

THE DISEMBEDDED CUSTOM: INTRAFAMILY MURDERS FOR SEXUAL HONOR IN TURKISH METROPOLISES

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ABSTRACT

*The subject of this article is the intrafamily murders committed for sexual honor in big cities and metropolises. Murders for sexual honor and the customs concerning them are among the basic elements of traditional and rural cultures. However, great waves of migration, technological advances, development of communication, and the globalization process experienced especially since the 1980's have radically changed the coordinates of the **rural-urban, traditional-modern** and **local-universal** distinctions. Just like many other things have been dismantled from their contexts, intrafamily murders for sexual honor, too, have been disembedded out of their original milieu, and begun to haunt in big cities and metropolises. Therefore, the globalization process does not only involve the expansion of such concepts as **democracy, liberalism** and **human rights** that are highly valued by the civilized world, but also that of **primitive cultures, violent customs** and **superstitions**.*

ÖZET

Yerinden Sökülen Töre: Metropollerde Aile İçi Namus Cinayetleri

*Son yıllarda büyük kentlerde sıkça işlenen aile içi namus cinayetleri bu yazının ana konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Namus cinayetleri ve onların dayandığı töreler geleneksel ve kırsal kültürlerin önemli unsurlarındandır. Ancak, özellikle 1980'lerden sonra yaşanan büyük göç dalgaları, teknolojik gelişmeler, iletişimin hızla yayılması ve en genel anlamda globalleşme süreci **köy-kent, geleneksel-modern** ve **yerel-evrensel** ayrımlarının koordinatlarını önemli ölçüde değiştirmiştir. Her şeyin yerinden sökülüp savrulduğu gibi, namus ve töre cinayetleri de orijinal*

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ortamlarından koparak büyük kentlerde ve metropollerde kol gezmeye başlamıştır. Bu bakımdan globalleşme süreci, yalnızca uygar dünyanın değer verdiği demokrasi, liberalizm ve insan hakları gibi kavramların değil, aynı zamanda ilkel kültürlerin, törelerin ve batıl inançların da dünyaya hızla yayılmasını içermektedir.

News (1): Massacre for Sexual Honor: 10 Dead at a Single Household (Milliyet, 21-10-1996)

A total family extinguished due to gossip at Esenler, İstanbul. Two cousins, pretending that their wives were cuckolding them, together with a third man and Calashnikof in hand, invaded the house of their mother in law. They shot oft all those who were playing cards in the salon and sleeping in the rooms.

News (2): He Killed His Daughter Who Said “I am not a Virgin Anymore” (Olay, Bursa, 19-06-1997)

The 17-year-old Özlem Alçeken, escaping her family ten days ago with her cousin from Gaziantep, Nuray İzbulan, was caught by the İnegöl police, and handed over to her family. Being very upset due to this event, Nuray İzbulan killed herself jumping down from the fourth floor of their apartment. Suffering too much from his grand daughter’s death, İsmail Hakkı Alçeken, decided to take his daughter Özlem to the hospital for a check of virginity yesterday. Upon the reply he received from his daughter “I am not a virgin anymore”, the 63-year-old İsmail Hakkı Alçeken was shocked, and harshly hit the dagger into the maiden’s ventral.

News (3): “Murder for Sexual Honor in Adana” (Yeni Ufuk, 27-06-1997)

At Narlıca neighborhood someone killed one of his sisters, and heavily wounded the other one by pistol, thinking that they became prostitutes. Abdullah Servi (39) heavily wounded his sisters Durdu and Arife shooting out them by pistol. The 24-year-old Durdu, taken immediately to the Numune Hospital, could not be rescued. The 31-year-old Arife is still under medical treatment. Abdullah Servi, on the other hand, was caught after the incident.

I. Introduction

These examples, chosen from among hundreds of similar events, show that the twenty-first century will not only be marked by “postmodern”, “postindustrial” and “globalizing” qualifications, but also by “pre-modern” cultural elements and primitive customs. The pace of change experienced in everyday social life made certain events, which could rarely be faced in the past, normal phenomena today. A group of would-be emigrant workers consciously taken to Marmaris by swindlers as if they were taken to Italy, computers that checkmate the world champion in chess came to be ordinary incidents in mass media. In the last few years there are some unprecedented news that we can hear even more frequently: intrafamily murders for sexual honor in great Turkish metropolises.

