

ENERGY

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THE INVISIBLE DEBT

Energy appears as an economic measure – megawatts, barrels, CO₂ equivalents. Numbers, graphs, reports. But behind these figures lie flows, debts, dominations – and to make these flows visible requires more than an economist: an artist, an activist, a cartoonist, a photographer, a painter. Enriching countries appear to have reduced their ecological footprint – clean production, green policies, falling emissions. But there is an invisible debt: while consumption continues, dirty production is exported to other geographies. It is borrowed from China, imported, made to look clean. This is the double hygiene mechanism – appearance clean, reality dirty.

"Enriching countries appear to have reduced their ecological footprints but are actually transferring them to other countries. While continuing consumption, they export dirty production elsewhere."

Turkey has exhibited consumption beyond its biocapacity since the 1970s – that is, it takes more than nature can replenish. This is not a technical detail but an existential reality: we are taking more from the land we live on than it gives us. The ecological footprint is measured in six categories: pasture, carbon, water, agriculture, forest, fish production – each a separate item of debt. In the search for oil, Turkey has no economically productive reserves – they lie deeper, the cost is high, extraction is not profitable. But without serious movement towards alternative energy sources, external dependency continues and energy imports are the primary source of the current account deficit. The concept of ecological savings – national savings that account not only for money but also for the loss of natural resources – shows that the growth story is told by consuming nature's capital.

Someone who grew up in a working-class family in Balıkesir, moving from Boğaziçi Economics to İTÜ – in a system where a 2.56 grade point average becomes a master's barrier – then to Marmara for a doctorate, from Erasmus in Portugal to a year of research in Sweden, questions the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis: the assumption that as countries grow, environmental pollution first rises then falls – this is wrong. It does not fall, it moves. Ecological flows hidden in international trade are the truth behind the story of clean growth. In women's labour research, one encounters a similar structural problem: the departure of educated women from the labour force cannot be explained only by education or culture – the systemic deficiency of care services is decisive. Fossil fuel subsidies block the path of climate policies – when subsidies are removed, the lowest income groups of society are most affected. Everywhere the same pattern: invisible labour, invisible debt, invisible cost.

THE LANGUAGE OF COAL

Climate change is an abstract concept – it does not interest most people. The concept is too big, too distant, too unclear. But when you say "coal," when you frame it as a health risk – air pollution, children's asthma, the elderly's breathing difficulties, the smoke from the chimney of the thermal plant – people respond. One must descend from the abstract to the concrete, from the global concept to the plant beside Ali Ağa's house. Beginning from the everyday life questions trapped in the local rather than the global concept is the only way to mobilise people.

"When it's concrete, people act. A thermal plant is going to be built next to Ali Ağa's house, the people here will get sick – that's where it starts. Then you can get to climate change from there."

A political sociologist born in Istanbul, moving from Boğaziçi Economics to a sociology doctorate at McGill in Canada, researches state-civil society-rent relations. Works in political science at Bahçeşehir University. Research on environmental organisations since 2008 – the link between the coal struggle and health issues, climate change communication, the dynamics of civil society mobilisation. The signing of the Paris Agreement (2015) became an unexpected source of legitimacy for coal activists – in 2016 this international legal reference provided a foothold for local struggles. The drought in Konya, the withering leaves of olive trees – these tell people more about climate change than the concept itself. Turkey is an ecologically very rich country – but its capacity to despoil that richness is also high. Ecological wealth and ecological destruction capacity live in the same body.

The developmentalist discourse is the greatest obstacle before the struggle – because the promise of growth legitimises destruction. In the Yeşilyol campaign, an activist walks the mountains trying to organise the people – but is perceived as an "anarchist." This is the problem of the translation of knowledge: the gap between global theoretical knowledge and local practice cannot be closed with good intentions alone. Starting from the concrete, starting from people's lives – there is no other way. Coal activists have understood this: instead of abstract climate targets, saying "the air in your neighbourhood is being polluted, your child is getting sick" is the language that mobilises people. A bridge can be built from a personal name to global theory – but the feet of the bridge must be local. In the triangle of state-civil society-rent relations, ecological struggle always remains on the margins – but when it begins locally, that marginality can become a centre.

THE CHAIN

Nuclear energy is presented as a solution to climate change – but this is wrong.

"We cannot address nuclear energy on its own. We have to think about it within the nuclear chain. From the extraction of uranium raw material to the generation of electricity, to plutonium at the end – that material at 4,000 dollars a gram, it controls the whole world at its fingertip."

