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### **Chapter 3**

#### **Halkevi members: political ambition, segregation and alienation.**

Chapters 3 and 4 focus upon a number of cases of Halkevi members and executive. These Halkevi actors are studied in relation to and upon the framework offered by the previous second chapter, i.e. not only in relation to the ‘textbook version’ of the Halkevi institution, but also in relation to the local society that contains the House and provides for its resources, personnel and clientele. Through the voices of these Halkevi actors we will attempt to study how the centre’s version of the Halkevi is experienced and accounted for by social actors in the field; how these actors’ status and position in the local society interfere with and define their experience as members of such a project; and, ultimately, how and to what extent the local socio-political milieu interrelates with and affects the Halkevi space.

The first part of this chapter addresses the cases of six members, three women and three male members of the Kayseri Halkevi. A scribe in a State Department, a local teacher and a foreman from Istanbul working in the Airplane Factory in Kayseri are the three male cases. A teacher from Istanbul working in the Kayseri Lisesi, the wife of the local CHP secretary, both of them Party members, and a young girl from a poor family of refugees recently settled in Kayseri make up the three cases of women members. The second part of the chapter dwells on the writings on Kayseri of two educated outsiders in an attempt to examine the discourses on Kayseri and its population of those who were by large supposed to ‘enlighten’ the local ‘real people’ by their engagement in the Halkevi activities. This chapter then culminates in the analysis of a more detailed case of a Halkevi member, a schoolteacher from Istanbul appointed to the High school of Kayseri.

In the previous chapter we have seen that the core of the active Halkevi members in Kayseri were by majority teachers and other state employees, a large part of whom were not locals, but appointed to Kayseri from other cities, usually Istanbul. A small number of professionals – lawyers, doctors and veterinarians, was also registered. The administration though of the House was kept in the hands of the local Party leadership and the chairman was a local member of the Party Administrative Committee and usually from a prominent local family of merchant – *eşraf* origin. We have also seen that in terms of its active manpower and executives the Halkevi space was related to other local spaces of state or local power and authority, such as the school, the local Party structure, the Municipality, a variety of financial and social clubs and associations. In terms of spatial location also the House, housed in the 1930s in the old Armenian church, was located in the centre of the town next or close to other centres of state or local power and authority: the Party building, the High School, the market, the main square, the Provincial Administrative Building

(*Hükümet Konağı*), the Municipality, the banks and Chamber of Commerce. The ideological proximity of the People's Houses to the educated segments of the society we have detected in their constitutive texts was also declared with a spatial proximity to the places these segments inhabited during working hours and after. The House was literally inscribed, inserted into the administrative, political and financial centre of the provincial town, a centre mainly inhabited by state and local elites that was habitually avoided by, or even kept clear of, the 'other'.<sup>279</sup>

#### A) *Halkevi members*

*Sahir Üzel: A dialogue with or a Discourse about the local People, the Halkevi's 'other'*

Sahir Üzel is one of the few state employees who was also an active member of the Kayseri Halkevi. Between 1936 and 1940, he was either a member or the chairman of the Library and Publications Section of the House. Üzel, a scribe in the Public Works Department, was also contributing articles to *Erciyes*, the Halkevi journal, and to *Kayseri*, a local newspaper.

In two of his articles in *Kayseri*, he touches upon issues related to local women. With his piece "Faces revealed, scarves removed. Since the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1935 the *çarşaf*<sup>280</sup> has been removed",<sup>281</sup> Üzel discusses the custom of veiling, which he describes as ridiculous (*gülünç*), vulgar (*kaba*), as well as contrary to the state laws, social life (*içtimai yaşayış*) and the bases of civilization (*medeniyet kaideleri*), which is of course understood in the singular, i.e. western civilization. In short, veiling is a sign of a sick soul (*hasta ruhlu*) and of reactionary mentality (*taasup zihniyeti*). The vocabulary he uses to disprove a practice that was common among the population is indistinguishable from the one the regime utilizes to classify and engage its at once 'other' and 'enemy', the pervasive target of the reforms: *taasup/irtica*. Üzel's piece follows the local ban of the *çarşaf* that was enacted a day before, as the article's subtitle suggests. His direct aim is to refute the likely accusation that unveiling runs contrary to Islam, the national customs, and the society's morality.

Nevertheless, although the bifurcated time of the 'modern' vs. 'backward' comes up in his article as revealed by his reference to 'civilization' as juxtaposed to 'reaction' (*medeniyet/taasup*), the stress of his argument shifts to

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<sup>279</sup> In her work on Ankara Funda Çantek has demonstrated how the residents of the old city of Ankara were avoiding but also expelled from the new parts of the city. Funda Çantek, 'Yaban'lar ve Yerliler. Başkent olma sürecinde Ankara (İstanbul: İletişim, 2003), p. 147.

<sup>280</sup> Garment covering a woman from head to foot.

<sup>281</sup> Sahir Üzel, "Yüzler açılıp, çarlar çıkarılırken. 8 Eylül Pazar gününden itibaren çarşaf ve peçe kalktı", *Kayseri*, Monday 9 September 1935, p. 1.

the issue of honour (*namus*), a discursive and cognitive category that is mainly invoked by the those who reject the novelties the regime was initiating at least in relation to women. In Üzel's piece *namus* is not discarded as an obsolete or backward value; instead the argument that veiling safeguards the honour of women is rejected. "The honour of the Turkish woman has always been clean, her forehead has always been white (clean) and free of sin (*pak*). The *çarşaf* does not protect honour, cannot act as the guard of honour." On the contrary, veiling "has always had a bad influence on the character and morality (*ahlak*) of women." Thus "the time headscarves had been dirtying this forehead has finally passed." Üzel then is 'defeating' his opponents with their own weapons, by turning against them their own arguments.

In another newspaper piece about the Sümerbank textile factory Üzel once more invokes modernity in relation to local women.<sup>282</sup> In a celebratory discourse he describes the 'modern' factory and all its positive consequences: "a brand new and modern city has been created". It is something more than a factory; it is also a school where young workers are taught how to run the machines, a canteen where you can hear "the subtle (*ince*) sound of spoon and fork", and a sports field. "Eat here, work there, sleep in these modern apartments, take a bath, do sports in these wide fields." The dialogic character of his piece becomes more evident if we imagine these attributes in the opposite: 'eat where you work, sleep in backward dwellings, do not wash, do not do sports and stay idle'. Although not mentioned outright, his arguments address an 'other' that apparently refuses to see his 'truths' and work in the factory.

Given the attractiveness of the environment for our writer, his frustration as exclaimed at the article's subtitle becomes more obvious: "Why women do not take advantage of such a blessing/favor?" Apparently female workers were more productive in the textile industry than men. Nevertheless, a constant<sup>283</sup> complaint of the factory director was the unwillingness of local women to work there. Üzel gives three possible reasons for this unwillingness only to dismiss them as false. "Some think it is a result of your husbands' and your own fanaticism (*taasubunda*), others think that you do not want to lower yourself by working, while others speak of low daily wages." What Üzel is refuting here are the regime's expressed enemies, 'reactionary Islam' and 'communism'. These are "wrong and bad thoughts", but not the real reason for the absence of women. For Üzel the real reason is that "you and the people" have not yet been explained the lofty aims of the factory. "The factory in our region is a basis for the Turkish industry, a source of livelihood for the workers, and a source of

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<sup>282</sup> Sahir Üzel, "Kayseri Kadınları. Bu nimetten neden istifade etmiyorlar?", *Kayseri*, Monday 11 May 1936, p. 1.

<sup>283</sup> Linke, a journalist travelling through Turkey at the same period was told by the factory director about the unwillingness of local women to work in the factory. Lilo Linke, *Allah Dethroned. A journey through Modern Turkey* (London: Constable and Co, 1937), p. 312. The same problem is also stated by A.S.Levent, Party Inspector for Kayseri in his 14/71941 report to the General Secreteriat of the CHP contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/671.262.1.

work and honour (*namus*) for the women workers.” Despite all his rhetoric about ‘the new and modern’, Üzel, although refuting it, or by the very act of taking it into account in order to refute it, implicitly admits what the director of the factory openly states about local women:

*But the women in Kayseri and the villages nearby belonged to the most conservative in the whole country and were shocked at the very idea of working side by side with men though they were living in dire poverty and could well do with a few piastres.*<sup>284</sup>

In short, as we have seen in the above two articles, Üzel, a state employee, educated and Halkevi member, in his attempt to present two of the novelties introduced to Kayseri and its people, the unveiling campaign and the Sümerbank factory with its mixed workforce, enters into a dialogue with the ‘other’, with those referred to as ‘reactionary’, or ‘old mentality’ people. He incorporates their voices only to the extent necessary to refute them. The interest in Üzel’s imaginative dialogue with the ‘other to-be-instructed’ lies in his inability to totally discard their categories as exemplified in the case of ‘*namus*’ – honour.

Notwithstanding the obvious propagandistic nature of both texts, I argue that in engaging himself in a dialogue with the ‘other’ he and the centre’s discourse situate at the other side of the border, our Halkevi executive member is actually drawing that same border that separates the ‘modern’ or ‘civilized’ from the ‘backward’ or ‘reactionary’ and at the same time signifies what both set of terms mean. The act of discursively drawing that border however exposes a delicate *tension* inscribed into the core of Üzel’s discourse. This *tension* is exemplified by the use of *namus* in relation to women and their attire in this respect. The position of women in society has been extensively considered *the* indicator of ‘modernity’, the measure of being modern/civilized and thus has functioned (and very much still functions) as the foremost boundary dividing the discursive and cognitive category modern from backward. The exact same can be argued, from the other side of the fence though, for the category *namus* – also related to women, although we cannot restrict its semantic validity only to gender issues. *Namus* and its possible violation functions exactly as the prime marker of difference, the reason why women were refusing to work “side by side with men”, or insisting in ‘dirtying their foreheads’ with the headscarf. Needless to remark, the addressed ‘other’ does not reply, but remains silent.

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<sup>284</sup> Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 312. In a letter to to Şükrü Kaya, Interior Minister, the Vali Adli Bayman confesses that “Kayseri is a part of our country that has lagged behind (*geri kalmış*) and has to be developed (*kalkınması*). In this region that has a very backward social life (*sosyal hayatı çok geride olan*) men and women have not come together (*kaynaşmamış*).” The letter, dated 26/4/1937, is contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2.