What sense should be attributed to these murders which appear as points of irony among the most advanced political discourses as “we are passing into a new age”, “we are entering the European Union (EU)”, “we are passing into the information society”. Intrafamily murders for sexual honor must have terribly interesting aspects for ordinary people who are inclined to perceive things in quite emotional patterns and as well as social scientists who may be expected to have a relatively more objective perspective. However, we can assume that the striking aspects for the two groups may essentially be different. In Turkey, where the government has signed many international conventions covering human rights, women’s rights, children’s rights and even animal rights, an important part of the society take these murders as barbarism, and severely reproach them even though they were committed for honor. It is expected that there must be some analytical questions to be answered by and for social scientists who wish these murders come to an end as well as for the rest of society.

We observe two shared points in all the murders summarized above: The first one is that they all have been committed in family and kinship institutions; whereas the second one is that they all have been done so in great cities and metropolises. The first and the most important question that comes to mind within this framework is how human beings, especially men, can kill their relatives, that is to say, their mothers, sisters and spouses.

This question, which aims to unearth the nature and dynamics of intrafamily violence both in countryside and in urban areas, constitutes one of the two basic dimensions of the present article. The other dimension is based on the question of how these murders, whose roots can be traced back to customs and folkways of traditional societies, may happen so frequently and sensationally in great metropolises which are called as “modern” or even

“postmodern” structures where the institutions of the global society,¹ i.e., the nation-state, are the most powerful and the most comprehensive. This question, too, necessitates that we investigate the processes of modernization, urbanization and globalization.

II. The Origins of Intrafamily Vengeance Killings

The origins of intrafamily violence and vengeance killings are perhaps as old as the history of mankind. According to the myths of creation propagated by monotheistic religions, Adam’s sons began to feud as soon as they fell onto the earth. Fratricide, which had started with the duel between Abel and Kanel, continued to exist hitherto.

Examples of intrafamily revenge and killing can amply be observed in the cultures of many archaic or savage societies. Ancient Greek culture, which is taken as one of the most important sources of contemporary Western civilization, is famous for, among other things, its tragedies narrating the violence between close kin. The myth of Kronos, which tells us how he used to eat his children one by one, is quite common. Epics like the Iliad and the Odyssey narrate the tensions and feuds between the gods of Zeus’s generation in the Mount Olympus.

King Oedipus, who was grown afar from his family as a good warrior, kills King Laos and usurps his wife at a war. Unfortunately, Oedipus does not know that the king he killed is his genuine father, and the queen he captured is his genuine mother. Having learned all these from the herdsman later on the young king, in hopes of redemption, goes to an altar, and cauterizes his eyes by a red hot stylus for catharsis. As we know, this myth constitutes the basis of the famous Freudian concept, the *Oedipus complex*. King Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his genuine daughter, Ephigenia, to the gods for the good pace of things just before he set out to capture Troy caused a more complicated and severer intrafamily vengeance. Agamemnon’s wife, Clitemnestra, suffers too much from Ephigenia’s death, and decides to take her revenge from her husband in his absence. She begins to cuckold Agamemnon. She kills him, in collaboration with her lover, soon after his return from the war. This time Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and

¹ The concept of “global society” signifies a sovereign and authoritative political union that covers smaller and more flexible cultural communities. Some major stereotypes of global society seen in history are the clan, the city-state, the local despotate and the nation-state. See: Maurice Duverger, *Siyaset Sosyolojisi*, Varlık Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1975, pp. 29-37.

Clitemnestra, kills his mother in order to avenge on her. The furies, with feelings of retaliation, set out to take Clitemnestra's revenge from Orestes.²

Myths and stories of revenge like the ones mentioned above left unerasable traces in contemporary Western languages. In English, for example, there are several terms denoting the murder of the members in a family: patricide (killing a father), matricide (killing a mother), fratricide (killing a brother) and infanticide (killing a baby, son or daughter). It should be stated that Turkish, too, is quite rich in terms of such idioms: *fetret devri* (the era of interregnum in Ottoman dynasty between 1402 and 1412 which was marked by a war among four princes in order to enthrone), *taht kavgası* (fighting for the throne), *katli vacip* (the killing of a wicked or deviant person is due), *siyaseten katl* (capital punishment),³ *aile kavgası* (feud in the family), *kardeşi kardeşe vurdurmak* (to incite brothers to kill one another).

