



Article Info/Makale Bilgisi

✓Received/Geliş: 23.08.2017 ✓Accepted/Kabul: 26.01.2018

DOI: 10.30794/pausbed.424394

Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

Akyol, Ö. (2018). "A Deep Ecological Reading of Yaşar Kemal's The Birds Have Also Gone" *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, sayı 32, Denizli. s.237-242.

A DEEP ECOLOGICAL READING OF YAŞAR KEMAL'S THE BIRDS HAVE ALSO GONE

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Abstract

Yaşar Kemal is an author with the outspoken advocacy of his political view and can also be considered as the one who is excelled at reflecting the actual panorama of his age from critical point of view. At the target of his criticism there lies the fast urbanisation period to which many provincial people desperately try to adapt. This theme is illustrated in the novel *The Birds Have Also Gone* (1978) whose story revolves around a group of young boys in Istanbul trapping migrant birds and selling them to the customers who aim to gain paradise by setting these birds free. Through eco-critical lenses this business is a direct manifestation of anthropocentrism which will probably cause serious environmental crisis in near future. Anthropocentrism ignores intrinsic values of nonhuman beings and justifies human interference in the nonhuman world. As eminent eco-critics, Arne Naess and George Sessions assert "Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening" (Naess& Sessions, 1995:68). This study then tries to explore the issue of anthropocentrism in Yaşar Kemal's *The Birds Have Also Gone* with reference to the theories of deep ecology.

Keywords: *Yaşar Kemal, Deep ecology, Anthropocentrism.*

YAŞAR KEMAL'İN KUŞLAR DA GİTTİ ROMANININ DERİN EKOLOJİK BİR BAKIŞ

Özet

Politik görüşlerini açıkça savunan bir yazar olan Yaşar Kemal kendi zamanının gerçek panoramasını eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yansıtmakta uzmandır. Eleştirilerinin hedefinde kırsal kesim insanların adaptasyon problemi yaşadığı hızlı şehirleşme süreci vardır. Bu konu hikâyesini göçmen kuşları yakalayıp serbest bıraktıklarında cennet kazanacakları vaadiyle İstanbul'daki müşterilere satan bir grup gençten alan *Kuşlar Da Gitti* (1978) adlı romanında ele alınır. Eko-eleştirel bir gözle bakıldığında bu iş ileride ciddi ekolojik problemler doğuracak insan merkezci bakış açısının açıkça bir göstergesidir. İnsan merkezilik insan dışı varlıkların kendine has değerleri olduğunu görmezden gelir ve insanoğlunun onların doğasına müdahale etme hakkı olduğunu savunur. Önde gelen eko-eleştirmenlerden Arne Naess ve George Sessions'ın ifade ettiği gibi "İnsanın kendi dışında kalan bütün canlılara mevcut müdahalesi üst seviyededir ve bu durum gittikçe kötüleşmektedir" (Naess, 1995: 68 çev.). Bu çalışma derin ekolojinin söylemlerine atıfta bulunarak insan merkezilik kavramını Yaşar Kemal'in *Kuşlar da Gitti* adlı romanı üzerinden açıklamaya çalışır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yaşar Kemal, Derin Ekoloji, İnsan merkezilik.*

