

Markets and Fields: An Ethnography of Cotton Production and Exchange in a Turkish Village

Koray Çalışkan

Abstract

How do farmers explain their engagement with commodity production and the market? This article describes the universe of cotton production and exchange in a Turkish village. Building on the scholarship concerning the anthropology of markets, I offer an account of the power relations whereby a cluster of agents interact in multiple ways. Describing the microcosm of cotton production and exchange as it is perceived by farmers in the largest cotton-producing village of the Söke Plain in western Turkey, the essay documents how farmers mobilize resources, interact with agricultural workers, find credit, and finally sell their product. Farmers see the market and their fields as interconnected geographies of struggle between various actors. In contrast to the cotton field where they perceive themselves as active and formative agents in the rural political economic universe, cotton growers understand the market as a location of encounter dominated by traders and controlled by various mercantile tools that weaken their agency. The market is neither only a place where the price is set, nor merely a location of commodity exchange. It is a power field where farmers encounter the “production” of price as relatively passive agents of trade.

Keywords: Turkey, Agriculture, Markets, Cotton, Exchange Relations, Farmers, Traders, Agricultural Workers, Prices

Koray Çalışkan, Boğaziçi University, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Bebek, İstanbul, koray.caliskan@boun.edu.tr

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Introduction

How to understand the production and exchange processes of agricultural commodities from the vantage point of farmers, still the single largest working population on earth? Prevailing scholarly literatures addressing this question locate the answer by analyzing the effects of global market expansion on peasant political economy. The study of the countryside primarily draws on the register of peasant reaction to the developments unfolding around the village. Going beyond such a narrow viewpoint, this article seeks to analyze the very interaction between fields and markets from the vantage point of cotton farmers.

Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century perspectives on agriculture, especially those inspired by Marx, view farmers as a transitory class doomed to disappear as a result of rapid industrialization and modernization. In the post-World War II period, Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars expanded their focus to cover the economic motivations of the peasantry, farmers' mode of production, relations with the state and other classes, and their role in rural transformation and development.¹ *Articulation theories* look at the ways in which farmers' surplus was extracted by urban actors (such as the state and capitalists); *persistence theses* explain the survival strategies of farmers against the world-wide expansion of the market or capitalism; and *differentiation theses* focus on the pace of proletarianization and internal variation among rural producers.² In this vast literature, capitalist relations and markets are implicitly considered to be outside factors that impacted on the lives of farmers, and it is the social scientist's task to study the process and consequence of that impact.

Polanyi's *Great Transformation* has reinterpreted the meaning of markets, emphasizing the role of the state and politics in the making of markets in the modern period, and the formative role of social relations in pre-modern societies.³ Following Polanyi, "substantivists" have argued that the study of exchange and production regimes requires the study of relations "embedded" in various socio-cultural settings.⁴ Drawing on this

1 See, for example, the articles in, Zülküf Aydın, *Tarım ve Köylülük: Toplum ve Bilim Özel Sayı* (İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 2001), Henry Bernstein, *Capital and Peasantry in the Epoch of Imperialism, Occasional Paper - Economic Research Bureau*, University of Dar es Salaam; No. 77.2 (Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam, 1977), Henry Bernstein, Tom Brass, and T. J. Byres, *The Journal of Peasant Studies: A Twenty Volume Index, 1973-1993* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1994).

2 For a detailed discussion of this literature, see, Nükhet Sirman, "Peasants and Family Farms: The Position of Households in Cotton Production in a Village of Western Turkey" (Ph. D. Dissertation, University College, 1988).

3 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944).

4 Conrad Arensberg, "Anthropology as History," in *Trade and Markets in the Early Empires: Economies*

line of research, researchers have shown that markets cannot be treated as spaces of interaction independent of their social context.⁵ Furthermore, anthropologists and sociologists have sought to show that markets and prices are culturally constructed in socially and politically embedded markets.⁶ However, this literature's treatment of prices and markets as "social things" falls short of analyzing how prices are produced and deployed on the ground. The challenge now is to carry out research that empirically analyzes the processes through which prices are made in concrete market settings.

This essay seeks to form a bridge between the scholarly literature on the effects of market expansion on the countryside and that on the anthropology of the market, by investigating cotton growing and exchange in a Turkish village. It aims at depicting the world of cotton production and exchange in its universe of interaction, without holding one of them constant. By focusing on the production and trading practices in and around a village I will call Pamukköy, the largest cotton-growing village located in the Söke Plain in western Turkey, I will first document how the agents of production understand production and exchange processes and, second, how they enact this understanding in their fields and the cotton market.

Instead of analyzing the effect of market expansion on farming communities, the article focuses on an infrequently studied theme in the literature—that is, the ways in which farmers see the relationship between production and exchange. The article examines the interface between the field and the market, explaining farmers' engagement in the processes of exchange and production. No other commodity gives us a better vantage

in History and Theory, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson (New York: Free Press, 1957), Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, *Markets in Africa: Eight Subsistence Economies in Transition. A New Selection, The Natural History Library; N39* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1965), Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972).

- 5 Frank Dobbin, *The New Economic Sociology: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Neil Fligstein, *The Architecture of Markets: An Economic Sociology of Twenty-First-Century Capitalist Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), M. Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *The American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3 (1985).
- 6 Jennifer Alexander and Paul Alexander, "What Is in a Fair Price? Price Setting and Trading Partnership in Javanese Markets," *Man* 26, no. 3 (1991), Haidy Geismar, "What's in a Price? An Ethnography of Tribal Art at Auction," *Journal of Material Culture* 6, no. 1 (2001), Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Milan Z. Zafirovski, "An Alternative Sociological Perspective on Economic Value: Price Formation as a Social Process," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 14, no. 2 (2000), Edward J Zajac and James D Westphal, "The Social Construction of Market Value: Institutionalization and Learning Perspectives on Stock Market Reactions," *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 3 (2004), Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

point to study the interaction between the field and the market. Cotton is located at the intersection of industrial, financial and agricultural relations of exchange/production that connect more than a billion people to each other through agriculture, trade and textile manufacture. Every year, more than fifty million farmers from eighty-one countries produce around ninety million bales of cotton. Compared to other cash crops that farmers rely on—excluding crops for the farmers' direct consumption, such as wheat—cotton covers the largest production area in the world, followed by sugar cane, sunflowers, coffee and tobacco.⁷ In terms of trade volume, no other agricultural commodity can come close to the circulation of cotton. Every year, more than one third of cotton produced all over the world crosses the boundaries of nation-states and is consumed in a country other than its original location of production. This is the largest share of any agricultural market in the world. Historically, too, cotton trade has put its mark on world trade, with a total value of twice as much as gold and silver combined in late nineteenth century.⁸

The literature on farmers in Turkey is underdeveloped in terms of ethnographies of agricultural production.⁹ The remarkable exception to this is Nükhet Sirman's ethnography of cotton production in Söke, in which she describes the production and labor processes during the 1980s in terms of household, gender and class relations.¹⁰ In my ethnographic field work in Söke, my goal was not only to investigate the social relations surrounding the production of cotton in the 2000s, but, more importantly, to focus on the interface between production and market exchange in a new light. Therefore, the empirical discussion in this essay is organized in two parts. The first part depicts the ways in which farmers prepare their fields, mobilize their resources, hire labor and create networks of exchange. The second part focuses on the moment of exchange—that is, the ways in which farmers encounter the market and the making of prices on the ground.

The first part opens the universe of power relations mobilized to grow cotton and the forms of negotiation among the various actors who interact on the field. In addition to presenting a descriptive account of the process of cotton production, I will also show that cotton production requires a considerable investment in research, expertise, labor and networking. Yet,

7 Food and Agriculture Organization *World Agricultural Production* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2007).

