TRACING THE SOURCES OF VIOLENCE:

THE TURKISH CASE

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In the issue of the Turkish daily <u>Milliyet</u> dated September 23rd, 1977, the following inventory of violent events having occurred in Turkey in the preceding 24 hours was presented to the reader:

1. In a fight between the "revolutionary" and the "idealist" [1] factions of the Diyarbakır Normal School for the training of primary school teachers one student was wounded in the chest and another in the abdomen. Both were hospitalized. The clash started when the Assistant School Director attempted to "rough-up" the two students because of their "hair and beard." The students retaliated and were set upon with knives by students of the "idealist" faction.

2. Ankara groups with "opposed views" fought in Tuzluçayır with sticks and stones. One person was placed in custody.

3. Responding to sounds of repeated firing, police arrested a student who was found to carry a gun.

4. In the "Republic Lycée," a group shouted "down with the Fascists" to right wing students and began firing in the air. Two students were placed in custody.

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[1] "Idealist": the name by which supporters of the National Movement Party refer to themselves. This party led by Mr. A. Türkeş has a political line which places it in the national-socialist quadrant. For the aims of this party see: Türkeş, 1975.

5. The General Secretary of the Schoolteacher's Association claimed that the police "fired guns" during the burial of a teacher who had been killed the preceding day. He also claimed that the Association's Gönen branch had been closed without justification.

6. The General Secretary of IGD*(Progressive Youth Association) stated that a Maoist group had forcibly occupied the Iskenderun branch of the Association.

7. A man was found in a traumatic coma in his room at the Terminal Hotel.

8. A 13 year old boy who happened to be in the path of an oncoming group, which was in pursuit of a person, became the target of a hail of bullets. He was hospitalized.

9. A group of students who demonstrated in a tea-garden to the effect that "Çayans never die" were apprehended.[2]

10. A student of the Ihsan Mermerci Lycée was beaten with revolver butts by two members of the National Movement Party. The attackers then fired in the air and fled.

These events were listed in the same column, under the same rubric implying that they were part of a set which could be thus clustered together. The summary for September 23rd I have presented was selected at random from all issues of <u>Milliyet</u> for September 1977. Since most of the clashes involved students at institutions of higher education, and since most of these were still closed (at the time) because of vacation, this was, in fact, a rather quiescent month. By winter standards, the list may even be considered to show a respite in violence. But the report for September 23rd was also mild compared to other September days when occurrences of violence were more numerous or more bloody.

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*IGD = Progressive Youth Association. A Formation supported by the Revolutionary Worker's Federation of Turkey (DISK).

(2) Mahir Cayan was one of the left-extremist student leaders who was killed in an armed clash between the police in 1971 after his hiding place was discovered.

Thus, Turkey, a country which foreign observers have reported to be unusually respectful of a legitimate authority, has recently been trying to live through an unexpected change in the social behaviour of some of its citizens. The change has come about in the last decade and has primarily involved students. Since 1965, Turkish universities have been the stage of violent student demonstrations, and since the late 60's guns and dynamite have become part of the campus scene. Between the fall of 1973 and the summer of 1977, 447 persons were killed in Turkey in such ideological disputes. Between the date of the decision to renew the recent elections (5th April 1977) and the date on which the elections were held (5th June 1977) 70 persons were killed and 797 persons wounded.[3]

Up to the late 1960's student upheavals were associated with a relatively low level of violence. Around 1969, a faction of students opted for guerilla tactics and the Pandora's box of violence was opened. The Turkish Army stepped in at that time. Emergency powers were granted to the government. Student "anarchists" were pursued, arrested or killed. Normal constitutional government was reestablished in the fall of 1973. At that time, the movement spread to institutes of higher education that were outside the University structure. Later, it trickled down to lycées and increasingly involved persons outside educational establishments. Student violence, by and large, is directed against other students. The pattern of attack, retaliation, revenge and counter-offensive in which groups are involved is reminiscent of the mechanism of the blood feud in its regularity, symmetry and inevitability. Another look at the Milliyet enables us to get a somewhat clearer understanding of the events reported.

