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ANOMIE AND CRIME IN THE FAMILY IN A TRADITIONAL AND TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper aims at elaborating and understanding of murder and homicide in the Albanian family. During the last two decades, Albanians have experienced rapid changes, great turmoil and transitions from a communist, traditional ethnic-based society towards a new era of modern norms of a “western” society. We will build on Durkhemian’s paradigm on anomie as the first leading cause to crime and deviance. We hypothesize that: “when ethnic-based family oriented societies face new rules and regulations, a deregulation of the social system and a disruption of family ties is displayed, hence a domain of anomie is created, a threat of collective conscience of the society, a state of being lost between past and future which influences people to be more prone to committing murder and crimes towards society, towards their families and towards themselves, committing suicide. The second hypotheses is that: the honor killings are nothing but a rudiment of the old patriarchal societies and an expression of the collision between the new imposed norms and old, well-established traditions.

Keywords: Anomie, crime, tradition, transition

Introduction

Researchers and theorists during the XX-th century have focused on two main theoretical derived models to explain homicide, one stressing the socio-economic conditions (Blau and Blaw 1981; Braithwaite 1979; Loftin and Hill 1974; Parker and Smith 1979; Stack 1983; Williams 1984; Parker 1989; Kennedy 1991; Lee 2000; Kim and Pridemore 2005; Green and Sabini 2006; Pridemore and Kim 2007; Antonaccio and Tittle (2007) et al. The

other paradigm is the cultural theoretical explanation which is employed on the idea that it is the cultural aspect that fosters crime and social conflict (Kressel 1981; Cohen and Nisbett 1994; Arsovska & Verduyn 2008) et al.

There is also a rich domain of literature concerning anomie and conflict, deviance and crime. Since Durkheim (1897) and Merton (1957) wrote their well-known book “Suicide” and essay “The Social Structure and Anomie”, a good deal of work has been done in both elaborating the theories and trying to test them out (Rose, 1966). Most of the researchers have done so in a dichotomy point of view by portraying macro-sociological analyses such as: society and crime; culture and crime; anomie and crime; poverty and crime, etc. In this paper we will try to pinpoint at the Albanian family which in our view provides a specific case study to test Durkheim due to its historical past and present as a patriarchal and transitional society and its Balkans belongings. Hence we try to fill a gap between previous research and upcoming research in the Balkan family studies.

After The Second World War, having a dilapidated infrastructure and poor economy, Albania embraced the totalitarian regime as most of the countries of Eastern Europe did, following in the steps of Russia, trying to build socialism and its ideological ideals. For almost half a century Albania was under one of the most rigid Stalinist regimes thus being the last one to resign from it in the ‘90-s. From that time on, it has been wavering into a transitional period of rapid changes of political and economic instability, a wide range of cultural metamorphoses such as what is considered “family”, what is considered “deviance” and so on. All this turmoil has created a clash between old cultural traditional norms and new modern western values, thus picturing the best anomic society that Durkheim himself could imagine.

This co-existence with the past and the future, this clash of customary patriarchal laws and future inspirations of entering European Union, equipped the social arena with new rules, new regulations, new institutions, new lifestyles, new stratification of the society, new perception of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, what is ugly and what is beautiful, what is legal and what illegal, what is old and what is new. As the majority of the people in the society experience a feeling of being lost, the only sphere to act and be present is the cell of the society, the family. As a result of this, during the last two decades there has been a growth in the number of homicides in the family, a revival of honor killings, crimes of passions, committing suicide, etc. The family is the only place when they feel safe, they are more prone to relinquish their stress and act against the feeling of being lost. Outside the family, everything is foreign and alienated.

What is Anomie?

