People's Houses vs Coffee Houses 4

In this chapter I study the Halkevi as a space of socialization and leisure-time practices in relation and contrast to the rival social space of the coffee house, its clientele and activities. My ambition is to read the consumption of novel free-time activities the Halkevi intended to promote in local societies. I study how these novel practices were applied and consumed by local actors, but most importantly how they interrelated with pre-existing male socialization and free-time practices and spaces, among which the coffee house occupied the most prominent place. Reading the Halkevi space and activities through the coffee house space and its dominant male homosociality will enable us to view the local consumption of the products of the Kemalist state in more depth. The association between the two spaces offers a more nuanced perspective because it builds upon popular spaces and everyday practices. In addition to the historical depth of the conflictual relations with state power since its appearance in the sixteenth century, the coffee house was immediately (and customarily in the 1930s and 1940s) contrasted to the Halkevi as an antagonistic space, a direct threat and rival to the regime's and Halkevi's aims.

The first part of this chapter offers a brief history of the relations between state and coffee house and a short presentation and analysis of the official discourses about the coffee houses in the 1930s and 1940s. The second part of the chapter focuses on the performing and consumption of everyday activities of free-time socialization in the Houses. Drawing from letters of complaint and Party documents, I encounter extensive grievances about the turning of the Halkevi into a coffee house, through the

habitual performance in the Houses of a set of social activities that were typically related to the coffee house, such as gambling and drinking. Lastly, I dwell on the accusatory practices of supplicants who, excluded from the Halkevi space, utilized tenets of the official discourse in an ingenious articulation of narratives that employ a vocabulary and imagery which in the following decades would heavily permeate the conservative populism of the discourses of the Turkish right, namely, that of the 'undeservingly oppressed' and 'righteous' subject.

State, Coffee House and Halkevi

There is a long history of tense relations between coffee houses and the Ottoman/Turkish state.[1] Since their first appearance in the sixteenth century, coffee houses became the targets of oppressive state policies and a negative discourse uttered by state and religious authorities. Kırlı has demonstrated that this negative discourse was framed in terms of morality, albeit not in the modern sense of the word. Rather, it was a political discourse signalling the transgression of social boundaries between rulers and ruled, a transgression the coffee house was supposed to generate by bringing together a heterogeneous clientele and becoming the hotbed of subversive popular political discourse. The coffee houses were places the state was suspicious of, not without good reason one might argue: a number of rebellions resulting in the sultan's deposition were reported to have started in coffee houses.[2] The Ottoman state occasionally closed down coffee houses or attempted to control them by means of exemplary punishments. By the middle of the nineteenth century, though, the reforming Ottoman state established a system of surveillance of public spaces, like coffee houses, through the employment of spies.[3] Kırlı has argued that by the 1840s a change had occurred in the way the state viewed the coffee house, passing from methods of disciplinary punishment to surveillance, a change underscoring the emergence of the concept of public opinion and

its significance for state power, but also of a gradual change in the way the state treated and managed its subjects, in short, of 'a new governmentality that underlined the Ottoman polity towards the mid-nineteenth century'.[4]

The nineteenth century witnessed another momentous change that transformed society and the coffee house space in particular. With the introduction of the printing press and the publication of the first newspapers, the coffee house would also function as a reading room. As a result, a new kind of coffee house, the *kiraathane*, was established. Books and newspapers were to be found, bought, read (out) and discussed in such coffee houses; in Istanbul, frequented by state officials and intellectuals, some coffee houses started to resemble modern-day clubs and associations.[5] Notwithstanding the revolutionary changes of the late nineteenth century, coffee houses continued to function as communication centres that men frequented to socialize, discuss, learn the news, read or hear the newspaper read, and meet friends and strangers. As public spaces, coffee houses were also used for explicitly political purposes. Prominent intellectuals during the last years of the Ottoman Empire gave lectures in coffee houses while Unionist agitators used the network of coffee houses and *kıraathanes* for propaganda purposes. Nationalist forces also used coffee houses as propaganda and mobilization centres during the War of Independence.[6]

From the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a shift in the way the coffee house was represented and thought of, with intellectuals starting to criticize the coffee house on different grounds from before. Emulating the discourse of Westerners on the Oriental coffee house, intellectuals started to compare it to the café of European capitals and criticized it as 'the nest of the idle and the ignorant'.[7] In the past, the coffee house had been primarily accused of being a hotbed of seditious talk (*devlet sohbeti*) and the site of the transgression of the accepted borders between rulers and ruled. But as new concepts achieved prominence, the coffee house began to be criticized with reference to the lack of hygiene and physical training or the obstacles it was supposed to pose to the population's productivity. A new discourse was coming into

being that would represent the coffee house as a nest of filthiness and laziness, drinking and gambling, moral and physical decay that adversely affected the well-being of the family, the nation and the people as a whole.[8]

The early republican period was not devoid of negative representations of the coffee house, mostly to be found in newspapers, but also in the writings of intellectuals and politicians of the period.[9] Coffee houses were depicted as places 'hurting family life', 'lodges of the idle' (in reference to the abolished dervish lodges) and 'nests of gossip'. They were also identified as almost antagonistic to the ongoing reform programme. It was lamented, for example, that 'our coffeehouses' did not resemble the cafés of European capitals, Vienna being the most popular example. In addition, a number of plans to reform the coffee houses were articulated and, to a small extent, attempts to modernize some in Ankara and Istanbul were realized.[10] Voices recommending more aggressive policies, even the total closing down of coffee houses, were heard in the 1930s and 1940s. In some rather rare cases, it was not the central state but provincial state and municipal authorities that applied repressive policies such as the closing down of coffee houses, the prohibition of the opening new ones, and the strict control of the existing ones through the employment of hygienic and administrative regulations.[11] Due to their sporadic character, similar repressive policies did not seem to have any substantial impact on the coffee houses. The sizeable amounts of tax revenue that coffee houses were producing probably constituted the most significant reason why the state did not apply any heavy-handed measure against them.[12]

