

Representations of Deviance and Crime: A Comparative Sociological Reading of the Past and Present

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Abstract---This study aims to examine the phenomenon of deviance and crime from a comparative sociological perspective by tracing the transformations in their representations between the past and the present and how these transformations have been reflected in the structure of social consciousness and the practices of social control across different societies. The study draws on the analysis of three research models: the first from Algeria, which addressed the value-based and social transformations that reshaped the concept of crime within the local context; the second from a Western country, which explored the impact of modernity and technology on the emergence of new forms of crime; and the third from an Arab Eastern country, which focused on the religious and cultural dimensions that shape society's perception of the deviant. This reading relies on the sociological comparative method supported by historical analysis of social discourse on deviance, aiming to understand the evolution of crime representations from cultural, moral, and institutional perspectives. The findings reveal that the concept of deviance is no longer static but evolves in accordance with value, social, and technological transformations. The moral and religious dimensions in explaining deviant behaviour have declined in favour of modern psychological and social approaches. At the same time, traditional societies continue to perceive deviance as a deviation from the symbolic order of the community rather than merely a legal transgression. This study highlights that understanding crime today requires moving beyond a narrow legal view toward a comprehensive understanding that integrates the cultural and social dimensions in interpreting the phenomenon within its evolving context.

Keywords---deviance, crime, representations, values, transformation.

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Introduction

Deviance and crime are among the oldest social phenomena that have accompanied humankind since the emergence of the first human communities. They have served as a point of departure reflecting the nature of a society's moral and normative structure at each stage of its history. Deviance is not merely a violation of the law but rather an expression of the individual's relationship with society and of the boundaries between what is permitted and prohibited as delineated by the prevailing cultural and social order. While traditional societies interpreted deviance in light of moral and religious standards, modern societies have redefined it within new frameworks shaped by economic, political, and technological transformations and the fragmentation of social bonds.

The trajectories of crime have undergone profound transformations alongside changes in lifestyles and the evolution of value systems. In the past, crime was understood through concepts such as honour, shame, and obedience, and social practice subjected individual behaviour to rigorous control derived from both the community and the sacred. Today, however, deviant behaviour has taken far more diverse and complex forms due to the expansion of social spaces, the decline of traditional control mechanisms, and the rise of individualism, rendering the notions of "deviance" and "crime" more relative and less consensual across cultures and societies.

A comparison between the past and the present reveals that the evolution of deviance is not merely a linguistic or legal shift but a structural transformation in how human beings perceive themselves and their relationship with society. In ancient societies, deviance was morally condemned before it became legally criminalised, as the symbolic order of the community exerted greater authority than did political power. In contrast, in the modern era, crime has come to be measured by the extent of its violation of positive law rather than its contradiction of norms or values. This transition from the "moral" to the "legal" reflects the movement of societies from collective to institutional regulation and from symbolic authority to the procedural authority of the state.

Furthermore, the emergence of digital technology, globalisation, and social media has reshaped patterns of deviance in contemporary contexts. New forms of crime, such as cybercrime, symbolic violence, and digital extortion, have arisen, rendering the concept of crime more fluid and ambiguous. Conversely, traditional forms of deviance have not disappeared; they have, at times, re-emerged in new forms, particularly within societies still navigating between the logics of tradition and modernity.

From this standpoint, the study of the representations of deviance and crime acquires profound sociological significance, as it enables an understanding of how societies' perceptions of deviant behavior evolve in accordance with their moral, economic, and cultural transformations. It also allows for a rethinking of the relationships among the individual, authority, and normativity; between freedom and responsibility; and between law and morality. This comparative reading between the past and present and among different cultural contexts—Western, Maghrebian, and Mashreqi—seeks to construct a comprehensive conception of the phenomenon of deviance in light of the significant transformations shaping the contemporary world. It further examines how societies have reconstituted the concepts of crime, control, and deviance within new frameworks of meaning and legitimacy.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework

Research Problem

Among the social phenomena most closely linked to the structure and transformation of society are deviance and crime, which cannot be understood in isolation from the moral and cultural framework that produces and continually redefines social norms. As societies evolve, social representations of what is considered "deviance" or "crime" change accordingly. Deviance is no longer merely a transgression of

the moral order or a breach of custom; instead, it has become a dynamic concept that shifts in accordance with the economic, cultural, and political transformations experienced by each society.

In traditional societies, the deviant individual was perceived as one who defied the symbolic order of the community, and deviance was morally condemned before it was legally criminalised. In modern societies, however, the concept has been reconstructed within legal and scientific frameworks. Crime is now understood as behavior resulting from dysfunctions in social interaction or structural conditions linked to poverty, marginalisation, or family disintegration.

These two models clearly indicate that the standards defining "deviance" are not fixed but rather express the profound transformations taking place within the moral and social order.

