

# FROM THE GARDENS OF THE EUPHRATES TO POVERTY IN THE SHANTY TOWNS: WATER DAMS, PEASANTS AND LIFE IN THE METROPOLIS

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## RESUMEN

*Este artículo enfoca las vidas de los campesinos que tuvieron que emigrar a la ciudad de Gaziantep in Eastern Anatolia como consecuencia de la construcción de la presa Birecik situada en el río Éufrates. Los inevitables cambios que esto significó durante los últimos diez años para estos campesinos, nos sitúan ante un importante estudio de caso en el ámbito humanitario cuya dimensión parece superar las ventajas económicas que ofrece la construcción de la presa. Las condiciones impuestas a los campesinos a lo largo de este proceso de transformación nos ofrecen mucha y valiosa información sociológica. Mediante el análisis de los datos basados en entrevistas con los campesinos reubicados y la evaluación de los aspectos económicos se intentará comprender cómo este proceso de migración ha cambiado la comunidad y las pautas sociales en la región.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Presas de agua, río Éufrates, cambio social, proyecto de Anatolia sureste.

## ABSTRACT

*This article focusses on the lives of peasants forced to migrate to the city of Gaziantep due to the construction of the Birecik Dam on the Euphrates River. The inevitable changes which these peasants have suffered over the last ten years face us with an important humanitarian case study, whose dimensions seem more important than the economical advantages created by the dams. The conditions faced by the peasants in this huge transformation process offer much valuable sociological information. By examining notes taken from interviews with the re-settled peasants and by examining economic concerns, understand we will attempt to understand how the process of migration has transformed the community and social patterns in the area.*

**KEYWORDS:** Water Dams, the Euphrates River, Social Change, the Southeast Anatolian Project

## 1. Introduction

Human civilization has a long historic relationship with water and its usage. Throughout the history of civilization we see connections between human beings and rivers or water (Wood, 2007; Wolf, 2000; Shiva, 2007). Obvious differences

are apparent between places close to water basins and those far away. We can examine the creative effect of water on the roots of civilization; in particular on such ancient cultures as Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, America, Anatolia, and China (Quinn, 1991: 138-141). The construction of water dams has increased worldwide after the 1950s as a result of support from the World Bank (Wood, 2007; Kiran, 2005: 79). The changes brought about by these constructions have, without doubt, caused more radical consequences than any effects made by older civilizations. Hydroelectric power stations and dam irrigation systems constructed on big rivers are devastating all traces of human civilization much of which has existed for thousands years. The source of life, both human and natural, that has developed along the banks of large rivers, has become expendable in the advance of technological, economic and political progress. (VanLoon *et al.*, 2005; Haddadin, 2004: 324; Gleick, 1993: 79 -84). Shiva (2007: 91) says that all water dam projects are instrumental in forcing migration.

The forced migration of people due to dam projects and their confrontation with poverty is not only apparent in Turkey but is a powerful reality in other regions such as Egypt (Abu-Zeid & El Shibini, 1997: 212-213), China (Jing, 1999; Heming, *et al*, 2001), Africa (Isaacman & Sneddon, 2000) and India (Wood, 2007). For instance, in India 16-38 million people have been forced to migrate from their homelands to other regions, and in China the Three Gorges Dam accounted for the migration of 10 million people. (Wood, 2007; Shiva, 2007: 91).

Dams have caused the reality of “water migration” (Özer & Talu, 2008: 1) in all regions of the world during the second half of the 20th and in the 21st centuries. Generally, people are affected by dam projects in three ways: 1) Economical decay of people who has experienced the forced migration; 2) Social instability as a result of immigration; 3) Negative environmental changes. (Heming, *et al*, 2001: 199; Parlak, 2007: 283 - 293).

## **2. Southeast Anatolian Project, Euphrates, and Dams**

The Eastern and Southeast Anatolian regions, despite their negative economical and social conditions, have some of the world's most prominent water resources, the upper waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which form the fresh water arteries of ancient Mesopotamia. While the increase of dam constructions on these rivers has provided economical profit for the country, at the same time it has given rise to serious changes in social dimensions. The Keban Dam and hydroelectric power station, completed in the 1970s, helped to inspire the construction of other dams for irrigation and hydroelectric projects in Turkey (Gökçe & Parlak, 2005).

