SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION AND CRIME

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ABSTRACT

Conventional crimes, and organize white collar crimes are one of the significant social problems in our time. This is simply because it disturbs democratization of the societies, and violates human rights principles. Also, the consequences of crimes introduce victimizations, and the offenders who follow the ways of living by violating legal rules and moral-ethical values of the society. On the other hand, sociologically speaking, we see that causes of the crimes are mostly independent of education, income, occupations, family and neighborhood environments, if we particularly consider the causes for organised-corporate-white collar crimes. The assumption above is also supported by the international total crimes statistics which show, mostly industrialized well-fare societies have very high crime rates than poor third world countries. Thus, in this study, I argue, there is a need to study sociological functions of religious culture, since it provides significant informal social control mechanisms standing against criminal and immoral human actions, in the societies. The data were collected in 1998 (N=380) and in 2002 (N=435) from the university students, including the School of Theology in Ankara, by following non-probability purpose sampling procedure, since I tried to reach those students, some of whom have high, and the other some have low level of religious socializations. The findings of the two sets of the data show that religious culture, particularly in a religious environment, relatively speaking, strongly rejects the ways of living which violate legal rules and moral-ethical values. On the other hand, the findings of the data collected in 2002 show that religiosity or/and acceptance of essential religious values, on the one hand, and on the other hand, rational value system of the subjects to save individuals' personal material securities, could be major sources for informal social control system, independently from each other.

Keywords: Social function of religion, homicide, crime and religion, sociology of religion, sociology of crime

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Literature shows that conventional crimes, namely; homicide, attempted homicide, manslaughter, assault, aggravated assault, sexual assault, robbery, burglary, larceny, theft, rape, and pick-pocketing, are mostly committed by the socially-economically deprived individuals. They have low income, low level education, and mostly unemployed citizens (Adler, 1991; Jewkes, 2001; Mayer, 2001). On the other hand, organized crimes, namely; smuggling (drugs, arms, human organs, foreign goods, historical artifacts), prostitution, gambling, commercial sex, sex trade, child slavery, kidnapping, extortion, contract killing, passport forgery, false passport, and debt collecting, tax fraud, mis-advertising, populism, nepotism, favoritism, bribery, fee splitting, insider trading, environmental crimes, anti-trust violations, computer crimes, embezzlement, fraudulent import/export, and fictitious bankrupcies are mostly committed by the socially-economically well off individuals. They have high levels of income and education (Williams, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Viano, 1999; Slaper, 1999; Ruggiero, 1996; Mahan, 1998; Jewkes, 2001; Kelly, 1999; Scambler, 1997).

These findings mentioned above may suggest that the occurrence of crimes, in general, might be mostly independent of income, education and other socio-economic variables. In other words, crimes occur regardless of the social economic status of people. These findings mentioned above might also suggest that free market economy system emphasizing too much egoistic value orientations, consumption and material achievements might cause high crime rates, evidenced by very high crime rates in industrialized developed nations, and evidenced by very low crime rates in third world countries (Adler,1991). Indeed, we also see that, in industrialized modern countries where social control mechanisms are weak, there is a high rate of crime, while Japan, Ireland, Germany and Switzerland have a low rate of crime, relatively speaking. It is because they have good social control systems by definition (Adler, 1991; Mayer, 2001; Jewknes, 2002). At this particular point, I should point out that not poverty itself but a combination of social and economic poverty and feelings of victimization, feelings of oppressions, at the individual level, contribute high crime rates.

At present, we see mass movements for individual freedom at the expense of traditional social order, and of traditional religious cultures. Perhaps the weakening role of the institutions like family and religion have resulted in higher crime rates. For example, sex freedom may accelerate divorce that is significant disturbing factor for the children to have emotional disturbances. As a consequence, those children may expose to drug problems (South, 1999; Beck, 2002; FBI crime statistics, 2000; FRG crime statistics 2000).

