

Blood Feud and Modernity

Max Weber's and Émile Durkheim's Theories

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ABSTRACT Modernity and vendetta are contradictory social phenomena, and yet globalization brings to light the existence of blood feud in a modernized world. In this article, Weber's and Durkheim's theories of modernization are reread in order to understand what modernity has to do with vendetta.

KEYWORDS globalization, organic solidarity, passion control, vendetta, violence

Blood feud¹ is regaining some interest in the social sciences after about half a century of little consideration. Criminology, for example, is interested in the concurrence of modern state law and traditional legal systems within immigrant populations in Europe and North America (Wahl, 1984). Ethnology has been very active in researching blood vengeance in Kosovo and other areas of growing international interest (Oakes, 1997; Schwandner-Sievers, 1995). And theology has rediscovered vendetta as a problem of divine justice, which becomes quite telling about Jewish and Christian legal thought when compared with Islamic ideas of righteousness and honour (Barbiero, 1991; Singer, 1994). The Christian urge to reflect on one's own standpoint might be due to the growing physical and intellectual presence of non-Christian, mainly Islamic, legal systems in Europe. All these – migration, internationalization of ethnic conflicts and the growing concurrence between traditions and religions – can be summed up as the phenomena of globalization. Furthermore, it can be said that globalization has brought to light blood feud as an existing legal and cultural phenomenon that cannot be overlooked. If globalization has to do with a new world order, it also has to face the judicial realities of the world and thus needs to understand the legal spirit of blood vengeance.

There has been a period of scientific interest in blood feud before. Most articles on the phenomenon either date from our times or from the early 20th

century which, as much as the current period, was a time of massive cultural contact (on different – rather colonist – terms though). For this literature, blood vengeance was interesting mainly as an ethnological phenomenon (Corso, 1930; Cozzi, 1910). Alternatively, blood feud was regarded as an ancient European legal problem (Ducros, 1926) and vendetta was interesting to social science because it offered an alternative point of view on modern legal systems and their presumed development.

Blood feud has much to do with passions and the way it has stirred the feelings of modern writers tells us more about their own feelings than about the phenomenon as such. Some prefer to read vendetta as an honourable alternative to modernity. Others view it as a ridiculous appendix of premodernity. Modern literature in particular offered a very straightforward interpretation. Honoré de Balzac's novel *La Vendetta* (1996[1855]) was written in times of a profoundly felt lack of social and moral order and mirrored his desire for the 'good old times'. Other literary sources rather tend to ridicule the social phenomenon of blood vengeance. In *Astérix en Corse* (Goscinnny and Uderzo, 1999: 26), for example, vendetta is placed in a southern European society where people's tempers are depicted as naturally hot and unrefined. Common sense is unlikely to be found. From these authors' point of view, blood feud is a sign of an immature cultural character.

However one might feel tempted to judge blood feud, it remains a somewhat foreign phenomenon to a modern understanding of society. Particularly the passions involved can be admired or mocked, but hardly understood, which is why this article is going to seek intellectual help from Max Weber and Émile Durkheim. These two 'giants' of classical sociological theory have integrated blood feud into their social theories very differently. The way they write about vendetta is revealing as far as vendetta is concerned, but it is also quite instructive about their social theories as such. For Weber, blood feud is in fact the central pillar of his theory of political organization, whereas Durkheim sees it as one of the many aspects of passionate sociality. The theoretical consequences of such different approaches will be outlined and analysed in this article. The secret of blood feud might not be unveiled in the end but we might have a better idea of what social theory has to offer in order to explain it. But first of all I will try and give an overview of theories of blood feud as far as they are outlined in ethnological, sociological and historical research.

Blood Feud and Social Order

Blood feud has been described as a perhaps primitive but often effective mechanism for the restriction of violence. Honour is not necessarily an aspect of blood feud – however, it often becomes involved in its dynamics. Honour is part of the alliance-making that in many societies is the result of blood feud and the fear of it. Therefore, blood vengeance mostly proves to be far more complicated than the

participating parties themselves would wish it to be. It often affects far more people than initially intended. Blood feud itself needs to be regulated, which is often done by sacred laws. Heroic or sacred leadership can often only momentarily impose strict rules on blood feud and only a convincingly strong third force that puts an end to the violence is able to stop the vicious circle of vendetta for good. Blood feud thus touches on a number of topics that are elemental to social research such as family (Dean, 1997), social bondage and the question of statehood (Godelier, 1999: 20).

