

## **A Biography: An Adamant Defender of 'Deep Ecology' and Ecofeminism: Günseli Tamkoç (1921-1998)**

Nermin Abadan-Unat\*  
Boğaziçi University, İstanbul

### **Abstract**

*This paper is dedicated to the memory of a dear, lifelong friend, Günseli Tamkoç, who until she passed away strived to surpass the socially accepted values, mores and attitudes and fought for the acknowledgement of new concepts such as "deep ecology", "eco-feminism" and peace movements. Although not interested in large-scale political movements, she progressively became a genuine fighter for local democracy, political participation and networks.*

### **Introduction: Biography of Günseli Tamkoç**



Günseli Tamkoç was born in February 1921 in Kalecik, near Ankara. Her father Dr. Hilmi Tamkoç was a wellread physician, whose whole career was dedicated to public health. A distant relative of the family was the famous Ottoman statesman and poet Ziya Paşa (1825-1880). As one of the most influential Ottoman intellectuals Ziya Paşa, particularly in his late years, attempted to introduce Western values and democ-

ocratic attitudes through his articles in the newspapers *Hürriyet* and *Muhbir*. Similar to her ancestor, Günseli Tamkoç who also fought in her later years for new outlooks, opening the path for a new understanding of our legacy regarding nature and the status of women.

---

\* Prof. Dr. Nermin Abadan-Unat, Boğaziçi University, Turkey. Department of International Relations, Bebek İstanbul.

After completing primary school, Günseli was sent as a boarding student to the Arnavutköy Kız Koleji in İstanbul where she acquired the English language and passion for literature. The appointment of her father as head of the Public Health Department in the district of Çeşme and İzmir caused her transfer to İzmir Girl's Lyceum in 1937. Completing her secondary education, Günseli Tamkoç opted for the English Department of the Faculty of Language, Geography and History, Ankara University. Due to her excellent command of Language, she graduated in three years in 1943 and entered the British Council as translator. In 1948, she married Naci Tilev, a geologist who recently returned from Switzerland. Her two sons, Murat and Fatih were born in Ankara in the 50s. Around 1955 she transferred to the Institute of Public Administration of Turkey and the Middle East (TODAIE) where she gained, among others, a deep and lasting friendship with Dr. Fatma Mansur. Toward the end of the 50s, her marriage was dissolved. Some time later, she married Dr. İhsan Kuntbay. This marriage also lasted only a few years. Meanwhile, Günseli Tamkoç had moved to the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance and became greatly interested in the field of social work.

During the early sixties, with the help of a UN scholarship, she went to Ann Arbor, where she obtained an M.A. degree in social work. After her return to Ankara, she continued to work in the Ministry of Health where she participated in a number of seminars and workshops in Pakistan and Great Britain. In 1965, she decided to move to the USA, where her brother, Metin Tamkoç, an academician in international law was teaching at Texas Technical University, Lubbock. The next 15 years were spent mostly in North Carolina where Günseli Tamkoç taught social work. During those fifteen years in the States, she reconsidered her primary values and gradually lost interest in the social work and started to study all aspects of environmentalism. This change in outlook was the motive to analyze the premises of the so-called "new age" and the scope of its movements. It is also during this period that she decided to become a vegetarian.

Günseli Tamkoç openly declared that she was a foe of institutionalized religion. Strongly influenced by her mother, who was a devoted Mevlevi disciple, that is, Günseli's moral code was mostly derived from Mehri Baba, a Hindu guru, living in India, whose writing she often quoted. After having taught and carried out practical social work with her students while, financing the higher education of her sons, she decided in 1990 to return home. Not willing to tolerate the stress, noise and smog of a big city, particularly Ankara, she followed the steps of her close friend, Dr. Fatma Mansur and opted to settle down in Bodrum. After completing her house there, she worked uninterruptedly in the peninsula of Muğla with the women of the surrounding villages. She collaborated with different associations while creating programs for children who are in need. Her belief in a healthy surrounding made her a local leader who went with her friends to clean the soiled beaches of Bodrum. Indifferent to being called "the garbage collecting old lady" she inspired a civic sense of responsibility in a large number of local inhabitants for a clean and healthy environment. Constantly reading recent literature on the relevant issues, she began to publish a new journalism, which included articles about ecology, particularly deep ecology and eco-feminism. Over time her beliefs became crystallized. When she assumed the task to become the first president of the Bodrum branch of the Association for the Promotion of Contemporary Living (Çağdaş Yaşam Derneği), she exemplified democratic le-

adership while establishing a number of committees and also tried to accustom her immediate circle in the practice of democratic participation.