I. RELIGION AND CRIME

As known, the criminals are the kinds of the citizens whose life styles, corrupt legal and moral rules in the society. Therefore, we may conclude that "the more the crime rate is, the more the moral corruption is, in the country". Here, the critical point is that conventional crimes are committed by the citizens who are socially and economically deprived people, while white collar crimes -organized crimes are committed by the citizens who are socially and economically prosperous people. Also, international crime rates show that industrialized – socially and economically rich countries have much higher crime rates than poor countries. For example, we see about 23 million, 5.5 million, 6.0 million, 65 million total crimes per a year, in the United States, England, Germany and France, respectively. On the other hand, total crimes per a year, in Turkey, is about 400 thousands. The combination of those statistics with the social – economic characteristics of the people who commit white color crimes provide meaningful evidences to challenge the assumption that quality of man is mostly related to social and economic wealth. For example, we see a university professor committing plagiarism, or a ministry taking bribes, or a high rank bureaucrat taking bribes, or a very rich business man committing tax fraud and so on. In consideration to high level of social and economic well-to-do industrialized countries with their own very high crime rates, and the social economic characteristics of those citizens who commit white collar crimes, we may conclude that getting high education, or/and having good incomes, or/and good jobs, themselves or/and itself do(es) not contribute effectively and efficiently for the development of human dignity. Otherwise, for example, we would not see a total of sales revenue of, at least, 1200 billion US dollars per a year for white color –organized crimes, on the world.

At present, all countries try to maintain free market economy system. This system very highly emphasizes material achievements through competition. However, the system of competition is not in harmony with the system of equal distribution of opportunities, since there is no perfect society, on the world, yet. Also, religious institutions should be in a state of equilibrium with respect to free market social system. Contradictions among the institutions are the significant factors for developments of crime. What we learn at the family, how people are socialized through educational institutions, and how people are socialized through religious institutions, and the way politicians rule the country should be in harmony. Otherwise, we see social, economic and political contradictions which cause immoral and illegal acts, at the individual level. Also, those contradictions are the significant factors for

the development of innovative- ritualist and retreatist characteristics, as developed by Robert Merton (1938). Therefore, we may try to see the functions of religious values with respect to moral and legal norms, since crime is mostly independent from educational and economics institutions as discussed on the above.

The relationship between crime and religion has been studied by many scholars. Some scholars suggest, religiosity is a good social control in a democratic, free social systems (Ellis, 1985). Religiosity develops a good sense of group solidarity and sentiments (Al-Khalifah, 1994). Religiosity develops "fear of God", causing individuals to stay away from immoral acts (Bonger, 1996; Ellis, 1985; Mutlu, 1990, 1996). On the other hand, some argues "not religiosity itself" but religiosity in a religious social environment may cause to control crime (Safi, 1990). However, those studies have ignored what we call "white collar or corporate crimes", which are committed by high income and high education citizens. This is the essence on this paper.

II. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

At our time, crime prevention policies mostly emphasize more and more policing techniques, and community involvement programs. In other words, interest in crime prevention has generally intensified and accelerated with a particular emphasis on the efforts spent by the specialist police crime prevention departments. Also, citizen involvement in crime prevention programs were established. Namely, crime prevention panels and neighborhood watch schemes were introduced (Morgan, 1987; Smith, 1984; Bennett 1987). Also, Home Office Crime Prevention centre was established to provide specialized training for the officers, in England (Home Office, 1993).

Also, interest in crime prevention has caused a boom to private security systems. CCTV (closed circuit televisions), electronic access controls and emergency communication networks are installed. However, all those crime prevention measures, use of all the means of technology did not introduce a significant decline in crime rates (Lab, 2000).

All those facts mentioned above make me study the relationship between religion and crime, since, for example, a university professor who is by definition is one of highly educated population, does not necessarily reflect a greater degree of internalized moral-ethical values than, an average citizen with low education and income, evidenced by, for example, plagiarism and income tax fraud. Similarly, it does imply any less of a need for maximum security at

libraries to control the stealing of books simply because educated people in general use such facilities. Such examples from our everyday life have led me to search for something other than a lack of formal education and low income to gain insight into the causes of crime.

