

# A conquest of rice: agricultural expansion, impoverishment, and malaria in Turkey

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing decades after Turkey's emergence as a modernist nation-state, Dr. Mehmet Şerif Korkut (ca. 1895-1957) portrayed dystopian circumstances plaguing the republic. From his vantage as physician and politician, he discerned factors of human and physical geography that –when connected through unfettered agrarian capitalism and a proliferation of rice as cash crop– contributed needlessly to immiseration, illness, and death. A medical doctor, he also represented Burdur province during the late 1940s in the Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, or TBMM). Viewed historically, his writings merit attention with regard to agriculture, medicine, and politics as his overall thesis integrated these sometimes-disparate concerns and displayed continuities with progressive and populist criticisms of agrarian capitalism. Moreover, amid contemporary evaluations of the Turkish state's medicalized nature and its politicization of disease and public health (e.g., Evered & Evered, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b; Evered, 2014), his

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works—especially *Isıtma ve Çeltik* (Malaria and Rice)—emerge as a unique public health-based interpretation of Turkey’s political economy and the associated economic and political ascendancy of capitalist farmers.

In this article, we contextualize, describe, and analyze Korkut’s writings and medicalized critique of agrarian capitalism. As a point of entry, we first address historical geographies of rice in Ottoman Anatolia, situate it as commodity and legislative concern, and follow this contextualization with a profile of Korkut and his experiences. Scrutinizing his thesis, we sketch out rudimentary parallels between alternative assessments of commodities, impoverishment, and—more broadly—capitalism, on the one hand, and Korkut’s observations and arguments, on the other hand. Associated with his articulation of relationships between commodity, capital, and poverty, there were two outcomes that he contended were manifest—diseases of the state and the citizenry (*i.e.*, corruption and malaria). Through subsequent sections of this article, we analyze his strategies to establish these linkages with respect to narrative approaches, literary style, and graphic illustrations. In particular, Korkut’s observations were invigorated by incorporating local voices and others’ writings. Supplementing his own voice and adding weight to his wider thesis, these *hidden transcripts* (Scott, 1990) from rural Anatolia constituted collectively a colorful and robust critique of those empowered economically and politically within the republic. In addition to Korkut’s works and newspaper articles accessed through collections at the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago and at Turkish libraries, this study draws from archival records held in Ankara at: the Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (the Prime Minister’s Archive of the Republic, cited as BCA), the Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Kütüphanesi, and the Refik Saydam Library. Incorporating and analyzing these sources—in addition to laws governing rice cultivation, we present how the politics of planting—and of *not* planting—rice were framed variously by (and for) particular interests within the state and beyond (*e.g.*, large-scale landowners) as matters of public health, economics, regulation, and even human rights. Finally, we engage with how Korkut framed his critique of agrarian capitalism in early Cold War Turkey—not as an expression of radicalism but as part of wider agendas to counter communism.

## 2. SITUATING RICE IN OTTOMAN ANATOLIA

Addressing rice cultivation and associated matters of labor, İnalçık observed that, if *examining the earliest period of rice growing in the Ottoman Empire one should logically look first in the official survey books of the sancak of Hudāvendiğār [northwest Anatolia], the birth place of the Ottoman state* (İnalçık, 1982: 69). Doing so, he demonstrated that rice was lucrative—a commodity of significance to fiscal demands throughout the empire’s his-

tory (1299-1920s). Elaborating on the crop and associated regimes of land tenure, water rights, taxation, and labor appropriation and organization, he established that reclamation of land and water resources for rice was a principal means of securing legitimate tenure under Islamic and Ottoman traditions (İnalçık, 1982: 71-83). In this context, rice was very much a state-controlled commodity and traditions of coercion were not unknown in managing associated labor. Likewise, under threat of confiscation, merchants and farmers were prohibited from rice trade until at least eight months after annual harvests, enabling the state to sell its shares first and at desired prices. Coinciding with imperial geopolitics, internal expansion of cultivation was associated commonly with state initiatives (*e.g.*, sedentarizing Yörük, Turcoman, and other nomadic peoples). Moreover, diffusions of rice cultivation and consumption into Black Sea regions, the Balkans, and southeastern Europe seemingly followed Ottoman armies' expansions and establishments of garrisons and settlements. Thereafter, *there was always a great demand for rice in Ottoman markets, especially in the rapidly growing urban centers which kept the price for this staple high*, and constituted eventually *a basic ingredient in the Ottoman diet; served and eaten particularly in hospices, convents, as well as in royal palaces* (İnalçık, 1982: 72, 113-115; also İnalçık & Quataert, 1994; Taşlıgil & Şahin, 2011). However, historians now speculate that the extent of rice consumption was limited largely by the empire's reach and the depths of citizens' pockets, making it not so common beyond the state's charitable institutions or tables of the well-heeled; rice was *a modest luxury and not a popular, everyday food* (Faroqhi, 2000: 19). In Ottoman times, for most agrarian communities and households –and in most traditional *pilav* dishes–, *bulgur* (*i.e.*, cracked wheat) was the common staple.

By the Ottoman-to-republican transitional era, rice's significance increased and cultivation was associated ever more with southern and southeastern regions of Anatolia as regional distinctions arose in scales of both production and labor (household/family versus wage-based/sharecropping); these patterns persisted throughout the twentieth century. A family farm mode arose and typified regional production around Ankara, on the one hand, and a commercial mode targeting markets and practiced on mid- to large-size farms came to be associated most with Adana and its hinterlands (Güneş, 1971: 20). The expansion of rice fields –in number and size– enabled rising rates of substitution of imports derived previously from Egypt and India. Indeed, according to Korkut (1950), many Turks presumed rice was always imported until the late nineteenth century. Amid the empire-to-republic transition, state concerns with rice production broadened the economic to encompass public health due to heightened concerns over malaria. Following a series of 1880s scientific discoveries of the parasitic microorganisms causing malaria and the late-1890s identification of the mosquito's role as vector, rice fields –and wetlands, in general– were regarded increasingly as sites of environmental risk and targeted for reclamation, re-

striction, and other preventative remedies (Harrison, 1978; Haynes, 2001: 85-124; Packard, 2007; Webb, 2009). Reflecting this view, Korkut quoted Italian malariologist Giovanni Battista Grassi; *rice fields are paradises for anopheles* (Korkut, 1950: 35; source omitted).

### 3. RICE IN REPUBLICAN REGULATORY AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

Based in Ankara, the nascent republic initiated a public health agenda years before the empire's end (Evered, 2008, 2014; Evered & Evered, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999). Integral to its missions to survey the provinces, research priority maladies (*e.g.*, malaria), and institute state-centered public health initiatives, the republic enacted health-related laws, regulations, and orders (Evered & Evered, 2011, 2012a). While the Anti-Malaria Campaign Law (Law No. 839) of 13 May 1926 had provisions specifying treatment of rural populations and farm laborers (*e.g.*, requiring landowners with workforces of fifteen or more to supply quinine), the major legislative development regarding rice and public health was enacted a decade later. Accepted on 11 June 1936 by the TBMM and enacted on 23 June 1936 by publication, the Rice Cultivation Law (Law No. 3039; TBMM, 1937) established the state's explicit governance of rice. Understanding this law is essential; it demonstrates how the state regulated rice cultivation and enables appreciating how Korkut viewed this law and its alleged obfuscation by affluent landowners and corrupted politicians, on the one hand, and how critics viewed their relative position and rights, on the other hand. In its initial article, it mandated that each *vali* (provincial governor) for urban vicinities or *kaymakam* (or sub-provincial leader) for rural areas establish local commissions where rice was planted –or simply proposed– that would include this administrator as chair, provincial/local agricultural officials, technical experts (*e.g.*, civil engineers), provincial/local directors of (or physicians with) the state's antimalarial campaign, a representative rice farmer (selected locally by his peers or, in the absence of their designation, appointed by fellow commissioners), and –for areas with Ministry of Agriculture officials familiar with rice– one such expert. For locales with fewer than ten hectares of rice –sites assumed to be particularly rural, the law provided an additional list of local alternates who could serve in any of the above-indicated capacities. In its subsequent articles, the law established directives for: farmers to seek permission to grow rice; how lands might be sanctioned for (or prohibited from) cultivation; and, the roles of commissions in approving applications and making related determinations regarding appropriateness of fields, irrigation and water resources, and incorporating input from state, municipal, and other community authorities –down to including villages' elders for traditional rural communities. Moreover, it set guidelines for appealing commissions' judgments, for

