Violence within the Bosom of the Family

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ABSTRACT

Family is man's most private and immediate social environment, his innermost primary group. For all people in face-to-face interaction; some "dose" of conflict and quarrel is just natural. However; some important problems may give way to disastrous violent incidents within the family unit. The extent of the violence as well as the persons involved show variations depending on the specific situation and the characteristics of the family in question.

Key Words: Family; violence; conflict.

Introduction

—How horrible it is
For a man
To square his account
With a tree, with his brother,
Or his mother!
How awful for him
To depart from his shirt, his hat! —
Sabahattin Kudret Aksal (Trans. by S.Ç.)

Families constitute the nuclei of human societies. The individual's most confidential and secure shelter, his most secluded resting nest is the family hearth. Nevertheless the family members' getting along with one another is not so smooth and peaceful, all the time. Frictions, quarrels, or even physical rigor may at times threaten the serene picture of the household.

In the traditional Turkish society; the possessive idea of "loving and beating the beloved" simultaneously prevails as a dominating savvy. This does not pertain to Turkish culture alone. Loving, caring is universally associated

with protecting and warning against perils, this, in a hurtfully scolding manner, if necessary.

Feelings of jealousy further complicate the scene: *Little (or sometimes even the senior children) envy the interest and care directed to the new-comer-infant. If the lover catches the beloved one's eye elsewhere, trouble erupts. This also happens after the wedding is realized. The mother gets angry with the child who wants to go play in the street. She warns her spouse, who risks his life or health. Anxiety and anger go together, when there is a probability of loss. Moreover, this attitude proves to be functional and deterring. It reminds the staggering precious one his / her value in a marvelous way. The child who thought he was being neglected, now regains his spiritual balance. Fury at the right time, dose and place; let alone being proper; may even be required* (highlighted from Bowlby 1988: 79)

A certain level of conflict is expected and is the result of candid intimacy, which formal and distanced relationships do lack by nature. It may be regarded as the manifestation of feelings of mutual responsibility for one another.

Years ago TV news about a Soviet space capsule intrigued me not due to the technical aspects but the human aspects, instead. The cosmonauts were said to quarrel among themselves about several issues during the space travel. An extension of such a closely-knit common fate. A Turkish idiom explains such close encounters with having to look into somebody's eyes and face.

Years ago a bunch of Turkish teachers were sent to a course in America. Just like the above-mentioned cosmonauts, we all felt as though we belonged to an artificially-formed special family uniting all of us. Each felt

himself responsible (*) for the others for the whole duration of the course. If somebody clad shabbily, or neglected to mend a torn button or sneezed loudly in the toilet; the others became guides of good mannerism and made the necessary warning for the man to pull himself together. Sometimes a visible tension was reining in the air. Too much solidarity was obviously constraining freedoms. A final break with the group with an announcement of absolute independence was a venture some threatened with but could never dare.

A work sheet for an English class in a university came to my attention at a student hostel. It was an elaboration of the possible consequences if Shakespeare's immortal characters Romeo and Juliet had married. The work sheet pictured a not so pink-colored picture about that hypothetical wedding (*).

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* In many oriental and traditional societies (this includes Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Turks among others) kinship assumes much more important connotations —feuds being one indication of such responsibility— than in a western society. Affiliation and collectivity versus individual freedom, in general, is the contrasting philosophy behind. Even the physical distance between any two persons talking to each other, is noticeably shorter than that in the American society, for instance. In a gathering like a picnic meal, similarly, persons are sitting more closely with respect to a corresponding western picnic scene. Emphasizing a personal success could be regarded as shameful. Indeed; Ottoman miniature-artists used to avoid putting their signatures on their masterly works. If there is no accompanying document, It is only by inference from the style and color patterns that one can trace a work back to *Levni*, the famous court painter of the late 17th cenurty, for instance.

