Chapter 5
Dramas of Conflict

On Friday the 8th of March 1940, in the early afternoon Muammer Köksal finished his work at the Dumlupınar school in Trabzon and went to the Halkevi to start working on a project of the school’s principal. They were struggling to stage Aksüs and the school’s principal Orhan had asked him to compose the music of the play. Upon arriving at the House Muammer took the piano from the Hall to their room, the Fine Arts Section’s room, and started working. In the late afternoon the Halkevi chairman came in and hearing the piano asked the janitor who was playing. He had the janitor call Muammer to his room.

- You asked for me, I said.
- By whose authority and with what right do you open the piano?
- If I do not open the piano, who is going to open it. As a matter of fact there is only one friend apart from me that plays the piano, isn’t that so?
- Sir, the piano was closed.
- If the piano is closed, I have the keys.
- Did you ask me? In that case you might as well open the safe in the Halkevi.
- You cannot compare the piano with the safe. It is my right to open the piano, not yours. You won’t insult me for a piano and you have no right to shout at me.
- You have gone too far, I will shout, without asking me not only you won’t open the piano, you won’t be doing anything here. Otherwise I should resign and you should take my place.
- It won’t be bad; it would be better if you resign, that’s what the youth wants after all.
- You talk too much, get out, and don’t come here again, he yelled.
- Just don’t forget that this is the People’s House; no power can thrown me out, not even you.

[Some days latter] I went to the orchestra room. Ten minutes later the janitor came to tell me that the chairman was calling me. I went downstairs to his room.
- You have called me, I said.
- No, I haven’t called for you, they have (with his right hand he showed the police officers standing by the door).

There were five of them. He was supposed to have me taken to the police station.
Look, am I a murderer? Can anybody be driven away, can anybody be sent to the police station from the Halkevi?

It has become clear after this incident that the chairman and the Halkevi accountant, who assists him in this kind of business, have not yet understood what the Halkevi means.418

Muammer ends his letter writing, “I think that today the House’s activities are going to become weak because of the chairman and the accountant” and asks for the Party’s intervention. Muammer’s letter is one of the many denunciation and complaint letters that describe, imply or refer to similar cases of a clash or an ongoing struggle between a number of people in relation to the People’s Houses, mostly staged in the Halkevi Halls. The denunciations of Halkevi chairmen by fellow Halkevi members or others, 419 usually concluding with a request for his removal, demonstrate exactly what the above letter speaks about, i.e. a feud or a situation of conflict between (usually) prominent members of a local community. This struggle between persons or groups/fractions is revealed to us when one of the sides, usually the overpowered one, asks the center’s mediation in order to get the upper hand. The conflicting persons/sides can be diverse. The same applies for the occasions and/or pretexts leading to the written appeal to the center. District and sub-district governors (Vali, Kaymakam), gendarmerie and army officers, Party leaders, Judges and Prosecutors, Mayors, civil servants of almost every state department, school teachers, tradesmen and professionals, Party members or not, Halkevi chairmen and members, some, or even all of them, might appear on one side or the other of a conflict/power struggle set in a provincial center, where other spaces and constellations of power, such as the local Party, the chamber of commerce, the local army unit and Police, the municipal assembly and the bar, as well as local kinship structures, might be involved in the conflict, internal and inter-institutional enmities and alliances into the open.

The scope of this chapter is to study the complaint letters and the reports of Party inspectors that relate to these feuds and conflicts that seem to be ubiquitous in local societies and occasionally surface in the Halkevi Halls. It is an attempt to place the Halkevi, its activities and members, within its local

418 Letter by Muammer Köksal sent in 14/3/1940 contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/844.337.2.
society while illustrating the relations, the ties and bonds connecting the House with other spaces and their residents. In Esat Adil’s case, in the previous chapter, we have studied a case of conflict between local power brokers, one of them being chairman of the local Halkevi. Nevertheless, the local House, although connected to the conflict once its chairman was implicated in it, did not feature in the core of the feud, was not the foremost battleground of the rivals. In this chapter, based on a number of complaint letters, we focus on fights between elite social actors enacted in the Halkevi halls. In the cases to be treated below, the People’s House is the stage upon which, the arena wherein the local feuds are fought and in relation to which the actors unfold their narrative.

The study of these narrated ‘moments of conflict’ will help us inscribe the Halkevi space into the local society; view how the Halkevi space might be related to other spaces through the words of social actors related to the House and other spaces of status and authority. In a similar sense this part will try to place the Halkevi into its local surroundings, an operation that is rather difficult if we consider the nature of the bulk of the sources, i.e. the official Party sources, which depict the People’s Houses as a replica of the regime’s plans and discourse, in the utopian realm of the not-yet-there, the still-under-construction.

A second aim of this chapter is to treat these fights in the Halkevi halls in order to address the issue of the relations between the centre with (state or local) social forces and agents operating in provincial urban settings. The centre was implicated in these fights from the very beginning through the participation of its agents in the periphery. It was usually the texts the rival sides/actors addressed to the Party Headquarters and/or to state offices that initiated the centre’s involvement. Lastly, the reports by high-level bureaucrats and Party men the centre was appointing to investigate attest the involvement and occasionally the centre’s response to the supplicants and to the issue in hand. Besides being the stage of the fight and/or the space claimed then, through this ‘dialogue’ generated by the communications between agents of the centre and forces in (or of) the periphery, the Halkevi also emerges as a juncture through but also in relation to which a multidirectional interaction between the state, conceived as offices and agents in the centre as well as in provincial societies, and social forces in (and/or of) the periphery is performed.
Gendarmerie Officer

A first instance where we observe the space of the People’s House/Room claimed by different persons is in a number of cases of ‘occupation’ (isgal) by local Gendarmerie officers. This seemingly happened in small towns or villages where few suitable buildings existed for the use of state offices, such as the Police/Gendarmerie structure. In 24/12/1945 Şakir Karataş, teacher and chairman of the People’s Room of Gölyaka, complained that the Gendarmerie Commander (Jandarma Komutani) had occupied the local People’s Room. In 18/1/1950 Alihan Tatar, chairman of the Şırnak Halkevi, reiterated the same complaint. He informed the Party “the elections are coming … [and the House needs to] deliver necessary speeches to enlighten the people”.

Another letter comes from the Party leader of Hopa in 12/5/1948. He complained that Turgut, the local military commander, and Ertuğrul, the deputy sub-district governor (kaymakam vekili), “have filled the House with soldiers.” In a similar complaint, the party chairman of Bingöl informed the Party Secretariat in 25/7/1951 that the local recruitment officer Captain Sabahettin Noyan had requested to use the Halkevi building in order to assemble the recruits and upon receiving a negative answer occupied the House for one day breaking the doors and leaving a lot of damage.

I chose to read these letters as the result of a local dispute between Halkevi or other local Party leaders and a state functionary, such as the Gendarmerie officer. Such a dispute is evident in two more examples. Mustafa Bener, chairman of the People’s Room of Belveren requested the Party’s intervention against the local Jandarma officer. “We thought to organize a party to celebrate the coming of the New Year. We invited the people. While the people and the students of the 4th and 5th grade were in the Room, for a reason we did not quite make out the Jandarma officer, corporal Adem, left the Room and, after returning with 3-4 Jandarma men, threw the students out with curses and improper language. He ruined the merriment and leisure of the people shouting insults (I am the security officer I can do whatever I like) to Mehmet, school teacher, and Mahmut, nurse.” In another case, the Halkevi chairman of Buldan was brought to court by the Jandarma officer with the accusation of being “an ordinary theatre man” (alelade bir tiyatrocu). Because of the usual lack of female volunteers, the Halkevi chairman had invited two actresses from a traveling theatre company to participate in a theatre play to be staged by students. According to the chairman’s letter, the Jandarma officer demanded

420 BCA CHP, 490.1/827.271.3. The letters that follow are not necessarily presented in a chronological order, as I have classified them according to the subject or question I want to address.
421 BCA CHP, 490.1/843.332.1.
422 BCA CHP, 490.1/830.279.2.
423 BCA CHP, 490.1/827.332.1.
this cooperation to be stopped. “He maintained that the coming together of these sick women with the youths would supposedly give rise to a number of negative feelings among the youths.” The Halkevi chairman suggests that his employment of the two actresses was just the pretext for the Jandarma officer to intervene. Although not giving the ‘real’ cause behind the officer’s action, the Jandarma officer’s determination to produce a document (zabıt varakası) that could be used against the Halkevi chairman in court points to a deep-rooted enmity between the two actors.

