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Classes and Status Groups in Times of Great Transformation: Reading Agrarian Change in Çukurova through the Lens of Yaşar Kemal

Büyük Dönüşüm Dönemlerinde Sınıflar ve Statü Grupları: Yaşar Kemal'in Gözünden Çukurova'daki Tarımsal Değişim

Burak GÜREL*

Abstract

This study investigates the changing positions of social classes and status groups during the capitalist transformation of agriculture in Turkish Çukurova region throughout the last century from the perspective of Yaşar Kemal's literary works. The study begins with a methodological discussion on the use of literary works in historical and sociological studies. It stresses three points regarding the agrarian change in Çukurova. Firstly, the resistance of lower classes to the capitalist agrarian transformation had a wide scope spanning from the Luddite-type machine-breaking to land and labor struggles. Secondly, proletarianized villagers viewed wage work as a temporary rather than a permanent condition, which would help them accumulate funds and engage with small-scale farming. Finally, transformations of classes and status groups were closely related. While the previous generations of landlords remained loyal to pre-capitalist social norms, failed to adapt to capitalist transformation and thereby declined, new generations started to rise, embracing profit maximization as the main goal.
Keywords: Yaşar Kemal, Çukurova, sociology of literature, agrarian change, social class, status group

Öz

Bu çalışma, geçen yüzyılda Çukurova bölgesinde yaşanan tarımsal dönüşüm sürecinde toplumsal sınıfların ve statü gruplarının değişen konumlarını Yaşar Kemal'in edebi yapıtlarının sunduğu perspektiften inceliyor. Makale edebi eserlerin tarihsel ve sosyolojik çalışmalarda değerlendirilmesine ilişkin yöntemsel bir tartışmayla açılıyor. Daha sonra, Yaşar Kemal'in eserlerinden yola çıkarak Çukurova'daki tarımsal dönüşüme ilişkin üç noktaya dikkat çekiyor. Birincisi, alt sınıfların tarımın kapitalistleşmesine karşı direnişleri Luddite tipi makine kırıcılıktan toprak ve emek mücadelelerine uzanan geniş bir yelpazeye sahipti. İkincisi, proleterleşen köylülerin bir bölümü ücretli işçiliği kalıcı bir durum olarak değil, küçük ölçekli çiftçilik için gereken birikimi yapmaya yardımcı olan geçici uğrak olarak görüyordu. Son olarak, sınıfların ve statü gruplarının dönüşümleri birbirleriyle yakından ilişkiliydi. Kapitalizm öncesi döneme ait toplumsal normlara bağlı kalan toprak ağaları kapitalistleşme sürecine uyum sağlayamayıp gerilemiş, kâr maksimizasyonunu öncelikli hedef olarak gören yeni tip toprak sahipleri bu süreçte yükselişe geçmiştir.
Anahtar sözcükler: Yaşar Kemal, Çukurova, edebiyat sosyolojisi, tarımsal değişim, toplumsal sınıf, statü grubu

*Doktor öğretim üyesi, Koç Üniversitesi, İnsani Bilimler ve Edebiyat Fakültesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü,
e-posta: bgurel@ku.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-1666-8748

Introduction

This article discusses the use of "social class" and "status group" as conceptual tools for the analysis of social change in rural Turkey in the twentieth century. Although these categories are often perceived as mutually exclusive ways of understanding social changes, they can also be used in mutually supportive ways. In other words, class and a status group should be seen "as fused and reinforcing sets of processes rather than being restricted by their original and careful formulation as necessarily diametrically opposed in their operation" (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1983, p. 298). An assessment of their relationship requires a spatial and temporal perspective in the sense that "seen in long historical time and broad world space, they fade into one another, becoming only 'groups'," whereas "seen in short historical time and narrow world space, they become clearly defined and so form distinctive 'structures'" (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1983, p. 298). By concentrating on a specific historical period (the twentieth century) and region (Çukurova in the eastern Mediterranean region of Turkey), this article discusses the processes in which new classes and status groups based on capitalist agriculture replaced old groups based on pre-capitalist landlordism.

This article addresses three related themes: the impact of rapid capitalist transformation on the peasantry through conceptual tools constructed by Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Karl Polanyi; the transformation of established rural elites into a modern agrarian bourgeoisie illustrated by the cases of elite success and failure in response to the requirements of capitalist accumulation; and the changing forms of agrarian class conflict during this period. These themes are addressed through a close reading of Yaşar Kemal's literary works on the agrarian transformation in Çukurova. Kemal's novels and stories are *not* entirely works of fiction. They offer rich ethnographic insights that can be read through theoretical concepts such as class, status group, household economy, capitalist development, primitive accumulation, and proletarianization. Such reading can contribute to the analysis of socio-economic changes in rural Çukurova in the twentieth century.