* At the time I was in deep depression, trying to recover from a bitter romance. My sweetheart had deserted me some time ago. The worksheet proved to be a good remedy, a silent and effective session of psychoanalysis for me; leading me to write down some verses, as a reevaluation of our bygone love: *It is good you broke away / Before contamination / Of the*

A retired signal officer on one occasion talks about his visit to his former Signal Officers Training School. Some fantasies about a young girl Perihan come to the surface of his memories, an image which owes its freshness to the fact that marriage did not somehow follow: *After leaving the Signal School I searched for the gas-mask factory and could not find that in its place, either. What did I search and re-discovered, after all? Up the hill over the road, Perihan used to watch the street from her window, the princess of my sleepless nights in the military ward. Neither she nor her house was erect there at the moment. I took the train. Only the train's route was the same. When we arrived in Cebeci my heart ached. Neither Perihan nor any sign from her any more! Once we passed the Kurtuluş station, I watched the Kurtuluş park from the window. I used to stroll in this park with Perihan, both of us dreaming about our would-be-shared-future!* (Saraç 1995).

The first Step to Derangement in Family: Unrest and Blues

Bilen (1978, Section VI) lists the following reasons under the subtitle "Situations Causing Depression in the Family" and, for a beginning recommends the acceptance of the realities:

—*Temporary segregation (war, hospital stay, work, travel)*

—*Chronic Illness*

—*Absence of Children*

—*Children with Abnormalities*

—*Drop in the Income Level*

—*Unemployment*

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purely platonic / Form of our affection / From now on you shall live / Merely in my reverie / And thus grow more an more / celestial with the times! s.ç.

—Old age

—Alcohol Use and Gambling

We see that while some such problems may stem from cases which are beyond the reach of the family; some other problems are of behavioral nature, only. In other words; they stem from negative attitudes. As Author Öztürk specifies it; one of the conspicuous negative attitudes is polarization **(*)** within a given family:

Sometimes; within the family; clique formations, protests against an individual or group, secret agreements can be encountered. Sometimes the parents versus the children, or the mother along with a child versus the mother along with a child **(*)** *become polarized. At times the whole family might go against a single whipping boy* (Öztürk 1994: 424).

The Categorization of the Intra-Family Troubles

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* Indeed; as one of the German founding fathers of Sociology, *Georg Simmel* (1858-1918), emphasized long ago; once the size of the group expands from two (dyad) to three (triad); group dynamics commences. Two can form an alliance and exclude the third and the actors may change all the time.

* A science teacher once received a new-year postcard from a private female student to his home address. The suspicious wife took it as a card from another woman and the relations tensed until the misunderstanding disappeared. As the teacher narrated; in the mean time; his daughter sided with the mother, while his son appeared to support the father. The teacher took a lesson and with a sighing voice complained about the seemingly stable but actually ephemeral affection of a daughter for his father.

A common classification of the violence in a family can be given as parent brutality against children, violence among siblings, violence against parents or violence against the female (İçli 1994: 282-283).

An extreme form of violence against children is the "battered baby syndrome", a result of beating and persecution of the child, which is a topic of forensic sciences.

In the Turkish society; beating the child used to be a traditional educative method. Many sayings support the idea: "The beating stick came from the paradise" is one such proverb. In former times; a parent consigning his child to the first teacher would traditionally say "his bones belong to me while his flesh is all yours from now on" implying that the child may be beaten as long as he remains in good health.

A situation aggravating the intra-siblings troubles is discrimination due to being a step child. A barber (*Meister Saffet*) once recounted the following quick-eyed observation of his, while shaving my hair: "*Yesterday I saw the affectionate departing of a mother and son on the municipality bus and the spirit moved my heart. Definitely they must be separated. The boy must be living with the father. When I was a child, my own mother was the wife of another man. I used to go see her furtively. When my step-brothers somehow deduced a visit of mine to my mother, they would beat me badly.*

In western societies brutal revolts of adolescents against the parents is not such a rare case; whereas in Turkish culture and in other traditional societies it is a horrible, totally unacceptable behavior. One item of the famous *Hammurabi* laws in ancient Babylon (as given in high school books) was stipulating cutting the hands off for a son who had beaten his father.