Almost a century ago, Durkheim provided sociologists with a formidable conceptualization of anomie and crime (Pescosolido & Georgianna, 1989). The popularity of this concept is just a few decades old but its roots go back more than twenty five centuries ago (Orru, 1987). Although it is a very well known notion in sociology, criminology and psychology, anomie is easily defined etymologically but not semantically. Its origin is from Greek word *anomia* which means the absence of law. As stated in Orru(1987) such definition is so broad thus when using instead its semantic definition the meaning varies greatly throughout the literature reflecting specific concerns of different epochs and cultures. Anomie means ruthlessness in Euripides, anarchy in Plato, sin and wickedness in Old Testament, unrighteousness in Paul's letters and a human condition of insatiability in Durkheim(Orru, 1987).

Although nowadays, Durkheim is mostly famous for his use of anomie, it was from the writings on anomie of the 19th century philosopher and sociologist Jean Marie Guyau developed in the book *L'Irreligion de l'avenir* published in 1887 and reviewed by Durkheim in the *Revue philosophique* the same year. Although Guyau lived only 33 years, he is considered as one of the most prominent of French philosophical critics who had an influence on Durkheim work.

In recent years, both empirical and theoretical studies have focused on Durkheim's specific ideas without seriously considering how historical changes might have affected his general propositions and how this propositions might be translated to consider new social contexts (ibid). Although his core propositions of his theory were presented in "*Suicide*" (1951 [1897]), there are some authors like Rose(1996) who think that the first Durkheim who wrote: "*The division of labor in Society*", is not quite the same as the one who wrote "*Suicide*". In the first book he refers to anomie as a breakdown of the regulatory mechanisms to which the term 'normlessness' might well refer(Rose, 2006). In the second book he describes anomie as a condition where either the ends outstrip the means as in prosperity or the ends remain the same and the means are severely restricted as in depression(Rose 2006). In 1902 Durkheim writes: 'If anomie is an evil it is above all because society suffers from it, being unable to live without cohesion or regularity. A moral or juridical regulation essentially expresses, then, the social needs that society alone can feel'(Orru 1987, pp 107).

There are other scholars as well like DiCristina who think that Durkheim's theory of homicide exists in a somewhat fragmented and incomplete state. In the "*Suicide*" he implies

that the rate of social change can influence homicidal dispositions with anomie being the key intervening variable. Anyway, a connection between the rate of social change and anomie is proposed in both of his two major works. In “Suicide” he directly addressed the relationship between anomie and homicide (DiCristina 2004). He described anomie as a state in which people are unable to achieve their goals or satisfy their desires due to a rapid change which reduces the amount of interaction between people or various groups, thus it leads into a breakdown of norms, values and so on.

In fact in “Suicide”, Durkheim (1951[1897]), referred to different sorts of anomie, such as domestic anomie, matrimonial anomie, economic anomie and sexual anomie. A couple of years later, the economic anomie was further developed and tested by different sociologists like Krohn (1978), Messner (1982) et al. Building on Durkheim paradigm, Krohn implied a positive relation between societal development and homicide. According to him, population, urbanity, industrialization and the division of labor create anomie, a state where men’s desires exceed his means to accomplish or satisfy them. This inability to satisfy desires fosters unhappiness, disappointment, anger or rage than can drive a person to commit suicide or homicide (Durkheim 1897). As cited in Dicristina (2004), anomie begets a state of irritated weariness which may turn against the person himself or against other persons, according to circumstances. When turning against himself the person commits suicide, when turning against the others, he /she commits homicide. DiCristina (2006, pp 74-75) states that the notion of Durkheim’s anomie (1951 [1897]: 357-9) could cause both suicide and homicide.

Although currents of anomie may flow through all societies, abrupt and substantial changes in a social system can generate high levels of anomie(DiCristina 2004). Such changes although can be good, can make the rules obsolete, especially in the periods of rapid social changes which can also bring an increase in homicidal dispositions (Durkheim 1951[1897]: pp.369). For Durkheim anomie is a condition where goals and aspirations are unrestrained, or deregulated, when the end of actions become contradictory, insignificant or unassessible; a condition of anomie arises when there is a general loss of orientation, when there are feelings of emptiness and apathy, in this sense anomie is conceived as a state of meaningless.

