

The Depiction of the Traditional Culture in Yaşar Kemal's novel entitled *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls***Dr. Emine Sonal**

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ABSTRACT: Yaşar Kemal is one of the pioneers and prolific writers of contemporary Turkish literature whose epic stories in his fictional works enabled him to be compared to Homer in terms of his lyrical style and epic vision. He is also a representative of the south in Turkey who wrote numerous novellas, essays, novels, and folk tales based on the lives of under-privileged people and his understanding of human nature and whose works were translated into more than forty-five languages. In this paper, I will examine one of his most impressive novels, *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* in the light of its cultural history. The main focus of the novel is on a tribal group called Yörüks, nomadic Turcomans, in Southern Turkey, known as Karaçullu. The story deals with their struggle to find permanent wintering land in the Çukurova and summer pastures in Aladağ Mountain. In its historical context, the Yörüks were pacified by the Ottoman-Turkish authorities, who forcibly settled them in the fertile Çukurova Plain to live as farmers instead of being nomads. The main reasons for the forced settlement was so they could be taxed and drafted into the military. The forced settlement destroyed the traditional life of the Yörüks, who were decimated and who gradually lost their customs and social practices that they had followed for centuries. The Yörüks tried to maintain their moral values despite unbearable poverty, sickness, despair, and death. It was devastating for the Yörüks to see their pastures and wintering lands in the Çukurova occupied by landlords when they were away from their land. The ongoing struggle in *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* is the struggle of the nomads to keep their culture alive for the next generations. In this study, I start with the topic “the depiction of the past,” then, I analyze the novel in terms of four topics: “the relationship between traditional and modern values,” “feeling hopeless about future,” and “the persistence of traditional culture among the Yörüks” by adopting the definition of culture by Matsumoto et al. (1999:2).

Keywords: Yaşar Kemal, *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls*, Karaçullu Yörüks, Traditional Culture, Conflict between Old and New Values

Introduction

Human beings are a product of their social and natural environment and do not come into the world as fully rounded cultural beings. They gradually acquire the social norms throughout their lives by interacting with nature in a social environment and pass their tradition on to the next generation. The process of acculturation often includes periods of hardship, conflict, and obstacles that must be overcome during these challenging processes so that humankind can endure. According to Terry Eagleton, culture emerged as a means of defense in the struggle of humankind against nature, including all aspects of our lives (2000:1). Anthropologist Edward B. Taylor argue that the concept of culture is not limited to only one area of literary studies, but includes knowledge of art, law, tradition, and value judgments that human beings acquire as individuals within society (qtd. in Greenblatt 1995:225). For Taylor, culture in its broadest sense, includes ceremonies, rituals, morals, customs and their way of life such as their habits and the capabilities of the members of the society. As Raymond Williams (1980:83) states in *Yaşar Kemal's Novels*, a novel can do everything because it will eventually possess everything. The people and phenomena used in novels can be considered as reflections of people in society. The events they experience in daily life, their interpersonal dialogues, their happiness, concerns, dilemmas, struggles, and hopes for the future are often fundamental themes within novels.

The Legend of the Thousand Bulls is a passionate novel written by Yaşar Kemal. It was published in 1971 by Can Publications and translated by Thilda Kemal and published in English by Collins and Harvill Press in 1976. It has twenty-nine chapters and is set in the Çukurova² Plain near Adana, Turkey. The title of the novel is inspired by the Taurus Mountains, near the southeastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey. Mahmut Temizyürek, a literary critic and author, quotes Yaşar Kemal's words:

Bull also means "fertility" for our Çukurova Turcoman. ... And the name of our Toros Mountains is actually Thousand Bulls Mountains. I heard the Toros name for the first time when I was in the city. People from the Çukurova either name it in parts or call it Thousand Bulls.... Nomads had built the great Ottoman, Seljuk and many other states. With their words, they were the father of the Ottoman language. (2017b)

The word "Legend" in the novel's title evokes a sense of myth that is transmitted from generation to generation. The Folklorist Pertev Naili Boratav provides a detailed definition as follows:

The main characteristic of legend is the belief. What is being told is accepted as being truly lived and a real phenomenon. Thus, it is distinguished from tale and rather associated with story and epic. Another specific characteristic is that it is a

² In this study, the Anglicized spelling of Turkish names have been changed back to Turkish to create a common form.

short narrative, devoid of the anxieties of tone, written with plain colloquial accent and excluding stereotyped forms. In short, legend is a kind of narration that has its own unique style, presented in a plain and simple language. (Güzel & Torun 2004: 217)

In this study, I analyze the key theme of survival, the need for a change in the unhealthy conditions that the tribe is enduring, and the importance of protecting cultural values so they can be passed to other generations with dignity. I evaluate the traditional culture in *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* under four sub-headings: “the depiction of the past,” “the relationship between traditional and modern values,” “feeling hopeless about future,” and “the persistence of traditional culture among the Yörüks” by adopting the definition of culture by Matsumoto et al. (1999:2) as the set of “attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors” shared by a group of people in order to survive in a communal tribal life. After clarifying the significance of this novel as a historical document that fictionalizes the forced settlement of the Yörüks by the Ottomans, its traumatic and violent impact on them will be discussed throughout this paper.