mediating potential disputes over such decisions or the process itself, and for assessing commission members' fiduciary obligations to petitioners should there arise unnecessary procedural delays. Additionally, rice farmers' rights and responsibilities were established, as were consequences for neglecting the review process or engaging in cultivation in violation of commissions' verdicts and instruction. For initial violations, farmers would be fined, with charges doubling for subsequent violations and the threat of losing any future access to licenses to grow rice. The law's final articles addressed those matters that were most problematic, based on Korkut's critiques of rice cultivation and associated illegalities (Korkut, 1950); designations for approved fields' proximities from settlements, variations in sanctioned distances from settlements as determined by irrigation types, and employers' responsibilities to their fieldworkers. Based on the size of neighboring settlements, approved fields were required to be greater than specified minimum distances from the settlements. For fields with irrigation that could be controlled (*e.g.*, drained to inhibit mosquitoes), distances increased correspondingly with the designated sizes of the communities; established safe distances were set at 50 meters from village or *nahiye* (townships) centers, 500 meters from town centers, and 1,000 meters from city centers. However, in contexts where field drainage would not be practicable—and where there was standing water even in dry seasons (referring especially to natural wetlands brought under cultivation), cultivation was prohibited within three kilometers of any settlement. Expanding on the 1926 Anti-Malaria Campaign Law (Law No. 839), the 1936 law increased farmers' responsibilities for their workers. It prohibited workers from sleeping in the open within 50 meters of irrigated fields or three kilometers of continuously-flooded fields. If impractical, farmers were required to construct small barracks set at least one meter above ground and with mosquito-proof doors and windows. Additionally, landowners were prohibited from assigning work in fields before sunrise and after sunset, and they were required to provide free quinine. Finally, sanctions were restated for infractions of these provisions.

At the time of enactment and over the coming decades, the 1936 law was criticized variously by landowners as an impediment to meeting national food requirements, as a constraint to capitalism, and as a violation of landowner—and even human—rights. Not infrequently, as when the law's regulations regarding field proximity to settlements was challenged in 1939, the Ministry of Agriculture sided with landowning farmers (BCA 030-10-22-125-8). Such trends point to the mounting political weight of rice—and of landowners' demands—as steadily discernable from the 1920s onward. Indeed, developments in Turkey's political landscape between the early 1920s and when Korkut wrote in the late 1940s and early 1950s corresponded with numerous socio-economic shifts nationally and globally that compel us to think beyond simply questions of disease and/or greed in framing the place and politics of rice.

As early as its 1927 congress, Turkey's single political party, the CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi; or Republican People's Party, RPP), included "populism" as a central tenet of its platform; by its 1931 congress, "etatism" (*devletçilik*, also *étatisme* or statism) was incorporated, as well. Both principles were part of the CHP's "six arrows", enshrined constitutionally in 1937 (Türkeş, 2001: 92) and reflective collectively of increased efforts to embrace politically *and* economically a largely rural and agrarian populace. This agenda was motivated by compelling economic circumstances; the September 1929 stock market crash in the United States and the ensuing global economic depression prompted critical reevaluations of the potential roles of the nation's peasantry and villages. As a matter of practical economic policy from above, etatism could ensure conditions of autarky—at least for key food staples (Sarc, 1948). Achievement of such a status (attained for rice by 1937; BCA 030-10-184-268-14) was also promoted and celebrated as a matter of national pride (*e.g.*, with black tea; Hann, 1990).

Fusing principles of populism and etatism, officials and intellectuals promoted notions of "agrarian populism"—encouraging variations of what historians identify as Turkey's "village" movement. Proponents tended to advocate village-focused/-friendly development policies; critiquing approaches that perpetuate or exacerbate the uneven standings of rural and urban communities. Sometimes ascending to adoring platitudes that romanticized the seemingly innate virtues of the peasantry and village life, such narratives found expression in articulations of Turkish nation and nationalism (Karaömerlioğlu, 2006: 66-69). Beyond its support of agricultural development and self-sufficiency in key commodities, such discourse—and associated development strategies—served other practical purposes; it countered rural-to-urban migration trends that threatened to overwhelm plans for urban development (Evered, 2008: 339). While agrarian populism could reflect interests of extremely conservative Kemalists, it also included advocates (especially leading intellectuals) at the other end of Turkey's political spectrum within the CHP. The 1930s Kadro (or Cadre) movement is depicted commonly as "leftist" yet supportive of statist initiatives for the peasantry, promoting simultaneously a "third way" neither capitalist or wholly socialist (Türkeş, 2001). Progress along these alternative trajectories—both the state's etatism and the Kadro-aligned agenda (especially as articulated in their 1932-1934 journal, *Kadro*)—ended effectively by the late 1930s with the approach of World War II. Though Turkey largely avoided direct involvement, it was compelled to mobilize a large military, increase defense expenditures, and initiate provisioning in response to inflation (especially of food prices). Commenting on the state's challenges and reactive policies, Pamuk wrote, *High inflation, wartime scarcities, shortages and profiteering accentuated by economic policy mishaps soon became the order of the day* (Pamuk, 2008: 280). Depicting Kadro's sentiments as too radical, the movement was largely pushed from the CHP by commerce-oriented interests—articulated by Celâl Bayar, Adnan Menderes, and Fuat

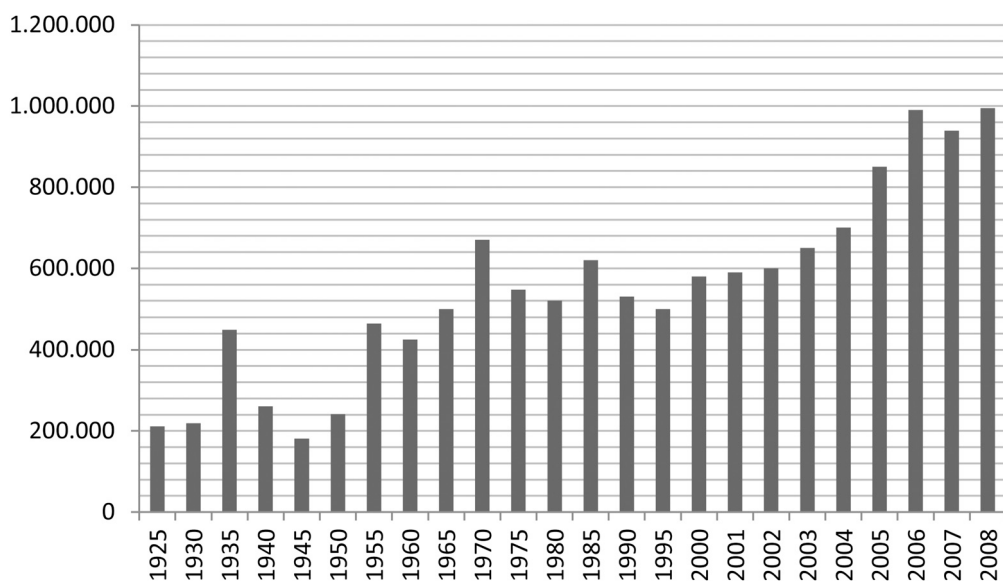
Köprülü, among others; actors later forming the nucleus of the Demokrat Partisi (DP; see Hale, 1980; Harris, 2002; Sarc, 1948; Türkeş, 2001).

**TABLE 1**  
**Shifting area of rice cultivation**

Year	Area (in <i>dekar</i> ) with rice	Year	Area (in <i>dekar</i> ) with rice
1927	110,280	1944	153,650
1933	272,760	1951	303,000
1935	448,850	1953	500,000
1936	406,900	1957	570,000
1937	208,580	1962	610,000
1941	412,000		

Source: Taşlıgil & Şahin (2011: 194).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Shifting area of rice cultivation, 1925-2008**



Source: Taşlıgil & Şahin (2011: 195), reproduced by permission of the authors.

Developments in public health legislation and in the state's political-economic priorities combined to define the evolving economics of rice. In 1923, the emergent republic produced between 30,000 and 40,000 tons of rice, but these amounts increased in the coming years due to restrictions on imports; profitability from domestic rice production rose

accordingly. Turkey produced 72,154 tons of rice by 1934 and nearly 100,000 tons by 1935. The rapid swell in rice production escalated public health concerns and resulted in the aforementioned 1936 Rice Cultivation Law. However, with its enforcement and restrictions on *who* could cultivate rice and *where* it could be planted, production hence declined, dropping to 40,000-50,000 tons by 1936 (Taşlıgil & Şahin, 2011: 188-189). This decline –and a subsequent rise (one associated with landowners’ increased influence enabled by WWII and their ultimate 1950 electoral victory)– can be seen in annual shifts in the total area under rice cultivation (measured in *dekar*; 1 *dekar* = 0.247 acres; Table 1 and –for a broader view extending almost to the present– Figure 1; also compare shifts with those for just the 1940s provided by Korkut, Table 2).

Commenting on developments diminishing etatism—and facilitating a return to wider scales of rice production that alarmed Korkut, historian Feroz Ahmed noted that the private sector developed readily amid wartime opportunities and insisted on greater political recognition by war’s end. Though CHP supporters of etatism sought to employ Kemalist populism and contain the private sector’s expanding influence by advocating agrarian reform, *the bourgeoisie and landlords wanted a free-market, an independent landed class and integration with the West* (Ahmed, 2008: 231-232). Pressures culminated in the DP’s 1946 formation and its 1950 general election successes. The circumstances of intensifying free-market pressure, a demise of etatism and challenges to the CHP, and rice-/malaria-related trends that Korkut associated with these profound shifts constituted collectively the socio-economic and political terrains that Korkut sought to navigate and contest.