The place of literature in sociological analysis

We need a broader theoretical perspective on the relationship between literature and social science to better appreciate the value of Yaşar Kemal's works for the analysis of Çukurova's agrarian change. The reflection theory of literature has a considerable impact on the social scientific analysis of literary works. The theory stresses that literary works are not born into a vacuum but informed and shaped by the social and cultural context of their time. Although writer's artistic quality determines her aesthetic success, literary works reflect much more than her individual traits. Novels, stories, plays, and poems explore a wide range of social, political, and cultural themes (urbanization, class conflict, political competition, civil and international wars, gender and family relations, etc.). Moreover, canonical and aesthetic paradigm shifts take place under certain social and historical contexts. Hence, the reflection theory analyzes the content and style of literary works in sociological and historical terms rather than solely in terms of writers' individual characteristics. By uncovering the social processes that shape the thematic agenda and stylistic qualities of individual writers, it offers a historically informed sociological alternative to individualistic and aesthetic approaches (Albrecht, 1954, pp. 15–83).

Although it is easier to accept that literature more or less reflects society, it is harder to establish the value of literature for sociological analysis. With reference to György Lukáʂ' literary theory, Berna Moran (2017) suggests that whereas science reflects the essential characteristics of nature and society through abstraction, art reflects it through concretization. Art does not attempt to take all complexities of nature and society into account but reflects some of their fundamental characteristics through concrete and vivid examples. This distinction makes art a valuable source for scientific inquiry (Moran, 2017, pp. 49–50). If we leave aside the broader question of the relationship between art and science and focus solely on the sociology of literature, we can identify two main approaches. The first approach analyzes the authorship, circulation, and readership of literary works through a sociological lens. It tries to answer "how literature affects individuals as well as organizations and is affected by them" through "an external structural analysis

at both the individual and group levels of the consumption and production of literature." The second approach, used in this article, analyzes literature "to make revelations about society." This approach includes various semiotic and deconstructive methods aiming to "reveal multiple meanings" hidden in complex texts. It also includes the analyses of literary works that cover social themes and problems in an explicit manner, without engaging complex semiotic and deconstructive methods (Hegtvedt, 1991, p. 2). Yaşar Kemal's literary works contain elements suitable for both methods of analysis. This article does *not* use semiotic and deconstructive methods; instead, it restricts itself to the analysis of the themes related to agrarian transformation in Yaşar Kemal's literary works.

As a theory of social contradictions and historical transformations, Marxism has been influential in the sociology of literature. In an article published in 1977, Ian H. Birchall (1977) suggested: "The future of literature is inextricably bound up with the future of society as a whole. It is a realization of this that lies behind the recent growth of interest in the Sociology of Literature, a field in which much of the work done draws on Marxism to some extent" (p. 93). In fact, the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were pioneering examples of the sociology of literature. Marx believed that "literature can have a content of truth" and in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, he drew "on a wide range of literary sources – for example, the novels of Balzac– as a source of documentation and confirmation of his economic analysis" (Birchall, 1977, p. 98). Interestingly, unlike *some* of the later Marxists, Marx and Engels did *not* think that only the works of socialist realists are suitable for social analysis. For instance, Engels thought that although Balzac was against the French Revolution, "through his realism and against his own personal intentions," he became "an ally of the revolutionary course" (Birchall, 1977, p. 98). In other words, as long as a literary work seriously engages with social realities, it can be subjected to social analysis. Regardless of their different political beliefs, the works of Balzac, Dickens, Scott, Stendhal, and Tolstoy are valuable sources for sociological analysis because they capture the realities of their times including social injustices (Moran, 2017, pp. 48–49).

Literary works have significant value for analyzing social changes in Turkey as well. Kemal Karpat's long essay "Social Themes in Contemporary Turkish Literature," published in two parts in the *Middle East Journal* in 1960, provided one of the earliest and most detailed interpretations of literary works in terms of socio-political change in the late Ottoman era and 20th century Turkey. According to Karpat (1960a), since the contemporary Turkish literature stresses "the material-economic causes of the social problem," it "provides valuable insights into the nature of the social problem and its special features in Turkey" (p. 30). Interestingly, Karpat (1960b) observed that fiction writers addressed important sociological themes earlier than sociologists. For instance, Karpat (1960b) stated: "Future modernization in Turkey appears likely to be decided in the town […] Yet, there are practically no sociological studies dealing with the town. But imaginative writers have begun to deal with it" (p. 160). Recent scholarly literature similarly acknowledges the value of literary works in social scientific analysis. For instance, Ahmet Makal (2008) argues that Turkey does not have a rich working class literature but the existing works can still significantly help the labor historians in Turkey (pp. 15–43).