Even though vendetta is very confusing to modern spectators, it would be wrong to equate blood vengeance with social disorder. In fact, a certain notion of social order in blood feud can be presumed. The Albanian word 'Kanun' describes the traditional set of ideas that regulates vendetta (Schwandner-Sievers, 1995: 111). The obvious similarity to the 'canon' of Roman law indicates that feuding societies themselves see an order behind the seeming chaos. In some societies vendetta is even the opposite of chaos, as Joel Rosenthal (1966: 137) explains:

The feud, in contrast to simple chaos, was a method whereby a society without strong central (or non-kinship linked) government sought to achieve a balance between the centrifugal and its centripetal elements. The rituals that accompanied the blood feud were a centripetal device, designed to regulate violence by setting restrictions upon how and when and where vengeance would be exacted. The emphasis upon family networks was a delineating mechanism, whereby from the moment of first outrage any member of society could say exactly who was and who was not concerned with the quarrel.

Blood feud, from this point of view, is therefore a social mechanism that serves to prevent violence from spreading in all directions. Blood feud makes a society safer than it would be if there was no regulation of violence and its use against others.

In his entry on vendetta in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, the Italian ethnologist Raffaele Corso (1930) suggests that the universal basis of every blood feud is the idea that only blood may wash away blood. 'Whoever sheds the blood of men by men shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God has God made men' (*Genesis* 9:6) is the biblical explanation of this concept. It might be theorized that those who take revenge in a vendetta do so in order to repair a situation that has been damaged by others. Hence blood feud shows itself to be a 'sacred duty' (*debito sacro*) of groups towards members who have been harmed or even killed by members of another group. Pierre Ducros (1926: 351) argues that the social bondage that leads to the duty of blood vengeance is based on blood ties, but I think that Corso is right when he argues that the benefiting groups can be associations of all different kinds.

According to Corso (1930: 38), blood vengeance basically leads to two forms of social cohesion: active and passive solidarity. The order thus attributed to violence is of course extremely weak, but it must be recognized that the basic and primitive idea of vendetta is order and not chaotic violence.

If we accept blood feud as a – perhaps primitive – mechanism for the social restriction of violence, we must immediately face the fact that it has also proved to be a factor in the continuation of violence. The idea of revenge is very often passed down the generations until it is actually carried out. It might be unusual to wait for up to nine generations (as has been reported in the case of a blood feud on the Bellona islands [Kuschel, 1988: 172]) until a vendetta takes place, but violence is very often postponed, although rarely forgotten. If vendetta is combined with the idea of honour (as it often is), then not only physical harm must be repaired by blood, but also the harm to one's honour. This can make vendetta more complicated and the regulating effect may be lost. In Albania, the building up of networks (so-called 'Besa') can be useful for increasing the power and therefore the safety of a kin and its members. But when honour, which is the *spiritus rector* of such a network, is under threat, vendettas become frighteningly complicated, as has been described by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (1995: 116):

The breaching of Besa seems to be an inevitable source of blood feud, because Besa includes several conflicting parties: If for example a guest is being killed his patrilinear relatives will want to take revenge. But also the host and his family whose hospitality (Besa) has been inflicted will seek restoration of his honour.

In order to restore his honour, the dishonoured often exaggerates it, and thus with his vengeance he does not really repair but in fact destroys any possibility of a balanced degree of violence. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (1995: 123) quotes one of her interviewees: 'If they kill one of us we will kill 10 of them.' This shows how unbalanced the calculation of violence in a vendetta can actually become. Blood feud in these cases becomes the problem it was thought to resolve.

Heroic leaders might be able to enforce (most commonly) brief periods of peace. The Qur'an simplifies the ancient Arabic regulations for blood feud dramatically. Hell awaits those who try to complicate things again (*Sura* 2: 178–9). Honour no longer justifies any exaggeration. Only the deliberate killer should be killed (Schacht, 1993: 185ff.). In all other cases of harm, punishment mainly takes the form of fines as ordained by divine law. Heroic leaders might also expand social relationships to form new boundaries of reciprocity. The prophet Mohammed, for example, wishes his followers to live in *walaya* (friendship) (*Sura* 8: 72), which implies the duty of blood feud for each other. Heroic leadership is often a phenomenon of militarily active phases of history. Thomas E. Lawrence (also known as Lawrence of Arabia) writes that during a one-week campaign

against the Turks, Arab tribesmen asked him to resolve no less than 14 cases of blood feud (Lawrence, 1992: 466).

All in all, vendetta is seen as a form of violence regulation that loses importance only in societies where an effective apparatus of law and law enforcement is able to control violence. René Girard (1972: 38) has called these social bodies '*sociétés policées*'. If we take a close look at the history of policing (Girtler, 1980; Harnischmacher and Semerak, 1996), we can get an idea of how recent the effective abolition of vendetta actually is.

Max Weber on Blood Feud

Max Weber's social theory does not understand society as the output of a foreseeable course of events. One might like to call his theory anti-Marxist as it refuses the idea of linear history and social 'laws', but it is not really Nietzschean either as the 'eternal return' makes no part of Weber's scientific rhetoric.

