



Violence as a communicative action: Customary and honor killings

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Abstract

The concept of gender plays an evident role in arranging the social structure. It is observed that societies are commonly arranged with a matriarchal structure or a patriarchal structure. In matriarchal structure, women are in a respected position that has a social power. On the contrary, patriarchal structure operates with an understanding that men are superior. Patriarchal structures reign inversely proportional to the civilization level of the society especially in the societies in which monotheistic religions are practiced. It is believed that bloodline is continued over men. The perception, which considers man as a seed and woman as soil, reduces the women to a carrier for continuing the human bloodline. This perception affects human relations to a great extent. Social and legal norms, which are formed in order to maintain the social order, are formed and practiced within the scope of this perception. Social order is regarded as normal in view of this perception. Socialization materializes in compliance with this perception, and values are reproduced in accordance with this perception. These are all actions which are performed in a communicative sense.

Blended with violence; blood feud; honor killing; '*berdel*' (the bartering of women between families to avoid paying dowry related expenses to each other); similar practices and cultural structure, the patriarchal understanding becomes the language of daily life in the extent of communicative action.

Customary and honor killings – which are performed with the discourse of honor, customary, and pride that were conveyed to other regions and countries with the internal and the external migration commonly practiced especially in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey – are types of violence that are emerged with the patriarchal structure as a communicative action; they are fed by ignorance; and they have an economic background. In this study, an attempt will be made to question the reasons for the customary and honor killings which are currently highlighted in the media and to analyze the social structure in the societies in which these killing are performed, and as an aim to find a solution to this problem, the issue will be discussed with the following questions; Is violence a communicative action? When and why does violence become a communicative action?

Keywords: Patriarchal Social Structure, Customary Violence, Honor, Shame, Enmity.

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Introduction

Individualization through the liberalization of human mind is a phenomenon created by the enlightenment. Individual enlightenment brings the social enlightenment along with itself. Intellectual individuals and societies which are composed of intellectual individuals enable the emergence of people who question the individual acts and who do not obey blindly.

Violence is an action exerted by at least one person on another, and it shows expansion and distribution through bodily or moral divisions as being physical, emotional, economic and sexual violence. Violence can be defined as the power of being in authority and reflecting power, the established and rooted tradition of which are based on the political field. Violence, when observed especially in terms of our country, becomes a current issue with its aspect related to women, and it bases its source on the male dominant viewpoint in terms of social gender.

According to Jürgen Habermas, human action is divided into two categories as instrumental and communicative action. Humans interact with nature in order to generate their material existence. This is called instrumental action and this action exerts its dominance on the nature through science and technology. The action – which is performed by the humans in the intersubjective area due to the fact that they have to interact with each other in order to live as the members of common social organizations – is called communicative action. According to him, the path to the liberalization of humans is possible with the completion of the enlightenment project. That is because enlightenment is the glorification of the mind. By its very nature, mind reproduces itself in the language spoken. Communicative action occurs in the intersubjective relation between at least two subjects who have the ability of language and action. According to Habermas, in order to discuss about the intersubjective common situation definitions, previously interpreted living stages have to establish a relation with each other concurrently in objective, social and subjective world. This interpreting language design constitutes the basis of various efforts on establishing a formal pragmatic relation (Habermas 2001: 122).

Communicative action – which is possible through learning social roles, gaining social identity, conveying cultural knowledge, in short, defining institutional relation – considers

the contradictions of these three different worlds as a common area in which social life is positioned, and tries to understand these contradictions instead of covering them up.

Social gender

Customs/Tradition which is formed by the social culture is a process of creating an organized world that covers expression types, forming meaning and image, social, class and gender relations. The worldview of a culture also contains the images of women, and these images play a significant role in shaping the opinions on women in terms of the whole culture (Berktaş, 1996, 17).

The emergence and institutionalization of the patriarchal social structure; the process of the dominance of monotheistic religion; the deepening of hierarchical duality in ancient Greece as soul-material and in Christianity as soul-body; identifying the women with the body which is considered as the inferior part of these contrast caused the legitimization of exerting social control over the body of women. Moreover, the perception of woman's body as an instigation factor in the Islamic culture and hijab were legitimized as an indication of social control (Berktaş, 1996, 11).

According to Berktaş, (1996, 15-16), regardless of social system or level of development, the status of women in both public and private space is defined by looking at 1. The power and authority of women, 2. The roles considered as acceptable for women by the society.

