

Military Students within the City, on Weekend-Leaves

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Abstract

This paper basically studies the interaction of cadets with their civilian peers in a Central Anatolian city in early 1990s. The military school in question used to give a considerable boom to the relatively weak local economy in the city, a fact which the adults mostly appreciated. However, when the cadets went on leave on weekends; proud, talented and “good-shaped” as they were; they attracted the attentions of young girls. Their civilian peers reacted with envy. A competition over the admiration of girls naturally ensued. The delicate social-psychological situation easily nurtured physical conflicts in the past. Sportive confrontations especially aggravated the obvious rivalry. With the advent of the first staff-officer as the school-commandant, the trend marked a rapid change, resulting in concession from counter-aggressiveness, in the part of cadets. A stricter understanding of discipline and a more down-to-earth enforcement of the regulations did cause an abrupt change in the cadets’ attitudes. (The replacing commandants all being staff-officers as well), the street-fighting scenes eventually literally disappeared in the city.

Keywords: Jealousy; Envy; Competition; Cadet; Peer

Introduction

The essence of this work consists of a study of the relationships between the cadets of a military secondary school and the surrounding population, basically their civilian peers. At this point the definition of interaction might come handy: “The complex interplay between the person and the environment is called interactionism (Bandura 1978; Endler 1981). It suggests that human behavior results from the ongoing interaction between consistent personality^(*) dispositions and the situations in which people find themselves” [1].

In order to grasp the interaction between the school in question and the host-city; some information about the school as well as the city itself is essential.

The Military School

The school in question is the Non-Commissioned-Officers Preparatory School in the Central Anatolian city of Çankiri. A synonym for the word “non-commissioned-officer”, abbreviated as “NCO”, is “warrant officer”^(**) (Figures 1-4).

This military school is equivalent to a high-school (lycée). The students (cadets) are chosen from junior high-school graduates. Following an education of three years (which comprises academic courses as well as military courses and summer training camps) the cadets graduate.

Then they attend branch-schools (infantry, artillery, tanker, quartermaster etc.) for another year and gain their military ranks (two yellow stripes on the arms. The number of stripes augments to seven before retirement).

The City

The 50,000-populated city of Çankiri is deprived of substantial industry. Even small-scaled manufacturing sectors are far from being developed.

Commerce (with all kinds of small stores and a few bigger magazines) is the main source of making a living. The service sector is another (shoe repair shops; electrical workshops, radio and television

*Military life indeed develops certain common personality traits in the long run.

**The word “petty-officer” is more self-explanatory. But this is more of a navy term.

repair centers, tailor shops, house renting, house cleaning, baby-sitting). (Of course some government jobs are also available).

The Undeniable Economic Significance of the School

The NCO-School employs a considerable number of military and civilian personnel. All these people are the actual clients of the commerce and service sectors. Above all, there being only a limited number of official lodgings available, these people are also the renters of apartments.

The cadets themselves are also clients of restaurants, photography shops, stationary shops, billiard-saloons and pudding-shops (solely on weekends).



Figure 1: The hat-cockade of the Naval equivalent of the military school of Çankiri (Scanned by the Author —S.Ç.).

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Figure 2: Cadets were indeed favored by the girls of the city (illustration by the author himself — S.Ç.).



Figure 3: The postal stamp of the above-mentioned petty -officer preparatory school's post-office, cast in molten lead (Scanned by the Author — S.Ç.).



Figure 4: 1994-year silver-made graduation ring of the infantry petty-officer school, a training institution a level higher (Scanned by the Author — S.Ç.).

The rumor of 1991

In autumn 1991, following the general elections, a rumor began to circulate in the city: The NCO-School would be moved elsewhere (either to Bursa or to Istanbul) and a new military-unit (a basic-trainee-brigade) would be brought to occupy the present buildings, installations and facilities.

A basic-trainee-brigade keeps many newly-enlisted privates for only a short duration. Once their basic training is over (a matter of a few months); they are sent all over the country and new-comers arrive.

These privates make a lot of expenditures on the market. Especially the transportation sector (with many families and relatives coming to

visit the soldiers) gains huge profits. What is the importance of the small pocket-money of a cadet in comparison with the expenses of circulating private-population-pools, who readily spend their savings or the funds sent from home?

The entire city was bubbling up with joy! The wives of the newly-appointed officers themselves were full of hope and enthusiasm! They would quickly escape from that “small, remote, God-forsaken” place to end up either in Bursa or in Istanbul! What a piece of luck! (The officers themselves, being more realistically-oriented, were not as optimistic as their spouses, though).

