



## Try for Recognition: Cultural Explanation of Suicide Action in Ilam

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### Extended Abstract

Suicide is one of the important problems the prevalence of which has brought about a crisis in Ilam province. Numerous studies have been carried out, but have not adequately addressed the cultural causes (meaning). Hence, the main issue in the present research is what is the meaning of suicide among the people of Ilam? To achieve the response, the strong program approach in the cultural sociology of Alexander and Smith was used. The method is of a qualitative kind; it is based on the "strong program". In this research, due to the subject and the conditions, purposive sampling was used. The sample includes all individuals who have had suicide attempts (unsuccessful) in the province during the period from September to December 2014, or relatives of those who have committed suicide. Data collection techniques, included observation and interviews with either people who had committed suicide some of their relatives. The data was supplemented through interviews with hospital personnel, university professors, researchers and informant individuals, referring to articles and publications; news reports and press releases; sites and weblogs; as well as proverbs, poems, etc. The results show that in Ilam society, suicide is a symbol of the objection against the status quo and is codified as evil. There are two main narratives about suicide: fatalism and salvation. Through analyzing the symbols, codes and narratives of suicide, it is understood that suicide is thought to be a way the person is recognized.

*Keywords:* Cultural Sociology of J.C. Alexander, Symbol, Code, Narrative, Recognition

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## INTRODUCTION

Suicide is one of the important issues the prevalence of which has brought about a crisis in Ilam province. Numerous studies have been carried out, but have not adequately addressed the cultural causes (meaning). In international studies, a very limited number such as Douglas (1967), Lester (2011-2012), Colucci (2006), and Meng (2002) have studied the cultural aspects of suicide. It is also rarely considered in local research studies. Hence, the main issue in the present research is what is the meaning of suicide among the people of Ilam? (To understand the meaning of suicide, in accordance with Alexander (2006), it is necessary to answer the following questions: 1) What does suicide represent in the culture of Ilam?; 2) How is it codified?; and 3) what are the narratives of suicide?

## PURPOSE

The present study was conducted solely with the aim of studying the cultural context of suicide in Ilam community.

## METHODOLOGY

To achieve the goal, the strong program approach in the cultural sociology of Alexander and Smith was used. This approach is based on "autonomy of culture from power and social structure" (Smith & Riley, 1994, 355). In their view, in the sociology of culture, "culture is something to be explained, by something else entirely separated from the domain of meaning itself" (Alexander and Smith, 2006, 12-13). But in cultural sociology, "meaning and culture are dependent variables." This approach "examines the inner structures of meaning, and emphasizes that meaning and value are intertwined with all other processes." (Alexander, 2008, 460).

The method is of a qualitative kind; it is based on the "strong program". In this approach, a few basic steps should be taken to achieve the meaning of what a phenomenon or event has in a culture based on which actors act. First, "a commitment to a cultural-sociological theory that recognizes cultural autonomy." Second, "the commitment to hermeneutically reconstructing social texts in a rich and persuasive way" through "a thick description of the codes, narratives and symbols that create the textured webs of social meaning, "and the third is "to anchor causality in actors and agencies " (Alexander and Smith, 2006,13-14)

In this research, due to the subject and the conditions, purposive sampling was used. The sample, according to the third step above, includes all individuals who have had suicide attempts (unsuccessful) in the province during the period from September to December 2014, or relatives of those who have committed suicide (and died) Have had. Data collection techniques, in addition to lived experience (given that one of the researchers was a native of Ilam), included observation and interviews with either people who had committed suicide some of their relatives. The data was supplemented through interviews with hospital personnel, university

professors, researchers and informant individuals, referring to articles and publications; news reports and press releases; sites and weblogs; as well as proverbs, poems, etc.

### RESULT

Deprived Ilam experienced post-war rapid growth in suicide. Its patriarchal culture, was important. Hence the father's opinion to be superior to the new generation (the girls). There was some suspicion, incrimination, and rumor, and aggression against them. There is, also, a disappointment to the future. In such a situation, intentions for suicide obviously are different: to attract attention, to outface, to complain, to frighten and to retaliate. Indeed, the suicide is a cry to protest the situation. Suicide is forbidden in the Quran and in the religious community of Ilam, but in the new part-culture, there are regulations that implicitly provide a higher status for suicide. However, Ilam community believes that suicide is the destiny, and it is the only way to save this situation.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, confirm the achievements of Douglas (1967), Jacobs (1967), Lester (2011-2012), Colocci (2006), and Meng (2002): In this study, suicide has been considered as meaningful social action; it is emphasized on the view of actors (suicide attempts); An attempt has been made to understand the cultural meaning, distinct from the individual motivations of suicide; it is attempted to understand, what is suicide symbol; and the result is the same as Meng.

### CONCLUSION

Suicide is a symbol of the objection against the status quo and is codified as evil, in Ilam community. There are two main narratives about suicide: fatalism and salvation. Through analyzing the symbols, codes and narratives of suicide, it is understood that suicide is thought to be a way the person is recognized.

In order to reduce the rate of suicide, an intelligent change in the value system and the normative and interpretative system is necessary. Cultural beliefs of the past and the new generation must be adjusted. To make these changes, a successful cultural policy is needed to make a fundamental difference in the meaning of suicide for actors: the cultural link between the need for recognition and the instrumental use of suicide must be disrupted.

### NOVELTY

The application of Alexander's cultural sociology to study a social problem -suicide- is taking place for the first time. The originality or value of this research is that for the first time the cultural causes of suicide are studied independently. In addition, it is for the first time that an interview with suicidal person is conducted to determine the meaning of their actions.



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