

Profiles of Guards in an Anatolian Prison in Early 1990s

Sinan Çaya^{[a],*}

^[a]Ph.D., Associate Professor, Istanbul University, Institute of Marine Administration and Sciences, Vefa-Istanbul, Turkey.

*Corresponding author.

Received 2 September 2015; accepted 28 November 2015

Published online 26 December 2015

Abstract

This article presents a view of a Turkish Penal Institution in the city of Chankiri in early 1990s obtained through the techniques of interviews and questionnaire-administration. Further interviews with guards at Ankara Ulucanlar Prison (now converted into a Museum) supply extra support for the conducted field research. A fairly convincing evaluation of the typical correction institutions of the country is thereby obtained at the moment. Essentially the overall picture seems to be a decent, contemporary formation with which no major faults are to be found, even if when it comes to talk realistically.

Key words: Prison; Guard; Chief guard; Manager/ warden; Convict; Reform

Çaya, S. (2015). Profiles of Guards in an Anatolian Prison in Early 1990s. *Frontiers of Legal Research*, 3(4), 10-23. Available from <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/flr/article/view/10.3968/8030> DOI: 10.3968/8030

INTRODUCTION

The research got affected at *Chankiri* E-type of prison, a big and old penal institution which had been re-constructed in 1980s. The letter (E) refers to the architectural structure. The top view literally represents the letter (E), whereby the vertical segment contains the offices and social facilities, while the horizontal sections constitute the wards.

It will be appropriate to throw in a *little bit of philosophy*, here at this specific point: The administrators / managers themselves, quite rightfully, were somewhat cynical about reforming the convicts. Even if prisons do sincerely attempt to and believe in reform and correction; can the prisoners themselves internalize the so-called reform and correction? Many claim that they feel so hurt by the society that they stay as revengeful as ever.

One novel of the German author *Heinz G. Konsalik (Mädchen im Moor)* is about a girls' reformatory in 1960s. In this work he depicts an ideal warden character with advanced ideas, who struggles to achieve good results through his exemplary institution, which functions with lenient methods and humanly understanding on the part of the management. The girls go to work in fields and enjoy outdoor activities during the day, in contact with the local peasant community. (The surrounding swamp makes escape impossible, anyhow). Disappointing incidents do happen from time to time.

It is no doubt that many perpetual prisoners have an entirely different view of the world, which does not overlap with that of the enforcing authority, at all. They are figures of anti-heroes and they are committed to be that. *Jean Genet* depicted such a psychology in the context of French prisons in 1930s. The guillotine-candidate Harcamone is glorified and sanctified in his eyes.

If only the beautifully written things on official papers could be successfully realised! "Modern treatment calls for an explanation of the cause of crime. Treatment is aimed at reform aid. The proper method will [hopefully] establish new habits, new attitudes, and new goals in life" (Landis, 1939, p.145).

Some sources include more realistic passages in their claims:

The chief aims of the penal systems of the United Kingdom are to deter the potential law-breaker and to reform the convicted offender. The aims of the prison service are, briefly, to provide for the detention of those committed to custody and training in the hope that rehabilitation will be attained. (*Britain, 1977: An Official Handbook* p.93)

*The prisons do not diminish the rate of criminality. Finally the prison indirectly produces delinquents by making fall into the poverty the family of the detained. The same arrest which sends the head of the family into the prison; reduces every day the mother to deprivation, the children to abandon, the entire family to vagabondage and begging. It is under this relation that the crime threatens to take deeper roots (Foucault, 1975, p.269, 273 as cited from Charles Lucas, 1838, p.64: *de la reform des prisons*, II).*

1. METHODOLOGY

Preparatory interviews with the administrators were virtually of conversational nature. Questions were open-ended and spontaneous.

An interview is indeed “useful for pilot testing to assess suspicion and the subject’s general reaction to the experiment” (Carlsmith et al., 1976, p.192).

It is strictly forbidden for the management of utter precise statements about their organization. In accordance with the official principles, we will refer to them as the administrators/managers, without even specifying their number. This word, therefore, is meant to include the director (warden) as well as the vice-directors — the “secondary directors” as they are called. When we quoted a sentence which is illuminating about the jailing topics, we deliberately avoided to attribute it to a specific name. This is for prevention of pinpointing the actual speaker.

