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## Between Central State and Local Society

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### Citation

Lamprou, A. (2009, December 18). *Between Central State and Local Society*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14423>

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

### **PART III**

*'Gamblers', 'Theatre Girls' and 'Villagists': Kemalist Policies  
consumed*



## Chapter 6

### People's Houses vs. Coffeehouses

The aim of the following three chapters is to study how social actors in provincial centers were 'consuming' a number of 'novel' social practices the People's Houses were to initiate and/or develop in local societies. Here I should repeat that by consumption I refer to "what 'consumers' or 'users' make with the 'products' imposed by a dominant economic order", a 'making' "related to social situations and power relationships",<sup>464</sup> necessary contexts I have attempted to sketch in the first two Parts of this thesis with the 'human' and 'political' geography of the Halkevi space.

More specifically, in this chapter I study the Halkevi as a space of socialization and leisure-time practices in relation - or in contrast - to the social space of the coffeehouse, its clientele and activities. My ambition is to 'read' the consumption by social actors of free-time activities the center had imagined and planned for the Halkevi as they interrelate with pre-existing male socialization and free-time practices and spaces, among which the coffeehouse occupied the most prominent place. I particularly choose to focus on one of the most prevailing themes of the corpus of complaint and petition letters,<sup>465</sup> namely the *kahvehane* in relation to the People's House. My basic argument holds that the association of the coffeehouse and related practices of male socialization with the Halkevi is a privileged site to study the consumption of the products of the Kemalist 'dominant sociopolitical order' for two reasons: firstly, there is a long history of conflictual relations between central state and coffeehouse since the latter's appearance in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, the center's discourse started to portray the coffeehouse and the social practices related to the coffeehouse space in antagonistic terms, as a direct threat and rival to the new spaces and practices the state and Party were establishing, such as the People's House and People's Rooms.

The first part of this chapter offers a brief history of the relations between central state and coffeehouse, a short presentation and analysis of the dominant - or 'official' - discourses produced in relation to the coffeehouse, and of the consequent placing in the 1930s of the coffeehouse and what it was considered to represent in direct contrast to the People's House and similar 'modern' spaces. In the second part of the chapter I study how social actors in the complaint letters consume and ultimately re-use the 'official' discourse about the coffeehouse. Lastly in the third part I focus on the social practices my letters disclose in relation to socialization and free time activities in the Houses, and elaborate on what these practices can ultimately tell us about the ways social

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<sup>464</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. xiii, 31, 35-6.

<sup>465</sup> For a presentation of the corpus of complaint/petition letters used in the thesis see Appendix.

actors make sense and use of the discourses and practices the center propagated in relation to free-time socialization through the Halkevi institution.

### *A short history of state – coffeehouse relations*

There is a long history of relations of tension between coffeehouses and the state.<sup>466</sup> Almost since their establishment in the 16<sup>th</sup> century coffeehouses became the targets of oppressive state policies and a negative discourse uttered by state and religious authorities. Kırılı has demonstrated that this negative discourse was framed in terms of morality, albeit not in the modern sense of the word. Rather the discourse of morality employed in relation to coffeehouses was a political discourse signaling the transgression of social boundaries between rulers and ruled, a transgression the coffeehouse was supposed to establish by bringing together a heterogeneous clientele and becoming the hotbed of subversive popular political discourse. The coffeehouses were places the state was suspicious of, not without good reason, one might argue: a number of rebellions resulting in the sultan's deposition were reported to have started in coffeehouses.<sup>467</sup> Thus the periodic closing down and the attempts to control the coffeehouses by means of exemplary punishments, or later on by the employment of spies.<sup>468</sup> Kırılı's main argument is that roughly since the 1840s a change had occurred in the way the state was viewing the coffeehouses, passing from methods of disciplinary punishment to surveillance, a change signaling the emergence of popular opinion, or rather the importance of public opinion for the state, and of a gradual change in the way the state treated and managed its subjects, in short of "a new 'governmentality' that underlined the Ottoman polity towards the mid-nineteenth century."<sup>469</sup>

Further changes altered the coffeehouse during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the introduction of the printing press and the publication of the first newspapers the coffeehouse started to function as a reading room. A new kind of coffeehouse, the *kıraathane*, was established. Books and newspapers were to be found, bought, read (out) and discussed in the coffeehouse. Coffeehouses in Istanbul

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<sup>466</sup> The 'oriental'/Ottoman coffeehouse is a large subject I cannot account for in this thesis. I am drawing on a few works for the above presentation. Ralph Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses, The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1996); Ekrem İşin, "A Social History of Coffee and Coffeehouses", in Selahattin Özalpabıyıklar (ed), *Coffee, Pleasures in a bean* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001); Helene-Desmet Gregoire and François Georgeon (eds), *Doğuda Kahve ve Kahvehaneler*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999); Cengiz Kırılı, *The Struggle over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780 – 1845* (PhD Dissertation, State University of New York, 2000); Serdar Öztürk, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Kahvehane ve İktidar (1930 - 1945)*, (İstanbul: Kırmızı Yayınları, 2005); and Uğur Kömeçoğlu, *Historical and Sociological Approaches to Public Space: The Case of Islamic Coffeehouse in Istanbul* (PhD Dissertation, Boğaziçi University, 2001).

<sup>467</sup> Kömeçoğlu, "Historical and Sociological Approaches to Public Space", p. 46.

<sup>468</sup> Kırılı, "The Struggle over Space", p. 24.

<sup>469</sup> Kırılı, "The Struggle over Space", pp. 283 – 4.

were frequented by state employees and intellectuals and started to resemble modern day clubs and associations.<sup>470</sup> They continued to function as centers of communication. Prominent intellectuals during the last years of the Ottoman Empire were giving lectures in coffeehouses. Members of the Committee of Union and Progress used the network of coffeehouses and *kıraathanes* for propaganda purposes. Coffeehouses were also used during the war of independence for propaganda and mobilization purposes.<sup>471</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we can speak of a gradual change in the way the coffeehouse was represented and thought. Many intellectuals started to criticize the coffeehouse on different grounds than before. In a way resembling the discourse of westerners on the oriental coffeehouses, prominent intellectuals of the last period of the Ottoman Empire started to emulate the orientalist discourse in relation to the coffeehouse, which they compared to the cafés of European capitals and criticized as ‘nest of the idle and the ignorant’.<sup>472</sup> Instead of being attacked solely in terms of the illegitimate *devlet sohbeti* or the trespassing of the accepted borders, new concepts started to be employed in relation to the coffeehouse. The coffeehouse was to be criticized with reference to the ‘new’ discourse of hygiene, productivity, physical training and free time.

*“Nest of the idle, the jobless, the reactionaries, the gamblers and drunkards”:  
negative discourse about the coffeehouse*

The early republican period was not devoid of negative representations of the ‘coffeehouse’ and what it was supposed to stand for, mostly to be found in newspapers, but also in the writings of intellectuals and politicians of the period. Serdar Öztürk’s seminal work<sup>473</sup> offers numerous examples of this anti-coffeehouse discourse. Coffeehouses were depicted as places “hurting family life”, “lodges of the idle”, and “nests of gossip”. There were thus identified as almost antagonistic to the ongoing reform program. It was lamented for example that ‘our coffeehouses’ did not resemble the cafes to be found in European capitals, Vienna being the most popular example. In addition, a number of ‘plans’ to reform the coffeehouses in Turkey were articulated and, to a small extent, attempts to ‘modernize’ a number of coffeehouses were realized, mostly in Ankara and Istanbul.<sup>474</sup> Voices recommending more

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<sup>470</sup> For a brief history of the Ottoman coffeehouse and the *kıraathane*/literary coffeehouses of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul see Kömeçoğlu, “Historical and Sociological Approaches to Public Space”, pp. 29 – 74 and 59 – 62 respectfully.

<sup>471</sup> François Georgeon, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun Son Döneminde İstanbul Kahvehaneleri”, in Helene-Desmet Gregoire and François Georgeon (eds), *Doğuda Kahve ve Kahvehaneler*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), pp. 72 -7.