Concentrating on ecology, she took a very clear position on this nebulous and many times misinterpreted issue. Her preference was for a "deep ecology" She edited a book on this subject, which soon after its publication became a textbook in courses on urbanism and environmental issues. Thus she distinctly separated herself from protagonists of environmental protection. Her choice made her do a close study in ecofeminism. During her last years, she totally dedicated herself to the protection of nature and sustainable growth. This outlook eventually led her to sympathize with peace movements, particularly with the attempt to bring Greek and Turkish women closer together. Her last participation in a public meeting was during her trip to the island of Kos, where under the leadership of Zeynep Oral, a group of Turkish women together with their Greek counterpart, led by Ms. Pappandreu, tried to delineate a common policy of good will. The meeting on Kos (Sakız) island took place on April 30-May 3, 1998. In the same year, because of a fast spreading cancer she passed away in Istanbul on July 9.

Summing up, Günseli Tamkoç represented her generation by trying to use the new freedoms republican Turkey had given to its women. Although she was a sincere Kemalist, however her interest in politics started only in her late years. She was a liberal, convinced of the superiority of democratic participation in all situations of the public life. Her belief in the importance of education and its secular basis was decisive. She loved her sons and grandchildren. Unable to cope with the heat during the summer in Bodrum, she managed to build herself a summerhouse near her brother's home in Çeşme. For her, the big tree in front of her bedroom was like a real friend to whom she would talk in her lonely moments.

Günseli was one of those democrat women who managed with patience and without publicity to implant the new concepts she had acquired abroad and at home over the years in her immediate surrounding, and later through some articles in small weeklies. The following will elaborate what has been her understanding of "deep ecology"?

## Deep Ecology

A French social scientist Luc Ferry in his book *Le Nouvel Ordre Ecologique* (1995) emphasizes the fact that ecology is not only "the science of the natural habitat or the justified worry to preserve the environment." This movement also represents a rising political force. Although the said subject supports different approaches, they all share a common concern: the status of nature in regard to the human being.

On one hand those partisans of ecology who are labeled, as "superficial" desire to protect the environment of the human being thus safeguard a certain quality of life. On the other hand "deep ecology" "which is closely related to the liberation of animals and ecofeminism-considers Nature as a quasi-entity, anterior and superior of man, which needs to be respected on its own. Partisans of this type of "radical ecology" reject an anthropocentric and technical vision of the world, which represents the major characteristics of western modernity. For them the dictum of Descartes "we should become master and owner of nature" is to be negated. According to radical ecologists, the Declaration of Human

Rights of 1789 reflects a "Cartesian Humanism" which is nothing else than pure tyranny. In order to modify this approach, a total decentration has to be realized, aiming at abolishing all privileges granted to man in order to acknowledge animal rights and nature as a whole, which is a moral and legal status, which surmounts the human being.

Defined in this way, deep ecology amounts to a counter-cultural environmentalism. According to one of its best-known representatives, the Norwegian writer Arne Naess, the basic principles of "deep ecology" are as follows:

- 1) The well-being and flourishing of human and non human Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- 2) Richness and diversity of life contributes to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- 3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- 4) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
- 5) Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- 6) Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- 7) The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes. (Naess, 1994)

In the late 70s, other radical ecologists went further. Their utopian vision of a new world order led them to resist public work, even going as far as forming independent tribes "who became "eco-guerillas" In the 1990's radical ecologists engaged in a fierce fight against anybody wearing animal furs. Parallel to these developments, which were based on action, an additional philosophical approach became influential in the thinking of these ecologists. (Merchant, 1980)

