

THE SCIENCE OF SOCIETY

A Sociological Introduction

Edited by

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Chapter 8

ORDER AND DEVIANCE IN SOCIETY

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Introduction

The concern with social order is as old as human society. The fact that people cohere in society is itself a pointer to the fact that they share something in common. This "something" that is common gives some understanding, on the one hand, that makes social interaction possible. A concern with this order also raises the issue, on the other hand, of the potentiality for a departure from the understanding. Hence, the issue of deviance. This chapter discusses the phenomenon of deviance and argues that meaningful appreciation of the issues involved has to be done within the context of rules, values and norms - concepts that are central to the evolution of order in society.

Order in human society

Order can simply be defined as a 'regular disposition' or "established method." One of the major concerns of sociology is the explanation of social order in society. There is a general agreement that social life is 'ordered' and regular and that social order is systematic and patterned.

The base of this order or regularity is seen in the various customs and norms of the society. These various customs and norms form the core of the culture of each society. Customs and norms constitute values which are expressed in the organization of a system of norms which is said to define the rights and duties or obligations of the individual in his relations with others in society. The rights and duties or obligations come as rules which make it possible for society to function as a unit and the individual to achieve his goals. The goals in turn are culturally determined and introduced to the individual in the process of socialization which transforms the biological man into a social man.

It is the adherence or conformity to these norms, values and goals in society that makes for social order and the continued functioning

of society as a social unit. Typically, the sociologist has assumed that the proper adjustment of norms produces equilibrium and social order¹. Sociologists have argued that social order is an imperative in society. As argued by Sofola (1994), social order is necessary for the propagation and preservation of human species and the objective of procuring food. He further argued that with social order, man maximizes his productive capacity, whereas disorder produces uncertainties and anxieties which inhibit productivity.

Man thus has some constraints towards non-conformity to social order principally due to his membership in social group within which he necessarily has to interact. Man has to adapt or conform to the rules of the social group for several gains that accrue thereof. These gains include the need for survival and security; and personal gratification and recognition. Besides, punishment which is in stock for non-conformists constrains people in society.

There have been several theoretical efforts to explain social order in society. There are two major types which can be linked to: (a) Emile Durkheim/Talcot Parsons and the functional school of thought; (b) Karl Marx and the conflict school of thought. The functionalist focuses on the role of shared norms and values in maintaining cohesion in society. For Durkheim, questions of morality are central to the explanation of social integration. Identifying two moral types based on solidarity, he argued that solidarity in pre-industrial society rested on shared beliefs and values located primarily in the conscience collective. This he called mechanical solidarity. On the other hand, the advent of industrialization sees the emergence of a new form of solidarity (organic) based on interdependence arising from specialization and structural differentiation. Here moral

¹ Ethnomethodologists, however, do not believe that an actual or objective social order exists in society. To them order is not necessary due to the intrinsic nature or inherent qualities of the social world. To them social order is a convenient fiction.

restraints on egoism arise from association and forms the basis for social cohesion.

On the other hand, the Marxist tradition offers a materialist rather than a cultural account of social order. Marx emphasized inequality in material wealth and political power especially in capitalist societies. Here unequal distribution of power the basis of conflict between different collectivities which he referred to as social classes. Marx argued that following from this conflict, there is no moral consensus and social order is always precariously maintained. To him, social order is the product of the balance of power between competing groups, in which the powerful constrain the weaker groups; and cohesion is sustained through economic compulsion, political and legal cohesion, and bureaucratic routine. The dominant ideology or conception of order is thereafter paraded as "normal" and the weaker groups are invariably incorporated into it.

These two typical examples represent what can be termed macro explanations of social order. There, however, exists the need to study social order at the micro level. The writings on **symbolic interactionism** in dramaturgy, **ethnomethodology** and exchange theory provide good explanations of how order is reproduced at the face-to-face interaction level.²

From the foregoing, one major conclusion can be made. That is, either through the moral classification of Durkheim (consensus and the socially integrative structure of status) or through the Marxist production relations (conflict and the emergence of classes), a form of order exists in society which members are expected to conform to. Where conformity exists, a person's opinions and behaviour coincide with the prevailing values and behaviour of the social units with which the person identifies.