Notwithstanding the absence of any comprehensive repressive policy against urban and rural coffee houses alike, this moralistic discourse about the shortcomings and the harmful consequences of the coffee house persisted well into the 1930s and 1940s. The centre's suspicion of the coffee house space continued, exemplified in occasional suppressive policies[13] and sporadic attempts to correct the coffee house space through the input of novelties, such as hygienic regulations, sports, state or Party propaganda, film

projections and theatre plays. However, imbued with Orientalist overtones about the backwardness and slothfulness of the coffee house, this discourse still shared with the Ottoman state the old fear of coffee houses as uncontrollable and potentially subversive spaces. The republican leadership continued to be suspicious of the coffee house for the same old reasons. The coffee houses of ethnic and religious minorities were seen as spaces promoting identities antagonistic to the unitary national identity the regime was striving to enforce: following the closure of their lodges, dervish orders were suspected of secretly operating in coffee houses; during the Free Republican Party experiment in 1930, coffee houses were considered spaces of subversive propaganda and gossip, whether 'communist' or 'reactionary'; and during the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1926, they were suspected of sheltering brigands, vagabonds and lowlifes, and the police were ordered to monitor and even prevent the discussion of politics in coffee houses.[14]

The regime's anti-coffee-house moralistic discourse contrasted the new spaces the state and Party were establishing to coffee houses and their 'dirty atmosphere'. When, for instance, a Halkevi journal criticized local people for still visiting coffee houses, the author exclaimed that 'today the coffeehouse of the Turks is the Halkevi'.[15] The People's House emerged as an alternative to the coffee house, endowed with qualities, infused with activities and ideas supposed to be contrary to those of the coffee house. In a parallel fashion, the People's Rooms were portrayed as spaces that were in contrast to village coffee houses and village rooms.[16] With the establishment of the People's Rooms, these village rooms were considered outdated,[17] while the images employed to describe the two spaces overtly corresponded to the incompatibility that was supposed to exist between them: village rooms were 'filled with smoke, nasty smells and foggy', in contrast to the 'clean and educational order' of the People's Rooms.[18] The People's Reading Rooms (*Halk Okuma Odaları*), another regime project to establish free-time socialization spaces under state control, were presented in an analogous way

as 'hearths of education and ideas for the people of every class and type, [aiming] at satisfying the students' need for reading and saving them from dirty places like the coffeehouse and the night club'.[19] The Education Ministry presented the Reading Room as 'an upright place people can visit instead of going to the coffeehouse'.[20]

According to this official moralistic discourse, the people and the youth were the coffee house's primary victims in need of the new spaces the state and Party were establishing for them. For a Party boss seeing that 'the village lads' visiting a provincial town's market were filling the coffee houses and drinking alcohol was a very good reason to request the opening of a People's Room to save 'these youths from bad habits'.[21]

Occasionally even the intellectuals suffered from the lack of Reading Rooms, sports clubs and People's Houses and, of course, the activities these spaces were supposed to offer. Nevertheless, the principal beneficiaries of the new spaces and their activities were reported to be the youth and the people. Here, the separation of the educated and state elites from the rest of the people of the Gökalpian synthesis and the regime's project of people's education[22] was reproduced verbatim in this moralistic anti-coffee house discourse. There, the coffee house was portrayed as a space of the people and possessed all the people's vices and deficiencies to be treated with people's education; a space of filthiness and laziness in need of hygiene, sports, national culture, civilization, theatre and arts. The divide between people and intellectuals and the concomitant contradiction of the official discourse with its populist rhetoric, as analyzed in the first chapter, permeated the regime's rhetoric on the coffee house. Only two years before the establishment of the People's Houses and only ten days after the establishment of the Free Republican Party in 1930, the Party issued a communiqué prohibiting gambling and the consumption of *rakı* in Party buildings and Turkish Hearths. The reasoning behind such a prohibition is interesting: 'these activities [drinking and gambling] will not be tolerated by the

people'. Nevertheless, drinking and gambling were not prohibited in general, as 'in reality drinking is not at all prohibited by our principles. Everybody is free to exercise this pleasure', but 'it is forbidden to give the impression of a drinking tavern'.[23] The centre's preoccupation with appearances here is comparable to the Ottoman state's attitude towards the coffee house: it was not against the consumption of coffee, but against the uncontrollable socializing in coffee houses, the concomitant trespassing of the borders separating population from state officials, and the subversive popular political discourse, the *devlet sohbetleri* mentioned in the police reports Kırlı has studied.[24]

Considering the position and functions these two spaces had (or were supposed to have) in local societies, the rivalry that the official discourse claimed to exist between them seems reasonable. Notwithstanding their differences in many respects, both were spaces of free-time, after-work socialization. In contrast to the coffee house, though, the Halkevi was designed as a heterosocial space, although female participation in the Halkevi space and activities was rather low.[25] This overlapping of activities together with the pervasiveness and long history of the coffee house as a popular male socialization space immediately established the Halkevi as a competitive space and rival to the coffee house and vice versa. This rivalry becomes evident if we consider a few activities that were customarily carried out in both places. The Halkevi theatre and musical events, the Houses' radio sets and cinema projections, were in direct competition with the performances of traditional storytelling (*Meddah*), popular and shadow theatre (*Karagöz* and *Orta Oyun*), and of wandering theatrical troupes, but also occasional cinema projections, radio listening and newspaper reading – all commonly taking place in coffee houses.[26]

The letters used here amply employed the moralistic discourse when referring to the coffee house or coffee house-related activities (gambling, drinking coffee, gossiping and sitting idle).