First, two clarifications: to upbraid students for their "hair and beard" is not related to keeping up standards of cleanliness but to the

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(3) Günaydin, August 6, 1971. The source used here is a newspaper and, as usual, we do not know who categorized the events and what criteria were used, but the count is used as a first approximation.

symbolic "charge" of violating customary appearance. Such a shape may mean

a number of things, from flaunting an "Alevi" (a Shiite symbol to express

anti-orthodox Islamic attitude) to being an "anarchist." Symbols always had

a power of their own in Turkish society. S.N. Eisenstadt has shown the special

function of symbols in patrimonial regimes in implementing the power of the

center. (1973, p. 132). But here, the symbolic "charge" appears at many more

levels of social interaction and elicits an unusually strong resonance. Many

of the protagonists in the Milliyet list seem to think that they are contributing

to their goals by "firing guns in the air." The stance is better understood

when we remember that this is a widely used warning to desist in rural Turkey.

Some further characteristics which may be drawn from the Milliyet data are the

following:

1. The clashes oppose persons of differing ideological views.
2. Many persons carry guns in Turkey.
3. Protagonists seem to resort to violence somewhat precipitously.
4. Violence is centered in educational institutions but not limited to them.

All of these are characteristics which were not known in Istanbul

or Ankara before large scale social change in Turkey in the 1950's. Most

striking of these changes is the emergence of ideology as determining cleavages

and conflict. In the early days of the Republic up to 1950, for the majority

of educated Turks, the enemy was religious "obscurantism." There was, therefore,

no overt ideological difference within the stratum of educated Turks. All were,

willy nilly, followers of Kemalism. An incipient right and a left had always

existed, but what is significant is that, since 1950, it has found a clientèle,

and that the young are preponderent among this clientèle. Anticipating some

of my conclusions, I would add that the social mobilization of Turkey, the

emergence of persons who were formerly part of a dormant rural and provincial

culture on the national scene since 1950, has shown the inadequacy of Kemalism

as an ideology for educated, highly motivated, and socially mobile persons at a time when the entire surrounding social framework is changing. This vast change has also brought together an ill assorted but surprisingly workable "collage" of values drawn from folk culture and of modern ideologies.

One of the most common, plausible--and partially true--explanations of student violence makes politics the key variable. Regardless of its merits, I believe that this explanation is also used as an ideological smoke-screen that befogs the social structural elements of the problem by tying the development of violence to a conspiracy of the right. I shall outline this explanation.

The main political cleavage in Turkish society between 1950 and 1960 was the rift which separated the Republican Party from the Demokrat Party. From the literature on the subject we may draw the following picture. The RPP was the Party of Atatürk, the Party which had established the Republic. It was thus the party of the Republican establishment, governmental or bureaucratic. The Party considered itself the upholder of Atatürk's secularizing policies. Its economic theory consisted of etatism, a form of state capitalism. Among its economic policies the most vividly remembered was the economic burden it imposed on the rural population during the Second World War.

The Demokrat Party, founded in 1944, represented the aspiration of persons who desired a society more open to capitalism and also to responsible parliamentary government. It aimed to emend the secularist policies of the preceding two decades. The rules of the game were set by the willingness of the RPP to let free elections take place in 1950. Between 1950 and 1960, the decade when it ruled Turkey, the Demokrat Party thoroughly alienated Turkish bureaucracy by downgrading its power vis-a-vis politicians, by undermining its standard of living, and by generally lowering its prestige. Even many of its early supporters were not satisfied by its ambiguous definition

of democracy: "power to the people" but without democratic institutions, fundamental human rights, or separation of powers. The Demokrat Party was toppled in 1960 by a military coup. Students were prominently involved in the events that preceded the coup, and acquired a certain amount of prestige as political "giant killers" thereafter.

It is no real contradiction that while economic and political factors propelled the military to action, the junta which assumed power was made up of idealistic officers with a diffuse, quasi-socialist (perhaps populist) bent. Their willingness to discuss subjects considered dangerous in times past, and their willingness to try to carry out some social reforms, established an entirely new intellectual climate in Turkey after 1960. Multi-party government was eventually restored and elections were carried out in 1961. In the election of 1965 the government was formed by the Justice Party who was carrying on a new version of the Demokrat Party program. At this junction, a younger generation of RPP politicians tried to refurbish the image of their Party, especially to do away with what had been labeled as the RPP's "elitist" characteristics. It thus hoped to increase the peasant backing of the party; the RPP now emerged as the champion of the underprivileged and as the foe of elitism whether cultural or hierarchic.