*Kemaleddin Karamete: the absent Kayseri of a local teacher.*

Kemalettin Karamete was a local teacher and Halkevi member with a discernible life journey and career. Karamete, or else Kemaleddin Kara Mehmet Ağa zade, was born in Kayseri in 1908; completed his secondary education in the Lycées of Kayseri and Istanbul; lived in France and studied Chemistry and French at the Universities of Lyon and Paris. From 1930 till 1952 he taught French at the Lycée of Kayseri. He was engaged in publishing: 1934 Erciyes Kayserisi ve Tarihine bir bakış; a brochure called Yeni Erkilet and a guidebook of Kayseri in Istanbul. He was also publishing in local newspapers and journals.<sup>285</sup> Some of his writings apparently were published in the Revue Hittite et Asiatique in Paris.<sup>286</sup> Karamete was also an active member of the Kayseri Halkevi, registered in the Language, History and Literature Section. In the Halkevi Karamete taught French, delivered speeches, prepared the programme of a local holiday with his students at the local High School.<sup>287</sup>

Next to all these activities, Karamete aspired to be elected to the National Assembly. He applied at least twice, in 1943 and 1946, to the General Secretariat of the CHP.<sup>288</sup> The second time, in order to convince the Party, he wrote a five page application enumerating in great detail all his achievements in Kayseri. His Mebustalebnamesi (application to become a Party candidate for the National Assembly) constitutes an extremely interesting text in relation to the study of the Kayseri Halkevi's cadre. It has been shown above that schoolteachers, such as Karamete, were among the House's executives and most active members. Karamete's application then offers us the opportunity to see how a local teacher and scholar presents himself and his work in Kayseri to the Party Headquarters.

He starts by declaring that his family, as well as his wife's family, is one of the oldest families of Kayseri. He then presents his educational background, with studies in Turkey and France, and his mastery of four European languages. He mentions his military service as an NCO, and his professional status as a teacher of French in the Kayseri Lisesi. The lengthiest section of his application though is about his publications and researches on local history, mainly on the Hittite monuments of the Kayseri province. As he puts it himself, "I was not content with just teaching; I worked to make Kayseri and its inhabitants known to Turkey and the outside world."<sup>289</sup> This work is conceived as a national duty; one of his books "ensured that a Turk before any foreigner made a number of historical monuments of our country known." To

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<sup>285</sup> Kemaleddin Kara Mehmet Ağa zade, *Erciyes Kayserisi ve Tarihine bir bakış* (Kayseri: Yeni Matbaa, 1934). Additional information on Karamete taken from Önder, *Kayseri Basın tarihi*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>286</sup> Önder, *Kayseri Basın tarihi*, p. 170.

<sup>287</sup> Kemaleddin Kara Mehmet Ağa zade, *Erciyes Kayserisi ve Tarihine bir bakış*, pp. V – VI.

<sup>288</sup> His Applications are contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/306.1249.1; 490.1/307.1250.2.

<sup>289</sup> One of his forthcoming books doubtlessly serves this purpose; *Et'in Ulus hayatında önemi ve ürünlerinden pastırma* (The importance of meat in the Nation's life and one of its products, *pastırma*). Mentioned in his 1946 *Mebustalebnamesi* contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/307.1250.2.

reinforce this image of himself as the introducer of Kayseri to the world, Karamete states that “it is me who for the last 16 years is presenting Kayseri to all the Turkish and foreign scholars, Ambassadors, and other visitors.”

His work in the local People’s House is also mentioned in brief, as well as his articles in the local newspapers. Last but not least, his commitment to the Party is explicitly stressed in the concluding paragraphs of his letter, where, in an overtly ornamented language reminiscent of the era’s politician’s panegyric speeches, Karamete confesses his loyalty to the regime’s great deeds and goals towards progress (ilerlemeğe), which he defines as the creation of the numerous revolutions (reforms), the destruction of whatever is outmoded and harmful to the nation, and the protection of the nation and the country from the troubles of the Second World War.

In short, in his attempt to promote his request by presenting himself, Karamete refers to a number of attributes he considers essential for a prospective MP. Judging by his own case, his reputable family and educational background, his esteemed profession, his voluntary active participation in the state and regime’s social projects – the Halkevi being one of them, his interests in local studies and social activities, and his capacity/authority to act as a representative of his region to important foreign and Turkish guests, as well of the reforms to his fellow compatriots, all make him eligible for the job. What is more, all the above characteristics outline a - to some extent definitely imagined - persona, an ideal(ized) citizen of the Turkish Republic, instilled with all the necessary qualities granting him membership of a prescribed/imaginary group, what high-level state and Party functionaries were calling ‘guiding element’, or ‘mass of intellectuals’ (rehber unsur, münevver kitlesi/kütlesi). Being an energetic ‘Halkevcisi’ is definitely considered desirable, if not a prerequisite, to belong to such a category. Karamete was not the only local schoolteacher and Halkevi members who considered himself a natural member of this enlightened group. It is not a coincidence that at least another four schoolteachers and Halkevi members asked for the Party’s nomination in Kayseri.<sup>290</sup>

However active he might present himself to be in presenting Kayseri to the world, in his speeches and books about Kayseri the contemporary town and its people are conspicuously absent. Karamete was a highly educated local, an intellectual coming from a local prominent- eşraf family who was obviously intimately familiar with the local society and population. Nevertheless, in his account of Kayseri presented in his book<sup>291</sup> he has almost nothing to say about modern Kayseri and its people. Only a few pages are dedicated to Kayseri’s recent past, more specifically to the town’s contribution to the war of independence coupled with a few remarks about the achievements of the

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<sup>290</sup> Fahri Tümer, Ömer Sıtkı Erdi, Hamdi Uçok, Nazlı Gaspıralı. Since we could only find the relevant folders for the 1943 and 1946 elections in the Archive, it is not illegitimate to expect more similar cases. These applications are contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/306.1249.1 and 490.1/307.1250.2.

<sup>291</sup> Kemalettin Kara Mehmet Ağa zade, *Erciyes Kayserisi ve Tarihine bir bakış*.

Republican regime in the locality. Karamete's Kayseri is a town with a reclaimed illustrious and national Hittite - Turkish history evident in the monuments of the distant past and an absent and uninhabited present. His inability, or reluctance, to address his contemporary Kayseri differentiates him from other educated and non-local Halkevi actors, such as Üzel, İğneci and Kudret (treated below), whose texts dare to wrestle with the present, the people and the city surrounding them.

*Mahir Şener: Halkevci with a purpose.*

The files in the State Archive contain information regarding yet another member of the Kayseri People's House, who fortunately comes from a different occupational background than our previous examples. Mahir Şener, a foreman at the Airplane Factory (Tayyare Fabrikası) in Kayseri and the chairman of the Fine Arts Section of the Kayseri Halkevi, sent two requests to the Party Headquarters in 1938 and 1939. In his first letter,<sup>292</sup> dated 28/7/1938, he asks for a financial favour, to receive a monthly salary (maaş) instead of a daily wage (yevmiye).<sup>293</sup> According to the information given in his dilek, Mahir Şener was sent for three years to an A.E.G. factory in Germany during the First World War, where he received training in arms production.<sup>294</sup> He had been working for 23 years in various arms production units in Turkey. For the last 6 years he had been employed in the Airplane Factory in Kayseri, paid on a daily basis (yevmiye). In order to buttress his request he mentions his engagement in the local House. "Apart from my official duty, I have been working at various People's Houses in the Fine Arts Section and their Committees; moreover I have been working for the publication and propagation of our national music together with my daughter for the sake of realizing our People's Party's principles." He then goes on in a fashion that is quite typical of similar petitions by stating his and his family's destitute financial situation. "I am the father of six children and together with my parents and wife I provide the means of support for a family of ten persons." A letter of support from Naci Özsan, the Halkevi chairman, was attached to the request. The chairman confirmed that the Fine Arts Committee chairman Mahir Şener and his daughter, Ms Belkis, actively participated in the House's annual programme of activities.

In his second letter to the Party, dated 20/5/1939,<sup>295</sup> Mahir Şener asked for the Party's mediation to become the head of a section of the Factory or be transferred to the management of any other department outside Kayseri, as my

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<sup>292</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/838.311.1.

<sup>293</sup> With a monthly wage he would probably be paid for all the days of the month instead just the working days the daily wage covered. In other words, he was asking for an increase in his payment.

<sup>294</sup> AEG was involved in airplane manufacture during the 1st World War and Mahir was probably trained in this field as his employment in the Kayseri airplane factory suggests.

<sup>295</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/478.1947.1.



family “can not get on well with the climate here.” Once more he played the card of his position and work in the Halkevi to persuade the Party to help him. He even implied that he is entitled to this help by calling the possible realization of his request “a reward (mükafat) for his numerous efforts”. He also named witnesses that can vouch for his person and works; the MP Reşit Özsoy, the Halkevi Inspector Behçet Kemal Çağlar and ‘the people of Kayseri’.

Mahir Şener is the only Committee chairman who was not a teacher or a civil servant. He was the only worker in the Halkevi whose voice has been recorded in these letters. The 1934 and 1937 lists of the Sectional Committees mention three more pipe fitters (teşviyeci) - Hamit in 1934, Ali and Sait in 1937. Their names appear only in those lists. They did not seem to publish anything in the Halkevi journal. In default of more sources we can only speculate on their cases. On the other hand, turning to Mahir Şener, with a relative degree of certainty we can argue that, as a foreman in a specialized field with training abroad, he cannot be considered a typical case of worker, such as the unskilled ones we might expect to find working in the Kayseri factories. Furthermore, he was not from Kayseri, where he settled in 1932 (or 1933) coming from Istanbul, a fact situating him far off the bulk of the industrial workforce of Kayseri. The Sümerbank factory workers Lilo Linke is describing in her book could not have been Halkevi frequenters in any case: “most of the workers looked wild and uncouth, with faces burnt by the sun and clothes torn by age and hard work. Peasants and regular workers, hitherto living without any regular order, sleeping in hovels or, during the summer months, out in the open, half animals in their dumbness and ignorance.”<sup>296</sup>

Şener’s petitions were forwarded through the Halkevi and local Party mechanisms. His membership and active involvement in the House is presented as an argument to buttress his demand to the centre, exactly the same way Karamete and the Halkevi actors to be treated below in their petitions to the Party. These sources portray the Halkevi as a mediating institution between Halkevi members and the centre, between elite social actors and the state/Party mechanisms. This constitutes an obvious and widespread deviation from the way the Halkevi was prescribed by the centre to operate, something the sheer number of similar petitions sent to the Party Headquarters reveal.<sup>297</sup> The constitutive of the Halkevi institution texts presented in the first chapter envisage and stipulate a ‘cultural’ institution that would close the gap between the ‘real people’ and the ‘intellectuals’, an institution that would mediate between the wider society to-be-‘enlightened’ and the educated - mainly under the state’s employment and payroll - segments of society, a process to be carried out under the supervision of state and Party (local and central). Şener’s

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<sup>296</sup> Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 303.