#### 4. CONTEXTUALIZING DR. KORKUT AND HIS WORKS

Despite authoring a vigorous medicalized and populist critique of agrarian capitalism, Korkut’s overall politics may be viewed as somewhat ambiguous. Indeed, as a single-party, nationalist-era MP, he was most likely viewed by fellow citizens as conservative. Apart from his writings, there are not abundant records about him, with the exception of cursory biographical facts from *TBMM Albümü*; he was born in Burdur, graduated from a military medical school, and received additional training in Tübingen, Germany. Through his career, he was both physician and public health official in Elazığ, Diyarbakır, Adana, Antalya, Istanbul, Kayseri, Zonguldak, and Ankara (TBMM, 2010: 457) and thus participated in contemporary developments in preventative medicine –particularly for diseases like malaria. Based on a comprehensive survey of parliamentary records from his years of service (*TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*), however, his role as MP was marginal except for service on TBMM’s special commission for labor and employment conditions; this ex-



perience provided additional opportunities to formulate views on rice cultivation and its socio-medical impacts. Apart from this data, his sole reference in historical sources emerges from İhsan Kudret's memoirs; she described him pointedly as a "fascist" and noted disparaging remarks following his passing uttered by Turkish writer Nurullah Ataç. In context, however, Kudret's isolated characterization appeared entirely personal (*i.e.*, referencing her friend Saffet Korkut, the physician's spouse) and were not presented in a context of any meaningful discussion of politics (Kudret, 1998: 42). Indeed, nationalists were not infrequently labeled with such pejoratives during these –and later– years in Turkey.

Korkut's works –published in the late 1940s and early 1950s– coincided notably with Turkey's multi-party shift and the 1950 election of Prime Minister Menderes. Strongly allied with the U.S. and personifying the landed elite, Menderes was associated with economic liberalization –and voiced early sentiments of Islamism. In Korkut's view, wealthy landowners increasingly acquired political sway within his country and over its systems of governance; a development personified by figures like Menderes. Infiltrating the state directly or through lobbying, he contended, affluent farmers plied their influence and expanded the area of rice cultivating in defiance of the law and to the detriment of impoverished peasants. Compiling commentaries on this concern as authored by others (*e.g.*, letters to newspaper editors) and editing them into a volume that included his own observations, Korkut's *İstima ve Çeltik* (1950) and other writings (Korkut, 1949a, 1949b, 1952) rendered collectively a distinctively positioned critique of agrarian capitalism at a time in Turkey's early Cold War history when the specter of radicalism loomed large and was policed heavily amid the country's unique experience with the red scare.

Though Korkut himself was likely no "radical", tracing comparisons between his critique of agrarian capitalism and treatises that are better known to scholars is useful. Simply put, it provides a better appreciation of the intricacies of Korkut's assessments despite his works' apparent lack of (academic) sophistication; a factor that may explain why scholars have not yet examined his works. In order to do so, considering how rice functioned as a commodity in the Turkish context is an essential first step. Noted previously, rice became a vital product for many actors in Anatolia's economy well before the republic's emergence (recalling İnalçık, 1982; Taşlıgil & Şahin, 2011) and thus emerged *as money* –and not merely as a good consumed by producers or buyers (Marx, 1867/1976: 955). Amid republican-era attempts to expand scales of production in the south and southeast, however, its valorization as a single commodity relied ever more on the input of wage –and not just household– labor. As profitability –and not state or subsistence demands– played increased roles, suppression of labor costs (in the form of wages and other factors –like precautions/costs for workers' health and safety) became a priority for large-scale

farmers (Marx, 1867/1976: 340-416). In these regards— and in Marxian terms, as rice’s overall value (opposed to just its simple “use-value”) prompted expanded cultivation, its socio-economic significance rose to that of commodity (*i.e.*, possessing “exchange-value”; Marx, 1867/1976: 125-131). To appreciate rice’s significance “as a commodity” in twentieth-century Anatolia—even in Marx’s terms, it is useful to again contrast it with *bulgur*. As Güneş wrote of *bulgur*, *Although in our country bulgur is consumed more frequently, its trade has not been as developed... [because] families themselves grow all the bulgur that they need*. Continuing, he added, *In contrast to bulgur which is not a trade commodity, with 97.9% of its harvest yielded to the market, rice is a trade commodity* (Güneş, 1971: 164-165). In other words, though *bulgur* endured as mainstay on Turkish tables—especially for rural families, rice ascended as the gateway to profits for landowners. Following Marx’s analysis beyond how the *individual commodity* functions seemingly as the *elemental form of wealth* in capitalist societies (Marx, 1867/1976: 125)—and thereafter how the commodified value of labor is implicated, we encounter inevitably his *general law of capitalist accumulation* (Marx, 1867/1976: 794-802); referenced by some (though not Marx) as his *immiseration thesis*. Summarizing this law’s essence— and outcomes, he wrote that

*the accumulation of misery emerged as a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth, and that, accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole* (Marx, 1867/1976: 799).

Clearly, our intention here is not to summarize thoroughly—much less engage comprehensively with—the many observations and assumptions of Marx that resulted collectively in *Capital’s* first volume<sup>1</sup>. Rather, what we do convey are those basic elements of *Capital* that resonate deafeningly while reading and considering Korkut’s own linking of commodity, capital, and poverty (Korkut, 1950), as addressed throughout this article’s subsequent sections. Viewed in concert, Korkut’s works on wage labor in Turkey’s rice fields add a literal dimension to the figurative predicament of Marx’s worker, wherein “(t)he wages of the agricultural labourer are therefore reduced to a minimum, and he always stands with one foot already in the swamp of pauperism” (Marx, 1867/1976: 796).

Beyond Marx, works of other critical scholars echo when examined alongside Korkut’s writings—though to lesser degrees. Published in 1892 and 1899, Kropotkin’s utopian manifestos *The Conquest of Bread* and *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* were written when Western capitalism collided increasingly with the political economies and wellbeing of tradi-

1. Instead, see HARVEY (2010); or: <http://davidharvey.org/>

tional peasantries (Kropotkin, 1892/1995, 1899/1996). Reacting against resulting inequities, Kropotkin conveyed one anarchist's optimistic views of alternate pathways into the future. In so doing, he focused on envisaging localized alternatives to a globalized system based on pervasive appropriations of "others' toil" (Kropotkin, 1892/1995: 47). In his ideal society, humanity organized at community scales and embraced modernity's technological benefits, evolving beyond imperial ambitions and nationalistic particularization; an idealized transformation that would render the modern state irrelevant. Though aspiring to rapid modernization, the early Turkish republic was consumed with nationalism and statism, and capitalism was firmly entrenched –albeit within the corporatist state's parameters.

Writing a half century after Kropotkin, Korkut's works did not inspire images of an ideal future or any call to effect radical change –as conveyed by Marx. Rather, Korkut focused on exposing a societal malady spreading within his nation at the hands of rich agriculturalists; one with economic, socio-political, ecological, and epidemiological consequences. Similarly, he addressed comparable conditions of agrarian capitalism's uninhibited expansion as observable in rural Anatolian rice fields and in the health of both the poor and the nation-state. In this regard –and also drawn from first-hand experiences, Korkut's works were consistent with more commonly accepted traditions of Turkish critique –as with elements of the earlier 1930s Kadro movement and the later works of Nâzım Hikmet which, though suppressed during his lifetime, are still venerated by many. A luminary of Turkish literature and leftism, Nâzım Hikmet recorded –especially through poems– the predicaments of the poor and the suffering of peoples at the mercy of the corrupt or empowered. In particular, these themes were stressed in his five-volume set of poems *Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları* (Hikmet, 1966-1967; known in English as *Human Landscapes from My Country*, 2002), authored while a political prisoner in Bursa and drawing on his associated impressions of a typical Anatolian life, as conveyed by fellow convicts –who were mostly ordinary criminals (Blasing, 2010; Freely, 2009). Even in this collection, the corruption of large-scale rice growers and of state officials (especially those working for the state's grain exchange board) –and attempts to resist this corruption– emerged as a significant tale (Hikmet, 2002: 342-362). As an MP on TBMM's special commission for labor and employment conditions, Korkut travelled throughout the republic's subregions and observed its working poor. Reflecting on such experiences and infusing associated local accounts and folklore, both he and Nâzım Hikmet recall analogous considerations regarding the impacts of agrarian capitalism on a society and its landscape and literature (see Williams, 1973).