I. The Novel as a Historical Document

The Legend of the Thousand Bulls is about the struggle of the Karaçullu nomads who lived in the Çukurova for centuries. In addition, it is a retelling of the lamentations of the nomads who vanished from history and were swept away after a battle during the late Ottoman Empire in 1876. They are the Turcomans who once pitched sixty tents at their camp sites in the Çukurova during the winter, and on Aladağ Mountain during the summer, and were healthy and wealthy with their increasing herds. Now as dispossessed folk they long for their past. *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* underlines that the Turcoman Yörüks are the last nomadic tribe of Anatolian culture who survive despite the difficulties experienced during the Ottoman period. Temizyürek states in, “Teleskoplu Destancı” [An epic poet with a telescope] that “*The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* is an epic novel that is a real story in every aspect. Temizyürek points out that Yaşar Kemal’s novel was inspired by a true story that happened in 1949. Andaç also quotes Yaşar Kemal on his novel regarding some of the problems the Yörüks experienced:

They are still crawling like dogs in the Çukurova. They do not muzzle their animals on the roads because you cannot tie the mouth of the animal when in passing it takes a mouthful pinch from the crops. Thus, the owner raises hell. Thus they can neither follow a road nor pass near a village. They cannot gather in one place as there are no empty fields left in the Çukurova. The nomads give thousands of liras to the villagers to settle in the pastures of the villagers. (Andaç 2003:218)

Kemal Silay’s “Liminality, Ritual and Social Performance: Yaşar Kemal's Legend of the Karaçullu Yörüks and the Problems of Nomadic Entity in Anatolia” underlines Yaşar Kemal’s words that were included on the back cover of *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls*: “This is one of my most realistic novels” (Silay 1996:13). The novel details an epic war that the Ottoman launched to gain economic and political power over the Turcoman Yörüks. The Karaçullu

nomads gradually diminish and disappear from the region. Kemal reflects on the plight of the Yörüks:

In 1876 a battle took place between the Turcoman nomads and the Ottoman rulers. The Ottomans wanted to settle the nomads, to tie them to the earth, to make them pay taxes and enroll them in the army. The Turcomans refused to be yoked. They resisted fiercely, but were beaten in the end and compelled to settle. The bitterness of this defeat, the ignominy of their forced settlement, have ever remained a raw wound in the hearth of every Turcoman. (Kemal 1976:38)

Kemal emphasizes that the Ottoman forced the Turcoman Yörüks to adopt a sedentary lifestyle by organizing them into villages to work in agriculture. Within the novel a poetic lamentation describes in detail how the Ottoman violently exerted domination over them, and that Payas Castle was used as a prison where the pressure and oppression would continue. Small children and the elders of the Karaçullu Yörüks, had to continuously migrate to find suitable wintering land which became an increasing problem. In the quotation below, Yaşar Kemal describes how poor nutrition and unhealthy conditions affected the children around Payas Castle:

... [T]he children were dying like flies. That morning again they buried a little boy at the foot of Payas fortress and threw a few handfuls of that cruel Ottoman earth over him, of that thankless earth that knows not benefits nor customs and traditions, nor even common humanity, that rejects its hilt. (157-158)

Jongerden, in “Beyond the rural-urban divide: new space for development”, explains briefly why the Yörüks had to settle down as given in the followings:

The *Aydınlı* were not settled by force in the Çukurova plain in the last quarter of the 19th century, as many others were. In 1876, the military were guarding the roads into the Toros Mountains from the Çukurova plain, and not a soul was allowed to pass, either from the plain to the mountains or from the mountains to the plain. New villages and towns were to be built, and officials were busy measuring and calculating squares, avenues and streets. (2010:7)

Nedim Gürsel (1997) broadly discusses the reasons why the southern part of Anatolia remained underdeveloped. The Çukurova region in the nineteenth century was an area attractive to mountain dwellers, with high summits. But it was difficult to reach due to lack of transportation links. The nomads had their own land and local government in a feudal society that included a social, religious, and political structure that was perceived as a threat to the Ottomans and their dominion over them. The Yörük nomads refused to pay taxes or to send their sons to participate in military service. He further adds that in order to resolve the conflict with the Turcoman Yörüks, the commanders in the Ottoman army, like Dervish and Cevdet Paşa, used the military to forcibly settle them. The uprising of the Yörük tribes was quickly suppressed by the Ottoman soldiers in a short time. After a battle with the Ottomans, some Yörük tribes did not surrender, but abandoned their lands and settled in the plains where they suffered from dysentery, malaria, and other contagious diseases (271-78).