8 Douglas A. Farnie, "The Role of Merchants as Prime Movers in the Expansion of the Cotton Industry: 1760-1990," in *The Fibre That Changed the World: The Cotton Industry in International Perspective, 1600-1990s*, ed. D. A. Farnie and David J. Jeremy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

9 Nükhet Sirman, "Sosyal Bilimlerde Gelişmecilik ve Köy Çalışmaları," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 88 (2001).

10 Sirman, "Peasants and Family Farms".

almost none of the farmers perceive their work in such a way. For them, their job is a rather humble one with no skills required. However, once challenged, farmers have a tendency to change their position and assert their agency in terms of skill and dexterity. I seek to show that this is a frequently used rhetoric that empowers farmers. Furthermore, the first part describes how farmers have a dynamic way of bringing together various informal and flexible cooperatives to economize their resources and income. Still, farmers' innovative networking seems not to work in the cotton market.

In the second part, I will analyze the ways in which farmers encounter the cotton market as they sell their produce to private merchants or TARIŞ (Union of Agricultural Co-Operatives for the Sale of Figs, Raisins, Cotton, Olives and Olive Oil), the only cooperative that deals with cotton trade in western Turkey. Farmers do not see the cooperative as a merchant. Because they have an organic relationship with the cooperative, its cotton purchase is seen as endogenous to their production process. In contrast, cotton traders and their offices are considered exogenous to farmers' fields. As one farmer put it, "things happen there," referring to the trading tools and manners that traders produce and deploy to empower their position of bargaining in the market. The article will analyze this relationship of power and argue that prices should not be seen as a mere tool of exchange set by the supply and demand of cotton. Serving as a social and financial interface between the field and the market, the price is also a tool that merchants produce to deploy in the market. This tool—together with other specific ways of carrying out trade—limits the farmers' agency.

As farmers produce and exchange cotton, they are affected by several markets, including those for seeds, inputs, implements and fuel oil, but the two in which they have to participate directly are the labor market and the market where cotton is exchanged. Through a detailed presentation and discussion of the ethnographic evidence, I will demonstrate that farmers, their workers and the traders who buy the cotton all have to mobilize various resources and tactics to acquire a degree of power in these two markets. These resources and tactics include what I call market performances, which are shaped through relations of power and people's positions in the labor and/or cotton markets. Thus, the amount of land one has, the degree of dispossession of a worker, the farmers' and workers' relations with labor gang leaders, the indebtedness of the farmer, the solidarity among merchants, and the power asymmetries between farmers and merchants at the moment of exchange all play a dynamic part in shaping the labor and cotton markets. I also seek to show that there is no single price for cotton, as it is reflected in the index of world cotton prices.

Rather, different price forms are experienced, produced and deployed by farmers, merchants, the state, and the big players in the world market. Hence, prices are made in fields of power, as I will explain below. The essay will demonstrate that the cotton farmers of Pamukköy see the market neither as a place where the price is set, nor as a mere location of commodity exchange. The findings of my field study suggest that the market is a power field where farmers encounter price production as relatively powerless agents of trade.

The Field: Cotton Production in Pamukköy

Field Preparation and Sowing

Mehmet Aydın woke up before 4:30 a.m. on June 8, 2001, in his two-bedroom house in Pamukköy to get ready to sow cotton. In fifteen minutes, I was sitting on the wheel-cover of his tractor on the way to his twenty-two decares of land. At dawn, the village was twinkling with the lights of tractors and houses. The road was congested with traffic, and the air was full of voices of men greeting each other, women shouting to their children, dogs barking to strangers, donkeys braying, and engines sputtering. We were carrying 250 kilogram of cotton seed he had bought from a local merchant in Sarı, the closest municipal center. It was going to be a late sowing, for he had grown barley before cotton and harvested it only a couple of days ago. Unlike more than half of the households of Pamukköy, he had chosen not to start sowing cotton sometime between late April and end of May. Instead, he had taken the risk of growing barley to use it as animal fodder.

Cotton reaches maturity after approximately five months if provided with a hot, sunny and dry climate. The leaves of the plant, like sunflowers, follow the sun during the day to accumulate as much energy as possible. The Aegean region's climate gives farmers and cotton a little more than six and a half months of good weather. Mehmet was using the last five months of this good weather to grow his cotton. Such a decision bore great risk. It delayed the cotton harvest by at least four weeks, making it more likely to rain during the harvest. Rain decreases the quality of cotton fibers, making them wet and dirty and creating rain spots on the lint. Furthermore, it would be more costly to pick the cotton, because, on the one hand, wet soil decreases the speed of the workers and, on the other hand, rainwater increases the weight of cotton, thus increasing the cost of the workers' daily wages. The daily wage that farmers pay to workers is a function of the weight of the cotton that the workers pick.

Mehmet's land was three kilometers away from the village. Compared to other cotton growers, he considered himself lucky for a number of

reasons. His land, located next to the Büyük Menderes (Meander) River, was one piece and not scattered around the village. Furthermore, it was close to water, decreasing the cost of irrigation. Finally, it was not far from the village, which made it easier to inspect the growth of the cotton.

Slightly more than ten percent of Turkey's total production comes from the Söke Plain, Turkey's second-largest cotton-growing plain.¹¹ Located in the province of Aydın, the plain is in the administrative boundaries of the town of Söke, an agro-industrial city 155 km west of İzmir. Cotton is the single most important cash crop of the plain. Looking down from the hills of the Samsun Mountains in August, the plain looks like a green sea of cotton, encircled by Lake Bafa, the Beşparmak Mountains and the Aegean Sea. Depending on the source one consults, between 4,010 and 6,152 farmers grow cotton in the plain and live in villages and towns encircling this green sea which provides cash revenue not only to cotton growers, but also to thousands of migrant agricultural workers who arrive in the plain every year to work in the cotton fields.

We reached Mehmet's field after a fifteen-minute ride and found his thirty-one-year-old son Enver inspecting the land. Following a short greeting, we unloaded the cotton seed sacks and emptied them into the four containers placed on top of the sowing machine. This was the beginning of a long work period that would end with the selling of the family's cotton in October for a price only slightly more than the family's cost of production.

Like the other families of the village, the Aydın family would see six stages of growing cotton, based on the steps of the plant's bio-economic life cycle of growth and marketing: field preparation, sowing, hoeing and selection, watering, harvesting, and, finally, marketing. In each of these stages, new struggles would be waged between growers, workers, traders, insects, the cotton plant and the natural environment. Field preparation happens nearly all the time while the field is empty. How Pamukköy farmers attend to their field directly affects their yield. That is why the first stage of a growing year almost coincides with the last stage of the previous cotton year. Before sowing starts, the soil has to be aerated to enhance its productivity. After that, growers apply fertilizers and mix the fertilizer, subsoil and the upper crust of the land by ploughing the field, mostly with the help of tractors. Finally, the land has to be rolled by driving a heavy roller over the field, so that the soil is sealed to prevent loss of nutrients and water.

Almost none of the cotton-growing households in the village hire workers or drivers to carry out the sowing. There are 287 households in

11 For more information regarding cotton production in Turkey, see, Tijen Özüdoğru, *Pamuk Durum ve Tahmin 2006-2007* (Ankara: Tarımsal Ekonomi Araştırma Enstitüsü, 2006).

Pamukköy. However, only 257 of them spend all of their time in the village. Thirty households divide their time between the city and the village, creating a category which makes visible the problematic nature of assuming a clear-cut boundary between city and village. All but seven of the households that permanently reside in the village grow cotton and consider it their major cash income.

According to the village headman (*muhtar*), until twenty years ago the population of Pamukköy was around 1,700. The implementation of neo-liberal reforms in the early 1980s increased migration from the village to cities, thus decreasing Pamukköy's population to 734 by November 2001. The 250 households of Pamukköy own 2,495 decares of land, an average land size of about ten decares per household. Seventy-one percent of households own land in the village (see Table 1). Half of the remaining households rent land for cotton production, usually no more than five decares. The rest do not grow cotton, but have household members who work in cotton-related jobs; they work in others' fields and drive their tractors. Those who do not reside in the village own fourteen percent of the village land. Farmers who reside in Pamukköy use almost all of this land in exchange for either rent or cotton. Land use patterns follow land distribution patterns in the village.