More denunciations of sub-district governors by Halkevi or local Party chiefs exist. Local Party and/or Halkevi men had in many cases written denunciations of ‘outsiders’, in particular powerful state functionaries, such as the Kaymakam or the Jandarma officer. The files of the archive that have been consulted for this study are only the ones the Party’s General Secretariat classified as relevant to the People’s Houses. Large numbers of denunciation/complaint letters exist in other files. Consequently similar letters describing conflicts between locals and state officials are very likely to exist in greater numbers. It will become clear from the following examples that clashes between influential/powerful individuals or groups were rather typical in local settings. Our concern here though is not the disputes per se, but the venue of their staging, i.e. the Halkevi. Consider the following case of a letter against the Jandarma officer of Pazar.

In the afternoon of the 12th of December 1943 during a concert organized in the Halkevi the commander of the Gendarmerie Company Nazmi Sevin was seen publicly on the stage engaging in immoral acts with Ms Necmiye, who was singing on stage. The above is an extract from an official record (zabıt varakası) signed by the Halkevi secretary and accountant as well as four citizens. It was sent to the General Secretariat of the Party with the request for a formal investigation by the Party and the Public prosecutor. The Party Inspector of the Trabzon Area (Trabzon bölgesi Parti müfettişliği) was ordered to visit the region and investigate the issue. According to his report the Jandarma officer had embraced and kissed Naciye, who his sources described as “a woman of low morals who goes with everybody”. As for the Jandarma officer, following exchanges with the locals, the Inspector wrote the following: “apart from any legal and disciplinary action that is necessary, I report that his removal from Pazar would be appropriate. Nazmi Sevin, who dared to make such an ugly act and various similar actions, is known by the people of Pazar as an enemy of

425 Halkevi chairman Cevdet Kızılöz to CHP, 7/1/1943, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/831.281.1.
426 Only the archive of the General Secretariat of the ruling Party contains a number of folders with complaint letters in relation to a variety of issues, from Party, Municipal and National elections, to Party Congresses, Party candidates and ‘General Issues’. The other archives of the State Archives also contain folders with complaint letters as a simple search on its web site demonstrates.
427 BCA CHP, 490.1/842.329.1.
morals (ırz düşmanı) and for this reason has attracted the hate and disgust of the people.” The report disclosed something the initial letter had not mentioned. The relations of the officer that was denounced in the letter above with the locals, or ‘the people of Pazar’ as the Inspector writes, had been pretty bad even before his ‘acting on stage’.

High School Principal

The Gendarmerie officer was not the only state official/civil servant to attract the Halkevi chairman’s rancor. The Pharmacist Ziya Evren, chairman of the People’s House of Aydın signed a letter to the Party Headquarters asking for the removal of the director of the town’s Ticaret Lisesi (Commercial High School), Mehmet Özmet.\(^{429}\) His letter is a list of accusations against the director. It starts with Özmet’s refusal to allow one of his students to participate in a theatrical play on the Halkevi stage. The Halkevi chairman notes that although he showed him the General Secretariat’s communiqué,\(^{430}\) Özmet refused saying “I do not recognize the Party and the Halkevi. The House did not give me chairs for the Dance Party I gave; the same way I do not allow this student [to perform in the House].” By his account, the chairman had even applied to the Provincial authorities, but to no avail. From this point forth the letter escalates into a polemic against the Lise Müdürü (High School Principal). A series of charges are lodged. He did not invite but a few people to the opening of the two schools “thus showing that he gives no value to the people and the region’s intellectuals; he always and everywhere engages in questioning issues he is not justified to question (kendine ait olmayan işlerin tahkik ile uğraşmaktadır); he speaks against our Party disputing in detail the outcomes of the Party meetings and tries to initiate gossip”; “when discussing with his friends he even speaks in a manner that downgrades the enormous achievements of the Turkish victory and of the great Turks”; lastly, “he is the grandchild of the Kurd Cemil who, together with the last ottoman sultan and caliph, tried to strike the Turkish nation in the back at its most difficult times”.

The letter was written in 1948, at a time of relatively more liberal Party politics than before and of a severe competition between Government and opposition. Although the political antagonism of the era could have been a reason for the chairman’s hostility, he failed to note it. The letter is rather implying another set of reasons for this dispute. “From the very first day he came to Aydın, we never discovered this person’s nature. He has been opposing any kind of gathering (topluluk), he has been opposing the institution of the ‘Teacher’s Association’ (Öğretmenler Derneği), he has not entered the Association, but also prevents his teachers from entering. In this way he has damaged the solidarity within the family of culture (kültür ailesi arasındaki

\(^{429}\) Letter of 31/10/1048, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/825.263.1.

\(^{430}\) The occasion for the theatre play as well as other happenings in the House was the 25th celebration of the proclamation of the Republic. The Party communiqué the chairman is referring to was probably a letter giving local Party and state authorities orders/instructions about the celebration.
tesanüdü bozmuştur).” What the complainant is stressing here is that the teacher was not a local to the region and that he never tried to become a part of the local kültür ailesi, which were probably the reasons for the hostility against him.

The social, educational, life-style, and mentality differences between locals (elite and especially non-elite populace) and the state officials coming from outside, usually from big cities like Istanbul or Ankara (where the major educational institutions existed in the 1930s and 40s) was a well known phenomenon, essential for understanding the symbiosis, the coexistence and relations between these actors. By means of their education, status and of the power the state had entrusted upon them, these educated outsiders, mostly state employees, were automatically positioned among the local elite, and thus among the existing local power relations with their fractions, alliances and conflicts. The important place these ‘outsiders’ occupied in local communities and among the local elites becomes more apparent in the case of state officials/employees that were carrying more influence and power than our Lise director. Consider the case of the sub-district Governor (Kaymakam).

Sub-district Governor

The Kaymakam appears equally with the Gendarmerie officer or the teacher, if not more, vulnerable to similar to the above complaints by local actors, including the Halkevi chairman. Consider the following denunciation of the Kaymakam by the Ilgaz Halkevi chairman.

The sub-district governor Agah Erozan has covered himself behind the government’s authority and has exploited his position and influence to satisfy his personal desires. In that sense he does not refrain from doing exactly the opposite of these principles. He is also plotting against civil servants and persons from the people (halktan) he dislikes using official dealings as a pretext. He tries to succeed in satisfying his desires by complaining about them and by using his powers to open investigations against them.

431 The sub-district officer was a common target of denunciation letters not only by Halkevi chairmen, like the ones treated here, but also by other locals as well. For instance by local Party chairmen as in the case of the denunciation of Osman Tulğa, Kaymakam of Pınarbaşı by six members and the chairman of the Party Administrative Committee of the town, dated 19/2/1947, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/239.950.1 and of the Kaymakam of Tercan denounced by the local Party chairman in 12/1/1939 contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/833.289.1. In both cases the reasons given for the denunciation of the Kaymakam were multiply among them being an accusation of damaging the works of the local Halkevi.

432 Letter of Mustafa Akman, chairman of the Ilgaz Halkevi, No 106, dated 12 April 1940, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/830.278.2.

433 He refers to the principles of the Halkeveleri and the regime, such as the need to ‘enlighten the people’, to ‘make them love the government,’ and similar ‘national’ needs, all dressed up in the regime’s jargon.
Those under his influence, both civil servant and individuals from the people are hindering the communication between the people and the rest of the civil servants. Unfortunately, the people of our sub-district have stayed behind in the realms of culture and knowledge. Because of this they think that his acts are in concert with the government’s wishes and for this reason the people, as it is normal, have started to harbor concealed disobedience towards our institution.

Moreover the people, unable to tolerate these unlawful acts, have appealed to various official authorities and have made complaints even to ministries. [...] Nowadays he has even attacked me and he has consequently started to become an obstacle to the activities of our House.

A similar denunciation letter comes from Bulanık, a town in the province of Muş. The chairman of the local Halkevi wrote a complaint letter against the Kaymakam of the regional Kaza.

The kaymakam of the kaza Asım Büyüklü, although invited with a personal note, did not come to our theatre play ‘Yurdumuzu Geziyoruz’. Moreover, he invited a number of our intellectual friends to his house and, in this way, prevented them from coming to our House.

He then reported that a few weeks before a similar incident had occurred.