Radioactive waste, thermal pollution, tsunami risks, storms, earthquakes – the risk list is long and each item is a different face of catastrophe. If water levels rise at Akkuyu, 12 reactors could be submerged. Nuclear energy appears to be a technical problem but it is geopolitical, it is a power relation, it is a matter of sovereignty.

An economist and trade unionist who lived two years in Japan and was at the Hiroshima Peace Park during the 1999 earthquake. The Fukushima disaster (2011) changed their life – they have been to Fukushima three times, turned to nuclear research, begun writing for Yeşil Gazete. Now both a doctoral student and doing a second master's – in sociology and civil society – coordinating nükleersiz.org, a full-time struggle. Sinop, Mersin, İğneada – Turkey's nuclear power plant projects, each a separate risk map. The Karakuşlar Black Sea Campaign – someone named Hüseyin rows a thousand kilometres over three months, transforming his body into political action. This is aesthetic-political action in its most bare form: body, message, movement.

Nazım Hikmet's ballad of Hiroshima, heard in childhood – the weight carried by a poem has, decades later, turned into a sense of personal responsibility. Chernobyl and Fukushima have turned that ballad into reality. Nuclear energy is marketed as a climate solution, but when the calculation is made along the full nuclear chain – the environmental cost of uranium extraction, the energy consumption of processing, the millennia of radioactivity in the waste – the equation comes out far from clean. The geopolitics of plutonium, international lobbying, show that the energy question is not a technical but a political problem.

LIVING WITHOUT MAKING WASTE

A woman born in Trabzon-Sürmene, whose childhood passed between school and agricultural life, who moved from teacher's assistant in a nursery class to art education at Mimar Sinan, has returned to her village – alone. Living alone as a woman in a village, making environmental sensitivity part of everyday life – both a solitude and a strength. Her very presence gives other women courage; accepting deficiencies and taking responsibility creates power.

"I use art as a tool in my own life and in the region where I live. In order not to serve the same system while criticising it, I first had to live not making waste for myself."

Transforming plastic bags into artistic material, converting waste into expression — music, performance, painting, a multidisciplinary practice. In her village a copper mine pit has been converted into a waste disposal site — she organises a protest exhibition against this, but not only introducing it to attention: she creates a space for finding solutions together. The Çamburlu Natural Culture Art Association is founded — collective struggle as a civil society organisation is stronger than individual artistic action. Stories told to workers' children through art are heard better by children — the most beautiful dimension of art is touching people. Stepping outside the system is not only an individual choice; being an example, giving others courage, becomes a source of collective power. Even the presence of a woman living alone in a village expands what is possible.

THE WEEKLY RITUAL

A cartoonist born in 1985, drawing a weekly column in Penguen and Uykusuz since 2006 — an unbroken routine of twelve years. The weekly cartoon is a form of record that combines the political agenda with popular culture and urban observations. When repeated, it ceases to be a column in a humour magazine and becomes a kind of history-telling, a recording project. Almanac, exhibition, calendar formats — the topical evolves into archive, humour into historical document.

Ecology is a field that receives very little attention on the general political agenda. But connections can be made: beginning from topical politics and connecting to nuclear energy is possible — the cartoonist's skill lies precisely in these transitions. On the "Nuclear Turkish Style" film project, collaboration with a director has continued for more than three years — production of visualisations and infographics, a map of nuclear disasters, the conditions at Akkuyu, the industrial topography of coal and nuclear distribution. The figure of the Standing Man — political action made using the body — shows that when performance, text and visual combine, a completely different communicative power emerges. Just like the message of the body rowing in the Karakuşlar campaign — movement precedes words. Humour and political message must go together — but this is a very difficult balance. Drawing cartoons on ecology is the effort to bring the most marginalised issue of the agenda to the centre. Working with other disciplines is essential for sustainability — the cartoonist alone is not enough; one must produce together with the director, the researcher, the activists.

CEREYAN

A photographic artist born in Urfa, who did a master's at SVA in New York, works with a project spanning years on water, flow and energy — the Cereyan series. Old photographs found in second-hand bookshops, worker-family negatives discovered during a workshop at the Silahtarağa Campus — memory is the raw material of photography. The first works were born from these archival finds.

Six to seven years of research on the GAP Project since 2007: the dream that Harran would "turn into a sea" — a grandfather's poem — and then the reality. We present nature within a utilitarian framework: we extract its stones, cut its water, celebrate it as development. But that drought causes war beyond the border. Borders exist but nature has no borders at all — a whirlwind suddenly drives sand and fires into the crops; this image has become the main axis of the project.