Table 1: Land Ownership in Pamukköy

Decares	Number of Households	Percentage of Households %	Cumulative Percentage of Households %
50 and more	5	2	2
40 to 50	2	0.80	2.80
30 to 40	4	1.60	4.40
20 to 30	20	8	12.40
10 to 20	44	17.60	30
5 to 10	49	19.60	49.60
0 to 5	54	21.60	71.20
None	72	28.80	100

Field preparation and sowing are not the most labor-intensive stages of cotton cultivation. Using a tractor, two farmers can complete these two stages without much external help. Only three percent of cotton growers in Pamukköy hire external labor for these two stages; the rest use labor barter and unpaid household labor. Two men, usually relatives, come together, work in each other's land, and exchange their labor power. Alternatively, if there are two mature men in the immediate family, like Mehmet and Enver

of the Aydın family, field preparation is carried out solely by household labor. In large landowners' fields, either seasonal or full-time workers do the pre-sowing preparations.

The successful germination of the plant signals the beginning of a series of activities to be carried out in the field: mechanical and manual hoeing. These activities are the second-most labor-intensive stage of cotton cultivation after the harvesting and have to be finished by the beginning of irrigation, roughly six weeks following the appearance of the first shoots.

Mechanical and Manual Sowing

At 6:00 a.m. on June 19 Mehmet and I arrived at his field for mechanical hoeing. The depth of the hoe had to be fine-tuned according to the field's leveling and the cotton's height. The four sets of steel flat-spoons of the hoe had to aerate the soil, while at the same time neither cutting nor burying the fragile plant. The machine hoeing was completed at around 3:00 p.m. It took twenty minutes to return home for a short rest. Over dinner, I asked about the work day. "This is not real work," Mehmet said. "We are *amele*, working just with our muscles. What we do does not require mental work. It is routine, all the same. We don't need to learn anything nor use our brains."¹² I challenged him by reading him the notes I had taken, especially the part on why I thought that it required expertise and years of training to carry out planning the cultivation and all of its stages. Combing his long, gray mustache with his fingers, he said: "We're accustomed to see it that way. Besides, it is shameful for one to present himself as someone important in a praiseful manner." This was quite a contrast to the way merchants and traders marketed their importance in the world of cotton exchange.

After the machine-hoeing, the time had come in Pamukköy to begin spending cash, especially for hiring the workers Mehmet needed for hand-hoeing the cotton. This expenditure is the second-most costly procedure after the harvest itself. Exactly two weeks after we sowed the cotton Mehmet hired twelve women workers to carry out the delicate process of aerating the soil by using a hand hoe, around each plant, one by one. This process weeds out two thirds of the cotton, while cleaning up the weeds in and around the rows. Tractors help both farmers and pests. The furrows that tractors leave behind help pests to reach the roots of the plant more

12 The term *amele* (Ottoman Turkish for "worker") was used until the 1940s and became increasingly replaced by *işçi* (Modern Turkish for "worker"). *Amele* is usually used in a derogatory manner in contemporary Turkish. For a short discussion on how the meanings of the term have changed in labor history in Turkey, see, Koray Çalıışkan, "Organism and Triangle: A Short History of Labor Law in Turkey (1920-1950)," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 15 (1996).

easily. The hand-hoers therefore also have to disrupt the lines left behind by the tractors' huge tires. Like many other forms of work, hoeing is determined by the gendered formation of the village work force. Hoeing on others' fields is considered a woman's job. It is a sign of poverty and weakness for Pamukköy's men to cover their heads and go hoeing for money. For Central Anatolian and Kurdish men of the Southeast, who migrate to the Söke Plain to work, hoeing is acceptable, since they are already known as poor and, thus, weak. Two men worked as *dayıbaşı* (labor gang leaders) in the village, organizing gangs of female and male laborers for those who exchanged money for labor. Children of the village do not work in the fields. The youngest child I saw working was a fifteen-year-old girl from a very poor family. Yet, Pamukköy farmers do not have strong objections to put Kurdish child laborers to work. "It is their business," one cotton farmer told me as I asked him the reason why he employed children. Finding workers for others is done informally, because gang leaders do not pay taxes. Neither of the two gang leaders from the village owned land in the village. Their power stems from the networks they forge among those who hire labor and those who sell it. Since those who hire are men and those who sell are women, wives of gang leaders play a role as central as that of their husbands.

The hoeing can be divided into two main stages. At the beginning and end of the hoeing season, the number of fields to be hoed is limited; thus, work opportunities are limited as well. It is critical for workers to find a job in the village during these days, for they prefer to work as much as possible to earn cash to grow cotton in their own small fields. They have to sustain a working relationship with the gang leaders, and the gang leaders have to forge good networks with the employers, so that they can acquire either money or other favors from them when needed. Both gang leaders and farmers prefer the poorest and least powerful female workers. Poorest workers need the work the most and, thus, farmers are helping the village women to survive.

However, the real reason for the preference to hire the neediest has nothing to do with benevolence. The poorest cannot refuse work when needed. They are more flexible in terms of the duration and condition of work. They do not have anything to lose but time during these rare days of work. Both the poorest and the better-off make fifty cents per hour; yet, for the poor the fifty cents are more valuable. When field owners ask workers to continue hoeing for a couple of hours after 3:30, the usual time to stop work in the afternoon, poor workers rarely decline. Paradoxically, the immediate reason for their compliance is not their need for cash, but their fear of losing work opportunities in the future if they decline. They are

always willing to give up the additional payment for being able to stop work on time, because there are many more tasks to be done before going to sleep around 10:00 p.m.

The workers bring sacks with them to carry the grass and other weeds that they find around the fields, to be used as feed for their animals. For collecting grass and weeds, they need additional time. They also have to work their own fields, usually not more than three decares, which also requires time. Moreover, they have to cook, serve the food, do the dishes, look after the kids, take care of the animal(s), do some hand work such as mending clothes, sewing and knitting while keeping an eye on the television and then prepare the beds. These tasks need more than six and a half hours, and the additional time spent in others' fields steals time away from their sleep, thus making the next day's work harder.

The fifty cents earned after 3:30 p.m. is thus less valuable than those earned earlier. Yet, they cannot refuse, since the marginal loss they choose to make may result in punishment by the field owner or gang leader. They might not be hired the next time. This is why the field owners who want to employ the best workers—that is, the neediest and least powerful—treat the gang leader well, mostly in monetary terms. In return, they get the poorest workers. And the poorest treat the gang leader's wife well to make sure that they get a place among the women who hoe the fields. Favors mostly take the form of bartering labor when workers cannot find employment in the winter, or by giving the gang leader's wife a handmade gift that can be exchanged or bartered later.

A couple of days before the field was ready to be hoed by hand, Mehmet went to see one of the gang leaders, a young man from a rather poor family in the village, for help to put together a gang of workers. On the day of hoeing, he drove his tractor to the end of the village, and then made a U-turn to collect the twelve women workers from the minibus stops on the road. They each carried a bag with their lunch, fastened either to the wood handle of their steel hoes or placed in wickerwork baskets. It was a quarter to five when Mehmet reached the *kahve* (coffeehouse) to meet the gang leader who would find workers for him. I watched seven tractors pass in front of us, all towing trailers full of workers. On only one of them, men were among the workers. Women's heads were covered with orange and white turbans, protecting them from the cold in the morning and the sun during the day. The gang leader did not show up. Mehmet called him on his cell phone. There was no answer, and we left. Looking at the workers looking at us, he said: "There was a misunderstanding." He was not given the workers he wanted; they were all from families who had land in the village, workers who did not urgently need the work. I would better

appreciate Mehmet's concerned look by the end of the hoeing day, around 3:30 p.m.