The kaymakam ordered the Gendarmerie to prohibit the staging of the play ‘Kanun adami’ we had prepared for New Year’s Day because, as he said ‘I was not informed’. He also ordered [the officers] to use their weapons in case ‘they don’t listen’. But, without being aware of that, we had already postponed the play for a couple of days. In the evening the Police commander came and told us not to stage that play. Everyone heard this and all the people were informed. This incident has reduced the people’s interest and the region’s esteem towards our House and, as a consequence, is preventing the realization of our aims. [...] In order not to cause similar ugly events and not to break the people’s interest in our House, we informed the Kaymakam with a document that a place has been reserved for him and asked him to honor us with his presence. It was only in this way that we managed to be saved [and stage the play]. But he did not come again.

The Halkevi chairman continued: “if this Kaymakam stays here, there will not be any possibility to continue with our activities. Because I am a civil servant, he wants to damage my record and tries to discredit me to my
superiors.” He ends his letter with a direct request for the Kaymakam’s removal from the region.434

Another comparable incident happened in the Halkevi of Çan in the province of Çanakkale. The problem started when a traveling theatre company asked permission to perform in the local Halkevi.435 The permission was given and the theatre company gave four shows. The crisis began on the second day when “it was observed that the play was running contrary to our By Laws”, as the chairman wrote to the General Secretariat. “At the same time a petition writer (arzuhalcı) named Yunus Özdemir was seen drinking rakı and was immediately warned not to continue drinking. On the third day of the play more persons were told not to drink rakı”. The Halkevi officials decided to stop the play. The artists went to the local Party leader Osman Kaya, at whose hotel they were residing, and asked for his mediation in order to continue performing. Osman Kaya tried to intervene “in order to safeguard his own interest”, but was informed that their performance was not appropriate to the Halkevi By Laws.

Osman Kaya took the theatre players with him and went directly to the Kaymakam. The Kaymakam İslam Ferit Öztürk said to the Party chairman “apart from you nobody can interfere with the Halkevi; I am ordering you now, go to the Halkevi and inform the chairman”. While I was sitting with two of my friends from the administration [of the Halkevi], the [Party] chairman came and said ‘Kazım, the kaymakam has ordered [that the players should continue to perform] and is informing us’. I reminded the chairman that such an order was not proper (yerinde olmadı). He went again to the kaymakam. This time the kaymakam took the Gendarmerie officer and went to the Party. He said ‘since I am the chief of the sub-district and hierarchically (badema) the Party chief is responsible for the Halkevi, I gave the order and the players will perform’. Then the Gendarmerie officer came and said in a threatening tone ‘I gave an order, you are not going to interfere with this issue, otherwise you will be reported’. In this way the players performed in the evening of 3/3/1947.

The Halkevi chairman continued his letter referring to similar problems he had with the Kaymakam and the local Party chief in the past. “In the past I wrote numerous letters to the Party Inspector and the Provincial Party structure concerning the national and local elections. The Kaymakam is definitely aware of that and is continuously trying to cause problems to my personal issues and to accuse me. Once again I prepared a report to the provincial Party structure about the last village/neighborhood headman (muhtar) elections that contained

434 Letter No 3, dated 19/1/1941, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/841.326.2.
435 Letter of Kazım Özyurt, Halkevi chairman, dated 4/3/1947, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/830.277.1. All the following extracts are from this letter.
a paragraph about the Kaymakam. Osman Kaya took a copy of that report to the Kaymakam saying ‘here you are! Again he writes against you’. The paragraph was then erased. Then the Kaymakam came to our [Party] meeting of 4/3/1947 and stayed until the paper was signed”. The offended Halkevi chairman then asked for the Party’s intervention. “In case this situation is not ameliorated, I’ll decide to resign from the Halkevi and the local Party Administrative Committee.” At the end of the letter he also shortly presented himself to the Party: “I am a villager by origin and current situation and I reside in the village. I have been a Party member since 1928. Before the sub-province of Çan I have worked in Biga. I have been elected delegate to the provincial congresses for the last ten years. I was a member of the previous Provincial Parliament (İl Genel Meclisi). I have been a member of the Çan sub-district [Party] structure since its foundation and the Halkevi chairman.” His last words to the Party Headquarters reveal that the Halkevi chairman was not a ‘common’ person, but one of them, of the ‘Party friends’, plus a ‘villager’, which is a reference to the Party and regime’s discourse. His request was not disregarded by the Party and the Party Inspector was dispatched to investigate his accusations.

Recai Güreli, MP for Tokat and Inspector of the Balıkesir area (Balıkesir Bölgesi Müfettişi), sent his report in 17/5/1947. His account of the event that brought the conflict to the surface was similar to the chairman’s version. The Inspector did not dwell on this event but rather focused on the ongoing conflict between the Kaymakam and local dignitaries.

There is a complete disagreement between the Kaymakam, the Party chairman and members of the Administrative Committee [of the Party] in this region. This Kaymakam is constantly creating problems for the Party friends and acts in an oppositional manner (Müşkilat çıkarmakta ve muhalefet göstermektedir). He looks down on the Party friends, considers them incompetent and thus prevents all the achievements they want to demonstrate in the name of the Party and the Halkevi. In fact, the Kaymakam İslam Ferit Öztürk feels that he was insulted by the Party and the Government because he was made Kaymakam to this sub-district from a position as deputy Governor (Vali Muavinliğinden). As a matter of fact, during the previous national and municipal election he betrayed our Party. I have reported this issue before. I consider his immediate dismissal from this region as quite appropriate.436

Let’s take a step back: a trivial Halkevi theatre play provided the stimulus for the surfacing of a local feud. The consequent letters of the Halkevi chairman and the Inspector’s report reveal that there was a state of conflict

436 BCA CHP, 490.1/830.277.1.
between local power brokers and the Kaymakam. The Inspector gave a plausible reason behind the Kaymakam’s reported negative behavior towards the Party and its local representatives. He probably considered his appointment as the Kaymakam of Çan (in the province of Çanakkale) as a form of administrative exile and demotion from a Provincial centre and the position as the Deputy Governor. This might seem sufficient to account for his ‘betrayal of the Party and the Government’ but it does not fully elucidate the relation between the Kaymakam and the local Party boss, an issue not mentioned by the Party Inspector, whose report simply states that the Kaymakam was in constant disagreement with the Party friends. Moreover, if we consider this case in relation with the above denunciations of state officials by local Party men, the option of the Kaymakam’s resentment caused by an ‘administrative exile’ or ‘demotion’ alone does not seem adequate to explain the clash. In my opinion, an explanation pertaining to less personal and more social attributes appears more reasonable. More specifically, I wish to argue that local social, economic and cultural conditions, local power networks, as well as the place reserved for, but also claimed by, the ‘outsider’ state official within that ‘local order of things’ can and should provide a broader interpretative framework for an analysis of the relations between state officials and local power brokers (local Party men, merchants, professionals). In many cases this relation must have been conflictual from the very beginning, especially in areas the Party Inspectors or Governors might describe as ‘lagging behind’ (geride kalmış). This idea becomes more obvious, if we think that most educated civil servant usually came from big cities and were most likely prone to ‘read’ local norms (from local habits and beliefs to local accents) as signs of ‘backwardness’. Consider the motif of the ‘idealist teacher’ and the ‘idealist Kaymakam’ struggling against all odds to bring ‘civilization’ (medeniyet) to an indifferent, or even hostile, populace. In reality the motif of the ‘idealist teacher’ points to the cultural difference and the difficulties to adapt to local condition the state officials encountered, rather than solely to the mission-like effort they were showing (or were supposed to show).

