

Vendetta. Theory and practice of conflicts resolution

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Abstract

Taking as ethnographic material the blood feud in Albania in the twentieth century, this article aims to show that both the blood feud and the feud are manifested through the exercise of violence and according to the defense of moral or material interests of a group. Nevertheless, they respond to a different logic. The general assumption of this study is that the values of the feuding paradigm are negotiable; as such, they can be at play and can be constantly modified even in contexts functionally renewed.

Keywords

Theory; Practise; Conflict; Feud; Albania.

Introduction

Revenge was and is an arcane principle. According to a primitivist perspective, it is conceived as an expression of destructive violence, a natural principle and a rudimentary means to resolving conflicts. It has been defined a form of punishment and also a juridical institution, but it becomes a bilateral ratio resulting from the reversion of the offence and the exchange of roles between the offender and the offended [Verdier 1980, 14], nevertheless remaining a *moral idea* [Westermarck 1906-1908] expressed in terms of honour, blood and violence. Revenge is therefore a multifaceted paradigm, scaleable according to different principles. Its effectiveness does not cease with the establishment of formal law but it is preserved in contemporary societies. It shows that it continues to be part of the imaginary collective law [Ost 2004] and contributes to Rouland's hypothesis of the process of legalization that is the foundation of the common imperative aim to ensure the regularisation of what society considers essential to its own

perpetuation [Rouland 1988, 144]. The language of revenge, in fact, presents itself not only as a useful tool to regulate behaviour but also in its imaginative principle, shaping new practices and new meanings [Geertz 1977]. For this reason, in the following, we refer to the term revenge considering it as a semantic field. Nevertheless, revenge, in its paradigmatic significance, is likely to generate misunderstanding because it embeds different retaliatory practices. To introduce the chosen argumentative perspective, I'll use as ethnographic field the analogy between a blood feud and feud to rebuild it in an antinomian key.

Our considerations will be supported by the ethnography on the field research conducted in the 1990s in the Shushicës valley, Southern Albania [Resta 2002]. The hypothesis of this paper is that, as a premise, a blood feud and a feud are both retaliatory actions between groups and both can be read as different and violent forms to repair damage promoted by a malicious fraud suffered to re-establish a relationship of mutual equality between the parties. Nevertheless, a blood feud and feud are different because the violence anchored in blood feuds takes root in a symbolic dimension that is denied in the violence expressed in the feud, and because of the nature of the group that gives rise to the feud is different to that inherited in the moral obligation of the blood feud.

The ethnographic background

In the 1990s, when the borders in Albania were reopened, it was discovered that blood feuds were being rekindled. There was astonishment and disbelief towards news that evoked the use of a rudimentary means, according to Spinoza's definition of blood feud, to resolve conflicts, in a modern rule of law. These blood feuds were not attributable to the action of criminal groups, to reprisals between armed gangs, but they were *gjakmarrje*. According to the local customary law code, *Kanun*¹, the *gjakmarrje* were part of an institution aimed to control conflicts and violations of rules, based on the retaliatory principle [Elezi 1994]. For the reason that it was not considered a violation or a form of violence, even if it caused a series of murders. The retaliatory practice used to cause damage to others was defined *hakmarrje*. It has included the idea of take the law into one's own hands, responding with 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. The *gjakmarrje*, blood feud, was a specific form of the *hakmarrje*, and at the same time its founding principle. They were part of a sequence of blood feuds in which the blood of a man, who recognized himself brave because he killed to defend the honour of his lineage, is paid to keep intact the honour of his kinship group. In Albania kinship group is called *Fis*, and it corresponds to a patrilineal lineage, subject to a perpetual

¹Referring to the Code of Lek Dukagjini, the customary law of the Albanian people. It is widespread mostly in the mountains of Malësi and Madhe, in the region of Dukagjini and in the region of Tropojë, but it is not the only Albanian Kanun. In the Puka region, there was a Kanun. In Mat and Mirditë, in the north of Tirana, it was common the Kanun of Skanderbeu. Also, in Laberia, the region in the south of Vlore, it was widespread a Kanun. The Kanun list could certainly be more consistent. All of these are similar for underlying structures and general rules; the differences are small local variations. In this article, for the citations to the Kanun articles, we will refer to Patrizia Resta (ed.), *Kanun, le basi giuridiche e morali della società albanese* (Besa, 1997).

segmentation. According to Kanun, the blood feud cycle was divided into three stages: the murder, the '*besa*' (an untranslatable word that in this context means a truce) and the peace. The protagonists of these stages were, and still are, the brothers, both those of the victim and those of the assassin, those who give '*life*' to the blood feud. Both the person who physically "pulled the trigger" and his *fis*, as a legal person, were considered responsible for the murder that opened the blood feud cycle and all that followed. After the murder, a request for the *besa* (the early truce) occurred. It was granted by the father and brothers of the victim. The *besa* was an expression of strength and pride for who granted it and it implied a temporary undertaking not prosecuting the murder. It was given to allow the murderer's family time to organise their defence [*Kanun*, art.122, paragraph 854]. The *Besa* was binding on those who gave it, but who received it had to participate at the deceased funeral and show condolences to the victim's family. According to the same logic, a second request to obtain a longer truce occurred. It had to be asked by the elders of the village immediately after the funeral. They acted as mediators and became guarantors for the *besa* pronounced in public [*Kanun*, art.122, paragraph 859]. They could never impose mediation or suggest a solution. The third phase involved the pacification. This was the most difficult decision; it was rarely applied and only if many murders were committed; it foresaw the payment of a blood money as a symbol of fraternal union. The consequent ritual included the forgiveness ceremony, during which a few drops blood from the two heads of the households was poured into some brandy. In this way, it was well represented, in a symbolic form, the undying bond that would unite the two families [*Kanun*, art. 140]; in effect of this ceremony, from that moment, the union between the two families was so strong that it was even forbidden marriage [*Kanun*, art.16].