<sup>297</sup> The reply of the General Secretariat to Şener’s and Özsan’s letters rejects their demand for mediation and thus the Halkevi’s involvement in such issues reminding them that the petition has to be addressed to the Undersecretariat of Defence. The reply of 3/8/1938 is contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/838.311.1.

petitions, as well as the petitions of Karamete's and of numerous other Halkevi members, present a quite different picture. The People's House of their texts rather appears a space frequented, manned and controlled by local elites and state employees, functioning as a means of negotiation and communication between these local and state elite actors and the centre. In short, instead of being an institution that introduces the centre's policies and reforms to the local population by facilitating the 'merging' of 'intellectuals' and 'people', our sources display the Halkevi of Kayseri as an establishment controlled and inhabited by local and state elites that facilitated the communication between centre (central state and Party mechanisms) and urban elites, locals and outsiders, state employees, professionals, and merchants.

### *Women*

Among the names of the Committee members, women always constitute a minority. Almost all of them are teachers and usually a male member of their family also takes part in the Halkevi activities. The same applies for the female Party members. Unfortunately the Party statistics do not state the percentage of women over men members. The only available evidence is the list of members of the Municipal Assembly and the Administrative Committees of the local CHP. According to these sources, women are extremely rare exceptions; no more than four women appear in Municipal Assemblies between 1930 and 1950, and two women in the Party *Idare Heyetleri* between the years 1940 – 1946. In the first case, Nazlı Gaspıralı was among the Municipal Assembly's members between 1933 – 1936 and 1946 – 1950. Mamurhan Özsan was also a member between 1933 – 1936 together with Naciye Özsan, the wife of Naci Özsan, Mamurhan's brother-in-law. Finally, Zehra Karakaya, described as "the daughter of the Mevlevi Şeyh Ahmet Remzi effendi", was the last female member of the 1933 – 1936 *Belediye Meclisi*. Zehra's name appears nowhere else. As for the rest of the Municipal Assemblies (1930 – 1932, 1936 – 1939, 1939 – 1943, and 1946 - 1950), no woman was elected.<sup>298</sup> The available here sources then indicate that the very few women at the high echelons of the local political elite were either educated outsiders or wives and/or daughters of influential locals.

The relevant Halkevi sources for Kayseri offer very little information about the women members, just numbers and a few names. In July 1937 the Kayseri House had 53 women members over 1346 men, and in December 1937 82 over 1891 male members. Women were mostly registered in the Language, Literature and History, Fine Arts, Social Assistance and Courses Sections. The members' lists of the Administrative Committees of the House record 11

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<sup>298</sup> Çalışkan, *Kuruluşundan Günümüze Kayseri Belediyesi*, pp. 90-1, 94-5, 106-7, 117, 122-3, 133-4.

women, the majority (nine) being schoolteachers. It is highly probable that more teachers than the ones recorded at the Committee members' lists were registered. The number for these women teachers cannot be determined, but if we put them together with some of the wives and daughters of all those local Party men and state functionaries, the number 53 or 82 can be easily reached. A brochure published<sup>299</sup> in Kayseri describing one of the Village excursions the Vali Adli Bayman was organizing in the 1930s contains a list of the participants. Apart from two women teachers, the rest of the 11 women taking part in the excursion were accompanied by (or accompanying) their husbands or fathers; the Vali's wife and daughter; the wives of the Özsan brothers (Naciye and Mamurhan); the wives of the Sumer factory director and of the Sumer Sports' Club chairman; the wife and daughter of a certain Mustafa Okar.

If the above data is treated as representative of the female Halkevi membership, then the two groups, schoolteachers and women from the families of important local or non-local statesmen, comprise the majority of the women members of the Kayseri Halkevi.

Information concerning three women members is given here. Luckily enough, although in a fragmentary form, their own voices are also heard. Without claiming that the following three cases constitute a cross section of the women members, they definitely allow for an insight of their own understanding and experience of their participation, as well as for a glimpse over the involvement of women in a provincial House.

#### *Nazlı Gaspıralı*

Wife of Dr Haydar Gaspıralı, son of İsmail Gasprinski, Nazlı Gaspıralı, teacher of Turkish at the Kayseri Lycee, was either a member or the chairman of the Language, History and Literature Section from 1934 till 1940. In 11/2/1943 she applied to the Party to become an official Party candidate for the National Assembly. Her application (*Mebustalebnamesi*) is an interesting text, a kind of Curriculum Vitae where a Halkevi member is presenting herself to the Party with the direct aim to be selected an MP.

*I am the granddaughter of Namık Paşa, who worked for the opening of the first War College, and daughter in law of the late Turkist (Türkçü) İsmail Gaspıralı. My social activities: after high school, I graduated from the Philosophy Department of the Literature Faculty at the Istanbul University. I was employed at the Istanbul Çapa Lisesi as a teacher and vice-director. I then settled in Kayseri as my*

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<sup>299</sup> İlbay Adli Bayman'ın Başkanlığı altında Kayseri Halkevinin Tertip ettiği Yaya Köy Gezileri Tetkik Notlarıdır, Seri: 2, *Germir Köyü*, Yazan: Etiler Başöğretmeni Kazım Özdoğan (Halkevi Müze ve sergiler komitesinden), (Kayseri Vilayet Matbaası, 1937). The brochure is contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.1

husband, Dr Haydar Gaspıralı, chose to work for the fatherland in Anatolia. After working for a long time at the Kayseri Lisesi for boys, together with my husband we went for a year to Germany for research in relation to our specialization. Upon our return, I undertook, following an invitation, certain social duties. I was elected to the Municipal Assembly. I was the president of the Language, History and Literature Section of the Kayseri Halkevi. After realizing the lack of good care for children in Kayseri, I resigned from my duty at the Kayseri Lisesi in 1941 in order to do something useful in relation to this issue. Although I undertook a number of projects on this issue, due to the present (existing) order of things, I was not able to complete a number of preparations. In 22/11/1941, upon the proposal of the Exalted CHP, I was elected president of the Yardımsever Cemiyeti [Philanthropic Association] of Kayseri. During my time in office I managed to register 600 members to the Association. During the last elections, I was among the 12 nominees of the Exalted CHP for Kayseri. Due to a few lacking votes, I was ninth. My dissertation was on “war and peace stages of social evolution and theories of perpetual peace”. Research papers: “Character” (Seciye), on Rousseau’s education principles, “Ahlak meslekleri” [Morality issues]. Another of my works is the translation of Leon Brunschvicg’s *Introduction a la vie de l’ esprit*.<sup>300</sup>

Nazlı Gaspıralı is definitely an exceptional person in Kayseri of the 1930s and 40s. She is an educated woman, teacher; coming from what seems to be an important family; member of the Municipal Assembly, almost an MP; chairman of a local Philanthropic Association; a translator and writer; and, finally, an outsider, an ‘İstanbullu’. She is not only an exception among the by 11% literate Kayseri women, but also among the Halkevi and Party members, as a woman and chairman of a Halkevi Section, probably by virtue of her education and family (and her husband’s family) lineage. This not explicitly stated exceptionality then makes her qualified to become an MP. Gaspıralı’s *Mebustalepnamesi* follows the same pattern as Karamete’s request. She stresses certain facts of her self and life that make her a member of that certain group considered able to represent the ‘people’, i.e. her modern education, her profession, her engagement in ‘social’ activities’ (Halkevleri, *Yardımsever Cemiyeti*), her literary works, and her family’s long and proven affiliation with the ruling elite and its ideas. Her gender is not an explicit issue though. Given the regime’s expressed interest in and legislation aiming at the improvement of the social status of women, one might expect Gaspıralı to underscore the fact that she is a woman, an exemplar of the ‘modern’ woman the regime was

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<sup>300</sup> BCA CHP, 490.1/306.1249.1. Leon Brunschvicg, *Introduction a la vie de l’ esprit* (Paris: Alcan, 1931).

aiming at. Nevertheless, she does not make a point of it, unlike our next example, Mahmuran Özsan.

*Mahmuran Özsan*

Mahmuran (or Mamurhan) Özsan, born in 1903 in Kayseri and graduate of the *Kayseri Kız Rüştîyesi*, was according to her own account a housewife engaged in ‘social services’ (*içtimai hizmetler*). She was married to Osman Özsan, the Party secretary in Kayseri, brother of Naci Özsan, who was also a Party member, lawyer, Halkevi chairman and MP for Kayseri. Mahmuran was a member of the Party Administrative Committee of the Vilayet, of the Society for the Protection of Children (*Çocuk Esirgeme kurumu*) and of the Social Assistance Section of the Kayseri Halkevi, “an enlightened/intellectual of the Kayseri women” and “sociable”, according to Party inspector Hilmi Çoruh (*Kayseri kadınlarının münevveridir. Girgindir*).<sup>301</sup> In 1937 she took part, together with her husband and brother in law, in the Village excursions organized by the Vali Adli Bayman.<sup>302</sup> In 1943 she sent a request to the Party Headquarters in Ankara asking to become an MP for Kayseri. According to her *Mebus Talebnamesi*, she was a delegate at the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses. She also mentioned her active engagement in the Kayseri Halkevi, the Red Crescent and the *Çocuk Esirgeme kurumu*. She did not fail to state that her father was a member of the *Müdafaayı Hukuk*<sup>303</sup> and of the People’s Party.<sup>304</sup> In short, she implicitly suggested that because of her family’s status and her dedication and labor within the Party and her ‘social and political services’ (*siyasi ve içtimai hizmetler*) she possesses the necessary qualities to become an MP. Moreover, “I believe that I’ll be able to act and work towards the realization of the revolutionary role of women in Turkey as well as towards the spirit of the advances of the revolution in the National Assembly.”<sup>305</sup>

In another request, sent directly to the Party secretary Memduh Şevket Esendal in 22/2/1945, Mamurhan Özsan again highlights her chairmanship of the Social Assistance Section of the Kayseri Halkevi and the fact that she is the only woman between the members of the Municipal Assembly (*Umumi Meclis*) in order to buttress her request. According to her own words:

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<sup>301</sup> 25/12/1944 report of the Party inspector Hıfzı Oğuz Bekata contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/273.1094.1; 03/03/1940 report of Party inspector Hilmi Çoruh in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/670.255.1; reports of the local Party structure for the period between 1/6/1944 – 1/1/1945 and 1/1/1945 – 1/6/1945 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/671.261.1.

<sup>302</sup> İlbay Adli Bayman’ın Başkanlığı altında Kayseri Halkevinin Tertip ettiği Yaya Köy Gezileri Tetkik Notlarıdır, Seri: 2, *Germir Köyü*, p. 15, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.1.

