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Chapter 8

Halkevi in the countryside: Village Excursions

In one of his short stories Mahmut Makal⁶⁴¹ recounts the story of a ‘Village Evening’ in a provincial Halkevi.

Last year the chairman of the Village Section of the Halkevi came to the teacher: a decision was taken to organize ‘Villager’s Evenings’ once a week. In the beginning the Administrative Committee objected. They ridiculed this activity saying ‘The villagers are occupied in their own works [and they won’t] attend your meetings’. They found the idea funny. “What does a villager understand of meetings; a lesson on military issues might be ok...” they said.

Nevertheless, out of curiosity, out of interest to this novelty, the Hall was very crowded on the meeting days. Because the town’s market was on Thursdays, most of the villagers were coming to town the previous day. So, the Wednesday evenings were quite suitable for the meetings. This was the reasoning behind the decision. In any case, this was a good start. After all, the Halkevi Hall was not to become dilapidated. Even if these meetings were nothing more than that, at least they were an opportunity for the villagers to see the inside of a structure they had been seeing for years from the outside.

During these evenings, dances, popular songs and wrestling events, all familiar to the villagers, were organized. The customs of every village were introduced to the others. An attempt was made to give the villagers some basic information (basit bilgiler). This was a part of the activity described as People’s Education. The villagers were coming in great numbers.

Later on though nothing could be performed or sold, as the complaints began. “The Hall is full of lice, get rid of the villagers!” This voice came from the eminent merchants, the grocers and the ‘bosses’ (amir), as well as from those who had taken the decision to carry out these meetings.⁶⁴²

The Halkevleri institution was established by the ruling Party with the primary aim to disseminate the reforms and the regime’s new policies to the people. This ‘reform diffusion’ being amongst its most significant objectives, the People’s House was envisaged as a melting point of the ‘people’ and the intellectuals, in other words of those the Party regarded as its natural followers and the ‘remainder’, often called the ‘real people’ (*asıl halk*). All the relevant sources we used in chapter 2 on the People’s Houses of Kayseri and Balıkesir indicate that the People’s Houses were under the control of the party and the

⁶⁴¹ A village(r) teacher who became very famous in the 1950s with his autobiographical book *Bizim Köy* translated into English as Mahmut Makal, *A Village in Anatolia* (London, 1954).

⁶⁴² Mahmut Makal, *Köye gidenler* (Istanbul, 1965), p. 70.

local party elites, while a large number of their active members and authors of their activities were schoolteachers.⁶⁴³ By virtue of their education and social status, as well as because of their membership and active engagement in an institution propagating the fusion of intellectuals and ‘real people’, the Halkevi officials and members are in the middle of a rather confusing situation; they are asked to violate the social borders separating them from the rest of the people, the old border of the Ottoman state discourse between *has* and *avam*. Needless to say this differentiation between state officials and population was quite similar to the old border of the Ottoman state discourse that differentiated the governing state elite from the rest of the governed subjects.

We have seen that the incorporation of the ‘other’ in the Houses the regime was planning was exceptional or even minimal. Makal’s story is quite expressive in demonstrating the attitude of the urban elites staffing the Houses towards the villagers. A number of texts by both local and non-local members of the Halkevi of Kayseri treated in Chapter 3 offer a similar picture. Their texts are usually devoid of locals, especially those that might easily fall in the category of the ‘real people’, and when they refer to them, a sense of embarrassment and discomfort emerges, signifying in a sense the social distance separating the ‘intellectuals’ (*münevver*) from the people. The limited inclusiveness of the Halkevi officials and regulars was in all probability coupled with the indifference, even repulse of the ‘real people’ over the Halkevi, although the evidence is rather circumstantial and limited.⁶⁴⁴ This is reinforced by the given exceptionality of the very few cases of Halkevi worker or ‘underclass’ members (see case of Mahir Şener or Zatiye Tonguç). The People’s House then appears less as the House of the people, but rather as the ‘Intellectual’s House’ (*Aydımlarevi*), a term coined by an eyewitness of their activities.⁶⁴⁵

There is a Halkevi activity though, richly recorded in contrast to the rest of the Houses’ activities, that by its very nature demanded the coming together of intellectuals and people, although not in the House and under given limitation of time and space, the Village Excursion (*Köy Gezisi*). It can be broadly

⁶⁴³ İbrahim Azcan, *Trabzon Halkevi: Türk modernleşmesi sürecinde* (İstanbul: Serarder, 2003); Çelik Bilgin, “Tek Parti döneminde Aydın’ın Sosyokültürel Yaşamında Halkevinin rolü”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, Vol. 11, No 66, (June 1999); Melek Çolak, “Muğla Halkevi ve Çalışmaları”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, Vol. 13, No 73, (January 2000); Nurhan Karadağ, *Halkevleri tiyatro çalışmaları* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 1998); Müge Özmen, *The activities of the People’s House of Eminönü and its review: Yeni Türk* (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 1995); Adil Adnan Öztürk, “Cumhuriyet ideolojisini Halka Yayıma Girişimleri: Halkevleri ve Aydın Halkevi”, *Tarih ve Toplum*, Vol. 31, No 182, (February, 1999); Resul Yiğit, *Mersin Halkevi (1933 - 1951)*, (MA Thesis, Mersin University, 2001); Sabri Zengin, “Yeni Tokat. Bir halkevi Dergisi”, *Tarih ve Toplum*, Vol. 39, No 232, (April 2003).

⁶⁴⁴ In Cevdet Kudret, *Havada Bulut Yok* (İstanbul: İnkılap ve Aka Kitapları, 1976), the city poor do not know what the Halkevi is. In Arzu Ötürkmen, *Türkiye’de Folklor ve Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1998), p. 69, an old lady says that she did not go to the House because of shamefulness (*ayıplık vardır, gidemezdik*). We have viewed a similar sense of inability to enter the People’s Houses due to issues of low morality and shamelessness conveyed in the large number of complaint and petition letters treated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

⁶⁴⁵ Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu, *Anıların izinde*, Vol. 1, (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1977), p. 336.

defined as an expedition of a group of Halkevi members to nearby villages in order to carry out a number of activities, most of them stated in the Halkevi Bylaws.

The aim of this chapter is to study this moment of ‘fusion’ in order to explore the ‘consumption’ by Halkevi actors of the regime’s village(r) policies. In a way similar to the ‘Turkish woman’, the ‘Turkish Village’ and the ‘Turkish villager’ were targeted by the regime and its policies. The People’s House was in the middle of this attempted change of the villager, of the way the villager was perceived and accounted for. The Halkevi was expressively designed and instructed to execute village(r) related activities. This chapter is about exploring the (re)appropriation by social actors of the village-related categories, discourses and practices the regime had produced and attempted to introduce through the Halkevi network. I argue that it is upon this (re)appropriation that the categories ‘villager’ and ‘village’ are (re)created and (re)defined, the same way the relationship between (and the border separating) the villager and the state, its offices and personnel, between the countryside, its inhabitants and the city is also shaped.

In the first part of the chapter I try to give a brief outline of the emergence of the ‘village issue’ offering a ‘prehistory’ of organizations aiming at changing the village and villager roughly since the 1908 Young Turk revolution. The second part presents the textbook version of the Halkevi’s village activities drawing on a number of publications on the activities of the Village Section of the People’s Houses and proposes an analysis of the Halkevi ‘village operation’. Next follows the study of the execution of this Halkevi operation based on a series of Village Excursions of the Halkevi of Kayseri in the late 1930s.

The emergence of the Village Issue: a short Prehistory

Before dwelling on the Halkevi *Köy Gezisi*, a few words have to be said about the history of similar ‘villagist’ programs and activities preceding the establishment of the People’s Houses. The village excursion was not an activity initiated by the People’s Houses in the 1930s. The Halkevi institution was not the first cultural and political structure to conduct village and villager related activities in Turkey. A steadily increasing interest in villagers and villages had existed, in a more or less organized form, at least since the Young Turk revolution and the second Constitutional Period. This interest took a solid form within the ideological framework of the emerging Turkish nationalism and especially within the era’s cultural, and certainly political associations, such as the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, the *Milli Talim ve Terbiye Cemiyeti* and the *Türk Ocağı*, as a part of what was later to be emphatically called ‘Popular Education’ (*halk terbiyesi* or earlier on *terbiyeyi avam*).⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁶ İsmayil Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, *Halkın Evi* (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1950), pp. 20-28. See Chapter 1 for a more thorough presentation of ‘Popular Education’.

The increasing interest in the villager and the village life that appeared at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th among intellectuals was also echoed in the literature of the period. Village actors and themes started to make their appearance in the Turkish novel since the beginning of the 20th century. It was after the 1920s though that a ‘village literature’ emerged with the works of a number of urban intellectuals. Makal was probably the first village born writer to publish ‘village literature’ works, but it was in the 1950s.⁶⁴⁷ The interest in the village cosmos evident in the contemporaneous emergence of ‘village literature’ works and of the thesis about the ‘education of the People’ was an urban phenomenon taking shape among urban elite circles.

Although the term ‘Popular education’ and its meaning might not have remained certain and uncontested throughout the period from the 1908 revolution to the Republican Turkey of the 1930s, the core of the term’s definition was surely stable: it referred to the need to have the ‘people’ ‘educated’, or ‘enlightened’ by the ‘enlightened’, the intellectuals. We can discern this continuity in a number of sources from the period: the declaration of the *Türk Derneği* (1908);⁶⁴⁸ the 1915 bylaws of the *Milli Talim ve Terbiye Cemiyeti*;⁶⁴⁹ the 1912 *Nizamname* of the Turkish Hearth (1912);⁶⁵⁰ the bylaws of the *Köylü bilgi Cemiyeti* (1919);⁶⁵¹ the preamble of the 1932 bylaws of the People’s Houses.⁶⁵² The term ‘people’ is used in contrast to the ‘intellectuals’, but it definitely denotes the villagers, as the majority of the ‘non-intellectuals’ reside in villages. ‘Popular education’ then necessitates the coming together of the two groups, ‘intellectuals’ and the ‘people’, the ‘fusion’ the Halkevi sources refer to as the main goal of the Houses. Ziya Gökalp’s influence is obvious; the distinction between intellectuals seen as carriers of civilization, and the ‘people’ as the reservoir of (national) culture, as well as the need to have these two ends of the spectrum come together in a process of mutual exchange resides in the core of Gökalp’s thought.⁶⁵³

The need to reach the ‘people’ and especially the villagers – consider the creation of a specific Halkevi section for this reason, the Village Section - was also felt in the Turkish Hearth association, within which two groups were formed during the First World War with the specific aim to ‘reach the people’, and thus the villagers: the *Halka Doğru* journal and movement and the *Köycüler Cemiyeti*. In 1916, the *Halka Doğru Cemiyeti* of Izmir was

⁶⁴⁷ Ramazan Kaplan, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Romanında Köy* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1997), pp. 33 - 63; Carole Rathbun, *The Village in the Turkish Novel and Short Story 1920 to 1955* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1972), pp. 18 - 22; Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “The peasants in early Turkish literature”, *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No 2, (2002).