How Come That Rumor Came Into Being?

“Grapevine (rumor) is an informal way of communication which usually reflects people’s wishes rather than the actual facts”. As Horton and Hunt (1976:378) put it: “People uncritically accept and believe a rumor if it fits in with their pattern of beliefs and dislikes, or if it provides an emotionally satisfying explanation of phenomena”.

A small city where the economy depends on commerce and services would of course “fancy” such a change!

At the time, a re-organization of the army was taking place anyhow. Cumbersome divisions were being converted into brigades (smaller and more moveable units). Not only had that, but a couple of compatriots of the very same city happened to be in very high points in the government at the moment!

So, after all, somebody initially had a good reason to imagine all those stories. Then the rumor found a very suitable environment to grow and spread on.

Was the Economic Aspect the Only Ground of the Rumor?

Indeed no! Something more was involved. The dream would be two hits at one throw!

The city would get rid of “troublesome adolescents” also! According to some, those “arrogant youths who stroll through the streets on weekends and engage in fights at the smallest pretext”, would finally go away!

Not all compatriots were sharing the same attitude, though. Case History: A stationary-owner said that the idea of moving the NCO-School elsewhere was totally wrong. He argued that the present institution was much better for the interests of the city. (A stationary owner gained from the cadets. But he couldn’t have possibly made much of a profit from basic-trainee-privates).

The Role of Scuffles in Myth-Building

The culmination of the rivalry of the cadets with their civilian peers used to result in frequent street brawls. The main reason was the competition over wooing girls! Sometimes, as the affairs got worse, some grown-up relatives used to take sides with the civilian peers naturally, leading into fights of bigger scales.

On one hand, Chankiri, with its relatively small population, is somewhat of a *Gemeinschaft*. “*Gemeinschaft* is a small, stable, close-knit community of people with close personal ties of kinship and friendship. The social glue that holds *Gemeinschaft* is a sense of collective identity” (Coleman 1976). “A man cooperates with his neighbors because he feels their fate is his fate” [2].

On the other hand, the economic contribution of the NCO-School

could not be underestimated. Money making had also its part to consider. In that respect, Chankiri is somewhat of a Gesellschaft.

“What holds the Gesellschaft together is interdependence? Specialization forces people to cooperate in the pursuit of self-interest” [2].

The optimum solution would thus be the replacement of the NCO-School with a basic-trainee-brigade. The rumor had good reasons to ripen.

The Advantages of the Cadets in the “Game”

The cadets were selected lads. Before sitting an entrance examination, they were chosen from among thousands of applicants through physical inspections, oral interviews and sportive tests. Eventually a health certificate from a military hospital as well as a family investigation confirmed the admission process. In short, they were well-built and athletically able youngsters (Figure 2).

The oral interview eliminating those who have speech faults or very heavy accents, those with scars or excessive pimples, those with very dark complexion, those with protruding ear lobes etc. The probability of the existence of handsome youths (as far as facial looks go) must also have been much higher than in any civilian school.

To complement all those “natural gifts”, the “fancy uniforms” were also there to consider. Moreover; those cadets were very close to obtaining their economic independence. The seniors had only one more year to get their first salaries and become “bread-winners”! This fact alone should have furnished “honorable purposes” (leading to prospective marriages) when it came to “chasing girls”.

Even the danger of “getting a girl in trouble” was not such an awful outcome. A hasty wedding (in a year of course) would have “cleared up the mistake”.

So; with all these factors working together, the average cadet obviously had an “edge” over his civilian counterpart. This is why the jealousy of the typical civilian rival was stirred up. The Dictionary of Psychology gives the following definition for the term “jealousy”: “A complex emotional state, involving a sentiment of hate by one person for another, because of the relations of both to a third; the commonest from being sexual jealousy”.

Fights between cadets and civilians used to break out on many occasions.

Case-history: A young shop-keeper narrated a “very big fight” involving many adolescents years ago. “At the time I was ten years old. For a few weeks, the cadets were forbidden from coming down town”, he explained.

Sport Competitions Aggravated the Rivalry

The inter-scholastic games like basketball, volleyball, ping-pong and wrestling used to give occasions for sharpening the existing rivalry. The civilian counterparts of the cadets among the spectators sometimes shouted out demeaning cheering and ironical boing phrases like:

“Soldiers are those!” (asker bunlar!)

“So the country is supposed to be consigned to them!”

(vatan onlara emanetmiş!).

(Citing all those trifling facts is a matter of sociological objectivity here. Such puerile conflicts do happen among adolescents. In actuality, Chankiri is a very much patriotic city indeed!)