Gambling, Drinking and Elite Segregation in the People's House

Probably one of the most prevalent aspects of complaint letters was the gambling and drinking of coffee and alcohol in People's Houses.[27] Gambling and alcohol drinking were strictly prohibited by the Houses' by-laws. The drinking of coffee was not; nevertheless, the complaints employed the vocabulary of coffee and coffee-drinking to project the negative image of the coffee house inside the People's House. Many petitioners employed this tactic in stressing the (unattained) difference between Halkevi and coffee house, such as the 18 people signing as the 'the Youths of Sarıgöl' on 3 April 1940: '[T]his holy nest you have opened with the aim to enlighten and save us, the youth, from the dirty atmosphere of the coffeehouse.'[28] Salim Çanga from Bahçe complained that the Halkevi chairman was hiding the House's books and newspapers so that 'our people lead a solitary life in the coffeehouse corners'.[29] The image of the coffee house with all its negative characteristics, gambling and drinking, was frequently mentioned in order to stress the gravity of the situation: 'It has become entirely a place of gambling completely resembling a coffeehouse';[30] 'you cannot distinguish between a coffeehouse and the reading room. The Halkevi is having a catastrophic effect on the region, as its secretary drinks a lot of booze';[31] or, 'on its tables the gamblers play from dusk to dawn and have turned this beautiful place into a common gambling coffeehouse'.[32]

The letters drew from the ready-made moralistic discourse circulating in newspapers and Party publications and described the coffee houses as dirty and unhealthy places that promoted laziness and spread evil ideologies. But, this time, the same rhetoric was also implicating the Peoples' House. A civil servant complained that the youths 'are damaged in the corners of the coffeehouse, in dirty places' because of the local House's idleness.[33] Signing as 'a Party member', the anonymous author of another letter played with the state's old fear of the coffee house as a centre of seditious talk. He

lamented that the local House's Sports section had done nothing to attract the youth and, as a result, 'the youths will be surrendered to very catastrophic ideologies in the coffeehouse corners. Whose duty is [it] to save these youths from the coffeehouse corners?'[34] Our authors, clearly copying the official jargon, contrasted the People's Houses and Rooms with the coffee houses and reminded the Party that the Houses were established to save the people and the youth from the coffee house. They gave various reasons for this failure. The letters usually invoked the negative image of 'the [dirty] corners of the coffeehouse' in two circumstances. The first, as we saw above, occurred when, deprived of the space and the activities of the Halkevi for a variety of reasons, the complainants and those they purportedly represented (most commonly 'the people' or 'the youth') were left with the only available option, which was to assemble at the coffee house.

But secondly, and most importantly, complaint letters cited the coffee house when they disclosed that popular practices of male socialization which were associated with the coffee house (gambling and drinking) were also commonly taking place in the Houses. As a complainant reported, 'coffee and tea are served to the visitors of the Halkevi library, while they can also play domino, chess and similar games. Now this nest of culture functions like a coffeehouse; it is impossible to read a book or a newspaper because of the noise.'[35] Another letter protested that 'some civil servants, thinking highly of themselves and despising the local population, are customarily and in front of the local youths exercising immoral deeds, such as gambling and drinking, in the Halkevi.'[36] Drinking coffee or alcohol, gambling and playing other games, activities the letters related to the 'dirty corners of the coffeehouse', were reported in the People's Houses of Bozcaada, Biga, Osmaniye, Bayramiç, Arhavi, Tortum (Erzurum), Kemalpaşa, Kuşadası, İnebolu, İzmit, Kızılhisar (Denizli), Kula (Manisa), Kızıltepe (Mardin), Sinop, Erbaa (Tokat), Bingöl and Amasya, and the People's Rooms of Ceylanpınar (Urfa) and Bozova (Urfa).[37]

Next to accusations of immorality, the exclusion of their authors from the Halkevi was probably one of the most common

themes of the letters.[38] Sometimes it was the sole reason for complaining; sometimes it emerged as a corollary to the situation or event described. In their attempt to report their exclusion from, or inability to enter, the People's House for a variety of reasons, not a few authors resorted to the argument that 'unable to go to the House, the people or the youth spend their time in the coffeehouse', which the letters describe of course in negative terms, employing the regime's moralistic discourse.

A village teacher complained that the gendarmerie corporal had occupied 'the People's Room and its garden.[39] When the doors of our People's Room closed for our villager fellow citizens, everybody, the youth and the elders started to waste their time in the coffeehouse corners.'[40] In a similar vein, Rifat Kayral 'from the people of Buldan', denounced the 'illiterate' and 'ignorant' Halkevi janitor who was the reason 'our people and our youth are refused the access to knowledge [and] spend their time in the coffeehouse corners'.[41] In a different tone, the chairman of the Sports section of a provincial House complained that 'it is difficult to assemble the youth to do sports, because there is no space for such activities, which means that the youths stay behind in life as they generally spend their time in the coffeehouse corners'.[42] More inspired reasons were also given for the youth's estrangement from 'their own House'. According to an anonymous letter, the youths of Doğubeyazit were filling the coffee houses playing poker because the Halkevi chairman could not speak Turkish, while the hobby of the 45-year-old Halkevi secretary 'has been for a long time now to defile youths, that is, he is a sodomite [*kulampara*]'.[43] 'Lack of proper administration' (*idaresizlik*) and apathy were, on another occasion, the reasons the youths of Bilecik were left with no choice but to 'spend their time in the coffeehouses and in the streets gossiping'.[44]

But most of all the exclusion was once more expressed in terms of the all-pervasive divide between 'the people' and the 'intellectuals'. This divide, and the exclusion it signified, apart from the rhetoric scheme of the letters, denoted certain social and discursive practices enacted by our actors customarily, but

also in response to the centre's policies and their implementation, and prominent among them was the establishment and operation of new social and institutional spaces, such as the People's Houses. More specifically, many letters complained that, although prohibited, coffee-house activities were performed in the Houses, expressed in terms of the omnipresent 'people' vs 'intellectuals and civil servants' divide. The letters commonly denounced the civil servants and intellectuals for monopolizing the Halkevi space and for excluding their authors ('the people' and 'the youth') while practising what the centre was vehemently criticizing the people for performing in coffee houses. Two tailors from Biga, for instance, complained that the Halkevi chairman and executives were playing cards and poker in the Halkevi, while 'the youths spend their time in coffeehouses'.[45] In simple words, the argument went as follows: '*[T]hey* gamble in the Halkevi, when *we* are asked not to visit the coffeehouses in order to gamble.'

