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A CLASH OF TRADITIONS — ANALYZING ALBANIAN AND GEORGIAN TRADITIONS IN ISMAIL KADARE'S „BROKEN APRIL" AND VAZHA-PSHAVELA'S „HOST AND GUEST" AND „ALUDA KETELAURI"

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საკვანძო სიტყვები: *ტრადიცია, კულტურა, კავშირი, საქართველო, აღბანეთი*
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ABSTRACT

A Clash of Traditions – Analyzing Albanian and Georgian Traditions in Ismail Kadare's "Broken April" and Vazha-Pshavela's "Host and Guest" and "Aluda Ketelauri"

Literature plays a significant role in cultural communication. It is a field where each culture and ethnicity voices its perspective, revealing numerous points of intersection among their ideas. Literature serves as a profound example of the collective unconscious upon which humanity thrives. Through their works, Ismail Kadare and Vazha-Pshavela open a window for readers with the Albanian and Georgian cultural perspectives and views, emphasizing deeply ingrained traditions of hospitality, the practice of blood vengeance, and the complex interplay between honor and justice.

This paper examines cultural parallels manifested in the literature of seemingly different cultures, focusing on traditions that carry not only cultural significance but also express the universal experiences of individuals and societies. Specifically, it explores Ismail Kadare's novel "Broken April" and Vazha-Pshavela's poems "Host and Guest" and "Aluda Ketelauri".

The research delves into traditions such as blood vengeance, the Albanian gjakmarrja (blood feud), and the tradition of cutting off the right hand of the deceased, which shows ritualistic similarities with the Albanian practice of putting the gun on the back of the killed person. It also examines the fundamental aspects of hospitality traditions in the Albanian Kanun and the unwritten laws of Georgian customs.

The presentation compares symbolic actions, such as the right hand of an enemy, hung on a house's exterior, in the Georgian context, and the victim's clothes hanging on a house balcony in Albanian villages. Beyond literary and cultural similarities and differences, the study investigates the semantic parallels between the Albanian Kanun and the Georgian Kanoni (law), emphasizing the significance of mountains as geographic topos in these traditions.

Ultimately, against the backdrop of the protagonists' chronotope, their adventures, and narrative flows, the study synthesizes the cultural, historical, and social contexts reflected in these literary monuments at both collective and universal levels.

The research aims not only to identify similarities between Georgian and Albanian traditions but also to highlight shared values that emerge at the level of distinct cultural identities. As a result, this comparative analysis holds importance not only in literary terms but also from sociological and ethnological perspectives.

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Tradition is a set of customary standards of thought and behaviour inherited from previous generations in an unwritten manner. It includes those components of social and cultural experiences that have proven to be the most effective means of addressing recurring societal challenges and have endured through historical, structural, and organizational changes.

Literature, as a display of these traditions, is a profound medium to reveal the essence of culture and tradition. As T.S. Eliot once said, literature embodies tradition by showing "how the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present. "In this context, the paper explores how the literary works of Ismail Kadare and Vazha-Pshavela portray traditions and their role in shaping cultural identities, demonstrating the enduring impact of the past on contemporary life.

The concept of tradition is often deeply connected with the idea of the collective unconscious, shared, innate memories and experiences that are part of the human psyche. This connection can be attributed not only to the deep historical background of migration but also to the ways in which these traditions are transmitted orally across generations.

In this paper, we will examine Georgian and Albanian customs, which have been vital aspects of daily life passed down orally through the ages. These customs have been regulated by unwritten rules, for example, it was not until the 20th century the Albanian Kanun—a collection of centuries-old customary laws—was documented. Each aspect of Albanian tribal society has been regulated by these laws, which have cross-religious significance for Albanians and are considered sacred yet secular, permanent, and authoritative. Kanun is common for both Christian and Muslim Albanians. "*Strong pre-Christian elements combined with Christian motifs show how the oral customary law of Albania is stratified across different historical periods; the following strata have been identified: pre-Indo-European, Indo-European, Ancient Greek, Ancient Roman, general Balkan, and Osmanli.*" (Trnavci. 2010. Pp. 203-204) Among the Albanian literary artifacts of significance to Indo-European studies is the customary law of northern Albania, which reflects numerous ancient legal procedures. It has been noted that *"The laws governing such matters as hospitality, the rights of the heads of households, marriage, blood-feuds and payment of damages find precise echoes in Vedic India and ancient Greece and Rome".* (Forston. 2010. p 448) As I have already mentioned, Kanun is the collection of laws, it consists of 1262 articles divided into twelve sections, regulates various aspects of life in the mountainous regions, including economic organization, hospitality, family honor (nderi), and personal honor (Besa). Over the 20th and 21st centuries, various regional Albanian customary laws have been compiled and published, including The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, The Kanun of Skanderbeg, and The Kanun of Labëria. The most extensive compilation, by Shtjefën Gjeçovi, was published in 1933.