The central research question of the present study is as follows:

- How have the representations of deviance and crime changed between the past and the present, and what sociological and cultural factors have redefined the concept of deviance in light of moral and social transformations?
- Furthermore, this shift in representations reflects an evolution in collective consciousness towards a rationalisation of the phenomenon, or is it merely a transition from traditional forms of social control to institutional ones without a fundamental change in the intellectual structure of society?

This study proceeds from the central hypothesis that the representations of deviance and crime are not fixed concepts but rather structural transformations that society continually experiences. As systems of values and social roles evolve, so do the meanings of deviance and the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable. The study also posits that the shift from moral and religious conceptions in the past to legal and rational frameworks in the present has not eliminated the symbolic and religious dimensions but has reconfigured them into new, more flexible forms adapted to the demands of modernity.

Accordingly, this comparative reading seeks to address the stated research problem by analysing empirical models representing three contexts: the Algerian (as a transforming Maghrebian traditional model), the Western (as a rational modern model), and the Arab (as a religious-cultural model) to elucidate the similarities and differences in the representations of deviance across time and cultures.

Hence, the study's hypotheses are as follows:

- First hypothesis: Representations of deviance and crime change with the evolution of the moral and social system over time.
- Second hypothesis: Representations of deviance in societies are determined more by economic and technological transformations than by moral factors.
- Third hypothesis: Representations of deviance in Eastern societies oscillate between traditional religious frameworks and modern civil frameworks.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its engagement with one of the most sensitive and complex sociological issues, deviance and crime, as a field that mirrors social transformations and evolving modes of thought. Discussing deviance is not merely an exploration of a deviant social phenomenon or abnormal behavior; it is, at its core, a study of the relationship between the individual and society and between cultural values and social transformation. The study of representations of crime and deviance enables the researcher to understand the following:

- To compensate for the moral and social transformations that have led to the changing conception of deviance and crime between traditional and contemporary societies.

- The relationship between deviant behavior and the cultural structure of society and how societies continually reconstruct their moral standards within their historical context are highlighted.
- Analyse the mechanisms of social control and their transition from symbolic and moral regulation in the past to legal and institutional regulation in the present.

Objectives of the Study

The study titled “*Representations of Deviance and Crime: A Comparative Sociological Reading of the Past and Present*” aims to achieve several analytical and scientific objectives, most notably:

- To analyse the evolution of the concepts of deviance and crime across historical stages, from traditional to contemporary societies.
- To identify the social and cultural factors that have contributed to the reconfiguration of crime representations across different civilisational contexts.
- To compare patterns of social control between the past and the present, we clarify the mechanisms underlying the shift from symbolic to institutional regulation.
- To provide a critical sociological reading that integrates historical and cultural dimensions to understand deviance as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon.

Rationale for Topic Selection

The choice of this topic was driven by several scientific and objective considerations, including the following:

- There is growing sociological interest in the phenomena of deviance and crime amid the rapid social and cultural transformations characterising contemporary societies.
- Comparative studies that integrate both temporal (past and present) and cultural (Western, Eastern, and Maghrebian) dimensions are scarce.
- The desire to understand value transformation in Arab societies, particularly in Algeria, and its impact on the perception and representation of deviant behavior.

Methodology of the Study

This study adopts the comparative method as one of the fundamental approaches in sociological research. It enables the analysis of social phenomena within diverse contexts and facilitates the comparison of their representations across time and space. The purpose of employing this method is to understand the transformation of the representations of deviance and crime across historical phases and among different societies, highlighting what remains constant and what changes in humanity's perception of deviant behavior.

To achieve this objective, three sociological studies representing distinct cultural and historical contexts were selected:

1. **The Algerian Study** focuses on the moral and social transformations within Algerian society and their impact on the perception of crime amidst economic and cultural change.
2. **The Western Study:** Examines the evolution of the concept of crime in modern Western societies, particularly in the context of globalisation and digital technology, which have generated new forms of deviance.
3. **The Arab Study:** Emphasises the influence of religious and cultural references in shaping society's perception of deviance, analysing the interaction between traditional values and modernity.

The study also employs historical analysis to trace the evolution of social discourse surrounding deviance, as well as structural-cultural analysis to uncover the relationship between moral

transformations and social representations. The theoretical data are drawn from a combination of classical and contemporary sociological sources, along with findings from previous field studies that have addressed the phenomenon in various contexts.

This methodological approach aims to construct a comprehensive comparative vision that interprets deviance not merely as individual behavior but also as a social and cultural product reflecting the dynamics of change within the moral and normative structures of both traditional and modern societies.

Comparative studies

First: The Algerian Study

Ben Sassi, Jamila. (2019). *Representations of Crime and Deviance among Algerian Youth: A Field Study in Constantine* (Master's thesis in Sociology, University of Constantine 2, Algeria).

This study is among the most recent Algerian works addressing the representations of deviance and crime within a transforming social context. The researcher sought to understand how Algerian youth perceive the concepts of crime and deviance amid economic and social crises and the decline of traditional values.