⁶⁴⁸ Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 7-20.

⁶⁴⁹ Baltacıoğlu, *Halkın Evi*, pp. 22-4.

⁶⁵⁰ Francois Georgeon, “Les Foyers Turcs à l’ époque Kemalist (1923 - 1931)”, *Turcica*, XIV, (1982), p. 169. Also in Zafer Toprak, “Osmanlı Narodnikleri : Halka Doğru gidenler”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, 24, (1984), p. 70.

⁶⁵¹ *Köylü Bilgi Cemiyeti esas nizamnamesi* (İstanbul, 1335 [1919]).

⁶⁵² *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Halkevlerin Talimatnamesi* (Ankara, 1932).

⁶⁵³ Niyazi Berkes, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization. Selected Essays of Ziya Gökalp* (London, 1959), p. 259; see extract from Gökalp’s article ‘Halka Doğru’.

founded,⁶⁵⁴ followed in 1918 by yet another Association stemming from the Turkish Hearth Society, the *Köycüler Cemiyeti* (Villagists' Association).⁶⁵⁵

All the above associations underscore the rising interest in and the importance intellectuals of the era – soon to be seen in key positions in the Republican state – placed on the 'enlightenment' and 'progress' of the villagers. Due to the precarious conditions of the period though, these villagist⁶⁵⁶ activities remained extremely limited in nature, scope and outcome, never really surpassing a missionary-like enterprise with no clear aims and program. This lack was partly covered with the expansion of the Turkish Hearth association within a more stable social and political environment after 1923.

Village Operation: Theory

The villagist part of the 'Popular education' movement adopted a more organized and systematised form with the establishment of the People's Houses in 1932. The years preceding their establishment saw a growth in the importance placed on *Halk Terbiyesi* by intellectuals, especially within the Houses' predecessor, the Turkish Hearths.⁶⁵⁷ A number of events though that took place around the year 1930 alarmed the ruling elites of their failure to pass their reforms to the people. The failure of the Free Republican Party to provide a loyal and controllable opposition Party, the Menemen Incident, the repercussions of the 1929 Crisis, and reports of a widespread public distress over the regime's policies – to name only a few of these events, led to the adoption of a set of policies seeking to overcome the failure to win the population to the reforms, the establishment of the Halkevleri being one of them. One of the sections of the Houses was especially devoted to the 'progress' of the villagers. The Village Section was the headquarters of the Houses' 'villagist' activities, which had adopted a more organised and sophisticated form than the earlier attempts by the Turkish Hearths. A series of publications⁶⁵⁸ were compiled by the Party or various Houses, especially the

⁶⁵⁴ Zafer Toprak, "Osmanlı Narodnikleri", p.75.

⁶⁵⁵ Uluğ İğdemir, *Yılların içinde* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976), p. 292. Reşit Galib was also a member of the group of leading intellectuals and politicians engaged in the establishment of the Halkevi institution. Anıl Çeçen, *Atatürk'ün kültür kurumu Halkevleri* (Ankara, 1990), pp. 107 – 110. For more information on similar associations see Chapter 1.

⁶⁵⁶ The term köycü/köycülük is rendered here as villagist; peasantist is another alternative.

⁶⁵⁷ Some examples: Hamit Zübeyr (Koşay), *Halk Terbiyesi* (Ankara: Köy Hocası Matbaası, 1931); S. Laslo, "Faşist Halk Terbiyesi", *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 4, (1930); F. Yozsef, "Fin Yüksek Halk mektepleri", *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 1, No 24- 218, (1929); n. a., "Yugoslavya'da İslav Sokol Kongresi", *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 5/24, No 32/226, (1930).

⁶⁵⁸ Some examples: Ankara Halkevi, *Ankara Halkevi köycüler şubesi talimatnamesi* (Ankara, 1932); Tevfik Kılınçarslan, *Köy kütüğü* CHP Ankara Halkevi Büyük boy No. 25, Köycülük Şubesi, (Ankara, 1939); Salahaddin Demirkan, *Köy nasıl tetkik edilmelidir?*, İstanbul Eminönü Halkevi Dil ve Edebiyat şubesi Neşriyatı: XX, (İstanbul: Kültür Basımevi, 1942); "Ankara Halkevi Köycüler kolunun çalışması", *Ülkü*, Vol. 4, No 24, (February 1935), p. 465; "Köy Anketi", *Ülkü*, Vol. 1, No 6, (June 1933), pp. 362-4; Salim Gündoğan, *Köycülük ve Köy Davası hakkında bir etüd*. *Aydın*

Ankara Halkevi, and distributed to all Houses.⁶⁵⁹ These publications functioned as a set of directives or instructions on how to carry out a number of village-related works, from the collection of folklore material to the speeches the Halkevi visitors were supposed to deliver to the villagers.

Ülkü, the journal of the Ankara Halkevi, was among the first to pave the way and give instructions and examples of ‘Village studies’ with an article series entitled “Village Survey” starting in June 1933. The article recommends a number of sections a village related study should have: ‘General information about the village’, ‘Social situation’, ‘Educational situation’, ‘Economical situation’, ‘state of hygiene’. More articles on the Houses’ village activities followed.⁶⁶⁰

Published in 1939 by a member of the Village Section of the Ankara Halkevi, *Köy Kütüğü* (Village Register) is another example of publications offering guidelines on ‘Village studies’. It is a booklet offering Halkevi members, especially members of the Village Section, a set of guidelines on how to conduct their activities. “Our House’s Village Section has created a ‘Village Register’ for every village with the aim to render the cause for village progress, to which our Party has given great importance and value, easier as well as in order to achieve more positive results in practice.” The book is actually a list with all the information deemed necessary for the village development operation of the Party. Starting with a sketch and photographs of the village before and after the Republic (*Eski ve Yeni köy*), the prospective authors of such ‘Village Registers’ are asked to collect and register information divided into a number of sections: geographical data (climate, water, natural difficulties and beauties), population statistics, cultural situation (schools, number of students, teachers, literacy statistics, stories and tales), historical information and folklore (dances, musical instruments, songs, customs, stories about the village’s name and history), administrative situation (number of gendarmeries, households, public services), public works (roads, gardens, parks, ponds, bridges, Square and monument of the Republic), hygienic conditions (general hygiene, cleanliness, Turkish bath, laundry, swamps, stables and manure, water, diseases), economy (agriculture, crafts and commerce), and social situation (family life, family budget, ways of living – *hayat şekilleri*).⁶⁶¹

Halkevi Neşriyatından 25, Köycülük Şubesi (Aydın: CHP Basımevi Raif Aydoğlu, 1944). See also Nusret Kemal, *Köycülük Rehberi* (Ankara: Çankaya Matbaası, 1934), where most of his articles in *Ülkü*.

⁶⁵⁹ For an account of the Villagist discourse see Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “The People’s Houses and the cult of the peasant in Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34 No 4, (1998) and Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Orada bir Köy var Uzakta* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2006).

⁶⁶⁰ Dr. Zeki Nasır, “Köylerimizin sağlık işleri”, *Ülkü*, Vol. 2, No 5, (August 1933), pp. 42 -45; Salahattin Kandemir, “Coğrafya bakımından köy”, *Ülkü*, Vol. 3, No 14, (April 1934), pp. 153 – 160.

⁶⁶¹ Tevfik Kılınçarslan, *Köy kütüğü*, CHP Ankara Halkevi Büyük boy No. 25, Köycülük Şubesi, (Ankara, 1939), pp. 1 - 47. For a similar plan of village research see Nusret Kemal, *Köycülük Rehberi* (Ankara: Çankaya Matbaası, 1934), the part entitled ‘Köyü nasıl tanımalı’ (How to know the village), pp. 6 – 18.

The People's House of Kütahya published a similar booklet on the subjects a Villagist should turn his/her attention towards when studying a village.⁶⁶² The categories of study are similar: the geography of the village, its position, waters; agriculture; the village houses, transportation means; the village culture; schools, teachers, literacy rates, existence of books and newspapers, dictionaries, Atatürk's speech and law books; fairy tales, sayings, folk songs and stories (Battal Gazi, Nasrettin Hoca, Köröğlu); social situation: drugs, alcohol consumption and gambling; reactionary and superstitious customs; men and women's clothes; economy and products.

Another book published in 1942 by Salahaddin Demirkan gives a similar account of how a village research is carried out. Most important, he notes in his introduction: "the village and the villager are distinctive beings, just like all the objects and aspects of nature and society. In relation to them, [we] have to be as objective as possible, as if we were to study an 'object', staying away from any personal interests, objective, calm and with no resentment."⁶⁶³

Both books stress the importance and seriousness of the operation to be conducted in the villages and upon the villagers. Villagers and villages are 'objects' to be counted, described, photographed, transformed, and instructed. Moreover, they almost emerge as parts of nature, in contrast to what the visitors stand for, which is not mentioned but somehow implied: the city, the state, the elite, civilization. Both texts inscribe relations of power between researchers and researched (in contrast to the populist rhetoric of the regime about the villager). "The peasant subject is produced for non-peasant consumption", Mitchell reminds us.⁶⁶⁴ This becomes apparent when we look at who possesses speech, or more plainly who is bestowed the right to speak about whom. What these books on how to conduct research on villagers describe is an 'operation' over a mute, or rather silenced 'other'; an object created within the wide framework of the social and political change that had been going on for some decades by the time these works were published; an object 'inherited' by local scholars, 'villagists' and Halkevi members, in other words those instructed to carry out the operation, from previous institutions and persons with similar aims, as well as from the Party headquarters. Drawing from De Certeau's distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics', I argue that what I call here 'Village operation' is exactly what he describes as a 'strategy' in contrast to a 'tactic', i.e. "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats can be managed. It would be also correct to recognize in these strategies a specific kind of

⁶⁶² C.H.P. Kütahya Halkevi Köycülük Şuğbesi, *Köycünün defteri* (Kütahya: İl Basımevi, n.d.).