Consider the following incident as described, on the one hand, by six complainants, and explained, on the other hand, by the local Party chief. On 3 November 1944 'the undersigned youths' – a farmer, a tailor, a shoemaker, a municipal porter, a caretaker in the state dispensary, and a grocer – denounced the *Kaymakam* of the small Aegean town of Kuşadası for cursing and expelling them from the People's Room while slapping one of them in the face. 'Is the People's Room the civil servants club? The people are rejected there.'[46]

In his letter to the provincial Party branch (Izmir) on 1 April 1944, Dr Sezai Yavaşça, chairman of the local Party branch, recounted the event quite differently.

> Our district is small and there are no suitable places for our civil servant friends[47] to sit. In order not to have them visit unsuitable places but in order to gather [in a place] together, one of the rooms of this building, which belongs to the municipality, was allotted to them. Those from them [civil servants] who desire to study and exchange opinions pass to the People's Room, which is a separate

> room, while those wishing to play common games enter the other room. So the incident took place in the civil servants' room, which has no relation to the People's Room. As for the incident:
>
> When the Kaymakam Fevzi Hamurculu entered the civil servants' room, the complainants were playing parafa [a card game] on one of the tables. The Kaymakam addressed them in the following words: 'why do you follow us, there are eighty coffeehouses, this place belongs to the civil servants. There is no reason to be impolite, just go there.' Then, according to rumours, he entered the room a little later and, seeing them there again, he slapped Kenan Önder in the face. All of them are about eighteen–twenty years old. They are *not intellectuals, but immature youngsters, some of them wishing to pass for rowdies and toughs* [*külhanbeyi*].[48]

The way the local Party chief described the plaintiffs is telling of the way categories that were exalted in the official discourse, such as the 'youth' or the 'intellectuals', were used in the local context. He reported their youth as a handicap rather than an asset, attesting to the fact that they were not intellectuals. This contempt for their youth conformed to popular norms regarding seniority. In that sense, the complainants were depicted as trespassing on a space they were not fit to enter due to status (non-intellectuals or civil servants) and age restrictions. Needless to say, these restrictions were not to be found in the Halkevi by-laws; quite the contrary, they were prohibited. What is more, in discrediting the complaints, Sezai Yavaşça moved away from categories employed by the official discourse (intellectuals/ the people) and invoked the image of the *külhanbeyi* of the neighbourhood. In popular representations, the *külhanbeyi* was an ambiguous figure, the local 'tough guy' who would 'protect' the 'honour' of the quarter and its residents (especially its women) against the outside, but at the same time was the local bully. In the eyes of a centre, which aspired to penetrate and 'modernize' the locality that this local 'tough guy' was protecting against outsiders, the *külhanbeyi* was translated into an outdated negative type that obstructed the very 'progress' of the region

the centre was aiming at with the People's Houses. In the eyes of educated and usually non-local state officials, the *külhanbeyi* was seen as a low-class primitive vestige, an 'immature youngster wishing to pass for rowdy and tough'.

The manner in which gambling was accounted for by the implicated is also telling of the way the distinction between civil servants and locals was expressed and performed. Here, the complainants mentioned nothing about gambling. Instead, their accusation was based on the argument that they were expelled by the *Kaymakam* because they were from 'the people' and not civil servants. The accused side, on the other hand, admitted that they were denying access to 'non-civil servants', albeit not from the People's Room but from an adjacent room that had been allocated for the exclusive use of civil servants. Moreover, upon explaining the reasons for reserving a room for exclusive use by civil servants, the local Party chief used a tone somehow assenting or accommodating to the accusations of exclusion. As they desired to assemble by themselves, and since their district was small with no suitable places for them, an adjustment was necessary. Eloquently yet quite simply expressed, they considered themselves entitled to be segregated from the people and the 'unsuitable' coffee houses they frequented.

As for the complainants, the *Kaymakam*, who was accused elsewhere[49] of playing backgammon with the bank's vice-chairman in the Halkevi, was reported explaining where the complainants – that is, not the 'civil servant friends' – should assemble, that is, at the coffee house. The problem, thus, was not playing cards *per se*, but playing cards in the wrong place, in the People's Room, where gambling was prohibited. And, as one can plausibly assume and the Party chief's letter implied, the civil servants were playing cards or – as Dr Sezai Yavaşça put it – 'common games' in the Halkevi. Instead of excluding the low-class 'others' from the People's Room then, as the complainants protested, the local Party chief responded that a separate space was created for that same purpose within, or next to, the People's Room. True or false, this arrangement was an ingenious solution

on the part of local Party and state elites, an answer to two seemingly incompatible demands: on the one hand, to spatially segregate from local non-elites without monopolizing the Halkevi and thus excluding the 'other', while, on the other hand, to be able to perform privately and away from the public gaze (coffee house) activities prohibited in the People's Houses.[50] In the terms of the Ottoman state's political discourse (not necessarily its practices), this solution prevented the transgression of the border between rulers and ruled by safeguarding distinct spaces of socialization for state officials. But from another point of view, current state practice regarding the relationship of important state officials with the population of the places they were appointed to was also based on a similar rationale: high civil servants, judiciary, police and military officials were not usually appointed to their place of birth or residence and would be optimally reappointed to a new area after some years so that they would not establish relations with locals that would compromise their duty to the state. In a similar fashion, the Party delegated the duty to inspect local Party structures to non-local MPs or Party elites. So, a certain distance from locals was both solicited and expected. The ingenious method of creating a segregated space within the People's Room to separate from the locals while gambling was excused on these grounds.

A letter from İnebolu revealed an analogous method to keep the border intact and achieve the segregation of the gambling and drinking intellectuals from the rest by a similar act of exclusion.