As previously mentioned, Kanun reflects customs and traditions, but it is not unique to the Albanian people only. As Ismail Kadare himself notes, its origins can be traced back to ancient Greece, with the oldest Greek tragedies addressing the themes embodied by the Kanun. He points out that *"the world has forgotten Agamemnon and the vengeance that led to his death,"* and that even "*Hamlet is a tragedy centered on the revenge, where "the father's ghost demands that his son avenge him.*" (Izikovich. 2015) In an interview, Kadare also clarifies that while customs related to Kanun are often associated with the Caucasus region, it did not originate there, though it has become part of the cultural fabric of the area. Since Georgia is a part of the Caucasus, these traditions, or at least their modified versions, can be encountered there as well. Kadare emphasizes not only the historical aspects of these traditions but also their literary significance—the motifs on which the Albanian Kanun is based, and which serve as the foundation for his novel "Broken April". Importantly for our discussion, these same motifs are widespread across the Caucasus, particularly in Georgian mountain regions, where Vazha Pshavela drew upon them in his poetry.

The custom of blood feuds was a prevalent and deeply ingrained practice in the regions of Svaneti and Khevsureti in Georgia. According to the "Khevsuruli law," failing to avenge a blood feud brought great shame upon an individual and their family within the community. It was believed that the soul of the murdered person would suffer in the afterlife if vengeance was not taken. Consequently, in Khevsureti, no one would forgo the opportunity to seek revenge for a slain relative. This practice was so severe that entire families and even whole villages were sometimes destroyed because of blood vengeance, as recounted in preserved stories known as "Andrezi". The relentless cycle of retribution was not just a matter of personal or familial honor but was also seen as a moral and spiritual duty, reflecting the community's deeply rooted beliefs in justice and the afterlife.

Both Vazha Pshavela and Ismail Kadare share and adopt similar motifs, modifying them according to their national beliefs and cultural contexts. One of the most significant motifs that both authors emphasize is the deep connection between humans and nature. In their works, nature is portrayed as a constant companion to humans, understanding them without the need for words.

The first example of this bond can be seen in Vazha Pshavela's poem "Host and Guest," which begins with a vivid depiction of the landscape:

"The river moans in its dark ravine
Turbid, with grief at its heart.
The mountains too are bowed down,

Laving face and hands in the water;
On their breasts, many have died,
Unfitting is the blood on their flanks."
(Vazha-Pshavela. Host and Guest. Tr. Lela Jgerenaia)

In these lines, Vazha Pshavela personifies the natural world, showing it as a silent witness to human struggles and tragedies. The mountains, rivers, and cliffs are not mere backdrops; they are active participants in the unfolding drama, sharing in the grief and bearing the marks of human conflict.

Similarly, in Kadare's "Broken April", nature plays a crucial role in reflecting the inner turmoil of the characters. When Kadare describes Gjorg, the protagonist, he writes that he *felt "only a vague animosity for the wild pomegranates and the patches of snow,"*(Kadare. 1990. p 8) suggesting a complex relationship with the natural world. The snow remains the "scattered witness" of his act of revenge, silently testifying to the bloodshed that has occurred.

Both authors use nature not just as a setting, but as an integral part of their narrative, mirroring the emotions and actions of their characters.

What we should consider is that this deep connection between humans and nature is an essential element of mountain folklore itself. The mountains are not only physical landscapes but also cultural spaces where traditions like the Kanun in Albania and the unwritten codes of hospitality, blood vengeance, and other customs, Kanoni itself, (that means rule) in Georgian mountain societies developed.

