



The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier

Chris Gratien

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Chris Gratien's book is about the transformation of Çukurova and its mountainous hinterland between Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in the mid-nineteenth century and Turkey's development initiatives in the mid-twentieth century. Gratien claims that although the history of the Ottoman Empire is somehow well-known, it has rarely been portrayed with the rural lifestyle of individuals and locations at its core. He continues by saying that Ottoman history is mainly of the commercial and governmental decisions made in Istanbul and the provincial capitals, although the vast majority of the Ottoman population was made from those rural places, the decisions regarding those places were taken in central places. A bold claim follows which says that the histories of these discrete but numerous places demonstrate how agrarian change produced Turkey and other post-Ottoman republics. Rural landscapes had to adapt as society and politics in the Ottoman era changed, and as a result, so did how individuals perceived and organized their surroundings. At some point, Gratien makes a big claim by saying that *Çukurova was in many ways a microcosm of the empire's transformation*, although it is clear that he tries to convince the reader that his book is able to give a general portrait of the rural transformation of the Ottoman Empire. According to Gratien, the histories of small parts of the Ottoman could collectively prove that Turkey and other post-Ottoman era states were the products of agrarian transformation during the final period of the Ottoman Empire. The author says that the remaking of Ottoman society and politics caused a remaking process of rural areas, and during the time of the transformation, the perception of

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the people regarding the environment also changed. Gratien says that his book not only looks at how the state, capitalism, war, and science changed the Ottoman border but also makes a case for how human civilizations and diseases like malaria, which are caused by a complex web of ecological forces, have changed over time. When people altered their forms of habitation and malaria was a factor in the local ecology, new infections were likely to occur, making malaria the leading disease of the settlement border. He then, gives some scientific information about the history and expansion of malaria, concluding with a claim that the history of malaria is a political history. Gratien believes that the history of malaria is in some forms, the history of inequality and dispossession that the identification of which is not so easy. He claims that the history of how the development of the modern world altered the characteristics of epidemic disease helps to explain why colonial settings became centres for malaria research and discovery and why, during the twentieth century, national public health projects became so preoccupied with malaria eradication. Gratien says that malaria was not merely a hindrance to commercial activity; to a significant part, it was a representation of the ecologies that colonialism and capitalism had created. Gratien tries to enlighten the life of ordinary people by using malaria as a tool rather than as an aim in his book while he gives a different perspective of the rural areas of the Ottoman Empire during the transformation period. Alongside many others, one of the author's inspirations of rural life in Çukurova, as he mentions, is the works of Yaşar Kemal, which he deservedly says gives the best perspective of rural life in Çukurova.

The book consists of five chapters. Chapter one analyses the relationship between local political power and autonomy and the local ecosystem, which was affected by seasonal migration between the highlands and the lowlands, to show how the frontier of Çukurova was the result of changes that transformed over several centuries. Chapter one focuses on some more points: it emphasizes that the defining characteristic of this environment is the temporal space of the *yayla*, summer encampments situated in the Taurus and Amanus Mountains. The nomadic pastoralists who made up a large portion of the population in the Cilicia region at the beginning of the nineteenth century frequented the highlands. They made the most of the vegetation's availability at various elevations and throughout the year. The *yayla* was however just as significant to urban inhabitants as a place of safety from the summer annoyances of sweltering heat and malaria, which spread in the lowlands throughout the hot months of the year. However, the *yaylas* also acquired political significance as a result of their movements. The position of the mountains in Cilicia persisted despite attempts by the Ottoman Empire to reposition the area throughout the early modern era, and those who controlled them. Chapter two examines the creation of the modern state and the function of settlement policy in the lowlands of Çukurova in the context of the Tanzimat's overarching objectives in the 1860s and 1870s. It highlights the environmental effects of settlement on refugees and forcibly settled pastoralists, highlighting the widespread famine and mortality that many tribes have experienced. It clarifies how Ottoman policy on the settlement was a component of a civilizing mission put out by politicians like Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, who considered settlement and cultivation as essential to the reform of the

empire. It also demonstrates how the spread of malaria sparked among the populations vulnerable to settlement leading them to rebellion against Ottoman rule. The Ottoman administration changed its policies in response to their resistance so that they were more in line with the region's natural reality. Chapter three discusses that in the latter decades of the Ottoman administration, the Cilicia region underwent significant change. Cilicia was referred to as Second Egypt by some because of its supposed agricultural potential, particularly for the cultivation of cotton. This chapter examines also the distinctive local type of capitalism that developed in Çukurova. It claims that the commercial economy created inequality as well as rifts in the agricultural society. It also describes how seasonal labour rhythms brought workers to Çukurova from all over the empire, and how the Ottoman government set up new medical facilities and focused on a more thorough environmental makeover of the countryside as a result of the spread of malaria and other health problems among these groups. Chapter four details the social and environmental effects of war and migration in Çukurova. It focuses on the lengthy 1914–1923 World War I era. The Adana region's economic output was negatively impacted by the war effort, and Çukurova became a region of mass migration. Additionally, the war accelerated ecological change. On the one hand, the Ottoman state and its agents expanded their influence in the agricultural sector. On the other hand, malaria assumed a novel form as a result of the battle, leading to an outbreak that was particularly virulent and had an unlikely epicentre at a yayla in the Taurus Mountains. After the war, France invaded Cilicia to establish a colonial mandate, but its brief presence there was only another example of the dislocation and unrest caused by the conflict. In Chapter five, it is examined how the nation-state in the Republic of Turkey used science and technology to further reshape the former Ottoman frontier it had inherited. It examines the early republican era, World War II, and Turkey's 1950s transition to democratic rule. In the fields of agriculture and medicine, science became a crucial element of the interaction between the government, local people, and the environment. Because of a significant malaria control campaign, the Adana region was used as a testing ground for new government technology. The republican state's technocratic consensus gave rise to a militant language about nature and the economy as a whole. In addition, a romantic view of nature focused on the mountains and the yayla as places for affluent recreation. However, it wasn't until these pastoralist communities were pushed to the periphery that the mountains and the communities that formerly inhabited them became idolized. The gentrification of mountain regions by the emerging urban elite and middle class, as science, technology, and medicine facilitated a radically altered experience of rural landscapes, marked the culmination of the process of settling the late Ottoman frontier.

Gratien's book is likely to be criticized for some of the ground-breaking claims it contains. The claim that the history of some small rural places could somehow explain the Ottoman history, that malaria was actually political, and that those topics were not adequately covered by Ottoman historians are some of those claims. Even if Gratien is right in his claims, I think he should have made a more comprehensive literature discussion to prove his claims. On the other hand, some of the many positive

points that could be said about this book are: It deals with a part of the Ottoman Empire that could be described as an internal border rather than its outer borders like the Arab world, Africa, Iran and the Balkans, which certainly differs it from similar studies. Another point is that the author has not only well-connected concepts such as rural area, settlement, migration, transformation, progress, modernization and disease, but he also has successfully dealt with the historical process, which is his main purpose by using those concepts. Gratien has benefited from many archives and libraries like Turkey, France, the United States, Armenia, Greece, Lebanon, Switzerland and the United Kingdom to write his book, which I think is a key point that makes his work valuable. In conclusion, I would like to state that I recommend this book to those who want to have a better understanding from a different perspective of the transition process from the Ottoman Empire to Turkey, starting from the history of the rural areas.