> We are of the People's Party and since its establishment the Halkevi of our district has been divided into two parts; the large hall is reserved for studying, theatre plays, and all kinds of meetings; the other part is a small room where the Halkevi administration has permitted [the drinking of] coffee, and the playing of billiards. Everybody could sit in both rooms. In the evening of 22 March 1949 we, children of this country, went to the Halkevi that we know to be open to everybody and sat in the small playing room that is used as a coffeehouse. Upon ordering two coffees and the domino, the person making

> coffee replied that he will neither give us the domino nor make coffee because, as it seems, the Halkevi chairman had said that only Halkevi members, lycée graduates, and civil servants could enter this small room used as a coffeehouse and open to all the people over the age of eighteen. If lycée graduates and civil servants are considered to be from the people, then aren't we – non-lycée graduates or civil servants – from the people?[51]

Both practices revealed by the letters (elite segregation and card and game-playing) were in particular invoked in popular grievances against the City Club (*Şehir Kulübü*). City Clubs were established as places of socialization for local and state elites, usually educated professionals, civil servants and bureaucrats. Some were supposed to operate as a 'scientific and social institution in the region'[52] – to quote the by-laws of the *Şehir Kulübü* of Balıkesir. Outside Istanbul, Izmir or Ankara, City Clubs started to appear in the 1930s and it seems that most City Clubs of Anatolian provincial towns were established in the late 1930s and 1940s. Right from the beginning, they were spaces established and frequented by state officials to the effect that they were alternatively called 'civil servants clubs'.[53] Consider, for instance, that in 1934 the Party Secretary Recep Peker informed the Party organization that youth unions and 'clubs under other names' could function as nuclei for the forthcoming establishment of a Halkevi. For this reason, he recommended that such institutions be protected and controlled by the local Party through the registration of Party members and supporters.[54]

At the same time, though, the City Club was commonly targeted by both complaint letters and newspaper articles[55] using the same rhetoric and discursive terms as was applied to the coffee house. They were accused of hosting 'high gambling parties'[56] and discriminating against non-elites.[57] But the City Club was also negatively associated to the People's House and its activities by both complaints and Party investigations. In an interesting and rare case from the island of Bozcaada, for instance, state officials had turned the local People's Room into a City Club; they even

had a sign put at the Room's entrance: 'City Club, entrance only for members'. The ensuing investigation by the Party confirmed the accusation and ordered a return to the previous state of affairs.[58]

Zühtü Durukan, MP for Samsun and Party inspector of the Bilecik area, related the indifference of some civil servants towards the Halkevi to the existence of a City Club. According to the inspector, Bilecik was a small and neglected province and the former governor did not care about anything, waiting as he was to serve his last five years until retirement. The situation was aggravated by a number of civil servants who, instead of facing prosecution for previous offences, had been administratively exiled in Bilecik. These civil servants 'were taking advantage of the governor's indifference, have lost their discipline to the state, and were assembling in a place called City Club, where they were gambling until morning, sometimes even abandoning their service and continuing gambling at daytime'. As a result, the Halkevi 'remained stagnant', and 'as some of the addicted to gambling high-level civil servants were not visiting the Halkevi, they became an obstacle to the participation of the junior civil servants as well'.[59]

Muhsin Adil Binal, MP for Konya and Party inspector of Seyhan, offered a more general assessment of the 'City Club' phenomenon, its causes and results:

> In fact, one of the first things a governor is thinking of doing in the cities and towns is to find a building for the civil servants in particular to assemble in order to relax, and to manage it as a Club. In such a place, they come together to chat and read newspapers and journals; depending on the place, in a small or large scale, gambling is accepted as a natural fact. Our People's Houses are obliged to benefit from the efforts of the intellectuals and the expertise of the civil servants. After all, in small towns the success of the activities of the People's Houses depends solely on the civil servant members. From this perspective, the existence of such Clubs is naturally preventing the activities of the Houses. It is also needless to explain

> how much damage to our social body the gambling in the Clubs and the creation of lazy and vagabond types produces.[60]

Although criticizing the fostering of gambling, and while he recognized the potential impediments to the Halkevi activities these clubs might produce, the Party inspector did not seem to consider the idea behind the creation of such clubs – that is, the carving of an autonomous space for the exclusive use of civil servants – harmful, unless perhaps used for gambling. This is reminiscent of the Party's position on drinking and gambling in Party buildings and Turkish Hearths in 1930, when a Party communication stated that these activities were not prohibited in general, but only inside Party buildings in order not to give the wrong impressions to 'the people', who 'will not tolerate them'.[61] Appearances again were paramount. The need to sustain the border was silently expressed, but the civil servants within the border should not *appear* provocative to the excluded. The ambivalence was once more conveyed: drinking, gambling and playing games, although condemned as inappropriate and unpleasant in the official discourse, were not always evaluated the same way regardless of where and by whom they were performed. The documents available do not directly voice the opinions of the main users of such spaces – the civil servants – but Muhsin Adil Binal partially conveyed them. The civil servants were tacitly granted the right to assemble together separately from the rest of the people and, if not becoming 'lazy and vagabond' or 'preventing the activities of the Halkevleri', 'gambling, big or small, is considered a natural fact', almost acceptable.

Similar grievances were raised by complaint letters as well. A letter from Tosya attempted to direct the centre's attention to the local City Club 'because I consider it to be opposing the government and Party principles'. The anonymous author informed Ankara that all the regional civil servants, including the public prosecutor, judge, mayor and the Halkevi chairman, were members and paid membership fees. As a result, the civil servants became totally indifferent to the Halkevi and the gap between the

people and state officials was further widened. The complainant continued that the Club was doing nothing for the region or the common good: 'It is just a nest of gambling and drinking for three or five civil servants and their superiors. For the judge and prosecutor's sake Party and Halkevi members say nothing and have fun together.'[62]

Three years later, a communiqué of the interior ministry reiterated almost identically the charges of the above letter against the City Clubs. The document admitted that the City Clubs were established and run in opposition to the People's House; that the Clubs had obtained a number of privileges in comparison to other public places; that because of these privileges they had become gambling and drinking centres; that they were obstructing the 'coming together' (*kaynaşma*) of people and intellectuals; and that they were preventing the interest and participation that was necessary for the People's Houses and Rooms.[63] Considered together with the above report by Muhsin Adil Binal and numerous letters from Party chiefs and civil servants, the Party communiqué revealed the existence of various perspectives among Party and state personnel regarding the place the People's House and state officials should have in the provinces. State and Party institutions and actors in the centre and the provinces were expressing a set of needs and aims that were mutually exclusive. On the one hand, silently or not, the need of civil servants and bureaucrats to separate and keep themselves segregated from the rest of the local people was voiced; equally expressed, on the other hand, was the primary aim of the People's Houses, to realize the 'coming together' of intellectuals and people. A number of ingenious solutions to these two conflicting demands were devised by Halkevi elites and consequently denounced by those excluded from the Halkevi space.

