

THE SOCIO-NORMATIVE
CULTURE OF ARMENIA AND THE
SYMBOLIC POWER OF *TRUTH*

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Research questions

Can a certain group impose social norms?

Who are the main actors possessing the power to influence the socio-normative culture in Armenia?

What influence does the criminal-oligarchic elite have on the socio-normative culture of Armenia?

What role does the concept of *truth* have on the socio-normative culture of Armenia?

Methodology

The methodology of this paper is comprised qualitative descriptive methods. The data collection was done through an overview of the historical records, archival videotapes, and observations of ongoing events.

The main theories used: *Division of Labour in the Society* by Emile Durkheim and *Symbolic Power theory* of Pierre Bourdieu

Social Norms: The Micro Level of Social Solidarity

Social norms are the unwritten rules that make the relations among people comprehensible and predictable. It is important to differentiate social norms from conventions, as conventions are descriptive norms, such as fashion, traffic, etiquette, while social norms act in cases of tension or conflict. (Bicchieri, 2005, p. 3)

To function consistently, the norms should be internalized by the individuals. “Individual apply sanctions to their behaviour and respond to these by internally generated rewards and punishments.” (Horne, 2001)

Emile Durkheim. The Social Solidarity

Mechanical Society

Mechanical societies are usually small societies where the labor division is done equally; everyone is involved in more or less the same type of job, has the same lifestyle, the same values and beliefs.

Armenia is closer to the model of mechanical society

Organic Society

In the organic societies people are diverse; they have different professional and social roles, thus different functions. Consequently, they are interrelated and respect each other's differences.

The Mechanical Nature of the Armenian Society

Armenia is closer to the model of mechanical society

A photo of a family of Armenian woman and an Afro-American man with their child was posted in social networks. The photo of the happy family wearing Armenian garments became a topic of discussions and provoked aggressive hate speech. People wrote that by marrying a foreigner, the woman betrayed her Armenianness or as was stated betrayed “her Armenian genes”. Because of the aggression towards the family, the photo was removed



Michel Foucault. The *Truth*

The power can be exercised only in case of possession of the **truth** and vice versa. In other words, the ones possessing power has a **privilege to define others**.

“There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.” (Foucault 1979, p. 27).

Pierre Bourdieu. The Symbolic Power

- Symbolic power is the “invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it.” (Bourdieu, 1994, 164)
- Church, political parties, minority groups or academia; any of these and other groups can possess the symbolic power. The ones possessing more power has more chances to impose their group values on masses, thus make their dominance legitimate. (Bourdieu, 1994, 167)

The *Truth* of *Qucha*

The Armenian term for *yard* is *qucha*. The difference of *qucha* from the yard is that it also embraces the interactions between men happening in the yard. So the conflicts, the clashes and other type of interpersonal relations are a part of *qucha*.

The leaders of the districts have a title of *qucha nayogh* (literal translation: watcher of the yard). Such authorized men regulate the affairs in their yards or the neighborhoods. It is considered that the leader of the yard knows all answers to all moral questions. Interestingly, such ultimate answers are known as **truths**.

The Psuedo-Criminal Normative Culture of the *Quchas*

One of the criminal characteristics of *qucha* is the geographic divisions based on the power relation among people and mostly male. *Quchas* have a specific group of people handling or representing them; sometimes they are named after the leader of the yard or the district.

Officially, Yerevan is divided into 12 districts. Unofficially, each district is known after a certain person, which owns the power of decision-making in that district.

Malatia is “overlooked” by a businessman, MP Samvel Aleksanyan,

Arabkir district is associated with the name of another businessman Artak Sargsyan,

Qanaqer-Zeytun - with a businessman Mihran Poghosyan

...

The Power to Define Others. The case of the Criminal-Oligarchic elite of Armenia

From the perspective of the symbolic power theory, the pseudo-criminal norms have become massively spread in the society after independence because a certain group seized the power to define the rest.

EXAMPLE: The Vice President of the National Assembly and the Spokesperson of the Republican Party of Armenia, Eduard Sharmazanov said: “We are a one family, we are a united amicable family, that has one father, Serj Sargsyan.” (Azatutyun.am, 2017)

The Soviet Normative Remains: *Blat*

Blat originated in the criminal world and became a part of the routine in 1930s. These were the times when the Soviet economy restricted circulation of many goods. However people always seek better quality life. So, the connections helped to get hard-to-find goods and services, luxury items imported from abroad. (Ledeneva, 2001, p. 7)

So, *blat* is the informal mechanism of sustaining the private interests in conditions of state distribution system limitations. (Gharagulyan, 2011, p.17)

The Soviet Normative Remains: *Blat*

The *blat*, a practice inherited from the Soviet Union has become one of the components of the social solidarity in the society, and made loyalty a more important value than the professionalism. (Aliyev, 2013)

The surveys of 2010-2017 by the Caucasus Barometer show that in Armenia, people identify the possession of connections as the most important factor for getting a job.

Conclusion

The most important factor in fighting against the criminal component in the socio-normative culture is the political discourse and the political will to do so. For successful and fast elimination of the criminal from the society, it is important to involve cultural worker, anthropologists and sociologists to study the problem.

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