

**CONSTRUCTING AN “ELEPHANT CAGE” IN ANATOLIA: THE U.S.
AIRBASE IN KARAMÜRSEL AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE
(1950s-1970s)**

by

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Koç University
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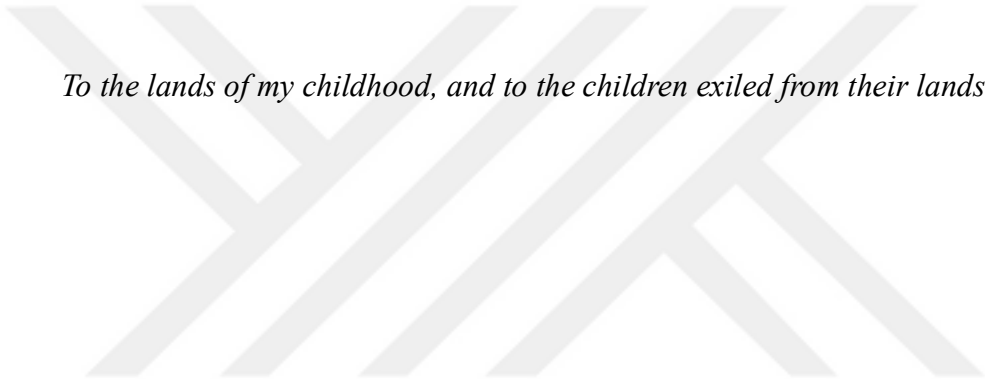
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To the lands of my childhood, and to the children exiled from their lands.

ABSTRACT

Constructing an “Elephant Cage” in Anatolia: The U.S. Airbase in Karamürsel and Its Impact on Social Life (1950s-1970s)

In the bipolar world order that emerged after the Second World War, the United States, as the leading power of the Western bloc, established a wide network of military bases across various regions of the world to counter the Soviet Union. Beyond their military functions, these bases also served as instruments through which the U.S. projected its economic and cultural hegemony. This study examines the transformations experienced by Karamürsel, a small Anatolian town hosting an American military base during the Cold War, focusing on the new social and economic order shaped by the U.S. military presence. Drawing on local and national newspapers, school yearbooks, memoirs, and oral testimonies, the thesis demonstrates that the base, established in 1957, had a tangible economic impact by providing significant employment opportunities for the local population and facilitating the spread of American goods into Turkish markets. The American personnel and their families stationed at the base also played a key role in disseminating the American way of life in the region. However, this mission of transmitting American cultural and social norms to host communities during the Cold War did not proceed unchallenged. The newly emerging social and economic order in Karamürsel occasionally gave rise to tensions and conflicts, especially in the field of labor, that proved difficult to contain.

Keywords: Cold War, American military bases, Karamürsel, Turkish-American relations, local history

ÖZET

Anadolu’da Bir “Fil Kafesi” İnşa Etmek: Karamürsel Amerikan Üssü ve Sosyal Hayata Etkileri (1950’ler-1970’ler)

İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra ortaya çıkan iki kutuplu dünya düzeninde, Batı bloğunun lideri olan Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Sovyetler Birliği'ne karşı koymak amacıyla dünyanın çeşitli bölgelerine yayılmış geniş bir askeri üsler ağı kurdu. Bu üsler, askeri işlevlerinin ötesinde, ABD'nin ekonomik ve kültürel hegemonyasını yansıttığı araçlar olarak da hizmet ettiler. Bu çalışma, Soğuk Savaş sırasında bir Amerikan askeri üssüne ev sahipliği yapan küçük bir Anadolu kasabası olan Karamürsel'in yaşadığı dönüşümleri inceleyerek, ABD askeri varlığının şekillendirdiği yeni toplumsal ve ekonomik düzene odaklanmaktadır. Yerel ve ulusal gazeteler, okul yıllıkları, anılar ve sözlü ifadelerle dayanan tez, 1957'de kurulan üssün, yerel halka önemli istihdam olanakları sağlayarak ve Amerikan mallarının Türk pazarlarına yayılmasını kolaylaştırarak somut bir ekonomik etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Üste görevli Amerikalı personel ve aileleri de bölgede Amerikan yaşam tarzının yaygınlaştırılmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Ancak, Soğuk Savaş döneminde Amerikan kültürel ve sosyal normlarını ev sahibi topluluklara aktarma misyonu sorunsuz ilerlemedi. Karamürsel'de yeni ortaya çıkan sosyal ve ekonomik düzen, özellikle emek alanında zaman zaman kontrol altına alınması zor gerilimlere ve çatışmalara yol açtı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Soğuk Savaş, Amerikan askeri üsleri, Karamürsel, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri, yerel tarih

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ABBREVIATIONS

AOSHS: American Overseas Schools Historical Society

APO: Army Postal Office

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CHP: Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)

DECA: Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement

DEV-GENÇ: Revolutionary Youth Federation of Türkiye (*Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu*)

DP: Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*)

Harb-İş: Union of Defense Industry and Allied Workers (*Türkiye Harb Sanayi ve Yardımcı İşkolları İşçileri Sendikası*)

KOCWC: Karamürsel Officers' and Civilians' Wives Club

MP: Nation Party (*Millet Partisi*)

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCO: Non-commission officer

OLEYİS: The Union of Hotel, Restaurant, and Entertainment Places' Workers (*Otel, Lokanta ve Eğlence Yerleri İşçileri Sendikası*)

PX: Post of Exchange

SOFA: NATO Status of Forces Agreement

THKC: Turkish People's Liberation Front (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Cephesi*)

THKO: Turkish People's Liberation Army (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu*)

TİP: Workers' Party of Türkiye

Tumco: The Tumpane Company

TUSLOG: The United States Logistics Group

TÜ-KO: Consumers' Cooperative (*Tüketici Kooperatifi*)

TÜNATOS: Union of Turkish National Defense and Foreign Workplaces (*Türkiye Milli Savunma ve Yabancı İşyerleri İşçi Sendikası*)

U.S.: United States

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

YOL-İŞ: Turkish Union of Road, Building, and Construction Workers (*Türkiye Yol, Yapı ve İnşaat İşçileri Sendikası*)



CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the economic and cultural relations that emerged around an American airbase in Karamürsel which operated between 1957 and 1979 in the context of the Cold War. The Karamürsel base was not only a component of global American military network, but also a significant instrument for the U.S. economic and cultural hegemony. The following account seeks to offer a close gaze to the social life around the base to highlight this latter aspect. It also examines the challenges this hegemonic project encountered and how the United States and Türkiye responded.

The transformation Türkiye underwent during the Cold War was reflected in Karamürsel, a small town shaped by the presence of the American base. The base significantly influenced social life, creating a microcosm of Cold War-era Türkiye with U.S. products in local markets, American lifestyle in streets, and privileged U.S. officers in the town. However, anti-American political debates and social movements did not resonate as strongly in the region. Consequently, the social and political transformations experienced at the national level during the Cold War took on distinct forms locally. This study aims to shed light on the everyday life of Cold War-era Türkiye through the social transformations observed in Karamürsel and on the impact of local dynamics on these transformations. In doing so, it also examines the regional effects of the policies implemented by the United States to gain the local population's acceptance of its presence in areas where it established military bases.

Historical Background

Following the World War II, a bipolar world order emerged. Even before the end of the war, the Soviet Union grew suspicious of the United States and the United Kingdom, as these

powers shifted their support away from the USSR against its fight with the Nazi Germany and instead prioritized aid to British forces in North Africa.¹ Tensions escalated in 1946 with Winston Churchill's famous speech, in which he declared a political war against the USSR and referred to Eastern Bloc countries as being behind an "Iron Curtain."² Following political developments (the Soviet Union's refusal to withdraw from northern Iran in violation of prior agreements, the military coup in Czechoslovakia, and the Berlin Crisis in 1948) alarmed the United States and its allies about the rise of communism and Soviet expansionism. The economic and political fragility of Western European nations, the rise of communism in France and Italy, and the Soviet Union's advancements in nuclear technology—threatening the U.S. monopoly in the field—intensified these concerns.³ The ensuing rivalry between these two blocs, characterized by competition in economic, political, and technological domains rather than direct military conflict, came to be known as the Cold War.

The growing tensions between the two blocs had a significant impact on Türkiye. Under Joseph Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union demanded military bases in the Turkish Straits in violation of the Montreux Convention and sought to annex certain provinces in eastern Anatolia.⁴ Having remained neutral during World War II, Türkiye felt threatened by these demands, which jeopardized its territorial integrity. This sense of insecurity prompted Türkiye to align more closely with the United States in the newly established bipolar world order. Intrinsically, the Soviet threats in question were not as tangible as perceived by Turkish diplomats of the time. In fact, some scholars have argued that Türkiye deliberately exaggerated this threat to secure support from the West. Given Türkiye's economic difficulties, the financial

¹ Carole Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Philadelphia, Westview Press, 2013), p. 61.

² David F. Schmitz, "Cold War (1945-91): Causes," in *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 149.

³ Müge Kınacıoğlu, "Turkey-NATO Relations: Strategic imperatives, identity-building and predicaments," in *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics*, ed. Alpaslan Özerdem and Matthew Whiting (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 447.

⁴ Mehmet Gönlübol, "NATO, USA and Turkey," in *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition, 1950-1974*, ed. Kemal Karpaz (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 13.

assistance provided by the United States was already a sufficiently strong reason for the country to align with the Western bloc, while the perceived Soviet threat further reinforced this decision.⁵

The U.S. aids which attracted Türkiye to join the Western Bloc started in 1947. In this year, U.S. President Harry S. Truman introduced a policy aimed at providing financial assistance to European countries to curb Soviet expansion in the region. Known as the Truman Doctrine, this policy encompassed Türkiye and Greece, providing a total of \$400 million in aid to both countries and marking a significant step in Türkiye's rapprochement with the Western bloc.⁶ A few months after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, the U.S. government introduced the Marshall Plan to assist European states in rebuilding their economies. According to Erik Jan Zürcher, the plan had three complementary objectives: to help Europeans help themselves, to sustain profitable export markets for U.S. industries, and to eliminate poverty, which served as a breeding ground for communism.⁷ In this way, the plan aimed to keep European states away from Soviet influence and align them more closely with the United States. Türkiye also benefited from this economic aid, further solidifying its alignment with the U.S.-led Western bloc.

In 1949, Western bloc countries formalized their alliance by establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Shortly thereafter, Türkiye sought to join NATO, but its application was not immediately accepted.⁸ The United States had certain conditions in exchange for Türkiye's membership, the most significant being the right to establish military bases within Turkish territory. While negotiations between the two countries continued, a preliminary agreement on this matter was reached in October of the same year, marking a

⁵ Onur İşçi, "Turkey at a Crossroads: The Soviet Threat and Postwar Realignment, 1945-1946," *Diplomatic History* 47, no. 4 (2023): 624-626.

⁶ Odd Arne Vestad, *The Cold War A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), pp. 92-93

⁷ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History* (London: IB Tauris, 2004), p. 209

⁸ Amy Austin Holmes, *Social Unrest and American Military Bases in Turkey and Germany since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 48.

significant step toward the construction of U.S. military bases.⁹ However, a change in Türkiye's government in 1950 disrupted the agreement. Following the elections, the newly elected Democrat Party (DP) insisted that Türkiye's NATO membership be a prerequisite for allowing the construction of bases.¹⁰ The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the first arena of armed conflict in the Cold War, saw Türkiye join the conflict on the side of the Western bloc and South Korea.¹¹ Before the war concluded, Türkiye became a NATO member in 1952, thereby consenting to the establishment of military bases on its territory.

In the third article of the treaty certifying its accession to the NATO, Türkiye declared that it would provide mutual assistance and cooperate with the parties to the treaty in order to strengthen their collective ties.¹² The principle of mutual assistance and joint action in this article led to the conclusion of a series of bilateral agreements between Türkiye and the United States, the leading power of NATO, for the establishment of military bases and facilities.¹³ Following the 1954 Agreement on the Status of U.S. Forces in Türkiye (*Türkiye'deki Amerikan Kuvvetlerinin Statüsü Anlaşması*),¹⁴ bases and facilities under U.S. administration began to be established. Since then, Türkiye has hosted United States armed forces at approximately twenty-six facilities, including intelligence-gathering centers, air bases, missile launch detection sites, naval support installations for the Sixth Fleet, and storage units for various nuclear weapons.¹⁵ As NATO had no authority or jurisdiction over these bases, the rights to expand them, procure and stockpile necessary materials were entirely entrusted to U.S. authorities. Thus, the U.S. became able to create its own administrative units within the Turkish

⁹ FRUS (Foreign Relations of the United States), (FACC D12/9), 28 February 1950, Vol. V, pp.1234–1235.

¹⁰ A. Haluk Ülman, "NATO ve Türkiye," *AÜSBF Dergisi*, no. 4 (1967): 150.

¹¹ Zürcher, p. 235.

¹² Haydar Tunçkanat, *İkili Anlaşmaların İçyüzü* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınları, 1975), p. 181.

¹³ Sinan Kıyanç, "Soğuk Savaş Yıllarında Türkiye'deki ABD Üs ve Tesisleri," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 36, no. 101 (2020): 205-206.

¹⁴ *Resmî Gazete*, 7 July 1954, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ Richard Outzen, "From Crisis to Cooperation Turkey's Relations with Washington and NATO," *Policy Notes*, no. 12, (2012): 2.

territory. Furthermore, the 1954 Agreement on the Status of Forces between the Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty (*Kuzey Atlantik Andlaşmasının Taraf Devletler Arasında Kuvvetlerinin Statüsüne Dair Sözleşme*) granted the sending state's courts jurisdiction over crimes committed against its personnel and offenses arising from acts or omissions by its personnel in the course of duty.¹⁶ This resulted in the U.S. military personnel serving in Türkiye gaining a legally privileged status.

In addition to these agreements, secret bilateral agreements between the U.S. and Türkiye have also been decisive in determining the status of American military bases and the personnel stationed at these bases. Since these bilateral agreements were sometimes concluded in writing and at other times verbally, even ministers and bureaucrats were sometimes unaware of their content and scope.¹⁷ For instance, in 1967, İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil, who was serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, responded to a question regarding bilateral agreements during a parliamentary session by stating that these agreements were confidential and numerous, and that he himself had learned of fifty-four agreements in three months.¹⁸ Furthermore, his failure to answer the question of whether there were clauses in these agreements that violated international law or NATO treaties highlights the secrecy surrounding these agreements. Some of these agreements, which were verbally approved, caused long-standing confusion regarding authority over the administration of the bases.¹⁹

Discussions surrounding the presence of American military bases in Türkiye did not follow a uniform trajectory over time. Selin M. Bölme divided the history of American military bases in Türkiye into three distinct periods, taking into consideration the historical evolution of

¹⁶ *Resmî Gazete*, 20 March 1954, pp. 7-13.

¹⁷ Doğan Avcıoğlu wrote that Turkish officials wanted to amend the bilateral agreement on this matter in order to prevent smuggling through the American Post Office, but they could not find the agreement. He added that they then contacted U.S. State Department officials and received a response stating that the agreement had been made "verbally." see: Doğan Avcıoğlu, "Türkiye'deki Amerikan Üsleri," *Yön* 4, no. 139 (1965): 8.

¹⁸ "Meclis'te Amerikan Üsleri, İkili Anlaşmalar ve Kıbrıs," *Yön* 6, no. 198 (1967): 4.

¹⁹ Kıyanç, "Soğuk Savaş Yıllarında Türkiye'deki," p. 206.

the bases, their legal status, and the dynamics of Türkiye's relations with the United States and NATO. The first encompassed the period during which Türkiye became a member of NATO and decisions regarding the establishment of the bases were made. The second period covered the early years of the Cold War and extended into the mid-1960s, when the American presence began to be questioned. The third period began with the 1969 Joint Defense and Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Türkiye and continued until the end of the Cold War in the 1990s.²⁰

While Bölme's periodization appears valid when focusing on U.S.-Türkiye relations and negotiations over the bases, the social and political debates surrounding the bases suggest a need for a different framework. In her comparative study of protests against the American military presence in Türkiye and Germany, Amy Austin Holmes has divided the timeline into two phases: the pre-protest cycle (from Türkiye's NATO membership to the 1960s) and the protest era (post-1960s).²¹ Although the beginning of the protest era could be dated earlier, this alternative periodization provides a more insightful perspective for understanding the social and political implications of the bases.

As the rapid increase in the number of American personnel in the late 1950s suggests, many of the U.S. military bases in Türkiye were established during this period.²² Nevertheless, the issue of American bases did not become a topic of political debate, as both the ruling DP and the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) were not disturbed by, and in fact supported, the presence of the United States in the country. However, with the rise of the left-

²⁰ Selin M. Bölme, "Soğuk Savaş'ta NATO-ABD-Türkiye Üçgeninde Askeri Üsler: Süreklilik ve Değişim," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 9, no. 34 (2012): 52.

²¹ Holmes, *Social Unrest and American Military Bases*, pp. 44-94.

²² As of March 31, 1957, there were a total of 6,025 American personnel in Türkiye, including 3,720 military personnel, 138 civilians, and 2,167 family members. By March 15, 1958, this number had increased to 10,573, of whom 6,449 were military personnel. Just six months later, on November 15, 1958, the number had reached 13,247. See: Selin M. Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü: ABD'nin Üs Politikası ve Türkiye* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012), p. 236.

wing movements during the 1960s and early 1970s, the U.S. bases became a central focus of both political debates and social movements. Leftist publications of this period devoted considerable attention to the issue of American bases. For instance, in 1967, *Ant* magazine published an article based on U.S. sources, revealing details about American bases and facilities in Türkiye. The anonymous author described these bases as “occupied Turkish territories” and referred to them as “colonies” and “states within a state.”²³ Similarly, in 1965, *Yön* magazine argued that those who labeled Türkiye as “Little America” were not entirely unjustified, citing the lack of recognition of Turkish law in American workplaces.²⁴ Through such articles, the leftist press of the time sought to shape public opinion against the American presence in Türkiye.

Amy Austin Holmes classified responses to the American presence in Turkey into four broad categories: political opposition, street protests, labor strikes, and armed struggle.²⁵ Founded in 1961, the Workers’ Party of Türkiye (TİP) brought the issue of American military bases into the political arena, particularly after winning fifteen seats in the parliament in the 1965 general elections. In his opening speech for the party’s election campaign, TİP Chairman Mehmet Ali Aybar criticized the U.S. bases and facilities, describing them as “little Americas,” where Turkish police and judges had no jurisdiction.²⁶ Furthermore, a 1968 report by the party addressed these bases, stating that they operated outside the control of the Turkish

²³ “Türkiye’deki Amerikan Üs ve Tesislerini Açıklıyoruz,” *Ant* 37 (1967): 8-9. *Ant* was a weekly socialist magazine founded in 1976 by Yaşar Kemal, Fethi Naci, and Doğan Özgüden. It began publication in response to the growing need for a socialist outlet independent of the Turkish Workers’ Party (TİP), which had been gaining prominence at the time. Deniz Deren Önen, “Ant’ın Öyküsü: Doğan Özgüden’le Söyleşi,” *Sosyologca* 2, no. 4 (2012): 79.

²⁴ “Türkiye’deki Amerikan Üsleri,” *Yön* 4, no. 107 (1965): 4-5.

²⁵ For Holmes’ categorization, see: Holmes, *Social Unrest and American Military Bases*, pp. 63-84.

²⁶ Barış Ünlü, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Mehmet Ali Aybar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), pp. 205 and 242.

government.²⁷ American military bases also became a central focus of social and student movements. During the early 1960s, there were strong organic ties between the TİP and student movements, which led to a convergence of their goals.²⁸ In 1968, student protests against the arrival of the U.S. Sixth Fleet in Istanbul and the burning of U.S. Ambassador Robert Komer's car in 1969 in Middle East Technical University in Ankara exemplified growing anti-American sentiment within these movements.

Over time, some left-wing oppositional groups resorted to armed struggle against American presence. Organizations such as the Turkish People's Liberation Army (THKO) and the Turkish People's Liberation Front (THKC) carried out attacks targeting the U.S. military bases and personnel during the early 1970s.²⁹ Alongside these armed actions, there were also civilian protests in areas near the bases. For example, in 1967, residents of Adana staged demonstrations in response to allegations that personnel stationed at İncirlik Air Base had harassed local women.³⁰ As a result of these developments, the presence of American bases became a recurring topic on the parliamentary agenda. In 1965, appointed senator (*kontenjan senatörü*) Sadi Kocaş requested information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding these bases.³¹ Similarly, in 1967, three parliamentarian from the nationalist-conservative Nation

²⁷ Mehmet Ali Aybar, "III. Olağan Büyük Kongre Açış Konuşması," in *Çalışma Raporu Üçüncü Büyük Kongre 9-12 Kasım 1968* (Ankara: 1968), p. 7.

²⁸ Holmes, *Social Unrest and American Military Bases*, p. 68.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 80-84.

³⁰ "Adanadaki Amerikan aleyhtarı halk hareketi," *Yön* 6, no. 220 (1967), p. 7.

³¹ "Türkiye'deki Amerikan Üsleri," *Yön* 4, no. 107 (1965): 4-5.

Party [*Millet Partisi* (MP)], submitted a parliamentary motion of no confidence to examine the issues of American bases, bilateral agreements, and the Cyprus in the assembly.³²



Figure 1. 1 Map of the U.S. Bases in Türkiye. Source: *Ant*, no. 37 (1967): 9. The caption under the map reads: "In various provinces of Türkiye, there are bases and facilities belonging to the U.S. Air Force, where American flags fly. For a country that won its independence through a life-and-death struggle against global powers, allowing the lands of Türkiye to be adorned with the flags of a foreign state is undoubtedly the greatest misfortune... Turkish history will surely not forgive those who have brought about the situation depicted in the map above for the Republic of Türkiye."

