Through the Working Class
Ecology and Society Investigated Through the Lens of Labour
edited by Silvio Cristiano

Othered Bodies and Ecophobia
Mamak Garbage Area

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Abstract This study aims to examine Mamak Garbage Area and the residents in that neighbourhood within ecophobic discourse in terms of analysing why and how they have become the target of ecophobic psyche. Garbage areas in general constitute elemental bodies combining natural elements and human influences since these areas are human-made natural storage yards. Moreover, junkyards reflect the relationship between human and nonhuman encounters. However, when disastrous results are experienced, human beings simply blame nature itself for the wrongdoings of the human practices. Furthermore, ecophobia is also targeted towards the human bodies residing in the garbage areas and depending on garbage for their living. Moreover, similar to wild nature, those human bodies are also excluded from the civil order, contributing to the discursive deep clash between nature and culture.

Keywords Ecophobia. Mamak Garbage Area. Garbage. Dirt. Nature vs Culture.

> Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m'dear.
> (Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 27)

Earth's history is full of records of destructive fiery agencies, the most striking examples of which, according to Hans H. Rudnick, vary from "the burning of the famous library of Alexandria to Hiroshima, Three Mile Island, and Chernobyl" (1988, 65). This contributes to the mystery surrounding fire with its both destructive and creative agential capacity. This perception of fire contributes to the ecophobic psyche in terms of "[i]magining badness in nature and marketing that imagination – in short, writing ecophobia" as Simon Estok underlines (2011, 5). This results from the fact that fire is an independent agency regardless of human perceptions. Nonetheless, in most of the cases, fiery agency prevails against human agency. In order to hear the catastrophic power of fire, Michel Serres has a suggestion: "Let's listen, there, to the screams of the Roman sailors that Archimedes burned, to the howls of Hiroshima's irradiated, whose torture the vanished Majorana no doubt wanted to avoid and present, or if not, delay; let's listen to the appeal sent out by Empedocles's vanished

Culture del lavoro 8 ISSN [online] 2610-9379 | ISSN [print] 2610-8852
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-296-3/005 | Submitted: 2018-07-20 | Accepted: 2018-08-29
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-296-3 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-297-0

body, amid Etna's deafening thunder and tall flames" (2012, 78). That is to say, although human history is marked by miraculous operations of fire in daily life, uncontrolled fire is hostile to human embodiment and habitat. Its incomprehensible agency has led fire to become an idol of uncontrolled power and solemnity. One example of uncontrolled fire displays itself in garbage areas with high risks of large scaled blasts. Consequently, garbage areas turn into direct reflections of ecophobic psyche as any human intervention is disregarded at times of garbage blasts, and the area itself is enunciated toxic and venomous. Along with the spatial labelling, residents are also taken out of the civilised order on the pretext of their toxic presences. In this framework, this study aims to explore ecophobic treatment against garbage areas and residents in that neighbourhood along with social and political enforcements onto the garbage pits.

Underlying this ecophobic perception is the discursive clash between matter and mind since anything other than human realm is accepted to be non-existent instruments ready for human service. The denial of the agency of matter automatically results in human beings' constant struggle to take the agency of nature under their control along with an attempt to tame nature in accordance with their own cultural norms and aesthetic appreciation. However, as Karen Barad also contends, "[m]atter is not little bits of nature, or a blank state, surface, or site passively awaiting signification" (2009, 139). Matter has an informational formation on its own independent from human agency. So, the superior status of human beings as the only knowledge-producer and unique subjects is shattered by pointing to the intrinsic meanings of matter. Matter has its own way of communication and information in its formation. For instance, John Fowles underscores the agential capacity of trees pointing to their biochemical formation to prevent a branch of another tree to occupy the other tree's space (2000, 25-6), which indicates their onto-epistemological formations without any human intervention. Furthermore, through the layers and roots of a tree, it is possible to read the history of that particular area where the tree stands. This illustrates that matter tells a story independent from human discourses.