For Merton, anomie is an adequacy of means for the fulfillment of cultural goals or society’s sanctioned culturally goals. He conceived anomie not as much as an anomie of the individuals, but mostly as an anomie of the institutions. Anomie is a disjunction between goals and institutionalized means. That doesn’t mean that institutional norms or means don’t

exist, they are present but they don't guide the conduct of the people. Merton also conceived anomie as a state of normlessness of means and ends.

As cited in Cao et al., according to Merton anomie refers to 'a lack of consensus on norms judged to be legitimate'(Merton, 1964). Merton (1938) argues that anomy is a unique characteristic of an open democratic society. In a closed society anomie is more rampant, because people know their place in the stratification system. A social democratic political system is thus the precondition for the growth of anomie. He also states that in every society and societal system there are two essential elements: cultural goals and institutional norms. Merton argued that anomie is socially induced. Latter research (Cao, Zhao, Ren, Solomon Zhao, 2009) demonstrated that people in societies with more social support should be less anomic because their fundamental needs are satisfied and they are not any under extreme pressure to achieve monetary success.

In other terms, in cultural level Merton emphasizes the lack of equilibrium between socially described means and ends of action. Anomy is caused by the imbalance that results when cultural goals are overemphasized at the expense of institutionalized means(Bernburg, 2002). Although Merton talked on anomie of the institutional level, it was Messner and Rosenfeld (1994, 1997) who established the Institutional-Anomie theory.

Edwin Sutherland (1939) argued that social disorganization is the basic cause of systematic criminal behaviors. Cultural conflict is a specific aspect of social disorganization. A cultural system can be disorganized in the sense that there are conflicts between values, norms and beliefs, within a widely shared, dominant culture (Jinger, 1960). Similarly in his paper Sellin (1938) argued that when we study a specific conduct it is important to think of culture conflict as a conflict of conduct norms, that such a conflict may arise as a process of group differentiation within a cultural system. There is a conjunction between cultural, social and legal norms during rapid changes which may create a culture of conflict or in other words can create anomie.

Transition and Tradition

During the last two decades Albania faced tremendous political, socioeconomic and ideological changes. A culture of conflict or violence has developed in Albania because of the lack of the conjunction between legal, social and cultural norms and due to the rapid changes that happened in the legal, economic and social institutions. In such times of transitions, the institutions are not deeply rooted in "the collective conscience" of the

individuals, and the social ties are weak. In this bipolar anomic system created by individual and institutional anomie, the social structure is very unstable and people try to find ways to survive or be successful by turning to delinquency. In some cases the legal norms of one group are extended over areas of the other groups by creating confusion and violating their legal, cultural norms (Sellin, 1938).

Because of the changing of the political system and going from communism to democracy, Albanians were asked to embrace values and norms that were anathema for them just a few years ago. New economic and political norms and values trying to cope on the old, social ones, thus creating a wide array of challenges related to crime, law and justice (Pridemore & Kim 2007). As a result, a widespread corruption especially among the political elites has been growing, a growth of crime and homicide in the society in general and within the family in particular, a dramatic increase in interpersonal violence, a diminishing law and a growing “cult of the individual”, reflected in the revival of old Canon Medieval norms, which will refer below. In modern societies “the cult of the individual” characterizes the social relations and the moral values (Durkheim 1898).

It is very important that when we study crime in a society we take into account the cultural system and the historical background. Culture is a crucial element in understanding a given society, especially the traditional ones where cultural goals (Durkheim, 1897) really matter. Attitudes, values and beliefs that are sometimes collectively referred as “culture” play an unquestioned role in human behavior and progress (Huntington and Harrison, 2000).

In most of western societies, crime or violence is seen as something illegal, illegitimate, as a law-breaking act, as an offence, as a corruptive act, as misconduct, as delinquency, as an offence against the law, as a violation of the law, etc. In a traditional society these conceptions are on the top of social structure but not rooted in the psycho-social mindsets of the individuals. Their ethnic, religious and cultural identity bequeathed in their history, their folklore, their myths and traditions, is more important than other legal mechanism imposed se externally on them.