The Southeast Anatolian Project (SAP) is a huge economical and social plan which focuses on nine provinces: Adiyaman, Batman, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, and Şırnak. The Project (SAP) is designed to build dams for irrigation and hydroelectric power stations on both the Tigris, and the Euphrates. SAP's other aim is to create a transformation effect upon the region's social structure. The Project includes no less than the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power stations on these two rivers, and other small rivers

in the region. The government is planning to irrigate 1.80 million hectares of land with the use of dams which are under construction in the nine provinces, an area equal to 10 % of Turkey's land mass.

The Euphrates river basin, the main source of the SAP Project, covers 444.000 square kilometers, and 28 % of this basin is within the boundaries of Turkey. The Ataturk Dam, the biggest construction project, took 1.5 years to fill with water drained from the Euphrates (Kıran, 2005: 66 - 83). Consequently, the SAP is the biggest project in the history of the Turkish Republic.

### **3. Dams: Abundance or social and environmental destruction?**

Major water dams, while creating short term economic advantages, bring about serious questions in the long term (Horowitz, 1995; Spaargaren, 2000). We can already say that the creation of dams is forcing too many radical and non-renewable changes on the natural and ecological system (Wood, 2007). The natural ecological environment created over millions of years, is becoming seriously damaged by the increase of water of dams. The artificial lakes and huge dams are causing a serious increase in humidity rates, which affect people as well as plants and animals. It is a fact that endemic plants and agricultural crops such as the pistachio nut, which are the main crop in the areas around Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa, have been damaged due to the increase in the level of humidity. Farmers and peasants report that the quality of the harvest and the yield of pistachios are reduced. In other words, despite all political claims, the short-term benefits of the dams are being considered while the social and environmental structures of the area are not (Wood, 2007; vanLoon *et al.*, 2005). The reality is that the profits from the hydroelectric power stations and from the products obtained from the irrigated lands will be eaten up by further major structures and interests. It may be argued that the labor needed during the construction of new dams can be supplied locally, thus easing unemployment in the area, but this is only temporary work (Gökçe & Parlak, 2005: 101-104).

Ironically the areas where dams are constructed but which are lost or devastated by the rise in water levels, are generally fertile alluvial lands, richer and more fertile in fact than the fields designed to be irrigated with the water from the dams. The main issue here is that the right usage of the land for agricultural production is not being considered. Furthermore Turkey has a huge amount of fertile land presently being used for non-agricultural purposes (Kayıkçı, 2005: 58-80).

In addition, the SAP region is a very important area with regard to cultural heritage. Many prominent Mesopotamian civilizations thrived along the riverbanks, and thousands of years of civilizations have been submerged under the water of the dams, a process which is still on-going. One example of a cultural site is Zeugma, an antique city, founded 60 kilometers to the Northeast of Gaziantep, which will be covered by water due to the Birecik Dam. And the historical city of Hasankeyf and its ruins will be lost under the Ilisu Dam to be built on the Tigris River. It should be remembered that the region of the SAP is home to some of the most important

archeological sites in the world founded along the Euphrates and Tigris. Many important archeological excavation areas will be covered by the water dams on these rivers; valuable archeological heritages of humanity sentenced to death forever under the mud and water. According to the official sources, 336 villages or settlements will be affected by dams and other projects (GAP, 1994a: 1).

Besides this, the effect the water dams are having on people's lives and on social patterns needs to be understood from a sociological perspective. As a social historical problem, the SAP region (Southeast Anatolia) in particular has a system of unequal land ownership (Aydin, 1986; Beinin, 2001: 34-35). Under these conditions, the poverty of the peasantry becomes a strong factor which the SAP does not take into consideration in any way. As a result people who have had to migrate to other places have suffered many traumatic experiences.

As part of the SAP project, the Birecik Dam was built on the Euphrates between Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa provinces. Construction on the dam was begun in 1993 and the main focus was to generate electricity. The dam was completed in 2000 (Özer & Taluğ, 2008: 3). Villagers migrated to Nizip and Gaziantep as the nearest cities.