On similar grounds, as an amalgam for storied matter coined by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino, garbage displays an agential activity since it clearly "carves life-forms out of" (McWhorter 1999, 167) its activity. So, garbage, as opposed to the general assumption, is not a passive or inert matter awaiting to be loaded up with meanings by humans. It, rather, constitutes its own meaning through a number of living beings inside its intrinsic material formation. In the toxic realm of our time, garbage is a mobile organism which also indicates its material influence over both the human body and the physical environment. It moves "with us on our shoes and bodies, […] [is] moved by elemental forces like wind and water, and […] [is] dispersed by mechanized means of travel" (Sullivan 2012, 516).

In other words, garbage and dirt are found in our clothes, food, drink, and soil, hence carrying their own informational bodies everywhere through bodily intra-actions. Garbage is a subjective agenct. To acknowledge the subjective agency of nonhuman bodies leads us towards the question of agency as a whole. In this sense, the concept of agency has been revisited through new materialist and posthumanist perspectives challenging the superior position of human beings (implemented by humanism and Cartesian dualism) and human exceptionalism, hence questioning the ontological and epistemological categorisations of human and nonhuman beings. Stacy Alaimo draws attention to the fact that the recently revisited concept of agency has uncovered our rhizomatic relations in the physical realm stating that "we are permeable, emergent beings, reliant upon the others within and outside our porous borders" (2010, 156), hence hinting at the intermeshment of the environmental agency (matter) with the cultural realm (discourse). Defining the inevitable relation of the human to other beings such as animals, plants, matter, robotic bodies, elemental bodies, and inorganic bodies, the new definition of agency blurs and deconstructs the strict discrimination between the human and the nonhuman; matter and discourse. Agential capacity of the nonhuman, in this framework, "emerges from its intra-actions in a web of relations in which bodies and environments are co-constituted" (Alaimo 2010, 154). So, matter is not "a passive object of our linguistic creation" (Hekman 2008, 92). It has its own agency which cannot be reduced to the capacity of human conceptualization, and it has a unique capacity to act upon something and to be acted upon. With its agential power, matter creates its own echoes within the cosmic and earthly bodies, and creates various resoundings of its own form. That is to say, just as much as human is framed by nature and elemental forces, nature is framed by human agency, co-constituting a reciprocal formation. Material entities prove their agency in affecting the discursive formations of human societies, or vice versa, which underlines the intra-active process of becoming and emerging.

Similar storied agencies, garbage and dirt as subjective formations on their own tell their own story. The composition of garbage displays the fact that the agential potency of the elements is indomitable and prominent within the human lives. Yet, ignoring the fact that they are also composed of the same elements materially, human beings endeavour to patronise the four elements in the physical environments by trying to take them under the control of the human agency and domination. David Macauley hints at the human psyche noting that the "elements often appear dimmed down or diminished as they enter the human *domus*" (2010, 2). This is closely related to ecophobia which Simon Estok defines as "an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism" (2011, 4). Furthermore, along with fear and hatred, ecophobia also en-

closes the control impulse of the human; nonetheless, "the more control we seem to have over the natural environment, the less we actually have" (Estok 2011, 5). Thus, the more the human tries to control the elements, the more catastrophic the results become. As regards, David Macauley further explicates that

> pollution took the form of an assault on the elements as places and environmental conditions. Mining technologies and the timber industry in particular adversely affected air, earth, and water. The quest for mercury, lead, and arsenic – which contributed to bone, brain, and blood diseases – often caused streams to be redirected, dried up, or contaminated. The increasing removal of forests visibly scarred the landscape. Herodotus, for example, took note of the fact that an entire mountain was upended in search of gold. Emerging metallurgy emitted smoke and poisonous gases into the air in addition to the wood and charcoal burned as fuel. (2010, 128)