Several Houses could circumvent the Houses' programmatic openness through the veiled segregation of civil servants, teachers and students. 'Teachers' evenings', students meetings and civil servant meetings were employed to this end.[64] However, the most common and commonly denounced method of segregation was

the issuing of invitations. The system of invitation cards (*davetiye*) to Halkevi events, such as theatre and musical performances, was devised by Party and Halkevi bosses to regulate the entrance to Halkevi activities but also to restrict the entrance only to the people receiving the invitations. In this way the entrance to many – perhaps most – Halkevi activities was restricted and the Halkevi executives could limit entrance, enforcing rules of partial (spatial and temporal) inclusion of some and exclusion of others. Not unreasonably, then, the *davetiye* was one of the most popular grievances of those excluded from the Halkevi Halls. Several letters mentioned or complained about the invitations needed to enter the Halkevi during a theatre play or general show,[65] a concert,[66] or a ball.[67] In Zonguldak, as an anonymous writer protested, a system of coloured tickets was applied to regulate the entrance to the Halkevi cinema. The Monday evening shows were restricted to high-level officials holding white cards; the Tuesday evening shows to the rest of the civil servants with the pink card; the Wednesday shows to executives of the state Mining Company with the blue card; the Thursday shows to low-level company employees with grey cards; and, finally, the Friday evenings to workers.[68] In another example, the chairman of the Izmir Halkevi printed invitation cards for the Halkevi programme on 12 July 1943, entitled 'Cultural Evening'. The card was for two persons and informed that students and other minors would not be admitted.[69]

To sum up, the complaint letters and the reports – be it from a local Party man or an (external) Party inspector – referred to two practices already present in a number of spaces and occasions even before the creation of the People's Houses. One was the practice of segregation of the educated and elite segments of local societies from the rest of the population. The second was a wide set of leisure socializing activities the centre had been suspicious of for centuries, including the space within which they typically took place, that is, the coffee house. These practices intersected with the new space of the People's House and its activities; encountered and contrasted with the Houses' aims; and interrelated with, reflected and became reflected in conflicting but also parallel discourses

employed both by the regime and social actors. We have seen how the accommodative discourse employed by civil servants and Party men in relation to their need to segregate from the rest of the people was contrasted with the accusatory discourse of those excluded from or denied access to the Halkevi.

The letters complained about many deficiencies, wrongdoings and the exclusion of their authors from the Houses. Willing but unable for a number of reasons to enter according to their account, these complainants used the official discourse in a tactical and ingenious way; turning, stretching and even mutating without totally and outwardly refusing it, using its own contradictions and ambiguities in order to further their accusation and, ultimately, their request. I read these grievances as the result of a continuous struggle that was waged by our actors (included and excluded) upon the Halkevi border. By Halkevi border, I do not refer to the Houses' spatial characteristics alone, but to the totality of the discourses describing, the practices connected with and the values attributed to the Halkevi, and to the contenders or refuters of such discourses, practices and values; that is, the men and women situated in, on, outside but also far away from the Halkevi border. I chose to view these twists and turns and the accommodation tactics and discourse involved as acts of domestication of the practices the centre was striving to introduce. Domestication here refers to acts by social actors that attempted to render the policies of the reforming state familiar to local needs and interests, and to the socio-political and cultural realities of local societies.

Drawing on Meltem Ahıska, I employ the term boundary management to designate but also to explore this process of domestication, of that continuous turning, twisting, resisting and accommodating the centre's projects on the real, practical and discursive border of the Halkevi.[70] Ahıska studies Turkish radio broadcasting in the 1930s and 1940s in order to explore the continuous boundary management the Turkish elite was practising in relation to twin concepts such as foreign/national, elite/people, men/women, or authentic/artificial. Employing the term to point to the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the representations of such

notions in radio broadcastings, Ahıska notes the ability of the representations to recognize the existing boundaries and thus draw new ones, while stressing the association these operations of boundary management had to relations and practices of power. I use boundary management in a broader sense, to denote the struggles social actors were engaged in at the boundary of Halkevi space, but also to include – next to its representations – the discursive practices that constituted the boundary separating the Houses and what they were supposed to stand for from their exterior that they were intended to 'nationalize' and 'civilize'.

Employed by their authors to enhance the expected result of their petition, the letters' vocabulary drew from the official discourse but also reflected their authors' perceptual and cognitive panoply. Even upon a quick reading of the letters, it becomes immediately apparent that their authors were aware of and utilized the official negative discourse about the coffee house.[71] The extensive use of the anti-coffee house moralistic discourse, first of all expressed the authors' ability to identify the regime's fears and preoccupations and manipulate them to advance their own demands and interests, and claim the Halkevi space, its resources and the facilities and status it might offer to contesting sides in an ongoing local feud, such as the ones analyzed in Chapter 3.

On a more general level, petitioning the Party meant that the author was likely to start and conclude the letter with some kind of reference to the ideals of the Party and the People's Houses. In their attempt to demonstrate their commitment to the regime and ensure a positive reaction to their demand, many authors imitated the Party's vocabulary to show a degree of ideological affinity. A tactical move disclosing the supplicants' ability to acknowledge and utilize (fragments of) the regime's jargon, 'speaking Kemalist'[72] was something expected but probably not as common as 'speaking Bolshevik' in the Soviet Union.[73] The utilization of the Kemalist jargon did not automatically mean that the underlying discourse was readily accepted; rather, the employment of the official discourse was a conventional way to address authority. After all, denouncing the regime's principles

would not have been a productive way to protest or request anything from that same power; thus the letters needed and tried to phrase their demands in the appropriate language.