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As well as his strong political stance embedded in his works Kemal also provides reader with highly illuminating panorama of his age by creating typical characters and treating subjects peculiar to that age. Most of his works usually centre on Anatolian people and their endeavours in life but he also produces works set in Istanbul though comparatively less in number. One of these works is *The Birds Have Also Gone* (1978) whose story revolves around a group of provincial young boys trapping migrant birds and selling them in Istanbul. As stated in the narrative the tradition of aviculture traces back to the age of the Byzantine Empire. The 1000 year old custom, which appears in the novel as sale of birds in front of synagogues, churches and mosques to the customers aiming to gain paradise by setting these birds free (azat buzat), is the preliminary motif in the novel. As a matter of fact the disappearance of this tradition is at the core of the story since the narrator implies that this change refers to social and moral corruption in the society which has alienated from nature in the urbanization period. However this tradition that has been applied for centuries has nothing to do with nature but it is completely anthropocentric activity serving only on behalf of human needs. It not only ruins the balance in nature but also exploits sacred values of societies. The tradition has been seemingly practised as an indication of compassion and respect for the sacred but it is essentially a commercial activity corresponding to survival instinct of human beings. The tragic end of the story also reinforces this idea. After losing all their hopes at the bird sale the young boys have no choice but to eat all the birds they have caught in order to survive. This action is also an extension of anthropocentric perception. It is understood that according to the narrator the disappearance of this deep-rooted tradition is the sign of social and moral corruption in the urbanized modern world. Through ecological lenses, however, this tradition which is read human interference in nature ignores the intrinsic value of non-human life and explicitly serves for human purposes. Though all the narrative argues for perpetuity of aviculture tradition this article argues against anthropocentrism and human interference in nature embodied in aviculture tradition in the light of principles of deep ecology.

Anthropocentrism which can easily be delimited as human exceptionalism perceives nature as a source that human beings derive assistance from it. Being postulated as "other", nature is subdued, quashed and subjugated by human beings. Ecocritics believe that the human authority over nature is the primary reason for current environmental crisis or upcoming ones as well. At this point, deep ecology disregards the human authority yet celebrates nature and urges to lead a life where intrinsic values of human and non-human beings are all appreciated. Deep ecology is a term firstly mentioned in 1973 by Arne Naess in a distinctive article titled "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary." Naess faults Western culture for not seeing themselves as a part of the world but rather having human centred approach towards nonhuman entities. He tries to elaborate the differences between his new radical ecological perception and the typical mainstream environmentalism which he sees as an expanded version of European and North American anthropocentrism. This "shallow" (as he calls) paradigm tries to conserve nature and protect biodiversity for the sake of maintaining human welfare and assess nonhuman entities primarily through their benefits on human life. The deep ecological point of view, however, condemns practices of European and North American anthropocentrism and sees itself as "a substantial reorientation of our whole civilization" (Naess, 1989: 45). The movement recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and place this view in the centre of environmental policies. Deep ecology is a way of developing a new balance among the individual, communities and all non-human life in nature. Bill Devall and George Sessions define the theory "It can potentially satisfy our deepest yearnings: faith and trust in our most basic intuitions; courage to take direct action; joyous confidence to dance with the sensuous harmonies discovered through spontaneous, playful intercourse with the rhythms of our bodies, the rhythms of flowing water, changes in the weather and seasons, and the overall processes of life on Earth" (Dewall and Sessions, 1985: 7). Forerunners of deep ecocriticism Arne Naess and George Sessions determine eight principles which can be collected under these headings: inherent value of nonhuman life, diversity of biosphere, vital needs of human beings, human population, human interference in nonhuman world, policy change, quality of life, obligation of action. Some of these principles will be elaborated in this article through the dramatic examples portrayed in *The Birds Have Also Gone*.

The Birds Have Also Gone is a novel which contains the struggle of poor and young people in order to survive in urban life. Semih, Hayri and Süleyman used to live in small towns in Anatolia and for some reasons they have to abandon their hometown and move to a metropolis. It is an experience completely new and mostly challenging for them. One of the boys, Hayri and his family used to live in Rize and had a tea field hosting so many quails but his mother had to sell it so as to pay the attorney's fee for Hayri's father who killed his neighbour. This turns to bloodshed. Therefore Hayri has no option but to move to Istanbul to cover his track as well as to make his living both for him and his mother. Like his friends he wants to resume his life in Istanbul. However, his formation

and expectations contradict what the urban life requires and offers. This is the main reason of the complete frustration Hayri and his friends end up with. In the beginning of the narrative these three friends set up a tent in Florya, comparatively more natural place in Istanbul, start to trap migrant birds and try to sell them especially in front of mosques, churches and synagogues for making their living. Their most probable customers are the elderly and children who buy the birds and set them free to assure Paradise. However, as the narrator tells us this ancient tradition is no longer popular; very few people look eager to buy the birds. The reason for this change can be explained through the varied perception of societies. In the past the aviculture was perceived as a myth which appeared as a model explaining the realities of life. In the modern life, though, myths are replaced by rational thinking empowered by technology and science and they can only appear in nature which is mostly referred as irrational domain. Needless to say disappearance of myths can be explained through this changing perception in the urbanisation period. In this point the narrator believes that the extinction of azat buzat tradition is the inevitable outcome of the period. This idea is dramatically narrated through the frustration of Hayri and his friends who expect to make their living through this tradition.