<sup>303</sup> She means the Societies for the Defence of National Rights (*Müdafaai Hukuku Milliye Cemiyetleri*) that started to be established in 1918 and were merged into the *Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaai Hukuk Cemiyeti* later to form the nucleus of the People’s Party.

<sup>304</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/306.1249.1.

<sup>305</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/306.1249.1. “Türkiyede kadının inkılabcı rolünü idrak ettiğine ve büyük millet meclisinde inkılab hamlelerinin ruhuna uygun hizmet ve faaliyetlerde bulunabileceğine kan ...yım.”

*A year ago my house was broken into and all the winter clothes and objects were stolen. [...] in order to obtain all the indispensable items and as my family has no other income except my husband's 100 lira wage, I was compelled to run into debt during the war years. I have been a member of the Party Administrative Committee for 11 years; the only woman member of the Umumi Meclis for the last three periods; president of the Social Assistance Section of the Halkevi. I have been a person working with all my heart and energy for the social and political activities of my region the last 11 years. My father has worked in the Party for long years and is now an old man who has lost his wealth. [...] I'll ask for your help in order to save myself from this grave situation. [...]*

*The situation is the following: the issue of the elections for the Kayseri Umumi meclisi will come to an end by March. The allotment for the members of the Daimi Encümen of the Umumi Meclis is 140 lira and I am asking to become a member of it. I was a member of the Daimi Encümeni before and I worked without a fault. As the only woman I was always in the minority. Because of various interests the male friends do not want to give me this job. [...] You will say 'why don't you get in touch with your seniors there?' I am a woman, if this issue stays behind, my self-respect [izzeti nefsim] will be damaged. Besides, the interests excessively collide on this issue. The male friends always have the upper hand.<sup>306</sup>*

Mamurhan Özsan was one of the extremely rare cases of women members of Party and Municipal Administrative<sup>307</sup> bodies. She was an educated – rare in those days – woman married to an influential local Party boss and one of the very few local women who were members of the People's House. Similar to Nazlı Gaspıralı but more explicitly she evokes her family's – or, more precisely, her male family members' – involvement in the War of Independence and their Party credentials. In a sense, both women's commitment to the Party, regime and reforms is testified not only by the direct involvement in its projects – the People's Houses being one of them, but also by their family, their husbands and fathers. Their male ancestors and their husbands with their Party or 'Turkist', or 'Müdafaayı Hukuk' credentials bestow upon them an almost natural membership to a greater 'family', to the political elite and its cause. The oxymoron lies in the fact that these two 'liberated' and 'modern' women who openly participate in the local political and 'cultural' life among men do not fail to stress their attachment to male relatives, an emphasis that is quite reminiscent of the wider society's traditional – here in the sense of

<sup>306</sup> BCA CHP, 490.1/478.1947.1.

<sup>307</sup> It seems that she did not manage to become a member of the Standing Committee and one and a half year later she resigned from the People's Republican Party. The letter of her resignation is contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/450.1854.5.

widespread – ideas about the proper position of women in the private sphere among family members and definitely not among unrelated men. Even for these very rare cases of politically active women– at least as members of local political assemblies – their participation in local politics seems to be only possible through their husbands. In the local socio-political arena – as well as to the General Secretariat of the ruling Party - they appear (and chose to appear) not only or primarily as individuals but as members of a family, that is women related to their male relatives, most commonly a husband who is also a locally active political figure. The voices of these women then - certainly Mamurhan, whose husband is the local Party secretary - speak of their husbands as well, if not primarily. They attest their husbands’ attachment to the regime’s ideology and policies in relation to the women’s issue. When they speak of their engagement in local politics as women, they also speak of, and thus applaud, their husbands’ political life, the same way Ali Talashioğlu and Murat Şerbetçi target Naci Özsan, Halkevi chairman and local Party boss, when they inform the General Secretariat that his sister in law, Mamurhan, “is known among the people as a woman of low morals”.<sup>308</sup> The very few active in Halkevi and local politics women are thus not independent, but rather operate through and next to their husbands, whose political career and prospective can potentially both enhance and harm.

Mamurhan is again more explicit regarding the impact of her sex on her political life and the way “the male friends” treat her. First of all, she stresses that she is a woman right from the beginning. She pledges to work for “the realization of the revolutionary role of women in Turkey”. She mentions that she is the only female member of the Municipal Assembly, and then being “the only woman always in the minority”, “the male friends do not want to give me this job.” The reason she gives for not speaking to the ‘seniors’ in Kayseri is that as a woman “if this issue stays behind, my self-respect [*izzeti nefsim*] will be damaged. [T]he male friends always have the upper hand.” In order to further her request Mamurhan plays the ‘female card’, emphasizes her exceptionality as a woman, and finally while mentioning the attitude of the male friends towards her because she is a woman, she implicitly alludes to the opposition of the ‘male friends’ and – we might also add – of the wider society to the participation of women in the public and political life of the region.

By mentioning the possible threat and damage to her public esteem and honour, Mamurhan informs the Party of the sacrifices involved in her attempt to be a model Turkish woman in a resisting society. Although explicitly mentioned by her, we can also assume the danger her damaged self-esteem might pose for her husband’s honour. In case the public esteem or honour of a woman is hurt, it is her male relatives, fathers of husbands whose *izzeti nefis* is

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<sup>308</sup> Denunciation sent to the Party Headquarters by the chairman of the Lale ocak in Kayseri Ali Talashioğlu and Murat Şerbetçi, member of the same ocak in 14/3/1939, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/344.1440.4.

primarily damaged as they are considered to be the guardians of their families' (and women's) honour.

Unlike Mamurhan, Nazlı Gaspıralı is less interested in referring to such a resistance to her involvement in local socio-political institutions such as the Halkevi, even if we allow for a rather cryptic reference to the "existing order of things" as an excuse for not accomplishing all her plans in the region. I contend that for outsiders with more loose connections to the locality and the population like Gaspıralı, the opposition to female political participation due to issues of 'honour' is less relevant. For Mamurhan on the other hand, her husband and family's status is relevant and crucial because of their position in the local power networks as local power brokers competing with other local elite segments in front of the eyes of the local public, in front of local rivals and clients. Admirable as it might have been for the eyes of the CHP leadership in Ankara, a politically active woman in a provincial society might easily invite opposition and threaten her and her husband's position in the local political equilibrium. My argument is that Mamurhan's letter to the CHP has to be placed and understood within the frame of local politics and the resistance the participation of women in politics was instigating. Within such a context Mamurhan's petition appears as an attempt to enlist the assistance of the central Party against the opposition she and her husband were facing by local rivals within a society that was not that agreeable to innovations regarding the participation of women in politics.

#### Zatiye Tonguç

Zatiye Tonguç was another young woman engaged in the activities of the Kayseri Halkevi. Her case deviates from the above-described pattern of female participation in the Halkevi. She was first of all younger, 18 years old, and came from an apparently less well-off family of refugees from Romania only recently settled in Kayseri. Up until her dismissal in 1940, she had been employed in the library of the Kayseri Halkevi. In 21/8/1940 he wrote directly to the Secretary General of the CHP asking to be reemployed.

Her request is the following:

*Your humble servant, I come from the immigrants from Romania, a girl of 18 years old I am. We came to Turkey two years ago and were settled in Kayseri. My family consists of eight members. I take care of the education of my four brother and sisters. I also have an aged father and mother. It is me who provides the livelihood for all of them. A year ago I was employed at the library of the People's House of Kayseri for a salary of 30 liras. For a whole year I had never left my duty*



*(post) and I had been working every day till 11 o'clock at night. The other day I was ill, I took two days' leave from the Halkevi secretary and after being treated for two days I returned to my duty. By that time the Halkevi chairman had dismissed me from my duty. [...] Now they rejected me and a family of eight persons has been impoverished. This is why I write to you [...] I cannot work anywhere else because I am a girl and we cannot go anywhere else once we had been settled in Kayseri. That's why I ask for your mediation to get back to my post.*<sup>309</sup>

Zatiye Tonguç was probably one of the girls Hilmi Çoruh, the Party Inspector, was referring to in his 3/3/1940 report on the Kayseri Halkevi. The Inspector found the Halkevi Library in a bad state with many books missing and unregistered. "Two 15, 16 year-old girls are employed with a 30 Lira salary as Library Servants (*Kütüphane memuru*). They are also supposedly working in the Theatre Section as well."<sup>310</sup> It is not right to assign this job to these ladies who have not a legal license. There is a need for a responsible clerk."<sup>311</sup> It is not clear whether Zatiye was also active in the Theatre Section, but even if she was, as an article in a local newspaper suggests,<sup>312</sup> she did not mention it to buttress her request, as might have been the case in the above examples of Halkevi members. Karamete, Mamurhan Özsan and Nazlı Gaspıralı did not neglect to refer to their Halkevi credentials when sending their requests to the Party – surely for something regarded as rather more significant than a petty job request. This difference can quite plausibly pinpoint the social distance between Zatiye and the previous Halkevi members. For a girl from a poor family recently immigrated to Turkey stating the obvious, i.e. their destitute situation, might seem sufficient enough to make her seniors feel sorry and help her, rather than bragging about her commitment to the Party's high ideals and her participation in the reform projects, which seems to be the case in the more typical Halkevi Administrative members mentioned above. Zatiye's moving piece seems to have touched the Secretary General Dr. A.F.Tuzer, who personally sent a letter to the chairman of the Kayseri Halkevi asking for the employment of 'our little girl' to her former position or to a 'suitable job outside the House'.<sup>313</sup>

Up until now, Zatiye seems to be the only woman from a 'lower' social background than the previously mentioned women whose voice has survived,

<sup>309</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/838.311.1. Original text in Appendix.

<sup>310</sup> In all probability the employment in the library came as a reward or a compensation for their acting on the Halkevi stage, something widely considered not moral for women. Because of the unwillingness of women to 'climb the stage', compensation in the form of a job or an amount of money was offered to women ready to take part in theatrical plays in many Houses. See Chapter 7.

<sup>311</sup> Report contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/671.263.1.

<sup>312</sup> "Halkevi Temsilleri", *Kayseri*, 1 April 1940, p. 2. "Lise orta kısım talebelerine Reşat Nuri'nin 'Taş parçası' (...) Remzi rolünde Ahmet, Müzeyyen rolünde Zatiye".