<sup>472</sup> Öztürk, *Cuhmuriyet Türkiyesinde Kahvehane ve İktidar*, pp. 86-8.

<sup>473</sup> Öztürk, *Cuhmuriyet Türkiyesinde Kahvehane ve İktidar*. For examples of the negative discourse directed against coffeehouses see especially from p. 111 onward. The book in its entirety is full of newspaper articles containing anti-coffeehouse rhetoric.

<sup>474</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, pp. 183 - 267.

aggressive policies, even the closing down of coffeehouses were heard in the 1930s and 1940s. In some rather rare cases, it was not the central state but bureaucrats in the provinces and municipal authorities that applied a number of oppressive policies, such as the closing down of coffeehouses, the prohibition of opening new ones, and the strict control of the existing ones through the employment of hygienic and administrative regulations.<sup>475</sup> Such policies did not seem to have any substantial impact on the coffeehouses, probably due to their sporadic nature. The substantial amounts of tax revenue coffeehouses were producing was probably the most significant reason the state did not apply any oppressive coffeehouse-related policies that would completely adhere to the suspicion it historically had nurtured towards the coffeehouse space or to the prevailing among intellectuals and statesmen alike negative discourse about the coffeehouse. The same financial reservations leading to similar inconclusive policies of the Ottoman state in relation to coffeehouses and taverns have been pinpointed by Kırılı as well.<sup>476</sup>

In a nutshell, what I call ‘official-moralistic’ discourse continued in the 1930s and 1940s. The center’s suspicion of the coffeehouse space persisted, exemplified occasionally in suppressive policies and sporadic attempts to reform the coffeehouse space in accordance with a number of ‘modern’ discourses (hygiene, free time, productivity, etc). Nevertheless imbued with ‘orientalist’ overtones, this discourse still contained elements of and similarities with the old discourse of morality used continuously since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Serdar Öztürk has forcefully demonstrated that the Republican leadership continued to be suspicious of the coffeehouse space for the same or similar reasons with the ‘old regime’. The coffeehouses of the minorities and ethnic groups were thought as spaces promoting minority and ethnic identities against the unitary national identity the regime was striving to enforce;<sup>477</sup> following the closure of their lodges, dervish orders were suspected of secretly operating in coffeehouses;<sup>478</sup> after the Şeyh Sait uprising and during the *Takrir-i Sükûn* period coffeehouses were suspected of providing shelter to brigands, vagabonds and lowlifes (*çete*, *şaki*, *kabadayı*, *serseri*),<sup>479</sup> and the police was ordered to monitor and even to prevent the discussion of politics in coffeehouses (1926);<sup>480</sup> there was even a proposal heard in the National Assembly to close down all village coffeehouses for the above reasons;<sup>481</sup> coffeehouses were also considered spaces of subversive ‘propaganda’ and ‘gossip’, whether communist, reactionary, or even anti-CHP, before, during and even after the short life of the Free Republican Party in 1930.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, pp. 162 – 79.

<sup>476</sup> Kırılı, “The Struggle over Space”, pp. 58 – 62.

<sup>477</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, pp. 99 - 100.

<sup>478</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane*, p. 106.

<sup>479</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane*, pp. 101 -2.

<sup>480</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane*, p. 104.

<sup>481</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>482</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane*, pp. 357 ff. During the years of the Second World War coffeehouse frequenters were ridiculed for their ignorant know-it-all talking as ‘coffeehouse diplomats or

## *The Halkevi and the Coffeehouse*

The anti-coffeehouse moralistic discourse employed by intellectuals and in regime/Party sources conversely describes a number of spaces fabricated by the state and/or Party as contrary to coffeehouses and their 'dirty atmosphere', the People's Houses, People's Rooms and Reading Rooms (*Okuma Odaları*) being amongst them. The Halkevi emerges as a place alternative to the coffeehouse, assigned with qualities, infused with activities and ideas supposed to be contrary to those of the coffeehouse. Similarly, the People's Rooms in the villages were viewed by the political power and intellectuals close to the regime as spaces opposite to the village coffeehouses and the village rooms (*köy odaları*). According to Kemal Akça, the village rooms had served their purpose and had become outdated with the introduction of the Halkodaları.<sup>483</sup> The images employed to describe these two spaces overtly correspond to the incompatibility that was supposed to exist between them. Village Rooms were places "filled with smoke, nasty smells, and foggy", in contrast to the "clean and educational order" of the People's Rooms.<sup>484</sup> The opinions voiced about the *Halk Okuma Odaları* were analogous. "The Reading Rooms are hearths of education and ideas for the people of every class and type. [Their aim is] to satisfy the students' need for reading, to save them from dirty places like the coffeehouse and the night club (*gazino*)."<sup>485</sup> A newspaper announcement of the Education Ministry about the aims of the Reading Rooms stated the following: "The reading room is an upright (*nezih*) place for the people to visit instead of going to the coffeehouse".<sup>486</sup>

According to this 'official-moralistic' discourse, 'the people' and 'the youth' were those mostly suffering from the coffeehouse and were thus in need of the 'new' spaces created for them by state and Party. Occasionally even 'the intellectuals' were suffering from the lack of Reading Rooms, Sports Clubs, and People's Houses and, of course, the activities these spaces were supposed to offer. Nevertheless, the principal targets of the 'new' spaces were 'the youth' and, more generally, 'the People'. Both terms are general and vague, but can be somehow clarified by the way they were used in the sources, that is, next or in contrast to 'the intellectuals'. The intellectuals were usually defined as the civil servants, the educated professionals, or in sum as those considered closer to the regime, its policies and imposed reforms. Thus what the sources

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politicians' (*kahve diplomati/politikacısı*). Based on his own experience of the 15 days he was hiding from the police, Rıfat İlgaz's novel *Karartma Geceleri* is a first hand account of the close supervision of coffeehouses and similar public spaces by spies and policemen in İstanbul during the Second World War. Rıfat İlgaz, *Karartma Geceleri* (İstanbul: Çınar Yayınları, 1974).

<sup>483</sup> Kemal Akça, "Eski Köy Odaları", *Folklor Postası*, Vol. 1, No 6, (March 1945), pp. 3-4, mentioned in Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, p. 285.

<sup>484</sup> Naşit Uluğ, "Halkevlerinin Memleket Hayatına getirmiş olduğu büyük içtimai inkişaf", *Ulus*, 25 February 1940, reproduced in Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, p. 286.

<sup>485</sup> *Akşam*, 17 January 1930, mentioned in Serdar Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, p. 186.

<sup>486</sup> *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 15 January 1932, reproduced in Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, p. 188, where more examples are given.



called ‘the People’ can be broadly defined as those considered (or suspected of being) somehow distant from the regime’s ideas. Together with ‘the youth’ then they were ultimately in need of getting closer to, accepting and believing in the reforms, which the new spaces were supposed to propagate.

The above separation of the ‘people’ or the ‘Turkish nation’ between ‘intellectuals’ and the rest of ‘the people’ used in regime sources, and their ‘coming together’ presupposes a deep distinction, difference and ultimately distrust of ‘the people’, something not openly proclaimed if we are to take into account the celebratory populist rhetoric of the period. This divide and the concomitant contradiction of the official discourse with its rhetoric on the issue can be also sensed in relation to activities related to coffeehouses and condemned in the examples of the ‘official – moralistic’ discourse given above. If we are to put it differently, while on the one hand the ruling Party and its supporters were publicly claiming and boasting of being from the ‘people’, on the other distinguished in every occasion themselves from the ‘people’. In an analogous contradiction, the activities this elite declared to be harmful for the people in relation to the coffeehouse seem to be at least silently tolerated and practiced by local elites as our letters below disclose.