The managers told that “the kids”¹ were very suspicious by nature of their work; since we could run the risk of being considered a “government agent” with a cover story, trying to pinpoint some faulty prison employees!

Accordingly, later, the questionnaire was prepared in a manner which would eliminate all possible suspicion. This was achieved by excluding all personal questions regarding grouping of ages, educational levels, home cities, years spent on the job, as well as any specimen of one’s handwriting. This guarantee of anonymity was also emphasized in the written directions, lest it might go unnoticed by the guards! In this manner, these suspicious subjects were relieved from the fear of even indirect guesses towards identification of the answer-givers.

It is understandable that a guard picks up this suspiciousness, even if he is not so by nature, through constant anxiety of possible desertion of and / or assault by a certain prisoner.

The information on the number and the general education level of the guards, their new official titles (punition security officer) etc. were all obtained during this preparatory interviews. There were about 300 guards and chief guards, two-thirds of whom were *lycée* graduates.

Many other revealing pieces of information were also brought up, meanwhile. For example, in more recent times, a different type of prisoner with considerable education has emerged — namely the political prisoner. One administrator said that a political prisoner was very well-advanced intellectually. He added that the guards dealing with them must have considerable education to get even. The same administrator explained that in the last decade the general ambience of the prison dormitories has also changed a lot:

—Formerly each dormitory had a big shot (ağa) who was dominating everybody. Nowadays, everybody is his own big shot! Furthermore, a conviction does not endeavour to impress and influence the guards by displaying his physical prowess, any more. Instead, he attempts to pull a few strings’ in Ankara [the capitol] and get his favors granted in this manner, if he ever can!

¹ The administration’s reference to the guards and chief guards as “kids” was indeed astonishing. Some of them were older than some managers, as far as the calendar age went. The word obviously indicates the cohesiveness and group commitment prevailing in the total-organization.

One elderly administrator described his job as “a very interesting kind of work, despite all its difficulties”. He gave the impression that he had a deep understanding of human nature — a talent acquired through years of interesting experience. He wondered at how inscrutable a being mankind was!

Once he witnessed a convict condemned to death to pick up a wounded, half-frozen bird in the courtyard.

— “He gave the bird crumbs of bread. He pressed it against his breast, right onto his naked skin! A killer as he was, he was not tolerating the death of a tiny bird!” he narrated.

The most difficult times they had been during the anarchy days just before the military coup of September 12, 1980, he explained. Receiving letters of threat on a daily basis became a routine. Most prison wardens resigned. Only a handful persevered. At the time he had a cutaneous trouble on his neck and went to hospital. The doctor, upon noticing him at the gate, exclaimed: “You must be a policeman or something! A stressful job is yours!”

These were the times when all prison employees suffered from burnouts. (In fact, Myers (1988) associates burnouts primarily with “guards, policemen, social workers”). The same manager added that to insist on such a job one “must of course have some liking for that job”. (On the managerial level, transfer to another government office could be “fixed” much more easily, in comparison to the common guard’s position).

Still another administrator recounted his most awful ordeal which he had to go through in another prison some fifteen years before: Witnessing a capital punishment! His superior had obtained a sick-leave on the grounds of having a weak heart and put him forward as the most senior representative of the penal institution.

Based on our “magazine knowledge”, along the course of the interviews, we threw in that a Turkish lady working for the American Federal Government visited the Turkish prisons some years ago and wrote reports suggesting reforms. The name came out in chorus: “Melda Türker!” they exclaimed unanimously. One even said “Melda Türker from Ohio”, putting it more specifically. It was as if the administrators won the special, subtle examination that we had popped up for them. Proud they were!

The administrators, who showed themselves very cooperative, specified the requirement of getting a permission from the attorney involved, before actually carrying out the survey. This, we did the very next morning.

1.1 Preparing the Questionnaire

Here at this point, only some key articles of the employed questionnaire are to be mentioned, specifically. The whole list contained a total of 65 items, the first twenty of which were taken from the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire.