The Arabian Nights, taken by the Orientalists as the classic example of the Eastern culture, too, came out as an extension of intrafamily vengeance and massacre. As we know, at the beginning of the *Arabian Nights*, the king of Iran, Shahryar, goes out with his men for a drive shooting. During his absence his wife, together with some of female servants, has sexual intercourse with male slaves. The king's brother, who is the king of another state, comes to visit them for a few days. He accidentally witnesses everything happening in the court. After a long state of hesitation, he tells his elder brother what he happened to see. After a short time Shahryar pretends to go out for a drive shooting again, and suddenly turns back in order to catch his wife red-handed. He, too, witnesses the acts of adultery. Filled with a terrible feeling of revenge, he orders the execution of his wife, the female accomplices and the male slaves. However, he can not get rid of suffering from being cuckolded by his beloved wife, and begins to feel disgust and vengeance against all womankind. He rapes a virgin every night, and kills her as soon as the sun begins to rise. This goes on for several years, and there remains no more virgins in his country. All maids have either been killed by the king, or sent out clandestinely by their families to

² The furies chase Orestes, but cannot kill him because the gods save him. This signifies in a way a transition from the matriarchal society to the patriarchal one. See: Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Trilogy*, Penguin Publishers, Harmondsworth, 1959.

³ *Siyaseten katl* was generally executed in the Ottoman political and legal system against those who committed crimes such as treason and spying. Sometimes, as seen during the reign of Mehmet II (more commonly known as Fatih Sultan Mehmet), killing the princes and other heirs in order to prevent potential fights for the throne was an integral part of *siyaseten katl*. See: Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*. Hill and Wang, New York, 1973; Ahmet Mumcu, *Osmanlı Devletinde Siyaseten katl*, Birey ve Toplum Yayınları, İstanbul, 1985.

other countries. There remains only the two beautiful daughters of the king's vizier. Shahryar demands, as he does everyday, a virgin from his vizier. Having searched a maid everywhere but not found, the vizier hopelessly takes the issue to his elder daughter, Shahrazad. Shahrazad, seeing that her father is in a difficult situation, accepts being the victim of Shahryar. She is a very beautiful and well-educated girl. After the sexual intercourse she tells very interesting tales, which she learned from books, to the king. Although the night ends, her tales enjoyed very much by Shahryar, do not. The king wants her to recount the remaining tales the next night because according to their beliefs, recounting tales during day-time is taken as bad luck. Shahrazad knows so many interesting tales that it takes her "thousand nights and one night"⁴ to tell them to the king. They have three children in these years, and happen to love each other very much. The king forgives Shahrazad, who proved that not all women are indecent and wicked, and gets married with her. That Shahrazad, despite in a tale, influenced the heart of such a big tyrant is perhaps one of the first feminist successes against men in human history.

We can infer from these mythical examples that one side of family and kinship relations, especially in traditional societies, is characterized by affection, solidarity and security while the other side of them may turn out tension, violence and even massacre. This is also compatible with Giddens's argument that kinship systems are characterized by internal conflicts and tensions although they regulate social life in traditional societies. Which side of family and kinship relations would be more decisive depends on whether or not the family or kinship groups are in sufficient competitive or solidarity relations with other similar groups. Communities that become more introvert, and maintain an extreme private life get isolated, and are shattered by internal feuds. Communities that are continuously worn out by internal conflicts may end up with fratricide.⁵ However, communities that have stronger relations with outer world may develop a firm internal solidarity against the contentions and threats coming from other groups on the one hand, and alleviate their internal tensions and conflicts when they set more peaceful and more positive relations with them, on the other.

⁴ It is not easy to clarify the acceptance of "thousand nights and one night" as literally to mean 1001 nights, or, as figuratively a very long period of time. See: Powys Mather, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1986.

⁵ Sennett, R., *Kamusal İnsanın Çöküşü*, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996.