According to another definition, we must look at 1. Social organization of the ruling class, 2. The quality of ideological and institutional tools which control the body of women, 3. Gender-based division of labor and roles in the society.

Women are dominant in a matriarchal society. The basis of this order is the idea that women are superior. Bloodline is determined by women. Authority is in the hands of women. In these societies, women are respected more than men are. Having made observations in Northwestern Melanesia in order to research which powers regulate the law and order in the primitive matriarchal societies, Malinowski examined how the social norms operate. For instance, in an incident where a youngster committed suicide, the social pressure which was developed by the society against this youngster as a result of violating the custom in that society caused the suicide of this youngster. This incident shows that the violation of social

norms has a number of sanctions. Social pressure, which is named as dispersed sanction defined below, directed the youngster towards suicide. Malinowski states that this incident happened as result of another person who loved and wanted the girl with whom the youngster had a relation. The youngster was abashed. At first, he tried to scare his opponent by saying that he can perform black magic. Having failed to scare him, the youngster insulted his opponent in public and accused him of having a sexual relationship with his kin. Then, society's acting in collaboration with these accusations through oppression and externalization drove the youngster into committing suicide. The suicide is performed in a ritual way by wearing festive clothes and ornaments. After expressing the reasons which drove him to this horrible end and accusing his opponent who sent him to death, he cries aloud continuously according to customs and commits suicide by jumping off fifty or sixty-meter high tree. This incident also causes the emergence of a blood feud between the clan of the dead youngster and the clan who made him kill himself (Malinowski, 2003, 85, 89). In the incidents of murder or killing, there is a practice of paying a "blood money" called "lula" which is a similar practice to the practices in the blood feuds in Anatolia. In the background of this customary violence, there are beliefs stating that the society will suffer a number of consequences if they do not perform those acts. For instance, it is believed that having a sexual intercourse with a kin will cause the occurrence of wounds on the body and similar incidents will be suffered where fatal diseases emerge.

Malinowski states that public opinion had to act only after the proclamation of the crime in public and the related person reviled against the wrongdoer in the incident which was mentioned above (Malinowski, 2003, 91).

This incident caused the emergence of a public opinion in negative terms as a result of the accusations and slanders of the opponent youngster. It is a practice which is entirely open to assessment and deception in accordance with the circumstance. Although the objective is to divert someone from his or her way, a social consent can be established by finding a customary reason for it. Even though the society knows the real reason behind the incident, they play the game together in order to not suffer from it, abstaining from opposing it. For instance, the death sentence given to the couple who had a forbidden relation by defying the custom sometimes can end up with the killing of the girl and man's paying "blood money" for his life. Here, it is revealed that customary practice has an economic offset. Therefore, it

is possible to discuss tricky ways in customary punishments mentioned by Malinowski. It is also possible to discuss the hypocrisy in the societies in which the custom is practiced.

Due to the fact that customary practices are open to be read and interpreted over certain signs, they are completely open to abuse and can be used in line with certain purposes. Those who read the signs and interact with that person behave hypocritically by accepting the truth in a form that is intended to be shown. They choose to protect themselves by cooperating in order to not be ostracized from the society or charged with similar offenses just like in the spiral of silence theory. The penal aspect of the law is more obscure than its public aspect in the traditional societies. As stated by Malinowski, the idea of justice operates differently from justice in the modern society. The reestablishment of the distorted social balance takes time. For instance, blood feuds continue in Anatolia for many years and people keep taking lives for revenge in the framework of reciprocity. These kind of customary communicative actions are common in community type structures. It is known that women play a significant role as instigators in bearing a grudge by the relatives of the dead person and in payback by the men of the family.

Patriarchal social structures and power relations

People have a position in systems of value, attitude, status and role as a part of the culture of the society in which they live, and they bear a personality in the social culture. The individuals in primitive or developed societies continue the relations with each other according to the following: 1. Unconscious, self-created normative rules, 2. Consciously created normative rules. Social norms emerge unconsciously in a course by themselves with moral, religious, traditional and customary rules formed in the culture. The second one is the rational norms such as the law which are formed by the people consciously and can be exercised by the authority that can use this power. Social norms and norms, which arrange the value and attitude systems involved in the cultural system and which enable the social life to be sustained in order, show an actual entirety. Social life is a process in which this entirety is constantly reproduced (Özcan, 1998, 44-45).