The renewal of blood feuds at the end of the Hoxha dictatorship showed how it has been kept as a practice embedded in the local culture. It was governed by local customary laws, rooted in the legal habitus [Voell 2003], and, according to Llewellyn [1960], it can be interpreted as a factor of stabilization for the local juridical culture. Requests for expertise advanced by 'UNHCR in recent years, designed to assess the possibility of granting asylum to those seeking refuge in Italy, as in other EU countries, because of '*in blood*' , albeit quantitatively imprecise, testify how the idea of revenge is still widespread.

For the Albanians, the normative force of blood feud was unknown, but they were conscious of its prescriptive force. If, for anyone who pulls the trigger, the systemic dimension in which the actions of blood feuds were embedded were negligible data, the sense of the action and the practice of retaliation relating to it were clear. The blood feud, according to the Albanian perspective, related to a more intimate dimension, dealing with the emotional sphere. There is a profound difference between the norm, the spirit that it represents and the lives of the protagonists. The detailed description proposed in the *Kanun* cools the imagination and it leads into the error of considering it a perfect system. Instead, it is a complex phenomenon that discloses a range of procedural variations, often ignored by the people involved in the blood feud. These latter perceived the blood feud in its dramatic human dimension, as a disaster, as a tragic

and an inevitable event, as a disgrace to the family involved. The family involved was forced to impossible alternatives: it had to choose whether to be exterminated to cleanse the honour, or be cancelled and socially despised if the honour it was not cleansed by the male members of the family. For an Albanian the blood feud appears as a rational behavior or as the result of a rational choice made by the members of society [Keiser 1986, 490], rather than being a traditional rule. It is probably for this reason that any attempt to interdict the blood feud exclusively on the legislative dimension, as yet, has not had the desired effect.

The use of the blood feuding practice was stopped shortly after the mid 1900s through the new code promulgated by Enver Hoxha in 1952, in which was affirmed the principle of criminal responsibility of the person. This principle reversed the meaning of the *Kanun*, based on the collective responsibility of the *fis*.

The dictator, after coming to power, attributed to his law, and only to it, the right to punish. In this way he prohibited the blood feud. To achieve the break in current blood feuds and prevent future ones, it was necessary to provide a substitute in order to allow the people involved in blood feuds to give up the bloodshed without ignominy. To this purpose, Hoxha used to his advantage the words of tradition. He prohibited the exercise of the blood feud in the spirit of the customary order that he intended to prohibit. He proclaimed himself father of the nation, thus exercising the functions of head of the household, the one who had the right and the duty to promote blood feuds, but also the one to accept peace. The violent arrogance through which he ruled the country did the rest. But with Hoxha's death, as many wrote, the blood feuds which were previously interrupted, were rekindled.

Pain, death and fear reappeared and young people, who had only known blood feuds as hearsay began to follow. There was an upsurge in murders for blood feuds and as a result, in 2001, it was necessary to increase the punishment for this specific type of crime. Through Art. 78 of the Criminal Code, the same punishment was inflicted for *Gjakmarrje* and *Hakmarrje*: a prison sentence from 20 years to a life sentence. Again, the measure was ineffective and blood feuds continued. Despite the fact that reliable statistics are not available, blood feuds extend themselves through several generations. In the country it was clear that the phenomenon was in constant growth and it was necessary to implement a series of measures, both legislative and political. In 2005, ex lex n.9389, the State intervened by setting up a specific institute, the *Coordinating Council in the Fight against Blood Feuds* and in 2013 it amended Art. 87 of the Criminal Code in order to distinguish between the punishment to be imposed in the case of *Hakmarrje*, a form of revenge that does not involve murder, and *Gjakmarrje*, the blood feud. For the latter, the sentence was increased from a minimum of thirty years of imprisonment up to a life sentence. This brief description confirms, after more than ten years of fieldwork conducted in Albania about blood feuds [Resta 2002], how this latter is a procedure that makes it possible and thinkable in a retaliatory act at a judicial level [Pospisil 1971] different from State law. What kind of order can be ascribed to the rules governing the vindicatory procedures: if revenge be a form of punishment or on the contrary should it be written in the plurality of rights that make up the

network that guides individual actions based on the choices that the subject performs? [Vanderlinden 1993] These are issues that make up the hermeneutic puzzle that delimit the investigation.

The regulatory framework in which revenge is inscribed, whether or not it be interpreted as an expression of legal pluralism which Griffiths [1986] meant it to be the normal condition of every society, or a specific manifestation of the locality, the fact remains that the presence of blood feuds in the contemporary western context imposes an additional reflection in legal anthropological studies, which calls into question the distinction between the feud, an expression generally referring to the clash between mafia gangs, and the founding principle of blood feuds. To illustrate better this distinction, it would be appropriate to retrace, though summarily, the debate on the topic.

The Blood Feud

Given the expression of a form of vindictive justice [Terradas Saborit 2008], the blood feud is inscribed in an articulated sense of order, the understanding of which can be supported by an interdisciplinary approach.