⁶⁶³ Salahaddin Demirkan, *Köy nasıl tetkik edilmelidir?*, İstanbul Eminönü Halkevi Dil ve Edebiyat şubesi Neşriyatı: XX, (İstanbul: Kültür Basımevi, 1942), p. 5.

⁶⁶⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts. Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 144.

knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with its own place.” In our case the center’s power to operate upon the villager sustains but is at the same time justified by the rationalist and expansionist knowledge of ‘science’, be it hygiene, architecture, rural planning, medicine, and the statistics to represent and legitimize the operation. By contrast then, tactic is “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. (...) The space of the tactic is the space of the other. (...) In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.”⁶⁶⁵ Thus, tactical can only be the villager’s response to a strategic operation, such as the Village Excursion.

What we have termed Village Operation, the Halkevi Village Excursion being part of it, signals the change of the state’s perspective on the villager. From the Sultan’s subject, a resource for the extraction of taxes and conscripts, the villager became citizen of the Republic, and in the populist rhetoric of the period was proclaimed the ‘true master of the country’. The populist overtones and the nationalism of the Republican regime and its discourse clashed with the old mentality and practice of the Ottoman state to differentiate, at least in theory, between the ruling elite and the population.

Nevertheless the discourse of the Village operation discloses a ‘objectified’ villager, a mute, silenced object, upon which the state’s increased interests and aims are to be enacted by state mechanisms and personnel (in a variety of fields, from education, military, and financial, to the cultural field). So if we place the village operation or more broadly the state’s new attitude over peasants, within the unchallenged relations of power existing in the countryside, we can speak of a continuation of the old state mentality that sees itself away and over society and populace in direct contrast with the otherwise expressed policy of populism, a paradox or ambiguity exemplified in the Party slogan ‘*halka rağmen halk için*’ (for the people, in spite of the people).

In a nutshell, the change in the state and regime’s perspective and wishes for the villager did not seem to significantly alter the old mentality and practice of demarcation that functioned within an effectively uncontested system of power relations.

Village Operation: an Example

A series of Village Excursions were carried out by the Kayseri Halkevi between the years 1936 – 1939 with the active encouragement and involvement of Adli Bayman, the Vali of Kayseri.⁶⁶⁶ Bayman reached Kayseri in September,⁶⁶⁷ while the first Village Excursion took place in October 1936.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 35-7. Italics in original.

⁶⁶⁶ Necmettin Çalışkan, *Kuruluşundan Günümüze Kayseri Belediyesi* (Kayseri: Kayseri Büyükşehir Belediye Kültür Yayınları, 1995), p. 17.

⁶⁶⁷ “Yeni Valimiz geldi”, *Kayseri*, 3 September 1936, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁸ “Köy Gezintisi”, *Kayseri*, 22 October 1936, p. 1.

More were to follow.⁶⁶⁹ Adli Bayman describes the aims of these excursions in a letter to the Interior Minister and Secretary General of the CHP: to work for the progress of the villager, to carry out research in the villages, and to enlighten the villager. The situation in Kayseri, according to the Vali, makes these needs even more pressing: “Kayseri, as you also know and recognize, is one of the most underdeveloped parts of our country.”⁶⁷⁰ Every Sunday, a group of people, mostly members of the Kayseri People’s House, headed by the Vali himself, were walking to nearby villages. Apart from the reports the Vali of Kayseri was sending to the Party Headquarters, a series of brochures about the villages they visited was published. Bringing these sources together with some of the participants’ accounts and with Cevdet fictitious - Kudret’s to a certain extent - version of the visits, as well as comparing the discourses of all sides, could be highly instructive in an attempt to comprehend the actors’ conflicting perspectives on the Excursions and of the Halkevi activities in general.

A report by the chairman of the Village Section of the Kayseri Halkevi informed the General Secretariat of the ruling Party of the Section’s activities.

- 1) *The Village excursions program continues with the participation of women. We are working towards the strengthening of feelings of mutual affection and cooperation between men and women villagers and city men and women.*
- 2) *A doctor and a health care worker take part in the excursions examining the ill villagers. Medicine is distributed free of charge by charitable associations.*
- 3) *Research on the cultural, social, and financial situation as well as on the history and hygiene of every village is carried out and an attempt is made to publish a brochure on every village visited.*
- 4) *During the excursions orators from the Section deliver speeches on various issues with a simple and comprehensive to the villager language. (Revolution, Independence, infectious diseases, village cooperatives, improvement of products and animals).*
- 5) *Our villagers are invited during the holidays and fests to the House. Wrestling competitions are set up between villager wrestlers.*
- 6) *Our section is trying to establish People’s Courses (Halk dershaneleri) by coming into contact with the village teachers (they are considered natural members of the section). Our Section also assists the villagers who visit the Halkevi in their paperwork with state offices.*

⁶⁶⁹ “Germir gezintisi”, *Kayseri*, 9 November 1936, “Mimar Sinan gezintisi”, *Kayseri*, 16 November 1936. In 21/11/1937 to Erkilet, in 31/10/1937 to Mulu village, in 19/2/1938 to Karahüyük village, in 12/12/1937 to Anbar village, in 8/5/1938 to Yamula village, and in 15/5/1938 to Ağırnas village, according to Adli Bayman’s reports to CHP contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2.

⁶⁷⁰ Letter sent by Adli Bayman to Şükrü Kaya, General Secretary of the ruling Party, in 26/4/1937 contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/ 837.310.2.

7) *During the village excursions members from the theatre section stage plays inoculating the revolution and independence. The Halkevi band is also taking part playing national songs creating in this way a beautiful and amusing day.*⁶⁷¹

The Villagists of the Kayseri Halkevi carry out philanthropic (treatment of illnesses, distribution of medicine), propagandistic, cultural and educational (speeches, music, theatre, courses) activities, as well as the more ‘scientific’ work of studying the village(rs) and collecting a broad spectrum of information about the village, from folk songs and material to financial and agricultural data. The village is counted, registered and studied, medically treated and politically instructed; and becomes the recipient of entertainment and charity. The Section’s activities are canonical, that is they bare close similarity and in one sense follow the norms set by canonical texts on villagist activities; at least in theory, when reported to the source of that canon, the ruling Party.

Participants

Before moving to the actual texts we have to clarify who were the participants in these Village excursions. The authors of the accounts are either teachers (Özdoğan, Fahri Tümer, Cevdet Kudret) or civil servants (Sahir Üzel, the Vali Adli Bayman). Moreover, most of the participants referred to in the texts are also teachers or some kind of civil servant (doctor, scribe, health care worker). One of the brochures published by the Kayseri Halkevi describing the excursion to the village Germin listed the names of all participants.⁶⁷² Thirty-seven men and women took part. Ten Halkevi members, whose names are not mentioned, composed the Halkevi music band. The other 27 participants are given by name. Out of the eleven women, eight were actually accompanying their husbands or fathers: the wife and daughter of the Vali, the wives of two local Party men, of the local military commander and of the director of the Sümerbank factory. The last three women were schoolteachers. The male participants were, apart from the above ‘influential’ men, three schoolteachers, a lawyer, a merchant, a doctor – all Party members, two civil servants (a scribe and a nurse), an army officer, the president of the Sumer Sports Club, and an ‘unidentified’ man. The participants’ names mentioned in the Vali’s reports and the rest of the accounts used here show that the group of people taking part in similar excursions were almost the same, or at least from similar social

⁶⁷¹ Report of the activities of the Village Section’s for the period between 1/7/1937 and 31/12/1937, compiled by the Section’s chairman Fahri Tümer in 28/1/1938, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2.

⁶⁷² *İlbay Adli Bayman’ın Başkanlığı altında Kayseri Halkevinin Tertip ettiği Yaya Köy Gezileri Tetkik Notlarıdır, Seri: 2, Germir Köyü*, Yazan: Etiler Başöğretmeni Kazım Özdoğan (Halkevi Müze ve sergiler komitesinden), (Kayseri: Vilayet Matbaası, 1937).

groups. In short, this ‘villagist’ group of people was mainly composed of civil servants, teachers and local Party men, plus some female family members. In a sense then, the group acted, or at least was perceived (certainly in the eyes of the villagers), as representatives of the state, the Party, and the People’s House, sometimes combining all three statuses. After all, all three institutions were considered, not at all unjustifiably, very similar if not identical. From a different point of view, these people can be seen as agents of the city and carriers of all it might signify – civilization, power, the state, science, authority – to a place and to its inhabitants residing in a space away from all the above, closer to, or even *in*, nature. Nature then can be perceived as a place away from and lacking (or perhaps in need of) the above attributes.⁶⁷³

For some of the civil servants, similar Village excursions were definitely their first contacts with villages and their inhabitants. Conversely, we do know that provincial elites – usually local Party bosses – had been in contact and had a set of relations with villagers. Urban elites had been maintaining client – patron relations with villagers, provided credit and help when needed, absorbed part of the villagers’ product, acted as middle men in the villagers’ relation to state and town officials, and might have a past as tax-farmers (*mültezim*). In short, the local urban financial and political elites that were usually the local Party bosses shared a complex and old set of relations with the village population extending from financial, to political and cultural ties. Part of the aims of the regime’s Village operation and the discourse about the villager was referring to the need to ‘enlighten’, ‘civilize’, and ‘liberate’ the villager from the ‘oppression’ of the ‘landlord’ (*ağa, mutegallibe*). Put more simply, a paradox emerges: the Village Operation was partly executed by members of a social group whose structural relation with the countryside and the villager population was one of the prime targets of that very same operation.

Let us now turn to the texts and their authors.

The Bureaucrat: Adli Bayman

In his report sent to the *CHP Genel Sekreterliği* in 13/01/1937,⁶⁷⁴ Adli Bayman is describing their visit to the village of Reşadiye. “A group of 29 people from the Village, Sports, Music and Social Assistance Sections of the People’s House, we went on foot to the Reşadiye village.” Because the common room of the village was not big enough, the visitors and the villagers had to gather in the village mosque. “For hours we discussed with the villagers.