This ambivalence can be observed in a similar occasion. Only two years before the establishment of the People’s Houses, the General Secretariat of the ruling Party issued a communiqué in relation to the consumption of alcohol and gambling in Party buildings. Just ten days after the establishment of the Free Republican Party (SCF) the CHP General Secretariat in a communiqué sent to ten Party Inspectorships prohibited the consumption of *rakı* and the playing of cards in the Party buildings and the Turkish Hearths. The reasoning for such a prohibition is interesting: “these activities [drinking and gambling] will not be tolerated by the people”. Nevertheless, drinking and gambling per se were not prohibited in general, as “in reality drinking is not at all prohibited by our principles. Everybody is free to exercise this pleasure”, but “it is forbidden to give the impression of a drinking tavern (*meyhane*)”.<sup>487</sup> The center’s preoccupation with appearances here is comparable to the Ottoman state’s attitude towards the coffeehouse: it was not against the consumption of coffee per se, but against the uncontrollable socializing in coffeehouses, the concomitant trespassing of the social borders separating the population from the state, and the subversive popular political discourse, the *devlet sohbetleri* mentioned in the police reports Kırılı studied.<sup>488</sup>

Considering the position and functions these two spaces had (or were supposed to have) in local societies, the rivalry the official discourse claimed to exist between them seems reasonable. Notwithstanding their differences in many respects, both were spaces of free time, after-work socialization. The

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<sup>487</sup> Communiqué No 2882, dated 21/8/1930, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/435.1804.2, reproduced in Cemil Koçak, *İktidar ve Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2006), pp. 193 – 4.

<sup>488</sup> Kırılı, “The Struggle over Space”, p. 50.

Halkevi was not supposed to be restricted to men only, as was the case with the coffeehouse, but the female participation in the Halkevi space and activities, as we have seen in previous chapters, was rather low and less than expected, if we take into consideration a series of directives from the General Secretariat to the provincial Party structures,<sup>489</sup> and the coercion exercised upon women teachers to participate in the Halkevi activities.<sup>490</sup> This overlapping of activities together with the pervasiveness and long history of the coffeehouse in the Turkish society as a widespread male socialization space immediately established the Halkevi as a space competitive and rival to the coffeehouse and vice versa. This rivalry becomes evident if we only consider a few of the Halkevi activities that were customarily carried out in coffeehouses. The Halkevi theatre stage, musical events, the Houses' radio sets and cinema projections were directly competitive to the coffeehouses, where similar or identical activities were taking place: wandering theatrical group's performances, *Karagöz* shadow theatre, *Orta Oyun* and *Meddah* shows, occasional cinema projections, radio listening and newspaper reading.<sup>491</sup>

The letters used here amply employ this 'moralistic' discourse when referring to the coffeehouse or activities related to coffeehouses, such as gambling, drinking coffee or being 'unproductive' and 'idle'.

### ***Letters on Halkevleri and Coffeehouses. Employment of moralistic discourse.***

A very large proportion of the complaint letters used here criticize the consumption of coffee, alcoholic drinks and the playing of cards and other games in both coffeehouses and Halkevleri. This is probably the most prevailing complaint issue. Gambling and alcohol were strictly prohibited by the By Laws of the People's Houses. The drinking of coffee was not; nevertheless, coffee is used as a metonym for the coffeehouse and what it was supposed to stand for, almost a complete reverse of the People's House. In many letters the contrast between the House and the coffeehouse is stressed, as in a letter by 18 people signing as the "the Youths of Sarıgöl", sent in 3/4/1940: "... this holy nest you have opened with the aim to enlighten and save us, the youth, from the dirty atmosphere of the coffeehouse...".<sup>492</sup> In another letter

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<sup>489</sup> See directives No 413, 414, 415, and 418, *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Katibiumumliğinin Fırka Teşkilatına Umumi Tebligatı, Temmuz 1934' ten Birinci Kanun 1934 sonuna kadar*, Vol. 5, (Ankara: Ulus Matbaası, 1935), pp. 21, 22, 23, and 27 respectively.

<sup>490</sup> See next chapter.

<sup>491</sup> Some of the Halkevi activities were apparently antagonistic to other enterprises as well. Consider the letter of the Yıldız cinema owner in Trabzon complaining to the ruling Party in 20/6/1939 that the local Halkevi was organizing cinema projections free of charge and was thus damaging his livelihood. Contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/844.337.2. For a similar complaint see the two letters of Hakkı Darcan, cinema owner in Aydın, sent to the General Secretariat of the CHP and to the Ministry of Interior, dated 10/11/1939 and 8/2/1939 respectfully, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/824.260.1.

<sup>492</sup> Contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/840.322.2. "biz gençlere pis kahve havasından kurtarip nurlandırmak gayesile açtığınız kutsi yuva...". Also in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/844.340.2, 27/1/50 signed

sent from the sub district of Bahçe in 3/2/1942, Salim Çanga complains that the books and newspapers coming to the House are locked up by the chairman and so “our people lead a solitary life in the coffeehouse corners.”<sup>493</sup> The image of the coffeehouse with all its negative characteristics, gambling and drinking, is recurrently used to stress the gravity of the described problem.<sup>494</sup> The prevailing in newspapers and Party publications ‘moralistic’ discourse about the coffeehouse is employed by our authors as well, but this time in regards to the Peoples’ Houses. Mehmet Solmaz civil servant from Düzce, wrote to the CHP: “Why the youth is not taught to exercise here? Why are they damaged in the corners of the coffeehouse, in dirty places?”<sup>495</sup> In another anonymous letter from Sariyer, dated 27/9/46, the author, signing as ‘Bir Partili’, wrote the following about the Sports Section of the local Halkevi: “This Section is non existent. It has not initiated any activity to attract the youth. [T]he youths will be surrendered to very catastrophic ideologies in the coffeehouse corners. Whose is the duty to save these youths from the coffeehouse corners?”<sup>496</sup>

The similarities the letters display with the official ‘moralistic’ discourse continue. Our authors, clearly copying the official jargon, contrast the Halkevleri and Halkodaları with the coffeehouses. According to the letters, the Halkevleri were established in order to save ‘the People’ and ‘the youth’ from the coffeehouse, but in most of the cases this was not achieved for a number of reasons, which usually form the core of the letters’ complaints. The letters usually invoke the negative image of ‘the (dirty) corners of the coffeehouse’ in two circumstances: firstly when the Halkevi is reported functioning as a coffeehouse (coffee drinking and gambling) and, secondly, when the exclusion

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by Ahmet Kayaner Ceylanpınar bucağı Gençlik kulubu başkanı (chairman of the Youth Club), and 27 more names. “Halkodasında kumar oynatmaktan başka bir faaliyetini gördüğümüz yoktur (We have not seen any other activity in the People’s Room apart from gambling). [If you do not do anything] bizleri ve bizim gibi gençleri kahve köşelerinde zehirlenmemize sebebiyet verdirileceğini arz ederiz. ( we inform you that you will become the cause we and other youths like us get poisoned in the corners of the coffeehouse.)”

<sup>493</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

<sup>494</sup> “Tamamen bir oyun yeri olan ve tam bir kahve manzarasına arzeden. (It is completely a gambling place and completely resembles a coffeehouse.)” **BCA CHP**, 490.1/840.322.2, 30/6/1935 from Kula Halkevi Temsil kolu başkanı (chairman of Theatre Section) Mustafa. “Okuma odası bir kahve haneden ayırt idemesiniz ... buranın sekreteri ... fazla içki istimal itmesi halkevi muhitinde fena tesir yapmaktadır. (You cannot distinguish between a coffeehouse and the Reading Room. The halkevi is having a catastrophic effect on the region, as its secretary consumes a lot of booze.)” **BCA CHP**, 490.1/829.273.2, 27/8/1943 from İnegöl, signed by 10 members of the Theatre and Spor Sections. “8 – 10 masasında kumarbazlar sabahtan akşama kadar kumar oynamakta ve bu güzelim salon adı bir kumarbaz kahvesine çevirilmiş bulunmaktadır. (The gamblers gamble from dusk to dawn and have turned this beautiful place into a common gambling coffeehouse.)” **BCA CHP**, 490.1/839.316.1, anonymous from İzmit, sent in 27/11/48.