Adaptation to local conditions meant cooperation with local power brokers, such as the local Party, social and economic elites. This cooperation might at the same time mean that the state official was taking one side in an ongoing local feud. Horst Unbenhaun in his monograph on the small town of Datça indicates that since the 1930s the local ağa families were establishing a set of relations with the state officials coming from outside. The local elite families offered cheap housing and provisions services. The local Party structure was staffed by members of the same families. Within such a setting, the opinions of the Kaymakam, Unbenhaun remarks, can be observed upon a shifting axis roughly corresponding to their relations with the local elite families, be it close or not that close. Occasionally we can speak of a strategic alliance. It is not a coincidence that till 1945 three sub-district governors were married to the daughters of local ağas. On the other hand, “the two
Kaymakams (in 1928 and 1942) that went contrary to the power of the ağas demonstrate that the symbiosis did not always operate the same way.437 A similar instance illustrating the potentially troubling symbiosis of the ‘outsider’ district governor and local elites, between representatives of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ republic, as he terms the two systems, is given by Michael Meeker in his book on the district of Of. There the Kaymakam forcefully replaces the mayor with the deployment of gendarmeries, but then artfully enters into negotiation with the deposed mayor in order to select his successor.438

In sum, the letters read here position us in the middle of that problematic symbiosis between ‘locals’ and ‘outsiders’, as well as in the midst of ongoing feuds involving local elite actors and ‘outsider’ state officials, operating as individuals or, more commonly, in antagonistic to each other groups. Of course, the letters rarely offer a complete picture, but rather fragments of the conflict, usually the voice of one of the camps. What is of interest to our study here though is not the local feuds described/mentioned in these letters, but rather what these stories of conflict reveal about their actors in relation to the People’s House, which emerges as the stage of the conflict and/or the space whose control the battling sides and individuals are clashing for.

Conflicting sides II: Denunciations of Halkevi chairmen.

Halkevi chairmen and local Party bosses were not the only complainants to the Party headquarters in Ankara. They were also the object of complaints by Halkevi members or other citizens as we have pointed out in the beginning of this part with Muammer Köksal’s story. Let us now turn to some examples of similar complaints against Halkevi chiefs that reveal the existence of conflicts between Halkevi members. The letters used here to demonstrate that a state of struggle and antagonism existed in the Halkevleri do not necessarily denote that such open conflicts were always on the local agenda, but rather that the position and functions of the People’s House within a local community was shaping the Halkevi as a space structurally susceptible to such events.

The first example comes from Nazilli. It is an anonymous letter sent by a Halkevi member in 29/9/1948.439 The anonymous ‘Partili’ complained that the Halkevi chief was displaying tyrannical behavior towards the Halkevi members. More specifically, the Halkevi chief Fütuhat Töker, was the wife of the director of the local Factory. The conflict emerged when she asked Bedia Erbatur, chief of the Social Assistance Section, to give her the money the Section had gathered from various events. The president of the Social Assistance Section demanded to know where these funds were to be spend in order to record it into the Section’s registry book (Faaliyet defteri). The

439 Contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/825.263.1.
Halkevi chief’s response was fierce: “(I ask for your apology, but that is what she [the Halkevi chief] said). With what right are these idiots asking me to account for this. I terminate the [existence of the] Social Assistance Section.”\textsuperscript{440} According to the complainant the rest of the Halkevi officials did not resist at all, “because Mrs Fütuhat is the director’s wife; if one goes contrary to her wish or even shows courage to speak, one is messing with his future.”

The anonymous complainant, probably an employee of the Factory, continues with more examples of the Halkevi chief’s oppressive behavior that was based on her husband’s powerful position in the area. The state Factory (Sümerbank Basma Fabrikası) was one of the large state industrial projects of the era. It seems that the directors of these factories were treated as high-level bureaucrats, as their names figure prominently in the Party and Halkevi sources.\textsuperscript{441} In short, in his/her complaint of the Halkevi chief the anonymous ‘Partili’ discloses first of all the importance, status and power the state Factory, its director, and his wife enjoyed in the local society, and, secondly, the currency this status had in the Halkevi, with all the consequences – in our case the inscription of the Halkevi space into the geography of local power brokers and their rivalries.

Finally, the letter implied that a number of Halkevi members were troubled with the president of the Halkevi, but were unable and scared to act because of the president’s husband. Apart from these unhappy Halkevi members, the author implicated another person in the incident. He requested that the investigation he was asking for be carried out by the retired Captain Osman. Instead of reading this just as a request for impartiality in the person of the retired officer, it might also be suggestive of the existence of various fractions and/or persons antagonistic to the persons holding positions of power, such as the Halkevi chairmanship.

The file does not contain any other paper – the report of a Party Inspector for instance - that would defend the above suggestion. In other instances though the existence of the ‘outsider’s’ voice - in our case an inspector’s report - makes my suggestion more plausible. An example comes from the town of Artvin. Between September 1940 and August 1942 three complaints were made against Cemal Alper, the local Halkevi and Party chairman. The last one,

\textsuperscript{440} O eşeğiği eşekler benden ne hakla hesap sorabiliyolar, sosyal yardım kolunu lağ(va) aynı ediyorum.
\textsuperscript{441} In Kayseri, for example, where another large state factory was built in the 1930s, the director’s name can be found in a couple of sources indicating his high status. For instance, in a brochure of the Kayseri Halkevi describing a ‘Village Excursion’ the names of two Factory directors are between the first in the list following the Provincial Governor and the local military commander. İlbay Adli Bayman’ın Başkanlığı altında Kayseri Halkevinin Tertip ettiği Yaya Köy Gezileri Tetkik Notlarıdır, Seri: 2, Germir Köyü, Yazan: Etiler Başı öğretmeni Kazım Özdoğan (Halkevi Müze ve sergiler komitesinden), Kayseri ilayet Matbaası, 1937, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/837.310.1. The extraordinary status and power of the director of a state factory can be found in Linke’s description of the director of the Kayseri factory, in Lilo Linke, \textit{Allah Dethroned: A journey through modern Turkey} (New York: Alfred A. Knipf, 1937), pp. 300-14.
signed by the tailor Bahri Curdan, brought about an investigation by the Party Inspector of the Çoruh Area. The first letter, signed by two civil servants and two teachers, is a direct denunciation of the Halkevi chairman Cemal Alper. More specifically, the incident that caused the writing of the complaint letter was described in the following way by the complainants:

On Thursday 12/9/1940 the plaintiffs went to the Halkevi to listen to the Radio broadcast as always to learn the last events of the war. A little later the Halkevi chairman came together with the Party secretary, two municipal officers and the secretary of the local Department of Education. The Halkevi chairman and his friends were reported as being in a cheerful state. They ordered the Halkevi janitor to change the Radio to a music channel. The complainants protested, a debate followed, and, finally, the Radio was set again to the news broadcast, but it was only at the end of the program. They also complained that the Halkevi chairman had behaved similarly many times in the past. In their opinion such acts run contrary to the principles of “our honored Republican Government” and of the Party. They finish the letter asking that such acts be prevented in the future. The letter describes a verbal confrontation between two groups of civil servants in the garden of the Halkevi. Moving beyond the core of the letter’s complaint, which is the dispute about the Radio broadcasting, we can see that the group of complainants denounced the Halkevi chairman’s general manners and by asking for the center’s intervention, which can be read as an indirect invitation to have the chairman removed from office, revealed a confrontation between local elite actors for the control of the Halkevi, its facilities, consequently the status and power their control entails, and, even more interesting, the prerogative to represent the Government and the Party.

One and a half year later, the chairman of the Halkevi of Artvin became the target of two more denunciation letters. Luckily in this case, the report on the second complaint letter by the Party Inspector uncovers the dynamics of a conflict staged in the Halkevi between the chairman and a group of ex-members of the Halkevi. The Inspector’s report also reveals the tactics the complaining group chose to follow to further their plans.

The first letter was sent to Fikri Tüzer, General Secretary of the ruling Party, in 25/2/1942 by Mehmet Bilgetürk, Accountant at the Directorship of State Monopolies in Artvin (İnhisar Başmüdürlüğü). It is a direct assault on the Halkevi chairman, Cemal Arper. The letter can be divided into two sections. The first in all probability describes the core event that led the complainant write the letter. The second is a list of accusations against the Halkevi chairman.

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442 Letter of 12/9/1940, signed by the ziraat muallimi (teacher of agriculture) Şevket Şengün, two civil servants in the Financial Department, (Maliye veznedarı) Haydar Beken and (Maliye tahrirat katibi) Nuri Atabek, and the schoolteacher of the village Aydın Hasan Fehmi, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/830.279.2.

443 Letter of 25/2/1942, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/830.279.2.
Mehmet Bilgetürk starts his letter with a brief description of his relationship to the Halkevi of Artvin. He was a member of the Theatre Section, but was also active in the Fine Arts Section. The chairman requested from the Administrative Committee of the House to remove the orchestra’s chief, “Hasan, a clean youth [well] known to all people of Artvin.” The decision was signed by the majority and Hasan was removed from his position and from the House. “After a few days the Decision Book (Karar defteri) was brought to me for signing by the House’s secretary Ibrahim. I did not sign because of the following phrase: ‘Due to his continuous immoral behavior he was removed from his duty’. Later on I understood that it was Cemal Alper who had added that phrase.” Following his refusal to sign he was never again called to the meetings of the Administrative Committee of the House. Some time later he received a letter from the Halkevi chairman informing him that he was considered resigned from the House, something he never accepted.

