, even imaginary in our eyes today. In the western enlightenment tradition, we started to say: *"There is no difference between the cries of an animal or the grinding of the machine when experimenting"*. The same mentality reached horrific dimensions in the hands of the church in the tortures of witches, the wise women. They too, became objects of limitless science. *"The most realistic way of looking for the roots of the increasingly deepening ecological crisis, which develops parallel to the crisis of the social system, is to consider the beginning of civilization. The more alienation within society happens due to domination within society, the more the alienation from nature is realized."*<sup>2</sup> The human has become cruel towards nature by oppressing its own species:

*"Especially the scientific method developed by Francis Bacon constituted an attempt to enforce an order that would have an rationalistic and scientific effect on nature. Similar to the determination of the movement of planets, this scientific method required the extraction of nature from its spirit in order to implement rationalistic methodological processes. Carolyn Merchant, in her book 'The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution' claims that it was in this age when nature was identified with woman and that along with Machiavelli, scientists like Bacon started expressing their desire to oppress 'irrational' (woman-like) nature. In fact, Bacon used the analogy of the interrogation of witches to argue for the scientific methodology of the extraction*

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<sup>2</sup> – Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, *Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumsal Ekolojiye Dönüş*, p.133

*tally an ideological consciousness. It is like the bridge between the borders between philosophy and ethics. Only if the politics that aim to save us from the contemporary crisis are ecological, it can lead us towards a right societal system"*<sup>7</sup>.

*"No matter how small, there are the remains of natural society in everybody"*<sup>8</sup>. Perhaps this means to look at our inner mirror when looking for solutions. Only if everybody turns towards this inner mirror to examine one's own responsibilities, consciousness and actions, ecological problems, and nature's mysterious, extraordinary existence can be felt. With this in mind, we must not allow capitalism to propagate individualist solutions to what requires a global system change.

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<sup>7</sup> – Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, *Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumsal Ekolojiye Dönüş*, p.136

<sup>8</sup> – Imralı prison island notes

to organize and mobilize all of these efforts and bring about a faster and more efficient intervention. Abdullah Öcalan's statement that "the revolution of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ecological" not only stresses the extent of the solution, but also its importance, as well as the idea that the crisis is indeed resolvable when the solutions are implemented. This statement is also important to understand and expose the cleverness of market circles and their views that the global ecological crisis can be resolved within capitalism or through reforms. When we look at the effects of the problem on our lives, even if roughly, it is clear that a revolutionary viewpoint and practice is necessary. In order to see this, the problem must be approached in an ethical way. Because if our real standard in our attitude towards nature is the natural society, and if natural society is the stem cell of the ethical-political society; our perspective on the resolution of ecological issues must contain an ethical dimension: *"It is not possible to defend the rationality, ethics of any societal system that does not unify with nature. The reason for the system being overcome in terms of rationality and morality is the fact that it is in the greatest conflict with nature. The relationship between the chaos experienced by the capitalist societal system and environmental catastrophe is dialectical. Only the exit from the system can overcome the radical contradictions with nature. It is clear that environmental movements alone cannot overcome this contradictory character. On the other hand, an ecological society necessitates a moral transformation as well. The anti-ethical system of capitalism can only be overcome with an ecological attitude. The ethics-conscience relationship necessitates an empathetic and sympathetic spirituality. This in turn can only carry meaning with a competent ecological equipment. It is friendship with nature, it is the belief in natural religion. As such, it means to re-unite with the natural organic society with a new and awakened consciousness. A societal consciousness devoid of an ecological consciousness cannot help but dissolve and corrupt, as seen in the case of realsocialism. Ecological consciousness is fundamen-*

*of 'truth' from nature. He wrote: 'In order to observe nature's adventures, there is no other way than to force it into a corner. That is the only way to rule it. According to Merchant, 'nature is seen as a woman who takes orders from man and operates under his authority'"*<sup>3</sup>.

The result of this struggle in the name of conquering irrationality under the banner of reason was complete irrationality in turn. It is out of discussion that in the name of "obtaining the truth", truth itself was betrayed. After our mentality broke away from natural society's mentality, the name of the societal system changed but its mentality did not. It is a mentality that breaks from natural society, betrays itself and nature, and every day cuts the tree branch it sits on. It does not matter whether we call this mentality formation dominant, statist, slaveholding, feudal or capitalist. All of these together constitute a break from natural society and nature. They make up the opposite pole to natural society, in other words, they are anti-nature. They are anti-life, anti-human. Thus they are anti-ecological. If sociality and nature managed to live together for thousands of years in harmony, it means that human, in fact the human of natural society, proved this reality: The human is not the opposite of the same nature it came from, on the contrary, it is nature's very own child. And thus, they can live together without eradicating each other. Thus, contrary to the long imposition of western mentality, neither nature is savage, nor does human need to survive by fighting against and conquer this "savagery". This is a philosophical lie which tries to break the truth into subject-object dichotomies, incites conflict, and aims to perpetuate the hegemonic system as eternal. It is a story of a conscious struggle by hegemonic systems to alienate humans and nature from each other. This story of alienation has attained an irreversible structure under capitalism. Every-