Though one author was an MP and the other an exiled communist, the fact that Korkut's and Nâzım Hikmet's works shared broadly similar sources of inspiration and por-

trayals should not be too surprising –even amid Turkey’s own pre- and early-Cold War red scare era. Indeed, though there have been scholarly attempts to historicize, categorize, and analyze leftist politics and radicalism (as early as Karpat, 1966), notions of “radical”, “leftist”, “Marxist”, or “communist” have rarely been accurate labels in Turkish society and politics; figuring as convenient means either to provoke or malign political rivals, on the one hand, or to elevate one’s own standing among particular cultural or intellectual elites, on the other hand. For this very reason, the actual progressive content of ideas and convictions within otherwise Kemalist or anti-Kemalist ideologies in Turkey has often been understated or ignored entirely by many scholars of the country. While a literary scholar would discern a vast aesthetic gulf between the works of the two, the common ground existing between their essential messages on poverty, despair, and corruption –messages by one of the republic’s most oppressed and exiled artists and by a contemporary functionary of the state and its medical community– adds particular credibility to the assertions of both concerning the lived conditions of Anatolia’s poor. During his surveys, Korkut was moved especially by circumstances of the country’s farm laborers and the conditions of their homes and communities and thus concluded that the greatest threat endangering the nation and its health was malaria. However, for those not moved by empathy for those who suffered, he also pointed to an undeniable socio-economic concern; the countless days wasted each year to the disease and how rice –though enriching a few– contributed overall to peasants’ marginalization and to national underdevelopment (Korkut, 1950: XIII).

## 5. A MEDICALIZED CRITIQUE OF AGRARIAN CAPITALISM AND CORRUPTION

Beyond continuities between Korkut’s linking of rice to capitalism and poverty in ways that resonate with the works of various social and political critics, an additional matter to keep in mind before analyzing his work topically involves his connecting of these issues with corruptions of both state and body. In this regard, the commodity-capital-impoverishment combination is seen to result in malaria for farmers and a moral degeneration for Turkish society– one also diminishing its body politic. At various points, Marx illustrated clearly ways in which his *general law of capitalist accumulation* resulted in poverty and in compromised states of health and shortened lifespans. Citing public health reports and the studies of specific physicians, he sometimes related trends with corresponding declines in the quality of housing for the working poor, with departures of affluent classes from urban areas, and with rising demands for laws defining and enforcing public sanitation (Marx, 1867/1976: 592-595, 808-818). Moreover, though Marx’s focus –arguably– was decidedly urban, these associations were true for agrarian societies amid

modernization, too. Noting Victorian India, Davis observed that poverty and associated hardships (*e.g.*, famines) may *go hand in hand with agricultural commercialization and infrastructural modernization* (Davis, 2000: 63; citing Satya 1994). Indeed, since the times of Marx and of Korkut, poverty has come to be even more associated with the incidence of illnesses and premature deaths (Farmer, 2001, 2003).

Likewise, the corruption of society –and of politics– in *Capital* emerged with references to such figures as *boyars* and others (Marx, 1867/1976: 344, 346–348); affluent elites with voices and concerns that carried over those of their many workers. In Ottoman and Turkish histories, images of a landholding elite of rural society (characterized sometimes as *ağas*) have occupied similar positions in scholarly and literary accounts of the region (*e.g.*, Besim Atalay’s 1923 historical and geographical survey and Yaşar Kemal’s many novels situated in peasant communities –especially in the malaria-associated southeast). Describing this socio-economic ordering of society in the region of Maraş (or Kahramanmaraş)– and foreshadowing Korkut’s thesis, one authority wrote:

*[...] agriculture is still done by the old methods. Rice is mostly grown; rice fields extend to the city, choking the area with malaria. Farmers of Maraş, like farmers everywhere, owe much [i.e., have considerable debts] because the wealth and livelihood of the ağas come from the farmers’ backs* (Atalay, 1923: 123).

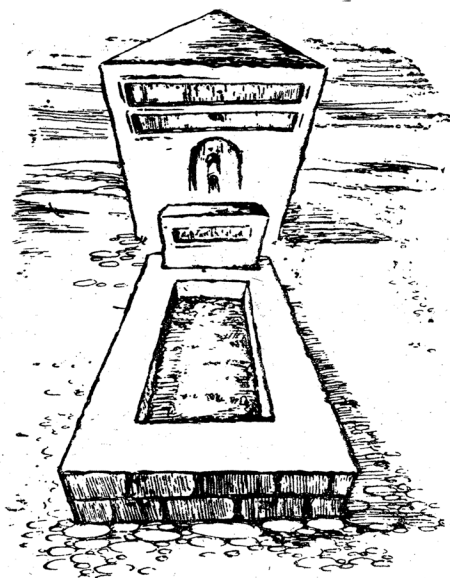
## 6. MALARIA AND RICE

In his opening to *İstima ve Çeltik*, Korkut strived immediately and vigorously to impress upon readers the urgency of confronting malaria as a national priority and a humanitarian mission, citing İsmet İnönü and later incorporating bleak and harsh graphic images (likely rendered by cartoonist Hüseyin Mumcu). In a prefatory quote from İnönü’s remarks at the eighth TBMM’s opening session, universal goals of public health were stressed; *We must bring the benefits of preventive medicine all the way to the villages*. Beneath the leader’s declaration, Korkut noted that prioritizing disease prevention should be embraced by the general public as a national concern of the utmost consequence (Korkut, 1950: III). Accompanying his call to combat malaria as a nationalistic project in public health, he stressed humanitarian aspects of the disease over subsequent pages in words and images. Citing verses from one of the earliest Sufi poets to write in Anatolian Turkish, Korkut quoted Yunus Emre and his account of how one of the smallest birds shook so forcefully that it brought down even the strongest of eagles. Paired with the poetic reference to malaria’s destructive capacity was an illustration of the disease’s ultimate consequence (Illustration 1; Korkut, 1950: IV). Identifying malaria further as Turkey’s

“greatest enemy” –and illustrating the foe plaguing and weakening the nation via mosquitoes (Illustration 2; on mosquitoes as symbols in public health, see Evered and Evered, 2012b), Korkut invited readers to learn of the disease through the words of the people themselves; this was his introduction to a poem of over 160 lines that served as a first-hand account of not only disease and its ravages but also as affirmation of his thesis as to its socio-economic origins.

### ILLUSTRATION 1

Image of a grave accompanies Korkut’s quote of Yunus Emre



Source: Korkut (1950: IV).

Including teacher Abdullah Zeki Çukurova’s untitled poem from *Engizek* (published collectively over 7, 9, and 11 September 1948) –a Maraş-based newspaper that included local authors’ works, Korkut ostensibly gave local voice to support his contentions as to malaria’s severity and its diffusion amid an inexorable expansion of agrarian capitalism. This selection was significant, however, as it was written by an educated resident from the region most at-risk from malaria and because it echoed two compositions familiar to many. First, throughout the poem, we are reminded of the famous story of the *ney* (an end-blown reed flute, associated especially with Turkish Sufism) authored by Sufi master Jalal ad-Dīn Muhammad Rumi; in Rumi’s poem, the *ney* suffered when removed from the marshes but survived its experiences to produce beautiful music. Second, Çukurova’s poem recalled one of the most recognizable of *mevlûts*; an account of the Prophet’s birth (recited

collectively as poems –sometimes accompanying verses from the *Koran*, *mevlüts*–particularly the one referenced– are associated with solemn occasions and feature as unique aspects of Islam and its practice in Anatolia). Structured and stylized in these immediately discernable ways, the poem not only presented a work with familiar regional textures, its author created opportunities for teasing readers, twisting recognizable phrases or verses in surprising yet evident ways to better satirize and parody his subjects (Korkut, 1950: VI-X).

**ILLUSTRATION 2**  
**The mosquito; Turkey’s “greatest enemy”**



Source: Korkut (1950: IV).

