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## Psychological Profile of the Military Student: Turkey's Example

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### Abstract

In the Armed Forces, privates (plain soldiers), the bulk of the man-power, are the conscripts. The hard core consists of the non-commissioned and commissioned rank holders, the professional cadres. They are trained in military schools. The formation of the cadet profile emerges through formal training and education as well as informal influences deriving from their own interaction among themselves. In addition to such internal shaping forces, external factors defined by the country's socio-cultural and economic situation also come into play.

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### 1. Introduction

The Military is a very important institution for Turkey. It is more than a classical defense instrument. For the Military; peace time missions are also important as a contribution to development. The Turkish Military manages such peace time functions with the utmost success. Firstly; for a conscript, the entire period of service is like attending a public education program designed for adults. Then come activities like offering help in natural disasters, upholding the economy by technical expertise of retirees and contribution to social development as role models.

Today's cadets are the commanders of tomorrow and the traditional schooling style of the burgeoning hard core keeps determining the profile of the future command. Of course martial values are indoctrinated officially through the curriculum, on one hand. But on the other hand, the informal interaction of the cadets with one another is at least as influential as the formally impregnated values and attitudes and this sometimes happens in opposition to the

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formal efforts. Moreover, external environmental factors beyond the military schools themselves can not be denied in their effects either.

## 2. The Social Background of the Cadets

The social milieu from which NCO (warrant or petty officer) schools find their roots are much more modest than those from which officer schools find their “footing”. The latter, however, is itself not very high as far as its location among the stratification is concerned.

When talking about the background of cadets an important point to consider is the fact that Turkey is in rapid constant transition. This change is more conspicuous since 1950s. As the bigger society changes for the better, the social make-up of the pool of professionals will also be modified.

Statistics [from the Second Development Plan] display that; city-centers increase in size and number; on one hand; while people tend to choose to live in big cities on the other hand (Tütengil, 1984).

The fact that even for the moment, two-thirds of the population of İstanbul (Turkey’s biggest city) is made up from “those who were born elsewhere”; is the hardest evidence that İstanbul is invaded by “provincials”. No doubt, this invasion will continue with a growing acceleration in the years to follow. The funny thing is, the affirmation of “being an İstanbulite” is also very common among those who had moved to İstanbul from outside (Kongar, 1992).

Nevertheless; many other urban norms are strongly resisted. No wonder for that. The driving force of urbanization is basically migration into the cities rather than natural evolution. In a sense, this means that many traditional norms and values are simply “transplanted” onto the social and cultural setting of the big cities, instead of falling into oblivion.

In fact, while up to 1950s, the well-established, distinct urban culture could dilute and buffer the incremental intrusion of rural habits and assert itself as a role model for the new-comers; nowadays; the new-comers attempt to dominate the city-dwellers and make them resemble themselves.

Paradoxically, as Erkal (1978) points out, one of the reasons why people leave the rural areas and arrive in cities, is the purpose of joining the already gone compatriots! So, we can see neighborhoods of compatriots growing in big cities.

But whatever course urbanization follows, confrontation with the social reality of the city, obliges the formerly-rural new settlers do take up some modern norms. Moreover, one conspicuous gain of urbanization is better formal education, which is reflected onto the education level of the military-conscripts directly.

As the immediate subjects of their leaders (professionals), the better educated and more urbanized conscripts, in turn, affect the behavior patterns of the leaders themselves. These leaders are also the educators and the trainers of the cadets (military students).

An officer, who had worked in the admission committee of a military school in 1990 (registering data about the parents of the newly-accepted cadets), once said: “The most striking thing about the parents was that the majority of the spouses had about the same age. A substantial percent of the mothers had jobs, too”. Those people were the parents of 15-year-old boys. They were in their mid-thirties and early forties. In the previous generations, husbands were older than their wives, and the wives generally had no jobs. Those parents then represented the lower-middle classes of the big cities.

Tütengil (1984) says that in contrast to developed countries, the armies of the less developed countries originate from those layers and classes who advocate for the betterment of masses.

Nesin (1996) puts it more explicitly: “We, the former cadets [coming from Selimiye Military Junior Highschool] were mostly sons of poor families of big cities like İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. Some came from small towns but were yet adapted to İstanbul life-style. When we entered the Military Highschool (from the Military Junior Highschool) quite a number of rural boys came to join us” (The years of 1930-31).

More specific information is to be found in a military school’s own publication: Fathers of our cadets are mostly government officials / clerks. (40.9%). The second big representative layer is that of the laborers (23.2 %). 63.7 % Of our cadets had completed their junior-highschool years in province centers (including the three biggest cities). 33.1 % Of our cadets had completed their junior-highschool years in the country / rural areas (Kuleli Askerî Lisesi Hazırlık Sınıfı Öğrencilerinin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Kültürel Özellikleri, Anket Sonuçları 1987-1988 (The Socio-

economical & Cultural Traits of the Prep Students at Kuleli military Highschool, the Results of the Administered Questionnaires), Çengelköy, İstanbul).