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<sup>3</sup> – Josephine Donovan, 1985, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions*

body was turned into a subject of this massacre on nature in the name of bravery, in the name of achieving victory in the war against the “wild”. Now it is the turn of this story’s “object” to speak. Now, it is talking. And every day, it gives us the message that we need to take it seriously. Whether we see it or not, now the word belongs to nature. This word cries that it no longer wants to be the object of this story:

If we take a look at internet searches related to thousands of recent news items on “environment” or “ecology”, while keeping in mind that such searches can only scratch the surface of the real extent of our earth’s ecological disaster, it is easy to hear this outcry. Dams and other infrastructures that swallow natural beauties, nuclear plants, fossil fuel energy sources, forest fires due to wars or climate change, petrol contamination of water and soil, chemical waste dumpings, deforestation, intoxication of soil, water and air due to gold cyanidation, the global food crisis and the development of GMOs, the dangerous disposal of medication, lack of access to clean drinking water, greenhouse gases related to industrial agriculture, extinction of species, mined territories, earthquakes, activated volcanoes, tsunamis, the emergence of illnesses, the disappearance of natural environments in favor of cities and factories, acid rain... and perhaps many other phenomena we may not even be aware of and which have caused ecological disasters by human hand. Extending this list not only depresses us, but the multiple dimensions of the problem is also illustrative of nature’s mysterious self-defense power.

Nature has an evolutionary character that has been in action for millions of years. This is not about the fittest exterminating the less fit. Perhaps it is true that the less fit decrease in numbers. However, the smallest organisms to the great ecosystems in nature arrange, adapt and change themselves according to changing conditions. In other words, nature resists. It creates its own mechanisms to defend itself. Or the human-caused issues upset nature’s balance and result in catastrophes that bring

*ecological phenomenon is to prevent the relationship between nature and society to become a gap. If this gap is not closed as soon as possible, the society will turn into dinosaurs*<sup>6</sup>. When we look at the issue from this perspective, we can make a global effort to sense the problem and bring it to the agenda.

The World Social Forum’s slogan “Another World is Possible”, the UN’s climate conferences, locally organized free ecological forums, social urban movements, the agreement of big countries on issues like reducing carbon intensity, countries’ discussions on bio-security, the creation of ecological collectives, hundreds of thousands of activists around the world risking their lives to draw attention to ecological issues, the discussions of eco-socialists and eco-feminists, the organization of ecology festivals, UNESCO compiling a list on endangered world heritage, sustainable energy conferences, the slogan “The dead don’t wear gold” of those whose soil has been contaminated, and thousands of actions, events, organizations, work, increasing awareness and activism are all signs of an effort to close this gap between nature and society. However, when considering the size of the catastrophe we are facing, these initiatives remain dispersed and insufficient. Let us look at the call made by an ecology site: *“The ecological crisis is not a coincidental feature of capitalism. It is in the DNA of the system. It is not possible to resolve through reforms this incessant hunger, the desire to multiply profits perpetually. The only thing that capitalists can think of when considering the ecological crisis is how much more profit they can make out of it. Therefore, the struggle against the ecological crisis cannot succeed until the capitalist system is removed.”*

Indeed, the mentality of the solution is important. To create a common ecological mindset in the face of the capitalist, civilizationist mentality that created ecological destruction means

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<sup>6</sup> – Demokratik ve Ekolojik Toplum İçin Bir Taslak (Proje) Düşüncesi, p.112

knows how many nuclear tests there are? How much have our seas, our lands been contaminated by petrol or toxic material? We don't know exactly the amount of greenhouse gases and carbon contamination. Who would know the biodiversity and ecosystems that were eliminated by the soldier hands that also burned down the forests of Kurdistan? In short, there is an uncontrollable attack on nature by humans. That is why perhaps nature will strike back with a horrible surprise through a series of uncontrollable disasters that we cannot anticipate. Our aim is neither to demonize humans, nor to advocate for a protection of nature that is separate from the human and society. We merely discuss a factual reality that was designed by human hand, mind, and action, perhaps by lacking the knowledge over the importance of time.

At the beginning of this writing, we mentioned the development of the ecological issue with the rise of the slave-holding system. But those concerned with ecological problems are aware that the system that has deepened and further led these issues to insustainability is capitalism. *"Europe's individualism has come to embody the massacre of the society and its ecology. The capitalist system's establishment of its dominance, its move from individuality to individualism, not only reversed social gains, but also caused the biggest ecological deviation in history"*<sup>5</sup>.