III. The Custom for Sexual Honor as a Source of Intrafamily Violence

When we deal with the concept of “honor” and the “murders for honor” we confront harsh and relentless customs. The concept of custom should thus be defined very clearly. “Custom” belongs to the conceptual framework of “social norm” together with other collective rules such as “tradition”, “mores”, “folkway” and “habit”. However, “custom” differs from other social rules by the dominance of its punitive side. It enforces severe sanctions against social and moral deviance. “Custom” brings the most rigid and deterring measures to the crimes committed against sacred values and taboos in a community. Generally speaking, in the incidents of murder, rape and cannibalism, customs function as a system of law.⁶

Like other social rules, customs spring out from the needs to regulate the relations between human beings. In this respect, it is quite normal, especially in long-lasting communities and in their everyday life, that certain regulatory rules emerge. Although social rules stem from interpersonal relations, they begin to determine, once they are formed, human behavior, attitude, frame of perception and reference points.⁷ The maintenance of social rules depends on how far they can prevent social chaos, on whether or not they hinder the satisfaction of important social needs.⁸

As for the juridical aspects of honor; It should firstly be noted that there are a number of words to denote honor in Turkish: namely, *namus* (honor / sexual honor), *şeref* (honor), *iffet* (shame / modesty), *haysiyet* (dignity / worth / value). Normally, there is no harm in their being used alternately. However, in order to understand the main causes of the murders for sexual honor, which make up the fundamental theme of this paper, the concept of honor should be narrowed and specifically defined. There are a number of studies dealing with the organic relations between social status and sexual behavior in the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern cultural domain where Turkey takes place.⁹ A common approach of these studies is

⁶ *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, “Norms”, vol. 11-12, p. 205.

⁷ Şerif, M., *Toplumsal Kuralların Psikolojisi*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1985, p. 98.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 155.

⁹ For example: Black-Michaud, J., *Cohesive Force: Feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1975; Campbell, J. K., *Honor, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964; Mernissi, F., *Beyond the Veil*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1975; Peristiany, J. G., *Honor and Shame: The Values of the Mediterranean Society*, The University Press, Chicago, 1966; and *Mediterranean Family Structures*, The University Press, Cambridge, 1976; Sabbah, F. A., *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*, Pergamon

to divide such concepts as honor, shame, dignity and honesty into two different but organically related categories, that is, the categories of male and female conduct. In this way the values and attitudes of man are represented by the concept of honor whereas those of woman are done so by shame or modesty. Despite this bifurcation, especially in patriarchal societies, the shame of a woman is an integral component of man's honor and value. How does a decisive association between the two sexes emerge? In other words, how does a woman's sexuality determine the value of her male partner? The answers of such questions should, doubtless, be sought primarily in patriarchal social regulations and organizations. A fundamental property of patriarchal social organizations is that they give a very low social status to women, and contrarily, an extreme value to their sexuality. Communities in the geographical and cultural region where Turkey is placed could exist for thousands of years on a strictly patriarchal order. Since the Middle East is an arid and inabundant area, the economy continued to be a minimal subsistence economy for a long time; social division of labor and accumulation of capital developed at a minimal level. Another consequence of arduous natural conditions is that individuals could exist and self-actualize only under the protection of extended family and kinship groups. The geographic characteristics of the Middle East caused other developments as well. The institutional means, laws, security forces, educational systems and market mechanisms of central authorities and global societies could not expand to rural areas. This in turn led the local communities to organize in themselves, and establish a social order which is based almost exclusively on tradition and customary law. Thus, family and kinship affiliations came to be the only means of existence and security for individuals.¹⁰

Solidarity among family and kinship members is the only way of existence, and should thus be maintained and strengthened. As a consequence of natural division of labor between man and woman, the former specialized in hunting and war whereas the latter specialized in fecundity and domestic affairs. In such a social environment where security and subsistence are the most vital problems to be solved, the male authority and descent line came to be an absolute measure. It is unavoidable for those families and kin groups who live under the threat of difficult natural conditions, and rival communities to establish a strong defense mechanism as well as an equally strong retaliation mechanism in case they are attacked or harassed.

Books, New York, 1984; Ünsal, A., *Kan Davası, Yapı Kredi Yayınları*, Istanbul, 1995.