In particular the German philosopher Hans Jonas, in his essay entitled "The principle of responsibility" discussed the controversy between the acceleration of scientific progress and "progress" containing terrible threats. (Jonas, 1984) According to Jonas, the question is not what kind of future is waiting for us but whether the extension of our power does not render us responsible for the future of all humanity. According to this philosopher, "humanity has no right to suicide!" He demands recognition of the biosphere and argues that this responsibility falls totally upon the shoulders of mankind. Finally, the new conceptualization of time has to be mentioned. Contemporary sociology makes a distinction between a) clock time, b) Timeless time and c) glacial time. According to Lash and Urry, the notion of glacial time implies that "the relation between humans and nature is very long-term and evolutionary. It moves back out of immediate human history and forwards into

a wholly unspecified future." (Lans & Urry, 1994) This is exactly what makes the environmentalists insist on the matter of "legacy" According to them, glacial time means to measure our life by the life of our children, and of the children of our children. The best example is the anti-nuclear movement: its basic idea is that we have to consider the safety of generations to come. Thus the ecologists have created a new identity, which they call biological identity. This socio-biological identity does not imply denial of historical cultures. Ecologists bear respect for folk cultures, but they consider as their enemy state nationalism. One of the founders of the Green Party, Petra Kelly said "We must learn to think and act from our hearts, to recognize the interconnectedness of all living creatures." (Kelly, 1994) All these concepts are sympathetic with certain status of women issues and thus lead us to a new form of feminism, namely ecofeminism.

## Ecofeminism

The field has grown immensely since the term (*eco-feminisme*) was coined in 1972 by Françoise d'Eaubonne in *La féminisme ou la mort*. (d' Eaubonne, 1974) How does ecology and feminism meet? In the absolute respect for nature as the foundation of liberation from both patriarchalism and industrialism, they see women as victims of the same patriarchal violence that is inflicted upon nature. And so the restoration of natural rights are inseparable from women's liberation. According to Judith Plant (Plant, J. & Plant, C. 1992), "Ecology speaks for the earth, for the 'other' in human / environmental relations. And ecofeminism, by speaking for the original others, seeks to understand the interconnected roots of all domination, and ways to resist to change."

Recently several extremely interesting approaches have been developed. One of them involves "Ecofeminism meeting business" Chris Crittenden tries to develop an ecofeminist capitalism model which will promote moral and psychological health. (Crittenden, 1998) Crittenden sharply criticizes intensive factory farming; he favours ecocentric awareness bringing harmony at all level of holism: self, family, community, bio-region, nation-state and the global environment.

Ecofeminists have astutely criticized the masculinist bias in the daily functioning of the environmental movement and played an important role in the growing challenge to the modern model of "development" Most ecofeminist activists are engaged with grassroots political work, whether or not they identify with any particular party, movement, or ideology. Many ecofeminists work in the Green politics movement because the democratic, community-based and the ecological Green political vision includes ecofeminist concerns and aspirations. (Association of State Green Parties, Ten Key Values.)<sup>1</sup>

A leading eco-feminist critic, Vandana Shiva, asserts that the modern model of development being imposed by the West is inherently patriarchal because its fragmented, "anti-life" opposed to diversity, dominating and delights in "progress" based on nature's destruction and women's subjugation. (Vandana, 1988)

---

See <http://www.greenpartyus.org/tenkey.html>.

## A Turkish Ecologist Speaks

The existing literature has grown so fast and is so vast that I prefer to turn to Günseli Tamkoç's writings and would like to explore the means and examples for working in the field in Turkey.