Beginning his epic, the teacher wrote, *Çukurova told [its] story*... and recounted the area’s corruption by money and by alcohol served in Adana’s garden cantinas. To deliver him from those evils, he prayed and cited a common Islamic psalm commencing with the verse, *Let us utter the name ‘Allah’ first*. Playing on even this refrain, however, he instead wrote, *Let us utter the name ‘Money’ first* –thus initiating his tale of the region’s (and Heaven’s) eventual corruption and despoliation by rice growers (Korkut, 1950: VI). Beyond rice’s

desecration of earth, Heaven was also susceptible when it arrived with Devletoğlu (the antagonist's name translates literally as "Son of the State"), a rice grower who hungered for profits even in the afterlife. Devletoğlu represented Maraş farmer Mustafa Efendi, said to have been, in 1927, the first to plant rice in Kadirli (a town on the Çukurova plain north of Adana). As soon as he arrived, Devletoğlu conspired to trick Allah; he quickly prostrated himself and wailed before Allah for permission and a contract to sow his crop. Drawing water from Kevser (the sacred river that flows in Islamic depictions of paradise), he planted rice. However, mosquitoes and malaria soon followed –killing the *huri* and *gilman* (angels; *huri* are generally female, and *gilman* are male). These deaths from malaria (effectively at the hands of Devletoğlu) and Allah's inability to save their lives (due to a binding contract) jointly convey the outright greed, immorality, and apparent omnipotence of the moneyed rice grower. Continuing to suffer the same on earth, the *umma* (nation of believers in Islam; all people) despaired and sent Sufi leaders as pilgrims to appeal to the Prophet in Mecca; neither he nor the angel Gabriel could help as Allah was beholden by contract. Learning of this, the Sufis and *umma* despaired and rejected their religion, their God, and His Paradise –now devoid of *huri* and *gilman*; thus came about the end of Islam– at the hands (and avarice) of the sacrilegious rice grower (Korkut, 1950:VI-IX). Integrating local, broadly Anatolian, and Islamic themes and sensibilities, the teacher's poetic apologue instructed as to the consequences of greed but also targeted pointedly the rice grower as subverter of state and religion. Embodying rice and greed, Devletoğlu was a vector more insidious and malevolent than any swamp or mosquito. From Çukurova's local voice –and with another graphic image (Illustration 3), Korkut initiated his text on malaria and rice/capital.

### ILLUSTRATION 3

#### Illustration facing Korkut's introduction



Source: Korkut (1950: XVI).

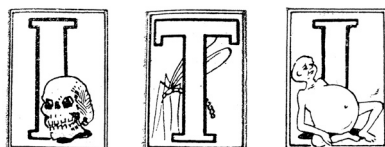


## 7. MALARIA; DESTROYER OF CIVILIZATIONS, KILLER OF CHILDREN

Contributing to a decades-long narrative regarding malaria in the republic<sup>2</sup>, Korkut's introduction spoke to malaria's effects on world civilizations through time –impacts emphasized throughout the book (Illustration 4). Declaring *malaria is a disease that prevents progress*, he asserted that its spread contributed even to ancient Greece's decline (Korkut cited, among others, Jones, 1909). Additionally, he pointed to the rapidity of Japan's recent development (up to WWII) remarking that it was enabled by the disease's relative absence from the island nation. Malaria itself and as a civilizational obstacle, he argued, continued to plague the Turkish nation. Viewing Anatolia from a perspective akin to European *Orientalism*<sup>3</sup>, he wrote of malaria as the source of his people's presumed indolence. He further perpetuated depictions of Turkish peoples suffering from *wretchedness, reduced energies for work, psychological degeneration, disinterest, and submissiveness* –all owing to the vicious toll inflicted on his people's constitution and character (Korkut, 1950: 4-6). While Korkut maintained many of the same biases against his own peoples that were shared by large numbers of contemporary physicians and public health officials of Turkey, it is important to note that he did not blame the peasantry of Turkey for its own state of impoverishment –in marked contrast with the attitudes of many of his peers<sup>4</sup>.

### ILLUSTRATION 4

#### Historiated initials preceding paragraphs of Korkut's volume<sup>5</sup>



Source: Korkut (1950: 1, 7, 12).

2. This narrative of malaria as Anatolia's civilizational enemy through history was reiterated repeatedly in early years of the republic, culminating in a "triumphal" 1950s state-published album commemorating the republic's *war on malaria* –as though it had been resolved (*i.e.*, SÜYEV, 1953; cited in EVERED and EVERED, 2011: 473, 476).

3. On the *Orientalist* attitudes of republican physicians and public health officials towards their fellow citizens from rural Turkey, see EVERED and EVERED (2012b); on *Orientalism*, see SAID (1978).

4. For republican doctors and officials, the peasantry was not only the demographic most afflicted by malaria, they also were disparaged as the class most to blame for its perpetuation and diffusion. On this bias and associated references to malaria as a *köylü hastalığı* (*i.e.*, a "village disease"), see EVERED and EVERED (2012b: 313-314).

5. Simple historiated initials preceding paragraphs of the volume's introduction and most chapters added emphasis and underscored the themes of death, danger, and immiseration that the author associated with the unhindered expansion of rice cultivation. Examples include a skull, a mosquito, and a child victim of the disease complete with distended abdomen from an enlarged spleen –an iconic symbol of malaria in Turkish media.

Following two brief chapters wherein Korkut addressed malaria's etiologies and epidemiologies in order to medicalize his wider critique, he related its recent histories and impacts in Anatolia. Lamenting a lack of complete statistics for late Ottoman and early republican contexts, he nonetheless noted that publications from both the republic's first medical congress in 1925 (which focused on malaria) and its attempts to survey and compile provincial socio-medical geographies yielded collectively sufficient data to affirm that it was prevalent and problematic during the republic's initial decades<sup>6</sup>, adding that years of conflict in WWI and the War of Independence (1919-1923) and growing numbers of refugees and migrant workers (*e.g.*, for railway construction and agricultural employment) exacerbated appreciably malaria's diffusions and effects. In the specific case of the republic's new forward capital, he claimed that these nation-scale dynamics coupled with regional and local factors (*i.e.*, the expansion of rice fields to meet expanding rail lines and the arrival of immigrants to help build-up Ankara) to make the growing city a "malarial hell" throughout the early 1920s. This situation compelled *almost everyone in Ankara* during summers and autumns of 1923 and 1924 to serve as a *volunteer* in the national struggle with malaria. As treatment and preventive measures expanded beyond the capital, he continued, many people sacrificed to overcome the disease that most came to call a *child killer* (Korkut, 1950: 20-22; see Evered, 2014).

## 8. LIMITS OF STATE PLANNING AND ONGOING THREATS OF "RICE FEVER"

Despite the efforts of dedicated citizens and state, there was no absolute victory over malaria. According to Korkut, the state itself shared a measure of the responsibility for a fluctuating record in declines and resurgences:

*[...] there were dimensions to our economic and agricultural development programs that harmed the health of the country. In other words, development plans were not symmetrical with the country's [goals for public] health. Consequently, malaria remains a national threat that undermines the country's wellbeing* (Korkut, 1950: 23).

He bolstered his assertions with statistics indicating ongoing infections from remote and isolated communities that, he implied, had not known previously the hardships of malaria in past generations. Summarizing experiences with malaria in the cities, towns,

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6. Analyzing papers from this conference see EVERED and EVERED (2011); and, assessing these surveys in terms of syphilis, note EVERED and EVERED (2012a).

and hinterlands of numerous sites throughout Turkey (*e.g.*, he included Istanbul, Adana, Antalya, Aydin, Balıkesir, Bursa, Eskişehir, Kocaeli, Konya, Sakarya, and Samsun, among others), he declared that the state's pro-development posture, the rush to modernize without fully incorporating public health into development plans, and rice growers' lack of mercy for this lionhearted nation combined to enable further ravages of this mass murderer (*i.e.*, malaria) (Korkut, 1950: 23–26; on modernist states' failed development projects, see Scott, 1998).

Profiling a few sites in greater detail, Korkut spoke more directly to his thesis of rice as he detailed how he viewed the commodity actually contributing to national underdevelopment—and thus poverty. Addressing circumstances observable in Bursa, he wrote, *the Raubbau-style<sup>7</sup> of rice cultivation brought health conditions to a level that may be said to be catastrophic* (Korkut, 1950: 27). Not only resulting in a 1924 outbreak and elevated rates of infection thereafter, the rice-malaria permutation also jeopardized Bursa's aspirations to be known as a “city of water” and of good health, undermining local capital investments in balneology and the nearby sanatoriums associated with Uludağ (Korkut, 1950: 27).

