Between Central State and Local Society

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Conclusions

An autobiographical anecdote of İsmet İnönü, Atatürk's companion, second President of the Turkish Republic and a staunch advocate of the reform movement, will serve as an illustrative example of what this thesis has attempted to address.

Years before the establishment of the Turkish Republic İsmet, a young staff officer of the Ottoman Army, was stationed in Yemen, where he and his officer colleagues bought a gramophone from a French engineer and western music records from an Italian diplomat. With hindsight, İsmet recounted many years later his first impressions upon listening to these records. Although they had never before listened to such music, they all considered it to be good music because it was 'European' and 'modern'. Nevertheless their first impressions were completely negative and they were annoyed that they could not appreciate these arias and operas. It was difficult to "endure it". "We put the machine off as we could not endure the noise of the pieces we did not know and sense." Having no other records to listen to, they listened to these records again and again every evening until some of them managed to appreciate it. "The next evening we had the same experience. It took us many long days to endure listening by force to these heavy records." İnönü, who later on would become a regular at classical music concerts at the Ankara Conservatory, apparently succeeded in appreciating this kind of music.[722]

Notwithstanding the happy end to this story, in İnönü's recounting of the event years later the initial difficulty to endure this music is not vanished pointing to an initially painful experience. I choose to read this little anecdote as an indication that even for those elite members of the Ottoman military and bureaucracy who had been educated in 'modern' schools and were convinced of the necessity to become 'modern' or 'civilized', at the personal level the path to 'modernity' or 'civilization' was not a straightforward path, devoid of ambiguities or difficulties. As the above anecdote reveals, the experience – the learning first to 'endure' and then to 'appreciate' - was disturbing and demanding, even traumatic one might say, in order to be 'successful' and remembered with pride after so many years. The path was then rather full of ambiguities, occasional contradictions, full of no-man's-lands, even for its most steadfast supporters like İnönü. To put it more forcefully, a severe believer in the reforms, İnönü was apparently quite religious and tried

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[722] "İşitmediğimiz, bilmediğimiz parçaların gürültüsüne dayanamayarak, makineyi bırakırdık. Ertesi akşam aynı tecrübe. Bu zorla ağır plakları dinlemeye tahammül çok uzun günler sürmüştür." *İsmet İnönü Hatıralarım. Genç Subay'ın Yılları (1884 - 1918),* Hazırlayan: Sabahettin Selek, (İstanbul: Burçak Yayınları, 1969), p. 112.

privately[723] to perform religious duties, such as praying and fasting, till the end of his life.[724]

Moving away from such examples from the founding fathers of the Turkish republic to social actors in concrete social settings in the provinces, to whose voices I have attentively tried to listen in this thesis, a number of questions arise. How did they 'endure' listening only to western music on the state radio, or wearing the hat? How did they 'cope with' the tension the compulsory introduction of such innovations in their lifes apparently gave rise to? Was their understanding and management of such moments of tension similar to İnönü's response? And ultimately what can such disturbances and tensions, as well as their management in situ, can possibly tell us about (i) the vast and equally vague field of 'state and society' relations and (ii) how the consumption of these reforms within local sociopolitical and cultural contexts can be related to the study of collective and individual social identities.

In order to view what this 'coping with' change meant for social actors in the field, this thesis has focused on the People's House institution and has resorted to an analytical perspective that led to an end-product that can be described as a multi-locale historical ethnography.[725] Starting with an analysis of the institutional/text-book version of the Halkevi locus, the thesis turned to the study of specific social loci – Halkevi in provincial urban centers. Then moving away from the Houses' ideological-discursive and social-political loci, the thesis jumped to 'thematic' loci and attempted to read the responses social actors in provincial urban societies produced upon consuming three 'themes', three sets of policies that were normatively produced by and in the centre and were (to be) enacted in provincial Houses.