All the nation-states of Balkans, which are basically all ethnic-based societies characterized by a strong nationalistic spirit form a perfect model of this framework. Looking back in history, these nation-states always fought for a bigger Albania, a bigger Serbia, a bigger Rumania, a bigger Macedonia, etc. All the wars and the fights through the centuries create a colorful history, while ethnicity being a benchmark of it. These are ethnic based societies where the use of violence is usually seen as an archetype of social control. In all these societies, culture is a big issue, more than politics, more than economy, because through

their culture they identify who they are. Their culture identity is strong, because they are all ethnic-based societies and when faced with new political norms or laws, the old well-established laws usually prevail, thus leaving some individuals lost between the past and the future, or living in anomie, a prerequisite for crime and homicide.

The essential part of the cultural norms in Albania is promoted by its traditional customary laws. Almost four centuries ago, during Middle Ages, society was governed by a codex of six customary laws, also known as Canons: Canon of Skenderbeg, Canon of Leke Dukagjini, Canon of Luma, Canon of Puka, Canon of Laberia and Canon of Kruja. In the Medieval time these canons played a significant role in regulating all spheres of life, legal and social issues, such as marriage, the conflicts, the relation between men and women, etc. Although five of these canons diminished and are not existent any more, the Canon of Leke Dukagjini is still vivid and influential especially in the interrelations between men and women, by posing their rights and their duties, by accessing of what is crime and what is family, by promoting the old patriarchal values in new family arrangements. Although it is easy to assert that societies in transitions turbulence the society and influence crime rates, no study so far has focused on this triple framework: the rapid change, the family crime and the role of patriarchal background. Albanian society provides a perfect example of these three paradigms.

First, a flood of foreign values, imposed by western socio-economic systems (Pridemore and Kim 2007), have eroded traditional norms leaving many Albanians culturally disoriented and socially disorganized and psychologically lost between past and future. As Polanyi (1947) and Pridemore and Kim (2007) state it, in such transitional conditions individuals co-exist with a pressing need for money as they try to cope with the rules of the new political economy and capitalist market. This occurs in a society where the individual aspirations and liberties are limited from above and where group oriented values run deeper than the beginning of the Third Millennium (Kharkhordin 1999).

According to Messner and Rosenfeld(1997), there is an anomic cultural ethos in the nature of capitalist economy, and this is in the relation of the economic and non-economic context. Messner and Rosenfeld referred to the American society to describe this relationship. Nevertheless this is not the case in Albania. Because of its transitional and traditional society, the economic system is not embedded or regulated by other social institutions. During half a century of the common market, being all similarly rich or similarly poor, showed that the social ties were strong and that there were no alienations of the individuals. People are under anomic state when they feel alienated, when they don't know where they belong. Because of

the rapid changes and the free market economy laws have invaded all other spheres, the social, the public and the private ones. Thus the society fails to guide or regulate the behavior of its members by means of social norms (Bergenburg 2002). This condition where goals are deregulated or unrestrained was described by Durkheim as anomy. In a society where culture matters, where tradition, kinship ties are tight and canon norms are strong, a clash between them and western capitalist norms of market modernity is usually creating the anomie. This clash fosters homicide and murder not such in the society but within the family members as well.

Conclusion

Anomie and crime are part of social lives and social changes in societies that go through economic, political and social turmoil. In such social structures, people face new ways of live, new values and new norms which usually creates a clash of synergy between the past, well established norms and the new, modern ones. This clash of new capitalist norms of market modernity fosters homicide and murder especially in societies under transition when the individual is strong and the state is weak. Many studies of criminologists and sociologists (Rose 1966; Merton 1997; Gore and Gordon 2002; Harris 2002; Konty 2005 et al.) show that whenever there is social disruption or social deregulation in a society, the level of homicide and delinquency tends to grow. A feeling of being lost, of being apart or alienated from the rest of the society is conceived as a state of anomic behavior which further enables the delinquent individual to commit crime or suicide.

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