We can interpret Yaşar Kemal's works in the broader context of the sociology of literature. It is a well-established fact that Kemal's novels and stories are *not* entirely works of fiction. Kemal was born and raised in rural Çukurova, and many of his works were informed by extensive first-hand observations in the region.[1] Apart from his literary career, Kemal also worked as a journalist and published many reports depicting various aspects of daily life (especially of the workers and peasants) in Çukurova (and other Turkish regions) in the 1960s and 1970s, which were later republished in several volumes.[2] Kemal was a leading representative of "village fiction" which emerged in the 1950s and remained popular until the late 1970s. As Talat Halman (2007) noted, the village fiction dealt "with the stark realities of the countryside" including "poverty, economic and psychological deprivation, droughts, blood feuds, stagnation and

[1] Alain Bosquet's long interview with Kemal provides detailed information on Kemal's personal experiences and their influence on his literary works (Kemal and Bosquet, 1999).

[2] For a complete list of Kemal's literary and non-literary works see: ("Yaşar Kemal - YKY," n.d.)

starvation, the tyranny of the gendarmes and petty officials, and exploitation in the hands of landowners and politicos". For Halman (2007), "a great strength of the Village Fiction in the 1960s was its freedom from rhetoric." By the end of the 1960s, "Yaşar Kemal was Turkey's only novelist enjoying worldwide fame […] and was the acknowledged master of Turkish 'village novel'." His novels "are testaments to the dauntless spirit of the peasant to survive and to resist – sometimes through rebellion– the oppressive forces" (p. 88). Other scholars also underscore the significant value of Kemal's works for Turkish sociologists and historians.[3]

Agrarian change in Çukurova

The development of capitalist agriculture in Anatolia was not rapid, and small-scale family farming remained strong until the 1950s. Çukurova was one of the notable exceptions to this trend. A combination of various factors – the rule of Kavalalı İbrahim Pasha (who defeated the Ottomans and ruled the region between 1832 and 1840) during which Egypt's experience of large-scale cotton farming was transferred to the region, the state-sponsored sedentarization of nomads, and the promotion of large-scale landholding patterns – transformed Çukurova from an uninhabited marshland at the beginning of the 19th century to a highly commercialized region closely linked to the world economy at the end of the century (Toksöz, 2006, 2010, pp. 97–110; Varlık, 1977, pp. 41–55). This period can be seen as the region's first agricultural revolution. The ethnic and religious composition of the population changed in the first half of the 20th century. The Armenian population decreased rapidly between 1909 and 1922. This process also brought large-scale property transfers from non-Muslim elites to Muslim-Turkish elites. Muslim-Turkish landowners maintained strong relations with the republican regime established in 1923. The 1942 Wealth Tax completed the transfer of property from non-Muslims to Muslims. 12.7 million Turkish liras were collected in the Çukurova region, mostly from non-Muslims. In order to pay this enormous amount, the non-Muslims sold their land and other property to Muslim-Turkish elites and left the region (Toksöz, 2010, pp. 198–204). This was the economic and political setting of Çukurova before its second agricultural revolution in the 1950s.

Marx (1977) describes primitive accumulation as the "pre-history of capital" (pp. 862, 928) in the sense that it is "an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure" (p. 873) For Marx, a self-subsisting and independent peasantry would never be willing to transform into the industrial proletariat. Referring to new American settlements, where the people's "passion for owning land prevents the existence of a class of labourers for hire", he comments: "as the worker can accumulate for himself – and this he can do so long as he remains in possession of his means of production- capitalist accumulation and the capitalist mode of production is impossible. The class of wage-labourers essential to these is lacking" (Marx, 1977, p. 933) Therefore, "annihilation of that private property which rests on the labour of the individual himself", – in other words, the dispossession of the self-subsisting peasantry from land – appears as a prerequisite to the capitalist mode of production and accumulation (Marx, 1977, p. 940). Hence, he explains that primitive accumulation is a process through which the "necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians" to urban industries is achieved (Marx, 1977, p. 895). In line with Marx, Weber sees the economic logic behind the expropriation of workers as the creation of "the most favorable conditions for discipline" that is necessary for capitalist production (Weber, 1978, p. 138). Polanyi is in complete agreement with Marx and Weber on this issue when he points out the centrality of "the smashing up of social structures" and liquidation of "organic society, which refused to let the individual starve" in order to "extract the element of labor from them" (Polanyi, 1944, pp. 172–173). Proletarianization is not the only outcome of primitive accumulation. Primitive accumulation also explains the genesis of the capitalist class to a certain extent. At the end of the 16th century, capitalist farmers largely benefited from the dispossession of the peasantry:

> The agricultural revolution which began in the last third of the fifteenth century, and continued during the bulk of the sixteenth century […] enriched him just as quickly as it

[3] For instance, see Karpat, 1960b, p. 156; Yıldırım, 2017, pp. 862–864.

