

A CRITICAL READING AGAINST CONCEPTUALISATION OF HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN: LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS

İNSAN VE İNSAN DIŞI KAVRAMLARINA KARŞI ELEŞTİREL BİR OKUMA: EDEBİ VE FELSEFİ TEMSİLLER

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Abstract

Human fears, albeit in different forms, are what “Man” has been trying to avoid as part of his hegemonic motivations over nature. The fears, controlled by humans or controlling them, can operate as both motivation and demotivation, showing how “Man” is strong enough to not be weak, but also weak enough not to be strong. This study problematises humans’ perceived superiority over nature and non-humans through theoretical and literary readings. It surveys the intersections of literary and philosophical narratives that challenge dominant human-centric viewpoints. By exploring narratives from diverse perspectives, it attempts to understand the underlying agents causing fear, alienation, and otherness embedded in different cultures. Hierarchical power dynamics in the forms of race, class, and gender are considered as “man-made” concepts, distorting human perceptions into dominating non-human and nature. Apparently, fear, alienation, and othering play a detrimental role in how these power dynamics operate. However, at the same time, fear and alienation potentially hint at human vulnerability. The study intends to reclaim nature from its submissive position against the concept of human-nature, ideologically pertaining to society and culture. In this way, it shows a thorough understanding of human behaviour and motivation in the face of domination and perceived superiority. It concludes that the concepts of fear, alienation, and otherness potentially bear the ways in which human hegemony could be limited if not subverted.

Keywords: Fears, Alienation, Hegemony, Nature, Non-Human.

Öz

İnsanın doğa üzerindeki hâkimiyeti, farklı biçimlerde ortaya çıkan korkularını kontrol edebilmesine bağlıdır. Koşullara bağlı olarak insanın kontrol ettiği ya da insanı kontrol eden korkuları onun hem zayıf olamayacak kadar güçlü ve hem de güçlü olamayacak kadar zayıf olduğunun işaretleridir. Bu çalışma, kuramsal ve edebi okumalar aracılığıyla insanın doğaya ve insan dışı varlıklara karşı algısal üstünlüğünü sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Çalışmanın odak noktası insan merkezli bakış açılarını eleştiren edebi ve felsefi anlatıların kesişim noktalarıdır. Çalışma farklı perspektiflerden anlatıları inceleyerek, farklı kültürlerde yerleşik olan korku, yabancılaşma ve ötekiliğe neden olan etkenlerin altında yatan unsurları araştırır. Bu çalışmada, ırk, sınıf ve cinsiyet biçimindeki hiyerarşik güç dinamikleri, insan algısını insan dışı varlıklara ve doğaya hükmedecek şekilde yozlaştıran ve “insan zihniyle üretilen” kavramlar olarak ele alınmaktadır. Görünürde korku, yabancılaşma ve ötekileştirme, bu güç dinamiklerinin işleyişinde olumsuz bir rol oynar. Bununla birlikte, aynı zamanda, korku ve yabancılaşma potansiyel olarak insan savunmasızlığına işaret eder. Çalışma, toplum ve kültürün istekleri doğrultusunda ideolojik insan-yetiştirme kavramını eleştirerek, doğayı kontrol edilen konumundan özgürleştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu şekilde araştırma, tahakküm ve algılanan üstünlük sonucunda varlığını sürdüren insanın davranışını ve motivasyonunu anlamlandırmayı hedefler. Son olarak çalışma, korku, yabancılaşma ve ötekilik kavramlarının aslında insan hegemonyasının kırılmasına ya da sınırlandırılmasına öncülük edebileceği sonucuna varır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Korku, Yabancılaşma, Hegemonya, Doğa, İnsan Dışı.