The study employed a qualitative field-based methodology grounded in semistructured interviews with a sample of young people from urban and semiurban neighborhoods. The researcher sought to uncover the relationship between representations of deviance and the structural conditions faced by youth, namely, unemployment, marginalisation, and low institutional trust. The study reached significant conclusions, most notably, that the concept of deviance is no longer perceived merely as a "violation of the law." However, it is also understood as a "social reaction" to the absence of social justice, reflecting a symbolic transformation of the phenomenon. The findings further revealed that crime, within the collective imagination of Algerian youth, is no longer necessarily stigmatised but may, at times, serve as a means of expressing dissent or asserting one's identity.

This study demonstrates that representations of deviance in Algeria are closely linked to value-based and social transformations, providing a solid foundation for comparison with Arab and Western studies.

Second: The Western Study

Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.

Howard Becker's study is one of the most influential classical references in the sociology of deviance, marking a theoretical paradigm shift in understanding crime and deviant behavior. It moved from the positivist approach, which explains deviance as an attribute inherent in the individual, to the symbolic interactionist approach, which interprets deviance as the outcome of a social labelling process.

Becker adopted a qualitative analytical method based on field observations and interviews with groups of young people belonging to deviant subcultures (such as jazz musicians and drug users). He focused on how deviant identity is formed through interactions with social institutions (police, school, family) and with reference groups.

The study's findings highlighted that deviance does not concern the act itself but rather society's reaction to it. An act becomes deviant only when it is defined as such by a social or legal authority. Consequently, the individual becomes a "deviant" because others have assigned them that label.

The significance of this study lies in its redefinition of deviance as a relative social phenomenon that varies across cultural and historical contexts. It also opened new avenues for understanding crime through a constructivist lens that emphasises not only the act but also the social process through which the "deviant" is produced. In contrast, this Western study allows for a comparative evaluation of how modern societies conceptualise deviance as a product of social interaction, whereas Arab societies (as discussed in the Eastern study) tend to interpret the phenomenon through the moral and value-based structure of their communities.

Third: The Arab Study

Al-Janabi, Abdullah. (2010). *Social Deviance in Arab Societies: A Sociological Approach*. Baghdad: Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyah al-'Ammah.

This study stands among the most significant Arab contributions to the sociological analysis of social deviance from within an Arab intellectual framework. The researcher Abdullah Al-Janabi sought to deconstruct the social and cultural structures that contribute to the production of deviant behavior in both traditional and contemporary Arab societies.

Al-Janabi adopted a descriptive analytical method grounded in a critical review of Western sociological theories such as social control theory and labelling theory and compared them with Arab cultural conceptions of deviance. He combined theoretical analysis with limited field research conducted in Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon, thereby giving the study a comparative dimension within the Arab context itself.

The findings revealed that deviance in Arab societies is not understood solely as an act contrary to the legal order but rather as a disturbance in the system of moral and social regulation rooted in the concepts of honour, religion, and family. Al-Janabi observed that rapid social change and the influence of Western models have produced a state of value dualism, causing Arab societies to oscillate between two conflicting paradigms: the conservative traditional and the modern liberal.

He concluded that Arab deviance emerges from a crisis of moral identity, wherein traditional moral references have eroded without being adequately replaced by coherent legal or rational systems. Moreover, he noted that Arab societies tend to interpret deviance primarily through a moral–religious lens rather than viewing it as a complex social phenomenon.

The importance of this study lies in its demonstration of how representations of deviance differ between the Arab East and the West, showing that Arab societies continue to uphold a conservative moral interpretation in contrast to the constructivist and interactionist approaches prevalent in Western sociology.

Fourth: Comparative analysis of the three studies

The comparison among the three studies reveals notable differences in the sociological approaches employed to address the phenomenon of deviance and crime, reflecting the cultural and social contexts of each society. Although these studies converge on their shared objective of understanding the mechanisms through which representations of deviance are formed, they diverge in their analytical perspectives and explanatory frameworks.

In the **Algerian study** (Ben Sassi, 2019), deviance is viewed as a direct outcome of the social transformations affecting youth, where deviant behavior takes on a protest-oriented form against marginalisation and economic exclusion. In this context, crime emerges as a symbolic act reflecting a crisis of trust between the individual and institutions, expressing a society in transition from a traditional model to a modern model whose contours remain incomplete.

In a **Western study** (Becker, 1963), deviance was conceptualised within an interactionist framework constructed through social relationships. Crime is not interpreted as an objective act but rather as the product of a social labelling process exercised by institutions of authority and social norms. Here, deviance does not reside within the act itself; it is a social classification reflecting society's power to define what is acceptable or unacceptable.

Conversely, the **Arab study** (Al-Janabi, 2010) examines deviance as a phenomenon rooted in the disintegration of traditional systems of moral values in Arab societies, where moral and religious references continue to serve as the primary determinants of behavioural judgement. Thus, deviance is interpreted as a deviation from prevailing ethics rather than merely a breach of legal order.