In the legal approach, the issue has been analysed through the relationship between the punishment practices adopted in societies in which political power is diffused, and afflictive punishments adopted in state societies [Sacco 2007]. On the other hand, in an anthropological and legal anthropological approach, the main categories to analyse revenge issues are reciprocity and exchange. These latter categories have been used in two different perspectives. The older, the structural functionalist theory, has interpreted the blood feud as «a structural movement between political segments by which the form of the ... political system ... is maintained» [Evans Pritchard 1940, 158]. This interpretation has had the same alternating fate of the functionalist theory and was ignored at the end of the 20th century. The second perspective, a dynamic one, has interpreted the blood feud as a system or sub-system for the exchange and the social control of violence [Verdier 1980]. Making use of comprehensive reading, Verdier explains the blood feud not as a phenomenon, but he focuses the analysis of the relationships that it presupposes, in the political dynamic in which it occurs and in the ethical dimension to which it refers. According to his global approach, blood feud has been justified as a relationship based on exchange. It is the latter that, in Verdier's hypothesis, structures the whole blood feuding system, i.e. a system able of handling a sacred norm for society, laying it on the logic of reciprocity [Verdier 1980]. The articulation system allows blood feud to be read as ethics, but also as a social code and even as a power instrument. As ethics since it represents the founding values of a society that practices it; as a social code because it prescribes rules and rituals to undertake, carry on and conclude the blood feuding action and finally as a power instrument for the reason that it is beneficial to identify the social units and the blood feuding groups that delimit each other in the blood feud. In this way, the blood feud transcends itself

to appear as the set of regulated and ritualised actions, ideas and values that perform the feuding act [Verdier 1980].

The L.'s blood feud, which started in the first half of the twentieth century² in Southern Albania, was still alive in the memory of descendants in the late 1990s. The conflict arose over some pastures and involved two *fis* living in neighbouring towns. The first *fis* consisted of six brothers and this was the reason why they felt so courageous. The second *fis* assumed rights on the grazing land because it was within the town borders of Gjormë, where they resided. The conflict degenerated: one of the six brothers murdered the father of the Gjormë shepherds. The blood feud was immediate. The victim's sons responded by shooting one of the six brothers. They refused to grant the besa as foreseen by the Kanun. In this context, it is related to a 24-hour truce. The five surviving brothers, in turn, denied again the besa, and killed one of the first victim's sons. They buried the corpse under a pile of stones: a sign of extreme insult. It was during this time that two of them were arrested. The stronger of the two died unable to stand the imprisonment. Three years later, the other brother was released and he joined the partisan forces. After the war the communist regime proposed, in this as in other cases, the pacification, suggesting a mediation between those *fis*. As each *fis* had two dead men, the pacification was possible. In the count of the persons murdered, the brother who died in prison was included because he had been imprisoned for the blood feud.

The L.'s blood feud seems to confirm the Verdier hypothesis: the two groups behaved according to some values that still seem to be embedded in the Albanian culture as solidarity between brothers. They fought each other drawing the line between enemies and allies. In the end, they showed the prescriptive force of the blood feud, as they acted according to the customary rules. On the other hand, here it is evident Hoxha's intervention to pacify the two groups. The dictator's decision to ban blood feuds in the Socialist Albania, putting the right to practice an equivalent punishment in the hands of the State, seems to suggest that the blood feuds could survive only in the context of sanctions active in societies where state authority and the justice system were not fully developed [Sacco 2007, 317].

While corroborating the systemic nature of revenge, the case of L. does not deny that revenge is a primitive form of punishment. [Pospisil 1968, 391; Pospisil 1971].

Once again the blood feud seems to be a thing of the past, an instinctive behaviour, confined in those preliterate societies that existed before globalisation conserved only their memory, as an example of a system regulated by a form of incipient law [Redfield 1967,5]. It was considered a form of justice in low complex political system societies [Hoebel 1954].

The Italian case suggests a different perspective. It is very interesting to reconstruct the background of the studies about blood feud. In Italy, during the mid-twentieth century, the national literature has had its own specificity due to the Italian context, where the southern peninsula and the two largest islands, Sicily and Sardinia, are involved in a retaliatory logic. The hypothesis made therein shows that when revenge is explained

² Direct evidence acquired in 1998, in Lapardha in the Shushicës valley

according to the local action, the hypothesis about revenge are a part of «regional theories in the geographical and also the epistemological sense» [Bourdieu 1977,31]. This latter is not the opposite of dominant theories but suggests new elements with respect to theories that claim to appear as general theories [ibidem].