### 3. Cadets and Rites des Passages

It is known that soldiers (as well as para-military people like policemen, firemen etc.) enjoy a good comradeship, which is usually absent among civilian milieu. The reason for such strong solidarity and comradeship can be explained by the initiation they go through. Though in the literal meaning initiation occurs only in primitive native tribes; in a figurative sense, hardships of the military and similar environments, are substitutes for a modern version of an initiation rite or ceremony.

“Initiation represents ‘any single dramatic ceremonial observance’; it is a ‘rite of passage’: Our society gives little formal recognition of the physiological and social changes a boy undergoes at puberty. He may be teased a little when his voice changes [breaks] or when he shaves for the first time. Changes in his social status from childhood are marked by a number of minor events [only]. Neither physiologically, socially, nor legally is there a clear demarcation between boyhood and manhood in our society” (Whiting, Kluckhan & Anthony, 1958).

“Members of fraternal & sororal organizations have long believed that the allegiance [loyalty] of a new member would be more secure if his indoctrination included some sort of painful (or at least uncomfortable) initiation ¾ wearing silly clothes, scrubbing the floor of the fraternity house with a toothbrush, paying a large initiation fee, undergoing painful paddling [walking barefoot], and so forth .In a similar vein, psychiatrists have also contended that their high fees serve, in part, to make the therapeutic relationship more important to the patient” (Raven & Rubin, 1976).

Even in a football game an easy victory can taste vinegar, whereas a victory gained by sweat and energy might be more gratifying for the team!

An officer who had worked at Çankırı NCO Preparatory School used to say: “I like my NCO cadets better than my former military lycée (a school for the future officers) cadets. When I encounter one of my former cadets from Çankırı I always stop to talk with him for a considerable time, five to ten minutes, maybe. When I worked in a military lycée, I was in a big city. But in Çankırı we were, in a sense, like prison mates; going through a provincial-deprivation together for a number of years!”. Here, we can see a trace of initiation, indeed.

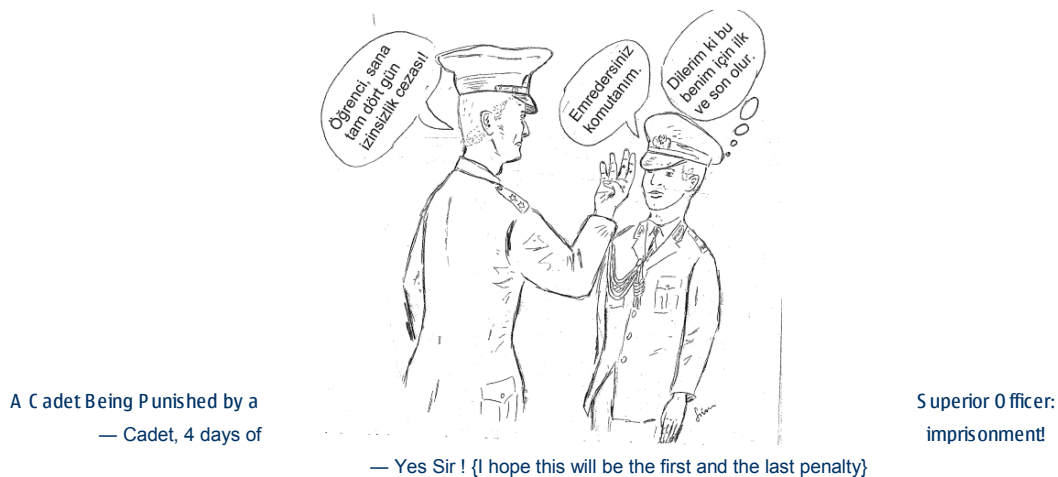


Fig. 1 trace of initiation

Common hardships collectively experienced may invoke a fantastical identification of inner groups. An intellectual infantry major (who had also attended to and graduated from a civilian university while he had been a captain) speaks (1999): “When I was the company commander in a recruit training unit, one night I was told that a first grade corporal awfully beat a few recruits. After the beating they had conversion fits with rigid limbs, tremors of muscles and all those symptoms! The strange thing was that about half of the company soon had the same symptoms in the wards, as if they got beaten themselves! That was a busy night, with an ambulance car commuting between the unit and the state hospital in the city (the military infirmary did not suffice us)”.

What is even more interesting is that a comradeship feeling connecting different seniority circles internally can also be achieved likewise, through shared and common problems and hardships.

#### 4. The Cadet’s Own World

Accordingly; within the military; the new recruits (novices), the experienced privates (those who have left behind the basic-training season), reserve officers, military students (cadets) all have their own worlds with their own popular subculture, slang, jokes and informal value understandings.

Some informal aspects of seniority can be observed to come into play among military highschool students. There different grades are separated in different buildings (and thus different class-rooms, dormitories and dining facilities). Different grades (like Lycée one classes and Lycée two classes, for instance) normally have no reason to associate with one another. But on occasion, some interaction may occur.

Here is an interesting case history: About two decades ago; a cadet with a very stern, serious facial expression and naturally penetrating looks; used to cause irritation to higher grades and got beaten by them occasionally for his “filthy stare”.