To mitigate the opposition and resolve the jurisdictional ambiguities caused by bilateral agreements, the Joint Defense and Cooperation Agreement signed between Türkiye and the United States in 1969. All previous agreements up to that date were consolidated under this framework, and Türkiye's authority over bases and facilities was expanded. With this agreement, some of the U.S. bases were transferred to Türkiye, while the remaining ones were designated as joint defense installations under NATO. This meant that the United States could no longer utilize these bases without the approval of Türkiye. Furthermore, the use of the bases

³² *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi* 11, (1967), p. 15-50; "Meclis'te Amerikan Üsleri, İkili Anlaşmalar ve Kıbrıs," *Yön* 6, no. 198 (1967): 4. The motion of no confidence was rejected by the members of parliament from the ruling party (the Justice Party [*Adalet Partisi* (AP)]), which held the majority in the assembly.

for offensive purposes, except in cases of legitimate self-defense, was prohibited.³³ Although the agreement sought to address public dissent, societal and political opposition to U.S. bases persisted in the years that followed.

An important turning point for American bases in Türkiye came in 1975. In that year, following the U.S. government's imposition of an arms embargo on Türkiye in response to the removal of the ban on poppy cultivation and the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus, the Turkish government seized the control of all U.S. bases and facilities except the one in İncirlik.³⁴ The Turkish state appointed Turkish commanders to these bases and ensured their supervision. However, the American presence and activities at these bases continued for a few more years.

Following the lifting of the embargo in 1978, U.S. authorities considered the reactivation of military bases in Türkiye to be crucial for maintaining their influence in and countering the Soviet Union's presence in the Middle East. Consequently, on March 29, 1980, the United States and Türkiye signed the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA). Under this agreement, the United States was granted the right to continue its operations at twelve bases and facilities: Sinop, Pirinçlik, İncirlik, Yamanlar, Şahintepe, Elmadağ, Karataş, Mahmurdağ, Alemdağ, Kürecik, Belbaşı and Kargaburun. However, the number of American personnel at these bases was reduced; Turkish Armed Forces were stationed there, Turkish commanders were appointed, and any increase in the number of American personnel became subject to Türkiye's approval.³⁵ Thus, while the American military presence continued, Türkiye gained greater authority over the use of the bases compared to previous periods.

³³ Bölme, "Soğuk Savaş'ta," pp. 63-64.

³⁴ Ibid, 64-65; Kıyanç, "Soğuk Savaş Yıllarında Türkiye'deki," p. 207.

³⁵ Kıyanç, "Soğuk Savaş Yıllarında Türkiye'deki," pp. 227-228.

One of the U.S. bases that became operational in the late 1950s and remained active for about two decades was the Karamürsel Air Station, located in the district of Kocaeli. A 1967 *Ant* article that the site comprised both an air station and a communications center, with the air station described as the “main facility.”³⁶ The Americans likewise referred to the Karamürsel Air Station as the “Main Site,” while the local population called it simply the “airfield” or “the field.”³⁷ Owing to its proximity to Soviet missile testing areas, the site was a highly valuable installation for the United States. Despite the extreme secrecy surrounding the Soviet Union’s first manned space mission, which launched Yuri Gagarin into orbit, American personnel managed to monitor the mission through the listening systems at Karamürsel. Intercept operators at the base succeeded in tracking the launch and flight in real time, and even in recording the communications between Gagarin and mission control.³⁸ Because of its enormous circular antennas, the facility came to be known among the Americans as the “elephant cage.”³⁹ Following its evacuation by the Americans as a result of aforementioned developments in the 1970s, the base was handed over to Türkiye and massive antennas were dismantled as quietly as they had been built.⁴⁰

³⁶ “Türkiye’deki Amerikan Üs ve Tesislerini Açıklıyoruz,” *Ant* 37 (1967): 8-9.

³⁷ Erdoğan Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya Karamürsel* (İstanbul: Zinde Yayıncılık, 2017), p. 249.

³⁸ James Bamford, *Body of Secrets* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), pp. 130-131.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 66-67

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 457.

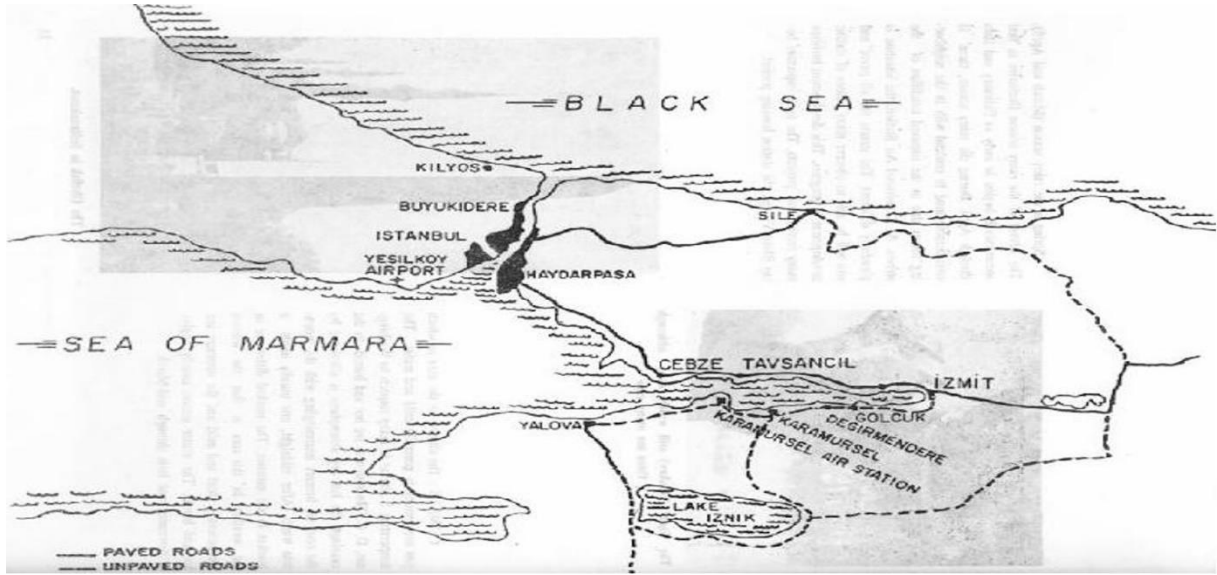


Figure 1. 2 Location of the Karamürsel Air Station from the KAS Brochure

As the developments in the 1970s show, the Karamürsel Air Station was affected by the shifting relations between Türkiye and United States. However, the local population largely remained indifferent to rising opposition to American military presence. This situation invites a closer examination of how the American presence shaped the region. The employment opportunities created by the base apparently fostered consent for the American presence. Likewise, the fact that local stores became distributors of American products, perceived as superior in terms of quality, played a similar role. The presence of American personnel and their families on the base also helped popularize the American lifestyle among the local population. All these factors revealed that American bases were not only part of a defense alliance but also instruments for constructing U.S. economic and cultural hegemony.

Literature Review

Studies on the social and cultural impacts of American military bases have generally examined the issue at the national or continental level. One such work that approaches the topic

from a continental perspective is Rebecca Herman's book *Cooperating with the Colossus*.⁴¹ Focusing on Panama, Cuba, and Brazil, Herman's book explores the relationships that developed around American military bases in Latin America during World War II. She investigates labor-management relations, gender-based conflicts, and criminal prosecutions associated with these bases. By doing so, she brings a comprehensive approach to the debate on military bases, which is often examined through the lens of security policy, and reveals the active roles of local communities, workers, women, and states in matters concerning the presence and operation of bases. Moreover, she demonstrates that the discourse of cooperation is redefined not only at the diplomatic level but also in terms of everyday life and practices of sovereignty.

Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present, an edited volume compiled by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, also focuses on the social and cultural impacts of U.S. military bases, specifically in Japan, Korea, and Germany.⁴² This multidisciplinary study approaches the global network of U.S. military bases not merely as a strategic or geopolitical structure, but as a web of social, cultural, and gendered relations. It conceptualizes base areas as sites of "everyday empire," where imperial power is enacted and contested through daily interactions. The book offers a detailed analysis of the gendered regulations, racial hierarchies, economic dependencies, and sovereignty conflicts generated by the American military presence in host communities. At the same time, it highlights local forms of resistance and negotiation that emerge in response to these dynamics. By demonstrating how militarism is internalized and reproduced not only in interstate relations but also in the fabric of everyday life, the work provides a significant contribution to the literature on U.S. military bases.

⁴¹ Rebecca Herman, *Cooperating with the Colossus: A Social and Political History of US Military Bases in World War II Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁴² Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, ed., *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Donna Alvah's work, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965* is a significant contribution to understanding U.S. public relations efforts at overseas military bases.⁴³ Alvah's study examines the importance of military personnel families' presence at these bases during the Cold War. According to Alvah, American military families played an influential role in U.S. foreign policy and cultural diplomacy efforts by informally promoting American values and lifestyle abroad. She argues that these families saw themselves as representatives of the American way of life, dubbing them "unofficial ambassadors." She also provides a gendered analysis of the interactions between American families and local communities. While women in American families disseminated American culture and values through their relationships with local communities, these encounters were shaped by gender norms of both American and host society, creating a form of cultural negotiation space.

Besides these, there are also a limited number of works focusing on certain American military bases in Türkiye. One of the most significant examples of such studies is Selin M. Bölme's book *İncirlik Üssü: ABD'nin Üs Politikası ve Türkiye*.⁴⁴ Bölme traces the history of the İncirlik Air Base, located in Adana, from its establishment to the early twenty-first century by examining its legal status, its role in the U.S.-Türkiye relations, and its significance within U.S. base policy. While primarily analyzing the subject from political and legal perspectives, it devotes minimal attention to cultural and social history perspectives. The latter are most visible in the section addressing the rise of anti-American sentiment during the 1960s. It particularly highlights how public perceptions of Americans became increasingly negative and demonstrates the growing anti-American sentiment in Adana.⁴⁵

⁴³ Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ Selin M. Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü: ABD'nin Üs Politikası ve Türkiye* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012).

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 233-244.

One of the most important studies approaching an American military base in Türkiye from a sociocultural perspective is Charlotte Wolf's 1969 book, *Garrison Community: A Study of an Overseas American Military Colony*.⁴⁶ This sociological work, conducted at a relatively early date, focuses on the lived experiences of American officers and their families stationed at the American base in Balgat, Ankara, between 1965 and 1967. Offering a comprehensive theoretical discussion and historical background, the book examines topics such as the facilities at the Balgat base, the daily lives of Americans stationed there, and their economic conditions, supported by the oral testimonies of officers and their families. Although the study's limited temporal scope prevents it from addressing the impact of political developments in the late 1960s and 1970s on the living conditions of Americans in Balgat, it offers a notably strong sociological analysis. Wolf demonstrates that military bases constituted culturally and institutionally self-contained systems, and that the boundary between these bases and the host society was not merely physical but also cultural and class-based.

Finally, Gül Eda Bulanık's master's thesis, exploring the changes experienced in daily life in Adana during the 1950s, includes a section examining the transformations brought about by the presence of the İncirlik Air Base.⁴⁷ The study centers on everyday encounters between Americans and the local population, as well as the popularity of American goods and lifestyle in the region. Drawing on oral testimonies of individuals who lived through the period, Bulanık reveals that the impact of American presence on daily life persisted for decades, with traces of this transformation still evident in memories from the 1980s. In doing so, the study demonstrates—through firsthand accounts—how military bases can shape and alter everyday life in profound and lasting ways.

⁴⁶ Charlotte Wolf, *Garrison Community: A Study of an Overseas American Military Colony* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1969).

⁴⁷ Gül Eda Bulanık, "1950'li Yıllarda Türkiye'de Gündelik Hayatta Yaşanan Dönüşümler: Adana İli Üzerine Bir Araştırma," (Master's Thesis, Hacettepe University. 2020).

This study seeks to contribute to the expansion of the cultural Cold War literature by incorporating military bases into its scope. Works in this literature have mostly focused on the activities carried out by the United States and the Soviet Union, the two leading powers of the Cold War, particularly in the fields of art and literature. One of the most notable examples is Frances Stonor Saunders' *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, which examines the cultural and artistic figures and activities supported by the CIA.⁴⁸ Similarly, Kristin Roth-Ey's *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* addresses the cultural initiatives of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ In this literature, however, military bases have often been excluded from the focus, as they are typically regarded as entities belonging to political and military domains. However, this thesis argues that American military bases also played a crucial role as instruments of the cultural Cold War, thereby challenging the notion that this realm was limited to activities in publishing and the arts.

Inspired by the aforementioned studies on American overseas military bases, this thesis examines the social impact of the Karamürsel Air Station on the local community. It addresses issues such as labor relations, cultural interactions and conflicts, and gender roles that emerged around American military bases. Focusing on a single base located in a relatively small town, it aims to illustrate the impact of the American presence more clearly on everyday life by tracing the social and cultural transformations it triggered. Examining a period of more than two decades, the thesis argues that the Karamürsel military base functioned not merely as a component of defense strategy, but also as an instrument for promoting and imposing the American way of life on the local population. However, in doing so, it does not offer a unilateral

⁴⁸ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

perspective; instead, it examines how these developments were received, responded to, and shaped by the locals.

Sources and Limitations

The primary sources of this research are periodicals from the era, with local newspapers being particularly significant for conveying events in Karamürsel and the surrounding region. Two local newspapers published in Karamürsel during this period were accessed through the National Library (*Milli Kütüphane*) in Ankara. The first is the daily *Şirin Karamürsel*, with issues available from the beginning of 1964 through June of that year. The second is the daily *Karamürsel Ekspres*, with all issues from June 1964 to the end of 1991 accessible. This thesis the issues published between 1964 and 1980.

Since the target audience of these newspapers was the residents of Karamürsel, their language and content can be seen as both reflecting and seeking to shape the perspectives of the local population. However, both newspapers were only two pages long, with much of the second page devoted to advertisements, announcements, poetry, and other non-news content. Additionally, some of the reported news covered events in neighboring districts, other cities in Türkiye, and abroad, which limited the papers' capacity to fully document local events. Aside from these limitations, the coverage of the two papers was largely shaped by local power relations. Since the Karamürsel Air Station played a significant role in the local economy and contributed to the development of the district, negative portrayals of the American presence were largely absent. Even during periods when anti-American sentiments intensified across the country, these newspapers refrained from criticizing the American bases. The political orientation of the newspapers' proprietors was also likely a contributing factor in this situation. For example, as a person who was elected to the municipal council as an independent and who consistently emphasized his political neutrality, Ferhan Kalyon, the proprietor of *Karamürsel*

Ekspres, may have refrained from expressing anti-American views commonly associated with the political left.

An important source for understanding the relationship between Turkish workers and their employers at the Karamürsel Air Station is the biweekly newspaper of the Union of Turkish National Defense and Foreign Workplaces [*Türkiye Milli Savunma ve Yabancı İşyerleri İşçi Sendikası* (TÜNATOS)]. Several issues of this newspaper named *TÜNATOS* from 1968 and 1969 are available at the National Library. The newspaper contains detailed information about the union's activities both on and off the Karamürsel air base, as well as the experiences of Turkish workers. As one of the primary sources for this study, the main limitation of this newspaper is that only issues from a two-year period are accessible. Consequently, it was not possible to gather information from this source about the relations between workers and their employers during the base's earlier years.

An important source for understanding the activities of Americans at the Karamürsel Air Station is *The Sentinel*, a biweekly newspaper published by the station's command. As the official publication of the base, all issues from December 1961 to the end of 1963 are available at the National Library. This newspaper provides valuable insights into daily life on the base and also contained information about American activities in Karamürsel and Yalova. Given its status as an official U.S. publication, *The Sentinel* also reflects the American perspective on the base and the surrounding region, making it a key source for understanding how the Americans viewed their presence and operations in the area. Like most of the other periodicals consulted, this source is primarily limited by the short period covered by the accessible issues.

In addition to local newspapers, national newspapers of the period occasionally reported on the region. Particularly during the 1960s, when anti-American sentiment was on the rise in Türkiye and debates over the U.S. presence in the country were prominent, many articles in national newspapers focused on American bases and personnel stationed there. For this reason,

two widely read national newspapers, *Milliyet* and *Cumhuriyet*, are used as primary sources in this study.⁵⁰ While *Milliyet* published a large number of reports, providing detailed information on Turkish-American relations in Karamürsel and the surrounding region, *Cumhuriyet* serves as a valuable source for this thesis, particularly through its coverage of crimes involving Americans.⁵¹ In doing so, they offer a contrasting perspective to the predominantly positive portrayal of Americans in local publications.

Similarly, leftist magazines of the period occasionally published articles about U.S. military bases in Türkiye, including the Karamürsel Air Station. During the second half of the 1960s, the number of these magazines increased significantly, reaching a substantial readership and the articles they published played a crucial role in shaping public opinion.⁵² As these publications including *Ant*, *Emekçi*, *Türk Solu* and *Yön* were among the leading voices of rising anti-American sentiment, they are also included as primary sources in this study.⁵³ While their coverage of American bases makes an important contribution to this thesis, a key limitation of these publications is their lack of a localized perspective, owing to their broad audience and national focus. Moreover, when reporting on relations and conflicts between the locals and Americans, they often omitted offenses committed by the former.

Another significant source for understanding the period and region is the student yearbooks of Karamürsel Dependent School, which was located on the airbase. These yearbooks not only include photographs and information about the students but also provide details about their activities within the school. Such information offers valuable insights into daily life within the American base. Moreover, the yearbooks contain information about the

⁵⁰ Archives of both newspapers are available in their websites.

⁵¹ The surrounding region refers to the districts of Yalova and Gölçük.

⁵² By the 1960s, leftist newspapers and magazines in Türkiye had reached a circulation of approximately 200,000. See: Tülay Arpa, “1960-1975 Yılları Arasında Sol Basında Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri,” (Master’s Thesis, Pamukkale University, 2005), p. 36.

⁵³ The archives of these journals were compiled and digitized by the Foundation for Social History Research in Turkey (*Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Araştırma Vakfı* [TÜSTAV]).

school's staff, shedding light on critical aspects such as the gender composition of the personnel and the roles of Turkish employees in the school. These details are crucial for understanding the social dynamics surrounding the base during the 1960s and 1970s. The yearbooks from 1967, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1975, and 1977 are available through the online archives of the American Overseas Schools Historical Society (AOSHS).⁵⁴

The memoirs of Ahmet İsvan—a former Istanbul mayor and agricultural expert who resided in Yalova's Taşköprü district—contain a brief yet significant section about the American personnel stationed at the base in the early 1970s.⁵⁵ This section provides valuable insights into local relations and offers a personal perspective on social and cultural interactions in the region. To complement this perspective, the oral testimonies of two Turkish workers, Emin Doğansoy and İsmail Peker, who were employed at the base have also been consulted. Emin Doğansoy worked at the Karamürsel Air Station between 1965 and 1971, first as a phone operator and later as a work order clerk. He told me the story of his working years in the base on September 1, 2023, in Karamürsel. İsmail Peker was a worker in commissary of the base between 1971 and 1977. He shared his experiences with me on March 6, 2024, in Karamürsel. These oral accounts not only shed light on aspects overlooked by other sources but also enrich the study by reflecting the views of individuals from different social backgrounds on local social dynamics.

Structure

This study consists of two chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion sections. Chapter 2 titled “Economic Relations: Satisfying the Needs of Americans and Locals” focuses on the facilities established to meet the needs of the American personnel stationed at the base,

⁵⁴ To access these yearbooks, see: <https://aoshs.org/collections/yearbooks/eu/tr/717/>. Date of Access: 30.11.2024.

⁵⁵ Ahmet İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye Tarımda Bir Modernleşme Hikayesi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009).

such as housing, healthcare, education, and shopping. Additionally, it delves into the working conditions of Turkish laborers and the overall dynamics of the base as a workplace. It explores the formation of labor organizations within the base, with a particular focus on the causes and evolution of various labor conflicts. Furthermore, it investigates the local and national trade networks formed through the illicit introduction of the U.S. goods, originally intended for the American personnel, into Turkish markets. Building on this framework, the chapter aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of economic life both within and beyond the base. Chapter 3 titled “Cultural Interactions and A New Social Order” is dedicated to exploring cultural relations in the region. It details the leisure activities of American personnel stationed at the base, addressing the lifestyle they sought to establish within the base and examining how this American way of life was projected beyond the base’s boundaries. Focusing on efforts to disseminate and institutionalize American culture, this chapter also analyzes how American personnel perceived local communities in Karamürsel and the surrounding region. This chapter also explores criminal activities involving Americans -both by and against them- such as marijuana usage, sexual violence, traffic accidents, and theft to highlight the potential sources of conflict in the region. It analyzes the efforts of both governments to address these sources, shedding light on how local relations were managed. By doing so, this chapter traces the role of the states’ legal and social policies in the formation and maintenance of a social order aligned with their interests

CHAPTER 2:

ECONOMIC RELATIONS: SATISFYING THE NEEDS OF AMERICANS AND LOCALS

The establishment of the American base in the region and the arrival of personnel assigned to serve there laid the foundations for a new local economy. By choosing to align with the Western bloc, Türkiye not only joined a defense alliance but also accepted certain economic adjustments. According to Kemal Kirişçi, the Türkiye-U.S. alliance involved Türkiye in a ‘security community’ that is determined by the institutions of the U.S.-led world order and embracing democratization, free trade, and liberal markets.⁵⁶ In addition to this overarching economic transformation, certain local economic shifts also occurred. First and foremost, the arrival of Americans spurred activity in the housing market, driving up prices. However, the primary economic exchanges took place within the base itself. A large number of Turkish workers were employed at construction of the base and facilities built to meet the needs of American personnel, making the Karamürsel Air Station one of the significant employers in Karamürsel and neighbor districts. This contributed to local consent for the American presence, as the bases served as instruments of American soft power and hegemony.⁵⁷ The employment of Turkish workers also led to the rise of union organizations, introducing new actors into the local economic sphere. The smuggling of goods from base into local markets further demonstrated an acceptance of American economic dominance. One of the key entry points for these goods into Turkish markets was Karamürsel, due to the base’s presence, and both local merchants and consumers showed interest in these products. Thus, American presence in Karamürsel played a defining role in shaping economic relations in the region.

