



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Broken April and Blood Snakes in an Ethnoliterary ViewFikret Ramadani^{1*}, Vjollca Dibra^{2*}

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ARTICLE INFO**ABSTRACT**

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This study explores the ethnoliterary significance of folkloric and mythical elements in cultivated Albanian literature, focusing on the archetype of the sin of parilem and the phenomenon of blood feud. It examines how these themes, rooted in broader cultural traditions and influenced by the Canon of Lekë Dukagjini, are reflected in Ismail Kadare's *Broken April* and Adem Demaçi's *Blood Snakes*. The objective is to analyze the artistic and symbolic representation of these motifs, alongside their socio-cultural implications, within a literary framework. Using analytical and comparative methodologies, this paper traces the historical and anthropological evolution of the sin of parilem and its transformation into a recurring literary theme. The analysis reveals how Kadare emphasizes the personal psychological struggles imposed by the Kanun, while Demaçi highlights the collective and political dimensions of fratricide and blood feud. These findings provide a comprehensive perspective on the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of blood feud as a literary and cultural motif.

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INTRODUCTION

Universal myths have traversed cultures and are widely studied. However, their transformations within smaller, less influential cultural contexts remain underexplored. This study focuses on the evolution of fratricide, rooted in the myth of Cain, and its transformation in Albanian culture into the concept of blood feud. It examines how this transition is conceived within popular tradition and revived in literature (Frye, 1951; Sinani, 2020).

In Albanian studies, the influence of folklore on cultivated literature has been extensively analyzed, although less attention is given to specific themes, such as the incorporation of motifs from the Canon of Lekë Dukagjini (Yamamoto, 2005; Ramadani, 2019). Despite the decline of folkloric elements in contemporary literature—a trend influenced by modern poetics—authors like Ismail Kadare and Adem Demaçi have created works deeply rooted in popular traditions. Kadare's *Broken April* draws from the harsh laws of the Kanun, while Demaçi's *Blood Snakes* employs similar methods with notable differences (Kadare, 2015; Demaçi, 2012).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper employs a combined analytical and comparative approach to offer a comprehensive analysis of the sin of parilem and blood feud in Albanian literature. First, an analytical method is used

to trace the evolution and cultural displacement of these archetypes. This theoretical foundation facilitates understanding of the interplay between folklore and literature (Chevrel, 2016).

Detailed analyses of Kadare's and Demaçi's works explore their treatment of blood feud and fratricide, focusing on narrative construction, motives, and the messages conveyed. For example, the psychological struggles of Gjorg in *Broken April* and the societal ramifications illustrated in *Blood Snakes* are examined to highlight the thematic depth of these novels (Kadare, 2015; Demaçi, 2012). The comparative method identifies similarities and differences in artistic treatments and cultural realities, reflecting how these phenomena embody traditional Albanian culture. By intertwining these methods, the study highlights representations of tragic guilt as both individual and collective phenomena, enriching our understanding of contemporary literature (Ramadani, 2019).

THE FIRST SIN AND ITS INTEGRATION INTO LITERATURE

The archetype of fratricide originates in religious texts, symbolizing rebellion against predestined roles and rights. A prime example is the biblical story of Cain and Abel, where Cain's act of killing his brother reflects themes of jealousy, defiance, and the violation of familial bonds as ordained by divine will. Anthropologically, this theme has appeared in religious, secular, and world ethnocultural traditions. Cain's sin, as a universal theme, explores human emotions and their consequences. It has been reimaged in literature, such as John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, which examines human nature and free will (Frye, 1951).

In Albanian culture, fratricide evolved into blood feud, persisting as a historical and cultural phenomenon. This transition is evident in the Canon of Lekë Dukagjini, where the eldest brother's authority encompasses decision-making for the household's fate. Such norms reflect a deep-rooted ethnotype, illustrating how historical memory shapes cultural identity and literature (Yamamoto, 2005; Sinani, 2020).