Here we should compare the words Georgian Kanoni (კანონი) and Albanian Kanun, as it seems both words must have been derived from the Greek kanṓn that was rod (bar) used as a measuring standard and meant "rule, standard".

One of the most striking customs that we want to compare is the placing of the gun on the back of the killed person in Albania and the cutting off the right hand of the killed person in Georgia. These rituals are introduced early in both literary works, serving as powerful symbols of the cultural values each society holds.

In Albania, the ritual of placing a gun on the back of the deceased signifies that the killing was carried out according to the rules of the Kanun, especially concerning blood feuds and vendettas. This act symbolizes the fulfillment of a duty within the traditional Albanian social and legal structure. It also serves as a form of documentation, signaling to others that the death occurred within the accepted norms of society as dictated by the Kanun.

In contrast, the Georgian custom of cutting off the right hand of the deceased serves a different purpose. While the Albanian practice shows respect for the dead within the context of social obligations, the Georgian tradition is designed to abase the killed person, linked to beliefs about the afterlife. Georgian mountain people believed that if the killer cut off the right hand of the slain individual, the deceased would be unable to seek revenge in the afterlife, as they would be unable to hold a sword or any other weapon. This belief underscores a fear of posthumous retribution and reflects the deep connection between physical actions in life and their spiritual consequences in death.

These customs, while both rooted in the tradition of blood vengeance, reveal the distinct ways in which Albanian and Georgian mountain societies viewed honor, death, and the afterlife. The Albanian practice emphasizes adherence to a societal code, while the Georgian custom reflects a more personal and spiritual approach to vengeance and the afterlife.

But these traditions manifest differently in Albania and Georgia, particularly in how it is perceived by both the killer and the victim. Kadare notes that the Kanun recognizes the state of shock that may overwhelm a killer after committing an act of vengeance. This acknowledgment is so profound that the Kanun permits passers-by to complete any unfinished task that the killer, incapacitated by shock, could not carry out. In this context, failing to complete the act is not considered shameful in Albania; rather, it is understood as a human limitation, and the community steps in to uphold the honor of the code.

In contrast, Georgian traditions around blood vengeance place a strong emphasis on personal honor and the necessity for the killer to complete the task with their own hands. In Georgia, leaving a task unfinished is considered dishonorable, and the killer must see the act through to the end, no matter the emotional or physical toll. This difference highlights the divergent cultural values placed on personal responsibility and communal support in the context of vengeance.

A vivid example of this is found in Vazha Pshavela's poem "Aluda Ketelauri", where the protagonist, Aluda, kills his enemy Mutsali. After the act, Aluda experiences a profound moment of recognition, seeing in his enemy a reflection of the dignity and humanity he values. He realizes that Mutsali, like himself, is a son of the same land, and this connection is symbolized by the dying man placing grass on his wound. Out of respect—or perhaps out of a desire to meet Mutsali again in the afterlife for one final confrontation, Aluda chooses not to cut off Mutsali's right hand.

Aluda's decision, however, brings him into conflict with the members of his community, or "temi", who see his behavior as a violation of their code. When Mindia, another member of the community, retrieves Mutsali's right hand, Aluda is enraged, demonstrating how deeply personal and significant this act was to him. Unlike the Albanian tradition where the community may complete the task, in Georgia, such an act by another is seen as an intrusion, an affront to the killer's personal honor.

This contrast between Albanian and Georgian practices underscores the different ways in which these cul-

tures interpret the obligations of vengeance. In Albania, the act of revenge is somewhat communal, with the burden shared among those present. In Georgia, however, the act is deeply personal, and the killer alone must bear the full responsibility for completing the task, reflecting a unique sense of honor that permeates Georgian mountain culture.

What is more, there is a strong belief in both cultures that if no one avenges the soul of the dead, the deceased will struggle in the afterlife. In "Broken April", the haunting image of Gjorg's brother Mehil's bloodstained shirt hanging on the balcony serves as a powerful symbol of this belief. The shirt remains there until Gjorg takes revenge, and as Kadare writes, it was believed that the bloodstains were gradually fading because Mehil was suffering in the afterlife, tormented by the lack of vengeance for his death.