As we approached the harvest, misunderstandings in the village and the greater region increased in frequency. The next day, we learned that, after receiving a call from the city, the gang leader had left for a large landowner's field, rearranging the entire gang who worked for him and taking the poorest with him. The large landowners, the *beys*, pay one daily wage extra to the gang leader for every fifteen workers he finds for them. However, he would be paid less in the village, losing one extra pay for every twelve workers. Since the large landlords hire as many as 120 workers, the gang leader's income increases tenfold.

We reached the field and parked the tractor under the mulberry tree. The work started at 5:30 a.m. sharp. The workers formed a row in the middle of the field, each quickly hoeing one cotton line as the sun rose slowly. They each hoed one row, until the edge of the field, then walked slowly back to the middle and continued the other way. Walking a little before each half-row helped their backs rest, for they would spend hours hunched over. The hoe is small, yet its weight increases as one uses it, cutting three to four shoots, then digging gently three to four times around the fifth, chopping the weeds surrounding it, mixing the weed and dead cotton with the soil, and taking a step forward only to begin the same operation.

A few hours before the end of the work day, the workers had not even finished two thirds of the field. Mehmet was silent and looked anxious. "It is not going to be done," he said and silently accused the workers of hoeing slowly. He walked toward the row of working women. They stopped as we approached them. "It is almost 2:30, let's work a bit faster and finish *our* work," he said. The younger ones remained silent. An older woman, gesturing the field with her hand, replied: "This is not going to finish, there is too much work. We have to leave anyway." The others' silence meant approval. To my surprise, Zeynep did not support her father and instead toyed with her hoe, implicitly supporting the workers. Mehmet then offered an additional eighty cents on top of their daily wage if they finished the work. They declined and returned to the work, then stopped at 3:30 p.m. sharp.

We left the field unfinished, giving the workers a lift back to the village. Mehmet had to hire six more workers to continue hoeing the following day. He was frustrated. "They have animals, they are wage workers, they are land owners, and they are everything. Nobody knows what they really are," he said over dinner, referring to the workers he had hired, his fellow village women. "Are they really workers? A worker is the one who works

whenever you pay! These say ‘no, we’ll work in our fields, cut our grass, and hoe our cotton.’” He then accused the gang leader for not “giving” him really “hungry workers.” “The ones you saw today,” he continued, “are the ones with full bellies.” That is why he was not happy to have workers who can decide when and where to work, those who were more or less in a condition similar to his.

The labor market—that is, the exchange of labor in return for wages—is enacted on the farmers’ fields in Pamukköy. Cotton growers like Mehmet and agricultural workers from the village, such as the women who worked on his land, can negotiate the terms of exchange on a relatively equal footing, if not in a totally symmetrical relationship of power. The workers of Pamukköy do not bow before Mehmet’s demands for longer hours or more intense work in return for the meager wages they make, because of their relative strength in the labor market. This semblance of market strength derives from the fact that they are not indebted to Mehmet and own, even if very little, at least some land.

Irrigation

Since hoeing had finished on June 23, Mehmet had spent thirty-three days on the field, carrying out various tasks from spraying pesticides and killing the insects and other creatures on the cotton and the field, to applying various fertilizers. He did not hire any workers, nor did he want help from others until the time for the second hoeing came on August 3. For this, he hired seven woman workers, again from the village. He spent the entire time overseeing the workers as they weaved through row after row. The workers aerated the soil around the fragile cotton plants, carefully protected from small insects with big appetites and unruly weeds of no commercial value. Only the cotton has the right to life on the farmer’s land. After the second hoeing, the field was ready for irrigation, perhaps the most difficult part of the long months of work. Once the watering starts, growers cannot take a break until it is completed. Irrigation can take as long as two days of nearly continuous work.

We left my house to pick up another farmer whom Mehmet had hired to work in the field. Süleyman was twenty-nine years old, my age, yet looked older. He did not own any land or olive trees. He rented “a corner,” as he called the tiny two decares, and worked it with his wife. He did not pay rent in cash, but bartered his and his wife’s labor with the man who leased him the corner. Süleyman was born into poverty and a hard working life. He would make sixty cents an hour and hope to save enough to buy the corner, those two decares of land. “I sometimes have a dream. I wake up happier and want to work more. One day, God willing, I’ll own that land

(the two decares). We save whatever we make,” he said, as we rode down the hill toward the field, “a huge twenty-two decares,” according to Süleyman, and a tiny piece for Enver, Mehmet’s son. Mehmet would not be able to buy any land that year or in the next five years. Instead, he would sell some land in order to pay his debts.

As we reached the field, Mehmet drove the tractor backwards toward the water. Süleyman unwound a large plastic hose into the field. He connected it to a water pump, then connected the pump to the tractor with a drive belt. When they started the engine, the tractor supplied power to the pump, and the pump supplied water to the field. The field was divided into many smaller plots, creating a grid of one-meter-high partitions. Each small pool would be filled with water, so that the plant could grow quickly and produce more fibers. One imagines watering to be less challenging than hoeing or hand-picking. After all, one fills the land with water and then waits, or perhaps even leaves for the village. “Land is very fragile,” Süleyman explained as he worked. One needs to continue leveling, even on plots that are machine-leveled, a process carried out with huge tractors and heavy equipment to flatten the land surface so that the soil’s upper crust has an even height. “You have to carry a bit of soil from here to there, a bit of soil from there to here,” he continued, resting his back by leaning against the wood handle of a tall shovel.

The work on Mehmet’s land was completed in twenty hours. Süleyman earned twelve dollars. We barely slept that night. The field had to be overseen, but one cannot oversee a field when it is dark. One has to walk around in the field, listen to the sound of feet sinking into the soft soil, sense whether the water is enough or not, touch the cotton, smell it. The field was not left alone until the next watering on September 6, 2001. However, the work in between was not limited to inspection. Each round of watering takes less and less time as the soil absorbs more and more water. Two days were spent cutting wood from the bushes around the river, wood that would be used by the Kurdish workers who would soon arrive from northern Turkey, where they worked in the hazelnut harvest in the Black Sea region. If the farmers do not cut wood, they need to buy it in order to supply the workers with fuel for heating water and cooking. Three days were spent inspecting the animals in the upland pastures and then selling a few in order to raise cash. The water tanker needed repairs, so that the workers could use it around their tents. New weeds, which had fed on the fertilizers, had to be killed and recycled back into the soil. The list of tasks was long. In short, without exception, farmers have seven-day work weeks until the few weeks following the harvest, as their anxiety is replaced by a short-lived period of joy.

The Harvest

After months of hard work, networking, raising cash, borrowing money, killing insects, spraying weeds, cutting wood, selling cows, giving gifts, cleaning excrement, and driving around the tractor, the time had come in Pamukköy to get ready for the harvest between late September and mid-November. The selling of the cotton following the harvest would be the only major cash revenue for Pamukköy farmers. The harvest is the most labor-intensive part of the entire cotton-growing process. The way in which the harvest is organized follows the same logic employed during the hoeing. Three different groups of farmers deploy three distinct ways of concluding their individual growing season.

First, those who have a large enough supply of labor in their households and relatively less land to work on by and large draw on non-monetary forms of labor exchange during the harvest. It is safe to assume that a family can rely on household labor if it has less than two decares of land per working household member. Even in these cases, these families usually borrow labor from others. However, a land/household member ratio above that requires some sort of monetary or non-monetary labor exchange in the village. Second, those families who own more than two decares per working household member, but do not have enough money to hire laborers from either the village or abroad, tend to employ labor-pooling. A few families come together to work in each other's land. Farmers use complex methods of labor control in such arrangements.