Ecological issues and their sources have been discussed through a variety of philosophical, societal, eco-feminist and many other perspectives and have thus become visible as a serious problem for years now. Perhaps the real problem then is how much this problem is being felt. This concerns the real powers of the society. Because when the real forces that make up society start to sense this problem, a large part of the solution will have been achieved. Because *"The actual*

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<sup>5</sup> – Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, *Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumda Komünal ve Demokratik Değerlerin Tarihsel Özü*, p.95

about great changes. While humans tried to conquer and dominate nature and to engage in a competition to show nature who is the master, they forgot a fairly simple phenomenon. Nature was their home, their birth nest, it was the life atmosphere to which humans owe their bread, water, their very existence and happiness. *"The fundamental reason for ecological problems is the ruling power rendering an anti-natural life possible through its tyranny and lies. By denying nature's role in life and by replacing it with fake deities and creators, it is possible to call nature 'blind force'"*<sup>4</sup>. But the eyes and hearts that were so focused on profit ambitions remained oblivious to this naked reality. While the belief was held that nature has been made mute after all these attacks, the one who was forced on their knees was the human in the end. In a way, nature managed to express itself in many ways, while it was the humans to swallow their tongue. In order to see the ways in which we pay the price for destroying the right to live of the same nature we owe our life to, let us have a brief look at some natural disaster news at the time when this article was first written (2009–2010):

*Experts claim that the flood in Pakistan and the extreme heat in Russia are linked to the extraordinary impacts of global warming. Due to flood and landslides, more than 700 people in China, more than 1.600 people in Pakistan, more than 130 people in India have been killed. Thousands of people disappeared. Millions of people lost their homes. In the smog and dust that covers Moscow and which resulted in drought, toxic material has been discovered. In the fires that have started in more than 600 different areas, 50 people in Russia have been killed. The fires started to affect the military areas so that the explosive materials in these regions were carried to other areas by the authorities. In Chile, 1.5 million homes were destroyed, the number of disappeared people rose to 300. Chile's president Bachelet claimed that he could not find the*

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<sup>4</sup> – Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, *Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumsal Ekolojiye Dönüş*, 134

*words to describe the 8.8 level earthquake and the catastrophe it caused. In a country with a population of 16 million, at least 2 million were affected by the earthquake. Rescue attempts continue in Italy's north, where an earthquake took the lives of 250 people. In the earthquake, 15 thousand buildings were rendered inoperable. It has been reported that the bush fires that have been continuing in the south of Australia for days have been caused by arson. Fires continue still in 20 different places. The number of deaths might increase to 230. Global warming is melting the glaciers of Mount Kilimanjaro, which is considered world heritage. The forest fires in Greece cannot be brought under control. The fire that started near Athens is approaching the city center. Due to the increasing fire, strengthened by the wind, a state of emergency has been declared.*

Things have only worsened ever since. More recently, a scientific report by the WWF revealed that 60% of animal populations have been wiped out by humanity since 1970 with disastrous effects on nature and its human children. It seems that ecological catastrophe has advanced to such a degree that it would take up to 7 million years for nature to recover even if destruction would be halted now. Entire species are predicted to die out, countless hurricanes, droughts, floods, wildfires and glacier meltings are anticipated. Experts speak of a "climate genocide". The most affected humans of these developments are in the Global South, in particular indigenous and rural communities, whose relationship to nature is symbiotic and organic. The ecological crisis is also caused by global arms trade and likewise wars are often triggered by changes in the climate, due to unsustainable capitalist interests in natural resources. Yet, states and companies, the main culprits of ecological catastrophe consciously withdraw from legal and international responsibilities and resort to means of denying the obvious, disastrously approaching death of life. As if to summon the end of the world, they announce further destruction of natural habitats and the exploitation of life. And there are more news items

about bigger and smaller ecological disasters and catastrophes that are not include here.

Is it possible that humans call human-made catastrophes "natural disaster", in order to cover up their own guilt? Or perhaps, by calling these disasters "God's plan", they try to find a divine partner in crime? In reality, no disaster is able to grow this much and claim so many lives, without the impact of humans. Indeed, human-made industry, technology, wars, weapons (chemical, biological or any other kind of weaponry), overpopulation and many other developments or inventions burn nature, and nature burns back. The more it gets destroyed through human hand, it destroys back. The more it gets massacred by humans, it brings death to humanity.

These are neither expressions of a pessimistic point of view, nor do they reflect the propaganda of a science fiction hero that is looking for a piece of land to start a new social life with the seeds in their hands after all the lands have been eradicated. Maybe these catastrophes may not have impacted all of us individually yet. Perhaps we have not yet seen hundreds of people die at once in front of our eyes. But everybody who lives on this planet needs to know that the human-made catastrophes are as close to us as are our breath, water and bread, even as the blood running in our veins. As always, we are under nature's siege. But this nature is no longer the natural nature of thousands of years ago. This nature is a nature whose nature has been manipulated. That is why its siege is unlike its mother nest. We are in the siege of a nature that has been hurt, divided, defiled, poisoned, harmed and made to bleed. Of course, in cases when nature seemed defenseless against humans, there have been times where it brought disasters in turn. But what was the difference? The nature of that nature had not yet been played with. Through certain observations, humans were able to more or less identify and estimate the location, time, extent of such disasters and act accordingly. But nowadays we are not even aware of how we exactly harm nature as humans. Who