For Turkey the more significant dimension of the intra-family troubles is violence against the female. Therefore, the intra-family violence, in essence, is a male problem (İçli 1994: 281).

Household brutalities are mostly carefully concealed from the outsiders. Still, it is appropriate to talk about the growing interest of public and the media for the problem, in recent years (İçli 1994: 280).

Indeed; the age-old diction "the arm gets broken but it stays within the arm-sleeve" is being discarded more and more. Persecuted family members are becoming whistleblowers and denouncing their tormentors in the household more eagerly in contemporary times. The values and ideas are changing with urbanization and modernization, swiftly.

A female's resorting to violence against the male is an exceptionally rare case for Turkey. In western societies this is not so rare. *George McManus'* famous comic strip, *Bringing up Father* has been popular in Turkey, too. It was adapted to Turkish names and enjoyed by newspaper readers, probably *Jiggs* alleviating the persecution feelings of some Turkish hen-pecked husbands as a comrade and *Maggie* making their oppressive wives look milder.

Some years ago, in a private high school in *Teşvikiye-Istanbul* a guest female student from America (AFS program: American Field Service) talked about the problem in her host-family to the administration. (At the time, I was among the faculty, teaching three kinds of courses). The female of the host house was often beating her husband and this situation was bad for the morale of the guest student. The school administration contacted the AFS office and arranged for the student's transfer into another family.

The Long-Term Negative Impact Upon the Child

A conflict-generating house ambiance affects the personality development of the children badly. The unhappy child lingers his / her psychological problems into adult years. The repercussions are manifold and long-lasting. The victims usually end up as problematic individuals in the society

Tense and friction-involving mother-father relations create an insecure and irritating climate for the children. Due to continuing problems, the children develop fears for probable separation and resulting helplessness. They can not openly express such fears. Sometimes they think they have their share of the blame in those quarrels. Considering the fact that some of the fights actually break out because of them and sometimes they are confronted with open accusations like "all because of you!"; the culpability feelings are better understood. The healthy emotional development is damped with abasing accusations, beating, threats of divorce, renewed quarrels (Sonuvar 1989: 134).

A Problem Not Suitable for Outside-Intervention

One specific trait of intra-family problems hindering improvement or betterment is the difficulty of interference of others due to the intimate nature of the family. In actuality; such an intervening is much more dangerous than it appears at first sight. I remember an article **(*)** in an American journal which I

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* The title was embedded in my memory: "Police Under Fire Fighting Back". The journal was *U.S. News and World Report* in 1978. Years later, I could trace the basics of the article in the internet. The author's name is not given; it is classified as anonymous (The author was accordingly courageous in handling the delicate and even risky subject).

In many realistic scenes depicted in the novels of Joseph Wambaugh —himself a former Los Angeles policeman— it is possible to encounter scenes whereby the interfering cop finds

had read years ago. It said that many police officers were shot with their own guns while interfering with family fights.

A female author has things to say, regarding this side of the story: "*Let us not forget that sometimes we are confronted with ungrateful feelings or worse consequences just when we do what we think is the proper thing to do While I was just married to Milton, upstairs lived another couple. The husband was regularly beating his wife. One day we got fed up with the situation and Milton exploded upstairs in a heroic mood to stop the beating. Then the couple left each other, came together as a closely-knit team in full solidarity and started beating poor Milton!*" (Viorst 1993).

Figure 1. A cantankerous wife sick and tired of the drunkness of her husband (illustration by the author).

himself in peril, even though he was *sometimes* —because usually it is a neighbor who phones to the police station— fetched by a call from one of the spouses, themselves.

While I was at the age of six we lived in a rented house in *Dikmen* quarter of *Ankara*, a remote and unfrequented settlement at the time. Next door a young non-commissioned-officer lived with his wife. They had no children. The man used to beat his wife at times and we heard her weeping voice. But, the strange thing, they soon reconciled and went to play volleyball in their back yard. On one occasion, the beating session lasted a bit longer. My mother warned my father: "So, you are a tanker-officer —father held the rank of a captain, then— Go tell that man to stop!" Father took his eyes off the newspaper and spoke: "Don't you know the proverb which authorizes not to get between man and wife? Moreover; in half an hour; they will start playing volleyball, again!"