<sup>495</sup> Letter of 3/8/1939 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/828.271.3.

<sup>496</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/835.300.1. For some more examples: Article from newspaper *Tasvir* of 30 September 1945 about the Kırşehir Halkevi in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/838.314.1; letter by Hüseyin Erkaya from Kadınhan, dated 10/11/1949 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/840.320.1; letter of 22/3/1941 signed as “yüzlerce bafra genci (hundreds of the youths of Bafra)” in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.330.2. The majority of the letters dealing with similar issues (coffeehouse, gambling) use similar expressions.

of the complainant and/or those he purportedly represents ('the people', 'the youth') from the Halkevi leads them to the coffeehouse.

Rıza from Kızılhisar in the province of Denizli complained that "from the 1<sup>st</sup> of November coffee and tea is served to the visitors of the Halkevi library, while they can also play domino, chess and similar games. Now this nest of culture functions like a coffeehouse; it is impossible to read a book or a newspaper because of the noise."<sup>497</sup> In a telegram to President İnönü in 29/11/1947, Salih Peker from Elmalı complained that "some civil servants, thinking highly of themselves and despising the local population, are customarily and in front of the local youths exercising immoral deeds, such as gambling and drinking in the Halkevi."<sup>498</sup> Two tailors from Biga complained that the Halkevi chairman and the members of its administrative committee were playing cards and poker in the Halkevi, while "the youths spend their time in coffeehouses."<sup>499</sup> Drinking coffee or alcoholic drinks, playing cards or other games, and gambling, activities the letters relate to the 'dirty corners of the coffeehouse', are reported to take place in the People's Houses of Bozcaada,<sup>500</sup> Osmaniye,<sup>501</sup> Bayramiç,<sup>502</sup> Arhavi,<sup>503</sup> Tortum (Erzurum),<sup>504</sup> Kemalpaşa,<sup>505</sup> Kuşadası,<sup>506</sup> İnebolu,<sup>507</sup> İzmit,<sup>508</sup> Kızılhisar (Denizli),<sup>509</sup> Kula (Manisa),<sup>510</sup> Kızıltepe (Mardin),<sup>511</sup> Sinop,<sup>512</sup> Erbaa (Tokat),<sup>513</sup> Bingöl,<sup>514</sup> Amasya,<sup>515</sup> the People's Rooms of Ceylanpınar (Urfa),<sup>516</sup> and Bozova (Urfa).<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Letter of 16/11/1947 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/831.282.2.

<sup>498</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/824.257.1.

<sup>499</sup> Letter of Sami Filibeli and Mehmed Dilmez dated 3/9/1941 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/830.276.1.

<sup>500</sup> Letter by F. Doğaner, dated 18/3/1948 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/830.277.1.

<sup>501</sup> Letter of 26/11/1946 by Fuat Karal, principle of the high school of Osmaniye, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

<sup>502</sup> Letter of 1/3/1948 by Mustafa Timin in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

<sup>503</sup> 29/9/1948 article of *Tasvir*, "Halkodası değil, kahvehane" contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/830.279.2.

<sup>504</sup> Telegram by Ahmet Umutlu, 5/8/1948, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/833.291.2.

<sup>505</sup> Telegram to Premier Şükrü Şaraçoğlu by Nuri Gümedağ, 18/3/1946, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/836.305.1.

<sup>506</sup> Letter by local party boss Dr. Sezai Yavaşca to the CHP Administrative Committee of the Vilayet of İzmir following a complaint letter, 1/4/1944, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/836.305.1.

<sup>507</sup> Letter of Ahmet oğlu Hamdi Gozluk and Sadettin, 29/3/1949, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.309.1.

<sup>508</sup> Anonymous letter, 27/11/1948, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/839.316.1.

<sup>509</sup> Letter by Rıza, dated 16/11/1947, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/831.282.2.

<sup>510</sup> Letter by two members of local Halkevi's Theatre Section, 30/6/1935, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/840.322.2.

<sup>511</sup> Letter of 23/6/1948 (No 7/12089) from the CHP General Secreter (signed by Cevad Dursunoğlu, MP for Erzurum) sent to the CHP Administrative Committee of the Vilayet of Mardin following a complaint letter. **BCA CHP**, 490.1/841.325.2.

<sup>512</sup> Anonymous letter of 8/10/1949, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/843.333.2.

<sup>513</sup> "Gençlik", in *Hürses* (Günlük Siyasi Demokrat Gazete), No 135, 8 February 1946, p. 6, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/843.336.2.

<sup>514</sup> Letter of 28/4/1941 by Ali oğlu Mustafa contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/827.269.1.

<sup>515</sup> Letter of Hasan Karabacak, 4/5/1949; letter of Ahmet Yumuk dated 18/8/941 to CHP General Secretary, and 15/9/1941 to Halil, MP for Zonguldak; letter of Tahir Atabay, dated 9/2/1939. All four letters contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/733.3.2.

The exclusion of their authors from the Halkevi is probably one of the most common themes of the letters. Sometimes it forms the main or sole reason for complaining, sometimes it emerges as a corollary of the described situation or event. In their attempt to report their exclusion from, or inability to enter the People's House for a variety of reasons, not a few authors resort to the argument that 'unable to go to the House, the people or the youth spend their time in the coffeehouse', which the letters describe of course in negative terms employing the official – 'moralistic' discourse.

Şakır Karataş, teacher of the Gölyaka İmamlar village school, in a letter to the ruling Party in 24 December 1945 complained that the local Gendarmerie corporal had occupied "the People's Room and its garden."<sup>518</sup> When the doors of our People's Room closed for our villager fellow citizens, everybody, the youth and the elders started to waste their time in the coffeehouse corners."<sup>519</sup> In a similar vein, Rifat Kayral "from the people of Buldan", complained not of the local Gendarmerie officer, but of the 'illiterate' and 'ignorant' Halkevi janitor who was the reason "our people and our youth are refused the access to knowledge" and "spend their time in the coffeehouse corners".<sup>520</sup> In a different tone, İbrahim Kacar, the chairman of the Sports Section of the K. Bölük Halkevi, wrote: "it is difficult to assemble the youth to do sports, because there is no space for such activities, which means that the youths stay behind in life as they generally spend their time in the coffeehouse corners."<sup>521</sup> More inspired reasons were also given for the youth's estrangement from 'their own House'. According to an anonymous letter from Doğubayezit (*sic*), the youths were filling the coffeehouses playing poker because the Halkevi chairman could not speak Turkish and the Halkevi secretary was a pedophile.<sup>522</sup> 'Lack of order' [*idaresizlik*] and apathy were in another occasion the reasons the youths of Bilecik were left with no choice but to "spend their time in the coffeehouses and in the streets gossiping."<sup>523</sup> Another example comes from the People's Room of Bahçe. Salim Çanga complained that the chairman kept the books and journals of the People's Room locked in a cabinet. Consequently, "our people

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<sup>516</sup> Letter signed by Ahmet Kayaner, president of the "Gençlik kulubu", and 27 more people, 27/1/1950, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/844.340.2.

<sup>517</sup> Letter by Mehmet Akcan, 5/2/1946, in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/844.340.2.

<sup>518</sup> The occupation of or the claim over the Halkevi space by Gendarmerie officers or other civil servants and the concomitant exclusion of the complainant is a common theme of the complaint letters as we have seen in Chapter 5 and is an indication of local politics and ongoing struggles between social actors in local societies, the control of the Halkevi space and its facilities being one amongst the conflicting sides' objectives.

<sup>519</sup> **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

<sup>520</sup> Letter sent in 25/11/1939 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/831.281.1.

<sup>521</sup> Letter of 21/2/1940 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/831.281.1. Similar letter by Mehmet Solmaz in 3/8/1939 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/828.271.3.