'Human Geography' of provincial Houses

The 'human geography' of our case-study People's Houses carried out in Chapters 2 and 3 has shown that most of the provincial Houses were manned by local notables (mostly local merchants, professionals and, to a lesser degree, artisans) and state employees, while at the same time they exhibited a limited degree of tolerance and inclusiveness of local social actors that belonged to other occupational categories and can be roughly described as 'low-class' or subaltern.

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[723] Atatürk was also privately enjoying traditional songs he was so absolute in 'banning' from the state radio and declaring inferior to western music and thus not adequately modern and suitable for the Turkish people. Mango, *Atatürk*, p. 466.

[724] Metin Heper, *İsmet İnönü: The making of a Turkish Stateman* (Leiden: Brill, 1998),pp. 78 – 81, 100. He requested to be buried according to the Islamic custom.

[725] George Marcus, "Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System", in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 171 – 2.

More specifically, we have seen that the Halkevi space was managed and controlled by local urban social, political and financial elites – by majority local notable families that provided the local Party leadership as well – under the supervision of local Party structures, bureaucrats appointed to the region (Vali, Kaymakam), and to a rather lesser extent personnel and offices of the central state/Party (CHP General Secretariat and Party or General Inspectors). The predominance of local urban elites in the People's Houses run parallel to the dominance of these social segments over the majority of other local social, political and financial structures. These local powerbrokers had also functioned in the past as middlemen between local populations, state structures and personnel. Some had even assumed official state employment positions in their locality or elsewhere, but also in central state offices becoming tax-farmers, bureaucrats, and MPs.

Next to these local elites, state employees, predominately schoolteachers and non-local civil servants, composed the largest group of active House members. We have seen in chapters 2 and 3 that the active participation in the Halkevi activities of schoolteachers was necessary for the 'success' of the Houses' activities. It was schoolteachers who were carrying out the majority of the Houses' activities. Schoolteachers in the previous years had also been active in the 'cultural' terrain as founders or members of similar institutions, the Turkish Hearths and Teachers' Unions being the most famous examples. The Halkevi statistics show that the intended by the regime 'instrumentalization' in the Halkevi of the educated segments of society, the 'army of teachers' being the vanguard of this 'enlightened element' referred to in the regime's discourse, was to a large extent successful. Moreover, schoolteachers provided the majority of the Halkevi female members.

Drawing from a number of texts produced by Halkevi actors, we have also detected different patters in the Halkevi participation as well as differentiations in the way the Halkevi experience and involvement was recounted and mentioned by members. This differentiation appears mostly between locals and outsiders, that is, between local urban elites and non-local civil servants – although this divide cannot be claimed to be absolute. These discrepancies though point to differences in the educational, professional and social outlook between Halkevi members, while they also confirm the existence of divergent – occasionally conflicting - interests and ultimately perspectives over the Halkevleri, their place and activities, as well as the reforms they were supposed to propagate to local societies and populations.

'Political Geography' of provincial Houses: Local Politics

Through the study of the case of the first chairman of the Balıkesir Halkevi and an analysis of a number of feuds between elite social actors that were related to and/or enacted on the Halkevi stage, I have attempted to inscribe the

Halkevi space into the local political landscape within which the Houses operated. By focusing on the relations, at once conflictual and cooperative, between local powerbrokers, bureaucrats, and civil servants in relation to the Halkevi space, as well as on the occasional intervention and level of involvement of the centre in cases of conflict, I have tried to view the People's House in its functioning as a 'juncture of state and society', as one of the spaces within which the symbiosis of non-local agents of the central state, state employees and bureaucrats, and local financial, political and professional elites was acted out.

The picture drawn from the study of local politics in these two chapters bears close similarities to Meeker's 'imperial state society', wherein local elites continue in the republican period to function as connecting ties between the centre, its agents in the local society and the local population. Occasionally local elite members become state employees, while they form the bulk of the provincial Party leadership and are occasionally elected to the National Assembly. In the provinces they interrelate with bureaucrats, while they even maintain vertical relations with members of the ruling elite in the centre they occasionally use to their advantage in cases of conflict with state employees or local rivals. From another perspective, the state bureaucrats in the provinces find it hard to accomplish their duties without enlisting the cooperation of local powerbrokers, whose hostility might even endanger their position in the locality but also their reputation in the centre and their standing in the eyes of their superiors.

