**Ethical Divides within the Environmentalist Movement in Turkey:**

**History, Structures and Actions**

**Background**

‘Environmentalism’ covers a range of social and political movements and ethical perspectives which share a concern for the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. Almost twenty years after the 1960s when sizeable environmentalist mobilizations had first come to light and begun to shore up critical public debates and projects for radical social change in Western Europe and North America, the environment was still not a very substantial worry across a wide spectrum of social movements in Turkey. In the 1970s small mobilizations for the environment had surfaced here and there in connection with the tide of student and working class radicalism; yet these were only sporadic groupings. None of them succeeded in reaching a scale capable of developing the capacity to influence the political context in their own right.

The situation had changed drastically with the military intervention in 1980. The junta banned almost all political activities, especially those that aimed to improve the political and economic conditions of the working class. With the brutal suppression of class politics, all forms of mobilization for radical social change had either receded or gone underground. Paradoxically it was in the post-junta period that environmentalism had become popular and influential not only among radical societal activists but also within the official political society.

With the return to ‘democracy’, now forced to fit the limits drawn by the restrictive 1982 Constitution, public space was opened, for the first time, to several environmentalist movements which, in less than a decade, were to be momentous mobilizations. These “new social movements” made effective use of the opportunities provided by the new codes and regulations legislated and implemented by successive governments in response to an alarmingly deteriorating natural environment, in addition to the international obligations acceded by the Turkish state by signing bilateral or multilateral environmental accords.

The majority of such mobilizations were initially local and focused in their horizons. A typical case was the contention between the concerned people of a locale, mobilized usually by the initiations of professional associations of lawyers, engineers and doctors or marginal and perhaps clandestine left wing groups, and a multi-national corporation operating without even minimal reverence for the natural riches of that locale. Needless to say, this was not only a typical case in Turkey but rather a common experience around the world, especially in the South, as a consequence of the insertion into the new global governance regime, later to be called Neoliberalism, which puts the demands of corporations before the environment and is prone to the “market solution”.

It was within and through such local mobilizations that the environmentalist movement in Turkey not only proliferated but also expanded in its reach and broadened its horizon. Various environmentalist mobilizations since the 1980s, which have also increased their connections with transnational environmentalist currents and movements, can be grouped under five categories with respect to the issues that they have been concentrating on and struggling against:

1. Mobilizations against the adverse effects of fossil fuel plants - mostly coal-fired thermal power plants.
2. Mobilizations against the lack of regulations aiming to protect the commons
3. Mobilizations against the adverse effects of nuclear power plants
4. Mobilizations against gold mining
5. Mobilizations against hydro power plants built along rivers

**The objective of the chapter**

In this chapter, against the background of the emergence and consolidation of the environmentalist movement in Turkey in terms of the prevalent structural conditions of the global and local contexts at particular intervals of time over the period of our analysis, we analyze the ethical bases and principles guiding, governing and justifying the actions of the aforementioned mobilizations. Using a two dimensional taxonomy we aim to differentiate mobilizations according to their ethical premises. On one hand, we observe groups of mobilizations that share the assumptions, values and judgments of the *anthropocentric* perspective. On the other hand, we single out groups of mobilizations that move beyond the former and draw from the *ecocentric* perspective. The difference between these two is that while the former conceives present and future human beings as the only things that have intrinsic value, the latter sees all living organisms as things with equal significance in value terms.

Our initial examination of the particular mobilizations within the environmentalist movement in Turkey leads us to recommend the following generalizations (which surely need to be further studied and elaborated by future research).

1. In terms of the historical trajectory, as a general trend, mobilizations move away from the anthropocentric perspective towards the ecocentric perspective.
2. The general trend that we observe is more salient in grassroots mobilizations than those sponsored by the corporations under the auspices of social responsibility projects.
3. The dividing line between the two sorts of ethical positioning is the position taken vis-à-vis the capitalist system. Those that take on a definitive anti-capitalist stance are almost completely inclined toward the ecocentric perspective. Unlike these, those that take on a reformist line of action and are associated with various corporate agendas remain very much anthropocentric, and thereby aim to rectify the wrongs of an otherwise well-functioning *status quo*.