In the second part of his letter, Mehmet Bilgetürk launched even more accusations against the Halkevi chairman. He complained that the Halkevi account books were full of irregularities he had attempted to fix, as he was a professional accountant employed in the Monopolies Department. Needless to say, the chairman was against his efforts and removed him from that duty. He then reported that the furniture of the House were in bad condition. Moreover, he accused the chairman of tyrannical behavior. “This man is an ignorant person who cannot understand what he is reading.” He even accused him of drinking rakı in the garden of the Halkevi. This complaint letter is typical in its narrative structure, from the description of the critical event that led to the confrontation, to the climactic delirium of accusations, some of them seemingly inflated.

A third denunciation of the same Halkevi chairman and the following report of a Party Inspector somehow elucidate the event. It becomes evident that the Halkevi chairman was the target of an orchestrated assault by a group of people close to the local Halkevi. “The Halkevi chairman is a man with much influence in the region but worthless. Although worthless, his supporters form the majority and thus he is powerful. He became the Halkevi chairman, although he was the local Party leader as well. […] The Halkevi of Artvin shows no activity due to Cemal’s unlawful and unplanned activities.” The denouncer, signing as “Bahri Curdan, tailor in Artvin”, based his denunciation of the Halkevi chairman on general grounds without describing any particular incident.444

The report on the issue sent to the Party Headquarters by the Party Inspector of the Çoruh area on the 1st of October 1942 added a lot of information about the complainants of the last two letters, Bahri Curdan and Mehmet Bilgetürk. According to the Inspector, Bahri Curdan “is a personality who has no relations with the Party and the Halkevi, and is unable to

444 The letter is not dated. It was sent before the 12th of August 1942, day the Party instructed the Party Inspector to investigate the issue. BCA CHP, 490.1/830.279.2.
understand anything of the region’s problems. In July he had given two anonymous and meaningless letters to Nazif Ergin, 3rd General Inspector, upon his arrival at Artvin. [The 3rd General Inspector] attempted to find the meaning and aim of the complaints of this person’s letter; as a result, it became evident that he [the complainant Bahri] is an abnormal man.” The Inspector continued that Bahri Curdan was actually used by Mehmet Bilgetürk and Hasan Şener, the former a civil servant and the latter a member of the Halkevi orchestra. Both had been removed from their duties in the Halkevi by the chairman and had henceforth been acting against the Administrative Committee. The Party Inspector considered the complaint a malicious and fake charge (iftira) against the Halkevi chairman. The cause behind the complaint was their removal from the Halkevi due to “the improper execution of their duties and their unpleasant behavior that was distressing the region.”

In the time span of two years three denunciations of the same Halkevi chairman were made. As in so many other cases, we can definitely argue that the position of the Halkevi chairman almost automatically attracted opposition. The complaint and denunciation letters we treat here are a confirmation of this hostility. The chairmen of the People’s Houses were elected, or rather appointed, by the local Party Administrative Committees, in many cases from among its members. The Halkevi chairmanship was a foremost Party position and thus a position of power and influence. In official ceremonies, the Halkevi chairman figures among the important local Party and state leaders (Vali/Kaymakam, Military/Police commander, Party and state officials). Moreover, the physical closeness of the Halkevi to other Party and state buildings (usually situated on the Cumhuriyet Meydanı [Square of the Republic] next to the Hükümet Konağı [the ‘Government’s Mansion’, i.e. the Headquarters of the state administration in the locality, seat of the Governor], the CHP, the Lise and other state buildings) underscored the Houses’ place within state and Party power. In some cases the Halkevi was even sharing the same building with the local CHP. Photographs of state ceremonies show the state and local elites in their official attire in front of the Halkevi building. By taking into account the disputes between local elites, as well as the struggle to occupy the limited number of positions of power open to them, our letters, what they describe and, even more important, what they rarely refer to openly – local conflicts, are related to a broader context, i.e. local politics and the relations of power between local power brokers, state officials and their contenders.

From another point of view, our letters form just the tip of the iceberg in that the rarely offer a complete picture of an ongoing conflict between two sides. They usually refer to the acts of the denounced that usually turn into a

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446 For an elaborate reading of the public space and especially the Cumhuriyet Meydam within which the Halkevi is usually situated see Neşe Gurallar Yeşilkaya, Halkevleri: ideoloji ve mimarlık (İstanbul: İletişim, 1999), pp. 140 – 7. Needless to say not all Houses were situated in the Cumhuriyet Meydam but were nevertheless in physical proximity to other power-laden buildings.
inflated climactic inventory of accusations, without any direct mention of the ‘other side’, something the report of the external Party Inspector customarily reveals. In some few cases though, the antagonism escalates into an open fight with occasional use of physical force, where the conflicting sides are exposed. In such cases, the accounts portray the Halkevi as an arena within which ‘dramas of conflict’ are staged between local actors. The selection of the Halkevi for the staging of the conflict is not always accidental: in most case it is the control of the Halkevi that is contested, but also the Halkevi clientele is selected as the audience of such a play, which can be considered as a tactic employed for the public discrediting of the accused side/person. Let us now turn to a couple of examples of such ‘dramas of conflict’.

**Dramas of Conflict**

The Halkevi of the small town of Silvan, the administrative center of a sub-district linked to the Province of Diyarbekir, became the stage of two consecutive clashes between two of the House’s chairmen and a group of civil servants and Party officials. Both cases are relatively well reported in the archive enabling a more in-depth reading and analysis of such cases of conflict than the incidents we have treated above. Apart from the relevant abundance of sources, another feature distinguishes Silvan from the previous cases: an actual verbal and physical confrontation between the conflicting persons/sides on the Halkevi stage, reported by both sides. In other words, the existing antagonism between the actors escalated and erupted into an actual fight. This eruption offers the opportunity to study the conflicting discourses produced about the ongoing hostility and about its escalation into an actual fight, but also to ‘read’ the actions and tactics used by the actors in situ, before, during, and after the fight.

*Stage one: ‘Ulan namussuz Tevfik!’*

On the 17th of January 1935 a person signing as Rahmi, resident of Silvan, wrote a complaint letter to the Silvan sub-district governor (Silvan kaymakamlığına) against Tevfik, the chairman of the local Halkevi. In his rather long letter (5 handwritten pages) Rahmi accused Tevfik of as many as 17 faults. Nearly all his charges (15 out of 17) are of financial nature. For

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448 Contained in *BCA CHP*, 490.1/832.283.1.
instance, he accused Tevfik of embezzling the House’s income in several ways; denying control by accountants; not paying the Halkevi janitor; purchasing a number of items for the House at inflated prices; moving furniture from the Halkevi to his House; and other similar charges. Lastly (charges No. 16 and 17), he charged Tevfik (school principal) with not attending his classes while spending his working hours in the House and with treating his subordinate teachers badly. At this point, we have to keep in mind two issues: firstly, most of the accusations above pertain to the chairman’s financial ‘misconduct’ indicating that the complainant was rather skillful in economics or accounting. Secondly, from the 12th accusation onwards the handwriting is completely different denoting that at least two persons wrote and were aware of the accusations, and thus can be considered as Tevfik’s opponents.

Three months later, in 21/3/1935, Rahmi wrote another denunciation of the Halkevi chairman this time to the superior of his previous letter’s addressee, the Provincial Governor of Diyarbekir (Diyarbekir vilayeti yüksek makamına). Rahmi, again signing as resident of Silvan, reported: “because up until today there has been no result from my last denunciation (ihbariye) of Tevfik, this person has become more audacious and in the evening of the second day of the Bayram attacked the Kaymakam and the Director of Finance (Malmüdürü) while he was drunk. [...] Moreover, he damages the accord between high and low officials. Because of his sick mind he does not find the time to oversee the students and the teachers of the school. It is well known that the second and third grade students under his instruction do not know how to multiple one by one.”

Unfortunately no other document in the relevant file refers to this incident, real or not. Nevertheless, this last letter argues that the local sub-district governor and at least one high-ranking civil servant had been engaged in a fight with Tevfik. The letter also implicates other civil servants as well, although in a quite vague way.