All in all it is difficult to speak of a clear demarcation between state and non-state elites, between outsider state employees and local powerbrokers, or else, put more generally, between 'the state' and 'society' or between 'the state' and 'non-state social forces', although in many instances civil servants express the need to segregate from the local population and even construct such segregated spaces, a phenomenon vehemently criticized by local denouncers. Thus the 'border' separating an omnipotent, energetic 'state' from a passive and resistant 'society', inherent in the modernization paradigm and in 'statist' perspectives, but also abundantly expressed in both the 'image of the state' and in certain state practices, appears rather illusive. The Halkevi space and its habitués appear floating within society, situated within a mélange of interrelated social spaces, institutional structures, and a vast array of formal or informal financial, political, and social networks.

A further aim of this Part has been to reveal the significance of local politics in relation to the Halkevi space and to the various ways the discourses, ideas and practices initiated by the Halkevi were employed by local social actors, something the third part of the thesis has turned its attention towards. The 'consumption' of the regime's policies the Halkevi institution was planned to facilitate can neither be appreciated in a realm devoid of the dimension of local politics, in a power vacuum, nor within over-simplistic dualistic themes

of 'modernizing', 'enlightened' leaders, ruling elites, regimes or 'states' versus 'backward' and resisting 'societies' or populations.

Consumption

The three last chapters of the thesis have attempted to view the consumption by social actors, our Halkevi members and clientele, of three sets of policies initiated largely by and enacted partially within the Halkevi space. Placed within the framework of the 'human geography' and the web of local politics outlined in the previous chapters, I have tried to study the ways the Halkevi actors made use and sense of a number of practices the Halkevi was supposed to propagate, namely the free of 'coffeehouse activities' socialization in the Halkevi halls, the engagement of women in the Halkevi activities and theatrical stage, and the propagation of the regime's policies to the villages that was supposed to be carried out through the Halkevi 'Village excursions'.

In relation to these three themes, the Halkevi actors – by majority what we have termed urban elites - were requested to alter their social habits of segregated socialization by abandoning the coffeehouse and the practices associated to it, while the People's Houses they were administering and frequenting were to be inclusive of the local population from which these same elites had been trying to keep aloof.

The Halkevi actors were also asked to facilitate the 'liberation of women from the shackles of obscurantism' by initiating and/or executing a set of women-related policies that were supposed to alter the social position of women in the Turkish society. Lastly, they were requested to enforce a contradictory set of villager-related plans and operations whose rationale required the altering of the entrenched among urban dwellers and state personnel alike practices and perspectives over the villager.

In short, the Halkevi actors were asked to 'melt with the People' and violate the otherwise endorsed practice to separate from the local/non-state population; change from coffeehouse male socialization to 'modern' practices of socialization in the Halkevi; make their women visible on the Halkevi stage and dancing floor among unrelated men in a society wherein women were (supposed to be) segregated and among a population that would immediately consider such acts and their perpetrators as immoral, and thus threatening their local status and authority; and 'enlighten' the fellow citizen villager the same Halkevi urban dweller was, by and large, distrusting, avoiding and treating with disgust.

I have argued that, upon consuming/using these practices, social actors produce their own responses, which should be understood not as passive consumption of the centre's 'products' but as a new production, an active consumption shaped by local situations and power relations. I have also detected the surfacing of moments and instances of *tension* upon the execution

of these policies as well as a variety of responses to this tension by social actors. Social actors produced a variety of practices and discourses in response to the tension produced upon their consuming of these policies, a production that refers to tension and identity management.