In one of her recent articles (Tamkoç, 1999) she reminds us that Turkish culture reflects a great lack of sensibility towards nature. A quick overview of some Turkish proverbs reveals this tendency, such as "Every sheep is hanged on his own leg", "The man who rescues his boat is the captain," "A serpent which does not bite me may live a thousand years" At each discussion about nature, the issues of cutting down trees, forests devoured by fire, filled-up lakes or springs, get very little if any attention. Do we not belittle those who start a discussion on the protection of 'nature' or the 'environment'? The Turkish culture contains very little of an awareness for the independent existence of nature. At present, we eagerly destroy our rivers, lakes, and mountains in order to become a "consumer society" This shows how little understanding there is in regard for "sustainable development"

Tamkoç also stressed the fact that, the new eight year long education plan should absolutely include as a major goal the need to inculcate love for nature in the mind of children at an early age. She continues by saying: "If our indifference would not be so widespread, how can we explain our total disinterest toward the struggle, the citizens of Bergama are displaying?" (Tamkoç, 1997) She concludes by saying: "As a human being, we have to renew ourselves and we have to transmit to our children the responsibility, we should feel toward 'nature'. In this respect, I never want to lose my hopes.

In one of her short articles, Tamkoç provides a homage to the brave women of Bodrum, whom she calls "the ecofeminists of Bodrum who didn't know what ecofeminism is!" Citing the case of Kızılağaç village near Bodrum, she deplores how merciless some entrepreneurs have literally shaved down one of its hills to exploit a limestone quarry. Similarly, in the nearby village of Kurudere, whose dwelling were leaning upon a small hill covered with pine trees, a company who had obtained the right to excavate the place in order to obtain the mineral dolomite, met very strong resistance from the villagers. The most dramatic part of this struggle which, went on for six months, happened on April 4, 1996 when the villagers who attempted to block the entrance of heavy excavating machines, were forced to lie on the ground by the gendarmerie. During this confrontation the veils and the pants of the peasant women were torn, stones were hurled at them and about twenty men and women were arrested and brought to Bodrum. They were released the same night. This incident followed by a public hearing in the square of the village on April 7, 1996. The peasants were still unable to recover from the shock they experienced. Their indignation was intensive. And here comes the most poignant observation of Günseli Tamkoç. She remarks: "The women of Kurudere village did not undertake this action because they wanted to be called ecofeminists or wanted to be looked as such. For them, this resistance was very natural. They had been born there and all they wanted was to protect their natural surrounding. They were saying: "The forest is our life; we can only exist with this forest." This consciousness had reached such a dimension that nobody had to tell them what to protect and how to protect it. They simply acted. Tamkoç concludes: "The women

of Kurudere may lose their first suit against the Semkay Company. But it is for sure that they will continue to fight. The "Bodrum Platform of Women" decided to support this struggle.

Observers of Günseli Tamkoç as a leader of civil society will notice that from the moment she began to deal more intensively with ecofeminism, her willingness to participate in limited political action grew. In one of her unpublished notes, she drew up the program for a seminar on ecofeminism. This seminar took place on April 20, 1996 and was based on an analysis of the different types of ecofeminism, namely liberal, cultural, social and socialist ecofeminism to be followed by group discussion and a summing up of the discussion. At this point I want to stress once more how much attention Tamkoç devoted to collective work, to share knowledge with others and to give each group member a chance to express herself; in short, to act as a genuine democrat.