Through this comparative analysis, the following conclusions are drawn:

- This Arab study focuses on the moral and ethical structure of the phenomenon.
- The Western study centres on the symbolic and interactionist construction of deviance.
- The Algerian study occupies an intermediary position, combining structural-social analysis with symbolic interpretation, reflecting a transformation in representations of crime between the traditional and the modern.

Conceptual Definitions

Concept of Deviance

Deviance is one of the central concepts in modern sociology because of its multiple connotations associated with social transformation, regulation, power, and identity. Contemporary sociological studies have moved beyond classical conceptions that restrict deviance to a violation of law or deviation from general values toward a more complex understanding linking deviance to the social and cultural structures that generate it.

From the perspective of the modern structuralist approach, deviance is defined as a product of structural and social inequalities within society, wherein conditions of social exclusion, poverty, marginalisation, and unemployment contribute to the generation of behaviors categorised as deviant within the dominant social order (Clinard & Meier, 2016, p. 27). Hence, deviance is not understood as an individual transgression or a social pathology but rather as a phenomenon arising from imbalances in the distribution of resources and opportunities.

Moreover, the symbolic interactionist approach posits that deviance is not inherent in the act itself but rather in the way the act is socially defined. Social authority determines which behaviours are labelled deviant and which individuals are designated "deviants" on the basis of specific cultural and historical criteria (Goode, 2019, p. 42). Thus, deviance becomes a social construct shaped by the mechanisms of labelling and classification exercised by society.

In the modern Arab context, several studies have expanded the concept of deviance to include behaviours resulting from value transformations, cultural globalisation, and weakened social regulation in large cities. Deviance is thus viewed as reflecting an identity crisis and the disintegration of the traditional moral order (Al-Zarād, 2021, p. 65).

The Concept of Crime

Crime is one of the most prominent social phenomena accompanying the evolution of human societies. It serves as a primary lens through which to understand the nature of the social system and the limits of social control within it. Crime is not simply a legal act that contravenes codified laws; rather, it represents a complex social phenomenon that embodies relations of power and reflects the prevailing values and norms governing a society at a specific stage of its development (Carrabine, 2017, p. 13).

From a modern sociological perspective, crime is understood as the outcome of specific social, economic, and cultural structures rather than merely as an individual deviant act. Structural factors such as poverty, inequality, urban marginalisation, and symbolic violence contribute to the creation of social environments that either promote or tacitly legitimise criminal behaviour (Newburn, 2018, p. 27).

Some researchers argue that crime serves as a mirror of social transformations, revealing patterns of change in values and norms while expressing crises of identity and social integration. In modern societies, for instance, cyber and financial crimes have become more prevalent than traditional offences, reflecting a shift from crimes associated with physical violence to those linked to technology and economic interests (McGuire & Dowling, 2020, p. 44).

New cultural approaches, in turn, associate crime with the symbolic transformations of social discourse, whereby the meaning of crime is constantly reconstructed through media, politics, and legal practices. This reconstruction reflects ongoing struggles over symbols and meanings in the public sphere. Such approaches emphasise that understanding crime requires analysing the social discourses that legitimise or criminalise it (Jewkes & Yar, 2019, p. 52).

In the contemporary Arab context, studies have linked crime to the rapid transformations occurring in Arab cities, such as family disintegration, rising unemployment, and widening class disparities. These studies view modern crime as a product of the transition of Arab societies from traditional patterns of solidarity to urban and individualistic modes of social organisation (Boukhtah, 2022, p. 104).

Concept of Representations

The concept of social representations is a foundational notion in contemporary sociology, providing an analytical tool for understanding how individuals and groups perceive the social world and how meanings are constructed and reproduced within society. Representations are not merely individual ideas or perceptions but rather collective mental constructs generated through social interaction, reflecting a society's outlook on reality, including sensitive phenomena such as deviance and crime.

Serge Moscovici, the principal founder of social representation theory, defines representations as “a system of values, ideas, and practices that enables individuals to orient their behaviour and communicate with one another about the objects of their social world” (Moscovici, 2018, p. 22). This definition, however, has evolved in recent studies, where representations are no longer seen as passive reflections of reality but as cognitive and ideological mechanisms that actively contribute to the production of reality through language, symbols, and discourse.

From a contemporary critical sociological perspective, representations are understood as products of power relations within society. They reflect not only individual consciousness but also the symbolic balance among social groups. For example, the way society represents the deviant or the criminal is not neutral; it is influenced by authoritative and cultural structures that determine who is labelled “deviant” and who holds the authority to define this label. In this sense, representations contribute to the reproduction of the social order by reinforcing stereotypes and value judgments about behaviours and individuals (Howarth, 2016, p. 38).