In relation to 'coffeehouse activities' that were prohibited in the Halkevi, we have seen that social actors produced an accommodative discourse that claimed the need or even necessity civil servants had to segregate from the local population and create a space of their own wherein playing cards and backgammon while consuming coffee and alcoholic beverages was considered almost natural. We have also seen how cunning and tactical solutions were devised to fulfill this 'need', solutions that simultaneously attempted not to reject the centre's prescribed 'melting' of the 'intellectuals' with the 'People'. These practices and the discourses employed to justify them are reminiscent of the 'state discourse' and several state practices that differentiated 'the state' and its officials from the 'subject' population, and argued in favor of the observance of that border, something we cannot plausibly argue that was not still current among our social actors or even within the state bureaucracy at that period, even today as a matter of fact.

Similar accommodative discourse and practices were produced in relation to women-related Halkevi activities. Struggling to initiate and carry out a number of practices that were novel and widely considered inappropriate – to say the least – for women, Halkevi actors produced a number of practices that attempted to keep women participating in Halkevi activities segregated from unrelated and especially non-elite local men, thus carving a protective from the eyes of locals 'modern mahrem' for their women. This accommodative to wider social practices segregation was accompanied and justified to the centre by an accommodative discourse produced by Halkevi actors. We have seen how Halkevi members and executive heavily employed a discourse of morality and justified their practice of excluding and 'othering' the local non-elite population 'in order to avoid ugly events' (*çirkin hadiseler*).

On the other hand, these practices of 'excluding and othering' locals, especially non-elite males, were contested by the very same excluded and 'othered' locals, who in turn tactically employed the official populist rhetoric of the regime to counteract their opponents in the eyes of the centre, producing what we might call an 'anti-civil servant' and 'anti-elite' narrative repertoire. A third option was also mentioned in our sources in relation to women-related policies: the total rejection of these policies the centre attempted to initiate through the Houses and of the accommodative discourse and practices produced by the Halkevi actors in situ; for some, women on the Halkevi stage were nothing more than 'theatre girls' having no difference from the 'immoral' actresses of the *Tuluat* stage, which was equally condemned by Halkevi members, locals and, to a certain extend, the centre.

We have also detected a similar variety in the responses of social actors to the Halkevi Village excursions. The texts produced by Halkevi actors taking

part in these excursions demonstrate a variety of images and perspectives over their 'target', the villager. These texts end up in constructing the category 'villager' through the amalgamation of two different perspectives of the villager (the 'old' villager-subject and the 'new' villager-citizen), while they also contribute to the creation of a national canon of 'village(r)' themes and a national archive of folkloric material to be used in different contexts and audiences than the original ones, in the villages. The Halkevi village excursions constituted a part of a larger village operation that, I argue, was constitutive of the category 'villager'. The discovery of the villager in the Halkevi texts turns him/her into a 'topos' in the literature and understanding of urban and state intellectuals, an exoticed object, while on the other hand this 'discovery' the Halkevi facilitates becomes equally constitutive of the identity of the discoverer. A parallel consequence of this operation was the shaping of the category of the villagist, urban intellectual, through the (re)appropriation and restructuring of the discursive and practical border between the two categories, a re-appropriation oscillating between conflicting images of the at once celebrated in populist rhetoric 'master of the country' villager and the treated with disgust and suspicion potentially 'reactionary' peasant.

The Kayseri Halkevi villagists' discourse and practices produced upon the consumption of the centre's Villagist policies were equally accommodative to the existing sociopolitical relations between villagers and provincial urbanites. The villagists' texts, while paying lip service to the regime's ideas and projects, exhibit a practical inability of their authors to care about the villager and a general indifference in the villager's cosmos. The centre's 'new govermentality' and its envisaged 'scientific' village project is stripped off its 'scientific' overtones and is turned into a 'picnic', an occasion for a free time entertainment for urban elites, while on the other hand it becomes an opportunity for the reconfirmation and ratification of the power relations between urban elites and peasant population.

Local politics, power relations and local social practices were also clearly related and were partially gaving shape to the practices and discourses (accommodative, exclusionary, dissident) produced upon the consumption of the centre's policies. The solutions Halkevi actors devised in order to exclude undesired locals from Halkevi activities, such as the 'davetiye' system, were clearly responses not only to their need to keep their women segregated and away from the eyes of the local male plebs. These exclusionary practices interrelated with local relations of power and authority. By such exclusionary practices the Halkevi executives – what we can also easily call local and state elites – were also cunningly bypassing the Halkevi's programmatic openness to all citizens to carve an 'elite space' and exclude local non-elite men – the participation of local women was, as we have seen, exceptional, not to say non-existent.