In 1937, Corso submitted a framework regarding revenge in a specific entry in the Italian Encyclopedia. Therein, he distinguished between blood feud as a *sacred debt* which falls to the siblings of the victim ... «negli infimi gradi dell'organizzazione primitiva» [Corso 2005, 38] (in the lowest levels of primitive organization*), from the form of blood feud involved in folklore tradition. The focus on folklore tradition, to which he dedicated a brief paragraph called "Folklore", is his most innovative contribution. By shifting the axis of discussion from primitive societies to contemporary Western ones which declassify blood feud to the rank of simple traditional customs that have survived «the circle of civilized nations*», justified on the basis of superstitions that have primordial roots, such as the one that imagines 'a victim's restless soul wandering while the stain of bloodshed remains [ibidem]. Corso's proposal contains a significant reversal from the juridical stage to the cultural one. At the first stage, revenge is defined as a sanction, at the second, it is acquired through it's a symbolic dimension. Since the studies regarding the local context, such as the Sardinian one, Pigliaru has analysed the traditional barbaricin codex (Barbagia is the inland area in the province of Nuoro). Pigliaru has connected the survival of revenge in non-traditional contexts to the weakness of legitimate power [Pigliaru 1959], however, he was inclined to consider the cultural habitat in which it manifests itself. In a short article, he explained the philosophy that inspired his research with the aim to free traditional culture from *provincialism*, through overcoming of some traditional forms which can still be found in the Sardinian culture [Pigliaru 1956]. According to Corso and Pigliaru, the existence of the feud is still interpreted as a sign of an incomplete development or inefficiency of legal institutions. The change occurred in later years, when Lombardi Satriani investigated the symbolic blood dimension in the peasant/land-worker environment of southern Italy. He suggested that the blood feud was expressed within a *mythical pattern* that is the foundation of its *legal cogency* [Lombardi Satriani-Meligrana 1982, 329-330]. In this optic, the danger of the murdered victim or, the danger of the bloodshed of a relative who asks to be avenged, is equivalent to the mythical configuration of a punishment because of non-observance of retaliation [Lombardi Satriani-Meligrana 1982, 335]. The feud, although still included in the criminal system, is anchored in the order of the symbolic dimension, wherever it appears as a cultural reply. In Italian folk culture studies the two instances have merged. The first evaluates institutions and norms as products of a supposed cultural evolution. In this perspective, the feud is a survival that has to be modified, but it also remains as an expression of a local culture. The second considers the dynamical nature of relationship between customary law and regulatory practice. According to the most recent discussions, this latter hypothesis puts the "*juridicity*" between cultural relativism and individualistic universalism [Assier-Andrieu 2000].

Countering the belief that the evolutionary formal punishment for revenge is wanted, Rouland, for example, digs in the direction that tends to bring out the different principles which respond to punishment and revenge. In his interpretation, the punishment tends to isolate the offender from the afflicted community, while revenge manifests the bond of solidarity that unites the avenger of his group [Rouland 1988]. A widely held view in literature [Verdier 1984], and on which we shall return shortly, revenge is considered a procedure not only *to do something*, such as to restore the blood debt between the parties; it also *talks about something* and indicates who are friends and who are enemies. Revenge tells of the debt that the murderer contracts for his group and also the debt that the avenger acquires in his group as an agent of vengeance. In the latter sense the feud, even though considered as a form of punishment, marks the boundary between the rival groups and at the same time reaffirming the obligations that govern the moral standards of the community that recognises and acknowledges revenge, using the language of retaliation.

Already in the nineteenth century, Marcel Mauss supported the precariousness of an approach that focuses on the relationship between the two paradigms, revenge and punishment. According to him, the public-private opposition, which controls the relay between punishment, as an expression of the collective will, and revenge, an expression of group solidarity, stands in a divergent criterion due to the fact that the first is imposed by laws, while the second is determined by virtue of the religious unity of the clan [Mauss 1896]. A second opposition deals with the origin of the action, which in the case of punishment comes from the «société qui punit» (society that punishes), instead in the case of feud derives from «un groupe qui se défend» [ibidem] (a group that defends itself*). Mauss moved the focus from an evolutionary perspective to a procedural one. The first attracts attention to the feuding changes, the second to the dialectic between punishment for the crime committed, which operates through the punishment, and the defense for honour violation, which is entrusted to revenge. This latter perspective has been shared by Westermarck [1906-1908] who has defined revenge as a *moral idea* enrolled in the criminal legal culture but recognized as praxis by law. It is an obligation which remains even in societies where conflicts are regulated by the State. It falls on the victim's relatives and can, under certain conditions, be replaced by (the payment of) compensation and in others can appear as a form of sacrifice [Westermarck 1906-1908]. This perspective will be accorded later by René Girard [1972].

The importance of 'belonging' is the obvious consideration that "before a number of alternating killings can take place, there must be groups of people who share a responsibility of revenge" [Kuschel 1993:691]. The intimate relationship within the feuding groups shows the opposition between allies and enemies.

In 1995 a vengeance began in a village near Shkodra in the north of Albania; in 2000, it was still ongoing. This was a *hakmarrje*, it had not yet become a *gjakmarrje*. There had not been the first murder; for this reason the conflict could have been stopped. However, what was taking place was a retaliation, which might have developed into a blood feud. Two families linked through affinity were involved. The cause of conflict was some offensive remarks that a man had addressed to his cousin and to the mother of

her husband. According to the kanun, the husband should not tolerate this insult. His wife tried to organize a meeting with the brothers to prevent the conflict, caused by offensive comments, and lay peace between her kinship group and her husband's one. Her brothers living in Dukagjini, north Shkodra, refused to meet with her. The situation became worse when another cousin apparently visiting, went to the woman's house. He was armed; his intentions were to attack his cousin's husband. According to tradition, the head of the household must welcome him courteously on the threshold. However, on the doorstep, the woman's cousin drew his gun but the head of the household was quicker. The latter shot first and hit his wife's cousin in the leg. A wound is not the same as a murder but according to the kanun it must equally be compensated with a payment of blood. The risk of the manifestation as a blood feud was greater. From that moment the head of the household and his only son, in turn father of a newborn baby boy were forced to live "closed" waiting for a blood feud. Father and son could not expose themselves or go out, not even for work. According to tradition, they had asked for a truce but had only obtained a promise that was too fragile, as it had been granted by some, but not by all, of the male members of the woman's *fis*. According to common opinion the behaviour of the woman's brothers was considered legitimate, despite their threat could involve also their uterine nephew. According to their patrilineal descent system, the solidarity is strongest between brothers and male cousins, rather than between the brothers and their sister and her son.

Not casually, according to Verdier, the whole retaliative system is based on solidarity, distance and reciprocity. This case seems to be exalted. [Verdier 1980, 30].