<sup>313</sup> Letter dated 19/9/1940, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/671.263.1. The Secretary General would only rarely interfere personally with such 'trivial' issues and, in not a small number of similar requests, no answer is to be found in the archive.

albeit in a fragmentary form, in the archive. We do not possess any source that would demonstrate whether Zatiye case's was typical among Halkevi members. It is almost impossible with the available sources to say anything definite on whether people, especially women, from poorer and less, or not at all, educated segments of the local society were Halkevi members, to what extent, for what reasons, and what they might have thought of it. It suffices here to say that their silence in the sources rather points at their absence. In that sense, Zatiye Tonguç was, in all probability, an exception among the women of the House, as well as an exception of the women of her social status in Kayseri as a newcomer with no roots in the region. This can be also seen as a sign of the House's popularity among middle or low class locals and, especially, women.

### ***B) Images of Kayseri***

We have seen that a substantial number of the active members of the Houses we have studied were educated outsiders, usually civil servants (teachers, doctors, bureaucrats) appointed to the region. The aim of the following is to examine what educated outsiders (in majority coming from Istanbul) say about Kayseri and its people through their texts. The way they viewed the city, the local society, not to mention the people they were supposed to 'instruct', is important if we are to come to a better understanding of the Halkevi as an institution of the prescribed social change these people were (supposed to be) involved in. The images of Kayseri and its people they convey in their writings are significant for the purpose of contemplating their self-positioning within a local society, its people, and, most important, within an ongoing process of imposed social change, the *per se* locus of which was the People's House.

Two texts are used here, two cases of Istanbul intellectuals either visiting or working in Kayseri in the mid 1930s. The first one is the novelist Nahid Sırrı Örik. He wrote travelogues about the places he visited in Turkey.<sup>314</sup> In March 1936 he visited Kayseri. He published his impressions in 1955.<sup>315</sup> The Kayseri travelogue was published again in 2000 as a part of a compilation of Örik's works; this version is used here.<sup>316</sup> The second case is Murat İğneci's article series "Bir Geziden İntibalar", ('Impressions from a trip') published in the local newspaper *Kayseri*, between 2 and 20 March 1939. In these articles İğneci is presenting Kayseri to one of his friends coming from a large city. In short, we are dealing with a novelist writing for an educated audience and a civil servant writing in a local newspaper for a local public.

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<sup>314</sup> For a short biography and a list of his published works see <http://www.biyografi.net/kisiyrinti.asp?kisiid=818>.

<sup>315</sup> Nahid Sırrı Örik, *Kayseri Kırşehir Kastamonu* (İstanbul: Kanaat Kitabevi, 1955).

<sup>316</sup> Nahid Sırrı Örik, *Anadolu'da yol notları, Kayseri Kırşehir Kastamonu, Bir Edirne Seyahatnamesi* (İstanbul: Arma, 2000).

In March 1936 Nahid Sirri visited Kayseri; he stayed four days. He was accommodated at the Kayseri high school building. He was mostly attracted to the remains of the past and his travelogue is full of description of old monuments and buildings, mosques, libraries, as well as famous individuals, poets, scholars and rulers. He does not show the same interest in the contemporary city or her people. When he turns his attention to the city and her people, his comments are not very flattering.

Immediately after his arrival he went out to visit a coffeehouse. By visiting a coffeehouse, he claims, a stranger can quickly feel the general character (*umumi hava*) of a city and witness some of its peculiarities. The coffeehouses of Kayseri though were very few. He was told that the most suitable and clean coffeehouse was the one across the Lise building. "This coffeehouse, though, that was the cleanest one of a Vilayet centre such as Kayseri, the ninth largest city in Turkey with a population of 46.419 according to the 1935 census, was a place that would not give the right to any provincial town to praise itself." What was wrong with that coffeehouse? It was crammed with customers, the tables were not covered with any tablecloth, most of the customers were playing backgammon, and the only available newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, was moving from table to table. "The atmosphere was heavy, smoky and suffocating. Small local civil servant and small tradesman types." The voice of the radio, the backgammon and chat noises, together with the sound of the door being closed and opened, disturbed and annoyed the author and his company. Even the waiter seems to annoy the author: "... the waiter, whose white jacket had lost its colour and whose hair seemed to have been lost since his childhood." The author and his company left the coffeehouse displeased without even finish drinking their coffee.<sup>317</sup>

The next day the author woke up early and wandered around the city streets without any certain direction; "[n]arrow, knotty, quiet stone streets". Both sides of the streets were blocked by walls covered with thick, black stones. The city has been built upon a straight road, while the houses could only partially be seen or even not at all. "These roads, these houses very much display an Arabistan picture."

Our author then strolled through the *Cumhuriyet Meydanı* (Square of the Republic). "The central square of Kayseri is full of small, ugly and ruined buildings. The place has not been repaired; it is full of mud in the winter and full of dust in the summer." The author was equally disappointed by the cinema of Kayseri. "I went to the cinema; very expensive and crowded." The author had seen the film the previous year in Ankara, so he left for the coffeehouse.

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<sup>317</sup> This is an all too typical of the period discourse on the coffeehouse as a degenerate place of gathering. See Chapter 6.

It is difficult to find a single word of praise in what he wrote about modern Kayseri. All the places he visited were described as ugly, unsatisfactory, always in lack of something. The coffeehouse, the restaurant, the cinema, a building with shops at the market, the hotel, even the streets and houses, all are presented as deficient and ugly, unable to match the grandiose of the monuments of the past, the magnificence of the Mimar Sinan mosque or the old castle of Kayseri.

What he has to say about the local people is equally negative. “After a while the doors started to open and men exited the houses. The frock coats they wore with their grey backs resembled long overcoats, or even the robes of the ulema. They rarely wore collars or ties, while some had caps. It was the first day of the Bayram and these men are the first visitors. Women could only be seen later on. As the *çarşaf* had been abolished, they were all dressed in coats, but some of them wore black coats and gloves, holding their black umbrellas in such a way, that it would have been impossible for anyone to see their faces.”<sup>318</sup> Ironically the author is once more referring to the past when describing in this way the people he saw. This is not the illustrious past of famous ancestors though, but a contemporaneous past, or else a ‘backward’, ‘traditional’ present that should have stayed behind both in space and time, in ‘Arabistan’ as he writes in disgust some paragraphs above.

Two pages above, a remark on some pictures in a house he visited reveals the way Kayseri, or probably any given provincial town, was thought of and situated in space and time by intellectuals and people with a ‘modern’ education. The pictures depicted a city by the sea, ‘just like Istanbul’, as the author writes. “Who might have been the painter coming from which place in Europe, passing who knows where from to come all the way up to *this place!*”<sup>319</sup> Once again, Kayseri, as described by our Istanbul gentleman, is a ‘location’ distanced in space – and thus, in time – from a place where such activities as painting mean anything, something the author’s amazement makes clear.<sup>320</sup> Nahid Sırrı’s account of Kayseri and the local people appears as a description of an ‘other’ in its own space and time, away from the ‘modern’ time and space the author resides in. His text is imbued with images and expressions that assign this ‘other’ to a ‘backward’ space and time, the space of an ‘Arabistan’.

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<sup>318</sup> In relation to the way women dressed after the local abolition of the *çarşaf*, the author seems to describe here a ‘making do’ practise, where the people/actors, unable to reject an order imposed upon them, invent ways to circumvent it, or else to evade without openly or formally opposing it. Necmi Erdoğan, “Devleti ‘İdare etmek’: Maduniyet ve Düzenbazlık”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, 83, (2000).

<sup>319</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>320</sup> All the extracts quoted above are from Nahid Sırrı Örik, *Anadolu’da yol notları, Kayseri Kırşehir Kastamonu*, pp. 90 - 116.

Unlike Nahid Sırrı who was a visitor, Murat İğneci lived and worked in the region, although he was not a local of Kayseri. In this article series published in a local newspaper in March 1939, he describes the visit of a friend from Istanbul. The visitor was employed by some state department to travel through Anatolia and compile some kind of report. The author acted as his guide. His articles are important in that he provides us with the feelings and thoughts an educated foreigner – and Halkevi member - living in Kayseri had about the city. In a sense his articles offer us a picture of Kayseri through the eyes of an educated civil servant with a ‘modern’ outlook, interested in the cultural activities – including the Halkevi – of the region.

The article has an obvious overall negative stance and as it is published in the local press the author feels obliged to state just after the title that his ideas and critique do not accuse anybody, individual or institution.

He starts by writing that he feels ashamed to show a city full of mud and dirt to his friend and old classmate, Hüseyin Özkan, who had studied city planning in Europe and now travelled through Anatolia as an official. The author warns his friend not to expect much of Kayseri and states that he is probably going to feel ashamed himself too. Just to prove the already stated, Özkan’s left foot falls into a ditch at the beginning of their tour. They return to their residence so that Özkan would wear a new pair of trousers, since the old one is full of mud.

They then walk through the town’s market place. The market is full of village women, elders and local tradesmen trying to sell their goods by shouting, something ordinary even today in Turkey as elsewhere too. The author feels annoyed though, as “the shouting is annoying the customers”. The goods are displayed in baskets and open bags “open to microbes in the mud”. The market itself is “full of mud and dirt”. The author poses a series of ‘whys’: why so much dirt, why no price labels, why do they have to shout, why do the sellers try to deceive the customers, why don’t the authorities do something?<sup>321</sup>

They then proceed to the Cumhuriyet Square. In the middle of the square there is an empty pool within which an empty column is standing. The plan was to inscribe the Atatürk’s speech to the youth (*Gençliğe Hitabesi*) but due to low temperatures the plaster fell. That’s why they kept the pool empty. They had also placed dung in the pool in order for it not to crack. It is fortunate that ‘we were saved from [having to endure] that smell.’<sup>322</sup> A series of ‘lacks’ or deficiencies pervade the text. The author complains about the absence of any public toilet. The town clock is not working.

Next comes the local cinema. They could not find any difference between 1st and 2nd class tickets. The furniture is in bad condition. “[They] have been made in order to make people feel uncomfortable.” The hall was full of noise.

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<sup>321</sup> Murat İğneci, “Bir Geziden İntibalar”, *Kayseri*, 2 March 1939, No 1316, p. 2.

<sup>322</sup> Murat İğneci, “Bir Geziden İntibalar”, *Kayseri*, 16 March 1939, No 1320, p. 2.

“This is not the director’s fault. This noise directly shows the social and psychological manners (*terbiye*) of the spectators.” They whistle, shout, and applaud. “The curses fill the hall right from the beginning.” “We give 35 *kuruş*, we sit on wood, our head explodes with the noise, and every two minutes the film is cut.” The author’s friend thought that there was a second film. “Second film? What second film? Did you think you were in a cinema in Ankara or Istanbul? It is too expensive!”