The Last Stage of Violence: Extermination

The range of violence or force varies from belittling words through maltreatment to sheer bashing; but its culminating point may end in murder. The typical psychological profile of many Turkish people may be depicted as hot-tempered (Despite individual variations, a common historical, geographical and cultural melt-down imparts certain collective traits to people). Many murders get committed as a result of sudden fury, on the spot rather than by premeditation and fine planning, as encountered in western societies.

At *Çukurova* University, a visiting agricultural engineering Ph.D. student from Germany, on the occasion of toxicology, once recounted the following pre-planned homicide in his country: *A husband smeared a strongly poisonous substance on the menstruation-wad of his wife. The crime, nevertheless, did not go unnoticed.*

In one of hiss novels (An American Dream, 1965), Norman Mailer gives the story of a politician who throws his wife from a high window and gives the appearance of an accident. Detectives almost solve the truth behind the case; but his complicated influential networking assures his acquittal (Ironically; his powerful father-in-law takes a role in saving him from the justice. A detective full of rage can not help snorting the sentence: "You have a big brother, somewhere!").

In a famous short story by John Collier (The Chaser) young Alan goes to a mysterious old herb-seller to buy love potion. He will make Dianna drink the potion and she will reply to his love. The potion proves to be very cheap, just a dollar. The old man meanwhile talks about very expensive "cleaning" potions, impossible to detect at an autopsy. The old man is a future-investor. He sells extremely cheap liquids to the new-comers, in expectation to see them years later, this time as rich customers in quest for expensive cleaners. The title (*) of the story itself is suggestive. While the happy man leaves the dusty shop heavily, the old man says "au revoir" in French, meaning "see you later", instead of "adieu", which would connote a final departure. A dreadful story, in brief!

The liberated, conscious —or even sophisticated— American woman, in possession of the minute details of her legal rights is not any more so enjoyable a being for the American man, at the last analysis. The tremendous increase in divorce rate is accordingly high.

Conclusion

* Chaser is defined as *a mild drink taken after hard liquor* (Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary 19990: 228).

Family members are in warm contact with one another as the closet and dearest individuals. This intimate ambiance involves correction of visible mistakes instead of overseeing them as it would be the case in formal relationships (A Turkish proverb says that *the true-friends talks bitterly*).

But; once the problems exceed a certain limit; conflict may reach unhealthy levels. Then happiness and peace are no more realities. Persecution converts a family hearth into an inferno. Children get molded under undesirable adverse effects which could have their negative impact lifelong. They grow into problematic, aggressive [*], troublesome and maybe even criminal adulthood. Violence within the family is a calamity. The result could eventually be the graveyard for the victim and the prison for the actor.

Nevertheless, the polar opposite situation completely free from discipline, where no respectful constraints, are in question and everybody runs wild can not be a good model family, either. Especially putting up with all faults of the child, imploring him instead of penalization or putting himself in a pity-deserving situation as a parent can be awfully wrong. As Sonuvar (1989: 138) points out; in that specific case; *the children develop behavior patterns*

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[*] In a realistic (or even naturalistic) contemporary American novel (whose author and title escaped my memory), one of the auxiliary characters was a female ringleader of a delinquent bunch. Cold, rigid, harsh, having nothing to do with tender feelings which a young girl is expected to possess! At the ending episode, a climax leads her into tears for the first time and makes her confess her great big secret: Her well-to-do father; who never neglects to send his allowances from her far-away-home; is the one who had raped her at the age of thirteen! ("He spat at his Goddamned prick and violated me!"). Poor girl! In actuality she is nothing else but an incest victim!

characterized as disobedient,   selfish, irresponsible, disrespectful of others'

rights, and rebellious against authority.

The key appears to find the appropriate moderate, intermediate mid-way

in raising children and maintaining good relationships in the family.

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