According to him, solidarity is an expression of the nature of the bond that binds the victim to kinship and through it to his avenger. In this analysis, Verdier is in debt to Radcliffe Brown's interpretation [Radcliffe Brown 1933, 204], who in turn borrowed it from Durkheim [Pospisil 1968, 389]. The distance indicates the space as a social container of the blood feud. By virtue of this principle it is possible to show that in blood feuds two types of violence are implied. The first aims to protect the group from self-destruction, imposing as a punishment the permanent or temporary removal of the offender from his group, the second is the destructive violence symbolizing warfare, characterised by the presence of aversive relationships, according to Verdier [1980]. Finally, the reciprocity implies the assumption by which the blood feud involves two complementary and antagonist groups who define themselves as such, provoking a conflict.

In the case of the 1995 blood feud, according to the principle of solidarity, two groups were constituted: one formed by the *fis* of the woman's brothers and the other by the *fis* of her husband's. Furthermore, the space in which the conflict took shape, had limited boundaries so that only the two groups were involved in blood feud without exposing the entire community to the conflict. Finally, the alternation between equal sides in the fight meant that the wound inflicted by the woman's husband to her cousin, did not leveled the score between the two groups but on the contrary fueled the escalation of revenge.

In this sense, it is suggested that the blood feud is referring to a sphere of meanings in which the avengers after putting upon themselves the blood debt, having to honour it to be respected. The currency of compensation is more blood. The obligation in the retaliation practice compels the avengers in a debt situation; this permanent debt, inscribed in a symbolic order, produces the mutual violence. The blood debt is the cohesive force [Black-Michaud 1975] that contributes to keeping alive the blood feud by increasing it. According to Black Michaud, the debt status regarding both victims and perpetrators, and also their respective kinship groups, is a sign of the power relationships involved in feuds. The blood debt that produces feuds, however, can be developed according to a different grammar. If sustained, as in other contexts [Resta 2002], that a blood feud is a semantic code, it may be possible to assume that it is rather more just a semantic field. This latter makes the practices imaginable, as an expression of different disciplinary codes, inside of which the idea of the compensatory dimension is prevalent. In this second sense, the principles at the basis of blood feuds can be translated as general principles, applying them to the meaning that revenge takes in non-tribal context, absorbed and returned by different logics. The examination of the blood feud literature brings to the conclusion that the blood feud is the principle from which derives the retaliatory practice in which the feud is defined.

The feud

In contemporary dictionaries and in specialised literature, there is no significant difference between *feud*, which is blood feud, and *blood feud*, which is feud. In this last part of the essay, sharing Peters' proposal, it would be appropriate to distinguish between the two conceptual fields [Peters 1967, 265], and paraphrasing Kuschel, I shall propose to bring order in the uncritical use of apparently equivalent terms [Kuschel 1993, 690]. This misunderstanding is caused by the fact that both the feud and the blood feud have been interpreted as a moral obligation, as they foresee a retaliatory attitude, justified on the basis of defending the honour, the name and the blood of a group. Finally, starting from the latter consideration, I will try to argue that feud can be generically defined as the right e/o duty to avenge a wrong by those who have suffered an offense, while blood feud is defined as the response to a murder by a group that purports that blood be given back.

In languages where the two terms have distinguished meanings, such as Italian, these latter evoke an opposition linked to the dichotomy between simple/complex. Vendetta keeps the sense of a founding principle, as the origin of the evolution of punishment systems, whereas feud has a more functional meaning, usually linked to the exercise of a criminal practice. This hypothesis has long emerged among scholars studying revenge [Lasswell 1931, 220]. In fact, there is an inexistence of support, both theoretical and ethnographic, which would helps to scale the meaning attributed to the different terms used to express the feuding action. Whether power, honour, consideration, self-worth, feelings, value or wealth are the reasons of the action, the meaning universally attributed to revenge does not change. The last considerations reflect on the principle

of solidarity, distance and reciprocity. The data derived from the Albanian case have shown the importance of the sibling solidarity in the blood feuding system. In fact, the ethnographic monographs, focused on the study of revenge or dealing with it [Among which, Karsten 1923; Evans Pritchard 1940; Henry 1941; Lewis 1961; Colson 1962; Black-Michaud 1975; Boehm 1987; Ginat 1987; Descola 1996; Resta 2002; Scionti 2011] and the numerous and significant essays about revenge [among which: Gluckman 1955; Otterbein and Otterbein 1965; Peters 1967; Descola 1993; Kuschel 1993; Tsantiroopoulos 2008], have a common denominator: the existence of two rival groups, who are equivalent but at the same time complementary and antagonistic. For example, in Albania the force expressed by family bonds has derived from the fact that, in blood feud, the action was independent by the individual will. Through the exercise of blood feud, the group has kept and defended its own rights. In this way, it has defended itself and its offended identity. In the avenger's position, it was irrelevant if the person acted by himself or for his kinship group. In the blood feud, the individual's blood has flowed into the group and the group has flowed into the individual, becoming one.