The essential and original source of religion strongly emphasizes elements of moral values such as human equality, dignity, justice, tolerance for those who differ in beliefs, and social contract. Moral values in religion also emphasize control of basic human instincts and of human greed by rejecting too much emphasis on sex and material gains. In religion, addictions for alcohol, gambling, and drugs (all positively related with conventional crime in a general sense) are defined as "sin". We also see in religion that honesty and human dignity, a lack of which may generate tolerance for white collar and/or corporate crimes, are highly valued. Therefore, I assume, other things being equal, beliefs in hell and heaven, the day of judgement, and in God, may prevent people from satisfying their needs through immoral and illegitimate means.

III. DATA COLLECTION

In order to understand how religion is conceptualized and to see social control functions of religious values against immorality and crime, data were collected in 1998 with a sample size 380, and in 2002 with a sample size 435, from university students including Theology Faculty in Ankara, by a non-probability group administered procedure to ensure minimum possible reliability and validity problems. As we know, "social desirability effects" and "anonymity" cause serious validity and reliability problems in social sciences. Respondents do not report their true opinions for sensitive and value-loaded items when they are subject to answer the items on the questionnaire (Bailey, 1987).

The questionnaire included 54 statements. Some were demographic items, some others were related to religiosity, and to understand, or conceptualize religious culture or beliefs. It took about 20 minutes for the respondents to answer the questionnaire in average. The respondents answered the questionnaire in the classroom settings.

IV. FINDINGS

Demographic characteristics of the subjects in 1998 data show that 58.2 % (N=220) are male, while 41.5 % (N=157) female. 39.6 % (N=150) are 20 years age old or younger, while 60.4 % (N=228) between 21 – 26 years age old. On the other hand, 18.8 % (N=71), 61.1 % (N=231), 6.1 % (N=23), 9.0 % (N=34), and 4.8 % (N=18) were freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior and post graduate students, respectively.

Demographic characteristics of the subjects in 2002 data show that 55.6 % (N=242) are male, while 44.4 % (N=193) female. 8.5 % (N=37) are 20 years age old or younger, while 72.9 % (N=317) between 21 – 26 years age old. On the other hand, 23.4 % (N=102), 15.6 % (N=68), 23 % (N=100), 33.6 % (N=146) were freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior and post graduate students, respectively.

In order to see the respondents' religious beliefs our questionnaire included questions concerning the Day of Judgment, the Muslim Holy Book, namely the Qur'an, God, hell and Heaven. This refers to objective measurement of religiosity as operationalized on the above. Table 1 shows the findings.

Table 1 : Subjects religiosity (N=380 for 1998) and (N=435 for 2002)

I T E M S	AGREE		DISAGREE	
	N	%	N	%
There is a Day of Judgement				
2002 data	363	84	65	15
1998 data	331	87	47	12
Qur'an; the message of Allah				
2002 data	387	89	46	10
1998 data	330	87	45	12
Being judged by Allah				
2002 data	386	88	46	10
1998 data	331	87	45	13
Hell and Heaven				
2002 data	395	91	34	08
1998 data	329	87	45	12

In average, about 88 percent of the respondents have beliefs in a Day of Judgment, Qur'an, God, Hell and Heaven. These findings suggest that overwhelming of the subjects in this study carry a very good beliefs for the essential elements of religious culture. In order to see religiosity of the family environments, they were asked to indicate the way they perceive their parents' religiosity. The findings are reported in Table 2, as following:

Table 2: Religiosity of the parents as subjectively defined by the respondents (1998 data N=380; 2002 data N=435)

Father	very religious	religious	not religious	not at all religious
1998 data	85	149	103	34
2002 data	31	224	114	62
Mother				
1998 data	85	193	74	22
2002 data	54	256	76	43

Table 2 shows that overall about 67 % of the subjects believe their parents are religious and while 32 % see their parents not religious, if we combine the frequencies of very religious and religious categories for mother and father (N= 1077) and then divide this by grand total (N=1605) and multiply by 100. This help us see the family environments where the respondents were raised. That means, they were mostly raised by religious parents, relatively speaking.