“We walked around Kayseri, step by step. We walked one after the other, without being upset, the poor (*zavallı*) streets that were full of mud, dirt, rubbish and dirty water. [...] We saw there how the people throw their garbage to the streets, how the garbage collectors do not lower themselves to collect it, how they surely take the garbage inside their houses in cans. We saw how these poor people live in houses with no number or with broken or unreadable numbers, which are also impassable because of the animals’ dung. Go and see yourselves. [...] The city is becoming prettier but too slowly.”<sup>323</sup>

What does an educated outsider say about a place like Kayseri, either as a sightseer or as a compulsory resident, a state employee? Unlike Karamete’s silence, in describing Kayseri, or presenting Kayseri to an outsider these two texts appear as a treatment of (or for) absence, i.e. lacking of certain attributes. Even when our authors depict negatively something existing in Kayseri – the dirty muddy roads or the ugly buildings, they actually invoke the lack or absence of something that should had been there. Certain things are really missing, like a public toilet, or an ambulance, newspapers (apart from *Cumhuriyet*), and so forth. Other things are *there* – restaurants, coffeehouses, Hotels, market places, cinema – but are devoid of certain qualities the authors are apparently expecting, be it beauty, hygiene, cleanliness, table cloths, and so many other characteristics that would not evoke a picture akin to an *Arabistan manzarası*.

The people of Kayseri we encounter in their pages are also not as they should have been; they live in awful old houses full of dirt, mud and garbage, they are coarse, lacking in manners as they shout and annoy customers at the market or in the cinema hall. Their cloths were not what Nahid Sırrı would expect, ‘western’, but suspiciously resembling the cloths of the ‘other-to-be-abolished’, the cloaks of the ulema or the *çarşaf*. İğneci felt ashamed of Kayseri and Nahid Sırrı’s travelogue conveys a sense of mistrust (or even suspicion) and clear disgust for the local people. Both texts reveal a polarized sense of time (and place, i.e. spatialized time<sup>324</sup>), a historicity to be found in the

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<sup>323</sup> Murat İğneci, “Bir Geziden İntibalar”, *Kayseri*, 20 March 1939, No 1321, p. 2.

<sup>324</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 7-10.

occidental discourse of non-western elites complaining about the ‘lagging behind’ of their countries and fellow citizens.<sup>325</sup>

What educated intellectuals appointed to Kayseri from big cities like Istanbul felt and wrote about Kayseri and its people is essential if we are to study the way they experienced their residence in the provinces and the engagement in the People’s House. What then emerges from their texts is a sense of embarrassment – one might even say repulsion – for Kayseri, and mistrust for the local people they were supposed to ‘instruct’. This professed and felt distance separating these intellectuals from the ‘real people’ is expressed – but also criticized- in a somehow different account of the same period – the mid 1930s – and environment, Cevdet Kudret’s story of a schoolteacher.

### ***C) The Kayseri of Cevdet Kudret: the town, its people and Halkevi***

Apparently the most dynamic and committed element of the cadre of the Kayseri Halkevi was, according to the Committee members’ lists, the mass of teachers of the various schools of Kayseri and, to a lesser extent, the civil servants of the region. Nevertheless, the archival sources used here do not tell us much about the way all these members experienced their involvement in the activities of the Halkevi, or about their motivation to take part in such an enterprise. Fortunately enough one of the teachers involved in the activities of the local Halkevi in the 1930s left us an account substantially different from the sources heretofore used.

The novelist Cevdet Kudret spent two years in Kayseri between 1936 and 1938/9. His name is not mentioned in the Halkevi lists, since he was a simple member of the Language, History and Literature Section of the People’s House of Kayseri and a literature teacher at the Kayseri Lycée. Most important, he wrote a novel<sup>326</sup> describing the life of a literature teacher in Kayseri. Apart from telling the story of Süleyman, his hero, Cevdet Kudret is also describing the life of civil servants and teachers in the Kayseri of the 1930s and 1940s. In other words, Cevdet Kudret in his novel *Havada Bulut Yok* is offering us a personal and semi-fictional account of a teacher’s life in Kayseri and his engagement in the Halkevi in the 1930s. It is widely acknowledged that *Havada Bulut Yok* depicts parts of Cevdet Kudret’s life in Kayseri. The author himself admits<sup>327</sup> that he used his experiences as a Lycée teacher in Kayseri as raw material for this novel.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Meltem Ahıska, “Occidentalism: The Historical fantasy of the Modern”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102, 2/3 (2003) 351-379.

<sup>326</sup> Cevdet Kudret, *Havada Bulut Yok*, 2nd edition (İstanbul: İnkılap ve Aka, 1976).

<sup>327</sup> İhsan Kudret and Apay Kabacalı (eds), *Cevdet Kudret’e saygı* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993), p. 171, from an interview of the author.

<sup>328</sup> İhsan Kudret, *İhsan benimle çalışır mısın?* (İstanbul: İnkılap, n.d.), p. 96.



Cevdet Kudret's life and some pages from *Havada Bulut Yok* can clearly demonstrate this autobiographical quality of the novel. Cevdet Kudret (Solok) was born in 1907 in Istanbul, graduated from the Istanbul Law Faculty and worked as a literature teacher at the Kayseri and Ankara Atatürk Lycées. He started publishing poems while still a lycée student in *Servet-i Fünun*, in 1928. Between the years 1936 – 1938 he taught literature at the Kayseri Lycée, where in 1937 he married his 19 year-old student İhsan Kudret, one of the very few female students and member of one of Kayseri's old and influential families, the Feyzioğlu.<sup>329</sup> He was an active member of the local Halkevi, participating in a number of its activities.<sup>330</sup> His experiences in Kayseri were used as raw material for his novel *Havada Bulut Yok*, which he wrote between 1947-9. In an interview, the author states the following about himself and his life in Kayseri:

*I went to Kayseri with great hopes. I hoped to transmit an interest in literature that is open to the western civilization to this city of middle Anatolia and one of the important centers of Eastern civilization. I was a child of Istanbul. The first time I traveled to the province was full of very painful realities. I was faced with a number of 'scenes from real life' (hayat-ı hakikiye sahneleri). When I saw students coming to school without coats and with holes in their shoes during the winter, I fell from the clouds to the face of earth. Some of them did not even have a light in their houses and were doing their homework under the street lamps. Literature was a clear luxury for them. I was then left in such a dilemma. In order to get to know the environment, I tried to help in the Social Assistance Section and the village activities of the Halkevi during my spare time. I was probably very much engaged in these activities, because my behaviour opened the way to a number of whispers. I used my observations in Kayseri later on as material for my novel 'Havada Bulut Yok'.<sup>331</sup>*

According to Ali Rıza Önder, an old student of Cevdet Kudret, the novelist was one of the youngest teachers of their Lycée. "He was a person born and raised in Istanbul, but this did not obstruct him from feeling close to the people of Anatolia. He developed an interest in the folk singers (*ozan*) of our region. He once brought one of them, Uzunyaylalı Âşık Talibi Coşkun to our school. We gathered in our school's courtyard and listened to his poems and tales (*Şiir ve öykü*). We knew that he was interested in cultural meetings outside school.

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<sup>329</sup> She was apparently a relative of Prof. Turhan Feyzioğlu. For a biography of Cevdet Kudret see Murat Yalçın (ed), *Tanzimat'tan Bugüne Edebiyatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001), pp. 524-5.

<sup>330</sup> His name is only once mentioned in the Kayseri Halkevi papers in the State Archives when in 1938 he gave a speech about the life and works of A. Hamit contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2.

<sup>331</sup> İhsan Kudret and Apay Kabacalı (eds), *Cevdet Kudret'e saygı*, pp. 171-2.



He gave a very instructive lecture on Nazım Hikmet in the Halkevi Hall located in one of the old churches. This lecture was not confronted with any kind of reaction either by the officials or by the part of the people that was opposed to the left.”<sup>332</sup>

Both texts, Cevdet Kudret’s own account as well as his student’s recollections, speak of an educated person of somehow left leanings, an idealist teacher coming for the first time from Istanbul to the provinces. Both are alluding to a specific difference existing between a person such as Cevdet Kudret and the people of Kayseri. The author though, as well as his novel’s hero, tried to surmount these differences and interact with the local people. Cevdet Kudret on the one hand had hopes to make a wind of literature “that is open to the western civilization” blow, while on the other hand he showed an immense interest in local folk songs and stories. “I wanted to experiment with a contemporization of tradition by taking advantage of the folk song tradition in Kayseri.”<sup>333</sup> Kudret easily falls into the category of the ‘idealist teacher’ or intellectual (*meşkûreci/ülkürcü öğretmen/münevver*), following the archetype of Feride of Reşat Nuri Güntekin’s *Çalıkuşu*. It does not come as a surprise then that the reality he comes across upon arriving at Kayseri falls short of his dreams and ambitions, even though Kudret’s appointment is in a provincial town and not in a village.<sup>334</sup>

### Teachers, state functionaries and Kayseri Halkevi

#### a) Civil Servants: boredom and alienation

The first person the hero talks to upon his arrival at Kayseri is the principal of the Lycée. He says to Süleyman:

- *We are like a family to each other. We are all very close to each other. We are 15 to 20 intellectuals. Fifteen to 20 educated persons also come from other [state] departments; you cannot find anybody else to see. Do you know how to play backgammon?*

- *No.*

- *Very bad! You must learn at once. (...)We, the intellectuals, have nobody else here.*

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<sup>332</sup> Ali Rıza Önder, “Cevdet Kudret ve anımsadıklarım”, *Cumhuriyet*, 10/10/1992, in İhsan Kudret and Apay Kabacalı (eds), *Cevdet Kudret’e saygı*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>333</sup> İhsan Kudret and Apay Kabacalı (eds), *Cevdet Kudret’e saygı*, p. 172.

<sup>334</sup> For an example of the influence of Güntekin’s story on generations of teachers see Hürrem Arman, *Piramidin tabanı. Köy Enstitüleri ve Tonguç* (Ankara: I Matbaacılık ve Ticaret, 1969), p. 185.

This feeling of alienation from the locals that can be discerned in the principal's words reappears again in Kudret's description of the civil servants' life in Kayseri. At 15:00, when the school closes, the teachers go to the coffeehouse (probably the one opposite the High School building, 'the best of Kayseri', as Örik describes some pages above).

*After 15:00 the door of the coffeehouse the teachers frequented opened. One by one the intellectuals, the principal was referring to, arrived. Burhan the bailiff, İhsan the land registrar, Selami the matrimony officer, Yahya the birth registrar, Nazım the pharmacist ...*

After many card and backgammon games, the group of teachers went to the restaurant for dinner. One of them is amazed to find out that Süleyman is not drinking raki.