Notwithstanding the letters' affinity with the official discourse, from another perspective they deviate from the centre's discourse. Apart from just copy-pasting the regime's vocabulary, many authors' tactical use of it overturned some of its propositions. That was evident in the authors' frequent employment of the distinction between intellectuals and people, but also of key words from the Kemalist lexicon ('intellectuals', 'people' and 'youth', in particular) in a fashion that radically differed from the official populist discourse. In their reuse, the terms were transformed to denote different attributes.

The supplicants' exclusion, for instance, was voiced in terms of 'we' against 'them';[74] the 'them' included were 'the civil servants', 'the rich', 'a few rich merchants', 'oppressors', and 'landlords' (*mütegalibe*, *zengin*, *ağa*).[75] The complainants depicted themselves as (of) 'the people' or 'the youth' and as conscious supporters of the regime's ideals. In doing so, they consciously employed the regime's own categories of the celebrated youth and people, whom official ideology was proclaiming as the source of sovereignty. However, the complainants reversed the official discourse by presenting themselves as the oppressed, suffering and disempowered people or youth, something that was emphatically invoked when complaining about their constant exclusion from their 'own House', that is, the People's House. And it was here that their self-presentation as the people both separated from and built on the official populist discourse. In the official discourse, the people were trained into civilization, nationhood and equal citizenship by the intellectuals; in a way evocative of the official jargon, the complainants contrasted themselves (as the people) with the intellectuals, but only to protest their exclusion from the 'training' they were supposed to receive from these same intellectuals.[76] The celebrated 'people' of the official populist rhetoric then was turned into the humble or the unjustly

treated subject – a common motif in petition letters – who was despised and oppressed by the officials.[77]

In another resourceful employment of the official discourse, some authors – even those signing as 'from the people' – repeated the 'child metaphor' of the discourse of social engineering and people's education. Their presentation of the people as a passive and naive child easily surrendering to coffee houses, gambling and drinking was a device to stress the exclusion from the House and the oppression by state and local elites, whom the letters denounced as 'civil servants' and 'landowners', the 'high class', the 'usurpers' and 'oppressors'. What is evident is the authors' ability to acknowledge and manipulate the official discourse in a tactical attempt to safeguard their interests.

But as we have seen in a number of cases, when Party and state elites had to respond to the accusations of exclusion, they likewise portrayed the plaintiffs as 'from the people', 'non-intellectuals', 'non-civil servants', or 'immature youngsters'. Within the context of multi-party politics after the postwar political liberalization, RPP and government elites felt less restrained by the official populist discourse when denigrating the supporters of the opposition as 'plebs', a 'mob', 'lowlifes', 'bad breeds' and 'flat-cap wearers' (*kasketliler* – referring to the popular headgear the lower classes and villagers wore as opposed to the more expensive brimmed hat of civil servants and urban elites).[78]

Another salient trait of the accusatory discourse of complaint and denunciation letters was the constant invocation of/reference to morality. As exemplified in the complaint about coffee-house activities (gambling, laziness, drinking, etc), the supplicants' exclusion from or aversion towards the House, but also the more general theme of the oppressed people's suffering at the hands of oppressing elites, was expressed in terms of immorality. Just like the civil servants in the City Club, the Halkevi executives and state/local elites who excluded 'the people and the youth from their own House', were not only 'thinking highly of themselves and despised the local population', but were also 'customarily performing immoral deeds in front of the local youths, such as

gambling and drinking'.[79] In popular discourse and grievances, oppressiveness of the accused went hand in hand with their immorality. The oppressed, on the other hand, were frequently rendered as moral and righteous.

In more general terms, the letters' language did not revolve on the axis of modern/backward but moral/immoral. Simply put, the authors did not complain that local Party and state officials were backward or reactionary, but that they were acting in an immoral fashion. The vocabulary the letters resorted to typically invoked the morality/immorality divide; certain words appear regularly, such as '(im)moral(ity)', 'upright', 'proper', 'clean' (*nezahet, nezih, ahlak, gayri ahlaklı, ahlaksız, feci, temiz, hayasızlık, rezalet, namuslu/suz*). A commonplace rhetoric means that what many letters conveyed was the image of the coffee house, the gambling house, the drinking tavern and the brothel, all signifying a moral and social decay.[80] On the other hand, this emphasis on morality was very rarely expressed in words that had a religious connotation.[81] In most cases, religiously flavoured words were infrequently paired with (and in praise of) a Party institution or idea, as in the banal references to 'our Party's sacred aims', or 'the sacred Halkevi stage'.[82]

But if the authors were astute in not referring to Islam when denouncing a Party executive to the Party, they also appeared – rather unexpectedly – incapable of using ready-made anti-regime categories in their denunciations. The letters very rarely accused their adversaries of being 'reactionary' or 'backward'. The vocabulary the regime used to identify its enemies (*yobaz, irtica, murteci, şeriatçi* and so forth) was hardly ever employed in these letters. This was probably due to their lack of relevance within any widespread frame of reference outside the official discourse. Otherwise, our authors would have been quick to use the Party's catchwords to blame their adversaries, as, for instance, in the contemporary Soviet Union where accusations such as *kulak* and *Trotskyist* were extensively used.[83]