¹⁰ Black-Michaud, *Feud in the Mediterranean....*; Peristiany, *Honor and Shame...; Peristiany, Mediterranean Family....*

Woman's sexuality is capable of influencing the purity of family's descent line through fecundity. It should not be so difficult to estimate the degree of this influence in a society that is established on ties of blood.¹¹ Woman's sexuality is exposed to interfamily / intergroup plunder and harassment in another respect: Symbolic and abstract superiorities are as important as economic and concrete ones in a competition among communities with equal or similar status. For men, just like the honesty of their female relatives, seducing the womenfolk of rival families is, in many situations, a source of symbolic superiority and prestige. A community holding a symbolic and abstract superiority may become more powerful, and seize over time the material and concrete superiority as well. A family, whose women / maidens are abducted or raped by the men of rival families, will lose value both in symbolic and concrete terms. The fact that women contribute greatly to household economy by doing agricultural and domestic work, by bringing in a bride price will make families, whose women are abducted, suffer an economic loss besides a moral corruption which includes symbolic and abstract elements.¹²

The symbolic and abstract value of woman's sexuality can clearly be observed in the protection of virginity meticulously before marriage. The loss of it in ways that are contrary to norms, as seen in the "News 2" at the beginning of this article, may bring about fierce murders in families and kin groups. However, the divinity of virginity, just like the high value attributed to woman's sexuality, is a cultural phenomenon, and has therefore a relative place in different cultural systems. For example, while the loss of virginity before marriage causes the killing of thousands of maidens in the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern cultures, in such places as the Eddystone Island girls reaching the age of puberty can have sexual relations for a gift (generally a valuable ring) until they get married with many young men they loved and their families approved. Although the removal of virginity before marriage is not something obligatory, contrary instances are faced quite rarely.¹³ Even this small comparison of cultures show that the extreme value attributed to virginity in Turkey and elsewhere is not the intrinsic value of the hymen, but it is given by society.

Many primitive communities and traditional / rural parts of some modern societies execute the custom for sexual honor as an oral law system. As pointed out before, families and kin groups, devoid of the institutional guarantees of modern state, have to provide justice both in themselves and in

¹¹ Abu-Lughod, L., *Veiled Sentiments*, The University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988, pp. 158-160.

¹² Ünsal, *Kan Davası.....*, pp. 46-50.

¹³ Şerif, *Toplumsal Kuralların Psikolojisi.....*, p. 120.

their relations with other communities. They need to establish such a system in order to overcome the difficulties in sharing the scarce resources of subsistence and the hazards of fatally competing for them.

When we look at the political, economic and social structure of Turkey, we see that an important part of Turkish society is living under similar conditions. Especially in the east and southeast of Turkey blood feuds and murders for sexual honor are quite common. This shows that the global society and its major institutions such as the security, justice, economy, education and health are enfeebled in these regions.¹⁴

When a murder for sexual honor is committed in Urfa, Gaziantep or Siirt, members of bars, feminist organizations and mass media rush immediately to such districts, and they even hold protest movements. The reactions of these groups, which generally internalized the values of the global society, are approached by the custom-abiding local people with great astonishment.¹⁵ This means that the global society and the local communities have very different value-orientations and world outlooks. The global society asserting itself as the only and the absolute distributor of justice, takes the murders for honor, which have the qualities of an individual or a local justice system, as the elements to enfeeble its authority.

IV. The Disembedded Custom

Namus Belası

Düştüm mapus damlarına öğüt veren bol olur
Toplasam o öğütleri burdan köye yol olur
Ana, baba, bacı, gardaş dar gününde el olur
Namus belasına gardaş verdiğimiz can bizim.¹⁶

The Honor Trouble

Many are there to advice once have I fallen into jail
Those advices make a path from here to the village
Mother, father, sister, brother all become strangers when you are in trouble
That suffices! my brother, the life we sacrificed for honor malady

¹⁴ van Bruinessen, M, *Agha, Shaikh and State: Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, Zed Books Ltd., London / New York, 1992; Ünsal, *Kan Davası.....*

¹⁵ *Tempo*, April 1996, p. 152; *Hürriyet*, 17-04-1996.

¹⁶ This stanza is not the whole song, but the most representative part of it with regard to the subject of this article.