*Don't you drink raki? And how are you going to spend your time? Every day after leaving school at 15:00, what are you going to do up until 23:00? If you are thinking of books, they don't come here; if you are thinking of newspapers, until they arrive here its all old news. If you are thinking of cinema or theatre, there are no such places here. Not even a decent brothel exists here... If you are married (...). But you are single. How are you going to spend your free time after 15:00, or when you do not have any lessons, from the morning till the evening? It's easy for one or two days, but what when it is for 1,3,5 years, every single day after 15:00? You are obliged to go to the coffeehouse, play backgammon, then to go to the restaurant and drink raki till you go to sleep.*

Cevdet's description of the coffeehouse and tavern the teachers frequented, their clientele and conditions are almost identical to Nahid Sırrı's account of the same places, a detail that exhibits the proximity of the background in terms of place of origin and education of both writers. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the same applied for many state employees with a similar background appointed to places like Kayseri. A similar reference to the alienation and isolation educated state functionaries were experiencing in provincial centres can be found in an account by a foreign writer. Lilo Linke, a German journalist, toured through several regions of Turkey in 1935. In her book *Allah dethroned. A journey through Modern Turkey*, published in 1937, raki is once more the exit from, and at the same time the signifier of, boredom. In July 1935 Linke was introduced to Galib, a civil servant in Giresun. "For eight years he had been living abroad, mainly in France, to study law. Now he was a junior town clerk with a monthly salary of 50 Turkish Liras. '[I] don't complain. Turkey is a poor country. Things will be better in a few years', Galib

says. He then states, 'I am speaking of rakı. Everybody drinks here. Life is so dull, we couldn't bear it otherwise. On Sundays we start at three o'clock in the afternoon, on ordinary days at six'.<sup>335</sup>

Kudret – with a dose of exaggeration perhaps - describes Kayseri almost as the intellectual's wasteland, and it is plausible to think that many people with similar experiences must have felt the same way about Kayseri in the 1930s and 1940s. A further reasonable assumption would be that the People's House must have been an alternative 'they' could not easily refuse, a place where '*We, the intellectuals*', as the principal had eloquently put, could gather and spend their time among peers. It should not then be a coincidence that the members' lists cited above suggest exactly this: that the largest part of the House's cadre was composed of teachers and state functionaries. It should be acknowledged though that the People's Houses, although designed to fuse the 'real people' (*asıl halk*) with the intellectuals (*münevver*), were clearly designated to gather and have these 'intellectuals' as the organizers of their activities. Several sources indicate the centre's aim to draft the 'enlighten' segments of society into the People's Houses.<sup>336</sup> Official and/or unofficial, direct or not, pressure on teachers to join in the People's Houses was routine.<sup>337</sup> Nonetheless, Karamete, Özdoğan, as well as Cevdet Kudret and his hero, and many other teachers' membership and active involvement, cannot be considered just as the result of pressure from above. The names of teachers filling the pages of the Halkevleri journals<sup>338</sup> and the members' lists suggest

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<sup>335</sup> Lilo Linke, *Allah dethroned. A journey through Modern Turkey* (London: Constable & Co, 1937), pp. 150-1.

<sup>336</sup> It suffices here to mention of only a few: Recep Peker, the Party's Secretary General states at the opening ceremony of the first 14 Halkevi: "there is great need of a guiding element that would be composed of all the mature/experienced people that would function as educators". When, a few lines below, he becomes more specific, he only refers to teachers, deputies and doctors. (Recep, "Halkevleri açılma nutku", *Ülkü*, Vol. 1, No 1, (1933), p. 6). In a circular sent to the Party Branches by the Secretary General a few days before the opening of the first Halkevi, the Recep Peker states that "it is very useful to invite to the halls of the Houses the country's educated elements, for example a week before the opening ceremony, and explain them beforehand the common goals". Moreover, "efforts will be made to have, civil servants or not, intellectuals from all the professions, especially teachers, come to the first gathering that will take place with the aim to organize the opening." In *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Genel Sekreterliğin Fırka Teşkilatına Umumi Tebligatı* (Ankara, 1933).

<sup>337</sup> Akyüz argues that the Turkish Teachers Unions were insistently pressed to join the Halkevleri during the years Recep Peker was the Secretary General of the Party. Yahya Akyüz, *Türkiye'de öğretmenlerin toplumsal değişimdeki etkileri 1848 - 1940* (Ankara: Doğan Basımevi, 1978), p. 259. Another example comes from the memoirs of Hürrem Arman, *Piramidin tabanı. Köy Enstitüleri ve Tonguç*, p. 208: in 1938 Arman witnessed in Denizli the Vali's obsession with the reluctance of the women teachers to take more active roles in the Halkevi and, more specifically to act at the theatrical plays the Halkevi was staging. The Vali even went as far as to report the situation to the Party, which in turn informed the Education Minister. Both the Vali's letter (No 273/CHP Denizli İlyönkurul başkanlığı, dated 02/06/1939) and Hasan Ali Yücel's reply are contained in *BCA CHP*, 490.1/831.281.1.

<sup>338</sup> Ahmet Yüksel has demonstrated that, in the case of the Merzifon Halkevi, a group of schoolteachers were mostly responsible for the Halkevi activities and the publication of its journal *Taşan*. When some of them were appointed elsewhere in Turkey and had to leave Merzifon, the quality of the journal fell leading to its closure a few months later. Ahmet Yüksel, "Merzifon Halkevi ve Taşan Dergisi", *Kebikeç*, Vol. 2, No 3, (1996). For the predominance of schoolteachers

the existence of alternative motives for participating in the Halkevi activities than sheer pressure from above. Undoubtedly some participated because they were pressed to do so, or just “out of kindness”, as A.S. Levent noticed in one of his reports on the Kayseri Halkevi,<sup>339</sup> others, considering it as a promising choice in their social, professional life,<sup>340</sup> or even a future in politics,<sup>341</sup> yet others might have joined because they wholeheartedly espoused their role as ‘educators of the people’, the enlightened/educated element Recep Peker and the Party was searching for; finally, others – Cevdet Kudret and his hero Süleyman being one of them – while believing in their status and function as educators working for the progress of their people, never accepted the overtly paternalistic and implicitly contemptuous for the common people mentality and practices of the *mission civilisatrice* of which the People’s Houses formed an essential part.

In his novel, Cevdet Kudret gives a picture of the Kayseri Halkevi and its activities, as well as of some of its members.

#### b) Reports’ Factory: Kayseri Halkevi

In order to evade from boredom, Süleyman becomes active in the local Halkevi. His association with the Kayseri House starts when he visits the Halkevi chairman to ask his mediation so that one of his poor students can find a job in one of the state factories. It seems that this was a rather common activity of the Halkevleri.<sup>342</sup> The author describes the chairman, Reşat bey, as an ambitious man whose aspiration is to become an MP.<sup>343</sup> He believes that being the chairman of the local Halkevi is a position that would lead him to the

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in the Halkevleri journals also see B. Varlık’s articles: Bülent Varlık, “Yozgat Halkevi Dergisi bibliyografyası”, *Kebikeç*, Vol. 2, No 3, (1996); “Devrimin sesi: Bilecik Halkevi dergisi bibliyografyası”, *Kebikeç*, Vol. 3, No 6, (1998); and “Ülker, Niksar Halkevi Kültür dergisi”, *Kebikeç*, Vol. 7, No 14, (2001).

<sup>339</sup> Report No 238 of the Aydın mebusu (MP) A. S. Levent, Niğde Bölge Müfettişi, Kayseri 16/07/1942 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/671.259.1/4<sup>th</sup> Büro.

<sup>340</sup> In his memoirs, Rauf Inan recalls the story of Seyfeddin Erdem, a teacher who tried to prevent his appointment to a remote village playing the ‘Halkevi card’. He said the following to Inan, who was the director of primary education of the region: “What have I done without knowing it that I am punished with an appointment to a village? I am the chairman of the Halkevi of Alaşehir.” In Rauf Inan, *Bir ömrün öyküsü* (Ankara, 1986), p. 193.

<sup>341</sup> Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu, *Anıların izinde* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1977 - 9). p. 274 (1st volume); Şevket Beysanoğlu, “Anımlarımda Diyarbakır Halkevi”, *Kebikeç*, Year 2, No 3, (1996), p. 165. The files of the Archive containing the *Mebustalebname* of those desiring to become MPs quite eloquently demonstrate the importance the supplicants place on their Halkevi credentials, as we have already seen in Chapter 3.

<sup>342</sup> Resul Yiğit, quoting from the *Yeni Mersin* newspaper and the Halkevi journal *İçel*, has shown in his unpublished MA thesis that the Social Assistance Section of the Mersin Halkevi was operating as an employment bureau; Resul Yiğit, *Mersin Halkevi (1933 - 1951)*, (MA thesis, Mersin University, 2001). P. 89. It is also listed in the *Halkevleri Talimatnamesi* as one of the Social Assistance Section’s duties. *C.H.P. Halkevleri Çalışma Talimatnamesi* (Ankara, 1940), article 68, p. 20.

<sup>343</sup> Naci Özsan was the Halkevi chairman when Kudret was in Kayseri. A local Party boss and lawyer, Özsan applied at least in 1946 to become an MP candidate for the CHP. His application is contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/307.1250.2.

Parliament. He doesn't seem to be genuinely interested into the Halkevi activities, but rather sees them as instrumental for his political and social rising. He has an obsession with the activity reports he compiles and sends to Ankara. He even writes reports of completely fictitious conferences and other events. It is in this sense that he is willing to help Süleyman's student to find a job, since he conceives this as a great subject for a report on the 'solutions the Halkevi gives to the people's problems'. Moreover, he asks (in return) Süleyman to join the Social Assistance Section of the House, which is also something he doesn't fail to record in his next report as yet another success of the House.

Next to the Halkevi chairman, another local Halkevi member is also described rather negatively. The Music teacher of the local high school, Şadan bey, was a local teacher with political ambitions. He became a Party Orator.<sup>344</sup> Cevdet describes his colleague with a dose of irony. He notes that he became a Party Orator by giving a speech to no more than a handful of people 'at a corner of the square of the statue' in Ankara. Our author is referring to the Ulus Square in Ankara under Atatürk's monument in an obviously ironic fashion. Şadan bey then returned to Kayseri and assumed all by himself the serious role of the regime's representative and instructor, only to be mocked and ridiculed by the locals and most importantly by local elites and state employees. He was wandering around the town showing everyone his identity card as a Party Orator and a picture showing him delivering a speech to 5 – 10 people in the Ulus Square, always trying to find an opportunity to 'climb the podium' in public ceremonies and deliver speeches, even when he was neither invited to do so nor such a speech was part of the program. He had a number of ready-made speeches with subjects such as the 'Turkish soil', the 'Fatherland', 'Our Blood', and so forth. Once in the middle of a public anniversary, he managed to climb the podium unnoticed and started shouting his speech. For all warnings, he did not stop shouting leaving the Governor (Vali) no choice but to order the band to start playing so that his voice would not be heard. After a while he had to run off the podium.<sup>345</sup>

Notwithstanding the chairman's and other local Halkevi members' attitude, Süleyman takes a real interest in the Halkevi and the Section's activities, but all the plans he recommends receive the same reply: 'no money'. Soon he understands that the Social Assistance Section, just like all the other Sections, is nothing but an empty structure. The House has no fixed income to carry out any activities, and furthermore only those activities that can yield an arresting report are taken into serious consideration.