Recent studies indicate that representations change with shifts in communication media and cultural transformations. Media platforms and digital networks now play pivotal roles in reshaping public perceptions of deviance and crime, fostering new moral judgments that redefine what is considered “normal” and “deviant” in society (Moscovici, 2018, p. 45).

In the Arab context, the approach to the concept of representations has gained traction in recent years within sociological research, particularly in the study of phenomena related to women, deviance, and cultural identity. These studies highlight that representations in Arab societies are closely linked to the value-based and religious system and reflect the nature of the conflict between modernity and tradition, as well as between collective values and individual subjectivity.

Theoretical Approaches Explaining Deviance and Crime Over Time

Classical Approaches to Explaining Deviance and Crime

Classical approaches constitute the foundational basis for all subsequent analyses in criminological sociology, having established the initial frameworks for understanding the criminal phenomenon as a product of the individual's relationship with law and society. These approaches emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, influenced by industrial and political transformations in Europe, alongside efforts to regulate social order amid expanding cities and increasing urban crime.

The Italian positivist school, led by Cesare Lombroso, focused on the biological dimension in explaining crime, positing that the criminal is born with distinct physical and neurological characteristics that distinguish it from other individuals. Despite the deterministic nature of this view, it represented the first “scientific” attempt to explain criminal behavior outside religious and moral frameworks. It was later criticised for its justificatory tendencies and for reducing the human being to the physical body.

However, it paved the way for approaches linking crime to psychological and hereditary traits (Lombroso, 2018, p. 32).

In contrast, the French classical school, led by Émile Durkheim, redefined crime as a natural social phenomenon inherent to all societies. For Durkheim, crime was necessary because it performs a moral function by re-establishing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour within society (Durkheim, 2014, p. 79).

From this perspective, this approach presented crime as a mechanism for reproducing the social order rather than as a disease to be eradicated, thereby affording sociology a renewed explanatory capacity to understand the phenomenon beyond rigid legal frameworks.

Alternatively, Enrico Ferri and Raffaele Garofalo offered a middle-ground conception combining social and natural factors, considering crime as the result of complex interactions among heredity, the environment, and economic conditions. Thus, early classical approaches varied between biological determinism and social relativism.

In the early twentieth century, classical criminology evolved toward a more complex vision, especially with Émile Durkheim and his disciples, who introduced the idea of social disintegration as a source of deviance. Durkheim argued that as social bonds weaken and collective values decline, the likelihood of deviance increases because individuals lose the moral compass that regulates their behavior. This concept paved the way for later modern approaches, such as Robert Merton's anomie theory, which highlights the strain between societal goals and means as a key cause of deviant behavior.

Three main features characterise classical approaches:

- Determinism: Criminal behaviour is seen as a necessary consequence of prior factors, whether biological or social.
- Moral perspective on law: Law is regarded as the supreme expression of the collective will.
- Focus on the individual as the site of deviance rather than the social structures that produce it.

Despite criticisms, these approaches remain foundational because they shifted the discourse from a theological to a scientific frame and established criminology as an independent knowledge field. They enabled researchers to understand crime within its social context, not merely as legal violations. This initial phase represented a qualitative leap in the history of criminal sociology by framing crime as a structural and functional phenomenon, thus opening the door to modern approaches emphasising the social, economic, and political contexts as fundamental determinants of deviance.

Contemporary Approaches to the Interpretation of Deviance and Crime

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a fundamental transformation occurred in the study of deviance and crime as a result of globalisation, digitalisation, and value shifts. Modern theories have surpassed classical frameworks that focus on the individual or social structure to understand crime as a product of new patterns of cross-border cultural and technological interaction. Today, crime is interpreted within the context of communication networks and the digital society, not as an isolated legal act but as a complex symbolic social process.

The critical cultural approach offers the perspective that crime is not only a breach of law but also a symbolic struggle between competing cultures and meanings in a globalised society. Digital and media cultures produce new symbols that redefine deviant behavior as freedom or legitimate rebellion (Hayward, Ferrell & Young, 2015, p. 89). In this sense, analysing the "criminal imagination" in cinema and media becomes essential for understanding how contemporary culture manufactures crime symbols and meanings. The relativity of the concept of deviance from one culture to another also emerges, which is dependent on power and knowledge patterns that define what is "deviant" or "acceptable."

The technological-digital approach focuses on cybercrime and electronic deviance as expressions of a new social reality where boundaries between the real and virtual are erased. The digital society has generated new forms of deviance, such as cyberblackmail, identity theft, cyberbullying, and hacking (Wall, 2017, p. 132). This approach shows that crime has become immaterial, and its motives intertwine economic and symbolic dimensions within a more fluid and less controlled interactive space.

The postmodern approach views crime as a consequence of a crisis of values and the disintegration of grand references such as religion and family, producing an “ethical infinity” that generates new patterns of deviance such as symbolic violence and digital addiction (Bauman, 2000, p. 66). The criminal governance approach focuses on risk management through digital surveillance and proactive behaviour control instead of traditional punishment, rendering crime a “managed” rather than a “punished” phenomenon.