As for the next twenty questions, they were chosen and adapted from among the 105 questions of the French scholar Salinsaulieu (1977, pp.438-447). This was a questionnaire initially designed for an electrical company and especially meant for the workers. The original questions each had three choices for appropriate replies. They were adapted in a manner to match with the 5-reply-format of the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire: I AM NOT SATISFIED AT ALL; I AM NOT SATISFIED; I AM UNDECIDED; I AM SATISFIED; I AM VERY MUCH SATISFIED.

Finally, the last 25 questions were specially designed² exclusively in view of prison guards. To comply with the other items: their reply alternatives went as I STRONGLY AGREE; I AGREE; I AM UNDECIDED; I DON'T AGREE; I DON'T AGREE AT ALL. As proposed by Kâğıtçıbaşı (1983, p.117); favorable and unfavorable statements were mixed in a manner so as to eliminate a yes-answer tendency, a high probability in Likert-type of scales.

The highest satisfaction degree was assigned a value of five points, the lowest only 1 point. Thus a score of 2.5 points would represent the exact middle scale, that is, the case of sheer undecidedness.

1.2 Administering the Questionnaire

Due to security reasons, a simultaneous sitting for all guards for answering the questionnaire was impossible. Instead, groups of guards were called by the administration to a specific desk (a watch-relieving post where the pictures of the entire organization were attached on the opposite wall in a framework), to fill out the forms. They did this in ink.

The filled forms were retrieved immediately. We stood around, supplying clarifications when necessary. For example, at a particular item regarding the way the superiors treat them, one young guard mumbled that he was satisfied with Mr. so-and-so but unsatisfied with Mr. so- and-so. I advised him to consider all administrators and base his answer on the majority.

It proved to be a good session. Indeed; this captive audience method whereby the instrument is *administered to a group of individuals assembled in the same place*; typically works well when it comes to “research in schools, prisons, and other [total] organizations of this kind. There is a good probability of a high response rate because the respondent lacks the ready option of refusal. In addition, there is always the opportunity to clarify ambiguous instructions, because the respondents are assembled in one group” (Forcese & Richer 1973, p.167).

² After administering the questionnaire and obtaining a tabulation of the results; the internal consistency of those brand-new 25 questions was ascertained. The computed alpha coefficient needed for this purpose (Kaplan, 1987) came out to be 0.77, a quite acceptable value.

2. FINDINGS AND THE ENSUING ELABORATIVE ARGUMENTS

The great majority of the punishment security officers and chief officers (guards and chief guards) are free of guilty feelings regarding their work, as the analysis of the answers given to the related item depicts (3.29 average score.). (Related item: “I am able to do things that do not go against my conscience”).

Some historical research, in fact, gives the impression that this has been the case even in earlier Ottoman days in the Turkish punitive conventions, in general:

“In those cities which I have seen in Turkey, the debtors have a prison separate and distinct from the felons. Without such a separation in England ,a thorough reformation of the gaols can never be affected” (Howard 1791, 1973, p.62).

The same author, it is true, also does mention about a bastinadoing incident in Izmir (Smyrna):

The prison for criminals in Smyrna [Izmir] is situated near the sea and consists of two rooms and a court. So speedy is the execution of justice here, that I found in this prison no more than seven prisoners at any of the three visits which I made to it in 1786. One of these prisoners having been bastinadoed so severely that he was swelled from head to foot. I advised him to bathe in the sea and to apply to the soles of his feet plasters made of salt and vinegar. In the use of these means, with the addition of two doses of Glauber’s salts [crystalline sodium sulfate, $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4 \cdot 10 \text{H}_2\text{O}$] he recovered; and I acquired a credit which made the keepers, in my subsequent visits, particularly attentive to me. (Ibid)

Now the bastinadoing³ here seems to be a cruel procedure. But, this event was taking place in the year of 1786. Moreover, bastinadoing was not administered arbitrarily; it had its own rules. Only the soles of the feet (a safe part of the body) were beaten. The amplitude of the swinging motion of the arm holding the beating-stick, the number of strokes (based on the offence committed) etc. were all specified. But, the most important discussion is that this procedure; no matter how cruel a method it is; after all; is to be compared with its counterparts in application elsewhere, at the times. For instance let us take a look at the situation in America in 1926, let alone the corresponding year of 1786:

Of the punishments commonly used in the old days, flogging appears to have disappeared in all the prisons visited with the exception of Colorado. In the ‘Honor prison’ of that state it is practiced and defended by the officials. Early in 1925 the Civil Service Commission of the state declared the flogging of prisoners a legal form of punishment and upheld the warden who practiced it. In Ohio prisoners in solitary confinement stand eight or more hours a day confined in a close-fitting semi-circular steel cage (MacCormick & Garrett, 1926, p.25).