Inasmuch as the agential acknowledgment of the elements as lively beings with potentials to act upon the human realm within the cosmos is to threaten the anthropocentric primacy of the human, the elements are targeted as the source of fear and hatred. Yet, this ecophobic hatred is located towards not only the physical environment but also the material body. Especially according to Renaissance philosophies, to appreciate spiritual beauty as well as intellective goodness, one has to avoid physical and bodily desires. This hatred is unwillingly exercised since the body is the allegedly restrictive and bounding factor for the exertion of rational ascent. The body becomes the bounding factor for the human beings because it is the only link for humans to the earth, which, consequently, constitutes their only material side. Jeffrey Cohen and Lowell Duckert point to the inhabitance of the cosmic elements within the body, which they describe as "temporary hosts for itinerant tales [which] are themselves elemental [;] every mind, soul, eye, or book a recording device to give local habitation as story proliferates, mutates, moves along. Our knowing the world is matter-mediated (enabled, impressed), an intimacy of substance, force, flesh, trope, plot, and weather" (2015, 11). Therefore, the body turns into the lens through which the physical environment can be experienced for a human being. The body, thus, becomes the principle nature and materiality for which human beings bear an inherent ecophobic impulse.

From another perspective, the allegation that the perfect soul is captivated and contaminated by the material body has always been inherent within Western philosophy and religion. Ken Hiltner draws attention to the fact that "Eve (like all human beings, imagined as a split amalgam of spirit and flesh) was portrayed as falling because she privileged the flesh while marginalizing the spirit" (2014, 86), portraying the interminable clash

of body and mind (soul). In relation to this eternal clash, Thomas Kjeller Johansen furthers this discussion underscoring that

> [b]odily illness is caused by the interference of the four elements and their derivatives within the body. Each element has a proper region in which parts of the same element are arranged together. When the elements go beyond their proper region they cause illness. Illness is seen as the result of unnatural acquisitiveness (*pleonexia*). [...] Timaeus goes on to explain how we can restore the elements within us to order (*eis taxin*) and prevent them from breeding wars (*polemous*) and diseases in the body by keeping the body in measured (*metriōs*) motion. When each element in the body is put next to a friendly element (*philon para philon*) physical health is restored. (2004, 20)

Within this framework, this innate ecophobic impulse to have the ultimate control is inevitably directed towards body which is inevitably the key material point of exposure to the elements along with to the natural phenomena. Nevertheless, the unmediated exposure inevitably kills: "ask Robert Falcon Scott (found frozen in Antarctica, currently the coldest place in the world) or '49er[1] Richard Culverwell (found desiccated in Death Valley, currently the hottest). Common deaths by exposure include hypothermia and dehydration, too little or too much fire" (2015, 13) state Lowell Duckert and Jeffrey Cohen. Henceforth, prevailing is the human-centred and ecophobic control impulse enacted specifically towards the elements which are the basic units through which humans can perceive the world. Moreover, the human body as a material substance is also composed of the natural elements, whereby it becomes the target of ecophobia, too. Therefore, just like the wild nature independent of human control, human body can also be converted into a source of ecophobia by the civilised human beings.

Interestingly though, human beings create their own untamed material-discursive formations which can be exemplified in garbage areas and junkyards. Garbage itself is an elemental embodiment, combining all the four main roots of the universe: water (with the generally chemical leaking water out of the garbage), earth (since they are dumped on the soil and mix with it forming different plant species), fire (with its explosion potential out of the squeezed methane gas) and air (because harmful gases are released). Formulating an elemental encounter on its own, garbage connects bodies. As a result, we all turn into "relatives by water, air, and dirt. Our bodies are made up of elements from the same piece of ground. Through

1 Editor's note: the *49ers*, called after year 1849, were a group of pioneers exploring Californian harsh areas in the Gold Rush age (see for instance Wood 1980).

endless cycles that dirt perpetuates itself. We arise from it and return, it circulates through these permeable membranes that individuate us temporarily" (McWhorter 1999, 173). However, separating themselves from this elemental enmeshment, human beings endeavour to take the material agency under their subjective control. However, although humans seem to tame nature through cultural dump areas and junkyards, ecophobic control impulse brings forth natural/cultural disasters for human beings; just like in the *Ümraniye* garbage explosion on 29 April 1993 in Istanbul, Turkey.