Weber's idea of historical development might be best compared with a complicated set of railways. Societies (like trains) follow tracks they might not have chosen in the first place but which are consequences of earlier choices. Weber argues that people and societies were not that different from each other in the beginning. In fact, even such geographically and philosophically distinct cultures as the Chinese and European were very similar in the beginning: 'The further you go back in history the closer the Chinese and their culture . . . seem to be to what can also be found in our culture' (Weber, 1988a: 517).

It is by a process of what Weber calls 'rationalization' that cultures divert more and more until they end up on totally different cultural 'tracks'. The meaning of Weber's rationalization thesis has been much discussed. An interesting hint at what might be meant by this term can be found in a little text on the sociology of music. The very first words are 'all harmonically rationalised music is based on the octave' (Weber, 1947: 818), which implies that there might also be other rationalizations of music such as those based on melody or rhythm. The reader's problem in trying to understand the meaning of 'rationalization' is that, for Weber, 'rationality' sometimes *also* implies attributes such as 'western', 'European' or, in the case of rational law, even 'German'. On the one hand rationalization is a universal process. In the case of music it might mean that rhythmically and melodically rationalized music is as much the result of cultural bifurcation as is harmonically rationalized music. But Weber also writes that *all* rational music follows the scheme of harmonically rationalized music. On the other hand the word rationalization, as Weber uses it, implies the specific development of occidental culture.

If we stick to the translation of 'rationalization' into a set of choices and cultural bifurcation that leads to the development of certain cultural habits, we come to understand why Weber is so interested in blood feud. We will not find any trace of a Weberian global history of vendetta. And yet blood feud is of central

importance to Weber's argumentation. The words 'Blutrache' and 'Blutfehde' as such appear 17 times in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1980), whereas the central noun 'Protestantismus' can be found 22 times in the same book. This gives some indication of the relative importance of blood feud for the sociological stream of thought of Max Weber. In the following quotation from *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Weber tells us why a sociologist should be interested in blood feud:

A continuous path leads from the purely sacral and purely arbitrary influence on blood feud which makes any guarantee of an individual's law and security a concern of his kin which by oath and duty of revenge is bound to him to the position of the nowadays policeman as 'God's representative on earth.' (Weber, 1980: 561)

For Weber, blood feud is a universal institution. It belongs to the logic of all peoples and all cultures. Policing, on the other hand, is a rather occidental phenomenon. Apart from the cities, the Orient never knew much about policing according to Weber. The oriental city, which was organized mainly for administrative purposes, might in theory have installed a police-like entity, but 'its efficiency ceases very shortly beyond the city walls' (Weber, 1988a: 381). The inhabitants of the countryside very much relied instead on blood feud when it came to personal security and law enforcement. So, for Weber, western culture is – apart from its economic, judicial or political rationalization – also depicted by the policing of its public force. According to Weber, there is a straight path from blood feud to policing in occidental societies. Blood feud and policing must be understood as the two ends of a line of development. Weber's theory of blood feud is therefore a theory of public force or political violence.

It has been argued that, for Weber, all use of violence is purely political (von Ferber, 1970: 55ff.). Even though it might be said that violence and politics are closely related, for him such a view seems to be a bit shortsighted. In fact, competition and selection are equal sources of violence as much as politics. For Weber (1978b: 38):

There are all manners of continuous transition ranging from the bloody type of conflict which, setting aside all rules, aims at the destruction of the adversary, to the case of the battle of medieval chivalry, bound as they were to the strictest convictions, and to the strict regulations imposed on sport by the rules of the game.

It would thus be an exaggeration to presume that all violence for Weber is political.

For him, the contrary seems to apply: 'All political structures are based on the use of violence' (Weber, 1980: 520).² Politics and violence might not be the same but they interrelate very much. For Weber (1978b: 901), a 'political community' can thus be defined as 'a community whose social action is aimed at

subordinating to orderly domination by the participants of a “territory” and the conduct of the persons within it, through readiness to resort to physical force, including normally force of arms’.

Political power in this sense can be traced in all kinds of social groupings, and even the family/clan in Weber’s eyes is nothing but a very basic form of political community. The stability of clan structures (Weber speaks about ‘Sippe’ in German) is guaranteed by blood vengeance. This concept is universal and can be found in the early stages of the cultural development of all societies. The ‘Sippe’ is the most primitive political community and its physical force is blood vengeance.

According to Weber, Hindu and Chinese developments have tended to rationalize the idea of kinship. Therefore blood vengeance has remained the main tool of public force in Hindu and Chinese culture. Occidental societies, on the other hand, have rationalized public force and have, step by step, developed into societies whose public force is executed by a specialized body of law enforcement.