⁵⁶ Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkish-US Relations in Turmoil,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics*, ed. Alpaslan Özerdem and Matthew Whiting (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2019), p. 402.

⁵⁷ Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, p. 64.

Housing

Karamürsel Air Station had a critical significance for U.S. because it housed an air station and a communications center as military facilities.⁵⁸ But at the Turkish side, it is not possible to determine exactly when the Karamürsel Air Station was constructed due to the confidentiality of bilateral agreements. However, the sources consulted in this study provided some clues. While the *Karamürsel Ekspres* newspaper announced in 1979 that the base had been handed over to the Turkish Naval Forces, it also mentioned that the base had been located in the district for 28 years.⁵⁹ An archival document also reported that the expropriation of several properties had been approved in 1955 for construction to be carried out at the base located in the district.⁶⁰ All of this indicates that construction of the base began in the early 1950s and that a complex identifiable as a base had been established by 1955. However, the base did not become active in those same years. The earliest reports and job advertisements related to the base found in newspapers date back to 1957, suggesting that the base became operational or its capacity increased in that year.⁶¹

Following the activation of the base, U.S. officials initiated the construction of housing facilities on-site in an effort to establish a stable American workforce. Some detached houses with gardens for single families were built to provide housing for U.S. personnel, but the number of these detached houses was inadequate until the 1970s. According to Grawthol and Moorhus, due to the Air Force Command's indecision regarding the placement of the housing complex and the delayed arrival of prefabricated panels, only twenty-two out of 200 units could

⁵⁸ "Türkiye'deki Amerikan Üslerini Açıkıyoruz," *Ant*, no. 37 (1967): 9.

⁵⁹ "Deniz Üssümüz Hayırlı Olsun," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 1 May 1979, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA), 30.18.1.2/138.117.4, 7 February 1955.

⁶¹ Also, there is a Facebook group that Turkish and American residents of Karamürsel Air Station join, and in the introductory part of this group, active years of the base described between 1957-1979. See: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/239100263204112>. Date of Access: 24 April 2025.

be completed in 1966.⁶² U.S personnel and their families had to settle out of the base because of this inadequacy. To help newcomers with housing, an office was established in the Karamürsel Air Base called the Family Services Office, providing information to newcomers about housing opportunities in and out of the base. They also prepared pamphlets and booklets that include information about people being transferred, household items for loan, and informational materials for the benefit of newcomers.⁶³

Off-base housing was primarily concentrated in three districts: Karamürsel, Yalova, and Gölcük. Karamürsel was apparently the main district preferred by the American personnel as it hosted the air base. However, some local actors became dissatisfied due to the American presence in their hometown during the early years of the base. According to Cemalettin Özbay, some people in the district center showed their negative attitudes towards these newcomers with “grunts (*homurtular*).”⁶⁴ Some locals attacked U.S. personnel on several occasions prompting some base personnel to live in Yalova and Gölcük, according to Emin Doğansoy who described this violence against Americans as “the evil done by the gang of vagabonds to Karamürsel.”⁶⁵ These were attacks by young people who did not want to live with a group of foreign people, coming to the district from outside. However, it appears that some local residents adopted a different attitude. Presumably expecting significant economic gains, they rented their homes to Americans. Americans opted to live close to each other and formed a neighborhood in Karamürsel that was called the “American neighborhood (*Amerikan Mahallesi*)” by locals, a name that still persists today. Before the arrival of U.S. personnel, the field of this neighborhood was full of plum and olive trees, but then, opened for construction and turned into a

⁶² Robert P. Grawthol and Donita M. Moorhus, *Bricks, Sand and, Marble: US Army Corps of Engineers Construction in the Mediterranean and Middle East, 1947-1991* (Washington: Center of Military History, 2009), p. 231.

⁶³ During 1961, over a hundred families went to Karamürsel Air Station, and the Family Services Office assisted them in locating off-base housing. See: Colonel Kenneth W. Holbert, “Commander’s Column,” *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Interview with Cemalettin Özbay, cited in: Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya Karamürsel*, pp. 248-249.

⁶⁵ Interview with Emin Doğansoy, 1 September 2023.

neighborhood to meet the housing needs of Americans.⁶⁶ Following the granting of the construction permit by the municipality, landowners in the area began constructing housing for Americans in the early 1960s. The presence of this neighborhood and its residents was considered a “source of pride” by a *Karamürsel Ekspres* columnist, Süleyman Çubuk. In 1967, Çubuk wrote that “the presence of inhabitants of the American neighborhood ought to be a matter of pride for the entire town (*varlığı ile bütün kasaba halkının iftihar etmesi gereken Amerikan mahallesi sakinleri*).”⁶⁷ Furthermore, some other new buildings were built because of the presence of American residents in different places of the town in 1963 thanks for the efforts of the district attorney to settle Americans in Karamürsel.⁶⁸

Yalova, located to the west of Karamürsel, was a district of Istanbul at that period, but had no land border with that city. According to Ahmet İsvan, American personnel began to move to this district in the late 1950s, giving way to a new trend: local people of Yalova started to build houses and rent them to Americans. As a result, the number of U.S. families in the town exceeded two hundred between 1955-1972.⁶⁹ The U.S. side corroborated this estimated number. An article published in *The Sentinel* in January 1962 noted that the number of houses rented by U.S. personnel outreached 300 in Yalova.⁷⁰ Thus, American people and cars became visible in Yalova streets,⁷¹ and Yalova can be deemed a remarkable American settlement for that period.

Although sources about the Americans who lived in Gölcük, a town located to the east of Karamürsel, some news was seen in *Karamürsel Ekspres* about the American inhabitants of this town.⁷² Also, the chaplain of the Karamürsel Air Station announced in 1961 that he invited

⁶⁶ Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya Karamürsel*, p. 250.

⁶⁷ Süleyman Çubuk, “Amerikan mahallesi ve sakinleri,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 11 September 1967, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Tarık Bağdat, “Turizm,” *Şirin Karamürsel*, 28 January 1964, p. 1.

⁶⁹ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 240.

⁷⁰ “Yalova Homes Getting ‘Stateside’ Look, Say Housing Committee,” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

⁷¹ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 244.

⁷² For example; “Gölcük’te bir Amerikalının yanına gizlenen Bir Yunanlı genç kadın dün sınır dışı edildi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 9 January 1965, p. 1.

the base personnel to meet for Christmas Day in Karamürsel and Gölcük.⁷³ This announcement suggests that a considerable number of American personnel lived in but the latter town.

U.S. authorities took attention to these houses which were rented by base personnel and attempted to provide U.S. standards in there. According to Ahmet İsvan, as the number of American families increased, American-style houses began to be built in the area. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, those who built housing improved the standards of kitchens, bathrooms, and overall construction in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁷⁴ In doing so, they would be able to rent their homes to American families at higher prices. However, the improvement in housing standards was not solely due to this reason. U.S. officials also made efforts to raise the housing standards in the area to meet American norms. The approach taken toward the houses built on the bases was similar and extended to off-base housing as well. The United States Air Force's housing guide specified standard closet and kitchen dimensions for homes, regardless of location.⁷⁵ According to an article published in *The Sentinel*, a committee named Off-Base Housing Advisory and Appraisal Committee inspected over 300 homes under the supervision of the district governor (*kaymakam*) of Yalova “to establish minimum requirements in an attempt to bring the homes up to U.S. standards” in 1962. The committee identified major deficiencies of as the local housing stock including inadequate kitchen, dining and bath facilities; unsmoothed and unpainted floors, insufficient space for bedroom suites; uncleaned, unfinished and unpainted walls and woodwork; obstructed and unsealed drains; and unsatisfactory water reservoirs.⁷⁶ Command of the Karamürsel Air Base tried to increase the standards of off-base houses where U.S. families lived, and their attempts yielded positive results. Major Richard C. Warden, head of the committee, stated that landlords were cooperating

⁷³ “Chaplain’s Corner,” *The Sentinel*, 22 December 1961, p. 2.

⁷⁴ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 243.

⁷⁵ Mark Gillem, “America Town: Planning the Outposts of Empire,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 58, no.3, (2005): p. 6.

⁷⁶ “Yalova Homes Getting ‘Stateside’ Look, Say Housing Committee,” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

with them to improve the conditions of their houses. “In fact,” he said, “some of the homes were so vastly improved that we had to suggest that rent be raised.”⁷⁷ The situation was similar in Karamürsel. Reporting on a 1974 debate regarding the renaming of the American neighborhood, *Karamürsel Ekspres* described it as “the neighborhood with modern houses.”⁷⁸ This emphasis highlighted the distinct and modern appearance of American residences compared to other houses in the area. By enforcing American housing standards to local homes, U.S. authorities did not only provide a comfortable living environment for personnel stationed at the base but also introduced the local population to the American preferred model of housing, thereby encouraging the construction of new homes in line with these standards.

In the early 1970s, the expansion of housing on the air base led to a gradual shift of personnel from off-base residences to the base. Mediterranean Division personnel supervised for the Air Force construction of 200 family housing units in Karamürsel in 1968.⁷⁹ As construction activities continued over the following years, Ahmet İsvan noted that American residents of Yalova gradually left the town and began settling on the base.⁸⁰ By the mid-1970s, due to the deterioration of Turkish-American relations, a significant portion of the areas inhabited by Americans—both within and outside the base—were vacated. According to a newspaper article published in *Milliyet* around the same period, approximately 5.000 U.S. military personnel waited for an order from Washington to leave the Karamürsel Air Base.⁸¹ In an article in *Airman* magazine in 1977, Captain John B. Taylor wrote his impressions about four

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Belediye meclisinin ilçemizde hayretle karşılanan bir kararı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 19 February 1974, p. 1. A similar situation occurred in Adana during the 1950s. One neighborhood in the city came to be known as “Hollywood Mahallesi” (Hollywood Neighborhood) because the modern style of the houses resembled those seen in American films. See: Bulanık, “1950’li Yıllarda Türkiye’de,” pp. 98-99.

⁷⁹ Grawthol and Moorhus, *Bricks, Sand and Marble*, p. 269. The Mediterranean Division was an organization established by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1952. Although it was initially created to oversee construction projects at U.S. military bases in Türkiye, its scope gradually expanded to include bases in Libya, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Pakistan, and Iran. See: “Our History,” Middle East District Public Website. <https://www.tam.usace.army.mil/About/History/>. Date of Access: 23 April 2025.

⁸⁰ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 243.

⁸¹ “ABD Bayrağı İndi, Türk Bayrağı Çekildi,” *Milliyet*, 27 July 1975, p. 10.

U.S. air bases in Türkiye: İzmir, Ankara, İncirlik, and Karamürsel. According to him, Karamürsel Air Base had some of the best family housing units because it was undermanned due to deteriorated Türkiye-U.S. relations. Private rooms were obligatory in dormitories.⁸² After the decision of Turkish government, U.S. military personnel started to leave the base gradually, and in 1978, the Turkish government declared that U.S. personnel must evacuate Karamürsel Air Base completely.⁸³



Figure 2. 1 One of the older housing units of Karamürsel Air Base from *Airman* magazine.

Besides Americans, the base employed a large number of Turkish workers, who also made initiatives to improve their housing conditions. Turkish workers employed at Karamürsel Air Station established a cooperative to meet their housing needs. This organization, named the “Karamürsel Airfield Workers’ Housing Cooperative (Karamürsel Hava Alanı İşçileri Yapı Kooperatifi),” held its first congress in July 1968 at the Karamürsel City Club.⁸⁴ In February

⁸² John B. Taylor, “Living in the Land of Legends,” *Airman* 3, no. 21 (1977): 27-28.

⁸³ “Amerika, Karamürsel Üssü’nü Boşaltıyor,” *Milliyet*, 23 July 1978, p. 14; “Ambargonun Kalkmış Olmasına Rağmen,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 3 August 1978, p. 1.

⁸⁴ “Kongre İlanı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 20 June 1968, p. 2.

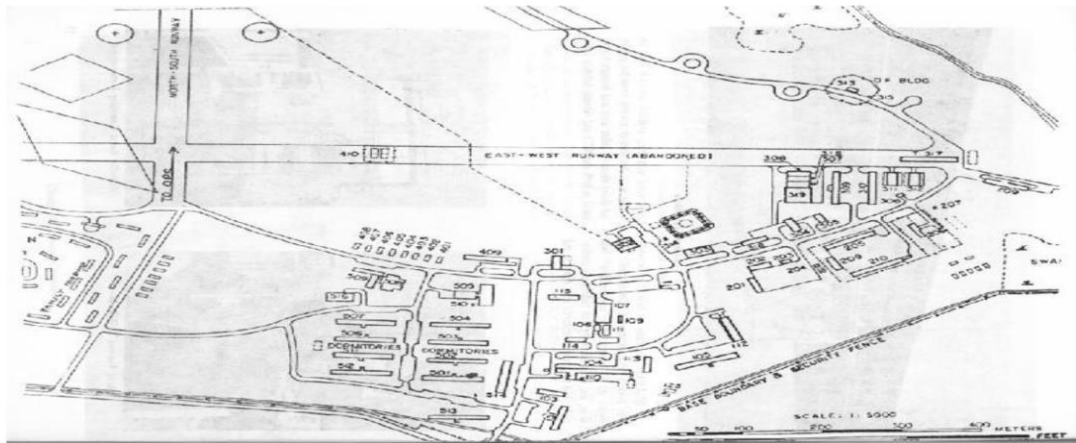
1969, they announced the tender for the construction of a nine-apartment workers' housing project, outlining the conditions for the bid.⁸⁵ Three months later, construction began with the groundbreaking of a site in the Kayacık neighborhood, which would consist of three buildings, each three stories high. Cooperative President Süleyman Yıldız stated that they would work to complete these buildings in a very short time and that, in the coming years, they aimed to increase the number of workers' residences to ensure all workers could become homeowners.⁸⁶ This initiative thus marked a collective effort to secure homeownership for workers.

Facilities to Satisfy the Needs of Americans

A brochure was prepared for newcomers to the Karamürsel Air Base provide detailed and specific information about the buildings in the complex and the daily activities of U.S. personnel. The second part of the brochure which contains a map of buildings of general interest (see Figure 2.2), along with a detailed explanation of the services provided in these buildings, shows that U.S. authorities tried to create an isolated living place for their personnel.

⁸⁵ "İnşaat İlanı," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 05 February 1969, p. 2.

⁸⁶ "Blok Apartmanların Temeli Dün Sade Bir Törenle Atıldı," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 21 May 1969, p. 1.



Buildings of General Interest

BLDG SECTIONS	BLDG SECTIONS	BLDG SECTIONS
101 Base Commander's Office Base Admin Office Base Finance Office Base Flight Opns Office Base Legal Office Base Lira Control Office	115 Theatre *640 Commanders's Residence 204 Motor Pool Dispatcher	504 Airmen's Lounge Education Office
102 Main Gate Pass and ID Turkish Postal, Telephone and Telegraph	301 Fire Station 303 Base Laundry & D/Cleaning	505 Consolidated Mess Airmen's Club
103 Chapel	308 Commercial Transportation Customs	508 Special Services Supply Gymnasium
104 Dispensary	307 Base Supply	509 Bowling Alleys
105 BOQ	310 Unit Supply Base Publications	513 Tailor Shop
106 Library	317 Commissary Clothing Sales Store	514 APO Hq Sq Commander 1st Sgt Office CO & Base Locator Mail Room Personnel Affairs Personnel Civilian Personnel Housing Office Red Cross
107 AFEX Snack Bar	401 -	516 Service Club
112 Officers' Club Officers' Open Mess	408 Dependent School	706 Operations Security Guard Communications
113 Dental Clinic	409 NCO Club	
114 Special Services Hobby Shop Photo Lab	410 Tennis Courts 501 NCO Lounge	

Figure 2. 2 Map of Buildings of General Interest in Karamürsel Air Station, Source: Karamürsel Air Station Brochure Part 2, https://merhaba-usmilitary.com/KAS_BRO/kasbook2.html, Date of Access: 12 March 2024.

The map shows that Karamürsel Air Station included various buildings for satisfying the needs of the U.S. personnel, such as base supply which ensured the procurement, storage, and distribution of the materials needed by the base, tailor shop, the American Postal Office (APO), dependent school, fire station, motor pool dispatcher, laundry, dental clinic, dispensary, dry-cleaning, clothing sales stores, and commissary. These buildings provided different services for U.S. personnel to turn this military base into a living space. Officers could send and receive mail by using the APO, purchase all kind of necessities such as food, clothes, household appliances, cigarettes and drinks (all of them were U.S.-made) at the commissary (or PX) market, and get their cars repaired in the motor pool. Their children went to the dependent

school, and the dispensary provided medical service for them and their families. For their religious duties, a chapel was built in the base and its chaplain occasionally contributed articles to *The Sentinel* under the heading, “Chaplain’s Corner.” In these articles, it can be seen that most of the U.S. personnel were Protestants and Catholics, and the chapel was utilized by these two sects jointly.⁸⁷ While activities such as mass prayers, confessions, Ladies’ Secret Heart Mass and Brunches, nocturnal adorations, holy name prayers for men, and choir were organized for Catholics; Protestants were provided with bible studies, prayers for men and women, and choir sessions.⁸⁸

Along with Americans, Turkish workers were employed in the facilities built to cater the daily needs of American personnel. These facilities provided job opportunities not only for the local population but also for people from various cities across Türkiye. Through employment in these facilities, Turkish workers gained access to the Karamürsel Air Station, which was otherwise restricted to American military personnel. In this way, the base served not only military purposes but also functioned as a workplace. Naturally, the Turkish citizens employed in these facilities held subordinate positions in the hierarchy beneath the Americans. This hierarchical structure became a defining factor in the economic relationships both within the base and in the surrounding region.

Turkish Employees of the Base

Karamürsel Air Station had been providing job opportunities to the local people since the start of its construction in the early 1950s.⁸⁹ The sources which were consulted in this

⁸⁷ “Chaplain’s Corner,” *The Sentinel*, 22 December 1961, p. 2.

⁸⁸ “Chapel,” *The Sentinel*, 3 August 1962, p. 7.

⁸⁹ By 1955, the construction of the airport in Karamürsel was completed. In a decree passed in February of that year, the council of ministers decided to expropriate some real estate located around Karamürsel Airport due to the construction of military facilities. In the following year, the cabinet put a new decision into action that allowed overtime work in the construction of three military bases in Karamürsel, Diyarbakır, and Ankara. See:

work indicate that construction works continued after the base was opened. For instance, the Turkish cabinet published a decree in 1959, permitting overtime work in the construction of the Main Site, located between Yalova and Karamürsel.⁹⁰ This appears to be the last governmental decree regarding construction at Karamürsel Air Station, but in 1967, the daily paper *Milliyet* reported that the U.S. allocated a 4.2 million dollars budget to build new facilities in the base.⁹¹ According to the same newspaper, the following year, the U.S. House of Representatives decided to allocate 1.7 million dollars for U.S. bases in different countries, with 276.000 dollars designated for Karamürsel.⁹²

Employment opportunities at the Karamürsel Air Station were not limited to construction-related activities. With the base becoming operational, the local population began to familiarize themselves with the names of various companies operating in connection with the facility. As in all U.S. military bases in Türkiye, Karamürsel Air Station employees were employed by The United States Logistics Group (TUSLOG); however, various contractor companies that won tenders for different works also employed workers. According to Cemalettin Özbay, an American commission went to Karamürsel after 1952 to make investigations for an area that was appropriate for building a military base. After its return, some U.S. companies, including Hamilton, Airport Maintenance, and Boeing, built their construction sites in the district.⁹³ In two job announcements that were published by *Milliyet* in 1957, Air Port Maintenance Company was seen as the employer.⁹⁴ Between 1960 and 1971, the Tumpane Company became the main employer at Karamürsel Air Base. The company was

Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA), 30.18.1.2/138.117.4, 07 February 1955 and BCA, 30.18.1.2/144.84.16, 11 October 1956.

⁹⁰ BCA, 30.18.1.2/151.73.9, 07 February 1959.

⁹¹ “Amerika, Türkiye’de üslerinde yeni tesisler kuracak,” *Milliyet*, 4 October 1967, p. 1.

⁹² “Amerika, Türkiye’deki üslerde 10 milyonluk inşaat yapacak,” *Milliyet*, 20 July 1968, p. 1. Although the news report did not specify which facilities these funds would be allocated for, it is likely that the funds were designated for the previously mentioned housing construction.

⁹³ Interview with Cemalettin Özbay, cited in Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya Karamürsel*, pp. 248-249.

⁹⁴ *Milliyet*, 07 June 1957, p. 5 and 24 July 1957, p. 2

responsible for providing services at the base, including civil engineering, vehicle maintenance, food services, dry cleaning, commissary operations, laundry, and office equipment repair.⁹⁵ According to a report that was prepared by the Interstate Commerce Commission and published in 1971, the Tumpane Company, which had a number of contracts with the U.S. Air Force had 5.000 employees, and many of the employees worked in U.S. bases located in Türkiye, Greece, Ethiopia, and Spain.⁹⁶ While the majority of these workers were Turkish and American nationals, the company also employed a limited number of personnel from third countries. In some announcements, the employer was called “an American institution,” and applicants were directed to the Tumco Personnel Section.⁹⁷ Since no separate company named Tumco is mentioned in the sources, it is likely that this was an abbreviation for The Tumpane Company. Additionally, the presence of the same abbreviation in the logo of The Tumpane Company found in a 1965 book supports this view.⁹⁸ An article published in *Karamürsel Ekspres* mentioned another company in Karamürsel Air Station named Reynolds Company.⁹⁹ In 1965 Military Construction Appropriations, Reynolds Construction Company was seen as the contractor for the construction of warehouses and facilities in Karamürsel Air Station.¹⁰⁰ After 1973, Boeing appeared as another employer at the base. İsmail Peker said that Boeing won the tender for being the contractor against The Tumpane Company and became the new contractor

⁹⁵ *Board of Contract Appeal Decisions 71-2* (Chicago: Commerce Clearing House, 1972), p. 41823.