The migration factor is not new for this region, and has been occurring since the 1970s. However, due to many reasons, the process was speeded up during the 1980s and 1990s (GAP, 1994c: 5). But generally speaking, and despite strong migration from rural areas to cities, the rural population rate in Turkey is high. Although, according to statistics, rural population percentages have diminished markedly from 1923 to the 2000s (90% in 1923, 86% in 1950, 54% in 1980, and 30% in 2000s) (Aysu, 2006: 181), village or peasant population still constitutes a high figure when compared to industrialized societies.

#### **4. After the building of the dam**

In the SAP region there has been a major confiscation of lands and other properties from people living in the villages which have been submerged under the water of the dams. Özer (1998: 188) says that there are three sorts of expropriation; seizure of property from 1) Middle-sized land owners: All peasants belonging in this category migrated to the cities after accepting a sum of money. 2) Landlords: They had large areas of land and most of them, being rich farmers, bought new fields with the compensation money they acquired and carried on with agricultural production. Others, however, discovered new ways of making money in the cities particularly as building contractors or tradesmen. 3) Poor peasants: They had no land any way. They were always poor and landless and had worked on other people's land as rural laborers or moved from area to area as seasonal agricultural workers. These poor peasants were the first to migrate from the dam construction areas to the cities because they had no property in the villages and therefore received little or no compensation.

It is this group of people which forms the main subject of this article. Attempts were made to carry out interviews with people who had migrated to the metropolis (Gaziantep) from villages affected by the Birecik Dam.

Interviews were held with 18 people. All the interviews were held in semi-structured form during the months of July, August, and September 2008, in a quarter known as “Çıksorut” one of the main ‘shanty town’ suburbs of Gaziantep. The duration of the interviews varied from 50 minutes to two-hours. All the people interviewed were born in villages and migrated to the city later. While interviews with young and middle-aged men were held in a café in the heart of the quarter, those with women and old people were held in their homes for obvious reasons.

In all interviews we tried especially to focus on the “key words” (Tonkiss, 1999: 255). We took particular notice of the attitudes of the people being interviewed since attitude often tells as much as speech. (Silverman, 1997; Fontana & Frey, 1998: 54-68).

The people who migrated from the villages affected by the Birecik Dam, have almost all settled in the same quarter, “Çıksorut”, and in nearby streets. The exception is a few landlords. The quarter café (“kahve”) is a place frequented by all men who are unemployed, or those waiting to be hired as cheap laborers. This café therefore is not just a tea house but functions as a social space for meeting, for exchanging information and as a reminder to people of their past lives and relationships.

As stated above, interviews were held in July, August and September 2008 and included 18 people. We specifically chose to interview villagers who were forced to migrate due to the Birecik Dam and all of these were peasants whose fertile fields or houses had been confiscated. The demographic range of people is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Gender	Age						Total
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-	
Female	1	2	2	1	1	1	8
Male	2	2	3	1	1	1	10
Total	3	4	5	2	2	2	18

The people we interviewed were from the villages of Erenköy, Çardak, Eneş, Meydan, Elif, Belkis, and Keklik. It was necessary to record the interviews in writing because the interviewees refused to have their voices recorded.

#### 4.1. The Younger Generation: Growing up with stories

Inevitably all the families, despite social-economical differences, have many children. Therefore, finding young people to interview is much easier than finding older people or women. We encountered a clear difference of ideas between the young people and their parents. Many of the young people had migrated to Gaziantep when they were around 10 and therefore their concept of ‘village life’ had lost most of its meaning. It can be said that young people between the ages of 20-29 have adapted easily to city life. The first reason for this is that they spent very little time in the villages. When the displacement of villagers began in 2000, this generation was about 10 years old. Therefore they were at an adaptable age when they left

the village and rural life, and entered the city. Their school education began in Gaziantep. But despite this process of change, traditional values and family relationships are still held strongly amongst them. A second reason is that people in this category are more capable of reaching beyond traditional or tribal relationships and all of them see this as a positive step forward. According to us these people are at the crossroads of traditional rural values and modern city life.

In spite of the tendency for families to impose traditional expectations on young people, they are nevertheless eager and open to learning new jobs and to change.