Table 3: Religiosity of peer groups as subjectively defined by the subjects (1998 data N=380) and (2002 data N=435)

	very religious		religious		not religious		not at all religious	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1998 data	39	10.3	124	32.8	156	41.3	54	14.3
2002 data	09	02.1	165	37.1	182	42.1	76	17.5

Table 3 shows that overall about 42 % of the subjects believe their best friends are religious and while 58 % see their peer groups not religious, if we combine the frequencies of very religious and religious categories (N=337) and then divide this by grand total (N=805) and multiply by 100. This help us see their close social environments where the respondents were associated with.

Briefly, the findings on the above show that the respondents in this study have strong beliefs for religion, and raised by the parents who are mostly religious people, and have best friends who are mostly religious oriented individuals.

In order to see some specific functions of the religion, the respondents were asked to report the relationship between religosity, honesty, and dignity", as they understand. Table 4 shows that about 70 % of the subjects say "there is a good relationship between being a person of honesty and dignity".

Table 4: The relationship between religion and   honesty, and dignity as reported (N= 453)

LIKERT SCALE	N	%
Strongly agree	178	41
Agree	127	29
Disagree	73	17
Strongly disagree	54	12

Further, the respondents were also asked to report the relationship between religion and adultery, alcohol and drug consumptions. As we know, adultery is one of the significant contributing factor for divorce. On the other hand, alcohol and drug problems are significant FACTORS for   violence (Brown, et al., 1999; Coleman, et al., 1980).

Table 5: Religion and adultery, alcohol and drug problems (N=380 for 1998) and (N=435 for 2002)

I T E M S	AGREE		DISAGREE	
	N	%	N	%
Adultery is sin				
1998 data (N=380)	295	78	80	21
2002 data (N=435)	339	78	96	22
Alcohol and drug addictions are sin.				
1998 data (N=380)	317	84	56	15
2002 data (N=435)	374	86	57	13
Religiosity keeps people away from alcohol and drugs addictions.				
1998 data (N=380)	314	83	66	16
2002 data (N=435)	368	85	65	15
A good religious individual does not consume alcohol.				
1998 data (N=380)	304	80	57	15
2002 data (N=435)	317	73	117	26
A good religious citizen does not use drugs.				
1998 data (N=380)	317	84	57	15
2002 data (N=435)	347	80	86	19

The findings on table 5 clearly show that the respondents see religious beliefs, or religious culture keeping people very much away from adultery, alcohol and drug addictions. As indicated above alcohol and drug addictions are the important factors for violent actions. Therefore, these findings are meaningful in respect to criminal, and immoral acts.

In summary, Tables 4, and 5 show that religion strongly contribute to the moral value

system of the society against those factors which disturb family, and which contribute much for the violent human acts. Further, the subjects were asked to report the reasons for they follow moral and legal ways Table 6 shows that the essential factors for the subjects not to violate legal and moral codes is 'fear of sin'. 65 percent of the subjects in this study reported that not legal sanctions, and not social pressures, but the "fear of sin" is the major reason they follow moral and legal norms.

Table 6: "what is the most important factor for you to follow legal and moral way of living" (2002 data, N=435).

ANSWERS	N	%
Legal sanctions	69	16
Social pressures	31	07
Fear of sin	283	65
Others	44	10

Over all the findings above on tables 4, 5, and 6 show that religious culture, or/and beliefs are significant factors for informal social control mechanisms to have a society of morality. Therefore, at this particular point, in order to clarify the relationship between religion and living within legal and moral codes, further the respondents answered the questions to what extend they follow moral and legal acts in a perfect sense, in the light of 'belief in the judgement day'.

Table 7: Crosstabs between belief in judgement day' and 'insulting-violence/aggression- and cheating' (2002 data, N=435)

TYPES ACTION	Belive in judgment day				
	YES		NO		
	N	%	N	%	TOTAL
Violant act as necessary					
YES	117	31	264	69	381
NO	11	23	36	77	47
Insulting people as necessary					
YES	259	67	125	32	384
NO	41	89	05	11	46
Cheating on exams when get a chance					
YES	282	76	89	24	371
NO	38	83	08	17	46
Never use illegal drugs, because It is sin	176				
Never use illegal drugs, because It is unhealhty	159				

Those subjects who have 'belief in judgement day' mostly report that that they do not apply violence. As we see on Table 7, 69 % of the subjects who believe in the judgement day reject to have violent acts towards the others even if it is necessary. However, 67 %, and 76 % of the subjects who reported that they believe in the judgment day, do insult people if necessary and cheat on the exams if they the opportunity for it, respectively. These findings suggest that in order to have a clear understanding for the relationship between religious beliefs and moral acts. In other words, we should see what people say and what people do. Table 8 shows everyday praying (namaz=*salat*) and doing moral acts.