Süleyman recalls some of the House's activities. During the 'Tobacco Week' (12 – 19 December) lectures were delivered and a number of signposts with slogans praising the value of saving were hung in streets and schools.

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<sup>344</sup> On the *Halk Hatipleri* organization see Işıl Çakal, *Konuşunuz Konuşturunuz. Tek Parti Döneminde Propagandanın Etkin Silahı: Söz* (İstanbul: Otopsi, 2004), pp. 67 – 77. It is interesting to see the reception of this project of the regime in a local society.

<sup>345</sup> Cevdet Kudret, *Havada Bulut Yok*, pp. 80 – 3.

Copies of the conferences and pictures of the signposts were sent to Ankara in the form of a report. On another occasion, a wealthy merchant donated a sum of money that was used to purchase cloths for poor students. This event was turned into an important ceremony on a holiday's eve. Pictures were taken and then published in newspapers showing the members of the Social Assistance Section in the front and the sponsored students in the background.

After a while the hero was thinking to stop working in this 'report factory', as he called the Halkevi. The only reason he stayed was the village excursions that gave him the opportunity to visit the villages and see their situation. Up until the Second World War the work within the House continued in the same way, "full of ideas, projects, speeches, reports, members and activity sections."<sup>346</sup> During the first or the second year of the war, though, as famine emerged, they had to come up with some kind of solution. Every day at least 8 – 10 people were coming to ask for job, help, charcoal, or bread. The Social Assistance Section started working to find new sources of income. There were thoughts to let out the new Theatre Hall of the House, to stage plays with an entrance fee, or to organize balls with the collaboration of all the Sections in order to gather money to support the Social Assistance Section. The money eventually gathered from these events was used to purchase wheat, potatoes that could then be distributed to those applying to the Halkevi. As soon as the news was heard, the Kayseri poor started coming to the House in groups. Finally, after witnessing such an unexpected demand, the Committee members came to the conclusion that they had to determine who were the real poor and then distribute the food. For this reason they set up a committee that would visit the neighbourhoods and, with the help of the local *muhtars*, make up lists of the city's poor.<sup>347</sup> Süleyman was a member of this committee.

The author describes in great detail the hard living conditions of the poor people of Kayseri in contrast to the wealth of the few rich. Interestingly enough some of the poor did not know what the name Halkevi stood for. One of the poor women they visited, Kadıncıkhanım, when informed that the Halkevi had decided to help her, asked: '*Who is this Halkevi? Is he very rich? It seems that good people exist in this world*'. The same occurred when she met another poor woman, Zelhana: '*What is the Halkevi you just said? Is it the government?*' One of the rich of the city though, Rüstem Ağa, was well aware of the existence of the House and its activities (or at least some of them): '*Tell me what is going on in the Halkevi now? Are you getting new theatrical groups? Are you going to put women on the stage again? Last time, that dark skinned woman had a great voice. Oh my God!*'

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<sup>346</sup> It has to be noted that the author demonstrates a great familiarity with the paraphernalia of the Halkevleri, reports, conferences, members' lists, meetings and similar documents and activities.

<sup>347</sup> Both activities, the distribution of food and the compilation of a register of the poor with the help of the *muhtars*, actually took place in 1945 and 1946, according to Mustafa Şanal, "Türk kültür tarihi içerisinde Kayseri Halkevi ve Faaliyetleri (1932 - 1951)", *Milli Eğitim Dergisi*, 161, (2004), p. 10, where articles from *Erciyes* are used. It is not yet clear, though, whether Cevdet Kudret was in Kayseri at that period of time.

In Kudret's description of the Kayseri Halkevi, the people whose progress the House was supposed to work for either have not heard of it, or perceive it as a part of the Government or the state – not without reason one might say. This perception though demonstrates the distance existing between the 'real people', those termed as the 'targets' of the People's Houses, and the Houses themselves. The rich merchant, on the other hand, is aware of the existence of the Halkevi. His reported speech designates the House more as a place/source of entertainment, like a theatre or a cinema, rather than a more 'serious' institution carrying out 'the lofty aims' of the Party.

Kudret portrays the Halkevi as the playground of teachers, civil servants, local Party men and merchants, each one participating or just being there for his own purpose, be it sincere interest, boredom, political ambition, entertainment or, one might add, a combination of all or some of the above. The teachers and other non-local civil servants like himself are segregated among themselves, active in the House out of boredom, obligation or both, and with a sense of common identity in contrast on the one hand to the local people described in rather analogous terms with the texts of non-local educated civil servants or intellectuals such as Örik and İğneci, and on the other hand to the local elites, Party bosses, merchants and local intellectuals such as the Halkevi chairman, the teacher-Party orator and Rüstem Ağa. The local elites and teachers he is related to through the Halkevi activities are depicted with a degree of irony, only superficially interested in the Halkevi's activities, participating for their own reasons, be it political ambition or interest in the House's opportunities for entertainment, women on stage singing being one of them explicitly mentioned.

The rest of the Kayseri population, on the other hand, is absent from the House and in many cases incognizant of the House's existence, or unable to distinguish it from the state, the government or the Party. Seeing the House as an extension of the government would probably have driven the people even further away from the House, as the 'simple man' would rarely come willingly into contact with the state or its agents unless extremely necessary. The absence/exclusion then of the 'other', regardless of (or even in contrast to) the regime's rhetoric about the villagers and the 'real people', can be also sensed in the texts of the Halkevi members treated above, where a strong sense of identity, of membership in a particular group of people, and thus of a border separating them from the rest, is conveyed.

### ***Conclusion***

Building upon the 'human geography' of the Kayseri Halkevi given in the previous chapter, this chapter has focused on the writings of a number of members of the Kayseri House, in an attempt to consider how various social actors experience and express their engagement in the Halkevi project within a local society and population. By studying their texts our more general aim is to

study how this ‘juncture of state and society’ operates in practice and within local provincial societies, where the majority of the People’s Houses operated. We have seen that the pool of active Halkevi members was mostly composed of two groups: non-local educated state employees (mostly teachers) and members of what we can term urban elites (a few professionals and state employees, and mainly merchants/artisans, usually from certain families of *eşraf* origin) that occupy key positions in other local socio-political and financial institutions. While we can classify the first group of Halkevi members by their identity as state employees and educated outsiders with limited relations to the locality, the second group of Halkevi members derives its origin from local elite groups and individuals that traditionally had functioned as intermediaries linking the state and its agents in the periphery with the local population/society. This chapter then has turned to a number of Halkevi members differentiated by gender, occupation, social status/class and place of birth. With the possible exceptions of Zatiye and Mahir, the rest of the cases treated above belong to these two main categories of Halkevi personnel.

#### *Halkevi actors*

The texts of our Halkevi actors display a number of similarities and differences. Locals and non-locals alike usually appear to request something from the addressee of their text, be it a seat in the National Assembly, an appointment to the local Municipal Assembly, a promotion in their workplace or their reemployment in the House’s library. This characteristic is definitely due to the nature of the sources we use, by majority petition letters to the Party Headquarters. Nevertheless, at first glance these texts and the similarities they exhibit clearly point at certain characteristics that we can easily designate as structural. All our authors use their Halkevi membership – usually among other credentials – to bolster their request and in this sense the Halkevi undoubtedly appears to be used as an opportunity space for both locals and outsiders.

The local Halkevi actors, by majority merchants, landowners and local Party bosses and power brokers, tend to place themselves in the Halkevi institution, especially the management of the Houses, for political reasons. In other words, their membership and control of the House is instrumental as it offers a better positioning in the local politic scene to further their aims and interests. The participation into the House activities and management of the non-local state employees on the other hand apparently was not fulfilling the same objectives. Some data indicate that they were occasionally semi-obliged or even coerced to take part in the Halkevi activities, while other sources, including accounts by these actors, express other, more ideological, or even practical reasons for their participation. Some, like Cevdet Kudret and numerous other schoolteachers, saw and tried, occasionally in vain, to experience their participation as an idealist enterprise to ‘enlighten’, and ‘educate’ the locals. Others, as Kudret’s own account again implies, became



Halkevi members and used the People's House as a place they couldn't miss in the 'wasteland' of the local society: an exclusive space of gathering among themselves - the 'intellectuals' that facilitated their segregation from the locals whom they tended to mistrust and dislike.

The divergent patterns of participation into the Halkevi space and the different ways the Halkevi membership was experienced between local-elite and state-elite actors point at, and can be understood by, the divergent network of relations both set of actors have with the local society and thus the Halkevi. In other words, their position and interests in the local society and within local politics differentiates the Halkevi members in relation to issues they address in their texts as well as to the use they make of the Halkevi. We have seen how local Halkevi members in their texts to the centre might lie (Halkevi chairman composing reports of fictitious events) or avoid (Karamete's inability to talk about modern Kayseri and its population) addressing certain issues about their society. Non-local civil servants on the other hand, like Kudret, İğneci and Üzel, appear more outspoken in relation to the place they have been appointed and its population. Outsiders like Kudret and Üzel do not have the locals' entrenched interests and relations in the local society and thus are more open to speak about the local conditions and people. Their texts share motifs of mistrust, disgust of and differentiation from the locals, elites and non-elites alike (Halkevi chairman, Party Orator and wealthy landlord in Kudret's novel, the local people in Örik and İğneci).

The differentiation between locals and outsiders is also evident in the very few cases of women active in the local political and social life. Although both women treated in this chapter present themselves as members of a family and thus attached to their male relatives, fathers and husbands equally engaged in similar activities, they diverge with respect to the manner they express their exceptionality as female political actors in the region. This time it is the local Mamurhan Özsan who appears more outspoken than the outsider Gaspıralı about the fact that she is the only woman in various local political associations as well as about the opposition and resistance she is experiencing to her engagement from her male colleagues and the local society at large. Here the entrenched in local politics position of the local elite Halkevi members (women and their politically active family and husbands) and their organic ties and endangered interests in the region is more relevant and pressing than what an outsider like Gaspıralı might face.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> For more on female Halkevi members see Chapter 7 whose sole focus is the participation of women in the Halkevi activities.