In the anthropological perspective, the nature of the group is more important than their size and function. However, it was considered a prequel, which has rarely played a key role in theories about revenge. For this reason, in the following pages, I will try to mark out the distinction between feud and blood feud in two fields. The first being where violence makes itself explicit, it is a key factor both in feuds and blood feud, the second deals with the articulation of the belonging (or grouping) rules, which are the basis for the formation of groups. First, I will examine two elements of retaliatory violence: duration and intensity [Pospisil 1968]. The duration refers to the extension of the revenge chain. In the common representation, revenge is greedy and endless. This assumption is based on the premise according to which in feuding societies, each murder and each offense could generate a retaliation, as testified in the Albanian case. This retaliation, in turn, has to be compensated by an act of equal violence. The essence of revenge is thus based on a tautological premise. A single act of violence may not be defined as blood feud or feud, even if it is inspired by a feuding sentiment, such as blood feud and feud were both already an answer to a received offense. Pospisil, for example, has set a limit. A retaliatory action can be defined as revenge when there are at least three murders in sequence [Pospisil 1968]. The retaliation can die down in a short cycle, or it can last a long period, reactivating itself also after a period of latency. Evans Pritchard, for example, by analyzing the Nuer feud has stressed the extended duration of revenge. It is difficult to foresee the conclusion of the duration, but its end is certain.

The idea that violence has a duration involves the consideration that it has a beginning but also an end. On the other hand, all societies have developed procedures aimed to limit retaliatory violence, both when there is a punishment given by a judge and when there is the payment of the blood money. According to Verdier, the blood money is a means to replace the counter-offense with a counter-gift, without changing the reciprocity between the parties and their internal solidarity [Verdier 1980, 28]. Far from standing as a stage in the evolution of revenge into the punishment the blood money appears to be a complex code. The involved compensation is not a means to

quantify the punishment inflicted to one of the two parties, nor a means to turn blood into a commodity. The payment of the blood money, however, can turn the conflict into alliance and in this way it can stop the blood feud and the feud cycle. It does not invalidate their meaning. Rather, it shows that it is not a violent and self-perpetuating mechanism, but it is part of social dynamics. Social dynamics shape revenge, setting its timing and performance methods and generates the dispositions through which the social agents decode its meaning.

It is different the discussion regarding the intensity of the violence. In my hypothesis, it is referring to the aim pursued by the feuding group, in feud; instead it is proportional to the reaction of «public sentiment» [Pospisil 1968, 389], it is believed as an equivalent response to the damage suffered, in blood feud. In this perspective, the intensity becomes the measure of the violence exercised on the basis of a right that the community considers as appropriate. A right deriving from the obligation to protect the group to which it belongs. The violence seems justifiable and almost reasonable when it acts in defense of the identity. Therefore, it becomes a instrument of legitimate retaliation. The belonging is, in this case, a huge container of potential conflict and a criterion to justify violence. The latter acts on the basis of a bond felt and experienced as generative. A bond, able to erect barricades, identify enemies and prohibit mediation. The theatre of the bloody ethnic wars that involved Africa and Europe at the end of the twentieth century, was the dramatic stage on which the ability to multiply and identity power and rhetoric of belonging was exhibited. The rhetoric identity has more strength in blood feuds because it is justified by the need to fulfill the sacred obligation of cleansing the shame of the potential prejudice of the blood of his own group. It is less influential in the feud because, in the proposal we are advancing the stimulus retaliatory action does not arise from the outrage of blood but from the defense of common interests of the group.

In the years of difficult Albanian reconstruction, in the internal area of Vlora, vast agricultural areas were planted with marijuana. Every family cultivated their own field; each of them, individually, harvested, packaged and exported the product. The profits remained in the hands of the family and was managed on behalf of the group. Periodically, the police intervened to burn some crops.

When the field of the family of H., together with the ones of the neighbouring families, was burnt, everyone expected that the owners would take feud for the injury by assaulting the police officers who physically had executed the order. This was considered a good behaviour, a manful behaviour. The landowners reacted and assembled themselves as a faction. However, the other owners whose fields had not been burnt did not appreciate the attention that was being drawn to the area, opposed the first. They created two factions with different interests. The first sought feud, the second not. Since trade was thriving, the first preferred to mitigate their retaliatory violence. They, together with the second, created a new faction, a group with shared purpose: the protection of common interests.

Despite the violence employed in its destructive force, in the case of blood feuds, it has a quality: it is exercised against an enemy to whom is recognized equal rights and dignity. The blood feud is essentially a matter of honour. In the case of feud, the rhetorics of

belonging keep a similar function, even though not perfectly equal. Because the feuding groups gather around a strategy that can also be temporary, binding solidarity into reciprocal interest, which generates an unstable solidarity, they consider others as rivals and opponents and whom they challenge in the attempt to overpower and win over. The dispositions to make violence understandable in the case of blood feud, in the feud turn out to be modified. The theme of belonging emerges powerfully and it knocks on the door of vengeance, proving to be the not-so-hidden agent of the whole system. For this reason the rules that determine the feuding groups formation have been discussed for last. In this hypothesis, this latter issue is the most constructive one to demonstrate that the feud and blood feud are based on criteria which act differently. For this, it is necessary to graduate the meaning that the retaliatory practice has to, in each one of them, reveal that they act on separate but contiguous levels.

As already known, in societies that adopt the unilineal descent system, descent groups are formed. In societies with a bilineal descent system, there are not descent groups, but ego-centered groups, positioning the ego in network made up of the group's family ties according to its momentary interests. The temporary nature of the relationships in ego-centered groups is the key to the issue. As hoped it has been demonstrated in the theoretical framework about blood feud, the different expressed positions focus on the existence of rival groups, which are equivalent but also antagonistic and complementary. The nature of the rival groups has remained undefined. Radcliffe Brown, for example, has included among these groups the *clan, local community and kindred*³ [Radcliffe Brown 1933, 204]. Hence, types of groups formed on the basis of different systems, such as descent and residence, and opposite ones. For example, the clans are formed according to an unilineal descent, instead kindred according to cognatic descent. Nevertheless, according to Radcliffe Brown, the principle of the mechanism of revenge is collective solidarity.