In the meantime, new formations had appeared both on the "right" and on the "left" of existing parties. The new "left" consisted of a variety of Marxist groups, of which only one was able to form a viable political party. The Communist party was proscribed by law. The new "right" consisted of two distinct streams: first, a nationalist group with many characteristics of national socialism; second, a movement of Islamic revivalism.

The new left was the first group to organize on a national scale. Its competent use of communication enabled it to generate an agitational cli-

mate in the media, which then spread to the universities. The left movement soon divided into factions some of which believed that only violent revolution could change the social system of Turkey. These groups went into action around 1969 with the consequences that have been described. After the return to normal parliamentary government, in 1973, student agitation re-surfaced.

The first — and more superficial — of the political explanations of student violence attributes the increase of student violence to their general discontent with the policies of the right-wing parties or the coalitions which — but for a short interlude — have ruled Turkey since 1963. A second, more convincing explanation is based on the widespread activities of national para-military groups, the so-called "commandos."

The national socialist — although not the Islamic — right has been organizing its para-military forces since the 1960's. If the stronghold of the left were certain faculties of the universities, the stronghold of the right was the Ministry of Education and the system of State Teacher Training Schools. The main development since 1973 on this "turf" of the right has been the infiltration of the key posts in the administrative structure of the Ministry and of the schools by partisans of the national socialist group and by the "commandos." [4] It is true that sharing political spoils among members of right wing coalitions made this parceling out of state institutions possible in the first instance. Similar developments also occurred in a number of faculties of various universities.

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(4) Educational establishments were infiltrated by "left" currents before 1970. In this light it is probably more useful to speak of an overall "politicization of the teaching profession." (See Tachau, 1977, p. 307.)

The second level of the political explanation of violence states that violence is the consequence of a systematic attempt to establish ideological control over educational institutions on the part of the National Movement Party through its "commandos" and to brainwash the students in these establishments. In these circumstances, it is claimed, the left only takes measures of legitimate defense when their students or professors are attacked. I believe the "provocation" argument to be only partially valid for three reasons: (1) it fits only some of the episodes of violence recorded; (2) it does not explain why "provocation" became endemic in the late 1960's rather than in the 1950's; (3) the failures of leading leftists to "cool down" their students require other variables related to the cultural universe of the students, who go on battering one another despite any apparent "provocation."

We thus need another level of explanation which is related to social change rather than to political strategy. Two approaches are possible here. One proceeds at a global level and uses such concepts as the decline of legitimate authority, the increasing bureaucratization of society, the political and social mobilization of formerly quiescent masses, or the world-wide search for identity. These are explanations that would fit Turkey as much as Italy or Japan. A second way to look at the problem is to single out changes that make for differences between nations. At this level some nations are affected more than others by demographic variables, by secularization, by economic growth, and by internal cleavages. Again, an impressionistic look at the question immediately suggests the complexity of the variables involved. Here we can only suggest some directions that would be relevant in undertaking further research on the problem.

A. <u>Demography</u>: Turkey has evolved from a country with a population of 17.800.000 in 1940 to one of 44.000.000 in 1977. This demographic change

has affected Turkish society in several ways. About 44% of the population of Turkey is under the age of 15. Adolescents in the 16-20 age groups are very numerous compared to persons of middle age. Turkey is a "young" country. Traditionally, Turkey has been a country which depended on the authority of the elder. Today, some respect is still accorded to the old but they are no longer considered the carriers of "truth" (or even "wisdom"). Republican ideology already adumbrated this development by shifting its vision of ideal society to the future and its conception of the carriers of truth from the elder to the younger. But what was a wish in the 1930's has become a reality in 1977. But this reality has become difficult to cope with. The middle aged expectation of a continuously accelerating standard of material comfort has been frustrated; for the young *their* oracles sound increasingly empty. The generation gap is an important variable in the student rebellion and has to be taken into account in the setting of violence.