When the Yörüks travelled along the roads and passed through villages they were

required to pay a city toll. In the novel, Durmuş Ağa wants a sheep levy toll and declares to Headman Süleyman:

“You’ve got so many sheep... While we here never have a bit of meat all the year round. Only when you nomads come along, God bless you for that, only then our children can eat a little meat.” (Kemal 1976:121)

Gürsel (1997) points out that the history of the Yörüks accords with the words of Silay, who emphasizes the difficulties they faced while trying to find a dwelling place: “Wherever they move, they are obliged to pay a higher price in money or sheep to the landowners of the Çukurova” (1990: 448). The Yörüks were prevented from maintaining their way of life by the government. They were pushed away by the forest guards in the mountains, and similarly, they were swept away by the landlords from the plains. Dadaloğlu's poems³ deal with the tragedy of the noble and dignified Yörüks and the destruction of their culture by the Ottomans. In Dadaloğlu's poems, the dimensions of this oppression can be observed along with the rise of capitalism in the Çukurova, which destroyed the nomadic people's culture and lives.

Furthermore, in the novel, Yaşar Kemal himself appears as one of the minor character known as the public scribe, Blind Kemal. Yaşar Kemal worked in different jobs when he was young, one of them, as a “street letter-writer” in Kadirli, Adana (Andaç 2002:309). Yaşar Kemal was called “blind” by the locals after losing his right eye in an accident when he was five (Andaç 2003:309). In the story, Headman Süleyman agrees to buy the tumulus of Deliboğa from Beardless Ali Ağa after agreeing to settle down. However, the title-deed is not given to him and he is advised that the sole remedy is to go to Blind Kemal and have a petition written. Blind Kemal immediately realizes that the Yörüks were fooled like the other villagers; thus, there is nothing to be done. The deep sadness and agony he felt as a result of this situation is reflected by his actual words, ““But to whom am I to write? Where?” He said. His only eye, large and sad, shone with pity. ‘Where, to whom?’” (Kemal 1976: 85). The fact that Yaşar Kemal, presented himself as “Blind Kemal, the public scribe” is a reflection of his real life through his fiction.

In conclusion, Yaşar Kemal in his acceptance speech for an Honorary Doctorate states that “[his] village was founded by the nomadic Turcoman tribes who were forced to settle there after a revolt in 1865” (Tharaud, 2011:204). From that point of view, *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* is a historical document that can be read as a testimonial story of this horrific experience with an intention to blur the boundaries between historical truth and fiction, thus perhaps aiming to create an alternative history in the opposition to the Turkish official history. The meaningful relationship between a fictional text as literature and a non fictional memoirs based on the historical truth has always been a great interest by the literary scholars.

II. Reflections on the Cultural History

³ “Daha da hey Osmanlıya aman mı? / Azrailden de başkasına aman mı?” are the lines by the poet Dadaloğlu who protested the Ottoman government's oppression of the nomadic community. In line 2, Azrail (death), also known as the *Grim Reaper*, is a metaphor to describe the trauma of the Nomads. For more information see *Cenupta Türkmen Oymakları II*, by Ali Rıza Yalman (Yalkın), İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1977, 64-66.

The practices of traditional culture depicted in *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* can be categorized under four sub-headings: “The depiction of the past”, “The relationship between traditional and modern values,” “Feeling hopeless about future”, and “The persistence of traditional culture among the Yörüks” since these concepts take place important roles in the definition of a Culture and Social Anthropology depending on any form of human beings.

II. A. The Depiction of the Past

In the exposition of *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* the reader is introduced to the Hıdırellez festival, which is also known as “Hızır-İlyas day.” It is an ancient tradition that is celebrated once a year on May 6th. Walker and Uysal explain that Hızır-İlyas day is “associated in the folk mind with fertility, with the annual renewal of vegetation and the seasonal life cycle” (1973:289). In the story, the Yörüks attend the celebration at the night between 5th May and 6th May. During the celebration, the Yörüks await the reunion of Hızır and İlyas until dawn without blinking their eyes. Old Haydar, the Master Blacksmith, orders those who first see the reunion of Hızır and İlyas to wish for suitable wintering land and summer pastures for the tribe so that the tribe can uphold their traditional customs and values and pass them on to the next generation. A year later, in the resolution of the novel, the Yörüks who had survived come together to pursue their holy duty in Hıdırellez. It is interesting to note that the author chose to set the story within the cycle of one year. In this novel, the recurrence of Hıdırellez becomes one of the significant leitmotifs in this novel since it is just one of the many festivals in this rich culture as Headman Süleyman explains as follows:

In the days of their glory the Turcomans had songs and legends and epics. They had traditions then, festivals, ceremonies. The ritual *semahs* and *mengis* were danced in large crowds. Solemn congregations were held that lasted three days and three nights. They had minstrels and flutists and great bards. Every household had an aged Turcoman grandmother who could tell all the ancient tales and ballads. There were sacred hearths [societies] then, and holy sages, and master-craftsmen who could fashion swords and beat the felt and weave carpets and kilims, and make soft leather saddles and precious silverware and vegetal dyes, master-craftsmen whose fame spread from Iran to Turan, from the land of the Rum to Arabia. (Kemal 1976: 198-99)

As Clifford Geertz emphasizes there would be “no human nature independent of culture” (qtd. in Bressler, 2011:190). Similarly, Kasapoğlu and Ecevit comment in their article that “no culture can exist without a society and vice versa” and they emphasize the reciprocal and parallel interrelationships between cultural products and social structure (2004:137). The nomads were in a constant search to find permanent land which meant they were unable to partake in their established cultural habits of practicing *semahs* and rituals, singing their songs, legends and ballads, reciting the poems of Yunus Emre and weaving colorful kilims.