This song, which was quite popular in 1970's, reflects very well the geographic and cultural distribution of honor in those years. As emphasized in the song, people used to fall into honor troubles in villages, but serve their sentence in the prisons that are established in big towns or cities. However, the present situation is highly different from what the above song cited. Although murders for sexual honor are still committed in rural areas, and murderers are still put into the jails in big towns or cities, there is something which severs the present time from the 1970's and before. Murders for honor are not just confined to rural and traditional parts of society anymore. The custom for sexual honor is disembedded from its usual time-place coordinates by rapid migration, intensive urbanization, excessive social mobility between rural and urban areas and increasing communication. Thus, the custom for honor, whose rules have been dismantled from its original habitat, is now haunting in great Turkish metropolises. Furthermore, it sometimes leaps to principal world metropolises like Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam. That the custom for honor is wandering about through the globalization wind is a weird reality. Because the murders for honor are most of the time sensationally highlighted by mass media, they can easily make up the agenda of many people in the world-Turks or foreigners. Ironically speaking, it is something like the expansion of Coca-Cola and Hamburger throughout the world.

In order to understand the dismantlement of the custom and its influx into cities, we should investigate the complicated processes of life experienced by those who migrated from rural areas to metropolises with their traditional values. First of all migration from countryside to city should not be taken as a linearly increasing modernization movement. The assimilation or transformation of the "traditional" by the "modern" is not the sole outcome of their confrontation. Most of the time, the "traditional" and the "modern" can coexist peacefully side by side and even jointly.¹⁷ However, people who leave their traditional social environment and original culture are expected to experience various difficulties and tensions. Cities, which are seen as the indicators of modernity, offer the new comers many amenities and opportunities on the one hand, while confronting them with a number of risks and threats, on the other.¹⁸

When we compare the security and risk parameters of traditional and modern social milieus we can predict more clearly what kind of psychological changes are undertaken by the migrants. In the pre-modern social milieu the basic mechanisms of maintaining security are the kinship

¹⁷ Genç, E., "Kentleşme, Geleneksel-Modern Geriliminde Kimlikler ve Özgüllüğün Farklı Biçimleri", *Türkiye Günlüğü*, no. 46, Summer 1997, pp. 124-131.

¹⁸ Giddens, A., *Modernliğin Sonuçları*, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul, pp. 14-17.

ties-in spite of their internal tensions-, the local community as a familiar environment, religious systems that consist of beliefs and rituals, and the tradition which reproduces the social life and connects the present with the future.¹⁹ The risk table of the pre-modern milieu consists in natural disasters, violence created by human beings, and being subject to bad manas through heresy or apostasy.²⁰

The basic mechanisms maintaining the security of individuals in modern culture are, among other things, personal relations, abstract systems, visions and projects about the future. The risk creating factors in the same cultural framework are, on the other hand, the unpredictable consequences of modernity, war and armament, the insensibilities stemming from the reflexes developed by individuals as a reaction to the consequences of modernity.²¹

How will people, who used to count on the security systems of their families or clans against natural disasters and outsiders, and to compensate by resorting to customs for the injustices they were exposed to in a traditional village setting, behave when they first come to cities? First of all, it should be noted that there will be a decisive increase in the risk and threat factors for the new comers. The migrant family, who had to formerly overcome the risks coming from natural events and rival families in the village, is exposed to thousands of strangers, unexpected consequences of modernity, various cultural influences produced by human associations, social institutions and mass media against its traditional values and customs in the city.

Confronting such a table of risks in the city, the migrant families have two choices: conforming to the urban life by changing rapidly, or, remaining unchanged and even more strictly bound to their traditional values than ever before by perceiving the modern city life as an evil and alien setting. It is almost impossible to face the two kinds of adaptation in their ideal forms in real life. In practice, it is more common that the younger generations, who attend schools, work places and other necessary institutions, can change and adapt to the city life more easily. The older generations, whose value-orientations are already recalcitrant, maintain an isolated and an introvert life, resisting the cultural, moral and behavioral criteria set by the modern urban milieu.

The differences that the younger and older generations exhibit in the speed and the mode of adaptation to the city life may shatter the traditional family ties and protective kinship systems. Parents, who could easily control

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 93.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 93.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 93.

their children in rural settings, will find it very difficult to do the same thing in big cities.