The social life of humans is discussed in two different levels; 1. Society, 2. Community. Society refers to the social plane which is in a certain power distribution and in which common culture, social norms, values and standards formed by the humans in the macro

level as required by living together are existent in large extents. Community refers to the grouping types in which face-to-face relations are continued by the people. Community is the area in which the communication occurs in the most direct and dense way. Conflicts of interest between people and threats coming from nature require the members of the primary groups to unite among themselves. Communities are unities of such kind. There are conflicts of interests in these communities. However, these conflicts are managed in negotiations that preserve the unity against the outside forces and do not require ending the face-to-face relations. Social norms and all cultural standards are formed in a communication process which starts with the face-to-face relations of the individuals and spreads to more extensive relation circles (Özcan, 1998, 46-47). In this cultural system, social norms stipulate certain behavior forms as the correct behaviors. Experiences gained and knowledge used by the people in the struggle of sustaining their existence are certain lingual expressions that cover both the relations of humans among themselves and with the nature. When considered from this perspective, social norms take place in the culture with their qualities of self-formation; containing suitable methods in the struggle of sustaining existence; and being conveyed through learning. These are 1. Material phenomena: they are composed of production tools and produced objects. 2. Kinetic phenomena: they are composed of the factors which can be observed externally from the behaviors of the individuals in their relations among themselves. 3. Psychological phenomena: they are composed of the aspects of the knowledge, values and attitudes which are shared by the members of the society and which find a place in the psychology of the individual. Social norms outside the law are divided into four main groups in the primitive societies. These are 1. Moral codes: these are moral codes which result from both internal and external sanction mechanisms. The rule of not rebelling against father is among such codes in patriarchal societies. In the event of violating these codes, there may emerge individual unrest and sanctions like social exclusion or killing. 2. Religious rules: humans feel the need to attain meaning to the unknown and adapt themselves in proportion to the primitiveness of their culture. These are continued with lingual formulations and rituals in both internal and external terms. They provide social propinquity and solidarity. They give the feeling of belonging to the individual. 3. Customary and traditional rules: although they develop in a cumbersome way in their formation process, these are habits that are performed consciously once they become a habit. There are two kinds of customary and traditional rules as transitive and intransitive. Transitive rules order the person to perform the positive behavior. Intransitive rules order the

person not to perform some behaviors. 4. Other rules similar to customs and traditions: in some cases, rules similar to customs and traditions can be used as a conventional practice that is also adopted by others. In the event that the individual obeys or do not obey the social norms, social sanctions can be classified according to two criteria. These are 1. Positive or negative criteria, 2. Widespread and legal organized sanctions. Widespread sanctions emerge in two forms in the event of the violation of the norm. The performed action is given response in the same way. In the event of a failure to fulfill the given promise in gift exchange or performance of contract, similar performance is applied on the other party. In cases like killing, wounding a person or similar cases, the same punishment is exercised on the other party, or the loss of the party is compensated by giving girls to the other party as brides or paying money in designated amounts which is called “blood money” in the society (Özcan, 1998, 61-68).

Customary and honor killings

Fromm (2005, 18-19) states that there are different types of violence and different psychological backgrounds of these types. According to him, the most basic and normal violence type is the violence which emerges as demonstrations of skill that do not bear destructiveness or hatred. The violence type which is called reactive violence stems from fear. Reactive violence is the most common type of violence. The reason for this violence is the conscious or unconscious fear. This fear may come out as a fear of losing life, goods, honor, freedom or similar things. The feeling of being threatened and reactive violence caused by this feeling usually emerges as result of the clouding of human mind rather than real reasons. For instance, people with different individual interests can drive some people into violence by evoking in them a feeling of resistance after making them believe that they are threatened.

According to Fromm, the feeling of being prevented can also lead to violence. Apart from this, the feelings of envy and jealousy are feelings that cause violence. Another type of violence which is similar to reactive violence and which emerges as a result of a morbid psychological condition is revengeful violence. The strength of the revenge motive is in inverse proportion to the strength and productiveness of a group or of an individual. The individual or community, which believes that they suffered loss, offended and insulted, wait for an opportunity to take revenge in order to reestablish their lost self-esteem in accordance

with the principle of “an eye for an eye”. According to Fromm (2005, 22), there exist intense and increasingly organized feelings of taking revenge in primitive communities. For him, the need for easing the feelings of deprivation and losing honor causes a destructive feeling of hostility and taking revenge.

