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**The review of the doctoral dissertation “The Hands of Social Messiness in the Raise of Economic Cybercrime: A Case of Sakawa Phenomenon in Tamale, Ghana” authored by Abubakari Yushawu**

The dissertation by Abubakari Yushawu is a work in the field of sociology of deviance and criminology. The Author investigates various dimensions of cybercrime in his hometown Tamale. The Author mostly uses qualitative data in order to understand the phenomenon of Sakawa (as cybercrime is called in Ghana) and reinvigorates the theoretical framework of the social disorganization theory. In order to interpret the findings Yushawu employs a plethora of concepts embedded in various theoretical traditions. The dissertation is 398 pages long and consists of a Preface, Acknowledgements, Abstract, Abbreviations and Definitions of Terms, Contents, List of Figures, Introduction, ten chapters, and a bibliography. In this review, I go through all the above-mentioned elements of the dissertation. For the sake of brevity, I focus on the shortcomings but **my general opinion of the dissertation is positive.**

The Preface of the dissertation informs about parts of the text that were already published or are under consideration by various outlets. Two articles that are integrated into the dissertation were already published in a very decent journal “Deviant Behavior” – I treat it as evidence of the Author’s academic skills. I do not include the Acknowledgements in the assessment of the dissertation, yet it shows both the Author’s embeddedness in the international academic community and his links to the community where the study was conducted. The abstract correctly summarizes the work. Similarly, the Abbreviations and Definitions of Terms are useful for the readers, and the Contents are correctly constructed.

In the Introduction, the Author presents the background of the study, the key notions like Sakawa, and the landscape of cybercrime in West Africa. The general aim of the dissertation “to reveal the social process and dynamics that drive the proliferation of Sakawa activities, which carry consequences not only locally but also globally” (p. 20) is stated. Also the term (also included in the title of the dissertation) of ‘social messiness’ is introduced and explained. I need to point out that

despite its prominence highlighted in the title of the dissertation I do not see that the ‘social messiness’ plays such a key role in the whole work. Actually, the term is abandoned and not mentioned in the dissertation after its presentation in the Introduction. The dissertation is located by the Author in the field of sociology of deviance but the important influence of criminology, legal studies, and social psychology are also underlined. The Author stated four general research questions where he asks about the conditions under which social control allows the development of cybercrimes. Social control seems to be a key notion that helps the Author understand and analyze the Sakawa phenomenon. The Author declares adopting the multimethod research approach, where qualitative research techniques are applied. It is rightly justified by the Author due to the exploratory nature of his research questions. Another notion key for the Author ‘collective efficacy’ is also introduced. Yushawu sees the significance of his study in expanding the social disorganization theory and proposing recommendations to mitigate the sakawa. The introduction is closed by a brief presentation of the organization of the dissertation.

Chapter one has a bit too dramatized title “Sakawa and Cybercrimes are Global Pandemics”. In this chapter, the Author introduced the phenomenon of cybercrime, its scale, and legal definitions. Then the context of West Africa is discussed and the difference between the context of Nigeria and Ghana. After presenting the online romance fraud, the Author makes a bit surprising 9-page digression into the issue of power inequality between the victim and perpetrator in cybercrime. I think this digression, although interesting breaks the construction of the dissertation, placing the discussion of power imbalances before the general theoretical framework is presented. At the end of the chapter, the Author presents the negative consequences of Sakawa in the West African context. What is important for Nigerian or Ghanaian society these consequences are visible only on the macro-level (harm to national reputation and economic stability), to some extent on the meso-level creating obstacles to Ghanaian legitimate e-businesses. Yet, cybercrime targets mostly the victims from outside of Ghanaian society, and because of that the direct negative consequences are not experienced there. In the chapter there are some minor editing mistakes like the wrong numbering of the sections or subtitles located on the bottom of the page – these minor mistakes occur also in other chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter two ‘Theoretical Approach of the Study’ is key for the dissertation. The framework proposed by the Author is social disorganization theory, specifically its newer reformulations like the systemic social control model or dynamic model. Yushawu points to collective efficacy, social ties, and social capital as key structures mediating informal social control (p. 79). I do not think that collective efficacy and social capital are structures. In this chapter, as in the whole dissertation, the Author struggles how to conceptually grasp the tension of the social control that is not mitigating the behaviors targeting the victims who do not belong to the community. Another conceptual tension that the Author attempts to tackle stems from the fact that most of the theoretical frameworks he builds

were developed in order to understand the traditional deviant behaviors occurring in concrete communities. Yet, sakawa done by actors belonging to the concrete community does not physically happen within the community. It is a more general problem for the current sociology of deviance and criminology. The chapter surprisingly is not concluded (all the other chapters are concluded which is very helpful for a reader) so eventually we do not learn what is the precise framework that the Author decided to apply for the interpretation of the results. The Author also did not come back to his guiding research questions and did not present them in the language of the disorganization theory. There is no link between the concept of ‘social messiness’ (used in the title of the dissertation) and social disorganization made. As I will show in the discussion of chapters presenting the results, quite many theoretical inspirations employed for the interpretation of the research findings are not presented in the “theoretical chapter” and they are not integrated into a general conceptual framework.