Random garbage dumping and covering garbage with soil in order to prevent the unpleasant smell results in squeezing garbage and dirt, and leaving it without oxygen, which consequently forms methane gas. The squeezed methane gas causes explosion. According to Şengüler and Yılmaz, the detrimental ecological effects of landfill gas sneaking out of garbage areas can be listed as follows:

- It is extremely insanitary for human [and nonhuman] health in terms of its potential toxic and partly carcinogenic substances.
- Coming up to % 5-14 proportion in the air, methane gas concentration results in explosions, fires, and consequent loss of lives.
- Covering the roots of the plants, it interrupts their contact with the air.
- Some gases such as hydrogen and sulphide emit unpleasant smell.
- When covered with soil, the gases emanating in the unregulated storage areas cannot reach upper levels of the atmosphere, and start to move horizontally within the body of the garbage. These gases, therefore, get through permeable formations, cracks, and fractures towards the sewerage system and basements of the households, which, as a result, forms a very critical health problem for the residents of the city. (1994, 65)

Ümraniye Explosion is an example of this formation as a result of which eleven houses and two garbage trucks were swallowed by the garbage blast (Gümüş 2014, 134). Apart from being a garbage area (pit) where all the garbage in the Anatolian side of İstanbul are gathered, *Ümraniye* is also home for garbage collectors (Nesin 1995, 64). Therefore, the explosion in *Ümraniye* is a human-made environmental and material catastrophe, and it has social and cultural dimensions as well. According to Miyase İlknur's report on *Cumhuriyet* (a popular Turkish newspaper) a year after this disaster, "although garbage is no more dumped in Ümraniye, people continue to live on this embarrassment area because of poverty: they even feed on herbs and vegetables growing out of the garbage area" (1994). Even though most of the houses in this slum area were destroyed and burned as a result of the explosion with lots of casualties, people still live there since this place offers cheap housing opportunities. Moreover, the underprivileged in that neighbourhood are also exposed to toxicity

since they feed on the plants growing out of the contaminated soil in the garbage area. This validates McWhorter's statement on dirt that it "must be treated as a living thing that is cultivated and cared for just like the plant" (1999, 165). Miyase İlknur continues her report stating that "houses start again where the garbage area ends. At least five people still live in the houses damaged after the disaster. We are addressing Hacer grandma who is approaching towards us coming out of the door of a house which is about to collapse: 'Are you not afraid of living here?' 'Do we have any other choice? What good for us to be afraid? We do not have any other choice.' she answers" (1994).

Another example of a social problem out of poor housing opportunities in the slum areas near the junkyards is Mamak Garbage Area in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. Mamak Garbarge Area is a place where approximately 3,500 tons of garbage all around Ankara are stored a day (Uğurlu, Pınar 2004, 14). To be more specific, Uğurlu and Pınar further explicate that

> in Ankara-Mamak Dump Area, the waste and garbage of Ankara metropolitan arena have been dumped since 1978. The dump area is very vast both in terms of width and depth (its depth changes from 50 to 75 m). In this area approximately 3500 tons of garbage are stored a day. And leaking water from this area mixes İmrahor Brook with a flow of 3.5 a second. (2004, 14)

The hazardous chemical waste leaks out of this area and carries its toxic substance to *İmrahor* Brook, which in turn creates disease not only for human beings but also for nonhuman beings living in and around the brook. The location of the Mamak junkyard is very strategic in terms of its closeness to the water resources of the city. *Tuzluçayır-Mamak* unregulated garbage storage area is located in a very significant water basin: *İmrahor* Brook Basin. This basin is the southern channel passage of Ankara which is composed of a number of both ecological and recreational valleys (Dilek 2006, 331). The body of the contaminated area has an inevitable effect on other bodies, such as the body of the brook or that of the houses nearby.

Apart from shattering the ecological order, the garbage storage areas bring forth social problems as well. Since it is a risky environment to live in, housing is comparably cheaper; therefore, preferred by poor people. Nonetheless, this area grows within toxicity; henceforth, similar to the toxic body of the garbage, it causes human beings to sustain toxic bodies. In this sense, apart from substances and atomic particles of the garbage in this area, the junkyard also demonstrates the structure of society in Ankara, thereby it becomes the embodiment of both material (natural) and discursive (cultural) stories. In Miyase İlknur's report on the *Cumhuriyet*, they inquire into the area that was affected by the fires in Ümraniye

Garbage Explosion, and talks to Cemil Öztürk who lost his wife and his three children to the fires of the explosion: "Why did you get a house in the garbage area?" "Because the land was cheap there. Somebody had already parcelled that area, and was selling desperate people like us. I had no other choice. Who would know that the junkyard will explode? Did you know that?" (1994). This example exposes the failure of anthropocentric control drive which is the core of ecophobia. Although the junkyards seem to be controlled by the landowners and government authorities, to echo Simon Estok again, the more alleged control by human institutions result in the less actual control since material formations are unpredictable, and cannot be restricted to the limited human knowledge.