> impoverished the mass of the agricultural folk. The usurpation of the common lands allowed the farmer to augment greatly his stock of cattle, almost without cost, while the cattle themselves yielded a richer supply of manure for the cultivation of the soil (Polanyi, 1944, p. 906).

Hence, primitive accumulation creates the agrarian bourgeoisie, as well as large reserves of proletarians. The first agricultural revolution in Çukurova in the 19th century created an agrarian bourgeoisie from the wealthy and strong elites of the late Ottoman era and produced labor supplies from the settled nomads. The capitalist transformation of agriculture deepened after the World War II. The Marshall Plan, originally designed to reconstruct the devastated European economy, was extended to Turkey in 1948. Large amounts of American aid rapidly increased the use of farm machinery and modern seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides in the following decades (Keyder, 1983, p. 141). The prioritization of agriculture over other sectors was notable throughout the 1950s. As of the 1960s, Turkish economic and political elites focused on industry and adopted an import-substitution strategy whereby the state supported the native industry more than agriculture (Keyder, 1987, pp. 162–173). Despite the policy changes, however, agricultural modernization was rapid throughout the post-1950 period. The number of tractors increased from only 1750 in 1948 to 40,000 in 1955, 75,000 in 1967, 200,000 in 1974, and 430,000 in 1980. The number of harvesters increased from 1000 in 1948 to 6500 in 1955, 8,000 in 1967, and 130,000 in 1980 (Doğan, 2006, pp. 69–74; Güriz, 1974, p. 88). The area of cultivated farmland increased from 14.5 million hectares in 1950 to 23 million hectares in 1962, whereupon the opportunity for extensive growth was exhausted and further productivity increases depended almost entirely on intensive growth (Karapınar, 2005, p. 167).

Marx (1977) underlines the fact that English farm workers had access to land and other sources of livelihood before the enclosure movement. Alongside the small peasants, these workers simultaneously lost much of what they owned during the processes of enclosure (pp. 877–890). In parallel with Marx, Polanyi (1944) notes that before the enclosure movement, workers had "a garden plot, a scrap of land, or grazing rights;" therefore, their dependence "on money earnings was not absolute; the potato plot or 'stubbing geese,' a cow or even an ass in the common made all the difference; and acted as a kind of insurance". However, "the rationalization of agriculture inevitably uprooted the laborer and undermined his social security" (p. 96).

The processes described above are vividly illustrated in Yaşar Kemal's works. For instance, in the novel entitled *Salman the Solitary*, Kemal depicts the transfer of large tracts of farmland from non-Muslims to Arif Saim Bey, a deputy of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) that ruled Turkey from 1923 to 1950. Arif Sami Bey wants to hide those land deals from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic. Arif Sami uses his strong influence over the local officials and landlords to this end. The Land settlement commissions sell those areas very cheaply to the landlords who purchase them on behalf of Arif Sami. He makes sure that the landlords transfer him the title deeds of those areas after Mustafa Kemal's death (Kemal, 1980a, pp. 166–168).[4]

Yaşar Kemal also describes the proletarianization process in detail. Although the capitalist transformation of Turkish agriculture after 1950 significantly varied according to regions, Kemal's works imply that in Çukurova it followed a line similar to those depicted by Marx and Polanyi. The increasing mechanization of agriculture displaced a large number of sharecroppers and farm workers.[5] In his journalistic investigation of the impact of agricultural mechanization on the peasantry in Çukurova in the 1950s, Yaşar Kemal makes this point explicitly:

> Once upon a time, all the people from Central Anatolia and the neighboring cities were coming to Çukurova to find seasonal jobs. Hundreds of thousands found employment there.

[4] This is the first volume of the *Kimsecik* trilogy. The first edition of this volume dated 1980 is titled *Kimsecik "1"*. Later editions are titled *Kimsecik 1: Yağmur Kuşu* (*The Solitary 1*: *Plover*). The English edition of the book (published by the Harvill Press in 1998) is titled *Salman the Solitary*, a reference to Salman, one of the main characters of the novel.

[5] The expansion of the cultivated area, increasing intensity of farming, and creation of new jobs related to farm mechanization retarded the displacement of labor in rural Turkey but the pace of labor displacement increased after the late 1950s (Yıldırmaz, 2016, pp. 51–115).

> There is no such thing now. Landless peasants were workers, now they are not. All people could at least make ends meet, now this is not the case... Machines are everywhere now, you can hear their noise everywhere. Machines are smiling, landlords are smiling. But the situation of the unemployed is bad (Kemal, 1971, p. 492).