*“I was 11 when we migrated to Gaziantep. I finished primary school in Gaziantep. I wanted to continue going to school, but I could not and I became a car mechanic.... I don't miss to the village. I see myself as a townsman. I don't want to return to the village. I don't want to live there.” (Male, 21)*

We see this young men adapting to city life more easily. Gaziantep is an area of developing industries which require a labor force. However because of the large numbers of displaced villagers in need of employment competition for jobs is high and therefore work places can make high demands on their workers but for low wages. Young people are more capable than their parents of adapting to these conditions.

The conditions for young women are harder and more complex than those for young men. Traditional demands on young women have not effectively changed by migration to the city. Male children go to school after primary education even if they are not successful. But female children rarely get this opportunity despite their capabilities. The reality is that forced marriages or engagements are still prevalent in the Southeastern region of Turkey. Poor or middle-class people are eager to marry their girls at very young ages.

*“I wanted to go to school but my parents sent only the boys ... I really wanted to become a teacher... My father was just beginning to tolerate the idea of educating girls but then they made me get engaged... I do not have to return to the village. They (the women in the village) work harder. My mother tells me about it sometimes. I do not want to live like this. Antep has many negative aspects but despite everything it is better than the village. My uncles and my father say “Antep so bad”... But nobody talked about the village. It was only after the compensation money ran out that they started to remember the village.” (Female, 21)*

While it is possible for men to work and make money in the city by apprenticing to craftsmen, the same conditions are not available for women. Girls get married off by their parents when they finish primary school. However, during interviews with people in the quarter, we observed a gradual change in this mentality. Even if conservative villagers do not send their daughters to secondary schools, they approve of girls learning skills such as women's hairdressing and embroidery.

*“My father did not send my elder sister to school. My elder brothers were against it ... My elder sister married my uncle's son when we moved to Gaziantep. She is a housewife, now. My uncle's son (her husband) works in the*

*markets. (...) They have children. What else can he do? What would they do in the village? Do housework until late at night!" (Female, 26)*

The quarter where villagers have settled was not a new suburb but its population has increased dramatically since the 1990s. We observed during interviews that the young people are more able to challenge traditional values and also relationships even though their families maintain their rural attitudes. Oddly, although women are the ones who have been forced into early marriage and virtually been imprisoned within the four walls of their homes, it is the men who show more tolerance towards the idea of women working outside the home.

*"Everybody always tells good stories about the village... My grandfather natters on about the village from morning till night... Here children can learn skills. For instance, I am learning to become a mechanic... I will open my own workshop when I get my 'craftsman's' diploma. What would I do, if I were in the village? ... I don't know. Perhaps I would migrate to Gaziantep."*  
(Male, 21)

Another clear point emerging through interviews is that young people don't want to return to village life on any condition. One reason for this is that the villages they came from are no longer in existence. Other reasons include an addiction to city life and better opportunities for education and employment than their parents experienced. As car mechanics or in other areas of skilled labor young people can attend courses to become qualified craftsmen with the possibilities of opening their own places of work. They are thus more inclined to tolerate life in the city.

#### **4.2. Women remember hard work in the villages**

Among the people we interviewed, middle-aged women showed a different and interesting perspective. Through these interviews it was possible to compare the reality of the life the women lived in the villages in the past, and their current lives in the city. It could also be noted that although the government has supplied many courses focused on women's needs, none of these have had concrete results on the women's traditional way of life (GAP, 1994b: 12).

We interviewed 6 women between the ages of 30 and 59. Each of them came from a different village. All were landless or extremely poor when they were living in the village. Like the other people we interviewed, they now live in the "Çıksorut" quarter of Gaziantep. All of them have given birth to between 4 and 9 children. Except for one woman, all are literate and have had some schooling. According to these women, life in the city is easier and more comfortable than life in the villages due to the necessity for women in rural areas to work on the land as well as in the home.

