

PEASANTRY AND RURAL RESISTANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY TURKEY:  
THE CASE OF ÇİFTÇİ-SEN

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## ABSTRACT

### PEASANTRY AND RURAL RESISTANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY TURKEY: THE CASE OF ÇİFTÇİ-SEN

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In Turkey, the neoliberal transformation of agriculture which started in the 1980s has been catalyzed since the beginning of the 21st century by the governing party extractivist ideology of a commodified countryside. While past state's political elites always populistically approached the peasantry to deny their political agency, the current authoritarian context is facing a growing protest culture and potential organized resistance. The Çiftçiler Sendikası (Farmers Union) known as Çiftçi-Sen, was established in 2004 as an umbrella organization of different product-based unions extended across the country. This work demonstrates how this movement, recently refunded as a single union, resists while employing food sovereignty as a political program and constituting an unprecedented potential to activate peasant's political agency. This is particularly important in a context where authoritarian neoliberalism in the Turkish countryside is expressed by extractivist projects that cause ecological demise.

**Keywords:** Peasants; Agrarian Question; Resistance; Rural Sociology; Rural Turkey.

## ÖZ

### 21. YÜZYIL TÜRKİYESİNDE KÖYLÜLÜK VE KIRSAL DİRENİŞ: ÇİFTÇİ-SEN ÖRNEĞİ

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Türkiye’de tarımın 1980’lerde başlayan neoliberal dönüşümü, 21. yüzyılın başından beri iktidar partisinin kırsal alanı metalaştırarak sömürücü ideolojisi ile hız kazanmıştır. Geçmişte, devletin siyasi elitleri, siyasi etkinliklerini reddetmek için köylülüğe her zaman popülist bir şekilde yaklaşırken, bugün mevcut otoriter bağlam, büyüyen bir protesto kültürü ve potansiyel organize direnişle karşı karşıyadır. Türkiye’de Çiftçi-Sen olarak bilinen Çiftçiler Sendikası, 2004 yılında ülke geneline yayılmış ürün bazlı farklı sendikaların çatı örgütü olarak kurulmuştur. Bu çalışma, son zamanlarda tek bir birlik olarak kabul edilen bu çiftçi hareketinin, gıda egemenliğini siyasi bir program olarak kullanırken aynı zamanda köylünün siyasi etkinliğini harekete geçiren eşi görülmemiş bir direniş potansiyeli taşıdığını göstermektedir. Bu, Türkiye kırsalındaki otoriter neoliberalizmin ekolojik çöküşüne neden olan ekstraktivist projelerle ifade edildiği günümüz bağlamında özellikle önemlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Köylüler; Tarım Sorunu; Direniş; Kırsal Sosyoloji; Kırsal Türkiye.

*To our son, Arel.*

*May he always strive for a world where honest labor is truly valued.*

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Although it is in my plans, I have never run a marathon. Writing this thesis, however, certainly felt like one.

For the length, for the mental and physical strength it required along the way but specially for the self-doubt that one must endure when reaching a goal seems like the horizon, getting further ahead as one steps closer. If today this work looks like a reachable horizon, that is certainly owed to the many people that have helped to carry the load along the way of this marathon-like work. You know who you are, and you have made it possible. As it is hard to recount here all of you (and I am sorry for that), I must personally acknowledge those of you that have especially participated for key parts of the journey or that have accompanied the full length of it.

It has been an honor to take part in courses of the Department of Sociology of METU, between 2016 and 2018, as a graduate student. I have been a student of sociology since 2009 and I found at this department the courses and the professors that had a greater intellectual contribute for my learning of the field. My first acknowledgment goes to the entire department and its bright academic staff, particularly to Prof. Katharina Bodirsky with whom I was first in contact even before moving to Ankara and who kindly read and patiently commented the very first versions of my research project. I will never forget the stimulating roundtable discussions at her ‘Anthropological Theory and Method I’.

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losing the sight of the required ethical standards. From the many memories of the past 4 years, I recall with special pleasantness the strolls around the beautiful city of Krakow when we both participated on a rural sociology congress in 2017 debating our dear field of rural sociology, research interests or just shared cultural aspects of our two countries. All in all, her guidance and given support were fundamental for the conclusion of this research.

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Any missing or faulty aspect of this work is my responsibility alone.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AKP</b>	Justice and Development Party
<b>ARIP</b>	Agricultural Reform Implementation Project
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>ÇAYKUR</b>	The General Directorate of Tea Enterprises
<b>CHP</b>	Republican People's Party
<b>ÇKS</b>	Farmers Registration System
<b>ECVC</b>	European Coordination Vía Campesina
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FMI</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>GMOs</b>	Genetically Modified Organisms
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>IFIs</b>	International Financial Institutions
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>LVC</b>	La Vía Campesina
<b>MST</b>	Landless Rural Workers Movement
<b>PT</b>	Workers Party
<b>SGK</b>	Social Security Institution
<b>SAP</b>	Structural Adjustment Policies
<b>TAPDK</b>	Regulating Agency of Tobacco and Alcohol Market
<b>TEKEL</b>	General Directorate of Tobacco, Tobacco Products, Salt and Alcohol Enterprises
<b>TARİŞ</b>	Olive and Olive Oil Agricultural Sales Cooperatives Unions
<b>TMO</b>	Turkish Grain Board
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Debating the peasantry on the 21st century

*The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.*

(Marx and Engels [1846] 1974, 48)

Certainly, one of the main motivation drivers of this academic work is the search for two interrelated questions on the peasantry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first is ‘why do we still talk about the peasantry?’ hundreds of years since capitalism assumed its global hegemony (and note that the adverb ‘still’ is here employed precisely to emphasize the continuity of the peasantry as a significant mode of agricultural production). The second is ‘when does that persistence unfold forms of resistance?’ – which leads to other sorts of questions, such as, resisting what (e.g., against global settings of inequality in the countryside) and resisting how (e.g., by forms of autonomous collective action).

Nonetheless, the intriguing element behind all these questions and which constitutes the basis that supports them resides in the fact that the peasantry persists and/or resists despite conceptual frames (ontological and empirical but also the dominant capitalist ideology) predicting its disappearance. Yet more striking is the fact that those frames imply a condition of subjugation or subaltern upon the world’s peasants or peasantries,

as commonly used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, failing to grasp their heterogeneity and adaptation/survival strategies.

Is it not intriguing that a social group, simultaneously constituting a “way of living” (Fei Hsiu Tung quote in Shanin, 1985:66) and a mode of production, has been able to justify its existence until today?

That continuous existence is even more significantly justified when so often the verdict of its disappearance from the countryside has been given by “the inevitable expansion of capitalism” (Araghi, 1995, 337), notwithstanding that peasant farmers are on the 21<sup>st</sup> century responsible for producing roughly 35% of the world's food (Lowder, Sánchez and Bertini, 2021). This intriguing capacity to persist is intrinsic to the ‘peasant’ concept but also historically related to two different settings: one conceptual and another theoretical.

I am reserving for later a more detailed conceptual account of the definitions of peasants and the peasantry through history, but I would like, at this point, to mention the importance of Shanin’s (1982) work to clear the concept of peasant away from a mystification in which it was embroiled by “conscious manipulations of smart politicians and prestige-hunting academics” (Ibid.:408). As such, Shanin intended to provide a demystified account including the needed notions of heterogeneity, social setting’s embeddedness, and historical contexts. First, at the center of peasantry as a social phenomenon is the nature of the peasant household, in other words, that what allows for the generalization of the concept that peasantries around the world display is the “extent of integration of the peasant family’s life with its farming enterprise” (Shanin, 1985, 66).

For the peasantry family constitutes the lion share, although not exclusively, of the labor employed in agricultural production and the resulting produce is mainly for family’s consumption, although engagement in the market is possible. Also important of mention is the fact that holders of economic and political power, usually the state, enforce dues (namely taxes). These two are characteristics that allow generalizations.

Shanin identifies in the literature six categories by which the specificity of the peasantry can be generalized in the sense of making the concept meaningfully and empirically verified in different geographical and historical contexts, which relate to political organization of peasants, norms, social organization, system of social relations and so on, to which more attentively analysis will be devoted in timely manner in this manuscript.

Nonetheless, even before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the onset of the globalization debates in capitalism brought new focus of analysis about the question of heterogeneity of the peasants due to a “surprise at the tenacity of peasant social forms” (Shanin, 1982, 411). In other words, a surprise that the expansion of capitalism’s borders, that allow for transnational economic and financial transactions which also led to a whole new level of commodification of agri-food, did not cause the disappearance of the world's peasantries. This is the so-called ‘problem of non-disappearance’. Moreover, discussions on the structural change or structural transformation of the peasantry as a mode of production – which means in the Marxist fashion an account of relations of production and forces of production by which material needs of a society are answered – are prior to the onset of globalization. Much before, Kautsky’s *The Agrarian Question* (1899) and Lenin’s *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) had already focused on the processes of peasant’s social differentiation, those of which dispossessed would turn into a class of rural wage labor or eventually after rural exodus into proletarians and those capable of land accumulation would form a class of landowning capitalism farmers.

In fact, the major debates on the capitalist transformation of the peasantry by the Marxist scholarship are related with the resulting modes of production from peasant’s differentiation in the countryside. For Kautsky there could be several levels of insertion of capitalism in agriculture, differently from other economic sectors, but that would invariably lead to the destruction of peasant agriculture, much like Marx argued empirically with the English example on his widely known ‘primitive accumulation’ of the first volume of *Capital* (orig.1867). For his turn Lenin focused on what Shanin calls the “inter-peasant dynamics” of market relations, division of labor and eventually

class differentiation which would polarize peasants into classes of rich and poor, them being transformed into rural capitalists and proletarians, respectively. Leaving this conceptual setting intrinsic to the peasant concept as one made of generalizations but also heterogeneity, we can move now to the theoretical one. With the capitalist transformation of agriculture this setting is characterized by two different forms of scholarly work on the post-World War II period; the first devotes its attention to the disappearance of the peasantry while the other, and oppositely, to its permanence. The first deals with conditions under which peasants “do not dissolve, differentiate and/or pauperise” (Ibid.:417) but their importance on a given country's national economy gradually decreases which implies a marginalization of peasant agriculture under the impact of capitalism. This is often called depeasantization by the advocates of the ‘disappearance thesis’.

A variant of the advocacy of such thesis was rooted on a progressive premise according to which the non-disappearance of the peasantry was an “economic backwardness” signaling “an unresolved agrarian question” (Byres, 1986: ix) and such backwardness only persisted in geographies where capitalism in agriculture had not yet fully “rooted out and destroyed” pre-capitalist agrarian relations (Byres, 1991:7 quoted in Araghi, 1995:341).

Another variant assumed a less deterministic or evolutionary notion of capitalism in agriculture by understanding the question of peasant differentiation in the countryside as one of functionality of certain forms of peasant agriculture to capitalism itself – namely because the former would reproduce cheap labor for capitalist enterprises. This process is called, by one of the proponents of this variant, “functional dualism” (de Janvry, 1981) stating that while initially this dualism (peasant sector serving capitalist agriculture) may sustain due to “sectoral disarticulation” in Third World economies, over time the internal contradictions of such co-existence would lead to complete proletarianization: “their future [of the peasants] is full incorporation into one or the other of the two essential classes of capitalism” (de Janvry, 1981:32-45 quoted in Araghi, 1995:341). The functionality of the permanence of the peasants for capitalist

agriculture had already been sustained before in the classic work of Kautsky referred above.

The second thesis, so-called ‘permanence’ is rooted, by reaction against the disappearance thesis, on the argument that the internal logic of the peasant economy does not follow the developmental logic of capitalist modernity and that the survival of the peasantry shows a resilient reproduction in the countryside. According to the impactful work of Chayanov *The Theory of Peasant Economy* ([1925] 1987), the rationality of the peasant economy is not the maximization of profit but subsistence oriented production which, provided that peasant economic system is a system with its own laws of production, it would persist, or resist, the competitive forces of capitalist agriculture.

In Latin America, for example this thesis has later acquired novel relevant arguments sustained on the agency of rural social movements (Vergara-Camus, 2013), namely for the struggle for the land (Vergara-Camus, 2009; Kay, 2015) backed by the masses of landless peasants, indigenous communities and even integrated by urban to rural mobilities of urban poor that see in this counter-movements to neoliberalism a permeable platform to acquire political agency (Veltmeyer, 1993; Deveaux, 2018). In other words, contemporary examples of repeasantization constitute loci of rural struggles that display the persistence of the peasantry by resistance – this is a major argument to be sustained throughout the entire manuscript. Although both mentioned theses that prevailed on the 20<sup>th</sup> century were undoubtedly important in the time of their emergence for the debate around the agrarian question or the peasant question, it is important to mention here a methodological lack of “world-historical context” that Araghi tried to solve in his proposal (1995:343). According to his critique, the “nation-centered analyses that prevail in peasant studies”, lack the recognition of “the global dimension of the local social processes of our time” (Araghi, 1995: 337) which are important to grasp the different phases of depeasantization resulting from two different periods of the world market’s construction. The first is a post-war nationalism depeasantization (1945-1973) figuring the expansion of capitalism in agriculture with the United States hegemony at the forefront and second, a denationalized

depeasantization in which the hegemonic construct of capitalist agriculture is no longer led by the US but by transnational finance capital (TFC) (e.g. World Bank and the IMF) “as the agents of this transformation” (Ibid.:355), figuring the emergence of a ‘transnational state’ as “TFC-influenced state policy internationalizes agro-food systems.” (McMichael and Myhre, 1991:85). In Turkey these two phases are, in a very succinct manner at this point, visible on the first decades of the Republic but also with 1945-1955 decade in which agrarian reforms and mechanization aimed at import-substitution by a state developmentalism (Yıldırım, 2017) and the post-1970s, but particularly after the 1980s, with the onset of neoliberal transformation of Turkish agriculture (Aydın, 2010).

Before passing to clearly state the purpose of the study, I find important to provide first this quick overview on how the question of peasant’s persistence (which can be sustained by forms of resistance) is conceptually and theoretically framed on discussions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (disappearance) until the opposing theses about the on the 20<sup>th</sup> century (permanence), to show what is stake at the heart of the agrarian question as a question of the consequences of capitalism in agriculture.

Furthermore, to clarify the standing of this work, a first effort of understanding the questions posed at the very beginning is fundamental, as those two questions are not only the embryonic version of the research questions - to be presented soon below - but also constitute the main drive and motivation of my work.

For that, before passing to the next section, it is important to frame those questions on one of the most important agrarian question’s debates of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is, above all, a debate that discusses *depeasantization* and *repeasantization* in terms of resistance and hence framed within rural politics considering the re-emerging global contentious processes in the countryside (e.g., forms of land dispossession and commodification of agricultural labor by contract farming as part of enclosures led by agro-industrial complex) and the mobilizations against them.

But also, for a framing of the agrarian question as one that considers peasants with political agency and not only passive spectators of the material consequences of history. In other words, framing the agrarian question in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a question

of rural politics is to consider the persistence of peasant agriculture in our world as a matter of peasantries<sup>1</sup> with (but also without political agency), which in any case is a debate that distances itself from the sole reading of the transformative and destructive consequences of agrarian capitalism with peasants as silent pawns before coercive structures – *people without history* – following the famous provocative formulation of Eric Wolf (1982). The positioning that will be followed regarding the peasantry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century integrates, with different levels, movements with political agency and political program for a radical change of the food systems as well as for knowledge- and technologically intensive ways of producing (agroecology), having in mind the known Marxian formulation on constrained history-making in which subjects do not make history as they please (Marx, [1852] 1934:10).

Following a much more recent formulation adapted to the agrarian question which contextualizes the fact that the “narrative of capitalism modernity has overwhelmingly regarded the peasantry as an historical anachronism” while criticizing their “Euro- and state-centric” character that “has shaped a developmentalist episteme” not only responsible for the contemporary rural crisis (McMichael, 2008:205) but also failing to recognize (or deliberately ignoring) that “today’s campesinos [peasants] are not culturally static or politically passive” (Holt-Giménez, 2006:xii). In fact, contrary to the mainstream Marxist political economy that considers that talking about small-scale farming and peasants as capable of developing productive forces is but a populist attempt to avoid the unavoidable, or even that small-scale farming is no longer relevant for capitalist accumulation (Bernstein, 1996/97), the approach of Akram-Lodhi (2021:688) presents that:

it is small-scale agroecological farming that offers the means by which to develop the productive forces necessary to lay the foundation of a post-

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the plural ‘peasantries’ is not a mere formality of grammar to refer to different peasant societies around the globe, but critically to assert that “peasantries nowhere form a homogeneous mass or agglomerate but are always and everywhere typified themselves by internal differentiation along many lines”. (Mintz, 1973, 93)

That internal differentiation not only produces different complexities in the analysis of relations of the peasant sector with non-peasant rural sectors (e.g., capitalist enterprises) but also calls our attention that while studying the agency of peasants and its constraints from the subordination to the dominant group of rules, one should not overlook exploitation within the peasantry:

“Part of the difficulty, then, is that in observing how external groups may profit by controlling the peasantry, one may overlook how members of different sectors of the peasantry profit —and, often, remain culturally conservative—by controlling each other.” (Ibid., 94).

capitalist future (...) [suggesting] that the notion that a resolution of the agrarian questions requires the dissolution of the agrarian of small-scale farming is not what Marx thought by the end of his life.<sup>2</sup>

Once again, not only the conceptual map of this work is drawn upon the stated above but also constitutes the basis of departure for the questions stated at the beginning ‘why we still speak about the peasantry’ and ‘when peasant persistence unfolds forms resistance’.

## **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

When often asked to describe the purpose of this study in a simplistic fashion as ‘What is your thesis/research about?’ I would struggle to find a similarly simple answer from skipping the thousands of pages of readings, the layers of meaning I had sketched from them and the hundreds of thousands of characters from fieldwork interviews and consequently its analysis.

I have once read somewhere that if we cannot explain in a simple way what we are doing, then it must be because we also do not clearly understand it ourselves.

Having reached this stage, I am confident to express that I can answer the question of the purpose of this study in a clear, simple, and succinct manner, and as such I call your attention to the three points below.

First, and bringing again here the two embryonic questions on the origin and motivation of this work, the purpose of the study is to link the importance of (still) talking about the peasantry to the understanding of their resistance, under the form of

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<sup>2</sup> Refers to a Marx’s late life elaborated third path of transition from scale petty commodity peasant farming to capitalism (being the first is the development of capitalism in agriculture and the second being the peasant class differentiation) in which the peasant community could collectively transform itself, however slowly, into ‘an element of collective production on a national scale’ (Akram-Lodhi, 2021, 690, citing Marx 1983, 106).

This third path also sustains that capitalist development could create a “‘hybrid’ form of peasant subsumption to capital that maintains and sustains peasant communities where collective tendencies dominate because ‘smallholding and petty landownership ... production ... proceeds without being governed by the general rate of profit’” (Akram-Lodhi, 2021, 690 citing Marx 1981, 946; Arraghi 2009, 118). This last argument is quite like one presented before on Chayanov’s work and that is essential for van der Ploeg (2008) ‘New Peasantries’ to be referred to later.

formal movements and/or informal mobilizations but also the content of their action and organization. In other words, understanding the peasantry through their own collective action and resulting political agency. This is the assertion upon which “Peasantry” is used in the thesis title.

Second, and following the effort above, to frame this understanding within the historical context of rural politics in Turkey, which implies a dialectical discussion between the paternalistic weighted State-peasant tension, exacerbated by an authoritarian populist context of the ruling party over the last two decades, and the autonomy needed for the development of political agency, collective action and ultimately organized resistance. In other words, understanding the Turkish peasantry through their own history of lack of organized resistance while locating it on the debate of global peasant resistance. This is what is meant by “Rural Resistance” in the title.

Third, and finally, to source from the first and second efforts an analytical framework to characterize the peasant movement of the case-study having in account the tension with the authoritarian populism and extractivist-oriented rural accumulation that marks the rural Turkey of the 21st century. This is what is meant by “in the 21st century Turkey: the case of Çiftçi-Sen” in the title.

To operationalize this purpose, the research is divided into two main parts.

Part I includes chapters 3 and 4 as efforts to clarify both the conceptual linings of the debate on the peasantry and the framing of the agrarian question of the 21st century as one of rural politics, having in rural resistance its main indicator, after locating that debate on the historical context of the Turkish peasantry. This part refers mostly to the first two points of the purpose of the study above.

In this sense, chapter 3 starts with a detailed account on definitions of ‘peasants’ and the difference between the early debates on the agrarian question and the contemporary ones; a difference related with the differences between the historical constitution of earlier peasant movements to the contemporary momentum of ecological crisis and rural livelihoods, on the origin of the transnationally connected and clearly politically

moved agency of the peasant movements of our century. This implies concepts and debates that go from those of resistance and autonomy, and those in relation to food sovereignty as the political program that ultimately questions the developmentalist fetishism of capitalist agriculture, denouncing the pitfalls of its premises of perpetual growth. While chapter 3 basically locates those concepts and debates on the historical and geographical context of the case-study, which is to say, rural Turkey.

As such, Part I marks one of the purposes of this study as to ultimately locate the peasantry in Turkey within the debates of critical agrarian studies of the 21st century. That means, to search for a peasant's definition given by their political character within formed movements from which we derive that constituted collective action sustains forms of political agency. Those forms prove, I argue, on the one hand their history-making capacity and on the other expresses alternative modes of farming aiming at a reconciliation of the human-nature nexus of agriculture and thus to a sustainable food system that is not dependent on the developmentalist premise.

Part II includes chapters 5, 6 and 7 as respectively focused on understanding the movement Çiftçi-Sen in Turkey by characterizing its collective action and organization, followed by the analysis of the fieldwork results about their political program, with transnational links, as well as the authoritarian context against which their agency is enacted, and by which is obstructed. Therefore, on this second part the study presents its empirical backing to provide a better clarity for the reason why the concepts and debates were given room on the first part. In sum, part I and part II are respectively operationalized in two different instances regarding peasant's resistance.

The first is to consider the importance of rural social movements and its relationship with the current struggle for food sovereignty against the global food regime. That implies to understand the tension between autonomy and subalternity omnipresent in the history of the peasantry, and particularly keen for the Turkish case. Then, from such a tension, rural social movements have been able to express forms of resistance, either subjugated and/or autonomous forms.

The second is to present the major lines of the political program of what we call the global peasant resistance and the antagonistic processes on the countryside that it involves, with more emphasis on the main one; resistance politically defined as food sovereignty against the global food regime.

Last, but not least, namely in chapter 5, as the movement that figures as the case-study will be presented, a consideration to the internal patriarchal constitution of the peasantry is also considered. This consideration takes places as the peasantry is not gender neutral nor should this study be gender blind, asserting that the role of peasant women within the social division of labor of the peasantry and how the invisibility of women in peasant's moral economy of the past peasant studies is treated on the twenty-first century agrarian studies under the debates coined as rural gendered labor regime. This consideration is important as fieldwork shows it as one of the weakest links on the agency of the case-study movement in Turkey, namely the mismatch between the role of women in food sovereignty's narratives/discourses and the inability of the movement to pass from words to action in their past and present farmer-to-farmer networks of mobilization.

In sum, both instances are interrelated to express the significance of studying from the lenses of rural politics the agrarian question of our century as one of the resistances against capitalist agriculture and its global food regime for post-capitalist alternatives. Doing so in respect to rural Turkey demands to consider not only the specificity of the peasantry in Turkish rural history but also why/how that specificity results in power and relational state-peasant configurations that are marked by a dominance of subalternity and everyday forms of resistance. Finally, I would like to leave this section that clarifies the purpose of the study with three brief conceptual entries that constitute the backbone of the conceptual and theoretical positionings of this work.

- Persistence and Resistance

The persistence and resistance debate are a debate that concerns the conditions upon which capitalist agriculture works to organize global food-systems, with international capital as an organizing principle no longer dependent on the developmental will of states in the 21st century. While the persistence debate is usually expressed in terms of analysis into rural poverty, resistance focuses on the capacity to express political agency and mount collectively organized action for alternatives, for example, under the form of rural social movements. Nonetheless, the study will argue that the contemporary agrarian question sees continuous forms of resistance of different kinds persisting in the countryside, despite growing rural poverty and accompanied by conditions of ecological demise on the countryside have reached more aggressive levels of destruction of the moral economy of the peasantry.

In this context, persistence and resistance are interlinked debates on the political agency of peasant farmers of our times. This interlinked debate not only demonstrates the history-making capacity of today's peasantries but also affirms the peasant as an historical political subject where persistence (everyday forms of resistance) involves as much agency as resistance (either episodically protests or continuous and organized rural social movements).

- Autonomy and collective action

The concept of autonomy is essential to understand the peasant movements in the twentieth first century because it allows for defining peasants by a peasant principle of politically engagement and by analyzing its economic category of moral economy with a primacy on political agency - but also an agency with several degrees of active collection action (or lack of it) varying according to, globally influenced, local political processes. Furthermore, because the notion of autonomy questions the material conditions and the resources employed by social subjects to develop ideology and political projects aiming for autonomous social change from the market or the state. Which also means to ask how certain global and local processes are interlaced in constraining, even coercing, the conditions for the emergence of autonomous alternatives. Within critical agrarian studies, autonomy refers to the ability of peasants

to mount collective responses to the dominant actors in the globalized market or within the state, while remaining independent from political parties or politicians.

- Food sovereignty

At the most importantly and transnationally expressed level, in terms of rural social movements moved by the notion of autonomy, it is the Food Sovereignty Movement (FSM) that has in history better succeeded to create a global platform. The term sovereignty on the food sovereignty (FS) concept is precisely directed against the loss of national state's control over food system, replaced by the dominance of capital's accumulation on the countryside as the leading deciding factor: for what to produce (usually intensive monoculture cash-crops/export crops), when to produce (extensively throughout the year leading to erosion of soils and depletion of resources) and for whom to produce (the primacy of international trade).

Nonetheless, the movement has advanced and diversified its democratizing principles and struggles over the years making FS more a dynamic process than a term or a single definition. More importantly, its ontological premise against the neoliberalized notion of development in agriculture sustained on the disarticulation between humankind and nature, namely extractivism aiming at rural accumulation. Against this, rural social movement's resistance presents food sovereignty as a post-developmental critique proposing alternatively how the notion of peasant autonomy holds the potential to constitute a post-capitalist agriculture future for food systems. This being summarized, I finish this conceptual briefing by affirming that the present study includes, or at least, attempts to include its effort within the field of critical agrarian studies as defined by Akram-Lodhi et al. (2021, 3):

Critical agrarian studies often combine micro- and macro-level analyses, connecting individual and local dynamics with the global political economy, and by embedding its analysis and findings within the context of global processes such as the ecological, climate and energy crisis, financialization, COVID-19 or geopolitical transformations.

### **1.3. Research Structure**

Figure 1 below presents in a schematic fashion the empirical research structure (Part II) setting the basis for discussion (Part III) with the different interconnected rationale as well as the main processes and issues of discussion starting from the critical reconsideration of the traditional and historical definition of the peasantry in Turkey to the reframing of the agrarian question as one of rural politics where in the twenty-first century the agency of rural social movements has the will and potential for a repeasantization defined as resistance in which Çiftçi-Sen, in Turkey, affirms its agency politically moved by the food sovereignty program.

**Figure 1. Research Structure**

**TRADITIONAL PEASANTRY IN TURKEY**

Small-scale and family farming  
(women unpaid labour –  
women invisible in peasant studies)

Rural-to-urban migration

Rural Poverty

Worsened

**1980s onwards:** Neoliberal transformation in Turkish agriculture; agribusiness enforce contract farming – State slowly leaves the role of guarantor.

**2000s onwards:** agribusiness strengthened by privatizations of state agricultural companies and land dispossession. Rural villages status under Metropolitan cities – neighbourhoods.

And...land no longer is *güvence*.

enforced

**AKP Authoritarian populism:**  
*"divide and rule"*

- social transfers for rural poor - electoral support.
- Jobs promises from state-funded projects (geothermal, hydroelectric plants);
- Political interference in cooperatives.
- Prohibition / violent repression of protests.

**POLITICAL AGENCY**

*1960s - 1970s: Protest waves against lack of production and price supports.*

*Peasants as largely an unorganized class.*

*No unions. Lack of class consciousness.*

Toprak, Onur, Yaşam

Small-scale and family farming weakened.

Aging in agricultural labour.

Rural Poverty worsened.

Non-agriculture labour as survival (+ gender studies as women are increasingly involved).

Exploitation of seasonal migrant labourers as cheaper labour force  
Indebtedness – selling land.

**Agency of Çiftçi-Sen**

**NEW PEASANTRIES?**

Repeasantization as Resistance

Rural social movements: Food sovereignty, food security and agroecology against global food regime.

Representation of women and gender equality agenda? – scarce but growing initiatives (e.g. women cooperatives).

**VS.**

Having, above, clarified the map of concepts and debates that figure on chapter 3 (and therefore no further need to include it on the overview below), chapter 4 attempts to historically locate the study, (which are both contextualized in terms of the case study after the methodological considerations of chapter 2), the remaining chapters are devoted to the different stages of case-study analysis. Namely the presentation and characterization of the peasant movement (chapter 5), presentations of fieldwork results and respective analysis (chapter 6) followed by a final discussion and conclusion (chapter 7) that intends to connect the analysis with the conceptual and theoretical body to answer the research question and which is mostly guided around the following logic line: mobilized peasants understood by an agrarian question of rural politics, expressing resistance against capitalist agriculture defined in Turkey by neoliberal developmentalism, authoritarian populism and extractivism on the 21st century, and a movement that has in the food sovereignty its political program.

Finally, at this point it is also important to say that the term “peasant” may be used interchangeably with other related terms, such as “small-scale farmer”, “small-farmer” or even “small family farmer” as all respect criteria by which peasants are normally defined: one criterion is spatial (small farm-holding) and the other sociological (subsistence farming, not relying but possibly engaging with the market, and mostly relying on unpaid family farming, although other forms of labor may be employed).

#### **1.4. Research Overview**

Chapter 2 presents the characterization of the sample of interviewees, namely by their age group, gender, education, type of ownership of land, professional activity (if any besides farming) and the type of affiliation with the peasant movement. It also reflects on the limitations of the snowball sampling applied, namely the possible bias originated from interviewees being part of the central core of the movement’s organization but also provides a section that reflects on the fieldwork setbacks, both from the fact that the interviewer is a foreigner and translation has necessarily impacted on the qualitative analysis, but also on the limitation of predominantly having

had interviewed male farmers, members of the movement. It also clarifies any ethical considerations that may apply, namely by justifying the identification of each interviewed by the first real name as per agreed and by respective signed forms with all interviewees, particularly relevant in a context of authoritarianism.

Chapter 4 basically figures an effort to integrate the concepts and theoretical approaches presented in its previous chapter to the historical context of the Turkish peasantry. Namely, how the twentieth century agrarian question in Turkey, particularly the 1980s beginning of neoliberal transformation of Turkish agriculture, defines sociologically the peasantry in Turkey. In other words, what sociological transformations occurred on the 'peasantry' as a differentiated class in Turkey from the fully transition to capitalist (1945-1955), passing through the 1960-1970 radicalization of politics and protests wave in the countryside, to the 1980s-2000s first consolidation of a neoliberal-corporate food regime in the country.

These sociological transformations will be not exhaustively studied, as that is not the main purpose of the study, but the main processes that characterize the political economy of the country in those periods are strikingly important to understand the state-peasant tension and which contours it has when the country enters the twenty-first century which will come to be dominated by the same ruling party and a rural stance increasingly pointing to populism, extractivism and rural accumulation.

In other words, although not being exhaustive, it provides a regionally focused review of agrarian change related with the first law reform discussions of the early Republic until the agrarian modernization provided by mechanization and increasing commercialization of Turkish agriculture. Considering the main categories of agrarian political economy as land; labor; income and consumption/reproduction, it reviews land tenure structures evolved in the Turkish countryside throughout the twentieth century and forms of labor (unpaid family farming, sharecropping, wage labor, seasonal migrant labor etc..). But also, briefly mentions the ever-present question of rural poverty and its relationship with other processes that not only shaped rural areas in Turkey as well as urban areas, namely depopulation from the former due to migration waves to the latter. Following, when transporting these considerations into

the twenty-first century, we witness the deepening and acceleration of the former beginning of neoliberal transformation of Turkish agriculture in three different moments.

The first is the role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), like the IMF or the World Bank, in designing the retreat of the state from being the ordering principle of agri-food system in the country as well as promoting the end of policies of support to small-scale farming and the role of the state as main buyer of traditionally important crops in the country, like sugar beet, and paving the way for the growing influence of corporate farming giants on commodification of nature under the form of certified seeds.

The second is the resulting agrarian crisis which was populistically capitalized by the AKP joining a neoliberal developmentalist stance marked by extractive development projects with social transfers that allowed, through consent-making for the creation of rural roots of party support.

Finally, the third is the transition from the mentioned right-wing populism of consent-making to a more coercive authoritarian stance marked by an aggressive extractivism and, even unapologetic, repression, facing virtually no mechanisms of accountability, especially when environmental demise is in question.

Chapters 5 and 6 are here presented together as they are completely interlinked - from introducing and presenting the movement to the presentation of main findings and analysis. It starts (chapter 5) with the historical trajectory of the movement Çiftçi-Sen, not only from its official foundation in 2004 but also analyses its ideological background based on the political origin of its founding members, traced back to the progressive and radical left of the 1970s. It proceeds then to introduce the main political issues and claims on the origin of the movement and how they precisely match those of La Via Campesina's (LVC) and how their resistance is defined by applying (or trying to) the food sovereignty program to the specificities of Turkish rural politics and historical challenges.

For this effort of presentation, the study relied on key documents and produced media content by the movement and/or about the movement, namely analysis of the movement's statutes and manifesto but also of their intellectual and political activism in published writing material and their presence in Turkish media as well as its transnational relation with the European Coordination of Via Campesina (ECVC) as members.

Then, having in mind the main historical and political characteristics of the movement, chapter 5 also takes in account, by bridging for the first-time theoretical assumptions previously considered and empirical considerations, the movement under two indicators: degree of consciousness and collectiveness of action.

The first measures the history of the movement in terms of specific claiming and/or ideological standings. In other words, to understand if the resistance is more episodic or continuous, which means if it is formed mostly as reaction to policies/measures that threaten rural livelihoods or worsen its state, or if it formed continuously by a structured and organized set of proposed alternatives enacted (e.g., agroecological practices; local peasant markets, etc...).

The second basically assesses if the first represents collective action in the sense of its geographical, sectoral reach and hierarchically distribution of decision-making power, or if it is dependent on alliances with other civil society organizations, intellectual circles, and urban connections (cooperatives formed mostly in urban areas presenting new values of production-consumption). This chapter also has in consideration, although more briefly, one of the main pitfalls of the movement that is not only reinforced by the already crystallized patriarchal features of Turkish society, even more visibly expressed in the conservative settings of the rural society, but also for the gender inequality expressed on agriculture due to mainly, but not exclusively, unpaid family farming, therefore unregistered, and the low presence of women as farm proprietors (or the real decision-makers on farming even when they are the registered proprietors).

This constitutes the double invisibility of gender in the Turkish rural context in that has not been successfully tackled by the aimed peasant agency on the program of Çiftçi-Sen, despite intentions for such being well expressed on the movement's statutes and manifesto as well as on the shared views regarding the role of women in farming by LVC. Following on these premises, chapter 6 is mostly dedicated to presenting the main findings of the empirical part of the study, largely based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of Çiftçi-Sen, namely almost all members of its directing board, and the respective qualitative analysis with recourse to software assisted techniques of content and text-analysis, in this case recurring to MAXQDA. The analysis is also titled 'Toprak, Onur, Yaşam' (Land, Honor and Life) as it represents the resistance of Çiftçi-Sen, based on their own motto, unfolding the main political issues of their collective action, and expressed claims.

The first relates to a criticism of land-grabbing and extractivist development projects, namely energy-exploitation oriented and for the need to protect agricultural land. The second sees the protection and preservation of peasant farming as an honorable way of life and not a derogatory category of pre-capitalist societies. And finally, the third is a two-fold category that simultaneously presents peasant farming as the ecological alternative to capitalist perpetual growth in agriculture and defends the possible fairer and sustainable mode of production based on peasant farming with its relationship with nature and with the market.

More importantly, it also critically questions the narrative and practices of the movement having in mind these three issues of 'Toprak, Onur, Yaşam' and how they are linked with two processes identified while analyzing the findings. Those processes are titled 'Building up resistance: organization and limitations' and 'Facing authoritarianism for the right to organize'. Very briefly, by 'building up resistance' the study analyses the specific practices of mobilization and its limitations, namely related with the challenges of keeping a strong grass-roots basis throughout the country (questioning if that is in fact happening). Linked with this, by 'facing authoritarianism' the study takes into account, on the one hand, the way in which the movement was entangled, almost from its early years, in legal suits for its closure and the way it

exhausted its resources and capacity of action, and on the other hand, a resulting climate of instilled fear of protesting or be politically mobilized allied to a weary state resulting from all the above, further exacerbated by the recent year's more repressive machinery by the ruling party. This has also shown the potential of augmenting the rupture of the rural roots of the party as the moral economy of the peasantry is increasingly being threatened.

The final discussion on chapter 7 will depart from an assumption that has been already mentioned. How the processes of neoliberal agrarian change in Turkey in the 21st century are related to a reformulation of the agrarian question in terms of rural politics where resistance formed by newly emerging agrarian struggles is shaped around food sovereignty and a defense of nature against its commodification, rural extractivism and resulting accumulation that threatens livelihoods. In other words, worldwide agrarian change, particularly in the global south, is linked with the emergence of transnational agrarian movements or rural social movements, such as La Vía Campesina. In Turkey, Çiftçiler Sendikası (Çiftçi-Sen) is the only member of the European Coordination of La Vía Campesina (ECVC) and as such figured as the most obvious but also empirically relevant case-study that could conglomerate the analysis on the agrarian question in Turkey as a question of rural politics.

Having in mind this reformulation of the agrarian question, in Turkey, the discussion questions the political agency of the peasantry in Turkey in the 21st century by studying how Çiftçi-Sen constitutes and organizes resistance against the global corporate food regime for a progressive transformation of agri-food system, aiming at reconfiguring the human-nature nexus of a post-capitalist agriculture against extractivism. It also assumes autonomy and collective action as framed in a rural setting of newly emergent organized resistance. Then it proceeds to debate how in Turkey autonomous collective action and rural social movements are (un)organized and mobilized, considering not only the general panorama of its resistance but also leaves open the discussion, proposing new channels of research, on the possibility of alliances with broader environmental and food movements.

Finally, the discussion follows concluding remarks that proposes to overcome the persistence versus resistance debate stated at the very beginning of this study, by bridging them as an understanding of multiple forms of resistance that understands peasant farming persistence in the countryside also as a form of resistance, and politically organized resistance by mobilized social movements as defending the knowledge and practices of the historically persisting peasant farming.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The second and third empirical/analytical research questions below emerge from a firstly presented theoretical and conceptual research question, which has as main goal to locate the debate and defining categories of the Turkish peasantry within the global peasant resistance debate in the twenty-first century, so they are questions whose answers will be built both from the historical analysis and the empirical analysis.

Likewise, while the first hypothesis presented below is related with the theoretical effort of the first research question, the second hypothesis relates to second and third research questions.

1. Does the peasantry make its own history when mobilization is weighed by a paternalistic State<sup>3</sup> and obstructed by authoritarianism?
2. (How) is Çiftçi-Sen organizing resistance and constituting the (political) agency of the peasantry?
3. (How) has the organization/mobilization of the peasantry in Turkey been prevented and contained?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Devlet baba’, Turkish for ‘father state’ is a commonly used expression.

<sup>4</sup> These two questions are operationalized onto main interview questions that are presented on the methodological considerations of chapter 2.

### 1.5.1. Hypotheses

- The capitalist transition in Turkish agriculture, which formulates the traditional agrarian question, did not dispossess peasant farmers, generating a broad landless issue, nor fully transform them into wage laborers. Therefore, the agrarian modernization did not constitute a change to the persistence of small-scale farming nor to the predominance of historical peasant family farming. As such, in most Turkish regions, rural country-wide rural class conflicts, despite periodical land conflicts specific to southeastern regions, did not emerge. However, most of the historical analysis concludes that because of the former, registered peasant struggles are generally overlooked or underestimated empirically. We argue that such is related with the continuous paternalistic State character, directed by a landed elite, of the transformations in agrarian structures, namely land tenure, which prevented the emergence of a class consciousness and political agency on the countryside.
- The resulting dichotomous relations, characterized by a state-peasant tension, with the predominance of structure over agency, on the countryside constitute the main historical obstacle for peasant social movements to organize resistance, politicizing its autonomy as collective action, which is intensified and worsened in the twenty-first century by the current regime's authoritarian populism while other sociological phenomena are becoming interrelatedly more contentious: rural poverty, indebtedness, and extractivism. For its turn, the case-study movement Çiftçi-Sen has not also been able to dissociate its mobilization strategy from the state-centric tension and its narratives (on the origin and biggest challenges of the movement) present some contradictions between a wishful autonomy (no links to partisan politics and alliances with the opposition, namely on important municipalities) and a return of the protective state (subsidized production and the guarantees of state buying through the re-establishment of state control over pricing and market protection).

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study follows a Qualitative approach, as most of the data gathered are of qualitative nature (non-numerical, expressed as words, images, etc.)<sup>5</sup> and a mix of techniques will be employed for case-study on the selected locations: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observations, focus group.

For the Theoretical/Conceptual first research question a Historical Analysis, which concerns mostly the first part of this study, was applied to investigate aspects of social life in a past historical period, namely an historical review of the agrarian question from three periods: the period of the capitalist transition (decade of 1945-1955); the neoliberal transformation of Turkish agriculture (from the 80s) and the political economy of agrarian change where rural politics emerge at the center of the agrarian question (the 21st century).

It also applied an historical review of global peasant resistance while referring to iconic cases like the most significant rural social movement in the history of global peasant resistance. Following that, the analysis will move to the very recent case of a reactivation in this debate with Çiftçi-Sen. This will allow us to debate the location of peasant resistance in Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century among the issues of food sovereignty, land reform, agroecology, preservation of peasant knowledge and practices of farming, seeds initiatives, gender equality, which characterize a repeasantization in terms of

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<sup>5</sup> However, second-hand data as statistics can illustrate and serve to fundamental the historical comparative analysis (data that characterizes countries' agricultural production, data on livelihood of farmers such as land property, level of income, types of farming employment etc...)

resistance and an agrarian question in terms of rural politics. In sum, making the case that in the 21st century the peasantry must be defined on its active capacity to resist. The analysis has resulted, particularly visible on the conceptual-to-historical context links between chapter 3 and 4, in a clarification of a dichotomous relation between structure (state) vs agency (peasant) as marked by an historical tension which can be metaphorically described as a paternalistic (and patriarchal) father/son in terms of narrative of protectionism and populist assistencialism or master/servant in terms of a conservative and nationalist preservation of former power dynamics.

For the second and third Empirical/ Analytical research questions fieldwork took mostly place on Alaşehir and Ayvalık, but there also other sites of individual interview with members of the board of Çiftçi-Sen. For example, the first interview with the President of Çiftçi-Sen was conducted online by Zoom and follow-up interviews took place again online or in Soma, province of Manisa, namely interviews and observations/field notes targeting especially key figures of Çiftçi-Sen in those locations.

The focus on movements' key figures has the objectives of defining and categorizing their strategies of political mobilization and to understand aspects of their striving for autonomous collective action facing a context of authoritarian populism, namely, to distinguish if their political agency has been for structural change (ideological) or conjunctural (arising from moments of tension or against specific policies).

## **2.1. Methods, sample, and fieldwork**

As such the findings section is based on data collected through 18 semi-structured in-depth interviews mostly conducted in the Turkish language (3 were conducted in English as the interviewees had a good knowledge of the language) between August 2020 and October 2021. The interviews with members of the Coordination Committee of Çiftçi-Sen (5 of a total of 9) were not a one-off interview and there were follow-up

interviews<sup>6</sup>. Selection of interviewees followed snowball sampling technique, namely following the network of the first interviewees. Snowball technique, although a very useful and practical method of sample choice, has revealed some problems which are presented later in this chapter on a brief account of fieldwork notes. Besides, there is no methodological reason or explanation for the period of collection of interviews being extended for over a year. The reasons were merely practical or conjectural. As the study started in 2019, and that year was devoted to the theory parts of the study, the empirical data collection was planned for the beginning of 2020. With the pandemic restrictions and the draconian measures in places in Turkey for the first half of the year (and a decision to not advance for online interviews although that happened later) the summer of 2020 was the first moment in which restrictions of movement were lifted and therefore when the interview collection started. Restrictions of movement were never again that strict but due to new waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to find the openness from the members' side to arrange face to face interviews after September 2020. As such, in 2021 the interviews resumed (combining face-to-face interviews and online follow-ups), following the members' geographical location, with a special concentration of interviews in two different Aegean region provinces of Turkey, duly mentioned later.

Furthermore, the reason for the 2021 interviews and fieldwork visits being so apart throughout the year are related with the necessary need to make arrangements and convenience schedule negotiation between the professional activities of members (conditioned by pruning or harvesting seasons as well as other off-farm professional occupations) and my own professional employment status as a lectures at Ankara University with course lecturing duties and as such constrained by the academic calendar. One of the follow-ups was implemented using a different method, a focus group interview session, which was mainly decided to present the findings to Coordination Committee of the organization (it was decided that was an ethical issue to do so) and to generate a debate from which the resulting data is presented on chapter

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<sup>6</sup> Every time same interviewee is referred to with a different date the reason is because the earlier date was the first interview, and the later date was the follow-up.

7; more information is presented below, at the end of this chapter, about the focus group session.

Important however to refer that 4 exploratory research interviews took place between the summer of 2021 with the leaders of 4 different European peasant movements members<sup>7</sup> of the European Coordination of La Vía Campesina (ECVC) which had the purpose of recalibrate the follow-up interviews with members of the Coordination Committee of Çiftçi-Sen regarding questions of food sovereignty and the role of ECVC on the formulations of strategies of mobilization, communication and organization of Çiftçi-Sen.

It had also an important role to, from a comparative perspective, emphasize the unique situation of Çiftçi-Sen as prevented, in different periods, by legal procedures and court decisions to have fully legal recognition leading to many years of legal battles as we will see in the next two chapters. This was important to establish as an important part of the code system of the interview's data analysis a section devoted to resistance against authoritarianism.

Nonetheless, it is also important to clarify that the data collected in the exploratory interviews was not coded on the MAXQDA project of interview analysis used to sustain the chapter 5 of characterization of the movement and chapter 6 of findings, although very few quotes from two exploratory interviews are used to illustrate discussion points on chapter 7.

The data were coded and analyzed with the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. The excerpts of the interviews presented in the findings are coded segments which were tagged into the dimensions and their respective analytical issues (see table below), following a mix between inductive data-driven approach and deductive concept-driven approach, in which both the creation of categories and the application of categories (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019, 67) took place when forming the code system. While the categories of the code system related with the chapter 4's

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<sup>7</sup> Confédération Paysanne (France), Eco Ruralis (Romania), ARI (Italy) and CNA (Portugal).

analysis on the movement's history and characterization were created and the analysis used on chapter 6's findings, which mean, data-drive, chapter 4's categories on the code system for the analysis on the conceptual definition of the movement and chapter 7's discussion were applied, which means concept-driven.

In total 16 members of Çiftçi-Sen and two rural activists who are honorary/voluntary members (Fahri üyelik<sup>8</sup>) were interviewed. With due permission per use of consent forms<sup>9</sup> which were signed, interviews were recorded. Both on the table that presents the characterization of the interviewees (see footnote 10) and on the quotes used in the next chapter, interviewees are identified by first names and their positions in the movement. All the excerpts from the interviews that are used as quotes on the next 3 chapters were translated by me to English, but the original in Turkish will be presented by footnotes for each of the quoted excerpts (with exception, of course, of the interviews conducted in English). We acknowledge the limitations of extrapolating conclusions from data collected from 18 interviews, however, it is important to mention that among the 16 interviewees, five are members of the Coordination Committee of the organization.

Considering the characterization of the interviewees<sup>10</sup>, gender inequality remains a major setback for this organization, reproducing the double invisibility that rural women face in Turkey: they are not officially registered as farmers and therefore face a legal impediment to be part of the organization. Hence their voices are suppressed by the conservative patriarchal nature of family farming in Turkey. As such, only two interviewees are women, one of them being the only woman member of the Çiftçi-Sen Coordination Committee.

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<sup>8</sup> A group that Çiftçi-Sen established in their formal statutes to accommodate voluntary help from activists, researchers, journalists and members of other rural/ecological civil society organizations. Both honorary and voluntary are possible translations for the word. But considering the voluntarism of the membership, it is the second that will be used.

<sup>9</sup> To consult the template of the consent form, see appendix D.

<sup>10</sup> For a better outlook over the characterization of the interviewees see appendix C.

Regarding age group, two rural activists are aged 30-40, three peasant farmers are aged between 40-50, and the rest are aged between 50-60. This corresponds to the aging pattern of the Turkish rural areas, which is a major problem for rural struggles. In fact, the percentage of the elderly population in the total population of the country (the youngest in Europe) was 9.1 per cent in 2020. In the rural areas, this percentage rises to 13.4 per cent (TurkStat, 2020). According to data from the Turkish Farmer Registration System (ÇKS), there are 330,142 farmers aged 18-40, making for 13.46 per cent of the total registered farmers (TÜİK, 2018 cited in Berk, 2018, 2).

According to ÇKS data for 2020, the average age of registered farmers in Turkey stands between 55 and 56 (Hürriyet, 2020). Regarding size of farm holdings, all interviewees declared to own less than two hectares of land, which is the threshold recognized as a broad measure of a small farm (IFAD, 2013, 10). Nonetheless, a worldwide proposal to define “small-scale food producers” considers a smallholding that falls within the bottom 40 per cent land size at a given national level (FAO, 2018, 3).

According to the latest agricultural census 80.7% of the total agricultural holdings is in size groups smaller than 10 hectares (TurkStat, 2018). Therefore, we can confidently categorize all Çiftçi-Sen interviewees (and likely all members of the organization as reported by the leaders we interviewed) as majority male small-scale farmers or smallholders. The selection criteria for fieldwork geographical location are related with the selection criteria for the interviewees; the research followed the network provided by the leaders of the organization (the president and the general secretaries). We therefore used snowball sampling, as well as aimed to select locations in which the peasants face the most important contentious issues in Turkish agriculture and rural areas (e.g., land abandonment, energy projects leading to extractivism, depletion of resources, farming indebtedness etc.).

**Table 1. Interview guide: Dimensions, analysis, and main interview questions**

Dimensions <sup>11</sup>	Analytical issues	Main Interview Questions <sup>12</sup>
<b>organization and limitations</b>	Defining resistance	How does Çiftçi-Sen ‘recruit’ new members? And how are they mobilized?
<b>(Building up resistance)</b>	mobilization strategies	How does Çiftçi-Sen understand food sovereignty and agroecology?
	Alternative forms of rural production and rural politics (e.g., food sovereignty, agroecology, gender relations, new peasantries).	How are gender questions among the peasantry a concern of and tackled by Çiftçi-Sen?
<b>External constraints</b>	Representation of authoritarian populism in rural Turkey	How do you see the lack of continuous mobilization among the peasantry?
<b>(Facing authoritarianism)</b>	Consequences for the peasantry	What are the most visible problems for peasants in recent years? (Are peasants affected by land abandonment, depletion of resources or indebtedness?)
	Impediments to emancipatory alternative initiatives in rural areas	How was Çiftçi-Sen targeted with the several legal actions aiming at its closure?

<sup>11</sup> Are used to organize the findings in two main sections that have been titled precisely by each of these two dimensions.

<sup>12</sup> These main interviews unfolded others which can be seen on the full interview guide (see appendix B).

As such, the fieldwork took place entirely in the Turkish west Aegean region, namely in different villages of Alaşehir, province of Manisa, and in villages of Ayvalık, province of Balıkesir. The first relates to the production of grapes and is the locus of one of the foundational bases of Çiftçi-Sen with a strong past of mobilization and currently facing the negative impacts of established geothermal power plants. The second is an historical site of olive production, located on the most important olive oil production provinces and seeing threats of extractivism with attempts of uprooting olive fields for mining exploration permits.

## **2.2. Brief fieldwork notes and Ethical considerations**

Starting with the latter, ethical considerations, I would like to recall two issues from the fieldwork experience. The first is that there were never any problems of refusal encountered when requesting permissions to record the interviews as soon everything considering the aim of the recordings and the guarantee of their treatment (not sharing the content nor publishing its full content or the quotes used for any other purpose than of this research and related scientific publications) was explained, using the consent form for that purpose. Nonetheless, it was a definitely a mistake that on the first fieldwork interviews I did not present a Turkish version of the consent form (although it was the English one that always ended up being signed) and had to rely on the trustiness of my interpreter, Umut, himself a PhD researcher and voluntary member of the movement and also my second interviewee (and also the privileged contact that allowed the snowball sampling) to vouch for my intentions, although not saving the moment (especially important as the beginning of each interview is a moment of first impressions) for a avoidable discomfort. That is a grave mistake I should not repeat in my future research endeavors.

Secondly, and actually related with the first, the fact that the great majority of my interviews (with an exception of 3 conducted in English, one of them being with Umut) were conducted in Turkish language with the help of an interpreter (my Turkish is working level but proficiency is needed when interviewing peasant farmers due to

extensive use of colloquial speech, anecdotes and localism, not to mention technical agricultural terms) that was actively part of the organizing effort of the movement, as a volunteer and conducting his own research on local cooperatives, created some challenges. The first was the hardship of keeping at bay the risks of bias while conducting the interview considering that quite often the semi-structured character of the interviews would turn into open-ended and even life stories, due to previous relationships and common experiences between interviewees and interpreter. It was hard to manage to keep the interview loosely on track.

The second is the fact that not only, and understandably, my interpreter would make suggestions for added questions, due to his own prevailing interests over others, but also would his proximity with the interviewees would soften critical points that I would like to have been more assertively discussed, and quite often the tone turned as if the interview had as the main goal an amicable and even propagandistic aim for the benefit of the movement, which once again was very hard to manage, and quite often I had to change the formulations of the questions right there to avoid such a bias. I have also to mention here that many interviews and observation notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews. That was fundamental to contextualize moments that were less successful to calibrate the moment of transcribing the data, coding, and analyzing. This being said, not being able to conduct interviews on my own proved to have setbacks, not only from a language/translation perspective (with all that is lost when translation has to be done) but also from a perspective of being in control (as possible as it can be) of the complete occurrence of the interview.

However, considering my own personal time constraints and the earlier reported context amid the pandemic, I consider that the interviews went as best as possible and that pros and cons measured, I gain access to a lot of internal insights (to be included on chapter 7) that I would not if it was not by the kind of trust vouching, I had through the referred interpreter. In any case, I would suggest for researchers in similar situations as mine that more time should be invested in dominating the language and in trying to create one's own network to avoid all the many sources of bias when

recurring to an interpreter, which is simultaneously the privileged contact of the organization being studied.

Regarding fieldwork notes, methodologically speaking (analytical ones are used for analysis and discussion), interviews occurred both in coffeehouses whose owners or employees are amicable towards the founding movement's members political past of radical left or were themselves part of that past or even, are members of the movement. Some of the meetings happened in the houses of the interviewees, especially on the second fieldwork visit in Alaşehir, and finally 2 interviews happened in the headquarters of a union of miners in Soma, in which important notes were taken and will be referred to on chapter 7. Still regarding the location, and this why it is mostly mentioned here, only on the last two referred there were women (not peasant women), but considering that most interviews happened in mentioned coffeehouses and they are spaces of male socialization in villages the chances to interview women there were virtually impossible, but coffeehouses were convenient as places of choice to meet as there interviewees feel comfortable to speak as others also present also speak and there is a trust generated by the presence of peers and the environment .

The only one interview done with a peasant woman (besides the interview conducted to the only woman on the board of Çiftçi-Sen) was done at her house as the husband is also a member, and she is one of the rare cases in which her work as a farmer is registered (see more about it at the beginning of chapter 6).

As recently also registered (Gürel, Küçük and Taş, 2022, 7) about this difficulty to interview peasant woman, particularly as male researcher, on published research in which interviews with peasants in Turkey was one of the main sources of data, researchers pointed out that:

Our inability to recruit female interviewees is the main shortcoming of our fieldwork and was partly due to our short stay in those villages and partly to traditional patriarchal norms in rural areas that restrict women from direct contact with outsiders and easily accessible public spaces like coffeehouses.

I fully subscribe the above quoted and also add that the inability to conduct female interviewees is the main shortcoming of this study, not only for problems of biased

representation when reading the data collected from members of Çiftçi-Sen as equated with peasant farmer's representation and views, but also because peasant women are not only, more often than men, at the frontline of protests in Turkey but also because, as recognized in the interviews, they are more knowledgeable of key issues regarding peasant farming, namely the knowledge of local seeds. Finally, another shortcoming of the fieldwork is the fact that, although consciously only aiming at studying the internal organization and mobilizations strategies of resistance of a peasant farmer's movement in Turkey in order to understand the issues at stake unfolded by the research questions and hypotheses, the research would benefit from recruiting interviewees that are not members (either were in the past and are not anymore or that are knowledgeable about the movement but were never formal members), which also means to not be so exposed to the potential biases created by the dependence on a snowball or network sampling technique which depends excessively on the reliability of the first interviewees' own networks. Particularly these last two issues are potential sources of biases to avoid and to which I wholeheartedly recommend being alert for future research on agrarian studies in Turkey, namely for my own.

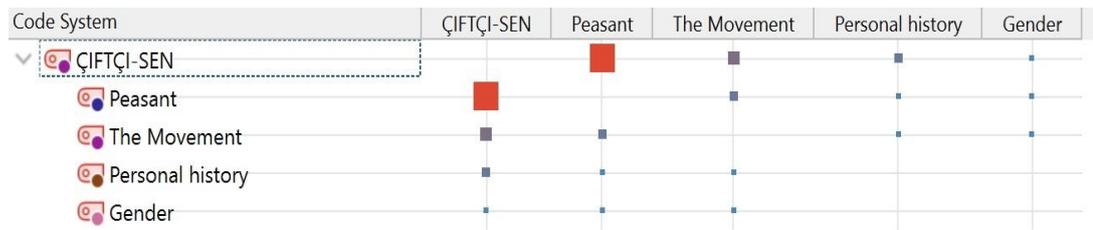
### **2.3. Coding and Categories of analysis on the history and characterization of the movement**

The code system presented below on figure 2 does not represent, like the next set of codes to be presented after, analytical categories but simply descriptive. The parent code Çiftçi-Sen was basically used to code all the segments that are related or mention the movement, directly or indirectly, which then would be distributed by the sub-codes data-driven created. As such, the sub-code Peasant coded automatically all the segments mentioning the words peasant, farmer, small-scale farmer, smallholder and alike. The segments were then read and re-coded, when such was meaningful, for the concept-driven effort to be mentioned below, in any case, in very few cases, when this sub-code coded segments for the interviewees' own definition of peasant, that is analytically used as such in this study, namely when presenting Çiftçi-Sen as a single union on chapter 5.

The sub-code ‘The Movement’ coded, manually, all the segments referring to the movement from a perspective of its structure of organization, strategies, recruitment, and history, which were then included on analytical and conceptual codes. Likewise, the sub-code mentioned before, it was also used to illustrate the effort of presenting Çiftçi-Sen both as confederation and single-union, again in chapter 5.

Finally, ‘personal history’ and ‘gender’ were used to, respectively, code segments referring to the personal histories of interviewees’ regarding their beginning and trajectory with the movement, and their references to the gender question, the main shortcoming, on the movement.

**Figure 2.** MAXQDA generated code-system and code relations for Çiftçi-Sen



#### 2.4. Coding and Categories of analysis on the conceptual definition of the movement

Landsberger's broad approach, not only to the definitional conceptual problem of ‘peasants’ is going to be mentioned as an important source in chapter 3 when dealing with peasants’ definitions but also was its inclusive approach to defining ‘peasant movements’. Accordingly, peasant movements are not defined per the simple, yet of operational complexity, question of whether a given assemblage of peasant farmers constitutes or not a movement but by an analysis guided by four different dimensions as well as their common or separate causes, interrelationships, and effects. In chapter 3 much will be written about each of the four dimensions and their possible causes, relationships and effects having in mind the historical context of the Turkish peasantry, but here it is important to present how those four categories were applied into the empirical chapters ahead.

On the next coming chapter 5, while presenting the case-study, the chapter ends with considerations over the political program of the movement culminating on questioning with a deeper analysis if their constitution as an organized movement presents degrees of common consciousness as well as, secondly, if that organization expresses degrees of collective action. In this sense, the end of chapter 5, which is to say, the final characterization of the movement is done by analytical using the first two dimensions of Landsberger approach: degree of consciousness and degree of collectiveness of action. For the first one, two sub-codes were created deductively from reading of interview segments coded for degree of consciousness. The first sub-code of degree of consciousness is the ‘hegemony’<sup>13</sup> that the governing party’s regime represents, which is to say, the rural roots of their dominant power by fashion of populist consent-making or authoritarian coercion, and therefore consciousness in this sense has a negative direction, in other words, it’s a degree of consciousness built on premises against that hegemony as well as the movement’s understanding of such.

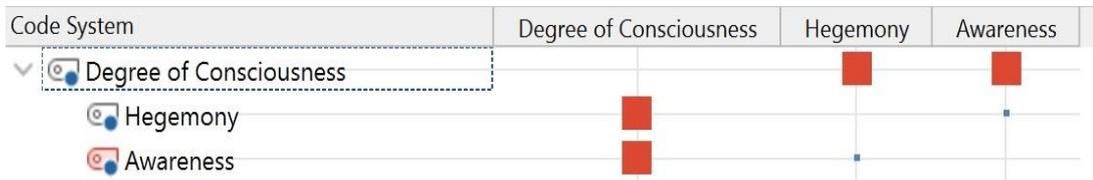
The second sub-code of degree of consciousness is the shared condition, or ‘awareness’<sup>14</sup> of the historical material existence as peasants, what Wolf expresses as reaction/ revolutionary potential arising from the subordination of the peasantry to power-holders or what Landsberger calls the “sharing of the same fate” may that be a feeling of “real loss during the preceding period and the threat of continued uncontrollable loss in the future” that gives rise to reactions (1974, 18), and in that sense, is a degree of consciousness expressed in a positive direction as that shared condition of awareness contains also expressions that strive for an alternative to the hegemonic power.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1983, 145-6) hegemony “ is now fairly common, together with hegemonic, to describe a policy expressing or aimed at political predominance.” while its use is important in Gramscian Marxism as “the struggle for hegemony is seen as a necessary or as the decisive factor in radical change of any kind, including many kinds of change in the base.”

<sup>14</sup> Awareness is defined as “knowledge that something exists, or understanding of a situation or subject at the present time based on information or experience” (Cambridge Dictionary) see: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/awareness>  
Here is employed on the Marxian recognition that “the existence of certain movements, and especially the nature of their goals, were intimately related with the awareness of their members” (Landsberger, 1974, 19).

**Figure 3.** MAXQDA generated code-system and code relations for degree of consciousness.



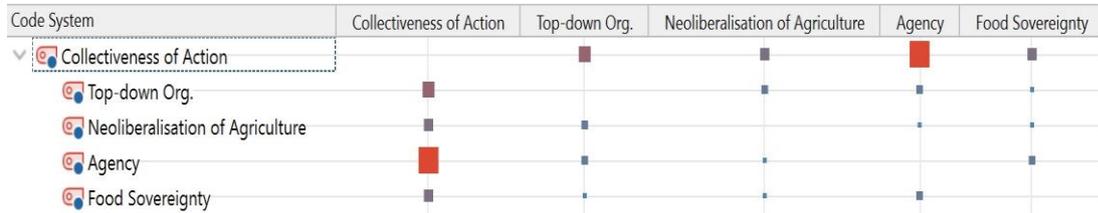
For the second dimension, degree of collectiveness of action, four different sub-codes were, again, deductively created. One that was tagged as ‘Top-Down organizations’ that codes references to their collective action as formed against an historical predominance of top-down state organizations of farmers and agriculture, such as state monopolies and cooperatives and presents their movement coordinated and organized independent from political parties and state institutions.

A second tagged as ‘Neoliberalization of agriculture’ in which collective action is defined by a political program that mostly intends to tackle the neoliberal reforms started in the 1980s and deepened by the ruling party.

A third tagged ‘Agency<sup>15</sup>’ to code all the references to the structure of the movement, organization strategies, recruitment and information practices and the internal production of knowledge and in that last sense is strictly connected with the last sub-code, ‘Food sovereignty’ that intends to grasp all the interview references to the peasant struggle of the 21st century, its principles and linkages to conceptual and political body of the transnational peasant movement LVC.

<sup>15</sup> Agency is a word that has been used a quite good deal of times throughout the study, yet without any definitional clarification about its employment here. It is a common word associated with the lexical body of sociology as well as it is usually used as one side of the duality with ‘structure’. Although it is important to note that such a duality is also referred to in this study for the state-peasant tension of the Turkish historical context of the peasantry, regarding this sub-code, a simple definition is used: “the ability to take action or to choose what action to take” (Cambridge Dictionary) see: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/agency>

**Figure 4.** MAXQDA generated code-system and code relations for degree of collectiveness of action.



The other two dimensions proposed by Landsberger are respectively, the one that asks if the collective action of the movement is ‘Instrumental’ to “achieve a goal outside of itself” (Ibid., 19) and a second that asks if the basis for the peasant movement action is just a reaction against the subordinated shared common fate of low economic and political status and the threaten to their livelihoods, present and future, or if there are broader political issues at play, such as at the national level. These two other dimensions will be referred to on the final chapter of discussions following this logic:

While the findings chapter (chapter 6) is mostly devoted to two processes expressed on the analysis of the interviews regarding the definition of the movement’s resistance, which means the ‘building of that resistance and while doing it, ‘facing authoritarianism’, the discussion and conclusion chapter (chapter 7) will take on the resulting definition of Çiftçi-Sen’s resistance to question if the Food Sovereignty program is that goal outside of itself, meeting the ‘instrumental’ dimension of the movement and if the movement’s strive for autonomous and democratic peasant’s political agency represents a broader goal than just a reaction to the current low status. In the sense that the movement advocates a search for post-capitalist alternatives and change of societal values in food production and consumption, while respecting the human-nature nexus and the status of peasant-farmers and a way of life and not as providers of food. As such, the categories that will be used in the discussion part are concept-driven from the 3 main theoretical issues presented on Chapter 2 on the theory part, that means Resistance, Autonomy and Food Sovereignty.

The logic behind is the effort of bridging findings and discussion mostly relies on results from the focus group session with members of the Coordination Committee of Çiftçi-Sen, in Below there is a clarifying explanation and account on how the focus group session was structured and its findings analyzed as key data for the mentioned effort of bridging empirical analysis with theory.

## **2.5. Focus Group Interview**

The focus group interview was the last step on the data collection with the members of the movement Çiftçi-Sen, in fact, it happened on the very last step of writing this dissertation for two reasons: one being practical and the other methodological. Starting with the latter, the methodological reason, the focus group interview was not planned on the methodological design of the study and its calendar. However, after finishing the work of coding interview segments and analysis, there were still some questions regarding three main issues mentioned above regarding the bridging of findings and discussion. As such it was decided, in the summer of 2022, when most of this dissertation was written, to contact the network of the Coordination Committee of Çiftçi-Sen to organize a focus group interview. Despite several unsuccessful attempts to schedule a focus group meeting with all the members of the Coordination Committee of Çiftçi-Sen, the secretary-general, Adnan, invited me for a general meeting of members at the end of October. Unfortunately, I was out of the country when that invitation was addressed.

At last, despite my contempt to do the focus group online, it was the only alternative left and on November 24, 2022, a focus group meeting was conducted with 8<sup>16</sup>, out of the total 9, members of the Coordination Committee, although only 7 participated actively in the discussion. The focus group meeting was conducted completely in Turkish, with the help of a fellow sociologist translating to me parts that I had difficulties to understand and to act as the moderator of the session (as she had

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<sup>16</sup> See appendix E for the detailed list of the members that took part of the focus group as well as the focus group guide, and its questions, that were used.

experience on the application of this method) as I was mostly occupied controlling the time per participant and taking observation notes. The focus group session was prepared with the valuable help of Krueger and Casey's (2014) practical guide especially the readings of parts of its chapter 3 'Developing a Questioning route' (103-121; 164-173) and parts of chapter 6 'Analyzing Focus Group Results' (317-342).

In that sense, the questioning route was developed and applied according principles of clarity, using words that the participants are already used on previous individual interviews with them during fieldwork, in order to ensure a common language, to be short and open-ended, calling for past experiences whenever possible even when a projection to the future was asked, providing one-dimensional questions to ensure the focus (even when follow-up questions were used inside each topic to open more the debate), and finally, including clear directions, namely when was needed for participants to use concrete examples of their past experiences to enrich their answers. As said before, the motivation to conduct a focus group interview session came on a late stage of the research considering that there was an identified need, not only to disclose the main findings of the thesis to the participants members of Çiftçi-Sen (for an ethical sake of clarity and honesty considering that all of them consented for their individual interviews to be recorded and results used on this study) but especially to open up their understandings on the 3 main concepts that form the backbone of the study, precisely following the definition of focus group as "conducting interviews in groups that typically include about six individuals; the synergy of the group encourages people to speak up, and ideas can expand because multiple individuals weigh in on topics" (Creswell, 2016, 575).

Following, the focus group's clear display of topics and concise, short questions used to make participants, speak up, also among themselves, and expand ideas are shown below (does not include the follow-up questions that spontaneously were asked during the session):

### **First Topic: Resistance and Types of Resistance**

1. What do you think about those changes?

2. How do you define your current resistance?

### **Second Topic: Autonomy of the Movement and possibility of Alliances**

1. What do you feel about that past experience of facing those problems?
2. And how did it change the organization in terms of autonomy (in terms of capacity to organize)?
3. Considering that experience, how do you feel about alliances with other movements or initiatives (e.g. food initiatives or ecological initiatives that are emerging in Turkey?)

### **Third Topic: Food Sovereignty in Turkey**

1. Suppose you had, for 1-2 minutes, the chance to tell everyone in the country about food sovereignty. What would you say?

### **Final Questions**

Have we missed anything? Would you like to add something?

## CHAPTER 3

### RURAL POLITICS AND RESISTANCE: UNDERSTANDING THE PEASANTRY AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

#### 3.1. Do peasants make their own history? From classical agrarian question to new agrarian questions

When we look at the past and present debates on the agrarian question we see, more than anything else, a continuity on the emerging of more ramified questions rather than proposed answers. It is clear though, that a question, such as the agrarian question, which deals with capital-led agrarian change from the emergence of capitalism to the mature state of global capitalism, was condemned from the beginning to open more debates than the ones capable of closing. But at the core of this endless debate is, simultaneously, a distinct social group – and therefore a sociological unit of analysis – a mode of production with distinctive relations of production and, on a more contemporary note, a way of living which has also acquired political activism. That is, of course, the peasantry, or in a more contemporary vocabulary, the global peasantries. When considering the most debated theme of agrarian political economy, spanning three different centuries since the famous ‘primitive accumulation’ of Marx’s first volume of *Capital* (orig.1867), Engels *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* (1894), Kautsky’s *The Agrarian Question* (1899) and Lenin’s *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899), one must carefully consider if is bringing any contribute, what kind of contribute while making sure it is not just needlessly added noise.

As it follows, it is important to lay all the cards right from the beginning as to guarantee there is no misunderstanding of our intentions while bringing about our perspective –

as in a way of looking – into the agrarian question and the debate of the peasantry in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This perspective comprises a previous need to pave the answers – as in the purpose of this dissertation – to the research questions already stated earlier on the first section (see Research Structure). Therefore, to locate theoretically the Turkish peasantry and its resistance on the global debate of peasantries and peasant resistance, the first step is to indicate how that peasantry has been historically contained and dispossessed of its organizing capacity. In other words, the historical rationale of Turkish peasant's lack of class consciousness and of a continuous trajectory of unorganized political action, not to speak of activism – which we will be calling agency.

As such, we will first locate such a lack of continuity in terms of political agency within a much wider debate on the very core of peasant's way of life – autonomy – and its direct relation with absence of collective action, as if the first would be a contradicting dimension to the latter. This exercise can only be done by referring to the classical theoretical approaches to the existence, announced death and persistence of the peasantry and the agrarian transformations brought by the emergence and establishment of capitalism in agriculture. These manifold approaches were and still are part of the most vivid debate in agrarian political economy that ever existed: the 'agrarian question'.

The agrarian question as it known for over 100 years places the peasantry at the center of the question because peasant economy is itself central to the understanding of the emergence of capitalism widely accepted to be firstly and successfully formulated on the Marxian 'so-called primitive accumulation': "The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process" (Marx, orig.1867, 2008:365).

Karl Kautsky wrote on the agrarian question as the question of "whether, and how, capital is seizing hold of agriculture, revolutionizing it, making old forms of production and property untenable and creating the necessity for new ones" (orig.

1899, 1988:12). It results that the peasant mode of production taking place in owned or rented land, mostly for subsistence farming and with limited engagements with the market, was not befitting capitalist accumulation and the creation of surplus value which would lead to rural transformation. Later for Lenin (orig. 1899, 1964), the main driving forces of rural transformation were located on the way capitalist relations of production in agriculture were changing peasant life. Both Lenin and Kautsky wrote about unprecedented changes at the global scale where increasingly farm products were being integrated into the world market due to improvements in supply-chain conditions, making up for the first world food regime (Friedmann, 1993). Therefore, they understood that the key driving factor for the immense changes that capitalism brought into agriculture was the emergent need for wage labor force and the main sign of capitalistic incorporation in agriculture was the presence of hired labor. In this sense, the classical Marxist agrarian question is simultaneously the question of the emergence of new relations of production in agriculture in detriment of peasant non-commodified mode of production and new social relations in detriment of peasant way of life.

For all the stated above we argue that defining patterns of peasant political action is a possible way to determine its character and constitute a valuable empirical tool to face its specific conceptual ambiguity. At last, another convincing fact for this argument is to be found on the nature of the situations in which the concept is used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The resurgence of the uses of ‘peasant’ particularly after the 2007-2008 food crisis, the emergent voicing for ecologically sustainable ways of agri-food production, especially due to agrarian crisis and food insecurity in developing and transition economies, configures a new debate between peasants and globalization and a new theoretical shuffle of the agrarian question within contemporary capitalism (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009:29).

This use of the concept is per se political, *because the peasant way* (literal English translation for La Vía Campesina) embodies all the political projects of change designated by the calls to agroecology and food sovereignty, bringing along local and transnational networks of rural and urban people organizing and establishing diverse

temporary platforms of political actions, well-structured and durable social movements or institutionalized civil society organizations – quite often working interchangeably. For instance, if in Latin America the twentieth century was an era of agrarian reforms portraying known peasant struggles for land across many different countries (Welch and Fernandes, 2009), where the 60s and 70s saw political revolution in Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba and Bolivia as thrust to agrarian reform (Teubal, 2009:152) and the neoliberalism emergence in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to put an end to aspiring farmers for reform for the interests of finance capital, the 21<sup>st</sup> century sees that “land and agrarian reform has acquired a new importance” (Teubal, 2009:159).