The migrant youth, who did not use to question social norms in the past, are now willing to compare them to the new values and norms they learn in the city. As a result of such comparisons, new choices and forms of relations may become more attractive for them. Young people experiencing a kind of mobility between rural and urban settings, undergo some sort of transition from traditional cultural patterns to modern constructs that have many individualizing qualities.²²

During this transition young people may be exposed to the pressures coming from their families who are in a position to implement the traditional norms. Thus, the normal generation-gap may turn into a more comprehensive conflict between different value systems and world outlooks. Abstract and symbolic values are more important in the city than in the village for older generations. For the younger generations, who can adapt more easily to the complicated and unstable urban environment, the meaning of these values may begin to change or even to cease down. Therefore in a migrant family a conflictual pattern of attitude may come out: While some members of a family may exaggerate or even worship their traditional values and norms, other members may deviate from them. This conflictual pattern may increase the intrafamily tension or violence in case any problem occurs. Intrafamily murders for sexual honor are generally experienced in more extreme ways in cities than in rural and traditional environments. We can face a situation in which “archaic” or at least “obsolete” customs are, as they were, challenging and reviving.

A psychological parameter should be taken into account here: Families, left their villages due, most probably, to various difficulties, enmities, and economic problems, will conform to their customs more firmly in the city than in the village in case they failed to self-actualize in the former. The migrant people, who undergo problems of identity and self actualization in the city, may dignify such symbolic values as sexual honor, virginity, and for their sake may kill even their daughters, sisters, mothers and other close relatives without any hesitation. These murders, albeit through negative mechanisms, will supply them with a certain social status and respect. People who kill their close relatives for sexual honor are not “real murderers” in the eyes of the global society and in those of the social environment, but “persons who clean up their honor”. Even though the institutions of the global society officially condemn such customs as primitive and unlawful practices, the value-orientations of the officers who run these institutions may bear out the criminals. In this sense, it is not

²² Akay, A., *Konu-m-lar*, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul, 1991, pp. 23-32.

unusual that there are many lawyers who defend murders for sexual honor, and that some state officers directly or indirectly approve them.²³ There is yet another point to be stressed here: Are those people, who worship honor and dignity in so exaggerated styles, and victimize their close relatives for them, willing to attribute such qualities to everybody? Or, are they merely inclined to harass and seduce other women, saving their own women or killing them in case they failed to save them? It seems that such double standards are almost inevitable in the countries where social institutions are not deep-rooted, basic services such as education, employment, security and justice are not supplied effectively, abstract and impartial systems to liberate individuals from the wrath of their family or clan are not developed adequately.

V. Concluding Remarks

In this article, the concept of honor and the intrafamily murders committed for honor-especially sexual honor-have been scrutinized in various parameters. It is quite difficult to show exhaustively the functions performed by the custom for honor today. According to W. H. Rivers, if the utility of a custom or norm can not be explained, this means that it has become a superstition.²⁴ If the present situation is something like this, that is, if the custom lost its original meanings and functions, this is a good stage in the process of its total expiry. However, it would be quite misleading to assume that the custom for honor and the murders committed for its sake especially in the east and southeast of Turkey have now become obsolete and superstitious phenomena. The fact that voluntary organizations rush to these regions, and protest murders and customs will not work too much unless a socio-economic transformation is realized there. This transformation involves both the establishment of major state institutions and the completion of important economic projects like the GAP.²⁵ The institutions of the global society will abolish personal and local exploits of justice. Big economic projects, on the other hand, will contribute to the development of market mechanisms which can dismantle collective customs as well as family and kinship hegemony over the individuals. Thus, individuals will not

²³ *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 08-04-1996.

²⁴ Şerif, *Toplumsal Kuralların Psikolojisi.....*, p. 155.

²⁵ The GAP (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi) is a mega socio-economic project intended to develop the southeast of Turkey. The project, which has been on the agenda of Turkish political economy for a few decades, is based on constructing dams, irrigation, intensive agriculture and food industry.

have to submit to their families and kin groups for subsistence and security unless they prefer the other way round.

As for the murders for sexual honor in great cities again; criminal measures and the police are not able to prevent them on their own. Individuals should be endowed with other institutional (political, economic, educational, occupational, social and cultural) mechanisms to self actualize themselves as free citizens. In this way, the sexuality of individuals (both men and women) should be freed from family or group interests. Only the individuals themselves should be authorized to decide on how to live their sexuality-for example in the form of a love companionship, cohabitation or marriage.