In the narrative the long known binary opposition becomes prominent; nature represented by Florya Plain and aviculture tradition versus culture symbolized by the city centre and commodification. In the very beginning of the narrative this opposition is depicted with these words: *"They arrived in posh cars, Mercedes, Volkos, Volkswagens, Murats, to fly their toy planes which made more noise than any real air plane as they whirled and dived in the skies above Florya. Crowding around them would be children from the suburbs of Cekmece, Menekse, Cennet mahallesi, and even from as far away as Yesilyurt, all watching in awed reverence, silent, quiet still, only their eyes moving from the toy plane to the person who controlled it. Not once Tuğrul looked up not even when helicopter whirred low above him, almost licking the crest of big poplar"* (Kemal, 1978: 8). It is quite normal to see the children living in provincial areas look mesmerized by technology in 70s Istanbul where *"the belief in rational progress and technology challenge human desires for eternal values and local belonging"* (White, J, B, 1999: 79). Moreover the scene that the helicopter and the poplar tree co-exist clearly underlines the nature culture opposition and also foreshadows this opposition which is abundantly exemplified throughout the narrative. Another example is given through the sale of Suleyman's mother's rug. The rug which was once attributed intangible value and seen as a sign of family heritage transforms into a commodity when it is brought to Istanbul. *"It belonged to his mother, who got it from her own mother when she became a bride. A precious keepsake, it was. Beautiful..."* (Kemal, 1978: 28). However, being completely desperate since he is not able to sell the birds Suleyman has to sell the rug which represents long standing tradition. In this sense he dethrones the tradition and devaluates it at the level of commodity. Suleyman says *"People will snap up an old kilim, but they won't buy a single bird"* (Kemal, 1978: 29). From these words it is understood that the rug is immediately sold not because of its traditional and moral value but its new formation as a commodity. The opposition is also spatially portrayed by contrasting two different places in Istanbul. On the one hand, Taksim, which is *"the most populous part of the town"* (Kemal, 1978: 56), is described as the place in which *"people jostling each other, spitting loudly all over the place, blowing their noses with their fingers and then wiping off the snot onto the nearest tree trunk, the men sickly faces[...]"* (Kemal, 1978: 57). The narrator tries to portray the chaos in the city centre as well as callousness of dwellers to each other and to nature. On the other hand, Florya is the first place where Hayri, Semih and Suleyman settle when they move to Istanbul and they continue to inhabit until the end of the narrative. *"Florya Plain [...] along the fringe of wood, on the little slope that inclined towards the railroad under the almond and fig trees, beside the clump of poplars and even among the patches of thistles"* (Kemal, 1978: 9). It is relatively a more natural place reminding where the boys used to live. These distinctively portrayed two places underline the culture and nature opposition once more. Based on these examples it could be easily stated that anthropocentric ideology of supremacy and exploitive dominance over non-human nature enhances the gap between nature and culture and rejects the idea of interrelatedness which is vitally important in deep ecocriticism.

In addition to these oppositions there is a strong paradox in the narrative. The narrator argues that people become alienated from nature and from their own traditions and values when they become urbanized and technologically surrounded. This alienation is tried to be revealed through disappearance of the azat buzat tradition, which is often associated with the sense of belonging and nature. The narrator says *"Nowadays, it is only the courtyard of Eyup Mosque that children manage to sell a bird or two to be set free. [...] And the children go back home, weary, disappointed, toting their cages still filled to the brim, wondering what to do with all these birds"* (Kemal, 1978: 14-5). In Istanbul, defined as *"godforsaken town"* (Kemal, 1978: 40) in the narrative, people are blamed for their callousness to the moral values and the disappearance of azat buzat tradition is the symbol of this callousness. When considered from the stance of deep ecocriticism, though, the tradition is an