The land question has not been solved but formerly peasant movements or rural labor movements formerly attached to socialist revolution projects are now allied with indigenous movements, gender equality movements, food sovereignty and agroecological movements, rural and urban poor as part of a “widespread struggle of the excluded, marginalized and unemployed” that more than attempting to occupy a place in the state “are oriented towards the transformation of society from below” (Teubal, 2009: 149-50). Nonetheless, the question of land is still at the heart of the assertion of the concept of ‘peasant’ within the field of rural politics that will be used in this dissertation, and that is well visible as much as on the past century use of the concept and with the current uses.

In the field of peasant’s studies, the appropriation of the State and the resulting periods of unrest in rural areas are well documented in different global geographies under the adjectives of ‘peasant revolutions’ (Malefakis, 1970; Kingston-Mann, 1983; Johnson, 1985; Viola, 1999; Kurtz, 2000), ‘peasant rebellions’ (Stokes, 1978), ‘peasant movements’ or ‘farmers movements’ (Landsberger, 1974; Brass, 1995; Fernandes 2020) and the more dramatic ‘peasant wars’ (Wolf, 1969). The overall and common reason for unrest is related with land, either in the sense of lack of it, the access to it or from dispossession of formerly owned land, buy land as the territorial dimension of the peasantry (as seen above a key feature for the ambiguity amid the capitalist agrarian transition at the core of the agrarian question) is at the heart of the formation of

movements on the sense that “the territory is a condition of existence” (Fernandes, 2020:2) and the fights for that condition “have been the political agenda of the peasant movements” (Welch and Fernandes, 2009 cited in Fernandes, 2020:2).

The assertion employed here of a peasant way of production denying and resisting to a fully transition into capitalist agriculture through the maintenance of social characteristics of production and reproduction that define it as a specific social group allows, as argued before, to focus on the different strategies of resistance against different contentious issues of rural politics, such as land dispossession. This assertion is strongly associated with the field of social anthropology (Elis, 1993:5) where peasant communities, while resisting to capitalist agrarian transition, represent themselves in transition in which they “stand midway between the primitive tribe and industrial society” (Wolf, 1966: vii).

In fact, the very idea of transition permits to bring about the interaction of the definition of peasants with historical change, proving its capacity of persistence and resistance. The idea of transition does not mean however that “peasants are here today and gone tomorrow”, but it means indeed that they “are never ‘subsistence’ or ‘traditional’ cultivators”, while “undergoing a continuous process of adaptation to the changing world around them” (Elis, 1993:5).

Within this idea of transition there are proposals which rely more on Chayanov’s peasant mode of production able to survive within capitalism or proposals that argue instead that capitalism expansion will lead to class differentiation of peasants into capitalist farmers and wage laborers. The first has been called the ‘disappearance thesis’ while the second ‘the permanence thesis’ (Vanhaute, 2012: 313-21). Both are also related to different anthropological emphasis on the status of peasants, as a social entity, within larger social systems.

Kroeber (1948:284) emphasized their capacity to retain distinctive cultural identities when describing peasant communities as “part societies with part culture” while Wolf (1966:11) emphasized their constantly and externally pressured status as existential

condition: “it is only when (...) the cultivator becomes subject to the demands and sanctions of power-holders outside his social stratum – that we can appropriately speak of peasantry”. In other words, following particularly the condition mentioned by Wolf, framing the agrarian question and the peasant question within the contentious issues of rural politics allows as well to capture transition because the main peasant struggle against ‘the demands and sanctions of power-holders’, either figured by the State authorities or agri-business capitalist interests (if they are not both acting for common interests), is a struggle between disappearance and permanence within a changing world around them.

However, we understand that by choosing to only refer to the peasantry using terms of rural politics (e.g. political agency and resistance), does not allow us to clarify important problems that may arise from strictly non-political notions, which in turn may result in unclear positions. For instance, we may face the question: how would we distinguish a peasant from any other kind of family farmer such as a farmer only employing family labor on an owned thousand-hectare export-oriented soybeans production in Brazil or an intensive small dairy farmer in France? To avoid such problems, to the analytical precision of the peasant definition relying on its resistance, we will add a clarification based on the classical work of Frank Ellis ([1988] 1993) to define peasants according to historical, societal and economical dimensions. That synthetic definition is built upon sub-definitions based on dimensions and their respective notions which the table 2 below summarizes.

**Table 2. Dimensions and Notions of ‘Peasant’ sub-definitions**

Dimensions	Notions	‘Peasant’ sub-definitions
History	Transition	From relatively dispersed, isolated, and self-sufficient communities towards market economies, implying change and adaptation not predetermined, according to local settings and without meaning an inevitable replacement by farm enterprises.
Society	Markets and exchange  Subordination  Internal differences  Dominant economic activity	Their production is exposed to market forces. A relationship of tensions between the risk of market participation or non-market participation for survival.  “It is correct to define the peasantry primarily in terms of its subordinate relationships to a group of controlling outsiders” (Wolf, 1966:13).  Are not uniform and homogeneous. There are differences in social status made by external forces acting on peasant societies and their responsive adaptation strategies.  Obtain their livelihood predominantly from farming the land although household members may engage in non-farm activity.
Economic	Land  labor  Capital  Consumption	Access to the resource of land as the basis for livelihood. Allocation of land often follows non-market criteria, where traditional rights may prevail over commodification of land. Land is the long-term security of the family.  Family labor is a distinctive characteristic from capitalist enterprises. Periodical use of hired labor (e.g. harvesting) or household own labor employed off-farm as a survival strategy may apply  Difficult to define a category of profit for household production.  Mainly subsistence basis of livelihood. However, peasant farm households may be specialized commodity producers or derive its consumption from non-farm income if livelihoods follow the other criteria above.

Nonetheless, before we come to define the political agency assertion of the peasantry, we must first consider quite carefully what it is meant by the word ‘peasant’, having in consideration both its historical changes and arrangements. The ‘United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas’, adopted on 17 December 2018, defines a peasant on the following way, relying on the definition by Frank Ellis (1988):

a peasant is any person who engages or who seeks to engage, alone, or in association with others or as a community, in small-scale agricultural production for subsistence and/or for the market, and who relies significantly, though not necessarily exclusively, on family or household labor and other non-monetized ways of organizing labor, and who has a special dependency on and attachment to the land. (UN, 2018:4-5)

Clarifying the use of ‘peasant’ in this study having the official UN definition as support is also empirically relevant because the movement that constitutes our case-study, Çiftçi-Sen, has used it on the very first article of the movement’s charter. For the movement it is according to the ‘United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas’ (2018) that they, themselves, present to their members and the public the definition of peasant.

Nonetheless, it is also important to consider that approaching the definition of ‘peasant’ and ‘peasantry’ from the lenses of rural politics implies to refer to the historical derogatory social uses of the terms which have lent the use of ‘peasant’ with a meaningful weight of backwardness. In its mediaeval origins in the English language, peasants designated the rural poor or the ordinary people. As a result, both in English and French (*paysanne*), it acquired pejorative connotations: ‘ignorant,’ ‘stupid,’ ‘crass,’ and ‘rude’ (Edelman 2013, 3), indicating subjugation. The Turkish word for peasant ‘köylü’ is also pejoratively employed. In all the native languages of the members of EVCV, the use of the word “peasant” is a field of political struggle. In Turkish, “köylü” is the one that lives in ‘köy’, a village. This has a double meaning; both living in the land and from the land. This reveals also that the disruption caused by the incorporation of capital in agriculture and the capitalistic development in the countryside, has both displaced peasants from their livelihood in the land, commodifying it and intensifying outputs for surplus-value and commodified their

human work from the land turning subsistence autonomous labor into an input of labor power.

The capitalist fetishism that juxtaposes development as continuous growth renders invisible a social group that accounts for the majority of world food production yet carries the derogatory ethos of standing in the way of progress. The struggle of the peasantry, as lead for the last three decades by the biggest social movement LVC, questions the above narrative, departing from an ontological reclaiming of the word peasant:

For me peasant means a very political concept, it's a concept that relates a lot to the way we organize ourselves as a social movement. Peasants have always been, as history shows, a social layer of society to which changes happened but always fighting for their beliefs and for their rights.

(Peasant farmer, European Coordination of Via Campesina, 13.07.2021)

From classical to contemporary literature, we encounter mixed vocabulary that is interchangeably used along the word 'peasant'. One may find 'farmers', 'family farmers', 'small-scale producers' or 'petty-commodity producers', 'sharecroppers', 'rural workers', 'agricultural people', 'country-dwellers' or 'rural people'. They are either related to rural labor or rural life, forming together a space of social relations of production. And that is precisely what it encompasses. The peasantry is the only social group that at the global scale is simultaneously a mode of production and a way of life, from the pre-capitalist old order but which still makes sense of its existence in our days. Despite of all that, the fact that we find a myriad of uses of the 'peasant' bypassing the use of the concept by applying others among the ones referred above reveals the stigma of the pejorative weight that the wording 'peasant' still carries, making its use fundamentally political for a reclaiming based on a mobilized peasantry. That is, at least, one of the conclusions taken from the narratives gathered interviewing not only the leaders of Çiftçi-Sen but also the leaders of other movements in Europe that are members of ECVC. For heuristic purposes, and not intending to resolve the definitional controversies around the uses of the word 'peasant', Edelman (2013, 2-12) prepared a briefing paper on the context of the work<sup>17</sup> that would lead

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<sup>17</sup> A briefing paper prepared for the first session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

later to the ‘United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas’. He divides the uses of different definitions into four different kinds, which are summarized below.

**Table 3. Different kinds and contexts of ‘peasant’ uses and definitions**

Kind of definition	Context of uses	Definition/uses
Historical	Used in societies where historically peasants were/are subordinate groups with restrictions (social, rights) and obligations to superordinate groups, but also to mark political struggles against that condition.	<p>‘Peasant’ is used with a derogatory meaning, expressing its subordination, and in opposition to an ‘efficient’ use of land, or standing in the way of ‘progress’, not worthy of full citizenship as they hold an inferior legal, political, economic and social status.</p> <p>Another use emerged by reaction from twentieth-century social revolutions. In Latin America, the Spanish word ‘campesino’ acquired a political identity of radical agrarian ideology.</p> <p>Still in the same geographical context, in cases of indigenous diversity of the rural population (Bolivia), campesino is used to embrace that diversity.</p>
Social scientific	Sociology; Anthropology; Peasant studies and agrarian studies.	<p>1960s and 1970s literature present contrasts between authors that provide frames of categories, characteristics and typologies to define ‘peasant’ (Eric Wolf, Teodor Shanin, Sidney Mintz) to others that argue its replacement by other terms as ‘petty-commodity producers’ considering the transition to capitalism (Bernstein).</p> <p>More recently, other authors attempted to synthesize those apparent contrasts, having in account the ‘pluriactivity’ of peasants providing an effort to theorize ‘peasant farming’ on a continuum with “entrepreneurial farming” (van der Ploeg, 2008) as not mutually exclusionary but as strategic o peasant’s struggle for autonomy.</p>
Activist	Agrarian movements (e.g. La Vía Campesina)	‘Peasant’, ‘campesino’, ‘paysan’ are all terms used politically to inspire social collective action, especially since 1990 by La Vía Campesina (LVC). Their use of peasants is marked by the umbrella concept “people of the land” <sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Article 1 of LVC’s 2009 adopted declaration of peasant peasants’ rights, which clearly successfully managed to have a say on the UN peasant right’s declaration of 2018 due to the similarities:

A peasant is a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, rely[ing] above all on family labor and other small- scale forms of organizing labor.

**Table 3 (cont'd).**

		(including the landless <sup>19</sup> ). The use is marked as a political claim of the word by contrast with its derogatory historical uses.  'Peasant' and 'farmer' are also used interchangeably in the activist kind of definition.
Normative	Civil society organizations or the UN Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council.	Activist definitions like those of LVC contributed to include the gender dimension on the definition of peasant (as seen at the very beginning of their peasant rights declaration) but that is also a mark of normative definitions. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Living in Rural Areas has in account the rights of 'rural women' and unpaid women rural workers on terms used by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

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Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities, and they take care of local landscapes and of agro- ecological systems. The term peasant can apply to any person engaged in agriculture, cattle- raising, pastoralism, handicrafts- related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area. This includes Indigenous people working on the land. See: [https://hdb-stiftung.com/images/pressarchive/2016\\_La\\_via\\_campesina.pdf](https://hdb-stiftung.com/images/pressarchive/2016_La_via_campesina.pdf) Accessed, October 30, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> The umbrella concept “people of the land” includes landless people that work the land in a difficult situation to guarantee their livelihood and follows the UN Food and Agriculture organization definition:

1. Agricultural labor households with little or no land;
2. Non- agricultural households in rural areas, with little or no land, whose members are engaged in various activities such as fishing, making crafts for the local market, or providing services;
3. Other rural households of pastoralists, nomads, peasants practicing shifting cultivation, hunters and gatherers, and people with similar livelihoods.

### 3.2. Historical global settings of the agrarian question

Eric Wolf's work on *Europe and the People Without History* (EPWH) provides insight of a transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies as the formation of a global market and a global division of labor, not losing the focus of the local embeddedness of that transition. The basic premise is that capitalism emerged from European expansion as a worldwide established system made and transformed by local cultures, politics, and places. The accounted transition from a tributary mode of production to capitalism brought remarkable changes in the relation of production affecting the internal dynamics and organization of the peasantry. Wolf states that the factors which move the wheels of those changes must be understood in the context of local cultural worlds. On the 1966 *Peasants*, Wolf devotes attention to the pressures of the social order which aim constantly<sup>20</sup> at the peasantry's existence. In response, peasants may form alliances to alleviate outside pressures, but which remain "sufficiently loosely structured" to maintain a "functional autonomy to guard their own survival" (1966:80). This results from an underlying tension between the peasant's strong will for autonomy and an equally strong tendency to form alliances.

In other words, if on the one hand the exposure to the larger social order's constraints favors the forming of alliances, on the other hand their existential feature of autonomy seems to disallow for longer and more stable organized actions, resulting in a continuous dynamic search for a solution to such dilemma (Wolf, 1966). It is from this basic dilemma that the peasant movements of the past are often historically represented as eruptive and conjunctural with irregular collective action and problematic consciousness. As such the historical cradle of movements, rebellions and social unrest from laborers is often framed and (only) "recognized to be in the movements of industrial workers" (Landsberger, 1974:19).

These representations are often linked with cases, such as the Turkish early Republic, where State authorities have a tradition of paternalistically appropriating the peasantry

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<sup>20</sup> We use here *constantly* following Wolf's formulation: "The perennial problem of the peasantry thus consists in balancing the demands of the external world against the peasants' need to provision their households" (1966:15).

to prevent (but not only) potential “destructive social revolutions” (Karaömerlioğlu 2000, 124). When Kautsky identified a contradiction “at the heart of an imperialist food regime” (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009, 11) as a lesser importance of agriculture in the global economy but a higher political importance of peasant farmers, he related it with the emergence of state protection that sustained an impoverished peasantry. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century this is even more drastic for the State is no longer the organizing principle of political economy, only facilitating capital, as the new organizing principle (McMichael, 2008).

For an active representation of the peasantry, and to return to Wolf, the global process of the capitalist mode of production must be understood in terms of their local embedded circumstances, or local worlds, which were interconnected in ‘one place’ during high colonialism and whose disruptions are linked by a colonial–postcolonial continuous dispossession (Araghi, 2009). It resides here precisely how important Wolf’s premise is on considering the local circumstances of global processes and how similarly they have affected and affect social labor, between resistance and subordination. Besides, it puts us on the path of the active definition of the peasantry as not just a relic that history imprints upon the word past: “We thus need to uncover the history of the ‘people without history’ - the active histories of ‘primitives’, *peasantries*, laborers, immigrants and besieged minorities.” (Wolf, 1982, preface; emphasis by the author).

A similar positioning is also sustained by van der Ploeg (2008, 23), expressing that the peasants must be defined “according to what they are, not as a negation of what they definitely are not.” In other words, by insisting on a negative definition we will be always approaching its mode of production as a lagged condition of the past, a category sentenced to disappear or even that peasants are some static reminiscences that could not yet become agricultural entrepreneurs. Proof that such a position is wrong can be found in the contemporary quality of the question “why has the peasantry as a distinct form of production been able to persist into the twenty-first century?” (Boltvinik and Mann, 2016, 1-2).

It should be clear by now that by ‘peasantry’ I refer to the mode production and livelihood of the peasant, depending primarily on own labor or of labor spent together

with family members on owned or rented land, for petty-commodity production, subsistence farming along or without participation in the commodity circuit, continuously constrained by outside pressures and consequentially facing a dilemma of alliances versus autonomy.

Whereas in relation to an agrarian question of rural politics we relate to the assertion of today's peasant types "from which resistance, countervailing pressure, novelties, alternatives and new fields of action are continuously emerging" (van der Ploeg, 2008: xvi). New fields of actions which resistance and countervailing pressure are set in an arena of political agency, linking rural producers to urban consumers but also new demographic trends, especially rural ageing, and mobilities that rearrange the rural-urban continuum, as for the case of Turkey the main processes that shape Turkish villages today "are strongly related to changing agricultural conditions and new movements of people" (Öztürk, Hilton and Jongerden 2014: 370). But also, where the advancement of neoliberalism in agriculture means that capital renders obsolete the traditional binary divisions of rural and urban and a revision of village types, marked by rural oriented urban mobilities, often meaning the impoverishment of rural settlers and their dependency when "urban income feeds back into the village economy" (Öztürk, Jongerden and Hilton, 2018: 245).

As such, today's peasant types are as diverse as multiple arrangements of production, consumption and the very notions of place and settlements that are being questioned by new patterns of mobilities. In this picture, the contentious issues emerging in rural areas in Turkey, as well as old ones, are accompanied by claims for alternatives. It has been argued in multiple and diverse European geographies that "agroecological farming currently generates farm incomes that exceed those from conventional and industrial farms" (van der Ploeg et al., 2019:58) where agroecology is in itself not just an embodiment of alternative agri-food initiatives and production practices but a political stand of food sovereignty and food security.

In Turkey recent research focuses on a seed's protection initiative involving a local municipality, a seed preservation center, producer cooperatives, and urban-based alternative food network and that which concludes with a successful interface between institutional mechanisms and strong grassroots support (Nizam and Yenal, 2020),

proving that the old heritage of lack of civil society mobilization in rural Turkey is not written in stone.

Therefore, we propose a look into the agrarian question departing from the argument that at different degrees there is a continuity from classical to contemporary debates regarding capitalistic transformation of agriculture as well as the peasantry where the peasant is taken as a passive observer of historical change brought by agrarian capital development in Europe. There is a wide set of examples as well as growing body of literature on of rural protests, peasant movements and even ‘peasant wars’, but yet, the same premise of peasant’s passivity is portrayed on the way that its political action is rather captured by other social groups than one emerging from the peasantry’s own collective action.

Reading on Wolf’s EPWH as what we might refer as a *global anthropology of the dispossessed* it is important to retain from the historically referenced narrative that the overseas expansion which has started on its global exchanges form with that “minor event in 1415”<sup>21</sup> (Wolf, [1982], 2010, 129) was responsible to widen and open up the cultural frontiers of the world filled with power and economic processes in their interrelation dynamics between different nations, for the way it changed human geographies (the people of current Brazil and Latin America has deep roots on the horrors of slave trade as intrinsically part of its present – for the violence,<sup>22</sup> racism and discrimination still seen today to black people or indigenous) and the ways of worldwide communications.<sup>23</sup> The development of the colonization effort in Latin

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<sup>21</sup> For Wolf the “the seizure by the Portuguese of the Muslim port of Ceuta on the African side of the Straits of Gibraltar” marks the beginning of the European overseas expansion, not only because it is the first major venture of European explorers in controlling a strategic point of trade (“the key to the Mediterranean”) but also because this lead to the control over Atlantic islands, from there to the western African coast which would later open the routes of the southern Atlantic to the European ships.

<sup>22</sup> Brazil was the last country to abolish slavery in the West and still today continues being “champion in social inequality and practices a silent racism mas equally perverse” (Schwarcz and Starling, 2015:15; own translation from the Portuguese). Same authors consider that violence is impregnated in the most remote history of Brazil as country whose social life was marked by slavery.

<sup>23</sup> The languages of the colonial powers of the past are today's official language in different parts of the world. See the very designation of “Latin” to refer to Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries of Central and South America.

America by the Portuguese and the Spanish is linked not only the developments in the Orient<sup>24</sup>, as well as with the political pressure from other European powers such as the French, the English and the Dutch which also attempted (and managed for some territories and historical periods) to have their share of control over the most recent New World. Contrary to Spain that started and financed its colonial expansion in the Americas by the immediate spoliation of the precious metals (having in Potosí, nowadays Bolivia, the peak of the silver extraction and accumulation), Portugal based its economic exploration of the Brazilian lands out of the agricultural enterprise – basically transferring successfully to Brazil the experience of the sugar plantations already achieved on the Atlantic islands.

This marked the integration of the American colonial enterprise on the productive European economy: “Brazil was the first of the European settlements in America to attempt the cultivation of the soil” (Ward et al., 1909, 389). This was also the basis under which surplus creation in Brazil sustained, at the beginning (later increasingly replaced by the gold mining in the North-eastern state of Minas Gerais,<sup>25</sup>) the exchange-value under which commercial relations between the Portuguese and other European powers were built upon, especially with England. Referring to the last decades of 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre made a list of all the commodities that Brazil had received from Europe including “brown beer from Hamburg, the English cottage, the steam engine, white linen, summer clothes, false teeth, gas lightning and – ahead of all of them – secret societies, notably Freemasonry, which played so big role in the Latin America at the time of independence” (Braudel, 1995 [1987], 14). In a more general and overall

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<sup>24</sup> As reminded by Andrew C. Hess (1973) the entrance of the Portuguese into trading in the Indian Ocean did not change overwhelmingly the existing economic structures despite attempting to block Muslim control of commercial operations For a more detailed account see Özbaran, Salih, (1972) *The Ottoman Turks and the Portuguese in the persian Gulf, 1534 – 1581*, Journal of Asian History, Vol. 6, No. 1, 45-87: “Not only was the long voyage from Lisbon to India expensive, but also the Portuguese could not transport either the kinds or quantity of goods in their ships sufficient to replace Muslim cargoes that had been exchanged in India for eastern products” (75). Adding to this the military expenses for engaging in sea battles with the Turks (see the Battle of Diu in 1509 and the Battle of the Strait of Hormuz in 1553), the growing of the spice trade back to the Mediterranean following the consolidation of Egypt and the Venetian “willingness to deal with the Ottoman empire” (Ibid.) forced the Portuguese to enter peace negotiations in 1563.

<sup>25</sup> Minas Gerais translated literally to General Mines.

perspective it displays more than anything else how colonialism facilitated processes of export-led exploitation while transforming pre-existing relations of production.

The concept of social labor thus makes it possible to conceptualize the major ways in which human beings organize their production. Each major way of doing so constitutes a mode of production – a specific historically occurring set of social relations through which labor is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization and knowledge. (1982, 75)

The concept of mode of production in Wolf's characterization of the peasantry and its inherent pressures under capitalism, is then on the core from which our analysis will depart. Not only because that itself departs from colonialism - as setting the global forces which move the original engines of capitalism - but also as the starting point from which the peasant mode of production underwent the initial pressures of its own transformation and later to be declared *on the way to disappear*.

We have here, therefore, the first important lesson from the EPWH, but also how the history of the people without history is written between resistance and subordination. Besides, it puts us on the path of the active definition of the peasantry - in terms of its persistence, its transformation and, on the agency of rural social movements, its resilience bearing to not be just an artefact that history would imprint upon the word past: "We thus need to uncover the history of the 'people without history' - the active histories of 'primitives', *peasantries*, laborers, immigrants and besieged minorities." (Wolf, 1982, preface; emphasis by the author). The way this is uncovered in the EPWH follows three different stages: Eric Wolf looks at first at the world in 1400s then he led us through a widely documented journey, which by a historical comparative analysis, immerses on the development of the European mercantile expansion and from there to the transition to capitalism on the course of industrial revolution. The last stage, according to Wolf, reveals the emergence of two types of participants in the same historical trajectory - "the ones who claim history and the ones to whom history has been denied".

In other words, it is within the major ways of organization and knowledge when dealing and transforming nature that the very mode of production is transformed in a struggle to define dominant ways of doing. This trajectory tells us that the history of the capitalist mode of production and the peasant mode of production are connected

by means of hegemonic structures and systems of power which not only assert the claimed historical narrative but also, as the other side of the coin, deny the narratives of the under ruled and its possibilities for resistance.<sup>26</sup> It is our understanding that there are these very structures that Wolf himself refer to when saying, on the preface to the 1997 edition of EPWH:

I tried to be historical by envisaging the unfolding of structures and patterns over time. (...) in the larger fields of force generated by systems of power exercised over social labor. (...) It is thus important to understand how they unfold and expand their reach over people in both time and space.

Five years later the first publication of EPWH, Talal Asad wrote a review article in which he expresses agreeable affirmation of Wolf's position regarding his conceptual tool to deliver an historical and anthropological account of the ascension of global capitalism: "the most powerful way - of *writing a particular history* of relations, institutions, processes, that have hegemonized (but by no means homogenized) the world." (Asad 1987, 603, author's emphasis). However, there is also discordance.

Talal Asad considers that the concept of mode of production has not the same explanatory value in relation to non-capitalist social relations in production. But what he really means with this critique to Wolf is emphatically put into one question: "to what extent is that history [of world capitalism] *equally* their history [of the colonized and dominated societies]"? (Ibid. 604).

In short, the question sheds light on a very important ideological positioning; the under ruled societies are also indispensably 'co-authors' on the history of world capitalism formation but as Asad rightfully reminds us, they do not occupy symmetrical positions in determining the historical narratives. Those asymmetrical relations of power which were and are marked by unequal struggles - some yet to be written - do not have to be underlined by the fatalism with which the story of capitalism is always told. More recently, in a 2018 review of the EPWH, it is considered that the work helped to "undermine the reductionism and fatalism surrounding peasantries and rural populations" (Hecht 2018, 1). On the 1966 *Peasants*, Wolf would also lay "the

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<sup>26</sup> Wolf uses the following formulation "In Europe and the People Without History I emphasize the combination of capitalist ownership and management with factory production by hired labor as the strategic means that enabled capitalism to undo other modes of production" (Preface, xxiii, 1997)

theoretical foundations for the anthropological study of world peasantries at a time when they were blazing into focus, as liberation movements and insurgencies” (2).

In other words, the study of the peasantries, at a global scale was and is still today always related with the so-called ‘agrarian question’, which means, that of the discussion on the dominant mode production and deployed social labor as well as the rural development (and thus rural change) paradigms. In *Peasant wars of the 20th century*, Wolf (1969) discusses widely how along the way paved by the dynamics of capitalism’s emergence the peasant livelihood (namely the autonomous relation with the transformation of nature) was threatened or destroyed. This steppingstone is crucial for the enterprise that Wolf took in EPWH, while historically reviewing and putting together the global puzzle of colonial European powers he goes also onto the new expansion ideologies and how they relate with destabilization of the peasant livelihood by ways of global scale mobilities, trade and knowledge systems.

Despite the mentioned destabilization, Wolf also displays resilience present on the local people which are rendered invisible and without meaningful history by the dominant colonial development models. In short, the history of peasantries’ destabilization along the path of colonial expansion to modern capitalism is also the history of peasantries’ resilience as well as its insurgencies, revealed on their today’s conditions of existence across the globe.

At the current historical moment, the global peasant resistance has sustained its praxis “focusing on the global politics of the corporate food regime in an effort to transform, as well as transcend, capital’s relations of subjection [and therefore also subordination] and its developmentalist teleology” (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2012, 27). Considering that empirically this takes place under the dynamics of the global movement of capital, and that peasants are rarely self-sufficient, to understand peasant resistance, we need also to understand (besides their own network of social relationships in their communities) their subordinate position to the state and to the labor markets under which conditions they operate.

Besides, as seen by one of Wolf’s first fieldwork peasant studies (1956) on coffee-producers in Puerto Rico, poorer peasants may intensify family labor input and sell

their labor to richer peasants to sustain their own peasant character of moral economy and thus survival, showing how social differentiation within the peasantry may also display internal forms of self-exploitation: “In effect, poor peasants permit themselves to be exploited so that they can remain peasants; and in so doing, they provide viability to the economic adaptations of those peasants richer and more secure than they.” (Mintz, 1973, 95)

The above-mentioned tensions were part of the past agrarian question debates as well as it is still today; especially for the ones who defend that the peasantry has still an *autonomous space* on the (new) struggle for food sovereignty. It is argued here, in accordance with the conceptual and empirical body of the *New Peasantries* (van der Ploeg, 2008), that is on the very will of the new struggles for autonomy and on the new ways of doing (types production and relations of production as well as the relation with the market by short and proximity circuits) that the peasantry still has a claim for its historical and future existence. Rewinding it considerably, when referring to the peasantry in France, Karl Marx stated that they do not form a class “In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union, and no political organization (...) They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”(1934 [1852], 109).

One of the most important rural sociology works done about the peasantry in France, namely concerned with the radical transformations that occurred in French rural society on the 1950-1960s period, is Henri Mendras’ *Vanishing Peasant* (1970, original title *La fin des paysans*, 1967) in which a peasant society is defined with relatively autonomy in the sense that is a *part society* limited by a city or the cities as its economy opposes the economy of the former because it is composed by household economy and its family division of labor, producing for the needs of its limiting part, the controlling city. Although the Mendras’ work would fit within the tradition of the ‘disappearance thesis’ mentioned before in this study, the relevance of his contribution for the current discussion is his account of peasant’s feelings of moral superiority with which they counteract their social inferiority status.

But more importantly, is how Mendras uses the notion of *space* in that moral superiority, in the sense that peasants perceive space not in the abstracts but “a real

and particular expanse perceived through a repeated work experience” by contrast with the industrial worker that works “in a space manufactured by man and organized rationally with a view to a better work output”. It is along with this sociological reading of the peasantry and its own conception of space but also of time that Mendras describes the radical transformations on this traditional part of society brought by the “second agricultural revolution” as one of innovations introduced in farming aiming at augmenting yield and productivity (e.g. introduction of chemical fertilizers) and the reactions of peasants to innovation fearing the end of traditional agricultural, managed by their conceptions of space and time. Although Mendras goal is not to provide a general nor complete peasantry’s theory, nor he provides further on that potential of organized peasant reaction to innovation and technological change, he does look into the future by questioning what will happen to its past.

In fact, the Marxism of the twentieth century also has that future outlook when realizing the peasantry as a potential ally but concludes to stress its lack of continuous internal organization that would have to be replaced by the party's structural capacity to organize it and to supply it with the support to fulfil the revolutionary agenda. But there was yet another problem much harder to resolve by the revolutionary agenda regarding peasant’s future; the fact that even if organized, the peasantry would cease the revolutionary way as soon as land reform and redistribution would pertain its goals: “The peasant will be victorious in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and then cease to be revolutionary as a peasantry. ” (Lenin, 1962, 259)

When discussing the peasant movements Wolf’s emphasis is particularly devoted to land holding and production’s autonomy always take precedence over any long-term ends which are required for a resistance to hold onto a pursuing of common goals, for which they need to be provided with external leaderships. It is perhaps on this line that Hobsbawm, when referring to the advent of capitalism in the twentieth century as the time of the death of the peasantry, has chosen the following terms: “the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this century, and the one which cuts us off for ever from the world of the past” (1994, 289). There are voices that affirm the non-relevancy of the agrarian question under the advent of the transnational capital ruling agriculture and the location of this question on the periphery of capital accumulation (Bernstein, 2004, 2009), while others, in despite, defend the re-centering

of the question in terms of its political dimension on a triad of resistance, autonomy and the food sovereignty movement (McMichael 2006; Araghi 2012). This triad claims that the corporate food regime's contemporary global agrarian crisis requires reframing the agrarian question in terms of food and in terms of the struggle against the industrial agro-food system. A renewed struggle for autonomy through food sovereignty. It brings along not only the ancestral backbone of the peasantry – autonomy itself – but it marks also the re-emergence of the peasant as characterized by what it is, on its active definition, which constitutes its political agency: a definition of peasant as per what it is and not by the negation of what it is not.

### **3.3. The agrarian question and globalization: ‘depeasantization’ and ‘repeasantization’**

The work *Global Depeasantization* (Araghi, 1995), devotes its analysis to the movement of peasants, especially in Third World countries covering the period between 1945 and 1990, from rural areas to urban areas leading to a de-ruralization – a process unfolding both an abandonment of the rural areas to urban areas by the peasantry and its consequently depeasantization – and an over-urbanization for the concentration of population in urban areas. The focused population mobilizations followed by the post-World War II capitalistic reinforcement and later with the advent of neoliberalism to the beginning of the new millennia, was even considered by Hobsbawn as one of the most spectacular and intensive flows of population worldwide within and inter-countries.

Araghi focuses on Latin American countries or Middle East countries<sup>27</sup> is intended to grasp the paradigms of growing globalizing capital and its gigantic infiltration in agri-food networks leading to the decline or almost disappearance of small-scale farming for whose peasants the only remaining option was to migrate to urban areas to look for possibilities of what became denied in their original roots – a rural/agricultural livelihood.

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<sup>27</sup> Where the rate of urban population was given by around 20% at the beginning of the twentieth century and after the ‘70s was around figures of 70%.

Picturing for example Turkey, as a developing/development country<sup>28</sup>, which for many historical moments and issues finds its way either bridging or ‘trapped’ between the Middle East and the European geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural context, the case of the capital Ankara, is especially relevant. Ankara witnessed a considerable inflow mobility of ‘depeasantized’ population since the 1940s, which contributed to a rapid overpopulation in the city but also to considerable planning issues quite visible today as well as to phenomena which urban planners in Turkey (Tekeli 1998, 2009; Şenyapılı 2004) have devoted considerable analysis<sup>29</sup>.

The case of Turkey’s depeasantization acquired a stronger momentum in the 80’s facing the structural adjustments policies (SAPs) in Turkish agricultural production perpetrated by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF or the World Bank, which paved the way for globalized international corporate capital to penetrate in the countries’ agricultural markets leading to further the decline of small-scale farming and the intensification of rural abandonment. Rural sociologists have devoted critical analysis on the consequences of these transnational organizations and the imposed adjustments for Turkish rural areas and agricultural production activities (Aydın 2009; Keyder and Yenil 2011).

Impositions which have constituted constant change in the strategic policies which promote certain crops for certain areas of the country in detriment of others and which had not only more economical relevance for given rural communities but also represented cultural and heritage values distinctively embedded in the region’s traditional and historical backgrounds.

Besides, there is no necessary need to assume as a referent of analysis merely in the Third World countries, or which is a more accurate analytical terminology, periphery countries, to picture processes of depeasantization. I have done past rural sociology

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<sup>28</sup> Considered ‘developing’ by the UN classification, however, it presents characteristics of a developed country. Nonetheless, I am quite critical and skeptical of the dual classification for it entails traits of Eurocentrism but also legitimization of the neoliberal potency for urban and regional development.

<sup>29</sup> The formation, growing and later demolishing of illegal settlements (gecekondu); the origins and growing of minibus (dolmuş) networks to provide to and from city transportation for gecekondu inhabitants and informal street selling counters (işporta).

research in Portugal on a comparative analysis with Greece (Ribeiro, J.D., Figueredo E. and Rodrigues C. 2018) and very similarly between the countries, there were processes of rural abandonment, deagrarianization of the countryside, decline of rural population, rural exodus to urban areas as well as loss of small-scale and family farming agrarian structures and modes of production to give way to corporate-like, medium-large scale capitalist enterprises and agro-food chains. These processes had their more crucial and visible historical momentum following the necessary adjustments to the *EU's acquis communautaire* regarding the chapter on Agriculture for the sake of the accession to EU and the following years with the integration and within the logic and rules of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The CAP had back then as main orientation the promotion and intensification of extensive large-scale agri-food production – which came in devastating contrasting effects with most of the agrarian structures and modes of production in both countries, that rely (and still do) in small and medium plots of farmlands by a medium small-scale farming (Papadopoulos 2015).

Moving to the phenomena of re-peasantization, briefly following the terms by which van de Ploeg (2008). The author, for heuristic and methodological purposes, divides agricultural actors (individual or collective) into peasants and peasant small-scale farming mode of production, medium-large scale entrepreneurial farming and corporate capitalist agricultural production. Accordingly, there is a growing tendency witnessed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which the peasants have the capacity to engage with the other economical modes of agricultural production and if successfully they can aspire to and constitute their own enterprises, having the control of the land and means of production as well as a relative autonomy on the relations with the market. The author analyses the ways by which a newly formed peasantry can deploy new strategies for survival and resilience in the rural areas which have the potential to encompass forms of sustainable agriculture and wider processes of socio-economic sustainability in rural areas within the advent of the globalized society and economy.

It is not just about the capacity to reify a lost (by de-peasantization) local embeddedness between rural agency and rural agri-food production but also to provide future possibilities and schemes of a production characterized by a newly emergent nexus of local/global agri-food chain. In sum, the author considers three potential processes on

the future of *the new peasantries*: a further industrialization of the agriculture in case of strong engagement with modes of production such as the large-scale entrepreneurial or the corporate kind; a repeasantization of non-peasants (movements of return to the countryside) or of former peasants through the activation of defensive or autonomous farming practices aiming generally modes of subsistence farming or, at last, the deactivation of the farming activities which can be either absorbed by the other modes of production or lead to an abandonment of the activity. Regarding the phenomena of repeasantization, I would like to make the following considerations on the 21<sup>st</sup> century's emerging rural social sciences' analytical issues and the alternative rural development paradigms which counteract the globalized paradigm that led to processes of depeasantization.

There is little doubt, not to say any at all, that the *Rural* as geographical unit, as 'space' of multiplicity of representations (physical and symbolic), as the construction of rurality (or in the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'ruralities') and also as locality where the local and global interconnect along with dualisms between conventional and alternative agri-food chains, is under different contingencies and tensions (Watts and Goodman, 2004). There are, briefly, two major scientific issues which concern rural social scientific research nowadays, and frankly for the last 20 years. In one hand, the focus on agri-food networks and food sovereignty, in its different approaches of transnational or national regulation policies and markets, socio-economic dimensions and binomials of 'intensive vs extensive agriculture' under the pressure of the globalized large companies, resisted by alternative local embedded small circuits of food production/consumption (Fonte and Papadopoulos, 2010).

In other hand, we notice a growing interest on the analysis regional structuring dynamics of the rural where the units of analysis are much more focused on population's mobility patterns (Marsden, 2009), regional/rural development paradigms and by extent policies/ decision-making for the allocation of funds concerned with inequalities<sup>30</sup> or potentialities<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> To alleviate regional disparities within countries, e.g., rural ageing, population decline and higher levels of unemployment.

<sup>31</sup> To promote distinct region's geographical/cultural traits, e.g., capitalistic tourism entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, with the continual urban cosmopolitanism and globalization of advanced societies and the urbanization of the countryside<sup>32</sup> there has been a growth in literature around the consumption of the countryside and the highly mobilized network society as traditional rural sectors have given way to more complex environmental and other concerns (e.g., organic farming or animal welfare) (Figueiredo, 2008). Following, one of the first contingencies or tensions to name here is precisely to be found between the new processes of modernity and technology that are attempting to deny local rural nature and its communities for the sake of capitalist global circuits of standardized agri-food, and at the same time rural actors, organized in public-private association networks of political intervention (Woods 2003, 2008) but also researchers identify new alternative socio-ecological possibilities for rural development<sup>33</sup> (Figueiredo and Raschi 2013; Kastenholz, et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, the technological forces of intensive production and scale economies of standardization in agri-food still have a powerful say and immense lobbying capacity on anticipating, at the national and transnational political decision-making, the strategic aims and structural policies of regulation and development (McMichael 1992; 1993). As so, much of rural social science is undertaking and directing its focus to the resulting contingencies and, in some cases as result, the emergence of alternative rural development paradigms.

More specifically now, these contingencies are located within the need for new regulatory policies and practices, on the advent of the reflexive society as a 'Risk society' (Beck, 1996), for its increasing awareness on the potential risks of the conventional food supply chain and the emergence of diverse regionalized ruralities. In the context of the European Union, as productivism-corporatism agricultural has declined in its political and economic power in the Member States, at some extent when comparing with the late twentieth century, food regulation has become, what

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<sup>32</sup> The growing pluriactivities in rural areas, such as the ones directly or indirectly connected with rural tourism (landscape, nature) or agri-food tourism (such as wine tourism).

<sup>33</sup> The construction of agri-food as 'local food' for 'localized markets or as 'locality' to bring wider awareness of cultural uniqueness, distinct quality, and traditional/ecological farming practices.

Terry Marsden considers ‘a key battlefield of knowledge and of power in the fulcrum of Europe’ (Marsden 2006, 11). Following with the same author, despite the loss of political and economic power control of corporate firms considering former levels of their political-action capacity for goals attainment from the, for example, institutions at the European level, the drive from the latter to minimize food risks for European consumers without creating too many obstacles for corporate capital (especially the ones from France, UK, Germany as the main contributors for Common Agriculture Policy budget but also as the main beneficiaries) is resulting in significant standardization in practice across the entire agri-food chain. This significant standardization is then accompanied by considerable spatial diversity costs, threatening regional diversity in food production.

Considering the recently above-mentioned we can find one of the most important key tensions to which rural science literature is devoting more effort, as reminded by Marsden; the one between an increasing regulatory standardization of the conventional agro-industrial and the emergence of greater rural regions’ and agri-food diversity. In fact, today’s differentiated countryside is an expression of the (apparently) decentralization of a mobile high-middle class population that looks for an escape of the urban anomic way of life while creating new localisms. A growing tendency which is characteristic of nowadays’ socially and economically postmodern and post-structural drive for idolized and romanticized representations of rural and ‘anti-urban’ bucolic getaway, while still relying upon the urban cultural and career representations (Soares da Silva et al. 2016).

As it follows, we are before a growth of ‘consumption’ and ‘post-productivism’ countryside which assumes two different categories within rural regionalization and differentiation as one of the above-mentioned sides of the contingency: the ability of rural areas to compete and perform within the national and European governance frameworks and different challenges between the forms of mobility which bring different forms of production and consumption (such as with the phenomena of re-peasantization and the return to the countryside mobilities). The *Rural* emerges then as both imaginative space and material object, between images of idyllic/oppressive and of a lifestyle desire. It is then a new challenge and need for rural social science to deconstruct these rural metanarratives which both emphasize the urban-rural

continuum and retain its differentiation with a blurring vs distinction dualism. In sum, from the dialectical relation between processes of depeasantization which are encompassed by the consequences of the dominance of globalized corporate capitalism and its deterritorialization of agri-food production to the processes of repeasantization which come on the advent of the emergence of alternative rural development strategies, mobilities, representations but also a reterritorialization of agri-food practices, it appears that defining the rural today is shifting from a paradigm of *productive rurality to produced rurality*.

Recent research in Turkey lead by Öztürk et al. (2018) on urban-rural mobilities conceptualizes this mobilities not so much as traditional migration movements from one place to the other but rather as livelihood strategies, such as investments or strategies of patrimony preservation in which, normally led by urbanites, after a certain point of their lives (but also after guaranteeing a certain socio-economic position which affords so) have what the authors call a “multi-place or dual life”. Which means, for example, one of the two following modalities: either keeping main professional activities in urban areas return temporarily to rural areas for the sake of an agricultural activity on owned farmlands or after retiring from the main wage activities in urban areas move to rural areas while nonetheless keeping a residence and some permanence in urban areas.

Despite of the possibilities for the rural and agri-food networks which the discussion the newly emerged rural development paradigms, representations, spaces but also repeasantization encompass we should not forget, as K. Halfacree (2007; 2009) notes that the rural area has also become deterritorialized. As signs of rurality become detached from their referent geographical spaces, they are reterritorialized as more abstract significations. Such abstractions begin to define the nature of the rural space as the cultural mappings and representations of the rural precede the recognition of rural space and by that way come to represent the rural as virtual space to be absorbed by cultural capitalism – forming *a simulation* (Baudrillard, 1981).

These rural debates’ overview of different approaches and paradigms is particularly important to discuss the place of the peasantry (or peasantries) amid rural activism and rural social movements, but also on bow they are transformed along the very

transformation of the *Rural* – such transformation of the peasant movement in Brazil from *just* about land to much a much wider movement with environmental and counter-hegemonic focus of struggle is an empirical proof of those transformations evolving mutually. And so, this mutuality is important for how these questions will be approached on the ruptures and continuities between the end of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic to capture the different socio-political landscapes in rural areas, for Turkey.

### **3.4. Assessing contemporary agrarian questions**

To embark on an effort to deconstruct and thus better understand the contemporary settings of the agrarian question, in relation to the peasant way of life and mode of production as well as the political reclaiming of its existence, three different dimensions of its study should be considered: agrarian, political, and economy. This heuristic division meets three different problems considered by Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2010) and based on three layers proposed firstly by Bernstein (1996/97) upon his review of Byres (1996). These layers are accumulation, production and politics and they are used to deconstruct analytically the agrarian question. Bernstein concluded respectively, from his review and the analytical use of these three layers, that ‘accumulation’ embodies an attempt to understand the extent of which agriculture can supply a surplus to fund industrialization (quite important to understand the first agricultural policies in the early republican period in Turkey); that ‘production’ relates to the classic works of Lenin ([1899], 1964) and Kautsky ([1899], (1988), exploring the consequences of the emergence and development of capitalism in the countryside and “the dispossession of pre-capitalist predatory landed property [referring mostly to European feudalism] and the peasantry” (Bernstein, 2006, 451); and ‘politics’ to which Bernstein gives primacy because it expresses tensions between “structures of domination, subordination and surplus appropriation and the capacity of individuals and social classes to express agency in order to transform and transcend these structures” (Akram-Lodhi and Kay , 2010, 256).

Bernstein finalizes his three-layered review of Byres’ work on the agrarian question by contextualizing them with the contemporary notes of the dominance of capitalism in agriculture. Very briefly, Bernstein questions the capacity of agriculture, and the

agrarian transition under capitalism (those implying consequences of accumulation of agricultural surplus and rendering the peasantry out of production being transformed into rural wage labor) to “facilitate or constrain structural transformation and the emergence of capital” (Ibid. 263).

In other words, Bernstein (2006, 2009) sustains that for the neoliberal globalization regime in the twenty-first century the agrarian transition may not be relevant anymore as global agriculture has become decoupled from capital accumulation, or in other words, global capital accumulation no longer needs to extract agricultural surplus for accumulation as manufacturing and financial services have taken that role.

For their turn, Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2010) present seven competing agrarian questions from different approaches that resulted from criticism of Bernstein position and attempt to provide unique analytical frameworks to reinvigorate the debate of the importance of the unresolved agrarian question amid neoliberal globalization and resulting rural transformation. Table 3 below presents an interpretation of the seven agrarian questions and their relations with only one of the three layers mentioned about, that of rural politics, not only because it results from struggles against processes of exclusion and inequality generated by the two others (accumulation and production) but also because it is the one that directly relates with the main frame of this study, resistance, and political agency by rural social movements. The reason for adopting such a strategy of presenting the contemporary agrarian questions is to help us to better understand the concept of the peasant in relation to agrarian question reframed as a question of rural politics, due to the possibility of the misleading consequences of using ‘peasant’, following the alert of Shanin (1985, 429-30):

Peasant’ is not an empty word reflecting prejudices of the populus, linguistic frivolities of the intellectuals., or else plots of ideological henchmen, even though each of those may be true at times. If retired this concept cannot yet be easily substituted by something else of similar ilk(...).

The conceptualization of peasant specificity rests on the admission of complexity and degrees of ambivalence of social reality and expresses an attempt to grapple with it on a theoretical level.

Looking at how these three different levels of production (dimension of the agrarian), accumulation (dimension of economy) and politics (dimension of the political) have been studied and defined, follows within Shanin’s alert to consider the complexity and

degrees of ambivalence of social reality, namely, to better contextualize and integrate the uses of peasant along the different theoretical formulations of the agrarian question.

**Table 4. Seven contemporary agrarian questions (AQ)**

Argument of AQ	Dimension of 'Rural Politics'
Emergence of capital in agriculture results from balance of <b>class forces</b> (having impacts like peasant differentiation) (Brenner 1986; Byres, 2006)	Class struggles mean a contingent agrarian transition has the potential to reconfigure production and the impact of the latter over accumulation.
The 'path-dependent agrarian question' (Warren, 1980) argues that capitalist relations of production across the globe produce <b>labor commodification</b> in developing capitalist economies.	Rural struggles are related with the conditions of wage-labor resulting from the commodification of labor.
The 'decoupled agrarian question of labor' (Bernstein, 2006, 2009) <b>questions the relevance of the agrarian question</b> for global transnational capital.	State is irrelevant in controlling agrarian capital and only retains control over the conditions upon which political struggles are expressed by subordinate classes of labor.
The 'global reserve army of labor agrarian question' (Araghi, 2009) understands the agrarian question on a <b>global historical</b> continuity between liberal <b>imperialism</b> and neoliberal globalization.	Struggles are about the reducing value of agrarian labor-power and the inability to reproduce itself under the food regime.
The 'corporate food regime' (McMichael, 2009) Follows the world-historical conjecture of Araghi to stress the creation of a <b>global food regime</b> .	The global food regime is counteracted by a global peasant resistance (Borras, 2008) focusing on politics and rights of food reframing the contemporary agrarian question as one of food. Individual and collective agencies are expressed around the principles of food sovereignty.
The 'gendered agrarian question' O'Laughlin (2009) emphasizes that production, accumulation and politics have gender dynamics without which renders the agrarian question gender blind.	Rural struggles interrogate gender relations addressing contradictions of gender on unequal reproduction of agrarian labor.
The 'ecological agrarian question' (Watts, 2009) focuses on the ecological dynamics of accumulation, production and rural politics, namely on the agroecological deterioration of corporate and industrial agriculture.	Rural struggles are related to proposing alternatives to the agri-food system based on an agroecological way of farming and preservation of local knowledge and environments. Individual and collective agencies are expressed around the principles of agroecology.

### **3.5. Persistence and Resistance: an agrarian question of rural politics**

The conceptual map of this work results from the outlines of the ‘disappearance vs permanence’ debates and how they turn to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a debate of persistence and resistance. First things first, the prior debate about the relation of the disappearance of the peasantry and the permanence of the peasantry is of mutual exclusion, as the realities that emerge from those views on the future of peasant agriculture cannot coexist. If we recall the dual functionalism proposal – that sustains a temporary permanence of the peasantry because it serves urban capitalism with cheap rural labor force – even, then eventually there is a fully proletarianization of peasants. On the opposite side, the permanence thesis has been criticized for being “couched in deterministic, essentialist, and ahistorical terms” (Araghi, 1995:343).

The debate that figures better the conditions upon which capitalist agriculture works to organize global food-systems, with international capital as the organizing principle no longer dependent on the developmental will of states (McMichael, 2008), is of persistence and resistance, in which they differ on their units of analysis (while persistence focuses on rural poverty, resistance has agency or group phenomena like mobilizations or collective action at the center of its analysis). So, they follow different methodological approaches, but theoretically they can be complementary as there is no mutual exclusion. In fact, while permanence invokes the peasant as a static element of history – a permanent relic without motion – persistence involves agency as much as resistance does. We can recall here with overdue opportunity one of the most celebrated proposals on the political agency of the peasantry as not empirically demonstrated on a history of active and continuous rebellions but on continuously sustained “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott, 1985: 36). One of the main arguments to be advanced throughout the work, especially referring to the Turkish case, is that although the activation of peasant’s political agency within the organizational accomplishments of rural social movements is an undeniable proof of resistance, most of the peasant’s resistance is their capacity to persist a life between a combination of traditional forms of peasant agriculture and novel strategies of survival - including tactical engagements with the market. The interesting points of this debate, which will be used to locate the contemporary peasantry in Turkey within the persistence and

resistance debate, are on understanding the interplay between these two processes while accounting for periods in which resistance acquires qualities of temporary reaction (protests, rebellions, land occupations etc..) and when it acquires characteristics of continuous non-compliance, that can be equally called everyday forms of resistance as much as everyday forms of persistence. This ambiguity between persistence and resistance is more integrated than disarticulated precisely because the mode(s) of production of the global peasantries are, although constrained and deeply affected, not essentially governed by the capitalism predominance in agricultural relations of production and the primacy of the market. A similar understanding constitutes the centrality of recent scholarship that takes the Chayanovian approach as conceptually fresh and inspiring for the emergence of, also global, rural social movements (van der Ploeg, 2013).

The validity of this approach can be empirically argued by two simple facts. First capitalism 'promises' of solving the agrarian question by developing the forces of production in the countryside are contradicted by the fact that the number of poor people not only keeps increasing globally but is also overwhelmingly more visible in rural areas. As such, capitalism's transformation of global agriculture did not only fail to develop the forces of production on the countryside as well as its pressures on peasants did not "result in their disappearance as a distinct form of production" (Lenin, 1967 [1899] cited in Ellis, 1988:51).

It is estimated that 79% of those that are affected by poverty live in rural areas (World Bank, 2018). Furthermore, not only living in rural areas increases the probability of suffering from poverty but also the global rate of poverty is three times higher in rural areas than the rate in urban areas (IFAD, 2020). The same quoted report by IFAD presents as main drivers of rural poverty low levels of agricultural productivity, lack of diversification in rural economies and difficulties accessing markets (as economic drivers) but also lack of political participation and power imbalances (social drivers) and finally degradation of natural resources and climate change (environmental drivers). So, the rural poor account for the majority of the world's poor while agricultural activities are their primordial source of food intake in which drivers of poverty are well identified. Yet two decades before another report by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2001) seems to provide contradictions

between diagnostics and proposals. One example is a part of said report in which it assumes that land reform is essential since the rural poor depend on farm income but usually have little farmland, not allowing for the prosperity of small family farms presented as a cost-effective strategy to reduce rural poverty. However, the same report also presents that the well-being of the poor could be achieved if the obstacles to seize market opportunities, promised by globalization, (and note that at the beginning of the century globalization was at its optimistic peak) would be lifted with proper market liberalization policies in these countries.

In other words, if international trade barriers should be lifted. In a later critical review of this report Kediri (2003:668) states that “ways to improving Third World farmers’ access to international markets are not explicitly discussed” followed by an account where “the problem is mainly from the side of third world countries” and “no mention of protectionist policies by rich countries which are partly to blame for the poor market access”.

Although roughly ten years after (IFAD, 2013) the same organization assumed the benefits of smallholding agriculture with more emphasis, one still sees that the very core of the problems – the development fetishism of capitalist agriculture – is never tackled. And that despite the fact that over the last decade institutions such as the World Bank (2016) and the UN Food and Agricultural organization (FAO, 2019; 2021) have been assuming the need to revitalize small-scale farming, becoming even a mainstream strategy to tackle rural poverty but also food insecurity, peasant poverty continues to figure as the main characterizing problem proving said institutions’ incapacities. Yet, despite same institutional backing for land reform and redistribution to empower smallholders that “manage over 80 per cent of the world’s estimated 500 million small farms and that provide over 80 per cent of the food consumed in a large part of the developing world” (IFAD, 2013:6), the problems in productivity and ecosystems preservation are often externalized on the phenomena of poverty itself as “poverty and the need to satisfy immediate needs can drive smallholders to adopt environmentally damaging agricultural practices” (Ibid.:17).

In other words, it is to say that small farmers (this designation can be used interchangeably with peasant farmers) are crucial although they need better conditions

because they are poor, and they are poor because their poverty forces them into damaging practices. This frankly tautological diagnostic sounds disguisedly apologetic, especially when reports over reports, year after year, the importance of small farms and smallholders is stressed yet no rural contentious issues are addressed. One example is that it is simply hard to find similar institutional criticism on ‘land-grabbing’, which means the acquisition or lease of large plots of farmland by investors. Quite early as 1979, precisely on the eve of the decade that saw the neoliberalization of world’s agriculture, and already addressing the global problem of rural poverty followed by a simultaneous interest of the World Bank and other “champions of the small farmer”, the contradiction between allegedly proposing modernization of farming techniques by providing capital transfers for “fertilizers, pesticides, earth-moving equipment, construction materials and expensive foreign consultants” (Payer, 1979: 203) and a simultaneous strategy to develop larger farms (and infrastructure that follows such as dams and roads etc..) is noted.

This attack on “self-provisioning peasantries” (Ibid.:296) by institutions that are globally deemed for reports on poverty, and rural poverty for that matter, is revealed in three different dimensions: first when methodologically poverty is measured on the per capita cash income (currently the World Bank defines extreme poverty on those who live on less than \$1.90 per day) peasant’s self-sufficiency outside the cash economy is excluded and immediately considered a “symbol of poverty”.

Second, ideologically, although it is not argued here or much less promoted that all self-provisioning or self-sufficient peasant communities live happily with their non-dependence on the market when actually their working conditions are invariably gruesome, hardly making ends meet, the very fact that their mode of production provides independence from the market is to be tackled by those promoting a globalized commercial agriculture.

Third, and at last, politically, when so-called third world peasant farmers are dispossessed by land-grabbing and it often involves a much deeper grid of structures of power and corrupted officials with questionable capacity to control land investments that are not conducive of rural poverty reduction or rural development, the biggest challenge is to expose the former by contradicting the developmental narrative set by

the first and second dimensions mentioned above which also legitimize land-grabbing. The hardest part of that challenge is the one set by the official discourse to regulate large-scale investments to avoid mismanagement or perversion of the market of land rights as if the only problem is management while at the same time legitimization that a market for land rights will do wonders for investment in agriculture promoting rural development. A critique (De Schutter, 2011: 250) of this strategy to develop a uncontested market for land rights for rural poverty alleviation argues that “by making such a presupposition, we underestimate the opportunity costs involved in giving away farmland (...) to promote a type of farming that will have much less powerful poverty-reducing impacts than if access to land and water were democratized for the local farming communities.”

Wrapping up this part, the central phenomena for the persistence thesis is rural poverty, or to put it in another way, the persistence thesis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century focuses not only on the fact that the peasantry persists but especially “whether that persistence explains the poverty of peasants” (Desai, 2016: ix). Chayanov’s work, approaching the persistence of the peasantry for its balance between labor and consumption as related to each other is especially important for this debate. First because it works as a standoff point for indicating “how peasant agriculture can contribute to responding to some of the big challenges humankind is facing”, namely food crisis – nowadays also manipulative used to justify agricultural growth as trigger for corporate investments, namely land-grabbing (van der Ploeg, 2013:5-6). But more importantly because it allows for a new ontological account on peasant agriculture, denying the dominant assumption as not capable of developing productive forces, implicitly causing food production insufficiencies and thus rural poverty.

Adding the discussion on rural poverty within the persistence of the peasantry to the contentious issues that are aimed at the core of peasants’ way of living – autonomy and independence – but also at the livelihoods of peasant agriculture (by coercive forms of extractivism as we will see for the Turkish case) leads to the mutual relationship between persistence and resistance. As brilliantly put “[t]he peasantry both suffers and resists sometimes at different moments, sometimes simultaneously.” (Ibid.:6)

Moving on into this bird view of the conceptual map to be employed in this manuscript, the concept of resistance will unfold, for this discussion, in two dimensions. An internal dimension related with the concept itself that involves a necessity to talk about agency but also autonomy and collective action, and for the Turkish case, the agency of peasants' (non)mobilizations. But also, how talking about resistance implies a discussion on the contentious rural issues on the era of neoliberal globalization, namely "the historical meaning and the contemporary relevance of the agrarian question" (Akram-Lodhi, Kay and Borras, 2008:214) framing it as one of rural politics (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010).

And a second dimension, more external or tangible, related with the types of resistance and its mutual relationship with persistence. A relationship that considers global rural poverty as not merely an economic phenomenon but also a politicized one – expressing different levels of political engagement, activism, conjunctural or structural mobilizations, but also the history of politicization of the peasantry, which means discussing class consciousness, (rural) social movements as counterhegemonic movements and their relationship with the state. Particularly the latter is paramount when tracing the discussions on the peasantry's definition in Turkey.

### **3.6. Autonomy and Collective Action: 'What makes peasants revolutionary'?**

The discussions on peasant's agency are usually found within a wider debate of social and political (radical) changes such as revolutions or revolutionary collective action. In fact, among the most emblematic works on the field of peasant studies are conducted precisely on the historical and political conditions of peasant revolutions in the twentieth century (Wolf, 1969; Scott, 1977). Or departing from the analysis of the relations of power between landlord class and peasants as the defining character of modes of development which contributed to produce different political forms in different geographies in the transition to industrialized societies and the modern age (Moore, 1966).

Starting with the latter, Theda Skocpol wrote in a review article with a very suggestive title *What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?* (1982:352) that a question raised by Moore on his "uncannily prescient" work *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy:*

*Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* constitutes a theoretical landmark for the emergence of a research genre on peasants and revolution. That question is: “What kinds of social structures and historical situations produce peasant revolutions and which ones inhibit or prevent them?” (Moore, 1966:453). But the most striking position put forward by Moore’s work for the development of such genre is the placing of peasants within the material conditions of history-making and social change: “No longer is it possible to take seriously the view that the peasant is an “object of history,” [author’s own emphasis] a form of social life over which changes pass but which contributes nothing to the impetus of these changes.” (Ibid.)

These two references from Moore were chosen especially because, quite purposely in my opinion, they aim at a structure/agency approach which both acknowledges the importance of societal structures as well as people’s active agency – what Skocpol calls a social-structural approach “that looks closely at institutionalized economic and political relations between landed upper classes and agrarian lower classes, on the one hand, and institutionalized relations among the peasants themselves, on the other.” (1982:360). Skocpol herself argues that peasants are a revolutionary class, contrary to the Marxist orthodox class reading of the peasantry. In the 1979 methodologically ground-breaking work *States and Social Revolutions*, while trying to uncover the similarities and differences between iconic revolutions (French Revolution, 1917 Russian revolutionary period and the revolutionary period in China 1911-49), she argues that peasants’ mobilizations were the sparkling flame as well as the ‘mass’ factor behind the three revolutions while empirically linked by the fact that all of them happen in largely agrarian societies marked by socio-historical contexts in which states were on the verge of collapsing from external and internal pressures.

Nonetheless, while her work pioneers an assertion against the, back then, mainstream notion of peasant’s as passive spectators of historical change and certainly non-revolutionary, most of the criticism pointed out to her work are related with almost no room left for active agency upon leaving the question “Are individuals so powerless to influence change in the face of structural pressures?” unanswered because the notion of cause is treated “with sophisticated generalizations” that end up to show that “each revolution has to be studied in its own right” (Giddens, 2009:61).

This notion of ‘in its own right’ will be very important for how this work sees the structure/agency debate for the question of peasants’ agency and the pressure of social and political contexts upon their most defining characteristic – the relative autonomy of their production. Which within the current era of neoliberal globalization is not even denied by proponents, as Bernstein (2006 and 2009), of an argument that is “no longer necessary that capital reorganize agricultural production [at the core of agrarian question]” because “transnational capital does not require access to surplus agricultural resources in order to facilitate accumulation” concluding that the “agrarian question of transnational capital has been resolved” (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010:264). The main premises of Bernstein on the corollary that for transnational capital in the consolidated neoliberal era, agriculture does not matter for accumulation is justified on the assertion that “agricultural production is located on the periphery of global capital accumulation” which means that the former is mostly sustained by manufacturing and financial services and secondly because states can rely on non-rural sources of capital to sustain national accumulation.

Nonetheless, this work will argue that it is factual global unrest on the countryside, allied to food crisis and transnational collective action (both urban and rural) among a global reserve army of agricultural labor (Araghi, 2009) holding the banner of the political program of food sovereignty that forms the core debate of a newly emergent field of critical agrarian studies (Borras 2009; Akram-Lodhi et. al, 2021) and has the potential to resolve the contemporary agrarian question (still relevant!) through an agroecological agrarian transition.

For such, it is important to consider that at the backbone of the critical agrarian studies field, among which this work aims to be placed, we find the concept of resistance. Not as a concept that purely depends on a romanticized notion of active agencies among the peasantry inspired by the account of peasant revolutions that successfully toppled power, like those of Mexico and Bolivia. But a concept that considers manifold types of resistance built upon “farmer-to-farmer networks” in which “agency is the key.” (Akram-Lodhi, 2021: 687). But if we take ‘agency’ as the key to understand the agrarian question of the 21st century as a question of rural agency under the form of rural social movements with a defined and globally shared political program interconnecting local movements within transnational organizations such as La Vía

Campešina (LVC), which is arguably the largest social movement in the world, we have to define its potency of power within the multiple contentious issues of agrarian change. That is to ask, using a question that served as criticism of Skocpol's methodology and reverting its adjective for this purpose, 'Are individuals so powerful to influence change in the face of structural pressures?'

To take agency within that question seriously we have to equate that in the context of neoliberal agriculture, approaching the issues of the current agrarian change (land grabbing, extractivism, loss of local seeds knowledge, food crisis, rural poverty and ageing, gendered rural labor regime) from a historical materialism perspective (which means to place the focus of rural struggle as a matter of unequal and exploitive relations of production in the countryside) we are posed with the problem that orthodox Marxism has with the structure/agency approach.

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Besides that problem, it also means that studying resistance in the Turkish countryside from the lenses of a peasant movement while departing from the traditional standpoint that there is a lack of collective action on the rural historical resistance in Turkey, notwithstanding the verified historical accounts of non-compliance and evasiveness to episodic forms of protests at the beginning of the 20th century (Metinsoy, 2021), requires be conceptually clear about our understanding of rural resistance and the peasants agency capable of mobilizing it.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. (Marx, [1852] 1934:10)

Bringing back the famous Marxian formulation, in fact "Marx's most important statement of the relationship between structure and subject" (Callinicos, 2004:1), one must consider first the underlying but very much sustaining negative assumption that structure has over the individual. As better said by Callinicos (Ibid.) the Marxian "formula suffers from a fundamental flaw, namely that it conceives the role of structure as essentially negative, as simply a constraint on action" but even more importantly it expresses the "ambiguous way in which Marx seems to conceive of agency".

The only way, it seems, left to approach the agency of a mobilized peasantry, that of which is the essential focus of this work, while making use, heuristically or methodological, of the historical materialism usefulness on the neoliberal and extractivist regime's transformation of agriculture in Turkey as a fiercer history of previous stages of exploitive rural accumulation, is to drop the biased developmentalist terms that both liberal and Marxist scholarship employ for modern history denying peasant's own history making. Therefore, the strategy to be employed in this thesis, and that in sum reflects the exact terms upon which the research will be conducted but also clarifies the conceptual approach to peasant agency and resistance is given by the following statements by McMichael (2008:207):

While there have always been, and continue to be, peasants, many of whom simply struggle to get by with a range of different livelihood strategies, there is a mobilized segment (...). Peasant mobilization, as examined here, reaches beyond the daily round of survival on the land to linking that struggle to a reframing of what is possible on the land in contradistinction to what is being done to the land and its inhabitants by the neoliberal regime.

Thus, rather than examine this new peasant question through the conventional lens of modern social theory, it is useful to shift epistemological gears and examine the peasant movement<sup>34</sup> through its own discursive practices, as it critically engages with capitalist narratives and their enabling policies. Such a shift of epistemological gears will be two-fold.

First involving the concept of autonomy which has been at the heart of what Vergara-Camus and Jansen (2022) call an “inter-paradigm debate” between politics and

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<sup>34</sup> I keep the exact same footnote on the original text of the citation because it also reflects exactly how ‘peasant movements’ will be used throughout the entire work, which will be also used interchangeably with other expressions such as rural social movements (which reflect peasant movements in their political synergies and networks in rural areas) and agrarian movements (usually employed to reflect the transnational networks of the global peasantries such as the platform formed by LVC):

“By ‘peasant movement’ I infer to a generic global movement that is nevertheless highly diverse localized with specific social and ecological projects, and yet with a historic and common politics of resistance to the commodification of land, seed and food, and to a WTO trade regime whose policies systematically disadvantage and dispossess small farmers across the world. Notwithstanding the divisions in and across leading organizations like Vía Campesina, there is a unity in diversity that informs the ‘food sovereignty’ project, which in turn constitutes (and advocates) a process of politics.” (McMichael, 2008:207).

movements”. In fact, on the most recent theoretical entourage of the critical field of agrarian studies the discussions on how 21st century global capitalism operates within agrarian issues, namely agriculture and food production, and what kind of subjects, their practices and places of context are involved, subjugated or building alternatives, unfolds an entirely novel body of literature that puts forward a more comprehensive reference to movements on the countryside as agrarian movements. Although we will keep throughout the thesis the expression peasant movements in order to channel its body of literature to the peasant movement in Turkey that constitutes the case study, the expression agrarian movements carry within not only peasant movements but also wider and diverse questions of rural struggles namely indigenous rights, the shrinking space for small-scale producers under the market imperatives but also complex rural settings involving class, gender and ethnic relations. In sum, the authors summarize the necessity of bringing autonomy into the discussion as a concept that expresses the “ability of individuals or collective subjects to escape the rule of capital or the control of the state” (Ibid., abstract) - which is essential to meet the question posed on the very first lines of this work ‘why do we still talk about the peasantry?’. In other words, we still talk about the peasantry because it still displays autonomy to escape the rule of capital or the control of the state.

Second, involving an empirical overview of the main contentious issues on global rural settings - which later will be funneled to a focus on the Turkish countryside - that in fact constitutes the agenda of the critical agrarian studies field in the 21st century, which is to say on the one hand all the processes of contemporary rural change by global capitalism, namely its intensified extractivism and globalized food market but also its caused, and politically legitimized, food crisis and ecological demise and finally how the food sovereignty political program emerges as the proposed alternative by the collective agency of peasant movements and as such forming the Food Sovereignty Movement (FSM). That meets the second question ‘when does persistence [of peasant autonomy] unfold forms of resistance?’ and of course what types of resistance empirically constitute the practices of collective agency. These two questions are the embryo of the research questions. Therefore, they will be targeted on the theoretical sections of the thesis forming a path which will lead into the formation of the research questions to be answered by the empirical sections, namely the ones

specifically about the case-study, findings and discussions. Refer to the next section for clarification on this path.

Nevertheless, before finishing this conceptual map in order to move on to a bird's eye viewpoint of the research chapter by chapter, I would like to further the mentioned two-fold effort of changing epistemological gears. First, as said, to clarify the importance of including the concept of autonomy into the analysis of peasant movements, or in other words, to understand why the struggle for autonomy bridges the most emblematic and commonly linked characteristic of the world peasantries over centuries, between past and current peasant movements in the 21st century. And secondly, to present, out of the most important focus of struggle (land rights, food systems, seeds preservation, class and gender dynamics, etc..) that are reconfigured in the 21st century under the political banner of food sovereignty (and its applicable form of production of agroecology) and forming the scholarship of critical agrarian studies, which ones are more empirically relevant for the Turkish case.

I will be referring to five main different bodies of literature while trying to form a meaningful synthesis of ideas for this two-fold effort at this initial stage. Later, on the respective theoretical chapters, also to be relationally linked with the finding's sections, they will be more deeply targeted. For the first effort, I will bring a critical dialogue with the main proposals of a special issue of the Journal of Agrarian Change, namely its Volume 22, Issue 3, titled *Autonomy in Agrarian Studies, Politics, and Movements*. For the second effort I will be referring to the Volume 41, Issue 6 of The Journal of Peasant Studies titled *Critical Perspectives on Food Sovereignty*, and finally, to the introduction of the newly published *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies* (Akram-Lodhi et al., 2021).

First, autonomy is here referred to the intersection between politics and movements, which means, on the capacity to constitute collective action for political representation of a collective attempting to constitute and voice an alternative to an established rule whose machinery of power produces conditions of inequality and domination. The words of Jansen and Vergara-Camus (2022) on a recent online post introducing the Volume 22, Issue 3 of the Journal of Agrarian Change mentioned above, encapsulates

precisely the terms by which autonomy is to be employed here linked to peasant movements and their concrete political actions and programs:

Historically, the term autonomy has often been used to express the ability of individuals or collective subjects to escape, in one way or another, the rule of capital or the control of the state. (...) Within agrarian studies and peasant movements, the concept has referred to the ability of peasants to mount collective responses to the dominant actors in the globalized market or within the state, while remaining independent from political parties or politicians. For indigenous movements, the term autonomy has been associated with a struggle or a project to take back control over their ancestral territories by challenging the nation-state. Discussions about autonomy are thus necessarily about the collective agency of social subjects within capitalism.

Departing from this quote we can identify three important axes on the concept of autonomy for the context of peasant movements. The first is the historical usage of mounting an alternative to escape a rule or control. For the specific context of the political agency of the peasantry in the 21st century, that alternative is directed against the global food regime controlled by transnational capital and facilitated by national states. In fact, the term sovereignty on the food sovereignty concept is precisely directed against the loss of national state's control over food system, replaced by the dominance of capital's accumulation on the countryside as the leading deciding factor: for what to produce (usually intensive monoculture cash-crops), when to produce (extensively throughout the year leading to erosion of soils and depletion of resources) and for whom to produce (leading to a battle between the 'Stuffed and Starved' to use the brilliant title of Raj Patel's known book).

The second is given by the expression "while remaining independent from political parties or politicians". This axis of the concept comprises the truly significant and original standpoint of LVC's emergence and constitution, ideologically and organizationally independent from formal political organizations. Nonetheless, there are critical accounts of attempts of appropriation and consequences of political proximity in cases such as the MST (Landless Rural Workers Movement) in Brazil and its symbiotic 'support to/supported by' relation with the PT (Workers Party) especially accentuated by the links to the charismatic leader Lula da Silva. Vergara-Camus (2009) reflected on the politics of MST precisely focusing on the issues of the success that the movement (a major if not *the* major peasant movement part of LVC

preceding in a couple of years the origin of LVC itself) had in constituting *relatively* autonomous rural communities through a effective politicization of their members which ensures and facilitates mobilization for the struggle for land. The author justifies the above term written in italic “to highlight the fact that these communities are not completely independent from the outside world.” (Ibid.,179) which means that although they engage with local, national and international actors and even receive state funding and donations from national and international organizations, the fact that “they are able to determine or negotiate the kind of external intervention in their member communities justifies the use of the term autonomy.” For the author the strength of MST derives precisely from that *relatively* autonomous condition, on the fact that they engage with external actors and are subjects of external intervention, making them, for the fashion of relational political agency, therefore not isolated, but remain based on autonomous political structures for they are politicized under the terms decided by the members.

Nonetheless, the benefits gained by engaging in institutional politics which lead to higher degrees of social visibility and strengthening the struggle - as concrete objectives and structures of mobilization have higher degrees of legitimacy - and by consequence increasing willingness for membership which ensures coherent continuity over time (a major historical pitfall for peasant movements survival), it also brings the setbacks of risking populist appropriation by a political party, either in the opposition or in the government.

This assertion, but also alert, on the use of the concept of autonomy when analyzing concrete conditions and trade-offs between social movements, civil society and the state will constitute a main arena of analysis on the section dedicated to the case-study peasant movement in Turkey. On the one hand, that three-fold relational context between movements, civil society and the state in the country has, as an historical weight in Turkey, a specificity of authoritarian contours. Therefore, attempts of autonomous social power under the form of movements and civil society itself are problematic and overweight under a cult-like figure of the father state (already referred before). On the other hand, autonomy is also problematic because of the historical process of Turkish citizen-identity formation in the country which perceives autonomous attempts of political expression as threatening; a “defensive reaction”

(Atabaki and Zürcher, 2004, 2) on the core of the modernizing formation process of the Turkish Republic as led by “an intelligentsia made up of bureaucrats and military officers, who identified their own interests with those of the state” having as a consequence that “the rights of the individuals and their relationship with the state were of marginal rather than central significant (...) [therefore] critical reason and individual autonomy seemed to have little significance.” This acquires even graver expressions if we consider what has been already mentioned, although without much detail yet, about the role of the peasantry in the Ottoman state and later at the hands of the modernizing swift reforms of the new Republic paid at the cost of agricultural taxes.