In his thesis on the *Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisations* (1978a), Weber describes the path of development of blood feud in ancient Greek society. Let us follow the path from tribal blood/vengeance/solidarity to statehood, starting from the Greek *polis* as one example of an early political community.

All ancient Greek *poleis*, Weber argues, were originally divided into tribes or *phylai*. Even the sophisticated political structures of ancient Greek *poleis* were derived from earlier tribal structures. Before the *polis* came the clan. The first political communities in the Weberian sense on Greek soil, which were responsible for an individual’s personal safety, were the *agchisteis*, ‘a group defined more narrowly than the clan . . . and mentioned as early as in Homeric epics’ (Weber, 1978a: 149). The members of such communities were bound to revenge the injury or death of other members. This system of tribal blood feud worked on the basis of a balance of terror. Individual safety was guaranteed by the clan or not at all. As an ancient Greek you were not free to choose your personal ties. You either belonged to a group or no one would worry for your safety. This is why, at a later stage, ‘those people who did not belong to a numerous and economically established community . . . found themselves forced to enter the clientele of one or another aristocrat’ (Weber, 1978a: 149).

Step by step, the tribal structure was paralleled by an interdependence between subject and aristocrat. Interestingly, these structures also worked on the basis of blood vengeance. The guarantee of vengeance was the backbone of both the tribal and early aristocratic structures in Greece. The idea of the family bond is also fictionally installed in cases of newly created political communities that make use of vendetta in order to ensure the individual safety of their members. The larger such a non-tribal community actually becomes, the less likely it is that blood feud will be guaranteed in any case. Yet the fiction of it is maintained for a long time.

Early aristocracies are one parallel form of social grouping that preserve the interpersonal bonding of their members by vendetta. The other parallel of perhaps even greater sociological importance is the military community. In fact, the ancient Greek tribal system and military organizations were closely related, as Weber (1978a: 150ff.) states: 'The tribe was connected with an earlier stage of the polis, and in fact was normally a feature accompanying the union of villages to form a polis (synoikismos), related to military organisation.' For Weber, aristocrats are warriors who guarantee the external defence of a territory in exchange for financial support. The expenses of war, such as weapons, horses or even a chariot, are carried by the aristocrat's community. The aristocrat, on the other hand, officially takes over the defence of his subjects but might also decide simply to plunder them (as has been the case with many military associations all around the world from the 'Cid' Ruy Díaz in medieval Spain to Chaka Zulu in southern Africa). Thus, the emergence of a military class does not necessarily lead to a system of monopoly of public force in the hands of the state. Very often the military classes separate from the rest of society and become a body of independent (and mostly plundering) enterprise (Weber, 1978b: 905). Blood vengeance in these societies remains a form of individual security guaranteed either by the clan or, in the case of warriors, by the military grouping they belong to. Because no one can claim public defence against harm, either family structures or institutional bonds, such as guilds, are used to guarantee a person's safety. Blood vengeance, according to Weber (1978b: 905), remains the main source of individual security in societies that do not have an integrated apparatus for the legitimate administration of force:

Only when the warrior group, consociated freely beyond and above the everyday round of life, is, so to speak, fitted into a permanent territorial community, and when thereby a political organisation is formed, do both obtain a specific legitimating for use of violence. The process, where it takes place at all, is gradual.

Military organizations might hold the tools of violence control in their hands, but it is not always in their interest to organize the monopoly of force. Other social groups are far more interested in the suppression of blood feud and the organization of public punishment. Priests are among the first to have a vivid interest in the administration of fines, which are gradually installed in the place of blood feuds. The influence of Christian priests and their determination to put an end to vendetta systems are specific reasons for the rationalization of public force in Europe.

Very often priestly influence was part of this development. In the realm of Christianity for example priests had some interest in rotting out blood feud and duel. The Russian *Knjäs*, who in ancient times was nothing more

than an arbitrator soon after Christianisation creates – under the influence of the bishops – a casuistic law. The term ‘punishment’ (*prodasha*) is only now introduced into the Russian language. (Weber, 1980: 482)

Punishment – a term that describes the interfering of a third party in a disagreement – is, of course, not an invention of Christian priests, but they are responsible for administrative and legal issues and therefore interested in enlarging their field of competence. Blood feud is a serious threat to priestly competence in occidental societies, which is why they are interested in its outlawing.