Kemal strikingly illustrates the same phenomenon in his literary works. In the novel *The Pomegranate on the Knoll*, a prominent/successful *agha* (landlord) hails this process: "Long live this tractor, long live this harvester!" He even praises the opportunities resulting from the Marshall brand of farm machinery: "Long live Marshal Marshall!" (Kemal, 1982, p. 78). On the other hand, a peasant complains about the introduction of tractors: "The landlord sent a message to us, saying that it is enough for us, the peasants to sponge on him. He said 'They should get out from my land. They have reaped my field as it is owned by their father. It is time to stop my suffering in their hands.'" He also refers to the Marshall machinery: "Alas this American infidel, alas engineer Marshall" (Kemal, 1982, pp. 26–27).[6] For a big landowner, Marshall is a "marshal" worth of utmost respect, whereas for a poor peasant, Marshall is an "engineer" who designed the tractors used in Çukurova.

Changing forms of the rural class conflict in Çukurova

Marx (1977) provides a historical account of the workers' resistance against the labor-displacing machineries with reference to the European revolts against the ribbon-loom in the 17th century, the burning of the first wool-shearing machine by 100,000 workers in 1758, and the strong influence of the Luddist movement (of machine-breaking workers) during the first fifteen years of the 19th century (p. 554). The machine-breaking peasants and farm workers of Çukurova appear in Yaşar Kemal's journalistic works (Kemal, 1971, p. 494). They are also portrayed in Kemal's novel *The Pomegranate on the Knoll*:

> The agha met with the sharecroppers and announced that from then on there was no job for them. Everybody left. Topal also left. After a while, maybe one or two months later, we suddenly saw that the head of the Massey-Harris brand motor was gone. Somebody had stolen it. That huge motor died. Agha went crazy. He appealed to the government authorities, to the mayor. He went to Ankara [the capital city of Turkey]. After a while, Topal said somewhere that he had done it. The state tortured him. He confessed that he had stolen it to rebel against the agha who had degraded us into hunger. He said, "Oh, I took my revenge on the agha. I threw the machine into the river in the middle of Anavarza. I put the machine into the depths of Ceyhan. I will not worry even if I die right now... He is in Adana jail now. Agha led his men to search for the head of the motor but they could not find it. Massey-Harris motor died (Kemal, 1982, p. 20).

As Fernand Braudel (1992) notes, during the first stage of capitalist agriculture in Europe, "it was no accident... that new farming ventures were so often launched on waste marsh or woodland. It was better not to upset existing land systems and customs" (p. 253). Similarly, the struggle between the big landlords and the small and landless peasants in Çukurova did not take place over the lands that had already been under cultivation or ready to be cultivated. What defined the agrarian class conflict in the region were the conflicting efforts to transform marshland into farmland. In other words, class struggles took place in the context of a greater struggle against nature. While the landless peasantry was fiercely fighting to form small plots out of marshlands in order to carry out small-scale, family farming, big landowners were aggressively expanding their landholdings. In *Yusuf, Little Yusuf*, Yaşar Kemal vividly describes this conflict:

> Uzun Ali and his friends obtained these lands by spilling their blood for it, and will continue to do so. The peasants on the shores opened hundreds, maybe thousands of small canals and erected dikes. By doing this, they let the water flow inside and obtained small plots step by step. A plunder started. Both the landless peasants who were scrabbling for their livelihood and the aghas and notables whose greed for land was great were attacking

[6] The first harvester used in the region (in the 1890s) was also a Marshall brand (Ener, 1958, p. 217).

> Akçasaz. Everybody took something from these golden lands every day. There was a great struggle around these fertile lands lying under the boiling water (Kemal, 1975, p. 45).

This fight against nature did not take place in a peaceful atmosphere. As Weber notes, "during its expansion, capitalist interest in land may come into conflict with the interests of the peasantry" (Weber, 2014, p. 166). Kemal's works reinforce this argument. The fight against nature is immediately followed by (and more often, simultaneously takes place alongside) the class struggles over land. Kemal notes that landlords followed the path of enclosure movements and tried to take the marshlands gained by the peasants. Here is a dialogue between a landlord and a gendarmerie captain:

> *Muallim Rüstem Bey*: You can send the peasants away. The job done by the peasants, i.e. successfully controlling nature is a dangerous event that no government or nation will allow. If Ankara hears about these developments, there will be much trouble. This is an event as dangerous as a Kurdish uprising...
> *Captain*: If you want me to do that […] I will send them away to where they come from. But in case of any incidence...
> *Muallim Rüstem Bey*: Don't worry about that. We can send telegrams to Ankara, saying that all the Anavarza Plain is in rebellion and peasants are plundering the farms. Then Ankara will send you a directive tomorrow morning. You can take action whenever the directive comes (Kemal, 1975, p. 238).