At last, at this part, the 21st century Turkey is particularly marked by an authoritarian era, also cult-like emanated power, which has grown less and less prompt to even conceive the possibility that autonomous collective action of resistance can have a say in the country. The level of graveness is such that the “specter of the terrorist” (Bodirsky, 2020, 67) labelling has been more and more loosely employed to vilify opponents, turning politics a moral game between an ‘Us’ inside the accepted morals and a evil ‘Them’ outside. The president has notoriously called terrorists to leading figures of the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and more recently called ‘sluts and rotten’ to the collective of Turkish citizens (millions throughout the country) that participated on the protests. As regarding successive protests throughout the Turkish countryside, usually against construction, mining or other energy projects that dispossess farmers from agriculture fields, the violence of the gendarmerie against peasants, villages, small farmers, is a typical display.

As for the third axis, we focus on the expression “take back control over their ancestral territories by challenging the nation-state” to make an important distinction between the Turkish case and cases in which such a challenge is usually related with indigenous peasant movements, more commonly originated against centuries of dispossession and latifundismo - the burning ashes of imperial colonialism in Latin America or its ‘open veins’ as Eduardo Galeano famously puts it:

The international division of labor is that some countries specialize in winning and others in losing. Our region of the world, which we now call Latin

America, was precocious: it specialized in losing since the remote times when Renaissance Europeans swooped across the sea and sank their teeth into its throat. (Galeano, [1971], 2003, 15)

The former is not an historical fact in the context of the peasantry under the Ottoman Empire - notwithstanding the fact that it was an Empire and not a colony - the historical land tenure, although owning fully private lands (*mülk*) was allowed and “consisted of homesteads, small gardens, private groves, and arable land granted by the state to individuals as a special privilege” (Aytekin, 2009, 937), most of arable lands were publicly owned lands (*miri*) and therefore absolutely property of the sultan - in 1528 around 87 per cent of the land was *miri* (İnalçık, 2016 [1973]). The peasants who worked it, especially for grain production, could only hold it in possession by payment of taxes as tenants of the state. This is, in simple terms, the mechanics of the *çift-hane* system which constituted the agrarian property and taxation system in the Ottoman Empire. As peasants were the vast majority of the empire, working on *miri* mostly for subsistence wheat-barley production (Kia, 2011, 94) the peasant household has been since pre-modern Ottoman empire the basic form of agrarian production (İnalçık, 1994, 143). In sum, the *çift-hane* system, that was the land tenure rule throughout as much on the conquered lands of the empire as on the territory of today’s Turkey, meant a class of ‘free’ peasants (the common social unit of production was composed by a married peasant male with a unit of arable land workable by a pair of oxen) cultivating the land under the rule of a taxation policy that combined Byzantine, Ottoman, and Islamic rules. (Khoury, 1997, 79).

The *çift-hane* system is important to understand the distinctive condition of land tenure in the Ottoman Empire as a condition with a legal-frame that disincentivized formation of alliances, and thus keeping rebellions at bay, departs from the individualization of the basic peasant household (*çiftlik*) which could also be said to foster autonomy - however a different assertion of autonomy, which we could say a non-politicized one. Let me clarify step by step; Aytekin (2009, 937) suggests that the system “was directly connected to its refusal to recognize any legal subject other than the abstract individual”, which is undeniably related with the fact that centralist state control over land possession and agricultural labor, from which most taxation was dependent, was essentially needed for the continuation of the sultan’s absolute power over the large territory of the empire. As Barkey (1991, 704) states “this lack of private ownership

reinforced the core of the patrimonial system: the ruler's ability to maintain and secure his position”.

Therefore, the potential for rebellious alliances, which can be considered politicized autonomy, was contained by a state-centric legal isolationist imposed over individual subjects and therefore over the peasant production. After all, keeping peasants on the land, which included production in a given land but also restricting mobility within the empire's territory, not only ensured the perpetuation of tax revenues (Kia, 2011, 96) but also, and adjacent to it, as conquests of new land started to slow down the survival of this system of land tenure and taxation was the stronghold of state's political authority, manifesting as a "dispenser of justice and perpetuator of the 'eternal order.'" (İslamoğlu-İnan, 1987, 103).

Regarding the isolated subjectification of the peasant production unit, the çiftlik, and its apparent autonomy, it is important to say that such autonomy did not favour the later emergence of the political or even rebellious autonomy we are trying to clarify here as part of peasants' movement class and political consciousness. Regarding peasant revolts at this stage in history, it is well known that state's harsh taxation and centralization upon the peasantry can produce peasant revolts and peasant movements as an outcome Tilly (1975, 1984). On the other hand, the breakdown of both state centralization and taxation has deep effects on agrarian social structures which can also result in peasant revolts (Skocpol, 1979). Although completely opposite processes in state's theory and history, they can both have similar outcomes.

As for the first, centralization and taxation, comparing peasant unrest and the state in seventeenth century France and Ottoman Empire, Barkey (1991) concludes that peasants in the Ottoman Empire did not constitute rebellious alliances but rather isolated cases of briganderie (remember the mention before the Yaşar Kemal's novels) which in fact instigated provincial rebellions serving a purpose for the state's interests to keep away national-wide ones which allowed for the maintenance of overall territorial order. Let us see Barkey's words below regarding the lack of alliances even between the less favoured group among the peasantry - the landless:

(...) they left their villages in search of other opportunities - they joined the army or entered religious schools and heterodox orders. Under the pressure of war, landless and impoverished peasants were urged by the state to join the army and acquire arms, military skills, and organization. (...) Between wars, when the state no longer needed large armies and entire companies of soldiers were demobilized, soldiers, deprived of a livelihood, turned brigand and rebelled. (Ibid., 702-03)

Barkey's argument for explaining the rebellious alliances of the peasantry in France and how the peasantry in the Ottoman Empire were, purposely kept, social isolated, is to be found on the interaction between the state's and provincial social structures, namely on how different types of centralizing policies imposed from the first produce different answers from regional-power holders, bringing either collaborations between peasants and landholders (France) or divisions between them (Ottoman Empire). The key factor is time. On the French case the long-term state's-imposed subordination produced rebellious alliances but on the Ottoman one its type of centralization aimed at creating short-term divisions and therefore had the opposite result:

I argue that peasant rebellions occur when state policies are aimed at the long-term subordination of all regional power-holders, thus creating common local interests with peasants, and when the existing provincial social structure encourages dependence and communal interaction between landlords and peasants.(...)

The second style of centralization is more reminiscent of old-style divide-and-conquer policies and is oriented toward short-term crisis management. Here, as in the Ottoman Empire, the state creates conflicts within the provincial command structure, projecting a shifting rationale for provincial groups to remain loyal to the state. (...) the "divide-and-conquer" style hinders alliances between various provincial groups by making alliances with the state the best way to gain access to resources and privileges. The problem of alliances at the provincial level is compounded if communal solidarity and landlord-peasant interaction are poorly developed. In this case, the state may benefit from the extreme fragmentation of the periphery (Ibid., 699-700).

Therefore, considering the extreme land fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire and the fact that the elite was either composed by members of the Ottoman household or the military, the provincial rule in this patrimonial system was based on the *timar* system, which means, allocation of fiefs to members of the cavalry, exempted from taxes but responsible to ensure the integration of the peasantry within the taxation system for which they were granted hereditary tenure of land. As such, the lack of private ownership allied to a system that imposes a two-layer control system (the sultan owns

all land but provincially giving power of administration to members of cavalry or local governors who *de facto* ruled over the peasantry) disallowed the creation of higher degrees of autonomy and even stimulated conflicts at the local level making the local administrators prone to rewards if keeping the order, but also to conflicts between the state and provinces and within provinces, generating a myriad of claimants of local/provincial power, and so not allowing the formation of material conditions for creation of alliances landholder-peasant to develop: “It is in the absence of general opposition to the state that the lack of peasant rebellions should be considered” (Barkey, 1991, 700).

In sum, the lack of private ownership during this period of the Ottoman Empire was paramount to maintain a strong patrimonial system. On the Weber’s reading of the patriarchal and patrimonial domination (1978,1015-20) based on a absolute expression of the authoritarian coercive domination dependent on the recruitment at any need of the propertyless peasants for waging war which also disallowed completely for potential competitors against the state: “the patrimonial ruler regularly based his military power upon the propertyless or at least the nonprivileged masses, and especially the rural masses. Thus he [the state] disarmed his potential competitors for domination” (Ibid., 1018).

In the same light, both Eric Wolf (1969) and James C. Scott (1977) consider, although with a different variant, that the peasants that possess land are more prone to revolution. For Scott the key explanatory issue is if the peasants have or have not the social-organizational autonomy to resist “the impact of hegemony ruling elites” (1977, 271, cited in Skocpol, 1982, 353) as for Wolf, that decisive key factor “lies in the relation of the peasantry to the field of power which surrounds it. A rebellion cannot start from a situation of complete impotence” (1969, 290). These two relevant expressions reveal how the concept of autonomy was relevant for the past and for the future of peasant expression of collective action against hegemonic constructs of subordination.

In fact and referring to the breakdown of state’s authority where historically Skocpol localizes the spark for peasant revolutions, in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire a change on the land code opened the way for the privatization of land, which curiously

was also followed by unprecedented, structured peasant conflicts due to the fact that the new land code was more aligned with the transition to capitalism in agriculture, favoring the landed interests and accumulation. However, contrary to what Aytekin (2009) considers to be a state-centric or legal formalist analysis of the mainstream historiographic scholarship about the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, the code did not represent a cause for land-related social change but rather a product of a change that was already being produced as Ottoman agriculture was gradually being developed along a transition to capitalist agriculture:

Eventually, the particular combination of the uneven development of the capitalist relations of production, various forms of agrarian conflict, and the complex matrix of the interests of ruling groups determined the course of the evolution of Ottoman land law in the nineteenth century. (Ibid., 936).

In other words, although the law remained very concerned with the maintenance of grain-production in arable lands, considering that agricultural production as said before was the main economic activity both for the subsistence of the population and for the tax-collecting ruling elite, impositions on commodification of land (by fashion of sale or purchase) were increasingly eased. Commodification of land also paved the way to former established interests for the formation of large estates, which conventional historians see as a “deterioration of the ‘classical’ Ottoman institutions” where, especially after the eighteenth century “increasing corruption and decentralization in administration enabled certain wealthy and powerful people to convert public land into private estates, violating the state’s and peasants’ rights.” and in the nineteenth century “several rebellions and countless disturbances where the estates or the attempts to create estates were a constant source of conflict” were witnessed. (Ibid., 943).

Although the breakdown of classical Ottoman control over privatization of land and especially accumulation of large portions of it and landed interests may have created a source of conflict for the emergence of autonomous peasant rebellions, the land code of 1858 especially marks not only the beginnings of capitalism domination of the agrarian relations of production and tenure, although small-holding remained the majority of land structures, but also a more permissive stance of the central state towards upper rural classes marked by three main signs of full commodification of

land: abolition of the public-private land formal delimitation, exclusion of landless cultivations from the new jurisdiction of the code and a gradually dominant capitalist notion of property. (Ibid. 948-9). This was particularly visible in regions where registered insurgencies and complex periods of land conflicts took place, namely the southeastern Kurdish majority regions, such as the historically contentious city of Diyarbakır where landlessness was indeed a major issue entangled and complexified by ethnic questions which challenged the order of the nationalistic-oriented modernizing Turkish identity constitution referred above:

Tensions emerged between a newly constituted class of landlords, and dispossessed peasants and villagers, and between various groups and peoples (ethno-religious communities), exacerbated, among other things, by a newly developing political ideology (nationalism). (Jongerden and Verheij, 2012,2)

This parenthesis on the evolutionary aspects of political economy of land during the Ottoman Empire pre-and modern era are important to understand how difficult it is to unveil the complex webs of land-based or caused social relations of agricultural production between cultivators (tenants or landless), provincial emerging powers (assigned military elite tax-collectors, governors and later holders of large estates) and the state, passing through a centralization-decentralization processes of legal understanding of public-private property. Besides, it provides two important lessons for the much latter reading of the state-peasant social relations and power plays of the early republic period and the contemporary government's rural authoritarian populism: the first is the 'divide-and-conquer' tactics of crisis micro-management strategy and the second is the favoring of a bureaucratic elite from extractivism of agricultural surplus - be that directly land or taxation.

Returning finally to the special issue of the Journal of Agrarian Change regarding the conceptual richness of autonomy to comprehend the agency of social movements within the scholarship of critical agrarian studies, a presentation of the special issue (Jansen and Vergara-Camus, 2022) divides it into four different themes among which, for the heuristic sake of the logical thread of this work, three are especially important: Capitalism in the Countryside and in Agricultural Production, Autonomy from the

Market or via the Market: and Social Movements, Autonomy in State and Non-state Politics.

The first is particularly important because it relates to an article (Janse, Vicol and Nikol, 2022) that employs a critique to the limitations of autonomy as part of the food sovereignty-oriented movements as well as to the scholarship regarding re-peasantization. Although the above-mentioned authors recognize that the important effort of van der Ploeg (2008) in theorizing the notion of autonomy as the key concept on peasant's condition or principle, considering that the former's re-peasantization is to be found on "the ongoing search and struggle for autonomy" (Ibid., 238), they present a critique on what they consider a "lack of analytical clarity" (Janse, Vicol and Nikol, 2021, 490).

The second theme is presented in an article of van der Ploeg himself with Sergio Schneider (2021) where the authors operationalize the theory of autonomous collective action based on an empirical example of self-organized set of practices that constitute a farmer's market in Brazil while simultaneously capable of transforming farming practices involving both resources and agency to build a "countermovement to the destructive dynamics of food empires." (Ibid.542).

Finally, the third, by Guimarães and Wanderley (2022) raises important questions on the tension between peasants as autonomous agents in Bolivia and the possibility to truly be autonomous, or independent, from internal domestic politics, the state and the market. The two questions raised by the authors, although from a peasant setting much different from the Turkish one, are quite relevant considering what has been previously said about the historical land-based socio-political relations in Turkey between peasants and the state: questioning the meaning of political and economic autonomy for peasants and their real capacity to "capacity to choose and decide about their destinies" and to "give themselves their own law." (Ibid.588).

The other article within this theme, penned by Jongerden (2022) brings to light the question of the agricultural policy in Rojava as expressing revitalization of war-thorned local economy by peasant farming achieving the establishment of 'nested markets' (a concept also used by Ploeg and Schneider's article) as "as the product and

medium of socio-political struggles over the provision of food” (Ibid. 603) representing a successfully example of autonomous ordering of agricultural production alternatively to the state and private capital.

The concept of autonomy is thus essential to an understanding, from the lenses of political theory but also of social practices of resistance, of the peasant movements in the twentieth first century. The reason why we chose this special issue to clarify this understanding is precisely because it fits the very positioning of this thesis on the analysis of the peasantry and the agrarian question of this century as one of rural politics. In other words, defining the peasant by a peasant principle of politically engaged, by analyzing its economic category with a primacy of its political agency - but also an agency with several degrees of active collection action (or lack of it) that results from both global and local political processes. Mostly because it questions the material conditions and the resources employed by social subjects, peasants in our study, to develop ideology and political projects aiming for autonomous social change from the market or the state. Which also means to ask how certain global and local processes are interlaced in constraining, even coercing, the conditions for the emergence of autonomous alternatives.

If the land code of 1858 opened the way for increasingly unequal forms of property holding and land accumulation, already with the Republic it was the post-World War II and the Marshall Plan that by fashion of attributing to Turkey the role of expanding its agricultural production by providing funds for mechanization and having the double impact of increase in production and rural-to-urban migration as result (Yıldırımaz, 2017, 64-70), it is the post-1980s that accelerates international capital control over agriculture in the country. It is then a visible trajectory of increasingly push factors for the dominance of the ‘Empire’ over the country’s food systems, where regarding the peasantry, also defied the Kemalist populist view and ideology of the peasant must remain on the village. Nonetheless, and despite an astonishing rural migration that started on the 1950s, not only small commodity production continues the Turkish countryside, but most important small farmers still account for the majority of agricultural production even considering increasing negative impacts over food systems (increase costs of inputs, depreciation of the lira, skyrocketing inflation, extractivism, land grabbing etc..).

Therefore, it is safe and sound to consider the importance of not only small farmer's resilience in Turkey, but also empirical proof of "an ongoing result of a very human agency motivated by the commonplace desire to maintain the farm and the rural roots of the family." (Öztürk et al., 2022, 332). This rural social feature is paramount to a fully and well-integrated understanding of autonomy in the Turkish peasantry.

But then, what is, theoretically speaking, the concept of autonomy in agrarian studies, politics and movements regarding the state and the market? Defining is only possible by mentioning first the reasons why there is no clear definition and by trying to overcome it with a proposed debate between the different views upon which and the different dimensions in which the concept is applied in agrarian studies. That is precisely what Vergara-Camus and Jansen (2022, 457-8) mention in their 'inter-paradigm debate'. The concept lack definition not only because it is presented as *the* peasant condition (van der Ploeg, 2008), as context-specific and politically motivated (Vergara-Camus, 2014) seeking autonomy from the state, the market and development (Böhm et al., 2010) that can either be displayed by agrarian movements struggling for political representation on the definition of agricultural reforms or policies against the primacy of the market or be characterized by self-determination ethnic motivated like the case of the struggle of indigenous groups for political recognition.

The context-specific feature and the type of demands on the origin of the constitution of movements imply dimensions of analysis which skew the concept of autonomy employed. In other words, Vergara-Camus and Jansen (2022, 457) identify three strands divided by the autonomy from the state, the market and development divide. The first derives from the tradition of Anarchism as related to a demand of 'self-valORIZED' autonomous spaces of creation by laborers themselves. The second, autonomy from the state, is inspired by the known movements like the Zapatista in Chiapas which aspires a radical societal change based on a first negative movement of destruction of established vertical structures of power to install horizontal and participatory ones, although criticism on the myth-making romanticism of this strand is well theorized by Holloway (2002). Finally, the third strand is located on the alternative or post-development approaches defending the empowerment of grassroots movements on their leading role to preserve local knowledge and practices and the communities built around them, against the destructive forces of capitalism. The way

these trends are integrated on the agrarian debate on autonomy can be summarized “through discussion about whether subaltern rural subjects can avoid the market or not, whether they can bypass, confront or influence the state, or whether their agricultural practices can be the basis of an alternative to capitalist agriculture.” Vergara-Camus and Jansen (2022, 457).

In other words, discussions on alternatives to capitalism in agriculture which for the case of Turkey, regarding the agency of the movement to study, is ideologically set by the second strand but in terms of real practices by the third strand. With this in mind, namely post-development approaches and how the notion of peasant autonomy holds the potential to constitute itself through food sovereignty and agroecology solving the agrarian question of the 21st century (Akram-Lodhi, 2021), table 4 above provides summary on what the stakes of autonomy are, from the market, from the state and from capitalist agrarian development is important.

The three-fold analysis of autonomy *from* will be a guide to later explore and understand the agency of, not only the processes of resistance in Turkey (accelerated by the context of authoritarian populism) but also of the practices of the movement Çiftçi-Sen itself, having in mind in accordance with the presenters of this special issue citing Harvey (2017) and Böhm (2010), that despite claims of autonomous re-peasantization initiatives being (or aiming to be) outside the system, autonomy has to be understood in the relational local settings of the wider capitalist context and the accumulation processes of capital and development.

**Table 5. Unfolding the concept of autonomy into ‘autonomy from’, processes, discussions, and questions**

<b>Autonomy as an umbrella</b>	<b>Historical periods of origin</b>	<b>Type of discussion</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Claims and strategies</b>
<b>Autonomy from the market</b>	Neoliberal policies in early 1980s	Agricultural Production and reproduction of labor power	- Can autonomy be achieved or simply implies forms of peasant self-exploitation functional to the market? - Extent of livelihood possibilities and which contexts?	Higher control over commodity chains by cooperatives, networks, and associations.  Market avoidance (Vergara-Camus, 2014), market integration (pragmatism) and market creation (van der Ploeg & Schneider, 2022).
<b>Autonomy from the state</b>	From early 2000s	Rural politics	- Can peasants mobilize other subaltern groups of society to form alternatives and pressure? - In case of alliances with governing groups, how does the strategy of the peasants change? What is the role of the state in food sovereignty?	Four paths: 1. Build alternatives outside neoliberal state (Scott, 2009); 2. Pressure the state for alternative policies (involves subordination); 3. Occupy the state (indigenous movements although with limitations, see Cordoba & Jansen, 2014 for Bolivia); 4. Transnational networks like LVC (Borras et al., 2008; Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017)
<b>Autonomy from capitalist agrarian development</b>	From 2010s	Farming, technology, and (agro)ecology	- Is peasant farming backward and inefficient as described by modernity’s understanding of development? - Peasant farming cannot provide living conditions for rural populations or that is the rhetoric of mainstream agronomy to replace peasant knowledge?	Peasant technologies can be combined for environmental sustainability (Barkin & Lemus, 2014), where the resilience of peasant farming systems with local resources available preserve and develop historical local knowledge and nature (Altieri & Toledo, 2011). Peasant-driven development differs from capitalist development with its own logic of self-provisioning producing with nature and not against it (van der Ploeg, 2008; 2010)

Source: Adapted from Journal of Agrarian Change, Volume 22, 3, 2022.

Besides, it is not as a unimportant detail that we include on the table above the periods of origin of different discussions but especially because they mark an important shift on the agrarian critical discussions of development with the emergence on the twenty-first century of a 'Post-Developmentalist Turn in Agrarian/Peasant Question Debate' opposing the conceptualizations of the peasantry within the 'petty commodity production' rationale that dominated the peasant studies on the late 1960s-1980s period (Büke, 2018, 176).

The theoretical implications of this two conceptualization, namely at the level of major assumptions, problematics and political propositions constitute in a very summarizing manner a shift between understanding the peasantry as undergoing class differentiations by the historically progressive narrative of capitalism as capable of developing the productive forces on the countryside and a critique of this modernity/developmentalist intellectual understanding of capitalism based on the recomposition of the peasants as political subject (with history!) against corporate farming and capitalist agri-food system.

In other words, against the capitalist modernity narrative of infinite progress according to which transition in agriculture implies the eventual disappearance of the peasantry or its differentiation, appears a post-developmental critique of that political economy understanding to a question of politics of knowledge (e.g. the peasant ways of farming and agroecology), criticizing the rationality of the former and calling for a revaluation of "peasant agriculture as opposed to corporate agriculture and/or industrial model of agriculture through a reformulation of peasantry as a political subject against the capitalist agrifood system." (Büke, 2018, 10). This shift is also not only responsible for the emergence of contradictions that dominate the debates of the post-developmental turn like "food security vs. food sovereignty, agro-industrial complex vs. agro-ecology, world/corporate agriculture vs. peasant agriculture, food from nowhere vs. food from somewhere, and the like (Borras et. al, 2008; McMichael, 2008, 2013 cited in Büke, 2018, 173-4), but also, and more importantly, has at its core a refusal of the developmentalist quest for the ideal capitalism in agriculture by mobilizing the agenda of "unsustainability and undesirability of the capitalist

development in agriculture” aligned with the respect of the knowledge resulting from the “differences, subjectivities and other styles of doing of the peasantries of the non-Western world” (Büke, 2018, 178).

The related reformulation of peasantry as a political subject is not only the main focus of this study, with the regional perspective of a case study in Turkey - which falls within the non-Western historical setting of peasant’s subjectivities - but also is on the origin of new issues in critical agrarian studies related with citizenship, democracy, farming, ecology, gender and food, namely food sovereignty which, as said before, provides the backbone of the political program of Çiftçi-Sen in Turkey.

This conceptual map will finish precisely with a review of the agrarian struggles by transnational agrarian movements (TAMs) against globalized capitalist modernity (Borras et. al, 2008) including a recent interest on its intersection with climate change (Borras et. al, 2022) and extractivist projects (Prause and Le Billon, 2021) that are related with struggles for/about the land (Souza Martins, 2002) and that may fall within the political representation of the banner of food sovereignty.

Stressing the relevance of the agrarian struggles in the current historical-material context could not be timelier for two different reasons. The first is that defining the peasantry critically on the methodological virtues of analyzing loci of struggles (protests, non-compliance, alternative agroecological farming practices) may result in fruitful assumptions to clear what is, quite ironically, one of the biggest conundrums of agrarian/peasant studies - the definition of ‘peasant’ itself:

At its outset, the ‘peasant studies’... confronted the central issue of peasants/peasantry as a general (and generic) social ‘type’: whether there are essential qualities of ‘peasantness’ applicable to, and illuminating, different parts of the world in different periods of their histories, not least the poorer countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa and their contemporary processes of development/underdevelopment. (Bernstein and Byres, 2001: 6)

In other words, defining the peasantry by their political reconfiguration and real-life capacities to constitute rebellious alliances, movements, initiatives, organize politically and sustain those forms of political agency is, I argue in this study, relevant to provide a clear path to said conundrum for a very simple reason: it proves the history-making and post-capitalist future-looking capacity of the peasantry denying

the ‘backwardness’ and anachronistic developmentalist narrative. This does not imply, however, that ‘class’ and class-oriented conflicts, both generated outside and within peasant groups, namely peasantry’s self-exploitation may not occur. In fact, as Guimarães and Wanderley’s (2022) work on peasant’s organization that attempt to transform liberal market rules and achieve or strengthen their own economic autonomy show for the case of Bolivia where indeed the two main demands (legal recognition of their economic organizations and supportive public policies) were achieved, the overall governmental policies “were [still] oriented towards an intensification of the extractive economic model” (Ibid. 589). This proves that even in favorable political settings where lower-class oriented public policies may even have constitutional backing (the case of Morales rule in Bolivia) it does not mean that fundamental exploitation may not continue or that peasant political and economic autonomy may not be sidelined. Another possibility, and still related to the same geographical context of Bolivia, agrarian reform may be on the origin of legal recognitions from which new organizations emerge generating conflicts with more traditionally established peasant unions (Fontana, 2014). Therefore, the class perspective is still important on any well-integrated study of peasants as they “neither constitute an eternal class on the basis of some unique and/or distinguishing qualities of which they are assumed to be the historical carriers [like subsistence and poverty], nor they are predestined to disappear as a social category” (Büke, 2018, 12).

The second is the transformative nature of the neoliberal globalization into more coercive, more aggressive, and more extractive with the challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic, which makes yet more urgent the efforts of the ‘counter-hegemonic globalization’ (Santos, 2002):

Counter-hegemonic globalization I define as the vast set of networks, initiatives, organizations and movements that fight against the economic, social and political outcomes of hegemonic globalization, challenge the conceptions of world development underlying the latter and propose alternative conceptions. (Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005, 29)

Particularly on the Global South the imposed lockdowns revealed that the quarantine caused by the pandemic is “a quarantine inside another<sup>35</sup>” (Santos, 2020) which means

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<sup>35</sup> Translated from the original publication in Spanish.

that the ‘quarantine of capitalism’ was exacerbated by the pandemic to show its true colors of living the under protected wage laborers under no protection at all. Regarding rural areas, not only the increase on the demand of commodity crops by the Global North increase in consumption forced an increase in production by millions of rural wage workers but also informal wage workers in urban areas were forced to move to their rural communities of origin as no more prospects in cities were left. While the first revealed the “fragility and lack of flexibility of the global food regime” (Vergara-Camus and Jansen, 2022, 458) the second showed not only that the rural community revival as part of strategies of survival for the working poor is still very much an option but also, and much more important, that a “return to a nationally-focused food regime and the rise of shorter commodity circuits, ingredients in some autonomous projects, seem less unrealistic than a few years ago” (Ibid.)

The reason why the concept of autonomy gains much more traction in a context of this double quarantine of capitalism is fundamentally that the (post-)pandemic caused disruptions to global food supplies demands a fundamental transformation of food systems (Clapp and Mosely, 2020) because it exposed contradictions that hold the potential for the subaltern rural subjects to mobilize collectively their political agency. A recent but iconic example of such is the wide and long protest of Indian farmers that started on the summer of 2020 proving that a new set of debates ranging from ‘ecological crisis’ to ‘jobless’ and ‘exclusionary growth’ are part of a larger agrarian distress on the milieu of the twenty-first century allied with the galloping consolidation of authoritarian rulers, rendering obsolete polarized older debates (Baviskar and Levien, 2021) and therefore demanding for renewed analytical tools that matches the agrarian reality of our times.

One of the issues from agrarian reality that demands adequate tools is the opposition to centralization of power on the context of authoritarianism - which was the claim that fundamentally glued the farmer’s protests in India - showing the real capacity of collective action but also “how agrarian studies is evolving and pushing beyond the polarized lines of debate over agrarian politics” (Ibid.1352). In other words, if the old debate over agrarian politics was either if a homogeneous peasant category was exploited by urban-located elite’s accumulation or the transformative effects of capitalism in agriculture over the peasantry, the renewed debate for the agrarian reality

of the twenty-first century, especially on the Global South, is much more than just agriculture and the disappearance or (poor) persistence of peasants in it. A conceptual approach to the peasantry's agency needs to consider peasants in their respective social relationships of production, diversified forms of labor and income strategies related with processes of persistence by adaptation and/or by refusal acquiring agency of resistance.

The resurgence of the employment of "peasant" in a politically charged fashion is deeply connected with the emergent voicing for ecologically sustainable ways of agri-food production, especially due to agrarian crisis and food insecurity in developing and transition economies, configuring a new debate between peasants and globalization and a new theoretical shuffle of the agrarian question within contemporary capitalism (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009, 29). In this framework, the use of the concept is per se political, because *the peasant way* – the literal translation of La Vía Campesina – embodies all the political projects of change, bringing along local and transnational networks of rural producers and urban consumers organizing and establishing ephemeral platforms of political actions, well-structured and durable social movements or institutionalized civil society organizations – quite often working interchangeably.

When we consider the entrenchments of world peasants facing the pressures of capitalist agriculture and its extractivist orientation and the countervailing resistance against it, we can capture the political nature of the word peasant. Therefore, if the peasantry persists, its existence is not redundant and is not a relic in the natural course of capitalism. It is, instead, an existence that can be defined by its (conscious or unconscious) political importance reflected in its position in society as a social class, whose labor output is an essential produce for humankind's survival but also "bearing the elements of a distinctive pattern of social relations—a highly self-sufficient society in itself" (Shanin, 1966:17). It is from this duality – essential for external consumption and yet autonomous – that an historical tension emerges, particularly when the self-sufficiency of the peasant family, mostly by fashion of access to land, is threatened, and from which political action may arise Wolf (1966, 11).

As emphasized, their constantly and externally pressured status is an existential condition: “it is only when (...) the cultivator becomes subject to the demands and sanctions of powerholders outside his social stratum – that we can appropriately speak of peasantry”. Or, in the formulation of Mintz (1974, 94) “the structural subordination of the peasantry to external forces is an essential aspect of its definition”. It is from this basic dilemma that the peasant movements of the past are often historically represented as eruptive and conjectural with irregular collective action with “large-scale uprisings comparatively rare (...) nearly always crushed unceremoniously” (Scott, 1985,29).

Therefore, peasant resistance has been portrayed by a “left-wing academic romance with wars of national liberation” (Scott 1985, 28) that do not properly consider that the most striking feature of resistance of the peasantry is not to be found on large-scale mobilizations but rather in the persistence of their existence over centuries, in other words, in “the patient, silent struggles stubbornly carried on by rural communities over the years [that] would accomplish more than these [revolutionary] flashes in the pan” (Bloch, 1966,170).

To counteract the intrinsic disorganization, during mediaeval times, the peasantry would rely on the importance of the consolidation of the village as a social group, whose legitimization and recognition would be given, not by the lord, “more concerned to profit” (Ibid.), but by the ecclesiastical figure of the parish and its church “as the only solid structure in the village” that could host the communal affairs’ meetings. The relation between the peasantry and religion, or mass belief, is well studied as marking a very important role in the generalized and known peasant’s conservative pious conformity.

The importance of peasants’ beliefs for their characterized autonomy is expressed by Redfield (1956) as “little tradition” (by opposition to the “great tradition” of the elites). Although the use of Redfield’s concepts is problematic in the extent that they do not question the uniformity of the little tradition in a society, Scott (2013, 17) recognizes what peasants “acknowledge to be a cultural hierarchy (...) To be closer to the center of a great tradition is to be closer to (...) its power, its institutional charisma” giving

the example of the hadj, the one that has done the pilgrimage to Mecca as the cultural center for peasants in Islamic societies.

The power play between the little tradition and the great tradition works to settle social stratification within the village but also represents peasant's own criterion of hierarchical arrangement, even though aspiring to get closer to the center of great tradition represents also cultural dependence and subordination "linked with political and economic dependence" (Scott, 2013, 17). Nonetheless, it is also precisely in the peasantry condition of subordination before this hierarchy that the cultural basis of radical conflict is to be found. In other words, culture hierarchy relegates the peasantry to "a status of permanent inferiority" whose designation of little tradition "contains elements of radical dissent" (Ibidem, 20) that are permanently in tension. In moments of rebellion, when tension acquires a material and physical expression, the intrinsic autonomy of the peasant is revealed; while peasants often leave the villages and retreat "back a rung of civilization" (Ibidem, 22) far away from the state, the elites retreat up for the protection of towns or the capital where the interests are defended by the state.

But can this tension produce an active agency of alliances and movements in the countryside? Back to Scott (1985) the unwritten history of resistance of the peasantry is better understood by "everyday forms of resistance" (Ibid., 36), that are characterized by "passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion and deception" (Ibid., 31) "often lacking the discipline and leadership" forming a "a social movement with no formal organization, no formal leaders (...). By virtue of their institutional invisibility" (Ibidem, 35) which are prosaic but constant. A truly significant historical account of the world peasantries must consider their persistence through an "invisible" capacity to resist.

In the Turkish case and aligned with van der Ploeg's (2007) "resistance of a third kind" (which means neither rebellious nor indifferent) a recent proposal has focused on peasant's tactical engagement in off-farm labor relations constituting a form of resistance that manifests in the labor process (Öztürk, Jongerden and Hilton, 2018). The quoted research suggests an acceptance by the Turkish peasants, or in fact a "new peasantry", of certain levels of proletarianization, to gain financial capacity to keep control of own agricultural assets (namely private property). Which means that "this

proletarianization comes together with the development of a new mode of peasant autonomy” (Ibidem, 246), not sustained on being reactive and against, neither prosaic and indifferent, but actively capable of a variety of practices in the processes of labor and production where non-entry into the markets can be combined with some levels of market engagement (e.g., family based unwaged farm labor combined with off-farm wage labor). More than a new mode of peasantry, that engagement in off-farm wage labor has been characterized before as rural resilience achieved by “temporary proletarianization” (Keyder and Yenal, 2013,152).

Regardless of the understanding of resistance employed, the struggle of the peasant-farmers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is undoubtedly different from their past political engagement by the visibility that rural social movements have acquired contemporarily. The designation ‘rural social movements’ will be employed here to embrace the agency of especially peasants, but also widely and diversely those who include small-scale family farmers and petty commodity producers<sup>36</sup> which are politically mobilized, seeking a transition to a more just set of social relations of agricultural labor and ecological (non-extractivist) cycles of production-consumption, aiming at a just agrarian transition.

It is precisely upon the factors referred previously (political and social subordination) that we find the background birth of contemporary rural social movements. The ‘developmentalist’ state, from the post-war period through the 1970s, kept a mass of peasant agriculture supported to supply domestic markets from national agricultural produce, keeping “the non-revolutionary peasant organizations” (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, 152) subordinated by clientelist relations serving urban electoral interests and “to stave off pressures for more radical change” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2002). It is thus, facing the shock of the 1970s and 1980s neoliberal restructuring of agriculture upon the retreat of the state from credit and price supports, that new peasant organizations were formed, “impatient with the tutelage of the state, often aligned with

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<sup>36</sup> Peasant farmers may have been pushed, considering the capitalist integration of agriculture in their geographical contexts, to acquire higher degrees of commodification, giving away their autonomy for market integration and dependence – constituting petty commodity producers.

dissident political forces, and variously organized to defend peasant interests in the new context” (Foley, 1995, 60).

Therefore, the fundamental difference of the peasantry within contemporary rural social movements is a will to reclaim locally the active agency of the peasant while supported by international and transnational effort of peasant communities’ networks, like LVC, displaying an array of agrarian mobilizations “against agrarian change, the commercialization of production and rural space, the destruction of the environment, and local cultures” (Kavak, 2020, 343). Such reclamation is sustained by an emancipatory political program, offering an alternative to the conventional and dominant logic of agricultural production. Food sovereignty has become that program. In the recent years, food sovereignty has acquired pluralist interpretations for putting its ideology into practice, ranging from organic farming, fair trade, localized farming systems, peasant feminism and finally agroecology. Food sovereignty as a political program claims the right to produce and access to land, bridging back the ‘living in the land and from the land’, and as in agroecology a labor and knowledge-intensive farming discipline that “provides the basic ecological principles for how to study, design and manage agroecosystems that are both productive and natural resource conserving, and that are also culturally sensitive, socially just and economically viable” (Altieri, 1995:ix).

Therefore, the banners of food sovereignty and agroecology are the ideological guidance of a politicized peasantry turning them from a bucolic picture of moral economy into a mobilized social group with potency of systemic change, proving that late capitalism in agriculture is failing to develop the productive forces (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). It is also, more importantly, aligned with “Marx’s views on the progressive possibilities of politicized small-scale petty commodity producers, shaping an emerging post-capitalist future within actually existing capitalism” (Akram-Lodhi, 2021,711). Although the LVC’s political program of the peasantry is based on the common premise of building more localized, decentralized, and democratized food systems, the challenge is however much tougher in contexts where authoritarianism protects the interests of the oligopolistic agro-chemical and agro-industrial complex, providing guarantees to the latter in exchange for rent-seeking agricultural policies. Nonetheless, it is also in these cases that we are witnessing with stronger emphasis the

political conditions for an emergent agency that strive for systemic change and challenge the power of capital in the food system.

### **3.7. Global peasant resistance and Food Sovereignty**

*not being either western liberals or student insurrectionaries, the peasants quite failed to make a choice in principle between peaceful and violent, legal and non-legal methods, 'physical' and 'moral' force, using either or both as occasion appeared to demand. (Hobsbawm 1974, 145–146)*

#### **3.7.1 Are individuals so powerful to influence change in the face of structural pressures?**

Coming to the last part of this chapter 3, it seems reasonable, considering that this part deals with, not only peasant resistance, but a global peasant resistance and its unity by around a common political program. The global reality of our days only gives us one example of a global peasant movement united around one program, and that is, La Vía Campesina (LVC) and food sovereignty. A critical account of both, as it is easy to fall on romanticized accounts for both, especially when writing from a perspective that falls within the field of critical agrarian studies, will follow at the end of this chapter. But for now, it is important to understand what theoretical assumptions and heuristic devices are followed in this study to define a movement and what are the key aspects of the peasant definition, as well of resistance and forms of resistance, that need to be taken in account for the definition of peasant movements. This also seems a reasonable effort to wrap-up the conceptual positions taken about the definition of peasant, resistance, autonomy, and movement.

After that effort is briefly cleared out, then we can move to see what multiple global contentious issues of agrarian change from what we called before the agrarian question of the 21st century as a question of rural politics, but also of rural agency. Recalling a question adapted from Skocpol's methodology regarding the possibility of agency and social transformations: 'Are individuals so powerful to influence change in the face of structural pressures?'

Starting with the last part of that question, one of the most important theoretical and methodological contributions for the definition of peasant movements is that provided by Landsberger in his first chapter of *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change*, which is in fact a contribution used at the end of chapter 5 to question the definitional characteristics of Çiftçi-Sen has a movement, but also uses two dimensions from the same contribution for the discussion on chapter 7.

Before going to those dimensions in Landsberger's contribution for the definition of movements, it is important to understand the author's position regarding the definition of 'peasants'. We have from before quoted contributions, at least four important characteristics. Three can be immediately visible by the following Moore's (1966, 111) statement:

it is impossible to define the word peasantry with absolute precision because distinctions are blurred at the edges in social reality itself. A previous history of subordination to a landed upper class recognized and enforced in the laws...sharp cultural distinctions and a considerable degree of *de facto* possession of the land constitute the main distinguishing features of a peasantry.

History of subordination to an upper landed class, cultural distinctiveness and *de facto* land ownership are the three characteristics presented by Moore. From Wolf's known definition of peasants as "rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers" (1966, 3-4) we have the stress on exploitation as a central characteristic of the peasant, as seen before earlier in this chapter. But later, on Wolf's (1970, xiv) *Peasant Wars* the stress is not on exploitation but on autonomy, another central concept in this study, as he defines peasants as: "populations that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the process of cultivation."

It can be taken from here that when Wolf wrote a work on the peasantry with a focus on collective responses to structural pressures, by fashion of peasant revolts that he called *wars*, autonomy was rather the characteristic chosen to emphasize on the definition of peasant. Likewise, the question above that people's agency to influence change when facing structural pressures seems to provide itself the answer for what Landsberger considers the first key factor for the formation of collective responses,

such as the establishment of a peasant movement are societal changes that precede such collective responses. In fact, although Landsberger (1974, 10) considers important the contributions from Moore and Wolf for a definition of the peasant, he concludes that

The epistemological starting-point for defining 'peasants' needs to be the recognition that there are a series of important dimensions along which the positions people occupy in society can be measured, and that these are continuous, and not of an 'either-or' type. Attempts to categorize positions as either being 'peasant' or not should be abandoned, and the furthest that one can fruitfully go is to announce that he will focus attention on those 'rural cultivators' (for on that, everyone is agreed) who occupy relatively low positions on various critical dimensions.

Two different points can be taken from his conclusion. That he does not recommend the use of the word 'peasant', and as such prefers the wording 'rural cultivator', but especially that he also follows Wolf's earlier stress on the characteristic of subordination, which above is used by the expression 'low positions'. Furthermore, when presenting different categories for the definition of peasant and coming to the category of political status, the two points emphasized here are very clearly expressed:

As for 'transformation process': peasants can, more or less, participate in the actual formulation of political decisions, whether legislative, judicial or administrative. For us, a peasant - if one wishes to continue using the word at all, and we recommend against it - is 'more and more' of a peasant the 'less and less' he participates. (Ibid., 12).

The "less and less' he participates" bit of the above citation is quite relevant for how the authors defined a movement in the context of peasants, and so peasant movements. They are actually defined as "any collective reaction to such low status" (Ibid., 18). Analyzing a historical series of peasant struggles resorting to land occupations in Turkey on the 1965-1980 period Gürel, Küçük and Taş (2022,5) similarly point out that: "What matters most to peasants is the ability to defend their livelihoods, so when legal claims and mechanisms do not work, they may resort to other discourses and methods."

Continuing with Landsberger, for defining how to consider a collection reaction or action by low status groups as a movement, one should not focus on a simple question

of size, but in using certain dimensions to analyze the causes, interrelationships and effects of a given assemblage reacting to an historical societal change. The proposed dimensions are, respectively, the degree of consciousness - or the awareness of the members of a collective action - of sharing a common fate; the degree of collectiveness of action measured by the extent of the persons that are involved and how coordinated and organized is the action; the instrumental character of an action, which is to say, if it has a goal outside of itself; and the extent of the low-status status of the reaction - aimed simply as a reaction to that status - of if it is an action in which other, broader, issues that take part. Briefly, we have reviewed three types of resistance among peasant movements or among peasants as autonomous reactions but not expressed as organized collective actions.

The first type of resistance is the one that expresses a conscious opposition and reacts to a societal change directly by manners of defiance to the rule, expressed in protests (rallies, tractor marches, gatherings, road-closures, sit-in protests, protest camps etc..) which have been historically repeated, from the twentieth century Latin American agrarian revolts for land (Wolf, 1970) to the recent wide peasant farmers long protests in India since the summer of 2020 when “hundreds of thousands of farmers have encircled Delhi, India’s capital, in what has been one of the largest agrarian protests in the country’s recent history” (Baviskar and Levien, 2021, 1341).<sup>37</sup>

The second type of resistance is the one that came to be better known by the title of its most representative work, ‘weapons of the weak’ or ‘everyday forms of resistance’ (Scott, 1985) where an detailed ethnographic account of peasants in a rice-farming small community, concludes that there can be resistance without the display of the violent or eruption associated with the first type above, calling for the attention that non-compliance, indifference, foot dragging, sabotage and individual boycotts against rich farmers, are examples of what Scott coins “ordinary class struggle” that although representing small events they have important political significance.

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<sup>37</sup> The societal change that sparked the protests were 3 laws approved by the ruling party in India (BJP) aiming at furthering the liberalization of the agricultural market in India and encouraging contract-farming.

Finally, a third type, which has example been coined as “resistance of a third kind” (van der Ploeg, 2007) in which there is a combination of different labor strategies: combining “peasant tradition of self-sufficiency and abstaining from commoditization of the farm and social relations” with “engaging in market integration” and “seeking out and utilization of out-of-farm (financial) transfers, such as by farming family members gaining paid work” (Öztürk et al., 2018, 245). Making it a sort of polarization that is however defined as a choice by which the “peasantry constitutes itself as distinctively different” (van der Ploeg, 2007, 2.1) keeping its mode of production a possibility to face neoliberal pressures:

this proletarianization combines with and aims at the maintenance of the private property that provides a (partial) means of (re)production (subsistence, economic and social); it represents a choice from among the options available, an adaption to the new reality, one that valorises the family farm, that assumes and establishes the continued holding and upkeep of the peasantry's primary, traditional capital, its land and stock, as an important life priority. (Ibid., 246)

Trying to critically cross-check Landsberger’s dimensions with these three types we can present 3 brief points:

1. The first type of resistance is normally expressed by movements with degrees of consciousness and collectiveness of action, but which may neither express any instrumental goals nor aim at tackling any issues more than a reaction against an unsustainable situation resulting from their low status, such as a threat to the moral economy of the peasant.
2. The second type of resistance may present a degree of consciousness (Scott argues that the prosaic forms of resistance are a choice in as much that they seem to put away readings of being ‘false consciousness’), and although they are not expressed as openly organized collective action within the representation of a movement, considering that they are expressed similarly by members of a small community, as if coordinated by sharing the same status and rituals. It is said that it is instrumental (Scott accounts for a reaction of the poorer peasants against the rich as they cut their ties to the religious rituals, threatening the rituality of village life) but not more than a reaction to their traditions, as expressed by their status and view of social life.
3. The last type definitely presents a degree of consciousness, as the choice that Ploeg emphasizes regarding the engagement with off-farm activities and the

market to keep their own peasant farming activities and own land, but it is a matter of household decision and not expressed by collectivities of peasant farmers. It does seem to be reasonable to think of this type of resistance as aiming at a goal outside of itself (the preservation of peasants' autonomy) nor more than strategies aiming at keeping the economic and moral conditions for such (maintenance of their own farms, self-sufficiency, local and family values).

For the case of Turkey, regarding the first and second type of resistance, we can see different periods that can illustrate them. Regarding the beginning of the twentieth century, Metinsoy (2021) gives an historically detailed account with examples of non-compliance but also of episodic forms of protests (next chapter will mention some of them). Later, focusing on the same period as Gürel, Küçük and Taş (2022), Alper (2010) provides an analysis on the 1968-71 protest cycle. The author reinterprets the emergence of social protests and the formations of social movements in that period of 1968-71 stressing the “centrality of politics and the relative political power of States, organizations and under-repressed groups” (Ibidem: 68). In other words, he looks for an explanatory sense on the emergence, organization and continuous actions of movements by reading the opportunities for political change in a given period, so for example, if there is a scarcity of such opportunities social movements are unlikely to emerge.

Following, this does not mean that processes such as alienation, deprivation, frustrations, and grievances are ignored or underestimated, but instead that the changes inside the power dynamics of political groups may provide the opportunities for lesser represented (or already alienated, frustrated) groups to emerge and organize as social movements. Furthermore, it is important to stress the focus on the relationships between social movements and the political groups from the perspective of their oppositional interests and the way by which there is a mutual and on-going (even volatile) influence of each parties' actions – as what defines the political agency of the social movements. These relationships constitute the focus to be found on the literature of social movements (della Porta, 1995; Maguire, 1995).

Specifically, about rural social movements in Turkey, or to put it on the terms of its initial configurations, peasant movements, Ergil (1974: 83-85) advances seven reasons to “Why a Peasant Movement did not Develop During the Turkish National Liberation Struggle”.

1. The first is that the peasantry masses were the main source of manpower for the Turkish military participation during I World War (nearly 1/5 of the Anatolian population);
2. the lack of institutional autonomy or leadership (dependency on the big landowners);
3. lack of strong and organized industrial working class in the cities that could have ties or impact upon peasant masses (besides both Istanbul and Izmir were under occupation);
4. the lack of “authority gap” that could eventually be filled by peasants' organized leadership (on one side there was the Nationalist bureaucracy allied pragmatically with big landlords which did not leave the countryside for city life and also the presence and influence of local religious figures);
5. Although eventful local insurrections followed the end of the Ottoman empire, these unorganized events were never moved by a political intent of establishing a new agrarian order;
6. Those rebellions never took the form of an extended civil war, also because under the threat of permanent foreign occupation the landlords focused their support on the Ankara Government.
7. Finally, even though there were rural militia as part of the Nationalist guerrillas, composed of peasants, they never had the political consciousness and the organization to defend peasant rights. These reasons are quite interesting, considering as well that they “(...) had a crucial effect on the socio-political structure of post-independence Turkey, which because of its hierarchical nature, could do little to increase the freedoms and life standard of the Turkish peasant masses.” (87)

In fact, was only on the verge of the 1960s-1970s protest cycle, already mentioned above, that agricultural workers began to organize themselves, as the Agricultural Workers' Union (Tarım-İş), the first major trade union in this sector was founded in

1962 (Güngör, n.d). And even though on the context of a sudden rise in unions and memberships throughout different sectors, the “(...) the small peasants remained the least organized group in the 1960s (...)” (Alper, 2010, 81), there was an increase in their political expectations regarding the land reform that had been promised in the constitution (Mülayim, 1970).

Besides, the intellectual political reading was that during the 60s and the 70s the capitalist expansion in the rural sector was deeply linked to the worsening of living conditions for small peasants. However, it is mainly the existence of such political expectations, allied to the social environment created by the late 60’s protest cycles that formed the political opportunity for the emergence of organized protests. Even though contemporary works as Kılıç (2005) point that the worsening economic conditions of the peasants are the explanatory cause of their protests, the cycle of protests were the moment in which “(...) they [small peasants] pronounced their age-old, continual complaints because they found a political opportunity to do so.” And so it follows that it is exactly within this time period that, in 1969, that takes places the first time that peasants used land occupation as a method of protest<sup>38</sup> as they demanded state-owned land, on the hands of six large landowners, to be equally distributed. Spoken worsening conditions of peasants and said mode of production’s livelihood had its hardest trajectory starting in the 1980s.

At last, on a recent reading of depeasantization and proletarianization in rural Turkey due to the introduction of neoliberal policies, contracts the deterministic view of the disappearance of the Turkish peasantry with a view on the development of a new mode of peasant autonomy aligned with the resistance of a third kind conceptualization (Öztürk et al., 2018). Besides the fact that this study is concerned primarily with collective actions under the form of peasant movement, rural social movements or agrarian movements (the three forms are often interchangeably used) and therefore deals with collective displays of conscious oppositions to the hegemonic neoliberal corporate food regime and agribusiness. As such, it argues that study argues that those displays are the ones that more broadly and significantly hold the potential for meaningful long-term alternative initiatives.

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<sup>38</sup> The first major land occupation took place in Atalan, village of Torbalı, Izmir.

On this guise, as arguably the biggest social movement globally<sup>39</sup> and claiming itself as the “global voice of peasants<sup>40</sup>” LVC is the movement that currently better represents the struggles of counter-enclosure movements (McMichael, 2006; Borras, 2008) against global capitalism enclosures in agriculture, denying the “death of the peasantry” (Hobsbawn, 1994: 289). Furthermore, as it is so geographically representative, considering its local and national members, like Çiftçi-Sen (the only in Turkey), it is not only constituted by forms of resistance encompassing different expressions of the 3 types enumerated above but also ticks all the boxes on Landsberger’s dimensions to define a movement.

### **3.7.2 The societal change preceding the establishment of transnational movements**

The momentum of the failures of the neoliberal model of capitalism call for the potential of a ‘movement of movements’ (the transnational social movements) to constitute a globally organized project of transformation and to act as counter-hegemonic movement (Evans, 2005) to replace the current hegemonic construct, to hold the political control and to maximize through the former an equitable development of human capacities. Evans theorizes on the constitution of this transnational-social movements as able to operate a critical synthesis from the multiplicity of their specific struggles (feminism movements, ecological political activist, race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender freedom of expression, extended political claims for more representative and direct democracies) from different regional contexts, which identifies as commonality the centrality to constitute a real threat and alternative to the current neoliberal hegemonic construct – by the establishment of the referred counter-hegemonic globalization (Evans, 2020).

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<sup>39</sup> “Currently, La Via Campesina comprises 182 local and national organizations in 81 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether it represents about 200 million small-scale food producers.” (LVC, 2021) See: <https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/> Accessed October 30, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Defined as “people who till the land to produce food, the fishers, the pastoralists, the farmworkers, the landless, the migrant workers, the indigenous people, and rural workers - of diverse identities, gender and age groups” (LVC, 2021, 2).

Or as it is referred to in the case of the peasant movements regarding land sovereignty, by the establishment of a people's counter-enclosure campaign (Borras, Edelman, and Kay 2009; Borras 2010; Borras and Franco 2012). To discuss my reading on the potential of the transnational-social movements I will refer to the arguments of Laclau and Mouffe (1987) for the constitution of a radical pluralist democracy.

This constitution will emerge from the representation of the multiplicity of social movement's struggles by a radical turn of democratic politics, to be operated by the renewal of the emphasis on the antagonistic/conflictual ontological dimension of the political without which the practical representation of the political by politics becomes void of its nature, and while insisting on the primacy of consensus given by the liberalism approach of today, the void will only create space for anti-democratic far-right initiatives to rise and to establish (as seen today with the rise of far-right parties among which some have won parliamentary considerable presence or even control of governments). Therefore, and considering the above there is a need for a prelude to Laclau and Mouffe's contributions, by contextualizing it within different traditions and approaches of conflict theory in Political Sociology. Conflict theories emphasize the importance of social cleavages which can turn into social conflicts which give account for political outcomes with different forms and temporalities (momentary political events such as elections; more enduring policies such as discussions on labor reforms or welfare state policies as well as long-lasting political institutions such as the political system per se, either e.g., executive presidential or parliamentary system).

In the tradition of the Marxist theories of the State, especially after its revisionism from the more Leninism orthodoxy under social democracy, one of the major intellectual problems was devoted to the question on how come the apparent concessions to the working class by the Welfare State could be made by a State exclusively serving the interests of the capitalists? In order to answer such questions, Poulantzas argued that the State can effectively perform only if it enjoys a considerable degree of 'relative autonomy' from that class (bourgeoisie) that is usually to fragmented and even divided (for its inherent competition) to realize on its own long-term interests by itself. So the formula by Marx and Engels that the state is nothing but a committee for the management of the common affairs of the state has to be interpreted in such a way that it acts in fact on behalf of the dominant class but not necessarily at the directives and

command of that class. And this is precisely how the welfare policies, and its state interventionism can only work so much as to displace or alleviate the contradictions of capitalism and not to resolve them. Therefore, the State, by its relative autonomy, operates an apparent field of political antagonism by not serving this or that class, while in fact reproduces the current hegemonic construct.

For its turn, the critical theory of the 'Frankfurt School' devoted its analysis to how the working class's false consciousness was the result of the triumph of 'instrumental reason' over 'substantive reason'. One of its members, Habermas, argued that modernity and globalized capitalism operates a growing danger of colonization of the life-world (culture, social norms, personal identities) by the system of purposive-rational action as it is visible by the tendencies towards State regulation justified by administrative rationality and commercialization of the life-world (as the focus of Horkheimer and Adorno on the growing industries of culture and art) by the commercial and bureaucratic systems of modern capitalist society. Therefore, Habermas considered that in the 'unfulfilled modernity' the so-called social movements will take up the side of the needed defense of the 'life-world' and with this banner to struggle against the monetary and bureaucratic principles of organization to replace them by the instauration of the universal communicative action.

In a different fashion the World systems theory marks a shift from the focus of social cleavage within countries to those between States and nations. The major cleavage, as conceptualized by Wallerstein, is that between the core countries whose structural positions and institutional actions dominate the capitalist world system and the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries dominated and exploited by the core through an international division of labor. The main thesis is that political power has intimate connections with the most powerful economic interests in the dynamics of world systems.

Following on this tradition but with a more recent and also sophisticated terminology, Hardt and Negri operate with the work *Empire* a move away from the localism of postmodernism and the pessimism of the post-structuralism in order to bring back the Marxian original backbone premise on the possibility/eventual overthrow/demise of capitalism. In order to operate such a move they claim that a transformation as

happened in capitalism from an imperialism based on sovereign nation-states and a type of Foucauldian disciplinary power to a new stage of global control, which is deterritorialized, both in terms of the operations of the capitalist market but also on the informatization of labor interconnecting economic, political and cultural control mechanisms which ‘permeate the masses of bodies of the multitude’ by a new form of biopower. Therefore, as the Empire globalizes capitalism in such a way that not even the imperialism could, it also creates (as a new synthesis becoming thesis and producing a new anti-thesis) a broader basis for anti-capitalist struggle in the multitude which is also a much broader category that includes all those whose labor is exploited by the Empire and subjected by it to norms of production and reproduction. The multitude comes closer to the potential counter-hegemonic actions of the transnational-social movements of Evans.

To think about the power of the transnational-social movements in constituting a real counter-hegemonic possibility and so as potential to replace the current, I have first to think in terms of that power in the question of politics and politics. For Weber, politics was first and more importantly a never-ending struggle for power; the power to control or influence the collective actions of the community. Such a possibility to control or influence the collective actions acquired legitimacy takes place within the State, which is to mean, by the State, which is defined in Weberian terms precisely as ‘a human condition that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’. For Weber, as for all the other conflict theories stated above, the question of the political nature and thus the possibility of political action (politics) is always permeated by antagonism. An ontological antagonism on the formation of the political which Schmitt conceptualized on the formation of a we/they or, in his famous form of friend/enemy. The Schmittian conceptualization of the political rely on the condition sine qua non of this formation for a real possibility of the political to exist and for politics to be activated in society, refusing the consensus approach of liberalism but also refusing its pluralist democracy approach.

Therefore, Mouffe (2005) argues ‘with Schmitt and against Schmitt’ since she accepts the critique to liberalism claims of consensus in politics but accepts to possibility of a pluralist democracy where the antagonism friend/enemy is turned into an agonistic adversarial mode – the antagonism friend/enemy continues irresolvable, but the enemy

is turned into an adversary where the conditions and norms of pluralist democracy are respected. And this is how I also think of the possibilities of the counter-hegemonic movements – as capable of reintroducing and always affirming that same ontological condition of the political.

Following this, and as conclusion, Laclau and Mouffe took Gramsci's emphasis on the political activity as the cultural basis of hegemony to deny that any social agent or class individually (such as the Marxian proletariat) have a central privileged position within the struggle. Therefore, they propose that the task of the political left is to radicalize plural democracy by exploiting the tensions created by the contradiction between the individualist aspects of unrestricted rights and the norm building nature inherent of liberal democracy. They expect that agonistic pluralism is capable of radical democratizing effects and by extent of a transformation of citizens from passive holders of rights to active builders of associations creating and exercising those and further rights.

Despite the fact that there are similar ideological movements in other Latin American countries, especially the ones you were part of the so-called Latin American Left-turn on the beginning of 21st century along with Brazil (as Bolivia, Uruguay, Ecuador) Brazil is the biggest agriculture producer of the region, the one with higher percentage of (by far) agricultural/arable lands, the one where land concentration is higher and the one in which the Landless Movement Workers (MST) as a Latin American supra-regional rural social movement, also with successfully formed international linkages of support, has pioneer and stronger presence. It is also, furthermore, the one in which the question of the peasantry and thus of the agrarian struggles and conflicts has distinctive features from the Andean or central American ones, like Mexico. In comparison with the ones just mentioned, until very recently a “deeply rooted system of independent smallholding cultivation based on an indigenous peasantry (...) has been absent from Brazilian history” (Souza Martins, 2002, 300).

Considering the focus of social movements' theories and approaches, the first question invariably to ask is ‘what are the causes of the origin of their formations?’ or ‘what are the main causes of their protesting?’. The classical approach to these questions focuses on the complaints, frustrations or deprivations of the people as on the origin and main

causes. Particularly they emphasize the processes of industrialization, modernization and later the neoliberal order establishment globally as causing processes of alienation. Nonetheless, regarding social movements in rural areas, in their struggle for land a food sovereignty project (Lerrer and De Medeiros, 2014; McMichael, 2015) against the corporate food regime (McMichael, 2006) or neoliberal food systems (Ioris, 2017), it is unavoidable to relate rural social movements with the current debates on the peasantry, as they were and still are the pillar of the so-called agrarian question.

### **3.7.3 Food sovereignty: the potentials and limitations of its political program**

This is essentially why the concept, but more than that, the political program of agrarian movements - the only one that consensually connects them transnationally while respecting local settings - is food sovereignty. First because being a “mobilizing frame” for social movements with “norms and practices aimed at transforming food and agriculture systems” as well as a “free-floating signifier” (Edelman, 2014, 959) with various content allows precisely to fill that need for renewed tools to understand the current agrarian reality. Second because it is, like the protests of farmers in India showed, about rights beyond agriculture, or as Patel (2009, 663) refers paraphrasing Hannah Arendt “food sovereignty is precisely about invoking a right to have rights over food”. In other words, the diffuse nature of the concept is not an operational weakness or result from practical ambiguities but rather its main strength because movements reflect their own collective experiences on its inclusiveness, or, as Edelman et al. (2014, 912) introduce it on the special issue to be analyzed, a “dynamic process” moved by an increasingly intensified “praxis” and “a profound process of self-reflection” that involves questioning key premises and assumptions.

Rather than providing a funneling and clear-cut search for the definitions of food sovereignty and an analysis to its narratives over the years since it first appeared championing the program of LVC (that effort takes place later the section ‘Concepts’ of Chapter 3), it is a review of that questioning that the special issue offers. That is particularly important because any student or any relevant scholarship to be produced about or at least touching on food sovereignty has first to mind the limitations of its bearings for peasant movements and concrete practices as it is too tempting for scholar-activists or at least sympathizes of the concept’s potentials, like me, to fall in

a romanticized narrative. To not be aware of the limitations or at least not to pose difficult questions is to confuse enthusiasm and the “idealistic righteousness” (Ibid.) of the radical change in agri-food or agro-food<sup>41</sup> system for a certain pitfall of complacent acceptance. Do not take me wrong, the study will still make the case that the food sovereignty movement (FSM) is conceptually rich enough as well as operational into practical solutions for a post-capitalist and peasant-oriented farming based on the respect for knowledge and rights, but it will also have always present the difficult questions emerging from the shortcomings of its applications within the collective actions of movements, namely Çiftçi-Sen in Turkey.

It is precisely with a set of difficult questions on the ‘whats’ and ‘hows’ of food sovereignty that the Journal of Peasant Studies Issue 41, Volume 6 of 2014 starts, namely by considering that during the complacent many years in agrarian studies regarding food sovereignty, the concept was either dismissed or non-critically embraced by scholars or simply not keen to challenge organizations, namely movements, formed around the concept or the leaders voicing its banner.

In order to bridge critical agrarian studies with movements in a more solid manner, the authors of the special issue propose the following set of (challenging) questions<sup>42</sup> that are even more timely nowadays than on the moment they were written for the simple reason that the ‘quarantine’ (post-)Covid-19 capitalism exacerbated on the one hand the ‘neoliberal agrarian restructuring’ (Akram-Lodhi, 2007) and with it, on the other hand, “long-running patterns of ‘uneven ecological exchange’ and consequent ‘ecological debt’, which result in part from histories of colonial and imperial relations between the core and periphery” (Borras et al. 2022, 5):

1. What are the origins of ‘food sovereignty’?
2. Does long-distance foreign trade fit into the food sovereignty model?
3. Can food sovereignty lead to greater food self-sufficiency?

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<sup>41</sup> Both terms are used in literature apparently without a fundamental distinction.

<sup>42</sup> The questions presented here are a simplified and summarized version of the original versions on Edelman et. al (2014, 912-13).

4. Does urban agriculture matter and can struggles of rural and urban producers be bridged?
5. Who is the sovereign?
6. Are diverse modes of agricultural production, farming styles, commerce and consumption accepted?
7. What are the property relations as well as cooperative and collective practices that a food-sovereign society may be characterized with?
8. What are the relations between food sovereignty and processes of agrarian transition (related with labor, resilience, consumers, rural aging and mobilities)?
9. Are there relations with other food movements?
10. Implications of food sovereignty within political-economic transformations such as transitions to post-capitalist society?

I believe it is possible, to be pragmatic and more analytical concise, to cluster these different questions into 3 different groups which relate to two different processes that characterize its dynamics, based on what previously quoted about food sovereignty being a dynamic process of *praxis* and *self-reflection*.

**Table 6. Organization of critical questions on ‘food sovereignty’ into clusters**

	Clusters	Characterization of the cluster	Process
<b>1</b>	<b>1.</b> (Origins) <b>5.</b> (Sovereign) <b>10.</b> (Political-economic transformations)	Power relations	Self-reflection
<b>2</b>	<b>2.</b> (Foreign trade) <b>3.</b> (Self-sufficiency) <b>6.</b> (Pluralism in production) <b>8.</b> (Agrarian transition)	Socio-economic relations (production, consumption, trade and policies)	Praxis
<b>3</b>	<b>4.</b> (Rural-Urban liaisons) <b>7.</b> (Property and collectivism) <b>9.</b> (External alliances)	organizational relations	Praxis

Source: Adapted from Journal of Peasant Studies Issue 41, Volume 6, 2014.

This cluster organization allows for a better understanding on how the interrogations are answered with pros and cons and the theoretical assumptions that emerge for the verification of the food sovereignty (FS) political project on the different settings where movements use its rich body of political program content to organize and represent themselves. For instance, for the analysis of Turkey's peasant movement Çiftçi-Sen, both the theoretical discussion and empirical work with the movement, for this study, are largely based on concerns that emerge from questions of cluster 1, even though some issues of cluster 2 (namely pluralism of forms of production co-existing with the proposed agroecology) and 3 (rural-urban liaisons and external alliances) were also reflected, although more superficially, on the interviews with the movement's members.

### **3.7.3.1. Cluster 1: An arduous road of self-reflection**

Defining 'democracy' Raymond Williams in his ultimate classic of terminology *Keywords* cites Aristotle, "democracy is a state where the freemen and the poor, being in the majority, are invested with the power of the state", to say that "much depends on what is meant by 'invested with power': whether it is ultimate sovereignty or, at the other extreme, practical and unshared rule." (1976, 93-4). The polemic theoretician of the *political* Carl Schmitt (2005 [1922]) defines the sovereign as the one deciding on the state of exception, which is a "deeply authoritarian premise" that certainly has "little to offer to the democratically-minded proponents of food sovereignty" (Edelman, 2014, 968). Nonetheless, on this line of thought, sovereignty is legitimated power-holding to decide on what/who is included and represented and what/who is excluded. For this particular case, the defining limits and the internal logic of the food system determine what modes of production and farming and whose actors and types of collective practices they form are to be included/excluded.

That is why, first, to understand how it is problematic for the established legal-bureaucratic machinery of the state as well as for the transnational agribusiness whose interests are vested by pressure groups upon that machinery, the use of the term 'sovereignty' on the FS project, one has to face how the combination of state's facilitator of capital in agriculture and agribusiness as the real controller of the former constitutes what van der Ploeg (2008), recurring to the terminology of Hardt and Negri

(2000), classifies as the 'Empire'. On that line, global and local power relations in agriculture are, what Raj Patel recently called in an interview, "a false binary", and are better represented by the notion of 'Empire' in food system:

Empire is a rigid and expanding framework composed of regulatory schemes of a political and economic nature that are imposed upon society and nature. In and by means of this framework the state and the market have become increasingly interlaced. (van der Ploeg, 2008, 255).

Hardt and Negri (2000) tell us that the modern critical strategy, referring to Machiavelli, Spinoza and Marx, is no longer effective to face this imperial sovereignty. The ineffectiveness is to be found in the fact that they all operate a critique from within the historical evolution of power looking for ways of ruptures, an "inside that searches for an outside" (Ibid. 185). It follows that for Hardt and Negri, the Empire operates by progressively eliminating the borders between inside and outside.

Spoken in terms of State sovereignty, we have that its modern conceptualization follows the legitimized control over civil order (the legitimate monopoly of violence as Max Weber named it) within a bounded space (either a real or a virtual territory) from where it derives the very process of modernization conceived as the civilization of nature or taming the outside. Therefore, for the authors, imperial sovereignty, on its turn, puts an end to that dialectical relation between civil order and outside nature, which characterized modern sovereignty.

At last, the authors activate an analogy between the progressively decrease of public space, as the sphere of socialization, by the growing privatization of that sphere.

They conclude that if the limits of the outside are no longer delimiting the boundaries of the sovereignty, its very conception according to that delimitation is no longer defined, unless by the definition of the exception, of the suspension, of the virtual – in the "imperial society the spectacle is a virtual place (...) a non-place of politics" (Ibidem, p. 189). It comes to be quite clear why for the rule of imperial sovereignty, state of exception has become of such a paradigmatic political use. What lessons can be taken from the conception of the sovereign under the rule of the Empire and how threatening other conceptions of sovereignty - like that of food - which attempts to go beyond the grasp of both the rule and the exception stated by the Empire?

There are two levels of lessons that we can take from the seemingly inclusionary but exclusionary practices of the Empire in food systems and generally in global agrarian realities: The first is a seemingly benevolent tendency to include points of contact with the conceptual body of the FS, namely appropriating the former to include some of its concerns (e.g. people's right to food, autonomy and self-determination etc..) into a more institutionalized concept of 'food security' which at the end only contributes to generate ambiguity and confusion about what really FS means and how different it is from the FAO definitions of 'food security, although the proponents of FS within the frame of LVC insist that both concepts are opposed. The incapacity to clearly define FS leaves space for the Empire to progressively absorb to itself the outer limits that threaten its rule of setting what/who is inside and outside its system of knowledge and power. As Raj Patel states: There are so many versions of the concept, it is hard to know exactly what it means" (2009, 663).

Moving to the second lesson, and the real Achilles heel of FS, if it is hard to know what it means, it becomes also harder for its activist proponents to define the strategic lines of power-demanding and most importantly its modus operandi of administration, its units of size (small farms can expand to international markets? - touching on the first issue of cluster 2), the determinations of relations with state institutions, a need for their own institutions (in or outside the state) and the maintenance of democratic legitimacy (Edelman, 2014, 974) - crucial to keep the nature of FS as scrutinized as possible not to be marginalized, or worse, absorbed as a puppet opposition to the dominant order in the food system. Second, another danger within the lack and reluctance from the representatives of the official narrative on FS, especially LVC, on setting a clear notion of sovereignty not as vague as the "right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni Forum, 2007, 9), is that of being appropriated by the strengthening of nation-state's control, which is particularly worrying on the context of growing authoritarian stances.

In the case of Turkey, the FS discourse could be easily appropriated by an already existent populist national production slogan 'milli ve yerli' (national and local) that is applied to national industries - particularly the defense/military and construction - and that has been used as a strategy to channel public funds over the years to the creation

and elevation of a partisan's capitalist class and business elite through clientelism and electoral favors. The reason why this did not apply yet to agri-food production and agriculture in general is because of the rent-seeking and extractive vision of the rural by the governing party, that on the one hand has eased over the years the control of cash-crops for exports, like hazelnut and sugar beet, to agri-food giants like Ferrero and Cargill respectively, and on the other hand the biggest construction/energy projects in rural areas are normally public tenders given to the clientelist network of companies above-mentioned.

From another perspective, more optimistic while severely harsh against the dominant discourse of food and development, Patel (2009) affirms that the reason why the whole terminology orbiting around the institutionalized assertions of 'food security', that simply passed by shaping the international food production and consumption priorities agenda in 2001 to include concerns on nutrition and public health is due to the "leadership taken by Via Campesina to introduce at the World Food Summit [in Rome] in 1996 [which is according to LVC the origin of the public life of the term] the idea of food sovereignty" (Ibid. 665). The author continues by saying that not only it is an achievement of the social movements holding the agenda of FS the fact that it pushed established power in being more democratically-oriented about food security in respect of production and consumption of nutritious and healthy food - because as far as security in food goes "is entirely possible for people to be food secure in a prison or under a dictatorship" (Ibid.) - but also the recognition in the international discourse that decisions about food are about relations of power, namely power politics in the food system.

Therefore, the reason why in terms of an institutionalization of both concepts (although LVC's FS is opposed to the official language of food security there is not a denial of the idea of security in food, in fact they consider that FS is a pre-condition to achieve food security) they remain vague is precisely because it functions for the possibility of agreements at the UN members states level, otherwise at the state's level, internal political arrangements would have to be radical. This is, indeed, a central question discussing FS and perhaps the central one for the study of the political agency of rural social movements in Turkey - the state.

Bernstein (2014, 1054) calls it “really the ‘elephant in the room’ of the programmatic aspirations of FS”, in the sense that for the project of FS to be considered with a real possibility of implementation at the local/national level then there is no other way to envision it if conflicting with the ‘real’ sovereign that the state in fact is.

Therefore, the most striking challenge for the proponents of FS, is in my view (that applies as well for the Turkish case), is to be able to acquire enough popular support from which the recognition and legitimacy of its premises leave the shadows of marginality in order to pressure the governments to consider policies and practices, at least a considerable effective range that Bernstein summarizes as in three axis: regulation of domestic and international trade, protect and promoting small-scale farming and subsidizing small farmers as well as consumer prices of products from the latter in order to scale up their production from the local to the national level. This sort of policies and practices can be included within a much wider context of peasant-state tension in which historically states have acted as watchmen of the developmentalist preached outcomes of capitalism, leading peasant revolts to be expressed against that watchman rather than capitalism itself.

Along these lines, McMichael (2010) emphasizes the need to consider ‘an agrarian citizenship’ that confronts the tactical shortcomings of waiting for the protection of the state for small farmers based on a simple traditional return to an idyllic rural life, representing a lack of a strategy that must assert a political program. Agrarian citizenship if recognized as an advocacy of “peasant-farmer rights to initiate social reproduction of the economic and ecological foundations of society” (Ibid.171) may be the political strategy for the implementation of FS without conflicting with the ‘sovereign state’, but here Bernstein, although agreeing with formulation of McMichael, presents his skepticism on the belief that the ‘peasant way’ with its low external input labor-intensive farming is capable of developing forces of production to feed the projected increase in world population, in fact he goes as far as saying that sympathy or solidarity with FS, which he also shares, does not have to lead to “any belief in humanity’s salvation through small-scale farming” (Bernstein, 2014, 1057) which only obscures FS.

This predicament leads us to the core of the concerns on cluster 2 as it represents the praxis of FS regarding production, consumption, and trade both at its local applications and, following the concern of Bernstein, if the transformation of the food system it advocates can feed the world.