Kasim, a thirty-year-old farmer who has six decares of land and one small child, organizes a labor-pooling program with three other families:

You know no one works in others' field as if it's his own. They won't work the same way as you just let the villagers work, with no control. Because what we do is difficult work. Under a burning sun we pick cotton. One is dirty all the time, covered with dust and earth. Your back hurts a lot. Spending hours bent over the land doing small things is difficult. And if these small things do not belong to you, you don't want to do them. So we control each other. If my wife and I work for our cousins' land and pick one hundred and seventy kilos of cotton a day, and if our cousins pick only one hundred and fifty in our field, it is a problem. So we sort out the difference with money in the end. The more you pick, the more you earn.

Ödek is the local term for these arrangements. Families of different sizes come together to pool their resources. Because all have different capacities to contribute to the pool, the surplus or shortage is covered by cash. In

other words, the difference between individual contributions is accounted for by drawing on wages charged for the same kind of work performed for money. These complex cooperatives are a frequently used form of labor-pooling arrangement in many developing countries where the majority of farmers rely on unpaid domestic labor for survival.¹³ Their flexibility is striking in the sense that these informal cooperatives can form a workshop in a couple of hours and dissolve it even quicker. The final group of farmers depends solely on hired labor. Compared to the first and second groups, these farmers use less complex means of labor control in the field. Workers are paid according to the weight of cotton they pick. The poverty of workers and their lack of union power facilitate labor control for those who have enough means to hire them. If a worker loses her job, she cannot make it to the next harvest without borrowing money.

The speed of picking cotton depends on dexterity, determination and wealth. Those who work on their own fields can work a bit slower, without exhausting themselves too much. Those who work for friends and relatives can choose not to enter a field when it rains, for the mud makes it very difficult to move in the field. The neediest and most impoverished are the ones who find themselves working under any condition. And they are mostly Kurdish seasonal migrant workers.

A family of four working members can finish hand-picking their cotton in two months or less if their field does not exceed twenty decares. With four seasonal workers, the same amount of land can be hand-picked in twelve to fifteen working days. However, since there has to be a waiting period between each round of picking, which is called a “hand” (*el*), these workers are employed on several fields simultaneously. It is safe to assume that, on average, workers can pick eighty-five kilogram of seed cotton per day. In two months’ time, this equals more than five tons of cotton. Hand-picking is usually carried out three times. The third picking becomes costly for large farms that employ paid labor. Compared to those closer to the upper parts of the plant, the cotton balls closer to the root mature faster, because their lint dries earlier. Farmers tend to wait a week or more after the first hand, depending on the weather conditions, before starting the second. Only those who do not hire labor perform the third, for the amount that can be picked progressively decreases as one reaches the last hand.¹⁴

13 For empirical examples and a discussion of this literature, see, Mohamed Abdel-Aal and Saad Reem, *New Egyptian Land Reform* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 1999), James Toth, *Rural Labor Movements in Egypt and Their Impact on the State, 1961-1992* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

14 Machine-picking is also carried out in the Söke Plain and may completely replace hand-picking in less than a decade.

The organization of work during the harvest is very similar in Kurdish and Turkish work gangs. The work starts early, right after dusk and continues until before dawn. Workers quickly pick the cotton as they bend over the cotton plant and fill the sacks fastened around their waists. Husbands and wives usually fill the same sack and get paid collectively. Their children, not older than fifteen, are usually included in these small cooperatives. Turkish women, however, refuse to throw their cotton into their husbands' sacks, since, as one of them explained during the harvest, "men tend to be lazy and hide behind the joint sack." Kurdish, Arab and Turkish workers hardly ever work together in the same field. If they do on a rare occasion, they always work in ethnically homogenous gangs.

Workers pick the cotton and fill the balls in jute sacks. When the sacks are full, they are brought to a corner of the field, where either the farmer or someone older, who cannot pick cotton, weighs and registers them under the worker's name. After unloading the sack, the worker returns to his row, for they cannot leave a row of cotton until it is all picked. The cotton is mixed with the other workers' harvests, pooled and pressed into large jute sacks. These bales of seed cotton are then brought and sold either to TARİŞ's buying centers or to private traders. The moment of pressing the cotton into the sacks is the last time that farmers see their cotton on the field.

From the time the seed is sown until the workers pick the cotton, farmers engage in multiple relations of exchange. Farmers buy seeds, implements, fuel oil, and many other commodities to continue producing cotton. Among these forms of exchange, the one most frequently engaged is the labor market in the village. Most of the cotton farmers of Pamukköy barter labor and settle the difference with cash or cotton in various forms of labor-pooling mechanisms. Those farmers who have larger fields hire workers to carry out production. Whether they use money or not, all these processes of labor exchange include market performances composed of various resources and tactics. These performances are shaped through power contestations and social positions in markets. The amount of land one has, the degree of dispossession of a worker, the farmers' and workers' relations with labor gang leaders, the farmers' indebtedness, and the power asymmetries between farmers and workers at the moment of exchange, all play a dynamic part in shaping the labor market in the countryside. As the size of land increases, farmers tend to rely more on monetary exchange. As the level of dispossession increases, farmers find themselves in a weaker position *vis-à-vis* those who hire them as workers on their fields. Yet, even the most powerful farmers in these relations of labor exchange at the village level experience disempowerment and poverty once they enter the market where the cotton is exchanged. To analyze this market and follow the ways

in which fields and cotton markets connect in the locality of Pamukköy, we need to examine the dynamics of commodity exchange on the ground.

The Market: Exchanging Cotton in Pamukköy

The scholarship on economic processes approaches prices and markets mainly in two ways. Neo-classical economists and sociologists describe markets as price-making contexts and explain prices as being made in markets.¹⁵ Aiming to break out of this circular reasoning, other researchers have sought to show that prices and markets are embedded and constructed in the very social and cultural contexts in which they operate.¹⁶ Recently, however, new research in economic and social anthropology has begun to focus on markets as socio-technical universes from the vantage point of price-making. This literature shows that prices are produced in the specific geography of the markets where they emerge within relations of power. Despite the presence of prices' globally accepted form (such as US dollars), each specific price is made in a multiplicity of power relations that go beyond a mere coming together of supply and demand.¹⁷ Each price is a tool produced and deployed in the specific context of an exchange relationship. The making of prices in the cotton markets of the Söke Plain is in line with the findings of the literature on the anthropology of markets. From the harvest to the final exchange of cotton, categorically different price forms emerge in relations of cotton exchange.

From the Harvest to the Emergence of Prices

The end of the harvest marks the last stage of the cotton's life cycle in villages like Pamukköy. Farmers sell their entire crop before the last day of October. There are two main buyers of cotton in the plain: the agricultural sales cooperative TARIŞ, and private merchants who also own ginning

15 For a summary and criticism of this literature from an institutionalist perspective, see, Douglass North, "Markets and Other Allocation Systems in History: The Challenge of Karl Polanyi," *Journal of European Economic History* 6 (1977), Joan Robinson, ed., *Collected Economic Papers*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980).

16 Paul DiMaggio and Hugh Louch, "Socially Embedded Consumer Transactions: For What Kinds of Purchases Do People Most Often Use Networks," *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 5 (1998), Brian Uzzi and Ryon Lancaster, "Embeddedness and Price Formation in the Corporate Law Market," *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 3 (2004), Harrison White, "Where Do Markets Come From?," *American Journal of Sociology* 87, no. 3 (1981).

