

ECOCIDE IN KURDISTAN

- a product of colonization

Usually, if there is a natural catastrophe or a destruction of the ecosystem happening against a whole land, against a whole society, a reaction from environmentalists, climate activists and NGOs is being shown. But that is not the case if the existence of a land and a society is denied or ignored – just like it is in the case of Kurdistan. Without being noticed by the public, we are today witnessing a large ecocide all over Kurdistan.

Kurdistan is one – as a geography and as an ecosystem

Because of the forced fragmentation over Kurdistan under the occupation of four nation-states (Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria) by the treaty of Lausanne in 1923, most of the people, including those who are in solidarity with the Revolution in Rojava, don't think Kurdistan as a whole. It is barely thought as an geographical, social or ecological entity. The aim of global, imperial and local hegemonic powers a hundred years ago was to erase Kurdistan from the consciousness of the world and today this is showing its effects. This makes it hard to acknowledge and analyze the ecological and environmental situation in the region. For example, both the Tigris (in Kurdish: Dicle) and the Euphrates (in Kurdish: Firat) are having their source in North Kurdistan; one in Elezîz, the other one in Erzîrom, whilst having important tributaries like the Zap-rivers that deprive from the East of Kurdistan. Those rivers are the main source of water for agriculture in almost everywhere in Kurdistan. Another example are the wide forests and fertile highlands on the large mountain chains that are dominating Kurdistan's geography. Since ancient times they are guaranteeing fresh air and rain for harvesting both in the mountains and the plains, being a home to numberless animals and plants and create and contribute all the conditions needed for farming. The ice that is melting in Spring on the mountain Cudî (in north Kurdistan) is providing the water for the fields in the Region of Cizîre (in Rojava). The hills around Efrîn are part of the mountain chain that continue on the north side of the Turkish border until Mereş and Elbistan. Facing these facts, the struggle for ecological change in Rojava can never be seen separated from Kurdistan as a whole.

Thanks to this rich and diverse ecosystem and *“Thanks to its geographical position the Kurds have been able to protect their existence as an ethnic community until today. On the other hand, it was the exposed position of the Kurdish settlement area which often whetted the appetite of*

external powers and invited them to raids and conquest.” (Abdullah Öcalan). In times of the clashes between the rural life of the society and the exploitation of natural resources and industrialization, Kurdistan is in the center of this contradiction. It becomes objected to an ecocide that is accompanied by an international silence. In all parts of Kurdistan we can witness attacks on the nature, the landscapes and human settlements. The Cûdî mountain is facing a massive deforestation and, since July 26, the Turkish army set fire on the forests and consciously let it spread in order to clear the region for oil exploration companies. On the Cûdî and Gabar mountains as well as in the Besta region, the lands are methodically destroyed for quarriers and coal mines. To get a hold on raw resources, no boundaries seem to be set in order to stop the destruction of nature. Since these regions being also strategical areas for the guerrilla forces of the PKK and is known for the resistance of the people, the Turkish state uses this for its argumentation to militarize against terrorism and deforest these zones. Some Turkish soldiers published videos of themselves on digital media platforms in which these videos show them starting fires. As well as in the regions around Dersîm and Bitlîs where military restricted areas have been created, the state declared a prohibition to villagers and locals to fight the fires. To save the nature that has been their home and shelter for over thousands of years was declared a crime by the state. Other ecocides have been witnessed in the province of Amed. The Pasûr river flow is affected by the construction of dams for hydroelectric power plants and polluted by sand quarries. While the Earth is facing a climate crisis, the capitalist industry raises carbon-dioxide emissions by the exploitation and consumption of the resources and cuts of the trees which are playing an essential role for healing the climate issues.

The denial shows it's effects: Silence from environmentalists

Besides of the aggressions in Kurdistan, the Turkish State also launched the war against all the ecological live spheres in not Kurdish regions. Since the 17th of July, in the village of İzköy in Muğla, despite the resistance of villagers and their supporters, the forest of Akbelen was chopped down under supervision of the police and military forces for coal excavation by YK Energy, co-owned by the Limak Holding and the İÇTAŞ company. The Kaz mountain, between the provinces of Çanakkale and Balıkesir in northwestern Turkey is also facing a massive deforestation. This is the result of the interests for copper mining that would bring huge profit for the Cengiz Holding company. Against these activities a wide range of protests is rising all over Turkey, which of course should be supported. But while NGOs such as Greenpeace take part in the protest in Akbelen, they remain silent about environmental massacre in colonized lands a couple of hundred kilometers further east, in Bakur. Accordingly to the answer of Greenpeace to a request by the bar association of Şirnex, it is stated that *“unfortunately, this*

topic is out of [their] field of profession.” It is visible that in Kurdistan the colonization and politics of denial are not only the basis for exploitation of society and nature, but also in keeping people that assume themselves democratic or ecologic from raising their voice. Kurdistan is not existing in legacy and nor in the mind of the public. This ecological disaster passes unnoticed since it is a colonial warfare.