<sup>522</sup> "Sonra 45 yaşlarında bir katibi vardır bu adam ötedenberi gençleri kirlletmek sevdasında yani türkçesi (kulampara) dır." Letter of 29/11/1945 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/733.2.2.

<sup>523</sup> Letter of Üzeyir Tüzün Köylüoğlu, dated 17/10/1945, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/827.268.2.

are not taking advantage of the books and lead a solitary life in the coffeehouse corners”.<sup>524</sup>

Even upon a quick reading of the letters, it becomes immediately apparent that their authors were aware of and utilized the official negative discourse about the coffeehouse. The large employment of the ‘moralistic’ discourse about coffeehouses and ‘coffeehouse activities’ in the letters then suggests that the state’s and regime’s preoccupation and suspicion was acknowledged and manipulated to a certain extent by the authors. Apart from signifying the possible existence of similar views in society then, the continuous utilization of this discourse demonstrates the authors’ ability to make out the regime’s fears and preoccupations while manipulating them in order to advance their own demands and interests, their claim over the Halkevi space, its resources and the facilities and status it might offer to contesting sides in an ongoing local feud the existence of which our letters seem to indicate. The similarities then between the official discourse and the letters suggest that the regime’s rhetoric/discourse was understood and used.<sup>525</sup>

Although the letters employ similar discursive elements with what I call official – moralistic discourse of the state/Party and its supporters, from another perspective they deviate from the center’s aims and discourse. First of all, it is clear that in many cases the employment of the official discourse is instrumental in furthering the authors’ aims. ‘Speaking Kemalist’,<sup>526</sup> that is using the regime’s jargon and showing a minimum of ideological affinity, is something expected and in deed noticed in similar works on denunciation and complaint letters.<sup>527</sup> Secondly, apart from just copying the regime’s discourse, many authors’ tactical use of it overturns some of its propositions. The authors frequently employ the distinction of the official discourse between ‘the intellectuals’ and ‘the people’ or ‘the youth’. In their use though, the terms are transformed. They usually depict themselves as (‘of’) ‘the people’ or ‘the youth’, without though accepting the implied in the official discourse distance from the reforms and the regime’s ideals on their part. After all their letters are sent to the regime itself and, although they mostly protest about somebody or something, they ultimately request something as well; thus they need and try to phrase their demand in the appropriate language. Letters filling a total refusal of the Party’s policies are not easily to be found in the Party’s archive. Instead, their employment of the ‘intellectuals vs. People’ distinction is different from

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<sup>524</sup> Letter of 3/2/1942 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

<sup>525</sup> Other works on previous periods have attempted to gauge the degree of reception by ordinary people of the state’s discourse and policies. See Milen V. Petrov, “Everyday forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864 -1868”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 46, No 4 (2004), pp. 730-59.

<sup>526</sup> Paraphrasing Davies’ ‘speak Bolshevik’ in Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>527</sup> Vladimir A. Kozlov, “Denunciation and Its Functions in Soviet Governance: A Study of Denunciations and Their Bureaucratic Handling from Soviet Police Archives, 1944 – 1953”, in S. Fitzpatrick and R. Gellately (eds), *Accusatory Practices. Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789 – 1989* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 136.

the official discourse. Although stating their acceptance of the reforms and their willingness to take part in them, the authors - signing as 'the People' and/or 'the youth' - were complaining that they were excluded from the 'new' spaces and their activities. Of course, what the Party and Halkevi sources collectively call intellectuals (civil servants, teachers, doctors, Party men, or in general the educated segments of the local societies) the authors call 'civil servants', 'landowners', 'high class', 'usurpers', needless to say all words with negative connotation.<sup>528</sup> The celebrated 'people' of the official populist rhetoric then is transformed to and becomes the metonym for the 'humble' or the 'unjustly treated' subject— an old and common motif in petition letters - and the despised by the officials 'people' and 'youth' of the letters.<sup>529</sup> This 'turn' signifies the actors' ability first of all to acknowledge and, secondly, to manipulate - to subvert without denying it - the official discourse in a tactical attempt to safeguard their interests.

The absence, or, one might add, exile from the letters of any explicit connection to religious discourse(s) in regards to the coffeehouse might be read as another sign of the authors aptitude to consume the official discourse, that is to use it in a complete different way its authors might expect it to be understood and used. The absence of any religious connotation from a discussion over a subject (coffeehouse) religious discourse has copiously treated before seems rather noteworthy especially when we bear in mind that the discussants likewise copiously attack the coffeehouse, its activities and clientele, excessively drawing upon the equally critical of the coffeehouse discourse of the governing elite, which in turn has exiled any explicit reference to religion in its public discourse.

Our letters keep an analogous stand in relation to the presence of women in the Houses and especially their stage. Once more, as we will see in the next chapter, our authors excessively employ another category – morality (*ahlak*) – that still exists in the official discourse but is less used in relation to women than the divide modern/backward. In this way our authors, without formally refuting the official power discourse, choose to use an argumentation in regards to women that draws its origin from both, seemingly contradictory, set of discourses, i.e. the 'modernist', secular discourse of the regime and the popular, faith-based discourse(s) common in society. One of course might also argue that this 'turn', this 'discursive hybridization', expresses the actors' attempt to consciously manipulate the official discourse to further their aims, or even a sincere attempt to think, speak and act in a 'Kemalist' way on the part

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<sup>528</sup> For some examples: 29/11/47 letter of Salih Peker from Elmalı to İnönü contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/824.257.1; 7/1/44 letter signed by "Kurtulmak isteyen Kozan gençliği" (Youth of Kozan that wishes to be saved) contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

<sup>529</sup> The same usage has been noticed by Davies, *Popular Opinion*, p. 8, where "officially hallowed words such as 'revolution' or 'the people' were reclaimed for the expression of dissent. So, while the regime employed *narod* to denote 'the whole people', and thereby to imply unity, dissenters used it in a divisive way to signify the powerless lower classes."



of our authors, which seems to be a more poetic act than a simple mimicking of the Party jargon that a first reading of the letters might suggest.

### ***Practices***

Moving away from their discursive components, when read together with the reports written by the Party inspectors, the letters disclose a number of practices that relate the Halkevi to the coffeehouse, as well as to activities enacted by the frequenters of both spaces.

One of the letters' most pervading theme is the exclusion of their writers from the People's Houses and Rooms. The exclusion of the complainants from the Halkevi is also reported in relation to the (on and off-stage) presence of women in the Halkevleri, a subject to be treated in the next chapter. The authors stress it once more in relation to the coffeehouse and to 'coffeehouse' activities. It is expressed again in terms of the all-pervasive divide between 'the people' and the 'intellectuals', an omnipresent theme as well. This divide, and the exclusion it signifies, apart from a rhetoric scheme of the letters, denotes certain social and discursive practices enacted by our actors customarily, but also in response to the center's policies and their implementation, such as the creation and running of new social and institutional spaces (i.e. Halkevi, Halkodaları, Okuma Odaları).

The practice touched upon in this chapter is the drinking of coffee and/or alcoholic drinks, the playing of cards and/or gambling, and the everyday social interaction mostly between men, activities customarily enacted in coffeehouses, but also as our letters disclose to some extent in the Halkevleri. These 'coffeehouse activities', negatively described in the official – moralistic discourse, are connected to the coffeehouse and contrasted to the People's Houses and their activities.

Drawing on similar discursive elements then, our authors complain that the same practice, although prohibited, is performed in the Halkevleri, which end up look like coffeehouses. Moreover, the letters relate this practice – either in the Halls of the People's Houses or in the coffeehouses – to those performing it, expressing in these terms the omnipresent 'people' vs. 'intellectuals/civil servants' divide. More specifically, the letters protest that civil servants/intellectuals monopolize the Halkevi space excluding at the same time their authors, 'the people' and/or 'the youth', while practicing what the center is criticizing the people of doing in the coffeehouses. In simple words, the argument goes as follows: '*they* gamble in the Halkevi, when *we* are asked not to visit the coffeehouses in order to gamble'.