⁹⁶ *Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission of the United States March 1970-January 1971*, reported by the Commission, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 758.

⁹⁷ “Personnel Wanted,” *Milliyet*, 27 June 1968, p. 6; “Eleman Aranıyor,” *Milliyet*, 26 July 1971, p. 6.

⁹⁸ Robert William Hays, *Principles of Technical Writing* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1965), p. 170.

⁹⁹ “Donanmaya Yar. Cemiyeti ilçemizde de geliyor,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 5 July 1965, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Military Construction Appropriations for 1965 - Part 2: Department of the Air Force Other Defense Agencies*, reported by Subcommittee on Military Construction (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1965), p. 14.

of the base in the early 1970s.¹⁰¹ Boeing was also pointed out as one of the employers at the base in a newspaper article about a strike at U.S. military bases in 1976.¹⁰²

The companies operating in various sectors at the base, along with the facilities established to meet the needs of American personnel, sourced the required labor force mainly from the local population. Job announcements in newspapers, especially in *Milliyet*, highlight the variety of employment and job opportunities at the base. For instance, an announcement from June 1957 stated that Karamürsel Air Port Maintenance Company (*Karamürsel Amerikan Askeri İnşaatı İkmal Şirketi*) sought to recruit six workers: two typists, two clerks, a tallyman, and a stockman. Speaking and understanding English at a sufficient level was the only requirement for applicants.¹⁰³ This announcement was published for three consecutive days in *Milliyet*, indicating an urgent need for workers. One and a half months later, *Milliyet* published another job announcement in which the same company sought to recruit three machinists, a machinist foreman, and a troubleshooting officer. The announcement provided information on the job content, salaries, specifying that only the troubleshooting officer was required to speak English.¹⁰⁴

In the following years, companies continued to publish job advertisements, and the qualifications sought in workers began to increasingly diversify. According to these announcements, electrical, mechanical, and civil engineers were in high demand at the base.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Interview with İsmail Peker, 6 March 2024. This company published two job announcements in *Milliyet* in 1973 and 1974. See: *Milliyet*, 04 July 1973, p. 9; “Eleman Aranıyor,” *Milliyet*, 22 March 1974, p. 11.

¹⁰² “23 ABD Üs ve Tesisinde Alınan Grev Kararının Nedenleri Açıklandı,” *Milliyet*, 21 February 1976, pp. 1 and 10.

¹⁰³ *Milliyet*, 7 June 1957, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ “Adam Alınacaktır,” *Milliyet*, 24 July 1957, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Milliyet*, 25 November 1960, p. 5; 31 June 1965, p. 7; 23 August 1970, p. 11; 22 March 1970, p. 11.

Employers also needed interpreters,¹⁰⁶ technical draftsmen,¹⁰⁷ clerical personnel,¹⁰⁸ architect,¹⁰⁹ and assistant cafeteria manager.¹¹⁰ For the period covering the 1960s and 1970s, I found only one announcement that did not include a job description. In that case, the employer was seeking a personnel member (*eleman*), with some work experience, proficiency in English, and completed military service.¹¹¹ Yearbooks of the Karamürsel Dependent Schools also show that Turkish employees held various positions at the school, including custodians, clerks, secretaries, assistant librarians, and teachers of host nation culture.¹¹²

Being able to speak and understand English had become a common requirement for all job announcements, with some even being written in English. However, employers were not always able find suitable candidates for open positions. Emin Doğansoy, who worked at Karamürsel Air Station as a phone operator, said that he initially lacked the necessary level of English for the position but improved his language skills while working there.¹¹³ Considering the education level of people in Karamürsel and Türkiye in those years, it can be inferred that this situation might have been common among other workers, especially the non-qualified ones.¹¹⁴ In this context, initiatives emerged to improve the English proficiency of the local population. For instance, *Karamürsel Ekspres* began publishing English lessons, primarily focusing on daily life conversations.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ “Tercüman Aranıyor,” *Milliyet*, 10 December 1961, p. 2.; “Help Wanted,” *Milliyet*, 13 June 1974, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ “Mimari Ressam Aranıyor,” *Milliyet*, 25 November 1960, p. 5.; “Technical Draftsman Wanted,” *Milliyet*, 16 September 1966, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ “Personnel Wanted,” *Milliyet*, 27 June 1968, p. 6.; *Milliyet*, 7 March 1969, p. 6; “Eleman Aranıyor,” *Milliyet*, 26 July 1971, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Milliyet*, 4 July 1973, p. 9; *Milliyet*, 22 March 1974, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ “Wanted,” *Milliyet*, 23 April 1960, p. 3.

¹¹¹ “Eleman Aranıyor,” *Milliyet*, 12 April 1962, p. 2.

¹¹² *The Minaret: Karamürsel Dependant School Yearbook 1969-1970* (Karamürsel: 1970), pp. 10-11; *The KAS ROWD: Karamürsel Dependant School Yearbook 1966-67*, p. 7; *The Minaret 1971*, pp. 14-15.

¹¹³ Interview with Emin Doğansoy

¹¹⁴ In 1975, 47.3% of Türkiye’s population was illiterate, 8.9% had never attended school, 34.7% had completed primary education, 7.2% had completed middle school, and only 1.8% were university graduates. Alpay Filiztekin, “Eğitim ve Demografi,” Eğitim Reformu Girişimi Danışma Toplantısı (Unpublished Working Paper), 2003, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ Between 4 June and 22 June 1964, the second pages of each *Karamürsel Ekspres* issue.

Besides newspapers advertisements, acquaintances already employed in the base appeared to play an important role in helping local people to find employment there. For instance, Emin Doğansoy obtained his position at the base through a contact who was already working there.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Ahmet İsvan mentioned that in Yalova, people approached Americans they encountered on the streets in the hope of finding employment.¹¹⁷

Job announcements suggest that companies active at the base were offering high wages often described as “goodly (*dolgun*)” and “satisfactory (*tatminkar*).” For instance, in 1957, the Karamürsel Air Port Maintenance Company, seeking to recruit a machinist foreman, three machinists, and a troubleshooting officer, announced that it would pay them three liras, two and a half liras, and two liras per hour hour, respectively.¹¹⁸ As the work was forty-eight hours by week, this means that machinist foremen would earn 576 Turkish liras, machinists 480 Turkish liras, and troubleshooting officers 392 Turkish liras per month. These wages were remarkably high in comparison to the monthly earnings of civil servants. In 1959, tenth-degree civil servants were paid 500 Turkish liras, eleventh-degree civil servants 450 Turkish liras, and twelfth-degree civil servants 400 Turkish liras.¹¹⁹ In another job announcement that was published in 1960, the employer offered 1,400 Turkish liras monthly for an assistant cafeteria manager, an amount higher than what was paid fourth-ranking civil servants that year.¹²⁰ The situation did not seem to change over the following years, making the base a preferred site of employment.¹²¹ For instance, Emin Doğansoy noted that although he began studying law at the

¹¹⁶ Interview with Emin Doğansoy.

¹¹⁷ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 246.

¹¹⁸ “Adam Alınacaktır,” *Milliyet*, 24 July 1957, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Salim Tozan and Feriha Cevan, *Kamu Personeline Sağlanan Mali ve Sosyal Haklar* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Personel Dairesi, 1977), p. 106. The tenth-degree refers to civil servants who hold an associate degree (*önlisans*) and have served for several years, or high school graduates with more seniority. The eleventh-degree typically includes associate degree holders with one to two years of service. The twelfth-degree represents the entry level for civil servants who have graduated from high school.

¹²⁰ “Wanted,” *Milliyet*, 23 April 1960, p. 3; Tozan and Cevan, p. 106.

¹²¹ According to Yıldırım Koç, between 1963 and 1970, the average daily wage of workers remained around 20 liras. See Yıldırım Koç, “1960’larda İşçi ve Memur Gelirleri,” *Aydınlık*, 28 May 2018.

university in 1960s, he chose to work in Karamürsel Air Base as a phone operator due to the high wage of the job.¹²²

Doğansoy's was not a peculiar case. Thanks to relatively high wages, the companies on the base were able to secure a large labor supply. İsmet Demir, a unionist and labor activist, wrote about a construction project at the airport in Karamürsel that employed between 400 to 500 workers in the early 1960s.¹²³ Similarly, while an article published in *Türk Solu* in December 1968 mentioned that over 900 workers were employed at this base. According to İsmail Peker, this number increased to 1,500 in the early 1970s.¹²⁴ To understand the magnitude of these numbers, they must be evaluated in relation to the population of Karamürsel. According to the 1970 census, 12,227 people lived in the district center, 6,539 of whom were male. By 1975, the population of the district center increased in 13,498 with 6,869 males.¹²⁵ Even though some of the workers came from Yalova and Gölcük, it is evident that the number of Turkish workers in Karamürsel Air Station was nearly equal to one-fifth of the male population of Karamürsel.

Another indication of the high salaries offered to employees at the Karamürsel Air Station is the fact that some of the workers eventually went on to establish their own businesses. For instance, Şefik Kutsi, who served as the supply control chief at the base, left his position in 1969 and began operating a facility that included a restaurant and a beach in Karamürsel.¹²⁶ Ergun Berksoy, a businessman who later owned several hotels in Türkiye and invested in tourism ventures abroad, worked at the Karamürsel Air Station between 1964 and 1976 as the

¹²² Interview with Emin Doğansoy.

¹²³ İsmet Demir, *Grevler ve Direnişler Üzerine Anılar Deneyler İşçi Sınıfı Mücadelesinden Bir Kesit*, ed. Demir Küçükaydın (İstanbul: Köksüz Yayınlar, 2013), p. 29.

¹²⁴ Bahattin Ali, "Türk İşçileri Amerikan Mahkemelerinde Yargılanıyor," *Türk Solu* 2, no. 56 (1968): 10; Interview with İsmail Peker.

¹²⁵ TÜİK Genel Nüfus Sayımı Veri Tabanı, Date of access: 12 May 2024.

¹²⁶ Şefik Kutsi, "Karamürsel, Tumpene Şirketi Personeline," *TÜNATOS*, 2 May 1969, p. 3. A news report published in *Karamürsel Ekspres* on January 21, 1975, indicates that this facility was the Kırahmetoğlu Motel in Karamürsel. See: "Fenerbahçeliler Karamürsel'e Hoş Geldiniz," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 21 January 1975, pp. 1-2.

Planning and Real Estate Manager, responsible for the maintenance and repair of the facilities.¹²⁷ Additionally, workers who gained skills at the base transferred this expertise to the businesses they established in the town. For example, Osman Filibeli, who worked in the dry-cleaning service of the American base, opened a dry-cleaning shop in Karamürsel in 1969, addressing a significant local need.¹²⁸ Thus, the American base not only provided employment for the local population but also imparted valuable know-how.

Although employment at the American base offered higher wages compared to other sectors, workers faced several challenges regarding working conditions. One of these issues was the commuting time. Workers traveled daily to the base from Karamürsel, Yalova, and Gölcük via shuttle buses. However, the commute was so time-consuming that the workers filed a lawsuit against the Tumpene Company, demanding that the travel time be counted as part of their working hours.¹²⁹ Moreover, there was discrimination in the provision of transportation services, with American personnel receiving preferential treatment over their Turkish counterparts. According to Ahmet İsvan, the U.S. Command allocated a bus with good suspension for American personnel commuting from Yalova, while Turkish workers were provided with a bus mounted on a truck chassis. Due to the potholed roads, the difference between these two shuttles was clearly noticeable.¹³⁰ Such a discriminatory practice was not, however, observed in every district supplying the base with labor. İsmail Peker, who worked in the commissary market of the base between 1970 and 1977 and lived in Karamürsel, noted that they, together with the U.S. personnel, were provided with robust shuttles.¹³¹ It is possible that the difference between these testimonies stem from different locations or the ideological position of Ahmet İsvan and İsmail Peker. Ahmet İsvan was an active politician within the

¹²⁷ Ergun Berksoy, "Business Career." <https://ergunberksoy.com/business-career>. Date of Access: 29 April 2025.

¹²⁸ "İlçemizin önemli ihtiyaçlarından biri daha giderildi," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 07 January 1969, p. 1.

¹²⁹ "Yolda geçen zaman değerlendiriliyor," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, p. 1.

¹³⁰ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 246.

¹³¹ Interview with İsmail Peker.

CHP, which, after 1965, adopted the principle of the "left of center" and began to follow a political line that could be described as center-left. As can be inferred from his critical tone in his memoirs, he was opposed to the presence of American military bases in Türkiye. In contrast, İsmail Peker, a worker at the Karamürsel Air Station and a supporter of the AP—the most prominent center-right party of the time—held a more favorable view of the American presence.¹³²

Discrimination was not limited to that between American personnel and Turkish workers; Turkish workers themselves were also divided into different categories. They enjoyed different rights and privileges, depending on their employer company and position in the work hierarchy. TUSLOG workers, for instance, had the right to receive seniority raises on their wages, whereas those employed by contractor companies did not. The wages of employees affiliated with contractor companies were increased based on the pay raises negotiated by their union (TÜNATOS and Harb-İş) through collective bargaining agreements.¹³³ Furthermore, U.S. authorities spatially segregated Turkish workers based on their position in work hierarchy.¹³⁴ The base command issued them different passcards categorized as A, B, and C. Emin Doğanşoy noted that Turkish employees with an A passcard could enter the Snack Bar, but those with B and C passcards were not allowed.¹³⁵ He added that the food prices in the bar were expensive, and some eligible workers could not afford them. Likewise, Cevat Elgin, another former employee of the base, wrote that a tray of meals cost a daily wage at the Snack Bar.¹³⁶

¹³² Following the 1977 general elections, in which the CHP became the leading party, İsmail Peker stated that he was dismissed from his job under pressure from the Harb-İş labor union, due to his readership of *Tercüman*, a newspaper with a right-wing orientation.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ While no such distinction was observed among American civilian personnel, rank distinctions among officers become apparent only in the privilege of accessing certain clubs.

¹³⁵ Interview with Emin Doğanşoy.

¹³⁶ Cevat Elgin, "Sıcak Aş İstiyoruz," *TÜNATOS*, 6 June 1968, p. 2.

Besides these problems, there were also conflicts between employers and workers in the base. Due to the deficiencies such as hierarchical differences and the lack of dining room for workers were sources of tension. Moreover, U.S. officials engaged in actions that undermined the dignity of the Turkish workers. Emin Doğanşoy recounted that when Turkish workers were required to work in a secret room or building, they were taken there blindfolded and entered the room in the same manner. Their blindfolds were only removed upon reaching the exact location where they were to perform their task. Once the work was completed, they were blindfolded again and escorted out of the room.¹³⁷ The fact that the base had its judicial body, which at times served to deter workers from defending their interests, was another possible source of tension. For example, a 1968 *Türk Solu* article referred to a case in which a Turkish worker who contested his salary was tried by a commission formed by U.S. authorities at a hotel, rather than Turkish courts.¹³⁸ Under these circumstances, and thanks to rising leftist and unionist movements in the 1960s, working class got onto the stage in Karamürsel.

Unionization Efforts at the Karamürsel Base

In 1946, the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP) changed the Law on Associations (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*), allowing the establishment of class-based associations. This shift facilitated the establishment of socialist parties and worker unions.¹³⁹ However, legal regulations that restricted union activities were introduced shortly thereafter. The Trade Union Law, passed in 1947, prohibited unions from engaging in political activities, while the right to

¹³⁷ Interview with Emin Doğanşoy. A famous Turkish writer, Adnan Özyalçın, penned a story, titled *Gözleri Bağlı Adam* (Blindfolded Man), focusing on this issue.

¹³⁸ Bahattin Ali, "Türk işçileri Amerikan mahkemelerinde yargılanıyor," *Türk Solu* 2, no. 56 (1968): 10. In 1965, an article published in *YÖN* mentioned same practice. See: "Türkiye'de Türk İşçilerini Amerikalılar Yargılıyor," *Yön* 4, no. 110 (1965): 12.

¹³⁹ Aziz Çelik, *Vesayetten Siyasete Türkiye'de Sendikacılık (1946-1967)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), p. 119.

strike remained outlawed.¹⁴⁰ Aziz Çelik referred to this period of unionization from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960 as “tutelage unionism (*vesayet sendikacılığı*).”¹⁴¹ However, with the amendment of a new constitution after the 1960 coup, the establishment of the TİP in 1961, and more importantly, a growing wave of labor militancy, unions finally gained the right to strike in 1963.¹⁴²

As an establishment with a large labor force, Karamürsel Air Station did not remain unaffected by these developments. As workers, lacking a union in the early years of the base, were occasionally fired without valid reasons, they began seeking ways to resist this situation. Some decided to become members of the Turkish Union of Road, Building, and Construction Workers [*Türkiye Yol, Yapı ve İnşaat İşçileri Sendikası* (YOL-İŞ)], provoking a strong reaction from the management. It fired fifty-five drivers, who apparently took a leading role in the unionization effort. Following this decision, the workers called on support from their union to resist, but it did not materialize, at least not to a sufficient extent. Thus, under the leadership of representatives chosen from among their own ranks, the workers took full initiative in the struggle and succeeded in getting the employer to revoke the dismissal decision. During this process, the workers came to realize the need for a new union, leading to the establishment of the Turkish National Defense, International and Foreign Workplaces Labor Union (TÜNATOS) in 1962, with its headquarters in Yalova.¹⁴³ Within a short span of time, TÜNATOS began organizing workers at the other U.S. bases in Trabzon (Boztepe), Çiğli, Adana, Gemlik, and

¹⁴⁰ The 1947 law did not, however, prevent political parties from carrying out activities within worker unions. See Sumner M. Rosen, “Turkey,” in *Labor in Developing Economies*, ed. Walter Galenson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 258-259.

¹⁴¹ Çelik, *Vesayetten Siyasete Türkiye’de Sendikacılık*, p. 115.

¹⁴² Holmes, *Social Unrest and American Military Bases*, p. 74.

¹⁴³ Orhan N. Güner, “Sendikamız,” *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, pp. 1 and 3.

Üsküdar and secured the right to make collective labor agreement with TUSLOG and Tumpane.¹⁴⁴

During the union's founding phase, trade unionists who would later become active in the TİP played significant roles. Yücel Kıvılcım, one of the union's founders and its president for several terms, was a member of TİP and was elected to the party's Central Executive Committee at its First Congress in 1964.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, another founding member, Ali Caydı, was also affiliated with TİP and at one point served as the head of the party's Karamürsel district branch.¹⁴⁶ However, the union was not entirely under the influence of TİP members. In their media organ, *TÜNATOS* newspaper, Soviet-supporting articles or socialism propaganda could not be seen. Furthermore, in 1968, one of the board members of this union, Rasim Özsüllü, carried out the position of provincial council member of Istanbul as a representative of the AP, and vice president of TÜNATOS at the same time.¹⁴⁷ Also, the union rejected joining any worker union federations. Union of Defense Industry and Allied Workers (*Türkiye Harb Sanayi ve Yardımcı İşkolları İşçileri Sendikası* [Harb-İş]) tried to collect all worker unions that organized in the national defense sector under their umbrella, however, TÜNATOS did not join this federation and continued its activities independently.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ "Amerikan işyerlerinde grev önlendi," *Emekçi*, 2 October 1964, p. 4; "Amerikalılara ait işyerinde çalışan işçiler grev yapacak," *Milliyet*, 11 November 1965, p. 3. Although the union expanded to the other parts of the country, its leadership remained under the control of Karamürsel workers. In 1968, ten of its twelve board members were from Karamürsel, and the one from Üsküdar was a former worker from there. See "Sendikamız Yöneticileri," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968-20 July 1968, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ "Türkiye İşçi Partisi (1961-1968) Merkez Kurulları Listesi."

https://turkiyeiscipartisi.org/?SX=_html/_tip_merkez_kurullari.php. Date of Access: 7 May 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Selçuk Salih Caydı, "Ali Caydı ve doksan yaşına basmanın hafifliği."

<https://konstantiniye.blogspot.com/2022/10/ali-cayd-ve-doksan-yasna-basman.html>. Date of Access: 7 May 2025; "T. İşçi Partisi İlçe Teşkilatının Tebriki," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 11 June 1964, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ "Sendikamız Yöneticileri," *TÜNATOS*, 6 June 1968, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Ali İhsan Uysalkan, "Milli Savunma İşkolunda Çalışma Koşulları," (Phd Diss., Dokuz Eylül University, 2010), p. 59. Harb-İş was established in 1956, and changed its name as Harb-İş in 1963. After this year, the union tried to spread through the foreign military workplaces. See: <https://harb-is.org.tr/tarihce/>. Date of Access: 6 August 2025.

