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RETHINKING GENDER AND LABOR RELATIONS IN TURKEY'S HISTORY OF AGRARIAN CAPITALISM IN THE 1960S

This presentation explores the processes of proletarianization for landless peasant women and their struggles against these processes in two large farms after the mechanization of agricultural production in the Aegean region of Turkey in the 1960s. Historically, first, they were sharecroppers and working on the landlords' land with low technology in the 1950s. Then, when landlords accumulated all means of production, they started to work as low paid workers on cotton fields in the early-1960s. Their wretched working and living conditions got worse when landlords started to cultivate new capital-intensive crop, Mexican wheat, instead of cotton, in 1967. This process resulted in their unemployment and they became the central actors of the landless peasant movement against landlordism in 1969.

In this frame, first, I explore the working of large-farms as it relates to women's labor power and the transformation of female labor demand, forms of supervision and labor control, organization of production after the mechanization in the villages. Then, I draw attention on how these women squeezed between the forefinger of men and the thumb of landlords actively struggled against the processes of proletarianization. This perspective will underline active roles played by women to affect their own living and working conditions and to change the class position of household.

By exploring these processes, my aim is to criticize the common tendency in scholarship on the deployment of petty commodity production and the elimination of rural poverty and class inequalities in Turkey in the 1960s. Against this perspective, this presentation shows that this was not the case for a particular segment of agricultural workers-landless peasant women. This presentation shows the process of the consolidation of agrarian capitalism and rural class struggles from a new gendered perspective. It is essential to a complete understanding of agrarian change in rural Turkey.