The subjects were asked to report whether they apply aggression/violence toward others when they think it is necessary, whether they degrade or insult people when they think it is necessary, and whether they cheat on exams when they have opportunity to cheat. They also reported their praying frequencies. The findings are on Table 8.

Table 8: Crosstabs between praying, and aggression – degrading – cheating (2002 data, N= 435)

I T E M S												PRAYING FREQUENCY		
Cheating	5 times/day		one/day		one/week		one/month			one/year		never		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
YES	52	76	34	53	64	85	40	87		46	79	75	81	
NO	20	24	30	47	11	15	06	13		12	21	18	19	
Agression														
YES	14	16	10	16	38	51	18	36		24	41	23	24	
NO	71	84	54	84	37	49	32	64		35	59	73	76	
Insulting OR/degrading														
YES	52	62	30	45	56	75	38	75		48	80	76	81	
NO	32	38	36	55	19	25	13	25		12	20	18	19	

Table 8 shows that 63 % of the respondents who pray daily, and 80 % of the subjects who never or at most one a year pray reported that "they cheated on the exams provided opportunities". On the other hand, 16 % of the respondents who pray daily, and 30 % of the subjects who never, or at most one a year pray reported that "they became violent, or aggressive toward others when they thought it was necessary". Also, 55 % of the respondents who pray daily, and 80 % of the subjects who never or at most one a year pray reported that

"they insulted, or degraded others when they thought it was necessary". These findings clearly suggest that religious practices help average citizens carry social relations with others more ethical than the others. Yet, human behaviour are not only regulated by religion. Therefore, other institutions also should be in harmony with religion, in order minimize unethical human acts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Crime is one of the significant social problems in our time. It stands against democracy and human rights since crime means violence and/or destructions of moral, ethical values without which human societies cannot be possible. On the other hand, when conventional and white collar corporate crimes are considered together, we see that crime might be independent of income, education and neighborhood which define sociological concepts like, poverty, social deprivation, social disorganization versus welfare societies, suburbs, refined social environment and citizens. In short, we see that crime is not only property of poor people within poor social economic environments.

In sociology, we see that each social institution has its own essential function. Education makes people get a job. Family makes social reproduction possible. Economics makes distributions and productions of the goods possible. Legal system makes conflicting interests get into a state of equilibrium. And, religion introduces what is ethical and what looks like to be a man of dignity. Therefore, other institutions should have a state of cooperation and interaction with religion without which insatiable human passions may cause crime. Thus, in this study I try to argue the relationship between crime and religion. For example, some studies clearly show that 33% of the serious traffic rule violations, 80% of domestic violence cases, 15% of work injuries and 20% of accidents at home are committed by those reported to have a high level of alcohol in the blood (www.pedam.com./alkol/alkol1.html).

On the other hand, a high quality of formal education is not enough to stop crime tendencies as evidenced by statistics, for example, for USA campuses, for sex offenses (N= 1200 per year on average), robbery (comparable to rate for sex offenses), aggravated assault (N= 2300), and burglary (N= 14000). Also, we ponder why libraries throughout the world, frequented by educated individuals, apply relatively high security systems to prevent the stealing of books. We also know that corporate crimes are committed by educated prestigious

individuals. However, it is interesting to report here that when university students (N= 650) were asked "which of the following institutions (good/healthy family, good quality formal education, or religion) best guards against moral corruption", more than 90% reported institutions other than religion.

However, in the light of the findings of this study, I argue that we should go over the essential functions of the religion in order to keep moral values to minimize crime as evidenced by the findings in this study. Free market economy emphasizes consumptions and material achievements, too much. And, insatiable human passions cannot be controlled only by a good qualified education and other social economic factors. Therefore, there is a need for further studies to clarify the relationship between religion and crime.

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