### **3.7.3.2. Cluster 2: The conundrum of development and the market on food systems amid a coming agrarian crisis**

The core thesis of van der Ploeg's *New Peasantries* is that the Empire as the ordering principle of production, consumption and trade is based on the destruction of ecological and social capital but also exploitation of natural resources as if indefinitely renewed but also degradation of farmer's livelihoods which impacts quality of food, leading to an 'agro-environmental crisis' which constitutes the coming agrarian crisis of our times. A crisis caused by the developmentalist fetishized perpetual growth. If classical agrarian crisis, on the origin of the historical peasant revolts, were due to the an over-exploitation of labor-power, worsening working conditions while disarticulating farmers with the surplus extractors, and thus the destruction of the social contract of the moral economy, which means the ethic of subsistence and thus the minimum prospects of those working the land, the coming agrarian crisis is mostly about a disarticulation between humankind, agricultural practices and nature that is based on ecological demise.

The impacts of similar crises have been seen in former food scandals linked to zoonotic diseases such as the 'mad cow' disease or avian influenza. The most consensual origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is yet another tragic example of such, on how the global organization and development of agri-food production demonstrates that as the Empire of food system expands so are more visible the fragile and contradictory premises of development in which it is sustained upon, namely how global and liberalized corporate food regime force an artificial global north and south divide of overconsumption and underconsumption. The scarcity responsible for geographies of hunger is not a natural tragedy of our times but an avoidable feature of the contradictions of the Empire deemed collateral but also feeding the whitewashing institutionalization of solidarity and worry with food security.

But yet a narrative which never really mentions that the primacy of small-scale production aligned with the preservation of ecosystems is the possible future of balance, although acknowledging, as a save face, that peasant farming has a place to be protected in food system, mostly because it provides a functional role within the Empire - that of cheap and available labor force in agriculture as proletarianization plays a role - and also figures as target for funded programmes of community support providing embellishment of reports and headlines.

This position been taken, we can proceed to briefly put in relation the main questions of this cluster as questions on the capacity of peasant farming to develop forces of production in agriculture and, which is linked to the first, on the possibilities of global food provision being highly dependent on small-scale farming with agroecological principles as defended by LVC.

The criticism of FS that is based on those two questions points out that it is a project that cannot make a leap from slogan to concrete policies that work on the ground. Part of such criticism is based on an awkward silence or reluctance that exists among the official proponents of FS on the role of market forces - although all agree that localization of food markets constitutes a defense against globalization - differing on the role of international trade and how to deal with the case of small farmers whose products are dependent on exports, like the case of coffee or cacao (Burnett and Murphy, 2014).

The cited authors argue that there is a risk of reduction of small farmers' incomes when shifting from profitable export crops to other for domestic consumption while drawing attention to the FS movement's silence regarding this issue. Localization of production and consumption raises more than just the challenge of dealing with the potential of increasing inequalities by impacts on small farmers' livelihoods that depend on exports but also on the question of the increasing control of a legitimate body (if not the State how could it be?) of authority over production and consumption, not to speak of the question of the social construction of tastes around the world. For the latter, Edelman et al. (2014, 973) mention with irony that if not for exported coffee how the endless academic discussion and activists' meetings would last?

They also remind us of previous research that suggests that the imported sugar from the Caribbean had a crucial role in powering the workforce of the industrial revolution in England (Mintz, 1986). As we can see, even if the most radical proposals of a complete overhaul of the globalized networks of trade would work to change the values and practices of our food system, the weight of long historical socially constructed tastes to be reversed is not only “probably close to impossible” and “certainly a poor road to consensus” but the main problem remains on “how to build political support for ‘the people’ democratically exercising control over ‘their’ food system”? (Edelman et al., 2014, 973).

These questions are on the very origin of the concept of FS and the resistance of FSM, precisely because a substantial part of the emergence of FSM as the conceptual and political glue of transnational agrarian movements in mid-1990s is due to the establishment of globalization as the consensual model of development in the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its 1995 successor World Trade organization (WTO). Previously cited authors Burnett and Murphy, in their participation of the special issue in analysis (2014, 1065-84) identify three important issues on a triad between the FSM, the WTO and international trade.

First, the rejection of the WTO as a regulator of international trade, defending instead the UN for that role, has led to a misconception that FSM is against international trade. Second, this misconception has been fed on the fact that although not against it, FSM does not have a clear stance on international trade - one that “should take account of the diverse needs and interests of hundreds of millions of smallholder farmers and farm workers around the world” as many depend on export markets. Third, and considering the latter allied to a changes on the functioning of WTO, namely at the geo-political level, showing signs of flexibility and openness for compromise (the authors offer the case of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food that in 2011 has both engaged with FSM and WTO for compromises on support to national food security strategies [de Schutter 2011]) must call for a new strategy on trade, suggesting FSM to reconsider its dismissal of WTO as FSM itself is evolving and taking and increasingly assuming important political role.

In sum, although the authors assume these arguments with caution, they depart from a position hoping to contribute for a stronger strategy of FSM for trade that includes a vision that is not grounded on unclarity, contradictions and ambiguous stances, as they also believe to be possible for the emergence of “cracks in the edifice of the WTO” (Burnett and Murphy, 2014, 1080) which can be used, from a more non-contentious and institutional take on social movements (Tarrow, 2011), as opportunities for structural change in such organizations like the WTO.

There is of course another entire body of literature on social movements that considers more adequate contentious strategies of action to engage politically on contentious issues. And that seems to be the approach that LVC takes, as the more widely recognized voice of FSM, regarding today the WTO. Based on a gathering in June 2022 in Geneva, LVC has released a ‘2022 Geneva Declaration’ titled ‘End WTO! Build International Trade based on Peasants’ Rights and Food Sovereignty!’, therefore it is quite clear that the narrative strategy of non-recognition of WTO as the *force majeure* behind ‘globalized free-market policies and speculative trade’ is very much alive. While denying WTO’s role on trade and asking governments to exit the organization, the emphasis is put on the UN, especially its FAO, as the proper forum in which governments should agree on the rules according to which global food production and trade should be sustained upon based on “Peoples’ Food Sovereignty principles and per the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), other human rights instruments, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)” (LVC, Geneva Declaration, 2022).

Regarding this more contentious, yet constructive (in fact the one that really strives for a construction of an alternative ordering principle for future food system) perspective on the action of social movements, it is a good time to remind of a previous statement by McMichael according to which I state that this research principle is guided upon. The statement stresses peasant mobilization that goes beyond daily survival and aims to reframe what is possible on the land against what is being done on the land by the neoliberal regime.

It is here that resides the alternative constructive mission of both FSM but especially LVC, but also in a way, that transcends the movement and the transnational organization involving “a societal dimension of a peasant-inspired politics” (McMichael, 2014, 938) referred by Nicholson (2009, 678-80) as “a process of peasant culture” that accumulates “forces and realities coming together from the citizens of the entire planet.” and as such not move by “just resistances... but also proposals that come from social movements and not just peasant movements”.

This can be summarized by the suggestion of Edelman (2009 cited in McMichael 2014, 938) that on the context of the construction of alternative to neoliberal food regime in the twenty-first century ‘peasantness’ is not an analytical category but rather a political one that emerges from a historical relation to the politics of capitalism accumulation in rural areas - not just in agriculture - which includes the conjunctural issues, premonitory of an agrarian crisis, that include land grabs, GMOs monocultures, loss of seed diversity amid the privatization of nature by the giant seed providers that have the protection of national states for the imposition of their certified seeds against the use of local varieties. These three issues, as we will see later, are all contention factors on the origin of Çiftçi-Sen in Turkey.

As such, the proposal of McMichael (2014) is that historicizing the political struggles of the FSM and particularly of LVC not only provides a defining framework for food sovereignty both to avoid the essentialist fetishism of a single definition and the criticism of its diverse defining principles, seemingly ambiguous. The first is visible on the attempts to appropriate food sovereignty as a utopian version of the much more institutionalized food security and the second unavoidably results from the fact that FSM functions truly as an autonomous and independent process transcending local territories and the peasant interests as well, because ultimately a defense of mono and chemical-ridden farming is in the interests of all human consumers.

Historicizing the concept means to frame it on the current specific conditions of “ecosystem plundering and the environmental hazards of biophysical override” (McMichael, 2014, 935) of the neoliberal food regime linking “the struggle for the land with the struggle on the land” (de Almeida and Sanchez, 2000) that is actually a warning of an ecological demise with catastrophic proportions on the making and a

ontological critique against “those who fetishize agro-exporting as the solution to global hunger” (McMichael, 2014, 951). It is precisely on a proposal that asserts ‘the peasant way of farming’ as an alternative to the Empire that we can not only explore the possibilities of such a way of farming to respond to the global need of food provision but also on how those conflicting visions (the one based on industrial agriculture and the other on peasant farming) are a struggle that represents an historical power inequality and yet one - via new forms of resistance and allied to the increasingly weight of imminent climate disasters - that proves capable of energizing and connecting rural and urban movements.

### **3.7.3.3. Cluster 3: Internal and external organizational challenges: fighting power with power (of) alliances**

Recurring to the same quote of McMichael, crucial for the definition of the purpose of the study, although resistance among peasants that, either by actively, yet episodically, participate in protests or apply forms of non-compliance like foot-dragging, there is a ‘mobilized segment’ and that mobilization requires collective action. Such action for its turn requires to develop and sustain levels of internal organization and consider external alliances - may those be to apply levels of institutionalization to a given movement and thus be accepted on the arena of negotiations or open way to non-peasant organizations, such as urban food initiatives or cooperatives and to augment the potential reach of the peasant movement. I would like to give three different notes that may attempt to connect all these challenges with empirical examples.

The first refers to the main premises of a sort of universal content that must glue all the movements arising from so many diverse national contexts but that yet find a platform to constitute an intellectual stance against agrarian capitalism. That content must also set a course of action for the future yet sustained in present discourses and practices, and therefore, no better candidate for such endeavor than a proposal to resolve the contemporary agrarian question. On a very recent article, Akram-Lodhi (2021) proposes an agroecological agrarian transition as the flagship proposal to revolve the agrarian question of the 21st century sustaining that the agency that an agroecological transition promotes, within FS and FSM, is of transformative resistance to the capitalist global food system while bridging the Marxist agrarian political

economy and the advocates of FS. Even more recently on a short video prepared for the Twitter account of The Journal of Peasant Studies, the authors explain that the motivation for writing the article was to “deal with a long-standing tension in critical agrarian studies” about on the one hand the premise that only large-scale capital intensive farming can develop the forces of production to both feed the world but also (from its own contradictions) create the pre-conditions for a post-capitalist future and on the other hand considers small-scale farmers at the forefront of the resistance against the former.

The article thus argues that a resolution of the agrarian question does not have to require the “triumph of capitalist farming” offering empirical evidence that capital is not developing forces of production and that the contemporary agroecological “is a knowledge intensive form of production that can maximize the productivity and energy flows” essential to the development of the forces of production. This is what is meant by an agrarian question resolution through an agroecological agrarian transition which is being “politically built by rural social movements of resistance in the present”.

While the development of forces of production is a debate that concerns more the cluster 2, the ‘politically built’ part is the core concern of the questions within cluster 3, namely how internally and externally this politically built resistance is organized (struggle on the land), which relations of property are envisioned by this resistance (struggle for the land) and how both are capable of generating alliances between rural producers/consumers and urban consumers. Widely known proponents of agroecology from a scholar-activist tradition (Altieri, 2009; Rosset and Altieri, 2017) argue that agroecology, besides its knowledge intensive principles of sustainable agriculture, offers also social ties that are potentially generated “within locally-oriented and democratized food system in which power is distributed equitably and intersectionality among the direct producers and eaters” (Akram-Lodhi, 2021, 687). The main challenge, I believe, for the challenges present on the 3 questions of cluster 3 (see above table 2) are bonded by a small part of the quote above ‘in which power is distributed equitably and intersectionality’. How does the agroecological agrarian transition deal with the question of power distribution and therefore how is that question reflected on the organizational and mobilization practices of rural social

movements is a critical question. But even more importantly, how do rural social movements deal with the question above in a global context where the conditions of power pursued (to set, for example in this case, the dominant farming concepts, and practices globally) are completely unbalanced in favor of the Empire.

In the revised version of William's 'Keywords' by Bennet et al. (2005), the concept of *power* is introduced by McLennan (2005, 274) precisely by its reference on how it motivates people, and so, the authors have chosen, amongst all the possible attributes of power its energy that motivates people to do their doings in a determine way. Therefore, this attribute direct us to the processes of *power-seeking* which acquires two different forms; holding better fitting knowledge in the power-seeking process (meaning the power to set the conditions for a better or worse position for power-seeking, as for example the social capital from owning a degree from a high-ranked university versus an average one) and the second the power that once attained allows for processes of *power-accumulation*.

When a moderate degree of comfort is assured, both individuals and communities will pursue power rather than wealth: they may seek wealth as a means to power, or they may forgo an increase of wealth in order to secure an increase of power, but in the former case as in the latter their fundamental motive is not economic. (Russel, 2004, 4)

The above quoted excerpt from Bertrand Russel describes that the energy for power-seeking, followed by power-accumulation, is a fundamental motivation of individuals and communities. To understand the balances of power within organizations, such as social movements and how that balance (emerging from contexts of unequal power distribution as movements offering an alternative to a dominant reality) is important to answer on what makes humans, either in their quotidian 'automatic' choices (i.e. going to work every morning as a habit) or in their political agency (voting; activism in movements or political organizations) relying or delegating power in a leading minority that then detains power(s) and exerts it, considering that the fundamental motive is not economic.

And second on how the action of power delegation is crucial to understand the very concept of culture, cultural-formations, and the processes that (invisibly) standardized

behaviors like conformity to rules, conventions, and the very notions of right and wrong confined within morality. Regarding the latter, and giving an example that matches a concern of the study, how local food is turned into commodity by market mechanisms and how the deterritorialization of local food implied happens with relatively conformity in global societies, in relation to the local knowledge of production, the dispossessed local communities and ultimately the process by which both knowledge and the dispossessed become also part of the commodification (by fashion of for example seeds control by agribusiness and proletarianization of peasant farmers, respectively).

I believe these questions are, essentially, determined by means and relations of power and therefore variations in relation to the most powerful standpoint, which by being positioned as such, determines the direction of the cultural variation. As Wolf (1982) demonstrates, that standpoint is colonialism and the Western colonizers. Wolf has demonstrated through his immensely descriptive historical analysis of the wealth accumulation processes of European powers in between the centuries of colonialism, that the history of their development was made possible through the slave trade and exploitation of resources where the very notion of development and progress was built upon.

On the same lines, van der Ploeg (2008) argues a line of continuity between the Spanish medieval conquest enterprise and the (food but not only) current Empire of the 21st century. The main point of contact, besides the obvious extractivism and negative externalities in geographies far from the center of power, is that both the medieval Spanish Empire and the Empire of today never had/have sufficient resources, in fact, they are almost void of resources. In the case of the Spanish Empire the power-seeking capacity was made possible from an “actively constructed network” that allowed for the possibility to obtain capital whenever and wherever needed, the maintenance of ways of communication and armies at disposal (Kamen, 2003, cited in van der Ploeg, 2008, 236). For the current food empires “as void as the Spanish Empire” (van der Ploeg 2008, 236) the structural features of power-seeking are expansion, hierarchy, and order.

The first is sustained on the political capacity to control trade based on the absence of borders (and this reminds us of LVC's resistance against WTO), the second on controlling connections which are made on the unambiguously source where the authority resides (examples of such are large corporations capacity to meet state regulatory schemes, even define the constitution of new ones, in hierarchical ways that small-scale farmers cannot even dream of) and finally the third is the mode of ordering that more characteristically defines the Empire, for the case of our interest in this study means ordering the nexus between nature and society namely at the level of production and consumption of food where "responsibility and agency are marginalized if not banned" (Ibid. 241). The first adjective 'marginalized' takes me to the second empirical note I want to give, while the second adjective 'banned' takes me to the third. The second is the capacity of FSM like LVC to be represented at the decision-making table over the years, which imply dealing with the challenge of institutionalization, namely having to do concessions while negotiating.

On July 23, 2022, the official Twitter account of the FAO Director-General tweeted a photo of a meeting with the LVC General Coordinator (a rotative periodically coordination that in 2022 is on the hands of the European Coordination Via Campesina [ECVVC]) with the following message "Supporting small-scale family farmers is central to achieving the inclusive rural transformation we need for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life for all." On the following press release published by LVC, it is stated that:

[LVC] raised the importance of the direct participation of peasants in the spaces where decisions that affect them are made. Citing instances such as The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) and the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), Ody [name of the general coordinator] asked for consideration of the revision and adaptation of the Letter of Agreement with FAO, to broaden the participation of peasant organizations. (LVC, 2022)

From these two cited instances, it is visible that, first, the FAO is the organization that LVC recognizes as the global political forum and, second, that LVC considers FAO to be much more accessible to represent the interests of peasants and peasant organizations having identified in a very clear way the platforms where there is way

for broader inclusion. The same press release also gives mention to a proposal of the director-general of FAO to organize a Farmers and Family Farmers event in 2023 reflecting the “participation of peasants and rural workers at the highest levels of global food and agricultural governance.”

Nonetheless, a critical standpoint considering the possible shortcomings of FAO to really ensure a match between declarations of interests, forums and even major approved documents at the highest level, such as UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas (UNDROP), is given by Burnett and Murphy (2014, 1079). First because FAO has “no mandate to govern agricultural trade”, secondly even if it had, they argue that the notion “that agricultural trade rules can somehow be isolated from other trade discussions” is wrong as “trade rules for agriculture, while having to respect agriculture and its specificities, are going to have to come to terms with other sectors and economic priorities as well”. For all this the authors consider that FAO is not equipped for these challenges and therefore a recognition of LVC in FAO may only be a struggle of FSM to reinforce the role of the UN as the main platform for global food trade. As such the authors warn of the danger of losing opportunities of not supporting countries highly dependent on small-scale farming to try and change the WTO from within. Countries that also have a large capacity of bargaining in WTO like Brazil, India, or China.

It can also be argued that even in cases where food sovereignty has been constitutionally recognized as a strategic goal, like Ecuador, there remains a gap between the constitutional mandate, policies and implementation (Giunta, 2014). Therefore, it is not just a question of strategically being able to sit at the higher of the highest negotiation tables but also how to confront, without being marginalized, the nature of territorial state power that protects the interests of capital in food trade (Trauger, 2014), especially when the right to food (a minimum humanly condition for the well-being granted in constitutions of sovereign liberal states) is not guaranteed. While Agarwal (2014) identifies a growing emphasis on rights of women and other discriminated or disadvantageous groups in farming with the potential of opening the FSM to wider promotion of social equity and democracy, Kloppenburg (2014) brings the question of the potential of ‘seed sovereignty’, against the growing global imposition of intellectual property rights on seeds, as carrying the capacity to generate

emancipatory outcomes from open-source seed initiatives. These two are examples on how FS being not a definition, but a dynamic process (Nicholson, 2012) expands the capacity for the localized initiatives, linked transnationally, to express democratization of rights, and not just of food rights, working to build up a movement of movements that can aim to the imbalances of power-seeking and building characterized by the Empire.

Finally, the third empirical note is the considerable gap between rural social movements in settings where institutionalization is possible and political recognition is, although arduous, also possible and contexts, like in Turkey, where marginalization of a rural social movement reaches a banning level by an authoritarian government holding the legal-bureaucratic machinery together with a discretionary judicial to set the arena of the power-seeking in terms of legality. Determining from the very beginning an outsider or a 'them' which is not even allowed to voice its message and when insisting is brutally repressed. This is the political context in which the case-study is approached in this study and therefore it will be recurrently developed throughout the upcoming chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### HISTORICAL TENSIONS AND POLITICAL FRAMES OF RURAL TURKEY

*Social banditry is universally found, wherever societies are based on agriculture (including pastoral economies), and consist largely of peasants and landless laborers ruled, oppressed and exploited by someone else - lords, town, governments, or even banks*  
(Hobsbawn, 1969, 15)

#### 4.1. The historical context of Turkish peasantry: a long state-peasant tension

If we bring back the question of persistence of the peasantry from the very beginning of the previous chapter, it is important to consider that the ‘subordination’ or even the ‘suffering’<sup>43</sup> for the case of the Turkish peasants hardly began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although this study does not employ an historical longitudinal analysis on the Turkish peasantry from the late Ottoman Empire, to the foundational of the new Republic and the decades that followed the transition to a multi-party regime until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is one single characteristic at the heart of the state-peasant relation that connects all the referred historical periods: the oppressive agricultural surplus extraction under the form of taxation. According to Faroqhi (2006: 336) the Ottoman ‘society’ was mainly constituted of “tax-paying peasants and a tax-collecting elite”.

This succinct and simple division into two classes can be further portrayed on the transition between the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1922) and the official declaration of the Turkish Republic (1923) by the following picture drawn by Metinsoy (2021:21):

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<sup>43</sup> Referring to a previous quote (van der Ploeg, 2013: 6): the peasantry “both suffers and resists: sometimes at different moments, sometimes simultaneously.” (Ibid.:6)

In the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey was like a big village stretched out across the Anatolian Peninsula that had been razed by long-lasting wars depleting the population and economic resources (...)

By 1927, 81 per cent of the people engaged in agriculture. The share of agriculture in the GDP was 49 percent in 1926 and 47 percent in 1936. (...)

Furthermore, modernization projects and state-building were to be financed largely through agricultural taxes and the state monopolies' revenues, which weighed heavily on smallholders. Oppression and coercion accompanied the economic exploitation of peasants.

It is not one of the purposes of this work, a critique on the dependence of agricultural taxes for the lion-share of the costly state-building of a new modern nation. One could focus on the lack of alternatives considering the state of the country after the First World War and the war of liberation (1919-1923) against European states that looked at Turkey with manifested territorial interests, following the transition and the end of the Empire. Or one could also focus on the exploitative nature of that agricultural surplus extraction effort that also benefited the large landowners and how the republic's economic policies favored their interests. That is however a debate for others to take on and upon which much ink has already been spilled. For the heuristic purposes of this introduction, presenting the conceptual map of the work, and later for the development of their theoretical interrelations but also empirical constataions, matters only the fact that peasantry exploitation has an historical continuity (which does not necessarily mean similarity or linearity) in Turkey up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In any case, some references will be done to the pre-1945 land reform, the 1945-1960 so-called "transition period" (Yıldırım, 2017:1) as well as the consequences of agricultural mechanization and trade liberalization policies on the 60s and 70s, undeniably the period that onsets the major transformations of Turkish agriculture from a perspective of integration of global capital and finance are the 1980s onwards. Precisely in that period began Turkey's agriculture structure adjustments policies (SAP), under international pressure from IMF, World Bank and WTO, to ensure integration into capitalist world economy (Aydın, 2009).

The Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) from 2001-2008 "was a move towards a market-oriented agriculture policy by the abolition of administered

prices and of input and credit subsidies, a restructuring of agricultural state-owned enterprises and agricultural sales cooperatives” (Köse, 2012: 80).

The debates around the ARIP can be divided into those that see the agricultural reforms designed accordingly with European Union (EU) Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and set towards a market-oriented agriculture, meant to achieve EU standards by restructuring small-scale farming and benefitting mostly landowners rather than producers (Aydın, 2010) and leading to an exodus of small farmers as farming has ceased to provide enough livelihood (Döner, 2012; Öztürk et al., 2014). And those that see benefits on the preparation of Turkish agriculture for the competitive global markets and paved the way for the EU accession (TUSIAD, 2008) – which (still) did not happen. As such, the question of the political agency of the peasantry is also important within the account of this historical “suffering” or persistence. Were the peasants merely coerced witnesses without agency or there is also an (un)accounted history of that persistence acquiring agency of resistance?

During the second decade of the Turkish Republic, Metinsoy (2021:44-7) gives a detailed account of several episodes in different Anatolian regions of the country where peasant smallholders complained of lack of sufficient support and debt which caused them to lose their land, but also of landless peasants who through several means, such as “letters to newspapers, petitions, politicians’ reports and the wish lists of the RPP’s [Republic People’s Party – the ruling party of the single party period] provincial congresses” (Ibid.:44), expressed their concerns and demands for land. But a much more contentious issue and one that resulted in more complaints from peasants is figured by the discontentment with land and livestock taxes where often the protagonists were the abusive and arbitrary actions of tax-collectors who seized livestock from peasants that could not pay their dues. In the poorest regions of the Kurdish majority southeast, we can find an account of the mid-1920s governor of Diyarbakır recommending the government the provision of land to poor peasants because of the rising crime such as theft and banditry (Metinsoy, 2021:47).

Forms of peasant banditry are widely known from the celebrated literary works of Turkey's renowned author Yaşar Kemal, especially from his tetralogy "Ince Memed" (Memed, My Hawk). Firstly, published in 1955, it pictures the life and adventures of an orphaned young poor peasant turned into a legendary bandit and a champion for landless peasants in Anatolia. Hobsbawn was in fact the first to name the phenomena that emerges when bandits, normally considered robbers, are not considered as such and even pictured as local heroes having songs dedicated to their deeds. His coined term of "social banditry" (1959) expresses the action of protest by bandits in peasants', societies against oppression for the violation of the moral economy code by the extractors, usually landlords or the state representatives, of food or rent, disrupting the minimum level of subsistence. The interesting features of the phenomena coined by Hobsbawn that he considered universally visible in societies based on agriculture (as the Turkish case on the twentieth century and before) is on the one hand that social bandits "are persons whom the State regards as outlaws, but who remain within the bounds of the moral order of the peasant community" and on the other hand even when they have a political program or organizational capacity it "does not go beyond the restoration of the traditional order which leaves exploitation of the poor and oppression of the weak within certain limits" (Blok, 1972, 494).

In one of the passages of the first book of the series, while Kemal gives a description of Memed's village, Dikenli (not by coincidence means 'Thorny') one can understand the historic condition of isolation of the peasantry in the first decades of the 20th century in Turkey:

Dikenli is a world by itself, with its own laws and customs. The people of Dikenli know next to nothing of any part of the world beyond their own villages. Very few have ever ventured beyond the limits of the plateau. Everywhere nobody seems to know of the existence of the villages of Dikenli or of its people and their way of life. (Kemal, [1955] 2005:4)

This description not only reveals the territorially marginalization of the peasantry but also the lack of consciousness in respect to sociological forms of belonging or identity such as being subjects of a state or citizens of a nation. This also derives a much stronger potency for the oppressive power of the local chieftain landowners,

commonly known as Ağa in Turkish. (Ağa, read with a silent ‘g’, is a term that connotes a position of power, originally a civil or military officer during the Ottoman Empire).

But by no means that isolation and marginalization meant necessarily a condemnation to oppression without any sort of agency against, of mobilized contestation, of violence to fight back. Indeed, Santesso (2012) has a reading on Kemal’s creation of the character Memed and his use of violence as revenge against landowners inspired on Fanon’s 1961 work “The Wretched of the Earth”, where it is argued that “a type of counter-violence has a positive effect on the oppressed” (Santesso, 2012:9), meaning for the case of peasants that violence has a cathartic effect for a collective ‘discovery’ of their subaltern condition. But contrary to Fanon’s belief that violence alone can create bounds of solidarity among the oppressed, that cannot be as simplistically expressed by Kemal’s fiction on the relationship between Memed and the peasants.

While the main character idealizes them and often the peasants celebrate his achievements, Kemal fantasises a peasantry that fails to collectively revolt united around Memed. This is a major indication of the author’s awareness of a conflicting dualism at the core of peasantry existence: unity needed to form alliances and autonomy indispensable for the reproduction of their subsistence farming (that possibly can come into conflict with sustaining forms of unity over time). Although Kemal’s Memed is not exactly about peasant resistance, his realist knowledge of the Turkish peasants allows him to grasp this inner conflictuality, essential to debate the possibilities of peasant’s resistance.

Furthermore, as astutely Santesso argues, invoking Raymond Williams notion of the novel’s capacity to express social change, as the violence perpetrated by Memed increases the state expresses its Weberian definition<sup>44</sup> as a legitimate monopoly of

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<sup>44</sup> The German sociologist Max Weber, in his 1968 lecture ‘Political as Vocation’ defined the state as “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” The use of the concept of *violence* on the emergence and consolidation of the modern state’s it is not done in the sense that only the state can exert violence, but the establishment of

physical force, that also involves a change in the peasant' subalternity because the state is no longer an abstraction but a "real political structure" (Ibid.:11). The emergence of the Turkish modern state with the new Ataturk's Republic is also, as an historical process, responsible for bringing into being changes in social life such as the politicization of the formal imperial subjects into citizens – a process in which the peasants remained at the fringe of the unjust coercive power of the village's Ağa but not yet fully citizens. Nonetheless, they are also witnesses and agents of "processes of construction/destruction" involving the "re-formation of subjectivities and the re-organization of social spaces in which subjects act and are acted upon." (Asad, 1992:337).

As such, and as in fact was already made quite clear by the accounts given by the forms of peasant discontent against lack of land distribution and taxation on the first decades of the republic, the effort of modern state formation in Turkey is intertwined, for its impacts on relatively isolated villages and peasants, with peasant's emergence as political agents, more or less conscious of such and more or less politicized (as well as populistically appropriated) for electoral gains, after all "In a modernizing society the successful party is born in the city but matures on the countryside" (Huntington, 1968:434).

Regarding the Turkish case, we can find firstly, on the arousal of tensions between a tax-paying peasantry and a growing provincial landowning elite (*ayan*) over landed estates *Çiftliks*<sup>45</sup> (Faroqhi, 1987:20), within the eighteenth and nineteenth century Ottoman empire, the seeds of peasant dispossession from the land and the expansion of sharecropping. In fact, the emergence of export-oriented farming is linked with the spread of landed estates (*Çiftliks*) owned by provincial elites (*ayan*), employing sharecroppers, and which became the standard taxpaying unit (Spyropoulos, Poullos

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its rule means that it is the only body of political organization and domination that can exert legitimate violence.

<sup>45</sup> "a unit of indeterminate size whereby the essential thing implied was ownership (or at least entitlement) by one party and actual production by others" (McGowan 1994: 681)

and Anastasopoulos, 2020). Although the undeniable link, the relation between this land tenure, international trade and peasant dispossession is not immediate as the formation of these landed estates throughout the empire was not homogeneous (Faroghi, 1987:20), and a differentiation of the peasantry, much less disintegration, did not follow.

While in the rest of Europe the development of capitalism demanded the dispossession of the peasantry, in Turkey the peasantry was not dispossessed until technological change with the introduction of industrial manufacturers after the 1950s. But even when that dispossession occurred it was still different from the one that occurred in Europe where the presence of wage-labor and hired labor in agriculture became dominant. Considering the political-legal and material conditions of land during the Ottoman Empire, which delayed the full development of capitalist agriculture with wage-labor, the increase of scale of production was yet possible “without altering the labor process of the independent peasantry, through sharecropping” (Keyder, 1983:53). After 1923, with the early republican period, despite processes of differentiation in rural villages and emerging large landholding employing wage labor or sharecroppers, most of the agricultural producers remained found in petty-commodity production highly dependent on family labor.

Therefore, there were two main tendencies regarding the dominant mode of tenure in rural Turkey set by an “interplay between concentration and fragmentation” translated into a “tension between sharecropping and small peasantry” (Keyder, 1983:130). This tension was particularly visible before the 1950s where periods indicate the growth of sharecropping in Anatolia (Keyder, 1983; Morvaridi, 1990) but ended with the cycle of development propelled by the so-called decade of transition (1945-1955). A transition from a society of peasant holdings with no individual property rights as set by former sultanic law, to small peasant petty commodity producers with recognized land ownership under the 1945 Law for Providing Land to the Farmer (Keyder 1993: 178).

But if dispossession of the peasantry in Turkey did not follow the formula of predominance of wage labor in agriculture, rural politics both pre-war and post-war period, along with the mechanization supported by the Marshall Plan (Yıldırım, 2017) have seen not only different populist appropriation of the peasantry for electoral politics, which brought the Democratic Party to power in 1950, ending the single-party period, but also deployed massive flows of rural-to-urban mobilities on 50s-60s period. Turkey's depeasantization and deruralization are correlated by the division of smallholdings into smaller parts. Between 1927 and 1950 the population grew over 7 million, of which 5.5 million in rural areas.

A higher number of households meant, as result of inheritance (an historical factor in rural Turkey), higher division of lands, driving family farmers further below subsistence levels and pushing for rural migration (Yıldırım, 2017:90).

**Table 7. % of agricultural holdings < 10 ha, 1963-2006**

	1963	1970	1980	1991	2001	2006
<10 ha	79%	80%	82,3%	82,9%	81,8%	78,9%

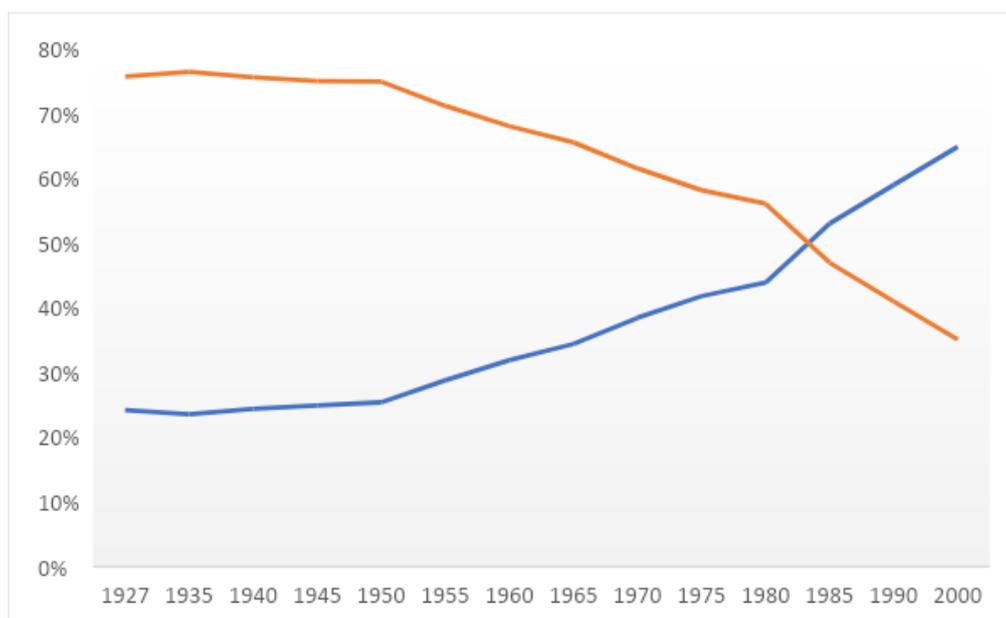
Source: TURKSTAT, 2008; 2010

**Table 8. Average farm size, agricultural land and holdings, 1950-2001**

	1950	1963	1970	1980	1991	2001
Average farm size (ha)	7.7	5.5	5.6	6.4	5.9	6.1
Total agricultural land (Million ha)	19.4	17.1	17	22.7	23.4	18.4
Total no. holdings (million)	2.5	3.1	3.0	3.5	3.9	3.0

Source: Oztürk et al. (2018:249) citing Miran (2005:12-3) and DİE (2003)

**Figure 5.** Proportion of City and Village population in total (%), 1927-2000



Source: TÜİK (2000)

For the case of Turkey, it cannot be argued that *latifundium* or the plural *latifundia*<sup>46</sup> is part of its agrarian political economy and that it has set the conditions by which land rights resistance was ever formed in the country. Nonetheless, it shares with the case of Brazil that the first attempts for land reform, those attempted by the single-party regime (1930s-1940s), were dictated by a landed elite. Although the literature on the processes of land reform attempts, culminating with the Law of 1945 presents controversies and differences of analysis, it seems reasonable to accept Karaömerlioğlu's reading (2000) that the land reforms attempts combined "a variety of concerns" among which are an "ideology of peasantism" to contain potential rural unrest that could also, in case of collapsing agrarian structures and livelihoods precipitate an rural-to-urban transferred proletarianization risking to propel socialist ideas, and to strengthen "Republican nationalist ideology in the countryside" for

<sup>46</sup> Not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America, the heavy colonial heritage of *latifundia* marks one of the "most striking social and economic disabilities" (Dean, 1971, 606) of the region. The predominant presence of large estates was neither resolved nor much less eliminated by the newly independent nations after most of the independent processes culminated in the early nineteenth century.

regime support (Ibid. 115). Same author argues that it is essential to understand the role of the aforementioned defined peasantist ideology to analyze the attempts of land reform because it allows primacy to political and ideological factors more than an exclusive economic explanation on the reasons behind the new republican elite intentions with the land reform considering that landlords were significantly present at the ruling bloc of the 1930s-1940s. This is why Karaömerlioğlu considers that “the nature of the political system and dominant ideology of the period cannot be fully understood without it [the land reform]” (117), which acquire an even greater importance considering that the land reform is deeply connected with the transition to a multi-party regime in 1946, only one year after the law that marked the culmination of the land reform<sup>47</sup> discussions and that it is argued (Birtek and Keyder, 1975; Yıldırım, 2017) as a game-changer for the loss of power of the Republican People’s Party (RPP) to the Democrat Party (DP) in the first elections in 1950.

The fact that in the early years of the Republic the peasant population was around 80 per cent of total population (Karaömerlioğlu, 2000), a largely majority as it had been in the Ottoman Empire, the world economic conjecture of global agriculture prices decrease due to the Great Depression, allied domestically to the severe crisis left by the national liberation wars, as well as the increasing complaints with the arbitrary use of power of tax-collectors in rural areas, led to an increased concern of the Kemalist elites with the peasantry. It is in this context that Village Institutes to raise educational levels of the peasant population are introduced. In despite of the mentioned growing concern, as Yıldırım (2017, 116) argues, this is a period in which the peasants “became more visible as an active component of politics” as opposed to the “imagine existence of the peasantry” during the previous political order of the Ottoman Empire.

The result of their active participation in politics, the same authors state, was also a gaining of consciousness in terms of political existence. Therefore, as it follows, this important rupture regarding politics and the peasantry marked a new arena of political

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<sup>47</sup> Law for Providing Land to Farmers (LPLF) on the translation of Karaömerlioğlu (2000) or Land Reform Law (LRL) on the translation of Yıldırım (2017). For the upcoming references to the law we will be using the latter form.

struggles in which the interests of the peasantry, at a populist level, were better captured by the DP's new rhetoric as they more effectively grasped the peasants' rights demands. On the other hand, the RPP fearing a revolutionary potential of the peasantry "tried to leave the peasants outside the political realm" (Ibid. 123), failing to understand that, first, the fact that most of the peasantry was constituted by independent small-scale producers "could not have much revolutionary potential" (Keyder, 1999, 174), and second that with the transition to a multi-party system peasants participation in politics did not need the intermediary role of the rural representative of the central power, following an arisen of peasant's own understanding of importance in politics.

In fact there was on a the period following the first elections an hostile perspective towards the DP, within which regards the peasantry as passive supports that have been deceived: "the supporters of the RPP and statist policies later try to claim that the 1950 victory of the DP was nothing but the conservative reaction of the peasants, who rejected keeping up with the modernizing elites under the influence of distant religious leaders" (Keyder, 1990, 54 cited in Yıldırım, 2017, 121-2). This not only shows that the RPP regarded the opposition as an enemy of 'the people' as the people supported a continuous modernizing project now interrupted but also that their political will had deceived a 'passive' and 'uneducated' peasantry. The active role of the peasantry emerged as an important role in the outcome of the 1950 elections, and although not revolutionary, shows that the activation of their political existence was very much willing to display its political exercise and interests.

Nonetheless, the political analysis that resulted from this period both implicitly accept the role of the peasantry as open to the deceit of political populism, emphasizing their passivity. This is a crucial continuous assumption regarding the peasant-state relations of subalternity-paternalism reinforced from the fact that, contrary to the case of Brazil in which accounts of peasant rebellions emerge very early in history and the mid twentieth century sees the first organized peasant mobilizations, later to be movements, there are no records of such in Turkey besides the mentioned everyday forms of resistance such as public discontent and protests (Metinsoy, 2021).

In any case, despite the differences in the reading of the active/passive role of the peasantry in terms of national politics and their own political consciousness, it is undeniable that the land reform and the LRL is a key issue to understand the political developments after the transition to a multi-party regime and the peasant-state debate. And that is why precisely, so much interest has emerged on the reasons why the RPP's elite invested on land reform attempts considering the risks of such, considering their own ranks of landed elite but also that it was a radical measure contrary to the overall political direction of the single-party era (Keyder and Pamuk, 1984) , which means, as stated before, to not to steer radical changes on villages and not bring politics into the countryside. It has also been argued, from a more strictly economic rationale, that the law was an attempt to increase agricultural productivity in order to extract more surplus for the country's initial industrialization (Birttek and Keyder, 1975). Be as it may, the political conjecture of 1945-1950 marks the center of the beginning of a changing perception of peasants in politics, but which is not followed by the formation of peasant's class consciousness and of widely organized rebellions or movements. Furthermore, land is also at the very core of the most impressive set of peasant forms of struggle in twentieth century Turkey, which were the land occupations in the 1960s and 1970s.

Providing the political context of such land occupations, Gürel, Küçük and Taş (2022, 9-10) strikingly point out that the “political atmosphere in the aftermath of the military coup on May 27, 1960, undoubtedly favored peasant mobilization” and that despite the anti-democratic clauses of the newly established 1961 Constitution, two of its articles, transcribed below, were not only important for the peasantry “but frequently referred...to legitimize land occupations.”

The State shall adopt the measures needed to achieve the efficient utilization of land and to provide land for those farmers who either have no land, or own insufficient land. For this purpose, the law may define the size of tracts of land according to different agricultural regions and types of soil. The State shall assist farmers in the acquisition of agricultural implements. (Article 37, 1961 Constitution of Republic of Turkey cited in Gürel, Küçük and Taş, 2022, 10)  
The State and other corporate bodies, where public interest deems it necessary, are authorized, subject to the principles and procedures as set forth in the pertinent law, to expropriate the whole or part of any immovable property

under private ownership, or to impose an administrative servitude thereon provided that the true equivalent value is immediately paid in cash. The form of payment of the true equivalent values of land expropriated for the purpose of enabling farmers to own land, for nationalization of forests, for afforestation, and for accomplishing the establishment of settlement projects, shall be provided by law. (Article 37, 1961 Constitution of Republic of Turkey cited in Gürel, Küçük and Taş, 2022, 10)

While the first clearly refers to land reform and to the attribution of land by the State to landless or small holders that do not have enough, we could suppose, for subsistence, the second article opens up another way for land reform based on expropriation. Adding to this political context, it is also important to refer that is also precisely in this period, 1961, that the socialist movement in Turkey (namely the foundation of the Workers' Party of Turkey [Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TİP]) entering to parliament in 1965 and which had the peasant's rights at the center of their agenda, to which it can be added that "between 1960 and 1971 successive governments prepared ten different land reform draft laws. None of these drafts was legislated by the Turkish parliament" (Ibid., 11).

Relations marked by a continuous struggle with the state over property, control of land and agricultural labor (Jacoby, 2008, 253) from the Ottoman Empire to the Republican period are ever present key issues of the Turkish agrarian context. If during the Ottoman Empire the peasantry kept petty commodity production as the main mode of production, even during the nineteenth century periods of rapid commercialization, the new civil code of land that made private land easier to acquire also "helped to consolidate the predominance of peasant property" as well as "landless and wage-labor have not emerged [predominantly] as generalized consequences of agrarian change.

As such, the persistence of petty commodity production in the country as well as debates over agrarian structure and rural conflict in the country are mediated by factors "directly emanating from the state" (Keyder, 1993, 176). The centrality of the state in the Turkish peasantry analysis emerges as well from the fact that, similarly to the "types of Ottoman market" the early Republican state established itself as the "primary buyer of a wide range of commodities" (like cereals) which is read of a two goal

maintenance of the centrality of the state; first to decentralize challenges to authority of the state and second to keep agri-food supplies to urban centers (Jacoby, 2008, 257).

The dominance of the centrality of the state type of analysis has also been responsible for the overlooking of the exploited condition of Ottoman peasantry and the state's attitude of indifference (Aytekin, 2008) despite the fact that in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century as well as in earlier periods there are registered "were several significant rural uprisings, instances of popular resistance, and protests" (Aytekin, 2012, 192). Same is valid for the overlooked everyday forms of resistance in the first decades of the new Republic as well as studied by Metinsoy (2021), or even later during the 1950s elections where it is acknowledged the peasant support for landed groups due to "mild commercialization, coupled with durable patron-client ties" but also the "more radical guise" of the political participation of the peasantry in "highly commercialized parts of coastal Turkey" (Rodrik, 1982, 437-8).

For his turn Keyder (1983a) defines analyses different types of development paths of rural transformation giving empirical accounts of variations petty commodity production in different villages that despite the domination of capitalism continued to thrive, but also giving accounts of land conflicts emerging in geographies, like the Kurdish-majority southeastern, where ambiguous land tenure records opposed sharecroppers and landlords who they claimed have illegally appropriated state property (1983b). In both cases, Rodrik and Keyder, despite touching on the political participation of the peasantry that emerged from the persistence of small-scale farming amid different levels of agriculture commercialization in the country, as well as land conflicts from contested land lord's seizing of former state's land, there is but only a "scant attention to the role of peasant struggles" (Gürel, Küçük and Taş, 2022, 1), namely, how conflicts were organized, managed and expressed in terms of a defined or diffuse nature of peasant's political claims and agency.

This lack of academic attention especially devoted to the struggles *as such* and not only in the reasoning from which they emerge, helps to explain why only much later, due to the particular heated and antagonistic political context of the 1960s-1970s as

“the heyday of both social movements and left-wing radicalism in Turkey” (Ibid.) Attempting to contribute to the lack, in the literature of rural politics in Turkey, of analysis of rural struggles in the country Gürel, Küçük and Taş (2022) collected reports on land question and land occupation from national and local newspapers as well as leftist periodicals spanning the 1965-1980 period, allied to field work, and provide a list of 56 land occupations, although they believe the real number is much higher as not all occupations deserved press coverage. Their analysis based on the archival and fieldwork focusing on the types of land occupations and the contentious issues on their origin, allowed them to identify three main varieties, which they classify as related with farm mechanization and resulting labor displacement, organized to protect village commons and targeting public land outside landlord control (Ibid. 14).

Curiously, the protection of village commons appears as one of the recent issues to which the case-study movement Çiftçi-Sen organized a mobilization campaign. The political economy of land conflicts in Turkey has acquired novel issues that differ from the three varieties identified for the 1965-1980 period and also important to refer that land occupation as a form of struggle does not constitute a form of resistance on the agency of the movement to be focused upon neither record of such is part of the rural politics in the twenty-first century Turkey. However, if most of the land occupations identified by the authors are especially contextualized on the 1965-1971 period (where 49 of the total 56 identified land occupations occurred) as the “peak before the military coup on March 12, 1971” which means signaling a specific political context of radicalism and fervorous ideological clashes, one can also identify the growing rural unrest of the recent past years in Turkey as potentially catalyzing organized forms of protests.

In sum, for the case of Turkey, either a majority of independent peasants that due to extensive marketization in rural villages continued to run the production ‘machine’ “by the peasantry....but not for the peasantry” (Araghi, 2000:151 cited on Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010:273), or they were the protagonists of a rural exodus to form a proletarianized urban poor, *gecekondu* (squatters) inhabitants (Stirling, 1993; Tekelli, 2011). That “large and resilient peasantry” (Oztürk *et al.*, 2018:250) persists in Turkey

today, whose issues relate not only to rural sociology but also to the emergence of urban sociology in the country.

#### **4.2. Rural Turkey in the 21st century: neoliberal developmentalism and authoritarian populism.**

Recent research (Gürel, Küçük and Taş, 2019) argues that AKP's authoritarian populism, which coercively prevents emancipatory political alternatives in rural areas, has been successfully linked with assistencialism and electoral bargaining with small farmers and villagers for agricultural subsidies, expansion of social assistance and new infrastructure plans. The achievement of creating a rural root of support for the party is related with a favorable macro-political economic conjecture that AKP benefitted on the first decade on power (2002-2013) which sustained the establishment of a hegemonic right-wing populism "that helped the AKP counterbalance its neoliberal policies with pragmatic developmentalist moves and social assistance programmes" (Karataşlı and Kumral, 2022, 3).

Despite the former, Turkey is also seeing the emergence of a new wave of ecological activism collaborating with peasant activism against development projects with paramount ecological consequences (Arsel, Akbulut and Adaman, 2015) but also producing considerable human losses after disastrous events, resulting from a triad of neoliberal developmentalism, authoritarian populism and extractivism (Adaman, Arsel and Akbulut, 2019). But it is yet to be seen if political accountability and change is to be produced by the current climate of politicization of the rural. The mentioned recent politicization of the rural is related with a different role taken by civil society organizations that distinguishes itself from that of the past for the newly emergent "civic mobilization in relation to women's, human and environmental rights" and where "tension between state and civil society are particularly evident in environmental issues" (Parker et al., 2013, 761).

In fact, studying the politicization of the rural from the lenses of rural struggles demands to go beyond the land question in terms of its tenure, labor and food system.

It demands to consider how the “increasingly aggressive modernization and industrialization” (Ibid.) represented by “three interrelated dynamics” of “authoritarian populism, neoliberal developmentalism, and extractivism” that can be located “at the intersection of neoliberal capitalism’s crisis of accumulation...and inequality” (Adaman, Arsel and Akbulut, 2019, 516) in Turkey is facing the birth of contact points a new arena of struggle, before traditionally seeing peasant struggles but is now allied environmental struggles.

But also how “cross-class alliances to resist development projects” (Arsel, Akbulut and Adaman, 2015, 393) can produce a much wider and broad societal audience of support, considering that, first environmentalism is one of the most consensual critiques to the neoliberal developmentalist of the AKP (Arsel, 2012), and second because challenging the authority of the state by an alliance of urban-rural movements (animated by peasant livelihood protection but also ecosystems in general) is less likely to fall for a ‘divide and conquer’ isolationist tactics of protest repression of the current government.

These tactics of repression have become more accentuated and aggressive as the consequences of AKP’s neoliberal developmentalism are producing crisis in different social classes in Turkey, and particularly in the countryside has been eroding the previous stable rural roots of the party, marking a move from the hegemonic right-wing populism of the first decade to an authoritarian right-wing populism from 2013 until the present (Karataşlı and Kumral, 2022).

However, as the authoritarian stance of the power becomes more aggressive to face adversities of reality and emergent discontent, aforementioned authors also alert for the lack of a strong left-wing populist movement capable of politically capitalizing such discontent and leaving the possibilities for progressive transformation or a new wave of right-wing populism. There are at least two points of contact between these two brief accounts of questions about the agrarian political economy of land in Brazil and in Turkey that, even without the will of trying to get comparative conclusions, provide interesting lessons about commonalities of peasant struggle on/for the land.

The first is the historical state-centric processes around land reform, that although with very different consequences on the current agrarian land question in both countries, express similarly how landed elites in the nineteenth and twentieth century were the political powerholders for land reform discussions and/or (lack of) implementation.

The second is again the centrality of the state with a reinforced emphasis on the state as the key agent of development, figuring a neo-developmentalism, and its relationship with extractivism and processes of authoritarianism and populism. From the first results a weighted history of state-peasant tension that in Brazil is responsible for the inability to change the latifundia dominant agrarian structure and in Turkey for the political appropriation of the peasantry populistically to deny organized political action but which can be animated by an emergent environmental-centered resistance. From the second results challenges for rural social movements regarding close relations with political parties, such as the MST and PT closeness case, or a type of challenge that coercively denies the right to exist and to be institutional represented on the political arena as a recognized movement.

This brief account was given to justify the references to Brazil regarding the state, agrarian structures and political agency of the peasantry under the form of rural social movements, throughout the study while emphasizing that it is not a comparative analysis that is attempted but rather an heuristic use of a strong historical case of state-peasant tension to illustrate how different historical trajectories produce different paths of rural settings for the peasantry, yet with similar contentious issues producing conflicts and resistance, that can work to better locate the Turkish peasantry on the global context of rural politics.

What makes the word peasant different in our days, it will be argued, is its political agency reflected on the project of agroecological agrarian transition aligned around the concept of food sovereignty and of practices of sustainable food systems and food security by small-scale peasant agriculture around the globe. Nonetheless, before we come to define this political agency assertion of the peasantry – political in the sense that practices are defined by opposition to the corporate food regime for fundamental

change in the organization of food systems away from extractivist agriculture – we must first define quite carefully what we mean by the word ‘peasant’ having in consideration both its historical changes and arrangements. It is thus needed to be analytically precise, and to distinguish them from other social groups, farming, and non-farming, in the countryside. Particularly the agrarian change or transitions and how they affect peasant households and peasant economies. And this is also why the agrarian question referred to widely in this chapter is also still a current one, perhaps more than ever.

If we read about rural social groups, we will encounter mixed vocabulary along the word ‘peasant’. One may find ‘farmers’, ‘family farmers’, ‘small-scale producers’ or ‘petty-commodity producers’, ‘sharecroppers’, ‘rural workers’, ‘agricultural people’, ‘country-dwellers’, ‘rural people’ or even ‘people of the land’. Perhaps the wisest way to understand what peasants are may be to accept a loose definition as well as look at its ambiguity as “its only specificity” or is “most valuable feature” (Cooper, 1981:285-6) and that way we can perhaps understand that the controversy and even obscurity on the definition of this social group lies on a complex locus of constant tensions between the declared death and persistence of world peasantries which emerges from the fact that the peasantry persists as a unique and intricate relation of production with the land.

This uniqueness is particularly well reflected by the formula “it is not the farmers who own the land but the land that owns the peasants” (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). But also considering that on the abrupt changes that the mechanisms of redistribution of peasants’ economies have undergone with the incorporation into modern economic processes brought by capitalism incorporation into agriculture, peasants remained not a fully incorporated social group but one in-between pre-modern economic features and the establishment of capitalism and the global dominant political economic model. In other words, if capitalism is often defined as by setting a divide between owners of means of production under which laborers work, the peasants may and may not fully own or control land, as they may fully own land, control it over a given period due to a lease or rental arrangement or they may be landless sharecroppers. Besides, as it follows if another feature of capitalism is the presence of hired wage labor (in

agriculture this a key feature of the capitalist agrarian transition), then peasants may only depend on non-monetized labor arrangements such as unpaid family labor, but which can also be paid family labor, or they may as well as rely on episodically/seasonal hired labor to complement the household one.

At last and considering both ownership of means of production and presence of hired wage labor, there can as well be arrangements in which besides working on owned or rented land employing labor directly from the household, members of the household may be involved as wage laborers in off-farm agricultural or non-agricultural from which an important, though not primary, source of income is taken. When we considered the entrenchments of world peasantries facing the pressures of capitalist agriculture and its extractivist orientation and the countervailing resistance against it we then capture the political nature of the words “land that owns the peasants” but accompanied by that resistance, particularly in the developing, the capitalist agrarian transition meant a growing dependence on farming or off-farm wage labor to sustain farming activities or even to retain owned land, crucial for subsistence of peasant families that “often live on the margins, [are] rarely prosperous, often precarious, and commonly poor” (Akram-Lodhi, 2021).

This dependency is commonly described by simultaneous processes of proletarianization of peasants and consequent depeasantization of rural societies. On the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the corporate food regime (McMichael, 2013) dispossess land and further the extractivism orientation of capitalist agriculture pressuring a further retrenchment of global peasantries to the already thin margins of food insecurity and making wage labor as longer a simple complement or a strategy of survival to retain peasant’s farming practices or to persist as farmers, but the *only* and primary activity of rural populations in developing countries.

We have spoken so far of conditions by which peasant’s remain either incorporated, fully or partially, as subjects of that agrarian transition, into capitalist agriculture, either by choice, by no choice at all, or as a quiet strategy of resistance to keep a possible autonomy on owned land. This ambiguity of economic and class positions

reflected from living arrangements is at the core of the difficulty to define this social group but also why as a descriptive term it does remain useful, especially when referring to the history of rural societies, however when it is to be employed in an analytical way to critically address particular social and economic structures, as this dissertation of the peasantry in Turkey intends, then facing that ambiguity is needed and an effort of placing clearly an approach on the peasantry needs to be presented.

In accordance with the previous statement that the agrarian question is, at this dissertation, to be taken as a question of rural politics, it must follow then that the analytical approach to the peasantry in Turkey must focus on its revealed appropriation by the field of rural politics in the country: by figure of the historical State's paternalistically contentious of the rural masses to prevent (but not only) potential "destructive social revolutions" (Karaömerlioğlu 2000:124) or a recent populist interplay between the extractivist regime from which funded-projects create job prospects and pro-poor social transfers rural poor as bargaining chips for electoral support in rural areas (Gürel, Küçük, and Taş, 2019).

Amid different types of State appropriation, applying consent over multiple contentious issues, such as accumulation by dispossession, extractivism, indebtedness and a worsened rural poverty along a gendered labor regime, which constitute the current sociological portrayal of rural Turkey, there are histories by peasant's own right of resistance, although mostly by irregular protests in the countryside and the recent struggle of a farmer's union to be legally constituted. These episodes spanning the last 100 years of Turkish history, reflect a dualism State vs peasant that can be approached, although not exclusively, by the sociological classic dualism of structure - agency. Heuristically, this approach is useful to organize historically the different periods of these interactions and resulting contentious of potential peasant rebellions in Turkey. We must, however, not to turn this heuristic tool into an essentialist approach which would take on processes of depeasantization and repeasantization – the first a result of the destructive forces of capitalist agrarian transition and the second the responding persistence or resistance in the Turkish countryside – as unilinear.

If depeasantization is often linked to disappearance of the peasant mode of production, turning peasants into rural wage laborers in capitalist farm enterprises, it is quite often part of diversified income strategies to retain control of land and own productions. This is visible and established “fact that small farming in Turkey not only survives but remains strong in numbers” and it is part of a recent analytical approach that considers survival strategies of diversification of income as “dynamic power of Turkey's new peasantry to take action and determine its own development” (Öztürk, Jongerden and Hilton, 2018: 247). Depeasantization in Turkey is, and in many other cases where rapid capital-intensive agriculture changed market conditions affecting rural populations, especially small farming, usually correlated with another process redefining social relations of production and labor arrangements in rural areas, that of proletarianization. Indeed, as Lenin (1964) argued, capitalism increased labor division and commodity production leading to differentiation, but the peasantry in Turkey neither saw its demise nor wage labor came to be predominant. Although also foreseeing the demise of the peasantry, Kautsky (1988) argued that proletarianization was decoupled from dispossession and so the first could occur in different forms. The Turkish proletarianization followed, for example, not only sharecropping by landless or smallholding peasant, working for wages in large cotton fields of the southern Anatolia Çukurova Valley, or proletarianization of rural poor moving to cities – but yet retaining owned small plots of land. This is precisely what Yıldırım (2017: 52) argues when saying that “the transformations of rural structures and internal migration are intertwined problems, so it is not possible to discuss one without the other”. Turkey reveals then a curious case where capitalist led depeasantization took place but neither meaning a demise of the peasantry nor a radical change on small ownership predominance.

As such, depeasantization and repeasantization in Turkey assume quite often an interplay of processes which makes them overlap, as for instance a peasant who engages in off-farm labor to retain land or even obtain more to increase output of own production with employment of family labor and whose household younger generations will be able to reproduce its past cycles of peasant economy, although with diversified strategies of income. There are contentious issues at stake, as labor

precarity and financial insecurity resulting from a recent trend of indebtedness in rural areas (which will be discussed later), making the example given above resemble an idyllic picture which is not often reality.

Getting back on track of the irreversibly ambiguous path of the social group of the peasants – the peasantry – as a concept that does not “fit well into any of our concepts of contemporary society” (Shanin, 1966:6) it is important to take in consideration that in the ‘contemporary’ state when Shanin’s states the unfit of the term still relates to our contemporary moment. And if as before, it was said that it is on its ambiguity that the peasantry has its uniqueness and its most defining feature this is only possible since “peasant society and culture has something generic about it (...) [while as well] with some similarities all over the world” (Redfield, 1956:25).

We will argue from here that that “something generic about it” providing the observation of global similarities lies on the proven ability of the peasantry “for cohesive political action, not only when facing traditional land-owners” but also “into political conflicts with large capitalist land-owners” (Shanin, 1966:16) varying the degrees by which the State acts in favor of one or the other side of the barricade, or when the State is no longer the organizing principle of political economical allocation of resources but a facilitator of capital doing that job with the advent of neoliberalism. Therefore, the chosen path for observing and stating those generic features but yet with global similarities are the moments in which political action of the peasantry erupts and its action with or against the political elites which capture at given moments the resources of the State. The reason why we believe this is a possible defining path of the peasantry, contributing therefore to clarify our analytically precise use of it, is contained in another argument. That argument goes aligned with two historical assumptions regarding capitalism that explain the contradicting presence of the peasantry within capitalism and the representation of backwardness as a relic of the pre-capitalist order that those assumptions make out of the peasantry.

The first assumption is that in the accounts of the history of capitalism there is *no origin*, as if “the seeds of capitalism are contained in the most primitive acts of

exchange” and before its emergence and establishment exchange relations and markets were simply only waiting to be “released from its chains (...) to be allowed to grow and mature” (Wood, 2017:4). The second assumption is that the process of that awaiting to be released from the chains of economic and political restrictions (may them be parasitic feudal structures of feudalism or an autocratic state in the old regime) is represented as “history has been an almost natural process of technological development” (Wood, 2017: 5).

The second assumption takes the peasant family holdings and the moral economy of the society of small producers in a village where “the individual in his own right does not count, he is but a part of the family whole” (Shanin, 1966:11) as nothing but a historical stage to which industrialization would break this frame and elevate the individual as the fundamental nuclear unit of society. The second places this new frame of society as the natural one to be dominant as soon as the expansion of the markets and technological development are mature enough and wealth is accumulated for the production and reproduction of the commodification cycles, namely in agriculture. The ontological consequences of this assumption for the history of development and the idea of development itself are the “stress the continuity between non-capitalist and capitalist societies” denying the specificity of capitalism under the guise of a natural process leading to it as a historical pinnacle. As if there were no rational exchanges before the capitalist market exchanges, as if every small and medium farmer just awaited the dawn of history to turn, finally, into capitalist farmers, as if this capitalist road equals the inevitable direction of human nature. The consequences that follow for the peasantry are the qualification of peasant’s logic as absent and its economic behavior irrational and this is the deepest assumption of the disappearance of the peasantry through the passage of time upon the advent of the capitalist agrarian transition which turns peasants into farmers and farms into enterprises, into commodified units of production for the market.

If on the 21<sup>st</sup> century we (still) speak about persistence of the peasantry when looking at the causes of rural poverty (Boltvinik and Man, 2016), we speak of class dynamics of agrarian change in capitalism (Bernstein) and resistance of peasants by fashion of

ongoing struggles for food (Van der Ploeg, 2013; McMichael, 2013) or organized with networks that cross national boundaries (Edelman and Borras, 2016) is because the absence of peasant's rationality given by the referred assumptions is in fact rather "a frame of reference and pattern of thought particular to the group, and serving their needs" (Shanin, 1966: 11). Again, if the peasantry persists, if the peasantry changes and particularly if resists, then the political factors of its existence are not redundant with a social group that is not but a relic on the natural course of capitalism, but a group with an existence that can be defined by its political influence within a society (consciously or unconsciously) presented on the importance of its essential produce for humankind's survival but also from its distinctive feature of a "highly self-sufficient society in itself". It is from this duality that political conflicts emerge, particularly when the self-sufficiency of the peasant family, mostly by fashion of access to land, is threatened, that political action may arise.

#### **4.2.1. From the developmental State to neoliberal developmentalism**

To assess the developmental state<sup>48</sup>, from which partly the theory of new developmentalism emerges in-between state autonomy and capacity to intervene in industrial transformation amid globalization transnational relations, two main perspectives will be seen on their different approaches and critiques, in order to proceed forward following one. The basis of the concept is to be found on institutionalist argument which divides between strong states and weak states accordingly to the capacities of institutions of given states to have higher degrees of autonomy from groups of society but also the capacity to negotiate (or simply impose) from within, in order to implement economy policies and achieve developmental goals.

It also criticizes the Marxist concept of relative autonomy of the state, in which state's autonomy is captured by the dominant classes' interests for capital accumulation. From

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<sup>48</sup> The historical context on the emergence of the concept is the early 80s, marked by the transition process of late capitalist countries from import substitution model to export-oriented industrialization.

the Marxist perspective, when state -led developmental strategies fail, the reasons are not to be found just on the weak state institutional capacity which political elites did not achieve to establish, but rather on the capitalist class, or the national bourgeoisie, resistance against strong institutions, for their own interests. In corporatist regimes strong institutions are, partly, only achieved for they provide state guarantees for the creation of monopolies for the national bourgeoisie.

One of the most cited classical theorizations of the state is the one by Max Weber. He was among the first to understand that a meaningful sociological approach to the state must include not only its ultimate legitimacy of rule (widely known as the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory*) forming the sphere of domestic political order but also the maneuvers of advantage/disadvantage, conditioned by historical contexts, on the transnational relations with other states (Weber, 1978). From the first, Weber unfolds the state by its coercive, administrative, legal and bureaucratic systems which rationalize and intermediate the relations between civil society and public authority, but also on how social groups organize within civil society as well as on the possibilities to engage politically and make demands. In other words, in a contemporary fashion, the top-down structures of state authority and the bottom-up civil arena of political struggles. From the latter, transnational relations between states, Weber employs, as an early precursor, his methodology of historical comparative sociology, or known as *comparative historical institutionalism*, focused on testing causality hypothesis to explain how transnational historical contexts shape and condition the development of individual states domestically and reciprocally.

In sum, “the modern state as we know it, and as Weber and Hintze conceptualized it, has always been, since its birth in European history, part of a system of competing and mutually involved states” (Skocpol 1985, 8). In terms of the definition of domestic politics and its translation on the action of governments through policymaking and decision-making, how does it approach the state? As Burstein (1987) well reminds on his revision of Skocpol *Bringing the State Back In*, the choice of focus to approach the state should reasonably include “state promotion of economic development and

redistribution, determinants of state capacities, and state influence on social and political conflict” (1269). In other words, a study on state’s autonomy and capacity to pursue its goals assumes the state as an *actor* and implies that the determinants of state’s autonomy are not only the capacity of dominant social groups to taken over the control over state power aligned to wider transnational structures for protection of corporatist interests. The Latin America of the 60s and 70s presents different “exclusionary” or “inclusionary” state coups installing corporatist regimes (Stepan 2015).

But also on the potential of likewise powerful opposition forces which after taking over the state, overthrown dominant groups and reorient national economic development in a manner of "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures" by grassroots class-based revolts (Skocpol 2015). The post-80s neo-Weberian literature leaded by (Skocpol, 1985) and by (Evans 1995) sustains this state-centric approach, asserting that it is the autonomy of the state and its capacity to organize, and bureaucratically regulate, the balances between public authority and civil society which offer developmental prospects. It is through this institutionalism that development in different countries is compared. From here derives the critique to the Marxist society-centered where the power of the state comes from society and thus from the historical antagonism between classes. In other words, the Marxist approach, on the institutionalist critique, overlooks the possibility of complete autonomy of the state presented on the power of state administrators, or a bureaucratic elite. The neo-Weberian approach recaptures from the Weberian orthodoxy that strong states may act completely isolated from social and pressure groups and impose the achievement of its goals through the enforcement of rational bureaucracy – “Turkey’s Ataturk revolution” is given as an example of such (Skocpol 1985, 10).

In a different critique to the Marxist *relative autonomy* of the state, Evans (1995) approach to the developmental state is done using the concept of *embedded autonomy*. The concept “is based on the contradictory synthesis between the internal integrity [of states’ institutions] and external links of bureaucracy” (Oğuz, 2013, 101) which allows for the intervention in the industrial transformation of the economy forming the main

pillar of the developmental state. In other words, by integral integrity Evans refers to a feature of *autonomy from society* in the Weberian sense also used by Skocpol, while external links refers to the state's capacity to discuss policies with interest groups due to ties established, and therefore there is an *embeddedness in society*. The scheme used by Evans for comparative historical institutionalism is through analysis of internal organization of the state and state-society relations. On his analysis of Brazil of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, to explain why developmental state did not produce positive outcomes in the country (by contrast with S. Korea), regarding autonomy from society, the institutional capacity never reached very strong features because from one side clientelist norms are protected by state apparatus, and from other bureaucrats are replaced in every change at the political power, not allowing for long-term goals regarding development.

As for embeddedness in society, Evans refers to the influential capacity of the big landowners, the rural elite, in preventing the developmental project between state apparatus and the industrial capital or in distorting it for their own clientelist agenda:

Reactionary rural elites were never dramatically swept (...) the traditional symbiosis that connected traditional oligarchs to the state has been reinforced by a perverse “modernization (...) in which landowning families delivered political support in return for the fruits of state patronage (...) and came to rely more and more on access to state resources as their principal source of power and wealth. (Evans 1995, 62-3)

In sum, both institutional autonomy in state internal organization and state relations with society have problems which are mutually reinforced, explaining thus Evans's classification of “intermediate cases” (12). For its turn, analyzing the same issue, for the case of Turkey, Öniş and Şenses (2009) the terminology of “reactive countries” is used to explain the lack of success of the developmental state in Turkey (and likewise in Latin America) since they only act after the emergence of crisis, which contributes for a restriction on their state's autonomy for policy choices. As such, with the crisis of the early 70s the choice for export oriented as responsive to the crisis and therefore immediately limited by the external intervention of the IMF. Besides, the same authors assert that in comparison with

East Asian countries Turkey had much lesser autonomy against big business groups, while the first established such autonomy through “established authoritarian regimes” (737) – although the contemporary presidential system is marked by growing authoritarianism there has not been a change regarding that reactivity.

On a similar argument, analyzing Turkey during the 2008-9 global crisis Öniş and Güven (2011) precisely assert that. Despite a short-term recovery in Turkish economy (much more rapid than in 2001) it “has been fully based on the rebooting of Turkey’s foreign inflow-dependent growth machine with the current account deficit quadrupling since 2009” and so it is a further indication of falling again on the crisis-reactive loop “rather than using it [the crisis] as a window of opportunity to tackle the structural challenges of Turkish development” (604).

For Marx, capital cannot does not have independence from labor as they both constitute a relation in which the first derives from the latter: [capital] “is not a thing, but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society” (Marx, (1991 [1867], 953). As such, the early developmental state’s Marxist critique focuses on how the state capture by the capitalist interests legitimized a political economy of exploitation and accumulation, and therefore maintaining the focus on class struggle.

The capitalist state therefore was the material concentration of specific class relationships and as such could not ever be absolutely autonomous, but rather relatively autonomous (Miliband, Barrow, and Hall 1980). And as relatively autonomous as the capital needs to enforce its politically legitimized domination over labor. On the times of neoliberal globalism that autonomy is relatively as far as it ensures the “integration of late capitalist countries with international capital accumulation process through technology-intensive sectors based on productive capital” (Oğuz, 2013, 117)

As referred to in the introduction (and later to be again regarding the peasantry) the efforts by Wolf on rooting in modes of production the historical results of dominant powers establishing their geographies of capital accumulation from exploitation and the exploited (and as such *without history*) is a certain sense connected with the reformulation of the unit of analysis of development from the nation-state to the “world-system” (Wallerstein 1974). In his world-system analysis Wallerstein defined capitalist relations of production (in a critique of development) as “the relations of production of the whole system” (127). The world-system, is therefore, emphatically described as “an antinomy of states and a single division of labor” where “world inequality was the overriding point of analytical departure” (Phillip McMichael 2000) across the historical global north/south empirical divide. The importance of the notion of antinomy of states for comparative analytical purposes is as well recognized by Tilly (1990, 11) when expressing that at the time most accounts on the formation of European states fail their viability at specific historical stages because “they locate explanations of state-to-state variation in individual characteristics of states rather than in relations among them”. The important questions to make when analyzing the transition from the national developmental(ist) state to the new developmentalist on the neoliberalism epoch are how to keep the centrality of political domination of capital over labor within social relations of production; and the ways by which new developmentalist states relate in transnational networks marked by the contradiction of uneven capital accumulation amid their relative autonomies to pursue development.

I believe a good start or a readiness to answer those questions lies upon the capacity to reactivate the critical approach to the globalization project and its de-institutionalization of monetary relations and wage relations – the first achieved by the capacity of transnational financial institutions (as the IMF) to absolutely constrain state institutions, legitimacy and sovereignty (McMichael, 2015) and the second by the devaluation of wage-labor and its decomposition as a guaranteed pillar of welfare.

I recognize the conceptual usefulness and methodological strength of the comparative historical institutionalism of quoted neo-Weberian scholars particularly on the concepts of state autonomy and capacity to pursue goals as an actor in a national and

international arena of historically defined determinants. As that we devoted the above considerations to the institutionalist perspective. Nonetheless, our later analysis on agricultural land accumulation and surplus extractivism in new developmentalist states on the neoliberal globalism historical frame (F. Araghi 2012) is more accurately captured by the Marxist critical analysis of capitalism today. Particularly on how the (trans)national capital accumulation reinforces the centrality of capital and social relations of production in uneven class relations and antagonism, undermining both state and society autonomy in the polity.

When we speak here of the new developmentalist state, it is about opposing it to two forms of state: on one hand, the liberal state and, on another hand, the old developmentalist state or national-developmentalists.<sup>49</sup>

(Bresser-Pereira and Theuer 2012, 813)

In Latin America while the national-developmentalists state faced a foreign debt crisis in the 1980s the neoliberal's precursors saw it had an open way to ride the so-called Washington consensus and bring back the liberal state. Nonetheless, in a context of globalization and since the liberal state's promises of development were not fulfilled – in fact the unbalances between global north and global south only grew heavier – the developmentalist agendas resurged under a national strategy of development that needed to be adapted to the new times – which came under the guise of new developmentalism. Conceptually, new developmentalist is based on structuralist and Keynesian economics (and this with the state on the forefront of it). For example, in terms of economic promotion stimulated by public funding, the state occupies the central strategic role by achieving a “competitive exchange rate, fiscal responsibility and the increase of the tax burden to finance social expenditure” (Bresser-Pereira and Theuer 2012, 814).

Not only *new developmentalism* (sometimes referred in the literature as ‘neo-developmentalism’) became the base of national development strategy (unfolding as not only as guideline for macroeconomics policy but also for the political economy of growth and stability) of Brazil under PT leadership but the very first use of the term

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<sup>49</sup> Own translation from the original in Portuguese.

has also its origins in Brazil. The Brazilian economist Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira was the first to use the term in 2003<sup>50</sup>, and so new developmentalism or the new developmentalist State is positioned in opposition to two other forms of State; the liberal State (of what is today the neoliberal State), a political system of economic liberalism and minimum State intervention and the developmental or national-developmental State. Therefore, new developmentalist as advocated by Bresser-Pereira in Latin America, emerges from an attempt to propose an alternative to the Washington Consensus (Bresser-Pereira, 2003; Bresser-Pereira, Oreiro and Marconi, 2014). The Brazilian economist who coined the term explains the difference between real occurring developmentalism and his theory on the following way: “Really existing developmentalism is a historical concurrence; it is a form of political and economic organization of capitalism, whereas classical [the old developmentalism] and new developmentalism are economic and political theories aiming to explain progress or human development” (Bresser-Pereira, Oreiro, and Marconi 2014,1).

What the authors intend to clarify is the difference between the reality of developmentalism<sup>51</sup> as capable of organizing capitalism and his “historical-deductive theory based on the successful experiences of fast-growth” in middle-income countries which are “late to the industrial and capitalist revolution” (2). Way of organization of capitalism or a deductive theory bonded to an historical understand of economic growth and stability<sup>52</sup> (as the Brazil and Argentina of the early 2010s) it is a fact that President Lula’s economic policies followed extensively on what senator Mercadante (2010) called “social-developmentalism”.