In summary, contemporary approaches have shifted beyond legal or moral analyses to focus on the cultural, technological, and symbolic structures that produce deviance. Crime is no longer regarded as an individual malfunction but rather as a product of digital modernity transformations that have redefined values.

Comparative Analytical Framework

This framework constitutes a fundamental stage in constructing this study, aiming to move from a systematic and conceptual presentation to an applied analysis that highlights the similarities and differences among the three studies under comparison. It is based on deconstructing the scientific content of each study according to its theoretical premises and basic hypotheses to understand how each approach addresses the concepts of deviance and crime and the context of its interpretation of the phenomenon in light of the value and cultural structure of its society.

The comparison in this framework is not based on evaluating the models. Instead, it seeks to reveal the social and cultural backgrounds that directed each study in its analysis of deviance and crime and how historical transformations contributed to reshaping the two concepts from religious, moral, legal, or social perspectives.

The analysis here relies on three basic levels:

- Comparison according to the hypotheses from which each study originated.
- Comparison according to the approaches and theories explaining deviance and crime.
- Comparison in light of the central question concerning the transformations in representations of the phenomenon between the past and present.

Through this framework, the study aims to construct an integrative vision that allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between society and deviant behavior and how its boundaries and meanings change according to the transformation of symbolic and cultural structures in each context.

Comparisons among the three studies on the basis of hypotheses

Scientific hypotheses form an essential starting point for any sociological research, as they determine the epistemological perspective guiding the analysis and reveal how the researcher constructs representations of the phenomenon. Considering the three studies (Algerian, Western, and Eastern), it is evident that each originates from a central hypothesis expressing a different sociological and societal background, whether in relation to social structure or the historical evolution of concepts related to deviance and crime.

In the Algerian study, which examined deviance in traditional societies, the fundamental hypothesis considers deviance a natural and functional phenomenon within the social system, which plays a role in reproducing the moral and value balance of the group. According to this perspective, society needs

deviance as much as it needs conformity, since the meaning of order cannot be perceived without the presence of its opposite. This hypothesis clearly belongs to the structural-functional school inspired by Émile Durkheim's thought, where social phenomena are regarded as objective facts beyond individual will, functioning according to the logic of maintaining the social system (Durkheim, 2014, p. 85).

This perspective assumes that crime and deviance are not indicators of social dysfunction as much as they are corrective mechanisms allowing for the reconstruction of moral standards. The more rules are breached, the more society redraws its symbolic and moral boundaries, thus ensuring its continuity and internal unity.

The Western study, however, originated from a fundamentally different hypothesis, which holds that deviance does not reside in the act itself but in the social labelling process that defines certain acts or individuals as deviant. Here, the focus shifts from seeking causes of deviance to exploring its social production mechanisms. An individual becomes deviant because others attribute this label to them through repeated social interactions, leading to what Howard Becker termed the "deviant identity" (Becker, 2018, p. 46).

This interactionist hypothesis rejects structural determinism and emphasises the role of meaning and interpretation in understanding crime. Deviance is not a fixed essence but rather the product of power relations and social symbols that determine what is accepted or rejected. Moreover, society is not a unified entity but a contested space where multiple definitions of deviance compete according to interests, class and cultural positions. Consequently, this hypothesis shifts the debate from searching for causes to investigating processes of social definition and classification, marking an epistemological break from previous functionalist hypotheses.

The contemporary Arab study adopts a more complex and open hypothesis, asserting that deviance in the digital age is no longer solely linked to the material social reality but is embodied in new symbolic and cultural spaces enabled by technology. With value shifts and the spread of digital media, the moral and religious dimensions in interpreting the phenomenon have receded in favour of more flexible sociological, psychological, and cultural approaches (Castells, 2020, p. 112).

This hypothesis posits that deviance in networked societies takes new forms that challenge classical classifications, such as cybercrime, symbolic violence, and virtual bullying. Traditional crime criteria cannot explain these phenomena, as their logic is not based solely on legal transgression but on the reproduction of values and norms within a transforming cultural context.

Accordingly, this hypothesis reflects a fundamental principle in contemporary critical approaches: deviant behavior must be understood within the dynamics of power and meaning inside the digital society, not solely by conventional standards of real-world behavior.

Through the comparison, it can be argued that the fundamental difference between the three hypotheses lies in the evolution of the view of deviance from being an objective fact (in the Algerian/classical approach) to a symbolic social process (in the Western/interactionist approach) and finally to a changing cultural structure (in the Arab/contemporary approach). This evolution reflects, in turn, the transformation of the sociological model from determinism to multiplicity, from structure to agency, and from act to meaning. It also shows how each society develops hypotheses about deviance according to its value system and historical context.