It is interesting to note that the cadet spectators always retorted back very politely in accordance with military courtesy:

“We are cultured youths! We don’t use such swear-words!”

(Biz kültürlü gençleriz; küfür etmeyiz!)

“We are all brothers! /We are all together in the service!”

(Hepimiz kardeşiz; askerde beraberiz!)

In a conflicting situation, “the desire to assault the opponent originates from the belief that the opponent is superior”. [Indeed] “High on the list of troublesome problems confronting many (college) students are those arising from feelings of inferiority. Logically and psychologically, a person can get a notion of inferiority only by comparing himself to a standard. The individual who exhibits (the inferiority) symptoms is usually shy and retiring in manner. Sometimes however, the behavioral picture takes the form of overt aggressiveness instead of retirement”[3].

It is also worth mentioning that a similar psychology was prevailing in the Western Anatolian city of Eskişehir in late 1970s: Whenever the much admired (or even much envied) Anatolian Lycée (the so-called privileged “kolej”^{(*)3}, where the medium of science instruction was English) sport teams were confronting

other school teams, almost the entire spectators invariably picked up the other schools to win and cheered against the Anatolian Lycée in the following manner:

“Faggot school! Faggot school, fag-got!”

Cadet Psychology Profile

It is a known fact that in a military environment, one depends on his comrade-in-arm in many respects. Cadets, being no exception, also form very cohesive groups, where solidarity takes on very significant meanings in daily life. For any cadet who is inadequate in any sense, identification with his group provides relief and counseling.

“Identification reaction occurs when one relieves tension through the achievements of other persons or groups. Identification is not restricted to childhood. Continual reference to “my club”, “my school” etc. shows the prevalence of identification” [3].

“Another conspicuous characteristic of cadet psychology is pride”. The psychological dictionary [4] defines the word “pride” as “excessively strong self-sentiment” [5] provide us with a thorough analysis of cadets of the *Coast Guard Academy* in the U.S. But, they seem to have captured the basics of the military sentiments. Some of what they present under the subtitle “*Socializing the Cadet*” might as well apply to all military environments all over the world:

As a consequence of undergoing very unpleasant experiences together (being hazed by higher classes) the swab class develops remarkable unity. The basis for the interclass solidarity occurs through numerous informal contacts between the upper classmen^{(**)4} and

³Kolej”, the Turkish version of the word “college” came to designate expensive private (or some expensive state-owned) secondary schools as distinguished from common public schools, whereas “akademi”, the Turkish

⁴As the authors say so, “though forbidden officially, hazing is a holy tradition”. This is even the case in some civilian boarding schools. In fact, this is the lot of the famous Galatasaray Lycée students as Nedim Gürsel, Çetin Altan and other graduate-writers refer to in their literary works. It should explain their closely-knit lobby and school-consciousness. (Galatasaray Lycée is a very old, distinguished state-owned Turkish secondary school, where the medium of instruction is French for more than a century by now).

'swabs', as a type of fraternization. The men who haze the "swab" are eager to convince the swab that they are good fellows. Their follow-on visits and explanations spread a "we-feeling" throughout the Academy...In addition the knowledge of common interests and a common destiny serves as a unifying force...An increase in self-esteem develops in conjunction with identification. One may be a low-ranking cadet, but cadets as a group have high status. This feeling of superiority directly enters into relationships with girls, with whom many boys lack self-confidence.

So, if a single cadet (or military person) gets involved in a brawl with outsiders, his best friend cannot really put up with his failure to defend himself or his embarrassment.

But, accordingly, civilians tend to generalize the faulty behavior of any single uniformed-person (whether a soldier or a policeman or a similar official). This is why discipline is so indispensable in any armed organization. This is why the presence of the military police is so important in all garrisons.

Similar Civilian versus Military Conflicts, Elsewhere

On leave day's great numbers of uniformed young males pour into cities. If that particular city is big enough to "buffer" that flood, it is okay. Otherwise, delicate situations may naturally occur from time to time.

Case history: During the First Gulf War, the following piece of news (*)⁵ appeared on a Turkish Newspaper: An American female corporal (a specialist) was working on a weapon in Saudi Arabia (the ally of U.S. against Iraq). The climate being hot, she had taken off her official jacket. Her bosom was discernable from the undershirt as she was moving about. For conservative Arabs, the scene was too obscene to watch. The Arabian civilians around (and also the Arabian soldiers urged by them) began to grumble and mumble complaints. The corporal's superior realized the situation and ordered her to wear her jacket right away. Of course here a culture conflict (*)⁶ also came into play.