Soon after that exchange, gendarmeries forced the peasants away from the lands, allowing landlords to appropriate them (Kemal, 1975, pp. 239–240). In fact, big landowners won most of the conflicts over the land in the region, which deepened the capitalist transformation of agriculture (and industry later on) in Çukurova:

> Cheap credit and the imports of machinery led to mechanization of agriculture, but, contrary to what was usual in most of Turkey, the landowners were in a position to eject the sharecroppers from their lands. Cotton needs only seasonal attention and could be tended very well by labour migrants from the surrounding mountains and the north Syrian plain. Thus, the large cotton farmers could maximize their prices (cotton was in fact the only Turkish agricultural produce that profited from the Korean boom). In this way, cotton producers could become very rich very quickly. The more astute among them soon invested their money in cotton-based industries in and around Adana, which became a classic boom town. Several of the 30 or so large family-owned holding companies, which dominate Turkish industry today started out in this way (Zürcher, 1993, pp. 238–239).[7]

On the other hand, there were also cases in which peasants successfully resisted dispossession, sometimes through violent methods. In *Iron Earth Copper Sky*, Kemal narrates one such episode:

> How long ago was it? Sefer recalled it all too clearly. Perhaps ten, perhaps fifteen years ago…They were picking cotton for an Agha in one of the border villages of the Chukurova plain where the mountain begins. It was a village where everything belonged to the Agha, the land, the houses, everything. The Agha wanted to turn the peasants out of their homes so as to sow more cotton, and for the past two years they had been in constant conflict. All about the village the Aga had planted cotton, in the lanes, the yards, right into the village square itself. One afternoon Sefer and his villagers were picking cotton in the very centre of the village when a terrible noise broke out. They heard the sound of hundreds of screaming voices and suddenly they saw the Agha running for his life, a huge crowd of women at his heels, pelting him with stones. And then he vanished. The women had caught up and closed over him like a horde of eagles. After a while the crowd opened up, still shrieking, and streaked off. In a deathlike silence, the villagers drew near, and what did they see! A leg, an arm, and half a lung still bleeding in the dust…Where had the rest of the Agha gone to? They searched and searched in order to bury him, but they found nothing.

[7] For a similar analysis see: Toksöz, 2006, p. 108.

> This had happened in broad daylight, in the populated Chukurova, before everyone (Kemal, 1974, pp. 115–116)!

Kemal's works also describe the fundamental characteristics of the emerging agricultural proletariat. The labor force employed in the large cotton farms of the Çukurova Plain were comprised of mountain village peasants who owned small plots. The low return of small-scale farming was the main reason behind the proletarianization of the peasantry. Without leaving their villages and completely giving up small-scale farming, peasants engaged in migrant labor during summer months. A report published in 1939 noted that about 70% of the villagers in the mountainous regions were able to partially subsist through farming their small plots for about six months a year, spending the remaining six months employed in wage work, especially in the cotton farms of the plains (Toros, 1939, p. 11). Since income derived from wage work comprised the bulk of their household income, the degree of proletarianization was extraordinary. In the novel entitled *The Wind from the Plain*, Kemal describes a high degree of proletarianization of the peasantry: "It is usual for village people in these parts to labour one or two months in the Çukurova cotton fields. For the inhabitants of the Long Plateu, the Chukurova is the principal source of income, much more important than their own crops or their own sheep or goats" (Kemal, 1963, p. 21).

One of Kemal's noteworthy observations is that some peasants view proletarianization not as a permanent condition but as a temporary necessity that they should endure in order to make upward mobility. For instance, Halil, a character in Kemal's *Salman the Solitary*, endures incredible hardship in the fields of Çukurova for many years in order to save money and return to his village. Halil hopes that his savings would enable him to hire workers to cut trees and clear up a sufficiently large area for grain cultivation, buy a pair of oxen or maybe a tractor (if it becomes affordable in the future), and as a result, earn an independent livelihood through grain cultivation (Kemal, 1980a, pp. 264–265). Hence, wage work becomes acceptable as a way to escape from permanent proletarianization. In the end, Halil's dream of upward mobility from farm work to small-scale farming failed to materialize. Similarly, some of Kemal's characters earn a living through banditry or as hired assassins with a dream of accumulating enough funds to become independent farmers, get married and establish a household (Kemal, 1992, p. 449).