Chapter Three presents the fieldwork approach and research design. The Author persuasively explains why he applies an eclectic approach. Tamale and the Northern region of Ghana are presented and the Author discusses his own positionality as a Tamale native doing research with an affiliation with a European university. The sampling and modes of interviewing are persuasively presented. Next to conventional qualitative techniques, the quantitative Facebook content analysis is also presented in the chapter. The Author also briefly presents the analysis strategy: how he was applying six stages of thematic analysis and coding the material. Much space is devoted to ethical considerations and honestly, I am surprised why a bureaucratic requirement to collect written agreements of research participants was imposed on the Author. I do not see a justification for such a demanding requirement regardless of the research context. I believe that any proof of consent to participate in the research is sufficient (i.e. oral consent stated at the beginning of the interview). I believe that the presentation of the research design would be more convincing if certain elements were fully presented as appendixes to the dissertation. I would like to see the interview guides and the lists of the informants with their brief anonymized characteristics. I would also appreciate it if the list of codes was presented in the dissertation. The chapter “Approaching Sakawa in Tamale: My Fieldwork Approach” convincingly presents the research design and execution, yet there is some asymmetry within it. Some elements are presented very briefly while there is maybe too much attention paid to others – I would like to see more about the actual coding by the author and not necessarily read about the differences between positivism and interpretativism in social science.

Chapter four is the first of the six chapters presenting the results of the study. In this chapter, the Author explains how sakawa is framed in Ghana as justifiable immorality. The difference between illegality, immorality, and deviancy is discussed. In this chapter interviews with various participants are analyzed and also the analysis of online discussions on social media is presented. The Author in an interesting and persuasive way concludes that in Ghana sakawa is perceived as an immoral activity but it is often neutralized and not perceived as an illegal activity. It is rather constructed as an immoral

way of making profits. It is one of the best chapters of the dissertation. Yet, it is very loosely integrated into the whole dissertation. The discussion of immorality, illegality, and deviance is not connected by the Author with his general framework of society disorganization. Similarly, important works on neutralization that are key for this chapter were not introduced earlier in the presentation of the general theoretical framework.

Chapter Five continues with the issue of morality but it is focused on moral repercussions and possible sanctions in the afterlife. According to the Author, sakawa actors are deeply religious and therefore obsessed with the possible divine punishment after their death. In this chapter, Yushawu includes new theoretical lines of interpretation and cites psychological literature on emotions, especially guilt. It allows the Author to introduce the notion of “Religious Dispositional Motivators” (RDM), “Victim Dispositional Motivators” (VDM), and “Scammer Dispositional Motivators” (SDM). Also, the concept of “amoral familism” (although without a reference to its author Edward C. Banfield) and Weber’s typology of authority are introduced. Mostly building on the analysis of the interviews with sakawa actors, the Author interprets their reaction to guilt, remorse, and strategies of receiving forgiveness. In this chapter the Author also shows that spiritual aspects are also important for victim selection – sakawa actors are not afraid of magic used as retortions by Whites, while they are sure that Africans might use some magical practices as revenge for scams. Forgiveness from god is achieved thanks to rituals like prayers, fasting, charity, and financial support to local religious leaders. The chapter is interesting although we do not learn if all sakawa actors are involved in spiritual activity in order to navigate the moral repercussions. Maybe there are some actors who are not guided by religious morality? Also in this chapter the theoretical strategy, applied also in the following chapters, is very visible: the Author introduces very diverse concepts and elements of theories (sometimes very distant from each other) in order to interpret short bits of data. The link with the general conceptual framework introduced in chapter two is not explained. I will come back to this issue in the concluding part of the review.

Chapter six is focused on social cohesion and economic conditions in which sakawa as a social phenomenon emerges. This chapter among the result chapters is the one the strongest connected with the general framework of social disorganization. In this chapter, the Author includes the concept of weak/strong ties and works on the role of the family in controlling the children. In this chapter the Author analyses interviews and what is disappointing quite often interprets the statements of the research participants at face value. Therefore their common sense perceptions of sakawa reality are sometimes rationalizations or expressions of ideological position that are not always interpreted by the Author but rather presented as a description of the reality and translated into the vocabulary of theories at hand. I think that the conventional grumbling about the breakdown of close-knit family and community relationships expressed by the research participants is not evidence for the actual crisis of a family as an institution. The remarks framing sakawa as an act of colonial retribution could also be

interpreted as an example of social cohesion where ideologically it is justified to commit immoral acts against the “colonist” where the crimes against community members are severely punished. I also do not agree with the implementation of Granovetter’s work on the strength of ties. This tradition of social network analysis shows that society requires both types of ties but they are used for diverse purposes. I find it useful for the future research of the Author works by Mario Luis Small who explores the community cohesion and the composition of various types of ties within a community.