In relation to Mamak Garbage Area, "the historical process and spatial development of the area have been determined by a junkyard, from which the name of the district derived. In this sense, the spatial movement of the region followed the spatial movement of junkyard. Before the appearance of the initial *gecekondus*,[2] this area in Mamak was the junkyard of Ankara" (Özuğurlu 2005, 45). Hence, that neighbourhood and all the bodies residing in that area are associated with garbage in one way or another. The ill-treatment of the storage yard leads to the disruption of the local ecology. As regards, Dilek underscores that "Tuzluçayır-Mamak Unregulated Storage Area occupies 30.9 hectare area, and maximum garbage density is up to 49 meters. It releases high ratios of ammonia nitrogen. Furthermore, the ratio of carbon monoxide is high above the limits" (2006, 324). Furthermore, Mamak garbage area, to continue Özuğurlu's observations,

> covers 96 hectares and is composed of 2200 households, consists of different and hardly relevant geographical sites to some extent. Between the first settlement region in the early 70s and the second one, there is the field of coal yard of Mamak, which was closed in 1997 and now is used for the animal sacrifice bazaar during the religious holiday (Kurban Bayramı [Sacrifice Holiday]). The third settlement, which was constructed on a rocky place, is nearer to Imrahor village and has quite distant relations with the neighbourhood because of the hill that was built by garbage. The fourth settlement, which was founded in the late 1980s is near to the new junkyard and is totally separated from the whole neighbourhood by the vehicle station of the municipality. (2005, 48)

As the area is identified with slum areas and underprivileged residents, that area automatically turns into the target of ecophobia as a whole. Even mass-sacrifice of nonhuman animals as a part of the religious and cultural practices is executed next to the garbage area. As a result of this sacrifice

2 A Turkish slang used for the houses in the slum areas.

practice, intra-action within animal parts, blood sacrificed and the local soil occurs, and this inevitably affects and, even, disrupts the local ecological environment. This negative intra-action adds another dimension in the toxifying capacity of the junkyard.

Similar to the *Ümraniye* garbage area, human beings residing in Mamak also become targets of ecophobia. In other words, both the area and bodies (especially human bodies) in it are feared and hated in terms of their potential toxic inclusivity. Greg Garrard underscores that "domination is implicated in discrimination and oppression on grounds of race, sexual orientation and class as well as species and gender" (2004, 26). Based on their class, in this case, human beings are marginalised and othered. They are further labelled as simply garbage collectors rather than citizens. Their lives are shaped by garbage; they feed on garbage; they earn from garbage. One example is Nurettin, whose story is told by Özuğurlu:

> He was 5 years old when he migrated with his family from Sivas to Ankara in 1976. At third grade, he started to collect sponge and rubber from the Mamak junkyard, as his father did. Since then, in his words, he "did not get out of the garbage." He is 32 years old even though the garbage "wore him down, made him older." He is married and has two children. Up to now, he has had no insurance. His only desire is to keep his children away from garbage collection, which he inherited from his father. (2005, 139)

The lives of the garbage collectors are so garbage-layered that the soil thickness covering the garbage at times descends down to one or two centimetres; therefore, in the gardens of some houses, trashes can be encountered as they circulate beneath the earth, and most of the houses are filled with bad smell (Dilek 2006, 324). Within this framework, human beings and the environment they reside in are intertwined, as a result of which nature (though changed by human practices) and local culture (though changed by certain material formations) have reciprocal effects on each other.