An Oriental priesthood never had the same interest in fighting the blood feud as its main interest lay in the maintenance of the given order. In India, on the one hand, it was the teaching of *dharma* (the belief) that every caste was the owner of its own specific ethics which rendered the creation of a universal code of ethics unnecessary or even dangerous. From an ethical standpoint, *dharma* meant the acceptance of diverse ethics ‘which are not only different from each other but do in fact contradict each other harshly’ (Weber, 1988b: 142). The Indian brahman was therefore very reluctant to develop the idea of a universal code of ethics. In contrast, the Confucian mandarin in China was very much interested in the developing of general ethical laws. But in China the enormous political, social and also religious and cultural importance of kinship hindered the development of a code of ethics that would undermine blood ties and blood feud (Weber, 1988a: 430).

Neither the Chinese nor Indian priests had any interest in the regulation of violence. For the Indian priest, the warrior fulfilled his *dharma* and could therefore do no wrong. For the Chinese mandarin, the maintenance of ritual order was far more important than any regulation of feuds. In fact, kin was of such religious importance that it remained ritually unquestioned during the whole of Chinese cultural development (Weber, 1988b: 145).

The different occidental development was due to some specific cultural bifurcation. The occidental city was a place of individual freedom earlier than the oriental one, first in the entrepreneurial sense and, later, also from a political and social point of view. The occidental Christian idea of brotherhood that valued the brother in faith more than the brother in blood strongly undermined the ethics of blood feud. Later on, the idea of equality before God (at least during holy communion) was responsible for the occidental development of an ethics that did not know frontiers of caste or kin (Weber, 1980: 745).

This specifically occidental development was paralleled by a gradual change in economic conditions. Policing became an important source of market security:

The . . . expansion of the market thus constitute[s] a development which is accompanied, along parallel lines, by (1) that monopolisation of legitimate violence by the political organisation which finds its culmination in the

modern concept of the state as the ultimate source of every kind of legitimacy of the use of physical force; and (2) that rationalisation of the rules of its application which has come to culminate in the concept of the legitimate legal order. (Weber, 1978b: 907)

This development is a very western one. Occidental development is different from universal patterns of social organization for two basic reasons: first, the character of the occidental city and, second, Christianity. Both played an important role in undermining the social role of clan structures that remained responsible for the maintenance of blood vengeance in oriental societies throughout their cultural development. They also led to a rationalization of violence as such and to the estrangement of modern man from the passions that had legitimated the pre-modern use of violence:

The Berserk with his manic fits of rage and the knight with his desire to measure himself with an opponent whose heroic honour is proven in order to gain honour himself are both foreign to [modern] discipline; the first because of the irrationality of his doing, the second because of the inadequateness of his inner attitude. (Weber, 1980: 682)

In the eyes of Weber, blood feud is a universal tool of political violence which, due to some cultural bifurcation, has been eliminated in occidental societies by the monopoly of violence by the modern state and its most visible representative, the policeman. The idea of policing and therefore overcoming blood vengeance is foreign to oriental societies. The passions that are related to blood feud are foreign to modern man because he finds them irrational and disturbing.

Émile Durkheim on Vendetta

When Weber writes about political communities, he also writes about violence. Émile Durkheim, on the other hand, is far more interested in the moral bonds that tie the members of a given society together. For Weber, all social evolution derives from the tribe, which guarantees individual safety through blood vengeance. If a community is not able to guarantee personal security by means of violence – or at least the threat of it – it is not a political community, according to Weber's definition. For Weber, blood feud is the primordial force of all social bondage. Durkheim's sociology is mainly interested in the fate of 'morale' in society. The French word *morale*, as it is used by Durkheim, has a rather broad sense and is justly translated by Anthony Giddens (1971: 68) as both 'morality' and 'ethics'. It is the force that turns man into a social being. In the eyes of Durkheim, man is a passionate being that continuously lusts for more (Müller, 1992: 22). Morality is able to subordinate these individual passions to collective values. Morality is therefore the principal force of social order and even more than

that. Society, for Durkheim (1970: 287), is ‘man’s social atmosphere’, which he cannot do without. ‘Every society is a moral society’ (Durkheim, 1893: 249) or it is not at all. Either moral standards are imposed on man by the collective social body or morals deteriorate and man follows his passions in a pathological self-destructive manner.

At first glance, this does not seem to touch the problem of blood feud at all. Moral standards are being followed not because the individual fears punishment, but as a result of respect.

When we submit ourselves to the leading impulses of society we do not only do so because it is stronger than us. Normally it is moral authority that invests all outcome of social activity and which bends our spirits and our will. (Durkheim, 1975c: 25)

Morality cannot be imposed by violent means. On the contrary, ‘It is by mental means that social pressure is exerted’ (Durkheim, 1968: 299). But, in fact, society as such is violent. Society, for Durkheim, is an independent body that is more than just the sum of its individual members. It is an entity that forms man according to its will. Society is possible

only at that price. On the one hand society stimulates human forces but on the other it is rude to the individual . . . and it is continually violent with us and with our natural appetites precisely because it lifts us above ourselves. (Durkheim, 1968: 452)

Sometimes morality is imposed by force in order to form the social man. Violent social sanctions therefore tell us a lot about moral values and are the traces that lead to Durkheim’s interest in vendetta.