*"I had been married for two-years when we migrated to Gaziantep. My daughter was a baby. I got up early along with my mother-in-law and sisters-in-law to feed the animals, even when I was pregnant... Then, we had to prepare and knead a huge bowl of dough for the day's bread. After that there was cooking, washing dishes, preparing meals, serving tea and coffee for guests...It was mainly the sisters-in-law and I that did the work. And again,*

*when the herd returned towards evening, it was back to feeding and milking. We were always the last to go to bed.” (Female, 31)*

Obviously for the women the hard life and working conditions, which at times would include working in the fields, was not a desirable situation. Accordingly the women’s memories of and attitudes towards village life are negative.

*“Yes, the men work in the fields and gardens during the necessary agricultural seasons. But I went with them when I finished my household chores. That was always really tiring. Men were much more relaxed compared to women. My parents married me off when I was 17 to my uncle’s son. There was no way out, because I was a woman. As a woman you must work harder.... Gaziantep is good now of course. I only do house work. There is nothing else. I have no work after the children go to school... In any case the man has to work and make money to bring home bread ... Really; I have never missed the village. I want to return here as soon as possible when we visit our relatives who still live there.” (Female, 35)*

As has been stated in the above interview, according to tradition, working, earning money and providing food is a man’s obligation. This is a comfort to women who have moved to the city from rural areas (Bhowmick, 2006: 380-388). They have become emancipated from physical tiredness experienced in the village even though they may suffer from poverty in the city. Most of the villagers have used the compensation money they received to buy a small house in the shanty town quarter where they now live. All of the women said that their house is the most important thing they possess, saying that by owning a house it is possible to survive even on a very low income.

Without doubt, the women’s attitude to living in the city has been positively affected by their negative past experiences in the village. Also, the women have little understanding of the labor market compared to their husbands. For example they know nothing about unemployment having spent their time at home. None of women who were interviewed had ever worked outside the home. For all their budget needs they are dependent on their husbands working and making money. They can only relate to the economy or to other external monetary problems in respect to their husbands’ wages.

*“I can’t go to work amongst strange men... Many women who I know do... but I can’t do that. Making money, being the bread winner, that’s the man’s primary duty. I am also working. My daughter is going to get married. I am preparing her dowry.... Yes, life in the village was good in some respects but working conditions were painful for women. I won’t leave Gaziantep. I don’t even want to return to a smaller town. My children are learning skills .... My husband goes to the factory.... He has insurance coverage but his wage is very low.” (Female, 41)*

As can be seen, women do not hesitate to delete from their memories their experiences in the village. They remember the village with negative thoughts. Despite the fact that the quality of their lives is so poor, the women believe that migration to Gaziantep has been a positive improvement for them. But according to their



traditional values women still adamantly believe that making money and working outside is a man's duty.

Naturally in this situation, with a sharp reduction in the time they spend working, women have more free time to spend with neighbors, friends and relatives. That this situation will lead to changes in gender roles in the near future is not expected although it can be anticipated at some time in the future. It is also true to say that men still exert absolute hegemony over women and children, but according to both the men and women interviewed, there is a difference between these powers, as it is used in the village, and the way men's authority is exercised in this new and different situation.

#### **4.3. The city: unemployment, poverty and change in traditional male power**

There are two categories of people that have suffered change, more tragically due to migration from rural to urban areas: Middle aged men, and elderly men and women. The experiences of these two groups reflect the many dimensions of social, economic, cultural and historical change.

In fact the government officially offered various solutions to villagers whose villages and fields were submerged by the waters of the Birecik and who had to migrate to urban places for this reason. Firstly, compensation money was paid to those whose fields were lost and to those whose houses were submerged. The government also recommended the construction of houses in new areas on higher land. But according to villagers, migration to urban areas after receiving compensation money seemed a more rational solution. This was due to the fact that whereas their original fields were on the fertile river plains of the Euphrates, the newly built settlements were in areas of less fertile soil unsuitable for irrigation, agriculture, and also the grazing of herds, and thus unable to provide the peasants with a livelihood.

Although most of the displaced villagers were landless peasants or small land owners, others were landlords. Some of these big land owners bought new fields for agriculture and they carried on as before, but many landlords took their compensation money and migrated to urban areas where they became tradesmen (Özer, 1998:188). Many of them have, however, since become bankrupt. Interestingly it has been estimated that those peasants who were forced to migrate will, in the long run, lose about % 90 of the income they would otherwise have had (GAP, 1994a: 16).