The underdevelopment/impoverishment by rice was evident through malaria's depletion of human resources (*i.e.*, deaths), as well. Focusing on migrant populations as potential economic assets for the nation<sup>8</sup>, Korkut noted how these communities were ravaged by malaria as they settled in regions of expanding rice cultivation. Citing his own first-hand experiences with villages near Antalya, he wrote of entire migrant communities that arrived following various waves of population exchanges during the early republican era. Within such villages, he asserted, roughly two-thirds of the migrant populations died within a few years of settlement, women became sterile from the disease, and few—if any—children could be seen. These incidents from Antalya were not geographically or historically unique; he listed similar cases involving migrant populations from the Caucasus and elsewhere during the late Ottoman era, and he told of their comparable decimations from rice/malaria. Depicting an ongoing continuum of like experiences with immigrants and refugees from the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Crimea, Greece, the Middle East, and North Africa—and even sedentarized Turcoman, Yörük, and other nomads—in places that included Çarşamba, Diyarbakır, Edirne, Kayseri, Kırklareli, Niğde, Samsun, and Tekirdağ, among others, he concluded that rice's profitability and state inattention to workers' health (under Ottoman and republican administrators) together resulted in

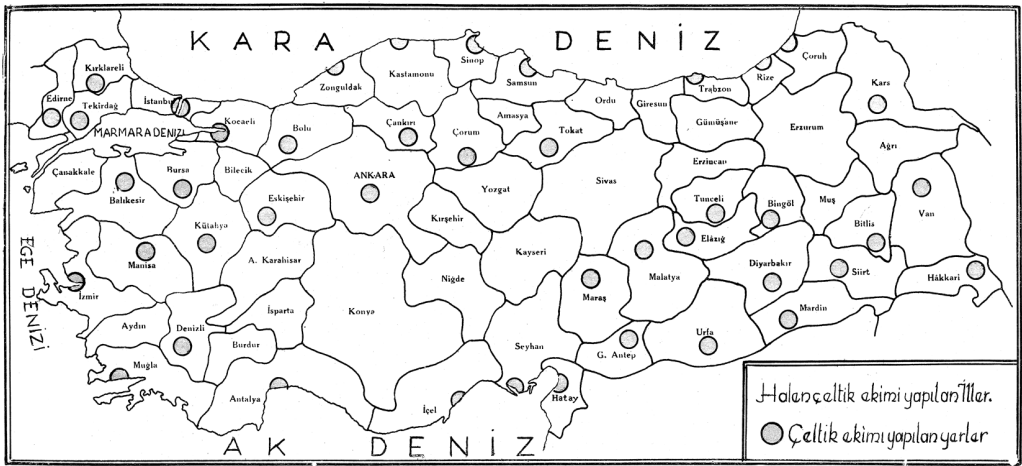
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7. Interestingly, Korkut employed the German term *Raubbau* (a word implying the exploitation of natural resources) in his critique of rice-based profiteering and its impacts on other industries.

8. In this regard, we discern similarities with state justifications for combating malaria that relied heavily on a rationale linking population and economy; on this *demographic discourse*, see EVERED and EVERED (2011).

the entire country no longer having any safe, malaria-free zones (for a map of areas under cultivation with rice at the approximate time of Korkut's book, see Map 1) (Korkut, 1950: 26-31). Augmenting his critique with an argument that bordered on eugenicsism, he added that this lack of governmental oversight and the rice grower's insatiable "appetite" for profits –one that forced many fellow citizens to *come face-to-face with death*, resulted in a spread of the sickness that would diminish the nation's *civilized character* (Korkut, 1950: 29).

**MAP 1**  
**Areas of rice cultivation as late as 1952<sup>9</sup>**



Source: Süyev (1953: 52).

Those involved in traditions of internal migration within Anatolia were also at increased risk, according Korkut. Referencing traditions of transhumance known as *yaylaçlık*, he claimed that those practices emerged as the mountains seemed a *safe haven malaria*, with people compelled to migrate as if they *were fleeing from plague* (Korkut, 1950: 29-30). State pressures to abandon such practices were misguided, he claimed, as a more appropriate response would entail education and a dissemination of *the tools of the war [against malaria] to the yaylas [or «mountains»]* (Korkut, 1950: 29-30). Focusing on the Çukurova region –an area that he stated was the *göçmen ovası* (or “the valley of migrants”), he recalled settlement policies that extended as far back as the Tanzimat period (a mid-nineteenth century era of reformism) and noted how many historians and

9. Though crude, this map bears out Korkut's statement as to the ubiquity of rice –and only indicates recorded locations; it omits total areas under cultivation, yields derived, and associated trends in cultivation.

officials described successive decimations of succeeding waves of migrants consisting of Turks, Nogays, Circassians, Tatars, and others (e.g., Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, 1980; Mehmet Cemil Bey, 1921; Sevük, 1948). In his view, these experiences and others of a like nature indicated that –unless wetlands and rice were controlled with greater resolve by the state, all future efforts aimed at settlement and agricultural development also would be doomed by what local folklore termed *çeltik humması* (or “rice fever”; Korkut, 1950: 32-35).

## 9. PUBLIC HEALTH AND RICE GROWERS’ “TRICKS”

Thus far, we dealt with how Korkut associated rice with undermining the nation’s public health –and its economy. As his critique proceeded, he continued to establish this connection, but he also focused ever more on the rice growers and their allies, too. Introducing a morality tale– one that contrasts with the account from İnalçık’s history of rice cultivation in Ottoman Anatolia (İnalçık, 1982: 71-83), Korkut related a popular regional story that retold the history of rice’s arrival in the vicinity of Maraş. According to this tale set in the nineteenth century, a local trader named Üdürgücü (referring to craftsmen making hollow walking sticks) smuggled rice from Egypt inside his cane back to his hometown Maraş. Until that time, most ate *bulgur* and only the rich could afford to eat rice, which was imported from Egypt, the Hijaz, and India. As rice production spread rapidly, however, the aggrieved Egyptian *Hidiv* (or “viceroy”; also Khedive) cursed Üdürgücü and his family, wishing that his “tree” would cease to grow larger and not put forth further branches. Since that time, so it was said, only one child in each generation of Üdürgücü’s descendants would survive (Korkut, 1950: 36-37).

Associated with this parable on the perils of growing rice –and the trickery inherent to it, Korkut wrote that, for generations, the state sought variously to regulate– and thus contain –its cultivation. Citing examples from the late Ottoman case of Bursa, when local administrators suspected the crop impinged on residents’ wellbeing and the vitality of the local silkworm industry, he wrote that the expansion of rice continued virtually unabated. Indeed, despite recent legislation that was integral to the republic’s “war on malaria” (referring to the 1926 and 1936 laws), he feared that rice growers would continue expanding their fields and intensify production; *Unless the necessary amendments are enacted to the existing law, it is likely that these people [now] appealing to the Council of the State may win the right to grow it again* (Korkut, 1950: 40). Bolstering his claims of the growers’ expansionism, he provided a chart that indicated significant increases in areas sown and yields derived (Table 2; recall Table 1 and Figure 1) –factors, he argued, that enabled the rapid propagation of malaria-ridden anopheles.

**TABLE 2**  
**Recent increases of rice in both area sown and yields derived**

Year	Cultivated Area (in hectares)	Amount Produced (in tons)
1944	15,536	27, 024
1945	18,129	32,482
1946	18,158	40,498
1947	21,217	56,875
1948	21,891	77,922

Source: Korkut (1950: 39).

According to Korkut, the earlier laws' more lenient standards for fields of periodic flooding (or temporary irrigation) were ineffective and were enabling too many to grow rice in inappropriate contexts. Just as these farmers flooded their fields, so too was rice *flood-ing everywhere with the mosquito* (Korkut, 1950: 41). Indeed, this leniency in the interest of promoting national development via an easy-but-dangerous crop, he insisted, simply emboldened further those who cultivated rice on large lands for quick profits.

Regarding the rice growers who owned large lands, he maintained, people of Anatolia increasingly spoke of them collectively and joked of them acting as if they had but one shared mind and voice. Quoting another submission to the Maraş-based newspaper *Engizek*, a story titled “Çeltik Okulu” (or “The Rice School”; Anonymous, 1948), he related indirectly how the growers learned at and graduated from this *toughest branch* of the *Trick University*. As the parody stated,

*There is no entrance exam, neither is there any expectation of degree or maturity to enter.*

*There is only one requirement: natural disposition!*

*[Concluding several paragraphs that deal with how the school produces people without ethics, compassion, or faith, the story continues] [...] rice cultivation without tricks has never been seen or heard of [...].*

*The graduate of this school can be more diplomatic than the cleverest diplomat. Give him the hardest border dispute and see how he [always] emerges victorious, even if it is [with] a disgraced victory.*

*There are as yet no other institutions that can train skilled politicians like this. There is no one [who can] match their cheating. The shortest way to rid Satan from the*

*face of the earth forever is to partner him with them in rice. However, he [Satan] reckoned this before trying thus [even Satan has] never shown an interest in rice cultivation.*

*The graduate of this school can immediately solve complicated migration issues. He can move a village immediately. He will say I moved it even before he does so. If someone comes and sees it, he will say (I was going to move it, I am going to move it). In the end he moves the village but moves it beyond this world [...] (Korkut 1950: 42-43; quoting Anonymous, 1948).*

Over subsequent pages, Korkut presented similar stories from folklore and from the newspapers, such as one titled “Çeltikçi Partisi” (or “The Rice Party”, a parody similar to “The Rice School” that detailed how rice growers always work together, convene congresses, and conspire collectively to promote one political cause –rice). Through these depictions of the rice grower, Korkut also began to engage more directly with the thoughts of peoples from the region. Throughout his narratives and the texts that he quoted from, we see how the peasantry –in their own ways– utilized storytelling, folklore, and other means of communication to resist their subjugation and immiseration and to achieve their own reckoning with rice, poverty, and malaria. They spoke of the rice growers’ *honeyed lips and busy hands* that could charm and hide the atrocities that they committed, of a class of people with abundant political influence who rarely worried of illnesses but who could afford any treatment should such misfortunes befall them –unlike the peasants who lacked even sufficient quinine (on the provision of quinine and associated shortages, see Evered and Evered, 2011: 474-481; Evered and Evered, 2012b: 319-321). When confronted by regulations, according to such narratives, the rice growers threatened politicians with the nation’s economic decline, they compelled officials to close opposition newspapers, and –when all else failed– they bought and bribed<sup>10</sup> whoever stood in their way (Korkut, 1950: 43-45). Through these words, in the pages of newspapers like *Engizék* and in Korkut’s account, we witness “hidden transcripts” communicating with wider audiences within Turkey –and to the historical record (Scott, 1985, 1990); narratives of alternative politics and of resistance.