FRATRICIDE AND BLOOD FEUD IN ALBANIAN LITERATURE

In Albanian literature, fratricide emerged as a late-recorded phenomenon, transitioning from folkloric memory to fictional representation. Writers like Kadare and Demaçi constructed novels inspired by Albanian ethnoculture, highlighting the enduring wounds of blood feud. Their works emphasize its socio-cultural implications, often linked to external forces like invaders, and its role in shaping communal identity (Ramadani, 2019).

Kadare's *Broken April* portrays fratricide as an individual tragedy, focusing on Gjorg Berisha's internal conflict as he grapples with the inevitability of carrying out a blood feud dictated by the Kanun. His psychological turmoil is vividly illustrated through scenes such as his hesitation before committing the act and his haunting reflections afterward (Kadare, 2015). Conversely, Demaçi's *Blood Snakes* underscores the collective dimensions of fratricide, emphasizing its societal repercussions. For instance, the character Mustafa represents the broader struggle against systemic violence, highlighted in moments like his refusal to perpetuate the cycle of revenge despite immense societal pressure (Demaçi, 2012). These detailed portrayals enrich the narratives, highlighting the interplay of guilt, love, and societal expectations (Chevrel, 2016; Sinani, 2020).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Kadare's *Broken April* focuses on Gjorg Berisha's personal torment, portraying blood feud as a relentless force that isolates the individual (Kadare, 2015). The novel's introspective tone and symbolic language emphasize the protagonist's internal conflict and societal constraints (Ramadani, 2019).

Conversely, Demaçi's *Blood Snakes* presents a collective perspective, depicting fratricide as a societal issue exacerbated by external pressures, such as the Yugoslav regime (Demaçi, 2012). The novel's language incorporates regional dialects and cultural references, reflecting its ethnographic depth (Chevrel, 2016). The metaphor of "blood snakes" illustrates the cyclical nature of violence and its devastating effects on society (Sinani, 2020).

Despite differences in focus, both novels share thematic elements, such as the influence of the Kanun and the interplay between love and violence (Yamamoto, 2005). The setting—the Albanian Alps—serves as a common backdrop, symbolizing tradition and resistance (Ramadani, 2019).

RESULTS

Key findings include:

1. **Psychological and emotional depth:** Kadare's focus on individual struggles highlights the internalized conflict and inevitability of blood feuds, offering a deeply personal perspective (Ramadani, 2019).
2. **Socio-political context:** Demaçi's emphasis on collective experiences underscores the broader societal implications of blood feuds, particularly under oppressive regimes (Sinani, 2020).
3. **Symbolism and setting:** Both novels utilize the Albanian Highlands as a backdrop, symbolizing tradition, resistance, and the isolation imposed by cultural mandates (Yamamoto, 2005).
4. **Cultural critique:** The works collectively challenge the perpetuation of archaic traditions, inviting readers to reflect on their relevance and impact in contemporary society (Chevrel, 2016; Damrosch, 2014).

DISCUSSION

The exploration of fratricide and blood feud in Albanian literature offers a multifaceted understanding of the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions underpinning these phenomena. In Kadare's *Broken April*, the portrayal of Gjorg Berisha's internal conflict exemplifies how individual experiences are shaped by rigid cultural structures like the Kanun. The symbolic use of the Albanian Highlands as both a literal and metaphorical stage underscores the isolation and inevitability faced by the protagonist (Kadare, 2015; Yamamoto, 2005).

Conversely, Demaçi's *Blood Snakes* shifts focus to the collective ramifications of blood feuds, reflecting the broader societal and political dimensions of the phenomenon. By intertwining themes of resistance and identity, Demaçi broadens the narrative to encompass not only personal tragedy but also the collective struggles of a community under external pressures (Demaçi, 2012; Chevrel, 2016).

The comparison reveals how literature serves as both a reflection and critique of cultural norms. Kadare's international acclaim highlights the universality of themes like guilt and justice, whereas Demaçi's work remains more regionally rooted, emphasizing ethnographic authenticity (Chevrel, 2016; Ramadani, 2019). Together, these works offer a complementary perspective, blending personal and societal narratives to provide a holistic understanding of the enduring impact of fratricide and blood feud.

Authors' contributions

FR conceived the idea, designed the project, and wrote the manuscript. VD provided critical insights, contributed to the literature review, and assisted in refining the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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