In the 1960s, the Union of Hotel, Restaurant, and Entertainment Places' Workers [((Otel, Lokanta ve Eğlence Yerleri İşçileri Sendikası [OLEYİS]) and the (Harb-İş) were also involved in organizational activities at Karamürsel Air Station.¹⁴⁹ Harb-İş had a branch in Gölcük, as this coastal hosted the central base of the Turkish naval forces, which employed a considerable labor force. According to an article published in *Karamürsel Ekspres* in 1965, some Karamürsel Air Station workers who became members of Harb-İş joined the recent congress of the Gölcük branch of this union, which subsequently decided to open a branch in Karamürsel.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile the organizational efforts of the OLEYİS did not appear to achieve the desired results. In 1966, the union chairman, Mukbil Zırtıloğlu, was denied entry to the base by the administration, prompting a protest declaration by workers apparently in contact with OLEYİS.¹⁵¹ Although the TÜNATOS leadership viewed these activities of Harb-İş and OLEYİS as attempts to undermine their position, TÜNATOS retained its dominance and became the authorized union to negotiate collective labor agreements.

The rival unions, however, sometimes attempted to exclude TÜNATOS from the collective bargaining process by reaching agreements with the employer and Turkish authorities. A clear example of this occurred during the 1964 collective bargaining process, which led TÜNATOS to declare a strike. At the beginning of 1964, TÜNATOS called the employer to negotiate a collective agreement at the Karamürsel and Trabzon workplaces, but the Istanbul Regional Directorate of Labor declared the union unauthorized. However, this decision was overturned by the court in February. Subsequently, the union reached an agreement with TUSLOG in April, but the U.S. government stated that the base would be handed over to The Tumpane Company starting in July and transferred the authority to this company. The Tumpane Company then declared that it would sign a collective agreement with TÜNATOS,

¹⁴⁹ Orhan N. Güner, "Sendikamız," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ "Fevzi Uzuner tekrar başkan seçildi," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 4 October 1965, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ "Sendika Başkanı Amerikan üssüne sokulmadı," *Cumhuriyet*, 11 July 1966, p. 1.

but in response, the Istanbul Regional Directorate of Labor (*İstanbul Bölge Çalışma Müdürlüğü*) once again ruled that the union was not authorized to conduct collective bargaining.¹⁵² The base administration pressured workers to join other unions and tried to sway them by allowing the leaders of two other unions inside. Moreover, TÜNATOS workplace representatives were dismissed for trivial reasons. The Regional Directorate of Labor unlawfully granted collective bargaining authority to these two unions, OLEYİS and Harb-İş.¹⁵³ These unions then signed collective agreements with the employer that granted almost no rights to the workers. TÜNATOS officials took the matter to court and succeeded in getting a favorable ruling. The court ruled that the existence of a sectoral collective agreement did not preclude the possibility of a workplace-level agreement, thereby enabling TÜNATOS once again to engage in collective bargaining. When The Tumpane Company threatened to fire union member workers, the union decided to go on strike. To break the strike, the company forced TÜNATOS president Yücel Kılıvcım to sign a protocol declaring the end of the strike. However, the union's executive board stated that only they had the authority to call off the strike and that the president had no such power, thereby invalidating the protocol.¹⁵⁴ As can be seen, in this incident, the employer, Turkish state authorities, and rival unions acted in concert against TÜNATOS and tried to usurp the authorized union's right to negotiate a collective agreement.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² “Amerika Sendikalara Müdahale Mi Ediyor” *Emekçi*, 22 August 1964, p. 1 and 4; “Amerikan işyerinde grev hakkı kanun dışı hareketlerle önlendi,” *Emekçi*, 02 October 1964, pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁵³ For Harb-İş, which was perceived as being more closely aligned with the state and employers, the transfer of bargaining authority away from other unions remained a state and employer policy throughout the 1970s. See: Zafer Aydın, *Asker Değil İşçiyiz* (İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2024), pp. 164-167.

¹⁵⁴ “Amerika Türk İşçisine Hak Tanımıyor,” *Emekçi*, 25 September 1964, p. 1; “Amerikan işyerinde grev hakkı kanun dışı hareketlerle önlendi,” *Emekçi*, 02 October 1964, pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁵⁵ The dispute over bargaining authority between TÜNATOS and Harb-İş continued in the following years as well. See: “İtirazımız yerinde görüldü,” *TÜNATOS*, 16 August 1968, p. 1.



Figure 2. 3 Bertram R. Crane, (seated at far left) labor relations manager for the Tumpane Company, signs a collective labor agreement on behalf of management in regard to 10.000 Turkish workers employed by the U.S. forces in Türkiye. Seat to his left is John D. Tumpane, assistant general manager of the company. The other gentlemen in the picture are Turkish. The picture was taken in Ankara, Türkiye. See: *Michigan Alumnus*, vol 71 (1964): 152.

The sources consulted did not provide information on how the strike was ultimately resolved. However, they did indicate that labor discontent at the workplace continued in the following years. In 1965, TÜNATOS expressed dissatisfaction with the employer's withdrawal from collective bargaining negotiations. The reason for the employer's withdrawal was NATO's refusal to allocate the necessary funds for wage increases. In response, the union sent a letter to NATO. In response to which, NATO officials stated that they had no authority over the TUSLOG bases in Türkiye. Following this, the union decided to go on strike.¹⁵⁶ In 1967, TÜNATOS once again attempted to launch a strike.¹⁵⁷ However, Turkish authorities blocked both strike attempts on the grounds that they posed a threat to national security.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ "Türkiye'deki üslerde NATO taraf değildir," *Cumhuriyet*, 9 December 1965, p. 1 and 7; "Amerikalılara ait işyerinde çalışan işçiler grev yapacak," *Milliyet*, 11 November 1965, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Engin Ünsal, "Grev Hakkı Kalkıyor Mu?" *DİSK*, 19 April 1967, p. 6; *Daily Report, Foreign Radio Broadcasts 191-195*, ed. United States Central Intelligence Agency, M1.

¹⁵⁸ "NATO grevi ertelendi," *Milliyet*, 11 December 1965, p. 3; Engin Ünsal, "Grev Hakkı Kalkıyor Mu?" *DİSK*, 19 April 1967, p. 6.

Although the union faced pressure and its strikes were suppressed, a degree of militancy still led to some gains. The collective bargaining agreements provided workers with certain social benefits. For instance, the TÜNATOS board announced that The Tumpane Company would start the distribution of shoes because an article in collective labor contract stipulated this as a part of social aid for workers in 1968.¹⁵⁹ Another issue that the union demanded to be resolved was the chronic problem of meals for workers at the base. In the 1964 collective bargaining negotiations between TUSLOG and TÜNATOS, the parties agreed that workers would be provided with lunch every day, and on days when lunch could not be provided, a payment of twelve liras would be made instead. However, this issue remained unresolved due to TUSLOG's subsequent withdrawal from the agreement, which triggered a process that ended with the union going on strike. Workers ate their meals in jerry-built eating houses around the base¹⁶⁰ because there was no dining room for them, and one tray of food sold at the Snack Bar was equivalent to a day's worth of workers' wage.¹⁶¹ Unionists negotiated with Colonel Cameron who was responsible with this type of issues to demand a dining room, but he responded that the U.S. bases did not include dining rooms for workers. Upon a preliminary investigation, unionists found out that there was a workers' cafeteria at the base in Diyarbakır, run by a contractor through tender, and put pressure on the administration to had a dining room in Karamürsel.¹⁶² As a consequence of this pressure, Air Station Command sent two officials to Diyarbakır Base to investigate the workers' dining room. These officials reported that a dining room for workers can be opened in Karamürsel Air Base. After this report, initiatives were taken to open a dining hall at the base. According to *TÜNATOS*, three types of meals would be served

¹⁵⁹ "Tumpane ayakkabı dağıtımına başlıyor," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ "Albay Cameron ve yemek," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Cevat Elgin, "Sıcak Aş İstiyoruz," *TÜNATOS*, 6 June 1968, p. 2.

¹⁶² "Albay Cameron ve yemek," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, p. 2.

in the dining hall, and workers will not be charged for these meals, each meal will cost between 200-250 piasters.¹⁶³

Besides negotiating with the employers to improve working conditions of their members, TÜNATOS undertook various activities outside the base to improve its members' living conditions. One significant initiative was the establishment of cooperative markets, beginning in Yalova in April 1968 and followed by Karamürsel in June that year.¹⁶⁴ These markets, named TÜ-KO (acronym of *Tüketici Kooperatifi* [Consumers' Cooperative]), aimed to provide affordable, high-quality food to the union members and distribute the profits among them. For this purpose, in May 1968, it was announced TÜ-KO would soon offer shares worth 50-100 Turkish liras on sale, allowing members to shop on credit for half of the shares they purchased.¹⁶⁵

Other activities by TÜNATOS included preparatory courses for its members' secondary school children and the arrangement of circumcision ceremonies.¹⁶⁶ For instance, in late June 1968, the union board announced that two collective circumcision ceremonies would be held on the 12th of the following month for the members' sons, one in Yalova and the other in Karamürsel.¹⁶⁷ Shortly after, with a new decision, the board of TÜNATOS expanded the scope of the circumcision ceremony, and children from poor families who were not affiliated with the union were also included. Thus, on the night of the organization, thirty-four children in Yalova and fourteen in Karamürsel were circumcised.¹⁶⁸ In July of the following year, the union

¹⁶³ "Yemekhane açılması için yapılan çalışma," *TÜNATOS*, 16 October 1968, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ However, the Karamürsel branch was short-lived due to financial problems. See Ahmet Genç, "TÜ-KO," *TÜNATOS*, 31 March 1969, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ "TÜ-KO Hizmete Girdi," *TÜNATOS*, 15 May 1968, p. 1-2; "TÜ-KO Karamürsel Şubesi Açıldı," *TÜNATOS*, 22 June 1968, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ "Kurslarımız tamamlandı," *TÜNATOS*, 2 September 1968, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ "Sünnet Düğünümüz 12 Temmuz'da sabaha kadar devam edecek," *TÜNATOS*, 22 June 1968, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸ "Kocaeli'de 14, Yalova'da 34 çocuk sünnet edildi," *TÜNATOS*, 20 July 1968, p. 1; "Sünnet düğünümüzden resimler," *TÜNATOS*, 20 July 1968, p. 4; "TÜNATOS Sendikasının düzenlediği büyük sünnet düğünü yarın akşam yapılıyor," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 11 July 1968, p. 1; "Tünatos Sendikasının tertip ettiği büyük sünnet düğünü sabaha karşı saat 5'de sona erdi," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 13 July 1968, p. 1.

organized another collective circumcision ceremony,¹⁶⁹ followed shortly afterwards by a well-attended concert that, according to *Karamürsel Ekspres*, satisfied the local community's long-standing desire for entertainment.¹⁷⁰ While these organizations brought TÜNATOS and the locals of Karamürsel and Yalova together, expanding its visibility outside the American base, rival unions were also engaged in similar activities. For instance, in 1966, Harb-İş opened a union house (*lokal*) in Karamürsel, stating that it would be open not only to union members but also to anyone interested in participating in activities to be organized by the union, such as language courses.¹⁷¹ This endeavor likely proved popular and prompted TÜNATOS to begin planning the opening of its own union house.¹⁷²



Figure 2. 4 Photographs from the circumcision ceremony organized by TÜNATOS in 1968. "Sünnet Düğünümüzden Resimler," *TÜNATOS*, 20 July 1968, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ "Tünatos Sendikasının sünnet düğünü," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 19 July 1969, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ "Gençlik kulübünün konseri dün gece," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 18 August 1969, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ "Harp-İş sendikası Karamürsel temsilciliği lokali hizmete girdi," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 6 April 1966, p. 1.

¹⁷² In August 1968, TÜNATOS announced earlier plans to open a union house, but they failed because the construction of the union headquarters had not yet been completed. "Sendikamızın lokalinin açılması için çalışılıyor," *TÜNATOS*, 16 August 1968, p. 1.

Although the sources consulted in this study do not provide information about TÜNATOS's activities after 1969, a speech delivered by Yücel Kıvılcım in 1973, in his capacity as the union's president, indicates that the union remained active in the early 1970s. While addressing the general problems faced by the working class people, Kıvılcım stated that TÜNATOS would continue to make its presence felt across Türkiye.¹⁷³ However, it seems that during this period, the union began to lose some of its members to Harb-İş. In fact, Kıvılcım himself mentioned in his speech that Harb-İş had become a source of trouble for them.¹⁷⁴ Reports showing that Harb-İş declared a strike in 1976 at several workplaces, including the Karamürsel base, reveal that TÜNATOS had lost its majority.¹⁷⁵

Trade and Changing Consuming Habits

Employment opportunities were not the only reason the base established strong ties with Karamürsel and its surrounding areas. The on-base stores, known as PXs or commissaries, also played a significant role in this regard. All products sold in these stores were of U.S. origin. Only a few types of silver rings and meerschaum cigarette holders were produced in Türkiye.¹⁷⁶ For a very short period, eggs were also sourced from Türkiye.¹⁷⁷ Aside from these, everything else was imported from the United States and offered for sale in the market.

¹⁷³ Yücel Kıvılcım, "Ufak Bir Kıvılcım Yeterli," TÜSTAV Kemal Sülker Arşiv Fonu 6-316.

¹⁷⁴ More closely aligned with employers, Harb-İş sought to prevent workers employed in military workplaces from joining other unions by depriving them of their rights in cooperatives and mutual aid funds, offering financial incentives for membership, and obstructing their access to the benefits of collective bargaining agreements. This situation placed other unions—less organized than Harb-İş on a national scale and limited in financial resources—at a considerable disadvantage. See: Zafer Aydın, *Asker Değil İşçiyiz* (İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2024), p. 68-75.

¹⁷⁵ "23 ABD Üs ve Tesisinde Alınan Grev Kararının Nedenleri Açıklandı," *Milliyet*, 21 February 1976, p. 1 and 10.

¹⁷⁶ "Modern Kapitülasyonlar ve Amerikan Kaçakçılığı," *YÖN* 4, no. 140 (1965): 8.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with İsmail Peker, 6 March 2024. İsmail Peker stated that during his time of employment, the base's egg supply came from Israel. However, when Israel entered into war, an attempt was made to source the eggs from Türkiye instead. This effort was halted because the eggs could not be packaged in a way that met the required standards. This account is corroborated by the 1973 edition of the *Balıkesir Provincial Yearbook*, which mentions that there was a commitment to supply the base's egg needs during the period when Israel was engaged

Since the products sold at PXs were of U.S. origin, American personnel were able to purchase goods of a quality that Turkish citizens could not access. This disparity was particularly visible in infant care. While American women bought disposable diapers for their babies, Turkish women used cloth diapers that had to be washed and reused, as disposable diapers were not sold in Turkish markets.¹⁷⁸ John D. Tumpane, one of the prominent figures of the Tumpane Company, recounted that the doorman of his apartment in Türkiye once asked him to buy a baby bottle from the PX, as these bottles sold in the PX, known by the brand name Pyrex, would not break when dropped.¹⁷⁹ In addition to infant care items, many other products unavailable in the Turkish market were also sold in PXs including Campbell's soup, Hormel's Spam, pork and beans and U.S. personnel could buy these at very low prices thanks to their PX cards.¹⁸⁰

The American personnel living off-base shopping at local stores led to an increase in the variety of products available in these shops.¹⁸¹ However, the real change was brought about by the PX markets. While these markets were exclusively open to American personnel and regulations prohibited the resale of purchased items, it was not uncommon for personnel to illicitly introduce goods from these markets into the local economy.¹⁸² Consequently, Karamürsel and Yalova emerged as significant trade hubs with second-hand shops offering American products.¹⁸³ According to one informed account, there were four such shops in Karamürsel where youngsters could find fashionable Levi's jeans and parkas.¹⁸⁴ Ahmet İsvan, likewise, remarked that used women's underwear were in high demand in Yalova. Erotic

in the Yom Kippur War. See: *Cumhuriyetin 50'nci Yılında Balıkesir 1973 İl Yılığ* (İstanbul: Dizerkonca Matbaası, 1973), p. 71.

¹⁷⁸ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 244.

¹⁷⁹ John D. Tumpane, *Scotch and Holy Water* (Berkeley and Kyoto: TESL-EJ Publications, 2019), p. 391.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 391-392.

¹⁸¹ Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya Karamürsel*, p. 250; İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 244.

¹⁸² İsmail Cem, "Yüzde 350 kar alarak satış yapan Amerikan pazarları," *Milliyet*, 20 March 1964, p. 5.

¹⁸³ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 244.

¹⁸⁴ Onur Yıldırım, "'Fil Kafesi'nin Gölgesinde Basketbol: Yerel Bir Hikaye,'" *Manifold*, <https://manifold.press/fil-kafesi-nin-golgesinde-basketbol-yerel-bir-hikaye>. Date of Access: 13 May 2024.

magazines also made their way into local markets through the base. According to Mehmet Asal, popular American men's lifestyle magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse* were unavailable in Turkish bookstores but could be found in Karamürsel. Enterprising booksellers bought these magazines from U.S. personnel and resold them to Turkish youth at exorbitant prices. As a result of these, this region started to be known as a marketplace for U.S. products in neighboring cities, and people came to this region for shopping.

It is important to note that PX markets were not the only means through which U.S. personnel accessed tradable goods in local markets. They also utilized a special postal service, the Army Post Office (APO), which operated beyond the control of Turkish authorities. Taking advantage of this system, they ordered various products from the U.S. and sold them in Türkiye to clubs, restaurants, and hotels.¹⁸⁵ Such activities led to the development of smuggling networks that reached major urban centers. For instance, in 1960, *Cumhuriyet* reported on a group of smugglers who gathered American products from U.S. personnel in Karamürsel, Yalova, and Gölcük, storing them in a house in Nişantaşı, İstanbul, to sell on the black market.¹⁸⁶ Two years later, the same paper published another article about three U.S. personnel from Karamürsel Air Base involved in smuggling goods obtained from the PX market,¹⁸⁷ while *Milliyet* reported on a construction worker at the base who was caught with contraband and U.S. dollars.¹⁸⁸ İsmail Peker's testimony corroborated these accounts about the smuggling. While working in the commissary market at Karamürsel Air Base, he recounted that, a significant number of products were found missing. The investigation launched to find out the cause revealed that some U.S. personnel had stolen perfumes and sold them in İstanbul and Bursa. Peker's account also gives an idea of how American goods entered households in

¹⁸⁵ "Modern Kapitülasyonlar ve Amerikan Kaçakçılığı," p. 8.

¹⁸⁶ "Amerikan malı alıp satan kaçakçılar," *Cumhuriyet*, 05 January 1960, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ "Amerikalı kaçakçılar," *Cumhuriyet*, 27 May 1962, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ "Bir işçinin evinde kaçak eşya bulundu," *Milliyet*, 14 September 1962, p. 2.

Karamürsel.. When he was too ill to work, he requested a medical report, and the doctor offered to provide it in exchange for canned mushrooms sold at the PX store.¹⁸⁹

As a consequence of increased smuggling and growing demand for American products, new trading spaces known as American bazaars (*Amerikan pazarları*) began to emerge in various cities in the 1960s. Most famous American bazaars were in İstanbul, Ankara, and Adana.¹⁹⁰ İsmail Cem, who prepared a comprehensive report on American bazaars for *Milliyet* in 1964, observed that an American bazaar he visited in İstanbul featured a wide variety of goods, including scarves, lipsticks, shirts, pans, aftershave lotions, alcoholic beverages, and cigarettes.¹⁹¹ According to Cem, in addition to products from PX markets, these bazaars also sold items left behind by foreigners before departing Türkiye, contraband from Europe, and goods provided to Turkish merchants to sell on commission.¹⁹² Cem also highlighted how the growing interest in American products spurred new forms of forgery in trade. He noted that some merchants in American bazaars affixed labels of American brands to Turkish goods.¹⁹³ Likewise, in 1968, *Milliyet* reported that foreign-branded liquor bottles were being refilled with local liquor and sold.¹⁹⁴

The growing trade in illicit goods around the Karamürsel base and their distribution to other cities prompted both Turkish and U.S. authorities to take various measures. In response to growing criticism, Turkish officials conducted inspections at the Karamürsel Air Station in 1966 and announced plans to place PX markets under customs regulation.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the negative perceptions among the Turkish public regarding the American personnel's access to

¹⁸⁹ Interview with İsmail Peker.

¹⁹⁰ Suavi Aydın and Yüksel Taşkın, *1960'tan Günümüze Türkiye Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018), p. 148.

¹⁹¹ İsmail Cem, p. 5; "Modern Kapitülasyonlar ve Amerikan Kaçakçılığı," p. 8-9.

¹⁹² İsmail Cem, p. 5.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ "Yabancı etiketlerle yerli malı satılıyor," *Milliyet*, 2 February 1968, p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ "Amerikan PX'leri kontrol edilecek," *Milliyet*, 6 August 1966, p. 3.

high-quality products also pressured U.S. authorities to act. In 1969, the U.S. Embassy declared that it would reduce the number of military personnel in Istanbul to 100 and close the PX market in the city. The embassy further stated that American personnel in Istanbul could procure their needs from the PX at Karamürsel if necessary.¹⁹⁶ However, all these developments also had an impact on the American markets in Karamürsel. For instance, Cüneyt Altunç recounted that he and his friends traveled from Istanbul to Karamürsel in the early 1970s, drawn by rumors that parkas, boots, water bottles, and flea-bags were being sold at the Karamürsel Air Base. However, upon their arrival, they found out that rumors were false. A passerby they encountered mentioned that such sales had indeed taken place in the past, but they were no longer ongoing.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

The presence of the American base in Karamürsel was not only a symbol of military partnership but also a catalyst for new economic relationships. Although American bases were designed to be isolated, the limited housing facilities on-site forced personnel to seek accommodation outside the base, leading to the emergence of a housing market catering specifically to Americans. Meanwhile, Turkish workers also entered the base as employees, transforming the Karamürsel Air Station into a significant local employer. Products imported from the United States to meet the needs of base's American personnel initially reached the markets of Karamürsel and Yalova, and subsequently spread to other cities. Turkish workers and American personnel brought elements of base life into the surrounding region. Thus, the tools for asserting U.S. economic dominance were not confined to the base but were instead employed first regionally and then on a national scale, as the United States sought to establish its hegemony. Through employment opportunities within the base, the American presence in

¹⁹⁶ "Amerikan Elçiliği İstanbul'daki PX mağazasını kapatıyor," *Milliyet*, 30 November 1969, p. 1 and 11.

