

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *Nomad's land: Pastoralism and French environmental policy in the nineteenth-century Mediterranean world* by Andrea E. Duffy

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Book details

Andrea E. Duffy, *Nomad's Land: Pastoralism and French Environmental Policy in the Nineteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019). 191 pages + notes, index and bibliography ISBN: 9780803290976

Scholars of the Mediterranean generally situate their analyses between two interpretive poles. Following Braudel's classic, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, some scholars highlight the common ecological contours and social and historical features of the region as a way to understand historical change in societies surrounding the *Mare Nostrum*. More current scholarship, however, questions the heuristic value of considering the "Mediterranean-as-commonality" and points instead to the distinct ecological irregularities and historical interruptions that render blanket categorizations of the region useless.

Andrea Duffy's *Nomad's Land* offers the French Forestry Service as the institutional commonality that bound Mediterranean societies during the nineteenth century. Duffy presents case studies of Provence, France, northern Algeria and the Anatolian region of the Ottoman Empire as three areas that she feels "collectively demonstrate both the rhythms and the irregularities of the Mediterranean world, and they illustrate the value of the Mediterranean lens" (xv). The growth of the French Forestry Service at home and overseas serves as the lynchpin in Duffy's analysis and one of the keys to understanding why "around the world, mobile pastoralists and other peripatetic peoples have witnessed the demise of their traditional lifestyle

over the past two hundred years" (xiii). In Duffy's reading, the French Forestry Service played a powerful role in the eclipse of pastoral nomadism in France, Algeria and Anatolia. In the end, "the relationship between forestry and Mediterranean pastoralism fundamentally altered both institutions as well as the landscape of the Mediterranean world" (xiii).

The book is divided into two parts, each comprised of three and four chapters respectively. Part 1 establishes the intellectual and institutional origins of the French Forestry Service and reflects Duffy's expert knowledge of her sources. These chapters offer a rich and illuminating story of the growth and reform of the institution through the Restoration (1815–1830), Bourgeois Republic (1830–1848) and Second Empire (1851–1870) and a detailed history of the Forestry Service's ongoing relationship with pastoralists in Provence, characterized by negotiation, resistance and ultimately the demise of French pastoralism in the region. Duffy's work in these chapters is a welcome addition to the literature on the role of environmental preservation in French state policies and more generally the social history of Provence.

Part 1 also explores what Duffy sees as the ecological similarities that link Provence, Anatolia and Algeria: precipitation, temperature, mountain ranges and vegetation "represent both the common elements and the range and variety of the Mediterranean environmental zone" (5). In the first chapter, the reader encounters an

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ambiguity—if not tautology—that plagues the theoretical foundations of the book: she chooses three regions that represent what she sees as the commonalities of the Mediterranean as a homogenous zone while admitting the vast diversity of the Mediterranean region characterized by a series of diverse micro ecologies. By pointing out similar patterns of rainfall in Marseilles, Constantine and Antalya and by highlighting that all regions had mobile pastoralists that were in different types of communication with “the state”, Duffy claims that “These features are descriptive not only of the three case studies here but to many other pastoral economies around the Mediterranean Sea. Together they describe a brand of pastoralism that is uniquely Mediterranean” (31). In a sense, Duffy claims both extremes of the larger debate over the viability of the Mediterranean as a collective region: the three case studies can be considered “Mediterranean” owing to a loose selection of climatic and ecological similarities. Simultaneously, these regions at times experience wildly dissimilar climatic patterns because they are a part of the Mediterranean region, which is naturally diverse. This paradox is never revisited after the first chapter, and beyond a short section on precipitation levels, the ecological similarities that supposedly link these areas remain unexamined.

Part 2 traces the spread of the French Forestry Service and the corollary changes to land tenure, preservationist models and social life in France, Algeria and, to a lesser extent, the Ottoman Empire. As in part 1, the treatment of pastoralism in Provence clearly demonstrates the ongoing struggle between state Forestry representatives and local pastoral communities as well as the growth of state institutions of governmentality over economically marginal communities in the south of France. Duffy presents the reader with a vivid context for the evolution of Forestry agents’ increasingly fraught and at times violent interactions with French pastoralists and the myriad ways in which locals subverted and deflected preservationist policies imposed by a growing and centralizing French state.