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10. Employing terms like *sekere* and *kirklama* (to denote how every rice grower set aside portions of their land simply to grow crops on them as “gifts” for influential people or how there were set-asides of crops –typically 1/40th– that went to members of rice commissions), Korkut’s text reveals a knowledge of the inner-workings of the graft and corruption at play in the connections between rice growers and politicians (KORKUT, 1950, 45).

## 10. THE PEASANTRY'S "EPICS OF RICE"

As a physician with years of experience treating patients in rural communities, Korkut had abundant opportunities to witness and hear the "hidden transcripts" of those who he thought paid the highest of prices for Turkey's rice crops. Ranging from common knowledge about the environment, agriculture, and disease to stories published in area newspapers, he assembled these "transcripts" as he presented and addressed what he termed the "folklore" of rice and malaria. As with the following example of a popular expression that he quoted which conveyed the conventional wisdoms of where to settle—and where to avoid, the vernacular of many communities appeared replete with references to disease, place, and livelihood:

*Do not stay where grasses are reeds and birds are geese!  
Reside where grasses are thyme and birds are partridges!* (Korkut, 1950: 47).

Expanding upon these expressions, the doctor recalled how one patient described the pain that he experienced from an injury; *Son-of-a-bitch hit me like malaria!* Even riddles conveyed the symptoms of the disease. As one questioned, *Neck like a stalk, belly like a jar?* The answer to the challenge was *a person with malaria*—referring to the extremely distended abdomens that many victims suffered due to enlarged spleens [recall Illustration 4; Korkut also included desolate photographs of a patient who suffered from this symptom—and from its treatment (Korkut, 1950: 55-58)].

It should be added that colloquial imagery of malaria also featured commonly in Korkut's earlier book *Hayattan Çizgiler: Tanıdıklarım* (or "Lines of Life: People I Know"; Korkut, 1949a). Rendering fifteen short stories that each depicted individuals who Korkut came to know while coming of age in southern Turkey, the book conveyed aspects of everyday life. Health as a motif of these persons' lives is a recurrent theme, and in this manner, malaria appeared to figure prominently for many, as well. In the story of Dağöttüren, a man with many tales of Turkey's wars and heroes, a fit of shivering and shaking overtook the character whenever he came to the close of his sagas. Referring to his malaria, the storyteller said that it *was not a manly man*—the honorable sort you could agree to fight openly with scimitar in-hand. Rather, it was a foe that, *in coming upon a person, it would devour one's marrow and consume him internally bit-by-bit*. No other force of nature or man could compare with the devastation inflicted by malaria; *it is like the soft thistle, a deep pain, like a worm that consumes its victim from within* (Korkut, 1949a: 5). These short stories recalled numerous other examples of how the disease figured in people's lives (e.g., with visits to saints' shrines, in drawing water from the *malaria fountain*, or when an *imam* (Islamic cleric) read verses as a person took their Sulfato pills—fortify-



ing their efficacy), but they also rendered insight regarding Korkut. In particular, he revealed his gratitude for Dr. Kozma, the Christian physician of Burdur, who saved Korkut from malaria during his own childhood years.

These accounts of malaria in each of Korkut's works conveyed collectively how the disease figured as a common aspect of many citizens' lives –especially in ways that associated the malady with the cultivation of rice. The poetry and prose lamented disease and crop, on the one hand, and chastised the rice growers and their corruption of state and society, on the other hand. In the quoted lines of Aşık Bayram's poem "Pirinç Destanı" (or "The Epic of Rice"; Bayram, 1948), the crop's innumerable damages to land, water, and humanity were summarized. At one point, the poet put forth an appeal to rid the world not only of rice but also of the rice growers:

*Is there no hero to rid [us] of rice,  
Making the innocent little ones smile?  
Whoever slays the rice grower will become a gazi<sup>11</sup>,  
Flying to Paradise like the wind* (Korkut, 1950: 48; quoting Bayram, 1948).

Addressing the calls from the republic's ambitious pronatalist programs promoted under President İsmet İnönü, Bayram continued –raising the question of the suffering experienced by women and children:

*Our İsmet Baba expects soldiers from us,  
[However,] our Fatmas<sup>12</sup> will not give birth* (Korkut, 1950: 49).

In another quoted (and otherwise unpublished) poem titled "Sivrisinek Destanı" (or "The Epic of the Mosquito") attributed to Ali Dılçoğlu, who reportedly authored and mailed the poem to Korkut, the pervasive problem of corruption and bribery of state officials in charge of agricultural administration and the rice commissions was targeted:

*The rice grower is up the mountain, without the mosquito bite,  
We hope for the official to come here,*

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11. Within Islam, the term *gazi* (also commonly transcribed as *ghazi*) refers to a warrior-savior-hero; it was also an honorific title carrying a similar meaning.

12. In this line, the common female name Fatma (also spelled Fatima) is employed to refer to women of Anatolia. Colloquially, the name's usage in this context may be read to imply that these traditional women are sturdy, hardworking, and –were it not for the rice-inflicted disease– fully capable of bearing many healthy children.

*To defend the poor person's right,  
Someone of a clean conscience who will not take a bribe!* (Korkut, 1950: 52).

In its conclusion, the poem's author speculated that, should no virtuous official arrive to save the people, the poor will certainly perish. Korkut included additional poems of similar titles, as well. One such work authored by Kozanlı Durmuş titled "Çeltik Destanı: İsmet Paşa'ya Arzuhal" (or "The Epic of Rice: A Petition to İsmet [İnönü] Paşa") echoed similar themes of excessive cultivation, mosquito infestation, the impoverishment and illnesses of villagers, and a lack of concern on the parts of the rice growers, but it was also framed as an appeal to the leader of the republic (Korkut, 1950: 53-54).

Before progressing to the final chapters, wherein he addressed what he viewed as the prospects for –and fallacies of– "safe" approaches to rice cultivation and detailed the recent WWII-era struggle with the disease, Korkut identified particular villains in the rice-malaria tragedy. Naming both Tahsin Bey and Mithat Bey –two supposed members of the TBMM elected to represent the people of Maraş<sup>13</sup>, the doctor declared that they and their rice growing partners would *rush to wherever there was water because they were consumed by greed to acquire [greater] wealth* (Korkut, 1950: 66). To underscore his own sentiments, Korkut quoted a man who himself admittedly profited indirectly from the sale of rice; a person who fabricated the sacks for containing each year's harvest. According to this witness, *the rice grower is a rich man who builds his villa on human bones. While acquiring his crop, he ends up destroying some people along the way* (Korkut, 1950: 61).

## 11. RICE GROWERS' AND OTHERS' REACTIONS TO REGULATION

On its own, Korkut's book stands as an insightful essay that connected agrarian capitalism, impoverishment, and a single commodity with disease and corruption. To better appreciate its relevance beyond simply the specific questions either of the political economy of rice or of popular perceptions of malaria and public health in the Turkish republic, it is essential to contextualize this text beyond just Marx's *Capital* or histories of rice in Anatolia; to do so renders significant understanding as to the dynamics of the Turkish state

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13. Who he was referring to as *Tahsin Bey* and *Mithat Bey* is uncertain; from a review of TBMM records for 1949 through 1950 (*i.e.*, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*), there appeared to be no MPs by either the name *Tahsin* or *Mithat* associated with representing Maras. However, he may well have been referencing two MPs who served in the TBMM in the 1920s; Mehmet Tahsin Hüdayioğlu and Mehmet Mithat Alan (both noted in TBMM, 2010). Whether these were names of these former representatives, pseudonyms of current representatives, or the first names of representatives of other provinces remains a matter of speculation beyond the scope of this article.

both at that time and in the present day. To this end, in this section we draw upon further archival records from the Prime Minister's Archive of the Republic (or BCA) in order to engage with alternative perspectives on—and debates over—the 1936 Rice Cultivation Law and similar attempts at governmental regulation. Along this line of further contextualization, we return to Korkut's own in the subsequent and concluding section of this article to assess how the doctor positioned himself and his works in Turkey's contentious early Cold War political landscape.