17 Koray Çalışkan, "Neoliberal Piyasa Nasıl İşler? Pamuk, İktidar ve Ticaret Siyaseti," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 108 (2007), Michel Callon, ed., *The Laws of the Markets* (London: Blackwell, 1998), Catherine Grandclément, "Bundles of Prices: Marketing and Pricing in French Supermarkets" (paper presented at the 4S-EASST Conference, Paris, 2004), Fabian Muniesa, "Performing Prices: The Case of Price Discovery Automation in the Financial Markets," in *Oekonomie und Gesellschaft*, ed. H. Kalthoff, R. Rottenburg, and H.-J. Wagener (Marburg: Metropolis, 2000).

factories. Since cotton has to be ginned before it can be sold in the institutionalized market settings—such as the cotton trading pit of the İzmir Mercantile Exchange (IME)—a vast majority of farmers (except for a few large landowners) are excluded from lint markets. For farmers like those of Pamukköy, the exchange of their cotton takes place outside the exchange building. It is still possible to keep their seed cotton and sell it to a trader later, but this possibility is realized only in a few marginal instances.

There are many reasons for the immediate selling of the crop. The primary reason is that growing cotton requires farmers to borrow heavily, thus creating an urgent need for cash after the harvest. Farmers who own land greater than twenty decares hire labor and pay the daily wages in cash, usually by borrowing. The farmers all have different means of finding the money. İbrahim, a farmer owning eighteen decares of land, borrowed money from a merchant who had a ginning factory in Söke. Although the terms of the borrowing were similar, he chose not to borrow from the state-owned Agricultural Bank (*Ziraat Bankası*) for several reasons. First, the bank required the farmer to have land under his name as collateral. İbrahim's land was not registered under his name. He owned the land, yet the land was formally registered as village property. Secondly, banks use formal written means of communication, visible to everyone. The letters sent to the villagers can be seen by anyone who frequents the *kahve*; the recipient of the letter will become the topic of conversation later in the day. To be known as someone who does not have the financial resources to grow cotton is shameful for many farmers. An indebted farmer's status declines in the village.

Informal bankers generally apply high interest rates, at least five percent higher than bank rates. They manage to buy their clients' cotton for less money, thus contributing to the temporary depression of prices during and immediately after the harvest. Moreover, when it comes to buying the cotton from the indebted farmer, it is not uncommon for them to overweigh the produce and downgrade the ginning outturn of the cotton. Farmers cannot resist selling their cotton to merchants, for they always sign a contract with these cotton-money merchants to pay their debt back on October 31, immediately following the harvest. Without financial backing, it is not possible for growers to keep their crop until the time comes to sell it under relatively better terms. The abundance of cotton and the urgent need for cash depress the prices between late September and early November. It would not make any difference, if they chose to sell to TARİŞ, since the cooperative pays the price of the day when cotton farmers bring their crop.

Traders' Price

An analysis of monthly cotton prices makes visible the large price differential between prices in October compared to other months. In the eleven years between September 1993 and August 2004, the average of the Cotlook A Index, a price index commonly referred to as the world spot price of cotton, was 66.78 c/lb. The average of October prices was 63.78 c/lb. This is a deviation of exactly 300 points, a difference vast enough for the New York Board of Trade (NYBOT) to formally enforce a halt in trading, because in the globally recognized cotton futures market of NYBOT a 300-cent deviation in a single trading session is an institutionally recognized sign of market crisis.

The Cotlook A Index represents the price deviation only to a limited extent, possibly under-representing the variance, for it incorporates the traders' perceptions of the price. The prices as they are shaped in the İzmir Mercantile Exchange reveal a more alarming difference. The average for October prices between 1993 and 2004, including the price of 2001, is a mere 65.23 c/lb. The average price for all other months is 73.19 c/lb, making a vast difference of 796 points. This is approximately eight cents for each pound of cotton, an amount more than twice the difference, enough to call a market crisis if it happened in the world of merchants.¹⁸

Farmers are excluded from lint markets because they do not have warehouses to store their cotton, the financial means to insure it, the means to follow prices on a daily basis, or the political power to participate in the price-making. These prices belong to the world of traders, merchants, brokers, and a few large landowners. To give an example, cotton prices in the İzmir Mercantile Exchange, the center of cotton markets in Turkey, are produced in three main forms in four different market places. Each of these price forms is produced in specific market geographies, almost all of which are designed to keep the farmers outside the exchange.¹⁹ *The market price* of the İzmir Mercantile Exchange is a price indicator used to set individual prices; *the pit trading price* is a rehearsal device that merchants produce in order to probe the market to see whether it is bullish or bearish; and *post-pit prices* are the actual prices of cotton exchanged in the market, but because they are not posted, no one has certain knowledge of them. In

18 The price statistics are from the Cotlook Ltd. Company and the İzmir Mercantile Exchange (IME). I thank Berrin Tařkaya of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute in Ankara for providing me with price data adjusted to USD.

19 For a detailed discussion of price production in İzmir, see, Koray Çalıřkan, "Price as a Market Device: Cotton Trading in İzmir Mercantile Exchange," in *Market Devices*, ed. M Callon, Millo Y., and F. Muniesa (London: Blackwell, forthcoming). For an ethnographic discussion of how global cotton prices are made, see, Çalıřkan, "Neoliberal Piyasa Nasıl İşler?."

short, the market as it takes shape in İzmir has multiple prices that work as “prosthetic” devices used by traders to pursue their mercantile interests. Prosthetic prices are developed to shape actual transaction prices. For example, the market price of cotton at the İzmir Mercantile Exchange is a prosthetic price, but it cannot be used to exchange actual cotton; rather, it is used to *set* actual prices for cotton exchange.

Apart from the production and deployment of various price forms, traders also affect the making of prices by negotiating each year’s supply and demand estimates. These estimates are more effective in creating prices than their real levels, for the actual levels are known only after all the cotton is bought and sold on the market in late October. In other words, in actual markets hypothetical supply and demand figures affect prices, not their actual levels. As a result, the meetings in which the estimates of the year’s supply and demand figures are set are formative of the actual prices.

Three main groups with three diverse motivations—merchants, the TARIŞ cooperative, and government representatives—attend the meeting of the Permanent Working Group on Cotton where supply and demand are estimated each year. Merchants dominate the meeting as the hosts of the caucus; the meeting takes place in the Exchange run by the traders. Merchants dominate the meeting in terms of numbers, too, for they attend all together, creating the absolute majority in the meeting room. They have an interest in depressed prices, because lower prices make it possible for them to trade larger volumes. As a result, they do their best to prevent the meeting from producing an underestimated production level, since a forecast of decreasing supply pushes up prices. The cooperative representatives have a contrasting motivation. Obviously, they benefit more from increasing prices, since higher prices mean a higher profit margin for the cooperative, the largest cotton seller in İzmir. Thus, they have an interest in preventing overestimation of the production level, because guessing a higher supply would depress prices. The government representatives, however, have not the same interest in price levels as the previous two groups. Their main purpose is to note the cotton supply levels as accurately as possible in order to inform the Minister of Agriculture.

My fieldwork at the IME suggests that merchants have a larger say in these estimates. Every year, traders manage to have the meeting produce an estimate higher than the actual levels and, thus, successfully depress prices before the harvest. These price forms disappear as the traders approach the countryside. Price as a prosthetic device does not play any role in the ways farmers attend to the conditions of exchanging their produce. Very few, those who cultivate cotton on large farms (less than one percent of Söke Plain cotton farmers and none of the Pamukköy growers), follow the prices

of the İzmir Mercantile Exchange and other prosthetic prices. For the vast majority of farmers, market prostheses or prices as device do not mean much, for a number of reasons:

First, the terms “merchant” or “trader” are used only in the singular form and in a pejorative sense. Traders are not trusted on the countryside. They are considered money lenders. Frequently, they are thought to protect the yarn producers’ and their own interests. Therefore, *any* price in any *form* associated with merchant houses or their organizations is regarded with suspicion, as just another tool used to get the farmer’s produce. The price is accepted to be a mercantile tool in the countryside. Second, whatever the price happens to be (price always “happens” in the countryside), a great majority of the cotton farmers are either locked into relations of debt with the merchants, or pledged into selling their cotton to their cooperative TARIŞ, for this is the only way they can get the credit they need to continue production. TARIŞ can extend indirect credits—such as supplying farmers with fertilizer, seed or pesticide—during the planting season and deduct the cost of these when the farmers sell their produce back to the cooperative.