Durkheim is interested in society for its own sake and thus delivers a *sociology* in the true sense of the word (Bouglé, 1930: 291). Society, for Durkheim, is a ‘thing’ or an ‘object’ that can be analysed scientifically like any other object (Durkheim, 1984: 89ff.). Society states the values that are necessary to the *conscience collective*. A society does not exist without its members. Even though it is stronger than the individual, society depends on the collective idea of togetherness. This is what the idea of *conscience collective* is about: society makes the moral man and moral man makes society in return. *Conscience collective* is the society inside every one of its members. Man is at the same time the subject and object of the society he lives in.

It is thus society that teaches the difference between moral normality and moral pathology. And society is also responsible for the definition of what is profane and what is sacred. On the boundary between one and the other, society has placed sanctions to indicate the borderline. The primary sanction, which distinguishes normality from pathology, is physical punishment. The borderline

between the sacred and the profane is also often associated with bodily harm. Initiation (which, for Durkheim, is the transgression from a profane status to a sacred one) is in many societies connected with pain. The Larakia rite of initiation, for instance, is a very obvious example of this violent transgression from profane to sacred. 'While the young people are in retreat in the forest they are being violently beaten by their guards every now and again without preliminary announcement as if without reason' (Durkheim, 1968: 448). Violence, for Durkheim, might not be the force of social order that it is for Weber, but it is an indicator that helps to explore the moral standards of different societies. The sanction of violence is a clear red line between what is socially acceptable and what is not (Durkheim, 1893: 24). Morality is not imposed by sanction, but sanction is the cover for morality. Thus, the (sometimes violent) sanctions show us where the moral boundaries of a given society are to be found.

Durkheim distinguishes between two kinds of societal bondage: mechanical and organic solidarity (Giddens, 1971: 76–81). He calls the first kind of solidarity 'mechanical' because people in such a society are all interconnected with each other like the parts of a machine. A movement in one part of society will lead to a reaction in the social body as a whole. 'Organic' (one might as well say 'modern') solidarity, on the other hand, grants enormous personal freedom to members of the society who specialize in different activities and freely cooperate with each other. Mechanical solidarity is associated with religious ideals that focus on society itself. In contrast, organic solidarity perceives the individual as the god of social idolatry (Filloux, 1977: 177–225). According to Durkheim, one can demonstrate a worldwide progression from one form of social solidarity to the other.

Using the example of violence in sports, Eric Dunning (1983: 135–138) has given quite an accurate picture of what Durkheim's differentiation of mechanical and organic solidarity leads to when associated with his own ideas on violence. While members of mechanical solidarities are exposed to little social pressure concerning their aggressive feelings, members of organic solidarities and their lust for violence are strictly observed. Mechanical solidarities are used to public outbursts of passionate violence; organic solidarities rather keep their passions 'behind the scenes'. The most interesting difference is to be found in the social acceptance of violence. Organic solidarities are tolerant only regarding the rational use of violence, whereas mechanical solidarities accept excessive use of it. Dunning has chosen football as an example that leads to less obvious kinds of fair and unfair play in organic solidarities. Opponents' bones are rarely broken during the match. Aggression is instead verbal and the whole game set under a strict regiment of rules.

Not only violence as such, but also the social violence that indicates boundaries between socially acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours differ between mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity tends to drastic boundary-setting and often proves to be cruel and passionate. As all members are

intertwined like the parts of a machine, the reaction towards a transgression by one of its members can only be expulsion from society (Durkheim, 1975a: 349). The reaction towards external harm is equally harsh and passionate. Every harm that is inflicted on the social body is regarded as a threat to the whole system. The reaction against harm is therefore passionate, collective and wild.

As mechanical solidarity societies strongly depend on the emotions of their members, a periodic outburst of these feelings cannot be avoided. In fact, periodically passionate violence takes place that might be regarded as heroic or simply destructive.

There are historic periods during which social inter-relations become much more frequent and active. . . . Changes are not only by nuances or degrees. Man becomes different. The agitated passions are then so intense that they cannot be satisfied but in disproportionate violent acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism. (Durkheim, 1968: 301)

Organic solidarities, on the other hand, know nothing of the irrational passions of primitive mechanical solidarity. They too set boundaries between morality and immorality, but they do not use inappropriate violence in order to restore the social body. The modern use of violence is directed against the individual as a means of reintegration of the delinquent into society. Modern society punishes ‘not because castigation gives any satisfaction to anyone but because of its conviction that a punishment paralyses bad wants’ (Durkheim, 1968: 92).