In this vein, the garbage area itself is a porous body where culture (discourse) and nature (matter) meet. The junk-yard, in Nurettin's words, "receives from *Çankaya* (a wealthy area in Ankara) '*parlak-mallı çöp*' (luxury garbage), but from *gecekondus* '*küllü-pis çöp*' (dusty garbage). […] No need for metaphors, looking from the junkyard may inform us about class inequalities and may provide us a critical insight about the centrality of consumption to modern capitalism" (Özuğurlu 2005, 139). As *Çankaya* is a wealthy neighborhood in Ankara, their garbage is totally different from *Keçiören*'s which is an area not as wealthy as *Çankaya*. This shows the class structure of society, concluded from the reality of the garbage area. Hence, dirt and garbage in this junkyard tell the story of a metropolitan

city where the financial gap between the poor and the rich is observed. Moreover, othered and marginalised within the social system of metropolitan civilisation, a garbage collector tells the story of the city simply by looking at the material presence and agency of the junkyard.

On the other hand, the government and the municipal corporation have recently decided to construct a recycling facility in the place of the open-air junkyard. This has revealed "capitalist consumerism that transforms matter into commodities" (Alaimo 2010, 147) on the one hand, and created another social dilemma on the other, and turned into a housing problem since people living in the slum areas have been left without their houses. In this regard, Garrard contends that "[e]nvironmental problems cannot be clearly divorced from things more usually defined as social problems such as poor housing or lack of clean water" (2004, 29), hence correlating an "association of acute environmental degradation and pollution with poverty" (2004, 29). On similar grounds, T.V. Reed points out that "for decades the worst forms of environmental degradation have been enabled by governmental and corporate policies of dumping problems on communities of color, poor whites, and the Third World" (2002, 146). In this sense, the Mamak Junkyard and the inhabitants in that area are examples for the othering process out of ecophobic psyche in the civilised order. Furthermore, the fact that a part of the land of this junkyard has been recently converted into a big shopping centre (Nata Vega AVM) underlines the commercial impositions of big corporations onto such environmental problems. Moreover, this conversion hints at the ecophobic psyche urging people to fit the physical environment into cultural and civilised human order. This former desolated and untamed environment is seized to be under human control, and allegedly saved to be a part of human civilisation with its own capitalist symbol of a shopping centre. However, as a result of this conversion of the land, housing problems have occurred for the inhabitants, whereby their toxic and othered bodies have been discarded from the civilised order, which consecutively functions as a relief for the civilised residents living in the city far from the garbage pits because it proves the fact that environmental and related social problems are things "that happen […] only to others, to lower-class people in ghettos or inner cities or squalid Third World villages" (Reed 2002, 151). The control attempt of the garbage area, which is itself a subjective and unique elemental body, erases the irrational fear and hatred towards the area on the surface as the polished newly-organised area fits into the metropolitan facet of the capital city with capitalist representatives on the land (shopping centre and governmental facility). Yet, garbage collectors are still the source of ecophobia in society, without proper housing this time.

Although created by human practices and discourses, such toxic environments as Mamak Garbage Area are easily targeted for ecophobic psyche of the humans. The disastrous consequences of toxicity spread-

ing out of these garbage areas are direct results of human misuse and ill-treatment because natural catastrophes generally stem from humans' anthropocentric drive to tame and control the physical environment, and to adopt nature into their own discourses and practices. Nonetheless, the chaos growing especially out of garbage areas hints at the failure of human-centred perspective since the more the humans interfere with the intrinsic material formations in the physical environments, the more chaotic the results become. Yet, the failure of human attempt to control is discursively associated with nature's uncivilised and untamed qualities. Henceforth, as nature itself is illustrated as the source of all these evil and catastrophic chaos leading even towards the loss of human lives, ecophobia prevails in the human psyche. In order to eradicate chaotic conflicts allegedly between human and nonhuman spheres, rather than resetting nature within a human framework with pointless attempts to domesticate, we must find out to live in accordance with the natural and material formations. But first, we should acknowledge that we are part of this material world, and along with human existence, nonhuman beings and matter also have intrinsic value and agential capacity. They tell their own stories regardless of the discursive impositions by the human domain.

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