As the proletarianization of the peasantry deepens, the repertoire of collective action shifts from resistance against mechanization and dispossession, to actions to improve working conditions and remuneration. In Kemal's *The Wind from the Plain* and *Iron Earth Copper Sky*, the latter type of class struggle takes place within significant variation of farmland fertility. During the harvest season, peasants from numerous mountain villages compete with each other to find jobs on the most fertile cotton farms, where wages are higher. Peasants employed on farms of low fertility suffer from low wages and face subsistence crises when they return to their villages. Intermediaries play a critical role in the agricultural labor market. Big landowners rely on them to bring workers from the mountain villages during the harvest, and the peasants rely on them to be employed. The village elite, especially the village headmen, act as intermediaries. In these two novels, Kemal tells a story of the peasants who are disappointed and angry at being employed on Bekir Agha's barely-fertile cotton farms. The village headman (Sefer Agha) tries to prevent peasant resistance by threatening the workers with unemployment. Also, the peasants are structurally indebted to merchants-cum-usurers (represented by Adil Efendi) to meet their basic consumption needs. They are required to clear their debt with cash earnings from farm work after harvest time every year. Both factors force the peasants into submission and guarantee the continuity of labor supply to Bekir Agha's farm. However, after years of resistance to Sefer Efendi, two peasants, UzuncaAli and Taşbaşoğlu, manage to break the status quo and help the peasants find better-paying jobs on more fertile farms.

Seasonal farm workers in the regions also struggled with significant public health problems. Malaria had been a widespread issue, from human settlement and agricultural production in the 19th century until the early 1950s (Ener, 1958, pp. 220–221; Toros, 1939, p. 20). In one of his first literary works, *The Drumming-Out*, Kemal (1955) presents malaria as a question of rural class conflict. The story revolves around the experience of big landowners who had high stakes in the expansion of paddy rice production in Çukurova. Since the expansion of areas drowned in water for paddy production exacerbates the malaria problem, paddy production could be expanded only by government approval. The landlords bribe local

officials and maintain good relations with the politicians in Ankara in order to obtain the approval for expansion. A few defiant peasants resist this process, which quickly becomes a mass movement. The newly appointed, young, and honest district governor hears their complaints and refuses the landlords' requests for new approvals. However, the local landlords use their political influence in order to get him appointed somewhere else. Although the story ends with the peasants' defeat, it nevertheless implies that the peasants were capable of challenging state policies which threatened their livelihood.

The crisis of old status groups and the rise of capitalist entrepreneurship

One of the central ideas in Yaşar Kemal's novels on the great transformation in Çukurova is that the rise of the capitalist mindset corresponds to the erosion of old status group identities. His novels illustrate how all that is solid melts into air; new customs, lifestyles, and ways of thinking that fit into the emerging capitalist agricultural system replace the old ones. To depict this change, he uses a strictly Weberian distinction between the power based on "status group," which requires "a special social esteem," and the power based on "class" position. According to Weber, despite the fact that "status groups are often created by property classes," and "economic opportunities tend to result in the rise of status groups" (Weber, 1978, pp. 306–307), they lie outside "'mere economic' power, and especially 'naked' money power" (Weber, 2014, p. 180). Weber also argues that "everywhere, some status groups, and usually the most influential, consider almost any kind of overt participation in economic acquisition as absolutely stigmatizing" (Weber, 2014, p. 193).

This behavior fits Yaşar Kemal's illustration of the dichotomy between the "old landlord" generations of Çukurova which prioritized social esteem, versus the "new landlord" generation which prioritized profit. This dichotomy is at the core of Kemal's *The Aghas of Akçasaz* trilogy. It is narrated through the conflict between Derviş Sarıoğlu , a typical old-fashioned landlord, and Mahir Kabakçıoğlu,a profit-seeking, capitalist agriculturalist. One way to understand this dichotomy is by comparing the two characters' attitudes towards the new agricultural technology of the 1950s. Sarıoğlu insists on hiring sharecroppers rather than using labor-saving technologies like tractors (Kemal, 1980b, p. 419). On the other hand, Kabakçıoğlu, who rejects a career in bureaucracy due to his desire to become a capitalist entrepreneur, admires labor-saving technologies and the establishment of large, capitalist farms:

> These are lands which will give you rhubarb even if you plant a stone... More than one thousand, two thousand *dönüm*s, there were several thousand *dönüm*s of fertile land which has no equivalent on Earth. He wanted to contribute to the country, to this poor nation... During his last trip to the United States, he visited big modern farms. He was going to establish that kind of farm, even more beautiful. He could do it because the quality of Çukurova's land was superior to the lands in the US. and the shores of the Nile River. He would establish a farm with tractors, harvesters, and specialists of soil, seed, and plant. It would also have workshops, air conditioners, a beautiful landscape, a forest, a flower garden, a children's playground, a tennis court, and a big park. If he did not establish that kind of a farm, he would die in pain (Kemal, 1975, pp. 101–102).[8]

Because of his ambition, Kabakçıoğlu harshly criticizes Sarıoğlu's old-fashioned beliefs and inefficient way of farming. He thinks that although the Sarıoğlu family farmland is more fertile than Egyptian farms, it is wasted "in the hands of an old feudal," hoping that "one day these beautiful lands will be handed to the men who will utilize them properly" (Kemal, 1975, p. 59). In short, Kemal portrays a fundamental contradiction between the new and old logics of power. He emphasizes Derviş Sarıoğlu's understanding of "social honor." Kabakçıoğlu proposes that Sarıoğlu cooperate with him in converting the marshlands into a joint private property. He argues that the agrarian transformation of the 1950s has critical importance in the accumulation of capital because "the foundations of big farms and, therefore great wealth" have always been laid in the ages of transformation. According to him, one should take advantage of the opportunities at this critical moment (Kemal, 1975, p. 65). He demands Derviş Bey's permission to