A threat to society is not as vividly felt as it is in mechanical solidarity. The collective energy, which in primitive societies leads to regular outbursts of passion, is dispersed in modern societies. The division of labour leads to social multitasking and man can now develop passions for his own work. The collective passion that once assured social stability in mechanical solidarities now becomes a professional passion of specialists. ‘The researcher, the engineer, the doctor . . . they all need endurance and energy as well. But it is a more silent endurance and less burning energy. All is more calm and continuous’ (Durkheim, 1975b: 161).

At this point, we finally get to talk about blood feud, which obviously is not as central for Durkheim as it is for Weber. Weber’s argument that developing political power for a long time maintains the legal fiction of blood vengeance is foreign to Durkheim’s set of ideas. For Durkheim, vendetta is primarily one of the many passionate manifestations of personal bonding between members of a mechanical solidarity group. In primitive clan-based societies, members of a group are identical with the members of a society. Everyone is personally connected with the others. In these mechanical solidarities, such a bond is manifested in several ways, such as ‘the duty of mutual help, blood vengeance, mourning’ (Durkheim, 1968: 143). Members of a given society recognize each other in the performance of these duties, which mark the difference between clan member and clan stranger. Feelings of anger and social insecurity incite the passion for vengeance

that is therefore typical of societies that are founded on mechanical solidarity. It serves as a means of social stability, but is in fact a very primitive one and should not be compared with rational punishment. Blood feud is a rather irrational and momentary behaviour that finds its roots in personal feelings:

The instinct of vengeance is nothing . . . but the instinct of conservation in front of danger. It is an arm of defence . . . a very coarse weapon. As vengeance does not know about its automatically rendered service it cannot regulate itself accordingly. (Durkheim, 1893: 92)

The mechanical solidarity society demands vendetta in order to guarantee its substance, but it depends on the passions of the members whether vendetta is actually executed or not. Social stability does not really depend on it. According to Durkheim, blood vengeance is 'a punishment which is recognised as legal by society even though its execution is commissioned by the individual members' (Durkheim, 1893: 100). Blood feud does not give any legitimization to social order as it does in Weber's theory. Society accepts blood feud as one of the possible measures to ensure its stability. However, the means, as such, are very primitive indeed. Moral standards can be imposed via blood feud, but the accurateness of such measures is very low in the eyes of Durkheim.

Blood feud, for Durkheim, is a phenomenon that can only be understood in relation to mechanical solidarity. Organic solidarity does not know the passions that breed blood vengeance. Vendetta is a very passionate and coarse reaction against an external threat and it helps to distinguish group members and aliens. It is not a real social sanction as it is executed by individuals. Yet society most often accepts the use of vendetta as an implementation of morality in mechanical solidarity.

Conclusion

Both Weber and Durkheim go beyond the question of whether blood feud causes social order or disorder. They both presume that it has to do with social order in non-modern societies. For Weber, it is even the most necessary tool of social order in societies that tend to rationalize kinship rather than the idea of general ethics. In contrast, policed society is instead far removed from the idea of blood feud as it has rationalized the public sphere rather than kin relations in the course of its evolution. Policing, for Weber, is an occidental phenomenon because only the West has developed such a degree of rationality that the passionate feeling of honour or rage has been replaced by discipline and logic. Durkheim is also convinced that modern society lacks the wild passions that culminate in blood feud. The passions in modern society are more individual than collective and are used for personal careers rather than collective agenda-setting.

According to Wolfgang Schluchter (1988: 351), Max Weber represents an anthropocentric social theory whereas Émile Durkheim's sociology proves to be more sociocentric. In fact, Weber is mainly interested in the individual reasons for agreeing to a blood feud system whereas Durkheim points out its general effects on society. For Weber, blood feud is the central argument for political power in primitive societies. The individual member of such a society agrees with the coercive force of the body politic because he can count on revenge being taken if he suffers any harm from outside his group. Larger political associations that transcend the normal size of clans maintain the legal fiction of blood feud even though revenge might not be taken in every case and for every member of society. It is only the modern forms of society that go beyond the idea of blood feud and which organize violence and force in the hands of the police and military. Durkheim, on the other hand, argues that society is a moral body that enables man to become a social being. Society defines social values and enforces them with sanctions that punish any transgression of moral standards. Blood feud, in Durkheim's eyes, is therefore just one of the many possible sanctions that enforce sociability in primitive societies.

Another difference between Weber and Durkheim is their perspective on modernity. For Durkheim, it is a universal movement which in some societies has been marching on at a quicker pace than elsewhere. Blood feud, for him, is strictly related to mechanical solidarity and will be overcome once the entire world has reached full organic solidarity. For Weber, modernity is the result of occidental cultural development, which bifurcated from universal trends somewhere during its social evolution. The occidental city and Christianity are two of the most important stepping stones of western estrangement from normal universal development trends. Blood feud here becomes less important because kin loses its importance. In occidental societies, kinship as a political community is gradually replaced by public law enforcement.