¹⁹⁷ Cüneyt Altunç, *Suadiye Suadiye* (İstanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2009), p. 81-82.

the region generated local consent; at the same time, their activities in the housing market and the introduction of goods into Turkish markets fostered free trade, constructing American economic and cultural hegemony.



CHAPTER 3:

CULTURAL INTERACTIONS AND A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

With the opening of the Karamürsel Air Base, local people witnessed the arrival of U.S. personnel and their families, followed by increased interactions in daily life both within and outside the base. This was in fact not the first time Karamürsel and surrounding region hosted people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Muslims in the region experienced living in a multicultural society during the Ottoman period. According to the Ottoman official statistics, non-Muslim population of Karamürsel outnumbered the Muslim population, whose numbers apparently increased with the migratory flows from Caucasia and the Balkans in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹⁸ Non-Muslims of the district, who were mostly Orthodox Greeks and Apostolic Armenians, had rooted relations with the Muslims. Alongside Muslim migrations, the departure of Armenians and Greeks in the 1910 and early 1920s led the district to enter the early years of the Republic with a more religiously homogenous population. After nearly three decades, the arrival of the Americans marked the beginning of a new experience of multiculturalism. The language, leisure activities, and consumption patterns of U.S. personnel were mostly new for the region.

American officials were aware that the local population would not easily accept their presence in the region. On September 20, 1957, TUSLOG official Eugene Terry sent a letter to the Turkish Prime Minister's office stating that they were preparing a guidebook for American personnel who would be stationed at new base in Karamürsel. The purpose of this guidebook was to acquaint the personnel about Türkiye's customs, laws, history, and significant points of interest, thus preventing unfortunate incidents that might arise from ignorance. To this end,

¹⁹⁸ Kemal Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914)*, trans. Bahar Tırnakçı, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003), pp. 168 and 204.

Terry requested copies of previously prepared guides for foreigners, maps of Türkiye's highways and railways, and laws concerning foreigners.¹⁹⁹ Considering that American bases were designed to meet all the needs of their personnel, the effort to prepare such a guidebook might have seemed unnecessary. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the failure of U.S. authorities to construct enough housing at the Karamürsel base meant that American personnel had to interact with the local population in their everyday lives.

One motivation behind the initiative to prepare a guidebook for the personnel was probably the fact that some local people reacted negatively to American presence even before the opening of the military base. In 1952, an American committee of six, led by a colonel visited Karamürsel to examine the area where the base would be built. After the inspection, they went to the district center, where some local people express their disapproval by grumbling, prompting the committee members to explain that they had been invited by the Turkish government.²⁰⁰ The early years of the base also saw several incidents in which Americans were reportedly beaten by locals, leading those living outside the base to settle closer to one another.²⁰¹

While U.S. officials sought to resolve the conflicts arising in everyday life, they also attempted to disseminate American culture in the region. One of the main instruments of this effort was the facilities on the base designed for the leisure activities of American personnel. The events organized at these facilities were diverse, many of which reached beyond the base community. As American daily life practices became visible, the local population began to observe economic and technological inequalities more clearly, which in turn facilitated U.S. cultural hegemony.²⁰² The base command sought to promote hegemony by also providing

¹⁹⁹ CA, 1957: 7 - 36 - 13.

²⁰⁰ Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya Karamürsel*, pp. 248-249.

²⁰¹ Interview with Emin Doğanşoy.

²⁰² İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, pp. 243-244.

opportunities for local artists and athletes who embraced American culture to showcase their talents on the base. At the same time, they organized activities to promote mutual sociocultural exchange. By appearing to appreciate the local culture, they reinforced the “friendly America” image, generating consent for their presence in the region. In order to institutionalize these relationships, various foundations and associations were established, and they played an active role in the local community.

Leisure Activities of Americans and Its Reflections on Social Life of Karamürsel

The Karamürsel base included various facilities established for the leisure activities of American personnel. Figure 2.2 shows three club buildings: the Non-Commissioned Officers’ (NCO) Club, the Officers’ Club, and the Service Club. The NCO Club, open to only Airmen First Class who had spent four years in the U.S. Air Force,²⁰³ provided various free-time activities for non-commissioned officers and their families such as dine and dance, kiddie games, game nights, pinochle tourneys, music concerts, toastmasters meetings, reduced price activities, and birthday parties.²⁰⁴ The activities at the Service Club consisted of smaller gatherings aimed at fostering social interaction, such as card games, game nights, and dance classes for children and family members of the officers.²⁰⁵ The Officers’ Club was open to officers and civilians of equivalent grades. A dining room, lounge, and bar were available in this club,²⁰⁶ used also for regular meetings of other clubs in the base.²⁰⁷ In addition to these organizations, *The Sentinel* mentions the presence of the Stork Club, which organized similar

²⁰³ Third part of the Karamürsel Air Station brochure, https://merhaba-usmilitary.com/KAS_BRO/kasbook3.htm, Date of access: 2 May 2024.

²⁰⁴ “NCO Club Schedule,” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

²⁰⁵ “Service Club Happenings,” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ Third part of the Karamürsel Air Station brochure, https://merhaba-usmilitary.com/KAS_BRO/kasbook3.htm, Date of access: 10 May 2024.

²⁰⁷ For example: “KOCWC Elect New Officers: Luncheon Held,” *The Sentinel*, 26 January 1962, p. 3.

activities to those at the NCO Club.²⁰⁸ For example, a music band played in these two clubs on different days.²⁰⁹

In addition to the clubs, one of the important recreational facilities was the theater hall, where personnel at the Karamürsel Air Base could watch recently released films.²¹⁰ For instance, the 1961 films *The Big Bankroll*, *Mad Dog Coll*, *Posse from Hell*, *Two Loves*, and *Misty* were shown in the theater hall in January 1962. Besides film screenings, theater was also an important leisure activity for the base personnel. They formed a little theatre group and staged several plays. For instance, the play *Mr. Roberts*, adapted from a best-selling novel by Thomas Heggen, was staged in 1962.²¹¹ The screening of relatively recent movies and the allocation of time and space for theater demonstrated that the base command prioritized the quality of recreational activities for personnel and their families.

Sports also occupied an important place in the lives of the base personnel and their families. Figure 2.2 shows various facilities for sporting activities, such as tennis courts, gymnasiums, and bowling alleys. As the reports from *The Sentinel* indicate, intramural tournaments were organized for the base personnel and their families in these facilities. In 1962, personnel who worked in different units formed their own basketball teams and organized a tournament.²¹² Around the same period, volleyball,²¹³ bowling,²¹⁴ and softball²¹⁵ tournaments were also held. One of the most popular among these was the Family Bowling Postal Tournament. All military and civilian U.S. personnel, their wives or husbands, and dependent

²⁰⁸ For an example of the activities in Stork Club, see “*Stork Club Activities*” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

²¹⁰ “Theatre Schedule,” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 2. American personnel could also watch movies from other countries. For example, “Hercules Unchained” was an Italian-French movie. See: Howard Hughes, *Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult*, (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2011), p. 3.

²¹¹ “KAS Theatre Group Presents ‘Mr. Roberts’,” *The Sentinel*, 3 August 1962, p. 4.

²¹² “Base Supply Snaps Charlie’s Eight-Game Winning Streak,” *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 4.

²¹³ “Volleyball Begins Soon,” *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 4.

²¹⁴ “Sentinel to Sponsor Second ‘Open’ Bowling Tournament,” *The Sentinel*, 22 December 1961, p. 3.

²¹⁵ “ECO Stages Seventh Inning Rally Beats Marines, 5-3 For Crown,” *The Sentinel*, 3 August 1962, p. 6.

children between eight and eighteen could compete in this tournament. Families could join this competition in different categories, such as husband and wife; one parent and one child; both parents and one child; one parent and two children; both parents and two children; one parent and three children; and both parents and three children.²¹⁶

In addition to being held at the Karamürsel Air Base, tournaments were also organized with other bases and teams. The base's basketball team, for instance, competed in the Mediterranean Cage Tournament organized in Karamürsel in 1962, facing teams from Kagnaw (Ethiopia), Adana, Samsun, Crete, and Çiğli,²¹⁷ and took the second place, losing the final game to the Adana Sidewinders.²¹⁸ The base also had an all-star bowling team, whose members were selected on their performance in intramural tournaments. This team travelled to tournaments held in İzmir and Ankara.²¹⁹ The base was also represented in soccer,²²⁰ softball,²²¹ and tennis²²² tournaments by its own teams.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when soccer and wrestling were the most popular sports in Türkiye, basketball began to gain a foothold in Turkish sports, at least in part through the efforts of personnel stationed at American bases. Karamürsel was no exception to this development. From 1970 onward, Karamürsel Gençlik, the town's only basketball club, began training on the base's basketball court, thanks to the initiative of Turkish workers employed there. During these training sessions, they also played practice games against the base's basketball teams. Beginning with the 1970-71 season, the club added two American basketball players from the base to its roster. This development contributed to the advancement of basketball in the town.

²¹⁶ "USAFE Family Bowling Postal Tourney Set," *The Sentinel*, 22 August 1961, p. 3.

²¹⁷ "Mediterranean Cage Tourney Begins Monday," *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 4.

²¹⁸ "Adana Defeat Eagles, 75-57 For Mediterranean Championship," *The Sentinel*, 16 March 1962, p. 4.

²¹⁹ "Bowling Stars To Travel," *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 4, "Six Keglers To Represent KAS In Bowling Tourney," *The Sentinel*, 14 December 1962, p. 6.

²²⁰ "Eagles Win," *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 4.

²²¹ "Area Softball Tournament Gonvewes Here August 20," *The Sentinel*, 3 August 1962, p. 6.

²²² "Sports..." *The Sentinel*, 3 August 1962, p. 6.

Karamürsel Gençlik won consecutive championships in the Kocaeli First Amateur League from 1971 to 1978, earning the right to participate in national tournaments.²²³ The American players on Karamürsel Gençlik's roster occasionally attracted the attention of the national media. In 1976, *Milliyet* reported that Davis, who played for Karamürsel Gençlik, kissed his fiancée before games.²²⁴



Figure 3. 1 Karamürsel Gençlik Basketball Team in the 1970s. Source: Yıldırım, "Fil Kafesi'nin Gölgesinde..."

Davis' story is not a unique one. It was common during the Cold War period for American personnel stationed at military bases to play for the basketball teams in their regions where they were posted. Erdoğan Özdemir asserts that during the 1960s and 1970s, American basketball players were only present in teams from İzmir and Kocaeli, and that these players contributed to the sport's growing popularity.²²⁵ However, both newspaper reports and

²²³ Yıldırım, "Fil Kafesi'nin Gölgesinde..."

²²⁴ "Karamürsel Gençlik'in 2.05'lik Amerikalı basketbolcusu Davis maçlara nişanlısını öperek çıkıyor," *Milliyet*, 7 February 1976, p. 11.

²²⁵ Erdoğan Özdemir, "Kocaeli'nin Spor Tarihinde Karamürsel'in Yeri," in *Uluslararası Karamürsel Alp ve Kocaeli Tarihi Sempozyumu II*, ed. Haluk Selvi, M. Bilal Çelik and Ali Yeşildal (Kocaeli: Kocaeli Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür ve Sosyal İşler Dairesi Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2016), p. 1717.

testimonies from that period provide information that contradicts Özdemir's claim. For example, Onur Yıldırım notes that in the 1960s, athletes stationed in Balgat, Ankara, played for Şekerspor and Devlet Su İşleri teams. In the early 1970s, Adana Demirspor also included players from the İncirlik base in its roster.²²⁶ The influence of these bases on basketball did not remain limited to local teams. Officers stationed at the Karamürsel Air Station played in teams in various cities across the country. For example, Felix Coleman, played for Fenerbahçe in the early 1960s.²²⁷ Over the following years, several other players from the base also played for Fenerbahçe, with some even gaining media attention. For instance, *Milliyet* reported on Fenerbahçe's signing of two players from the Karamürsel base in 1977, under the headline: "One is a radar operator, the other a missile launcher."²²⁸ Additionally, Atilla Çakmak mentions that in 1974, two basketball players from the Karamürsel Air Station, Captain Lucas and Private Jones, were transferred to Bursa's TOFAŞ team.²²⁹

Besides film screenings and sports tournaments, music concerts were among the primary leisure activities at the base. Numerous American and European musicians and bands, such as The Western Playboys,²³⁰ New Band,²³¹ and The Leny Smith Combo,²³² performed there. The stage of the air base was also open to Turkish artists who performed Western-style music. One notable example is Nejat Tahir Özyılmazel, known as Neco, a significant figure in Turkish jazz, who gave his debut performance at the Karamürsel American Base in 1964.²³³ Another was Mesut Aytunca, also known as Ringo Mesut, a renowned guitarist of the time who

²²⁶ Yıldırım, "Fil Kafesi'nin Gölgesinde..."

²²⁷ "Basketbolda haftanın maçını G.Saray ile F.Bahçe yaptılar," *Cumhuriyet*, 5 December 1961, p. 6.

²²⁸ "Fenerbahçe basketbol takımında iki Amerikalı..." *Milliyet*, 14 January 1977, p. 11.

²²⁹ Murat Kuter, *TOFAŞ Spor Kulübü 35 Yılın Hikayesi* (Bursa: Kuter Yayın, 2010), pp. 151-152.

²³⁰ *The Sentinel*, 12 January 1962, p. 3.

²³¹ "New Band," *The Sentinel*, 5 October 1962, p. 4.

²³² "Breaking Records," *The Sentinel*, 7 September 1962, p. 4.

²³³ Besim Kazado, "Caz müziğini en iyi O tanıttı," *Yeni Asır*, 11 September 2010.

https://www.yeniasir.com.tr/sarmasik/2010/09/12/caz_muzigini_en_ iyi_o_tanitti. Date of Access: 30 August 2024.

tragically fell victim to a murder.²³⁴ In this way, the American base not only provided concert opportunities for Turkish musicians but also selected those who could help disseminate American music culture. Similar to İncirlik Air Base's role in facilitating the dissemination of rock'n'roll among Adana's youth during the 1950s,²³⁵ the Karamürsel American Base provided performance venues for young musicians practicing American-style music. In doing so, it contributed to the popularization of American musical forms in the local context and helped sustain Turkish musicians' engagement with American music.

Music also provided an opportunity for cultural interactions. While Turkish musicians performing Western-style music introduced their work to the personnel stationed at the base, the Turkish-American Cultural and Friendship Association also made efforts to popularize Turkish music among Americans. The Yalova branch of the association, chaired by Reha İsvan, organized a concert introducing Turkish music with the participation of experts and artists. The songs performed at this concert were recorded and later played both at the Karamürsel Air Station and in a local venue in Yalova.²³⁶ In this way, Americans had the opportunity to listen to and learn about different genres of Turkish music.

Different Perspectives: Orientalist Approach versus Conversion of Americans

The relationship between Americans and the local culture did not always manifest as positive engagement. Some U.S. personnel viewed the local population through an orientalist perspective—one that, as Edward Said has argued, is rooted in the assumption of an ontological

²³⁴ Murat Beşer, "Müzik tarihinden 'Ringo Mesut' geçti," *İST Dergi*, no. 14, (2023). <https://www.istdergi.com/sehir/yasam/muzik-tarihinden-ringo-mesut-gecti>. Date of Access: 30 August 2024.

²³⁵ Bulanık, "1950'li Yıllarda Türkiye'de," pp. 99-100.

²³⁶ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 245. During the 1960s and 1970s, Türkiye-U.S. relations were institutionalized at the civil society level through organizations such as the Turkish-American Association, the Turkish-American Women's Cultural Association, and the Turkish-American University Association. See: Cangül Örnek, *Türkiye'nin Soğuk Savaş Düşünce Hayatı* (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2022), pp. 171-172.

and epistemological distinction between East and West. In this framework, the East is portrayed as romantic, exotic, mystical, and as having adopted a form of modernity that is different from and older than that of the West.²³⁷ . In addition to prevailing Western supremacist views, the United States' self-perception as the leader of the capitalist Western bloc during the Cold War further reinforced the orientalist perspective held by some American personnel. One of them was Captain John B. Taylor, who wrote a 1977 article titled "Living in the Land of Legends" for *Airman* magazine, in which he described his visits to Turkish bases. Taylor first noted that the 12,000 Americans stationed at these bases had discovered more than just sand and camels.²³⁸ He subsequently described Türkiye as a "land of legends," portraying the country in an exotic and mystical light.

Wayne W. Dyer, who came from Germany to the Karamürsel base as a teacher in 1973, gave an account of his observations about Karamürsel through orientalist discourse. Dyer recounted his first journey from Istanbul to Karamürsel with the following words:

During the long bus ride from Istanbul to Karamürsel I feel as if I'm being transported back to **biblical times**. I see animals being slaughtered in the central markets of the villages, all manner of carts carrying goods, and the locals driving old American cars or riding bicycles.²³⁹

His following account of Karamürsel focused on its proximity to nature, the constant opportunity to swim in the sea, and the experience of living in a Muslim country.²⁴⁰ The choice to depict Karamürsel as a mystical place seemingly frozen in time is a reflection of Dyer's Orientalist perspective.

Not only the Americans' narratives about Karamürsel, but also their preferred forms of entertainment reflected an Orientalist gaze. Belly dancers, frequently featured in events at the base, offer a crystallized example of the Orientalist perspective held by the personnel stationed

²³⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 1-4.

²³⁸ Taylor, "Living in the Land of Legends," pp. 18-19.

²³⁹ Wayne W. Dyer, *I Can See Clearly Now* (New York: Hay House, 2014), p. 139. Emphasis is mine.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 140.

in the region. As early as 1958, when the number of American personnel at the base was still limited, a belly dance performance was included in a Christmas celebration organized by an American aid delegation visiting Karamürsel. *Milliyet* reported on this performance, accompanied by a photograph of the belly dancer and the audience, noting that the Americans watched the show with great curiosity and that some even attempted to capture the moment with their cameras.²⁴¹ The presence of a belly dancer in this 1958 event was not an isolated occurrence. Personnel stationed at Karamürsel Air Base displayed a keen interest in belly dance (or Oriental dance). In an October 1962 report, *The Sentinel* announced that Edna Bailey, the wife of a Tumpane worker, won first place in a talent competition held at the base for her performance of an “exotic Oriental dance.” The accompanying photograph showed Bailey wearing an outfit with a more modest style rather than the typical belly dancer attire.²⁴² A month later, another article in the same newspaper announced that an oriental dancer named Faris would perform at the first-anniversary celebration of the Stork Club’s opening.²⁴³ Likewise, in his aforementioned 1977 *Airman* article, Captain John B. Taylor referred to belly dancing as “an honoured Turkish art form” and included a photograph of a mother and daughter performing this dance at the Karamürsel base.²⁴⁴ These publications collectively indicate a longstanding and sustained interest in belly dance among the American personnel stationed at Karamürsel Air Station.

²⁴¹ “Karamürsel’de Noel,” *Milliyet*, 28 December 1958, p. 3.

²⁴² “Talent Winner,” *The Sentinel*, 7 September 1962, p. 5.

²⁴³ “Oriental Dancer,” *The Sentinel*, 5 October 1962, p. 3.

²⁴⁴ Taylor, “Living in the Land of Legends,” p. 25.



Figure 3. 2 American Delegation Watching a Belly Dancer. Source: "Karamürsel'de Noel," *Milliyet*, 28 December 1958, p. 3.

Belly dancing, or Oriental dance, is one of the most frequently used symbols of Orientalism. This image, common in various works of art depicting Eastern countries,²⁴⁵ was a recurring feature of entertainment events organized by American personnel at the Karamürsel Air Station between the 1950s and the 1970s. According to Sunaina Maira, Western interest in belly dancing cannot be separated from its Orientalist and colonial past, as the dance simultaneously represents a public manifestation of the exotic and eroticized Muslim-Arab woman.²⁴⁶

Aside from Oriental forms of entertainment, American personnel at the military bases seemed to show a certain interest in Islam, which they encountered in their daily lives. Holding an orientalist perspectives, some viewed it as the source of the host society's backwardness. For instance, according to a personnel at the Balgat base, "ninety-five percent of the differences between Turks and Americans are due to religion" and this, he claimed, prevented Turkish people from becoming Europeanized. While this perspective was likely popular among some,

²⁴⁵ For more information about belly dance and orientalism, see: Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, "Belly Dance: Orientalism-Exoticism-Self-Exoticism," *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (2003): 13-37.

²⁴⁶ Sunaina Maira, "Belly Dance: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 340-341.

it was not the only one. The aforementioned Wayne W. Dyer, who served as a teacher at the Karamürsel base, remarked that living in a Muslim country had enlightened him in many ways.²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, press reports show that acts of conversion among the Americans did occur. In 1968, *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported that an American officer in Ankara named Wesley Dean Welsh accepted Islam in the presence of the Ankara mufti and changed his name to Doğan despite opposition from his family in the United States. According to the reporter, Welsh (or Doğan, as he was newly known) expressed his deep affection for Turks and Muslims.²⁴⁸ The mention of a conversion in Ankara in Karamürsel's local newspaper could be attributed to similar acts also taking place in Karamürsel.