³ On March 17, 1992, on a night program on the first channel (TV1) of the Official Turkish Television (TRT), former Minister of Justice *Oltan Sungurlu* asserted that torture is a crime in Turkey since 1923 [This is the foundation date of the Republic].

The first model Ottoman jail got built in Sultanahmet. It contained very clean well-regulated wards and work-shops. Nevertheless, soon after it degenerated into a state of irregularity. The convicts established their own order. The work-shops began to lack working inmates. All this happened at the heart of the city [then at capital of the empire] (Tekin & Özkes, 2008, p.188).

Famous poet *Nazım Hikmet* spent some time in *Sultanahmet Jail* as a leftist political prisoner. The establishment got transformed into a hotel in recent years. (For that matter, *Chankiri* accommodated another prominent literary figure: Novelist Kemal Tahir whereas *Sinop Jail* lodged famous writer Sabahattin Ali).

The Turkish penal system is based on a dormitory-system, not solitary confinement. The only place based on solitary cells at the time of this research was *Eskişehir Special Type of Prison*, an imitation of some European prisons, and it got evacuated soon after its inauguration. As an administrator put it, Turkish convicts cannot bear loneliness; loneliness is just awful.

— But in Europe, he explained a convict usually wouldn't even want new-comers. When a new convict arrives here everybody greets and welcomes him. There in Europe, the former occupier of the place just rolls over to his other side on his bed upon witnessing the arrival of a fellow-prisoner into his two-person-cell.

So, sociability is an outstanding trait of Turkish people. Privacy is not much of a value and Turkish prisons grant the convicts what they like: Community life and friendship. Turkish penal institutions are in continual progress, furthermore. Many new decisions are on the way.

Yalman (1957, p.207) notes that one of the urgent tasks of the newly-founded Republic was improving the circumstances in the prisons:

Another field of original Turkish pioneering was in prison reforms. Turkey has made headway during the last ten years with island used as a social sanatorium, and has engaged in a most successful experiment in prisons with open doors. I kept in close touch with such institutions and gave the government full credit for its achievements in this field.

It would be interesting to note that the right of education had been accorded utmost priority in Turkish prisons just after the alphabet reform:

[After passing the law on November 3, 1928; which makes the Latin-lettered new alphabet compulsory and abolishes the former Arabic scripture] *Mustapha Kémal decreed that all convicts in jails who learn the new scripture within the specified time interval, shall be pardoned, regardless of their crime* (Benoist-Méchin, 1954, p.425).

Analysis of the related item (“This is not a job meant for just anybody”; 3.62 average score) reveals the pride the guards display in doing a dangerous and difficult task. Being able to deal with criminals must be something special. This sense of being above the ordinary man is indeed to be observed in the obtained result.

Interestingly enough; when the great dams in Siberia at the time of Soviets were being built; many posters directed toward young people “worked” basically on this

principle: To recruit volunteers, they emphasized that only the “toughest” young people could endure this work. Many youths went to work on these dams to prove that they were among those “toughest” ones.

Similarly; In the U.S. the Marine Force basically relies on this attraction to enroll the soldiers. The marines are reputed to be “tough” and many young people join them to prove themselves.

For a mature, grown-up mind, such an attraction probably is not enough of an initiation to enter the profession. But, once “enrolled”; it might “flatter” the satisfaction from the job. This could also work as a rationalization for those who cannot obtain a better job.

In fact, the four items comparing them with the adjacent factory’s foremen, paper-work clerks, bank employees and sorts of salesmen (haberdashers and dried-fruit shop-owners) respectively; indicate that these reference groups are all regarded with envy.

In spite of the changing image of the prison-guard, those men are not glad of their status so far achieved within the organization, as the analysis of the related item (2.27 average score) verifies.