On the other hand, if the Yörüks had settled down to become farmers it would still have been difficult to maintain their way of life. As Terry Eagleton points out, “those who cultivate the land are less able to cultivate themselves. Acculturation [migration] leaves no leisure for culture” (2000:2) and everything they had inherited from their ancestors would come to an end.

II.B. The Relationship between Traditional and Modern Values

A key concern of *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* is the ongoing struggle of the nomadic Yörüks to survive under difficult conditions while hoping to find pastures in the Aladağ Mountain. In the Çukurova, as mentioned before, it has been a tradition of the tribe to live an unsettled life for over a century.

In the novel Jeren is a dynamic character who has wisdom and is someone who is able to maintain good relations with the members of the tribe. Her beautiful face is a reflection of her pure and deep spirit. After Ceren’s father’s offer to Headman Süleyman to convenience Jeren to marry Oktay Bey, Süleyman contemplates her virtues as a promising young girl to carry on their culture and feels guilty to abuse her life just to save the tribal people:

A heavy stone came and settled on the Headman’s heart. He felt himself sinking into a swamp of shame, dirty, slimy, viscid, like a dark night. Anything, anything but this. Never had anyone in this tribe interfered with their daughters in matters of the heart. No one had ever forced a girl to marry for money or riches or for any other reason. Had they fallen so low, were they lost to all the old values, utterly degenerate? [...] Everything was decaying, everything was dying out. I’ve gone through a lot, humiliation, trails, blows... I’ve been dragged to police stations, beaten, crushed, spit upon... There was nothing I could do about it. But this... The breakdown of all the old traditions... The tribes dwindling away to nothing. The tents, once so proudly upright, seven poled, now old and tattered with only a pole or two. Everything was ending, withering away.... (Kemal 1976:128)

Oktay Bey, the son of a landowner in the Çukurova, follows the nomad community for six years from a distance, hoping to marry Jeren, who is a model of perfect beauty and the moral excellence of the Yörüks. Jeren rejects his marriage proposal and waits passionately and patiently for Halil, whom she loves. Halil is the Bey of the tribe, who hid himself in the mountain after killing a man from an opposing tribe for the tribe people’s sake. Assuming that they would be given wintering land on the plantation of Oktay Bey’s father’s, some of the Yörüks insist that Jeren should marry Oktay Bey and eventually trick her by showing Halil’s bloody shirt as the proof that he is dead. Jeren, trusting her intuition, does not believe them. Her father, Abdurrahman states: “She said he is not dead, and even if he is... I will never marry anyone else” (Kemal 1976: 127). Abdurrahman comes to Headman Süleyman and says that only he can convince Jeren by talking to her. Headman Süleyman displays his attachment to the past with great dignity and wisdom:

I can’t do it. I can’t go to Jeren. I’ve done much to save the tribe, I’ve licked people’s boots, I’ve begged and crawled, but this I can’t do.... From Khorassan

we came, riding our noble horses.... And all through the years, through the many turns of fortune, our women and children were ever sacred to us. No one would hurt a hair of their heads. This is our tradition, our lifeblood, our whole existence. If I do this it'll be the end. Everything we have lived for will be lost forever. (Kemal 1976:129)

The Headman of the Yörüks, Süleyman is pleased when he hears Jeren's resistance to her father: "[I]t's a dirty thing to be Oktay Bey's wife, but death is beautiful" (128). Süleyman starts to think to himself, "Jeren was standing firm, good for her! So it was not all over with them yet. So the old blood still ran clear in their veins. So they still could" (Kemal 1976:128). Headman Süleyman is proud of Jeren and describes her as "the most beautiful thing the human race has ever brought forth" (Kemal 1976:162) and adds that he would not give up on her in any circumstances:

"Where," Headman Süleyman thought, "in what other race can one find such perfection? Such beauty.... Like a stream that has flowed underground for thousands of years and suddenly springs out of the earth, filtered, clear and pure.... [...] There's never been such a one as Jeren. (Kemal 1976:161-62)

After Jeren's refusal of Oktay Bey, Old Haydar's sword becomes the hope of the tribe, and he presents it to the Beys and Ağas to gain some pasture. The plans of obtaining wintering lands are not fulfilled, however, and as a result the nomads rely on Jeren's marriage to Oktay Bey. Headman Süleyman is confident that the Yörüks will not surrender because they possess dignity and good nature. He is overcome with joy and hope when he observes Jeren's instincts of resistance toward a marriage with Oktay Bey. His interior monologue quoted above, bears repeating:

Jeren was standing firm, good for her! good for her! So it was not all over with them yet. So the old blood still ran clear in their veins. So they still could... How many years is that Oktay bey fell in love with Jeren. (Kemal 1976:128)

Halil and Jeren, on his horse, go down to the Yörük camp in Aladağ on the day of Hıdırellez where they bow to their religious leader, Koyun Dede, and then attend the *Semah*. Müslüm, like other members of the tribe, is puzzled at Halil and Jeren's arrival. Headman Süleyman clarifies the situation: "He's still the Bey, even if only in name. He must be with the tribe on such a day, on Hıdırellez day. That's why he's come, Müslüm brother. And he did well" (Kemal 1976: 283-284).