Next comes Tevfik’s own narrative about the situation sent in 4/4/1935 as a telegram to the Party headquarters in Ankara. According to Tevfik, Kaymakam İzzet had been speaking negatively of the People’s Houses for a long time. As a result, he had caused the following events. Some ‘drunkards’ had attacked his house some nights before, in the evening of the 31st of May 1935 and “had insulted with curses the spiritual personality (şahsiyeti
maneviye) of the Halkevi and the committee that had the holy duty to organize
the show (musamere) for the benefit of the Red Cross”. In addition, it was the
Kaymakam’s opinions that led to the events during that show, when “our
beloved people participating in the show had to flee their own House.” Tevfik
ended his letter with a request for the removal of the Kaymakam from Silvan.
He did not name the ‘drunkards’, targeting just the Kaymakam. He did not even
explain what had happened during the Red Cross evening in the Halkevi. In all
probability this was not the only letter he wrote about the events.

Luckily, there is one last relevant document. It was sent from the Ministry
of Education (signed by the General Director of Primary Education) to Necip
Ali (Küçük), mistakenly called ‘president of the People’s Houses’. It is
dated 26 May 1935. The writer described it as “the result of the investigation
regarding the Educational Officer of Silvan (Silvan Maarif Memuru) Tevfik”.
He is described as an ill-tempered and heated person.

He was born in Sivrek in 1307 (1901). He graduated from the
Diyarbekir Teacher’s College in 1331 (1915). Lately his
relations with the Kaymakam and some of the people following
him have been bad. As a result, on the evening of 30/3/1935
during the show organized in the Halkevi for the benefit of the
Red Cross, a group composed of the Director of Finance, tax
collectors and civil servants from the Financial Departments
(Hususi Muhasebe ve Varidat memurları ve tahsildardan
mürekkep bir gurup) entered the House. The ‘Income Officer’
(Varidat Memuru) shouted, “this one did not pay”; then he
closed the gramophone behind the stage that was playing
music for the people and started checking the tickets. When
someone suggested that the control should be done at the
entrance he started shouting. Tevfik then said ‘don’t break the
good order of the Halkevi’. In reply to this it was uttered, ‘Hey!
Shameless Tevfik’ (Ulan namussuz Tevfik); according to some
present even harsher words were exchanged such as ‘Don’t
make me say what I’ll do to yours and to the Halkevi’s good
order’. Next the director of Finance said, ‘My officers know
what they’ll do’. He declined the intervention of the head of the
Conscription Office. As a result, the assailants were taken out
by the police (jandarma vasıtasıyle). The aforementioned civil
servants were dispatched to other areas and Tevfik was
removed from the Halkevi chairmanship by the provincial
authorities (Vilayetçe).

This report describes the fight at the Red Cross evening Tevfik was
alluding to in his own letter. The report clarified who the conflicting sides

451 Necip Ali was the head of the 5th Bureau of the General Secretariat of the CHP, one of the duties
of which was the monitoring of the activities of the People’s Houses.
452 BCA CHP, 490.1/832.283.1.
were: the Kaymakam and a number of civil servants from the Financial Services against the principal Tevfik. The reason behind the antagonism that culminated to the events described above is not given. If we believe the two complaint letters by Rahmi, the dispute was due to Tevfik’s unlawful administration of the Halkevi revenues, his professional negligence and tyrannical behavior towards his subordinates. Although not mentioned, Tevfik’s being from the area, but not a local of Silvan, (he was from Siverek, a largely Zaza-speaking area), might have been a reason for the disagreement. Moreover, the letters indicate that the actual incident at the Red Cross evening was a public eruption of an ongoing hostility between the two sides that had been dragging on for quite a while. The clash that evening was to a certain extent, as the letters leave to be understood, premeditated and staged by Tevfik’s opponents.

In a number of his works, Victor Turner has focused on situations of conflict between individuals and/or groups within social groups. He has termed such conflicts ‘social dramas’ during which public eruptions of hostility between the warring sides take place. He has argued that what he terms as a ‘social drama’ is a social event identifiable in every human society, not only the Ndembu where he primarily carried out fieldwork. He also has offered a structural analysis of such social dramas dividing them into four distinguishable phases. The drama starts, signaled by an act that makes the feud visible, by a ‘public eruption’ of hostilities, what he terms a “breach of regular norm-governed social relations”. It is followed by an escalation of the crisis, where the conflicting sides become clear and it is difficult for individuals or groups/institutions not to take sides, which is then followed by redressive action, i.e. by activity aiming at the resolution of the crisis. This may take the form of formal or not, institutional or unofficial arbitration. As a consequence of the mediation acts, the last phase of the drama ends with the reintegration of the sides within the social format or with an irreparable schism.453

In view of Turner’s classificatory and analytical categories, we may examine our case as a series of structurally interrelated phases, even though our sources present a rather limited picture when we compare them to Turner’s simultaneous fieldwork analysis. Open hostilities in Silvan seem to commence publicly with the actual incident at the Red Cross evening, a public declaration of war staged by one side, quite similar to Turner’s breach. The public character of the breach is crucial, not only for probing the centre’s involvement – probably not caused by the previous denunciation letters, but also in order to create a public fait accompli, an event that would make the return to the status quo ante difficult, if not impossible. The humiliation of Tevfik is a tactical move by his rivals. This direct, visible and public attack on his personality and public persona renders his ability to execute the responsibilities and duties of the positions he occupies (teacher, Halkevi chairman, thus state and Party

representative) curtailed in front of the eyes of both his local clients (students, Halkevi audiences, local public) and his superiors (Party and state). It is not accidental then that the accused side, Tevfik, is describing the incident exactly in terms of an attack on the ‘spiritual personality of the Halkevi and its executive members’ that made the people ‘flee from their own House’.

If the public eruption of the feud appears as the first necessary and structural phase, the petitioning, denouncing, complaining and reporting ‘communication battle’ that follows – in our case it had already started before the actual incident – is the second, successive structural phase of the ongoing feud-come-public. Bearing similarities to Turner’s second and third phases, the communicative skirmishes of our actors can be rather accurately explained as an attempt by both sides of the conflict to win the war by successfully instigating the involvement and/or mediation of mechanisms of the centre. Given the probably staged character of the Red Cross event, it is rather evident that one of the reasons behind its staging was exactly that, i.e. to bring about the institutional intervention of supervising state authorities. In this sense, both phases, the eruption of the incident and the communicative war that followed, were structurally interwoven and complementary in nature. The provoking of a public incident then is an act with communicative value, is a ‘play’ staged for an ‘audience’ - in our case both state/centre and local society – that aims at and finally achieves the direct involvement of this audience.

A part of this communicative battle – probably a large part – is missing. We could only uncover a few of its archival remnants that nevertheless indicate that more authorities must have been implicated than the local state bureaucracy, the Ministry of Education and the central Party mechanism. The paper trail regarding this case is not full. The reports of the accused Kaymakam, the local Governor, the Governor’s superior office, i.e. the Ministry of Interior, as well as the communications between these offices, to state a few possibly compiled documents, are missing.

Notwithstanding this partiality of the sources, the letters in hand give us a hint of the tactics the opponents followed during this entrenched battle of petitioning superior authorities. The one side accused Tevfik of occupational incompetence and negligence, of financial misconduct and embezzlement, of injuring the accord between civil servants; and lastly for being a drunkard. The accusations were directed to the complainants’ superiors, the highest state bureaucrat in the region, the Governor. All but the last accusations against Tevfik were pertaining to issues that fell under the direct responsibility and interest of the state administration and the local Vali. They were in a sense accusing their opponent of impeding the state’s authority and work, thus aiming at – or even trying to manipulate - the addressee’s sensitivity towards such issues and his duty to intervene.

Tevfik’s account of the clash exhibits the same quality. He elected to address the CHP, under his authority as Halkevi chairman and accuse his opponents of damaging the ‘spiritual personality’ of the House and its
executive members, as well as of causing ‘the People’ to flee from their ‘own House’. Correspondingly to his opponents then, he is accusing them of impeding the realization of the Halkevi’s aims, which were not accidentally the aims and policies of the Houses’ owner and the letter’s addressee, the regime and state itself.