Those men are very glad to represent the government (related item: “We may consider ourselves lucky. We are government officers. We represent the state! Isn’t that something, now?” 3.43 average score). Nevertheless; they can not fully enjoy their mastery and influence (related item: “The hardened types of the society are docile as lambs in front of us! Witnessing this alone is enough!” 2.27 average score, again).

As Tezcan (1987, p.186) specifies; *in our society; dominating others or being a chief has acquired a very positive value. To manage and order issues to others is a preferred behavior. This holds true both in our rural and urban lives. Parents wish that their sons serving in the army become corporals. One reason why government officialship is in demand is this domineering aspiration. Even the smallest official would at least give order the janitors, press on the button on his desk and call them. The Turkish proverb “he holds the seal is [Prophet] Solomon” clearly expresses the demand for official posts.*

This craving for enjoyment of power usually does not exceed its generally accepted limits and accordingly it does not in general lead to abuse, for the case of most officials. It might even render some officials golden-hearted, fatherly figures. But, this cannot be said of all, unfortunately.

Everyone is affected for good or evil by being in a position of power and the probation or parole officer is no exception. It may increase his sense of responsibility and his desire to help or it may give him such a personal sense of superiority that he lets it run away with him. (Pigeon, 1942, p.330)

An army-sergeant, who had worked for a military prison full of political detainees and convicts in 1981, at the time of a military *coup* in Turkey, once said that the officers and the petty-officers were horrified to be appointed as prison

administrators, but the guards (plain soldiers drafted to service at a young age) were very much glad to be there. Some of these guards invented many pretexts to maltreat the prisoners under their custody and the military administration had a hard time preventing such abuses. This can be regarded as corruption of suddenly-received power.

Those privates mostly came from rural areas. They were sons of peasant families. They were never respected and important people before. Now in their army service, they were all of a sudden bestowed with this tremendous power to dominate people. They had their plastic clubs with which they could beat any convict they wished, as they perceived it. Moreover, for them, this lucrative chance was a mere passing occasion. Once their term over, they would get discharged and return to their humble or even humiliated former existence. This was their time to become somebody and to prove it to those over whom they were charged with authority! The sergeant had been a good whistleblower in supplying this information, (if only following a decade after the events took place).

Since civilian guards are permanent officials, the above situation is not applicable to them, as a rule of thumb. As an administered put it, “ordinarily a guard wants to be well-liked among prisoners”.⁴ Basically they rely on referent power.

We were told that in one particular case the referent power “shatters” and “goes bankrupt”: With political prisoners.⁵ These prisoners have no respect for the “jailers”. They humiliate them, swear at them, insult them. There, the guards have just one choice: resorting to legal or even coercive power. Though the guards are well aware of the intellectual level of a typical political prisoner; somehow; they feel that they have their own grounds to make much of their official positions against them.

Looking at the rather low average score (only 1.86 average score) of related item (“Wearing a uniform every day — every day! Let alone the burden; it sort of depicts you, marks you downtown in the market place, on the street!”); they consider their uniforms “stigmatizing” downtown.⁶ They are not very well-liked, especially by

⁴ In our post-experimental interviews aimed at gleaning further information, a guard in Ankara Ulucanlar Prison said:

— “Anyone can end up in a prison, including you and I! So, why maltreat those unlucky people called convicts?”

⁵ I remember a newspaper clipping regarding the parole application in 1991. A fifty-year-old political parolee just released felt no gratitude. He said he had no place to go. He said that “inside” he could at least make some Money in the workshops. He eventually declared: “I am so enraged that I could burn the entire city!” (That specific sentence was pulled out as the headline).

⁶ As an exception; a certain Ankara-guard said he had such a high esteem of his uniform that it would be demeaning for him to walk into a common tea-house in his official clothing. “Some colleagues do it,” he complained. He specified his great delight in possessing authority over convicts. When compared with a policeman, he replied that he would have indeed preferred a policeman’s broader authority. When compared with also-blue-uniformed municipality controller; with a displeased pout of his mouth, he answered: “No, that is a work which anybody can exercise!” To fine dishonest tradesmen was not enough of an attraction for him.

people who have friends or relatives “inside”. As a matter of fact; the plain people and the government men appear to represent two distinct, opposite poles.