explicit violation of the first principle that covers the inherent value of nonhuman life. The long standing azat buzat tradition, which is associated with nature and moral values of the society, has been merely serving for the benefit for human beings. People capture and sell the birds to make their living and other people buy the birds to assure Paradise. They not only interfere with the balance in nature but also make it serve to their own interest by ignoring the intrinsic value of nonhuman life. The irony is revealed by a question in the narrative when Hayri and Suleyman try to sell the birds in Taksim. A person in the crowd asks *"You commit sin catching the birds, we will do a good deed by setting them free do we"* (Kemal, 1978: 62). Then immediately they are surrounded by the crowd who are discussing about which one is evil; to catch the birds or not to set them free. When viewed from eco-critical perception the first action is the direct interference in nature by human beings for their own wellbeing. In this regard, Naess tries to underline the necessity of appreciating intrinsic value of non-human beings when he argues *"The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes"* (Naess, 1995:68). Not only the idea that human being is the part of whole ecosystem is crystal clear fact but also he does not deserve any privilege over the non-human is another idea deep ecology counts on. All creatures are equal. *"Not to recognize this equality marks an imbalance, and ultimately a failure of the system. This, in turn, results in catastrophic misfortune to the ecosystem and humanity too"* (Lauer, 2005: 318).

The diversity of biosphere is one of the principles of deep ecocriticism. This diversity is perceived not independently but as a whole by deep ecologists. This contains individuals, species, populations, habitat, as well as human and non-human cultures. When this wholeness is disintegrated by ignoring mutual concern and respect, it will probably raise fundamental ecological problems. Based on the argument of integrity that everything is connected to everything else William Rueckert puts forward: *"The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which the two communities- the human, the natural- can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere"* (Rueckert, 1996:107-8). The holistic approach is shattered in the narrative when people in Florya interfere with birds' natural habitat, life span and migration route. *"And may be the birds, impelled by some ancient, deep rooted instinct, will come again to the sky over where that lofty plane tree is now but which will have been cut down by then. [...] They will flutter in little groups over the concrete agglomeration of houses, and finding nowhere to alight will take themselves off like some remote sorrow"* (Kemal, 1978: 85). This may seem a peculiar problem of migrant birds yet it certainly causes breaking of natural cycle and damages the diversity of biosphere.

Another principle of the movement is about the effect of overpopulation on ecological system. Naess asserts that *"The flourishing of human life and culture is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease"* (Naess, 1995: 68). This change resulting from population growth indicates a serious problem which can be explained by the ecological concept "carrying capacity." The concept which is coined by William R. Catton, an American social environmentalist means *"the capacity of an ecosystem to support a given population of a species in a sustainable and renewable manner"* (Catton, 1980: 36). Catton believes that human beings have long been taking over that capacity from other species to themselves. He maintains *"There are already more human beings alive than the world's renewable resources can perpetually support"* (Catton, 1980: 10). This problem at the dangerous phase has utterly devastating effect on the whole ecosystem. Catton anticipates in the Tobias anthology *"carrying capacity, though variable and not easily or always measurable, must be taken into account to understand the human predicament"* (Catton, 1985: 75). Ecological stance indicates that *"efforts to promote the human development by safeguarding opportunities for increasing consumption and overpopulation around the world, does in fact, hurt the long term possibilities for humans and nonhumans alike"* (Shoreman-Quimet&Copnina, 2016: 53). In the narrative this issue is reflected through the change in the panoramic vision of the city:

With the passing years, the thistle fields diminished gradually. New settlements sprang up and expanded, Senlikkoy, Yesilkoy, Ambarlı [...]. Ugly concrete apartment blocks began to crowd the lonely dale of Florya where violets used to grow. And now only this small tract of land between Menekse and Basinkoy, between the sea and the wood, is left for the birds. [...] A new gold rush is on in Istanbul, the rush to buy building sites. (Kemal, 1978: 85)

From anthropocentric point of view, overpopulation seems to be a problem of human beings and next generations. However, in effect, the overuse of natural sources similarly matters for all non-human entities in biosphere and may cause more serious environmental problems in long run.