Similarly, in "Host and Guest", the pressure from Joqola's *temi* (community) to avenge his brother's (Darlam) death further reinforces the idea that the dead cannot find peace until justice is served.

Despite the cultural differences between Albania and Georgia, the main characters in both Ismail Kadare's and Vazha Pshavela's works are united by a common drive for revenge. Gjorg, Aluda and Joqola are all bound by their respective traditions to seek vengeance. Moreover, Gjorg and Joqola share the same sorrow—the deep pain of losing a brother and the heavy burden of avenging his death. In "Broken April" we read: "*Gjorg Berisha has taken back his brother's blood.*"(Kadare. 1990. p. 12) Similarly, "Host and Guest" opens with the haunting journey of Joqola, *"Seeking the blood of his brother's killer, a man travels along the road."* (Vazha-Pshavela. Host and Guest. Tr. Lela Jgerenaia)

However, the traditions that guide these acts of vengeance impose different expectations on each character. In Albania, the Kanun dictates that the avenger, so called "jaki" must attend the funeral of the person they have slain. This gesture is more than just a formality; it is a profound expression of dignity, support, and respect for the deceased, even within the brutal context of a blood feud.

In contrast, Georgian tradition demands a strict separation from the enemy, even after the act of vengeance. In this context, the enemy remains an enemy, with no room for reconciliation or respect. Aluda's story illustrates this tension vividly. Despite his growing respect for Mutsali, the man he has killed, Aluda is bound by the rigid rules of his mountain community, which do not permit him to honor his fallen enemy. Mutsali is not just a personal adversary; he is seen as the enemy of the entire community and an outsider due to his different religion.

Aluda's internal conflict comes to the forefront when he decides to sacrifice a beast in Mutsali's honor, despite Mutsali being unbaptized. However, this attempt at showing respect is met with outrage by Aluda's community, especially the elders, who view it as a violation of their most sacred customs and in the end, Aluda himself sacrifices the beast, marking the beginning of an inevitable clash between his personal sense of honor and the rigid expectations of his community.

Another important tradition that is shared by both nations Albanians and Georgians is hospitality. As Kiknadze (2005) writes: "*Such a characterization of custom is not a poetic image, but a true expression of the existing situation. This is confirmed by ethnographic data" (p.* 130). In his works Vazha highlights the importance of this custom, especially in "Host and Guest" where we see how Joqola's family meets the guset Zviadauri, as Joqola himself says to his wife: *"'See, I have brought you a guest.' 'Mercy be to God.*" (Vazha-Pshavela. Host and Guest. Tr. Lela Jgerenaia). Yes, Joqola didn't recognize his enemy, the one who killed his brother and other members of his community, but the old man sitting at his door did. But he knew that:

"But a guest cannot start a quarrel
In another man's house.
He rose and excited quietly,
Biting his finger in bitterness,
He beat his chest three times,
As he stepped outside.
He left and went from house to house,
Sharpening his tongue with poison:
'Our deadly enemy, you Kists,
Walks with you, disguised, in the night.
It seems, Jokhala fails to know him
His eyes have not pierced the disguise.
He is the decimator of our people,
Attacking us with violence,
Forever insatiable in his desire
For our blood and bone.
Today he is in our hands, let's see
If we can make him taste the bitterness
Of those Khevsur killed this summer;".
(Vazha-Pshavela. Host and Guest. Tr. Lela Jgerenaia)

However, yet the old man and the other members of the community decide to take revenge instead of Joqola and to offend the rule of hospitality. What is that? The neglection of community or protection of one's own house and rules? As Zaza Shatirishvili (2007. 28) describes, the story is not about a simple conflict between the individual and society but rather a clash between two laws: the rule of hospitality, upheld by Joqola and his wife, and the rule of blood vengeance, demanded by the community. Both sides are justified in their actions, making the conflict a true tragedy where every party is both right and wrong.

Joqola is outraged and devastated by the betrayal of the sacred law of hospitality. As he shouts in anger:

"They are slaughtering my guest,
with their glittering swords.