Both sides then denounced their opponents to different parts of the centre, the Party Headquarters and the civil bureaucracy, in an attempt to gain the edge. They tried to implicate one part of the centre against another in the conflict, in a curious ‘civil strife’ between state offices and individuals occupying these offices. This ‘civil strife’ among state actors at the local level attempting to implicate other state mechanisms against each other has not been accounted for, or even is overlooked by the dominant in the history of modern Turkey theories and approaches overplaying a strong state tradition or a modern monolithic state against the passive, undifferentiated and occasionally ‘hostile’ society we encounter in both Kemalist sources from the period and in a large part of the bibliography on the period. The ubiquitous conflicts between state and non-state actors implicating state offices against one another, which occasionally erupt in ‘social dramas’ as the ones we study here render such approaches quite simplistic and unresponsive to scrutiny and to the data from the field.

Given the fragmentary nature of our sources it is rather tricky to determine what the conclusion of Tevfik’s case was, reintegration or an irreparable schism, in Turner’s classification. At first sight it seems that the Governor’s involvement produced a resolution of the crisis by removing Tevfik from the Halkevi chairmanship and some of his civil servants opponents from the area reappointing them elsewhere, although the Kaymakam, referred to by both Tevfik and the Ministry’s report as implicated in the event, was not removed from Silvan, but, according to another source, was made chairman of the local Halkevi, probably for a short, intermediary period until a more suitable candidate could be selected. Although the actors participating in the public event at the Red Cross evening were removed from the area and a new Halkevi chairman was selected, this was not a lasting solution.

Stage two: ‘he slapped his face in reaction’

Almost one and a half year later another similar incident between the chairman of the Silvan Halkevi and a number of state officials erupted in the Hall of the Halkevi. The file does not contain any document from an outside source (Party Inspector for instance), but only the letters of the two sides, the Kaymakam in defense of his assault and the Halkevi chairman demanding reprisal. The chairman’s (Ömer Öner) letter to the Party in Ankara was sent in 30/11/1936.

In the evening of 26-27/11/1936 I was at my place together with the teacher Aydost, Saadet and Esma from the family of the retired Rahmi. Sergeant Ali, the municipality’s tax officer came and told me that the Kaymakam was calling me to the Halkevi. I went with Aydost. The Kaymakam Ekrem, the Sectional chief Hulki, Captain Doğan and Inspector İbrahim Omay of the Land Registry were present in the Hall. There was a picture of Premier İnönü that was sent at the time of the old chairman, the Kaymakam İzzet Kılavuz. This picture was left in the book cabinet, the best place in the House. They attacked me using as a pretext that the photograph was not put on the Hall wall – as if there was not a bigger one on the wall – and taking advantage of the picture to further their secret aims with the inspector, with whom they had spend their last days and nights together. I was insulted and slapped in the Halkevi Hall, where we struggle everyday to enlighten and guide our people. They had opened the Hall with no authorization, they had sent the janitor away, and had put a (Jandarma) policeman at the entrance. In this situation I hardly managed to escape and save myself. The life of your child was in danger today in Silvan, your child that with a clean heart and a lofty aim has the Turkish culture on his shoulders. Let my records be examined. For the last ten years I have been working as teacher, principal; I have always been struggling in cultural duties and there is no black stain on my forehead.455

A few days later it was the Kaymakam’s turn to report the event to his superior, the Provincial Government.456 His report is not significantly different from the chairman’s. The actors remain the same with Ömer’s account of the event (minus the police officer at the entrance). Nevertheless, indirectly he admits that what they did that evening was to a certain extent premeditated. He wrote that even before the chairman Ömer came they had prepared an Official Document (zabıt verakasile), where they explained the state of the Premier’s photograph. The Halkevi chairman argued that the photograph was a pretext for the assault of the Kaymakam and the Land Registry Inspector. The Kaymakam, on the other hand, holds throughout his letter that the starting point for the dispute was the Premier’s photograph. The premeditated nature of their acts though, as well as what he wrote below about the chairman and the judge of Silvan disclose a deeper animosity between power brokers of the region. The Kaymakam reports that a week after the incident another picture, this time of Atatürk signed by him for the Halkevi was found in the school “in an ugly state, with its cadre made of common wood, full with glue stains, while for its

455 BCA CHP, 490.1/832.283.1.
back cover newspaper had been used. I took this picture with the aim to put it in a proper cadre.” The Kaymakam then turns to Ömer:

*The aforementioned Ömer was not insulted; it was he who insulted these photographs with his acts. This person was beaten in the middle of the market in public in the towns of Lice and Osmaniye where he used to reside. In what sense then is this person referring to self-esteem? He is a bad person and I think that just the event that took place above is sufficient to give an idea about his morality (bunun ahlaki).*

The letters reveal that the incident was just the beginning; both actors tried to act in response. The chairman wrote to the Party; the Kaymakam to his superior. Moreover, as the Kaymakam reported, Ömer enlisted the assistance of the local judge, who opened an investigation against the Land Registry Inspector. The Kaymakam accused the judge of partisanship and of trying to take revenge. He did not explain the reason for the judge’s behavior though. “The people of our region were living in order and peace for two months because the judge was on leave. [S]tarting from a small issue he magnified it to the point that the state authority is being broken.” He called the judge a ‘leader of bandits’ (çete reisi) and deplored that he had not been removed from the region after so many complaints and “letters sent to official authorities”, but instead had been increasing “his influence among the ignorant people.” The Kaymakam ended his letter requesting the removal of both judge and Halkevi chairman to another area. In his words: “because a teacher that has been beaten cannot instruct the local children (ders ve terbiye) […] he must be appointed to one of the nearby districts.” Moreover, he recommended the Director of Finance for the Halkevi chairmanship. If his requests were not to be carried out, he asked for his own reappointment elsewhere.

The two letters above clearly demonstrate that the clash – orchestrated in all probability - between the two bureaucrats (Kaymakam and Land Registry Inspector) and Ömer in the Halkevi was just one round in the fight between the two sides. It also becomes clear that many more people – bureaucrats and teachers – were implicated directly or indirectly by either side: the judge, the land Registry Inspector, a couple of teachers, the wife of the retired – probably teacher – Rahmi, the Director of Finance (Malmüdürü). We have to keep in mind that the persons referred to in these documents, even if not directly taking part in the dispute, were in all probability not mentioned in vain, but rather as potential witnesses in the (likely) case of an investigation,

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457 Here I translate the sentence “ve mutekait Rahmi’nin ailesi Esma” as ‘the wife of the retired Rahmi. If he was the same person that a year before had twice written to the Party against the then Halkevi chairman Tevfik, then my translation in the previous part of the chapter of his signature “Silvanda mutekait Rahmi” as ‘Rahmi resident of Silvan’ is wrong and should be ‘Retired Rahmi in Silvan’.
which is usually requested by one or both sides. In that respect, it is highly probable that they can be considered as allies of one side or the other.

Having concluded that the Premier’s photograph was not the sole cause of the conflict but rather the pretext, we cannot but notice the similarities of these events with those that had taken place one year before in Silvan again involving the principal and Halkevi chairman, the Kaymakam and a number of other state officials. Even if the Malmüdürü was not the same person, the match in terms of posts is almost identical. In this sense, the existing sources indicate that a rather enduring local feud was on. Another more general hypothesis is that in a place where the positions of power were even more limited than elsewhere (absence of Party structure – see below), the struggle for control over one of the existing ones – the Halkevi – was immediately more intense. Was there a ‘locals vs. outsiders’ character in the fight? In the case of Tevfik we know that he was from the region. Ömer, in the second case, seems to have been employed mainly in the region (Lice and Osmaniye). From the opposite side, the Kaymakam was always a foreigner of the region, as well as the Land Registry Inspector and the army officer in all probability. The same was also likely for the Director of Finance. Many more qualities of the actors might have been significant and contributing to the schism, for instance ethnic origin and language, social and educational background, lifestyle, although not mentioned in this case.458

Another point that deserves to be mentioned is the absence of any reference to local Party structures. Unlike most of the similar cases of conflict in a local setting, here the local Party is absent from the documents. Party structures were actually not established in most of the southeast provinces up until the late 1940s.459 A high-ranking arbiter existed though. The letter of the Kaymakam was sent to the Vali of Diyarbakır who in turn forwarded it to the 1st General Inspector (Birinci Umumi Müfettişliği), who was probably the one who forwarded it to the General Secretariat of the Party.460

In case we employ Turner’s four-phase scheme to examine this second successive ‘social drama’ enacted on the Halkevi stage of Silvan, we would encounter great similarities with the previous stage. The feud between groups of civil servants erupted into the open with a ‘breach of social protocol’, the public slapping of the Halkevi chairman into the House. As a consequence of

458 In a number of cases ethnic difference are raised. 8/3/1947 letter of Kemal Zülfikaroğlu complaining that during a show at the Diyarbakır Halkevi the accent of Bitlis was mocked. Without directly referring to Kurdish, he implies it when stating that “The people of Bitlis not only always speak Turkish everywhere, but also speaks pure Turkish.” BCA CHP, 490.1/827.270.2. Another example comes from Ağrı. The former Halkevi secretary complains that the current secretary was brought to this position by “Hamdi one of the Kurdish warlords of the area”, while “I am the head of the Kara babk tribal confederation/clan (aşiret)”. BCA CHP, 490.1/827.268.2. Letter of Nusret Arslan dated 13/1/1945.
460 Cemil Kocal, Umumi Müfettişlikler (1927 - 1952) (İstanbul: İletişim, 2003).
this staged public act, the feud became public and visible, and the opposing sides (Kaymakam and other civil servants vs. judge, Halkevi chairman and probably other schoolteachers) entrenched. What is more, audiences, both local and external, were established by the very same public, and thus communicative, act.