The Karaçullu Yörüks are strictly connected to their traditions and values, which are displayed at the sacred tent where all the holy tokens of the tribe are preserved. The nomads consider the Beylik tent as particularly important, which is why it is the first tent to be pitched when they arrive, and the first to load up when they leave a camp site. Moreover, it is not allowed to be touched by outsiders. It is the largest tent of the tribe, where they keep "a drum with shriveled skin," "a rug decorated with sun emblem," "a halberd," "a horsetail," "a banner," and "the Holy Kuran" in "a case of pure silk trimmed with beads". (Kemal 1976: 210)

II. C. Feeling Hopeless about Future

When the Yörüks realize that it is almost impossible to persuade Jeren to marry Oktay Bey, they turn their hope to Master Blacksmith Old Haydar, as their last chance for survival. Old Haydar and Osman, a young lad from the tribe, go to Adana to present his magnificent sword to the respected Ramazanoğlu as a gift in exchange for a request for wintering land. He experiences culture shock upon his arrival in the city that he saw once when he was completing his military service; he misperceives the electricity at night as the reflection of sunlight; he thinks that each person on the street is a relative or a member of Ramazanoğlu's tribe. He also wants the people around him to treat him with dignity and respect because he is a visitor to the city, as in "the days of glory of the great Turkoman" (198). The observations of Old Haydar, whose family have been blacksmiths for generations, cause his inner conflicts.

First, Old Haydar notices that "a young man whistling a tune came to stop beside them. His hair was long like a girl and he wore very tight trousers and a brightly chequered shirt" (Kemal 1976: 176). Haydar is about to ask for directions; however, something prevents him from going further, then he decides not to interfere. Haydar thinks that "This wasn't a man nor a woman either. This was a hermaphrodite!" (Kemal 1976:176). Haydar thinks that he is not the right person to ask such a question. Next, Old Haydar sees "a man walking over to a boy" and slapping his face. Haydar feels bad after witnessing the man hitting the boy continually, and the passersby do not interfere at all. Finally, Haydar watches a rider whipping his horse in the street. He feels a deep agony, watching such cruel treatment of the horse. Haydar believes that animals should be treated as humanely as possible. Then, there is a young boy "pinching a girl's bottom," "half-naked women," people passing by "cursing Allah" (Kemal 1976: 176-77). The events he observes in the street are meaningless and conflict with his culture, where they love and respect each other and give great care to children and animals. Old Haydar thinks to himself, "The world was changing, ah it was changing... And only they remained the same". (Kemal 1976: 177)

Old Haydar is surprised to see Hurşit Bey in a small house and thinks, "Hurşit Bey is supposed to live in a palace, not in a room no bigger than a hoopoe's nest" (Kemal 1976: 184). After listening to Hurşit Bey's story, Old Haydar expresses his sorrow, wonder, and pity about his people: "So everything is changing and coming to an end. Things are happening, unfamiliar cruel things that we don't know, that we don't understand. Nothing can save our world from dying out" (184). These words reflect the tragic plight of the Yörüks. Old Haydar is unaware of the rapid changes of the modern world and is shocked at what he observes in the society. He comes to the conclusion that Hurşit Bey is not the right person to bestow land for pasture and a wintering place. The cultural values of Old Haydar and his virtues conflict with the social norms of the sedentary people of the Çukurova. Haydar manages to see İsmet İnönü, the President of Turkey after 1938. With great patience, he waits for the President in front of the Pink Villa in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. When he notices İsmet Paşa appears, he stands in front of him in fear and great excitement. This moment of great tension is the climax of the novel. Finally, Old Haydar presents his sword with great care to İsmet İnönü:

“Take it, İsmet.” He said. “Thirty years I worked on it for you. And you know how it was with Rüstem, the blacksmith of the Çebi tribe.... That was long ago.... He went to the Padishah who was then in your place. Fifteen years it had taken him to make his sword, and what did the Padishah say? Now what, what did he say when he saw that sword? “Wish me a wish, Rüstem, Master”, he said.... And the blacksmith asked for land for his tribe to winter on. At once the Padishah bestowed upon him the whole land of Aydın, all in return for one single sword. He was only an apprentice, a newcomer to the profession.... But I Thirty years! For thirty years I’ve been forging this sword.... For you.... It’s agony what we’re suffering in the Çukurova, agony.... Take it.... Take this sword.” (Kemal 1976: 241)

Very proud of himself, he awaits the news that he will be given the land by the Turkish President. The Paşa’s visitor takes the sword and gives it to Paşa, uttering, “Look Paşa, look how beautiful it is.” The Paşa examines the sword and smiles. After that, he gives it back saying, “very beautiful, very beautiful” (242) while getting into the waiting car. Old Haydar is suddenly overcome with disappointment and after the President leaves, Haydar collapses in the street. For the first time he confronts the reality that his thirty years of hard work, his precious labor, has no value at all in the modern era. He comes to the conclusion that his tribe will never be given the pastures and wintering lands and that like himself, the Yörüks will perish because of the oppression from the landowners, Ağas, and Beys.