B. _Education_: Turkey expected to achieve modernization through education which would then generate economic development. But the demographic pyramid we have described places a heavy burden on a state-supported system of education, a burden partly met by downgrading the quality of education. Further, a university diploma does not guarantee a job.

This year, 360.000 competed in the entrance examination to universities for 60.000 places. This leaves 300.000 candidates to form a "critical mass" of frustrated youth. Size alone does not explain how this mass was set in motion or why it took the path of violence. For this we must consider such factors as positions in society, rights and obligations, values and norms.

Traditionally, Turkey was a highly hierarchized society, with every individual cognizant of his proper "place." There even was an expression in the vocabulary of polite society which denoted the "limits" of a person's posi-

tion (<u>hadd</u>, meaning limit.) On the other hand, another Ottoman tradition --
which was strengthened by the absence of a large burgher class to develop
autonomous civic institutuions — was that of equality. Equality, in this con-
text, signified the ease with which the rulers could be tumbled in time of
crisis, although the Ottoman system itself did not change. This tradition of
"direct action" was due to the absence of the civic structures of bourgeois
society in the West, to which Hegel and Marx gave the name of "civil society."

Traditional Turkish social structure also showed a great deal of
instability with regard to the integration of large numbers of unattached young
men into the economic structure. A large cohort of such persons, who could not
be integrated into the craft economy, seems to have been a permanent bane of
Middle East society and its rulers. The Caliph Nasr hit upon the solution of
establishing a permanent expeditionary force and youth club (the <u>Futuwwa</u>) to
utilize the young unemployed riffraff who were causing havoc in the cities.
In the Ottoman Empire the pattern of recruitment into the Janissary system (af-
ter corruption of the institution and after the recruiting of non-Moslem chil-
dren was abandoned) seems to have been another way of meeting the same problem.

But the remedy was unsuccessful. With the continued disintegration
of the Janissary corps, at the end of the 18th century, the Janissaries reverted
from elite foot-soldiers to petty neighbourhood toughs, terrorizing local citi-
zens. This was one - if not the main - reason for which Sultan Mahmut II de-
stroyed them with grapeshot in 1826. The problem of the unemployment of unmar-
ried lower class young men, who could only find work in marginal occupations
such as porters, servants or peddlers, was still mentioned in the middle of the
19th century as causing grave problems in the capital. This was aggravated by
the fact that these persons were exempted from conscription as residents of the
Capital. Part of the difficulty was due to mass migration from impoverished

villages to towns and especially to the Capital.

By and large, conscription, in an Empire which was continuously involved in wars, was a convenient way of using age groups that otherwise could introduce stresses into the system. Sir William Ramsay, who trekked through Anatolia on foot and horseback late in the 19th century, pointed out that the quiescence of Turkish villages was due to the middle-age composition of its population because the young had been conscripted. Since military service could stretch as much as 20 years, his point was well taken.

All of this seems to indicate that, in the Ottoman Empire, the problem of potentially disruptive unattached young males was "solved" by war rather than by integration into the economic system. The situation is somewhat different in modern Turkey. In 1955, Paul Stirling was already pointing to some strains in this system. In his article on "A Death and a Youth Club: Feuding in a Turkish Village" (1960), Stirling shows how the lack of village institution for conciliation and arbitration has led to an inability to stop blood feuds. He describes the role of existing machinery thus:

> What to do with the mass of unemployed young is a problem which recurs in a number of societies. In many cases it is solved by educational institutions which establish a "moratorium" on the participation of adolescents in activities of adult society and act to absorb energies which would otherwise become destructive. Modern Turkey has made an immense effort to create such institutions. The fact that these have become arenas of violence are due, it seems at the first, and, I repeat, rather superficial glance to three characteristics. First, in the modern setting social mobilization has brought elements of Turkish village culture within the framework of educational institutions. Second, "de-elitization" has been prominent in Turkey since 1950. Third, it is possible that institutions which place a "moratorium" on youth are not sufficient to bring about such a "moratorium."