The letters first of all point to the distinction between 'the People' and 'the intellectuals' – a distance the intellectuals are criticized of trying to maintain. Secondly they disclose the performing of a practice the center had prohibited in the Halkevleri, namely the playing of cards and similar games. Consider the following incident as described by six complainants to the CHP and as



explained by the local CHP chief. A telegram from Kuşadası, dated 3/11/1944 and signed by a farmer, two headworkers (*kalfa*) (one in a tailors shop, the latter in a shoe shop), a porter in the municipality, a caretaker in the state dispensary, and a grocer, reported the following to the Party Headquarters

*Is the People's Room the club of the civil servants? The people (halk tabakası) is rejected there. We, the youths signing below, were expelled from the People's Room by the District Governor, who also cursed and slapped one of us in the face.*

The letter of Dr. Sezai Yavaşca, chairman of the sub district's CHP branch, was sent in 1/4/1944 to the Party chairmanship of the province of İzmir. The chairman's account of the event is quite different:

*Our district is small and there are no suitable places for our civil servant friends<sup>530</sup> to sit. In order not to have them visit unsuitable places but in order to gather [in a place] together, one of the rooms of this building, which belongs to the municipality, was allotted to them. Those from them [civil servants] desiring to study and exchange opinions pass to the People's Room, which is a separate room, while those wishing to play common games enter the other room. So the incident took place in the civil servants' room, which has no relation to the People's Room. As for the incident:*

*When Fevzi Hamurculu, the district governor, entered the civil servants' room, the complainants were playing parafa [a card game] on one of the tables. The Kaymakam addressed them in the following words: 'why do you follow us, there are 80 coffeehouses, this place belongs to the civil servants. There is no reason to be impolite, just go there'. Then, according to rumors, he entered the room a little later and, seeing them there again, he slapped Kenan Önder in the face. All of them are about 18-20 years old. They are not intellectuals, but immature youngsters, some of them wishing to pass for rowdies and toughs.<sup>531</sup>*

The way the local Party chief describes the plaintiffs is telling of the way categories that were exalted in the official discourse, such as the 'youth' or the 'intellectuals', are used in the local context. In his text their youth appears as a handicap rather than an asset and somehow attests to the fact that they were not intellectuals. I suggest that the chief's contempt for their age conforms to wider social norms regarding seniority. In that sense the complainants were depicted as trespassing on a space they were not fit to enter due to status (intellectuals and civil servants) and age (elders) restrictions. Needless to say, these

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<sup>530</sup> Party sources generally use the term 'friends' to refer to Party members and executive.

<sup>531</sup> Both letters contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/836.305.1. Emphasis mine. "Müştekilerin hemen hepsi 18-20 yaşlarında münevver olmayan bir parça serkeş ve küllanbeyi geçinmek isteyen toylardır."

restrictions were not to be found in the Halkevi bylaws; quite the contrary, they were prohibited. What is more, in discrediting the complaints, Sezai Yavaşca moves away from categories employed by the official discourse (intellectuals/the People) and invokes the image of the *külhanbeyi* of the neighborhood. In popular representations the *külhanbeyi* is an ambiguous figure, the local ‘tough guy’ who would ‘protect’ the ‘honor’ of the quarter and its residents – especially its women - against outsiders or ‘outside threats’, but also the local bully. In the eyes of a center that aspires to penetrate and ‘modernize’ the locality this local ‘tough guy’ is protecting against outsiders, the *külhanbeyi* is translated into an outdated negative type that obstructs the very ‘progress’ of the region the center is aiming at with the People’s Houses.

The manner gambling is accounted for by the implicated is also telling of the way the distinction between civil servants and locals is expressed and performed. The complainants do not mention anything about gambling. Instead their accusation is based on the argument that they were expelled by the *Kaymakam* because they were from ‘the People’ and not civil servants. The accused side on the other hand admits that the act of denying access to ‘non-civil servants’ was taking place, albeit not from the People’s Room, but from an adjacent room that had been allocated for the exclusionary use of civil servants. Moreover, in a style somehow assenting to the accusations of exclusion, the local Party chief explains the reasons for having a separate room for the sole use of the civil servants: “*Our district is small and there are no suitable places for our civil servant friends. In order not to have them visit unsuitable places and in order to have them assemble together*”. As for the complainants, the *Kaymakam*, who was accused elsewhere<sup>532</sup> of playing backgammon with the Bank’s vice chairman in the Halkevi, is reported explaining where the complainants - that is not the ‘civil servant friends’- should assemble, i.e. the coffeehouse. The problem thus was not playing cards per se, but playing cards in the wrong place, in the Peoples House where gambling was prohibited. And, as one can plausibly assume and the Party chief’s letter implies, the civil servants were playing cards, or – as Dr. Sezai Yavaşca puts it - “common games” in the Halkevi. Instead of excluding the ‘non-intellectual other’ from the People’s Room then, as the complainants protest, the local CHP chief’s response denotes that a separate space was created for that same purpose within, or next to, the People’s Room. If true, this arrangement seems to be an ingenious solution on the part of local Party and state elites, an answer to two seemingly incompatible demands: one the one hand to have a space of their own and keep segregated from the locals without monopolizing the Halkevi and thus excluding the ‘other’, while, on the other hand, to be able to perform separately, and not publicly in spaces more open to the public eye and the local population, such as the coffeehouse,

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<sup>532</sup> Telegram to the Prime Minister Şükrü Şaraçoğlu, sent in 18/3/1946, by Nuri Gümedağ from Kemalpaşa, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/836.305.1.

activities the centre had banned in the People's Houses.<sup>533</sup> From another point of view, in terms of the Ottoman state's political theory, this solution prevented the transgression of the border between rulers and ruled, safeguarding in this way distinct spaces of socialization for state and/or local elites.

A letter from İnebolu discloses an analogous ingenious method to 'keep the border intact', to achieve the segregation of 'the intellectuals' from the rest by a similar act of exclusion, while performing 'coffeehouse activities'.

*We are of the People's Party and since the Halkevi was established in our district, it has been divided into two parts; the large hall is reserved for studying, theatre plays and all kinds of meetings; the other part is a small room where the Halkevi administration has permitted the [drinking of] coffee, and the playing of billiards. All the people could sit in both rooms. In the evening of 22/3/1949 we, children of this country, went to the Halkevi that we know to be open to everybody and sat in the small playing room that is used as a coffeehouse. When we asked the coffeehouse owner [kahveci] to make us two coffees and give us the domino, we were faced with the following answer.*

*He told us that he will not give us the domino and make us coffee because, apparently the Halkevi chairman had said that only the Halkevi members, High School graduates and civil servants could enter this small room that was used as a coffeehouse and was open to all the people over the age of 18. If High School graduates and civil servants are considered to be from the people, then aren't we - not High School graduates or civil servants - from the people?<sup>534</sup>*

The two practices the letters disclose, that is, on the one hand, the segregation of the 'intellectuals' from the rest of 'the People', and the playing of cards and games on the other, are also echoed in relation to a similar complaint theme, the 'City Club'. The 'City Clubs' were targets of both some complaint letters and many newspaper articles.<sup>535</sup> Both sources condemn them on the same rhetoric and discursive terms as in the case of the coffeehouse. Although the City Clubs' alleged aim was to "form a scientific and social

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<sup>533</sup> This compartmentalization of the Halkevi space in order to serve the civil servants' need to segregate from the locals has been also observed in the House's discursive rival, the coffeehouse. Referring to the coffeehouses in Orf, Meeker mentioned the existence of inner rooms in some coffeehouses reserved for the exclusive use of certain 'notables'. In a similar fashion, some coffeehouses were frequented mainly by non-local civil servants and educated local youths, while others by locals, villagers, merchants and artisans. Michael Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (California: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 348, 350-2.

<sup>534</sup> Letter of 29/3/1949, singed by İnebolu Çamikebir Mahallesinden Ahmet oğlu Hamdi Gözlük ve Sadettin, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.309.1.