² For more readings on this, see Cuff *et al.* (1992)

However, total conformity is an ideal-type situation in a society. There is some kind of deviance or non-conformity within society. Using available statistics, Durkheim as far back as 1950 had argued that 'there is no society that is not confronted with the problem of criminality'. He further added:

Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals, crimes, properly so called, will there be unknown; but faults which appear minor to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offence does in the ordinary consciousness.³

Suffice to say that all societies seek to instill within their populations the desire and willingness to conform to societal expectations. In actual fact, most people conform to these expectations. However, given that socialization is not always fully successful and the fact that the 'savage self' is never totally absent in man, there is always the potential for deviance and deviation in society.

Deviance

Commonsensibly, deviance has been seen as an attribute inherent in a certain kind of behaviour or person. Cultures and sub-cultures differ in their definitions of what they consider deviant within the context of social norms. However, all cultures have rules and behavioural expectations whose violations evoke disapproval, anger and indignation. Thus, it can be said that deviant behaviour constitutes a departure from social norms of the society. Deviance consists of those acts which do not follow the norms and expectations of a particular social group. Since members of society often deviate in one form or the other, Clinard (1974) suggested that the term deviance be used for "those situations in which behaviour is in a

³As cited in Hobs and Stuart (1975).

disapproved direction and of sufficient degree to exceed the tolerance limit of the community".

This clarification has become necessary because deviance could be positive or negative. When it is negative the society applies negative sanctions in form of punishment while the society applies positive sanctions in form of rewards for positive deviation. It is within the background of what is "normal" and approved in society that deviation is better appreciated. In essence, reference has to be made to the norms, values and rules of a particular society, community or social group. Thus, the first major characteristic of deviance is that it is culturally relative. Second, deviance can be relative to circumstance. For example, there are some behaviour that are accepted or condemned among kids that are frowned at for adults (e.g. nudity in public). Furthermore, killing is forbidden for personal reason (murder) but is allowed in the course of war. Third, deviant behaviour can also be relative to periods of time within any one society. In other words, the sinners, rebels and criminals of yesteryears might very well become cultural heroes and heroines of history.

It can be concluded that deviance is behaviour that represents some form of undesirable difference from the point of view of the majority. Not all deviations carry equal weight of response from members of a social group. While some minor deviations are often tolerated, some deviations which violate the mores of the society are severely punished.

The definition of deviance within the background of the culture of a particular social group is moderated by factors such as time, circumstances and public consensus or power. Thus deviance is relative.

Views on deviance

There are various views on deviance, six of which will be discussed here. First, is the view which sees deviation in a precise and literal sense. In this view deviant behaviour is that which deviates from the average. This stresses the statistical exception of deviance. Second, is the religious-ideological view which centres on concepts originating in religious terminology: sinner, heretic and apostate. In the secular world, this same orientation is reflected in the terms applied to those who are judged to be traitors to or deserters from the cause. The third is that which views deviance as a behaviour that interferes with the smooth running of the group or institution or society as a whole. Here, deviance is seen as that which creates stress and strain which threatens the well-being of the whole. This is the Boat-rocker orientation. The deviant can also be viewed as sick. In this view, just as human organs are subject to infection, disease, and impaired functioning, so also are psychic and social behaviour subject to unhealthy functioning. In this orientation, the deviants are defined as pathological. The fifth is the view that sees the deviant as being alienated particularly as a product of the emergence of mass, urban industrial society. The alienated are deviants estranged from the society in which they live. It is this alienation that is also used as an explanation for the emergence of various mass movements. Finally, is the view of a deviant simply as "another" human being who has a few quirks of some particular problems that make him or her different.