If the merchants depress the prices, they can buy more cotton and sell for less. Not only does the mark-up make the difference, but when the cotton price is depressed, more and more yarn factories switch from cheap, oil-based polyester inputs to cotton; they buy more cotton and thus contribute more to the merchants’ income. Finally, as the price decreases in the countryside, merchants need less capital to purchase the commodity, so their carry-over increases in real terms. Paradoxically, the reason for the increase in merchants’ income can lead to the eventual loss of all profit. The more they depress prices, the more difficult it becomes for small farmers to grow cotton—not only because of the decreasing contribution of cotton to their income, but also because the farmers are selling their land to pay off their debt, thus losing the chance to grow cotton altogether. If the process of being indebted continues for two more decades, the land will be consolidated in fewer hands and prosthetic prices may become more relevant in the countryside, not because the farmers will have understood how to use derivative markets, but because there will not be any small farmers left.

The Farmers’ Price

The cotton price for a farmer is never the formal posted price. For them, formal prices—whether posted by merchant houses or TARIŞ—are only indicative of what they can get for their cotton. “The price is what I carry in my pocket after I sell my crop,” said Numan, a cotton grower who had to

sell his cotton to a private merchant. He borrowed cash to be able to continue producing cotton. He did not use formal means to raise the money, for the reasons explained above. Instead, he approached a ginning factory owner, received his money in less than an hour and made a deal to “give” his cotton to this private trader, settling the difference after the debt had been deducted.

As we discussed the market over dinner in his house, he gently shook his head toward the door for his sons to leave and lowered his voice as if to reveal a secret, a common way of talking about power relations in the exchange market for cotton in Pamukköy. He explained how the price that farmers receive is always lower than the price they are offered:

Even if a farmer sells to the cooperative [TARİŞ], the price he ends up getting is lower than what he accepted. They deduct this, they deduct that. The government used to announce the minimum prices. No more. We have only the market. But even then, the price we used to get was lower than the announced price. If one sells the cotton to traders, the price will be even lower. They get our cotton by *doing things* (emphasis added).

The “things they do” begin with illegally lending money, yet creating a legal context for it. When Numan went to the ginning factory owner Hüseyin to borrow money, the trader told him that he had some bank credit he did not need at the time, and “since he liked Numan a lot,” he offered Numan that money to use. The interest rate he applied was even one point lower than the private banks’ rate. Hüseyin presented himself as a person doing a favor to Numan by using his network of “friends” at the bank. He sold his money, but pretended that he served as an intermediary between the bank and the farmer. “Usually, they never give money directly to us. We go and get it from the bank. It looks as if the bank gives us the money,” continued Numan, again in a hushed tone. He would stop talking when his wife entered the room.

- I know that it doesn’t come from the bank. He [the money lender] sends a note to his friends in the bank, authorizes me to withdraw money from his account, and it is his money that I get. Other villagers don’t know. They think it is the bank that gives them the money and that the *fabrikacı*²⁰ is the intermediary. When there is a bank, there is paperwork, the state is involved, courts, etc. They send letters and stuff.

20 Farmers call those traders who own ginning factories *fabrikacı*, or “factoryman.”

Everybody knows that you borrow money in the village, so other villagers don't want to work with you. You cannot even treat someone to a cup of tea if they know. They make fun of you in the *kahve*.

- What else happens before you get his money from the bank?

- You know, the first thing he [the *fabrikacı*] asks is not the amount of money we need, but the amount of field we have. Because he will not get the cash back, he will ask for my cotton instead. He says, "I'll also help you sell your cotton." I know how to sell my cotton. How exactly is he going to help me other than buying it?

- What is the price he offered you?

- It is always whatever TARİŞ announces. This is usually the deal. You cannot have a farmer sell his crop in advance without having TARİŞ's price. The *fabrikacı* also offers the TARİŞ price. But the amount he pays is always lower. For example, when you bring your cotton, he never likes it. His face becomes sour as he looks at it. I feel bad, a bit ashamed. He makes us feel that way. It happens all the time.

- Can you explain a bit more?

- I go to his factory with the cotton, he looks at me like this [he shows a face simultaneously angry and sad]. I feel bad. After all, this is my months of work. You feel bad when one looks down upon it. Then he gins a few samples. The *randıman* [ginning outturn] is everything in cotton. If the cotton has more seeds, it has less lint. So the money I get goes down if the *randıman* decreases. The *Fabrikacı* always mess with these roller-gins. They fix their scissors so that they pick a little bit less lint. So they pay less. They also play with their scales. Farmers' cotton always weighs less. They make money in this way too.

A former ginning factory owner confirmed Numan's description of how the cotton is sold in the market. We had dinner in İzmir three months after I had talked to Numan. He only contradicted Numan when he said that the *fabrikacı* usually offers less than the price TARİŞ would announce during the harvest:

This business of debt is making the rich richer, the poor poorer. But what can farmers really do? The Agricultural Bank does not give credit anymore.²¹ TARİŞ's bank is taken away. Farmers are left alone. Their lives are full of unexpected turns. They need money, and usually very rapidly. Who has money? The ginners. They don't like the poorest

21 The Agricultural Bank lends money at market rates rather than at below-market interest rates, as it used to in the past.

farmers. They don't like the richest farmers. The poor have nothing to lose; the rich have power to resist. They want the middle farmers who produce enough, yet don't have money to finance themselves. These farmers also need them, because they want to borrow fast, and they want to borrow it secretly. Ginners keep it secret, and sometimes the farmers lose their land secretly if they cannot pay the debt.

Not all farmers are indebted, yet they still work with private traders. Scales and sampling roller-gins usually are more balanced when it comes to working with farmers who are not indebted.

In discussing how the farmers' prices are formed, one needs to mention the "performances" put on by traders, which weigh heavily against the farmers. Selami, who with his wife owned fifteen decares and rented five more decares, wanted to sell his cotton to a private trader. Selami had inherited money the previous year and had better financial resources. He talked to a few ginners before the harvest about his intention to sell. "Initially all of them thought that I wanted to borrow money. They were nice to me, wanting to help me like a father. One of them even told me that I should consider him as a father, although it was the first time in his life that he met me." Selami and I were sitting in a *kahve* in Söke. I asked him whether the ginners' manners had changed once they learned that he did not want to borrow money. He replied:

- No, not much. They were still nice. But they changed after I brought them samples of my cotton after the harvest. They looked at it, didn't like it, yet still wanted to buy it. They are real actors. Like those on TV. They are real *Ceyars* [J.R.s].²²

- What do they do?

- Difficult to tell. The one I gave my cotton to was a short fellow. But he used to look at me as though he was taller. You see, compared to him, I am a bigger, stronger and taller guy, but I feel small when I am in his office. He has a large desk, a picture of Atatürk, awards he got. I can't quite express myself. Something happens when I am there.

- What happens?

- I don't know. They know how to bargain, to sell and buy things. We sell only once every year. In one day, he does *it* more than I do in my entire life.

- [...] You don't have to sell to him, do you? You can sell your cotton to someone else until you get the price you want.

22 He is referring to J.R. of *Dallas*, the popular US television series of the 1970s and 1980s.

- No, it doesn't work that way. You can't sell it to others, not always. They don't like smart ones like me. They call each other, they make sure that they don't pay more than TARİŞ. They stick together. Even if they don't stand together, they do *it* the same way. They are all J.R.s knowing how to bargain. They look like they don't like your cotton, they don't want it, so that you feel happy if they buy your cotton in the end.