For instance, in November 1958, *Milliyet* reported that an American named Stephens Robert Lewis, who worked as an electrical technician at the Karamürsel base, had converted to Islam. According to the report, after observing that Turks were kind-hearted and good people, Lewis concluded that their religion could not be bad either. Despite not having extensive knowledge of Islam, he decided to convert, changed his name to İrfan, and became engaged to a woman named Filiz Opa, who lived in Karamürsel.²⁴⁹ Motivated by his desire to marry a Muslim woman, these actions by İrfan provoked a strong reaction from his employer. In December 1958, *Milliyet* reported that he was dismissed from his job on the grounds that his conversion would undermine his sense of nationalism. According to the reporter, İrfan responded this decision firmly and did not back down.²⁵⁰ The dismissal of İrfan following his conversion is also a matter worth considering. As discussed above in the preceding chapter, the Karamürsel Air Station employed personnel through different contractors, the largest of which

²⁴⁷ Dyer, *I Can See Clearly Now*, p. 140.

²⁴⁸ "Bir Amerikalı Müslüman oldu," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 11 April 1968, p. 2.

²⁴⁹ "Bir Amerikalı Müslüman oldu," *Milliyet*, 20 November 1958, p. 3.

²⁵⁰ "Müslüman olan Amerikalı genç işinden çıkarıldı," *Milliyet*, 15 December 1958, p. 3. İrfan was not the only American who became Muslim in the region. *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported that an American named Jim Horod also converted to Islam in the presence of the Gölcük mufti in order to marry a woman from Değirmendere whom he had met in Germany. See: "Sevdiği kız için Amerikalı subay Müslüman oldu," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 27 August 1968, p. 1.

was TUSLOG, an official U.S. organization. It is evident that İrfan did not work for TUSLOG, as an official U.S. entity would not have prohibited the employment of a Muslim. Other contractors likely maintained a similar policy, given that the presence of Muslim soldiers in the U.S. military is well-documented.²⁵¹ This situation suggests that İrfan may have been dismissed from his job for another reason and adopted such discourse to strengthen his position.

Conversion events resulted from various cultural interactions. Some American personnel adopted Islam, motivated either by an interest in the religion or, seemingly most often, by a desire to marry Muslim women. In any case, the decision to convert reflects the depth of their engagement with the local culture. This indicates that the intercultural exchanges between personnel stationed at overseas bases and the local population involve complex and varied dynamics.

Conflicts Caused by American Personnel and Governmental Reactions

While acts of conversion did not seem to provoke major unrest in Karamürsel, disturbances involving American personnel —often in the form of acts deemed immoral by the locals and petty crimes— had the potential to do so. For instance, the local community, who considered public displays of affection such as kissing in the street as immoral, felt compelled to intervene in such situations.²⁵² Similar events also occurred in Yalova, where, according to Ahmet İsvan, locals experienced the full impact of living alongside a group from an entirely different cultural and economic background. İsvan described this experience as a “culture shock.” For instance, when the local population first encountered women who dressed more

²⁵¹ Robin Wright, “Humayun Khan Isn’t the Only Muslim American Hero,” *The New Yorker*, 15.08.2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/humayun-khan-isnt-the-only-muslim-american-hero>. Date of Access: 31 August 2024.

²⁵² Interview with İsmail Peker.

revealingly and interacted freely with men, contrary to local norms, they initially perceived these women as promiscuous. However, over time, they came to view this behavior simply a cultural difference.²⁵³ Given that the people of Yalova experienced this cultural conflict, it can be said that the region struggled to establish a shared life with people with different daily and cultural practices.

While conflicts arising from cultural differences were often resolved in daily encounters over time, there were incidents that required intervention by law enforcement. These incidents occasionally made their way into the media. For example, in 1968, two American officers were detained by the police in Yalova after being reported by locals for swimming completely naked. During their interrogation, the officers stated that swimming in such a manner was considered normal in their culture.²⁵⁴ Besides behaviors deemed immoral, offences committed by or against American personnel also required the intervention of law enforcement. Possession of marijuana for trafficking or use was among the most common offenses in the 1960s and 1970s. A 1966 report published in *Milliyet* stated that five American marijuana traffickers staying at a hotel in Karamürsel were apprehended. According to the report, the Americans, found with two kilograms of marijuana, were caught when selling the substance to the hotel clerk.²⁵⁵ While their stay at a hotel suggests the traffickers were not military personnel, it was likely that their awareness of the drug trade in the area came through connections with the base personnel. In 1972, following the detection of a marijuana trafficking incident in Karamürsel, three Americans and a Turk were detained. The Americans stated that the marijuana had been supplied to them by a person named İlhami Türkmen.²⁵⁶ Türkmen's name surfaced again in

²⁵³ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, p. 243.

²⁵⁴ "Plajda çınlıplak iki Amerikalı savcılığa verildi," *Milliyet*, 11 June 1968, p. 3.

²⁵⁵ "Esrar kaçakçısı 5 Amerikalı yakalandı," *Milliyet*, 8 June 1966, p. 1.

²⁵⁶ "Esrarcı 3 Amerikalı astsubay gözaltında," *Milliyet*, 6 December 1972, p. 1 and 9; "İlçemiz Polisinin yakaladığı esrar kaçakçısı 3 Amerikalı hakkındaki soruşturma derinleştiriliyor," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 8 December 1972, p. 1.

1974, when Michael McSmith and William Schneider, the sons of American non-commissioned officers, were apprehended with ten kilograms of marijuana. During their testimonies, McSmith and Schneider implicated an American officer, Robert Franke, in whose house the police uncovered an additional kilogram of marijuana. All three stated that they had obtained the marijuana from İlhami Türkmen, who was later caught in his residence with five kilograms of marijuana. The four suspects were arrested by the court.²⁵⁷ In 1975, another American non-commissioned officer named Sceme Jones and his Turkish associate Atan Köylüoğlu were caught with marijuana and subsequently arrested.²⁵⁸ Jones was sentenced to thirty months in prison.²⁵⁹

In regions hosting American military bases in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Germany increases in prostitution and sexual violence against women were observed.²⁶⁰ However, scholarly works and press reports do not highlight a similar pattern in Türkiye. The existence of the American base did not seem to produce a noticeable increase in sexual violence in Karamürsel. Nevertheless, some incidents were still documented, with the victims being mostly American women, unlike in other countries. In 1962, an American sergeant named Nickson attempted to assault a twenty-five-year-old woman from Karamürsel and was sentenced to twenty-eight months in prison and fined 100 liras.²⁶¹ According to a 1973 report in *Milliyet*, two “negro” American soldiers stationed in Karamürsel escaped from prison and assaulted and tortured the wife of an American doctor in Ankara.²⁶² Three years later, an

²⁵⁷ “ABD’li bir assubayla 2 astsubay çocuğunda 11 kilo esrar bulundu,” *Milliyet*, 2 May 1974, p. 1.

²⁵⁸ “Esrarla yakalanan Amerikalı astsubay dün tutuklandı,” *Milliyet*, 2 September 1975, p. 3.

²⁵⁹ “Amerikalı bir astsubay 30 ay hapis yatacak,” *Milliyet*, 4 April 1976, p. 6.

²⁶⁰ Akemi Johnson, *Night in the American Village: Women in the Shadow of the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa* (London and New York: The New Press, 2019), Seungsook Moon, “Regulating Desire, Managing the Empire: U.S. Military Prostitution in South Korea, 1945-1952,” *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, ed. Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), Maria Höhn, “‘You Can’t Pin Sergeant’s Stripes on an Archangel’: Soldiering, Sexuality, and U.S. Army Policies in Germany,” in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, ed. Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁶¹ “Bir Amerika’lı çavuş 28 aya mahkum oldu,” *Milliyet*, 26 October 1962, p. 3.

²⁶² “Cezaevinden kaçan 2 zenci Ankara’da bir kadına tecavüz etti,” *Milliyet*, 1 November 1973, p. 11. Turkish people exhibited a distinct approach toward Black American personnel, a phenomenon that was also reflected in

American lieutenant and a captain attempted to bring a woman employed in U.S. Consulate in Istanbul onto Karamürsel Air Station in their car. When stopped by Turkish personnel at the gate, the Americans claimed that they would drop the woman off at her home. Yet, shortly afterwards, they were caught “partying (*alem yapmak*) with her inside the base and were subsequently arrested.”²⁶³

In cases involving offenses such marijuana use and sexual violence against women, U.S. authorities consented to the intervention of the Turkish judiciary. However, in other cases, they often adopted a different course of action. According to the NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), jurisdiction for crimes committed during official duties primarily rested with the sending state. This provision was amended in 1956 to include the phrase “in the performance of official duty” alongside “by reason of official duty.”²⁶⁴ Thus, when the highest-ranking American commander in Türkiye submitted a document stating that the act, recognized as a crime, had been committed during or as a result of official duties, Turkish authorities were to accept it and transfer the case file to their American counterparts, regardless of the stage of investigation.²⁶⁵ Among the most common incidents where the Americans followed this path were traffic accidents.

With the activation of the Karamürsel Air Station and the settlement of Americans in the region, the number of automobiles began to increase, creating a pressing need for traffic police, according to press reports.²⁶⁶ For instance, in 1970, *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported that there were 5,578 motor vehicles in Kocaeli, with Karamürsel accounting for a significant portion of

the press of the period. Black individuals were referred to not only as “Americans” but also specifically as “Negroes”. For an example, see: Adanadaki Amerikan aleyhtarı halk hareketi,” *YÖN* 6, no. 220 (1967): 7.

²⁶³ “Üsse Kadın,” *Milliyet*, 23 February 1976, pp. 1 and 10.

²⁶⁴ Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, pp. 252-253. According to Bölme’s account, Turkish officials presented this amendment as a correction of a translation mistake in the previous text to avoid issues in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM). However, with the additions made, the change went beyond merely correcting a translation mistake and effectively resulted in the creation of a new legal provision.

²⁶⁵ Tunçkanat, *İkili Anlaşmaların İçyüzü*, pp. 232-236.

²⁶⁶ “Günden Güne Vasıta Sayısı Çoğalan İlçemizde,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 2 March 1967, p. 1.

this number due to the American base.²⁶⁷ Along with the increased visibility of motor vehicles came newspaper reports of accidents. Two separate reports from local dailies detailed fatal accidents involving American personnel working at the Karamürsel Air Base in 1958. In one of these cases, the driver was reported to have been arrested, while in the other, found not guilty.²⁶⁸ The following year, *Milliyet* highlighted the growing number of accidents with the headline: “Two More Americans Involved in Accidents.” The headline was followed by a report noting that two Americans stationed in Karamürsel had seriously injured their victims in separate accidents, leading to investigations against them.²⁶⁹

Traffic accidents caused by Americans continued in subsequent years. In 1962, two reports published in *Milliyet* four days apart mentioned two fatal accidents. According to the first one, an investigation had been initiated against an American sergeant who struck and killed a Turkish worker.²⁷⁰ The second mentioned one an American private who killed a woman but was released after questioning.²⁷¹ Similarly, a 1968 report noted that an American non-commissioned officer hit and killed a villager with his car and was released after it was determined that he was on duty at the time of the accident.²⁷² In these reports, Americans were identified by their ranks, while the Turkish victims were labeled as “worker,” “woman,” and “villager,” and the term “to crush (*ezmek*)” was used instead of “causing death by accident.”

Ahmet İsvan recounted similar incidents in Yalova. He mentioned an American officer who struck and killed the grandson of a farmer named Talip Ağa with his car. The local community apprehended the officer and brought him to court. Upon learning of the situation, U.S. authorities promptly prepared a duty document and presented it to the court. Just as the

²⁶⁷ “Kocaelide araç sayısı hızla artıyor,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 1 May 1970, p. 1.

²⁶⁸ “Amerikalı Bir Çavuş Bir Çocuğu Ezdi,” *Milliyet*, 17 April 1958, p. 3; “Üç trafik kazasında 1 kişi öldü 13 kişi yaralandı,” *Milliyet*, 8 December 1958, p. 3.

²⁶⁹ “İki Amerikalı Daha Kaza Yaptı,” *Milliyet*, 19 November 1959, p. 5.

²⁷⁰ “Amerikalı bir çavuş, bir işçiyi ezerek öldürdü,” *Milliyet*, 18 March 1962, p. 7.

²⁷¹ “Amerikalı bir er, bir kadını ezerek öldürdü,” *Milliyet*, 22 March 1962, p. 5.

²⁷² “Amerikalı bir astsubay, bir köylüyü ezdi,” *Milliyet*, 30 April 1968, p. 3.

judge was about to issue a ruling, Talip Ağa stated that he had called his grandson over, causing the boy to run into the road because and that the American was not at fault. This testimony led to the officer's release. According to İsvan, had the case been transferred to the American judiciary, Talip Ağa could have received substantial compensation. Talip Ağa, he argued, was aware of this but still declared the American's innocence for fear of earning unlawfully obtained (*haram*) money.²⁷³ Selin M. Bölme also notes that compensation was paid to the families of the victims in a similar case in Eskişehir.²⁷⁴ This shows that U.S. authorities often succeeded in ensuring that their personnel involved in traffic accidents were not prosecuted. Instead of facing imprisonment, they were required to pay compensation.

It seems that U.S. authorities were also mostly successful in preventing the local press from covering offenses committed by their personnel. Incidents reported in national newspapers, such as traffic accidents and drug smuggling, were entirely absent from the consulted local publications. *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported only one traffic accident involving an American driver who flipped his car after making a sudden maneuver to avoid an oncoming vehicle.²⁷⁵ Meanwhile, it reported numerous fatal traffic accidents involving Turkish citizens, including state officials²⁷⁶ This selective reporting suggests that the U.S. authorities undertook serious efforts at the local level to prevent unrest against the Karamürsel base and their personnel there.

Crimes Committed Against Americans by Locals

²⁷³ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, pp. 241-242.

²⁷⁴ NARA, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files (1955-1959), US-Bases Turkey, September 12, 1957. Cited in Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, pp. 253-254.

²⁷⁵ "İlçemiz civarında kaza serileri devam ediyor," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 3 May 1965, p. 1.

²⁷⁶ For instance: "Ölüm yolu sürat yüzünden bir kurban daha verdi," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 25 April 1972, p. 1; Altınova'dan sonra Ereğli'de meydana gelen trafik kazasında bir genç feci şekilde öldü," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 15 February 1973, p. 1.

The problems that arose following the arrival of Americans in the region were not solely caused by the newcomers. Locals also committed various offenses against Americans, with theft apparently being the most common in both Karamürsel and other base areas, since goods from these establishments and American homes could be marketed at profitable prices.²⁷⁷ In 1964, the house of an American was burgled while he was away, and an investigation into the incident was launched.²⁷⁸ That same year, in Kayacık neighborhood, known as the “American Neighborhood” due to the high concentration of American residents, a burglary occurred while an American family was sleeping, resulting in the theft of clothing. *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported this burglary case in the neighborhood and complained that such incidents had been occurring intermittently for the past eight months.²⁷⁹ The paper suggested increasing security measures, expanding the police force, and monitoring vehicles with foreign license plates to prevent such incidents. Although Americans began reducing off-base settlements in the 1970s, incidents of theft continued. In late 1971, a thief broke into the homes of three Americans, two of whom lived in the same neighborhood, stealing items such as radios, tape players, clothing, and jewelry. Following an investigation, the police identified and arrested the thief, who was a Turkish national and a former employee at the Karamürsel Air Station. The detainee then disclosed the names of the individuals to whom he had sold the stolen goods, enabling authorities to recover the items and return them to the Americans.²⁸⁰

In addition to the homes of Americans, thieves also targeted the base itself.²⁸¹ In 1964, cables worth 10,000 liras were reported to be stolen. Shortly afterward, the gendarmerie

²⁷⁷ The homes of Americans in Adana, where there was a U.S. airbase and a U.S. company was building a dam, often became targets of theft. See “Baraj Lojmanlarına Hırsızlar Dadandı,” *Bugün*, 25 April 1959. I would like to thank Can Nacar for sharing with me this and other news items from *Bugün*, published in Adana.

²⁷⁸ “D. dereden sonra ilçemizde de hırsızlar can yaktı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 7 August 1964, p. 1.

²⁷⁹ “Kayacık Mahallesinde yine bir Amerikalı’nın evi soyuldu,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 23 November 1964, pp. 1 and 4.

²⁸⁰ “Polisin Başarısı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 11 January 1972, p. 1.

²⁸¹ In the late 1950s, reports also appeared in the press regarding the theft of items and materials such as automobile tires, ammunition, iron, and cutlery from the İncirlik Air Base in Adana. See “İncirlik Hava Alanından Lastik Çalan Hırsızlar,” *Bugün*, 2 April 1958; “İncirlikde Askeri Depo Soyuldu,” *Bugün*, 4 January

apprehended one of the culprits,²⁸² who revealed the identities of the others, all of whom were subsequently arrested.²⁸³ A year later, several individuals from Karamürsel and Yalova were caught while making theft at the base.²⁸⁴ One of the largest theft incidents targeting the base occurred in 1967, when a father and his two sons stole copper pipes, coupling heads, metal shears, tube paste, beds, chairs, barrels, and containers. The thieves were apprehended with the stolen items after a report was made to the gendarmerie.²⁸⁵

The sources consulted show that at least one of the theft incidents led to an armed conflict. When two armed individuals attempted to enter the base at night in January 1965, an armed confrontation ensued after a warning from the Turkish soldier on guard. The sentry was injured, and the identities of the two assailants remained unknown.²⁸⁶ This confrontation necessitated precautionary measures by the Turkish state. The Ministry of the Interior decided to establish a police station at Karamürsel Air Station a few days after the incident.²⁸⁷ This station, staffed by one commissioner and three officers, was tasked with protecting the base from external threats and conducting investigations into crimes targeting the base. Such measures, along with the social policies of the base command discussed below, made the base relatively secure and gave it a degree of legitimacy among the local people.

Nevertheless, as reported by a leftist publication, protests could not be completely avoided. The fourth issue of *İleri*, the publication of the Revolutionary Youth Federation of Türkiye (*Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu* [DEV-GENÇ]), featured an article titled “A Worker's Diary (*Bir İşçinin Günlüğü*).” It recounted that workers imprisoned in Kartal Prison

1959; “İncirlik Hava Alanından Demir Çalmışlar,” *Bugün*, 26 February 1959; “İncirlik H. Alanından Çatal ve Kaşık Çalındı,” *Bugün*, 26 September 1959.

²⁸² “Hava Alanında Hırsızlık,” *Şirin Karamürsel*, 13 March 1964, p. 1.

²⁸³ “Meydandan tel çalan hırsızlar yakalandı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 16 March 1964, pp. 1-2.

²⁸⁴ “Hava Alanında iki hırsız yakalandı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 23 February 1965, p. 1.

²⁸⁵ “Baba iki oğul Nato Hava alanında hırsızlık yaptı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 31 January 1967, p. 1.

²⁸⁶ “NATO Üssüne girmek isteyen meçhul şahıslar nöbetçiye yaraladılar,” *Milliyet*, 24 January 1965, p. 1;

“İlçemizin NATO Alanındaki olay,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 28 January 1965, p. 1.

²⁸⁷ “Nato Hava Alanında Polis Teşkilatı Kuruldu,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 26 January 1965, p. 1.

were accused of shouting slogans such as “Down with America (*Kahrolsun Amerika*),” “Independent Türkiye (*Bağımsız Türkiye*),” and “National Army (*Milli Ordu*)” in front of the Karamürsel American base in 1970. The article also claimed that whenever protests involving workers, peasants, or students occurred anywhere in Türkiye, Americans would quickly seek refuge at the Karamürsel Air Station using the fastest available vehicles.²⁸⁸ While the sources I consulted during my research do not corroborate it, this account in *İleri* suggests there were some protests against the presence of the base and Turkish state tried to ensure the security.

American Women and Children in Karamürsel

Social policies, as briefly mentioned above, played an important role in preventing the spread of such protests. A key actor behind these policies was the American women at the base. The base hosted a considerable number of women, including American and Turkish employees as well as the family members of male personnel.²⁸⁹ One of the primary workplaces for women was the Dependent School. For example, the 1970 yearbook listed twenty-six American female teachers and staff.²⁹⁰ Apart from their professional roles, women were also visible at the base through their organizations. One of these organizations was formed by the wives of officers and civilians was the Karamürsel Officers’ and Civilians’ Wives Club (KOCWC). The club had a hierarchical structure with a president, recording secretary, treasurer, and corresponding secretary. One of its regular activities was monthly luncheons, where members gathered to welcome new members and elect officers to serve six-month terms.²⁹¹ Besides this, in 1962, the

²⁸⁸ “Bir İşçinin Günlüğü,” *İleri*, no. 4 (1970): 21.

²⁸⁹ No female soldiers serving at the American base were identified in the sources which were utilized in this thesis.

²⁹⁰ *The Minaret: Karamürsel Dependent School Yearbook 1969-1970*, (Karamürsel: 1970), pp. 6-11.

²⁹¹ Mary Ann Hesseltine, “KOCWC Elects New Officers,” *The Sentinel*, 22 December 1961, p. 4. In January and February 1962, 41 members attended the monthly luncheon of this club. See: “KOCWC Elect New Officers: Luncheon Held,” *The Sentinel*, 26 January 1962, p. 3; “41 Attend KOCWC Monthly Luncheon,” *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 3.

club planned to organize a Christmas ball and songfest. It also arranged a mixed bowling league and an amateur chef's night.²⁹² The club's activities, however, did not remain limited to the base. In the early 1960s, its members initiated a social project to provide a refrigerator for the Yalova Hospital. In two years, with contributions from other establishments such as former American Women's Club, the Protestant Vacation Bible School, and the NCO Wives' Club, this project achieved its goal.²⁹³ At the ceremony held to deliver the refrigerator to the hospital, all these organizations were represented by their members, and Turkish authorities were also in attendance. The activities organized by women's clubs formed were part of the "unofficial ambassadors" ideal described by Donna Alvah. According to Alvah, while U.S. officers, with their uniforms, weapons, and association with the military base, represented the masculine face of American policy, their wives and children embodied its feminine side. Women and children were often more persuasive than men in conveying the message of goodwill and cooperation, thereby playing a supportive role in achieving the military and diplomatic objectives of the United States.²⁹⁴

Another club formed by the women of the base was the NCO Wives' Club, which had a hierarchical structure similar to that of KOCWC, with members electing a president, vice president, treasurer, assistant treasurer, secretary, and corresponding secretary for six-month terms.²⁹⁵ The club's activities included health-awareness film screenings, poetry contests, luncheons, and hot dog parties.²⁹⁶ Its members were also involved in various philanthropic activities, one of which was the abovementioned "Project Refrigerator." Moreover, they provided financial support to successful or needy students at the Dependent School. For

²⁹² "Wives Plan Ball, Songfest During Coming Holidays," *The Sentinel*, 14 December 1962, p. 3.