Observed especially in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey, tribal social structures are communities that show a significant homogeneity in terms of language and culture; that are composed of many families; and that have bonds of origin, economy, religion, bloodline or marriage among themselves. Tribal system is a family community which is composed of a leader and his deputies. These were generally formed with the intention of protecting their territories against other tribes. There are nine tribes and many sub-tribes which separated from these tribes in Turkey whose socio-cultural structures continue to exist though experienced many changes from the period of the Ottoman Empire to our time (<http://tr.wikipedia.org>, 20.05.2009). In the tribal system, there is a patriarchal order, which is a social organization pattern based on the authority of men. The basis of this order is the idea that men are superior. Bloodline is determined by men. Sovereignty is in the hands of men. In these societies, men are respected more than women are. In the framework of this idea of men’s superiority, the culture of the society creates a form which is different from the one in matriarchal society (Wikipedi, <http://tr.wikipedia.org>).

Blood feuds that rank among customary killings are conflicts among families and tribes which result from the feeling of taking revenge in societies where the relations are solid among kinships. These blood feuds are continued with mutual killings in the form of retaliations. They emerge as a result of the individual’s attempt to take justice in their own hands in judicial systems in which there is no right to legal remedies; conflicts are not solved in a way to satisfy the related parties; and feelings of right and justice are not satisfied. Blood feud generally starts with an attempt by a person from the incurring party to take revenge, to reestablish honor, and to take justice in their own hands in the event that the wrongdoer is not punished enough in line with the crime they committed. In compliance with the principle of reciprocity in the primitive communities, these feuds are continued with the killing exercised by the other party with the same reasons. After the start of blood feud, the members of the litigant family establish a strong solidarity. Each and every member of the family is held responsible for the killings committed. Generally, male members of the family

are targeted. Killings of women and children are rarely observed. However, mass killings that also involve women and children can be observed in circles where blood feud exceeds the family members and transform into hostility between tribes (<http://www.yeniasya.com.tr>, 21.05.2009). For instance, it has been understood that a conflict involving women and land is the reason for the carnage performed by Abdülkadir Çelebi, his four sons and three relatives with rifles belonging to “village guards” in Bilge Village, Mazıdağı District of Mardin Province. Two groups of Çelebi family firstly plunged into conflict over the shared land. Then, a rape incident created a further tension in the relations. In response to this incident, Sevgi Çelebi, who was later killed at the carnage, was requested from the family. However, Sevgi is given to a hostile family. After that, masked assailants attacked at a marriage ceremony and cruelly killed a total of 44 people, including 6 children, 16 women and 3 pregnant women. The following words of the instigator of the attack were enough to make one’s blood run cold: “We killed everybody in order to exterminate them and to leave nobody to take revenge.” (dha).

Preserving honor and glory comes first in the system of values for the people of Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey. They are very sensitive and always ready to show violence in relation with these concepts. Family members, who become a target of any insult, gossip, or rumor especially on women, perceive this condition as a stain that needs to be cleaned (Ünsal, 2003, 158). For instance, Y.A. who were living in Diyadin District of Ağrı Province was allegedly had a relationship with another man while already married. Relatives of Y.A. gathered in the family council, asserting that the incident was a ‘matter of honor’. Y.A., who was stabbed in stomach and whose nose and ears were cut yesterday in line with the decision of the family council to ‘restore their honor’, was thrown into the land on the way to Tendürek Mountain between Boyalan Village and Taşkesen Village. (dha).

Another example; customs killed again in Doğubayazıt. Elder brother Mehmet Topaç convinced his younger brother 26-year-old Orhan Topkaç and his lover 16-year-old O.T., who fled to İzmir to get married, to come back. Mehmet Topaç exercised the ‘death’ sentence given by both families who had already have hostility with each other. Mehmet Topaç killed his younger brother Orhan with 7 bullets, saying, “You dishonored our honor.” He also shot O.T. with one bullet. Fainted by seeing that that his lover was dead, O.T. was

saved from death. Mehmet Topaç, who fled the crime scene by thinking that both lovers were dead, is sought by the police everywhere. (dha).

Blood feuds can start as a result of various reasons as it can be seen from the examples given in Bayram Yaşlı's book entitled *Yeter Artık Kan Akmasın* (2009,35, 153,191):

"In Şanlıurfa Province, twenty-seven-year-old Mehmet Akış killed Lütfiye Durmaz – who was eight years older than him and with whom Akış was living without a marriage by making *berdel* due to the family pressure – in the second night of their unofficial marriage by stabbing her in six places."