A major category of deviance that is also worth mentioning is that relating to legal norms of the society. It is called crime. This is a deviation from norms that are found in criminal records, constitutions and penal codes (such criminal laws are indirectly legal norms regulating various types of behaviour and are enforced by the coercion of the state.) Crime can be held to be:

an offence which goes beyond the personal and into the

public sphere breaking prohibitory rules or laws, to which legitimate punishment or sanctions are attached, and which requires the intervention of a public authority (the state or a local authority) (Marshall, 1994:96).

Legal norms (or criminal laws) can be classified into two major types:

- a. **Mala in se** - acts that are in themselves bad. Such laws have roots in religion.
- b. **Mala Prohibita** - acts that have been made illegal by virtue of law. That is acts that are criminal in its own sake.

From these typologies various acts and/or omissions can be categorized based on different criteria. For examples in southern Nigeria, an offence is classified on the basis of its seriousness (felonies, misdemeanour and simple offences) while in northern Nigeria, it is based on power of arrest and bail (felonies and other offences).

Explaining deviance

Obviously, society has a large stake in the understanding of why deviance occurs. Infact, man has been trying to find the cause of deviance particularly the form exemplified in crime (deviation from legal norms) for ages. There has been a movement from criminal anthropology to the science of criminology⁴. For example, there was a time when demonological explanation held sway. Scientists and sociologists alike have, however, come to reject such explanations. Thio (1986) divided the available 'scientific' explanation of deviance into two types: (a) those which look into individual characteristics for the cause of deviance; (b) those which focus on the society itself.

⁴ See Garland, D (1997) "Of crimes and criminals: The development of Criminology in Britain". In: Maguire *et. al.* (1997) especially his discussion on the emergence of the positive science of the criminal.

Included in the first category are those theories which stress physiological features. This trail was blazed in 1918 by Cessare Lombroso in his work in Italian prisons. His pioneering work was used as the basis for the development of Body-type theories. The submission here, is that criminals are born not made (Sofola, 1990).

In this category can also be included those who argue that genetic defects could be responsible for criminal violence in man. These biological explanations (as they are referred to) submit that an XYY chromosomal combination could create double aggression and more likely to put the individual to commit violent crime.

In addition, the various psychological explanations could be grouped under this first category. Examples can be found in Freudian theory of personality where he submitted that human personality is made of the **Id**, the **ego**, the **superego**. In the context of our discussion, a poorly developed ego (which is expected to operate at the reality level) could cause an individual to deviate. This is because the ego is the battle-ground for the id (the unconscious self which is activated by the pleasure principles) and the superego (which represents the part of an individual's personality that was created through socialization and which embodies for the most part, the cultural norms of society).

There is no doubt that the individual characteristics explanations can only explain a tiny fraction of deviance. This will become obvious as one considers the sociological explanations. Sociological explanations are as many as perspectives that are obtainable in the discipline. However, they can be conveniently grouped into two orientations.

The first group is based on the functionalist/consensus orientation. Notable here is the work of Durkheim on suicide in which deviance is seen as pathological. Borrowing from the concept of anomie (as developed by Durkheim), R. K. Merton argued that there could occur disjunction between the cultural goals and

institutional means of achieving them in society. In such anomic situation responses of people in society can be grouped into five - Conformists, Innovators, Ritualists, Retreatists and Rebels. All of these reactions, except conformists are deviants in the view of Merton. The question however remains: what factors account for the choice involved on the available options? Another explanation in this functionalist orientation includes the social control theory. This states that criminal behaviour results when social controls are either weakened or broken down. Second, the theory of differential association, by Sutherland, states that a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favourable to violation of law over definitions unfavourable to violation of law. It states that the mechanism involved in differential association is like any other learning process. Finally, in this category is the labelling theory which concentrates on societal reaction to role violation and the impact of this reaction on the role violator. Labelling suggests that the only difference between criminals and non-criminals and the only characteristics that criminals have in common, is that they have been "successfully labelled" criminals by the social group or the society. Labelling theory has been said to be good in the explanation of secondary deviation.