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<sup>50</sup> This was later to be solidified in a conference which gathered Brazilian and international prominent economists: “On May 24 and 25 of 2010, a group of economists sharing a Keynesian and structuralist development macroeconomics approach convened in São Paulo to discuss ten theses on New Developmentalism. (...) The meeting was part of the financial Governance and the New Developmentalism project, financed by the Ford Foundation. The project has as its background the failure of the Washington Consensus to promote growth in Latin America and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis that showed the limits and dangers involved in financial globalization and financial deregulation.” For more see Brazilian Journal of Political Economy, vol 32, n° 2 (127), pp. 336-339, April-June/2012

<sup>51</sup> Historically, for Bresser-Pereira, the material accumulation that mercantilism as a form of association between the monarchy and the bourgeoisie and the first industrialization that it allowed in England, Belgium and France was the first form of developmentalism.

<sup>52</sup> Historical-deductive method in the sense that generalizes from the historical observation of empirical regularities.

In fact, there are critics of Bresser-Pereira that claim for a new and more socially inclusive new-developmentalism as a real social-developmentalism. Bresser-Pereira responds by saying that the design of new developmentalism already states a criticism of inequality, that there was to be a compromise for a long-term growth of wages and that a country's economic development must answer the demands of the working poor. Therefore, to the economists asking for a social-developmentalism Bresser-Pereira responds, "as if new developmentalism would not be progressive or social [already]" (Bresser-Pereira, Oreiro, and Marconi 2014, 3)

Summing up Bresser-Pereira's theory of new developmentalism, the first assumption is the acceptance that markets are a well-fit regarding the coordination of economy, however they are not to be fully trusted regarding the macroeconomic and microeconomic prices (profit rates, exchange rates, level of interest rates and wage rates). Particularly on the last two, they require State intervention to keep the first as low as possible to allow for business and industry to access capital and as for the latter it has to increase with productivity to allow for standards of living (especially those of the poor) to increase progressively in a satisfactory balance with the profit rate of business, supporting continuous investment. Therefore, markets are to be working, especially with the integration in the global economy, but economic development must be assumed as human development either for security, individual liberties and the reduction of inequalities.

#### **4.2.3. From neoliberal rural transformation to extractivism and authoritarian populism**

*Let us farmers produce, and we will pay our debts*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Declaration from a farmer whose tractor is being taken from him by debt collectors from the State Agricultural Credit Cooperatives of Turkey, in a video message directed to the Minister of Agriculture (Fox Turkey, 28 January 28, 2021). Video available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80DIENN4c 8>.

For countries of middle-income, meaning countries that in global economy dynamics get indebted in foreign money (over which they have no control for depreciation) as it is the current case of Turkey, the new developmentalism thesis state that dependency of a State's in foreign currency should be reduced to avoid exposure, which can result on debt crisis like in the 1980s Latin America. This is again visible in the efforts put forward and successfully achieved to reduce debt to foreign creditors during Lula's terms.<sup>54</sup>

The case of Turkey presents different features, which is visible on the high level of exposure of the country's currency to the dollar demonstrated by the recent years' dramatic devaluation of the Turkish lira. For Turkey then, and to refer to the developmentalism assumed by the AKP's governing periods, the designation of *neoliberal developmentalism* (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2019) is in fact more than accurate. Turkey, as like Brazil, had a "developmentalist cycle" (Taylor, 2006) which ended with the debt crisis, already referred to. The crisis was followed by an intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), introducing the first neoliberal reforms in the country to increase international credibility and to attract foreign investors. The strategy was to attract foreign capital by keeping low inflation rate and overvaluation of currencies to increase domestic purchase power and so to stimulate consumption (Pereira, 2010; Rodrik, 2015). The resulting internationalization of domestic companies, due to increased reliance on foreign direct investment (FDI) as well as privatizations, resulted in a shrinkage of industrial sectors. According to data

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<sup>54</sup> In fact, from 2003 to 2016 Brazil's Foreign Exchange reserves were largely accumulated, when they rose to more than \$350 billion from under \$50 billion. In line with the economic policy to sustain economic growth on key domestic sectors supported by the State or in which the State keeps strong positions ( banks, oil, electricity and aerospace) which assumed global positions with the support of a international trade diplomacy, the country needed to express confidence that the devaluations and hyperinflations of the past would not occur. According to recent data from the U.S. Treasury Brazil is the fourth largest foreign holder of U.S. Treasuries in the world with \$311 billion. Recently (and here we can also see a change of policy from PT's administration) the ministry of Economy of Bolsonaro's government assumed that the country will start to sell the foreign reserves in dollar to increase the exchange value of the Brazilian currency Real, which marks a shift in the Central Bank's policy for a long time. For more see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-markets-fx-policy-analysis/brazils-foreign-exchange-move-paves-way-to-reduce-385-billion-reserve-stash-idUSKCN1V613Z>

from the World Bank, manufacturing industries declined from 26% of Turkey's GDP in 1998 to 18% in 2014.

The country would face its biggest economic crisis in 2001, precisely when the so-far lasting hegemony of the AKP government had its original rising opportunity out of the devastating effects of that crisis – which was also, as the most critical crisis, the culmination of a series of past ones<sup>55</sup>. Due to note that precisely the IMF and other international financial institutions (IFIs) intervention following the 1980s crisis started to cook the conditions (decrease in productivity, growth and increase in income distribution disparities) which led to the 2001 boiling pot of structural vulnerability of the Turkish economy to face the movements of finance capital due to the liberalization of economy that had been occurring since the 1980s (Aydın, 2005,105-7). This means, in short, as already hinted, overvaluation of domestic currency making imports more and more attractive while discouraging exports and influencing a dismantlement of the country's manufacturing industrial capacity and paving the way for increasing internal deficit. Adding, when foreign capital expects an upcoming crisis the panic generated leads to a quick runaway of said foreign capital out of the country which not only causes devaluation of local currency as well as, because of high levels of foreign debt (see the preceding overconsumption based on exports), the external deficit of the country also increases. It is nothing new that the known formula of liberalization of economy along with rapid integration in global markets and financialization of economy carries along a cyclic formation of crisis.

As it follows then, after rising to power following the 2001 crisis, the AKP has also accelerated liberalization of the economy and further integration into global financial circuits as well as widespread privatizations of important State companies. On this matter the year 2005 (precisely the year that Turkey was official recognized as a candidate to EU membership) was exceptional regarding privatizations where three large-scale and highly profitable state-owned enterprises Türk Telekom, TÜPRAŞ and

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<sup>55</sup> The past economic crisis were: in 1977-78; in 1980-81 after the political crisis which brought up the military coup; in 1983 a banking crisis; in 1988 a stock market crisis; another economic crisis in 1994 and finally in 2001.

ERDEMİR were privatized by block sales<sup>56</sup>. This period also marks the beginning of new controversial and political implications around pro and anti-privatizations political coalitions and dynamics of political struggles, as well as it started to mark AKP political economy's identity regarding the axis pro-market vs statist. (Şahin, 2010; Öniş, 2011; Angın and Bedirhanoglu, 2012). Besides, these privatizations also unfold within the lines of a commitment established with the IMF<sup>57</sup>.

Privatizations have indeed become a borderline of AKP's political economy identity which, despite criticism, the party was almost always able to shrug away suspicious of corruption and to strengthen its socio-economic basis and the creation of its islamist new elite (Aydın 2017b) by adding authoritarian populism to extractivism (present on the country's widespread huge new infrastructure plans as highways, bridges, trainways, airports, Dams, etc..) while compensating it with social transfers which created and maintained its lower social strata masses of electoral support.

At last, for this part, important not to forget that while at the first periods of the AKP rule there were indeed political liberalization measures which assumed a European-looking modernization of state bureaucracy (the EU accession process was in good grace), later social and economic drastic results<sup>58</sup> from the ruling party's extractivism became incontestable but also unaccountable and unapologetic. Particularly after 2015 with the breakdown on the independence of institutions and reversals on civil liberties and jeopardization of the constitutional backbone of separations of powers by the change to an executive presidential system: "It is the absence of societal pushback that allows the normalization (...) of the individual tragedies that characterize the

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<sup>56</sup> Concluded for 55% of Türk Telecom, 51% of TÜPRAŞ, and 46.12% of the ERDEMİR Group. See T.C. Başbakanlık Özelleştirme İdaresi Başkanlığı, "Yayınlar," <http://www.oib.gov.tr/yayinlar/yayinlar.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> This commitment was called 'Stand-By agreement' which was signed with the IMF for the period May 2005 to May 2008 and in which targets were established including the political choice of privatizing state-owned large enterprises.

<sup>58</sup> One of these drastic episodes is on the 2014 Soma mining disaster. The many political rallies organized in protest for the way the government pulled away strong evidence of negligence on the causes of the disaster led to violent responses from the police forces and arrests. (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2019)

fundamental threat of authoritarianism” (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2019, 532). The logic of Turkey’s neoliberal developmentalism is present on an authoritarian fetishism for growth, a “growth to all costs”<sup>59</sup>.

Furthermore, I agree that the pro-poor policies are a way of pacification of social unrest and control of political agency of social movements, however this process does not constitute a depoliticization of the question of poverty in the sense that coercion and consensus (the Gramscian ‘formula’ of hegemonic constitution) are being achieved by social assistencialism and so the question or the causes for potential unrest are being taken away, or negated<sup>60</sup>, from the political field. On the contrary, the very employed techniques for pacification of social unrest and to prevent a contentious growing public sphere of political exercise (either by violence as during Gezi, by social assistance and short-term economic alleviation on the job offering from new infrastructure projects by the AKP) reveal actually a politicization of the poverty question. It does not mean that by emptying the social sphere of political power it depoliticized the public claims and causes for protest. I can understand that “depoliticization of the question of poverty” is being employed here on the sense that neoliberalism replaces politicization of the social problems by offering instead a process of economization (Madra and Adaman, 2014), in other words, in the sense that all social and political problems are permeable to the solutions of proper economic incentives or (neoliberal) strategies for growth as the ultimate solution. A similar argument implying depoliticization of politics has been offered by the ‘end-of-history’ (Fukuyama, 1989).

Nonetheless, I consider that the governing-for-the-poor strategy based on display of economic growth which allows for extensive state social transfers programs (the referred assistencialism) and therefore also allowed for the AKP to expand the

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<sup>59</sup> To quote an interview done some 2 years ago with a Turkish official from the EU delegation to Turkey working in the department of Social Policy.

<sup>60</sup> The prefix ‘de’ in depoliticization means a negation of the process of politicization:  
1. “to remove from the arena or influence of politics”  
2. “to deprive of involvement or interest in politics” *depoliticization*. (n.d.) Random House Kernerman Webster’s College Dictionary. (2010).  
Retrieved October 15, 2019 from <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/depoliticization>

electoral base among the poor, is not accurately portrayed by a *depoliticization* of the poor labeling. That is because it not only contributed to gain and regain popular support from the poor masses but also to pacify potential contentious and segregated groups (the Kurds in Turkey). More than facing poverty as an economic power to be solved by economic means there is populism and frankly politicization of the poor for popular support (consensus) and to pacify, also by authoritarian means, social revolt or avoiding the growth of social movement's political agency (coercion).

For the theory of new developmentalism (Bresser-Pereira, Oreiro, and Marconi 2014), markets are accepted well-fit regarding the coordination of economy, however they are not to be fully entitled regarding macroeconomic and microeconomic prices (profit rates, exchange rates, interest rates and wage rates). Regarding interest rates, it implies State intervention to allow for business and industry to access capital under the form of subsidized loans for national flagships sectors or companies (like Petrobras in Brazil). As for the latter, wage rates must increase with productivity to allow for standards of living (especially those of the poor) to increase progressively in a satisfactory balance with the profit rate of business, supporting continuous investment. Therefore, markets are to be working, especially with the integration in global economy, but State-led economic push must be prioritized (like the construction sector in Turkey<sup>61</sup>), although still recurring to large-scale privatization of state enterprises (Angin and Bedirhanoğlu, 2012). The question of the poor, under this framework, assumed a novelty in terms of Welfare, where not only pro-poor assistencialism was expanded but also this class was mobilized as to constitute the electoral backbone of support.

But what rural setting has neoliberal developmentalist and authoritarian populism? The dispossession of Turkish peasants acquired stronger momentum in the 1980s facing the structural adjustments policies (SAPs) in Turkish agriculture perpetrated the

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<sup>61</sup> The AKP era of neoliberal developmentalism is particularly marked by a rise of energy and construction projects which not only reshaped completely rural and urban space, fed a new islamist elite, as well as it legitimized authoritarian neoliberalism (Tansel 2019) under the guise of a growth-oriented modernisation (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2019a) and with mottos such as *Yerli ve Milli* (meaning 'local and national' as message of economic nationalism).

IMF and the World Bank leading to “distorting effects on Turkey’s rural dynamics and to an exodus of small farmers” (Döner,2012,67), paving the way for globalized international corporate capital (Gils and Yörük, 2017). Neoliberal restructuring of rural Turkey led to the decline of rural population, concentration in cities already over-urbanized due to previous rural exodus, intensification of agricultural abandonment (Aydın, 2005, 2009; Keyder and Yenal, 2011) and growing engagement in non-agricultural labor by rural workforce (Öztürk, 2012).

In the 2000-2011 period the villager population decreased by almost 6.5 million people (Döner 2012, 71), while in the 1999-2019 period, cultivated land areas went down by 3 million hectares and more than 3.5 million people left agricultural production (TurkStat, 2010; TurkStat, 2020). Family holdings under ten hectares in Turkey remain a third of nationwide agricultural holdings (TurkStat, 2008; Öztürk et al., 2018).

This last period marks the beginning of new controversial and political implications around pro and anti-privatization political coalitions and dynamics of political struggles and revealed AKP political economy’s identity regarding the axis pro-market vs statist (Şahin, 2010; Öniş, 2011; Angın and Bedirhanoğlu, 2012). Rising to power following the 2001 debt crisis in Turkey, the AKP era has brought enormous changes. The Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) by the World Bank and the IMF (encompassing almost entirely the first decade of the AKP power), “was instrumental in eliminating institutions that represented state intervention” (Islamoğlu, 2017,79) but also to install a new market order, excluding farmers from the political domain (Islamoğlu, 2017,83).

The AKP has accelerated liberalization of the economy and further integration into global financial circuits as well as widespread privatizations of important state companies (e.g., the alcohol and tobacco monopoly TEKEL, sold to British American

Tobacco, and the progressive privatization of state-owned sugar factories<sup>62</sup>). In agriculture, this led to contract farming as the dominant form of wage-labor while reversing protection of small-holding farmers to foster large-scale cash crops (Gajac and Pelek, 2019). Together with a series of laws (2001 Tobacco Law, 2001 Sugar Law, and the 2006 Seeds Law), these measures are considered “the final nails in the coffin” (Aydin, 2010, 152) for the integration of global market players such as the US giant Cargill in sugar beet and corn production (Aydin, 2010).

The visible neoliberal developmentalism (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut, 2019) characterizing the agrarian political economy of the AKP can be traced to two interconnected and co-related trends: AKP’s hegemony building and its fiercer and authoritarian extractivism. The former was built on populist praise of macro-economic growth figures mainly achieved from a land-based accumulation (Yeşilbağ, 2021), where state resources were captured and mobilized for clientelist relations, benefitting a partisan capital elite. It was also used to set the foundational stones to a new hegemonic project, restructuring the fabric of everyday life and civil society (Bodirsky, 2020), fuelling a nationalistic rhetoric to polarize civil society through repression of social dissent (Esen and Gumuscu, 2020).

In rural areas, such rhetoric worked to prevent or deny farmers' organized mobilization, legitimizing its repression on a fetishism of growth “at all costs”<sup>63</sup> normalizing the tragedies it causes<sup>64</sup> (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut, 2019). Furthermore, this neoliberal developmentalism displayed the systematic state-sponsored energy projects (e.g., tenders for hydroelectric plants), privatizations of state-owned companies in the

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<sup>62</sup> Over the last years, more factories owned by the public Turkish Sugar Refineries Corporation (Türkşeker) have been privatized. In 2018, three factories were up for auction and fourteen more were on the list for privatization (Hürriyet Daily News, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> An expression used by a Turkish official from the EU delegation to Turkey during an interview in 2017 with the author.

<sup>64</sup> One of these tragedies was the “2014 Soma mining disaster” in the village of Soma, where 301 miners died (many of them former peasants who had been proletarianized). The many political rallies organized protesting the way the government hid strong evidence of negligence regarding the causes of the disaster led to violent repression from the police forces and arrests.

agricultural sector (Aydın 2010; Angin and Bedirhanoğlu, 2012) and bureaucratic control over cooperatives (Gürel, Küçük, and Taş, 2019), allowing for the extractivist rent-seeking system that feeds patronage and clientelism networks (Yılmaz and Bashirov). Prospective job creation from the construction of these energy projects, as well as social transfers for the rural poor have created bargaining chips for electoral support in rural areas.

In fact, that populist face coercively prevents emancipatory political alternatives in rural areas and has been successfully linked with the mentioned assistencialism and electoral bargaining with villagers for agricultural subsidies, expansion of social assistance and new infrastructure plans (Gürel, Küçük, and Taş, 2019). In other words, all social and political problems are permeable to the solutions of proper economic incentives or (neoliberal) strategies for growth as the ultimate solution.

For the AKP, the praised economic growth paid for extensive state social transfers programs to expand the electoral base among the rural poor during its first 15 years in power. However, recent skyrocketing inflation, the record lows of the Turkish lira, spikes in food prices due to increasing costs of farming inputs (especially fossil fuels and fertilizers) along with farmers' indebteding, have not only put a halt on the consensus-buying of social transfers but also changed the way locals see extractivism in rural areas – as they imply further ecological and economic destruction of livelihoods. Under the current economic constraints (inflation and currency devaluation) the government has been looking at rural areas with a sterner extractivist will.

Nonetheless, agrarian mobilizations have multiplied against projects that cause ecological demise in the countryside, namely from the construction sector (deepened by an administrative change in the status of villages<sup>65</sup>), the private energy sector

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<sup>65</sup> Law No. 6360 changed the administrative status of 30 provinces (out of 81), transforming formerly provincial limits into metropolitan limits. Former villages (*köy*) became city “neighbourhoods” (*mahalle*) (Demirkaya and Koç, 2017). We return to this change further ahead in the chapter, in the findings section.

(hydroelectric, thermal, nuclear) and mining projects<sup>66</sup>. Mobilizations are met with violent repression of the gendarmerie in rural areas.

Yet, this new wave of mobilizations is contributing to the strengthening and diversifying agency of local politics which were until very recently populistically appropriated: “Peasants respond to these changes in a dynamic, plural, and uneven manner that resists easy categorization” (Kavak, 2021, 260-61). The emergence of a rural world as a field of contested common senses, where livelihoods and ecological concerns are reconfiguring rural struggles in Turkey (Kavak, 2021), may constitute a continuous counterhegemonic understanding against the dominant extractivist, rent-seeking and commodified Turkish countryside.

But is also followed by another emergence – that of the true colors of a radical expression of the monopoly of violence. The AKP’s Turkey is paradigmatic of such. If we read the Gramscian notion hegemonic constitution with emphasis on alliance formation (Bodirsky, 2021, 68, quoting Hall, 1988 and Roseberry, 1994) we can understand that the strategic popular consent in rural Turkey was secured by bargain to sustain consensus within the dominated subaltern rural basis. But as that neoliberal bargain entails more contradictions it also produces social dissent and reveals a source of fragility for the continuity of the hegemonic project (Bodirsky, 2021).

In response, the AKP has been resorting to coercion, accelerating the polarized political environment of the country. That polarization allied to worsening of rural poverty may turn the unstable balance of peasant consciousness between conservative and transformative (Modonesi, 2014) onto the latter.

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<sup>66</sup> For a detailed list of mobilizations against the projects, see work of ecological newspaper Yeşilgazete: <https://yesilgazete.org/akp-doneminin-ekolojik-yikim-projeleri-turkiye-artik-bir-enkaz/>.

## CHAPTER 5

### HISTORY AND POLITICAL PROGRAM OF ÇİFTÇİ-SEN

Presenting the case-study of a rural social movement aiming at representing the Turkish peasantry in Turkey is an effort that goes beyond descriptive and chronological elements, and it is more than anything else an effort of analyzing the rural politics of Turkey of the past two decades, although linked to political issues at the countryside originating from an historical state-peasant tension.

As it follows, although only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the birth of the peasant movement that constitutes the empirical base of this chapter takes place, Çiftçi-Sen is a movement<sup>67</sup> whose founding members, at least the majority of them, have a personal history of revolutionary action and militancy deeply concerned with changing the fundamental principles of capitalist-oriented agriculture and claiming to strive for a culture of organized mobilization which is no more than a seedling in the Turkish rural context. These two elements are the basis on why the second part of this study is divided into two important processes that allow the characterization of the movement: degree of consciousness and collectiveness of action.

The aim of our union is to fight for the economic, democratic and social rights of our farmers on the one hand, and to explain to people that the final solution to the problems is to switch to another food regime on the other.<sup>68</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,  
July 30, 2020)

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<sup>67</sup> In this chapter there will be interchangeably references to Çiftçi-Sen as a movement but also with the use of the wording 'union'. The reason for that, as will be demonstrated, is that the movement originates from 7 product-based unions later united into a confederation of unions and finally a single-union. As such, 'union' was the legal body available, but later also targeted, to form a political organization of peasants.

<sup>68</sup> Original in Turkish: Yani sendikamızın amacı bir yandan çiftçilerimizin ekonomik, demokratik ve sosyal hakları için mücadele etmek bir yandan da sorunların nihai çözümünün başka bir gıda rejimine geçmek olduğunu insanlara anlatmaktır.

On this very succinct quote from the movement’s general secretary to describe the movement (on the quote referred as ‘union’ as that is its legal status), we have the first part of it representing exactly what is meant by *collectiveness of action* in this chapter, in other words the platform for farmer’s rights that the movement attempts to established, and the second part what is meant by *degree of consciousness*, in other words, the ideological standpoints that lead the action, namely a radical change of the food system.

But before that, the chapter starts by outlining the most important aspects of the movements’ history, with a chronological line based on different steps and political issues in different key agricultural sectors, and its political program, which have been two sides of the same coin for the last two decades of their formal, although intermittent, existence.

## 5.1 A brief history of Çiftçi-Sen

The history of the movement *Çiftçi-Sen* starts almost a decade before its first official formation on May 21, 2008, under the official name *Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (Confederation of Farmer’s Unions) as an umbrella organization, under which different product-based single unions were represented. Today *Çiftçi-Sen* has a whole different architecture, being no longer a confederation but *Çiftçiler Sendikası* (Farmers’ Union or Peasants’ Union)<sup>69</sup>, where membership is not tied to a product or sector-based but simply, and more universally, by being a farmer as defined by the 2018 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

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<sup>69</sup> While the term peasant has in Turkish the closest term *köylü* (‘villager’), the use of *çiftçi* (farmer) by *Çiftçi-Sen* is not a deviation from the political assertion that ‘peasant’ has today on the program of rural social movements like La Via Campesina, affirming the peasantry as a way of life. Rather, ‘farmer’ is used as a wider concept to encompass the rights of all rural workers but also as it represents more accurately, for legal purposes, the constitution of a union. Nonetheless, the term *köylü* is repeatedly used in the Charter of *Çiftçi-Sen* (<http://www.ciftcisen.org/tuzuk/>), as well as in their translation into Turkish of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas*, which *Çiftçi-Sen* defends for its recognition and application in Turkey, namely on the call of their charter: “köylü haklarıyla köylüdür!” that translates to “a peasant is a peasant with rights!”.

In this case, the path from a confederation to a single union was full of contentious issues marked by, on the one hand, the historical state-peasant tension, and, on the other, its authoritarian contours in the 21st century. That path will be delineated below while passing through the important and specific material conditions resulting from political decisions affecting agriculture and peasants, before 2008, that arose from the neoliberalization of Turkish agriculture widely referred to in previous chapter 4. Analyzing the history of Çiftçi-Sen along its own chronological construction of organization and (attempted) organized mobilization is paramount to link with its degree of consciousness and collectiveness of action as it provides the rationale behind the characterization of both.

As expressed and linked with neoliberal policies aimed at facilitating the integration of (international) capital in Turkish agriculture, among which we can single-out the transition from state as intermediary in the market to the predominance of agribusiness establishing its food regime and contract-farming turning peasant farmers from producers to wage-laborer providers, members of today's Çiftçi-Sen started to line out the first attempts of organization in 2001.

Those first attempts are marked by meetings of smaller politicized groups of peasant-farmers (already with a background of revolutionary political action as will be mentioned towards the end of this section) then more quantitatively expressive meetings, congresses and finally marking officially the effort to organize into several steps of forming product-based unions. A total of seven unions, representing historically important sectors in Turkey, for the volume of its production in the total amount of agricultural production but also for they represent the diverse regional specialization of agriculture in the country, were formed on six different steps that would culminate - but also forced - to be represented under a common umbrella confederation of farmers in 2008, as the step 7, in which for the first time the designation Çiftçi-Sen came to the rural political scene of the country, and later refunded into a single union, the current state in the presented chronology.

### 5.1.1. Step 1: The Union of Grape Producers

As such, the first farmer's union, product-based, that would in 2008 be part of the confederation, was officially founded on March 8, 2004, with 317 members. The founding president of this Üzüm Üreticileri Sendikası, shortly Üzüm-Sen, (Union of Grape Producers), was Adnan Çobanoğlu, the current general secretary of Çiftçi-Sen. On one of this study's fieldwork interview with him he explained that that specific date was chosen because of the International Women's Day as they wanted to acknowledge the importance of women's labor in agriculture and local seed and traditional knowledge protection<sup>70</sup>.



**Figure 6.** Üzüm-Sen's logo, 2004.

The establishment was the culmination of a climate of growing unrest resulting in voicing the need for organization among peasant farmers. Adnan says that 2001 marked a momentum in which product-based congresses organized by farmers started to take place as platforms for discussion. In that context, one year later in 2002 in the province of Alaşehir, an historical province of grape production and where part of this work's fieldwork took place, a congress of grape producers took place on April 2. Another important milestone referred to by Adnan was the publication of a newspaper

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<sup>70</sup> Although curiously one of their main shortcomings is the participation of women within the movement.

“Çiftçinin Sesi” (Farmer’s Voice) by volunteers of the growing effort to organize farmers, as it provided a tool to widespread information.



**Figure 7.** Cover of the newspaper “Çiftçinin Sesi” featuring the foundation of the confederation Çiftçi-Sen. The title translates to: ‘Now the producers have Çiftçi-Sen’. August, 2008.

At last, a decision was taken to accelerate the efforts for grape but also tobacco producers (another historical sector in the region) to unionize, which for the case of the former would happen, as said, on March 8, 2004. Also important to state some of the first proposals made by the newly formed grape producer’s union on the moment of their establishment were directed at the main problems that the producer’s were facing then and that can be divided into three main problems-solutions offered:

1. Solve the lack of proper facilities and tools to storage fresh grapes due to high costs by promoting and funding the establishment of cold storage facilities of shared use by small farmers.
2. Promoting the production of local wines, stimulating higher potential economic revenues, by providing the necessary technical training, tools and equipment but also access to low interest loans for equipment.

3. Democratization of the state controlled cooperative *Tariş Üzüm Birliđi*<sup>71</sup> (Union of Grape Cooperatives) for the inclusion of farmers, and not politically appointed members, in its structure.

It is not by chance that Üzüm-Sen is the first product-based union to be formed and to generate the organizing effort that later will turn into Çiftçi-Sen as a confederation considering that its founding president, Adnan, was and still is (his current position as secretary-general indicates so) one of the most active figures in the movement and part of the core group initially and still currently.

When researching in-depth the publications of Çiftçi-Sen online platform *Karasaban* (which means ‘Black Plough’ and is one of the main sources to be quoted on the following pages) he is not only one of the main writers of political orientations and manifesto-like words but also one of the most participative figures of the movement on the media, in local meetings and congresses regarding Turkish agriculture in general and the grape sector in particular, international meetings (as part of the representation at ECVC) as well on public statements at protests or other collective actions with farmers.

The trajectory and experience and the importance given by Adnan to the organizing efforts by grape farmers is visible on a journalistic piece that he himself produced interviewing members of a former movement of organized grape farmers founded in 1976. The interview starts with reference to the historical importance of this efforts for the challenges those similar initiatives face today as well as to the preservation of collective memory of political struggle:

The efforts to organize grape producers in Alaşehir, where Üzüm-Sen's headquarters are located, are not new. In 1976, a group of young people and grape producers established the Aegean Grape Producers Union (EGÜS) in Alaşehir (...) We thought it was important to transfer their experiences to today's producers and future generations, to ensure that an organizational

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<sup>71</sup> Extensive information on the pointed-out problems of this cooperative are provided on step six regarding Çiftçi-Sen's product-based union for olives and olive oil as the mentioned cooperative is mostly known for that sector where it was originally created.

experience is not forgotten, and to share with the public how those involved in the EGÜS view the past from the present (Karasaban, 2013a)<sup>72</sup>.

In a long reflection article published in 2006, Adnan intends to explain the main problems in the sector as well as the solution proposed by Üzüm-Sen. The article was a basis for printed brochures that Üzüm-Sen used to distribute and discuss with grape farmers on their initial efforts to recruit members. The article starts with an introduction about grape production in the country and the role of the above-mentioned cooperative Tariş Üzüm Birliđi and how its role changed after the 1980s introduction of neoliberal policies defined by the IMF and the World Bank in Turkish agriculture to later connect it with the deepening of those along the rise of AKP to power.

Those who say “We went bankrupt because of agricultural support prices. The farmers are paid out of the air” should know that they are the spokespersons of multinational companies, not of Turkish producers and consumers; They do not consider Turkey's land, human structure and economic situation, and they do not want to. (...) We have seen together that the AKP, which won the votes of the farmers and came to power by promising to fix all these problems in the electoral meetings, is not different from the others. We farmers know who the beneficiaries are. We have learned and are learning how we are marketed to big agricultural and food companies by our own governments and how we are sacrificed.

(Karasaban, 2006)<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Original in Turkish:

Üzüm-Sen'in genel merkezinin bulunduđu Alaşehir'de üzüm üreticilerinin örgütlenme çabaları yeni değil, 1976 yılında Alaşehir'de bir grup genç ve üzüm üreticileri Ege Üzüm Üreticileri Sendikası'nı (EGÜS) kurdular.(...) Onların deneyimlerini bugünkü üreticilere ve gelecek nesillere aktarmanın, yaşanan bir örgütlenme deneyiminin unutulmamasını sağlamanın, EGÜS çalışması içinde bulunanların bugünden geçmişe nasıl baktıklarını kamuoyuyla paylaşmanın önemli olduğunu düşündük.

<sup>73</sup> Original in Turkish:

Tarım destekleme fiyatları nedeniyle battık. Çiftçiye havadan para ödeniyor” laflarını söyleyenler biliniz ki Türkiyeli üreticileri ile tüketicilerinin değil çokuluslu şirketlerin sözcülüđünü yapıyorlar; Türkiye'nin toprak ve insan yapısını, ekonomik durumunu göz önünde bulundurmuyorlar, bulundurmamak istemiyorlar.(...)

Seçim meydanlarında bu aksaklıkların tamamını düzelteceđi sözünü vererek çiftçilerin oyunu toplayan ve iktidara gelen AKP'nin de diđerlerinden farklı olmadığını birlikte yaşayarak gördük. Biz çiftçiler olup bitenlerden kazançlı çıkanların kimler olduğunu biliyoruz. Kendi hükümetlerimiz eliyle büyük tarım ve gıda şirketlerine nasıl pazarlandığımızı, bizlerin nasıl feda edildiđini de yaşayarak öğrendik, öğreniyoruz.



**Figure 8.** Reads “Grape is our life, IMF is our enemy”, during a protest meeting of Üzüm-Sen members. Source: Courtesy of Üzüm-Sen archive.

The article finishes with a list of solutions proposed by Üzüm-Sen that can be divided into three different pillars:

1. The first set of solutions points to the reinforcement and institutionalization of political participation of farmer’s unions through, first, the recognition of their legitimate role in representing farmers with domestic legal regulations for farmer’s unions (which were inexistent), second, the opening of communication channels with the government.
2. A package of governmental supports that go from direct income support to small farmers (and not to big landowners), establishment of shared cold storage facilities for collective use of small grape producers as well as the promotion of house wine production to increase the potential revenue of the sector, the law that allows patents on seeds should be abolished and local seeds protected and agricultural insurance law democratize and not only accessible to rich farmers that can protect themselves from risks.
3. Reinforcing the autonomous and democratic principles of cooperatives to ensure that grape farmers have access to decision-making in the cooperatives, so their interests are preserved and prevent the cooperatives from working on

the market just as a competitor to private companies following their market logic.

The question on the cooperatives is quite important on the protest history of Üzüm-Sen considering that the several major protests that were organized on the first years of the union, especially in the Manisa Province town of Alaşehir, were almost always directed against the pricing policies or lack of payments/late payments by Tarıř Üzüm Birliđi.

Another important field of action of Üzüm-Sen is related to the damages caused to vineyards and therefore to grape producers' livelihoods with the construction, installment, and impacts on micro-climates by geothermal plants. On protest action and following press release in 2012, the board of Üzüm-Sen (some of which interview during fieldwork in Alaşehir) contested and condemned the destruction caused in the vineyards during the geothermal plant establishment and activity in the region between Alaşehir and Salihli. It was stated that the authorities did not take adequate precautions and that it was not even possible to compensate the damage with financial compensation (Karasaban, 2012a).

In sum, Üzüm-Sen's foundation and fields of struggle marks clearly a new stage on peasant farmers political organization in Turkey (it's historical capacity to successful establish a basis of mobilized peasantry is a question for the findings and discussion) and can also be said, represents the constitution of fields of struggle not only with the demeanor of negative impacts on peasants but as a responsive construction for alternatives on the twenty-first century.

As reminded by Adnan on a panel discussion carried by agricultural experts and unionists in Bođaziçi University in 2008 under the title 'Effects of Multinational Companies on the Food Crisis', although the current government is turning to liquidate small producers, it is also a process that witnessed the food sovereignty efforts and

increased the struggles of producers as the “21st century there will be a history of farmers' struggles in the world” (Karasaban, 2008)<sup>74</sup>.

### 5.1.2. Step 2: The Union of Tobacco Producers

One month later, on April 15, 2004, the second union, Tütün Üreticileri Sendikası, or Tütün-Sen, (Union of Tobacco Producers) whose efforts of organization went hand in hand with the grape producers<sup>75</sup>, was established after a gathering of 450 farmers in Izmir. Like the grape producer’s union, Tütün-Sen, with the leadership of Ali Bülent Erdem, the current president of Çiftçi-Sen, emerged as a strong reaction to material conditions reshaping Turkish agriculture and marking the worsening of peasant’s livelihoods. On top of those conditions are the fact that, according to Ali, as a result of the complete withdrawal of the state from support purchases and the privatization of the tobacco monopoly, tobacco producers were left unprotected and domestic tobacco production was forced to be abandoned. This situation has created the momentum for producers to unionize as an element of struggle and resistance.



**Figure 9.** Tütün-Sen’s logo, 2004.

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<sup>74</sup> Full reference in Turkish here:

Hükümetin küçük üreticiliği tasfiye etmeye yöneldiğini ileri süren Çobanoğlu, uluslararası tekellerin gıda egemenliği çabalarına sahne olan bu sürecin üretici mücadelelerini de yükselttiğini vurguladı, “21. yy. dünyada çiftçi mücadelelerinin tarihi olacak”

For more see: <https://www.karasaban.net/21-yuzyil-ciftci-mucadelelerinin-tarihi-olacak/>

<sup>75</sup> This fact is, according to fieldwork notes and interviews, related with the geographical proximity of the sectors (the Manisa province) and the interchangeable nature of peasant farmers in those sectors (farmers in grape production have been involved in tobacco production before and vice-versa) as well as the commonality of issues in both sectors, like of contract-farming, proletarianization and extractivism by energy projects.

According to the press statement given by Ali on the day of the establishment of Tütün-Sen (Bianet, 2004), three specific processes were chosen to mark the decision to organize:

1. Resulting from impositions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank the state's monopoly for tobacco (TEKEL) was privatized<sup>76</sup> in favor of foreign tobacco monopolies which will end purchasing supports.
2. When the state withdraws from support purchases, unorganized producers are left alone in the face of organized traders and industrialists. It is forced into production with contracts imposed unilaterally by the trader and the industrialist.
3. As TEKEL ceases to exist as a state monopoly, support purchases are withdrawn without legal protections to prevent fraudulent practices on the market, and the formation of the union appears necessary to defend tobacco farmers from these problems.

The case of the domestic tobacco production in Turkey is one of the most representative cases of the effects of the ARIP and the penetration of transnational companies (TNCs) in this market, as Turkey a large share of its participation in the global market in terms of exports, from \$601 million in 1997 to \$395 million in 2000 (Aydın, 2005, 168). A “sharp reversal” followed after and illustrates how “the domestic produce has steadily lost ground against imported tobacco. In 2006, for instance, exports were worth \$497 million and imports \$258 million” (Sönmez, 2021)<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> TEKEL in Turkish means literally single-hand, figuratively used for monopoly. It was a state-owned monopoly mostly for tobacco and alcoholic beverages, among other products. After two unsuccessful attempts for its privatization, it was privatized in 2008 after being bought in a televised auction on 22 February 2008 for \$1.72bn (BBC, 2008).

<sup>77</sup> For the full online article ‘Foreign companies reinforce control over Turkey's tobacco sector’ see: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/turkey-exports-once-profitable-tobacco-sector#ixzz71GMUpaOP>  
Accessed October 9, 2022.

Last year, Turkish tobacco exports were worth \$279 million while tobacco imports from the Virginia and Burley used by foreign companies were worth \$562 million (Tütün Ekserleri Derneği, 2020), which means close to double. In overall terms, 2020 figures show a considerable trade deficit, with exports worth \$922 million in 2020 and imports reaching more than \$1.2 billion. According to the quoted 2020 report of the Turkey's Tobacco Experts Association, Oriental tobacco, also known as Turkish tobacco, played a very important role in terms of global economy linkages during the Ottoman Empire and upon the collapse of the former, the cultivation of the variety had a continuous expansion as the local cigarette industry grew sustained by state support buying in accordance with the Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law<sup>78</sup>, which entered into force in 1969 (proceeding from previous laws in 1924, 1930 and 1938) and remained in force until 2002.

This scenario would drastically end with the “infamous Tobacco Law<sup>79</sup> speedily passed on 9 January 2002” (Aydın, 2005, 166) determining the end of support purchases and establishing a ‘Contracted Production Model’ (contract-farming) as well as establishing a Regulating Agency of Tobacco and Alcohol Market (TAPDK<sup>80</sup>) “to ensure a smooth transition to [the 2008] privatization of the tobacco industry” (Ibid., 167) as “foreign companies<sup>81</sup> have come to dominate the Turkish tobacco market” (Sönmez, 2021).

In fact, the Tobacco Experts Association also shows that while 42% and 35% in 2003 and 2006, respectively, of the tobacco used by the cigarette industry in Turkey was produced in the country, that figure decreases to 11% in 2020. In 2017, the sector became under tighter control of the governing party as on December 24, 2017, the TAPDK was closed with the presidential decree No. 696 (2017 was the year in which

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<sup>78</sup> Original in Turkish of the law: 1177 sayılı Tütün ve Tütün Tekeli Kanunu.

<sup>79</sup> Published in the Official Gazette numbered 24635 of 09/01/2002 the Tobacco Law No. 4733 (orig. 4733 Sayılı Tütün Yasası) came into force replacing the former No.1177.

<sup>80</sup> Original in Turkish: Tütün ve Alkol Piyasası Düzenleme Üst Kurulu.

<sup>81</sup> British American Tobacco (the one that bought TEKEL), Philip Morris Sabanci, Japan Tobacco International, European Tobacco and Imperial Tobacco and South Korea's KT&G.

by the April 2017 referendum the country's regime became Presidential) and its powers were transferred to a newly created Tobacco and Alcohol Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry<sup>82</sup>.

Before the tobacco law was enacted in 2002, we were producing an average of 210 thousand tons of tobacco in Turkey. In various parts of Turkey, 520 thousand producers were also producing tobacco. When you multiply this by family members, we can say that a very serious number of people make a living from tobacco. With the tobacco law, contract farming was introduced. When no money was made, people had to quit production. Now there are about 50 thousand tobacco producers left. Tobacco production fell to around 60 thousand tons.<sup>83</sup>(Gazeteduvar, 2018)

This is how the union founding President Ali presented recently in a summarized way the situation of the sector since 2002 with the rise to power of the governing party's (a trajectory accelerated by them, but which started before). A considerable shift from a favorable position of Turkey's tobacco production in terms of share in the global trade of tobacco but also of the percentage of that production coming from the local variety (which has an advantage to the others the suitability to be grown in drylands and thus does not need irrigation) to the dominance of international companies and the presence of other varieties, either grown in Turkey or, mostly, imported as seen by the figures presented.

This shift also came with another change in terms of relations of production, as contract-farming became the dominant relation between companies and tobacco producers. The abolishment of support buying, price supports, and direct income supports led to the abandonment of tobacco farmers from the activity, although not altogether ceasing agricultural activities, and an emergence of a "new type of

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<sup>82</sup> Taxes collected from cigarette sales amounted to 61 billion Turkish liras (\$8.7 billion considering an exchange rate in 2020) as 81% of the price tag of a pack of cigarettes is collected by the treasury under the form of various taxes. (Sönmez, 2021)

<sup>83</sup> Original in Turkish:

2002 yılında tütün yasası çıkmadan evvel biz Türkiye'de ortalama 210 bin ton tütün üretiyorduk. Türkiye'nin çeşitli yerlerinde 520 bin üretici de tütün üretiyordu. Bunu aile üyelerine çarptığımızda çok ciddi rakamda insanın ailesinin tütünle geçimini sağladığını söyleyebiliriz. Tütün yasasıyla birlikte sözleşmeli üreticiliğe geçildi. Para kazanılmayınca, insanlar üretimi bırakmak zorunda kaldılar. Şimdi aşağı yukarı 50 bin tütün üreticisi kaldı. Tütün üretimi ise 60 bin ton civarına düştü.

proletarianization”<sup>84</sup> for extractive industries, like mining, that settled in historical tobacco growing areas, such as the known Soma city of Manisa Province (mentioned on the fieldwork notes on Chapter 4) marking a paradigmatic Turkish ‘coal rush’ that shapes local labor strategies (Çelik, 2023).



**Figure 10.** Tütün-Sen protest march in 2006. Source: Courtesy of Tütün-Sen.

In this light, we better understand the words of Ali, founding president of Tütün-Sen and current president of Çiftçi-Sen (himself a retired tobacco farmer) on the already mentioned panel discussion in Boğaziçi University in 2008, about the impacts of contract farming as a threat to traditional production methods as food monopolies dictate the type (tobacco variety), the amount to be produced but also the when and how. And, although the new type of proletarianization implies that agricultural activities in owned land by small-farmers are not abandoned, contract-farmers are also proletarianized in their farming labor as “becomes workers in their own field” (Karasaban, 2008).

### **5.1.3. Step 3: The Union of Hazelnut Producers**

Towards the autumn, on September 1, 2004, in Ordu (province located on the Black Sea coast of Turkey) under the leadership of Kutsi Yaşar (currently member of the

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<sup>84</sup> “Under neo-liberal globalization a new type of proletarianization has emerged whereby workers do not abandon the countryside and instead find wage employment during part of the year.” (Keyder and Yenal, 2011, 70)

Coordination Committee of Çiftçi-Sen) the Fındık Üreticileri Sendikası, Fındık-Sen (Union of Hazelnut Producers) was established. The reasons stated behind this move to organized political representation are mostly related with the financial degradation of the sector which in 2004 was particularly worsened by a frost that decimated hazelnut production. On their manifesto one can read similar claims stated for the two unions above, which means, that being left dependent on market conditions without a transitory regulation or legal structures of protection from the state “hazelnut producers become the prey of large companies. Against this, as hazelnut producers, we come together under the umbrella of union organization in order to express our rights and demands together.” (Fındık-Sen, 2004).



**Figure 11.** Fındık-Sen's logo, 2004.

Therefore, at the top of their complaints are the dominance of contract-farming and the inadequacy of agricultural policies to avoid the continuous low levels in hazelnut prices. Two main actions of protests took place in response to the falling prices. The first was a rally under the banner "End Exploitation in Hazelnut" held in Fatsa (a historical town for the progressive left and politics of resistance in Turkey) in 2007, followed by a participation in a march of hazelnut producers on September 8, 2008, from Trabzon to Ankara.

Mentioning two protest events in the first four years of the union/movement may seem quite irrelevant, but one has to have in account that these are only two of the most relevant protest initiatives but most of all that this is also the first formally organized effort among producers in this sector, in fact all these mentioned above and below.

Another important claim of this union, but that also reveals a wider claim on the origin of the product-based unions, lies on the fact that the AKP ruling signaled a former exit of state institutions from regulating the agri-food system, particularly the market. On the specific case of hazelnuts, that claim is exemplified with the case of Fiskobirlik, short for Fındık Tarım Satış Kooperatifleri Birliği (Union of Hazelnut Sales Cooperatives), founded in 1935 as a quasi-state entity with an historical role, especially on the 1960-2000s period, by purchasing hazelnuts from member cooperatives and their producers and therefore setting predetermined prices and giving price-support.

The claim by Fındık-Sen is that Fiskobirlik that was being gradually turned into a facilitator for the commodification of hazelnuts by turning hazelnuts into a flagship product for the export market, in other words, as a cash-crop for international agribusiness, specifically mentioning a law<sup>85</sup> approved in 2000 aimed at the restructuring of agricultural cooperatives in Turkey in accordance with the “requests of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank”<sup>86</sup> (Bianet, 2006).

On the quoted interview to Bianet, the founding president of Fındık-Sen, Kutsi Yaşar, was speaking on the verge of an Extraordinary Congress of Fiskobirlik (September 12, 2006), calling to the 50 cooperatives and 250 thousand members of Fiskobirlik to use the congress to demand that Fiskobirlik should enforce its original and main function by: stop working as an institution that only buys hazelnuts to store it and then sell to exporters and working as a regulator in the market between producers and companies as well as dominating every link of the chain in order to ensure producer’s rights. There are two other claims that are important to further understand the role of the AKP on the restructuring of the power and management dynamics of this union of cooperatives for the sake of setting its “hegemony over hazelnut producers” (Gürel et al., 2019, 107).

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<sup>85</sup> Tarım Satış Kooperatif ve Birlikleri Hakkında Kanun No. 4572 (Law on Agricultural Sales Cooperatives and Unions No. 4572), passed on June 1, 2000.

<sup>86</sup> The original and complete part of the quote from the press article: Tarım Satış Kooperatifleri Hakkında Kanun" la birlikte Uluslararası Para Fonu (IMF) ve Dünya Bankasının istekleri doğrultusunda "yeniden yapılandırma" adı altında kooperatif şirketlere bölünerek tasfiye sürecinin ilk adımlarının atıldı.

The first claim is directed to the fact that more people are being elected for the management of the cooperative that see it more as a source of income rather than as an institution for the rights of producers, but also being ideologically opposed to the latter. The second claim is that gradually Fiskobirlik assets, namely its warehouses, are being targeted for rent or to be sold by turning Fiskobirlik into a “Fındık A.Ş”<sup>87</sup> (Bianet, 2006).

The context of this claims is a particularly heated period of rural politics around hazelnut sector between the 2003 and 2007 period that marks a transition from Fiskobirlik being a critical voice against the government regarding the dominance of export companies on the market<sup>88</sup> to its management being incorporated and dominated by AKP’s control. A renowned Turkish journalist specialized on agriculture policies and rural politics explains the political rationale of the AKP towards agricultural cooperatives, in this case Fiskobirlik, to build local rural hegemonies and establish the roots of its powers through pre-electoral period buy-offs and by incorporating its partisans on managerial positions:

AKP Kocaeli District President, Lawyer Lütfü Bayraktar, was elected as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of FİSKOBİRLİK (...)

Working actively in the AKP, Lütfü Bayraktar did not hide his party identity at the general assembly of FİSKOBİRLİK, where he was a candidate for the administration. On the contrary, by saying “If I am elected, I will bring political power here. It is not possible for us to solve the problems without political power” he won the election. (...)

From now on, the political power will determine the hazelnut policies and the future of FİSKOBİRLİK. (...)

AKP, as it could not take over before, disabled FİSKOBİRLİK and assigned the Turkish Grain Board (TMO) to purchase hazelnuts. TMO has been buying

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<sup>87</sup> Fındık A.Ş stands for Fındık Anonim Şirket (an S.A. corporation). This declaration is a critique of the corporatization of the cooperative. The original of the critique here: Böylelikle FİSKOBİRLİK işlevsiz bırakılarak Fındık A.Ş'lerin önü açılacaktır.

<sup>88</sup> Just to give two examples, the italian agribusiness Ferrero became the hazelnut market leader in Turkey after buying a turkish trading company (Oltan Gıda) in 2014. Similarly, and coming second in terms of market dominance, Olam Gıda, from Singapura bought a local trading company (Progıda) in 2011. The third market player is Balsu Gıda, a Turkish hazelnut exporting company, owned by Cüneyd Zapsu, a businessman that had a leadership role in the AKP between 2001-2008 period, and therefore playing a role in the party’s influence on the hazelnut sector. (Yıldırım, 2007; Gürel et al., 2019, 110). More recently, in 2021, Italian Ferrero ranked first in the list of the Black Sea Hazelnut and Products Exporters' Association with 334 million 591 thousand dollars of exports in that year (Yıldırım, 2021).

hazelnuts for two years. Before the 22 July election, AKP opened its mouth to get votes from the Black Sea Region, receiving over 70 percent of the votes. With the decree published in the Official Gazette on November 13, 2007, it was accepted that all losses arising from the hazelnut purchase of TMO and the hazelnut oil production would be covered by the Treasury. (...) As a result of the policy of "seizing the unions" during the AKP Government, the Agricultural Sales Cooperatives Unions became condemned to the politicians 7 years ago. Moreover, before 2000, only the general manager of the unions was appointed from Ankara. The FISKOBIRLIK elections showed that from now on, the unions will have to choose their board of directors from the government party to get support and solve their problems. (Yıldırım 2007)<sup>89</sup>.

There are two main reasons for the relevance of this statement. The first is that the region and particularly hazelnut producers are known for being particularly politically active, first on the 1960s and 1970s - an historical period of political unrest and influential action of the radical left in the country crushed by the 1980 military coup - and more recently a period of protests in the region on early 2000s, namely a considerable "eruption" on July 31, 2006 when around "100,000 hazelnut producers coming from different parts of the eastern Black Sea region gathered for a protest meeting in Ordu (...) one of the largest farmer protests in modern Turkish history" (Gürel et al., 2019, 1078). This is particularly important knowing that Turkey is the world leading source of hazelnuts<sup>90</sup> but at the same time the production is dominated by small-scale farmers, thus the generated tension.

The second reason is on how hard it was even for the ruling party to take over the union of cooperatives along the 2001-2007 period as there was an opposing coalition of criticism against the government concerning the favoring of exporters interests, between major opposition parties, the executives of Fiskobirlik, public perception, the Chamber of Agriculture, and the very Fındık-Sen which had an important role in organizing farmers to participate in meetings and protests during that period and facing

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<sup>89</sup> Original newspaper article here: <https://www.tarimdunyasi.net/2007/12/05/fiskobirlik-yonetimi-akpye-gecti/>

Above quoted parts translated by the author.

<sup>90</sup> The country supplies approximately 75% of the world production (Erdogan, 2018).

the consequences for such<sup>91</sup>, namely an angry reaction from the AKP prime-minister was expressed against the producers as the ones at fault (Karpat, 2006).

As such, considering the first and the second reason for the relevance of the hazelnut sector related with the political history of Fındık-Sen here portrayed by the case of the AKP's control over Fiskobirlik, we might say that on the one hand it reveals the beginning tactics of AKP's rural hegemonic basis<sup>92</sup> and on the other the difficulties of the left and center-left opposition to mount sustaining alternatives on generated discontent due to the governing party effectively enforced combination of favoring private agribusiness interests and a shift from hardline neoliberalism to social neoliberal policies of pro-poor social transfers which has worked in rural areas to "contain the radicalization potential of peasants and workers and to win elections" (Gürel et al., 2019, 103 citing Dorlach 2015, 521 and Öniş 2012, 137). The case of the successful hegemony building in the hazelnut sector and the eastern Black Sea region also marks the establishment of the rural politics rationale of the party and constitutes much of the reasoning behind the Çiftçi-Sen lines of struggle, as will be shown further with another portrayed case of the tea sector below.

The prevention of emancipatory alternative initiatives opposing the hegemony-building by the AKP is revealed by another quite relevant information about Fındık-Sen, and in fact sharing it with the previous Tütün-Sen, is that both consecutively faced court orders, following legal suits by the governorship of respective provinces, for closure on the year the unions were established and again two years later after the first court orders were overturned by higher courts.

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<sup>91</sup> The fact that the legal status of Fındık-Sen was not entirely recognized and that leftist activists, including members of Fındık-Sen, were main targets of arrests after the July 31, 2006 major protests are among the reasons pointed out.

<sup>92</sup> See for instance that AKP's general elections vote share in Ordu on the Black Sea region increased considerably after 2007; from 41% in 2002 to 55% in 2007, 60.2% in 2011 and 63.2% in November 2015, only to decrease in June 2018 to 48.7% (in coalition with MHP) yet still marking a victory. Source: <https://www.haberler.com/secim/ordu-secim-sonuclari/> Accessed: October 7, 2022.

On a specific section of the findings of the next chapter, but also on the step 7 of this section, attention will be devoted in detail to clarify these kafkaesque legal processes, nonetheless, the main legal loophole on the origin of the closure order is due to the Turkish Trade Union Law No. 2821 not making any provisions for farmers to have the right to unionize, and due to the lack of any other suitable formal recognizable bodies to form a movement (NGO or association like other cases in ECVC). As such, all these product-based unions were left with the single choice of forming a union as the legal body of representation of peasant farmers from a perspective of rural politics, of political agency and therefore a movement emerging from an important part of civil society - that goes beyond simply the interests of a class/sector of the labor market - namely producers of food, considering their essential produce for the reproduction of society.

Important to mention, at last, that the defense of Çiftçi-Sen's several unions (even before the umbrella organization was founded in 2008) is the Article 90<sup>93</sup> of the Turkish Constitution and by extension the need to respect conventions of the International Labor organization (ILO)<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> Translation to English by the author of the last paragraph (more relevant) of the referred Article 90 of the Constitution:

International Treaties duly put into effect have the force of law. It is not possible to apply to the Constitutional Court with the allegation that they are unconstitutional. In case of conflicts that may arise due to the fact that international treaties on fundamental rights and freedoms and laws that have been duly put into effect contain different provisions on the same subject, the provisions of the international treaty shall prevail. Original in Turkish:

Usulüne göre yürürlüğe konulmuş Milletlerarası Andlaşmalar kanun hükmündedir. Bunlar hakkında Anayasaya aykırılık iddiası ile Anayasa Mahkemesine başvurulamaz. Usulüne göre yürürlüğe konulmuş temel hak ve özgürlüklere ilişkin milletlerarası andlaşmalarla kanunların aynı konuda farklı hükümler içermesi nedeniyle çıkabilecek uyuşmazlıklarda milletlerarası andlaşma hükümleri esas alınır.

<sup>94</sup> Following the article 90 of the constitution, important to note that Turkey has ratified the following ILO conventions, that are in force, and that are relevant for the case in question:

Convention No.87 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to organize Convention, 1948, ratified by Turkey on 12 July, 12 1993; Convention No. 98 - Right to organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949, ratified by Turkey on January 23, 1952.

#### 5.1.4. Step 4: The Union of Cereals Producers and the Union of Sunflower Producers

In the following year of 2005, on April 5, Keşan (a district of the province of Edirne, Turkey's Thracian region) the Hububat Üreticileri Sendikası, or Hububat-Sen (Union of Cereals Producers) was formed by Abdullah Aysu, who would later become the first president of the confederation in 2008, when all the unions decided to be part of the same umbrella structure. The reasoning behind the formation of this union is like what has been previously written for all the others and that will be written for the ones below; to protect the rights of peasant farmers in this sector as the state ceased to provide it in a market increasingly dominated by agribusiness.



**Figure 12.** Hububat-Sen's logo, 2005.

Nonetheless the spark to constitute the union was the unsustainable situation brought by the abolishment of price-support and the rising costs of agricultural inputs that turned production costs much higher than farming income. Together with this union in the same district of Keşan, the Ayçiçek Üreticileri Sendikası, or Ayçiçek-Sen, Sunflower Producers Union, was formed on exactly the same day and year under the leadership of Nevzat Uğur.



**Figure 13.** Ayçiçek-Sen's logo, 2005.

On the foundation of these two unions, a common statement was read by Abdullah Aysu (Karasaban, 2005) in which two main political points are made clear. The first is the situation upon which peasant farmers is seen and described, calling for the need of action to be taken:

As the farmers of our country, we are living a joyful, happy and exciting day today. We, who have lived for years as individuals, without a union, without an organization, are crying blood. With the targeted agricultural policies implemented in recent years, we have been rendered unable to produce. At the end of each year's production, we ended up searching for to be [at least] like the previous years.<sup>95</sup>

The second is situating a sort of exceptionality of the Turkish case as one that, in agriculture and agri-food production was not yet capable of successfully establishing organizing efforts for representation of farmers, comparing it with the 'neighboring Europe' and calling the lack of farmer's organization a question of 'shame':

We are establishing our unions to protect, use and develop our economic and democratic rights and freedoms. Today, we are one of the very few countries in the world whose farmers are not unionized. We see this as a shame on our country and our democracy. We cannot accept this shame. Since our city is a European border city, we know that the neighboring countries right next to us

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<sup>95</sup> Original in Turkish:

Biz ülkemiz çiftçileri olarak bugün sevinçli, mutlu ve heyecanlı bir gün yaşıyoruz. Yıllardır örgütsüz, sendikasız ve birey olarak yaşayan bizler, bu gün kan ağlıyoruz. Son yıllarda uygulanan güdümlü tarım politikaları ile üretmez duruma getirildik. Her üretim yılı sonunda bir önceki yılı arar duruma getirildik.

overcame this shame years ago and that their farmers established their unions years ago.<sup>96</sup>

In fact, these two political statements are always to be found throughout the years in the rhetoric of Çiftçi-Sen's public statements, which is to say, their call to action resulting from an unprecedented situation of degrading conditions of farmer's livelihoods adding to the historical context of no previous formal political organization among the class.

But getting back to the case of these two product unions being formed simultaneously and the reasoning behind that, it is important to mention that these two unions were fundamental to bring to light in the 21st century one of the flagship struggles of Çiftçi-Sen. The struggle against GMOs (genetically modified organisms) is particularly relevant for these two sectors, cereals or grains and sunflower, as it was these two, more than any other products, that have seen the increasing use (with state support or its permissive stance) of imported genetically modified seeds. The opposition to the use of them was on the frontline of the activism of these two unions and an identified core struggle defining their program.

On the words of Çiftçi-Sen's liaison with ECVC, herself part of the support group that the single union created in 2020 as part of their new structure, not only the GMOs and seeds question was fundamental for these two product-based unions but for the entire umbrella organization as these focus of struggle constituted one of the pillars of the movement's understanding of food sovereignty adding to a second and a third which were land and the right to be organized. Furthermore, advancing these two subjects were also fundamental for the movements' approaching and support seeking to ECVC which ended up as Çiftçi-Sen applying and being accepted:

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<sup>96</sup> Original in Turkish:

Ekonomik, demokratik hak ve özgürlüklerimizi korumak, kullanmak ve geliştirmek için sendikalarımızı kuruyoruz. Bugün dünyada çiftçileri sendikalaşmamış çok az ülkeden biriyiz. Bunu ülkemizin ve demokrasimizin bir ayıbı olarak görmekteyiz. Bu ayıbı kabul etmemiz mümkün değildir. İlimizin bir Avrupa sınır kenti olması dolayısıyla, hemen yanımızdaki komşu ülkeler bu ayıbı yıllar önce aştıklarını ve çiftçilerinin yıllar önce sendikalarını kurduklarını biliyoruz.

They were not legal fully recognized by the state so they were trying to find support from international organizations, also then in a 2008 or 2009 in Turkey the struggle against GMOs was very very visible and Çiftçi-Sen was one of the key actors in the anti-GMOs platform so they were taken as the main actor by the platform because the platform was also engaging different NGOs or individuals or lawyers it was a huge platform and then Çiftçi-Sen was very active on the seed question because I remember myself participating in the seed working group meeting of La Via Campesina on behalf (...) so there are three main issues under food sovereignty for Çiftçi-Sen, land, seed and rights to be organized, so a democratic question.

(Olçay, voluntary member and ECVC liaison, April 20, 2021)

The active role of Hububat-Sen on the question of GMOs can be traced to a particular press statement in 2007 where its president addresses the Turkish prime-minister and as well as the Minister of Agriculture of the time from the ruling AKP government regarding “misleading statements” (Karasaban, 2007) about the domestic production of corn and imports of genetically modified corn:

The Prime Minister says that they increased the corn production, which was 2.1 million tons in 2002, to 4.2 million in 2005, an increase of 100%, but he does not mention the amount of production in 2006. Even less than a month after the Prime Minister's statement, neither the Prime Minister, nor a minister nor an official explains why they imported corn(...)

We import corn, and despite all the warnings of the organizations in the agricultural sector, we import these from countries that produce GMO corn.

Turkish Grain Board (TMO) announced on its website on March 16, 2007, that it will import 235,000 tons of corn and 15,000 tons of wheat.

When it was learned that Argentina was one of the countries to import corn from, organizations in the agricultural sector and other democratic mass organizations drew attention to the fact that corn could be GMO, and they considered it their duty to warn the government before the ships loaded with corn arrived at our ports.(...) Non-governmental organizations had samples taken from 40,000 tons of corn brought from Argentina and analyzed, and it was determined that the corn imported from Argentina was GMO. Non-governmental organizations shared this situation with the public. Again, there is no voice in the government.

The criticism voiced on the statement goes in accordance with the civil society platform that was emerging in the country around these years on Olçay's quote above. The criticism was not only directed at the government's position, seemingly in favor or at least permissive of imports of GMOs corn into the country, but also against a government's decision in increasing the quota of starch-based sugar (SBS) on the

domestic production of sugar, that which started at 10% as established by the Sugar Law (2001) and which was established at a much higher quota than the average for EU countries (see footnote 98). It shows the beginnings of a contradiction that started to develop within the AKP's agricultural policies from the nexus domestic production nationalist rhetoric and visible increase on imports as well as a set of laws, and political lobbying at the highest level<sup>97</sup>, to ease imports and agribusiness interests in the country.

In this line, there is increasing and generalized criticism among agriculture expert journalists and analysts that alert for the fact that Turkey is becoming more and more a world top importer of grains. The year 2021 was a year in which import of grains reached record numbers in this sector, surpassing China and becoming the country that imports the most agricultural products from Russia, namely on products such as wheat, barley, sunflower and bran, reaching a total of 50 billion Turkish liras for grain import (Yıldırım, 2022). According to the same source, the largest importer was the public sector, which is to say through the State's Turkish Grain Board (TMO). The former General Director of TMO recently published an article pointing to a "negative picture" that has led "for many years" to the decrease in production and increase in imports (Kemaloğlu, 2022)<sup>98</sup>, in fact, according to the recent report OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2022 – 2031 report, projects Turkey among the five major importers of coarse

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<sup>97</sup> "Cargill's long-term demand that was repeated in President Bush's letter to the Turkish government to eliminate or increase the quotas for isoglucose and fructose also found resonance in government policies. The first change of regulation came with the 2001 Sugar Law, which set the starch-based sweeteners at 10 percent of sugar production from sugar beet. This caused huge disenchantment among sugar beet farmers, who saw this as a potential danger to their production. It is instructive that Turkey has been pressurized not only by international agribusiness companies like Cargill, but also by the World Bank, IMF, the USA and the EU. In the EU as a whole, the isoglucose quota is less than 3 percent of the sugar quota. Despite the fact that the isoglucose quota is three times bigger than in the European Union, the Turkish government has been put under continuous pressure to completely eliminate it. For reasons of political legitimacy, the governments have resisted this demand for a while, but have had to yield to the demands to increase the quota rates. Consequently, in 2003 and 2008 the quota was raised to 15 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. These changes represent a huge victory for Cargill, who intends to control the huge sugar market and maize production business in Turkey." (Aydın, 2010, 167-68)

<sup>98</sup> Original of the quote in Turkish:

Türkiye'de tarım alanlarında uzun yıllara dayanan azalma üretimde düşüşe ve ithalatta da artışa yol açıyor. Çok sayıda temel altyapı sorununa dayalı bu olumsuz tablonun değişmesi için kırsalda yeni bir hikayeye ihtiyaç var.

grains (cereal grains other than wheat and rice used primarily for animal feed or brewing) in 2031 (OECD-FAO, 2022, 159), presents it as the third major importer of wheat, with 9 557 tons imported on the 2019-2021 estimation, only behind Egypt and Indonesia, and keeping that third position on the projection to 2031 (Ibid.,Table C.13.1).

But what exactly is this negative picture and most importantly what does it mean the expression “for many years”? As seen before on earlier sections, namely on chapter 3, the neoliberalization pathway of Turkish agriculture does not start with the leadership of the current governing party but in the 1990s under the supervision of the IMF and the World Bank with a series of privatizations and the known ARIP in 1999. But if we consider the last two decades one of the issues that stands out from the governing party’s agricultural policy is an importing stance allied with an extractivist and non-productive rural rationale, well summarized below:

In this period, when not production but imports were supported, hundreds of thousands of people were withdrawn from agriculture, when the family business was liquidated and corporate agriculture became dominant, the farmer always complained about not being able to earn money and buying consumer food and agricultural products too expensive.

Agricultural lands were mostly opened for non-purpose use in this period. With hasty expropriations, agricultural lands were opened to rent. Double roads<sup>99</sup> were passed through the plains. Olive groves were destroyed. Tender after tender was made to establish a thermal power plant on the protected plains. By amending the Metropolitan Law, more than 16 thousand villages were transformed into neighborhoods in one night<sup>100</sup>. Not only agricultural lands, but also streams were dried with hydroelectric power plants.<sup>101</sup> (Yıldırım, 2020)

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<sup>99</sup> Mostly referring to highways.

<sup>100</sup> There will be further reference to this law, clarifying its impact and what exactly it entailed in the upcoming Findings chapter.

<sup>101</sup> Original newspaper article here:  
<https://www.tarimdunyasi.net/2020/03/03/tarimda-40-yilin-bilancosu/>  
Above quoted parts translated by the author.

In sum, not only in the sector of grains are the policy of imports particularly visible, in fact, imports also play a role also for the exports in the food sector as on the 2003-2016 period 65% of exports were imported, in other words, the food industry processed the imported raw materials and sold them abroad (Yıldırım, 2017). But the case of grain is even more representative of the dependency on imports considering that, although TMO expressed in 2021 that imported wheat was used for processed food such as flour, pasta, biscuits, semolina and bulgur to be exported, there was a trade balance deficit of 4.5 billion dollars of imports against 3.8 billion dollars of exports, as the difference of “642 million dollars of grain was used for domestic consumption, not for export of finished goods.”<sup>102</sup> (Oral, 2022)

Although the sector of grains is mostly affected by the importing focus of the governing party, the other issues mentioned on the long quote above such as decrease in production, rural population, rentist and extractivist projects instead of agricultural land use constitute a picture forming several directions of struggle of Çiftçi-Sen as will be seen on the next sections of this chapter, but mostly on the next chapter. Nevertheless, before ending this part devoted to these two unions that were formed simultaneously, it is also important to mention another interesting example that seemingly affected the sector of sunflower illustrated by a pointed criticism that Ayçiçek-Sen constituted against a cooperative that, similarly to the case of Fiskobirlik, became, according to them, politically instrumentalized against the rights and interests of small producers.

The northwestern Thracian region of Turkey holds the largest areas of sunflower production and it's also home to the Trakya Yağlı Tohumlar Tarım Satış Kooperatifleri Birliği (Union of Thrace Oilseeds Agricultural Sales Cooperatives), the oldest and biggest Turkish cooperative in that sector, with its foundations in 1966, known as Trakya Birlik. Back in September 2013 the founding president of Ayçiçek-Sen, Nevzat, gave an interview (Birgün, 2013) titled ‘Ayçiçek üreticisi perişan’ (the misery of the sunflower producer) while explaining that right after the formation of the union

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<sup>102</sup> Original Turkish of the full quoted segment:

Bu veriler dikkate alındığında hububat dış ticaretinin açık verdiği, ithal edilen 642 milyon dolarlık hububatın mamul madde ihracatı için değil, iç tüketimde kullanıldığı ortaya çıkmaktadır.

the first actions were directed towards meeting the Trakya Birlik management but also the government to stop sunflower imports during harvest season due to negative impacts on domestic prices, expressed that the policies of the Trakya Birlik were putting producers on harm's way. The reasons for the damages inflicted on the producer are related with the cooperatives' late buying base price announcements or the late purchase orders which, Nevzat argues, forces producers to sell to much lower prices to 'tuccara' (private dealers/traders):

The sunflower producers have been seriously damaged due to this situation. Trakya Birlik management has delayed the announcement of advanced prices in the past years. This year, the period has been extended further and although it is close to the end of the harvest period, no explanation has been made. The producer, who sold sunflowers between 1 lira 40 cents and 1 lira 60 cents last year, is forced to sell it to "traders" for 80 cents this year.

Trakya Birlik is a producer organization. But instead of protecting the producer, condemns them to their mercy. This practice of Trakya Birlik should not be seen as independent of AKP's agricultural policies.<sup>103</sup> (Karasaban, 2013b)

When asked about why Trakya Birlik is delaying the announcement of prices (considering that are responsible to buy 70% of domestic production), Nevzat answers that the cooperative's justification is that they need to learn the prices on the international of sunflower before setting a domestic price, proving the orientation towards benefiting private international capital as well as imports as part of the governing party's orientations.

Like the case of Fiskobirlik (as well as the one we will see below for the Tea sector), the governing party's hand in the management of this cooperative is quite visible, considering that the Chairman of the Board of Trakya Birlik for the period 2005-2018

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<sup>103</sup> Original in Turkish:

Ayçiçeği üreticisi yaşanan bu durumdan ötürü ciddi manada zarar görmüş durumda. Trakya Birlik yönetimi geçmiş yıllarda da avans fiyatlarını açıklama konusunda gecikmeli davranıyordu. Bu yıl süre daha da uzatıldı ve hasat döneminin bitmesine yakın bir dönem olmasına rağmen açıklama yapılmış değil. Geçen yıl 1 lira 40 kuruş ile 1 lira 60 kuruş arası ayçiçeğini satan üretici, bu yıl 80 kuruşa "tuccara" satmak zorunda bırakılıyor. Trakya Birlik bir üretici kuruluşudur. Ama üreticiyi koruma yerine tüccarın eline, insafına mahkum etmiştir. Trakya Birlik'in bu uygulamasını AKP'nin tarım politikalarından bağımsız görmemek gerekir.

was a Member of Parliament of AKP elected by the province of Edirne, precisely where the headquarters of the cooperative are located. It is, nonetheless, interesting that we would be leaving both positions soon after critical declarations against his own party's agricultural policies, namely land-grabbing by companies in the Thracian region, the heavy toll that agricultural taxes take on small farmers as well, and more curiously, that the Minister of Agriculture of the time did not understand anything about agriculture:

My minister is a good general surgeon, a very decent man, but we learned that he doesn't know the 'T' of agriculture<sup>104</sup>. Unless we say these things, it is not possible for us to progress in agriculture in any way.<sup>105</sup>(Çolak, 2018)

As such, in sum, the role of Ayçiçek-Sen was initially focused on the question of the advance prices to be announced on its due time, organizing meetings with producers as well as rallies and protests, as well as denouncing other critical events such as the choice of the Limagrain giant French seed company (4th biggest back then) to invest in Turkey with an agreement with Trakya Birlik for the development of a market of production of seeds with “more quality and efficiency” on the words of Limagrain CEO's commenting on the agreement (Yıldırım, 2014).

### **5.1.5. Step 5. The Union of Tea Producers**

Turkey is a leading global black tea producer (Eastern Black Sea region) and consumer country<sup>106</sup>, with its 84 thousand hectares of tea producing area (ÇAYKUR, 2019) and it is only expected that such a key sector would be facing similar problems to those referred above, considering the major issues seen so far as state institutions, namely

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<sup>104</sup> This curious expression “the T of agriculture” is easily understood by the fact that the word agriculture in Turkish is ‘Tarım’ which starts with the letter ‘T’, in other words, it means that he does not know anything about agriculture.

<sup>105</sup> Original in Turkish:

Benim bakanım iyi bir genel cerrah, çok düzgün bir adam ama tarımın T'sinden haberi olmadığını öğrendik. Bunları söylemediğimiz sürece hiçbir şekilde tarımda yol almamız mümkün değil.

<sup>106</sup> Close to 400 thousand tonnes produced in 2020 and expected to reach 500 thousand tonnes in 2030 (FAO, 2022, 7) and consuming around 300 thousand tonnes, expected to pass 400 thousand tonnes in 2030 (Ibid., 8).

cooperatives, as facilitators of private interests or used as proxy for electoral interests. Illustrating the case of the contentious issues in the sector with the case of another cooperative, similarly to what was done for Fiskobirlik and Trakya Birlik before is what marks the case, although in this case neither exporting-orientation (case of hazelnuts) and imports (case of sunflower) is an issue because the turkish domestic market absorbs most of its production as the country is the only (as with China) among major producers that does not figure among major exporters of black tea. Three years later after the establishment of the Grape Producers Union, the Çay Üreticileri Sendikası, or Çay-Sen, would be founded in the Black Sea region Pazar district of Rize Province on September 25, 2007.



**Figure 14.** Çay-Sen's logo, 2007.

Although 2007 marks the official establishment of the union, its basic foundations were set much earlier when an organized group of tea farmers started in 2002 to set gatherings on villages of the district but also organizing a rally in Hopa. Another important detail worthy of mention is the distribution of founding members of Çay-Sen's board from the most important districts of the Rize province in terms of production, namely, Pazar, Of, Fındıklı, Rize and Hopa.

Among the most important foundational claims were the low prices of fresh tea and the simultaneous high production costs allied to an accusation of arbitrary payments by the private sector to farmers due to lack of legal regulations to protect the latter.

Likewise, hazelnuts, tea has also become a target for agribusiness commodification particularly after 1984 when the state-imposed restrictions for private investment on the sector were lifted. The case of tea, however, has a link with the governing party's neoliberalization stance in agriculture that runs along much deeper ramifications with the high echelons of the last two decades' regime and power dynamics. That can be illustrated by the case of ÇAYKUR, short for Çay Kurumu Genel Müdürlüğü (Tea Company General Directorate) as a monopoly state-owned enterprise founded when in 1971 the production and buying of domestic tea ceased to be controlled by TEKEL. In 1984 a law<sup>107</sup> determined the production, processing and marketing of tea to be opened to the private sector, although the determination of tea cultivation areas was left to the authority of the Council of Ministers, and ÇAYKUR became Çay İşletmeleri Genel Müdürlüğü (General Directorate of Tea Enterprises) as a state-owned enterprise operating in a open tea market with increasing national and transnational private investments (Çaykur, 2019, 5; Gürel et al. 2019, 110).