Irrespective of the motive behind the complaint, the validity of the grievance or the identity of the petitioner and his/her real

feelings about the reforms and the Halkevi activities, all letters converged in the language/rhetoric within which they were framed and with which they expressed their grievances. The most employed references in this accusatory discourse were to immorality and oppression; and it was upon these two grievances that the differentiation between denounced and denouncers, elites and people, was erected. Oppression was surely a very common rhetoric element of grievances in Ottoman history, but also before and elsewhere. It was a central element of the legitimizing discourse of many pre-modern states in the Middle East, in the official discourse of which the ruler dispensed justice by protecting his subjects from the oppression of state officials.[84] But the pairing of oppression with (im)morality was (and still is) to be found at the core of conservative populist discourses and of the Turkish right since the 1950s. The imagery and cultural scenarios[85] our letters depicted have been identified in the works of influential conservative intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s,[86] but also in the discourse of politicians and political parties since then.[87] For Bora and Erdoğan, for instance, the subject of conservative populist discourses is the people: their suffering, undeserved misery and oppression at the hands of immoral and over-Westernized elites constitute the backbone of such discourses. The archetypical scapegoat is the ethnic and religious Other, the Westernized woman and man, the foreigner and the communist. They were responsible for the suffering of the righteous people, who, in turn, are characterized by common sense as opposed to the superficiality and ignorance of the intellectual and oppressor elites.[88]

The imagery of the letters exhibits a number of similarities with the discourse of Turkish Islam that Açıkel has studied from the perspective of the 1980s and 1990s. For Açıkel, the discourse of 'sacred oppression' (*kutsal mazlumluk*) conveys feelings of oppression, disempowerment, insult, loss of status and reputation, alienation, but also the longing for the restoration of dignity and power of the undeservingly suffering moral subject. Paired with the immorality of the oppressor, the suffering

almost appears sacred – a common motif in all three Middle Eastern monotheistic cultures.[89] In that sense, the undeservingly oppressed and righteous subject awaiting retribution was a readily available and popular narrative and a cultural scenario constantly reproduced in popular literature and songs, music and cinema.[90] I view this scenario of the 'oppressed righteous subject' as a discursive and cognitive category through which the narration of socio-political relations and collective identities was performed and renegotiated.

But whose identities? For Açıkel, the subjects of the discourse of 'sacred oppression' were the millions of disoriented and destitute peasants that had been leaving their villages to settle in shanty neighbourhoods in Turkish cities since the 1950s. But our authors were neither displaced peasants nor could they be considered to be from the illiterate masses. On the contrary, based on the information provided by the authors,[91] most letters were compiled by middle-class, predominately male, and educated, or at least literate, urbanites, such as Party and Halkevi members and executives; teachers, lawyers, civil servants, merchants and artisans. In short, the excluded or indignantly observing complainants were none other than those the regime considered its own constituency in provincial urban settings.

The use of petition-writers cannot be ruled out – after all, many Houses assisted illiterates and villagers in their dealings with the state, and writing petitions was a typical activity.[92] Nevertheless, I view petition and complaint letters as negotiated cultural artefacts produced within specific political and literary contexts[93] and argue that, even if a number of letters were co-authored by public scribes and supplicants, that by no means suggests that the supplicants' voices and their discursive and cognitive universe were not reflected or reproduced in the end product. On the contrary, the letters are selected from an array of discursive resources: the Party jargon they were mimicking (perhaps the input of a professional scribe or a Halkevi petition-writer); the moralistic discourse of newspapers and intellectuals about the coffee house's smoky environment of gambling and

drinking that promoted an unhealthy and lazy lifestyle; and a populist conservative discourse that bemoaned and protested the exclusion and/or oppression of the people by state and Party elites who were performing immoral deeds (gambling, drinking, and womanizing) in the Halkevi, the City Club and elsewhere.

It was upon struggles for the management and definition of the Halkevi boundary (that is, what the proper Halkevi and its activities were or should be like) that these discursive melanges were produced by dissatisfied middle-class urbanites. In that sense, I view their narratives of insult, oppression and immorality as constitutive of the way they comprehended the Halkevi experiment, the reform movement in general, and their own position inside or outside it. But, as we have already seen in the previous chapter on the Halkevi space within local politics in provincial urban settings, this was inevitably a discourse of politics as it was ultimately about the political empowerment of its carriers.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how social actors coped with novel habits, discourses and practices of free-time socialization, while at the same time making allowances for local popular practices and discourses as well as their personal and group interests; and how both in terms of discourse and practices the actors of the stories narrated in the letters managed to domesticate the Halkevi practices of leisure by means of manipulating the ambiguities of the reforming state's practice and discourse, as well as through a number of ingeniously crafted adaptations of the activities the centre had planned. More specifically, although prohibited by the Halkevi by-laws and despised in the official discourse, activities habitually performed in the homosocial space of the coffee house – a *bet noire* for the Kemalist modernizing discourse itself – were routinely performed by state and local elites in the Halkevi space. Moreover, Halkevi actors devised a number of

ingenious techniques to keep the space of the Halkevi segregated while performing coffee-house practices. I view this as an act of domestication of the space and the activities the regime was attempting to initiate. The domestication refers to the way the centre's ideas and plans – without being rejected – were blended with activities, perceptions and practices they were supposed to eradicate, or to which they were discursively opposed.

By studying the accommodation and domestication of the reforms by social actors, my aim is not to assess the success or failure of such reform projects.[94] Rather, I am interested in viewing the consumption involved as a *process of boundary negotiation* indispensable for identity management. It is upon and within the continuously negotiated boundaries of the local socio-political and cultural milieu that men and women operated and produced meaningful representations of themselves and others.

The complainants, for instance, while recognizing and employing the official anti-coffee-house discourse, were able to employ elements of the regime's discourse in a fashion that cleverly manipulated its ambivalences to enable them to turn it without refuting it entirely. The way the word 'people' was employed in complaint letters to denote the powerless and unjustly treated is telling of their authors' ability to draw on a key element of the official discourse and use it to signify something completely different from its former meaning – the hallowed people of the populist rhetoric. In addition, the accusatory discourse of the letters exhibited imagery and characteristics that were employed by conservative populist discourses of the Turkish right after the 1940s. Interestingly, their writers were not those the Kemalist regime considered its arch-enemies. The authors were neither uneducated nor illiterate villagers, nor religious reactionaries; they were none other than what the regime considered its constituency in provincial urban settings.