The New School Commandant Handles the Problem

The advent of a new commandant, a staff colonel for the first time in the history of the NCO-school) almost coincides with the 1991 rumor.

In the military absolute obedience and discipline are very important concepts. Staff officers, being probable future generals, are very fastidious in implementing regulations. Thus the new commandant showed himself very resolute and non-conceding in the face of those fighting issues. Heavy penalties were imposed on fighters. Recidivists even faced expulsion from school. The officers were sent to city in big groups in plain clothes on weekends to survey the cadets.

Case history: In those days an officer encountered a group of cadets on a Sunday morning. He said:

"Well, boys, no more fights, I hope?"

The group replied in choir:

"If the civilians don't seek trouble!"

The officer got angry and shouted:

"What do you mean by 'if'? There is to be no more fighting, no matter what!"

In case of trouble, the recommended procedure was to report the civilian offenders or trouble-seekers. This, the cadets did do for a time. But legal procedures are usually long and frustrating and usually far from gratifying an angry person. Eventually they managed to avoid trouble very skillfully, by themselves! Maybe they even got to internalized peaceful handlings of all confronting situations, resenting their former admiration of bullying and defying manners as a representation of manliness. Who knows?

"People have consistent personality dispositions that predispose them to act in certain ways, but they also make discriminations among environmental conditions. In addition to tailoring their behavior to meet the demands of a situation, people also seek or avoid certain situations" [1].

After the two-year-long duration of the first staff commandant, another staff colonel took the command. The street fights which appeared to have thoroughly disappeared, did not "resurrect" under his command either.

How was the Problem Overcome?

A resolute (*)⁷ attitude of the new commandant in face of the very old problem did eventually bear its fruits. The severity of penalties inflicted seemed to be appropriate and effective for the aimed purpose. The cadets cannot face the danger of expulsion from school.

Getting sent home is no joke. For all their athletic and even academic abilities, those boys were almost exclusively were of very modest socio-economical origins. As the last infantry-colonel-commandant (the one preceding the two successive staff-colonels) once put it: "This place is like an orphanage and we the faculty, we represent the hope of the poor!" [6].

On one occasion, the Good Manners Club wanted to make a video movie to demonstrate good-mannerism in certain given situations. Boys were selected to take part as actors. But, girls were needed to accompany them. A notice was given to the girls of the newly established distinguished Anatolian

Lycée (*)⁸. A very disappointing result was obtained: Girls did not volunteer to take part in that video movie! For all the high esteem of non-student girls, female students of professional schools and even the girls of the classical high school (the public high school) for the cadets; obviously the Anatolian Lycée girls (*)⁹ did not have a high opinion of those boys.

Conclusion

The young adolescent mentality is not as mature as the adult male mentality in affairs pertaining to courting with the opposing sex. Adolescents sometimes even invent their enemy groups and schools to cope with. In such cases, individual rivalry through identification by

⁵Rather than an exact quotation's translation, the event is paraphrased from a recalling of the then-newspaper-clippings. S.Ç.

⁶Culture conflict means a disparity of values arising when the official values of one culture come into conflict with those of another" (Broom & Selznick 1956: 610).

⁷It appears that formerly the ever-present problem was mostly ignored. In fact, in the past; in similar military educational establishments elsewhere, some officers used to regard such matters as a matter of power comparison in the sense of "who can beat whom". Accordingly they used to implicitly support retaliations on the part of their own cadets. S.Ç.

⁸The special importance of such "kolej" type of Turkish government schools was explained before, in another previous footnote.

⁹Based on the Freudian view, the libido, when it cannot obtain the longed-for response, turns destructive. The Anatolian Lycée girls were quickly condemned with labels like "snobs" or even worse adjectives! S.Ç.

their own groups may lead to mass conflict, culminating in street fights.

This used to happen few years ago in a central Anatolian city among cadets and their civilian peers. Military and civilian teachers and school administrators should be well-informed and well-disposed in those matters in order to prevent and/or skillfully handle resulting conflicts. Otherwise long-lasting unpleasant rivalry traditions may easily ensue and constitute a potential danger for the involved students, parents and administrators.

Endnote: In the year of 1997; a self-fulfilling prophesy (or a Rosenthal Effect) came into being: The military school did move into another city in the western region of the country, to merge with another NCO-school there! However, to the “partial disappointment” of the city-dwellers, the evacuated buildings and installations were not filled with basic trainers. Instead, part of an armored brigade (consisting

of senior, skilled privates and their military leaders) were transferred from the near-by town of Kirikkale.

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