This idea has its historical roots embedded in conventions and traditions, too, as reflected in old tales and legends: *When an old woman finds a useful talisman the government men deprive her of this talisman by force. The people do not believe that the government representatives would act in justice. The sentry, the watchman of the quarter, the village-chief, the executioner can all be bribed and led astray* (Tuğrul, 1969, pp.109-110).

This by no means is to be interpreted in the sense that they all dislike their uniforms. Many of them love their uniforms. The related item (2.52 average score), merely a subtle way to inquire into this by referring to the dark blue color worn, reveals a very slight majority on the “satisfied side”. It would be appropriate to say that many members among them like the guard-uniform at its face-value. However they don’t like the way the people regard the uniform.

During the post-experimental interviews, in Ankara Ulucanlar Prison, a guard narrated how one of their friends went all the way to his village clothed in his uniform and boasted that he became a chief punitive officer. (In actuality he was not a chief guard. But he put on their ostentatious insignias on the way. Two crimson-colored stripes on the sleeves and two tiny stars on the hat below the crescent-cockade constitute the chief guard’s insignias while only one sleeve-strip and one tiny hat-star indicate the less senior guard).

Interestingly; a certain administrator replied to the question about uniforms in the following manner:

— “No, unfortunately, we, the managers, do not wear uniforms like our subordinates, the guards and chief-guards!”

A certain item of the questionnaire reflects the enjoyment they obtain through the state’s trust in their persons. (“There is a feeling of responsibility that I like. Here, they confine the enemy of society to you and they rely on you that you will not let him escape”. A pretty high average score of 3.68).

Finally, it must be mentioned that in Ankara interviews, some insinuations about the enthusiasm of some guards towards obtaining personal profits through the practice of bribery were also expressed. This should not go without saying. Thus, when these implications are taken into consideration, some of the so-called satisfactions of some corrupt punishment security officers might even be attributed to the illegal advantages that they are managing to “squeeze”. Such a probability may reduce the intrinsic satisfaction of the guards on the average, further down!

The starting hypothesis that guards are unsatisfied with their jobs is almost confirmed in this research, based on the gathered data and the subsequent analysis and computations. The total average score of satisfaction is 2.51 points (with respect to a fully satisfaction score of 5.00). It is so slightly above the mid-point grade that this infinitesimal excess may be neglected, easily.

CONCLUSION

As a significant sub-theme of a job satisfaction field research in an Anatolian prison, glimpses of the Turkish penal system in late 1990s are obtained and many inferences can be made. The system appeared to be functioning well and in accordance with contemporary concepts of rehabilitating and re-gaining the inmates onto the mainstream society; rather than a sheer primitive, vindictive retaliation and isolation.

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APPENDIX: VISUAL SUPPLMENT



Figure 1
An Approximation of Another Illustrator’s Criminal-Cartoon Without a Caption, (C.1991) From Mere Memory (as Re-Drawn by the Author — S.Ç.)



Figure 2
Re-Construction From Memory, (by the Author — S.Ç.) of a Cartoon Which Was Printed on the Back Flap of a Comic Strip in Turkish, as a Translation, at Least 30 Years Ago



Figure 3
Guards' Insignias on the Hat, Chest and Sleeves (Scanned by the Author — S.Ç.)



Figure 4
A View of the Chankiri Jail From an Automobile Windshield

63. Benden az emek verenler varsa da, yönetimin gözünde kıymetimin onlardan fazla olduğuna kâniyim. " " " " "
64. Yukarı kademe ne istediğimizi, ne düşündüğümüzü bilmiyor, kestiremiyor çoğu defa. " " " " "
65. Bu meslek tabiatı icabı benim mizacıma uygun. O bakımdan kismetliyim. " " " " "

T. C.
ADALET BAKANLIĞI
ÇANKIRI E TİPİ CEZAEVİ
MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

ANKETİN SONU

TEKRAR TEŞEKKÜRLERİ

Çankırı (E) tipi Kapalı
Cezaevi'nde infaz Koruma
Memur ve başmemurlarına
uygulanmıştır.
14.1.1992



Figure 5
The Seal and Stamp of the Prison on the Turkish Questionnaire



Figure 6
The Researcher Posing With Three Chief Guards