At the nation-state scale, one of the first issues to emerge from the 1936 law arose in 1939 in the nature of inter-ministerial differences over the law itself and an unsuccessful proposal for its tightening. By August 1939, officials within the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance came to view the 1936 law as inadequate due to its leniencies for growing rice on seasonal or drainable fields at lesser distances from established communities. Public health officials sought to further prohibit any cultivation of rice from within three kilometers of permanent settlements; the same distance mandated for cultivating on (or settling near) permanent wetlands. Challenging this proposal on the grounds that it would harm the nation's economy and ongoing villages development, however, the Ministry of Agriculture countered in a six-page report that this amendment was unacceptable, and they also argued that it was a premature tightening of the restrictions mandated only three years earlier. Furthermore, they argued that the practice of drained field rice cultivation had thus far proven productive and safe in neighboring Bulgaria (BCA 030-10-22-125-8).

To underscore the crop's purported economic significance to the country and to its villages, agriculture officials declared that the majority of suitable fields for rice cultivation were within three kilometers of existing settlements, that eliminating these fields would reduce national rice production to approximately one-tenth of its current levels, and that the crop was too significant (1) to the nation as a source of tax revenue, (2) as a source of jobs—not only in farming but also in food-related industries, and (3) as an essential food staple (on the self-sufficient provision of rice by 1937, see BCA 030-10-184-268-14). According to their report, the state derived roughly 1,100,000 Lira on an annual basis in taxes, that tax collections from rice were quite reliable (averaging between 90 and 99 per cent), that at least twenty factories had opened to process the grain, and that the water for irrigating drainable fields was thereafter of high utility for watering adjacent fields sown with other crops and for livestock. Citing examples of inter-ministerial cooperation and enforcement from the 1938 Agriculture-Health and Social Assistance inspections of the towns of Kadirli and Kozan in Seyhan province that resulted both in the prohibition and in the permitting of local farmers to grow rice, as based upon the on-site assessed safety of their practices, it was argued that the crop was thus too important economically, on the one hand, and capable of being policed and regulated, on

the other hand. In view of these determinations by agriculture officials, the ministry contended that accepting any proposal for outright bans on cultivation within three kilometers of every settlement in the country was a counter-productive over-reach by the state and an unwarranted measure with regard to safety (BCA 030-10-184-268-14). In subsequent exchanges between the Prime Ministry and its other ministries, the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance continued to seek imposition of the terms of this 1939 request –and stricter policing– due to alleged *dramatic* abuses by many farmers (*e.g.*, neglecting to drain irrigated fields according to prescribed measures) that resulted in *grim conditions in the health of the country*. The ministry also implied routinely that agriculture officials exaggerated their economic rationale for resisting restrictions of cultivation near settlements (*e.g.*, BCA 030-10-184-268-14); the outcomes in favor of large landowners and associated interests could be observed readily in the return to increased areas cultivated with rice (recall Table 1 and Figure 1).

Beyond viewing the regulation of rice as an aspect of intra-governmental contention, restrictions on farming the crop appeared most commonly –and not surprisingly– as a matter of individual and collective appeals to the state. In one such petition from 1940, the aspiring rice grower Abdullah Halis Ceyhan of Samsun wrote to the Prime Ministry to appeal restrictions applied to his properties (*i.e.*, a holding named Atabey Farm located in nearby Amasya); additional copies of his complaint were forwarded to the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Social Assistance, Finance, Internal Affairs, Justice, and Public Works. In stating his circumstances, he wrote that he had been denied permission for the past three years and implied that he felt his trust in the state had been misplaced. Alleging that every applicant to the local rice commission is treated as though they are *treacherous/unpatriotic and an enemy of public health*, he declared that such restrictions were violations not only of his *natural and human* rights but of his *legal rights*, as well. Moreover, he not only alleged that the commission was inconsistent when it permitted another man to plant rice on lands that were rented from him but also less than patriotic –noting that the other farmer who rented his fields was *a Bulgarian* (most likely a Muslim or even Turkish migrant from Bulgaria, or the descendant of one)<sup>14</sup>. Within this letter, Abdullah Halis Ceyhan also attempted to position himself as a pro-farmer landowner, accusing the state of depicting all farmers as *a bunch of ignorant and wretched people who do not follow health rules*. This alleged characterization resulted in what he described as discriminatory decision-making on the parts of officials concerning all those engaged in agriculture. Responding to his accusations, officials of the rice commission and the involved ministries noted that his requests and appeals at local levels had all been rejected, but these

14. It should be noted that such an appeal on the basis of national identity (*i.e.*, Turkishness) also figured in the scenario in Nâzım Hikmet's poetic account (2002: 342-362).

rejections were due to a comprehensive ban on rice cultivation in Amasya that was imposed as part of a regionally-targeted antimalarial project—his accusations were baseless (BCA 030-10-184-267-10).

Similarly, land owners from other regions submitted petitions to the republic following locally-administered rejections of their applications and appeals. As in the above case from Amasya, many of these cases revealed rice growers' frustrations with any form of state regulation and with any decision-making powers granted to local commissions. Such correspondence also routinely raised questions both of rice growers' individual rights—broadly interpreted—and of the economic necessity of rice for the nation and for local communities. In responding to such claims, however, state responses from various scales of governance tended to support initial local determinations by commissions. Indeed, the forthcoming responses often pointed to landowners' own records of negligence to practice properly—or even to construct the infrastructure necessary to enable—scheduled field drainage (for example, BCA 030-01-80-506-2 and BCA 030-01-80-504-3).

In the archival documents reviewed which were relevant to Korkut's critique, there existed no evidence of state ambivalence—much less animosity—towards rice growers as a class. Nonetheless, there appeared a general tendency among many rice growers to self-identify as victims and to frame accordingly their appeals to the state as violations of human or legal rights, as attacks upon entrepreneurs, or as instances of power hungry or corrupted officials' adroit maneuvering to subjugate local civic and business leaders. While it may be appropriate to question just the actions and decisions of the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance (on the ministry, note Evered and Evered, 2011, 2012a, 2012b), in the matter of rice, the Ministry of Agriculture appeared to act consistently as a fully competent counterbalance that could inhibit any alleged abuses of power by health officials. Indeed, recalling Korkut's own statistics (note Table 2), cultivation continued to expand significantly in area and yield throughout the 1940s. Despite these facts—and to the neglect of perspectives like those of Korkut, Nâzım Hikmet, those still associated with agrarian populism or the remnants of the Kadro movement, and many from the peasantry at the time, the rice growers' claims of excessive constraint on the free market by the Turkish state endured (*e.g.*, reiterated in Güneş, 1971: 31-40). Though there is no actual record of how the politics of rice factored into the outcome of the 1950 national election, the election did result in the decided victory of the DP—and its free market agenda—over the CHP and its platform of etatism.

## 12. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Viewed historically, Korkut's critique of rice rendered rich insight into the dynamics of agrarian capitalism, public health, poverty, and malaria in republican Turkey. His writings benefitted from his own experiences as a physician and as a member of parliament, and they incorporated many voices (*i.e.*, "hidden transcripts") from segments of the country's population that still remain today largely without voice. Indeed, though the archival record included letters from numerous landowners who protested their loss of profits, the peasantry did not seem either inclined or empowered sufficiently to write to the Prime Minister, particular ministries, or the TBMM about their losses of wellbeing or life. As analyzed in this study, Korkut's writings also arrived at powerful conclusions regarding the role of rice as a commodity within a context of an unrestricted market and an impoverished lower class. These conclusions pointed towards the ensuing enfeeblement of state and citizenry as inevitable outcomes –and they paralleled broadly analogous conclusions reached by Marx in the first volume to his *Capital*. In presenting these views that corresponded so closely with images and sentiments that also were conveyed in Nâzım Hikmet's verses, however, we can only imagine the perilous path along which the doctor strode; this was an era when having the works of Nâzım Hikmet on your bookshelf could result in severe political and legal repercussions.

In what perhaps was Korkut's final written work before his 1957 death, an article titled "The Rice Question" that appeared in the national newspaper *Ulus*, we acquire a sense for how he balanced his thesis about the diseases of capitalism with the contemporary necessity to position oneself as a Cold Warrior (Korkut, 1952). Though he cautions that, *We can never be too alert against Moscow and communism*, he also questions, *is the malaria problem that attacks our blood and poisons us from within and weakens us materially and morally a lesser threat?* Indeed, in this essay, Korkut framed his argument as a cause of both national security and Turkish nationalism –always the moral high ground in Kemalist Turkey. Bringing these arguments together, he wrote of a heightened risk of communism *if you cannot find jobs for those left jobless because of the tractor or because of aspirations to become rich despite the ominous [damages inflicted by] malaria*. Therefore, whether compared to the *boyars* of Marx's *Capital* or to the *ağas* of Turkish literary works by Nâzım Hikmet or Yaşar Kemal, the rice growers continued to figure largely as a metaphor for the agrarian capitalist as a force for the immiseration and untimely demise of the peasant –and now, a gateway for *Communism and Bolshevism* (Korkut, 1952).

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