According to Rogers, being in a good psychological state depends on the space between how we see ourselves (the genuine self) and what we want to be (the ideal self). If this space is wide, it causes psychological pain (Roediger *et al.*, 1996). When Haydar’s sword, which was their last hope to obtain wintering lands, does not get the approval from İsmet Paşa, he experiences deep grief and disappointment.

Haydar, the spiritual leader of the nomads, returns to his tent and does not speak with anybody except his grandchild Kerem. He puts his sword, with great disappointment and grief, onto “the glowing coals of the forge” (Kemal 1976: 255) and beats it through the night with all his effort to change his masterpiece into a shapeless iron ball. The following morning, he is found dead over his anvil. Yaşar Kemal concludes, in his interview with Nicholas Birch that appeared in *The Guardian*, that “Haydar’s destiny is in that lump of metal.” He further adds that “He could be nothing other than what he was.” [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/nov/28/yasar-kemal]

The living conditions of Yörüks become increasingly difficult after the death of Old Haydar, their spiritual leader. After the burial ceremony, in thirst and hunger, they begin their journey down to the Çukurova to camp.

In one of their challenging journeys, the Karaçullu Turcoman Yörüks pass through the Çukurova Plain up to the Aladağ Mountain and end up in Sarıçam. The people, especially the children and the women, were too exhausted to continue their miserable journey because of the weather and cold rains. Headman Süleyman and his respected friend Old Tanış wanted to find a

solution to obtain a piece of land for his community. They recall their glorious past with myriad tents, and they yearn for their festivals, legends, and songs. Grief-stricken Headman Süleyman states that “for forty years now the last remnants of the Turcoman had been agonizing all over the world” (Kemal 1976: 199). It is tragic to see the gradually decreasing number of tents: from two thousand tents to sixty; from sixty tents to thirty and their traditional culture has come to an end. The reader is spellbound by the variety of the cultural environment of the nomads, and experiences the grief when they are at the verge of extinction:

From Khorassan we rose and swept through the land and bright shone our long lances on our shoulders [...]. Our long seven-domed black tents of goats hair, each one a marvel of human craft, and inside the most delicate colours, the most beautiful designs.... And our lances, our swords, our daggers.... Our muskets with their gold-engraved ivory stocks... Our carved wooden mortars, our nose ring and necklaces and coronets.... Our rugs and kilims cilices.... In the plain of Harran we whirled in the ancient semah, thousands of us, and the gazelles of the plain whirled with us. [...]. (Kemal 1976: 268).

II. D. The Persistence of Traditional Culture among the Yörüks

When analyzing the effect of traditional culture on the main characters in *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls*, it can be observed that Jeren symbolizes the Turcoman Yörüks with her strong personality, stature, beauty, and humanity. “White kerchiefs and hennaed hair, long soft green eyes and red cheeks, simple silver-trimmed fezzes, full red smiling lips, silver diadems, nose rings, golden earrings, long flowered gowns, red and blue embroidered woven aprons, silver braided girdles” are the phrases referring to the cultural richness of Yörük women (Kemal 1976: 129-30). Jeren’s clothing reflects the culture and style of the other Yörük women. Kemal emphasizes that the Turcoman nomad traditions that had been protected for centuries will vanish if Jeren commits suicide and Halil leaves the nomad community and takes to the mountain with his gun.

The nomad community considers Jeren responsible for their tragic condition with children dying of exhaustion, poverty, and illness because they could not find adequate wintering land. They accuse Jeren: “You killed my child, Jeren, you!”, [...]. “It is all your fault, Jeren.”, “All your fault!”, “All!” [...]. (Kemal 1976: 131) and pressure her to marry Oktay Bey. Jeren reacts to these accusations by saying, “I didn’t, sister! It’s Allah.... [...]. “I never killed anyone. You’ve killed me” (131). As a result, the nomads treat her like a stranger, “She was like some still and stagnant water” (Kemal 1976: 262). Jeren wants to leave the camp in the dark and jump from the top of the mountain. Yaşar Kemal describes her suicide attempt as follows:

Just as she was about to hurl herself down the precipice she shuddered violently. Her legs gave way and she dropped on to the rock. A light burst in front of her eyes and went out. Three times it flashed and faded [...]. The night running wild, whipped by the winds, the rocks wrenched out, tossed through the air. The huge mountain uprooted, wobbling, lurching into the plain. Jeren rose. She opened her

arms wide like the wings of a bird ready to cast itself into the void, but again all the sounds died away and a desolate solitude encompassed her. 'I, Jeren, I! How did I come to this how? I, Jeren...' And she wept tremblingly. (Kemal 1976: 263-64)