Many years later, Verdier proposes a similar pattern. He bases his theory on the principles of reciprocity, solidarity and social distance and he claims the centrality of the feuding groups [Verdier 1980, 20]. The question then moves to the nature, stability and reliability of solidarity to which group members are bound. According to the lineage pattern, that has supported the majority of the ethnographic literature regarding revenge, it is assumed that, within the corporate groups, solidarity is maximum because the status is ascribed, the position is invariant and the pattern of alliances is embedded in the social organization. On the contrary, solidarity is weak within kinship networks. Here, members can redefine their ties following the ego-centered logic. This allows them to change the framework of their alliances according to their choice and to give priority to some kinship ties depending on their own interest.

According to this hypothesis, there is the belief that revenge might occur only in societies where group solidarity is deeply felt, that is to say, in the societies in which corporate groups are made on the basis of unilineal descent. The lineage model has enjoyed great success because it appeared functional. Nevertheless, its heuristic value

³Emphasis added.

has been repeatedly questioned [Peters 1967]. Thinking in terms of the distinction between folk systems proposed by Bohannan and analytical systems, Peters proposed to distinguish between the description given by social actors and the yield in terms of the lineage model used by anthropologists.

In the folk system, the reconstruction corresponds to the model through which societies represent themselves and represent a pattern of relationships in terms of an agnatic system. In the analytical system, the translation of the emic representation, in an ethical point of view, provides a rigid analytical framework of little heuristic value [Peters 1967, 279]; a cold approach, unable to obtain the different facets of meaning that revenge has.

Descola's ethnography regarding the Jivaro raises other doubts, pointing out critical issues to which the segmental model is unable to give satisfactory answers. Descola, describing the complicated plot that characterises the Jivaro ties of affinity, descent and residence, uses the cognatic solidarity to explain the conjunctural dynamic to which the pattern of alliances in the feuding system has undergone [1993, 174]. The fluidity of the scheme leads Descola to interpret Amerindian intertribal conflicts not as homogeneous phenomena but as manifestations of positions continually renegotiated [1993, 172]. The circumstance that brings the negotiation criterion into the determination and solidarity of the feuding groups strengthens and allows more thought about the aporia that has so far characterised the reflections on revenge. The criterion of reciprocity, that is the foundation of the feuding system and that is based on the determination of stable groups based on ascribed status, has also been applied to the examination of revenge in cognatic societies.

The ethnographic examples regarding this latter are numerous. Here it is sufficient to mention once again Pigliaru's historic work. As a foundation of his interpretation about revenge in Sardinia in the twentieth century, it is enacted the idea that the insult to honour which moves to a retaliatory action will spread within the group, following a concentric spiral of obligation that goes from the intimate group [Lasswell 1931] directly involved, in Pigliaru's uncertain lexicon indicated as "us shepherds*", to the more distant ones, "us barbaricini*" [Pigliaru 1975, 145]⁴. A lax reader might imagine all Sardinian shepherds feuding with the "non shepherds" and the "barbaricini" Sardinians feuding with the "non barbaricini" or with the rest of the nation. In fact, the question of responsibility is relevant. On the basis of the principle whereby revenge is inherited, the subjects belonging to a group take responsibility of revenge in the name of and on behalf of the group. The relationship between the group and the subject is essential. Pigliaru argues that in the barbaricin law responsibility is subjective. In a legal perspective, he assumes this principle as an indicator of the evolution of the customary Sardinian code, able to overcome the way to consider the relationship among groups and the relationship between individuals and groups, that normally characterise primitive societies [Pigliaru 1975, 149]. This hypothesis forced him to explain the nature of the relationship that binds the individual to the group, and to identify the group to which

⁴Barbaricini means *Barbagia inhabitants*.

Pigliaru thinks that the feuding agents are related. He deals with this issue in the fifth "Complementary Study", where he has to admit that the type of the subject's group is a family group and the binding nature of the relationship which leaves a margin rather uncertain to the subject.

As a mechanism of reversion of offense between two equivalent groups, blood feud returns to be strongly rooted in the unilineal groups. The problem is that there are no kinship groups in a cognatic descent system, as the Italian one, but ego-centered networks. In this case, there can be no certainty, nor about the composition of the group itself or about the solidarity firmness. Reflecting on the kinship form and function in medieval Europe, Marc Bloch touches upon the issue. He observed that in the case of conflict between two families, it might happen that some of the members were in the uncomfortable position of being members of both families. Because of this situation, he considered the family groups as «too unstable to serve as the basis of the whole social structure» [Bloch 1965, 138]. But, on the other hand, the same situation shows the already mentioned risks about instability of the ego-centered groups in a kindred. This latter antinomy risks calling into question the theories formulated so far on revenge. It does not permit with certainty the identification of the feuding groups and it limits the effectiveness of the theoretical framework to only the unilineal societies bringing revenge toward a kind of primitivism. Because of the ambiguity that characterises the examination of the feuding groups, there might be the temptation to avoid the definition of the feuding groups as descent groups considering the feuding groups present in Western and cognatic descent societies simply as groups of purpose. This choice is certainly more functional, but it does not solve the problem of identifying the rules that lead to the formation of groups that inherit the obligation of revenge.

Neglecting temporarily the questions about the unilineal descent, it is preferable to consider revenge as a semantic field and analysing the retaliatory paradigm in a wider context in which the rules for the formation of groups can be traced back according to the historical and cultural processes to which they are continuously subjected. For example, the diachronic perspective, through which blood feud in Albania at the end of the twentieth century has been dealt with, has allowed to reveal how it reshaped the revenge field. During the transition in Albania from communist to the capitalist government, the weight and function of the segmentary lineages have suffered an alteration. These latter have still yet to organise the kinship system that is based on the patrilineal descent and virilocal residence. This alteration, affecting the sibling solidarity, has modified the system redefining the groups in alliance networks similar to those present in ego-centered systems.