Again, about a decade ago, a military highschool cadet discovered that a cadet from a lower class was secretly wearing a golden chain on his neck (which is forbidden).

He confiscated this chain, assuming the lower cadet would not report it to the officers. The lower cadet did so, admitting his own violation of regulations and risking his share of the penalty. Confiscating a golden chain was a felony compared to the offence of wearing it. A more common practice is some upper class members’ confiscation of cigarettes (also prohibited) from lower classes and (secretly) smoking them in toilets.

In 1996, one of the favorite riddles of the cadets in the NCO Preparatory School in the city of Çankırı was only accidentally discovered by the eavesdropping of an officer and made known to other teachers as a popular joke. The riddle was based on a then-popular advertisement for a “winged” hygienic band (a certain brand of a sanitary napkin for menstruation): “It has a honeycomb but no honey; it has wings but can’t fly; [so what is it?]”

In 1992 the first female cadets were admitted to the War Colleges. In the Land Forces War College soon special words and phrases were coined and added to the cadet-jargon. In this context “harp-iş” (literally “war-work”) came to designate a female-cadet, while “harp-it” (literally “war-dog”) came to designate a male-cadet.

The word “jaws” (probably coined after a famous movie about sharks) came to mean a “horny” male-cadet who wants to woe or court or win the attention of a particular female-cadet, while “jawslamak” (here we have an English root combined with the Turkish infinitive suffix, the combination literally meaning “to go after a prey like a shark”) was the related grammatical adverb form.

In a military lycée in 1990 a certain cadet was designated as the informal special-spy of a harsh battalion commander (in such schools teachers provide academic teaching while company and battalion organizations deal with the disciplinary activities). He often got beaten by his fellow-cadets in the wards and officers on duty had a hard time securing his protection.

The famous writer the late Aziz Nesin, a graduate of the Military Lycée in Istanbul, in his posthumous serial in a newspaper, talks about the diaries of the cadets in his time: The diaries used to serve as a means of flirting with female students (in other lycées). I kept no such notebooks. But many girls used to send theirs for me to fill in because my answers were humorous and well-liked. Since my class-mates could not write such meaningful witty things, they sometimes made me write them for their sake.

Thus, I used to assume the role of Cyrano de Bergerac (Nesin goes on to say that a collection of such notebooks from various schools and years, if preserved and published, could have been a treasure for Turkey’s social history. Keeping such notebooks were officially forbidden for the cadets, of course).

The searches were usually carried out by the first lieutenants. Mostly Capon Ethem (Japanese Ethem) and Leb Tahsin (Lip Tahsin) used to search us. The former had an oriental look and slanting eyes like me; so we used to call him Capon Ethem. Leb Tahsin's lips were at least triplicate of normal lips; so we used to call him Leb Tahsin (Nesin, 1996) [Here we can also see that officers were attributed nick-names, which is also a forbidden practice]. The author also mentions about the horse-playing kind of jokes popular among cadets.

In spite of all the efforts of the administration to establish complete rapport with the cadets, they prefer to stay aloof from the officers; as if they were members of a different cast. As a case history we can look at the following meeting held in May 5, 1997 by The Leadership Research Evaluation and Development Center (a unit established in January 1995) of The (Land Forces) War College. A total of 93 cadets (31 freshmen, 29 sophomores and 33 juniors) were assembled in a lecture-saloon and handed out questionnaire forms to be filled in. But much more importantly, to warm them up and to urge them to give sincere answers, the senior officer (the head of this center) first had an informal talk with them, in a relaxed climate and inquired into their commonly encountered difficulties.

Some cadets then emphasized the lack of trust between them and the officers. Cadet U. said the following: "I think the reason for the lack of confidence is insufficient communication. When they want to make us do something, they prefer punishment rather than incentives or persuasion. This procedure goes on because our encounters with the officers take place under inconvenient circumstances. Afraid, we are! In actuality, we do not even expect remedies

for our particular problems! This further compels them to distrust us. If I want to call in sick one day before the tactical training, my officer will assume I am goldbricking".

On the same occasion Cadet İ. said the following: "In our army an understanding prevails which advocates the following idea: 'if you like the subordinate, then he will be spoiled; if you are severe with him, then he will keep silent and display submission'. There is an anxiousness not to give concessions! They think that authority will be damaged".

A young officer once said that at the infantry branch school —other branches are artillery, tank, signals, transportation etc.— just after the War College, they were still timid when it came to interactions with officers. Some even warned the others by saying "here comes an officer!" as if they themselves were still cadets. Indeed; transforming into the officer role is not overnight. Rather, it is a process.

## 5. Conclusion

Cadets in schooling age are the chain of command of the days to come. For the army they are precious beings incorporating the future and accordingly no efforts and no expenses are spared for their development. Nevertheless, their pretty humble social background, which itself is subject to change with times, is one factor beyond control. The strong subculture and inner solidarity reinforced by a we-feeling, itself rooted on initiation rituals, is another factor not to be determined by the official authority.

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