The "it" he is referring to is the market experience. When a rich trader and a poor farmer come together within an exchange context, like in any other context where the powerful and the powerless meet, the latter finds himself in a field of power that works against him. A trader tends to speak the language better, can articulate his position better, and uses an idiom farmers are accustomed to seeing only on TV. Traders are experienced in buying and selling. They perform better, not only because they are more skilled, but also because their financial power backs them with a cushion in case they do not win the bargaining. This is hardly the case for farmers like Selami. He cannot continue driving his tractor around the plain to find a buyer, show his samples and expect to gain a good bargaining position. The amount he hoped to sell is little compared to the amount the traders buy everyday. Selami knew that he was less experienced. He was aware of the power field of bargaining. Like many other farmers, he knew that the trader performs in a certain way, much like an actor:

- But Selami, you seem to know that they are only acting, like J.R. himself.
- Yes, we know that, but it doesn't help.

Knowing that trading performances are "only acting" does not help the Pamukköy farmers. The urgency they feel to sell their produce in order to pay their debt dominates the farmers' motivations in the marketplace. They cannot get their cotton ginned and wait for the best opportunity to sell their commodity. They cannot produce and deploy various prices to empower their trading position, for they do not have one. They cannot travel with their cotton between various potential buyers, nor can they shop around to find the best merchant. The market as seen by Pamukköy farmers is not a neutral place where supply and demand set the price. It is a power field where the traders' various performances and the farmers' indebtedness make the farmers relatively powerless agents of the exchange relationship that turns their cotton into money. This conclusion suggests a rethinking of the relationship between the field and the market.

Conclusion

The prevailing focus in the analysis of the global countryside seeks to register the effects of the expanding neo-liberal market on peasant livelihood and to explain the persistence or disappearance of farmers' modes of survival. This macro-perspective assumes the presence of the market without explaining what it is and how it works in reality. In contrast, this article has analyzed the interaction between the processes of agricultural production and exchange, and how markets work on the ground, through an ethnographic investigation of cotton production and exchange in western Turkey.

In the first part of the article, I have discussed the relations that farmers mobilize in order to produce cotton. Depending on their financial power, farmers mobilize different resources and networks. As the ratio of land size to adult household member increases, farmers tend to depend more on paid labor. In Pamukköy, a family who has two decares of land per family member can carry out all of the field work without hiring external labor. Yet, the farmers with the smallest landholdings choose to bring together informal labor-pooling cooperatives, work in each others' fields and economize their resources, only minimally deploying money in the labor exchange. As farm size increases, growers depend more on monetary relations of exchange; thus, the contact between the labor market and the field becomes more frequent.

Independent of farm size, cotton production requires investment in research, expertise, labor and networking. Farmers continuously carry out research to increase their yield, find cheaper labor resources and locate easier and more effective techniques of cotton growing. They even earmark parts of their fields to test the performance of a new seed or growing technique. Their profession requires years of learning and observation. Interestingly, farmers of Pamukköy do not regard farming as a skilled profession. Many see themselves as simple peasants who just watch the land: "We are *amele*, working just with our muscles. What we do does not require mental work," as one farmer said.

Yet, once challenged, farmers have a tendency to change their position and assert their agency through various skills and performances. A performance of humbleness and poverty is a frequently used tactic in the countryside. Such a performance empowers farmers as they negotiate the terms of labor-pooling, networking, finding cash, and hiring labor during the production process. Farmers see their fields as a space in which they can assert active agency. Farmers know that they cannot control all the parameters that affect cotton growing. They are aware of the risks—it may rain too much, or not at all; the workers may not come to pick the cotton, or

they may pick it badly; and so on. Nevertheless, they regard themselves as active agents of the political economic universe that surrounds them on the field.

Such a feeling of agency vanishes rapidly once farmers begin to consider the place of the cotton market in their lives. Although farmers engage in many exchange processes as they buy inputs and labor, they often do not regard such encounters as a market relationship; rather, they express these exchanges through an idiom of solidaristic relationships. For farmers, the place of the market is the trader's office, usually located in a ginning factory owned by the merchant himself. Contact with the market is composed of bargaining and agreeing on a price. Three factors taking place prior to the farmers' visit to the traders' offices prefigure the bargaining. First, the previous relationship between the trader and the farmer has a strong effect on the terms of negotiation. If the farmer owes money to the trader, he has to pay it back, usually before October 31. Traders informally cooperate not to buy from a farmer if he is indebted to another trader. Farmers have to sell their cotton to the trader from whom they borrow. In this context farmers are at the mercy of the traders. According to my calculations, in 2001 the Pamukköy farmers who borrowed from private traders sold their cotton for a price eleven percent less than the farmers who borrowed from family members or the cooperative.

The second factor that prefigures bargaining is related to the specific processes that take place in the İzmir Mercantile Exchange, the central merchant organization and hub of cotton trade in the country. All traders active in the Söke Plain have representatives in the Exchange. Well before the cotton hits the market, traders begin to work on preparing the ground for bargaining. Various prosthetic prices are probed and produced during pit and post-pit trading. Also, traders work hard to affect the market process. For instance, they lobby agricultural engineers, statisticians, researchers, government officials and cooperative representatives to influence their perception of the coming harvest. The traders' objective is to produce an estimate that foresees a high yield and low production costs. In caucuses dominated by traders, such as the Permanent Working Group on Cotton, the very supply of cotton is determined even before farmers harvest their crop. These estimates are always lower than the actual levels that are yet to be known.

The third factor that affects the bargaining in the market is related to the trading performances and politics that merchants forge on the ground. According to the Pamukköy farmers and many traders I interviewed, traders look down upon the farmers' produce to strengthen their trading position. Furthermore, merchants cooperate to ensure that they fix their

sellers even before the harvest. All cotton buyers in the plain, with the exception of a few, lend money to farmers, then buy the farmers' cotton and settle the difference. They refuse to buy the cotton of a farmer who has borrowed from another trader.

As a result of these three factors, the farmers of Pamukköy see the market neither as a place where the price is set, nor as a mere location of commodity exchange. My research suggests that the market is a power field where farmers encounter the production of price as relatively passive agents of trade. The market price that farmers encounter in traders' offices is produced prior to the moment of exchange. Merchants spend much time in building networks to affect the price levels, while farmers enter into these locations of exchange from a different space where they must spend all available time growing cotton, hiring or pooling labor in cooperatives, hoeing their fields, or picking their cotton. Farmers do not have the time to carry out market politics. They cannot maintain market platforms and grow cotton at the same time, for market exchange draws on concrete forms of production, performance and maintenance.

The price that serves as the interface between the field and the market can be regarded as a summary of all the power contestations that take place before and during the moment of exchange. Studies of rural relations of exchange and production should take into account the specific nature of price-making on the ground. Furthermore, without considering the asymmetries in the way prices are produced, any study of exchange and production relations would be incomplete. Treating prices as things that are set in the market is itself a political investment in shaping markets. Prices are not set through actual demand and supply; they are produced as prostheses to be used by a select group of market participants only. Without attending to these, scholarly research on agricultural production and exchange risks being a formative part of the political economic universe it studies.

The Pamukköy farmers see the markets and fields not as places of neutrality where supply and demand meet each other to set a price. Instead, these are power fields where various trading performances take place. The farmers' capacity to improvise and exploit these performances in the field increases together with their land size. Yet, for most of the cotton farmers living in the largest cotton-growing village of the Söke Plain, such relative autonomy vanishes as they leave their fields and enter the cotton market. The market makes the growers relatively powerless agents within the exchange relationship.

In conclusion, understanding economic activities in the countryside requires one to situate them in fields of power where a web of asymmetrical

relations are forged and maintained by a multiplicity of actors. These actors operate in a cascading relationship of domination, resistance and negotiation, structured in an essentially political topography of encounter. Such a political context can only be understood if one pays ethnographic attention to the specific predicaments of different actors involved in commodity production and exchange.

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