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In recent years, comparisons are always made between human and non-human. But it is known that at the start of it all, after creating heaven and earth God created the 'Man'. The pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (B.C. 481-420) formulated the classic ideal of Man to be 'the measure of all things' in Plato's dialogue Theaetetus (B.C. 369). After the Western Dark Ages during the Renaissance, the ideal Man figure was rediscovered and illustrated in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. Later, in the age of Enlightenment, the ideal man became the centre of attention and a dichotomy occurred between man and nature. This movement dominated Europe and included several ideas and scientific experiments by means of reasoning and exploiting nature for the sake of humanly concerns.

In the following centuries, the maltreatment and othering of the nature increased by eradicating the harmony between human and nature, hence causing clash and conflict. However, as Asberg and Braidotti indicate, human beings are not an "oxymoron" as we think; in this new age of Anthropocene in which everything is transformed within the hands of Man, "we humans are fully in nature, [a]nd nature is fully in us" (1). The European notion of nature not only includes the physical environment such as trees or rocks, but it comprises everyone outside of the perfectly proportioned body of the Vitruvian Man. According to Moore, most humans were excluded from Humanity such as Africans, indigenous people, most women and even some white-skinned men who were considered to be a part of nature (79). The Greeks considered foreigners as barbarians, the Westerns regarded native Indians as savages and the black people were mostly seen as animals rather than human beings. This ideology gave the Man the right to control, and it justified their actions to exploit everything within the scope of this degraded nature and bring the so-called civilisation.

When Rene Descartes uttered the words 'cogito, ergo sum' (I think therefore I am) in 1637, the precondition to exist became to be able to think and have a reason. Hence, anything outside of this reason was a mere object, like a machine with no life and soul. Animals were seen as objects akin to a wall clock only ticking away their remaining days. As reason attained superiority, a dualism started between body and mind. Is this Vitruvian Man really the measure of all things, or is it changing day by day and evolving as Heraclitus says, 'the only thing that is constant is change'. Just like the constant rotation of the Earth around its axis, every living being is continuously in flux.

It is not an easy task to make sense of human behaviour in a universe that is in constant flux. In the Medieval Ages, God was at the top dominating men and spreading fear. Dogmatic beliefs and religion dominated people. Towards Enlightenment and the rise of Industrialization, we have met a Man-centered universe as reflected within the texts. The man was enlightened but also became mechanized. The need for raw materials came to the scene. As much as they needed raw materials, they also became desperate for human

labour. The most visible domain showing this dual exploitation of nature and humans is colonialism. And now, this research embarks on discovering the newly centred universe of human life, answering the question what-centred universe we are residing in.

Nietzsche once said, the tragedy of man is that he was once a child. As Adam and Eve landed on earth, so did humans while leaving their warm and safe home called mothers' womb. Trying to survive on this new land, Man became weak in the face of nature and other living beings. Man did not possess "the teeth of the carnivore, nor the sense of hearing, nor the sharp eyes, which are necessary in the battle for existence" (Adler 28). Therefore, he needed protection and tools to maintain his existence. Since Man discovered fire, they attained the very first form of technology. With the use of this technology, the so-called nature, they became stronger and more merciless in using it to its best advantage. Humans were no longer weak and no longer aspired to own sharp teeth because they made knives, arrows, planes, and cars to fulfil the things they lacked from the animals. The more they desired to overcome their sense of lack and insecurity, the more they controlled and dominated nature to lessen their deepest fears. According to Kordic et al. (Posthumanism and Contemporary) the moment humans realized "their sense of power over other living beings," especially during the Renaissance, this power and superiority gave them the right to dominate, exploit, and take everything for granted for the sake of humanity.

Over the centuries, Man has become obsessed with power. They have dominated nature, animals, other human beings, and even their inner psyches. The reason for achieving this extensive power lies in Man's feelings of fear and weakness in their nature. As Bourke clearly states, "fear has been one of the most influential emotions in humanity's history" In the old days, people have feared many things, such as magic, evil spirits, God, death, and Kings and Queens who spoke in the name of God (111). As humanity moved towards the Enlightenment and Age of Reason, they wanted to liberate humans from fear with the help of advancements of thought and science and become their own masters (Horkheimer and Adorno 1). At this stage, with knowledge came great power.