This latter exchange was better understood during the insurrections in 1997, when the Albanian economy collapsed. During that period prefectures, barracks and the Vefa places (one of the major holding companies that caused the economical crack) had been assaulted. At the head of the rebels, there were people who gained acceptance through the family solidarity. The constitution of the groups, that endangered the Berisha Government and horrified the western world, reproduced the aggregation scheme used in the segmentary kin groups; therefore, they were unstable. The groups operated in

an autonomous and independent way. It was impossible a definitive surrender. In the same way, the leader's capture or his imprisonment could not resolve the problem because new segments originated from the previous ones, replaced them, according to the segmentary principle. No criterion was able to foresee the new aggregation schemes. The internal implosion of the group made it unstable, unpredictable, but at the same time unstoppable and extremely dangerous. The distance between the State and the citizens was so evident that in northern Albania the law enforcements had to start wearing hoods. Only the anonymity could guarantee against the risks of feuding; in this way, they could be free from the assumption of personal responsibility, in the case that one of them was forced to kill someone during a clash. The code of blood feud and the practice of the feud were skillfully mixed, creating a hermeneutic puzzle difficult to decode

In this situation, the corporate nature of the groups, the intensity of solidarity and the function of the new aggregates have been modified. The offense that moves the retaliation is not configured any more as an insult but as a challenge. In these conditions, the avengers have used the sibling solidarity to justify an alliance that is still thought to be based on solidarity determined by ascribed status but instead is based on temporary relationships related to the logic of choice.

It is here we can find the shift from the blood feud to feud. The avengers have made reference to the blood feud to take advantage of the existing dispositions, related to the habitus that have made comprehensible retaliative behaviour, but they pursue a different purpose [Resta 2002, 150]. The perception of the relationship has not changed and revenge is still classified as a blood feud. Revenge reveals in this way its strength, that is being a semantic field, able to regenerate the dispositions by which the feuding agents orient their actions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we propose to use the word *Revenge* to indicate the semantic field which refers to retaliatory actions; the term *blood feud* to indicate the semantic code from which derives the retaliatory practice in which the feud is defined, because connected apparatus symbolically linked to the blood; and the *feud* as the retaliatory practice linked to groups of purpose.

To justify our choice, we started by considering the retaliation principle scaleable according to different paradigms. Retracing literature on revenge, we proposed the hypothesis that it is a form of punishment, but also a moral obligation and a system based on retaliative exchange, to wind up with the interpretation as a semantic field that generates dispositions, maintaining links with the past, the continuous juridicisation process where the practice of retaliation is reabsorbed. Indispensable premise to return the conceptual autonomy that revenge deserves, distinguishing the principle of solidarity and reciprocity which it responds to by the practice of blood feuds.

We have questioned ourselves on two attributes that we believe are essential, for both the feud and the blood feud: violence and the nature of revenge groups. The violence,

in connection with its belonging, contributes to the defence of identity that is proposed as a constraint under which you can open the floodgates to both wars and conflicts as revenge based on blood feuds or based on the defence of the group's interests of which the avenger feels temporarily part of and to which he belongs. To a different conclusion, the examination has led to the group formation rules. On the basis of the different systems in lineage, we have seen blood revenge operated in corporate groups and cognatic kindred. While questioning the heuristic value of the lineage model, favoured by anthropological literature, we had to recognize that the paradigm of solidarity that cements the group for revenge, supports the principle of reciprocity and social distance in which the system is retaliative, operates differently in unilineal groups and in ego-centered networks. In the former, blood revenge is articulated as a response to an insult that affects the group's honour, in the latter, as a challenge for the group's advantage. Differently to what happens in the unilineal contexts, in which the principles of solidarity and reciprocity distance keeps a stable, functional and meaningful form to revenge, in contexts bilineal or cognatic, or unilineal in those contexts where the relationships no longer based on a moral obligation but the practice of scope, the values in the confluence model of revenge are reinvented and vindicating the action takes the form of the feuding practice. A reinvention made possible by the generating capacity in the field of revenge, can produce useful dispositions to decode the new meanings that revenge assumes. The contrast between feud and revenge can be solved within the performative process where revenge cultures are not deducted.

The constitution of the different groups, the modulation in the exercise of violence and strategies of honour which have proven useful to distinguish between feud and revenge remain the foundation of an institution which helps to support the juridicisation process perpetually acting in social contexts.

For this, the perpetuation in many areas of the theorem of revenge does not indicate a contrast between different rights, 'legitimate versus customary', but rather acknowledges and reveals the simultaneous presence of different juridical levels and the nature of negotiations themselves. The level of revenge and the level of the feud manifest a mutual porosity. The level at which you place the official rights apparently remains untouched compared to the levels expressed by the juridical regulations that support revenge and justify the feud. However, if it is true, as claimed by Ehrlich [1913], that the centre of gravity of legal development lies in society itself, as it is the internal ordering of social relationships, it is reasonable to assume that different juridical levels are always simultaneously present, focused on the reciprocal exchange register and, according to different angles and specific perspectives, they may appear at times collusive and other times conflicting. Revenge, as a semantic field, retains its strength and, as we have tried to show, in different contexts and at different times, reconfirms itself to be a generative matrix of the dispositions governing different aspects of the law, thus becoming a participant of the imaginary collective law.

* My translation

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