However, despite the opening of the sector to the free market dynamics, the fact that over the last years ÇAYKUR has remained the main actor in the procurement and distribution of tea in the country cannot be seen independently from AKP's electoral dominance in Rize since 2002<sup>108</sup> as the "continuation of subsidization [of ÇAYKUR] is an important factor behind this success" (Gürel et al. 2019, 111), especially considering that the ÇAYKUR management was heavily criticized for the impacts of the 2001 domestic economic crisis on the tea sector. Allied to this, is also important to consider that the fieldwork conducted in Rize among tea producers by above quoted

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<sup>107</sup> Law No. 3092 dated December 4, 1984:

Article 1 – Tea cultivation, production, operation and sale are free within the scope of the provisions of this Law. Real and legal persons can establish fresh tea processing and tea packaging factories, and they can buy the fresh tea leaves they need directly from the producer.

Original in Turkish:

Madde 1 – Çay tarımı, üretimi, işletmesi ve satışı bu Kanun hükümleri dairesinde serbesttir. Gerçek ve tüzel kişiler yaş çay işleme ve çay paketleme fabrikaları kurup, işletebilirler, ihtiyaçları olan yaş çay yaprağını doğrudan üreticiden satın alabilirler.

<sup>108</sup> AKP's general elections vote share in Rize on the Black Sea region: from 44% in 2002 to 53% in 2007, 69% in 2011 and 75,9% in November 2015, even to increase in June 2018 to 77.3%.

Source: <https://www.haberler.com/secim/rize-secim-sonuclari/>

Accessed: October 7, 2022.

authors, points to the importance of bargaining of the former with the AKP for rural electoral support and the latter capacity to increase employment opportunities for poorer classes through the state-led infrastructure construction projects as well as the expansion of social transfers.

It is well known that the economic growth of the AKP-period was mostly based on construction projects as well as investments on the energy sectors and mining (Arsel, Akbulut, and Adaman 2015) as well as it is known in Turkey the popular resistance that some of those projects have had in the Black Sea Region since 2008 through 2011 and more recently in 2021<sup>109</sup>. Nonetheless, so far, electoral results in the region, including from the sites from where protests emerged have been invariably favorable to the AKP, which is a fire-proof of the rural support hegemonic basis of the party as result from the interference and control of key economic actors, like ÇAYKUR, allied to expansive pro-poor social transfer.

The case of ÇAYKUR is yet another level of control because it also represents an entrenchment of the party, we argue, to prepare for possibilities of alternative initiatives as the economic construction boom of the past is not producing the surplus that was feeding the assistencialism for the lower classes of voters. And where is that entrenchment to be seen? Following a crisis to the governing party's hegemonic project in 2015<sup>110</sup> led to a new hegemonic strategy, in contrast with the previous less

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<sup>109</sup> “The movement has been fighting since late 2008 against a large company to prevent the construction of a coal power plant in Yaykıl, one of the villages attached to Gerze (...) The movement caught the attention of the national media in late August 2011, when more than 1000 people forced back drilling machines that were trying to enter their territory at 4 a.m. to run survey drills. This open display of defiance was highly noteworthy, given the persistent authoritarian posture of the Turkish state and its complex history of denying civil liberties. Another noteworthy demonstration occurred in November 2011, with the participation of more than 10,000 people – a rather striking figure for a struggle of a local nature” (Arsel, Akbulut, and Adaman 2015, 374).

More recently, in İkizdere, peasant farmers, with women again on the frontline, began a protest against the construction of a stone quarry led by a pro-government construction giant (New York Times, 2021).

<sup>110</sup> “In the summer of 2015, this crisis found expression in the electoral results of the pro-Kurdish, leftist HDP, which passed the 10% parliamentary threshold that had long been in place to keep Kurdish political parties out of Parliament and in this way undermined the majority of the AKP. A majority for the latter was however needed if it was to push through the introduction of a presidential system that then-President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had long pursued.” (Bodirsky, 2020, 75)

authoritarian alliance-formation, shifting “into a politics of dispossession that opened up resources for the state” (Bodirsky, 2020, 75).

One example of such ‘politics of dispossession’ is the creation of the Türkiye Varlık Fonu (Sovereign Wealth Fund), by the very President’s initiative who heads its Board, in August 2016 only a month apart from the failed coup attempt. The main purpose of the fund was to secure liquidity for the large-scale construction projects’ rationale mentioned above. Following, in 2017 by presidential decree signed off transfers of state-owned major companies’ shares and treasury lands to the Sovereign Wealth Fund and among those companies was ÇAYKUR. Quite curiously, ÇAYKUR describes in much detail the managerial history of the company but when it comes to this transfer in 2017 the wording is much less extensive with a simple sentence dedicated:

It was transferred to the Turkey Wealth Fund with the decision of the Council of Ministers numbered 2017/9756 published in the Official Gazette dated 05 February 2017 and numbered 29970.<sup>111</sup>

The wording in ÇAYKUR’s website on the section about their history is even shorter: “It was transferred to the Turkey Wealth Fund with the decision of the Council of Ministers numbered 2017/9756”<sup>112</sup>. The case of this transfer of all ÇAYKUR shares to the Sovereign Wealth Fund is also curious because unlike other state-owned companies, this tea state company was not privatized following a series of privatizations of state agricultural companies, as one may argue due to its economic importance as a main actor on the domestic tea sector<sup>113</sup> and for its economic

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<sup>111</sup> Original in Turkish:

05 Şubat 2017 tarih ve 29970 sayılı Resmi Gazetede yayımlanan Bakanlar Kurulunun 2017/9756 sayılı kararı ile Türkiye Varlık Fonuna aktarılmıştır. (ÇAYKUR, 2019, 5).

<sup>112</sup> Original in Turkish:

Bakanlar Kurulunun 2017/9756 sayılı kararı ile Türkiye Varlık Fonuna aktarılmıştır.  
See: <https://www.caykur.gov.tr/Pages/Kurumsal/KurumHakkinda.aspx>

<sup>113</sup> “Although it varies according to the years, approximately 55-60% of the fresh tea produced in the region is purchased by Çaykur. Çaykur's market share in the domestic dry tea market is approximately 50-55%.” (orig. Bölgede üretilen yaş çay ürününün yıllara göre değişmekle birlikte yaklaşık %55-60’ı

bargaining potential on pre-electoral moments<sup>114</sup>. Ever since the transfer took place ÇAYKUR has been under heavy criticism by the political opposition for what it is considered a damage to the company for the benefit of the management:

Although with 250 cups of tea consumption per capita in a year making Turkey the first in the world, the General Directorate of Tea Enterprises suffered losses in 2021 as well. The damage to the institution, whose losses increased exponentially after being transferred to the Turkey Wealth Fund, increased by 88% compared to 2017 and reached 503 million 840 thousand TL [around 30 million USD]. (Bildircin, 2022).

Over the years both Çay-Sen and its umbrella Çiftçi-Sen have made press releases and public statements to the press focusing on the following issues, among which some are directed to ÇAYKUR:

ÇAYKUR has also reduced the purchase of tea as the government has given up on price practices and supporting the producers, thus, companies have determined the market. The AKP Government transferred ÇAYKUR to the Wealth Fund in 2017 to completely withdraw it from the market (...)

If tea policies go like this, the result is obvious; If ÇAYKUR is completely deactivated, just as Tekel has experienced because of the privatization of sugar factories, producers will be left at the mercy of companies, and there will be extraordinary increases in the prices (...)

By enacting a democratic and participatory cooperative law, existing cooperatives should be managed in a democratic way, not like a company, and special support should be given to such cooperatives. While companies are purchasing fresh tea, they should negotiate with the producers' organizations. A Tea Law should be enacted to meet the demands of the producers. (Çiftçi-Sen, 2022a)

The end of the publication from where several parts were just quoted ends with a call for membership to the movement, from where mobilization can be built for a platform of tea producers and with the movement's call for food sovereignty and farmer's rights.

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Çaykur tarafından satın alınmaktadır. Çaykur'un yurt içi kuru çay piyasasındaki pazar payı ise yaklaşık %50-55'dir). See: <https://www.caykur.gov.tr/Pages/Kurumsal/KurumHakkinda.aspx>

<sup>114</sup> Out of the total five members of Çaykur's board, 3 are linked to the governing party. The current general director and chairman of the board of ÇAYKUR is the brother of the president of the AKP's organization for the province of Rize, while other two members are, respectively, a mayor and a former Member of the Parliament.

It must be said, however, a seemingly contradictory situation or at least conundrum that figures of hard resolution between the criticism and the claims (in fact, a question that will be further explored at the end of this chapter, visible also on the findings and discussed in the final chapter). The movement, in this particular case of the tea sector, but that actually would also fit for the cases of other cooperatives politically dominated by the governing party mentioned before, points for a reversal of privatizations, return of the state-owned supportive cooperatives against the free-market rule that is responsible for unfair pricing. It calls for truly democratic and participatory cooperatives but still at the hands of the supportive role of the state. And finally, it calls for food sovereignty. However, it seemingly fails to acknowledge that the history of the former state-owned monopolies in agri-food products where, in different historical conditions and for different political purposes, also used as key instruments of a strategy to build a former hegemonic state-building project, which can be put simply as the “historical sedimentations Kemalist state” (Bodirsky, 2020, 75).

To be fair, fieldwork has revealed critical discussions regarding the question of how to make coexist the food sovereignty project within a state with a long run history of authoritarianism and in which the initial history of the current regime is but a more repressive state re-making project where “the recent bout of repression was tied to a struggle about that state – about replacing (Kemalist) state elites and transforming the institutional set-up in particular through the introduction of a presidential system that would help secure the continuity of the regime.”(Ibid.,70)

In any case, while those difficult discussions within the party do not seem to produce a synthesis out of the conundrum, at least not a publicly expressed one, the movement’s intellectual and propagandistic production focuses on concrete questions such as denouncing prospective laws for the sector, like one recently proposed (June 20, 2022) by the governing party on parliament to promote contract farming in tea production obligatory for ÇAYKUR to buy from small farmers which would be turned into contract farmers. A law that was originally drafted and proposed in 2009 but was dropped due to farmer’s strong opposition (Genç, 2016) but now is being pushed again, according to Çiftçi-Sen, due to disorganization among tea farmers: “Taking advantage

of the time and the disorganization of tea producers, the AKP government is making a move to make Contract Production compulsory in tea production with the draft law it has prepared. (Çiftçi-Sen, 2022b)

### 5.1.6. Step 6: The Union of Olive Producers

Finally, the Zeytin Üreticileri Sendikası, or Zeytin-Sen (Union of Olive Producers), was established in Orhangazi district of Bursa, on October 28, 2007, having Sadettin Erarslan as the founding president. The claims of olive farmers left unprotected due to a sudden and unregulated or deregulated transition to a market without the role of the state, namely through historical cooperatives that were crucial for price-support and purchases and a growing dominance of contract-farming replacing the state-given guarantees are once again visible.



Figure 15. Zeytin-Sen's logo, 2007.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning two important very specific standings published at the press release marking the establishment of the union also as a political statement directed at the need to protect and ensure the democratic role of state institutions crucial for the sector. On the press release a set of institutions (mostly cooperatives) are referred with the need to be protected, already anticipating the rural political tactics of the governing party of infiltrating them with party members:

We came together to protect our own organizations, namely the Chamber of Agriculture, Village Development Cooperatives, MarmaraBirlik and TARİŞ,

and to enable these organizations to work for our benefit by bringing them to democratic administrations. (Erarslan, 2007)<sup>115</sup>

On the political statement to the press one year later, on September 9, 2008, on the verge of elections to the cooperative MarmaraBirlik, there is a call to maintain the directing structure and organization of the cooperative on the hands of peasants under the banner “Let’s Protect Our Cooperative” (orig. *Birliğimize Sahip Çıkalım*). In short, similarities are shown in the case of the olive sector to the cases of cooperatives on the hazelnut, sunflower and tea above, but yet with an important difference.

Taking, as an example the case of TARİŞ, short for Zeytin ve Zeytinyağı Tarım Satış Kooperatifleri Birliği (Union of Olive and Olive Oil Agricultural Sales Cooperatives<sup>116</sup>) is very distinctive in the historical development of cooperatives in Turkey as its first records of organization date back to a hundred years ago (1913) in the Aegean region of Turkey and it was later, on 9 October 1935, officially constituted by law<sup>117</sup>.

TARİŞ has 30 local (town located) different unions throughout the Aegean region claiming to represent 28 thousand olive producers to “provide their needs related to their professional activities, to evaluate their products under better conditions and to protect their economic interests by mutual assistance, solidarity and surety.”<sup>118</sup> This description of TARİŞ work purpose is contradicted by Çiftçi-Sen in different moments of its history in the following different aspects:

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<sup>115</sup> Original in Turkish:

Öz örgütlerimiz olan Ziraat Odası, Köy Kalkınma Kooperatifleri, MARMARABİRLİK ve TARİŞ’e sahip çıkmak ve bu örgütlerimizi demokratik yönetimlere kavuşturup bizlerin yararına çalışmalarını sağlamak için bir araya geldik.

<sup>116</sup> Under TARİŞ other unions of agricultural sales cooperatives for cotton and grapes were later created in 1941.

<sup>117</sup> "Agricultural Sales Cooperatives" Law No. 2834.

<sup>118</sup> Original in Turkish:

karşılıklı yardım, dayanışma ve kefalet suretiyle meslekî faaliyetleri ile ilgili ihtiyaçlarını sağlamak, ürünlerini daha iyi şartlarla değerlendirmek ve ekonomik menfaatlerini korumak amacıyla, see: <http://www.tariszeytinyagi.com/www.tariszeytinyagi.com/taris-hakkinda.html>

1. In deliberately keeping the small peasant farmers dependent on their purchases without fixing fair base prices, “focusing its demagoguery on the contradictions between poor peasants and small producers” in order to “complicate the struggle of the revolutionaries at every position in the countryside” (Karasaban, 2019)
2. Does not use its price control mechanism potential and capacity to “prevent the large landowner buying more crops per unit of land at a lesser cost so they can sell the product at a higher price due to storage and transportation facilities” (Karasaban, 2019)
3. The third is basically a synthesis of the former two that considers this union of cooperatives of not being open to any discussions to change the system in place - which is, according to Çiftçi-Sen, to keep a dependent mass of small farmers without a capacity to actively intervene politically in the local cooperatives that are part of TARİŞ - while its organization and work favours the big companies in the sector voiding the cooperative’s mission of defending the interests of member farmers.

This synthesis can be illustrated with two quotes from an interviewee, he himself an olive grower and olive oil producer and member of Çiftçi-Sen in Ayvalık, where one of the oldest, and historically important, TARİŞ local cooperative is located:

We have attempted several times to see if we can intervene in the management of a Tariş cooperative, but the mechanism<sup>119</sup>, we say, repels it. They're really good at that. For example, you do not even have the opportunity to speak at the congress of Tariş. In other words, you go to the Congress, you are a member or a partner, you are not

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<sup>119</sup> The referred mechanism was explained earlier on the interview on these terms:

How the workers who will work in Tariş get the job is determined by the administration and the rogues there. A gang mafia. They say, hire our boy, and the people there say, become a member of the AKP. Do you understand the mechanism? Such a mechanism is very difficult to break.

Original in Turkish:

Tariş'te çalışacak olan işçilerin işe nasıl gireceği yönetim tarafından ve oradaki düzenbazlar tarafından belirlenir. Tam bir çete mafya. Diyorlar ki bizim oğlamı işe alın oradakiler de diyor ki AKP'ye üye olun. Mekanizmayı anladınız mı? Böyle bir mekanizma bunu kırmak çok zor.

given the opportunity to speak there. The predetermined formal theater. This will break sooner or later because there is something missing.

Tariş is doing warehouse business as we say. What is warehousing, it collects olive oil from the producer and stores it. He keeps them in the summer and sells our oil to Kırlangıç, Komili and Crystal<sup>120</sup> at a very cheap price. The profit margin is less than the storage fee. Something is happening that the men have officially made Tariş a warehouse. In fact, they are using all of Tariş existing network into their system. The companies use the system established by the hand of the public, the same is true for hazelnuts.<sup>121</sup>

(Hasan, member of Çiftçi-Sen, Ayvalık, February 3, 2021)

On an interview given in 2008, Cahit Çetin, President of TARIŞ gives an interview (Cumhuriyet, 2008 cited in Karasaban, 2008) there is criticism against the financial calamitous state that cooperatives have reached, pointing to the AKP's liberalization and pro-agribusiness ARIP<sup>122</sup>-inspired policies<sup>123</sup>, but simultaneously and seemingly contradictorily admitting that if the structural organization of TARIŞ would allow he would act the same as one of the major olive oil companies, criticizing those that still see the role of cooperatives as an extension of the state:

While the ARIP project was implemented in 2000, the units began to be privatized. In the past, governments have implemented populist policies. The

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<sup>120</sup> All three are big olive oil companies in the country.

<sup>121</sup> Original in Turkish:

Tariş bir kooperatif onun yönetimine müdahale edebilir miyiz diye ama dediğimiz mekanizma bunları püskürtüyor. Gerçekten çok iyiler o konuda. Örneğin Tariş'in kongresinde konuşma imkânımız bile yoktur. Yani Kongreye gidiyorsunuz üyesiniz ya da ortağsınız orada konuşma fırsatı verilmiyor. Daha önceden belirlenmiş resmen tiyatroya. Bu kırılacak er ya da geç kırılacak çünkü elden giden bir şey var.

Tariş aslında şu anda bizim söylemimizle depoculuk yapıyor. Depoculuk nedir üreticiden zeytinyağını topluyor, depoluyor. Yazın tutuyor bunları nerdeyse çok ucuz fiyat Kırlangıç, Komiliye ve kristale bizim yağı satıyor. Aradaki kar payı depolama ücretinden daha azdır. Öyle bir şey oluyor ki adamlar resmen Tariş'e depoculuk yaptırmış oluyor. Aslında Tariş'in bütün mevcut ağını sistemine kullanıyorlar. Kamunun eli ile kurulmuş sistemi şirketleri kullanıyor aynı şey fındık için de geçerlidir.

<sup>122</sup> In chapter 3 the Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) is widely referred to.

<sup>123</sup> One of the examples of this was the privatization of one of TARIŞ important factories, its most important on the cotton sector (TARIŞ İplik), which led to a protests in front of TARIŞ Izmir headquarters by the workers who lost their job to which both Üzüm-Sen and Zeytin-Sen participated (Karasaban, 2010).

state always had a hand in cooperative unions. Today, our producer still perceives the cooperatives as the state. (...)

Our closest competitor is Komili company. Komili takes 700 tons of products that it needs monthly and withdraws. The following month he buys another 700 tons, this time at falling prices. What am I going to do? (...) If Tariş Olive and Olive Oil Union were my own business, I would do what Komili does. But cooperativism compels us to do this.<sup>124</sup>

In the next chapter where findings will be presented, attention regarding this sector will be devoted to another set of political issues and field of action of the Çiftçi-Sen considering that one of the fieldwork visits of this work occurred precisely in one of the most well-known provinces and towns for olive production in the country. Ayvalık, in the province of Balıkesir, is an historical town and renowned site of olive production (as already mentioned in the methodology chapter). One of those issues brings to light the question of rural accumulation through extractivism, which under AKP rule has taken and continues to use the pretext of energy. In the case of the olive sector, a recent change in a mining regulation law from 2017<sup>125</sup> is being contested for opening the way to the uprooting of olive gardens for mining, with the argument of increasing energy supply. Nonetheless, it is also an example, (one of the few), of what Çiftçi-Sen has called a victory as the change on the mining regulation law stopped by the Turkish *Danıştay*<sup>126</sup> on April 20, 2022, after Çiftçi-Sen filed a lawsuit, on March 2, 2022, with the argument that the change on the mining regulation law was against another law that protects the olive cultivation areas<sup>127</sup>. After this, the Ministry of

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<sup>124</sup> Original in Turkish:

2000 yılında ARİP projesi hayata geçirilirken birlikler özelleştirilmeye başlandı. Geçmişte hükümetler popülist politikalar uygulamıştı. Devletin hep kooperatif birliklerinin içinde eli vardı. Bugün üreticimiz hâlâ kooperatifleri devlet olarak algılıyor.(...)

En yakın rakibimiz Komili firmasıdır. Komili aylık ihtiyacı olan 700 ton ürünü alır ve çekilir. Ertesi ay bir 700 tonu bu sefer düşen fiyatlarla alır. Ben ne yapacağım?(...)

Tariş Zeytin ve Zeytinyağı Birlik bana ait bir işletme olsa ben de Komili'nin yaptığını yaparım. Ama kooperatifçilik bizi bunu yapmaya mecbur ediyor.

<sup>125</sup> The amendment to the article 115 of the law was published by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources in the Turkish Republic Legal Gazette (T.C. Resmi Gazete) on 1 March, 2022. See <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/03/20220301-11.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> The Council of State is the highest administrative court in the Republic of Turkey and is the last instance for reviewing decisions and judgements given by administrative courts.

<sup>127</sup> Law No. 3573 on the Improvement of Olive Farming. Original in Turkish: 3573 sayılı Zeytinciliğin Islahı Kanunu.

Energy and Natural Resources contested the judicial decision, a different division of the *Danıştay* has finally ruled again (November 9, 2022) in favor of Çiftçi-Sen's argument that mining cannot be done in olive groves in accordance with the Olive Law (Çiftçi-Sen 2022c; 2022d).



**Figure 16.** Çiftçi-Sen members at a sit-in protest at the village of Yırca (Manisa Province) back in 2014. The sign reads “Not the poison of Kolin, the olives of our village”<sup>128</sup>

Before passing to the final two steps on this chronology of the movement, which will be basically focusing on the questions of legality/illegality in which the movement became entangled for years and had a negative impact on its organization and financial resources and capacity, it is important to summarize the main political issues at stake on the foundation and activity of the different product-based unions that were on the origin of Çiftçi-Sen as a confederation of unions in 2008.

The following table presents the more important (yet not exhaustive) list of political issues and areas of protest that have been more visible on sectors in which product-based unions of Çiftçi-Sen were founded (however, it does not mean that each issue is exclusive to the actions of linked unions on the table) and presented arguments and lines of resistance on the narrative and political agency of resistance of the movement.

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<sup>128</sup> A protest in 2014 at Yırca village against the Kolin mining company that was uprooting olive fields for a new mining construction project. Source: Courtesy of Çiftçi-Sen's archive.

**Table 9. Political issues and lines of resistance by product-based unions**

Political issues and Areas of Protest	Product-based Union	Arguments and lines of Resistance
Contract-farming and proletarianization	Üzüm-Sen Tütün-Sen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis of the struggle against international food companies for the recognition of small farmers' autonomy and family farming role to prevent future food crises and to counteract the ageing of the peasant population.</li> <li>- It rejects any program that would integrate small farmers into the capitalist market by making them dependent on companies for their production inputs and markets, the real purpose of which is to destroy biodiversity, whether implemented under the name 'Rural Development' or under different names.</li> </ul>
GMOs and commodification of nature	Hububat-Sen Ayçiçek-Sen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defends an Ecological Constitution, which protects the seeds, soil, water and air, defends the right to life of all living things on Earth, and sees man as a part of nature, not the ruler of nature.</li> <li>- Considers industrial agriculture as condemning humanity to hunger, putting their health and all living things at risk, destroying ecological balance, biodiversity and making farmers dependent on companies, not as producers of food, as farmers but as providers.</li> <li>- Sees seed breeding has a threat to knowledge and practices those villagers have transferred to each other over tens of thousands of years as a product of collective knowledge and culture, not individual. For this reason, opposes any application that causes the seed to be patented, to collect seed information and production in one hand and to turn it into a commodity owned by companies.</li> </ul>
Privatization and Political interference in Cooperatives	Fındık-Sen Çay-Sen Zeytin-Sen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Works on the principle that they are organizationally independent from the state, political parties, organizations and institutions.</li> <li>- It is within the duties and powers to establish cooperatives that can contribute to the struggle for Food Sovereignty or to join such established organizations on behalf of its members, and to provide credit to its members, provided that it does not exceed 10 percent of its cash balance.</li> </ul>
Extractivism : Construction and energy projects	Üzüm-Sen Tütün-Sen Fındık-Sen Çay-Sen Zeytin-Sen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defends nature against the attacks of capitalism, which leads to the ecosystem's demise with the aim of capital accumulation.</li> <li>- Opposes the commercialization or extraction from natural commons (such as water);</li> <li>- Farmers/peasants have the right to access and equally use the natural resources necessary to provide adequate living conditions. Works to provide organizational conditions so that peasant farmers can exercise these rights by having a say in the policies applied for the management, development, use and protection of natural resources.</li> </ul>

Source: Çiftçi-Sen's Charter Article 4 - Purposes of the Union<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> See <https://www.ciftcisen.org/tuzuk/> (Madde 4-Sendikanın Amaçları). Arguments and lines of resistance taken from the charter considering that it was built over the two decades of work of the product-based unions and confederation and that the charter was inspired on the political areas of struggle and resistance of all the initial unions.

### 5.1.7. From confederation to single union: a chronology against ‘divide-and-rule’

This step 7 is marked by the first step taken by the different product-based unions to defend themselves against a ‘divide-and-rule’ strategy and that is the main reason for the decision gather under an umbrella organization in 2008 for the formation of the Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, known shortly as Çiftçi-Sen. This is also the first step for the movement of farmers in different sectors to start to be known as Çiftçi-Sen. That mentioned strategy of defense is related to the fact that right shortly after the formation of the product-based unions, between 2004 and 2007, they were informed of court cases opened for the closure of the unions.

The state<sup>130</sup> began to look for ways to disrupt this struggle from below. It started to file lawsuits to close the unions. First, a union was closed. Two more were later closed.<sup>131</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen’s General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,  
July 30, 2020)

The timeline, that includes the three unions closed mentioned by Adnan, on the closure of the unions is the following:

- After legal suits in 2004 opened for the closure of Fındık-Sen and Tütün-Sen, court decisions for the closure of both unions were taken in 2006, after two years of legal struggles.
- In 2005 a newly established union of animal breeders (Hay-Yet-Sen short for Hayvan Yetiştiriciler) was closed immediately after foundation to never be

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<sup>130</sup> The state in this quote is represented by authorities directly appointed by the government. For example, in the case of the legal suit for the closure of the tobacco union, it was opened by the Izmir Governorship on 27 August 2004, only three months after the union was founded.

<sup>131</sup> Original in Turkish:

Devlet, alttan gelen bu mücadeleyi sekteye uğratmanın yollarını aramaya başladı. Davalar açmaya başladı sendikaları kapatmak için. İlk önce bir sendika kapandı. Daha sonra iki tanesi daha kapatıldı.

active again<sup>132</sup>. In the same year legal suits were opened against Hububat-Sen Ayçiçek-Sen leading to the closing of the union's activities.

- In 2007 Çay-Sen and Zeytin-Sen faced similar legal processes and orders to be closed.

The only union that was not prosecuted was the first established grape producers' union. They showed us another approach. The Ministry of Labor sent a letter: 'Let's accept you as an employer's union. Let us know about the farmers who employ insured workers'. We were asked to kind of complain about them. We said: 'We are not employers, on the contrary, we produce agricultural products with the labor of our family. We employ temporary, seasonal workers. It doesn't take more than 2-3 days. There is no question of hiring workers for days as in large plantations. In fact, many of us go to someone else's field to work.'<sup>133</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun, July 30, 2020)

The above cited, in the words of Adnan, attempts to express another level of 'divide-and-rule' strategy. One single product-based union was left untouched, curiously the one that was founded first but also the one that had more members, to attempt another strategy of control, that of imposing a kind of suspicion between different classes of farmers. But that also shows what was in the main judicial argument used to open the legal suits against the unions; the fact that the Trade Unions Law No. 2821 mentions that only 'workers' or employers of workers can form a union and not self-employed farmers. Let see two more important points on the timeline.

- Taking the case of Tütün-Sen as an example, the decision taken for its closure in 2006 by the Izmir Labor Court, using the argument mentioned above, was overruled by the 9th Chamber of the Supreme Court, upon appeal of unions

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<sup>132</sup> This is the reason why this union Hay-Yet-Sen was not mentioned among seven described before.

<sup>133</sup> Original in Turkish:

Dava açılmayan tek sendika ilk kurulan üzüm üreticileri sendikası oldu. Başka bir yaklaşım gösterdiler bize. Çalışma Bakanlığı yazı gönderdi: 'Sizi işveren sendikası olarak kabul edelim. Yanında sigortalı işçi çalıştıran çiftçileri bize bildirin'. Onları bir nevi şikayet etmemiz istendi. Biz de dedik ki: 'Biz işveren değiliz, aksine ailemizin emeğiyle tarımsal üretim yapıyoruz. Geçici, mevsimlik işçi çalıştırıyoruz. O da 2-3 günü geçmez. Büyük plantasyonlardaki gibi günlerce işçi çalıştırılması söz konusu değil. Hatta birçoğumuz başkasının tarlasına gider çalışmak için.

lawyers, since if they are not workers then the legal process should not be determined by a labor court but by a civil one. Considering this Tütün-Sen appealed in 2007 for being recognized as a union arguing that the article 90 of the Constitution that recognizes the effects in the country of international conventions signed should be enough (they were referring to Turkey's ratification of the International Labor Organization convention that recognizes the rights of farmers to organize).

- One year later, on May 21, 2008, Çiftçi-Sen is founded as a confederation in order to be the official organization that as an umbrella organization can concentrate all the necessary resources, namely legal and financial, to defend the rights of all the product-based unions struggling to be legally recognized.
- Yet again, less than a year later, on March 5, 2009, a decision by the Ankara 8th Labor Court closed the confederation, as a decision moved by a legal suit opened, this time, by the Ankara governorship. The judicial argument used for the decision is based on the fact that the law of unions only mentions workers, employers and employees and not 'farmers'. Çiftçi-Sen would appeal to the Supreme Court with the hearing of the case taking place more than two years later on November 27, 2011 (Karasaban, 2013b).

Regarding this argument it is worthy of note here the words of Ali, president of Tütün-Sen in a press release in 2007 on the moment of their appeal.

After the Tobacco Law was enacted in 2002, the period of "contract-farming" began. Manufacturers can only produce by signing contracts with buyer companies acting in line with the demands of international cigarette companies. Unorganized tobacco producers were left alone in the face of organized global capital.<sup>134</sup> (Karasaban, 2007)

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<sup>134</sup> Original in Turkish:

Kaldı ki, Türkiye tarımı hızla değişmektedir. 2002 yılında çıkarılan Tütün Yasası'ndan sonra "sözleşmeli üreticilik" dönemi başlamıştır. Üreticiler Uluslar arası sigara şirketlerinin talepleri doğrultusunda hareket eden alıcı firmalarla sözleşme imzalayarak ancak üretim yapabilmektedirler. Örgütlü küresel sermaye karşısında örgütsüz tütün üreticileri baş başa bırakılmıştır.

The fact that ‘contract-farming’ which aims at the proletarianization of farmers precisely into workers is mentioned in this press release against the legal situation in which they must struggle against to implicitly express what are the motivations behind the legal suits. To signal that only ‘workers’ and not peasant farmers are to be legally considered followed the new contract-farming regime to be installed in the country.

Another content worth of note is the press release by the confederation a couple of days after the court decision in 2009, in which two important points are advanced. The first is their expressed self-representation as on the leading historical process of representing farmers in the country and the second is the also, clearly expressed for the first time in their press releases, reference to the ruling party’s bias against demonstrations of self-organized and autonomous agency from farmers.

We have fulfilled our historical responsibility by opening the farmers' unions and confederation. The Assembly, on the other hand, evaded its responsibility by not making the necessary domestic legal arrangements. This shows that the AKP government insists on taking its place in history by scolding, insulting and preventing the farmers that it has put in a difficult situation with its agricultural policies.<sup>135</sup> (Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, 2009)



**Figure 17.** Logo of Çiftçi-Sen as a confederation of product-based unions, 2008. The design of the logo is clearly based on La Vía Campesina’s own logo.

<sup>135</sup> Original in Turkish:

Biz çiftçi sendikalarını ve konfederasyonunu açarak tarihsel sorumluluğumuzu yerine getirdik. Meclis ise gerekli iç hukuk düzenlemesini yapmayarak sorumluluktan kaçtı. Bu da gösteriyor ki, AKP hükümeti uyguladığı tarım politikalarıyla zor duruma düşürdüğü çiftçileri azarlayarak, hakaret ederek ve örgütlenmelerini engelleyerek tarihte yerini almakta ısrarlı.

- Yet regarding Tütün-Sen, after the continuous legal process since its opening in 2004, the first closure decision in 2006, the overruling in 2007 and consecutive appeal, finally in 2012 there was a turn of the tide as April 16, 2012 the Izmir 9th Civil Court of First Instance stated that “there is no legal obstacle for tobacco producers to come together and establish unions in the constitution and in the law on trade unions” (Karasaban, 2012b).
- This decision not only would serve as legal precedent for the final legalization of the other product-based unions tied in similar processes but more importantly, would be followed by the Supreme Court’s final rule on January 11, 2013, reversing all previous judgment for the closure of the confederation, stating, alike for Tütün-Sen, that no national law impede the unionization of farmers, making also mention to the international agreements guaranteeing the farmers’ right to unionize.

On the press release about this final legal victory that left Çiftçi-Sen on a limbo of legality/illegality between 2008 and 2013, Abdullah Aysu, the president of the confederation at the time, affirmed that:

After this verdict, farmers will start to organize themselves village-by-village, province-by-province. Until today, an ongoing court case on the closure of our Confederation has caused serious legal obstacles that stood in the way of our unionization. Yet with its verdict the Supreme Court has recognized the fact that our rights which stem from international laws should also be included in national laws. The self-organization of farmers cannot be prevented. (Karasaban, 2013c).

Three important points can be taken for this statement. The first is that for the legal limbo period since 2008 the grassroots mobilization and organization efforts of the unions and the confederations were basically stopped or at the very least seriously threatened. The wording used in most of my interviews and fieldwork notes from off interview notes were unanimously about the constraints of going to villages, organizing meetings with farmers and then not being able to collect memberships, generating confusion about the real intentions or capacity of the movement.

In 2013, they started to do base work again. I went with Abdullah Aysu to Trakya, gathered with 20 to 25 villagers and started to spread the information that we gained the right to be organized in a Union. In that period, it was not possible to have proper memberships, because it was not legal. That is very important, you cannot collect fees, they want to be members and then you cannot register them. A very conflicting issue.

(Umut, voluntary member, February 4, 2021)

The second is that there is a claim for a real change at the national legal framework to literally protect the rights of farmers as it is believed that a protection based on international conventions ratified domestically were not enough to protect them considering the long legal struggle, they were embroiled in. The third is the use of the last word of that quoted statement, ‘prevented’, which clearly points to the beginning of a period (see the globally known case of Gezi protests in 2013) in which the authoritarian face of the regime was firstly and widely shown.

In sum, it can be said that the history of Çiftçi-Sen as a confederation is marked for the first five years of its existence by legal processes that had previously started against the product-based unions that in fact justified and led to the decision to form a confederation. It can also be said that the prevention of their movement is related with the potential that they started to show in terms of organization in the country. Answering a question for an interview with Birgün newspaper about what was achieved during the first seven years of Üzüm-sen, Adnan refers to that potential:

We held two rallies in Manisa, Alaşehir, we brought over two thousand farmers to the fields. There are rallies made by Tütün-Sen, Hububat-Sen and Fındık-Sen. Çay-Sen held a gathering last year in Of “Claim of your water, your land”. We provide legal support to the farmers. Whenever we make a press release, TARİŞ immediately pays its members. Üzüm-Sen currently has 4 thousand registered members. Our Confederation has nearly 20 thousand members, so 20 thousand families are our members.<sup>136</sup> (Karasaban, 2011)

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<sup>136</sup> Original of the answer in Turkish:

Manisa Alaşehir’de iki miting yaptık, iki binin üstünde çiftçiyi alanlara getirdik. Tütün-Sen’in, Hububat-Sen’in, Fındık-Sen’in yaptığı mitingler var. Çay-Sen geçen yıl OF’ta “Suyuna, Toprağına Sahip Çık” mitingi yaptı. Çiftçilere hukuki destek sağlıyoruz, ne zaman basın açıklaması gerçekleştirek TARİŞ hemen üyelerine ödeme yapıyor. Üzüm-Sen’in şu an kayıtlı 4 bin üyesi var. Konfederasyonumuzun ise 20 bine yakın üyesi var, Yani 20 bin aile bizim üyemiz.

If we focus solemnly on the question of numbers, later it was presented that the Confederation had managed to unite around 40 thousand members (Öztürk et al., 2018, 245), which is double of what Adnan said in that 2011 interview. The question of numbers seen quantitatively is not impressive as the number of registered farmers, mostly small farmers, has officially been presented, by the Ministry of Agriculture, around figures of 2 million according with the Farmer's Registration System (ÇKS) that they manage (Independent Türkçe, 2022)<sup>137</sup>. However, one could critically ask, why the trouble by the Izmir and Ankara governorship opening legal suits for the closure of Çiftçi-Sen's existence? The road from confederation to a single union, which is the current legal body of the movement, may help to answer that question.

We said: 'No matter what kind of product they produce, everyone should be able to become a member. People who are against the change in agriculture in Turkey and want to organize should unite under one roof.'<sup>138</sup>

(Ali, President of Çiftçi-Sen, Soma, February 5, 2021)

The reason sustained by the quoted above from the words of Ali is the most obvious one that made Çiftçi-Sen change its organization from an umbrella structure that accommodate and represented members that were farmers in different sectors to an organization that accommodates all farmers no matter the sector but also claims to have opened as platform to non-farmers activists, students and academics as

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For full interview see: <https://www.karasaban.net/ciftci-sindikasi-uzum-senneoliberalizm-ciftciyi-bitirdi/>

<sup>137</sup> These numbers are contested and other institutions present a much lower estimation, around half million, as will be seen later.

See full article here: <https://www.indyturk.com/node/527991/ekonomi/tarim-bakan-kirisçi-kayıtlı-ciftçi-sayısının-20-yılda-sadece-9-bin-758-kışı>

Accessed November 1, 2022.

<sup>138</sup> Original in Turkish:

Dedik ki: 'Ne tür ürün üretirse üretsin herkes üye olabilmelidir. Türkiye'deki tarımdaki değişime karşı olan ve örgütlenmek isteyen insanlar tek bir çatı altında birleşmelidir.'

volunteers, as represented by the excerpt below under a category of a ‘honorary membership’.

When the union was established, we formed a formation called Çiftçi-Sen support group. Some were academics, some were students, some had other jobs but could help us thanks to their foreign languages. Since almost none of our managers knew a foreign language, we needed translation support. There were members who kept us informed of world politics. These members had not previously joined us in the decision process. Their contributions continued only through our bilateral relations. A system in which they can participate has come together with an honorary membership.<sup>139</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen’s General Secretary, Alaşehir, October 31, 2021)

The second reason, as analytically understood from a reading on the fieldwork notes but also consulting and comparing the production of articles in Karasaban (the movements online blog), as a stronger proximity and even higher dependence on the intellectually produced by the European Coordination of Via Campesina (ECVC), namely from the diversity of content and orientations that the food sovereignty program contains, expressed around the years immediately before the re-foundation of the movement as a single union, which means around 2018.

Both of these processes do not result from the fact of the novelties to the movement that a ECVC membership brought, because Çiftçi-Sen was accepted as a member to ECVC right after the foundation of the first product-based unions in 2004. An indicator that the influence of ECVC in the movements’ resistance strategies is given by its official communication. A clear example of such is given by analyzing in detail the press release in 2008 on the context of the foundation of Çiftçi-Sen as a confederation. The press release ends with a list of demands, quite aligned with the demands already known for the product-based unions and listed before on table 8, which can be

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<sup>139</sup> Original in Turkish:

Zaten ilk sendika kurulurken Çiftçi-Sen destek grubu diye bir oluşum oluşturmuştuk. Kimi akademisyen, kimi öğrenci, kimi başka işleri olan ama yabancı dilleri sayesinde bize yardımcı olabilecek kişilerdi. Yöneticilerimizin neredeyse hiçbiri yabancı dil bilmediği için çeviri desteğine ihtiyacımız oluyordu. Bize dünya politikalarından haberdar eden üyeler vardı. Bu üyeler daha önce karar sürecinde bize katılmıyorlardı. Bizim sadece ikili ilişkilerimizle katkıları devam ediyordu. Onların da katılabilecekleri bir sistem gelmiş oldu fahri üyelikle beraber.

generally divided into questions of price supports, dignified working conditions for peasant farmers, against the agribusiness privatization of agricultural companies and their extractive use of natural resources as well as against the growing dominance of contract-farming, privatization of nature by use of modified certified seeds. But interestingly the word food sovereignty is not used once, and certainly it is not because the food sovereignty program having become central for LVC in recent years; it is well studied (Edelman, 2014) that the term, on the context of agrarian movements and especially LVC, was first discussed<sup>140</sup> at its Second International Conference at Tlaxcala, Mexico, in 1996 and was in the same year proposed as alternative to FAO's 'food security'<sup>141</sup>, which means one decade before the emergence of Çiftçi-Sen.

Studying the chronology of the movement and again based on its post-legal struggles period achievements, I argue that the proximity to food sovereignty program has two different moments both in time and in rationale. Çiftçi-Sen claims they were the first to use and introduce the term *gıda egemenlik* (Turkish for food sovereignty) in Turkey. The first moment the movement publishes a press release with the word is on April 17, 2005 for the commemoration of the international day of peasant struggle, a day that LVC uses to celebrate its existence. However, between 2005 and 2015 the term food sovereignty is used on the official communication of the movement has a term associated with other focus of struggle, namely the already mentioned struggle against GMOs, against energy projects, for seed preservation, for the protection of small-scale farming against the industrial model based on contract-farming, but never used as a political program or *the* political program of the movement *per se*.

That starts gradually to change after 2015, precisely at the moment in which the confederation is trying to build back its grassroot basis threatened by the legal problems. As such, this is the first moment in time that food sovereignty marks a stronger relation of proximity with the intellectual production of ECVC, and by

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<sup>140</sup> 'Food sovereignty, simply defined, is ensuring that land, water, seeds and natural resources are controlled by small and medium-sized producers. It is directly linked to democracy and justice' (Vía Campesina 1996, 21).

<sup>141</sup> 'food sovereignty is both a reaction to and an intellectual offspring of the earlier concepts of the "right to food" and "food security"' (Fairbairn, 2010, 15).

extension LVC, due to the fact that the movement needed the international platform of recognition and legitimacy of their work in the country due to lack of such domestically, where even their legal existence was threatened.

The second moment in time is that after 2018 to the present, marked by two important events. The first is the abandonment of a charismatic leadership from the movement, as the president of the confederation, Abdullah Aysu, decided to leave the movement in November 2019, announcing on a social media publication that he would proceed his struggle for rural workers in an independent way. I learn from fieldwork notes that the reasoning of his leaving was due to an internal disagreement about alliances with main opposition-led municipalities for promoted initiatives to revive local cooperatives, in which in fact the now ex-leader became involved in a similar food initiative in Istanbul.

the “leader left, and the organization finished”, there was this danger. This was a great challenge, and these guys were stubborn, to do the work, Adnan and Ali tried to consolidate the current members and with these consolidations they tried to do the conference and in 2020 this conference happened in Izmir and they decided that it would be better to organize in just one union, rather than a confederation. It was a totally new beginning.

(Umut, voluntary member, February 4, 2021)

Also, the former political period in Turkey was especially marked by a very heated political series of events that increased the climate of repression to any public demonstration of dissent, which had also its impacts in rural areas for the fear instilled throughout the country.

There was an issue on how the unions will continue when I enter this movement, there was this issue as well and one of the strategies was to make a conference for each of the unions but in that period the Turkish political agenda was highly confusing, the Gezi protests, the coup attempt, the referendum, elections, the municipality elections, so it was not really possible to do the base work because everything was so confusing.

(Umut, voluntary member, February 4, 2021)



**Figure 18.** Logo of Çiftçi-Sen as a single-union open to represent all farmers and rural workers, 2022. The design of the logo is even closer to LVC's by adding the colors that LVC uses.

In sum, the road towards the current single union was done by a set of circumstances marked by a greater dependence on the relations with the transnational platform, not only at a first instance for a need of domestic recognition provided from abroad<sup>142</sup> but also to provide the needed intellectual push for the moment in which an abrupt change in leadership led to a whole restructure of the organization. As a result, on 1 February 2020, Çiftçi-Sen, after a conference held in the city of Izmir, Çiftçi-Sen (Farmers' Union) was established on 21 February 2020 and assembled the first official congress on 31 October of the same year. As our research with the movement started actually after the restructure and in fact all the interviews took place when the single-union was already founded, the next chapter of findings provide more detailed insight into what are the current views of members and the importance of food sovereignty program as, not a side note to illustrate previous contentious issues, but as the main proposal of the movement around which everything, in terms of communication and practices, orbits. Some issues that became quite central for LVC's food sovereignty like rights of peasant women are, still, almost all communication with not much concrete in terms of practices, as the next chapter will also critically reflect.

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<sup>142</sup> When the confederation received an order of closure, ECVC made several calls to the Turkish authorities to allow the rights of farmers to organize as well as provide valuable legal assistance and counseling to the movement. See recent publication titled 'ECVC stands in solidarity with member Çiftçi-Sen in their struggle to unionise farmers' rights':

<https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/EN-Final-ECVC-stands-in-solidarity-with-Ciftci-Sen.pdf>

Accessed, 9 November, 2021.

## CHAPTER 6

### PEASANT RESISTANCE AND AUTHORITARIANISM IN RURAL TURKEY

#### 6.1. Defining the movement

We saw that the first union within the Çiftçi-Sen's as a confederation of product-based unions was that of grape producers with 317 members. A month later the tobacco producer's union was established with more than 400 members. The reason for the inaugural unions to be around these two products are related with grapes (Turkey is one of biggest world grape producers) and tobacco being historically important agricultural crops in the country and among the first to suffer from proletarianization and contract-farming. Besides, their province is the same (the Aegean Manisa province) and as I was told on the very first interview with the first president of the grape producer's union, in that region peasant farmers who stopped working with tobacco crops switched to grapes, and those who left grapes switched to tobacco. That being the reason why both unions carried out the first effort together.

For example, while Tütün-Sen struggled against the privatization of monopoly and contracted production, grape producers held rallies and carried out various activities in the face of low grape prices. In this way, we went to the villages and established relations with them.<sup>143</sup>

(Ali, President of Çiftçi-Sen, Soma, February 5, 2021)

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<sup>143</sup> Original in Turkish:

Örneğin tekelin özelleştirilmesi ve sözleşmeli üreticiliğin karşısında Tütün-Sen mücadele ederken üzüm fiyatlarının düşüklüğü karşısında da üzüm üreticileri mitingler yaptılar, çeşitli faaliyetlerde bulundular. Bu şekilde biz köylere giderek onlarla ilişki kurduk.

Later other product-based unions from other provinces of almost all regions of Turkey were incorporated: hazelnut and tea cereals, sunflower, and olives. Regarding all of those, both consider them individually and in their connected nexus, it was also shown the most important argued (against) political issues, areas of protests as well as the arguments of proposed solution and lines of resistance. However, nothing was said yet about the political background of the movement's founding members and its ideologically positioning that display an historical tension with the state which is at the origin of the weakening factor of the contemporary authoritarian consensus-making and coercion.

Although the final part of Çiftçi-Sen's brief chronological review focuses mostly on the consequences of legal coercions derived from said authoritarianism, it is important to consider not only a version of a movement that builds its struggles on the contradictions of the neoliberal food regime and extractive rural processes, but also on a critical account of the movement's on ideological premises which also reveal their share of contradictions, equally important here to avoid a romanticized account of a peasant movement its revolutionary promised tomorrows.

### **6.1.1. 2004-2022: Overviewing the ideological foundations of Çiftçi-Sen**

At the very beginning of this thesis two questions were posed which I would like to recall here; 'why do we still talk about the peasantry?' and 'when does that persistence unfold forms of resistance?'. Knowing what has been written so far, there is enough information to advance a bit more on answering these two questions which, as said at the beginning, is crucial to form the theoretical positions, given also by the findings and discussion, to answer the research questions at the conclusion.

On the preface of a 1974 edition of the International Institute for Labor Studies of Landsberger's *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change*, a former director of said institute, Robert W. Cox, rehearses some answers to those two questions. First, Cox writes that until recently "most of the world's workers have been

peasants” and that it was “possible during the first half of the twentieth century largely to ignore that fact”. That picture, according to him, changed in the second half due to two processes: the decline of traditional ways of rural life and the shrinking of the peasant economy. As reaction to consequences of those, the second half of the twentieth century witnesses’ wars in “areas of peasant population”, undergoing major social and political transformations as the peasantry of “Third World countries [as they are transformed] whether into a modern workforce or into a mass of un-integrated, poverty-ridden urban slum-dwellers.”

Talking about the peasantry in the Turkish context marks the transition to industrialized urban society in the country where precisely peasants have formed the workforce that migrated heavily to Germany as proletarians on the 50s, formed the cities’ *gecekondu* (as seen on chapter 3) but mostly constituted the urban poorest classes. The peasants that remained in agriculture, those to whom the cost of the changes that started to occur on the 80s with the early neoliberalization of agriculture was higher (a key point on Çiftçi-Sen’s foundational narrative) remained at large a conservative silent majority, but when that was not/is not the case, we may ask like Cox on the preface “Under what circumstances have peasants become active in attempting to change their condition?”

Note that this question, done in 1974, is very similar to the concern of the second question referred above about peasant persistence unfolding forms of resistance. One of the ways to understand that for the Turkish case in a way that connects with the early days of Çiftçi-Sen’s members is by understanding that period of the second half of the twentieth century which according to Cox was a period of peasant unrest, marked by violent political changes and even when not violent certainly not marked by consensus. We can then summarize two contexts of the peasantry in Turkey on the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from a politically active yet non-revolutionary and patronage-controlled peasantry (after 1950s) and an emergent yet rapidly and violently tackled revolutionary movement which was not originated nor restricted to rural areas but had in its political program the emancipation of peasant farmers and the recognition of rural people’s rights (1970s-1980s).

Examples of the former are the use of widespread land occupations by Turkish peasants as a protest method for the first time in 1969 (Alper, 2010, 72), the use of such protest method across Turkey on the 1965-1980 period (Gürel, Küçük and Taş, 2022) and the 1979 People's Committees established in the municipality of Fatsa, Black Sea region, where direct popular democracy principles, under an elected mayor by Dev Yol, were the banner for the rights of hazelnut and tea producers (Kahraman, 2013). But besides those periodical protest waves, related with the height of radical left in Turkey, and recent protests in the provinces of Manisa in 2005 and Ordu in 2006 (Gürel, 2014) there is no record of an organized (both in space and time) peasant movement in Turkey before Çiftçi-Sen.

The revolutionary background of Çiftçi-Sen is important regarding the similarly shared values that LVC took after the 1980s, namely the principles of autonomy from political parties and the government as to ensure the avoidance of state tutelage responsible for the subordination of earlier peasant organizations. This is a key point of historical tension in Turkish rural politics, especially because it intersects the two contradictory aspects of peasant's consciousness with a paternalistic-antagonistic relation with the state - to be shown by empirical observations on the next section. While past appropriation of the peasantry by the state's political elites was responsible for the lack of mobilizing agency on the countryside and therefore exacerbated subordination, appropriating the peasantry to prevent (but not only) potential "destructive social revolutions" (Karaömerlioğlu 2000, 124), peasant's autonomy and rural resilience enabled their persistence as a dominant social class on the countryside.

However, it is precisely when the state's withdrawal as a guarantor on the market (with the neoliberal transformation of Turkey's agriculture) becomes overwhelmingly present that we have the emergence of the first peasant organization in the country. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century this is even more drastic for the State is no longer the organizing principle of political economy, only facilitating capital, as the new organizing principle (McMichael, 2008) but also acquiring (as will be seen on the next chapter) a more aggressive stance of extractivism protecting the crisis of an overproducing capitalism that needs higher and deeper levels of commodification of nature to find sources of

accumulation. All the latter has been repeatedly stated as a major reasons for the formation of Çiftçi-Sen in fieldwork interviews. Furthermore, if on the second half of the twentieth century it was hard to ignore the situation of peasant populations marked by a growing unrest due to the destruction of peasant livelihoods and economy, the second decade of the twenty-first century is also marked by a crisis of capitalism which exacerbates older impacts. But also, brings along diverse responses, starting by the re-conceptualization of rural politics and peasant's political agency by fashion of a strengthened and directed political program presented by rural social movements and rural activism<sup>144</sup>.

This second decade has been marked by two major social and political events that go hand in hand (one sudden and one coming with much longer, silent and slow destructive potential). The pandemic, the first mention event, has revealed the crisis of an expanding agricultural capitalism and corporate food regime visible on the stressed food chains but also on the pressures put on rural workers and agro-food systems in Third World countries and the resulting global hunger and food crisis as shown by the 2022 Global Hunger Index report<sup>145</sup>. The second, climate change, has mostly shown that climate is essential to the internal dynamics of capitalism revealed on the intersection of two processes that are exacerbating rural poverty and power asymmetries in agrarian contexts of the global south: on the one hand as capitalism reaches limits of nature revealed by the biophysical manifestations of climate change it also ultimately suffers its consequences, and on the other hand leads to responses from above by capitalists (e.g. green extractivism like carbon capture schemes or the

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<sup>144</sup> The Journal of Peasant Studies has recently (Borras et al., 2021) called for a new forum capable of analyzing new consequences on the rural world caused by the relationship between capitalism and climate change, namely contribution capable of “examine different logics and strategies for anti-capitalist struggles that might connect climate change and agrarian mobilizations”.

<sup>145</sup> “Global progress against hunger has largely stagnated in recent years, according to the 2022 GHI. In many countries across regions the situation has worsened. Indeed, one indicator used in the GHI, the prevalence of undernourishment, shows that the share of people who lack regular access to sufficient calories is increasing, with as many as 828 million people undernourished in 2021.” (2022 Global Hunger Index, 2022, 7).

so-called mitigation policies) that are essentially false solutions and represent a cheapening of nature and define today's rural world as a 'capitalocene'<sup>146</sup>.

It is with confidence that one engaging in critical agrarian studies can affirm that the second decade of the twenty-first century marks for the rural world a need to critically analyze the dynamics of capital with nature among the two events mentioned and the resulting processes of worsening rural poverty but also cheapening of nature, and by consequence how the circumstances of this historical moment shape the responses from agrarian mobilizations. According to Jason Moore's intervention on the event mentioned on footnote 147 (and that which comes aligned with the intellectual call mentioned on footnote 145), political movements, namely in the rural world, need to "democratize capital accumulation, arrest state power, socialize key strategic economic sectors and discipline capital"<sup>147</sup>.

Some of these issues, particularly the one about state power and the socialization of key economic sectors while disciplining capital are quite important within the political program of Çiftçi-Sen, although contradictions from their member's narratives are also quite visible. Mentioning those contradictions, especially a main contradiction that stems from the vision and rationale that Çiftçi-Sen's s has as regarding the role of the State in Turkish agriculture and the peasantry itself, are at the core of the characterization of the movement's ideological body and organization structures as well as the action that emerges from them.

This effort of understanding their ideology, organization and action will start below by the following two different dimensions and while doing so this work will slowly

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<sup>146</sup> These formulations of 'cheapening of nature' and 'capitalocene' are taken from the participation of Jason Moore on the day two, September 27, 2022, of the Webinar "Climate Change & Agrarian Justice Conference" organized by the Journal of Peasant Studies, Transnational Institute, Collective of Agrarian Scholar-Activists of the Global South, Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies. The formulations can be further read in Chapter Three 'The Rise of Cheap Nature' of Moore's *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*.

<sup>147</sup> Citing the draft and unofficial summary document of the day two of the Webinar "Climate Change & Agrarian Justice Conference", referring to Jason Moore's talk.

connect theory with the findings to be presented in the next chapter, although results from the fieldwork will also be used now to illustrate the characterization.

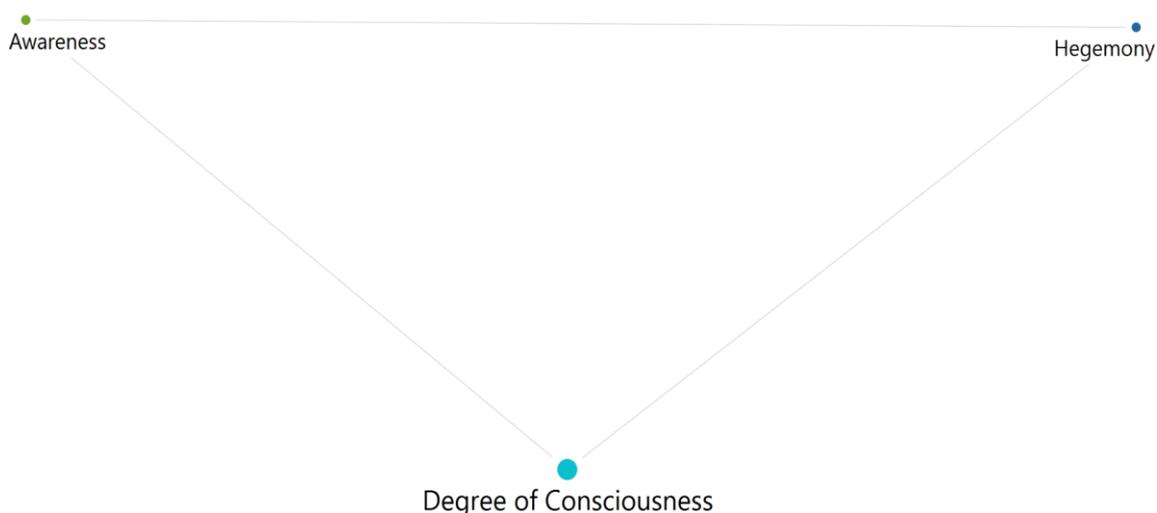
### **6.1.2. Degree of consciousness**

When considering consciousness in terms of social movements, and in this case, a peasant movement structured legally (although its legality is in itself a field of struggle) as a single-union but with a diverse past of product-based unions formerly united under a confederation, immediately the question of number of peasants that share a common consciousness comes to mind. In that regard, questioning the number of peasants that are now members of Çiftçi-Sen, does not take us far on the understanding of what Çiftçi-Sen is in terms of its degree of consciousness, considering that the current state of the movement is of reconfiguration, or better say, a reconstitution from the start where the bases of the past are not necessarily the ones of the present nor the ones that will, if they will, build a future for the organization.

Questioning the number of peasants that right now are conscious of their shared problems (awareness) and the dominant power constructs behind them (hegemony) and for that reason are members of the movement will not tell us much. That is why all the interviews' quotes to be used, to express the degree of consciousness, either by references to hegemony or awareness, are representations from the past and accumulated experiences of the movement, rather than referring to the present or even the future, as the movement's history talks much more about that quantifiable dimension of number of peasant members that were conscious.

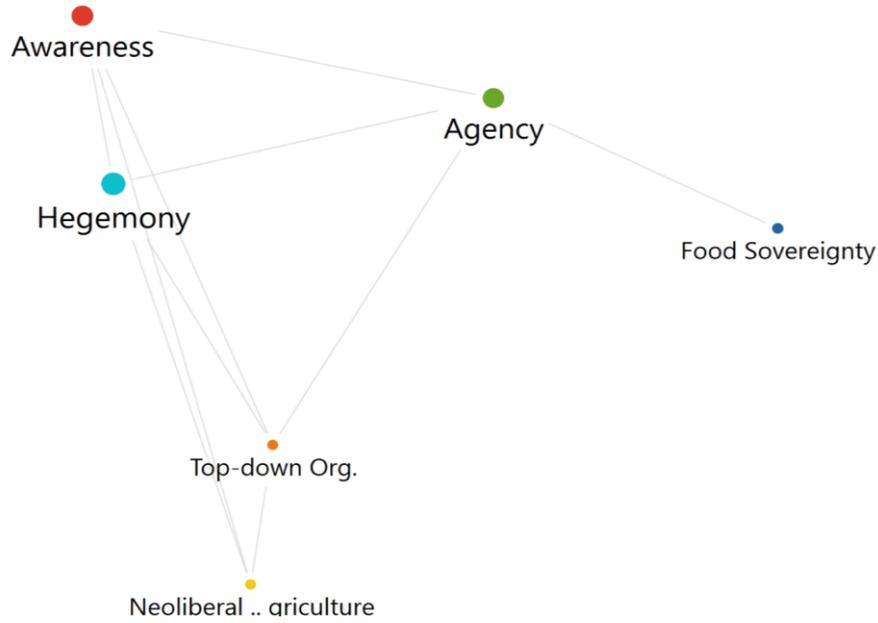
Although it is important to understand this time-sensitivity from the expressed by the interviewees, the quality of their consciousness allows to surpass that constraint of focusing too much on the number of members, and points out to their shared awareness of the societal system, especially the rural societal system, affected by the hegemonic rationale of a neoliberalism agriculture whose surplus must be extracted by non-productive forces and their instruments of control, such as contract-farming or provided loans for the industrialization of agriculture.

**Figure 19.** MAXQDA generated code-map (degree of consciousness and sub-codes).



Finally, before starting analyzing key coded segments under the code system for degree of consciousness, it is also important to say that the above shown code-map reveals two important pieces of information. The first is that, although there are intersections between coded segments for ‘Awareness’ and coded segments for ‘Hegemony’, their distance on the map shows that they are revealed as quite independently. In other words, there is a clear separation between the expression of consciousness of members in terms of their understanding of the negative impacts of the hegemonic rule in their livelihoods, the food system and agriculture in general and the more positive outlook into their condition as peasants with a capacity and will to do something about it. That is visible on the code-map below where the relations Awareness-Agency are less related with codes like ‘Top-down’ and ‘Neoliberalization of agriculture’ than ‘Hegemony’ is.

**Figure 20.** MAXQDA generated code-map (relations sub-codes of degree of consciousness and sub-codes collectiveness of action).



The second important information is that, besides being independently expressed, there is no visible predominance when comparing the coded-segments as ‘Awareness’ and coded-segments as ‘Hegemony’ for the definition of the degree of consciousness dimension. Starting with the latter, ‘Hegemony’ is mostly expressed in segments by two predominant time periods and related issues: the role of the state in agriculture before and after the rule of the current governing party. Nonetheless, this dominant expression by the interviewees in terms of before/after does not necessarily express a ‘before’ where everything was great and an ‘after’ where everything became worse. The picture portrayed on the interviews’ segments, coded for these two categories, is not black and white.

Prior to this process [dominant neoliberal policies], the state had partial protection and therefore the relationship between companies and farmers was weaker. In this process, the state said: 'I'm getting out of the way, whatever you do' and the farmers suddenly found themselves face to face with companies.<sup>148</sup>  
(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,

<sup>148</sup> Original in Turkish:

Bu süreçten önce devletin kısmi bir koruması vardı ve bu yüzden şirketlerle çiftçiler arasındaki ilişki daha zayıftı. Bu süreçte devlet dedi ki: 'Ben aradan çekiliyorum, siz ne yaparsanız yapın' ve çiftçiler bir anda kendilerini şirketlerle karşı karşıya buldu.

July 30, 2020)

In the early years of the Republic, agricultural credit cooperatives played a role when it came to industrialization based on agriculture, established agricultural sales cooperatives unions likewise provide loans for the industrialization of agriculture, and then they fulfil their duties in order for industrial agriculture to become widespread. Today, Turkey's agriculture is corporatized.<sup>149</sup>

(Ali, President of Çiftçi-Sen, Soma, February 5, 2021)

Although there is an acknowledgement of this partial “protection” role of the state and the developmentalist nature expressed in agriculture under the form of pushing for agricultural cooperatives and industrialization which contrasts with the corporatization of the current days, there is a grey between that black and white which is the historical consequences of that protection on the capacity for autonomous organization among peasants:

They [farmers] did not have many organizational traditions. The farmers in Turkey have just realized that if they can't organize in that sense, no one can help them on their behalf. Actually, this is a problem both because of AKP's policies and because the organization tradition in Turkey has not been created.<sup>150</sup>

(Ali, President of Çiftçi-Sen, Soma, February 5, 2021)

Furthermore, besides that lack of tradition of organization that is an historical issue and not a new phenomenon respective, it is also added the role that state cooperatives have played on preventing that tradition from emerging:

No matter what power comes, there is a process in which the members of the chambers of agriculture and their relatives are in the administration in Turkey, but from the beginning, the cooperatives in Turkey are used as tools that bring

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<sup>149</sup> Original in Turkish:

Cumhuriyetin ilk dönemlerinde tarıma dayalı bir sanayileşme söz konusu olduğunda tarım kredi kooperatifleri bu konu rol oynuyorlar, kurulmuş tarım satış kooperatifleri birlikleri aynı şekilde tarımın sanayileşmesi yönünde krediler kullanıyorlar, daha sonra da endüstriyel tarımın yaygınlaşabilmesi için görevlerini yerine getiriyorlar. Bugün Türkiye tarımı şirketleşiyor.

<sup>150</sup> Original in Turkish:

örgütlenme gelenekleri çok fazla yoktu Türkiye'deki çiftçilerin o anlamda da örgütlenemezlerse hiç kimsenin onlar adına yardımcı olamayacaklarını yeni yeni anlamış durumdadır aslında bu hem AKP'nin politikaları nedeni ile hem de Türkiye'deki örgütlenme geleneğinin yaratılmamış olması ile ilgili bir problemdir.

what you want to do, whatever kind of agricultural program you want to implement.<sup>151</sup>

(Ali, President of Çiftçi-Sen, Soma, February 5, 2021)

It is once again expressed here another feature of the state-peasant tension, revealed on a kind of contradiction between a certain expressed nostalgia for a past of state-led developmentalism versus the fact that peasants were left alone to face the companies, with the acknowledgement that the protection of the past also had as consequence the delay or even prevention of a culture of organization.

It is not a policy specific to the AKP. We experienced this in the years 77-78.<sup>152</sup>

(Bahri, Çiftçi-Sen's Financial Secretary, Alaşehir, October 31, 2020)

Essentially there is a negative attitude towards organizing, farmers, workers, probably coming from the essentials of the Turkish state, which does not want anyone to get organized, whichever subject you can put as the heads of the State.

(Umut, voluntary member, September 18, 2020)

While noting that such is not a new historical process resulting from a domination strategy of the current powerholders, there is a novel expression of that prevention which is, together with the control of cooperatives, another instrument of control of peasants: the financialization of agriculture expressed in terms of their accumulated and unsustainable indebtedness that is also linked with alienation of peasants' property and land-grabbing.

Farmers, who previously made a living by making a minimum income from their production, were dragged into debt.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Original in Turkish:

Hangi iktidar gelirse gelsin ziraat odalarının onların elemanlarının, onların yakınlarının yönetimlerde olduğu bir süreç yaşanıyor zaten Türkiye'de ama başından itibaren Türkiye'deki kooperatifçilik siz ne yapmak istiyorsanız, nasıl bir tarım programı uygulamak istiyorsanız onun gereğini getiren araçlar halinde kullanılıyor.

<sup>152</sup> Original in Turkish:

AKP'ye özel bir politika değil. Biz bunu 77-78 yıllarında da yaşadık.

<sup>153</sup> Original in Turkish:

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,

July 30, 2020)

In Aydın region like this, the lands that have been taken over by the bank are offered for sale from the hands of the farmers. The land is rapidly changing hands, falling into the hands of industrial companies.<sup>154</sup>

(Ali, President of Çiftçi-Sen, Soma, February 5, 2021)

The main problem is because most small farmers are in the system and it is very difficult for them to make a change because they have credits that they use and of course instead of growing their own food they grow corn to sell as animal food...it's difficult to do it financially. Some of them have lost their farms anyway, they are not actually farming anymore.

(Berin, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, May 5, 2021)

Besides, when we explore in detail this sub-code 'Hegemony', we can see that the most frequent code co-occurrences are with the code 'Peasant', that as explained before, codes all the references to the word peasant and the interviewees' definitions of it. That shows the proximity of situations on the code system of the interviews in which references to the hegemonic rule intersect with references to the condition of the peasantry in Turkey. Furthermore, ordering the analysis software to check on the most frequent words in the code 'hegemony', after the due cleaning by applying a stop list and lemmatization of words, the results point to 'farmers', 'peasant' and 'land' as the three more frequent words, emphasizing the spoken proximity. In other words, the references to the political situation of dominance by the ruling party to the interviewees' view on the Turkish peasantry is of clear proximity.

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Daha önce üretimiyle asgari bir kazanç sağlayarak geçimini sürdüren çiftçiler borç batağına sürüklendiler.

<sup>154</sup> Original in Turkish:

Bu gibi Aydın yöresinde bankanın eline geçmiş topraklar çiftçilerin elinden satışa sunuluyor. Toprak hızla el değiştiriyor, sanayi şirketlerinin eline geçiyor.

**Figure 21.** MAXQDA generated code-map (relations sub-code ‘Hegemony’ and codes ‘Peasant’ and ‘The Movement’).



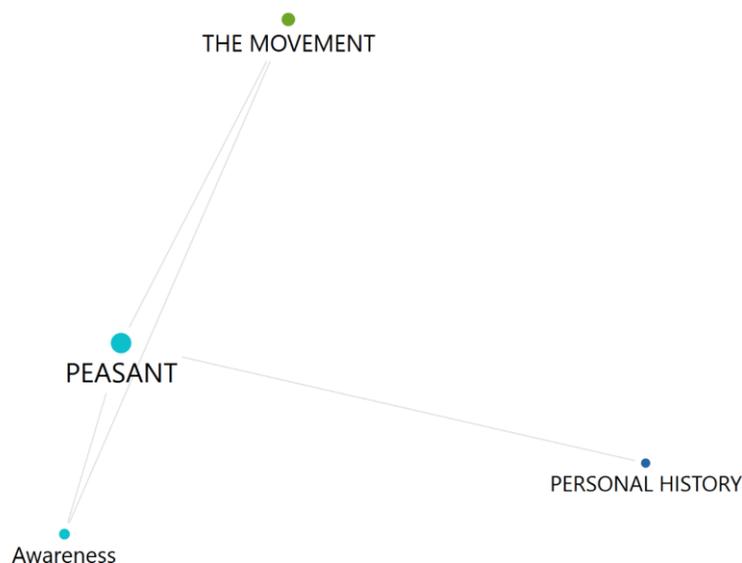
The code-map above shows that when exploring that proximity using a third general code, as ‘The Movement’ (that codes all the references to Çiftçi-Sen), as a reference for comparison, one can see that the co-occurrences of references between ‘Peasant’ and ‘Hegemony’ are much frequent than between the references to peasants when interviewees’ define the movement or speak about its trajectory, history, agency, and the like.

Although one should not rush into grand conclusions, considering that the sample in question is small and especially constricted to the views of the higher organizing dome of the movement, it is yet important to note that the analysis points to a significant weight of the hegemonic forces in agriculture and the food system, resulting in historical conditions (political and material) of the subordination of the peasantry, following Wolf’s definitional and conceptual body.

But how important is that idea of subordination for the second sub-code of degree of consciousness, ‘Awareness’? From Figure 21 it was already visible that the ‘Awareness’ has a much more relation of proximity in the code-map, in terms of co-occurrence, with Agency, as the most important sub-code of collectiveness of action, than it has with other sub-codes like ‘Neoliberalization of Agriculture’ that are more related with ‘Hegemony’. In this sense, awareness of being peasant as sharing a condition of commonalities of material existence is more defined affirmatively in terms of the will to struggle than negatively stressed on the political conditions that subordinate the peasantry.

To explore deeper that conclusion, one can also see from the relation that ‘Awareness’ of a shared consciousness has on the code for references to ‘peasant’, while using other codes such as the references to the movement Çiftçi-Sen and the personal histories of the members interviewed. Figure 23 below explores that set of relations and displays that awareness of the members in terms of consciousness of their condition has a higher weight in terms of co-occurrence on the references that define ‘peasant’ than references to the history of the movement or their own trajectories as active members.

**Figure 22.** MAXQDA generated code-map (relations sub-code ‘Awareness’ and codes ‘Peasant’. ‘The Movement’ and “Personal History”).



In sum, important to remind, as seen before about the characterization of the movement, that the interviewees’ views of Çiftçi-Sen and their awareness of belonging to the movement are reinforced by agency for alternatives rather than of a stress on the negative impositions of their shared condition of subordination. It is precisely that agency for alternatives that links affirmatively degree of consciousness with collectiveness of action, as it transcends the shared condition of the peasant farmers to the hegemonic forces over the food regime.

It will be carried out with the struggles of poverty in the city. We want to create a food movement. We say let's march to establish another food system. For this, it is not something that only villagers and farmers can do.<sup>155</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,  
July 30, 2020)

Although the official narrative is of a need for alliances, along with the shown contradictions regarding the protective role of the state, alliances are also a field of internal contradictions in the movement, and the discussion on Chapter 7 will provide a critical account on the movement's seemingly disconnected will for alliances and its *de facto* actions.

### **6.1.3. Collectiveness of Action**

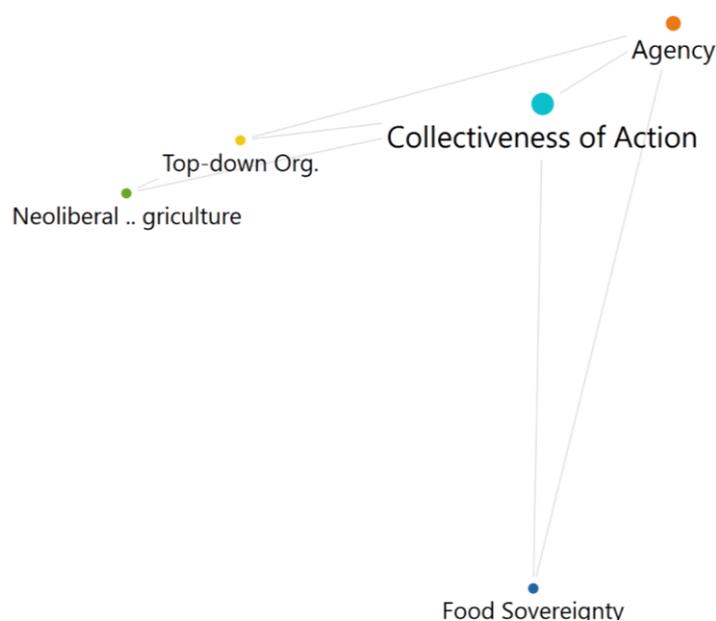
As mentioned earlier, agency plays a heavier a role in defining the collective action of the movement, as it is of a much relation of proximity with the main code 'Collectiveness of Action' than any other of the sub-codes created by references to issues such as the predominance of 'Top-down' organizations of farmers in agriculture, and the 'Neoliberalization of agriculture', as shown below.

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<sup>155</sup> Original in Turkish:

Aynı zamanda şehirdeki yoklukların mücadeleleri ile yürütülecektir. Bir gıda hareketi yaratmak istiyoruz. Başka bir gıda sistemi kurmak üzere yürüyeceğiz diyoruz. Bunun için sadece köylü ve çiftçilerin yapacağı bir şey değildir.

**Figure 23.** MAXQDA generated code-map (collectiveness of action and sub-codes).



For this dimension of collectiveness of action, the focus will be turned only to how agency is defined and how it reflects in terms of organization and mobilization strategies and its relationship with food sovereignty, which will also be a focus of findings and discussion. Agency and food sovereignty will be referred here on the nexus between both - in the sense that if one drives the action the other constitutes its political orientation on the struggle for alternatives.