Stirling adds (p. 192): "Among a people who habitually go armed, who are quick to resent insult, and for some of whom, at least, quarreling may serve to maintain the coherence and even the prestige of their lineages this leads to a considerable amount of violence."[8]

Stirling's further find*ing*, i.e. that the Government has been unwilling to share its authority with village authorities, is quite accurate. Turkish law does take cognizance of the institution of village elders, but only for minor disputes. On the other hand, since party government has existed the police and the gendarmerie have had the problem of being stymied in the enforcement law by local party officials. Thus an old feature of the period of Ottoman decline, the Kafkaesque distance of security forces and the courts from claimants, has been perpetuated. The Turkish center, unable to intervene effectively for the maintenance of security, has insisted on a tight control of associations formed under   Turkish law. This replicates at the town level the destructive Ottoman influence on potentially integrative institutions of the village. Personal security in Turkish society is thus in a penumbra; when in danger, a gun in the pocket is considered to be a better guarantee of safety than the intervention of the police.

But we now have to turn to a finding of Stirling's which I consider of greater fundamental importance: "The (village) lineage exist to defend its members....But at the same time the existence of the lineage depends on its having enemies against which to defend its members; since it has no other occasion for corporate action. A lineage at peace with its neighbors would lose the main point of its existence." (p. 172.) What we have here is an extension at the village level of a theme which I have already taken up at the national level with regard to unemployed young men in the Ottoman Empire. In the village, violence prevails because it has a key function, that of underlining corporate identity.

A final observation by Stirling on village values is this: "I am always tempted to describe village society as equalitarian. This is perhaps misleading, but at least, people are not respected for their ancestry. Young

members of respectable households obviously inherit village respect. But

there is no notion that belonging to one line rather than another confers in-

herent superiority. This is rather what I would call a "chip on the shoulder"

society. No one is willing to admit anyone else's superiority, let alone an

inherited right to issue orders." (p. 223).

To this, I can add certain qualifications. First, the incidence of

violence in Turkish villages is more highly concentrated in certain areas, mainly

the Black Sea coast and the South East. Second, the accentuation of primary-

school nationalism heightens the expectation of some of the more highly motivated

students, leading inevitably to a later shattering of the image they had of their

country's capabilities. Third, these young people, having internalized the ethos

of village violence, emerge on the national scene as frustrated organizers and

promoters of violence. By 1969 a process which I would call "de-Sanskritization"

had reached its maximal extent. Today's violence may be a direct outcome of

this process and I shall therefore go on to explain what I mean by this expres-

sion.

By "Sanskritization" I refer to the work of M.N. Srinivas who has used

this term to denote "the process by which a lower caste adopt the style of life

of a higher caste in order to raise its position in society." (Beitelle, 1977,

p. 143). What has happened recently in Turkey is that the "peasantization" of

the city has proceeded faster than the "urbanization" of the peasant. This might

be explained superficially by the volume of migration of peasants to large cities.

To give only one example, 40 to 50% of the population of Istanbul lives in urban

shantytowns (Geçekandu), or semi-shanties which are the product of such migra-

tion. I believe, however, that this has been accompanied by a "de-elitization"

of Turkish society which must be studied separately - as a matter related to

positions rather than to culture. The speed with which the traditional elite

shūclūrer   of Turkish society were eroded may well be related to the
absence of those more resistant institutions of "civil society" in Turkey which
I have already mentioned.

Up to 1950 the Turkish classical lycée system was geared to providing
recruits that would replenish the ranks of the ruling elite. Son of peasants
or craftsmen who went through the lycée, and then entered the university, dis-
posed only of the items which they had in their cultural knapsack. At the
university, they began to replace them with items which they were told belonged
in the luggage of an educated Turk. This included "Western manners" a "komilfo"
("comme il faut") demeanor as well as a belief in nationalism, state capitalism,
and the role of the educated as the "vanguard" of the people.