Muharrem Kaya further indicates that it was difficult for the Yörüks to sustain a nomadic life like their ancestors, "to live on a sheep-breeding economy and landing on Aladağ Mountain for summer and winter in the Çukurova plain" (2003:115). Two conditions destroyed the Yörüks. First, the Ottomans forced the Yörüks into a sedentary lifestyle because the Ottoman tax collectors had difficulty collecting taxes from the nomads; therefore they perceived nomadic life as a threat to Ottoman hegemony. Second, The Yörüks were unable to sustain their lifestyle due to processes of modernization and industrialization in Southern Turkey as explained by Jongerden:

Mechanized agriculture and the colonization of land leads common pasture to become private property, turned since tractors have moved in into ever expanding cotton and wheat fields. Year by year, there is less space for the Aydınlı [Karaçullu Yörüks] to herd their sheep and the toll levied on their camp sites are increased. Modernity is squeezing them out. (2010:6)

As a consequence of these changes, the nomads experienced difficulties in finding suitable pastures to live since they were pushed away by other tribesmen when they were approached their previous camp sites. Muharrem Kaya, similarly, discusses the ongoing situation in the early stages of *modernization* in Turkey as follows:

Turkey and the Çukurova now act with a rational and pragmatic logic. Soils were tilled by machines. Thus, even the smallest areas are cultivated and planted, and the land that the Yörüks wanted to settle in the Çukurova Plain seemed impossible. The hatred of the villagers and ağas against so-called "wild Yörüks," considered as "others," was no longer bearable. This brings to light the conditions that caused the collapse of the Yörüks. Eventually, the Beylik symbols and holy relics were demolished. The nomad community no longer had power left to maintain their old traditions. (2003:123)

The Legend of the Thousand Bulls starts with the celebrations of Hıdırellez, which is known as the "Hızır-Ilyas cult." Halil sees the threats facing him if he prevents the marriage of Jeren and Oktay Bey, but he still has to fulfill his duties for Hıdırellez as the Bey of the nomads. Halil and Jeren arrive on horseback at the camping site, which displeases the nomad community. Halil and Jeren walk toward the Beylik tent to rest for a while, and then they go out to wait by one of the natural springs till dawn. Upon their arrival, some tribal people bearing enmity toward Halil think that Jeren will not marry Oktay Bey, therefore, the nomads will not be given wintering lands in the Çukurova. They gather together to make war against Halil and reveal their hostility toward Halil: "This is too much," [...]. "To come back like this after ruining all our plans, after making us the laughing stock of all the Çukurova (Kemal 1976: 283). They lay in wait to ambush Halil and get shot him during the armed fight. Jeren takes the lifeless body of Halil and walks up

the mountain, leaving the nomad camping site behind which means that the centuries-old Turcoman nomad tradition no longer exists. After Halil's tragic death, Jeren rises up, strong and determined, and heads toward the mountains, leaving all the nomads behind. Headman Süleyman's orders his men to bring some wood and take out all of the possessions such as "the standard," "the horsetail," "the drum," "the kilims," "the rugs," "the saddle-bags" (Kemal 1976: 287) from the Bey's tent and put them on the heap for burning. Next, they put the Bey's tent on the fire. Just like Jeren's action, the destruction of the bey's tent is also a prominent conceptual metaphor that reveals that the Turcoman nomadic traditions have come to an end.

III- Discussion

Yaşar Kemal is a well-known representative of southern culture in the Çukurova Plain and Toros Mountains of Turkey. He focuses on universal topics such as the relationship between people and nature, and the conflict between privileged and under-privileged people. In an interview about "Yaşar Kemal's Çukurova," Kemal states that "I experienced lots of pain, richness, and poverty, but especially happiness there" (Andaç 2003:144). In his earlier life, Kemal witnessed and heard of the sufferings, miseries, and despair of the indigenous people living in the Çukurova. In *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls*, he becomes the voice of the oppressed and dispossessed Yörüks, the people who were exploited by landowners and the Ağas. Neclâ Aytür notes that Yaşar Kemal created a "believable and 'true' world with its history, geography and people" (1979:69). Yaşar Kemal had a deep insight and sympathy of the Yörüks who were at the cross-roads of tribal discomfort.

The novel also captures the agony of the Yörüks' struggle and their journey from one place to another, and it explores the difficult conditions under which they lived and their great resilience. On the other hand, *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls* is not only a work of fiction but also, an authentic document based on the historical incidents about the war between the Yörüks and the Ottoman. In the very beginning of the novel readers are informed that "a long battle took place between Turcoman nomads and the Ottoman rulers" (Kemal 1976:38). The information on the back cover of the novel also includes the history of Turcoman Yörüks and the history of wars. The author draws the reader's attention to the consequences of war between the Ottomans and the Turcomans that broke out in 1876, from physical, social, and psychological points of view. Although the Yörüks were mistreated and humiliated by the Ottoman government and other tribes, they never abandoned their loyalty to past traditions and they struggled to overcome the obstacles. In the novel, the nomads possess the moral virtue, wisdom and deep humanity. They practiced the teachings of their elders to reach a moral perfection, as Yaşar Kemal describes the wisdom they inherited from them and how they applied these sustainable valuable teachings in their social relationships and in every aspect of their lives:

From the shores of one great ocean to the shores of another we surged, wave after wave, and fortress, cities, countries, races bowed down before us. A whole age we enthralled, and many cruel things we did to the men we subjugated. But never

never did we humble their pride. Our tradition forbade this always, to shame human beings. We never hurt the poor and the destitute, the women and children, whatever their race or country or religion. Friend or enemy, we held them in respect and treated them as we would treat our own fallen brothers, our children, our women, the aged of our tribe. And we touched not a hair of the head of the enemy who called for mercy. (Kemal 1976: 268)

IV- Conclusion

Despite the difficulties and obstacles they encounter in the Çukurova, the Yörüks feel obliged to maintain their traditions. A predominant theme throughout the novel is the awareness of their cultural norms and the desire to follow tradition and the determination not to abandon their nomadic life and culture. Similarly, the following quotation in the preface to the novel conveys that the Yörüks' attachment to the soil is very strong and rooted deep in their culture: "Take the Yörüks away from their pastures or their wintering lands and they would die. The Yörük of Aladağ is like a plant growing on a rock, its roots clinging to the granite stone" (Kemal 1976: 5).

The majority of Yörüks have a strong desire to pass on their traditions, social norms, and culture to the next generations. The majority of the Yörüks wanted to follow the Master Blacksmith and Headman Süleyman's virtues and wisdom. As stated by Chambers (2008),

Our previous sense of knowledge, language and identity, our peculiar inheritance, cannot be simply rubbed out of the story, cancelled. What we have inherited – as culture, as history, as language, as tradition, as a sense of identity – is not destroyed but taken apart, opened up to questioning, rewriting and re-routing. (9)

The desire to preserve their traditional culture reflects the Yörüks' strength, loyalty, dignity, deep

common humanity and strong personalities.⁴ Although they went through hardships, they decided not

to surrender by creating hope out of despair and fight with the new mentality of people who occupied

the whole land and did not leave a space for the Yörüks. Their ongoing struggle was futile against the

⁴ In the speech by Yaşar Kemal, on the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate from Bosphorus [Boğaziçi] University on 29 June 2009, yearns his readers dedicated to the world peace and declares that "First, a reader of my books would be unable to commit a murder and would be against war. Second, he would stand up against exploiting, demeaning, or assimilating others. He would be unable to exult at the assimilation of others. Those who read my books should know that those who destroy another culture will suffer the destruction of their own culture and humanity" (206). Trans. Barry Tharaud. Middle Eastern Literatures 14.2 (August 2011) 203-6.

rise of capitalism, and they started to diminish in size and failed to become permanent dwellers in the

Çukurova Plain. Due to the recent advances in technology, vehicles like the tractor enabled people to

settle down in their land and become farmers. Silay (1990) points out that “magic and mythico

religious powers, symbolic craftsmanship, physical and spiritual goodness, heroic strength and

leadership, all are proven powerless (455)” against the new era of capitalism; the Yörük tribal culture

was ruined by technology and the capitalist mentality. It can be concluded that there is the implied swipe that Yaşar Kemal takes at capitalist values in a more neutral sense, namely the establishment of the new mode of the production and the exploitation of the Yörüks by greedy and vicious powers of landholding ağas or the feudal lords.

Finally, Philip Yang (200:40) states that the theorists of “Modernism have predicted that as a society becomes industrialized and modernized, ethnicity will fade away and eventually die out.” What Yang puts forward is applicable to the nomadic community in Yaşar Kemal’s novel. Historical change made the Yörüks -the offspring of the glorious Turcomans- leave their laments, folk songs, folk tales, legends, epics, ballads, dances, dreams, the ritual “semah” and “mengis,” and forget their minstrels, sacred hearts, flutists, bards, holy sages, and master craftsmen as they lose their traditional wisdom and moral virtue. This is the saddest part of the story to observe the loss of decency and humanity in the failure of the survival of Turkoman Yörüks’ values while it speeds up the power of the novel in recreating the suffering of the Yörüks whose superior values go down defeat which seems a portrayal that history often overlooks.

In one of his interviews, Yaşar Kemal foreshadows the destiny of the Turcomans in his words: “they were coming to an end, their glory and fame were fading away from the earth and instead, they were becoming something new, totally different beings. They were waking up to a completely new, [...] perhaps unhappier world. It was entirely new, quite different” (Temizyürek: 2017b). It is clear that it will be an entirely new world for their descendants –a world that contradicts the world of their ancestors, a world full of the agony of change and not a change for the better, just like a botanical garden with no tree or flowers which means a culture with no roots.

Notes:

* I use the definite article “the” as in the phrase “the Çukurova” to refer it as a region and “the Çukurova Plain” to indicate it as a plain based on the references to regions of the United States such as “the Midwest,” “the South,” and “the West.”

** In Works Cited, I put the name of the author under “Y” since Yaşar Kemal is a pen name for Kemal Sadık Gökçeli.

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