At the end of the narrative, anthropocentrism dominates the atmosphere at its most dramatic level. When Semih and his friends cannot manage the selling business, they become so desperate that *“they have nothing to eat but these little birds”* (Kemal, 1978: 118). At the final scene, the narrator happens to witness *“a heap of birds heads, hundreds of heads, rising as tall as the thistles. Yellow ants swarmed over these heads with the open lacklustre eyes”* (Kemal, 1978: 122). Compared to human interference in nature by capturing migrant birds and making them commodity for their own sake, the ants with open lacklustre eyes only try to satisfy their vital needs by fulfilling their task in natural cycle. The comparison between the attitude of ants and human beings reveals another principle of deep ecology which urges that *“Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs”* (Naess, 1995: 68). Apart from that, the narrator perceives the heap as *“a memorial to the callousness and the decadence of Istanbul town, to the oblivion of its past, of all that was human, to the loss of many many things”* (Kemal, 1978: 122). As a matter of fact, this memorial is the utmost level of anthropocentrism which has been exemplified throughout the narrative. From different point of view this memorial underlines an analogy between the dead birds and the boys who have lost all their hopes to survive in the metropolis. Sociologically speaking these boys have been victimized by the system which neglects their inability to adapt to urban life. When they migrate to Istanbul unequipped, they expect to survive by the bird business which compromises their formation. However, the city dwellers having already changed their perception about the aviculture tradition are far beyond to satisfy their expectations. They eventually become victims just like the migrant birds taken from their natural habitats, commodified and perished at the end.

Consequently, anthropocentrism also known as “enlightened despotism” (Luke, 1998: 66) stands for human exceptionalism and human being’s exploitive dominance over nature. On the other hand, deep ecology claims non-human entities in nature have their own intrinsic value and both human and non-human constitute an interdependent network in nature. Accordingly, deep ecologists settle some principles which aim to change the individual thinking and collective mind-set of human beings from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. *The Birds Have Also Gone* includes many dramatic examples related to how anthropocentrism contradicts these principles. The novel portrays the 1970s Istanbul referring to the experience of three young boys who have immigrated to Istanbul with the hope of making their living through the azat buzat tradition. It is soon revealed that the tradition which has been practised for ages is not popular anymore. What they have expected in the beginning contradicts with what they find in the end. Their frustration is directly interrelated with alienation of urban people from nature and moral values referring to the disappearance of the azat buzat tradition. However, this is the place where the main paradox of the narrative stems from. For centuries, the tradition has ignored the intrinsic value of non-human and also rejected the holistic approach which claims that man is a part of nature and has no right to damage the diversity of biosphere. From this aspect, the azat buzat tradition has been carried on as a sign of anthropocentrism. The narrative also covers other issues related to ecology like overpopulation. As Catton points out *“There are already more human beings alive than the world’s renewable resources can continue to support”* (Catton, 1976: 262). Exceeding the capacity of natural sources because of overpopulation not only affects human beings but also all non-human entities in biosphere. At the end of the narrative, the figurative memorial of birds’ heads appears as the most dramatic representation of anthropocentrism. From ecological perception there is a very distinctive analogy between the memorial and the end of human beings who have been in the grip of anthropocentrism which drags our planet at the brink of severe environmental crisis. On this point the deep ecology perspective which is *“subversive to an exploitive attitude and culture”* (Sessions, 1985: 33) of human beings insists on a fundamental change of human being’s mind-set. It is no doubt that changing the deep-rooted perception is not an easy step to take. As Bob Douglas asserts *“implementing such a change will require new approaches to human governance that respect the relationship between human communities and their ecosystems, strengthen the nature of community and operate on newly enunciated democratic principles of subsidiarity”* (Douglas, 2015: 612). However, the existence of welfare society is almost impossible while our individual thinking and our collective mind-set are still under the control of anthropocentrism.

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