However, the feeling of fear changed its form; people were now afraid of the unknown future and uncertainty of the scientific discoveries. In 1861 one of the readers of a magazine had commented that his aunt was afraid that "the electricity was leaking all over the place" (Jung 33). Jung mentioned this as 'Misoneism' which was the fear and hatred towards new ideas such as Darwin's theories of evolution (31). It is evident that despite having control over nature and the power of reason, fear is still stimulated in one way or the other amongst humans. Similar to misoneism, Simon C. Estok termed ecophobia as "irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives" (208). It can also be regarded as the fear of losing the anthropocentric control over non-human others. In order to cope with this fear, man has invented language and culture against nature. In cultural studies, it is believed that subjectivity is constructed through culture and social interactions, hence "culture makes the subjects out of concrete human

beings” (Sheikh 2).

The French writer and a feminist activist Simon de Beauvoir’s declaration ‘one is not born, but rather becomes a woman’ in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) can be a good example for this ideology. Therefore, the importance and impact of society are clear when Marx states, “[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (10). One’s culture and society play the biggest role in their psyche, including their consciousness and unconsciousness, as they are indoctrinated by their cultural values and inflicted by the dominant fears and horrors within their community.

As reason and science flourished, religious beliefs lost value in the eyes of Western people. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the monster can be associated with the social fears and problems people were facing at that time due to the decline of religion and the new scientific discoveries (Schreider 2). The authority of science made humans’ lives easier in some ways, but it could not clear off the fear of death from people’s minds and hearts. As the prominent anthropologist Ernest Becker argues, “the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else” (53). However, this was not the same in every society as in the old days; people had religious ceremonies where they worshipped their ancestors and connected the bridge between dead and living, showing that death was not the end (Moore and Williamson 4). The Greeks used philosophy to deal with death, and Christians during the Middle Age considered death to be the gateway to reaching God.

With the use of scientific innovations, many long-lasting beliefs and myths were overthrown. Maybe people were no longer afraid of pain or sudden death, but the ultimate act of death still instilled fear. The modern man’s unconsciousness thought of itself as immortal and found it hard to imagine his own death (Freud 23); however, the more science developed, the more man envisaged uncertainty and death. Hence, Bauman blatantly signifies that death is the ultimate defeat of reason as it undermines the trust and security that reason promised humanity (16). No matter how advanced technology and science one has, the act of death still terrifies humans but at the same time reminds them of their manhood and mortality.

The concept of alienation discloses many deep feelings and emotions; therefore it is seen throughout history and posits a common theme in literature, theology, and psychology. In the old days, this word was used for mentally handicapped people, in French, it is ‘aliene’, Spanish ‘alienado’, and in English, they still use the word ‘alienist’ for psychiatrists (Fromm 116). The source of this word can stretch out to Descartes, as in those days, the distinctive characteristic of humans was claimed to be the mind and reason; everything outside of that had no existence.

Firstly, alienation appeared with Christianity’s original sin when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge and were dismissed from the Garden of Eden. As they

were cast down to Earth, they became alienated not only from God but also from their nature and each other. Hence, this alienation would continue till the day they return to their original place. This concept of alienation can also be seen in the early Greek philosophers such as Plato (424-348 BC) in his Allegory of the Cave, where only the true philosophers can reach the world of Forms where nothing ever changes. Similarly, Plotinus (204/5-270 CE) and his term The One, which is essential to all living things, can be associated with alienation to oneself also.

During the age of the Renaissance, Man discovered himself, and later with the enlightenment, he improved his status and made use of science. The more he became grounded on Earth, the more he drifted apart from God. Humans thought so highly of themselves that they even took the role of God to create the world and living beings from scratch. This act passivised humanity and slowed the process of attaining their true nature, deepening the hole of alienation.