Look at those ruthless ones,
how they trample through my home!
They have my manhood in their hands,
and they crush it as they crush the grapes,"
(Vazha-Pshavela. Host and Guest. Tr. Lela Jgerenaia)

Joqola's words reflect his profound sense of dishonor and violation. For him, hospitality is paramount, and the attack on his guest is an attack on his own dignity and manhood. He cannot understand why the community would break the sovereign law of hospitality, the most revered tradition in his culture. His disbelief is evident as he asks, *"Why do you break our sovereign law? Why do you drench my head with mud?"* To Joqola, this act of violence is not just an affront to his home but a betrayal of the values that define their society.

Joqola, torn between the ancient law of blood vengeance and the equally sacred law of hospitality, declares with unwavering conviction, *"He is my guest, this day, though he owes me a sea of blood, I cannot betray him."* (Vazha-Pshavela. Host and Guest. Tr. Lela Jgerenaia) *"Blood vengeance and hospitality are mutually exclusive customs, and it is impossible to protect both in such a situation. This also means that according to customary law, it is not defined which moral custom is given priority in the case when the enemy is a guest and how the host should behave at that time. Therefore, we conclude that both sides have their own truth."* (Beburishvili. 2017. p. 115)

In our paper, we do not discuss the ethical dilemmas presented by these customs but rather focus on the parallels between two seemingly different cultures. To draw a comparison between Georgian and Albanian customs, we can look at a similar situation in "Broken April". In the novel, Besian tells a story to his wife; when a killer unknowingly sought shelter from the family of the person he had murdered. Despite their mourning, the family welcomed him. When the deceased's brothers recognized him, their father insisted not to harm him and *"They sat down with their enemy and guest for as long as the custom required. They conversed with him, they prepared a bed for him, and in the morning, they escorted him to the village boundary*". (Kadare. 1990. p 80).

What is more, Kadare himself emphasizes the sanctity of the guest in his writing*: "A guest is sacred, according to the custom, a mountaineer's house, before being his home and the home of his family, is the home of God and guests."* (Kadare. 1990. p 76) This sentiment is mirrored in "Host and Guest", as I have already mentioned, when Joqola proudly states that he brought a guest into his home, invoking God's mercy upon them. Both of these customs trace their roots back to the Old Testament, particularly in Matthew 25:35-40*: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."*

This biblical reference underscores the deep moral and spiritual foundation that both Albanian and Georgian societies attribute to the act of hospitality. The reverence for guests, seen in both Kadare's and Vazha-Pshavela's works, highlights a shared cultural and religious ethos that transcends national boundaries, binding these two mountain communities in their commitment to the sacred duty of hospitality.

The concept of blood revenge in both Albania and the Caucasian region, including Georgia, extends beyond family ties to encompass others connected through bonds like Besa in Albania. In "Broken April", Gjorg Berisha is drawn into the cycle of vengeance because long ago, a guest of the Berisha family was murdered, obligating his family to seek retribution. This demonstrates how the Albanian practice of blood vengeance can extend to individuals outside the immediate family, bound by a sense of honor and obligation.

Similarly, in the Caucasus, the tradition of blood vengeance can involve not just family members but also those connected through social or communal ties, like guests. *"Protection of the guest from all kinds of threats, including blood feuds, is a religious duty.... The dignity of the host and his family is related to the inviolability of the guest. What is more the host is obliged to revenge if the guest is killed."* (Kovalevski. 1886. p. 51).

What we may say is that despite the geographical distance between the Caucasus region, primarily Georgia, and Albania, the customs and traditions of these

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cultures are remarkably similar, as reflected in their literary works. Ismail Kadare and Vazha-Pshavela have both demonstrated that different cultures can base their traditions on similar motifs, adapting and modifying them according to their unique cultural beliefs and historical contexts. Through the protagonists' experiences and the narrative structures of these literary works, we gain a nuanced understanding of how these traditions function and evolve within their respective cultures. This thesis not only highlights the cultural similarities between Albanian and Georgian traditions as depicted in the selected literary works but also underscores their unique expressions and significance. This comparative analysis not only enhances our understanding of these two cultures but also contributes to broader discussions on the universality and particularity of human traditions and social practices.

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