[8] A dönüm equals about a quarter of an acre.

use his influence to dispossess the peasants. Derviş Bey's reason to reject the proposal illustrates the value of "social honor" for an old noble:

> I cannot tolerate his appropriation of Akçasaz. Even his farm, which is worth millions but he bought it for three hundred liras, belongs to this nation. From now on I cannot let him rob the people. Will he give me the half of the farm? I don't want it; I don't want to be an accomplice to his robbery. I have never eaten any *haram* [forbidden by religion] bread until today. I cannot found a gang of robbery with Mahir. I will not do any business with him, whether it is large or small. This is my final word (Kemal, 1975, p. 67).

Nevertheless, Derviş Bey's final words cannot prevent the calculating mindset of modern capitalism from entering his family. Weber sees a direct causality between the rise of the calculating spirit and the disintegration of various types of households. He states that, "with the multiplication of life chances and opportunities, the individual becomes less and less content with being bound to rigid and undifferentiated forms of life prescribed by the group. Increasingly he desires to shape his life as an individual and to enjoy the fruits of his own abilities and labor as he himself wishes" (Weber, 1978, p. 375). For Weber, the multiplication of educational sources is a factor behind the rise of this individualistic spirit. Although an individual may still be exposed to the conservative values of the family, different levels of social life could force her/him to adapt to new ways of thinking and benefit from new economic opportunities. In this context, it is no surprise to see the transformation of the sons of old landlords into capitalist entrepreneurs. Kemal illustrates both the adaptation and transformation:

> Though he had never spoken to him and only seen him once, he knew Dervish down to every quirk of his character. He was proud to have such an enemy: generous, brave, an upholder of the old traditions, an island of righteousness in the mire of wickedness, depravity and dishonesty of present-day Chukurova. An island, yes, and only two remained, where probity, honor, human values were still valid, the two houses of Sarıoğlu and Akyollu, and both were doomed to extinction, living out their last days. Within a week Dervish would be gone, and then it would be his own turn. Their children? Of what good were they, each one emulating those upstart Aghas (Kemal, 1980b, pp. 51–52).

The transformation of status groups also impacts the livelihood of the lower classes. Polanyi specifically points out the opposite side of the coin: "The catastrophe of the native community is a direct result of the rapid and violent disruption of the basic institutions of the victim (whether force is used in the process or not does not seem altogether relevant)" (Polanyi, 1944, p. 167). Common reference points that bind different classes of the old society to each other through specific communication channels – such as common "tribal consciousness" (Weber, 1978, p. 394) – cease to function in times of great transformation. For example, in *The Pomegranate on the Knoll*, when an unemployed ex-peasant begs the landlord to employ him, claiming that he is the descendant of the Dadaloğlu lineage, the landlord humiliates him by referring to his lower class position: "Oh! You are coming from the Dadaloğlu lineage! If you have such a sublime origin, why have you fallen down to this low position?" (Kemal, 1982, p. 78) In response to this negative trend, landless peasants tried to reverse their declining social status with different methods. One of them, as noted above, resorted to class struggle. Migration was another alternative. As Kemal Karpat (1976) states, rural outmigration "psychologically rehabilitated the former landless and poor villagers by giving them a higher status because of their urban life" (p. 189).

Conclusion

This study investigates the changing positions of classes and status groups during the process of capitalist transformation of agriculture in Çukurova in the twentieth century from the perspective of Yaşar Kemal's literary works. We have seen that Kemal's works provide valuable ethnographic insights into this process. The paper makes three main arguments. Firstly, agrarian transformation of the region involved the displacement of former sharecroppers through rapid mechanization of agriculture, and capital accumulation through dispossession of the rural lower classes from land. The lower class resistance was carried out through a combination of Luddite-type revolt and the struggle to defend land and labor rights. Secondly, some of the proletarianized villagers viewed wage work as a temporary rather

than a permanent condition, which would help them accumulate funds to engage with small-scale farming. However, the expectations of upward mobility from farm labor to small-scale farming mostly failed to materialize. Finally, the transformations of classes and status groups were mutually related. While the old landlords did not address the necessities of the new capital accumulation process because of their loyalty to old definitions of "social honor," and therefore declined, a new type of agrarian capitalist class, whose primary concern was profit maximization, became more prominent. Moreover, this transformation affected the members of old landlord households, which led to their disintegration and/or transformation.

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