²⁹³ "Two-Year KOCWC Project Completed," *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 3.

²⁹⁴ Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors*, pp. 2-3.

²⁹⁵ "Lee Hodge Is NCO Wives' Club Prexy," *The Sentinel*, 14 December 1962, p. 4.

²⁹⁶ "NCO Wives Club Notes," *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 3.; "Hot Dogs," *The Sentinel*, 3 August 1962, p. 4.

example, a photograph in the school's 1970 yearbook shows two students receiving cheques from the club's representative.²⁹⁷ Another women's organization at the base was the Protestant Women of Chapel. Its members met monthly at the NCO Club, with guest speakers—mostly religious figures—in attendance. For example, Father Nick Stengel, the Greek Orthodox Priest of Germany who was studying at the Heybeliada (Halki) Theological School was invited in February 1962.²⁹⁸

Different from women, children on the base spent much of their time at school, even though they benefited from recreational activities offered within the Karamürsel Air Station. The school primarily served the children of families stationed at the base. However, due to its boarding facilities, children from other locations—including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Somalia, Iran, Jordan, Rhodes, Adana, Uganda, Greece, Crete, and Cyprus—were also enrolled until the 1970–71 academic year. The school offered a variety of sports activities, and student teams participated in competitions against teams from the Ankara, İncirlik, and İzmir bases.²⁹⁹ The school clubs also covered diverse activities such as chess, science, French,³⁰⁰ debate, and drama,³⁰¹ providing students with opportunities for both personal development and leisure. Additionally, students actively participated in organizations like the music band,³⁰² the school newspaper,³⁰³ and the yearbook committee.³⁰⁴ Thus, the school not only provided students with a high-quality education but also offered numerous activities that allowed them to develop their social and intellectual skills.

²⁹⁷ *The Minaret: Karamursel Dependent School Yearbook 1969-1970*, (Karamürsel: 1970), p. 4.

²⁹⁸ "PMOC Slate Meeting Today," *The Sentinel*, 23 February 1962, p. 1. Title of this article was written wrong. There was another organization that was formed by men named Protestant Men of Chapel (PMOC), but the content of this article mentioned Protestant women.

²⁹⁹ "Karamursel Schools History," AOSHS, <https://aoshs.org/collections/school-histories/eu/tr/717/>. Date of Access: 1 December 2024.

³⁰⁰ *The KAS ROWD: Karamursel Dependant School Yearbook 1966-67*, pp. 22-24.

³⁰¹ *The Minaret 1975*, pp. 87 and 90.

³⁰² *The Minaret 1977*, p. 61.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 58-59.

³⁰⁴ *The Minaret 1970*, p. 70.

Although Donna Alvah described American families serving abroad as “unofficial ambassadors,” cultural differences and language barriers often prevented the establishment of strong and lasting relationships between Turkish and American families and their children. Additionally, the fact that American children did not frequently share the same environment with the locals further hindered the formation of such relationships. For example, in her study on families stationed at the American base in Balgat, Charlotte Wolf has showed that none of the American children attended Turkish schools.³⁰⁵ The sources consulted suggest that the same was the case for Karamürsel. Ahmet İsvan has, for instance noted that children of American families living outside the base also attended the school within Karamürsel Air Station.³⁰⁶ In 1966, *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported that the Dependent School at the Karamürsel American Base had chosen the Karamürsel Havuzdere Primary School as “sister school,” and its principal, along with his team, visited Havuzdere to address the school’s needs.³⁰⁷ The report, however, made no mention of any direct interaction between the students of the two schools.

These barriers were by no means insurmountable. At times, families were able to form strong relationships with one another. Ahmet İsvan, for instance, has noted in his memoirs that his family was close to an American Lieutenant Colonel named Lee and his family. Despite the language barrier, İsvan’s children became friends with Lee’s children. When Lee’s wife was about to undergo surgery, and no other American family was willing to take care of the children, İsvan’s family stepped in, deeply moving the lieutenant colonel. While recounting this event, İsvan argued that it showed how Turkish culture was superior to American culture in terms of generosity and helpfulness, apparently as a way to compensate for the inferiority complex experienced by locals vis-à-vis the Americans.³⁰⁸ In any case, this event was significant in

³⁰⁵ Wolf, *Garrison Community*, p. 153.

³⁰⁶ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye* p. 247.

³⁰⁷ “Havuzdere köyü ilkokulu kardeş okul seçildi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 26 December 1966, p. 1-2.; İbrahim Tok, “Kardeş Okul,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 27 December 1966, p. 1.

³⁰⁸ İsvan, *Köprüler, Gelip Geçmeye*, pp. 246-247.

demonstrating that strong cooperative relationships could be established between Turkish and American families in the region.

Besides such family-level interactions, some officers undertook individual efforts outside the base to foster engagement with the local community and thereby promote American cultural practices. According to Donna Alvah, the perception of American male officers, representing the masculine side of the U.S. policies, shifted to a more civilian, and thus more feminine, mode when they were off-base and out of uniform. In this context, their interactions with the local population could be seen as adopting a more equal, and therefore more persuasive, stance. An example of this was the free English lessons offered by David W. Kinney, a U.S. officer stationed at Karamürsel Air Station, to local children outside his duty hours in the early 1960s. Kinney's efforts, praised in the local newspapers *Şirin Karamürsel* and *Karamürsel Ekspres*, enhanced both his own image and that of the Americans in the eyes of the community.³⁰⁹ However, efforts to systematize initiatives similar to Kinney's ended in failure. For example, in 1968, another American volunteered to teach English courses planned by the Karamürsel Youth Club for the local community, but the initiative could not be implemented due to the lack of suitable classrooms.³¹⁰

Institutionalized Philanthropy by U.S. Authorities

The charitable activities of American families, whether through clubs or through individual efforts, were not the only philanthropic initiatives in the region. In order to mitigate the social unrest caused by American personnel and to legitimize the American presence in the

³⁰⁹ "Bir Amerikalının örnek hareketi," *Şirin Karamürsel*, 4 April 1964, p. 1; "Örnek bir insan büyük Türk dostu Amerikalı Hava Ast Subayı David W. Kinney'in örnek hareketi halkımız tarafından taktirle karşılandı," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 18 August 1964, p. 1.

³¹⁰ Z. Mehmet Tören, "Doğrusu Üzüldük," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 8 April 1968, pp. 1-2.

area, the base command institutionalized aid activities targeting the Karamürsel municipality and the local population. For example in the mid-1960s, it donated at least four trucks to the Karamürsel Municipality.³¹¹ In the same period, nine luxury buses were provided for a field trip for students of the Atatürk Elementary School to examine historical artifacts, a move that, according to press reports, was appreciated by both the children and their families.³¹² In late 1972, *Karamürsel Ekspres* requested that the Governorate of Kocaeli provide a vehicle for the district's police force. However, it was not the governorate but the Karamürsel Air Station Command that responded to this request. It donated a 1964 Dodge pickup, facilitating motorized patrols and other operational duties for the police.³¹³ Not long after, the base command also provided an ambulance to the health center in Karamürsel and began to permit Turkish patients, including traffic accident victims, to be treated at the base hospital.³¹⁴ This was an important move because the local health center lacked the necessary facilities and did not have a full-time surgeon until 1974.³¹⁵

The contributions by the Karamürsel Air Station Command were not limited to motor vehicles. In 1964, the command provided a landfill to the Karamürsel Municipality for operational purposes, and the municipality leased it that same year for 61,000 liras.³¹⁶ After the three-year lease period ended, the landfill was auctioned again in 1968 for 136,000 liras, becoming an important source of revenue for the municipality.³¹⁷ In 1971, the three-year lease

³¹¹ Belediye Hava Alanından Vasıta Aldı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 22 December 1965, p. 1; “Hava-Alanından temin edilen 3 kamyon ilçemize getirildi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 23 March 1966, p. 1.

³¹² “Hava Alanı Kumandanlığının güzel bir hareketi büyük memnuniyet yarattı,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 10 May 1966, p. 1.

³¹³ “Neşriyatımız Olumlu Sonuç Verdi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 23 December 1972, p. 1; “İlçemiz emniyetine hava alanından sağlanan pikap hizmete girdi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 22 January 1973, p.1-2.

³¹⁴ “Gazetemizin ele aldığı hayati sorunlardan biri daha gerçekleşti,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 10 October 1974, p. 1.

³¹⁵ “Hayret Doğrusu,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 29 May 1974, p. 1-2; “Devamlı Neşriyatımız nihayet olumlu cevap verdi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 12 November 1974, pp. 1-2.

³¹⁶ “Hava alanı çöplüğü 61 bin liraya ihale edildi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 15 December 1964, p. 1.

³¹⁷ “Belediyeye hibe edilmiş olan Karamürsel Hava Alanı çöplüğü senelik 136 bin liraya ihale edildi,” *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 30 January 1968, p. 1.

price rose to 217.000 liras.³¹⁸ Initially, the landfill was used to collect and sell usable items. However, over time, it was mismanaged, leading not only a decrease in profits for the contractor but also to complaints from the local population as it attracted flies.³¹⁹

The base command also provided various forms of assistance to individual residents of Karamürsel and nearby villages. In 1968, Hüseyin Türkmen, the headman of Subaşı village, publicly expressed gratitude to the base command for meeting the village's needs and contributing to its beautification.³²⁰ The following year, a local resident named İsmail Fedai extended his thanks to the command for sending a rescue vehicle to save his marine transport engine, which had run aground and was at risk of breaking apart during a storm.³²¹ Through such actions, the American presence gained a more positive image in the eyes of the local community.

Indeed, these initiatives were in general well received by the local population, who came to view the base command almost as a local governing authority. For example, in 1965, *Karamürsel Ekspres* reported that parents of Karamürsel students attending school in Gölcük expressed the need for winter transportation to and from school. Several of them approached the newspaper administration, asking it to relay their request for a vehicle to operate between Karamürsel and Gölcük to the base command.³²² The fact that this request was directed to the base command, rather than to local authorities such as the governor, district governor, or mayor, highlights the base's perceived role within the community. It also reflects the local perception

³¹⁸ "Belediyeye ait çöp ve hurdalık dün rekor sayılan bir bedelle yıllık 217 bin liradan ihale edildi," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 4 March 1971, p. 1.

³¹⁹ "Hava Alanı çöplüğünde sinekler yüzbinlerce üremeğe başladı," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 16 April 1969, p. 1; "Belediye başkanlığının dikkatini çekiyoruz," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 26 April 1969, p. 1.

³²⁰ "Subaşı Muhtarlığından," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 17 July 1968, p. 1.

³²¹ "İnsani ve örnek hareketlerinden dolayı Karamürsel Hava Alanı Komutanlığına Açık Teşekkür," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 5 February 1969, p. 1.

³²² Ferhan Kalyon, "Gölcük'te Tahsile Devam Eden," *Karamürsel Ekspres*, 24 November 1965, p. 1.

of the Americans' technological and logistical capabilities, underscoring their influence and presence in the region.

Conclusion

The American base, having already secured the consent of the local population by providing employment and profit opportunities in the region, also endeavored to extend this acceptance into the cultural sphere. For this purpose, both systematic and individual initiatives were undertaken, ranging from sports tournaments and music concerts to philanthropic and educational activities. However, it is not possible to claim that the personnel stationed at the base shared a common agenda for establishing egalitarian relationships with the local population. Although there were accounts of close relationships between American and local families, these remained limited. Moreover, an Orientalist perspective was dominant in the narratives and forms of entertainment of some personnel. Also, the presence of an American air base with a large foreign staff had the potential to cause serious unrest in Karamürsel and the neighboring region, forcing both the U.S. and Turkish governments to take specific measures. Through these measures, particularly social policies, the U.S. authorities sought to gain the consent of the local population and make the station an attractive posting for current and future personnel. Meanwhile, although Turkish authorities recognized the hierarchical superiority of the U.S., they did not approve every demand from their American counterparts. Besides stepping up efforts to tighten control over the bases in the 1970s, they at times also sought to have American personnel penalized for offenses they committed, aiming to mitigate public and political opposition. In this context, the aid provided by the base command to the local population and the positive image it cultivated facilitated the work of Turkish officials.

CHAPTER 4:

CONCLUSION

The “Elephant Cage” in Karamürsel, which monitored the Soviet Union and controlled the Turkish straits as a frontline outpost (*ileri karakol*) for the U.S. against the USSR, symbolized Türkiye’s alignment with the US-led Western bloc.³²³ For the local community, however, its significance lay chiefly in the new employment opportunities it created. Each working day, hundreds of people commuted to the base and returned home at the end of their shifts. Many had no major issues with the base’s presence and were unaware it was an American base, calling it the “airfield” or “NATO base.”³²⁴ In the mid-1960s, workers even appealed to NATO officials to resolve disputes with their employers at the base.³²⁵

The local workers employed at the Karamürsel Air Station were hierarchically subordinate to the Americans. Although TUSLOG and other contracting companies often offered better wages and working conditions than those in other sectors in Türkiye, this did not bridge the hierarchical gap between local and the American personnel. While the American staff could meet almost all their needs on the base, the Turkish workers lacked even a cafeteria where they could eat. This situation led to the workers’ efforts to organize and ultimately form unions. The unionization efforts remained focused on improving workplace conditions, and for this purpose, the workers occasionally staged strikes and protests to assert their demands against their employer.

³²³ The phrase “Frontline outpost (*ileri karakol*)” was used for Türkiye for its relationship with NATO, even in Cold War years. See: A. Haluk Ülman, “NATO ve Türkiye,” *AÜSBF Dergisi*, 4 (1967):151.

³²⁴ Erdoğan Özdemir states that the local population referred to this base as an “airport” and that most people assumed it was a NATO base. See: Özdemir, *Kaptan-ı Derya*, pp. 249-250.

³²⁵ “Türkiyedeki üslerde NATO taraf değildir,” *Cumhuriyet*, 9 December 1965, pp. 1 and 7.

The union's lack of broader leftist political objectives was likely related to the weak influence of leftist movements in the region. In the 1960s, TİP, the most prominent representative of the left in Türkiye's mainstream politics, had no grassroots support in Karamürsel. In the 1968 local elections, Ali Caydı, the TİP candidate for Karamürsel mayor and one of the founders of TÜNATOS, received only twenty votes in the district center. Until the 1977 local elections—which the center-left CHP won by a narrow margin of forty-two votes—right-wing parties had consistently dominated local elections. This weakness of the left also hindered the emergence of strong well-established local movements opposing the American presence. Many locals did not view the American base negatively, seeing it as a source of livelihood through its employment and business opportunities. Among the forms of opposition to American presence in Türkiye categorized by Amy Austin Holmes, only worker strikes emerged at Karamürsel Air Station. Political opposition, street protests, or armed struggle were not approaches favored by the local population. This situation highlights not only the weakness of the left but also the success of U.S. efforts to contain potential unrest and build consent in the region.

The American presence in the region generated not only employment but also profit-making opportunities through urban space. Settlements built outside the base were among the most prominent examples of the latter. By renting houses, Americans provided significant economic benefits to the local population. As a result, locals even began constructing new houses exclusively for Americans. U.S. officials may have delayed expanding on-base housing facilities until the early 1970s precisely to sustain this source of profit, as its continuation ensured local consent to the American presence in the area.

One of the most significant indicators that the people of Karamürsel consented to the U.S. presence in the region was the integration of American goods into the local

commercial life. Products illegally introduced into the market from the PX store on the base, or brought into the country via the American postal service and sold in shops in Karamürsel and Yalova, were in high demand. The distribution of a wide range of American-made products extended beyond local stores, as items obtained from Karamürsel were also sold in American markets across various Turkish cities, especially İstanbul. The spread of American products through these networks reflected the public's growing embrace of an American lifestyle.³²⁶ These products became part of a bourgeois lifestyle, a development that contemporary literary works did not overlook. The emphasis in Oğuz Atay's famous novel *Tutunamayanlar* on the protagonist's American-market-purchased armchair was meant to reflect this bourgeois lifestyle.³²⁷ Similarly, in Sevgi Soysal's renowned 1973 novel *Yenişehir'de Bir Öğle Vakti*, a wealthy and arrogant character appears who, begins his mercantile career by selling small goods to Americans, eventually becomes the owner of an American-style marketplace. Through this character, both Americanism and the bourgeoisie came under critique.³²⁸

American products were not the only vehicle through which American culture spread from the base to the streets of Karamürsel and the neighboring towns. Some popular American recreational activities began to permeate the local community. While several American personnel who played basketball on the base also joined Karamürsel's local team and contributed to the popularization of this sport, Turkish artists performing Western-style music were invited to perform at base events. Personnel living outside the base also played an important role in introducing and popularizing American consumption patterns and lifestyles. Until the 1970s, inadequate on-base housing forced

³²⁶ The fact that such a large number of goods were illicitly taken out of the highly secured Karamürsel Air Station may have reflected the base administration's tacit tolerance of the practice. After all, the spread of American goods in the region also meant the diffusion of the American way of life.

³²⁷ Oğuz Atay, *Tutunamayanlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2023), p. 554.

³²⁸ Sevgi Soysal, *Yenişehir'de Bir Öğle Vakti* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2001), pp. 75-90.

some personnel to rent homes in Karamürsel and the surrounding towns. They furnished these houses according to U.S. housing standards, which influenced the design of new constructions and introduced a different housing culture to the region. The relationships that American families formed with their Turkish neighbors in their off-base residences represented the more feminine side of the American presence. As Donna Alvah has noted, male officers in uniform symbolized U.S. leadership, while women and children embodied goodwill and a desire for warm relations. The above account shows that, despite language barriers, such relations were at times established, fostering cooperation between families in difficult times.

The interactions between Americans who settled in the region and the local population did not develop solely within economic and cultural contexts. The settlement of a significant number of individuals from a different country also brought about certain public order issues. Both the base and American homes became frequent targets of burglary attempts, as they contained valuable commercial and capital goods. Moreover, newspaper reports suggest that drug trafficking and traffic accidents increased after the base was established. Efforts to address these issues entailed negotiation, conflict, and cooperation between the American and Turkish governments. The U.S. authorities, on the one hand, leveraged the legal privileges that came with their leadership role in the Western bloc to protect personnel stationed in the region. On the other hand, they sought to cultivate local consent for the presence of the base by adopting the role of a generous benefactor toward the local population. Meanwhile, their Turkish counterparts worked to ensure the continued presence of military bases as a strategic ally of the United States, while also seeking to prevent incidents that could fuel the growing anti-American sentiment among the populace. These efforts reverberated in the region's social life, with

the policies pursued by both governments leaving tangible marks on the daily life of Karamürsel's inhabitants.

This thesis argues that American military bases were established not only to create a network of military cooperation against Eastern Bloc countries but also to disseminate capitalist economic principles and an American lifestyle. One of the primary reasons behind the extensive network of overseas bases was this dual purpose. While there was a continuously escalating military rivalry between the two blocs, the Cold War was, in essence, a struggle between the leading countries of both blocs to export their respective regimes. The United States utilized various means to promote its capitalist system based on an open-market economy. The above chapters contend that military bases were among these instruments. By contributing to the formation of a new economic and social order in their host regions, the bases served as conduits for the United States to transfer its economic and cultural policies and thus, acquired an identity transcending their pure military functions.

Providing a case study on the cultural and economic impacts of an American base in northwestern Anatolia between the late 1950s and late 1970s, this thesis situates itself within the framework of local history literature. Local history, which examines the lives of people within a defined geographic area through documentary evidence, also demands a comparative context on national and global scales.³²⁹ This study, hence, presents a localized narrative of everyday life in Karamürsel, compares these dynamics to other regions in Türkiye hosting American bases, and situates them within broader global literature on American military bases. By adopting this framework, the thesis not only contributes to the extensive body of local history literature surrounding American bases

³²⁹ *Encyclopedia of Local History, Second Edition*, ed. by Carol Kammen and Amy H. Wilson (New York: Altamira Press, 2013), p. vii.

but also emphasizes the distinctive features of Karamürsel. Through its integration of local and comparative contexts, the study highlights how these two dimensions can coexist to provide deeper insights into specific historical phenomena.

Today, approximately fifty years after the period covered by this thesis, Karamürsel is a much smaller region than it was during the Cold War era. The former Karamürsel Air Station now functions as a military training center under the Turkish Armed Forces, yet the memory of the Cold War years remains vivid in the area. The social and economic influences of the base's presence persist, continuing to shape the region's trajectory today. During our interview in 2023, Emin Doğansoy noted that tensions in Karamürsel, including instances of physical violence, led American personnel to settle in nearby areas such as Yalova, Değirmendere, and Gölcük. While these towns developed economically, Karamürsel lagged behind.³³⁰ Although Karamürsel's relative underdevelopment compared to neighboring districts may not be directly related to this issue, the narrative appears significant in terms of illustrating the position of the American base and Americans in the local community's collective memory. Even today, the United States is perceived by the district's residents as a "modernizing" force, and Karamürsel's lesser development compared to Gölcük and Yalova is attributed to the departure of the Americans. Thus, this thesis not only sheds light on the Cold War years but also holds potential as an important source for understanding contemporary perceptions of American presence.

³³⁰ Interview with Emin Doğansoy.

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