The group of six men interviewed, were aged between 30 and 56. All of them were married and had 4 children or more. Nobody in this group was a qualified worker and all of them had tried more than one job. Only two of them had social security but all of them were literate.

When we first met this group it was immediately obvious that none of them had wanted to work after migrating to the city. For the first year or two the compensation money was adequate but they later realized that what had seemed like a fairly large sum of money in terms of rural living did not go far in the more expensive world of the city. They spent the money rapidly and then, faced with economic crisis, were

forced to start looking for jobs. This was not easy for men still trying to adjust to living in a crowded, industrial metropolis. For village men, the first step in adaptation was to frequent a café in the heart of the quarter. This café also became the place where we were able to meet the village men and gather information. There everybody knows everyone else. The café is a transition place for newcomers and old villagers. They have all migrated from the same regions, and villages. Even the owner of the café is a villager who migrated from Nizip city earlier.

*“I bought a home here when we migrated to Gaziantep. All of our neighbors are from our village and also relatives. . . Nobody among us is a stranger. (...) I have worked at four different jobs.(...) It was the first time I had had to work for someone else. But I had no choice.” (Male, 38)*

*“If I had started to work at a factory when I first arrived here, by now I would have paid for many years of social security benefits and for a retirement pension! I thought later, that this would be useful and profitable for me and I started to work in a textile factory. Really, it is very hard for me. I can hardly open my eyes when I’m working due to cotton dust. But I have to work... There are six people at home and they all depend on my wage. (...) I only had to cultivate our own fields in the village. Our life was very good; easy and calm. Now I understand this.” (Male, 41)*

*“I would never have worked on construction sites. But now we have to. I carry bricks from early morning till evening and I prepare mortar, too. I come home with terrible backache. (...) In the early years you couldn’t find a vacant chair in the café, not even to drink tea. Everybody was playing games. (...) They had enough compensation money so nobody went to work. Then what happened? All the money finished!” (Male, 43)*

*“I realized that unemployment solved nothing. The factory was demanding workers. The foremen asked me what I could do. When I told him that I didn’t know, he put me to carrying sacks. I could only put up with it for one month.... Then I started to work in a cement factory and I worked there for six months but they did not pay my health insurance. (...) Sometimes, I weep when I remember the village and our life there. Everything was so peaceful. Nobody could interfere with my life. I had my own land, my garden in the village. May be that was not a lot but it was enough for us. I wish I had a chance to return there but there’s nothing left.” (Male, 47)*

The village itself, for this category of men, is lost forever and with it the good times. As we said before, it is the men who have had to face the hardest conditions in moving to the city. They have had to adjust from a rural work culture to an industrial one. Thus men have been more adversely affected than women. With time, people like these men, who are suffering in the city, are beginning to question and re-think the effects of the dam.

*“Each year in the village we would gather no less than 450-500 tons of plums from our gardens on the riverbanks of the Euphrates. Every kind of fruit and vegetable grew there. I never imagined the water rising so quickly. It seemed like a joke to all of us. But when the water started rising nearly one meter*

*per day, we went to our gardens to cut down the trees. I don't want to see the village now because of my deep sorrow. I shut my eyes when I go near the dam. (Male, 47)*

*"I don't think anyone in the village thought it was going to be like that. Everybody viewed the compensation money as a large sum. I thought that way too. In the village that money seemed like a huge amount but when we got to the city, it only lasted for about a year... I was only able to build this house with the money... And later? Looking for work of course! But which job can you learn after you are 50? I work really hard but my income is not enough. Gaziantep is a very expensive city. We wouldn't survive if we didn't have the wages of my two sons. It will be worse when the sons get married. (...) I have never liked it here. But the children and women are not like me... They are very happy." (Male, 57)*

It is also clear that it is not only people who have been affected by the waters of the dam, but that an ecological disaster has also taken place. It is an interesting point that the men were the ones who pin-pointed this disaster although they were not alone in witnessing it. The women and children had also lived through the same experiences but made no comments about the ecology during interviews. All the men criticized the construction of the dam and its negative effects on the environment but did so seemingly as a way of emphasizing their own dissatisfaction as a result of the migration to the city.