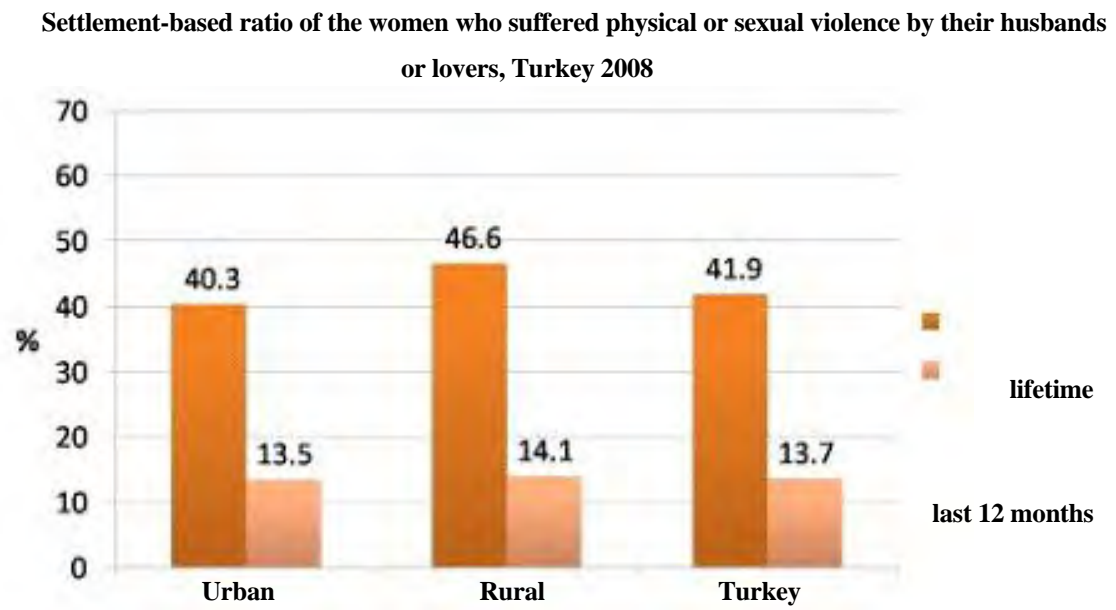
"Blood feuds turned into a unearned incomes in some aspects. Once hostility emerges between two families, fellow villagers fan the flames of hostility instead of ending it by intervening. The reasons for these hostilities are related with land conflicts. When the incident turns into a blood feud and people start shooting, midnight migrations begin."

"In Van Province, a family was suffering from a blood feud which started with a killing exercised in the name of honor. They made an official complaint to the office of the attorney general. The desperate father cursed this condition and stated his helplessness with the following words: "The other party wants my four-year-old daughter and one hundred thousand TL."

These are the words of a child about a blood feud which started when a cow owner killed his neighbor due to the fact that he felt his honor is stained when his angry neighbor cut the tail of his cow which went into the garden of this neighbor: "Why do people kill each other? Why the survivors pay the price for it? Isn't there a way to stop this? Why is the tail of the cow, which caused the death of their neighbors and forced them to migrate, important? What does that cow do now?"

"My father, my uncles and the grown males of the family knew very well that there is no way to run from the blood feud even if they run from their enemies. For that reason, we led life cowardly..."

Acts of violence, which are based on customary, spread to the large cities in Turkey and also to European countries. "Research on Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey" which was conducted by the Directorate General on the Status of Women shows the status of women in the Eastern and Southeastern regions where the bloodsheds are mainly observed. According to the research, the ratio of women, who suffered physical violence by their husbands or lovers, rose to 48 per cent. 13% of these women suffered from violence even during their pregnancy (<http://www.ksgm.gov.tr/tdvaw/istatistikler.htm>).



Source: Directorate General on the Status of Women

Conclusion

Formed with the blending of religion, morality, customs and tradition according to the features of the cultural environment, custom is the total of social norms which is intended for the community to live in order. Customs cause blood feuds which continue for years due to the practices of regaining or restoring the honor and the principle of reciprocity in the primitive societies.

In these communities where the patriarchal structure prevails, it is clear that women are oppressed due to the idea of man's superiority; they are given to somebody that they do not know as *berdel* or to end hostility without having a right to speak; men are living with the fear of being killed owing to the blood feuds; or they are provoked to kill someone from the other party to take revenge. On the other hand, the concept of honor which is perceived over women enables the patriarchal community to establish domination on women.

Moreover, the tribal system and rooted power structure in these regions constitute a serious obstacle for the people of these regions. Communities, which place their confidence in each other, sometimes come to harm from each other. The remedy for this condition can be possible with the improvement of the economic structure through raising the level of education and leaving the tribal order by practicing the urbanization concept.

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