⁶⁷³ Mitchell has noted that similar lotions and images of the ‘exotic’, ‘child-like’ villager residing in nature and lacking ‘education and culture’ abound in peasantist studies about the Egyptian villager. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, pp. 127 ff.

⁶⁷⁴ Report No 1177 of the Kayseri Provincial Party leadership to the *C.H.P. Genel Sekreterliği*, dated 13/01/1937, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2. Bayman was also sending copies of the same reports to the Prime Minister, contained in **BCA Muamelat Genel Müdürlüğü**, 030.10/199.360.16, dosya No. 23716.

Speeches on social issues (*sosyal konular*) were given in a language intelligible to the villagers.” The Vali is then enumerating some of the “problems” the villagers were facing, such as the lack of a road, school, mill, the dispute between the villagers of Reşadiye and a nearby village about grazing space. Apart from ‘discussing’ with the villagers about “their problems” and delivering them speeches, the visitors compiled a list of the village’s orphans and poor children in order to distribute them books gratis. They then distributed sweets to the village children. The Halkevi’s music group sang national songs (*ulusal havalar*) to entertain the villagers. Finally, the doctor examined the villagers and wrote prescriptions for 28 of them. The medicine were to be distributed free of charge at the Memleket Hospital and the American dispensary.

In a second report compiled some months before,⁶⁷⁵ the Vali Adli Bayman describes yet another Village Excursion, this time to the Mimarsinan village. The structure of the report, and probably of the work done, is similar: they (40 men and women visitors) ‘listened to the villagers’ problems’, ‘discussed’ with them, gave them speeches on appropriate issues,⁶⁷⁶ distributed sweets to the village children and books to poor children and orphans, played music, ‘entertained’ the villagers, examined and distribute them medicine. Once more, as in the previous report, the Vali mentions problems relating to the conditions of roads, schools and drinking water. He also gives examples of the excursion’s ‘achievements’: “five Liras were given to a disabled man who had lost his one foot in a work accident. Quinine was distributed free of charge to the poor malarial.” Moreover, Hacı’s wife, the poor and blind Halide, would be operated thanks to the Local Administration’s support. Finally, the Halkevi gave a gift to all houses of the village: a gilded photo of Atatürk and Mimar Sinan.

Bayman wrote his reports in his double role of Vali of Kayseri and Chairman of the local Party branch.⁶⁷⁷ As the local leading bureaucrat supervising all state affairs in the province he was interested in problems of infrastructure, such as the state of roads and bridges, education and school buildings, the local economy and agriculture. On the other hand, as head of the local Party and, thus, of the local Halkevi, he presided over the House’s and Party’s ‘cultural activities’ and the regime’s attempt to disseminate its reforms and set of ideas to the local population. The Village Excursions he had initiated then gave him the opportunity to combine these two functions, on the one hand

⁶⁷⁵ Report No 1046 dated 19/11/1936 in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2/5th Büro.

⁶⁷⁶ The teacher Kazım Özdoğan spoke about Mimar Sinan, his life and works.

⁶⁷⁷ A few months prior to Bayman’s appointment to Kayseri, the cooperation of Party and Government was strengthened, with the June 1936 declaration of the Prime Minister and Deputy head of the Party İsmet İnönü. According to the new policy, the Party’s General Secretary was also to become Interior Minister, while the Prefects (*Vali*) were also to become heads of the local party structures. Cemil Koçak, “CHP – devlet kaynaşması (1936)”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, No 118, (November 2003).

as a bureaucrat inspecting the villages and solving problems falling under his administrative jurisdiction, and on the other as Party leader supporting the Party and Halkevi activities in the villages. Bayman's reports were composed for the eyes of his superiors. They are, in a sense, texts explaining his actions and achievements, reports of a work in progress concerning the 'development' of the region.

The schoolteacher: 'Village studies' and 'Village research notes'

The Vali also started the publishing of a series of booklets, one for every village they visited. Kazım Özdoğan was the teacher entrusted with this mission. These booklets were envisaged – as the title suggests – as a series of 'research notes' of the Village Excursions the Vali had initiated. Five of them were published in 1937. They were the published outcome of the research carried out during the Village Excursions. Two more 'Village Studies' were published in *Erciyes* – the House's journal – a year later in 1938 by yet another teacher and participant in the Excursions, the head of the House's Village Section Fahri Tümer.⁶⁷⁸ They more or less follow the 'norm' set by the party and Halkevi publications – directives concerning Halkevi activities.

The "research notes" about the Germin village seem to fulfil two aims. The booklet first of all gives a short account of the Village Excursion, such as information about the participants, their journey from Kayseri to the village, and the acts of the 'villagist' group (medical treatment of villagers, distribution of books, speeches, hearing of complaints). Secondly, the brochure takes the form of a 'Village Study', complying to the categories the Party had set: description of the village's geography, economy, its social, cultural, educational state, and lastly the village's hygienic conditions. The text is supplemented with photographs of the Excursion, where a group of men and women dressed in suits and European style clothes are posing to the lens. There are no village women in the pictures and even villager men are hard to spot.⁶⁷⁹

Tümer's articles in *Erciyes* are closer to the Party's archetype of a "Village Study". The two texts can be easily described as a set of answers given to a compartmentalized questionnaire. The author starts with a physical description of the village and its surrounding area and a few notes on the legends or narrations about the village's past and history. He then continues with population data, number of households, men and women under the subtitle *Köyün nüfusu* (Village population). He comments on the waters and springs used by the villagers. Information on schools, libraries, reading rooms, students and local poets and songs (if any) go under the subtitle 'Cultural situation' (*Köyün kültür durumu*). Next follows the sanitary conditions of the village, i.e.

⁶⁷⁸ Fahri Tümer, "Hisarcık köyü", *Erciyes*, Vol. 1, No 1, (March 1938), pp. 27 – 30, and Fahri Tümer, "Hacılar köyü", *Erciyes*, Vol. 1, No 4, (June 1938), pp. 122-6.

⁶⁷⁹ *İlbay Adli Bayman'ın Başkanlığı altında Kayseri Halkevinin Tertip ettiği Yaya Köy Gezileri Tetkik Notlarıdır, Seri: 2, Germir Köyü*, Yazan: Etiler Başöğretmeni Kazım Özdoğan (Halkevi Müze ve sergiler komitesinden), (Kayseri: Vilayet Matbaası, 1937).

data on diseases, cleanliness, child death rates, and child caring. The ‘Social situation’ is the next subcategory. This is the smallest and least descriptive part of the ‘Village study’. Apparently it consists of replies to a set of questions: “is the ‘Village law’ applied normally? Has the assembly of elders (*ihitiyar meclisi*) been established? Is there any oppressor (*müteğallibe*) in the village? Do the civil servants visiting the village face any kind of problem? Are there different factions? Are the villagers devoted to the Party and the Republic?” These questions reveal the perspective of Party and regime over the village. They might also be seen as ‘problems’ faced in the past, or expected to exist in the future. They also reveal the centre’s concern about the reception of the new laws and the changes by the villagers, as well as the centre’s probable lack of information and feedback from the provinces. Finally, these questions expose the regime’s anxiety and mistrust of the villagers, and in general of the ‘real people’, as possible ‘reactionaries’. The last part of the study focuses on the economy of the village (*ekonomi durumu*), mainly stating the village’s agricultural, pastoral products and artefacts.

These studies say very little about the actual Village Excursion, the meeting of the Halkevi visitors with the villagers. They are extremely impersonal and tightly structured as they follow a ‘norm’, in reality a set of questions given by the Party headquarters reflecting the centre’s interest and perspective over villages and villagers. What do they say about the village and villager then? First of all, they see the village as a unit almost isolated in itself, away from the city and state, situated in nature having sporadic encounters with the state, its laws and functionaries. As for the villager, (s)he is a mute ‘object’, a ‘number’ in the population or education statistics, a healthy, or not, ‘body’, an agricultural ‘producer’, a passive ‘carrier’ of affirmative cultural qualities, such as music, songs, dances, folklore, or even undesired attributes, such as what the sources refer to as *batıl inançlar* (superstitious beliefs) or reactionary ideas. Finally, the villagers emerge as recipients of laws, instructions, propaganda, medical aid and charity, all ‘they’ (the villagers) *miss* (and thus *need*) and the visiting city dwellers *posses* and *offer*.

Another perspective: ‘impressions from a joyful journey to nature’

What both Bayman’s reports and Tümer and Özdoğan’s texts fail to express because of their specific aims is the atmosphere of the Village excursion and the impressions of the participants. In a newspaper article, M. Kılınmaz depicts the merry atmosphere of a group of friends and colleagues going on a weekend trip to the village of Erkilet.⁶⁸⁰ Although the article was published in February 1940, almost a year after Adli Bayman, the bureaucrat initiating the Village Excursions we are dealing with here, had left Kayseri, the mood should have been the same, since the participants were more or less the

⁶⁸⁰ M. Kılınmaz, “Erkilet Gezisi”, *Kayseri*, 1 February 1940, p. 1.

same people. Kılnamaz mentions four participants, all of them schoolteachers and Halkevi members: Nevzat Yücel (gymnastics teacher), Kemal Karamete (teacher of French), Hayri Özdemir (History teacher) and Melahat Erkmen⁶⁸¹ (gymnastics teacher). Kılnamaz offers an account of a journey full of joy.

Even before departing from the city the jokes started. {A}s the time passed the jokes continued and everybody started throwing snowballs to each other. Mr. Nevzat Yücel took a broken violin and tried to fix its strings. Ms. Erkmen then said, Children! Hit [with snowballs] Mr. Nevzat! {O}nce in a while, Mr Karamete and Mr Özdemir were joking to each other; we also participated sometimes and continued walking in joy. At the end, Mr. Nevzat Yücel managed to repair the violin and we started singing. Some of us sung songs, some türkü, but we were all very happy.

After resting for a while at the village, the merry atmosphere of the journey returned once more. “The jokes became more intimate and the souls more calm.” The article thoroughly reflects the joyful mood of the participants. Kılnamaz does not overlook to record yet another occasion for laughter. When they entered a village house and put their shoes off, “everybody looked at Özdemir’s torn socks and started laughing. At the end there was no end to our happiness, we were dancing, laughing, singing and having fun.”