In the 18th century, with the growth of Industrialization, which was a period of great social and economic change, the feeling of alienation among humans increased drastically from various perspectives. Humans became mere commodities to be used in factories; they became robotized and lost their true nature and morality. Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German philosopher who studied alienation in a broader sense. He had taken alienation from the ontological level to be studied at a social one. He mainly focused on human labour and how that caused self-alienation among human beings. The worker spends his time working, but he becomes alien to the product he creates continuously against himself, which causes estrangement from self (Marx and Engels 72). In the end, Man no longer has freedom in anything except “his animal functions-eating, drinking, procreating” (74). Therefore, Marx considers human labour to be essential in one’s life because people create their world with their productions, and this also helps them create and find their inner morality.

Humans, when they come into the world are nurtured by family, religion, and society against their nature. Hence, they want to do the same and nurture the environment. Having been indoctrinated into certain patterns, Man replicates the same to nature. In the postcolonial narratives, this ideology is manifested openly. For example, when the British invade a land, they consider it an open field with its nature, and people within that they can shape and mold as they please. Moreover, in the colonial texts, it is evident that the environment has been feminized with the words and phrases such as penetration and motherland. Gender roles nurture humans, so they nurture the environment in a similar vein. According to Dollimore, “men create culture as a defence against nature,” and because nature is associated with women, culture becomes the opposite of female nature too. Even further, nature is presented as a “miasmatic swamp whose prototype is the still pond of the womb” (xxiv).

The pull between humans and non-human as part of man’s perceived superiority also

echoes in literary representations. In Defoe's famous work, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) Robinson is the perfect example of the Vitruvian man trying to bring civilization and reason to the unknown and unpredictable land. Robinson's control and domination over the environment can be linked to controlling humans. The more Robinson controls Friday, the better he controls nature. And the more he controls nature, the more he escapes his fears and alienation on this savage land, but at the same time, he makes Friday and the environment the Other. This later causes loneliness and a lack of security for Robinson. It becomes Man versus Other, and it is the duty and the burden of Man to "control, contain, and otherwise govern the Other" (Said 48). Therefore, the feelings of fear, alienation, and otherness are all tangled up with each other and cannot be separated. As Pietikoninen puts it, the "[m]odern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature" (167).

In Mary Shelley's work, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Victor Frankenstein strived for the role of God and created a living being, but, in the end, due to his fear and abhorrence, he recalled his helplessness and human nature. Accordingly, the hegemony of humans is overthrown by the strong and infinite emotions of fear, alienation, and otherness. The "man-made" concepts of class, gender, and race come face to face with these innate human emotions. Generally, humans position nature as the 'other' to serve a purpose for the sake of Man. However, the 'nature' that they create becomes an entity that they fear and abhor. The main reason for this can be the threat of uncertainty that Estok mentions to be "the lifeblood of ecophobia" (476). In *Genesis*, when Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, they are feared by God and cast down to the earth. Hence the humans who regard themselves to be God-like creatures abstain from making the same mistake by preventing these non-humans from reproducing and only being an asset for usage.

The mistreatment and dehumanization of the clones are visible in Kazuo Ishiguro's book *Never Let me Go* (2005). The clones are only considered spare parts to be used when the time comes. Similarly, Friday is always seen as inferior and treated as a servant by Robinson in Daniel Defoe's classic *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Just like humans cut trees to make use of the wood for the fire, the clones are slaughtered to use their organs for the sake of better and healthier humanity. Also, no matter how royal Friday is, he can never arouse to a position of a companion but stay as an assistant. Therefore, Man always considers living or non-living people or objects just a mere matter of nature bestowed on humanity.

This act of domination can be associated with human's sense of lack and weakness in their nature. The last canonical text to be studied is the masterwork of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). It touches upon Man's sense of loss since Adam and Eve were cast down from heaven to earth, similar to the way humans are born into the world and lack their oneness with the creator, they had in the mother's womb. This provokes the start of

Man's sense of lack, inferiority, and alienation towards both nature and himself. In Doris Lessing's dystopian novel *Mara and Dann* (1999), the same disobedience by humans to nature is presented. In contrast to humans' greed and desire for power, nature reminds them of their vulnerability and weakness through natural disasters such as draughts, fires, and snowstorms.