In chapter seven, the Author presents the role of women, so-called sakawa-girls, in cybercrime. In this chapter, the Author follows the research material and presents the analysis of the interviews with sakawa-girls. Here again, new theoretical concepts are introduced ad hoc because the Author finds them useful to interpret various aspects of sakawa-girl activities: feminist criminology, economic strain in deviant behaviors, and even structural functionalism by Parsons or theory of performance by Butler. The findings of the chapter are very interesting, they describe the role of women in cybercrimes where often romantic aspect is employed by the scammers. Women are also less strictly scanned by financial institutions which provides them better opportunities to collect the money transferred by the victims. The chapter shows that most of the women are recruited to the sakawa activities through social ties – by their partners or siblings.

In chapter eight the Author introduces his own conceptualization of collective efficacy that is built on elements such as Informal Collective Efficacy, Formal Collective Efficacy, Cross Collective Efficacy, in-group connectivity, and out-group connectivity. The collective efficacy connected by the Author with the general framework of social disorganization theory is applied by the Author to analyze the interviews with community leaders from Tamale. Much of the leaders' statements are their common sense views on the social reality in Tamale and the idealization of the past. I would expect a bit more interpretative and critical approach to what is said by the research participants. Here also the Author introduces some new ad hoc theoretical elements like references to social exchange theory, the normative theory of leadership legitimacy, theories of trust, zemiology, and digital divide theory. The proposed by the Author model of collective efficacy is interesting and worth testing in other social contexts. I find it the most important theoretical contribution of the dissertation.

Chapter nine analyzes the interviews with members of the Ghanaian police force. This chapter adds a perspective of the formal control personnel and tells much about the conditions in Ghana that limit the capacity of the state to combat cybercrime.

Chapter ten is the conclusion of the whole dissertation. It is a well-constructed summary of the study. I think that in some cases the Author is too firm in presenting his interpretations as statements on “how things really are”. This is not a limitation of the work written in the interpretative tradition of qualitative sociology that it opens various possible interpretations of the examined case. The Author also provides recommendations for social change and suggestions for future research – both these

elements would benefit from being more developed. I believe that the findings of Abubakari Yushawu could be applied in other contexts than Ghana and also to other types of social deviance than cybercrime. All in all chapter ten is a good conclusion of the whole dissertation.

The bibliography is 54 pages long and well represents the erudition of the Author. The bibliography is generally well edited, although there are some minor errors: the dois are sometimes included and sometimes not (probably it is the fault of the reference manager), and the paper by Holt from 2018 is listed twice.

In conclusion, I find the dissertation by Abubakari Yushawu a very interesting multi-dimensional case study of cybercrime in Tamale. The Author with no doubt **presented a general theoretical knowledge in the discipline of sociology**. This impressive general knowledge is both an advantage and disadvantage of the dissertation. As a reader, I am convinced that the Author is an expert in sociology and is well-prepared to teach it. At the same time, I think that the Author was sometimes applying various theoretical elements ad hoc and name-dropping. For this reason, the dissertation is not as coherent as it could be. The Author also **presented his ability to conduct research independently**. The collected empirical material is impressive and its analysis allows for presenting the complex issue of sakawa in Tamale. I am not always convinced by the Author's interpretations of the qualitative data but this is the nature of interpretive social science. Sometimes the Author could be more critical about what his informants say but the general impression of his research and analytic skills is very high. The submitted work is well-written and edited. There are present just minor editing and language mistakes. **The dissertation is also an original solution to a scientific problem**. The Author aimed to describe, explain, and meaningfully understand the sakawa phenomenon in Tamale. He achieved that goal by presenting the complex case study from the perspective of the social disorganization theory. The development of the Author's model of collective efficacy is the theoretical contribution of the study. Providing more nuanced knowledge concerning the moral and social context of cybercrime in Ghana is the empirical contribution of the study. My evaluation of the dissertation "The Hands of Social Messiness in the Raise of Economic Cybercrime: A Case of Sakawa Phenomenon in Tamale, Ghana" is positive. I suggest the Author work on developing more chapters of the dissertations as articles and submitting them to criminology or sociology of deviance journals. Although I mentioned some of the dissertation's shortcomings **I recommend awarding Abubakari Yushawu a doctoral degree**.



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