*"All of those fields now lie submerged under the water. They were so fertile... Everything we planted grew... As the waters began to rise hundreds snakes appeared in the tops of the tree. I didn't know there were so many animals in the village. All of them were trying to escape from the water." (Male, 47)*

*"I went to the village this summer. I sat on a hill and looked at the trees which were under the water. It was like a ghostly paradise, I swear. Trees that had been planted by my grandfather, by my father (...) There were also trees which I had planted." (Male, 56)*

The men interviewed in this group, reflect most clearly the effects of the dam on the people who migrated from rural areas to urban settlements. Their thoughts reveal their awareness not only of social issues but also of environmental ones and lead again to the question of the dams' advantages.

#### **4.4. Old people: Passing away with dreams of the village**

For the old people who had to move to the metropolis with their sons, the situation is the most tragic. On the scale of adaptation to living in the city, there are young people and middle aged women at one end and old people at the opposite end. These elderly people have had to face extreme changes in their lives over the last ten years. In the village they were able to do most things for themselves. They had no need of help from their children. But with the flooding of the villages everything changed. It has to be understood that for these elderly people the village holds a different meaning in their world. Two old people who were interviewed reported that they had spent their entire lives in the village, only making occasional day

trips away from it. An old man of 78 said that he had never been away from his village for any length of time, except to do his military service and an old woman, 80 years old and speaking with difficulty, explained that she had visited Gaziantep only a few times in her whole life. Further information regarding the situation of elderly people was supplied by relatives.

*“My mother was vigorous when we lived in the village. She potted in the garden and the field. She was able to feed the goats and sheep, and she could the milk cow alone. But when we came here she gave up. She always complains of knee aches. She does not leave the home. (...) And there are no other old people left from her village so she doesn't have any friends. My mother did not want to leave the village... but she didn't have a son or daughter left in the village to stay with. She had to come with us..” (Male, 56)*

*“Bury me in the village! Do not leave me here! Let my grave be in the village graveyard!” (Female, 80)*

Both of these old people believe that migration to the city was not forced upon them by the government but blamed their sons and their spouses for the decision. They do not go out except to visit the hospital and both of them spend their time sitting on cushions at the street gate until late at night. Their only occupation is watching the street.

*“My mother-law did not want to come to Gaziantep... Her house wasn't submerged by the water because it was on a hill. Now, there is nobody in the village except for four or five elderly people. My husband wanted to bring her here with us. But she wouldn't come. She said, 'I want to die here'”. (Female, 47)*

*“Shall I tell you the truth? Most of our old people died of sorrow which began after the water covered everywhere. They were healthy when we were living in the village. Nobody could understand the problem. You know? They died suddenly like hens.” (Male, 62)*

*“When we migrated from the village, we packed everything onto a lorry. We left the village behind us. Suddenly my father stopped us and got down to look at the village. The water had covered up all the gardens and all the trees were in the water. He sat and wept like a child. He said 'What did we do?' He died of a heart attack one month after we came here.” (Male, 56)*

## 5. Conclusions

When people speak about the dams' economical and political advantages they dwell very little on the dimensions of the social and environmental destruction which has been caused. Buried beneath the waters of the dam, lies a lost world of nature and social history, which surely deserves reconsideration. The migration of people from the villages, wholly or partially submerged beneath the Birecik Dam, is dissimilar from other forms of migration in Turkey in that it has been forced on people as a result of political and economic assumptions. The problem here is that villagers, who were used to farming the fertile areas close to the river, have, for

reasons outside their own control, been forced to abandon their livelihood. As has been shown, the whole process of confiscation of property, migration and seeing their villages disappear has caused severe trauma for the peasants involved. The group of people least affected by change has been the younger generation who have fewer memories of the village and have adapted readily to city life. Middle-aged women have also reacted less negatively to the change, mainly because they have been saved from the heavy work they had to undertake in the village. The most affected groups therefore are the men and the elderly. The change has deprived the men of their strength, authority and pride, and the elderly, who have probably suffered the most, have lost their independence, their friends and for some even the will to live.

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