Her treatment of the French Forestry Service *outrémer*, on the other hand, suffers from a number of impediments and provides only a superficial understanding of many of the key features of the French empire in the region. Duffy does not demonstrate an expert understanding of indigenous systems of land tenure, she provides only a cursory reading of the complexities of North Africa’s overlapping microecologies, and her narrative reflects a narrow reading of the over 70-year French invasion and the slow spread of colonial institutions of governance. Duffy begins by underscoring the important point that control of land and resources was central to the French imperial project, but her singular focus on bureaucratic archives paints a skewed picture

of rural life in Algeria. She claims, for example, “in 1838 the French administration applied the Forest Code of 1827 to the whole of Algeria” (91), without questioning what exactly “Algeria” represented in the minds of French administrators or how indigenous institutions and environmental practices would have interrupted the spread of French conservationist ideologies. In 1838, French forces controlled a military base in Algiers while a small expeditionary force patrolled the plains around Mitidja. Shaych ‘Abd al-Qadir was reorganizing former Ottoman *beyliks* into a series of centrally controlled *khalifaliks* in the west and central midlands, and Ahmad ben Muhammad Sharif, the *bey* of Constantine, controlled much of the coastline and later the Aurès Mountains. There was, in short, little “French-Algeria” to speak of in the 1830s and 40s and the sprawling colony, and later, French *département* was a distant eventuality that Duffy often takes for granted. Only decades later, after a brutal invasion led by General Bugeaud and the resulting collapse of the Algerian ecosystem, did Napoléon III begin to imagine the kinds of institutional reforms that could make his “Arab Kingdom” a reality in Algeria.¹ In Benjamin Brower’s treatment of the same period, he demonstrates convincingly that the “colonial face” embodied by state administrators, tax collectors or, in this case, Forestry Service agents, was a vague echo outside certain urban centers as late as the 1890s.² Indeed, as Daniel Rivet reminds us, most Algerians in the Aurès Mountains had never met a French colonial officer until the military expansion beginning in 1954.³ In Duffy’s telling, however, French reforms promulgated in Paris make an immediate impact throughout the colony. In the end, this is a story about the “stumbling blocks” (91) that impeded colonial control in Algeria, and one gets little sense of how French reforms actually played out on the ground or more generally, as she claims in her introduction, how “the relationship between forestry and Mediterranean pastoralism fundamentally altered both institutions and the landscape of the Mediterranean world” (xiii). Duffy’s uneven perspective makes sense, as the story she tells is drawn almost exclusively from French bureaucratic sources while indigenous Algerians are denied any semblance of vocalicity. Duffy’s prose itself

¹Hélène Blais, *Mirages de la carte: L’invention de l’Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Fayard, 2014); James McDougall, “The British and French Empires in the Arab World: Some Problems of Colonial State-formation and its Legacy” in Cummings and Hinnebusch (eds.), *Sovereignty After Empire: Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 44–65).

²Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: the violence of France’s empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 98–102.

³Daniel Rivet, “Colonialisme et post-colonialisme en Méditerranée,” *Radio France Culture: Les Matins de France Culture*, November 5, 2003, cited in Brower, 98.

reflects her source base, as she often reproduces the vocabulary of empire uncritically, as when talking about the “civilizing mission” or how the French military “pacified” the countryside through total war, scorched earth policies and resettlement programs (89). Algeria, in all its complexity during this time of tremendous historical change, emerges as little more than a passive backdrop for French reform.

Duffy’s treatment of Anatolia is even more general, and at times, the reader might wonder why this region was included at all in the comparison. The rich history of Ottoman reform efforts during the period is minimized, the vast state resources devoted to sedentarizing pastoral populations is not adequately conceptualized, and the wholesale redefinition of Ottoman citizenry during the period—and crucially, the role of nomadic Bedouin populations in this history—is largely ignored.⁴ At times, the Ottoman state seems to be following the suggestions of the French Forestry mission (138); at other times, Ottoman reform seems to be guided almost exclusively by the “mastermind” reformer Ahmet Cevdet Pasha (130). Indeed, in her conclusion, Duffy admits that “French foresters found themselves virtually powerless within the Ottoman government apparatus” (185), yet somehow pastoralism in the Ottoman empire receded “under [French foresters’] watch” (185). In the end, it remains unclear what role the French Forestry Mission played in the Ottoman Empire.

Duffy’s conclusion restates the case for considering scientific forest preservation and the French Forestry Mission in particular to be central features in a unified Mediterranean story. Duffy demonstrates the role of preservationist anxieties in the spread of empire and the ways in which French foresters acted as arms of the colonial state in shoring up a regime of private and public property that contributed to the irrevocable alteration of the lives of untold numbers of pastoralists in Provence and northern Algeria. Curiously, she closes by stressing the limited efficacy of colonial forestry legislation alone and highlights the range of other forces that converged to sedentarize pastoral populations during the period. “[T]his process also required the confluence of other factors, including developments in transportation, technology, communication, population expansion, natural disasters and climate change, and the transformation of the global wool market, as well as the agency of Mediterranean pastoralists themselves” (189). This reviewer agrees that these and other important factors need to be

taken into account when considering the demise of pastoral life in nineteenth-century Algeria and Anatolia. Unfortunately, most of the factors that Duffy lists in her conclusion are absent from this book—most notably, the agency of the overseas pastoralists themselves.

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⁴For a treatment of this history, see Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).