The digging of opposing trenches and the communicative trench warfare that followed the event, and which we can only partially access through some of its archival traces, can be apprehended as part of the second and third phases of Turner’s processual analysis of ‘social dramas’. This communicative warfare involved – among certainly other tactics as well – the petitioning of higher authorities. Both sides became supplicants to their immediate superiors; the Kaymakam wrote to the Vali, the Halkevi chairman to the Party Headquarters in default of a local Party structure. Again their arguments bare close similarity to the ones the actors of the previous incident in the Silvan Halkevi had used. In order to achieve his goals and have the Halkevi chairman and local judge removed from their offices, the Kaymakam tried to manipulate the state’s concerns in relation to what was considered the proper functioning of civil bureaucracy. He accused his rivals, especially the judge, of hurting the cooperation of state officials, endangering the ‘peace and order’ in the region, and braking the ‘state authority’ by ‘increasing his influence among the ignorant people’. The words had been carefully selected to make an impression on the Vali: speaking of ‘sükünet ve asayış’ and ‘cahil halk’, the Kaymakam played with the state’s most dire preoccupations, suspicions and fears in general but especially in that largely Kurdish-speaking area. Regarding the Halkevi chairman, the Kaymakam hinted at an anti-regime stance on his side and was not afraid to admit that he slapped him. In addition he questioned his morality informing his superior that this person had been beaten in public twice before and thus he had no honor. “You cannot hurt the honor of someone who has been already publicly dishonored”. In that respect he made use of societal values rather than administrative criteria or preoccupations.

The tactic followed by the Halkevi chairman on the other hand was to petition the Party Headquarters and denounce his opponent of posing a threat to and damaging the ideals and policies of the letter’s addressee, the Party and regime. In unison with the references to his curtailed duty to enlighten and guide ‘our people’, aims the Party and state had assigned to him as an ‘intellectual’ and Halkevi chairman, in respect to the incident he presented himself as the ‘unjustly treated’, a narrative tactic typically employed by non-state social actors petitioning state authority against a local state representative. In short, both sides in their discursive tactics made

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461 It was the state or ruler’s duty to undo wrongdoings and protect his unjustly treated subjects (mazlum), from the oppression of his servants (zulm). The self presentation of the petitioner as unjustly treated was a common theme of petition and complaint writing even before the establishment of the Ottoman state. See S.M. Stern, “Petitions from the Ayyubid Period”, *Bulletin of the School of African and Oriental Studies*, Vol. 27, No 1, (1964), p. 9. On the system of grievance administration see “Mazalim”, *EI, 2nd Edition*, Vol. VI, p. 933.
allowances to both state preoccupations and societal values, addressing both centre and local society, a necessity as it seems, once the ‘social drama’ is staged for and in front of a double audience, the soon to intervene state authorities and the implicated, gazing and evaluating residents of Silvan, whether locals or outsiders, family members or students of the attacked schoolteacher, local clients of the implicated state actors, Sergeant Ali, the police officer, or even ‘the ignorant people’. 462

Conclusion

The clashes the above sources portray draw a picture of the Halkevi as a space of conflict, a ‘stage’ upon which ‘dramas of conflict’ are enacted. In the heat of the battle ‘actors’ perform in, but also claim the Halkevi space. Seen solely as text or script, various – almost theatrical - types emerge, the ‘idealista’ one – be it the vigilant complainant or the ‘unjustly treated citizen’ - being the most common self-portraying category. As for the villains – in our case unchangingly the accused side, the ‘oppressive’, ‘corrupt’, and even ‘immoral’ state and/or Halkevi official constitutes the major category.

The aim of this chapter is to utilize these ‘moments of conflict’ in order firstly to move beyond the “life is better, life is merrier” 463 picture of the Halkevi institution the official sources reiterate. To do so it is necessary to remove the Houses from the a-topian nature of the official sources and place them into their respective societies. This essentially contextualizing, or better re-contextualization, operation requires the incorporation into our own analysis, or perhaps ‘script’, of the Halkevi inhabitants, or rather the voices of ‘actors’ taking part in ‘plays’ the Party’s official ‘programme’ did not include. The input of actors then is provided by exactly these ‘moments of conflict’, through the actors’ one-sided ‘scripts’ though. Luckily enough the occasional ‘critique’ of these plays by an authoritative and, because an outsider, relatively trustworthy Party spectator makes the conflictual nature of these dramas, as well as the actors’ motives more obvious.

A second corollary aim of this contextualizing operation is to demonstrate that the Halkevi formed a nexus in a social network, where people, social groups and forces interact, in short a place linked with actors and other spaces of its locality. The People’s Houses were actually envisaged exactly as spaces

462 Leslie Peirce came up with a similar observation in her study of the court records of Antep in the 16th century. “Despite their brevity, the 16th century records of the Aintab court also reveal deliberate rhetorical strategies, but their audience was not the sultan. [R]ather, the audience was necessarily local”. Especially in case where “honor was at stake, they [the litigants] were mindful that another audience was listening.” Thus many, especially women, might break the law or opt for a stance that would convict them in court in order to protect their threatened honor and thus appear socially absolved. Leslie Peirce, Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab (California: University of California Press, 2003), p. 203.

463 Quote attributed to Stalin amidst the famine.
of interaction – ‘fusion’ [kaynaşma] – by their creators. The nature of the designer’s interaction was rather different from what we actually witness in our sources. The Halkevi space emerges not (only) as a space occupied by local elites in unison according to the regime’s wishes, but in conflict and antagonism, a place the control of which was constantly claimed and contested by different opposing fractions. The contestants and contesting groups were numerous. They seem to include the majority of what we can term elites, that is state officials – locals or outsiders, teachers, local urban elites, without, or usually, with Party credentials.

This conflictual quality of the Halkevi is also telling of the circumstances within which the aims of the Halkevi institution were (supposed to be) understood, performed, enacted and contested in a local setting. The social, discursive and practical space the Halkevi occupied in a society was not just one vigorously delimited from and exclusive of the ‘other’ it was supposed to reform (by his/her incorporation), but also (perhaps primarily) a space constantly claimed and fought for – an arena to wrestle in (and for) or a stronghold to be conquered - by the included, or at least those entitled to such an inclusion, collectively termed elites, local and state elites.

These characteristics of the Halkevi space are also telling of the possible ways the House – not to say anything about what it was supposed to stand for - might be understood by the larger populace, those habitually excluded, or at least temporally included (for instance in a cinema or theatre show with an entrance fee). The power struggles and the position of the Halkevi in their midst were known by the populace (‘heard by our people’ as the letters frequently mention). In that sense the Halkevi emerges in the eyes of the excluded ‘other’ as a space of power (state, Party), possible coercion and violence.

Lastly, this chapter has aptly demonstrated that the realm of interaction between state and non-state actors in local societies between themselves and parts of the centre cannot be understood within a simplistic framework based on the assumption of an immune to local social forces state and of a distinct border that separates state from society. Rather, my reading of these dramas of conflict depict the center (in terms of its practices and relations with the forces of and in the provinces) neither away from (or totally incognizant of) the ‘periphery’ (provincial urban centers here) nor totally immune to the social forces, actors, practices and discourses of the periphery.