Another constant element is the reference to nature coupled with the sense of joy transmitted in the above passage. Elements of nature, such as the weather or the landscape, are mentioned in an almost sensational way: “The sun was very nice and the horizon bright”; “a cool wind was caressing our hair”; “sitting proudly on the crest of a grey hill, boastful of its clean air and its abundant water, the village of Kırınardı has a delightful view. Like a magnified picture, a number of villages could be seen spread on the hillsides below.”⁶⁸²

Özdoğan’s brochure mentioned above also conveys the same feelings of joy together with a celebratory reference to nature. The brochure offers an almost expressionistic picture of the journey.

We went ahead following the Sivas highway under an autumn sun pouring out from the clouds. After five kilometres we arrived at the beginning of the road leading to the village. [We] passed through grey fields.

⁶⁸¹ Melahat’s husband (Ekrem Erkmen) was also a teacher at the Kayseri lisesi, chairman of the Library and Publication Section of the Kayseri Halkevi in 1940, and, in all probability also participated in the excursion. **BCA CHP**, 490.1/671.263.1, report No 42, of 3/3/1940 of Hilmi Çoruh, MP for Kastamonu, Party Inspector of the Kırşehir area.

⁶⁸² Sahir Üzel, “Köy Gezileri intibalarından. İki asrı birbirine bağlayan 130luk bir ihtiyar”, *Erciyes*, Vol. 1, No 6-7-8, (1938), p. 187.

The author of the brochure, Kazım Özdoğan, reflects the pleasure of the journey, the merry atmosphere among the visitors, and then concentrates on describing the village, its houses, and its location amidst a beautiful landscape. Not much is said about the villagers or their problems, apart from a celebrated reference to their healthy appearance and nature.⁶⁸³

*Most important, the bodies of the village people are healthy and robust. The doctor of our group, Behçet bey, after examining the villagers said that there was only one sick, in fact crippled, villager. (...) There is not even one skinny and weak person among the villagers.*⁶⁸⁴

Deviation from the model: the Centre's objections over the 'Village Study' series

Apparently the author's choice to incorporate into his 'Village Study' all these references to nature and to the pleasure the participants were experiencing (as well as probably some comments that were overtly flattering the Vali)⁶⁸⁵ attracted the criticism of the centre. More specifically, N. Kansu, head of the 5th bureau of the *CHP Genel Sekreterliği*, the office responsible for the monitoring of the Halkevi activities,⁶⁸⁶ upon receiving a copy of one of the brochures, sent the Halkevi chairman a letter politely criticising the booklet.

Our Party received two of the booklets published by the Kayseri Halkevi under the title "Village Excursion Series". It is surely necessary to praise the Village Excursions and Village Studies. It is also proper to recognize such activities. Nevertheless, it has been concluded that the two brochures we have in our hands are overstating the work done enormously, while reducing the seriousness and Significance of the work. I am sending you the account of a Village Study published by the Ankara Halkevi (Küçük Yozgat köyü). It is useful to publish the results of Village Studies in this way. But publications like the ones of the Kayseri Halkevi leave bad rather than good effects while they cause

⁶⁸³ The romantic descriptions as well as the absence of the villager and of his/her voice seem to be quite common characteristics of such texts. Arzu Öztürkmen has noticed these features in 'Village Studies' from various Halkevi journals. Arzu Öztürkmen, *Türkiye'de Folklor ve Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1998), pp. 125 – 7.

⁶⁸⁴ Both extracts from Yaya Köy Gezileri Tetkik Notları, Seri: 3, *Mimarsinan Köyü* (Kayseri: Kayseri Vilayet Matbaası, 1937).

⁶⁸⁵ Page 16: "The affection and applauding of the village people towards us made our pleasure grow. The Vali was mixing with the people, listening to their problems, thinking of solutions, and showing the way towards their progress."

⁶⁸⁶ *CHP Genel Sekreterliğinin parti örgütüne genelgesi. Birinci kanun 38 den 30 Haziran 1938 tarihine kadar*, Vol. 12, (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1938), p. 18.

*expenses.*⁶⁸⁷

Nafi Kansu's letter is significant in that it expresses the centre's (in the sense of the Party, or better, the official Party department charged with monitoring the Halkevi activities) disapproval of the way the Halkevi village studies are presented, and, more generally, of the way village-related activities are executed. Kansu's letter indicates that the Village Excursions and the research to be carried out in the villages is an important and 'serious' work (or even a 'scientific' work one might say). We can then discern a divergence between the 'village operation' as it had been planned/envisaged by the centre and the manner it was actually carried out. This is even more evident in the text of M. Kılınmaz, where a village excursion is described as more of a joyful weekend trip of friends to the countryside rather than a 'serious' scientific work. Although Kansu's argument is related to the publication of a brochure referring to such undesired features during a village excursion – study, we can reasonably argue that such a perspective was also valid for the actual execution of the excursion (and not only its published outcome).

A similar viewpoint is expressed by Arman Hürrem, a student taking part in one of the first research missions to villages in the 1930s.⁶⁸⁸ The author together with a group of students of the Gazi Academy and Halkevi members were living in a village near Ankara. They were doing research when a group of men and women came from the Ankara Halkevi to visit the village and apparently destroyed the relationship they had painstakingly created with the villagers and thus the results of their research. Arman describes them as 'foreign tourists'. They stayed for some hours and a feast was organized to celebrate their meeting with the villagers. Their superficial interest in the villager is severely criticized by Arman. Here we bear witness to the clashing of two different perspectives of urban dwellers in relation to the villager. Arman's group of students indeed believed in the seriousness and importance of their work for the 'enlightenment of the villager', either they saw this as a 'scientific' or 'populist' (or even both) endeavour. They were annoyed by their fellow villagers' light-heartedness and disinterest in changing the villagers' lives and critical of the ongoing client – patron relations of power between villagers and local elites, by majority the same people controlling the provincial People's Houses.

⁶⁸⁷ Letter by Nafi Kansu to the chairman of the Kayseri Halkevi in 6/4/1937, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/837.310.2. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁸⁸ Hürrem Arman, *Piramidin tabanı. Köy Enstitüleri ve Tonguç* (Ankara: I Matbaacılık ve Ticaret, 1969).

Havada Bulut Yok: an alternative account

In his novel *Havada Bulut Yok*,⁶⁸⁹ Cevdet Kudret offers an account of a Village Excursion of the Kayseri Halkevi. The novel's hero, Süleyman is an idealist teacher with left leanings from Istanbul appointed to the Kayseri Lise to teach literature. He aspires to educate and help his fellow citizens to improve their life and he takes active part in the Halkevi activities.⁶⁹⁰ Cevdet Kudret describes a Village Excursion his hero and alter ego participated – Kudret himself was a literature teacher in the Kayseri Lisesi in the 1930s actively participating in the local Halkevi. Kudret's description is treated here in detail since it offers valuable insights into how a schoolteacher might have experienced such an enterprise without being restricted to write in a conventional way, as a Party or Halkevi spokesman would be.

A group of almost twenty people, among them teachers, the municipality doctor, the hospital dentist, the public works engineer, the amateur folklorist schoolteacher of German, the Halkevi secretary, some members of the Social Assistance Section and some from other sections, started their excursion on a Saturday morning on a hired bus. They reached a village of the region. They then rested at the Muhtar's house for an hour and waited for the villagers to assemble in front of the village *Halkodasi*.⁶⁹¹ Then the House members stood in front of the Room facing the villagers.

The chairman ordered:

- Sit!

Everybody sat where they stood. Then the chairman said:

- Brothers, villagers! We have come here to listen to your complaints. The times have changed; in the old days you would stand in front of us. Nowadays it is we who stand in front of you. Look, the Halkevi chairman, the doctor, the dentist, the teacher, the engineer, great men came all the way to this place. Parties existed in the old days too, but this kind of things would have never taken place. The People's Party decided that the villager is the master (efendi). You do understand, don't you? Let us see, tell me, what are you?

A villager replied:

- We are villagers.

- Yes, you are villagers, but you are also masters. Impress this on your mind. You are now our masters.

⁶⁸⁹ Cevdet Kudret, *Havada Bulut yok* (Istanbul: Inkilap ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1976), pp. 108 – 111.

⁶⁹⁰ For Kudret's short biography and information about his time in Kayseri see Chapter 3.

⁶⁹¹ The People's Rooms were established in 1940 as an extension of the People's Houses in villages. Upon their abolishment in 1950 almost 5000 People's Rooms had been established. For their bylaws see "Halkodaları", *Ülkü*, Vol. 14, No 79, (September 1939), pp. 78- 80.

*Turning to the secretary,
- Suphi bey, give me this sign. See what is written here:*

THE VILLAGER IS OUR MASTER

*We will hang this on the People's Room's wall, you will show it
to those who come and you will read it yourselves.*

Kudret's irony is again at work: the Villagers are pompously given a sign they probably cannot read.

Then the chairman asked the villagers to express their complaints.⁶⁹² One villager complained that no doctor ever comes to their kaza. A second villager complained that the veterinarian as well is not coming to the village. Another was complaining about the taxes the muhtar is asking them to pay. The chairman instructed the secretary to write down these complaints in order to show the villagers that he takes an interest in their problems. Then he informed the villagers that they had brought books for them. The German teacher ironically remarked that no one knew how to read since the village had no school yet. At that moment, the villagers came to the People's Room to be examined by the doctors. The author is vividly describing the doctors' indifference to the villagers. When the villagers said that they do not have a pharmacist in their village to get the medicines the doctor is prescribing them, the doctor replies:

*- Well, I won't get involved with that. My job is to write
prescriptions. Haven't I written them? I have. As for the
other problems, you have to work them out yourselves.*

When Süleyman noticed that the dentist was taking out one villager's tooth he asks him:

*- Won't you use any anaesthetic before you pull it out?
- Drug you mean? These people have been used to a great
many troubles. Don't worry when they scream like that.*

After having their meal at the muhtar's place, the chairman addressed the villagers again.

*- Villagers, brothers! In the morning we heard your
complaints. Now let's hear your songs, let's watch your
dances.*

⁶⁹² Listening to complaints, receiving petitions and grievances was traditionally one of the Sultan's and state officials' obligations, as well as a tool to legitimize their authority. Halil İnalcık, "Şikayet Hakkı: 'Arz-i Hal ve Arz-i Mahzar'lar", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 7-8, (1988), p. 33.