<sup>535</sup> For examples see Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve iktidar*, pp. 175 – 178, 240.

institution in the region”<sup>536</sup> - to quote the Bylaws of the *Şehir Kulübü* of Balıkesir, in place of debate, they were reported hosting “high gambling parties.”<sup>537</sup> In most of the sources –complaint letters and newspaper/journal articles – the City Club, apart from the gambling accusations and the gap between intellectuals and people reported to preserve, is negatively associated to the People’s House and its activities by both complainants and Party Inspectors. Zühtü Durukan, MP for Samsun and Party inspector of the Bilecik area, relates the indifference shown by a number of civil servants to the Halkevi activities to the existence of a City Club. According to the inspector, Bilecik was a small and neglected provincial center; the former Vali did not care about anything as he was waiting to serve his last five years until retirement; and a number of civil servants, who had not been prosecuted for previous offences, had been appointed there as a form of punishment. These civil servants “were taking advantage of the governor’s indifference, have lost their discipline to the state, and were assembling in a place called ‘City Club’, where they were gambling all night till morning, sometimes abandoning their service and continuing gambling even during the day.” As a result of the civil servants and teachers’ indifference the Halkevi “remained stagnant”, and “as some of the addicted to gambling high-level civil servants were not visiting the Halkevi, they became an obstacle to the works [in the Halkevi] of the junior civil servants as well.”<sup>538</sup>

Muhsin Adil Binal, MP for Konya and Party Inspector of the Seyhan area, provides a more general assesment regarding the ‘City Club’ phenomenon, its causes and results.

*In fact, one of the first things a District or provincial Governor is thinking of doing in the cities and towns is to find a building for the civil servants in particular to assemble in order to relax, and to manage it as a Club. In such a place, [they] come together to chat and read newspapers and journals; depending on the place, in a small or large scale, gambling is accepted as a natural fact. Our People’s Houses are obliged to benefit from the efforts of the intellectuals and the expertise of the civil servants. After all, in small towns the success of the activities of the Halkevleri depends solely on the civil servant members. From this perspective, the existence of such Clubs is naturally preventing the activities of the Houses. It is also needless to explain how much damage to our social body the gambling in the Clubs and the creation of lazy and vagabond types produces.*<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> *Balıkesir Şehir Kulübü Nizamnamesi* (İstanbul: Türk Pazarı matbaası, 1934), p. 2.

<sup>537</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve iktidar*, p. 175.

<sup>538</sup> Letter No 354, dated 16/5/1941, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/827.268.2.

<sup>539</sup> Letter No 31, dated 8/2/1944, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/842.331.2.

Although criticizing the City Clubs as possible centers of gambling and recognizing the potential impediments to the Halkevi activities these clubs might produce, the Party inspector does not seem to consider the idea behind the creation of such clubs – the carving of an autonomous space for the exclusive use of the civil servants – harmful, unless used for gambling. This is reminiscent of the Party’s position on drinking and gambling in Party buildings and Turkish Hearths in 1930, when a Party communication stated that these activities were not prohibited in general, but only inside Party buildings in order not to give the wrong impressions to ‘the people’, who “will not tolerate them”;<sup>540</sup> appearances again. The existence of the need to sustain the border is silently expressed, the civil servants within the border though should not *appear* provocative to the excluded. The ambivalence is once more conveyed: drinking, gambling and playing games, although condemned as inappropriate and unpleasant in the official discourse, do not seem to be evaluated the same way always, and regardless of where and by whom they were performed. The opinions of the main users of such spaces, the civil servants, are not directly voiced in the sources used here, but the Party Inspector Muhsin Adil Binal seems to partially convey them in an implicit way. The civil servants are recognized the right to assemble together separately from the rest of the people and, if not becoming “lazy and vagabond” or “preventing the activities of the Halkevleri”, “gambling, big or small, is considered a natural fact”, almost acceptable – if we may add.

Similar critiques were raised by complaint letters as well. A letter from Tosya (in the Province of Kastamonu) attempted to direct the attention of the Party Headquarters to the City Club of the area “because I consider it to be opposing the principles of the government and the Party.” The anonymous author wrote that all the civil servants of the region, including the public prosecutor, the judge, the mayor and the Halkevi chairman, were members and were paying membership fees. He then enumerated the effects this ‘establishment’ had for the region. “For this reason the civil servants are totally indifferent to the Halkevi. This establishment creates a gap between the people and the civil servants. The membership fees are not used for the common good. This place is doing nothing good for the region, but it is just a nest of gambling and drinking for three or five civil servants and chiefs (*ümera*). For the Judge and prosecutor’s sake Party and Halkevi members say nothing and have fun together.”<sup>541</sup>

Three years later, a communiqué of the Ministry of Interior reiterated almost identically the charges of the above letter against the ‘City Clubs’. The communication admitted that the City Clubs were established and run in opposition to the People’s House; that the Clubs had obtained a number of privileges in comparison to other public places; that because of these privileges

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<sup>540</sup> Communiqué No 2882, dated 21/8/1930, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/435.1804.2, reproduced in Koçak, *İktidar ve Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, pp. 193 – 4.

<sup>541</sup> Letter of 15/9/1941 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.309.1.

they had become gambling and drinking centers; that they were obstructing the ‘coming together’ (*kaynaşma*) of the People and the intellectuals; and that they were preventing the interest and participation that was necessary for the People’s Houses and Rooms.<sup>542</sup> Considered together with the Party Inspector’s report given above, as well as together with numerous letters from Party chiefs and civil servants, this communication reveals the center’s considerations regarding the position of the Houses and of state representatives and employees within local societies. All the above sources then admit that there was a head-on confrontation between a number of conflicting needs and aims expressed by central and provincial institutions and actors. On the one hand, silently or not, the need of civil servants and bureaucrats to separate and keep themselves segregated from the rest of the local people is voiced, while on the other hand the objective of the regime and the People’s Houses to carry out the ‘coming together’ of intellectuals and people is equally expressed. The ingenious solutions to this deadlock, created and evenly denounced by social actors, were the answers to the tension the two conflicting needs were producing at the local level.

### ***‘Border administration’***

To sum up, the complaint letters and the reports - be it from a local Party man or an (external) Party Inspector - refer to two practices already present in a number of spaces and occasions even before the creation of the People’s Houses or similar ‘new’ spaces. The former is the practice of segregation of the educated and elite segments of local societies from the rest of the population. The latter is a wide set of leisure time and socializing social activities the center had suspected for centuries together with the space within which they typically take place, i.e. the coffeehouse. These practices intersect with the ‘new’ space of the People’s House and its activities; encounter and contrast with the Houses’ aims; interrelate with, reflect and become reflected in conflicting but also parallel discourses employed both by regime and social actors. We have seen how the accommodative discourse uttered by civil servants and Party men in relation to their need to segregate from the rest of the people is contrasted to the accusatory discourse of those excluded from or denied access to the Halkevi.