The conflict orientation is generally attributed to Karl Marx. From the background of unequal power distribution and the creation of classes in society, criminal law is seen as the tool of the ruling class. According to this orientation, law is being used to preserve the existing order. Examples here include Sellin's Culture Conflict Theory. A more recent conflict approach is what is referred to as radical or critical criminology. Contributions here include the works by Young and Walten (1973) and Quinney (1974). A typical argument here posits that the ceaseless drive for profit by cutting labour cost has created a large class of unemployed workers. This marginal surplus population becomes superfluous and useless to the

economy. Such people are likely to commit property crime to survive. Others may vent their anger and frustration against symbols of authority, while others may turn inwards having a feeling of powerlessness and alienation and thus suffer severe psychological pains.

People are accustomed to thinking of deviance as bad. Some have however suggested that deviance is not completely or often harmful to society. Amongst the advantages of deviance identified by sociologists for society are:

- (a) The enhancement of conformity by its definition and clarification of norms.
- (b) Strengthening of solidarity amongst law abiding members of society.
- (c) Provision of safety valve for discontented people.
- (d) Provision of jobs for many law abiding people through the various control agencies/organizations.
- (e) Stimulation of useful developments which could lead to fundamental social changes.

The stimulation of social change advantage of deviance can be cited in the activities of Nationalists under colonialism and of many civil right movements in contemporary Nigeria. It should be borne in mind that it was the 'deviant' activities of such 'Nationalists' like Herbert Macaulay, Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikwe and their various parties that led to the social change of political independence in October, 1960.

To pursue this advantage of deviance, attention is shifted below to the phenomenon of social movements - an organized effort by a significant number of people to promote or resist change in some aspects of society (Marshall, 1994: 489).

Social movements: 'The conscience of the society'

According to Marshall (1994), social movements must be distinguished from collective behaviour. Social movements are more purposeful and organized; have specific goals and formal organization, and a degree of continuity.

Furthermore, social movements endure for a longer time than collective behaviour which is mob psychology. A social movement can be defined as:

a form of collective behaviour in which a dedicated group of people organize to promote or to resist change. The movement has definite goals, an organizational structure, and a clear change oriented ideology. The movement consciously and purposefully promotes the policy it desires usually through political or educational activities (Baldrige, 1975:298).

The political and educational activities of social movements can manifest in the form of riots, propaganda, persuasion, voting law suits and changes in law. Social movements do try to affect public opinion and public values through education and to change public policy through political system.

Attempts have been made to classify social movements. A typical example is that by Ralph Turner and Lewis M. Killian (1957) which identified four categories - power oriented, value oriented, personal expressive oriented and resistance oriented. As Baldrige (1975) however warns, social movements do not stress only one characteristic, they only vary in emphasis, stressing one aspect, but never completely eliminating the other aspects.

Two major pre-conditions have been identified for social movements to develop. First, is that they may emerge after a long period of social discrimination and oppression. Here, the social discrimination and oppression could come in the form of poverty,

class divisions, regional hatred, clashes over power, job discrimination, discrimination in the area of education, housing, health, threat of genocide and/or political impotency. In the case of Nigeria, note the circumstances which led to the emergence of the Ogoni Youths Movement, *Afenifere*, NADECO, and JACON, to mention but a few, particularly in the south-west axis during the Abacha era (1993-1998).

Second, they could emerge after a short period of progress that generates rising expectations. In the second pre-condition, it is the widening gap between the expectation and what is obtainable that often breeds social movements.