*Five villagers started dancing and singing. [Th]e amateur folklorist German teacher was writing down the words. The chairman said to the music teacher, Şadan:
- Şadan Bey, write their notes. We'll use them in our concerts;
we'll also send a copy of them to Ankara.*

Then they hit the road again to visit yet another village. The place they were heading to was unsightly. The dentist commented on how people could set their village in such a remote place behind these rocks. The German teacher started to show off his knowledge explaining that the villagers always tried to hide from the tax collectors and the state. He referred to Evliya Celebi's Seyahatname and to Koçu Bey's Risale. This illustrates the way the villages and the villagers were viewed by the educated: as a page from a book, an object of literary, academic research, something completely alien to their lifestyle and mentality. After a while, due to the driver's carelessness, they had a small accident. Nobody was hurt, but the elderly doctor was terrified.

- My god, he said, I am not afraid of dying, one way or another we will all die one day. But we have to live for our cause. The men of the cause should die for the cause, not of a traffic accident.

The dentist showed his indifference and dislike for this work:

*The dentist spoke more openly:
- Why are we going to such remote villages? It's a corner of Hell. These are places of God's trouble (Allahın belası yerler). It is enough for us to improve the nearby villages. Let's leave the far away villages to be improved by those coming after us.*

After a while they managed to arrive at the village. They found the *muhtar* and arranged for 15 - 20 men to go and fix the bus. They then rested at the *ağa's* place. The *ağa* prepared a luxurious dinner with wine and *rakı*. Some of them slept at the *muhtar's* some at the *ağa's* house. The following day, after lunch they gathered the villagers.

*The same speeches were given; the same sign was hung in the Halkodası. The chairman:
- Come on speak, lets hear your problems.
Nobody said anything.
- Why don't you speak? Don't you have any problems?
A villager responded. It was not clear whether he was smiling or not, as his moustache was hiding his mouth.
- We don't have any problems, sir. Before you, a group of people (beyler) came here – may they be well – with pens in their hands.*

They wrote down all our problems. We are grateful; we have no more problems.

- A village without problems? How can this be real? Tell a few problems to us as well.

- There aren't any, sir. Who's the problem, who are we? (Dert kim, biz kim?) You have troubled yourselves to come all the way here. There is no road coming to our village, but yet you managed to find it. It's a pity for your bus.

The villagists were very sad to return empty handed from that village. They wanted to pay their debt for twice eating and drinking there by writing on a piece of paper their problems, but it didn't happen that way.

Kudret describes a Village Excursion almost as a travesty, in contrast to the official rhetoric that stresses the importance and seriousness of this Halkevi activity. The participants mentioned in Kudret's village excursion are the same persons we find in other accounts, teachers, Halkevi members, doctors and civil servants. The activities the Villagists carry out in the novel are the ones they were supposed to carry out and the same with those the other accounts mention: speeches on 'important issues', medical examination of villagers, distribution of medicine and gifts, folkloric interest, listening to the villager's problems. The significance of his story, if treated together with the rest of the accounts, lies not in his refutation of them, but rather in its complementarity with these accounts. For instance, the indifference – one might even say concealed antipathy – with which the Villagists treat the villagers in Kudret's novel easily corresponds to the 'disappearance' of the villager from the rest of the accounts. In the Village Excursion of the novel *Havada Bulut Yok* the villager is treated as a mere object of study, a quotation from a book (Evliya Çelebi), a text to be read, a music to be recorded, a body without an intellect or emotions to be 'fixed'. Kudret sketches in an ironic way the relations of power that are present at the encounter between the city visitors and their 'villager brothers': the Halkevi chairman orders the country's masters to sit and listen to him. The contradictions between the regime's statements about the villagers and the way the villagers are treated in reality by Party and state men and women are described with bitter irony.

Another instance of complementarity: in the Vali's report and Özdoğan's account the villagers are given prescriptions for medicine to be distributed free of charge in Kayseri. What they do not mention are the difficulties the villager might encounter to get to Kayseri or the expenses such a trip might entail. Kudret though does not fail to mention this fact. In short, Kudret offers an eyewitness' vivid account of the way villagers are thought of and operated upon by the Halkevi "beyefendiler".

Next to the participants' apathy towards the villagers, Kudret leaves the power relations between the visitors and the villagers as well as the occasional violence/coercion the villagers face in the hands of the Halkevi visitors

uncovered. The doctor's apathy to his patient's screams is an example. The villagers are ordered to sit in front of the standing Halkevi visitors in order to be demonstrated that they were the masters of the country. The irony is unmistakable. Lilo Linke described a quite similar incident that took place in Samsun in the summer of 1935. One of the members of the group of Samsun Halkevi members visiting the nearby villages, a young boy of 17 years, recounted the case of a villager with a venereal disease in need of medical treatment. "He had defied the previous orders of the visiting doctor. Talat [the Halkevi youth] warned him that he would be fetched by a gendarme and had told the *muhtar* and the teacher to keep an eye on him."⁶⁹³ Needless to say, the gendarme was the *bête noire* of the villagers, the villain of numerous complaint letters, and his service was necessary for the extraction of whatever the villager had to offer: taxes, military conscripts, corvee service, etc. In a number of cases disclosed in our letters we even see the gendarmerie providing the state and/or Party bosses in provincial towns with villagers from nearby villages to perform, dance and play musical instruments for the entertainment of high guests,⁶⁹⁴ in fests, holidays⁶⁹⁵ and folkloric events.

Lastly, *Havada Bulut Yok* offers some insights into what the villager's reaction might be during such an 'intrusion' of powerful city dwellers in his domain. The villagers treat the visitors silently but 'meaningfully': smile and nod affirmatively. When they speak they ask for practical things, a doctor, a veterinarian. Problems that we know the villagers were facing appear in Kudret's account: increasing taxes they are requested to pay, including part of the visitors' expenses (food, drink, shelter). It is rather reasonable not to expect such requests – if ever expressed – in the rest of the accounts treated above, although similar requests seem to have been heard in Party Congresses.⁶⁹⁶ As a matter of fact, the authenticity of the villagers' words is questionable in Kudret's novel. While it is reasonable to think that resentment among the villagers due to inflated taxes, forced labour, increased state control over their life existed in the countryside, it is difficult to expect this resentment to be

⁶⁹³ Lilo Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 174.

⁶⁹⁴ Letter by Faik Barım, chairman of the House of Ayvalık, to General Secretariat of CHP, dated 16/9/1942, contained in BCA CHP, 490.1/825.265.2, where he informed the Party of his intention to have some villagers brought by gendarmes (*jandarma marifetiyle*) to play music for the visiting Halkevi Inspector Adnan Saygın.

⁶⁹⁵ Letter by the teacher of the village of Çıtak in the province of Denizli, dated 24/4/1945, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/831.281.1, where the teacher, following requests from the villagers, complained of the customary (*her milli günde*) and by force (*cebren*) carrying of the village's musical group (*çalgı takımı*) by gendarmes to perform in the Sub-district (İlçe) that was ordered by the Halkevi chairman and the town's mayor. The Party did not show the same sympathy for the coerced villagers. In its reply to the teacher, dated 5/5/1945, contained in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/831.281.1, the Party wrote: "the calling (*çağırılması*) of village musicians to the town to perform on national holidays is right and must be considered positively because the happenings organized in the town become more national and more lively." The Party turned a deaf ear to the use of force: "it can be investigated by the responsible local authorities", in other words the local police, the very same people accused of using force.

⁶⁹⁶ *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Kayseri İli 934 – 935 yılları Kongre dilekleri ve sonuçları* (Kayseri: Yeni Basımevi, 1936).

expressed openly by the villagers in a setting similar to the one of a Village Excursion as described above.

The villager described, the villager quoted

At first glance, the villager is portrayed within the context of the limited – prescribed by the centre – way; as an object of study, as a number in population statistics, as a body in health-care accounts, as a producer of agricultural goods, as a container of ‘culture’ – music, songs, dances, proverbs and similar folkloric ingredients of a national culture in the making.

Images that correspond to, or perhaps derive from, the above way of looking at the villager emerge as well. The villager can be portrayed as happy, good looking and healthy.⁶⁹⁷ The typology goes on: the villager can have a heroic appearance (*kahraman yapılı*); he can be proud and full of national and military qualities: “I see in front of me a middle-aged villager with a thin beard. He is wearing a casket with the crescent and star on it saluting me militarily. – I am the village watchman sergeant Osman!”⁶⁹⁸ What all the texts agree upon is the Turkish villager’s hospitality, an almost national quality. Moreover, the villager is definitely a treasure and a history (or text) they – the intellectuals – have to read, study and evaluate.⁶⁹⁹ Invoking the characteristic category of the producer or the resident of nature are the metaphors of the field used to describe villagers: “their hands were like fields”, “her breasts resembled a productive field, a dried out spring.”⁷⁰⁰

The villager though can also be a repository of undesired, negative qualities. The superstitious villager who has faith in false beliefs (*batıl inançlar*) is also a common stereotype, a theme found in the manuals on how to conduct research in the villages, but also in literature.⁷⁰¹ In describing the village Hacılar, Fahri Tumer refers to a ‘superstition’ the villagers believe in. “A number of dervishes’ tombs (Seherdede, Heybetlidede, Hasandede, Sesli and Şeyharlan) exist here giving life to superstitions. These stones might be two or three meters long. The people believe that the dervishes were equally tall and attach long colourful wish-cloths to the tombstones. Some even attach silk veils and handkerchiefs. (...) The social life of this village that is very

⁶⁹⁷ “Köy halkının sağlam vücutlu ve dinç.” “Halk iri vücutlu, gülbüz cesur ve çalışkandır.” “Köy halkının yüzlerinde, güneşle tunçlaşmış bir renk, lastik gibi katı birer adeste vardır. İçinde tek bir zayıf ve sıksası yoktur.” (The people of the village have robust and healthy bodies. The people have big bodies, are sturdy, brave and hard working. There is not even one weak among them.)

⁶⁹⁸ Naci Kum, “Bir köy gezisinden örnek”, *Kayseri*, 11 May 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁹⁹ “Köylerimiz, üzerinde durulması ve etüd edilmesi lazım gelen ne kıymetli hazinelerdir?” “Okunulmaya değer bir tarihi sayılan bu iki Türk karısı”. (These two Turkish women are regarded as a valuable history to be read.)