Tamkoç's thinking and engagement in the direction of spreading the understanding of ecofeminism lead her to a closer analysis of peace movements. It is sad that she was not able to witness the fruits of this endeavor in regard to the improvement of Turkish / Greek relations. The detail description by Tamkoç of the efforts of Turkish and Greek women to engage in peaceful dialogues was first started by the founder and president of the Centre for Peace and Development, Mrs. Margarita Papandreu in 1995 during the Kardak (Imia) crisis. As a result, there was a first joint meeting of Turkish/Greek women in Athens. The Turkish side was led by Zeynep Oral, journalist/writer. This was followed by a second joint meeting on Kos (Istanköy) island, April 30-May 3, 1998. This meeting was organized by the members of the Bodrum branch of the Association for the Promotion of Contemporary Living (Çağdaş Yaşam Derneği Bodrum Şubesi). Günseli Tamkoç was also a member of the Turkish delegation. In her last written report, she was enthusiastic about how fruitful these efforts had been and the recommendations the summing-up report contained. Accordingly, the joint group was given the following suggestion 1) The development of an alternative tourism program called "Agro-tourism", 2) To support the creation of small and middle scale women enterprises, 3) To eliminate gender bias and prejudicial statements in the schoolbooks of both countries, 4) To organize summer camps for women and children endeavoring constructive discussion focusing on Turkish/Greek women, 6) To encourage Turkish and Greek authors to publish joint books, 7) To establish a follow-up commission monitoring the press of both countries. All these efforts resulted in the creation of a "Turkish/Greek Women's Peace Initiative", eventually called WIN-PEACE, to be realized by the Women's Initiative for Peace. Tamkoç hoped that all these ideas, initiatives, efforts would help to contribute to an effective way to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the UN Human Rights Declaration in November 1998. Two months later, on July 9, 1998, Günseli Tamkoç passed away. She was not able to witness the dramatic change which took place during the last year of this century. She rests for her eternal sleep in a modest, isolated cemetery near Gökçebel village, not far from Yalıkavak in the Bodrum archipel. Olive and mandarin trees are spending their shadow upon her grave. Her ideas however are spreading-faster than she could have imagined.

## References

Association of State Green Parties, Ten Key Values.

<http://www.greenpartyus.org/tenkey.html>

Critterden, Chris (1988). Subordinate and Oppressive Conceptual Frameworks: A Defense of Ecofeminist Perspectives, *Environmental Ethics*, Univ. of Tennessee, 20 (1988) pp. 247-263).

D' Eaubonne, Françoise (1974). *Feminisme ou la Mort*, Paris: Pierre Horay.

Ferry, Luc (1995). *New Ecological Order: Trees, Animals and Men*, (Tr. Carol Volk) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jonas, Hans (1984). *Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die Technologische Zivilisation*, Frankfurt: A.M., 1979, (2:1984).

Kelly, Petra K. (1994). *Thinking Green. Essays on Environmentalism, Feminism and Non violence*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Lans, Scott & Urry, John (1994). *Economies of Signs and Space*, London: Sage

Merchant, Carolyn (1980). *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Naess, Arne (1994). Culture and Environmental, *International Journal of Ecoforestry*, 1994, 10 (4)

Plant, Judith & Plant, Christopher (editors) (1992). *Green Business: Hope or Hoax*, London: New Society.

Tamkoç, Günseli (1997). Doğa Koruyucusu Çocuklar, *Pusulâ*, Bodrum, 16/05/1997

Tamkoç, Günseli (1999). Doğa Duygusuzluğu, *Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi*, İstanbul Üniv. Sayı 5, pp. 177-178.

Vandana, Shiva, (1988). *Staying Alive: Ecology and Survival in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women.



## Özet

### ***Bir Yaşam Öyküsü: 'Derin Ekoloji' ve 'Ekofeminizm'in Savunucusu Günseli Tamkoç (1921-1998).***

*Bu yazı, bir yaşam boyu süren vefalı bir arkadaşlığın anısına adanmış olup, yaşamı boyunca toplumda yerleşen değerlerin, tabuların ve davranışların üstesinden gelmek ve Türk toplumuna 'derin ekoloji', eko-feminizm' gibi yabancı olduğu kavramları tanıtmak uğruna mücadele vermiş olan Günseli Tamkoç'un yaşam öyküsü ve ekofeminizm alanındaki çalışmaları anlatılmıştır. Makalede sadece Türkiye'de değil, dünyada çok fazla bir geçmişi olmayan 'eko-feminizm' ve 'deep ecology' (derin ekoloji) ile ilgili açıklamalar yapılmış, Tamkoç'un bu alanda yaptığı çalışmalar anlatılmıştır. Geniş boyutlu politik harekete gerçekte fazla ilgi duymamakla birlikte, yerel demokrasi, siyasi katılımçılık ve birlik konusunda oldukça geniş boyutlarda mücadele vermiş öncü kadınlardan biri olarak Günseli Tamkoç'un hatırlanması dileğimizeyizdir.*