At the Domastik Art residency in New York, water drops from a bottle are set up to grow beans in a bed — the delicate balance of nature is this sensitive. Our intervention, on the other hand, is very crude and mistaken. Archaeology, geology, Mesopotamia — from Göbekli Tepe to early Byzantium — places submerged under water, population movements, saving and circularity. As the geographical scale grows, the boundary between local and global blurs. The Repeat-Cycle Talk Series — Ali Alper from the cycles of stars to ecological cycles — brings different disciplines together. Cereyan — at once electrical current, water flow and an unexpected event — the word itself is the essence

of the project. From cotton fields to ancient cities submerged under water, from population movements to dam construction — each a different moment of the same cycle. Reaching children, seeing that what you do reaches them — this is a knowledge carried in the pocket, not expressible in words, but working.

THE MOUNTAIN'S SKELETON

A painter born in Ankara, raised in Istanbul, a graduate of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts — in the art market since 2002, 10 solo exhibitions. A path beginning in 2004 with industrial spaces and abandoned factories has shaped itself around the theme of waste and absence — the abandoned itself is an aesthetic and a critique.

After Gezi 2012 it evolves towards wall graffiti, then to quarries. In Carrara, the marble quarries of Italy, various locations in Turkey — what you see is the mountain's skeleton: bare, stripped, painful.

"In marble quarries you see the skeleton of the mountain — it really pains me. But I have to find a pictorial language."

The distance between a past landscape and a present rupture is the matter of the canvas. The "Fill in the Plant" series: artificial nature, vertical gardens, concreted areas — while millions of trees are being cut, we deceive ourselves with a few pots. These artificial green make-ups are a selfish solution.

Does being beautiful make up for a painting showing bad things? A collector will buy this painting, hang it on the wall and see it as a beautiful thing — but does this not erase the message? Perhaps. But the aesthetic choice does not cause one to forget something — it creates another way of remembering. The work of art is sold, enters a collection, becomes a prestige object — this contradiction is the question the artist asks herself. Does the beautiful object render the critique inoperative? The tension between aestheticising nature and simultaneously criticising it is always felt — but to carry this tension rather than flee from it is a form of honesty.

THE ALTERNATIVE WORD

Today an alternative word has been produced here.

"If entirely different people had come around energy — bureaucrats, political party members, investors — they would have spoken of development, they would have spoken of national sovereignty. But we have produced an alternative word on the same subject, speaking of cycles, speaking of the domination humans have established over nature."

At this table, a different language has been spoken — "nuclear chain" instead of nuclear "energy solution," domination instead of development, cycle instead of growth. And changing the language is changing the gaze.

Documentation is different from being solution-oriented — but it is no less valuable. Just archiving, positioning a situation and creating a difference in people may be sufficient. One can be both activist and artist — there are artists who call themselves "activist" and those who do not. What matters is not which of these definitions you choose, but what your work is. Not seeing nature as a separate thing, remembering that we are a part of it — the violence done to nature is the violence done to ourselves. We must remind people of this, we must love ourselves at the essence of the matter. Being solution-oriented is not compulsory — sometimes the presence, the witnessing, the recording itself is sufficient.

Seven people — energy economist, political sociologist, anti-nuclear activist, village-dwelling artist, cartoonist, photographic artist, painter — from different geographies (Balıkesir, Istanbul, Trabzon, Urfa, Ankara), from different paths, have touched the same question. Each has held the concept of energy from a different position: economic energy, political energy, nuclear energy, vital energy, communicative energy, transformative energy, aesthetic-ethical energy. Ecological debt calculation, political discourse analysis, the risk map of nuclear disaster, the collective path of artistic intervention, the weekly record of history, the visualisation of transformation, the questioning of aesthetics — all are different faces of the same question. The slower trees grow, the more energy and heat they give — slowness

is accumulation. But everything has a cost. Nuclear, coal, electric plant – all take something from nature, return it with a degree of risk. This is transformation.

Energy is not an economic measure – it is a cyclical phenomenon, and against it stands the history of human domination. Leaving the language of the system and passing to another language – cycle instead of development, balance instead of sovereignty, saving instead of growth – this is a political act. The concept of socio-economic metabolism – how we organise our surroundings as communities, input from outside, processing inside, output to outside – this framework lifts the question of energy out of a technical problem and transforms it into an existential question. And this question, when academia, art and activism come together at an interdisciplinary table, can be asked, multiplying like a rhizome. Memory and history have been excavated at this table – old photographs, weekly cartoons, archaeological remains, Fukushima testimonies. All are a "not-forgetting" project. And not forgetting is a political act at least as great as transforming.