The reason for focusing here only on those two sub-codes of collectiveness of action is because much has already been said about the top-down character of organizations and institutions in Turkish agriculture and the instrumental role they played and play at the will of the powerholders with state's legitimacy and about the myriad of contentious issues and areas of protest that the neoliberalization of agriculture unfolds (see Table 8). In fact, these two are the main drivers of the collectiveness of action on the chronology of the product-based unions described and analyzed at the beginning of the present chapter.

When exploring in detail this sub-code we see that the most frequent code co-occurrences are with the code ‘Peasant’, so as said before, although peasant’s definition is marked by references coded as ‘Hegemony’, it also has a dominant sense of action or willing to act. Regarding the most frequent words in coded segments for ‘Agency’ we see that ‘farmer’ and ‘peasant’ are by far the most frequent, followed by ‘union’ or ‘movement’ and ‘organization’. There is, it is believed, no surprises here as agency in the case of a movement refers to their own movement’s capacity to act, specially to act in an organized way within their settings and along their members.

Another important aspect to refer to agency is its temporality considering the action of the members in terms of references to the movement and their personal history of becoming active within, in other words, the fact that their personal histories are very much linked with joining Çiftçi-Sen from the very beginning as well as the references to agency being much strongly linked to the movement and their personal histories from a past perspective than to the perspective of Çiftçi-Sen as a single union since 2020 (see figure 25 below).

I joined not as a farmer, but as a revolutionary. I am a socialist. But we do not look at the issues as an intellectual activity due to our political tradition. We see workers and laborers as organizations. We do not have a desk socialist revolutionary idea. That's why, as I told Umut, I've been dealing with agriculture since I met revolutionary ideas. I am trying to organize agriculture. My father was a worker in cooperatives. My mother was a village midwife. As such, my life was spent entirely in the villages.

(...)

I got to know the relations, exploitation and collapse in agriculture closely. I have both a farming background and a political identity. Of course, Ayvalık is different. Ayvalık is a place that has given up on agriculture before. The collapse here occurred earlier due to reasons such as construction [construction projects]. This is how I joined the union.<sup>156</sup>

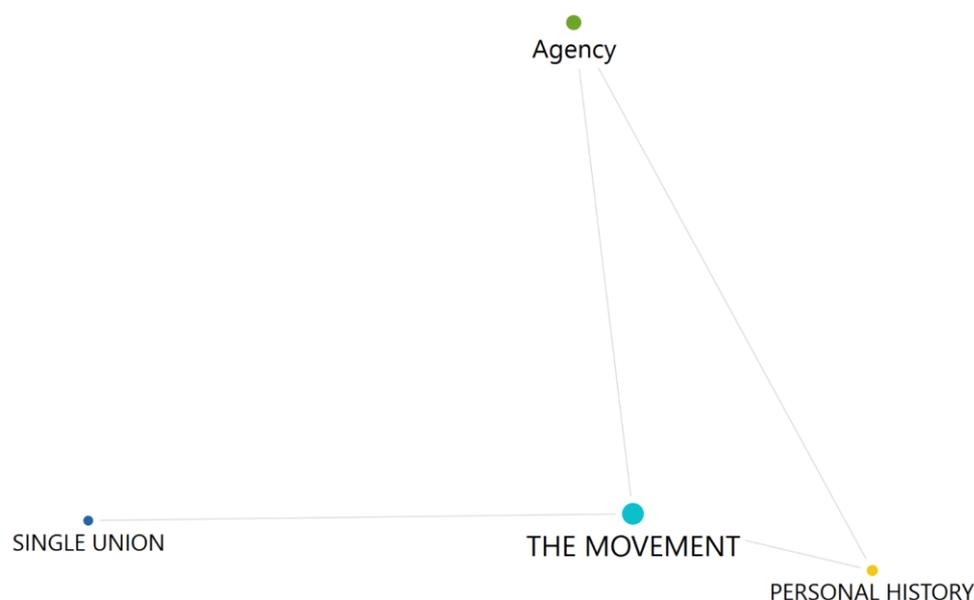
(Hasan, member of Çiftçi-Sen, Ayvalık, February 3, 2021).

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<sup>156</sup> Original in Turkish:

Tarımdaki ilişkileri, sömürüleri ve çöküşü yakından tanıdım. Hem bir çiftçilik geçmişim var hem de politik bir kimliğim var. Tabi Ayvalık daha farklı. Ayvalık tarımdan daha önce vazgeçmiş bir yer. Buradaki çöküş daha erken yaşandı yapılaşmalar gibi sebeplerden. Benim sendikaya dahil oluşum böyle.

**Figure 24.** MAXQDA generated code-map (relations between codes of Agency, Movement, Personal History and Single Union)<sup>157</sup>.



In terms of the agency of Çiftçi-Sen and its relational nexus with food sovereignty, one can see that their political past linked to a radical left (see last interview quote above) is an obvious driver of the type of organization, mobilization as well as the vision intended for the radical change of the food system. That is not only visible on the critique to cooperatives as instruments for creating dependency on the peasants and keeping that dependency for electoral gains but also on the alternative view of the main opposition in the country regarding farmers, agricultural policies but also the role of the cooperatives. As such, the agency that Çiftçi-Sen claims through food sovereignty also resonates slightly isolationist considering the problematic understanding of alliances. But to illustrate initially this problematic intersection of agency with food sovereignty and the potential need for political alliances in order to turn that political program into material actions and reality, I call the attention for the following two excerpts from fieldwork interviews that express internal contradicting views:

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<sup>157</sup> No co-occurrence of references to concrete actions coded for 'Agency' and the code 'Single Union'. Reason for this however has to take into account the relatively recent period in which Çiftçi-Sen operates as a single-union and the current effort of re-founding the movement.

I'm supportive of the roles of municipalities in supporting the organized, this is also very important for me, the organized group of producers connecting them finding ways to connect them to the organized group of consumers (...)

(Olca, voluntary member and ECVC liaison, April 20, 2021)

They came to this area, a team with the mayor [from the main opposition party CHP]. They said, 'We will give you animals, you will do agriculture without water, you give up silage products, we will sign a contract that we will buy the products from you'. This is a kind of contract farming. (...) <sup>158</sup>

(Bahri, Çiftçi-Sen's Financial Secretary, Salihli, Alaşehir, October 31, 2020)

The consecutive reading of these two excerpts can be used to reflect on two different issues. The first is the important state-pension tension that is a focus followed throughout this study since its first theoretical part but also mentioned on this chapter, in the sense of the distrust between the potential loss of the movement's autonomy, intrinsic to the peasantry, if collaborating with a political party that in the current conjecture heads the opposition. The second is another dualistic tension, linked with the first; the one between autonomy and alliances, also very much debated before and to which the discussion chapter pays special attention.

## **6.2. Double Invisibility: Gender on the agency and resistance of Çiftçi-Sen**

The last part of this characterization of the movement is reserved for what is clearly the main shortcoming of Çiftçi-Sen's agency, and in general one of the most prevailing issues of rural social relations of labor: the gender question. This question is not among the central points of this study, is not revealed in any of the research questions, did not have the attention it deserves on the theoretical part of the study, nor the methodological design and fieldwork manage to include it on the collection of data. As such, if one would say that the mentioned main shortcoming on Çiftçi-Sen agency

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<sup>158</sup> Original in Turkish:

Bu bölgeye geldiler belediye başkanıyla bir ekip. 'Biz size hayvan vereceğiz, susuz tarım yapacaksınız, silajlık ürünlerden vazgeçiyorsunuz, biz ürünleri sizden alacağımıza dair sözleşme imzalayacağız' dediler. Bir nevi sözleşmeli tarımdır bu.

is also reproduced by this study that has the movement as the case-study, I would not contest such an affirmation.

It is undoubtedly truth that this study was not capable of proving a framework dedicated to such a shortcoming, however, if any defense is possible, I would say that this ‘elephant in the room’ for the movement as well as for any knowledgeable person about the Turkish rurality was not included as a central issue of the study, and rather treated as an indicator, because the research questions, from their historically and critically perspective, are not specific enough to study the issue.

In other words, while asking about the historical reasons for the paternalistic subordination of the peasantry before the state and the current features of such in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in relation with the case of a movement attempting, almost in a pioneer fashion, the organization and mobilization of the peasantry, the question of gender does not have to be essentially taken to design such research. But if it is not essential to design research around the mentioned issues and to answer the resulting research questions, it is certainly incomplete. It is incomplete not only because within the subordination of the peasantry there is an internal degree of higher subordination towards peasant women considering the highly patriarchal structures of the social division of labor in peasant family farming but also because before the state, peasant women are not even taken as farmers (as they are usually not officially registered) considering the predominance of unpaid family labor that affects strictly women. That is what is meant by ‘double invisibility’ on the subtitle above.

Furthermore, this double invisibility acquires new forms of subalternity when considering that one of the results of the neoliberal restructuring of rural Turkey, accompanied by the decline of small-scale farming or at least the worsening of its conditions, is certainly the proletarianization of peasant farmers into workers for export-oriented industrial agriculture, where contract-farming is dominant. These new agri-food system labor relations depend highly on the presence of masses of cheap labor force, in which the predominant composition is of rural women.

As such, although this study lacks the theoretical, methodological, and empirical profundity that the issue clearly deserves, this section at the end of the chapter 5 intends to be something between a mere footnote and a deeper and more extensive analysis of the issue, to express the fully acknowledgement that a study of the peasantry should not fall into gender blindness, as this one, although incomplete, expressively does not. As drastically put by Eagleton, (2003, 3-4 cited in Boltivinik and Mann, 2016, 13), “it is remarkable how intellectual life for centuries was conducted on the tacit assumption that human beings had no genitals” which is still visible on today’s studies as well, particularly in agrarian studies as it is a field of production greatly gender blind. In fact, from its very start, if one takes into consideration that even regarding the question of peasants’ self-exploration, on the classical work of Chayanov, there is no meaningful mention about the domestic patriarchy in peasant household, which were never and largely are still not “equitable institutions” (Boltivinik and Mann, 2016, 13).

Returning to the question of the predominance of women employed as cheap labor by large-scale industrial farming in Turkey, it represents a blurred area between peasant and worker which is particularly affecting rural women which has come to be scholarly know as gender labor regime or gender regime. A recent brilliant ethnography work (Eren, 2020) about the gender labor regime in Turkey attempted to answer the question on the patterns that such a regime has for rural women employed as wage labor in agribusiness in the Bakırçay Basin, a very significant basin in western Turkey where large-scale agriculture greenhouses are located. Among the diversified conclusions regarding the patterns of emerging gender labor regime from an extensive ethnographic work with peasant women working as wage laborers for an agribusiness company, one is particularly relevant for this study because it wonders if the wage labor in the agribusiness company would contribute for an emancipation or empowerment considering the previously mentioned double invisibility. That study concludes regarding that question that, although there are indicators to argue a re-shaping of “social life and gender codes” by the participation in paid labor, it cannot also be linearly argued that such means empowerment:

this study does not see a linear, automatic and/or mechanic relation between women’s empowerment and their participation in paid labor. The complex

nature of empowerment in the process of gendered proletarianization for peasant-worker women at the Greenhouse rather reveals itself in mixed forms of achievements and limitations. Not being involve in —collective action that would allow them to make structural and cultural changes, what the women of the Greenhouse have experienced through work has been rather the —seeds of their empowerment. (Eren, 2020, 387)

Moreover, another important point in relation with the one above is something that has been argued for the need to be critically alert about the mistake of considering peasants as pawns of history ‘without history’ (read without agency).

Although the paid wage labor can be considered on the emergence of liberating changes in the lives of rural women but not meaning a complete path of emancipation due to the structural impositions on rural women by the rural politics of neoliberal adjustments in agri-food, their agency of resistance should not be underestimated as “ (...) liberalization and globalization are not top-down processes manipulating women as passive pawns, but also that women are resisting: women are thus both heavily affected and fighting back” (Razavi, 2012, 4, cited in Eren, 2020, 388). Both these theoretical positions are fundamental to give a brief account about the gender labor regime and peasant agency on Çiftçi-Sen’s trajectory of political mobilization. In fact, the gender question and the importance of rural women are intrinsically related with the very foundation of Çiftçi-Sen’s first product-based union, Üzüm-Sen, as the words of its first president directly point out:

Üzüm-Sen was founded on March 8, 2004, because women have a special place in agriculture. There is mostly female labor in agriculture. But if we look at their organization, they are almost non-existent. While the labor is produced by women, unfortunately, the right to save money is mostly men. We deliberately chose the date of March 8 in order to emphasize the importance of women's labor in agriculture<sup>159</sup>. (Birgün, 2011)

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<sup>159</sup> The decision for the date was explained by Adnan on those terms answering a question about the importance of the date for the newspaper Birgün.

Original in Turkish:

Üzüm-Sen 8 Mart 2004’te kuruldu çünkü tarımda kadının yeri apayrıdır. Tarımda en çok kadın emeği vardır. Ama örgütlenmelerine bakarsak neredeyse yok denecek kadar azdır. Emeği kadınlar üretirken maalesef paranın tasarruf hakkı çoğunlukla erkeklerde. Biz tarımda kadın emeğinin önemini vurgulamak amacıyla da 8 Mart tarihini bilerek seçtik.

When making a specific search for ‘*eylem*’ (translates to ‘action’ but which can also be used for ‘protest’) on Çiftçi-Sen’s online site of communication *Karasaban*, it is rather an exception not seeing women at the frontline of protests, for the last decade, generally against extractivist projects which by destruction and uprooting threaten the agricultural livelihoods and ecological balance of villages throughout Turkey. One of the most illustrative examples of those protests happened in the village of Yırca in 2014. Çiftçi-Sen, back then as a confederation, exactly one year after their legal status was reinstated by the Supreme Court, actively participated on the protests in solidarity and to provide effective assistance. Ali, who was back then general secretary of the confederation, recalls that ‘frontline’ character of peasant women’s participation:

In Yırca village, when olives were slaughtered, it was women who stood in front of the gendarmerie. In the same way, in the Black Sea region, there are always women who stand at the forefront in the same struggle and defend it at the cost of their lives, and even while we are chatting, the relationship develops there. You are together in the resistance areas.

We’ve also heard words like ‘We won’t do it anymore.’ Today, women dominate the village in places where those resistances are taking place. They establish their own workshops, make their own coffee, have strong relations between their own products, and women are active in the elections. Women come to the fore in everything. In fact, it is necessary to create a social movement in the countryside that will achieve this [representation that gives them public voice].<sup>160</sup>

(Ali, Çiftçi-Sen’s President, January 22, 2021).

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<sup>160</sup> Original in Turkish:

Yırca köyünde zeytinler katledilirken orada jandarmaların önünde duranlar kadınlardı. Karadeniz’de de aynı şekilde aynı mücadelede en önde duran ve orayı canı pahasına savunan kadınlar oluyor hep, hatta biz sohbet ederken tabi orada ilişki geliyor. Direniş alanlarında berabersiniz ya. ‘Biz bugüne kadar bunları adam zannediyorduk, jandarmayı görünceye kadar ne derlerse yapıyorduk. Bundan sonra yapmayacağız.’ gibi sözler de duyduk. Bugün o direnişlerin olduğu yerlerde kadınlar köye hâkim olmuş durumdalar. Kendi atölyelerini kuruyorlar kendi kahvelerini oluşturuyorlar, kendi ürünleri arasındaki ilişkiler güçlü, seçimlerde kadınlar üzerinden etkin oluyorlar. Her şeyde kadınlar ön plana çıkıyor. Aslında bunu çıkartacak kırsalda bir toplumsal hareketlenmenin yaratılması gerekiyor.



**Figure 25.** Peasant woman speaking at the Yırca village near Çiftçi-Sen and La Vía Campesina banners, 2014. Source: Courtesy of Çiftçi-Sen.

As it can be seen by the words of today's Çiftçi-Sen's president, the shortcoming of the movement in terms of women representation is not at all related with lack of understanding of how important women's agency in today's contentious Turkish rural politics, without which the very essential power factor of the peasant is lost: the knowledge of peasant farming.

the women have the knowledge of the seed, and she preserves the seed. The woman tells what to do when. It is the woman herself who organizes the whole production process, but as it is said, it is the man who solves all the problems such as the use of land and credit.

(Ali, Çiftçi-Sen's President, January 22, 2021).

Be that as it may, the fact is that discourse and practices are not levelled and that is the main reason why the result is the complete difficulty in producing a closer relationship between peasant women and the movement, and that criticism is also acknowledged from within.

(...) they're not giving too much effort in recruiting more women in the organization they find it very important, but it is in the society as well, people find women important, but they are not investing on bringing more women in the society in decision making processes and spaces, so it is not so different in Çiftçi-Sen. It is very important if you ask them, they can speak well, they use all the keywords and everything.

(Olcay, voluntary member and ECVV liaison, April 20, 2021)

On the cited above there is clear understanding of a continuous reproduction of the lack of women's participation in society in general which is augmented by the conservative values of patriarchal peasant household. That is why, although Çiftçi-Sen leaders emphasize a lot that women are at the forefront of protests and are knowledge holders of seeds and peasant farming, the movement has to understand that their agency as wage laborers should not be overlooked, as the relation between their exploitation as rural workers does not annul their capacity of agency to improve their lives.

From her ethnography Eren (2020, 396) concluded that despite the harsh working conditions at the agribusiness greenhouses women "seem to do be determined to continue to do so, as they plan to keep their distance from their previous life" as their seemingly romanticized peasant farming (on the movements discourse) "was characterized by a heavy burden of work in non-profitable small-scale production along with a sense of social exclusion in aging and depopulated villages." Failing to understand why they are determined to keep their rural wage labor activities fails to grasp women's condition of double subalternity in traditional unpaid family labor in peasant farming and their own will as agents for change. That is also quite clearly acknowledged by the only woman in the Directing board of the movement, although not much is advanced in terms of what strategies need to be in place by the movement to change the situation.

They become simple laborers; they are tired of farming of working the land. Young women in this village they never do anything with farming, working the land, but gradually I think when you are producing food and you have this...in time it will become a respectable profession and will convince women to come to farm again. I see that, even in their small gardens they try to grow something, it will change by the time. (...)in a way it is quite difficult because even our organization is mostly men, there are very few women involved. We are trying to connect them. It is one of our aims, but it is going slowly to be frank.

(Berin, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Sakarya, May 5, 2021)

### 6.3. The political agency of Çiftçi-Sen: reflections from fieldwork

*The subaltern classes suffer the initiative of the dominant class, including when they rebel; they are in an alarmed state of defence. Thus, any outbreak of autonomous initiative is of invaluable wealth.*

(Gramsci, 1975, 299-300 quoted in Modonesi, 2014,15)

On a sunny afternoon, following a dry summer that deeply affected the grape production in the Alaşehir region – already affected by the dozens of geothermal centrals dispersed in this region – I met for an interview with Cihat, a middle-aged peasant farmer who owns a family farm for grape production, at the end of October 2021. To the initial question, with which I have started all my interviews with peasant farmers linked to Çiftçi-Sen, the rural social movement studied in this study, ‘What meanings does the word peasant have for you?’ this peasant-farmer answered with a quote: *Atatürk’un sözlerinden gidersek [köylü] milletin efendisidir*<sup>161</sup>.

The word Turkish ‘efendi’ can be literally translated as ‘master’, giving the meaning that the peasant is the backbone of the nation, or the social group the nation mostly relies upon. The word is also employed figuratively with the meaning of ‘respectful’ or ‘the one that complies with’. Either we go with the literal or the figurative meaning, the importance of this quote is the role given by the state to the peasantry, which for the ones acquainted with the rhetoric of the newly founded Republic, comes attached with a strong paternalistic analogy. It is not by chance that ‘Devlet baba’, Turkish for ‘father state’<sup>162</sup>, is still today a commonly used expression. This role has a two-fold political appropriation.

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<sup>161</sup> If we follow the words of Atatürk (Mustafa Kemal) ‘peasant is the master of the nation’.

<sup>162</sup> The expression also crystallizes the profound patriarchal fabric of Turkish society assuming new modes with the AKP’s period (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011) and thus still very much visible on current attitudes and orientations (Ozdemir-Sarigil and Sarigil, 2021).

First the state's subjectification of the peasant as a taxpayer by which agricultural surplus was extracted and upon which the republican state-building was financed. Metinsoy (2021, 21) calls it 'The price of the Republic for the peasants': "The cost of the republican state and its modernization schemes was billed to the peasants in numerous ways".

Second, one of the thesis on the political interests vested by the Turkish ruling elite on the land reform attempts of the single-party regime (mid-1930s to mid-1940s) is "an ideology of peasantism combined with a fear of rural unrest", in other words, "a desire to strengthen Republican nationalist ideology in the countryside as a basis of regime support." (Karaömerlioğlu, 2000, 115). This two-fold appropriation is also responsible for two contradictory attitudes from the peasant before the state. One of dependency, as a subaltern looking up its paternal figure, and one of distrust which is mutually valid; one the one hand the distrust from peasants before surplus extraction of the state and on the other hand the Republican state also looked cautiously at the potential revolts of the peasantry.

It is not intended here to overvalue the symbolical features of a single quote in a single interview, but only to illustrate an important argument: the striking characteristic feature of the Turkish peasantry is their lack of continuous and structured organization and political mobilization, which is linked to the historical paternalistic appropriation of the peasantry by the Turkish Republic<sup>163</sup>.

The culture of Turkish...the culture of peasants in Turkey as well because of the history, because of the role that was given to the peasants to defend their state all the times, it is also very male dominant culture which actually when you go and work with women, they are more progressive in the rural areas, but they have no rights to be organized without asking.

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<sup>163</sup> It would be misleading to consider that what was expressed above would not have deeper roots on the land ownership nature during the Ottoman Empire. The "concentration of control over land distribution in the hands of some royal line" is a feature of a strong central state that over time "may be said to given rise to a certain *fetishism of the state*" (Berktaş, 1991, 135) employed here by the author on the Marxian sense of commodity fetishism. In other words, a form of centralised control originating state-centric social relations and institutions. Regarding the peasantry, by analysing documentation on Ottoman peasant economy, "official documents describe and define [peasants] mostly limiting themselves to enumerating the peasant's obligations" (Ibid. 133), which means mostly taxation.

(Olcay, voluntary member and ECVC liaison, April 20, 2021)

This has been reinforced, or better said reconfigured (recalling what was previously said about the state re-making hegemonic strategy) by the authoritarian populism of the governing party in the last two decades. Although peasants are often portrayed as irrevocably transformed by capitalism, around a third of the world's food is produced by smallholder farmers: the “smallest two farm size classes (0–1 ha and 1–2 ha) are the greatest contributors to global food production” (Ricciardi et al. 2018, 68). Nonetheless, the very same people that produce our food suffer “disproportionately from poverty, hunger and malnutrition” (UNDROP, 2018). And even when capitalist modernity locates peasants under a derogatory narrative of farming in the global south, we must not forget that in Europe, where large farms account for 50% of total land, small farmers are the majority feeding the ‘old continent’.

The struggle of the peasantry, as lead for the last three decades by the world's biggest social movement, La Via Campesina (LVC), questions the above narrative, departing from an ontological reclaiming of the word peasant:

It is a word with very political meaning. The simple fact we chose this name [Confédération Paysanne] in '87 was to reclaim the word. There is a strategy to make us think in a different way by using different words. But it is important we do not use it to exclude other people; even if you are trapped in an industrial way of production, let's together reclaim the word peasant.

(Morgan, European Coordination of Via Campesina, 30.04.2021)

As Wood (2017) reminds us, capitalism originated in agriculture not from opportunities naturally generated by technological development but rather by imposed market imperatives upon peasants' provisions. The striking characteristic of the peasantry resides in this historical tension between the “demands of the external world against the peasants' need to provision their households” (Wolf 1966, 15). However, the impositions of neoliberal capitalism are way beyond food provisions to a whole other level of the commodification of nature. In response, LCV's food sovereignty movement politicized food "through context-specific rights" such as access to land,

autonomy on what food to grow and how and fair trade, where a “mobilized peasantry makes its own history” (McMichael, 2008:219-20).

In Turkey, we cannot talk about a long history of continuously organized mobilization. Therefore, although the under-representation of Turkish peasants in terms of their mobilized political agency and even class consciousness is not particularly new, and therefore not a feature of the AKP’s ‘New Turkey’, the neoliberal transformation of agriculture catalyzed by the governing party’s stance of an extractivist and commodified countryside is precisely the moment in which a growing protest culture among the peasants shows its first attempts at wide organization, through Çiftçi-Sen (Farmer's Union), established in 2004 as a confederation of different product-based unions. The political background of the founding members is traceable to the Marxist political movement of the 1970s *Devrimci Yol* (Revolutionary Path) or Dev Yol, which suffered after the 1980 military coup a wide persecution and a long list of political imprisonments. Stressing the latter, all founding members of Çiftçi-Sen interviewed shared a past of political imprisonment in the context of the military coup trials.

The official name of Çiftçi-Sen translates the fact that a union is the only legal framework available to carry out political representation for farmer’s rights in Turkey. The movement relies on a bottom-up organizational model for peasant farmers based on a grass-roots village to village, or farmer-to-farmer network recruitment and mobilization. It is independent from the state, political centers, and companies. Regarding the current most prevalent contingency upon their existence Çiftçi-Sen has been facing a state apparatus coercion led by the governing elite against its mobilization, creating new impediments for the emergence of an organized protest culture. As with the pejorative inheritance of the word ‘peasant’, this chapter will reflect upon the possibilities of rural resistance in Turkey by studying the Çiftçi-Sen-led struggles, exacerbated by the neoliberal and populist authoritarianism of the AKP. As the state further withdrew from its regulatory role in agriculture, it is curious that it uses its legal apparatus to enforce coercion upon organized farmers. In the exploratory interviews with other ECVC peasant movements, I have not heard such a case. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first set of legal actions against Çiftçi-

Sen took place in the 2004-2008 period. They were justified in the fact that the Turkish Constitution only contemplates the right of workers to form labor unions and not farmers. The lawsuits have entangled them into uncertainty, expenditure of time and monetary resources, and after all, denying them legal recognition.

Chapter 4 did an overview of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) firm grip on power, since 2002, based on a premise of growth at all costs. It concluded that the first decade of AKP has shown impressive macro-economic growth figures mainly achieved from a land-based accumulation (Yeşilbağ, 2021), where state resources were captured and mobilized for clientelist relations, benefitting a partisan capital elite. But they were also used to set the foundational stones to a new hegemonic project, restructuring the fabric of everyday life and civil society (Bodirsky, 2020). Likewise, the AKP used systematic state-sponsored energy projects (e.g hydroelectric and geothermal plants) in rural areas, privatizations of state-owned agricultural companies, and bureaucratic control over cooperatives to secure its rent-seeking system and create bargaining chips for electoral support in rural areas.

However, skyrocketing inflation, the Turkish lira at record lows against the greenback, spikes in food prices, farmers' debts, and abandonment altogether have changed the way locals see extractivism in rural areas. Two years ago, in the village of Orhanlı in the Turkish Aegean region, several peasant women were planting olive tree saplings where an olive grove once stood, laid bare by the machinery of a geothermal plant construction site. One of those women mutters to a recorded video shared on social media: “our future, they should not touch our trees”<sup>164</sup> while covering a sapling root. Exactly five months after and over 1500 km towards the north, in İkizdere, Turkish Black Sea Region, peasant farmers, with women again on the frontline, start a watch

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<sup>164</sup> The video was published on November 21, 2020, on the twitter account of an ecological initiative ‘Kuzey Ormanları Savunması’ can be found here: <https://twitter.com/kuzeyormanlari/status/1330253072774336513>  
Accessed November 10, 2022.

against the construction of a stone quarry led by a pro-government construction giant, acquiring nation-wide media attention and support:

We live in challenging times; we cannot 'breathe.' The resistance in Ikizdere was like a 'fresh air' to people. The current political-economic situation in Turkey pushes people all over to do so and to support those who defend their nature.

(Eren, Rural activist, Ikizdere, 9.05.2021)

The current political unrest holds the potential for continuous resistance, thus challenging the Turkish peasantry's historical characterization as unorganized. While interviewing the leaders of ECVC organizations, I have noticed a typical pattern in forming their country-based member movements: gaining the right to be organized, acquiring scale and recognition to then institutionalize their food sovereignty banner to negotiate with policymakers. While this is done at different paces, country by country, Çiftçi-Sen (an ECVC member) is still dealing with step one. On top of that, the research's fieldwork with Çiftçi-Sen points to not a less significant problem, as, among members, mobilization shortcomings are voiced upon the absence of the protective role of the state. As with the pejorative inheritance of the word, I argue that Turkish peasantry needs an ontological reclaim to overcome the state-centric nexus of their existence. Their claim for food sovereignty must tackle the traditional weak culture of mobilization (the weight of its past) by not awaiting a return of the protective state. But instead, by sustaining everyday forms of resistance and constructing new societal values of production-consumption (Kocagöz, 2021:297) in the sense of what has been called weapons of the weak (Scott, 1985) as silent struggles patiently preparing active ones.

In a global context of environmental stress and depletion of resources, no other movement voices the food crisis ahead and the right to food than the peasant movement. After all, for the food sovereignty movement, "hunger is not a problem of means, but of rights" (McMichael, 2008: 224), starting from the right of own history-making.

### **6.3.1. Toprak, Onur, Yaşam: the motto of resistance**

Adding to the contradictory defining two aspects within the peasant's consciousness –subordination and affirmation of autonomy (Chatterjee, 1997, 205) – a historical tension of state appropriation of the peasantry in Turkey, one cannot be surprised that the result is not a fertile account of peasant rebellions such the ones of the mediaeval Europe (Freedman, 1997) or, more recently, the peasant participation in twentieth century socialist revolutions like those of Mexico (1910) or Cuba (late 1950s) that Wolf (1969) called “peasant wars”.

Despite its official name implying Union's (considering that a union is the only legal framework available to carry out political representation for farmer's rights) Çiftçi-Sen rather resembles a peasant movement for its grass-roots village to village recruiting and mobilization but also for their connection to LVC, being accepted as members shortly after their foundation, as well as into its European branch, the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) in 2008. These transnational movements raise the food sovereignty banner to politicize food "through context-specific rights" such as access to land, autonomy on what food to grow and how and fair trade, where a “mobilized peasantry makes its own history” (McMichael 2008, 219-20).

Following the latter Çiftçi-Sen became further aligned with the principles and political agendas of LVC, making for a geographically and culturally closer platform for the involvement of the members. If we consider the topics of mobilization on the 2004-2008 period (the most active phase of the movement's village to village work) in which Çiftçi-Sen was most active, as part of the general food sovereignty program, we can delineate an anti-GMOs platform, land rights and local seeds protection and preservation, as well as the legal and democratic right to be organized.

This period coincided with an “internal strengthening” in LVC in which the transnational organization decided to give “extra effort to internal training for member organizations, on strengthening operational mechanisms, and on building regional secretariats” (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, 164).

The ECVC liaison of Çiftçi-Sen at that moment confirms in an interview that the movement benefited from this process, acquiring more scale and visibility as well as collaborating with different NGOs, activists, and lawyers but most importantly it was the most active phase of the movement's village to village work.

But it is also in this period that the several product-based unions of Çiftçi-Sen started to face legal suits for the closure of the unions, opened by Ankara's Governorship and justified on the fact that the Turkish Constitution only contemplates the right of labor unions and not of farmers. That was the beginning of a long process that entangled Çiftçi-Sen for several years into kafkaesque procedures, legal uncertainty – which blocked them from legally accepting new members – and expenditure of time and financial capacity which depleted them of the needed energy and resources for mobilization. After 18 years, being celebrated this year, the challenges that Çiftçi-Sen have faced are illustrative of an unorganized resistance culture and of how the current agrarian political economy and its authoritarian stance places obstacles to any effort to organize.

The movement directs its agency (either combining defiance against the neoliberal commodification of food and agriculture labor and everyday forms of resistance) for the maintenance of peasant tradition of autonomy and social relations of production, as well as armed with the conceptual body of its LVC representation. For instance, regarding the new peasant mode that relies on proletarianization as a forcefully implied tactic to keep land and farming activities (the ultimate strategy) Çiftçi-Sen forms its political stance against the formulation of such new mode – considering it a lure of the market.

We mentioned before in this study that the most striking difference between the peasant rebellions and mobilizations of the past and the contemporary peasant movement that LVC represents globally (represented in Turkey by Çiftçi-Sen) is a political reclaim of the 'peasant' away from the subjection "to the demands and sanctions of power-holders" (Wolf, 1966:11).

This involves a constant state-centric tension, in the sense that peasant autonomy is expressed in the fact that the ‘sovereign’ in food sovereignty “is precisely about invoking a right to have rights over food” (Patel, 2009, 665), which may clash with the sovereign power of the state.

This state-centric tension is also visible in the foundational reasoning of the LVC movements, which claim that the root cause for the loss of autonomy, by peasant communities, over food production lies in the delegation, by the state, of the role of organizing the food system to international agribusiness. But even in geographies where elected governments incorporate the program of food sovereignty (for instance in Ecuador, where it is enshrined in the constitution) the “return to the state” may not be completely aligned with the human-nature nexus of food sovereignty. Indeed, a return to the state as an organizing principle of capital carries with it a “reinvention of developmentalism, where market maintains primacy” (Giunta, 2014, 1221). Thus, the primacy of the market over food production systems is continued.

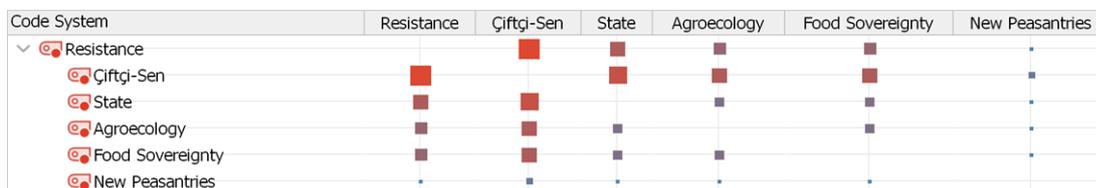


**Figure 26.** Çiftçi-Sen participates in protest in Ayvalık against a law in discussion by the ruling party to open agricultural olive fields to mining exploration. Source: Courtesy of Çiftçi-Sen, 2022.

Similarly, all these issues are expressed by the interviewees regarding the origin of Çiftçi-Sen in Turkey, always with an emphasis on the relation with the state. For example, when deductively coding the interviews for the characterization of resistance

as one of the central concepts for the movement, which means tagging each segment of data into the category “resistance” every time it is mentioned or described by the interviewee, a set of elements (nodes) was created to tag different analytical issues within the concept of resistance. The coded nodes for the category “Resistance” were then visualized into a code map in order to understand which nodes have a closer interrelation. The map below shows that the most salient relation is that between Çiftçi-Sen and the state, in other words the most frequent mentions or descriptions of their resisting agency is related with political processes (appropriation, populism, repression, extractivism, etc..) resulting from the relation of the peasantry with the Turkish State, and not so much defined by the political program of the peasantry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (agroecology, food sovereignty etc..), although in the recent years of the movement, particularly after the restructuring of 2020 as a single union the latter are more present on the movement’s communication.

**Figure 27.** Relation matrix of coded nodes on the concept of Resistance (MAXQDA software-generated)



In this sense, if we turn to the question ‘Is Çiftçi-Sen mobilizing and representing the peasantry in an authoritarian Turkey?’, we interrogate how peasant resistance reframes the agrarian question in the 21st century as an authoritarian charged question of rural politics. This question will be answered in the sections below.

### 6.3.2. Building up resistance: organization and limitations

The initial growth of Çiftçi-Sen, in terms of its village to village recruiting and grassroots network building, relied quite a lot on the experiences collected through several contacts with the leadership of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) of Brazil (one of the first and largest movements within LVC) and visits to their land

occupation sites and agroecological schools in 2015 and 2016. A former leader of Çiftçi-Sen, who represented the movement on those travels, wrote a book on the MST to introduce them to the Turkish public (Aysu, 2017). His intention was to explain how Turkey needs a similar large-scale and widely representative peasant movement. But, unlike Brazil, where landlessness has been the ideological glue, historically this was never a major issue for the Turkish peasantry (Faroqhi 2006), thus not being the precipitating factor for the political agency of peasants. The neoliberal transformation of Turkish agriculture, especially after the Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) of 2000-2002, commonly known as the framework that paved the way for such transformation, represents the “historical event preceded by and representing a change” (Landsberger, 1974, 24), forming the precipitating factor. In fact, and as seen on chapter 3, ARIP set in motion the privatization of many agricultural enterprises and the abolishment of support purchases in important sectors such as tobacco and hazelnut (Aydın, 2010, 160). This privatization preceded the arrival of AKP to power, but the new government did not halt the rationale of the ARIP, instead including it in subsequent agricultural reforms. The resulting need for an independent farmers’ organization was explained to us by one interviewee:

Existing farmer organizations [the Turkish Agriculture Chamber, cooperatives etc.] were consistent with the agricultural policies of 20 years ago or even 50 years ago. They were top-down, state-organized organizations. We discussed these; we discussed the problems of the different product sectors. Then we held a congress in Ankara in 2003. We said: 'What can we do? How can we stand against these policies? How can we organize?' In that congress, the creation of another organizational model, independent of the state, political parties, and companies, was discussed for the first time.<sup>165</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen’s General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,

July 30, 2020)

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<sup>165</sup> Original in Turkish:

Mevcut çiftçi örgütleri, 20 yıl öncesine kadar hatta 50 yıl öncesine kadar olan tarım politikalarına uygun bir tarzdaydı. Çünkü yukarıdan aşağıya, devlet tarafından örgütlenmiş örgütlerdi. Ziraat odaları olsun, kooperatifler, tarım satış kooperatifleri ve birlikleri devlet tarafından üreticileri kontrol etme ve o dönemki politikaya yöneltebilmek için örgütlenmişlerdi. Bu örgütlerin hiçbirinin sesi çıkmadı. Bir iki istisna dışında ciddi bir karşı duruş olmamıştı. O zaman dedik ki: ‘Ne yapabiliriz?’ Bunları tartıştık, ürünlerdeki problemleri tartıştık. Sonra Ankara’da 2003 yılında tüm Türkiye’deki üretici kurultaylarından gelen delegelerle bir konferans yaptık. Kurultay yaptık. Dedik ki: ‘Ne yapabiliriz? Bu politikaların karşısında nasıl bir karşı duruş sergileyebiliriz? Nasıl örgütlenebiliriz?’ O kurultayda aşağıdan yukarıya doğru, devletten, siyasal odaklardan ve şirketlerden bağımsız başka bir örgütsel modelin çıkartılmasında dönük tartışmalar yürütüldü.

After its first foundational motion in 2004, the biggest challenge that Çiftçi-Sen faced in terms of mobilizing and organizing peasant resistance was the strengthening of class consciousness among peasants, who had been traditionally unorganized. The initial recruiting was done on a volunteer basis of grassroots village to village mobilization and initially proved quite effective, as peasants recognized the problems affecting rural livelihoods and food systems. But organizing the peasantry in the historical context of Turkey requires time to build trust, considering their conservative character and the distrust for those who come to the village *kahvehane*<sup>166</sup> or square talking about politics, as recounted by two interviewees:

Organization is a relationship of trust (...) In other words, the villager, the peasant needs to be sure that you are not making a personal gain out of your intentions. This is the main strategy. As Çiftçi-Sen, we are trying to do this.<sup>167</sup>  
(Hasan, member of Çiftçi-Sen, Ayvalık, February 3, 2021).

We set up this movement by going from village to village. We are trying to be a unionized organization for a community that has no union organization experience. We are acting to break that understanding since the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, we are experiencing difficulties.

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,  
July 30, 2020)

These difficulties that the movement has been experiencing over the last two decades are not only related with the lack of peasant organization “since the Ottoman Empire”, as stated above, but also with recently manufactured disunity:

We have witnessed an era where the state was not playing the role of a guarantor between companies and farmers. [But now] We live in a moment where the link between the cooperatives and farmers was broken. Now the link between the farmers and their lands is getting broken and they are aiming at the link between farmers themselves.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> The village coffeehouse is the meeting point for peasants and is usually located in the village square. Generally, only men gather, marking an important trait of the patriarchal system of the village. In both fieldwork sites, interviews took place in the village square and the coffeehouse.

<sup>167</sup> Original in Turkish:

Örgütlenme bir güven ilişkisidir (...)Yani iyi niyetinizden kişisel hesap yapmadığınızdan köylünün, çiftçinin emin olması gerekiyor. Esas strateji budur. Çiftçi-Sen olarak bunu yapmaya çalışıyoruz.

<sup>168</sup> Original in Turkish:

(Ali, Çiftçi-Sen's President, January 22, 2021).

Indeed, indebtedness is forcing peasants to sell their lands, state projects are causing growing dispossession, and land is less and less *güvence*<sup>169</sup>. Data from the Social Security Institution (SGK) indicates that in the last ten years the number of registered farmers decreased by 53 percent, from 1,122 million in 2011 to 530,000 in September 2021 (Euronews, 2021).

Under the agrarian political economy of AKP, priority is given to energy projects in rural areas. It is accumulation by dispossession. Peasants cannot develop a proper organization against these issues.

(Umut, voluntary member, September 18, 2020)

Now the farmers need support, but they still do not think in the long term, and they are worried about the short-term gains, and, unfortunately, even sell their lands.

(Nihat, Founder of Kirazlı Ekolojik Yaşam Derneği<sup>170</sup>, member of Çiftçi-Sen, July 31, 2020)

Çiftçi-Sen argues that the peasants should not be forced into selling their lands or into off-farm wage labor, which have only increased rural poverty and vulnerability, particularly for women (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör, 2019; Eren, 2020). Indeed, in the case of women, the flexible, invisible – hence cheap – type of wage labor involved makes them experience a form of economic violence (Gündüz Hoşgör, 2020). The importance of gender equality for the food sovereignty project has been included as pivotal in the movement's charter, although with vague intentions and almost inexistent practices. But if authoritarian legal coercion is allied with populism in rural areas, the main problem for the movement is its existence rather than varied resistance, as explained by Çiftçi-Sen's president:

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Esas olarak devletin çiftçilerle bağının koptuğu, eksik de olsa ve devlet vesayeti altında da olsa kurulmuş kooperatiflerin devletle olan ilişkisinin koptuğu ve giderek çiftçilerle çiftçilerin ve aynı zamanda çiftçilerin toprakla olan bağının koparıldığı bir dönem yaşıyoruz

<sup>169</sup> Turkish word for 'assurance', a word that traditionally refers to owning land.

<sup>170</sup> Kirazlı Eco-life Association is a 2005 project funded by the UNDP's Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF/SGP) in the Aegean town of Kirazlı.

Traditional farming as we know it is represented mostly by women, [because] the knowledge of seeds is with them, with which they organize production. However, when we talk about land, use of credit, they are invisible. In industrial farming, women are even more invisible and maybe this is what companies want because women hold essential knowledge. (...) We are facing difficulties in putting women at the center as they are always excluded from several core financial activities.<sup>171</sup>

(Ali, Çiftçi-Sen's President, January 22, 2021).

This reflects the challenges posed by the gendered labor regime in rural Turkey, where women are twice as invisible. Although the number of women members of cooperatives in Turkey has risen three times in the last decade (Duguid, Durutaş, and Wodzic 2015, 37) it is insufficient to make women participation in farming visible and officially registered (KEIG Platform, 2018). Cooperatives in urban areas mostly communicate with local bodies (municipalities, development agencies and foundations) but in rural areas there is hardly any resemblance of such support, and they are crushed by legal and economic difficulties. One of our women interviewees told us the following:

Well, these women are coming together to produce something [in cooperatives] or open a small place where they can sell their food. Then the next step is usually producing the raw material themselves. [But mostly] they lost their role in farming practices as a result of industrial farming. They become just workers, and then they try to stay away from farming.

(Berin, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Sakarya, May 5, 2021)

Women's cooperatives mentioned above, although they represent more of a strategy of 'seeds of empowerment' to use an expression from before, than a form of outright

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<sup>171</sup> Original in Turkish:

Aslında bizim bildiğimiz geleneksel köylü tarımı demek kadın demektir. Siz tarımın bilgisini hangi köye giderseniz gidin kadından alırsınız yani tohumun bilgisi ondadır ve tohumu o muhafaza eder. Bütün üretim sürecini örgütleyen de kadının kendisidir ama kadın söylenildiği gibi toprak ve kredinin kullanılması gibi bütün problemleri çözen de erkektir. Bu yüzden de pratik olarak kadın tarımın içerisinde görünmez. Esas olarak tarımı bugün kendisinden kovan endüstriyel tarımın kendisidir. Çünkü çiftçilerin bilgisi değersizleşmektedir. Çünkü bilgi kadındadır. (...) Yani Kadının tarım içerisindeki dışlanmışlığı hem ürünü satmada hem kredi çekmekte hem diğer makinaları almada, örgütlenme meselesinde de bizim önümüze ciddi zorluklar çıkartıyor

resistance, that does not mean that those initiatives should not be looked as holding the potential for organized resistance and political agency. In fact, as acknowledged below, it seems to be essential.

It is very important for us those women organize and operate in the form of cooperatives. We are trying to relate to them. Because within the organization [Çiftçi-Sen], mainly women should be in this work and women should be the main elements of the organization, otherwise we do not think that we have any chance of success.<sup>172</sup>

(Ali, Çiftçi-Sen's President, January 22, 2021).

Including more women into the movement as their active internal policy can be inspired by positive examples of emancipatory alternative rural initiatives.

The organization is called Sakarya Küçük Üretici Dayanışma Ağı (SAKUDA). It is not a cooperative, it is a network of solidarity among small farmers. And there is also initiative of women coming together, women organizations, in our village there is one, in other villages as well. Not always for farming but producing food in a clean way, so they can have their niche markets. Women organizations are becoming common.

(Berin, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Sakarya, May 5, 2021)

Although the importance and their own proximity to women's initiatives are also a reality, again there is a lack in strategies to promote synergies that would connect the movement with them. A good example of such strategies of united efforts in the movement is an agroecological peasant farming project funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) started in 2005 in the Aegean village of Kirazlı and was led by a member of the movement. A third of the village farmers participated and local food channels were strengthened to the point that local and regional authorities could not turn a blind eye. In other words, while agroecological initiatives are not officially part of the strategies and official discourses of rural authorities, when they

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<sup>172</sup> Original in Turkish:

Kadının kooperatifler biçiminde örgütlenmeleri ve faaliyet göstermeleri bizim için çok önemli. Biz onlarla ilişki kurmaya çalışıyoruz. Çünkü örgütlenme için esas olarak kadınların bu iş içerisinde olması ve örgütlenmenin esas unsurları olarak kadının olması gerekiyor yoksa başarı şansımızın hiç olduğunu düşünmüyoruz.

acquire legitimization, such as UNDP support, then local and regional authorities approach the representatives of such initiative, however with merely populist electoral interests:

The approach is carried out in a populist way and with the idea of how to turn it into votes. I live in the village and once heard the imam announcing: 'The municipality will open an organic village market in such and such places. Villagers who want to attend this market should have their name written in the village headman's [Muhtar<sup>173</sup>] office.' I was shocked when I heard it. I called the headman first. I told him that what the imam said was not true [because the organization was not under the municipality]. The headman said the mayor told him so.<sup>174</sup>

(Nihat, Founder of Kirazlı Ekolojik Yaşam Derneği<sup>175</sup>, member of Çiftçi-Sen, July 31, 2020)

Although concerns with political appropriation like the example above are a reality, experiences like these result from knowledge transfer and practices that come from other loci of struggle. They show why it is so important for Çiftçi-Sen to become further aligned with the principles and political agendas of LVC, especially after the emergence of ECVC as the European umbrella of LVC in 2008, making for a geographically and culturally closer platform for the involvement of Çiftçi-Sen members. The importance of being a member of ECVC was summed up by the President of Çiftçi-Sen:

We must be a part of a global organization as well as a local organization (...)  
Each country [members] tells what their experience was and how it was lived.  
These experiences are very valuable to us.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> In each Turkish village, the muhtar is the highest elected authority of the village.

<sup>174</sup> Original in Turkish:

Politika popülist bir şekilde yürütülüyor ve her aktivitede ben bunu nasıl oya çeviririm düşüncesi ortaya çıkıyor. Önce pazar açtı başkan. Ben köyde oturuyorum. İmam muhtarlığın duyurusunu çağırıyor: 'Kuşadası belediyesi filanca yerde organik köy pazarı açacaktır. Bu pazara katılmak isteyen köylüler muhtarlığa ismini yazdırsın.' Ben duyunca şok oldum. Önce muhtarı aradım. İmamın söylediğinin doğru olmadığını söyledim. Muhtar belediye başkanının ona öyle söylediğini söyledi.

<sup>175</sup> Kirazlı Eco-life Association is a 2005 project funded by the UNDP's Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF/SGP) in the Aegean town of Kirazlı.

<sup>176</sup> Original in Turkish:

Yani yerel örgütlenmenin yanında aynı zamanda bir küresel örgütlenmenin parçası oluyoruz. (...)

(January 22, 2022)

Indeed, as a platform of “peasant internationalism”, LVC aims to build a shared peasant identity and discourse through an “international reference point for rural issues and problems for social movements” (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, 171). The reference point is defined based upon an ideological and conceptual body (e.g., food sovereignty and agroecology), the promotion of common organizational features of resistance (e.g., grassroots movements) and setting and framing the political agendas (e.g., right to the land, local seeds) that are absorbed and adapted by its national/local rural social movements members according to contextual needs. More importantly, it holds the struggle together, countering the hegemonic discourse of neoliberal late capitalism that renders peasant farmers invisible.

Similar initiatives were also useful to bring about a discussion within Çiftçi-Sen about alliances with municipalities headed by the main opposition party, the CHP (Republican People’s Party), which have started to support cooperatives for local food provision schemes. This support has been seen with caution and suspicion as “Çiftçi-Sen has to stay equally related to all parties”, but they cannot turn a blind eye, for they “should create a power in their hands to pull the other part in a space where you can negotiate”, as Olcay, the ECVC liaison told us in the interview. The peasant’s old dilemma of autonomy *versus* alliance has caused a few internal divisions in the leadership of Çiftçi-Sen. In an article published on Çiftçi-Sen’s associated online platform *Karasaban* (Black plough), our interviewee Adnan points out that the ‘good Samaritan’ initiatives of the municipalities towards the peasants may hide a continuous market supremacy, stating that those do not convey a truly future alternative for the food systems: “Today if the proposed projects are accepted without questioning, under

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Her ülke kendi deneyimlerinin ne olduğu ve nasıl yaşandığını anlatıyor. Bu deneyimler bizim için çok değerli.

the influence of the ‘we will/are doing good things for the farmers’ propaganda, it is not possible for the results to be different.”<sup>177</sup>.

Recent research on a seed protection initiative (Nizam and Yenil, 2020) in the Aegean town of Seferihisar displays a case of a successful synergy between the local municipality, headed by the CHP, and strong grassroots support (local seed center, cooperatives, and local peasant market), showing that, in a context of authoritarianism, taking two steps back in terms of autonomy but taking one forward in terms of alliances may be essential for resistance.

### **6.3.3. Facing authoritarianism for the right to organize**

The expression of authoritarianism on the history of organization and mobilization of Çiftçi-Sen starts at their very origin, with the legal suits and court battles described on step 7 of the movement’s chronology in the previous chapter. Even though full closure was not the result, the lawsuits entangled Çiftçi-Sen for several years into legal uncertainty, and expenditure of much needed resources (Çiçek 2017). Ultimately, it led to a radical change of the entire organizational structure in 2020.

As mentioned before, Çiftçi-Sen was founded as an umbrella confederation of unions but as the lawsuits aimed at the different unions individually, multiple efforts and resources had to be channeled to fight each legal case. Therefore, in February 2020, the leaders of the individual product-based unions met to make a hard decision; to start almost from scratch by giving up on the former structure and the formerly registered members, and establish a single farmers union, keeping, however, the same name. They needed to rationalize resources consolidating the union into one. Their last application, in February 2020, for a legal status, was accepted. However, in early 2021, Çiftçi-Sen started to be targeted by fines, as they were accused “of making false

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<sup>177</sup> Original in Turkish:

Bugün de “çiftçiler için iyi şeyler yapacağız/yapıyoruz” propagandasının etkisi altına girip, önerilen projeler sorgulanmadan kabul edilirse yaşanacak sonuçların daha farklı olması söz konusu olamaz.

For the full article see: [www.karasaban.net/belediyeler-ve-tarim-adnan-cobanoglu/](http://www.karasaban.net/belediyeler-ve-tarim-adnan-cobanoglu/).

statements because they were not registered as workers in the government employment agency” (ECVC, 2021). Intermittently, they became again entangled in legal procedures and their status was suspended. Adnan explained to us the impact of these procedures:

Closing the unions had a negative impact on producers and farmers. There was the dilemma of whether we are legal or illegal. These producers are people who have never been organized before. In fact, this period was one of the few times that producers were organized from the bottom up since the Ottoman Empire.<sup>178</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen’s General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,  
July 30, 2020)

A reading of the Çiftçi-Sen’s charter<sup>179</sup> shows that their struggle translates into land and food rights, seeds regarding traditional knowledge, and biodiversity protection. However, the constant legal battles transformed mobilizations into a struggle for survival, as the main goal became the right to organize. This was explained by Olcay, Çiftçi-Sen’s ECVC liaison:

They were not able to pass this first very basic stage - the right to organize. Survival is the first instinct for organizations as well. First you have to survive without any problem, then you can go deeply looking into the problems of your members.

(March 14, 2021)

The other face of AKP’s authoritarianism is extractivism in rural areas. The current government sees the countryside as an extension of the land-based accumulation in urban areas. As already mentioned, these are relatively recent contentious issues in rural areas, not because they never happened before, but because they became fiercer against local mobilizations. The means used by AKP include instrumentalizing the legal apparatus for discretionary purposes or openly bypassing protection and

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<sup>178</sup> Original in Turkish:

Sendikaların kapatılması, üreticilerin ve çiftçilerin üzerinde olumsuz bir etkisi oldu. Yasal mıyız yoksa yasa dışı mıyız ikilemi vardı. Bu üreticiler daha önce hiç örgütlenmemiş insanlardı. Hatta bu dönem, Osmanlı Devleti’nden beri üreticilerin aşağıdan yukarı örgütlendiği sayılı zamanlardan biriydi.

<sup>179</sup> <https://www.ciftcisen.org/tuzuk/>

preservation laws and regulations. One of the most striking examples happened in the village of İkizdere in early 2021, in the Black Sea Region, when peasant farmers, with women on the frontline, started a watch against the construction of a stone quarry led by a pro-government company, drawing nation-wide media attention and support (The New York Times, 2021). One interviewee explained to us the importance of this resistance:

The resistance in İkizdere was like a breath of 'fresh air' to people, and they wanted to hold on to this resistance. The current political-economic situation in Turkey pushes people all over to do so and to support those who defend their nature.

(Eren, rural activist, İkizdere, May 9, 2021)

Çiftçi-Sen was not active in the rural mobilization presented above, but its online platforms contain press releases and articles on land dispossession for the purposes of mining activities or on the destruction of farming lands for the purposes of building hydroelectric power plants and geothermal power plants. These are portrayed by Çiftçi-Sen as good examples of “clean energy authoritarianism”, to use the words of Umut, one of the interviewees. Alaşehir, one of the locations of our fieldwork, has seen the emergence of dozens of geothermal power plants over the past decades. The local grape producers we interviewed claim those plants severely affect the local microclimate and ultimately their produce.

A local member of Çiftçi-Sen recalls a protest in 2008, comparing it with the current situation:

When the people there [peasant farmers] blocked the road with tractors, the police attacked. They detained some, beat some, and sprayed gas. Villagers talk about such things when we offer to hold a rally in the villages. They say, 'Let's not go and get beaten again'. But even if we could, our hands were tied because they [legally] prevented the activities of our union. We have not been able to regain the potential we had.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Original in Turkish:

Orada insanlar traktörlerle yolu kapatınca polis saldırdı. Bazı insanları gözaltına aldı, bazılarını copladı, gaz sıktı. Bu tür şeyleri hala gittiğimiz köylerde miting yapmayı teklif ettiğimizde anlatır köylüler. 'Biz bir daha gidip dayak yemeyelim' derler. Ama bizim sendikanın faaliyetlerini

(Bahri, Çiftçi-Sen's Financial Secretary, Alaşehir, October 31, 2020)

On April 17, 2022, as Çiftçi-Sen commemorated the International Day of Peasant Struggle, a public meeting was organized in Ayvalık (see figure 27) to protest the opening of olive gardens for mining exploration permits, due to a recent discretionary law amendment. This meeting was preceded by a press release condemning the amendment and openly aiming at the AKP, citing a past strategy of legally opening way to destruction: “Even if this law is canceled later, thousands of olive trees will be killed, and thousands of acres of land will be opened for mining. (...) The magnitude of the danger can be predicted from the examples from the past.” (Çiftçi-Sen, 2022c). A day later, the movement announced a lawsuit against the government, invoking that the amendment was unconstitutional.

Indeed, the control over the legal-bureaucratic machinery of the state has become a political tool to annul opposition movements and, as such, to weaken democratic and civil society participation both in urban and rural settings. Regarding the latter, the 2014 Law No. 6360 changed the administrative status of 30 provinces (out of 81) that have metropolitan cities as capitals. Formerly provincial limits became metropolitan limits, changing the status of former villages (köy) by transforming them into city “neighborhoods” (mahalle). This cut the number of villages by almost half (Demirkaya and Koç, 2017).

Our commons [pastures] have gone. This law [Law No. 6360] means a great loss for us.

(Hasan, member of Çiftçi-Sen, Ayvalık, February 3, 2021)

While this law was mentioned by almost all our interviewees as reducing local control over natural resources, namely pastures, recent research has linked it to purposes of weakening local democracy and financial autonomy, opening the way for electoral advantages for the AKP (Döner, 2020).

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engellediği için elimizi kolumuzu bağladı bir anlamda. O yakaladığımız üye potansiyeline biz tekrar ulaşamadık.

**Figure 28.** A pamphlet<sup>181</sup> of Çiftçi-Sen for distribution in villages contesting the Law No. 6360.



Source: Own archive.

Above all, these issues artificially create conflictuality aiming to break farmer unity:

Half of them [peasants] were in favor of the mine<sup>182</sup> and half were against it. The villagers were divided into two because the opposing group does animal husbandry. We did not meet each other. There was a split in the kahveler [coffee houses].<sup>183</sup>

(Ibrahim, member of Çiftçi-Sen, Ayvalık, February 2, 2021)

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<sup>181</sup> The title reads “Being a rural neighborhood is not enough, we want our villages back with all their rights.” and it finishes with the movement’s slogan “Land, Honor, Life”.

<sup>182</sup> The mining waste on figure 29 refers to the mine spoken on this quote.

<sup>183</sup> Original in Turkish:  
köylü kendi arasında yarısı maden yanlısı yarısı karşıt olduğu için fikir ayrılığı oluştu. Karşıt grup hayvancılık yapacakları için ikiye bölündü köylüler. Birbirimize gitmedik. Küstük. Kahveler ayrıldı.

**Figure 29.** A mining waste pile near a water channel used for agriculture. Karaayıt village (Ayvalık).



Source: Own archive.

The current situation for rural political agency in Turkey thus reveals a movement that intermittently cannot move, as farmer's rights are either legally denied or repressively prevented. Furthermore, the state-centric tension and the past internal difficulties weigh on Çiftçi-Sen's vision of not being so keen to consider formal (parties) or informal (civil society organizations) political alliances. But in a context of authoritarianism growing fiercer, with ecological extractivism and land-grabbing also increasing as the new strategy of accumulation (from the construction sector as urban-based to energy projects as rural-based) refusing to see the potential of alliances seems at least risky for the survival of the movement, especially when the new strategies of the hegemonic rule are well-recognized by the movement:

Now, big companies have started to make agricultural reports and submit them to the ministry. It started with Cargill. Cargill presented the sugar report to the government and the public. They demanded that the rate of use of starch-based sugar be increased there. They demanded the privatization and sale of sugar factories.

The minister immediately set about implementing them. This year [2020], Ferrero had a hazelnut report prepared. The Ministry is now trying to implement the recommendations in this hazelnut report. They could not start it during the pandemic, but they put forward the Agricultural Production Free Zones Project. There will be workers in a region who will only produce in that region. Like the free zones in export-oriented industrialization, their schools will be in that region. Entering and exiting that area will be under the control of the company. They will also export duty-free from there, since it is a free

zone. There is such a project in their language right now. They are constantly trying to create a system for direct company farming.<sup>184</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,

July 30, 2020)

In sum, in a context of divide and rule, any movement has higher chances of meaningful resistance when allied to wider causes and to other platforms for political activism. After all, alliances do not necessarily imply forsaking everyday forms of resistance, as patient silent struggles are the most emblematic characteristic of the peasantry, but imply to forsake, at least partially, peasants' traditional search for full autonomy that is visible on the movement's punchline of being completely independent from state, institutions, and political parties.

But can they negotiate alliances? It is with this simple question, of autonomy versus alliances that we can pass over the next and final chapter of discussions, illustrated with the discussion gathered from the focus group, namely about the changes on the movement's resistance strategy and program, the question of autonomy and alliances and their relationship with the movement's understanding of food sovereignty.

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<sup>184</sup> Original in Turkish:

Şimdi de tarım raporlarını büyük şirketler kendileri yapıp bakanlığa sunmaya başladı. Bu, Cargill ile başladı. Cargill, şeker raporu sundu hükümete ve kamuoyuna. Orada nişasta bazlı şekerin kullanım oranının yükseltilmesini talep etti. Şeker fabrikaların özelleştirilmesini, satılmasını talep etti. Bakan, hemen bunları uygulamaya yöneldi. Bu yıl da Ferrero, fındık raporu hazırlattı. Bakanlık şimdi bu fındık raporundaki önerileri uygulamaya çalışıyor. Pandemi sürecinde daha başlatamadılar ama Tarım Üretim Serbest Bölgeleri Projesi ortaya koydular. Bir bölgede sadece oradaki bölgede üretim yapacak işçiler olacak. İhracata yönelik sanayileşmedeki serbest bölgeler gibi okulları o bölgede olacak. O bölgeye girip çıkmak şirketin denetiminde olacak. Oradan gümrüksüz ihracat da yapacaklar serbest bölge olduğu için. Böyle bir proje var şu an dillerinde. Sürekli doğrudan şirket tarımcılığına yönelik bir sistem oluşturmaya çalışıyorlar.

## CHAPTER 7

### (UN)ORGANIZED PEASANT RESISTANCE: A CONCLUDING DISCUSSION ON AUTONOMY AND ALLIANCES

*What is happening here is called an environmental struggle, but it is not in fact an environmental struggle. ( ... ) We are fighting against the state (Unal, one of the anti-coal activists)<sup>185</sup>*

This chapter starts with a citation from protesting the current extractivist face of the hegemonic rule, precisely because that last part ‘against the state’ reveals much of what has been the state-peasant relationship since the foundation of the Republic, from where, in the case of Turkey, but similarly to other geographies globally, it results the subaltern and subordinate character of the peasant farmer.

Perhaps, it could be said that the specificity of the Turkish case is revealed by the fact that when that subalternity appears to be contested and announces forms of institutionalized (which means legal and public) organization, the ‘against the state’ part of the above quote becomes a struggle for the right to organize. In a summary, reminding the case of Çiftçi-Sen; the first set of legal actions by the ruling party appointed governorships against Çiftçi-Sen’s product-based unions took place in 2004-2007. A second set followed in 2009-2013. The latter were opened by Ankara’s

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<sup>185</sup> This quote is used on the very first page of Murat, Akbulut and Adaman’s (2015) article to illustrate the anatomy of a popular resistance against a coal power plant in the Black Sea Region in Turkey and as part of their fieldwork, but especially to show that more than environmental consciousness the class characteristics of this resistance points to the motivation drive of the movements being more directed against the state, namely for its neoliberal developmentalist stance and suppression of social dissent. This reading of the authors on the motivation drivers of resistance and protests are quite keen to also understand the rural protests and political agency of the case-study movement of this study.

Governorship (whose Governor is appointed by the President of Turkey and is responsible for the implementation of government legislation within the province), with the justification that the Turkish Constitution only contemplates the right to existence of labor unions and not of farmers. Although a first decision by the labor Court of Ankara in March 2009 ruled in favor of the Ankara Governorship and ordered the closure of Çiftçi-Sen but after an appeal to the Supreme Court, the ruling was later reversed.

There are two main reasons why along the previous two chapters these legal processes denying the right to organize have been so much stressed. The first is the fact that the situation of Çiftçi-Sen is unique within the context of ECVC, because although on my exploratory interviews with leaders of other peasant organizations in Europe it was referred government's deliberate actions of excluding them from meetings or creating obstacles for their public voice, there was never a question of the right to exist as a legal organization. The second is because not only those legal processes happened on the initial efforts of organization of the product-based unions, and as such, it marked inevitably their activity but also because the problem followed along the entire first decade of the existence of Çiftçi-Sen, forcing them to create an umbrella confederation for defense purposes, which was also closed by first instance court order. Later, it also led the movement to search in the capacity of ECVC's intellectual production and support a helping hand for local recognition, which, by contrast, may have also produced negative effects as one can consider that prevented them from creating their own vocabulary and program of rural politics more adapted to the Turkish context.

I recall here a note from a fieldwork visit to Soma (notoriously known for the brutality of a fatal mining disaster, also called massacre, in 2014) in which the interview with Ali happened at the headquarters of a union of miners, friends of his. There, one of the leaders of the mining union asked me, with a tone of irony, why was I occupied with a "group of middle-aged intellectuals" when I should rather study "a real movement of struggle", such as theirs. Later, in one of my interviews I brought up this episode into a question of the real capacity of Çiftçi-Sen to constitute an extensive resistance

and represent a significant part of the Turkish peasantry. The answer<sup>186</sup> was that alliances are an urgent matter, considering not only the generational question (see the age intervals on Appendix C) but also because there was a depletion of resources and energy during the first decade due to the legality problems. Third, the fact that the right to unionize has been the core struggle from the beginning in this movement and that experience has had a tremendous influence on their path of resistance more than any other struggle. As such, not only the structure became more suspicious of attempts to end them from within but, in result, more cautious and even discreet, of their public image, normally only being given space or only accepting to be published by media that is neither mainstream nor distant from their radical left ideological background. At last, one of the main problems for any discussion about the movement and their trajectory of political agency is condemned to be more about what they suffered (also visible in their self-representations) which pushes them into the enclosure of the subalternity/subordinated and less about what they achieved, as the legal struggle they faced was mostly a defensive one and not a creative one. That is now, after the single-union formation in 2020, being attempted to change and it is, still too soon, to discuss if they have been up to the task.

Regarding that capacity of action, when asked about the changes that the organization did or was forced to do by the political circumstances of their material existence, the discussion in the focus group session pointed out the following important statements:

- Besides the obstacles created by the legal suits, the reason for the change into a confederation was that they started to see that the changes in agricultural policies in Turkey were going faster than them, despite all their opposition, meetings, rallies, marches, campaigns. As such, it was not possible to keep sustaining a struggle from the individual structured unions and the umbrella organization was needed to join strategies into a single program orientation, which was food sovereignty and agroecology.
- After, they were faced with another problem. There was a mismatch between the inclusive communication of the food sovereignty program and the fact that, despite all small farmers in general were being affected, they could not

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<sup>186</sup> It is not quoted here respecting the expressed on the consent form for that part of the interview.

represent farmers outside the spectrum of their specific product-based unions. As a result, they gathered in Izmir in 2020 to discuss a whole new organizational architecture and that is how Çiftçi-Sen as a single union was born.

Regarding the latter the context of the pandemic in which the restructure happened was widely mentioned during the focus group as something not very beneficial for resetting their former village-to-village (campesino to campesino on LVC's language) practices and networks.

Still related with the changes in the resistance strategies and organization, another interesting point discussed by the members of the Coordination Committee during the session was the context, ideological and conjectural, in which the movement had its origins. It was agreed that despite the ideological proximity of the founders, the rapid restructuring of Turkish agriculture by neoliberal policies created a conjecture that called for an organized reaction, in other words, the appearance of Çiftçi-Sen or other product-based unions was a result from a political conjunction that was specially marked by the disappearance of the public sector from agriculture, of which the most significant examples are, on the one hand, the privatizations of state-owned agricultural companies and cooperatives, and on the other a set of laws like the sugar law, the tobacco law and the seeds law. In sum, the conjunction of factors for the origin of the resistance are all examples of 'fight against the state', as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

After all this, the question was again repeated with a request to re-focus the discussion not on external reasons but to look to what happened inside their organization and the internal dynamics of that change. The resulting from that request is summarized by the following points<sup>187</sup>:

- As with the changes in agricultural policies that were faster than them, Çiftçi-Sen required to adapt its own knowledge and make research of the global

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<sup>187</sup> Note from the focus group session: it was curious to note that the interventions from the participants were regularly following the order of the directing board's hierarchy.

conditions of agriculture and the farming/food policies happening in other parts of the world. That help them to realize that it was not a strict attack to peasant farmers in Turkey but an organized attack to small family farming all around the world.

- After this research they could approach the global peasant movement La Vía Campesina, they applied for membership, and it was approved. The understanding that there were similar destinies of small farmers around the world help them to work with the local problems having the knowledge of global processes. Following, the fact that they hosted two big events of LVC in Turkey was very valuable for their local recognition.
- Nonetheless, although after this the meetings in villages with different product-based unions were happening more often, the state reacted by not accepting the legitimacy of their work.
- While their work was being stopped for legal reasons the pace of privatization of agriculture and agribusiness dominancy was accelerating and they were losing capacity to keep up with that pace.<sup>188</sup>
- An example of the loss of capacity given during the discussion was that it became harder to find farmers, due to the growing proletarianization and contract-farming, that cared about farming from a perspective of food sovereignty. An expression used was that they started to witness the ideology of agriculture without farmers.

The first part of the discussion about resistance and internal changes of resistance strategies of the movement, despite the insistence for the tone to be more internally focused and to reflect on internal processes of change and negotiation, was almost dominated by the highlights of the attacks on the movement's will to organize and the obstacles and sufferings through the years – which reflects, I stress once again, the state-centric influence of their struggle.

In any case, one thing that can be, I argue, surely concluded is that the fact that Çiftçi-Sen persists today – nevertheless the debate of *actually* representing *the* (or a part of

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<sup>188</sup> Note from the focus group session: precisely here a new moment of description of all the closures and legal struggles emerged again.

the) peasantry in the country – is their most representative act of defiance, in other words, their continuous existence since 2004 has been their most effective resistance.

That has been achieved not only through combination of types of resistance that go from protests, gatherings, and rallies to the more prosaic everyday forms of resistance of non-compliance or indifference (to recall an episode while interviewing Kadriye in which she gifted us some tomatoes, which we ate right there, while saying that their produce is from local seeds which they distribute on the local market although is not allowed). But also, from being able to adapt to new modes of autonomy and represent farmers that employ labor strategies that are aligned with the resistance of a third kind, where proletarianization is a condition to keep peasant farming, although that condition is a focus of struggle. All the mentioned above is not only a demonstration of the history-making capacity of today's peasantries but also affirms the peasant as an historical political subject where persistence has as much agency as resistance, in fact, in which one can be simultaneously the other.

Passing now to the second part of the discussion, where autonomy and alliances were the main topics launched to the group of participants, namely the capacity of the movement to develop projects aiming for autonomous social change from the market or the state, while remaining independent from political parties or politicians, yet with capacity to see the strategically and conjunctural importance of alliances (like the 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey fiercer extractivism and resulting ecological initiatives in reaction), I recover the question 'Can they negotiate alliances?'

The latter is not something completely unanimous and deprived from contradictory understandings inside the movement. For that, before passing to the discussion points, the following set of interview excerpts are shown below as to illustrate better a key and critical aspect of the discussion (alliances with political actors of the main opposition party):

It must be local [the effort for food sovereignty]. We can't do anything with support from above. While support comes from above, local awareness should also be raised. If the local sector cultivates what it has taken from above like a robot, if it does not generate any information or thought, we will encounter other problems in another government after 10 years. Because in the 70s and

80s, people with small-scale land were supported. But now in the transition to industrial agriculture they want people to sell their fields, large-scale agriculture should be done, people should be slaves. (...)

The peasant should not be a person who goes to bed when they say go to bed and gets up when they say get up.<sup>189</sup>

(Erdal, member of Çiftçi-Sen, Salihli, Alaşehir, October 31, 2020)

But there are some exceptions, however they are very recent. For example, in the last elections, in 2018, the municipality elections, in Rize there is a province called Fındıklı, CHP won the elections and this guy who won the elections had supported the resistance for long time, very famous person there and his position against the hydroelectric power plants brought him to this municipality.

(Umut, voluntary member, February 4, 2021)

There are also things that are not good in the country under the pretext of being good. (...) For example, municipalities and metropolitan municipalities that are in opposition parties support but do so without questioning. The current food system is not questioned. Let me give an example from this region, from the Izmir region. Izmir says that it has been supporting agriculture and farmers for the last 15 years. Posters are hung. Because 'we did this, we did that' in contract-farming. What companies want to do is to turn all production into contract-farming. When you say that you support contract-farming as a municipality, you are helping companies.<sup>190</sup>

(Adnan, Çiftçi-Sen's General Secretary, Kösedere, Karaburun,

July 30, 2020)

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<sup>189</sup> Original in Turkish:

Yerel olmalı. Yukarıdan destekle hiçbir şey yapamayız. Yukarıdan destek gelirken yerelin de bilinçlenmesi lazım. Yerel kesim robot gibi yukarıdan aldığı ekip biçerse hiç bilgi, düşünce oluşturmazsa 10 sene sonra başka iktidarda başka sorunlarla karşılaşırız. Çünkü 70'li, 80'li yıllarda küçük ölçekli arazisi olan insanlar destekleniyordu. Şimdi istenilen: endüstriyel tarıma geçişte insanlar tarlalarını satsın, büyük ölçekli tarım yapılsın, insanlar kul köle olsun. (...) Köylü yat deyince yatan, kalk deyince kalkan bir insan olmamalı.

<sup>190</sup> Original in Turkish:

Ülkede iyi olmak altında iyi olmayan şeyler de yapılıyor. (...) Örneğin, muhalefet partilerde olan belediyeler ve büyükşehir belediyeleri destek oluyorlar ama sorgulamadan yapıyorlar bunu. Mevcut gıda sistemi sorgulanmıyor. Bu bölgeden bir örnek vereyim, İzmir bölgesinden. İzmir, son 15 senedir tarıma ve çiftçiye destek verdiğini söyler. Afişler asılır. Sözleşmeli üretimde şunu yaptık, bunu yaptık diye. Şirketlerin yapmak istediği zaten tüm üretimi sözleşmeli üretim haline getirmektir. Bir belediye olarak sözleşmeli üretimi desteklediğini söylediğinde şirketlere yardımcı olmuş oluyorsun.

But if they would act as a typical intermediary if they do not consult with the producers and get their opinion this can create an anger on the producers side I can understand that but I do not totally and fully personally agree with Çiftçi-Sen's position on being totally against, you cannot be totally against with anything, you should create a power in your hands to pull the other part in a space where you can negotiate.

(Olca, voluntary member and ECVC liaison, April 20, 2021)

Particularly the last one, clearly in favor of alliances (and its curious that it comes from a volunteer member that has a contact with the wider realities of peasants struggles in Europe) is relevant because it points to a need to create a space of negotiation to pull the other part to one's agenda, namely food sovereignty which is something that the movement could not achieve. Which means, that although the discussion around food sovereignty could have been firstly introduced in Turkey by the movement (as it was claimed again in this meeting), its practices could not really have much broader impacts than the borders of their closer circles. About alliances and the future of the movement the following discussion points collected from the focus group can be presented.