⁷⁰⁰ Sahir Üzel, “Köy Gezileri intibalarından. İki asrı birbirine bağlayan 130lük bir ihtiyar”, *Erciyes*, Vol. 1, No 6-7-8, (1938), p. 189.

⁷⁰¹ Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “The peasants in early Turkish literature”, *East European Quarterly*, 36, (2), (2002).

close to Kayseri has not yet been raised (*yükselmemiştir*). Blood feuds persist.”
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Apart from the way(s) the Halkevi intellectuals might speak of the villager, their texts purportedly report the villager’s ‘voice’ (mostly in the form of the ‘villagers’ requests’) as well. What are the villagers reported as saying and what are their requests? What does their reported speech tell us about the authors’ activities, the Village Excursions – Studies, the meeting of the ‘intellectuals’ with the ‘real people’?

What the villagers ask from the Halkevi members is more or less what the Halkevi members would deem necessary for their “village brothers”: information about childcare, a school building, a road, a reading room in the place of the municipal coffeehouse, the demolition of the dervish tombstones that give life to superstitions. Taxes are not discussed as well as compulsory work in the construction of roads and state projects. These are requests voiced in the Party congress of Kayseri⁷⁰³ a few years before. Some of them (taxes) were even mentioned by Kudret’s villagers. Given the nature of such texts,⁷⁰⁴ it is rather surprising to have real popular requests and issues that were definitely arousing popular distress recorded, such as the forced labour in road construction for those not able to pay certain taxes. Village Studies though did not refer to such complaints. This is an indicator of the authenticity of the villager’s voice in these studies and of the degree the villagers contributed to the ‘exchange’ the Village Excursion as a project was supposed to generate. In a given confrontation with the ‘state’ and its agents (gendarmes, tax collectors, conscription officers), and the Halkevi members – with or without the Vali – were definitely that, the villagers were reported to nod even when disagreeing or, more likely, understanding nothing of the things said. On the other hand, the villagers’ indifference, evident in Kudret’s text and easily sensed in the rest of the accounts, precluded any possibility of a dialogue between the two sides –

⁷⁰² Fahri Tümer, “Hacılar köyü”, p. 124.

⁷⁰³ And published as *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Kayseri İli 934 – 935 yılları Kongre dilekleri ve sonuçları* (Kayseri: Yeni Basımevi, 1936). Requests coming from villages are by large what the CHP elites would also condone, or perhaps motivate: road construction, school buildings, telephone connection of villages, and dispatching of teachers. Nevertheless, more sensitive for the state requests are voiced: abolition or exception from forced labour, donation of seed, abolition of village scribes, lowering of the price of sugar and salt, payment of debts to Ziraat Bankası in instalments. The abolition of village scribes, the lowering of animal taxes and the price of electricity are among similar requests to be found in *Kayseri ili içinde 934, 935, 936 ve 937 yıllarında arzedilmiş olan CHP nin kongrelerinde serdedilen dileklerin kovalama ve bitimleri* (Kayseri: Vilayet matbaası, 1938). Mahmut makal is also describing the villagers’ fear and disgust of the village clerk: “a ridiculous extravagance (...) their duties are two: they call at each village twice a year to collect the village tax, and register the number of cattle. These clerks, scoundrels most of them, are men who have retired from some job. The villager is so frightened of them”. Mahmut Makal, *A Village in Anatolia* (London, 1954), pp. 139 - 140.

⁷⁰⁴ After all they were compiled by local Party elites for the eyes of the supervising authority, the Party center. Mete Tunçay has argued that the published texts of Party Congresses and the requests (Dilek) they contain were by large expressing the demands and interests of provincial elites. Mete Tunçay, “CHF’nin 1927 Kurultayının Öncesinde Toplanan İl Kongreleri”, *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 36, (1981), pp. 281 – 333.

and dialogue here is defined as an exchange between two sides that desire to communicate and *speak the same language*,⁷⁰⁵ which is definitely not the case here.

Villager Quoted

In very few cases the villager is permitted to say a few words. The exceptionality of such direct quotations signifies on the one hand the low intensity of the dialogue between city dwellers and villagers, while on the other it reveals the little importance the Halkevi members attached to searching for and recovering the villager's own voice. Not that direct quotations by their nature and especially within such a authoritative discursive space as the Halkevi and Party publications in the 1930s carried any guarantee of authenticity, or that the quotations were real and spoken word for word. They are important though in that they can disclose the way(s) the writers viewed their object, the villager. When the villager 'speaks' in these accounts, he/she is in reality permitted to speak. What then does the villager say?

In M. Kılınmaz's article about an excursion to the Erkilet village, the villager calls one of the visitors 'my teacher' in a very polite and respectful manner, while they call him 'my child', an instance highlighting the social distance between the villager and the educated visitor.⁷⁰⁶ In Kudret' novel the villager is directly quoted just once, while trying in a canny way to escape from the visitors' questions/interrogation. In general, the texts examined here are void of any direct quotation of any villager, especially of any length. Just once, an apparent excitement caused by the presence of a 131 years-old village woman allowed for her quotation at more length than usual. Because of the interest shown towards her by the Vali and the Halkevi visitors, the old woman is reported crying and saying the following words to the visitors:

"May Allah give you a life as long as ours! But I do not know, are these words for us a wish or a curse?"

When asked about her reminiscences she is reported mentioning her husband's prolonged military service.

"My husband was a soldier for 12 years in the lands of Arabistan. I was waiting for him for 12 years in this village. I will not be able to forget this pain

⁷⁰⁵ The unintelligibility of the two languages, the one spoken by villagers and the other by villagers, is mentioned by one of the pioneering villagers and villager theorist in the 1930s in Turkey, Nusret Kemal Köymen, "Köycülüğün daha verimli olması hakkında düşünceler", *Ülkü*, Vol. 13, No 73, (1933), p. 27, mentioned in Gülsüm Baydar Nalbandoğlu, "Urban Encounters with Rural Turkey", in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 201. On the difference of the language spoken by villagers and villagers see Mediha Eşenel, *Geç Kalmış Kitap. 1940'lı Yıllarda Anadolu Köylerinde Araştırmalar ve Yaşadığım Çevreden İzlenimler* (İstanbul: Sistem Yayıncılık, 1999).

⁷⁰⁶ M. Kılınmaz, "Erkilet Gezisi", p. 1.

till I die.”

The author’s assessment of this statement is quite telling of the way a villager’s word might be read by a Halkevi member:

She said with tears in her eyes, still feeling the pains of the old regime.

The third and last direct quotation comes at the end of the article:

“I haven’t seen anything. That’s it, I came, I will go.” She described with one sentence in an open, absolute and eloquent way the philosophy of her long life.⁷⁰⁷

This article is subtitled “Impressions from village excursions” and thus it is not about the village excursion or the visited village; it cannot fall under the category of the ‘Village Study’ as the ones of Kazım Özdoğan either. It is almost completely about the old woman. Out of four and a half pages about this woman the three quotes above are the only few words she is allowed to utter. The rest is what the author says about her. What her words say then cannot stand alone but only in relation to the rest of the text. In the first quotation she expresses her gratitude to the Vali and the visitors for their help and interest. This can be also read as an endorsement of the current state activities in contrast to her condemnation of the old regime’s deeds, which is the author’s reading of the second quotation of her words, as well as its function in the text. As for her last words, they couple smoothly with the metaphors the author uses to describe her: the words of a simple person, of an ‘object’, or else, of a “*bridge* connecting the beginning of the previous century with the current one”, “a *field*”, “a valuable *history* to be read”, “a *spring* feeding 54 grandchildren”, “a *residue* tossed from the previous to this century”, and “a precious *treasure* that has to be studied”, all of which are images and concepts used by the modernizing subject to imagine, apprehend, study, in short, ‘operate’ over its selected object, a mute (and/or silenced) ‘other’, an ‘other’ much celebrated as the repository of national culture and simultaneously feared as a potential core of ‘reactionary’ opposition.

Even when directly quoted, exceptional as it may be, the villager’s words do not amount to anything more than a part of the Halkevci author’s discourse. The villager simply reiterates with his ‘own’ words what the rest of the text expresses about him/her.

⁷⁰⁷ Sahir Üzel, “İki asrı birbirine bağlayan 130luk bir ihtiyar”, pp. 189 – 190.

In lieu of Conclusions: Administration of the Border between and creation of the categories of ‘Villagist’ and ‘Villager’

The founding fathers had envisaged the People’s House as a place where what they perceived as their natural constituency, partisans of their cause – teachers, civil servants, doctors, in short people with a ‘modern’ education and outlook, would congregate and come in communion with what the regime termed ‘real people’, in a fusion that would facilitate the propagation of their political and ideological program(s) and result in the production of ‘responsible’, ‘positive minded’, ‘free of superstition and backwardness’ citizens.

In the previous chapters we have seen how the power relations coupled with the practice of social segregation between urban elites, state employees and the rest of the population worked to exclude the Halkevi’s prescribed ‘other’ from its premises. The Village Excursion then appears as maybe the sole Halkevi activity wherein the meeting of the two parts takes place, even outside the House and for a limited amount of time. This limited amount of time, this ‘short moment’, was thought and planned in its smallest details, a fact attesting to its significance for the regime. A series of guides on how to conduct such an operation and a number of model-works to be emulated were published, while more theoretical texts on *Köycülük* and its importance within the regime’s ideology appeared in the 1930s, all of the above creating a corpus of works distributed to the Houses, whose activities they were expected to direct.⁷⁰⁸

A relative abundance⁷⁰⁹ of accounts about the Village Excursions carried out during the period Adli Bayman was in office as the governor (*Vali*) of Kayseri offers an opportunity to follow the village operation in practice, as it was executed, and thus to check the similarities and divergences between the plan, as set by the Party directives, and its implementation, as well as to contemplate on the importance of such an enterprise for the participants.

In this perspective I have tried to show how local agents have portrayed the *Köy Gezisi*, while reading their texts in order to assess their experience as participants in such an event. Their rather superficial interest in the cosmos of the villager, a trend depicted more clearly in the more ‘scholarly’ texts that resemble the canonical texts of the centre, provoked the centre’s polite reprimand. I chose to read this as the expression of an inability on the part of the actors to conform to the expectations of the centre. The sources used here, with the exception of Cevdet Kudret’s novel, do not offer extremely different accounts of the excursions. This might give the impression – not entirely wrong – that the Halkevi villagists comprised a homogenous group with only

⁷⁰⁸ For an account of the ‘villagist discourse’ of the 1930s see Asım Karaömerlioğlu “The People’s Houses and the cult of the peasant in Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34 (4), (1998).