If we are to remember the political geography of the Houses sketched in chapter 4 and 5, we may well read the letters’ complaining about the civil servants’ gambling (or generally about gambling and related ‘coffeehouse activities’) and the exclusion of their authors from the Houses, as a sign of ongoing struggles between local actors for access to the Houses, their facilities and, as a result, to the status this association might entail. In many occasions, as we have seen above, various groups were trying to maintain the exclusive

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<sup>542</sup> Communiqué No 22328/10391, dated 23/12/1944, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/847.352.1, mentioned in Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, p. 240.

use of the Houses' space, occasionally by the simple exclusion of others, with the employment of coercive methods (police, gendarmerie), or by imposing restrictions of entrance, enforcing rules of partial (spatial and temporal) inclusion/exclusion of others, as in the case of a 'Women's evening' (*kadın gecesi*),<sup>543</sup> the 'davetiye system',<sup>544</sup> the allocation of one room for the exclusive use of members or civil servants, and similar cunning regulations to bypass the programmatic dictum of the Bylaws that the Houses are open to all citizens regardless of wealth and social position. Telling of the struggle between various groups and individuals for entrance and access to the Houses on the other hand stand the letters complaining about many deficiencies, wrong doings and the exclusion of their authors from the House and/or its activities. Willing but unable for a number of reasons to enter by their account, their authors use the official discourse in a tactical and ingenious way, 'turning', stretching and even mutating without totally and outwardly refusing it, 'using' its own contradictions and ambiguities in order to further their accusation and, ultimately, their request, which we can finally read as a result of a continuous struggle that was waged by our actors (included and excluded) upon the Halkevi border. By Halkevi border I do not refer here to the Houses' spatial characteristics alone. I rather refer to the discourses describing, the practices connected, the values attributed to the Halkevi, and to the contenders or refuters of such discourses, practices and values, who in our case are the actors situated in, on, outside but also far away from the Halkevi border.<sup>545</sup> I chose to view these twists and turns and the accommodation tactics and discourse involved as acts of domestication of the practices the center was striving to introduce. Domestication here refers to acts by social actors that attempt to

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<sup>543</sup> See next chapter.

<sup>544</sup> I call 'davetiye system' the system of invitation cards to Halkevi events, like theatre and musical performances, that was devised by Party and Halkevi bosses to regularize the entrance to Halkevi activities but also to restrict the entrance only to the people receiving the invitations. The davetiye was one of the most prevailing subjects of complaint letters signaling the exclusion of the complainants from the Halkevi Halls. See anonymous letter of 8/7/1942 from Zonguldak complaining about the system of 'colored tickets' applied by the Halkevi to regulate the entrance to the Halkevi cinema: Monday evening shows are restricted to the head of departments with the white card; Tuesday evenings to the rest of the civil servants with the pink card; on Wednesdays to the company executives with the blue card; on Thursdays to the low level employees of the company with grey cards and finally on Friday evenings to the workers. Contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/845.344.2. For a similar system see Esra Üstündağ – Selamoğlu, "Bir Sözlü Tarih Çalışması. Hereke'de Değişim", *Toplumsal Tarih*, Vol. 8, No 45, (September 1997). Also letters of lawyer Necati Erdem from Sinop, dated 5/12/1947 and 23/2/1948, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/843.333.2. Letter signed by ten Halkevi members from İnegöl, dated 27/8/1943 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/829.273.2. Letter signed T.C. from Tosya, dated 22/3/1948, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.309.1. Also complaint letter published in 6/2/1940 in the newspaper *Kars*, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.306.2. Letter of university students sent in 27 February 1943, and letter of Ayni Kozak from Izmir Halkevi, both contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/836.305.1. For a printed davetiye card of the Karşıyaka Halkevi sent to the General Secretariat by a number of students excluded from a Halkevi event see their letter in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/836.305.1.

<sup>545</sup> Other *spaces* might posse similar characteristics, the 'City Club' being one example among a number of possible spaces with similar clientele and characteristics (*Askeri mahfil, Cumhuriyet balosu, Muallim Cemiyeti, Okuma Odası*, etc).



render the kemalist policies familiar to local needs and interests, in sum to the sociopolitical and cultural realities of local societies.

Drawing on Meltem Ahıska, I employ the term ‘border administration’ to designate but also to explore this process of domestication, of that continuous ‘turning’, ‘twisting’ and accommodation of the center’s projects, but also of the struggle waged upon the real, practical and discursive border of the Halkevi, and the level of inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the ‘other’ displayed by each House.<sup>546</sup> Ahıska refers to a ‘border administration’ that was continuously employed in the 1930s and 1940s in radio broadcasting between supposedly conflicting concepts, such as foreign/national, elite/people, men/women. Ahıska uses the term to point at the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the representations of such notions in radio broadcastings. She notes the ability of the representations to recognize the existing borders and thus draw new ones, while stressing the association this operations of ‘border administration’ has to relations and practices of power. In our case ‘border administration’ is used in a broader sense to include not only the representations or discourses but also the practices that constitute the ‘border’ between the Houses, or what the Houses are supposed to stand for, and the ‘outside’/‘other’; between social actors that were either included in or excluded from the Halkevi, while fighting either to enter or deny access to the Halkevi space.

## ***Conclusions***

In this chapter we have seen how social actors cope with the center’s ‘new’ habits, discourses and practices of leisure time socialization, while at the same time making allowances for local popular widespread practices and discourses as well as their personal and group interests; how both in terms of discourse and practices the actors of our stories manage to ‘domesticate’ the ‘new’ practices of leisure time by means of manipulating the ambiguities of the Kemalist reforms and their underlying discourse, as well as through a number of ingeniously crafted adaptations of the activities the center had planned.

More specifically, we have seen that (a) the complainants were able to recognize and employ the ubiquitous in the press, but also – to a lesser extent – in Party sources, ‘moralistic’ discourse about the coffeehouse. In addition, we have shown how (b) the authors employed elements of the official discourse cunningly manipulating its ambivalences, which enabled them to ‘turn’ it without refuting it entirely. The way the word ‘people’ is employed in the complaint letters – to denote the powerless and unjustly treated – is a telling example of our authors’ ability to draw on a key element of the official discourse and ‘turn’ it to signify something completely different from its former meaning – the hallowed ‘people’ of the populist rhetoric.

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<sup>546</sup> Meltem Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı. Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik* (İstanbul: Metis, 2005), p. 46.



In terms of practices, our letters once more convey the exclusion of their writers from the Halkevi, an exclusion they relate to coffee drinking and gambling, activities habitually performed in coffeehouses, but also in the People's Houses, although formally forbidden. Our complaint letters reveal that what the official discourse of the period was despising about coffeehouse and the Halkevi Bylaws prohibit was actually taking place in the People's Houses. Furthermore, the letters reveal that in many cases the practice of playing cards, backgammon or domino, the drinking of coffee and alcohol in the Houses was concomitant with the (need for) separation of civil servants and educated people from the rest of the population.

In addition, we have seen that Halkevi actors – usually civil servants and local elites - devised a number of ingenious techniques to keep the space of the Halkevi segregated while performing 'coffeehouse' practices. In short, the argument put forward is that by looking at the accusations about the consumption of coffee, alcohol and the playing of cards, activities associated with the coffeehouse, we actually become witnesses of yet another 'turn' or 'twist' of what the center attempted to create with the establishment of the People's Houses. Activities implicitly and explicitly condemned as contrary to the essence of the 'Kemalist cause', and were consequently prohibited, continued to exist within the Halkevi walls as well as in their initial core, the coffeehouse. I view this as an act of *domestication* of the space and the activities the regime was attempting to initiate. The 'domestication' refers to the way the center's ideas and plans – without being rejected - were 'blended' by local actors with activities, perceptions and practices they were supposed to eradicate, or to which they were discursively at least opposed.

By studying the accommodation and domestication of the reforms by social actors, my aim is not to assess the success or failure of such projects of social mechanics.<sup>547</sup> I am rather interested in viewing the consumption involved as a *process of border administration*. By studying the consumption of a number of products of the center's *project*, I wish to demonstrate the significance this *process of border administration* holds in relation to our actors' identity management.<sup>548</sup> If we are to study the "emergence of new identities and new forms of subjectivity", I argue that we need to be attentive to the production of such 'accommodated' spaces, discourses and practices, in short to the "local specificities of modernity",<sup>549</sup> that local sociopolitical and cultural milieu within and upon the 'administered' borders of which our

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<sup>547</sup> For a critique of the recent literature on the 'Turkish Modernization' and the trend to view it as a failure or success see Meltem Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapağı*, especially the part "Model ve Kopya", pp. 35 – 45.

<sup>548</sup> On identity management see Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, "Introduction", in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 10.

<sup>549</sup> Both direct quotations from Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern. On Missing Dimensions in the Study of the Turkish Modernity", in Bozdoğan and Kasaba, *Rethinking Modernity*, p. 113.

subjects operate and produce meaningful representations of themselves and others.