Consequently, despite their differences, the three hypotheses converge on a pivotal point: deviance is a dynamic social phenomenon that changes with the cultural and epistemological structure of society. While the traditional approach sees deviance as a deviation from the moral order, the interactionist approach views it as a social construction resulting from a labelling process, and the contemporary approach considers it the product of symbolic transformations in modern digital society.

Comparisons among the three studies based on theoretical approaches

Analysing theoretical approaches is one of the most important keys to sociological comparison, as it highlights the epistemological backgrounds on which each researcher relies to interpret deviance and crime. Each of the three studies (Algerian, Western, and Eastern) adopts a different theoretical framework reflecting the evolution of sociological thought from classical structural approaches to symbolic interactionism and finally to contemporary critical and cultural approaches.

The Structural-Functional Approach (Algerian Study)

The Algerian study is grounded in the Durkheimian and functionalist legacy, which views crime and deviance as natural and functional phenomena within society. Durkheim (2014) argues that crime exists in all societies because it fulfils a moral function by delineating the boundaries between right and wrong, as well as contributing to the renewal of the social order when transgressed.

Starting from this conception, the Algerian study confirms that deviance is not simply a violation of legal rules but an expression of social tension between the individual and the collective within a traditional society governed by collective norms. Hence, crime is interpreted as a mechanism to reproduce the moral order and regulate collective behaviour. The structural–functional approach thus relies on three main pillars:

Structural-functional approach

- An integrated social system in which all its components work harmoniously to achieve balance.
- Deviance is a temporary dysfunction that leads to the modification of norms and the restoration of order.
- Instead of focusing on individual factors, collective responsibility in interpreting crime.

However, this approach has been criticised for neglecting the symbolic and subjective dimensions of the social actor and for treating values and norms as fixed givens unaffected by cultural transformation. Despite this, the functionalist perspective remains a reference framework in the study of deviance within traditional societies, where crime is still interpreted from a collective moral–social viewpoint (Merton, 2017, p. 58).

The Symbolic Interactionist Approach and Labelling Theory (Western Study)

The Western study adopts an entirely different perspective, inspired by symbolic interactionism and labelling theory, which emerged in the United States in the mid-twentieth century with the works of Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, and others.

This approach is based on the hypothesis that deviance does not reside in the behavior itself but rather in the way the group defines and labels that behavior as deviant. Society produces deviance through language, symbols, and everyday interactions, that is, through "labelling mechanisms" that construct the deviant identity.

In this context, Western studies consider crime not as a necessary consequence of economic or biological conditions but as the result of social interactions leading to a redefinition of the self. An individual labelled a "deviant" may later adopt this identity and reproduce it behaviourally, creating a vicious circle of social deviance (Becker, 2018, p. 44).

This approach broadened sociological analysis to include the symbolic structure of social reality. It draws attention to the role of social control institutions (such as schools, police, and media) in producing and classifying deviance.

Thus, symbolic interactionism has shifted criminal sociology from seeking causes to exploring meanings, from explaining behavior to understanding its significance within the social system. Nevertheless, this approach faces some criticisms, particularly concerning its underestimation of the effects of economic and political structures in producing deviance and its reduction of the phenomenon to the symbolic dimension alone, without considering the power relations that reproduce it (Goffman, 2016, p. 71).

The Contemporary Critical and Cultural Approach (Eastern Study)

Modern Eastern studies adopt a critical cultural approach that combines sociological analysis and value critique amid current digital transformations. With increasing globalisation and digitalisation, deviance is no longer explained solely through local social norms but through global cultural structures that reshape behaviour and values. This approach argues that deviance in modern societies results from the interaction between symbolic structures and technological production, where communication media redefines standards through new virtual spaces (Castells, 2020, p. 109). For example, phenomena such as cyberbullying, symbolic violence, and media manipulation have become new forms of deviance that traditional laws cannot regulate.

The critical approach also emphasises power and knowledge relations (Foucault, 2019, p. 64), considering that defining what is "deviant" is subject to cultural hegemony systems imposed by institutions, media, and public policies. From this perspective, deviance is not merely individual behaviour but also a symbolic resistance mechanism against the dominant value system. This approach also highlights the impact of value and religious changes in redefining crime, where deviance is no longer measured only by moral standards but by its alignment or conflict with new consumerist and technological values.

Comparisons among the Three Studies Based on the Central Question

The three studies present distinct approaches to the central question, reflecting the cultural and social contexts from which each originated. The Algerian study focused on the value and social transformations accompanying partial modernity after independence; the Western study highlighted the structural shift in the concept of deviance within advanced industrial societies; and the Eastern study sought to understand the value tension between traditional religious reference and the demands of accelerated modernity.

In the Algerian context, the transformation is represented by the fact that deviance is no longer measured solely by religious norms or local customs but is linked to the degree of respect for codified law. Society today experiences duality in its representations: on the one hand, it still criminalises deviance morally and religiously, and on the other hand, it has begun adopting a modern legal approach that considers crime more a matter of social regulation than of moral fault. Hence, the study highlights that social changes (such as changes in family structure, education, and the decline of traditional social control) were the primary drivers in redefining the concept of deviance and crime in the Algerian collective imagination.