A divided land is becoming a target of ecocide

These attacks on the lands have to be considered as attacks against the people. Ecocide is a warfare against Kurdish people in the frame of decades of displacement of the population, massacres, looting and destruction of villages. By the means of destruction of the ecosystems with which people are related to and who are dependent on, the occupying states attempt to destroy the culture, economy and the way of life of the Kurdish villages, forcing the people into exile in urban areas. Since 2018 the canton of Afrin in Rovaja got occupied by the Turkish State and their mercenaries. Olive trees are regularly chopped down or pulled out of the ground, then sold or burned. Olives have been an important resource for the people of Afrin, a huge part of their life and their economy. Syrian Democratic Forces published a report regarding the occupied Afrin canton in May 2023. *“The mercenaries of the Turkish occupation cut down a total of 2,124 olive and pomegranate trees in the occupied Afrin region. Additionally, approximately 18,000 olive trees were burned. Furthermore, intentional fires destroyed numerous forest trees.”* In that case, the destruction of the lands shows no other aim than launching an attack on the inhabitants and on the Revolution. Targeting farmers makes it also clear that destroying lands is a strategy from the capitalist and state system to seize the people’s means to sustain themselves, and therefore, increase their dependency. Ecocide is a “white” genocide against the colonized people.

The most planned and heavy attacks on the forests are taking place in South Kurdistan (Başur), in the Regions of Zap, Metîna and Avaşîn (Medya Defense Area), at the Irakian-Turkish border, where the guerrilla forces of the PKK and the Turkish military are waging an intensification of war for almost two years. In this war, forbidden chemical and thermo-nuclear weapons are used constantly by the Turkish army without being objected by the international institutions. These weapons are not only inhuman, they are also having long-term effects on the water, flora and fauna which are not calculable yet. Accompanying these politics of destruction, the forests are burned down in carpet bombings that are turning ancient forests into wasteland. Another essential spot of politics is Lîce, near Amed (tr.:Diyarbakir). Alongside with military operations, justified with the war against guerrilla units, there are regularly forest fires, of which the recent ones have been the most destructive.

In East Kurdistan (Rojhilat), especially around the town of Merîwan, that is located close to the border between Iran and Irak, heavy fires have regularly destroyed large parts of the forests for at least five years. Villagers claim that these fires have been set by the Pasdaran, the so called “Revolutionary Guards”, the paramilitary forces of the Iranian state. Massive engagement has been shown by civilians to fight the fire but these efforts got repressed by military forces who abduct and kill activists. The fight against resisting groups in the mountainous areas are used by the Iranian regime as an excuse for setting up military zones to forbid any civilian presence. Another factor causing the forest fires, is the presence of old landmines left from the war between Iran and Irak which are detonating under the Turkish strikes against the Guerrilla. The Turkish and Iranian states see the guerrilla as threat for their hegemony. As they are constantly labeling self-defense actions as terrorism, they also see an ideological threat in the Freedom Movement.

The root of the ecocide lies in colonialism

To hold an effective ecological resistance, it is necessary to understand the roots of the ecological crisis carried out by capitalism that we are facing today. Capitalist modernity rose in the context of colonization. Genocides and slavery have been the condition of a massive looting of resources and destruction of lands and vice-versa. Ecocides and exploitation of nature, women and society as a whole went hand in hand for thousands of years. The capitalist system brought this logic onto an constant increasing scale, and pursues its way until making the earth inhabitable. Colonialism is nowadays still the very base of capitalism, providing most of the raw materials and cheap labor. Also, the system’s mindset is giving so little value to life that, also in the context of Kurdistan, ecocide is launched not only for looting resources, but also for the sake of destruction of any kind of resistance, in ignorance of the complexity of relations of different life forms that make life itself possible.

Social justice and ecological justice are one. To resist the capitalist murder of the earth induces internationalist solidarity with and between colonized people’s resistances, with social ecology as a horizon. Every colonizer of Kurdistan, and every state, every company providing means of this destruction and profiting from it, is responsible. Internationalism requires that people abroad see their responsibility in the social and ecological resistance, wherever there are profiteers and organizers of the war against life and nature in Kurdistan.