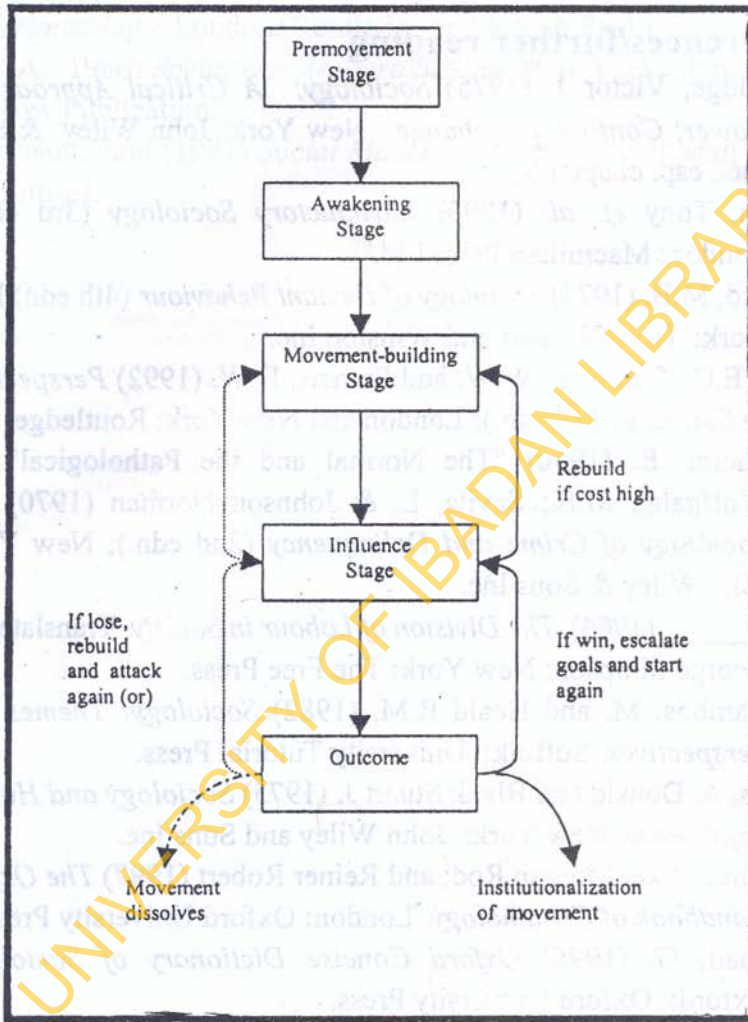
Sociological attempts have equally been directed at tracing the life of social movements. (see Figure 1 adapted from Baldrige (1975)). Of importance to this chapter is the influence stage in which authorities begin to covertly or overtly react to social movements with "social control". This reaction could include a counter propaganda or outright arrest and detention or jailing of leaders (especially charismatic ones) and members of social movements. (Note the spate of arrest and detention of democracy activists during the Abacha regime). This is done under the pretext that they constitute a strain or nuisance to social order in the society, or to smooth running of society. Common words from authorities include: 'disgruntled elements', 'misguided youths', 'self-seeking persons'; etc. This is often a very trying time for social movements. The success at this stage is a factor of organizational building and resource base of the social movements on one hand, and the nature and character of the authorities on the other. Authorities may respond in a number of ways including granting demands, coopting the movement, or suppressing it with counter-violence. Successful social movements are in the vanguard of social change and are among the most potent forces of transforming the existing social order in any society.

In summary, this chapter has argued that it is a fact that social

order exists in human society. The need for order centres around the need for social interaction amongst members whose interests, needs and survival is enhanced in the group. The sources for social order can either be seen in the value consensus or common morality or in the precarious balancing of the values/interests of warring social units or classes. However, there exists, especially in the very nature of a human being, potential for deviation from the social order. Society has a large stake in the understanding of behaviour that represents some form of undesirable difference from the point of view of the majority. This had led to the formulation of various theories in sociology.

Social movements are well-recognized groups that act either to promote or to resist change in the social system. Thus, they represent a form of deviation from the social order in society. They exist or have the potential to emerge in societies. Where they exist, they tend to emphasize one or more of the following orientations: power, value, personal expression and resistance. Social movements have life careers like biological organisms. As deviant groups they constitute a threat to the authorities and thus social order. They are therefore likely to come under severe control of the formal social control mechanisms. Where they are successful, several aspects of the social order will have to give way. Also, the social activists of social movements formally regarded as criminals, now become heroes of the day, leading to the emergence of new social order. Hence, we can conclude that social order is dynamic and thus subject to change. However, progressive change in social order is more desirable than retrogressive change. And one of the roots of such change often lies in the deviant act(s) of members in the social order.

Fig. 1. The Life-Career of Social Movements



Adapted from Baldrige (1975); p. 308

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