The rise to power of the Demokrat Party reversed this trend. The
populism of the RPP had always in theory justified "tapping the deep sources of
popular culture" and, in fact, the RPP went so far as to sponsor a folkloristic
revival. But populism now emerged in the new and uncontrollable form of the
"ruralization" of national politics. Turkish intellectuals immediately began
to object that this was not in the rules of the game, but their cries of an-
guish were overwhelmed by the changing mores. The provincial stamp first became
evident among the newly elected parliamentarians of 1950. In the long run, how-
ever, all of Turkish society became "Anatolianized." This was nowhere more
apparent than in prominence given to religious observance and rituals in the
large cities.

An implicit promise in the political program of the Demokrat Party
was to erase all traces of what its members considered the tyranny of the Center
and its uppity officials. From this followed an undermining of everything that
smacked of the RPP elitist-bureaucratic style, which meant as much the authori-
tarian style of RPP rule as the ideology of Westernization that came with it.

Thus, any form of Westernization other than Marxism has been under attack at the University. What is interesting is that this RPP bureaucratic syndrome came under attack from both the Demokrat Party, with its economic liberalism, and from the Marxists. One term, "nationalism",   kept its luster for all parties — but this, as we know, can easily take a socialist form. Even more interesting, the ideological discourse of both right and left activists in the University was strongly influenced by the values of the village--by its simplistic world view and quick resort to violence. It is even likely that the main attraction of Marxism for some students is its espousal of conflict.

What seems to have happened is that at no stage in the educational experience does a mechanism come in to re-channel what has now become a university level — and possibly national level — "collective representation," namely a way of life in which the settling of accounts by force has a central place. The middle school offers no new values to replace that of the forcible settling of accounts. Maybe Turkish society is still in the process of establishing foundations for the functioning of the general system which has been called "civil society" in the West.[5]   We recall, however, the lesson of recent years —that Western European "civil society" when faced with organized competing groups based on violence, turns out to be more fragile than we had anticipated.

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(5) In the Ottoman Empire forces that would tend to cause disorganization were kept in check partly by a system of harsh sanction. Thus Uriel Heyd states: "European observers in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries were impressed by the efficiency, effectiveness and even fairness of the Ottoman administration of criminal justice. In their view it compared favorably with the long drawn-out and very costly lawsuits and trials in Europe. They noticed with astonishment that in the Ottoman courts a case was generally dealt with in a single session; there were no lawyers who would drag out the procedure unnecessarily, and appeals were relatively rare. The speedy and often severe punishment meted out, together with efficient police methods and the collective responsibility of the whole village or town quarter for any crime committed there, were,in their opinion the main reason for the amazingly low crime rate, especially in the cities.

The negative aspects of Ottoman criminal justice, however, were not over-
looked. Little value was attached to the life, limb, property and honor
of the individual. Punishment was often hasty, arbitrary and excessively
cruel. Suspicion often passed as proof. As a 17th century Western travel-
ler rightly observed, Ottoman justice "will rather cut off two innocent
men, than let one offender escape, for in the execution of an innocent,
they think if he held guilty, the example works as well as if he were guilty
indeed." (Heyd, 1973, p. 313.)

The very tentative explanation of violent behaviour offered here

underlines the absence of certain key integrating structure in Turkish society.

However, it may be said that despite my argument Turks have used some new struc-

tures rather efficiently. Voluntary associations and labor unions, for example,

have grown considerably in the last 20 years. My point, however, was that,

especially for adolescents, a specific type of structure, a mechanism of inte-

gration, is absent. Schools are thought of as square meters of floor space for

the purpose of learning and not as places where responsible citizens are formed.

Paradoxically, this makes them into a good arena for ideological indoctrination.

And associations which re-group students around ideologies such as the Progressive

Youth Association thus acquire a clientèle. Again, this is a recent development:

Turkish educators have been overwhelmed by the demand for education. The point

I have tried to make is that it is simplistic to think that here the failure is

only one of supply. I think an important advance would be scored if we could

substantiate by further research what is now simply a hunch, namely, that the

"moratorium" for adolescents which Erikson mentions in his Childhood and Society

does not seem to exist either in the traditional Turkish culture or in the

Turkish rural world today. If this is true, the young would bring with them

to the University the stark adult universe of the rural world, and then be, in

addition, faced by the absence of adequate integrating mechanisms.

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