In the first half of the 20th century, after two world wars, millions of people were killed, many towns and cities were destroyed, and a sense of meaninglessness prevailed among people. Many thinkers and writers dwelled on feelings of alienation, loneliness, and disinterestedness. The Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is a masterpiece in this aspect. The main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, have become so alienated from the world around each other and themselves that they keep forgetting where they are and why they are waiting. Another great Irish writer James Joyce also illustrates alienation perfectly in his works. In one of his famous novels *Ulysses* (1922), the main character Leopold Bloom wanders around and goes to many events, and meets many new people, but in the end, he questions his purpose in life, asking who he really is and where he is heading. This feeling of alienation one has towards his being or psyche can be associated with Lacan's philosophy. Lacan talks about the concept of the mirror stage, where the child creates on an imaginary image as he observes himself in the mirror. He misrecognizes and misperceives himself as he continues to regard this fictional image to be his real identity. Later, he becomes ambivalent about the image he creates and becomes hateful as "he feels alienated by being and not being the image at the same time" (Sheikh 2). This contradiction also exists in Jung's concept of persona or the shadow. He notes that the act of meeting one's self is actually meeting his own shadow, which is defined as "a tight passage [...] whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well" (21). Therefore, as Man aims to achieve his ideal identity and reach unity within, he unconsciously internalizes the cultural and social values and becomes other to his own human nature.

Sartre pointed out that "fear [is] the feeling of being in danger before the other's freedom" (268). Hence, Man, since the beginning of life on earth, has feared the other and its power. The other became the figure of a stranger or foreigner to him. As Kearney puts it, the "notion of the stranger within is as old as civilization itself" (61). To suppress the power of the other, Man took the mission of domination and controlling nature. However, domination required some plausible explanation, so they had to discriminate against the other and the unknown because "only individual or group that can be marginalized or viewed as standing outside the norm may be monstrosized" (Nuzum 208). During the European Enlightenment, colonizers created dichotomies such as man-nature, man-woman or black-white extending the space they shared with each other. Their imperialist vision rested on the notion that they "had a duty to enlighten the rest of the world, conquering wildness and bringing order and rationality" (Adams and Mulligan 3). But in

reality, Man wanted to dominate and enslave these far islands and indigenous people not because they were uncivilized but because their “[n]ature was wild, unrestricted, magnificently unknown” (Adams 33). Humans were afraid of the unknown, and deep down, they were aware of their weak nature and inferiority. Hence they desired to overcome their inadequacy by controlling everything and everyone outside of their concept of Man.

Conclusion

Everything within nature such as animals, living beings, humans and non-humans turned into a source which could be manipulated and consumed as Man’s wish. The development of science and the advancements in technology enhanced this utilization even further. However, why do humans need the urge to exploit and dominate nature? It can be stated that earth has its own ecosystem. Humans, animals, and nature are all part of this system and have their separate roles. But the Man at the centre is causing injustice and due to his selfishness is using nature as an equipment for self-protection and advancements. As we dive deeper into human nature and try to undefine it, the feelings of fear, alienation and otherness come to light. These concepts not only unearth the weakness of Man but also demonstrate how human’s hegemony over nature can be limited if not subverted.

Michel Foucault once commented on the concept of man saying that man is only a recent invention and later claimed that Man needs to be dethroned for a better degree of accuracy and complexity (343). This idea eradicates the superiority of Man and promotes the equality of humans and non-human beings by destroying Man’s domination and agency. However, even today, humans always claim their existence with the ability of reasoning and reinforce their superiority by dominating nature and other living beings. As far as Man is concerned, they are humans only when they have the power over nature. It seems as if loss of domination and power would unearth their weakness and resurface their fears and alienation.

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