- They acknowledge that despite of the pandemic, the movement may not be able to collect many members because the current structure they have is clearer and pushes more for what kind of farming practices should a member be aligned with. It is given the example that before to be a member of a product-based union a farmer had only to be in a producer of grapes or grain, but now for the centrality of food sovereignty in their program, its principles must be understood by the members of the movement. Literally the following statements were made “it may be harder, but it is more correct”; “we will progress slower, but quality can be more important than quantity”; “we will be able to gather around a more relevant and qualified union”.
- It is also recognized that are diverse initiatives in Turkey to which food sovereignty message can be relevant, but it was also expressed that it is common in the country for groups that say the same things to proliferate, dividing themselves. However, there is no opposition from the movement to make alliances with other groups that believe the same they do.

- The problem regarding alliances for the movement is when those groups belong to specific political parties and are not independent.
- The same was expressed for the possibility of ecological alliances as many ecological initiatives are, according to them, part of political parties and for the movement that is dangerous as Çiftçi-Sen cannot be a part of a political party, as following one of their principles.
- It was stated that their independence is their main advantage as they have members that are from different political orientations, and it is important to remain as such. Here a statement was made on the lines of “I do not want to be unfair for the other groups, but Çiftçi-Sen was the one that had to suffer the attacks of capitalism in agriculture in Turkey.”
- It is stated that an alliance is only possible when opposition parties and other groups<sup>191</sup> accept that a unity between all of them and farmers must be formed around a post-capitalist alternative.

One of the important aspects of this part of the discussion was placed in terms of pushing for an agenda of autonomy and peasant rights, namely from a statement in which is explained that the next step for the movement is to struggle for an agenda that will reach the approval and ratification of the recent UN peasant rights declaration of 2018 in Turkey. However, it is, at least, hard to imagine an effort that culminates in that goal without having the support of a wider alliance that has domestic political connections and decision-making capacities. In this aspect is clear that the ideological aspect of food sovereignty, in the terms of its post-capitalist alternative, is rather heavier than any pragmatism for pushing forward the agenda of the movement.

Finally, the last part of the discussion focused on food sovereignty and how it has acquired centrality on the movement’s purpose. The discussion points gathered from the participants interventions below expressively present food sovereignty as the post-developmental critique, proposing alternatively how the notion of peasant autonomy holds the potential to constitute a post-capitalist agriculture future for food systems.

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<sup>191</sup> Note from the session: it is interesting to note that to refer to other organizations the wording ‘movement’ is not used but rather ‘groups’.

- It was expressed that they are not in the same processes where they were 20 years ago. There is a higher clarity in the message they are trying to pass about agricultural policies.
- To succeed in something larger than needed the movement needs to strengthen the food sovereignty program which is based on reclaiming the natural resources control to the hands of peasant farmers but also all rural workers to fisherman and those involved in animal husbandry, as supported by the UN declaration of peasant rights.
- About the expressed above a key statement was made “more than protecting what is existing we want to improve and develop what is existing”, namely through agroecology and food sovereignty principles, that want to bring together consumers, scientists, and producers and how they must go hand in hand.
- It was also expressed the success of the movement in terms of how food sovereignty was integrated into agricultural discussions and how it helped to develop a public opposition, composed by academics, civil society organizations, against agribusiness and large-scale industrial agriculture in the country.
- Another interesting statement was made here: “we succeeded in making people interested in agricultural policies and what the ruling party is doing”. They consider this particularly important as it is stated that the food sovereignty issue is not about producers of food but an entire society’s issue.

Finally, the following points can be concluded from all the expressed on the session, which can be divided by using again Landsberger’s proposed dimensions to characterize a movement.

- The degree of consciousness of the movement is cemented around two main aspects. Domestically the trajectory of fighting against the state which was deeply marked by the authoritarian stance that the movement had to resist for the right to exist. Internationally, by the food sovereignty’s post-capitalism

future for agri-food system which clearly influences the views about the possibility of alliances.

- The degree of collectiveness of action is marked by the expressed learning curve of the movement, shown from the statements that now their autonomy is much clear, in the sense of what they fight for and how their struggle and policy of gathering memberships for political representation is built, namely by being focused on having members that really are aligned with the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty.
- The latter clearly shows the instrumentality of the goals of the movement. In other words, there is an aim outside of itself, an aim that transcends the protection of what exists but intends to develop what can exist, paraphrasing one of the participant's statements.
- Finally, their understanding of food sovereignty also transcends their agency from a reaction to the low status character of the peasantry, but it is also involved in a tension between what they believe a mobilized peasant farmer in their organization should be and the reality they encounter, particularly when pragmatism seems not to be on the vocabulary of the single union's mobilizing practices.

## 7.1. Concluding Remarks

Reaching such a long-threaded way brought, at least in the case of this research and this author, an ambivalent feeling. On the one hand a feeling that the journey opened more questions than the ones answered, and although that might be one of the purposes of conducting research, the capacity to bring answers to a problem is rewarding. On the other hand, a feeling that is better expressed by using the words of my favorite Portuguese writer, José Saramago, for a novel that is precisely about a journey: ‘In the end we always arrive at the place where we are expected’. The path taken until these final words carry along also some certainty which compensate for the first feeling of having opened more questions than the ones answered. Regarding the latter, the most important questions that need to be answered (and which I believe they were, following the interconnected thread of chapters) as proposed at the very beginning of this work are:

1. Does the peasantry make its own history when mobilization is weighed by a paternalistic State and obstructed by authoritarianism?
2. (How) is Çiftçi-Sen organizing resistance and constituting the (political) agency of the peasantry?
3. (How) has the organization/mobilization of the peasantry in Turkey been prevented and contained?

About the first, more general research question, the study can confidently argue that the peasantry in Turkey not only has revealed a persisting capacity to make their own history and not be taken as a silent pawn before the turbulent passage of history but, and more recently, has also shown capacity to organize resistance in despite of the paternalistic statist heritage that is revealed in two distinct forms which are actually possible answers to the next two questions.

It cannot be lightly argued that Çiftçi-Sen, on its trajectory since 2004, has organized the resistance and constituted the political agency of the peasantry in Turkey in an extensive geographically and quantitatively sense. That is something that can hardly be achieved. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the movement has organized resistance among the peasantry and has constituted the political agency of many of their dozens of thousands of members, past and present. That effort of organization and constitution, however, was not yet capable of get ridden from a state-centric orbit in terms of narratives and practices which still influence and seemingly will influence how the movement displays their understanding of their own role as farmer-activists and the conjugation of that role with potential alliances.

First because the weighed paternalism of the state-peasant tension entangles them on the contradiction between two distant poles: the protective role of the state and the aim to be completely independent. Second because their most marking experience in terms of consciousness and collectiveness of action is structured around the struggle for the right to organize against a continuous authoritarian stance denying that right, which has produced effects on their capacity to believe on formal powerholders for the strengthen of the movement. Finally, the answer to the last question has been, with enough fieldwork illustrations on chapters 5 and 6, solidly answered as it is more than clear the methods and instruments used by the hegemonic ruling for the containment and prevention of emancipatory alternatives in the countryside. Considering the above, the present concluding remarks will follow with a briefing of main findings and suggestions for future research.

One of the most important findings of the study is sustained around the argument that a peasant movement, such as Çiftçi-Sen, has higher chances of mobilization and meaningful resistance when becoming a rural social movement allied to wider causes in rural areas and with other civil society platforms for political activism, but also for the promotion of new working practices aligned with food sovereignty principles, and autonomy in engaging with stronger localized markets.

This is precisely what the Kirazlı Eco-life Association, referred on chapter 6, implemented to the point that being ignored by local and regional authorities is simply not possible, particularly when authoritarian top-down decisions aim at the core of *köylülük* (a noun formed after the Turkish word ‘villager’). We integrate this approach together with the resistance of a third kind where agency is creative and resistance should not only be defined in the sole negative sense of being against, as reactive. In other words, by insisting on a negative definition we will be always approaching the peasantry as a lagged condition of the past, a category sentenced to disappear or even that peasants are some static reminiscences that could not yet become agricultural entrepreneurs.

As such, creative resistance proposes new fields of actions set in an arena of political agency, linking rural producers to urban consumers but also tackling alerting demographic trends, especially rural ageing. Today’s peasant types are as diverse as multiple arrangements of production, consumption and the very notions of place and settlements that are being questioned by new patterns of mobilities. In this picture, the contentious issues emerging in rural areas in Turkey, as well as old ones, are accompanied by claims for alternatives. It has been argued by the movement that agroecology is not just an embodiment of alternative agri-food initiatives and production practices but a political stand of food sovereignty.

Yet, as a political project the need to bring more pragmatism to the table of the reading of the current contentious issues in rural Turkey may be fundamental to not lose the relevance that such political project sustains also threatening the relevance of the movement itself.

Lastly, it is important not to forget that while for the first periods of the ruling party there were indeed political measures which assumed a European-looking modernization of state bureaucracy, the recent social and economic drastic results from the ruling party’s extractivism became undeniable but also unapologetic.

The capitalist fetishism that juxtaposes development as continuous growth renders invisible the peasantry as a social group that accounts for the majority of world food

production yet carries the derogatory ethos of standing in the way of progress, seeing attempts for their own history-making being denied.

As it follows, it is recommended that future research on this matter considers that more important than the claim for food sovereignty in Turkey, at the center of global peasant resistance to which Çiftçi-Sen is connected, is the tackling of the traditional weak culture of mobilization by not just awaiting a return of the protective state. It must also sustain everyday forms of resistance, against authoritarian populism, and build up new societal values, as well as allied platforms, of production-consumption against the extractivist ideology. But for the Turkish peasantry, and particularly to Çiftçi-Sen, to make its own history in a context of fiercer authoritarianism, an ontological reclaim is paramount to overcome the state-centric nexus of its existence, which implies to find a balance between the autonomy of its nature and the alliances that it needs. Future research could address alliances between the Turkish peasantry and environmental struggles and how both struggles feed one another. An additional suggestion would be to conduct research on the potential of the alliances between Çiftçi-Sen and opposition municipalities and how these alliances can foster strategies and spaces of resistance for new modes of engagement with the land against extractivism.

Not in the sense of peasants being unconsciously captured by an organization for political gains, but precisely the opposite. The chance for peasants, within organizations like Çiftçi-Sen is the potential to assume a role in their own history-making denying their historical portray of people without history, but more important is of being incorporated in a movement that emerges from their own core. After all, for those who struggle, resisting, to produce the material needs of their existence, the right of history-making cannot ever be denied.

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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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14 NİSAN 2021

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

#### Sayın Prof. Dr. Ayşe Gündüz HOŞGÖR

Danışmanlığınızı yaptığınız José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro “The Persistence and Resistance of the Peasantry on the 21st century Turkey: the case of the peasant movement Çiftçi-Sen” başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **129-ODTU-2021** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Dr.Öğretim Üyesi Şerife SEVİNÇ  
İAEK Başkan Vekili

## B. EXTENDED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Theoretical and Conceptual basis	Research Questions	Theoretical Questions	Historical/ Empirical Indicators	Interview Questions
<p><b>Peasant Persistence</b></p> <p>Classical Agrarian Question</p>	<p>1. How to locate the Turkish peasantry on the debate of global peasant resistance on the 21<sup>st</sup> century?</p>	<p>Why did not the peasantry disappeared or 'died' with the incorporation of capitalism in Agriculture?</p>	<p>1. Farmlands by ownership and size in Turkey from the 30s to the 80s.</p> <p>2. Sharecropping, rural-urban migration.</p>	<p><b>Age group</b> <b>Education</b> <b>Occupation</b></p> <p>What does the word "Peasant" mean for you in Turkey?</p> <p>Do you own farmland? Did you inherit or bought it? How was the farming activity of your ancestors? Were they make a living just out of agriculture? What about you? Did your type of farming changed in recent years (yield, crops, family labor or hired workers)?</p>
<p>Peasant 'wars' and the 'people without history'</p> <p>Dispossession of the peasantry from global colonialism to global capitalism</p> <p>Peasant agency and rural politics in Turkey</p>		<p>Why most of historical peasant rebellions did not form continuous collective agency?</p> <p>How capitalism keeps a dispossession of the peasantry since its emergence?</p>	<p>1. Summarized account of significant global peasant rebellions and account of rebellions in Turkey.</p> <p>2. Weak of class consciousness, populist appropriation of the rural masses (From the DP in the 50s to AKP 2000s-...)</p>	<p>Have you ever heard of a farmer protest here?</p> <p>How was it?</p> <p>About what was the protest?</p> <p>Is there discontent about the current situation?</p> <p>Have you ever been part of a cooperative?</p> <p>Can you tell us about your participation?</p>
<p>- Persistence of the Peasantry</p> <p>- Contemporary Agrarian Question</p> <p>- Neoliberal transformation in Turkey</p>		<p>What are main contemporary forms of rural production?</p> <p>How does the peasantry persist amid rural accumulation and poverty?</p> <p>What is the contemporary focus of rural politics?</p>	<p>1. Farmlands by ownership and size of holdings from the 80s.</p> <p>2. Modes of production from sharecropping to contract farming.</p> <p>3. Financialization of agriculture: indebtedness, partisan clientelism in cooperatives.</p>	<p>- If you look at recent past years what are the most important problems for small farmers?</p> <p>- Are there any issues of land in the region? (The laws that changed the status of rural villages and turn villages into neighborhoods</p> <p>- Indebtedness and being forced to sell land. Is land is still an assurance?</p> <p>- Are there any working cooperatives now?</p>

<p>Neoliberalism and authoritarianism</p>	<p>2. (How) has the organization/mobilization of the peasantry in Turkey been prevented and contained?</p>	<p>How is authoritarian populism represented in Rural Turkey?</p> <p>How the neoliberal developmentalism and authoritarian populism political expressions in Turkey have affected peasantry small-scale farming?</p> <p>How has it prevented formation of emancipatory alternative initiatives like Çiftçi-Sen?</p>	<p>1. Media analysis on account of repression in rural protests against governmental projects (e.g., mining and geothermal in Aegean regions)</p> <p>2. Protests against interest rates increase in farmer's debt.</p> <p>3. Participation of women in rural protests (quite often the most resilient).</p>	<p>When did you first hear about Çiftçi-Sen?</p> <p>How does Çiftçi-Sen approach farmers to 'recruit' them as new members? And how the organization is representing them?</p> <p>Do you know other members of Çiftçi-Sen?</p> <p>Can you tell us about the several times that Çiftçi-Sen suffered legal actions to stop it from being official?</p> <p>Why do you think this is always happening?</p> <p>Can farmers organize themselves? And when they organize what is it for?</p> <p>What were the most recent protests happening here?</p>
<p>Peasant Resistance</p> <p>New Peasantries</p> <p>Gendered Labor Regime in agriculture</p> <p>Food sovereignty, the global corporate food regime and emancipatory alternative initiatives</p>	<p>3. (How) is Çiftçi-Sem organizing resistance and constituting the (political) agency of the peasantry?</p>	<p>What are the forms of resistance that constitute the global 'new peasantries'?</p> <p>What are the definitions and implementation strategies of the food sovereignty project by Çiftçi-Sen?</p> <p>How does the food sovereignty project links to gender equality for rural women?</p>	<p>1. Urban to rural mobilities. - Proletarianiz. and off-farm wage labor in Rural Turkey;</p> <p>2. Active presence of women in Çiftçi-Sen organization and activities;</p> <p>3. Women cooperatives and women founded initiatives.</p> <p>4. Promotion and implementation of agroecological initiatives;</p> <p>5. Presence of active local agri-food systems;</p> <p>6. Existence of local and independently functioning cooperatives;</p>	<p>Do you or have you worked in off-farm activities? What and why?</p> <p>Can you keep your land and farming with other income?</p> <p>Does your wife/husband also works outside agriculture?</p> <p>How are the recognition of women in rural areas a concern of Çiftçi-Sen?</p> <p>Is Çiftçi-Sen linked to any rural women initiatives?</p> <p>What lessons can Turkey learn from transnational organization like La Via Campesina for political action to achieve the goals of agroecology, autonomy, food security and autonomy?</p> <p>How do you see the alternative of municipality and peasant/ small farmers cooperatives agreements for rural to urban links of local food?</p>

### C. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Name	Location of Interview	Day and Time	Relation w/ Çiftçi Sen	Gender	Age Group	Education	Occupation
Adnan	Kösedere / Karaburun and Alaşehir	5/08/2020 - 11.00	General Secretary	Male	50-60	High School	Retired/ Farmer
Umut	Izmir and Zoom	18/09/2020 - 09/11/2020	Volunteer member - Researcher	Male	30-35	University	PhD candidate
Nihat	Kirazlı/ Kuşadası	16/09/2020 - 16.30	Active Member - Organic Farming Activist	Male	50-60	High School	Farmer/ owner small restaurant in Kirazlı
Ali	Soma and Zoom	22/01/2021 - 13.00	President	Male	60-65	High School	Retired
Hasan	Ayvalık	03/02/2021 - 13.30	Active formal member/ recruiter	Male	50-60	University	Retired/ Farmer
Ali	Karaayıt/Ayvalık	03/02/2021 - 18.00	Former member	Male	40-50	Middle School	Farmer
Bayram	Akçapınar/Ayvalık	03/02/2021 - 19.00	Close circle but not member	Male	40-50	Middle School	Farmer
Ali	Ayvalık	03/02/2021 - 20.00	Active formal member/ recruiter	Male	40-50	High School	Farmer/ employee in a café in Ayvalık
Suat	Ayvalık	04/02/2021 - 11.00	Close circle but not member	Male	60-70	Primary School	Former President Tarış Cooperative in Ayvalık
Berin	Sakarya	16.05.2021 - 18.00	Member of the Board	Female	60-65	University	Retired / Farmer
Ramazan	Örnekköy/ Alaşehir	30.10.2021 - 13.00	Formal member	Male	60-65	Middle School	Retired/ Farmer
Cihat	Killik/ Alaşehir	30.10.2021 - 14.30	Formal member	Male	60-65	High School	Farmer
Savuran	Killik/ Alaşehir	30.10.2021 - 14.30	Formal member	Male	60-65	High School	Owner of a small kiosk / farmer
Hüseyin	Bağlıca / Sarıgöl	30.10.2021 - 16.00	Formal member	Male	60-65	Middle School	Farmer
Şaban	Çimentepe / Sarıgöl	30.10.2021 - 17.30	Formal member	Male	60-65	Middle School	Farmer
Kadriye	Çimentepe / Sarıgöl	30.10.2021 - 17.30	Formal member	Female	60-65	Middle School	Farmer
Bahri	Salihli	31.10.2021 - 11.00	Member of the Board	Male	50-60	University	Owner of a small cafe / Farmer
Erdal	Salihli	31.10.2021 - 12.40	Formal member	Male	50-60	Middle School	Retired/ Farmer

## **D. INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

### **Interview Consent Form**

**Doctoral Research title:** Peasantry and Rural Resistance in the 21st Century Turkey: the case of Çiftçi-Sen

**Research investigator:** José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro

**Research Participants name:**

The interview will take (enter amount of time). We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above doctoral research project at Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University (METU). Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying **information sheet** and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced;
- you will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors;
- the transcript of the interview will be analyzed by José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro as research investigator;
- access to the interview transcript will be limited to José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro and the supervisor Prof. Dr. Ayşe Gündüz Hoşgör (METU);
- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- the actual recording will be archived, and a copy will be sent to you. After the project the researcher's copy will be destroyed.
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

### Quotation Agreement

**I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:**

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used;

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- Spoken presentations such as conferences, symposiums, congresses, and other academic events.
- In an archive of the project as noted above

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

**Participants Signature**

**Date**

**José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researchers Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

*Contact Information*

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

**Name of researcher:** José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro

**Tel:** +90 553 056 4080

**E-mail:** [jose.ribeiro@metu.edu.tr](mailto:jose.ribeiro@metu.edu.tr)

You can also contact (José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro)  
supervisor:

**Name:** Prof. Dr. Ayşe Gündüz Hoşgör

**E-mail:** [hosgor@metu.edu.tr](mailto:hosgor@metu.edu.tr)

**What if I have concerns about this research?**

If you are worried about this research, or if you are concerned about how it is being conducted, you can contact the Human Subject Ethics Committee of Middle East Technical University:

Tel: +90 312 210 3707 E-mail: [ueam@metu.edu.tr](mailto:ueam@metu.edu.tr)

## **E. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE**

NOVEMBER 24, 2022

ONLINE (ZOOM)

### **PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Çiftçi-Sen Coordination Committee**

Ali Bülent ERDEM (President)

Ayşe Berin ERTÜRK (General Secretary)

Adnan ÇOBANOĞLU (General Secretary)

Bahri ÖNER Genel (Financial Secretary)

Kutsi YAŞAR (Member of the Directing Board)

Cengiz YAZAR (Member of the Directing Board)

Akın Türe Genel (Member of the Directing Board)

Müfit ÇIKRIKÇIOĞLU (Member of the Directing Board)

#### **Guidelines:**

No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.

We're recording as per your verbal consent (the recording will also be shared with you and unlike the individual interviews no direct quotes will be used nor participants will be individually named on the discussion chapter of the study).

One person speaking at a time (be direct and objective).

You don't need to agree with others.

You can and are welcome to talk to each other.

Me and Esra are moderators, and we will be to guide the discussion.

### **QUESTION FIRST TOPIC:**

**[Introduction:** from the 18 interviews I did with members of Çiftçi and studying its history since 2004 when üzüm-sen and tütün-sen were founded I saw that the Çiftçi changed its type of organization and resistance strategies over the years.]

1. What you think about those changes?
2. and how you define your current resistance?

### **QUESTION SECOND TOPIC:**

**[Introduction:** The history of Çiftçi-Sen is also an history of facing authoritarianism, for example with the several legal problems that stopped the movement from being legal several times.]

1. What you feel about that experience of facing those problems?
2. and how did it change the organization in terms of autonomy (capacity to organise)?
3. Considering that experience how do you feel about alliances with other movements or initiatives (like food initiatives or ecological initiatives that are emerging in turkey?)

### **QUESTION THIRD TOPIC:**

**[Introduction:** food sovereignty is definitely central on the political program of Çiftçi-Sen as the proposed alternative for the food system.]

1. Suppose you had the chance for one or two minutes to tell everyone in the country about food sovereignty. What would you say about it?

### **FINAL QUESTIONS**

Have we missed anything?

Would you like to add something?

## F. CURRICULUM VITAE



**Name:** José Duarte Medeiros Ribeiro

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**Nationality:** Portuguese

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2056-4263>

### EDUCATION

**Middle East Technical University, Department of Sociology (Ankara, Turkey)**  
PhD (2016 – 2022)

**University of Aveiro, Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences (Portugal)**

Master of Science (MSc) Urban and Regional Planning (2013-2015)

**MSc thesis:** *Between Bacchus and Dionysus. European Policies on Rural Development: the cases of Nemea and Basto wine regions* | Graded 19/20

**University of Porto, Faculty of Arts (Portugal)**

BA, Sociology (2009-2013)

**Ghent University, Department of Agricultural Economics (Belgium)**

Visiting Researcher (June-July 2021)

**Harokopio University (Athens, Greece)**

European Spatial Planning Policies – Erasmus + programme (2014-2015)

**Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, (Belgium)**

Sociology – Erasmus programme (2011-2012)

**TRAINING**

**Middle East Technical University, Department of City and Regional Planning (Ankara, Turkey)**

ESDP network Intensive Programme (IP) in Urban Planning (April – May 2014). 6 ECTS

**Roskilde University, Department of Social Science and Business (ISE)**

PhD Workshop Qualitative Research Interviews, 15-17 February 2021. 3 ECTS

**Koç University, Department of Sociology, Social ComQuant Project**

10<sup>th</sup> Social ComQuant Workshop in Computational Social Sciences, 2-4 March 2022.

**Tarih Vakfı**

Seminars on the History of Turkey, 12 January – 23 March, 2022.

**EXPERIENCE**

**RIVAR (Ibero-American Review of Viticulture, Agroindustry and Rurality)**

Editor-in-chief (2021-2026)

Journal edited by the Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Santiago de Chile (USACH)

ESCI - Indexed Web of Science and SCOPUS.

**Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography**

Lecturer, Sub-Department of Portuguese Studies (September 2018 - Present)

**Ankara University, Center for Latin American Studies**

Researcher (September 2018 - Present)

**University of Lisbon | Ankara University**

Coordinator (September 2018 - Present)

Coordinate and supervise the operation of the Place of Application and Promotion (LAPE) of Certified Portuguese Exams to foreigners (CAPLE) resulting from the protocol between the University of Lisbon and the University of Ankara.

**ÖSYM - Measuring, Selection and Placement Center, Ankara, Turkey**

Consultant and Evaluator for Portuguese Language Exams (October 2020 – Present)

Provides consultancy and evaluation on the preparation of Portuguese language exams for the governmental body ÖSYM, responsible for official examinations in Turkey.

**Embassy of Portugal in Ankara**

Foreign Trade and Economic Affairs Intern (December 2016 – May 2017)

**University of Aveiro, Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences (Portugal)**

Researcher (2014-2015) | Project: *Rural Matters - meanings of the rural in Portugal-between social representations, consumptions, and development strategies.*

**O Basto (Basto Region Newspaper, Portugal)**

Deputy Director (January 2014 to Present) [www.jornalobasto.com](http://www.jornalobasto.com)

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Sub-Department of Portuguese Studies**

Introduction to Portuguese Grammar

Portuguese History

Introductory Level of Portuguese,

Portuguese Culture

**Ankara University, Center for Latin American Studies (LAMER)**

Coordinator and Lecturer of 1<sup>st</sup> Certificate Program of Culture and History of Turkey (in Spanish) for Latin American academics and diplomats. 16 July 2020 – 27 August 2020 (online).

**Invited Lecturer**

Middle East Technical University (METU), Department of Sociology

Ethical and Political Values in Research, course of Research in Sociology I (2019)

One lecture on Rural Transformation in Turkey, course of Rural Sociology (2021)

**Visiting Lecturer**

Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Department of Political Science, course on Turkish Rural Sociology (April 2021)

**PUBLICATIONS**

**Refereed Journal Articles**

Ribeiro, J.D. (2021). Fronteras de identidad popular en las Fiestas de S. Sebastião del Barroso en Portugal. *Revista Iberoamericana de Viticultura, Agroindustria y Ruralidad*, 8 (23):220-238. ESCI (Web of Science and SCOPUS)

Ribeiro, J.D., Cihanger Ribeiro, D., Duarte, J.S (2020). A Legacy of Grape: A Socio-Cultural and Spatial Analysis of Ankara's Wine Production History. *Ankara Araştırmaları Dergisi*. 2020; 8(2): 215-251. DOI: 10.5505/jas.2020.29494

Ribeiro, J.D., & Necati Kutlu, M. (2020). Incertidumbre a los ocho años. Aproximación a la situación de los refugiados sirios en Turquía. *Desacatos. Revista De Ciencias Sociales*, (64), 32–51. DOI: 10.29340/64.2349

Ribeiro, J.D., Figueiredo, E., Rodrigues, C. (2018). Between Localness and Deterritorialization in Nemea and Basto wine regions. *Revista Iberoamericana de Viticultura, Agroindustria y Ruralidad*, 5, (14):39-60. ESCI (Web of Science)

### Online Journal Articles (Refereed)

Ribeiro, J. D. (2021, December 14). The Great Rising? Turkish peasants' fight for the right to food – and their own history [Online]. *The Sociological Review Magazine*. <https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.hvmq5229>

### Online Journal Articles

Ribeiro, J.D. 2020. "Peasantry and Rural Social Movements in Twenty-First Century Turkey." *EuropeNow* 10, December. <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2020/11/09/peasantry-and-rural-social-movements-in-twenty-first-century-turkey/>

### Book chapter (peer reviewed)

Ribeiro, J.D., Gündüz-Höşgör, Ayşe. (in press 2023). Do peasants make history? Authoritarianism and rural resistance in contemporary Turkey. In Isabel David and Kumru Toktamis (Eds.) *Fragments of repression and resistance: AKP rule in Turkey*. Bern/Lausanne: Peter Lang.

Ribeiro, J.D., Cihanger Ribeiro, D., Tosun, C., (in press 2023). Insurgency in Planning: The Case of Chamber of City Planners in Turkey. In Roberto Rocco, Gabriel Silvestre (Eds.) *How do you Employ an Insurgent Planner?*, Newcastle: Agenda Publishing.

Eusébio, C. Carneiro, M.J., Soares da Silva, D., Figueiredo, E., Kastenholz, E. e Ribeiro, J.D. (2015). Consumos de Produtos Agroalimentares em Portugal. In Figueiredo, E. (Cord), *O Campo é onde não estamos: Significados Sociais e Institucionais do Rural em Portugal*. ISBN 978-972-789-460-4. Universidade de Aveiro, UA Editora.

## **Book Editions and Translations**

Agostinho Neto (2020) Cihanger Ribeiro, D., Ribeiro, J.D. (Ed.) (Tr.) Tüm Şiirleri. Kutsal Umut. İmkansız Vazgeçiş. Gün Ağırırken. ISBN 978-605-136-494-0. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi.

Kutlu, M.N., Toledo, H., Yalçın, P., Yurtaydın, E., Erdem, G., Güler, C., Kadıköylü, N., Seçkin, F.O. (2019) Ribeiro, J.D. (Ed.) (Tr.) Relações Império Otomano – América Latina ao Longo do Século XIX. ISBN 978-605-136-413-1. Ancara: Publicações da Universidade de Ancara.

## **Conference Proceedings**

Ribeiro, J. D., Figueiredo, E. e Soares da Silva, D. (2014). Ligações familiares – o consumo de produtos agroalimentares locais em meio urbano: o caso de Aveiro. AEEA (Orgs). *Proceedings of X CIER – Coloquio Iberico de Estudios Rurales - Territorios rurales, Agriculturas locales y Cadenas alimentarias*, Editorial Universitat Politècnica de València, pp. 79-84.

Ribeiro, J. D. (2015) Wine terroir and cultural heritage protection in rural areas: The case of Nemea and Basto wine regions. *Proceedings of the Planning Law and Property Rights International Conference*, University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece.

Ribeiro, J. D., Soares da Silva, D. and Figueiredo, E. (2015). ‘Wish you were rural’: local food consumption in two main Portuguese urban centres through family relations. *Proceedings of the International Conference Meanings of the Rural*, Aveiro University, Portugal, 5 pp.

Ribeiro, J. D. (2016) Terroir ‘tale of two glasses’: localness vs. de-territorialization in Nemea and Basto wine regions. *Proceedings of the IV WPSC (World Planning Schools Congress) Global Crisis, Planning & Challenges To Spatial Justice In The North And In The South*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, pp.1634-39

Ribeiro, J. D. (2017) The rural in Turkey-EU relations: rural transformations in the Turkish rural areas through adjustments to EU agricultural policy reforms. *Proceedings of the XXVII European Society for Rural Sociology Congress*, Krakow, Poland, p.12

Ribeiro, J. D., Ramos, J.M. (2019) ‘Business over Politics’: a comparative analysis of Turkey’s agenda for Latin America in the 21st Century. *Proceedings of the Tricontinental Conference 2019*, Yeditepe University, Istanbul.

## **MSc Thesis**

Ribeiro, José Duarte Medeiros (2016). Between Bacchus and Dionysus. European Policies on Rural Development: the cases of Nemea and Basto wine regions. MSc Thesis in Urban and Regional Planning. Aveiro University, Aveiro. 186 pp.

## PAPERS PRESENTED

- 2014 “How Local is Terroir? Brief characterization of Nemea Wine-Producing Area”. Southern and Mediterranean Europe Social Change, Challenges and Opportunities in a Time of Crisis, European Society of Rural Sociology in Évora, Portugal, 11-12 December.
- 2015 “Wine terroir and cultural heritage protection in rural areas: The case of Nemea and Basto wine regions”. 9th International Conference on Planning, Law and Property Rights, Volos, Greece, 25-27 February.
- 2015 “Ligações familiares – o consumo de produtos agroalimentares locais em meio urbano: o caso de Aveiro”. Coloquio Iberico de Estudios Rurales - Territorios rurales, Agriculturas locales y Cadenas alimentarias, Palencia, Spain, 16-17 October (Co-authored with Elisabete Figueiredo and Diogo Soares da Silva)
- 2015 “Between Basto and Nemea: wine terroir as cultural heritage in rural areas”. VII Rural Studies Congress, ICS, Lisbon, 16-18 July.
- 2015 “Wish you were rural: local food consumption in two main Portuguese urban centres through family relations”. Rural Matters International Conference Meanings of the Rural – between social representations, consumptions and rural development strategies, Aveiro University, Portugal 28-29 September (Co-authored with Elisabete Figueiredo and Diogo Soares da Silva).
- 2015 “Terroir ‘tale of two glasses’: localness vs. de-territorialization in Nemea and Basto wine regions”. Rural Matters International Conference Meanings of the Rural – between social representations, consumptions and rural development strategies, Aveiro University, Portugal 28-29 September.
- 2015 “Terroir 'tale of two glasses': localness vs. de-territorialisation in Nemea and Basto wine regions”. International Seminar Human capital, wage labour and innovation in rural areas, Athens, Harokopio University 23-24 October.
- 2016 “Terroir 'tale of two glasses': localness vs. de-territorialisation in Nemea and Basto wine regions”. IV WPSC (World Planning Schools Congress), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil between 3- 8 July.
- 2017 “Between Localness and Deterritorialization: challenges in Southern European small-scale farming”. 4th International Seminar on Migrations, Agriculture and Food Sustainability: Dynamics, Challenges and Perspectives in the Global Context, Centre of Human and Social Sciences, Madrid, Spain, 26-27 January.
- 2017 “The Rural in Turkey-EU relations: rural transformations in Turkish rural areas through the adjustments to EU agricultural policy reforms”. XXVII European Society for Rural Sociology Congress, Krakow, Poland, 24-27 July.
- 2019 “Business over Politics: a comparative analysis of Turkey’s agenda for Latin America in the 21st Century”. Tricontinental Conference 2019, Yeditepe University, Istanbul, May 13, (Co-authored with Julián Martínez Ramos).
- 2020 “Fronteras de la identidad popular: las fiestas de S. Sebastião en el Barroso Transmontano”. I Seminario Internacional de Fiesta y Agricultura 2020, Instituto de Estudios Avanzados de la Universidad Santiago de Chile y Revista Iberoamericana de

Viticultura, Agroindustria y Ruralidad (RIVAR), octubre 5-8 (online).

- 2021 “Rural Politics after 15 Years of AKP: Assessing the Effects on Small-Scale Farming and the Agency of Rural Social Movements in Turkey”. IV ISA Forum of Sociology, Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 23-28 (online).
- 2022 “Food Sovereignty and Rural Social Movements in the 21st Century Turkey”. International online Conference STRINGS – Selling the Rural in Urban Areas: The role of Local Food Products in the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas. July 14-15, University of Aveiro, Portugal.
- 2022 “Food Sovereignty and Rural Social Movements in the 21st Century Turkey”. The Food System in the (Post-) Pandemic World. ISA RC40 Mini-Conference. October 19-21, Leipzig University, Germany.
- 2023 “The Rural in the 21st century Turkey: resisting extractivism and rural-based accumulation”. Turkey at 100: (Dis)continuities and (Dis)contents. February 8-10, Lisbon University, Portugal.

## CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION

Member of the Organizing Committee of the conference “Challenging Rural Studies in Turkey: present state and new imaginaries” co-organized by the Department of Sociology of Middle East Technical University and the European Society of Rural Sociology. June 23-24, 2022, Ankara, Turkey.

Member of the Organizing Committee of the conference “The Food System in the (Post-) Pandemic World” co-organized by the Internacional Sociological Association RC40 – Sociology of Agriculture and Food and Leipzig University. October 19-21, 2022, Leipzig University, Germany.

## SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS

- **Special Access Award**  
Special Access Award for the paper "*The Rural in Turkey-EU relations: rural transformations in Turkish rural areas through the adjustments to EU agricultural policy reforms*" by the Organizing Committee of the XXVII European Society for Rural Sociology Congress, in Krakow, Poland, July 24-27, 2017
- **Merit Scholarship 2014-2015**  
Won the Merit Scholarship for the academic year of 2014-2015 as being included on a final list of the 25 best students of that year. Attributed by Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior (Higher Education General-Directorate) and Universidade de Aveiro in September 2018.

- **2017-2018 Academic Year - METU Graduate Courses Performance Award**  
A certificate awarded for the most successful student in the Ph.D. Program of the Department of Sociology, with a CGPA of 4,00/4,00.
- **Koç University-VEKAM Research Award in 2019**  
For the ongoing project “Legacy of Grape: A Socio-Cultural and Spatial Analysis of Ankara’s Wine Production History”.

## ACADEMIC SERVICE

Revista Iberoamericana de Viticultura, Agroindustria y Ruralidad (Ibero-american Review of Viticulture, Agroindustry and Rurality), Manuscript Reviewer, 2021

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

ISA- International Sociological Association (RC 40 Sociology of Agriculture and Food)  
CES – Council for European Studies

## VOLUNTEER WORK

Bombeiros Voluntários Cabeceirenses (Fire Department), Cabeceiras de Basto, Braga, Portugal Volunteer Member - Fire-Department (2010-2016)

## LANGUAGES

Portuguese	Native	Turkish	Intermediate
English	Advanced - IELTS test level C1	Greek	Basic
Spanish	Advanced		

## G. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu akademik çalışmanın temel motivasyonu 21. yüzyılda köylülük (peasantary) üzerine şu iki soruyu sormaktır: 'neden bugün hala köylülük hakkında konuşuyoruz?' ve 'köylülüğün tarih boyunca ısrarlı sürekliliği ne zaman direniş biçimlerini ortaya çıkarır?' Bu iki soru, çalışmanın çıkış noktası olmasının yanında, araştırma sorularına da yön vermektedir. Bu soruları 21. yüzyıldaki tarım sorununa ilişkin önemli tartışmalarla çerçevelemek önemlidir. Her şeyden önce, tarım sorunu, arazi gaspı ve sözleşmeli çiftçilik kompleksi gibi kırsaldaki uzlaşmaz süreçlere karşı direniş ve kırsal politika açısından ele alan bir tartışmadır. Ama aynı zamanda, bu tartışma, köylüleri tarihin maddi sonuçlarının yalnızca edilgen seyircileri olarak değil, siyasi failliğe sahip olarak da ele alır. İzlenecek konumlandırma, 21. yüzyılda köylülüğün, gıda sistemlerinde radikal bir değişiklik için siyasi faillik ve siyasi program ile hareketler oluşturabilecek kapasitede olduğu görüşündedir. Ancak bu, öznelere canlarının istediği gibi tarih yazmadıkları köklü bir değişim mücadelesidir (Marx, [1852] 1934:10).

Yukarıdakiler göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışmanın amacı aşağıdaki üç madde ile özet bir şekilde ifade edilmektedir. İlki, köylülüğün kendi kolektif eylemi ve siyasi failliği aracılığıyla anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktır. “Köylülük” (peasantary) kavramının tez başlığında üstlendiği anlam budur. İkincisi, bahsi geçen anlayışı Türkiye'deki kırsal siyasetin tarihsel bağlamı içinde çerçevelemektir. Bu, iktidar partisinin son yirmi yılda ataerkil devlet-köylü gerilimi ve otoriter popülist bağlamı arasındaki diyalektik bir tartışmayı tanımlamaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, başlıktaki “Kırsal Direniş” (rural resistance) Türk köylülüğünün kendi tarihi üzerinden neden sürekli örgütlü direnişten yoksun olduğunu anlama hedefini ifade eder. Üçüncü ve son olarak ise 21. yüzyıl Türkiye'sinin kırsal kesimine damgasını vuran otoriter popülizmin doğasını da hesaba katarak köylü hareketini karakterize edecek analitik bir çerçeve sağlama hedefi güden örnek olay incelemesi “21. yüzyıl Türkiye'sinde: Çiftçi-Sen örneği” ile tanımlanmaktadır.

Bu amacı işlevsel hale getirmek için araştırma iki ana bölüme ayrılmıştır. Bölüm I., 21. yüzyıldaki tarım sorununu bir kırsal siyaset ve kırsal direniş sorunu olarak açıklığa kavuşturma ve bu tartışmayı Türk köylülüğünün tarihsel bağlamına yerleştirme çabalarını içermektedir. Bu kısım daha çok çalışmanın amacının ilk iki noktasına değinmektedir. Bölüm II, Türkiye'deki Çiftçi-Sen hareketini, kolektif eylemi ve örgütlenmesini karakterize ederek anlamaya odaklanmakta ve ardından bu hareketin failliklerini engelleyen otoriter bağlam içerisindeki siyasi programlarla ilişkin saha çalışması sonuçlarının analizini sunmaktadır. Kısacası, bu ikinci bölümde çalışma, birinci bölümdeki kavram ve tartışmaların ampirik gerekçesini sunmaktadır. Bölüm I ve Bölüm II köylü direnişine ilişkin olarak sırasıyla iki farklı odakta işlerlik kazanıyor. Bunlar:

I. Kırsal toplumsal hareketlerin önemini ve küresel gıda rejimine karşı mevcut gıda egemenliği mücadelesiyle olan ilişkisini ele almak. Bu, köylülüğün tarihinde var olan ve özellikle Türkiye örneği için önemli olan, itaat özerkliği ile ittifaklar arasındaki gerilimi anlamak anlamına da gelmektedir.

II. Küresel gıda rejimi ve otoriterliğe karşı gıda egemenliği olarak tanımlanan küresel köylü direnişinin ana hatlarını ortaya koymak. Ama özellikle örnek olay hareketi Çiftçi-Sen'i küresel köylü direnişi çizgisinde tanımlamak, konumlandırmak ve Türkiye'nin kırsal kesiminde direnişi nasıl harekete geçirdiklerini (ya da geçirip geçiremediklerini) anlamak.

Birinci bölüm daha temel ve genel bir araştırma sorusunu temsil ederken, ikinci bölüm daha spesifik araştırma sorularıyla ortaya çıkıyor:

1. Köylülük, seferberlik ataerki bir devlet tarafından tanımlandığı ve otoriterlik tarafından engellendiği bir ortamda kendi tarihini mi yazıyor? (I)
2. Çiftçi-Sen direnişi nasıl örgütüyor ve köylülüğün (siyasi) failliğini oluşturuyor? (II)
3. Türkiye'de köylülüğün örgütlenmesi/seferberliği (nasıl) engellendi ve kontrol altına alındı? (II)

Yukarıdaki araştırma soruları iki hipotezle ilişkilendirilmiştir:

- Geleneksel tarım sorununu formüle eden tarımdaki kapitalist geçiş, Türkiye örneğinde geniş bir topraksızlık sorunu yaratarak köylü çiftçileri mülksüzleştirmemiş ve onları tamamen ücretli emekçilere dönüştürmemiştir. Tarımsal modernleşme, küçük-ölçekli çiftçiliğin kalıcılığında ya da tarihsel köylü aile çiftçiliğinin baskınlığında bir değişiklik oluşturmamıştır. Bu nedenle, güneydoğu bölgelerine özgü periyodik arazi çatışmalarına rağmen Türkiye'nin çoğu bölgesinde kırsal ülke çapında kırsal sınıf çatışmaları ortaya çıkmamıştır. Bununla birlikte, tarihsel analizlerin çoğu, önceki kayıtlar nedeniyle, kayıtlı köylü mücadelelerinin genellikle ampirik olarak göz ardı edildiği veya hafife alındığı sonucuna ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durumun, toprak sahibi bir seçkinler tarafından yönetilen ve kırsal kesimde bir sınıf bilincinin ve siyasi failliğin ortaya çıkmasını engelleyen sürekli ataerkil devletin varlığı ile ilişkili olduğu bu çalışma tarafından iddia edilmektedir.
- Kırsal kesimde bir devlet-köylü ile tanımlanan ikili ilişkiler, köylü toplumsal hareketlerinin direnişi örgütlemesi, kolektif eylemini geliştirmesi önündeki başlıca tarihsel engeli oluşturmaktadır. Bu engel, mevcut iktidarın 21. Yüzyıl ile birlikte gelen otoriter popülizm yaklaşımı; ayrıca kırsal yoksulluk, borçluluk ve maden çıkarma gibi diğer sosyolojik fenomenler ile birbiriyle ilişkili olarak daha tartışmalı hale gelmektedir. Vaka incelemesi Çiftçi-Sen hareketi de seferberlik stratejisini devlet geriliminden ayıramamıştır. Hareketin kökeni ve en büyük zorluklarına ilişkin anlatılar, hareketin muhalefet partileri veya diğer örgütlerle bağlantısının olmadığı arzu ettiği bir özerklik ile koruyucu devletin geri dönüşü (sübvansiyonlu üretim) arasında bazı çelişkiler sunmaktadır.

Araştırma sorularıyla belirlenen hedeflere ulaşmak için toplanan verilerin çoğu nitel derecededir ve vaka çalışması için çeşitli tekniklerin birlikte ele alınmaktadır. Bu sebeple, araştırma niteliksel bir yaklaşım izlemektedir. Veri toplama yöntemleri: derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, katılımcı gözlemleri , odak grubu olarak sunulabilir.

Kuramsal/Kavramsal bağlamdaki ilk araştırma sorusu için, çoğunlukla çBölüm I'i ilgilendiren bir Tarihsel Analiz, geçmiş bir tarihsel dönemdeki sosyal yaşamın

yönlerini arařtırmak için uygulanmıřtır. Bu analizde tarım sorunun üç farklı dönemde tarihsel olarak incelenmiřtir: kapitalist geiř dönemi (1945-1955 on yılı); Türkiye tarımının neo-liberal dönüşümü (80'lerden itibaren) ve kırsal siyasetin tarım sorununun merkezinde ortaya çıktığı (21. yüzyıl) tarımsal deęiřimin ekonomi politięi.

İkinci ve üçüncü arařtırma soruları Ampirik/Analitik bağlamdadır. Bu süreç için saha çalışması çoęunlukla Alařehir ve Ayvalık'ta gerekleřtirilmiř; ancak Çiftçi-Sen yönetim kurulu üyeleriyle bireysel görüşmelerin yapıldığı başka sahalarda söz konusu olmuřtur. Örneęin, Çiftçi-Sen Başkanı ile ilk görüşme Zoom üzerinden çevrim içi olarak gerekleřtirilmiř, takip görüşmeleri yine çevrim içi olarak veya Manisa/Soma'da, özellikle Çiftçi-Sen'in kilit isimlerini hedef alan görüşmeler düzenlenmiř ve gözlemler/saha notları toplanmıřtır. Hareketlerin kilit figürlerine odaklanmak, onların siyasi seferberlik stratejilerini tanımlama ve kategorize etme ve otoriter popülizm bağlamında özerk kolektif eylem çabalarının yönlerini anlama, yani siyasi aktörlerinin yapısal deęiřim için olup olmadığını ayırt etme hedeflerine sahiptir.

Bu nedenle bulgular, Ağustos 2020 ile Ekim 2021 arasında çoęunlukla Türke olarak gerekleřtirilen 18 yarı yapılandırılmıř derinlemesine görüşmeden toplanan verilere dayanmaktadır (görüşme yapılan kişilerin 3'ü dil bilgisine sahip oldukları için İngilizce yapılmıřtır). Çiftçi-Sen Koordinasyon Kurulu üyeleriyle (toplam 9 kişiden 5'i) yapılan görüşmeler de takip görüşmelerine dayanmaktadır. Görüşülen kişilerin seçimi, kartopu örnekleme teknięini takip etmiř, yani ilk görüşülen kişilerin aęından yararlanmıřtır. Toplam 16 Çiftçi-Sen üyesi ve fahri/gönüllü üye olan iki kırsal aktivist ile görüşülmüřtür. İmzalanan onam formlarının kullanım başına gerekli izin alınarak görüşmeler kayıt altına alınmıřtır. Hem görüşülen kişilerin karakterizasyonunu sunan tabloda (bkz. dipnot 10) hem de bir sonraki bölümde kullanılan alıntılarda, görüşülen kişiler adları ve hareket içindeki konumları ile sunulmuřtur. Sonraki üç bölümde alıntı olarak kullanılan görüşmelerden tüm alıntılar benim tarafımdan İngilizce'ye çevrilmiřtir, ancak Türke orijinalleri alıntılanan her bir alıntı için dipnotlarla sunulacaktır (İngilizce yapılan röportajlar hari). 18 görüşmeden toplanan verilerden sonuçlar çıkarmanın sınırlamalarını kabul edilmekte birlikte görüşülen 16 kişiden beřinin kuruluşun Koordinasyon Komitesi üyesi olduğunu belirtmek önemlidir.

Görüşülen kişilerin karakterizasyonu göz önüne alındığında, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği bu örgüt için önemli bir engel olmaya devam ettiği ve Türkiye'de kırsal kesimdeki kadınların karşılaştıkları görünmezliği yeniden ürettiği görülmektedir. Kadınlar, resmi olarak çiftçi olarak kayıtlı olmadıkları için örgütün bir parçası olmak için yasal bir engelle karşılaşmaktadırlar. Bu itibarla, görüşülenlerden yalnızca ikisi kadındır ve bunlardan biri Çiftçi-Sen Koordinasyon Kurulu'ndaki tek kadın üyedir.

Son olarak, çalışma Çiftçi-Sen'in kendi iç organizasyonunu incelemeyi amaçlasa da, araştırma sorularının ve hipotezlerin ortaya koyduğu önemli konuları yakından anlamak için Çiftçi-Sen üyesi olmayan görüşmecilere ulaşılamaması bir noksanı olarak sunulmalıdır. Bu aynı zamanda, görüşülen kişilerin kendi ağlarının güvenilirliğine bağlı olan bir kartopu veya ağ örnekleme tekniğine odaklanmanın yarattığı potansiyel önyargılara maruz kalmamak anlamına gelecektir. Özellikle bu son iki konu, Türkiye'de tarım çalışmaları üzerine gelecekteki araştırmalar ve kendi araştırmam için kaçınılması gereken potansiyel yanlışlık kaynaklarıdır.

### **Klasik tarım sorunundan yeni tarım sorunlarına**

100 yılı aşkın süredir bilindiği gibi, tarım sorunu köylülüğü sorunun merkezine yerleştiriyor; çünkü köylü ekonomisinin kendisi, kapitalizmin ortaya çıkışını anlamının merkezinde yer alır. Bu anlamda, klasik Marksist tarım sorunu, aynı zamanda, köylünün metalaştırılmamış üretim tarzının zararına tarımda yeni üretim ilişkilerinin ve köylü yaşam tarzının zararına yeni toplumsal ilişkilerin ortaya çıkması sorunudur. Özellikle 2007-2008 gıda krizinden sonra 'köylü' kullanımının yeniden canlanması, tarımsal gıda üretiminin ekolojik olarak sürdürülebilir yollarının dile getirilmesi, köylüler ve küreselleşme arasında yeni bir tartışmayı ve çağdaş kapitalizm içinde tarım sorununun yeni bir teorik değişimini yapılandırıyor. (Akram-Lodhi ve Kay, 2009:29). Kavramın bu şekilde kullanımı kendiliğinden politiktir çünkü köylü yolu (La Via Campesina'nın gerçek İngilizce çevirisi), agroekoloji ve gıda egemenliği çağrılıyla belirlenen tüm politik değişim projelerini bünyesinde barındırmaktadır.

Bununla birlikte, köylülüğün siyasi faillik iddiasını tanımlamaya gelmeden önce, hem tarihsel değişimleri hem de düzenlemeleri göz önünde bulundurarak "köylü" kelimesinin ne anlama geldiğini çok dikkatli bir şekilde ele almalıyız. 17 Aralık

2018'de kabul edilen 'Kırsal Alanlarda Çalışan Köylülerin ve Diğer İnsanların Haklarına İlişkin Birleşmiş Milletler Bildirgesi', Frank Ellis'in (1988) tanımına dayanarak köylüyü şu şekilde tanımlar:

Köylü, tek başına veya başkalarıyla birlikte veya bir topluluk olarak geçimlik ve/veya pazar için küçük ölçekli tarımsal üretim yapan veya yapmaya çalışan ve münhasıran olmasa da önemli ölçüde güvenen herhangi bir kişidir. aile veya ev emeği ve emeği organize etmenin diğer parasal olmayan yollarına ve toprağa özel bir bağımlılığı ve bağlılığı olanlara. (BM, 2018:4-5)

Resmi BM tanımına destek olarak sahip olan bu çalışmada 'köylü' kullanımının açıklığa kavuşturulması da ampirik olarak önemlidir çünkü örnek çalışmamızı oluşturan Çiftçi-Sen hareketi bunu hareketin tüzüğü'nün ilk maddesinde kullanmıştır.

### **Küresel köylü direnişi ve Gıda Egemenliği**

Köylülüğün çağdaş kırsal toplumsal hareketler içindeki temel farkı, köylü topluluk ağlarının uluslararası ve ulusötesi çabalarıyla desteklenirken, köylünün aktif failliğini yerel olarak geri kazanma iradesidir. LVC gibi bunlar da “tarımsal değişime, üretimin ve kırsal alanın ticarileşmesine, çevrenin tahribatına ve yerel kültürlerle karşı” bir dizi tarımsal seferberlik sergilemektedir (Kavak, 2020, 343). Bu tür bir ıslah, tarımsal üretimin geleneksel ve baskın mantığına bir alternatif sunan, özgürleştirici bir politik programla sürdürülmekte ve gıda egemenliği de bu programın kendisi haline gelmektedir.

Son yıllarda gıda egemenliği, kendi ideolojisini uygulamaya koymak için organik tarım, adil ticaret, yerel çiftçilik sistemleri, köylü feminizmi ve son olarak agroekoloji gibi çoğulcu anlamlarla anılmaya başlamıştır. Politik bir program olarak gıda egemenliği, üretim ve toprağa erişim hakkını talep etmektedir. "Toprakta ve topraktan yaşama" ile agroekolojide olduğu gibi emek ve bilgi yoğun bir çiftçilik disiplini arasında köprü kurar. Bu, “hem üretken hem de doğal kaynakları koruyan ve aynı zamanda kültürel açıdan hassas, sosyal açıdan adil ve ekonomik açıdan uygun olan tarımsal ekosistemlerin nasıl çalışılacağı, tasarlanacağı ve yönetileceği konusunda temel ekolojik ilkeleri sağlamaktadır” (Altieri, 1995:ix).

Bu nedenle, gıda egemenliđi ve agroekoloji köylüleri ahlaki ekonominin pastoral bir resminden alıp sistemik deđişim potansiyeline sahip mobilize edilmiş bir sosyal gruba dönüştüren, tarımda geç kapitalizmin üretici güçleri geliştirmekte başarısız olduğunu kanıtlayan, siyasallaşmış bir köylülüğün ideolojik rehberliğidir. (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). Bununla birlikte, kırsal alanlardaki toplumsal hareketlerle ilgili olarak, kurumsal gıda rejimine (McMichael, 2006) veya neoliberal gıda sistemlerine (Ioris, 2017) karşı toprak mücadelelerinde bir gıda egemenliđi projesi (Lerrer ve De Medeiros, 2014; McMichael, 2015), kırsal toplumsal hareketleri, sözde tarım sorununun temel diređi olduđu ve hala da olduđu gibi, köylülük üzerine güncel tartışmalarla ilişkilendirmek kaçınılmazdır. Tarım hareketlerinin siyasi programının temelini gıda egemenliđi olmasının nedeni budur.

Bunun ilk nedeni, mevcut tarım gerçekliğini anlamak için yenilenmiş araçlara olan ihtiyacı karşılamaya yönelik “gıda ve tarım sistemlerini dönüştürmeyi amaçlayan normlar ve uygulamalar” ile toplumsal hareketler için “harekete geçirici bir çerçeve” olmasıdır. İkincisi, Hindistan'daki çiftçilerin protestolarının gösterdiği gibi, tarımın ötesindeki haklarla ilgili olduđu veya Patel'in (2009, 663) Hannah Arendt'in sözleriyle ifade ettiği gibi, "gıda egemenliđi tam olarak gıda üzerinde haklara sahip olma hakkına başvurmakla ilgilidir".

## **21. yüzyılda Türkiye'de kırsal: neoliberal gelişme ve otoriter popülizm.**

Son araştırmalar (Gürel, Küçük ve Taş, 2019), AKP'nin kırsal alanlarda özgürleştirici siyasi alternatifleri engelleyen otoriter popülizminin, tarım sübvansiyonları, sosyal yardımın genişletilmesi ve sosyal yardımın genişletilmesi için küçük çiftçiler ve köylülerle yapılan seçim pazarlığını başarılı bir şekilde ilişkilendirildiğini öne sürmektedir. Yeni altyapı planları Parti için kırsal bir destek kökü yaratma başarısı, AKP'nin iktidara geldiđi ilk on yılda (2002-2013) yararlandığı ve "yardımcı olan" hegemonik bir sağcı popülizmin kurulmasını sürdüren olumlu bir makro-politik ekonomik konjonktürle ilişkilidir ve AKP, neoliberal politikalarını pragmatik kalkınmacı hamleler ve sosyal yardım programları ile dengelemektedir (Karataşlı ve Kumral, 2022, 3).

Birincisine rağmen, Türkiye aynı zamanda olağanüstü ekolojik sonuçları olan kalkınma projelerine karşı köylü aktivizmiyle işbirliği yapan yeni bir ekolojik aktivizm dalgasının ortaya çıktığına tanık olmaktadır (Arsel, Akbulut ve Adaman, 2015). Ancak aynı zamanda neoliberal kalkınmacılık, otoriter popülizm ve ekstraktivizm üçlüsü yaşanan kimi felaket olaylarından sonra önemli insan kayıplarına neden olmaktadır (Adaman, Arsel ve Akbulut, 2019). Ancak kırsal kesimin mevcut siyasallaşma ikliminin siyasi sorumluluk ve değişim üretip üretmeyeceği henüz görülmemiştir. Kırsalın söz konusu son dönemdeki siyasallaşması, sivil toplum kuruluşlarının geçmişten farklı olarak yeni ortaya çıkan “kadın, insan ve çevre haklarına ilişkin sivil seferberlik” ve “devlet ile devlet arasındaki gerilimin” yaşandığı yeni bir rol üstlenmesiyle ilişkilidir ve sivil toplum özellikle çevre konularında belirgindir (Parker ve diğerleri, 2013).

Aslında, kırsalın siyasallaşmasını kırsal mücadelelerin merceğinden incelemek, kullanım hakkı, işgücü ve gıda sistemi açısından toprak sorununun ötesine geçmeyi gerektirir. "Otoriter popülizm, neoliberal kalkınmacılık ve maden çıkarmacılık"tan oluşan "birbiriyle ilişkili üç dinamik" tarafından temsil edilen "giderek daha saldırgan modernleşme ve sanayileşmenin" (Adaman, Arsel ve Akbulut, 2019, 516) Türkiye'de, daha önce geleneksel olarak görülen köylü mücadeleleri artık müttefik çevre mücadeleleri olan yeni bir mücadele alanı olan temas noktalarının doğuşuyla karşı karşıyadır.

Ama aynı zamanda “kalkınma projelerine direnmek için sınıflar arası ittifaklar”ın (Arsel, Akbulut ve Adaman, 2015, 393) nasıl çok daha geniş ve geniş bir toplumsal destek kitlesi üretebileceğini de göz önünde bulundurursak, birinci çevrecilik, çevreciliğe yönelik en uzlaşmacı eleştirilerden biridir. AKP'nin neoliberal kalkınmacısı (Arsel, 2012). İkinci olarak, köylülerin geçim kaynaklarını korumanın yanı sıra genel olarak ekosistemlerin de canlandığı bir şehir-kır hareketleri ittifakıyla devlet otoritesine meydan okumanın, mevcut protesto baskısının "böl ve yönet" yalnızlaştırıcı taktiklerine kanma olasılığı daha düşüktür.

AKP'nin neoliberal kalkınmacılığının sonuçları Türkiye'deki farklı sosyal sınıflarda ve özellikle kırsal kesimde krizler ürettiğinden, partinin daha önceki istikrarlı kırsal köklerini aşındırarak, hegemonikten bir hamleye işaret ederek daha vurgulu ve

saldırgan hale gelmiştir. İlk on yılın sağcı popülizmi, 2013'ten günümüze kadar otoriter bir popülizme dönüşmüştür (Karataşlı ve Kumral, 2022). Aslında, bu popülist çehre, kırsal alanlarda özgürleştirici siyasi alternatifleri zorlayıcı bir şekilde engellemektedir ve söz konusu yardımcılık ve tarımsal sübvansiyonlar, sosyal yardımın genişletilmesi ve yeni altyapı planları için köylülerle yapılan seçim pazarlığı ile başarılı bir şekilde ilişkilendirilmiştir (Gürel, Küçük ve Taş, 2019). Başka bir deyişle, tüm toplumsal ve politik sorunlar, nihai çözüm olarak uygun ekonomik teşviklerin veya (neoliberal) büyüme stratejilerinin çözümlerine açıktır.

Mevcut ekonomik kısıtlamalar (enflasyon ve para biriminin devalüasyonu gibi) altında hükümet, kırsal alanlara kar elde etme iradesiyle bakıyor. Bununla birlikte, köylerin statüsündeki idari değişikliklerle derinleşen inşaat, özel enerji (hidroelektrik, termik, nükleer) ve madencilik projeleri gibi kırsal kesimde ekolojik yokoluşa neden olan projelere karşı tarımsal seferberlikler çoğalmıştır. Kırsal kesimdeki bu seferberlikler kolluk kuvvetlerinin şiddetli baskısıyla karşılanmaktadır. Yine de, bu yeni seferberlik dalgası, yakın zamana kadar popülist olarak sahiplenilen yerel siyasetin güçlenmesine ve çeşitlenmesine katkıda bulunmaktadır: "Köylüler bu değişimlere kolay kategorize edilmeye direnen dinamik, çoğul ve eşitsiz bir şekilde tepki veriyor" (Kavak, 2021, 260-61).

Geçim kaynaklarının ve ekolojik kaygıların Türkiye'deki kırsal mücadeleleri yeniden şekillendirdiği (Kavak, 2021) tartışmalı bir sağduyu alanı olarak kırsal bir dünyanın ortaya çıkışı, baskın rant kollayıcı ve metalaştırılmış Türk kırsalına karşı sürekli bir karşı-hegemonik anlayış oluşturabilir. Ama bunu aynı zamanda başka bir ortaya çıkış izler; şiddet tekelinin radikal bir ifadesinin gerçek renklerinin ortaya çıkışı ve AKP'nin Türkiye'si bunun paradigmasıdır.

### **Vaka çalışması: Çiftçi-Sen**

Türkiye'deki köylülüğü temsil etmeyi amaçlayan bir kırsal toplumsal hareket vaka incelemesinin sunulması, tanımlayıcı ve kronolojik unsurların ötesine geçen bir hedeftir ve her şeyden çok Türkiye'nin son yirmi yılda kırsal siyasetini analiz etme çabasıdır. Tarihsel bir devlet-köylü geriliminden kaynaklanan kırsal kesimdeki siyasi

meselelerle bağlantılı olmasına rağmen Çiftçi-Sen hareketinin tarihçesi, 21 Mayıs 2008'de Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu adı altında, altında farklı ürün bazlı tekil birliklerin bir araya geldiği bir şemsiye kuruluş olarak ilk resmi oluşumundan yaklaşık on yıl önce başlar. Bugün Çiftçi-Sen bambaşka bir yapıya sahiptir, artık üyeliğin bir ürüne veya sektöre bağlı olduğu bir konfederasyon değil, daha evrensel olarak, 2018 Birleşmiş Milletler Köylülerin ve Kırsal Alanlarda Çalışan Diğer İnsanların Haklarına Dair Bildirge'de tanımlandığı şekliyle bir çiftçi tanımını kabul etmektedir.

Çiftçi-Sen'i oluşturmaya yönelik ilk girişimler, köylü-çiftçilerin daha küçük siyasallaşmış gruplarının toplantıları, ardından niceliksel olarak daha anlamlı toplantılar, kongreler ve son olarak ürüne dayalı sendikalar oluşturmak için çeşitli adımlar halinde örgütlenme çabaları ile belirlendi. Toplam yedi birlik, Türkiye'deki üretim hacminin toplam tarımsal üretim miktarındaki hacmi ve aynı zamanda ülkedeki tarımın çeşitli bölgesel uzmanlaşmaları nedeniyle tarihsel olarak önemli sektörleri temsil etmektedir. Daha sonra 2008 ve 2020'de ortak bir çiftçiler konfederasyonu çatısı altında temsil edilmeye başlandı ve mevcut durum olan tek bir birlik haline geldi.

Çiftçi-Sen'in örgütlenme ve seferberlik tarihinde otoriterliğin ifadesi, örgütün ilk on yılı boyunca açılan davalar ve mahkeme savaşları ile başlamıştır. Davalar tam kapatmayla sonuçlanmasa da Çiftçi-Sen'i yıllarca hukuki bir belirsizliğe ve çok ihtiyaç duyulan kaynakların harcanmasına sürüklemiş (Çiçek 2017) ve sonunda 2020 yılında tüm teşkilat yapısında köklü bir değişikliğe yol açmıştır. Daha önce de bahsedildiği gibi Çiftçi-Sen sendikaların çatı konfederasyonu olarak kurulmuş olsa da davalar bireysel olarak farklı sendikaları hedef aldığından her yasal davayla farklı kanaldan mücadele etmek için çaba ve kaynak harcamak zorunda kalmıştır. Bu nedenle, Şubat 2020'de, ürüne dayalı bireysel sendikaların liderleri, eski yapıdan ve eski kayıtlı üyelere vazgeçerek neredeyse sıfırdan başlamak ve aynı adı taşıyan tek bir çiftçi birliği kurmak için zor bir karar vermek üzere bir araya geldiler. Birliği bir araya getirerek kaynakları rasyonelleştirmeleri gerekiyordu. Yasal statü için yaptıkları son başvuru Şubat 2020'de kabul edildi ancak 2021'in başlarında Çiftçi-Sen, "devlet iş bulma kurumuna işçi olarak kayıtlı olmadıkları için yanlış beyanda bulunmakla" suçlandığı için para cezalarının hedefi olmaya başladı (ECVC, 2021).

## **Hareketin karakterizasyonu için kilit konuların tanımlanması: bilinç derecesi, eylem kolektifliği, gıda egemenliği ve ittifaklar**

Buradan hareketle, bu bölümün ampirik temelini oluşturan köylü hareketinin doğuşu ancak 21. yüzyılda gerçekleşse de Çiftçi-Sen, kurucu üyelerinin çoğunluğunun kişisel bir devrimci geçmişe sahip olduğu bir harekettir. Kapitalist odaklı tarımın temel ilkelerini değiştirmekle derinden ilgileniyorlardı ve Türkiye'nin kırsal bağlamında bir fidandan başka bir şey olmayan bir örgütlü seferberlik kültürü için çabalama iddiasındaydılar. Bu iki unsur, çalışmanın ikinci bölümünün hareketin karakterizasyonuna izin veren iki önemli sürece ayrılmasının temelini oluşturmaktadır: bilinç derecesi ve eylemin kolektifliği.

Hareketin bilinç derecesi iki ana unsurla yetiniyor: Birincisi, hareketin var olma hakkı için direnmek zorunda olduğu otoriter duruşun derinden damgasını vurduğu devlete karşı ülke içindeki mücadele yörüngesi. İkincisi, uluslararası ittifakların olasılığı hakkındaki görüşleri açıkça etkileyen tarımsal gıda sistemi için gıda egemenliğinin kapitalizm sonrası geleceği.

Eylemin kolektiflik derecesi, hareketin ifade edilen öğrenme eğrisi tarafından belirlenir; bu, ne için savaştıkları ve siyasi temsil için üyelik toplama mücadelelerinin ve politikalarının nasıl olduğu anlamında artık özerkliklerinin çok açık olduğu ifadelerinden gösterilir. Bunu agroekoloji ve gıda egemenliği ilkeleriyle gerçekten uyumlu üyelere sahip olmaya odaklanarak yapar. Gıda egemenliği, hareketin amacı üzerindeki ana merkeziliği elde etmiş durumdadır. Aşağıdaki katılımcı anlatımlarından elde edilen tartışma noktaları, gıda egemenliğini post-kalkıncı eleştiri olarak açık bir şekilde sunmakta ve alternatif olarak köylü özerkliği kavramının gıda sistemleri için post-kapitalist bir tarım geleceği oluşturma potansiyeline sahip olduğunu önermektedir;

- 20 yıl önceki süreçlerde olmadıkları ve tarım politikalarıyla ilgili vermeye çalıştıkları mesajın daha net olduğu ifade edilmiştir.

- Gerekenden daha büyük bir şeyi başarmak için hareketin, doğal kaynakların kontrolünü köylü çiftçilerin ve aynı zamanda tüm kırsal işçilerden balıkçılara ve

hayvancılıkla uğraşanlara geri vermeye dayalı BM köylü hakları bildirgesini baz alan gıda egemenliği programını güçlendirmesi gerekmektedir.

- Ayrıca, gıda egemenliğinin ülkedeki tarımsal tartışmalara nasıl entegre edildiği ve tarım ticareti ve büyük ölçekli endüstriyel tarıma karşı akademisyenler, sivil toplum kuruluşlarından oluşan bir kamuoyu muhalefetinin gelişmesine nasıl yardımcı olduğu açısından hareketin başarısı ifade edilmiştir.

- Burada ilginç bir açıklama daha yapılmıştır: “Biz insanları tarım politikalarına ve iktidar partisinin bu alanda neler yaptığına dair ilgi duymalarını sağladık”. Katılımcılar gıda egemenliği meselesinin gıda üreticileriyle ilgili olmadığı, bütün bir toplumun meselesi olduğu belirtildiği için bunu özellikle önemli görmekte-dirler.

İttifaklar ve hareketin geleceği hakkında odak gruptan toplanan aşağıdaki tartışma noktaları sunulmaktadır;

- Hareketin üyeleri Pandemiye rağmen hareketin çok fazla üye toplayamayabileceğini kabul ediyorlar çünkü mevcut yapıları daha net ve bir üyenin ne tür çiftçilik uygulamalarına uyması gerektiğine dair daha fazla baskı yapıyor. Daha önce bir çiftçinin ürüne dayalı bir sendikaya üye olabilmesi için yalnızca üzüm veya tahıl üreticisi olması yeterliyken şimdi gıda egemenliğinin ilkelerinin çiftçiler tarafından anlaşılması gerektiği örneği veriliyor.

- Türkiye’de gıda egemenliği mesajının ilgili olabileceği çeşitli inisiyatifler olduğu da kabul edilse de ülkede aynı şeyleri söyleyen grupların çoğalarak bölünmelerinin yaygın olduğu ifade edilmiştir. Ancak hareketten, kendileri gibi inanan diğer gruplarla ittifak yapmaya karşı çıkılmamaktadır.

- Hareket için ittifaklarla ilgili sorun, bu grupların belirli siyasi partilere ait olması ve bağımsız olmamaları olarak dile getirilmiştir.

- Aynı şey, ekolojik ittifakların olasılığı için de ifade edilmiştir, çünkü onlara göre birçok ekolojik girişim siyasi partilerin parçası durumdadır. Bu, Çiftçi-Sen’in

ilkelerinden biri gereği siyasi parti üyesi olamayacakları için tehlikeli olduğu belirtilmiştir.

- Farklı siyasi görüşlerden üyeleri olduğu için bağımsızlıklarının en büyük avantajları olduğu ve bu şekilde kalmalarının önemli olduğu belirtilmiştir.

- İttifakın ancak muhalefet partileri ve diğer grupların, çiftçilerle post-kapitalist bir alternatif etrafında birlik olması gerektiğini kabul etmesiyle mümkün olduğunun altı çizilmiştir.

### **Direnış inşa etmek ve otoriterlikle yüzleşmek**

Çiftçi-Sen'in 2004'ten bu yana izlediği yolda, direniş örgütlediği ve Türkiye'de geniş bir coğrafi ve niceliksel anlamda köylülüğün siyasi failliğini oluşturduğu hafife alınmaz. Bununla birlikte, hareketin köylülük arasında direniş örgütlediği ve geçmişteki ve günümüzdeki on binlerce üyesinin çoğunun siyasi failliğini oluşturduğu tartışılabilir. Bu örgütlenme ve anayasa çabası, hareketin çiftçi-aktivistler olarak kendi rollerine ilişkin anlayışını nasıl gösterdiğini hala etkileyen ve etkileyecek gibi görünen anlatılar ve uygulamalar açısından devlet merkezli bir yörüngeden henüz kurtulmayı başaramamıştır.

Bunun ilk nedeni, devlet-köylü geriliminin ağırlıklı ataerkilliğinin onları devletin koruyucu rolü ve tamamen bağımsız olma amacı gibi iki uzak kutup arasındaki çelişkiye bağlamasıdır. İkinci neden ise, bilinç ve kolektif eylem açısından en belirgin deneyimlerinin, güçlenmek için formel iktidar sahipleri üzerinde inanma kapasiteleri üzerinde etkiler yaratan, bu hakkı reddeden sürekli otoriter duruşa karşı örgütlenme hakkı mücadelesi etrafında yapılanmasıdır. Çalışmanın en önemli bulgularından biri, Çiftçi-Sen gibi bir köylü hareketinin, kırsal alanlarda daha geniş amaçlarla ve diğer sivil örgütlerle ittifak halinde olan bir kırsal toplumsal hareket haline geldiğinde seferberlik ve anlamlı direniş şansının daha yüksek olduğu argümanı etrafında sürdürülmektedir.

## Son sözler

Yaratıcı direniş, kırsaldaki üreticileri kentsel tüketicilere bağlayan, ama aynı zamanda, özellikle kırsal kesimde yaşlanma gibi alarm verici demografik eğilimlerle mücadele eden, bir siyasi faillik arenasında belirlenen yeni eylem alanları önermektedir. Bugünün köylü tipleri, çoklu üretim, tüketim düzenlemeleri ve yeni hareketlilik kalıpları tarafından sorgulanan yer ve yerleşim kavramları kadar çeşitlidir. Bu resimde Türkiye'de kırsalda ortaya çıkan çekişmeli meselelerin yanı sıra eski meselelere de alternatif arayışları eşlik ediyor. Hareket, agroekolojinin yalnızca alternatif tarımsal gıda girişimlerinin ve üretim uygulamalarının somutlaşmış hali değil, aynı zamanda gıda egemenliğinin siyasi bir duruşu olduğunu öne sürmüştür. Yine de, siyasi bir proje olarak, Türkiye kırsalındaki güncel tartışmalı konuların okunması için masaya daha fazla pragmatizm getirme ihtiyacı, bu tür bir siyasi projenin aynı zamanda hareketin ilgisini tehdit etmeye devam ettiği alaka düzeyini kaybetmemek için temel olabilir.

Buradan hareketle, bu konuda yapılacak araştırmalarda, Çiftçi-Sen'in bağlı olduğu küresel köylü direnişinin merkezinde, Türkiye'de gıda egemenliği iddiasından daha önemli olanın geleneksel zayıf tarım kültürüyle mücadele edilmesi olduğu önerilmektedir. Burada sadece koruyucu devletin geri dönüşünü beklemeyerek seferberlikten söz edilmektedir. Daha şiddetli bir otoriterlik bağlamında kendi tarihini yazmak için, varlığının özellikle Çiftçi-Sen'e olan devlet merkezli bağına aşmak için ontolojik bir geri dönüş çok önemlidir. Bu, hareketin doğası gereği özerkliği ile ihtiyaç duyduğu ittifaklar arasında bir denge bulma ihtiyacı anlamına gelmektedir.

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