In a more general sense, my study of these three instances of consumption evidently exhibits the ability and creativity of social actors to re-appropriate,

re-invent, and re-signify the regime's policies and discourses in accordance with local discourses, practices, and power relations. This discursive and practical re-appropriation might occasionally run quite contrary to the regime's intended objectives, even if we treat these objectives as lacking any internal ambivalences and contradictions of their own, which was not of course the case. We have also seen how these ambivalences were cunningly employed by our actors to further their interests. What is more, this process of active engagement with and the consequent reshaping of the regime's policies and intended projects by social actors did not lack its own repercussions in the centre: in certain occasions we have seen that agencies in the centre assigned with the supervision and administration of such projects – in our case the General Secretariat of the ruling Party – modified their goals and attitudes in response to the feedback they received from the People's Houses.[726] The controversy over and the final dissolution of the People's Houses and, even more, of the Village Institutes[727] is a case in point. Both institutions were increasingly criticized[728] from the establishment of the Demokrat Parti onwards and were finally abolished by the Menderes government in 1951. In both cases, it was evident that a part of the ruling elite in the centre and the provinces – the Democrat Party was after all established by leading members of the CHP and was widely supported by provincial elites that used to form part of the provincial CHP – was disapproving of the Halkevi and Köy Enstitüsü experiments for a variety of reasons.

I would further argue that, taken together, all three parts of this thesis contend that the bulk of the People's Houses to be found in provincial centres operated within and at the same contributed to the shaping of a discursive and practical local public sphere, wherein a number of structural and interrelated givens were at play: local politics, state and non-state elite actors and their complicated symbiosis, opportunities and interests of social actors, social (discursive) practices, an ongoing reform program and the regime's projects to be acted out in the Houses and other interrelated and occasionally rival local spaces (the coffeehouse for instance), and, at last, social actors that inhabit and function within this sphere and these spaces making sense and use, cunningly employing, domesticating, and/or rejecting these projects, while producing at the same time their own responses, practices and supporting discourses. These practices and the discourses employed in relation to and upon the consumption of these projects are significant in terms of identity management, in other words they are significant for the shaping of the social identities of their

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[726] The usage of Halkevi halls for circumcision ceremonies was an issue that was debated between Halkevi actors and the General Secretariat resulting in the altering of the latter's stance over the issue. See various documents in **BCA CHP**, 490.1/847.351.4.

[727] M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "The Village Institute Experience in Turkey," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, (May 1998).

[728] The discussion of a Party report about the prospective - but never to happen -reorganization of the Houses, which took place during the 7th Party Congress in 1947, is illustrative of the criticisms openly – perhaps for the first time – voiced of the way the Halkevleri had been operating. See *C.H.P. VII Kurultay Tutanağı* (Ankara, 1948), pp. 199 – 217.

producers, carriers and disclaimers, and for varying audiences, be it the Party Headquarters or other state offices in Ankara, or, equally important, audiences residing in the local public sphere, in ideological (or not) proximity, or even indifference, to the Halkevi space.

I imagine such a sphere as I crudely sketched above out of the 'noise' left over in our sources that points at a – again imagined – polyphonic assemblage of multiple and interrelated voices constantly performed at random and definitely not out of a group of voices performing a single and uniform monophonic 'symphony' of a mastermind single actor, composer and conductor at the same time, be it 'the state', the 'ruling elite', the 'modernizing' or 'progressive forces', and similar concepts the bulk of the literature on the 'Turkish Modernization' and its supporting theoretical constructions have imagined and accustomed us to expect. The ambition of this thesis is to demonstrate the need to study this sphere in concrete social settings - societies, to be attentive to its characteristics and the actors operating within, on its fringes, or even in isolation to it.