⁷⁰⁹ Abundance in contrast to sources of the same nature referring to other Halkevi activities.

inconsequential differences in outlook, perspective and thought about the villagers. Nevertheless, scarce as it may be, a different perspective of the Village operation is offered by Kudret, as well as in similar, mostly autobiographical, texts by schoolteachers engaged in Halkevi activities. These texts usually come later on though, in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷¹⁰

A variety of images of the villager emerges from the texts of the Halkevi villagers. The representations of the village, the villager, and village life might differ according to each author's and text's perspective, as well as the socio-political space within which it was produced, namely the author's social and occupational status, his position in a given local society, the nature of the text, the publisher, and, last but not least, the expected audience(s), be it the Party supervisors, Ankara, local readers or a broader audience, as in the case of a novel. Differences in style, language and overall perspective are thus expected. A number of features though that underscore the common origins of the endeavour persist unchallenged: those who speak and those who are spoken about; the villager either remains silent, or is spoken through the author, which in most cases means that the author's words give meaning to the villager's fragmented speech. The village operation by its conception, but also upon its execution, produces discourses *about* the villager and not *of* the villager. This is a common denominator of all accounts, however different they might be in style or authorial perspective: the villager is always a pervasive 'other', an object of study, interest, and description, an object to be operated upon.

If we imagine the dimensions of this village operation, the sheer number of excursions and texts produced as well as the number of participants within those 18 years of the Houses' life, then we can more clearly assess the range of the enterprise and reflect upon its outcomes. Between the years 1935 and 1941 at least 1000 village excursions were reported.⁷¹¹ We can only guess about the number of participants, but judging from the number of Village excursions and the 18 years the Houses –almost 500 in 1950 - were active, the number cannot be insignificant. Moreover, apart from the books published on villagers themes, such as folklore and village studies,⁷¹² the Halkevi journals were also publishing articles on Village themes for almost 20 years.⁷¹³ Clearly, the

⁷¹⁰ There is a large number of books by teachers, especially Village institute graduates, Mahmut Makal being a famous example.

⁷¹¹ Around 500 in 1935, 1250 in 1936, 1500 in 1937, 1900 in 1940 and 1200 for the first half of 1941. See figures in Sefa Şimşek, *Bir ideolojik seferberlik deneyimi, Halkevleri 1932 – 1951* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2002), p. 265, reproduced from *CHP Halkevleri ve Halkodaları 1932 – 1942* (Ankara: Alaaedin Basımevi, 1942).

⁷¹² Özacın offers a rich catalogue of books published by Halkevi and Party. A rather large part was related to Villages and Villagers. Orhan Özacın, *CHP Halkevleri yayınları bibliografyası* (İstanbul, 2001).

⁷¹³ On Halkevi publications see Kemal Karpat, "The impact of People's Houses on the development of communication in Turkey 1931-1951", *Die Welt des Islams*, 15, (1974). For a presentation of the Halkevi journals see Nurettin Güz, *Tek parti ideolojisinin yayın organları: Halkevleri dergileri 1932-1950* (Ankara, 1995).

village operation could not have been realized everywhere and always the same identical way, but this cannot forcefully alter the basic argument.

The argument put forward here is that by such an operation – meeting the villager and producing representations of him/her, the category ‘villager’ – however described in the past, or by the canonical texts of the centre – emerges bearing a set of characteristics. Consider the amassed folkloric data on villagers that was necessary for and led to the creation of a national repertoire, a national literary and folkloric canon carving the category Turkish villager. The ‘villager’ ends up being such and such, with these characteristics, such and such potential and needs, such and such limits. This is what the modernizing subject decides for him. This ‘discovery’ of the ‘Turkish villager’ executed by and through these village excursions and the consequent formation of a literary and folkloric canon for ‘national use’ is a de-contextualizing operation and presupposes the ‘death’ of its object as it used to be, a similarity it shares with ‘popular culture’: “studies devoted to this sort of literature were made possible by the act of removing it from the people’s reach and reserving it for the use of scholars and amateurs”, as De Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel argue in relation to the appearance of popular literature studies in the 19th century France.⁷¹⁴

The formation of the category ‘villager’ can also be seen as a redefinition of what the villager had been for the ruling urban elites before. As we have seen in this paper, through a intensifying process of ‘reaching the people’ roughly since the Second Constitutional Period that culminated in the establishment of the People’s Houses, a new set of discourses about the villager gained significance. The villager as a subject of the sultan (*tebaa*) only to be treated in disgust and only good for soldiering and paying taxes became the repository of the true Turkish culture and intellect in the process of becoming a citizen of the Turkish Republic through *Halk Terbiyesi*. It is not a coincidence that this gradual change of the villager’s essence runs parallel to the gradual expansion of the state’s control over the countryside (transport, communication means, infrastructure etc.). Not that contradictory images and ideas did not exist as well; the ignorant, backward, potentially hostile and dangerous peasant coexists with the polite, simple and hard working villager. We might also consider the increasing state and/or institutional interest and intervention in the countryside together with studies of ‘village sociology’ that started to appear by the late 1940s, for which the Halkevi Village Excursion/Study experiment (together of course with other important projects as the Village Institutes and their products) operated as an substratum of works, literature, attitudes and

⁷¹⁴ Michel De Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, “The Beauty of the Dead: Nisard”, in Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 119.

accumulated experience.⁷¹⁵

In that sense, I argue that the People's Houses Villagist operation was, to some degree, constitutive of the identity of what we might term 'Kemalist intellectual', or else for his/her (self)'positioning'⁷¹⁶ (or for its reinforcement) upon a social and cognitive 'map', where 'borders' and, thus, 'sides', are drawn. Apart from being an exercise in 'border administration' – to remember Ahıska, being a *Köycü*, working for the progress of the villagers, as an active participant in the Halkevi Village operation, was also a meaningful experience constitutive of the actor's social identity, for some to be mentioned with pride in their memoirs, for others an important argument when asking the Party for a favour, for instance to nominate them for the Municipal or the National Assembly.⁷¹⁷

Being a Halkevi member, participating in the Village excursions, meeting the other/villager, entails the realization of the border separating him/herself from the other (s)he is supposed to educate and change. If being a People's House member within a 'peopleless' House endows someone with status, if this membership plays a part in his/her positioning upon a social map, then the village operation (re)inforces this map, or, more precisely, makes the drawn borders more transparent. More precisely, borrowing from F. Barth's ideas on the significance of 'borders' for the (self)identification of ethnic groups,⁷¹⁸ I argue that by virtue of his/her Halkevi membership and, more importantly, by his/her participation in this 'map-drawing'/'border-(re)setting' operation the Village Excursions can be described as, the Halkevi member, if not initiated into, is reinforcing his/her position and membership within this missionary-like social group that aims at transforming the lives of the selected 'others', the villagers here. The 'fusion' ironically reinforces the existing distance between the two sides, the same paradoxical way the 'liberation' of the Turkish woman led to the creation of new forms of (hidden or not) segregation, something

⁷¹⁵ The articles published by Mediha and Niyazi Berkes in their journal *Yurt ve Dünya* in the early 1940s. Mediha Esenel, *Geç Kalmış Kitap. 1940'lı Yıllarda Anadolu Köylerinde Araştırmalar ve Yaşadığım Çevreden İzlenimler* (İstanbul: Sistem Yayıncılık, 1999). Niyazi Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri üzerine bir araştırma* (Ankara, 1942), Nermin Erdentuğ, *Hal köyünün etnolojik tetkiki* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1956), İbrahim Yasa, *Hasanoğlan köyü* (Ankara: Doğuş, 1950), and *Sindel Köyü'nün Toplumsal ve Ekonomik Yapısı* (Ankara, 1960). For a more detailed bibliography of village studies see Joseph Styliowicz, *Political Change in Rural Turkey. Erdemli* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 204 – 213.

⁷¹⁶ In the sense of setting and/or highlighting the necessary social and discursive borders for his/her (individual and/or as a member of a group) 'positioning' within a given society and within a social mechanics project in progress.

⁷¹⁷ The Archive of the CHP Genel Sekreterliği contain numerous files with a large number of Applications for becoming an MP (*Mebustalepnamesi*) composed by local elite members (schoolteachers, lawyers, local Party men/women, Halkevi members). Participation in Halkevi activities and Village Excursions is usually emphatically mentioned.

⁷¹⁸ Fredrik Barth, "Introduction", in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970). For a concise presentation of Barth's arguments see Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers, "Introduction", in Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (eds), *The Anthropology of Ethnicity. Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994), p. 1.

Kandiyoti⁷¹⁹ has alerted us to and we have also detected in women related events in various Houses in the previous chapter. The social distance between city dwellers and villagers, urban elites (patrons) and villagers (clients) that was once partially based on spatial distance is now (re)established and defined by small doses of an enforced ‘restricted proximity’ through the Village excursions.⁷²⁰

Secondly, although the existence of the border is not challenged, its range is contestable, as demonstrated by the divergent ‘positioning’ of actors upon the map, by differing perspectives over and images of the “beyond-the-border”, the villager. This divergent ‘positioning’ *vis-à-vis* the villager has been also noted in literary works of the same period whose main focus is the village(r). Cevdet Kudret (and his alter ego hero of the novel) can be placed quite close to Sabahattin Ali’s ‘leftist’ standpoint, while Kazım Özdoğan’s villager with his/her superstitious beliefs bears close similarities to the villagers in Karaosmanoğlu’s *Yaban*.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ Deniz Kandiyoti, “Gendering the Modern. On Missing Dimensions in the Study of Turkish Modernity”, in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 126-8.

⁷²⁰ In a similar vein, Mardin has remarked that “the modernization of media and of cultural life in Turkey generally increased, rather than decreased, the gap between the “little” (periphery, society) and the “great” (state, centre, bureaucracy) culture.” Şerif Mardin, “Center – Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?”, *Daedalus*, (Winter 1972/73), p. 179.

⁷²¹ Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “The peasants in early Turkish literature”, *East European Quarterly*, 36, (2), (2002).