For Weber, who regards violence as the *conditio sine qua non* of political association, blood feud is the central pillar of a political community. It is a universal phenomenon and as such the historic 'railway station' from where the cultural 'trains' once departed in the direction of all the different political communities. In Weber's view, blood feud is world history's political nucleus of cultural development, and even modernity and modern policing cannot be understood if this is not taken into account. Durkheim, on the other hand, does not accord such importance to blood feud at all. For him, social morality does not need violence or force to impose itself on its members. Therefore, political communities for him are instead moral rather than violent entities. Blood feud comes into play when Durkheim talks about the tools of morality-setting in mechanic solidarities. It is not regarded as a central instrument, but rather as an unhappy and too passionate solution to legal problems. Once organic solidarity is installed, the vendetta passions get lost and are of no further legal use. To sum up this difference, one might argue that Weber's sociological argumentation is rather

‘cultural’ whereas Durkheim’s sociology is concerned with ‘morale’. This explains Durkheim’s reluctance to deal with blood feud as it restricts his reflection on social morality in mechanical solidarities. For Weber, on the other hand, blood feud is a nicely obvious social phenomenon that helps him to develop and explain his idea of the cultural bifurcation of Orient and Occident.

Durkheim differentiates between modern (organic) and premodern (mechanical) societies. A universal development from one stage to the other for Durkheim is only a question of time. His theory of modernization can therefore be called ‘chronological’. Weber argues that oriental development will never lead to modernity. Only occidental societies have experienced modern evolution. For him, the universal difference is not chronological but geographical. The East will be modern only by cultural import whereas the West is the bearer and developer of modernity and its culture.

What can we learn from Weber and Durkheim as far as blood feud is concerned? First of all we learn that it takes a complex framework of social theory to approach it. What is the alternative to a society that relies on blood feud? Is it modern society? And what is modernity? Is it a cultural or a moral, a geographical or a chronological, an individual or a social phenomenon? We might follow Durkheim and hope that blood feud will be replaced by organic morality soon. But what are we to do in the meantime while we are waiting for that to happen? We might also follow Weber and presume that oriental cultures are not built to overcome blood feud by themselves. Shall the consequence of such a theory be something like a global system of apartheid that separates the world into oriental and occidental halves? Both results are too enormous to be of any practical use.

Maybe the solution has to be searched for on a much smaller basis. Both Weber and Durkheim agree that blood feud has as much to do with passion as with legal thought. And both agree that it is a phenomenon of non-modern societies. This latter argument is of little help, as we have seen, but as far as the passions are concerned maybe a practical lesson can be learnt from classical sociology. First of all, blood feud is more than just sound and fury; it is a legal problem that is interconnected with strong feelings of justice and moral order. Thus, it is not as foreign to the modern observer as it seems at first glance. Nearly every society has made attempts to slow down these passions in order to avoid bloodshed. The medieval legal habit of letting three days (Waechter, 1832/33: 360) or even seven weeks (der Cid, 2001: 155) pass until revenge could be violently taken is one of the many (in this case European) attempts to hinder passion from growing into something worse. So, if we agree with Weber and Durkheim and regard blood feud as a phenomenon of passion, we can also agree that its solution lies in a process of slowing passion down independently from culture, religion and degrees of modernity. We do not have to go as far as Georges Sorel (1981: 214) and try to re-establish passion as a legal tool. We just have to accept that passions have more to do with legal thought than we might presume in the first place.

Occidental authors have often written about vendetta with both amusement and admiration because the passions for them mirror a lost paradise of openly expressed feelings. Thus, blood feud has been described as both manly *and* childish. Most probably it is neither one nor the other. It is a legitimate passion that has to be formed into legal sense. No culture accepts the running wild of blood feud feelings. Every culture knows mechanisms that serve to slow these feelings down. The practical lesson to be learned is therefore to globalize the mechanisms of passion control and to try to find transcultural agreements in that concern – be modernity organic or occidental.

Notes

1. In this article, blood feud, blood vengeance and vendetta will be used as synonyms.
2. The English version, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, prefers to translate 'Gewalt' as 'force' rather than 'violence', which indicates the enormous problem that Weber's thought offers any translator. In fact, both translations are correct. The German language (and Weber accordingly) does not differentiate as strictly between 'force' and 'violence' as the English language does. A lot of Weber's intended meaning nevertheless gets lost once the translator chooses one definition as opposed to the other. For my argumentation a more salient use of language is useful, which is why I rely on my own translations.

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