The Western study offers an entirely different approach, asserting that the evolution of the concept of deviance is not merely the result of value shifts but a direct reflection of new social and economic structures. With the rise of advanced capitalism and globalisation, new forms of crime, such as cybercrime and financial crime, have emerged, which are not linked to weakened values but rather to market mechanisms, class inequality, and technological change. Thus, deviance is no longer viewed as a moral transgression but rather as a product of an unequal social structure that produces and reproduces marginalisation. Consequently, the Western perspective emphasises structural and functional analysis of social relations rather than focusing on religious or moral norms.

In contrast, the Arab study addresses the central question from a cultural–symbolic angle, seeing deviance as the result of a dual value crisis experienced by Eastern societies caught between a strong traditional religious heritage and the pressures of modernity and globalisation. While crime in the past was understood through religious law and traditions, it today takes on more socially and culturally complex dimensions, where the religious and secular, the local and the global, intermingle. The Eastern approach is characterised by its attempt to preserve religious reference points in interpreting the phenomenon while incorporating some modern concepts such as socialisation and cultural transformation, making it a middle-ground approach between tradition and modernity.

Comparatively, the three studies illustrate that representations of deviance and crime are no longer fixed but differ in identifying the factors explaining this transformation:

- The Algerian study explains this phenomenon through changes in values and social control.
- A Western study attributed this to new economic and technological structures.
- Eastern studies highlight the cause of the conflict of references between religion and modernity.

Hence, the concept of deviance has shifted from being an ethically or religiously condemned act to a dynamic social phenomenon understood within the cultural and economic context of society, making the understanding of crime today dependent on analysing the dynamics of society itself, not merely the laws that regulate it.

General conclusions and recommendations

This comparative study reveals that the concepts of deviance and crime no longer bear the same meanings as they carried in the past but have undergone a fundamental transformation reflecting the nature of contemporary societies and changes in their value, social, and cultural structures. While deviance in traditional societies was understood within a strict moral and religious framework, it is now read as a complex product of economic, cultural, and technological interactions that extend beyond individuals to the macrostructures of society.

The Algerian study demonstrated that this transformation manifests in the conflict between two value systems: one traditional that condemns deviant behaviour morally and the other modern-legal that attempts to regulate it rationally. Consequently, Algerian society experiences a state of value duality reflecting its transitional path toward modernity without a complete rupture from its symbolic heritage. The Western study offered a different vision, considering crime a structural phenomenon linked to modern economic and technological transformations rather than a collapse of the moral system. Deviance in Western societies is understood as a reflection of unequal opportunities, changing power patterns, and increasing individualism, which produces new forms of crime beyond the capacity of traditional morality to contain.

Conversely, the Eastern study revealed the continued strong presence of the religious dimension in interpreting deviance, albeit in a more symbolic and adaptive form in relation to modernity. Eastern societies still interpret crime through a religious value system but have begun to recognise that social and cultural transformations necessitate redefining concepts within a more pluralistic and open context. At the intersection of these three readings, it becomes evident that representations of deviance and crime have become flexible and mutable according to their social and historical contexts and that their understanding today can no longer be confined to narrow moral or legal interpretations. Instead, modern sociological approaches require transcending the division between religion and society, or between the individual and structure, moving toward a comprehensive reading that integrates value, structural, and cultural dimensions simultaneously.

The distinctive feature of this analysis is its emphasis on the transforming nature of deviance as a social phenomenon that reproduces itself whenever the value system of society changes. Every shift in the

value system and social relationships necessarily creates a new definition of what is "deviant" and what is "normal." Thus, deviance becomes a truthful mirror of the transformations experienced by society rather than merely an individual breach of rules.

On the basis of the above, understanding crime today requires moving beyond a narrow legal perspective to a broader comprehension that integrates cultural, social, and symbolic factors when analysing the phenomenon. This allows for a deeper grasp of the dynamics and transformation of society. Crime is no longer a "dysfunction" in the system. However, an indicator of its continuous change and renewal, sociology is a central tool for understanding and redefining its meaning within a rapidly changing time. Hence, a set of scientific and practical recommendations aimed at developing a sociological understanding of the phenomenon and opening avenues for field research and social policies can be identified:

1. Expanding the sociological approach to deviance and crime: It is necessary to move beyond narrow legal and moral interpretations toward multidimensional approaches that integrate cultural and symbolic dimensions in understanding deviant behavior within contemporary societies.
2. Encouraging comparative studies across time and culture, it is important to deepen comparisons between the past and present and between traditional and digital societies to highlight how crime representations change in accordance with value and technological transformations.
3. Considering the concept of deviance in light of digital transformations, this study recommends the inclusion of cyber deviance and electronic crime within sociological and criminological curricula to understand new forms of deviance emerging from virtual spaces.

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