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ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF VIOLENCE AS AN ELEMENT OF CULTURE

***Abstract.** The problem of study of violence, its appearances, and goals from the anthropological perspective is facing some obstacles. The analyses of the ethnographical data from the mountainous part of East Georgia proves the connection of the forms of violence with the system of values of the definite time-period of the historical-cultural development. The dynamics of the forms of violence depends on the changes of the values. The conclusion is drawn that the violence forms used in traditional societies to regulate the inner relations are to be understood as a cultural fact, the study of which needs to consider not only its instrumental, but also the functional aspects.*

***Keywords:** Anthropology, Violence, Culture, Value System, Georgia.*

The study of violence as one of the characteristics of culture is one of the significant research topics in social anthropology. Diverse interdisciplinary research in this field carried out over the years, has become an impetus for development of the new themes and research questions. The interest is focused on the study of the reasons, goals and the general foundations of the existence of violence in human society, its cultural essence and historical dynamics.

For analysing the historical dynamics of forms of violence, interesting material is provided by the Georgian traditional being. The subject of the study is the mountainous area of eastern Georgia (Tusheti-Pshavi-Khevsureti). I was interested in particular in those forms of violence that are associated with the institutions of blood feud and expulsion from the community. The data regarding the attitude

towards them and about their functional load are preserved in the written sources, historical documents, in memory and in the works of Georgian ethnologists.

There are various definitions of violence, based on the different perspectives. Violence implies mental or physical coercion aimed at suppressing the opposition and will of an individual or a group of people. It implies outside interference, forcing people to act against their will and causing suffering (Holsherr 1982, 376). In the dictionary of human rights, violence is explained as: a demonstration of force with the aim of gaining influence over a person or his destruction (Sakvarelidze 1999, 117). The contradictory nature of the phenomenon of violence makes it difficult to develop a universal definition. In this regard, a comparative study of this phenomenon is characterized by certain gaps.

When studying the issue, the connotation of the term and the negative attitude of society towards this phenomenon are also an obstacle. For this reason, the violence for a long time was considered as an oppositional pair of civilization and culture. Over the years, the study of such forms of violence as wars, open conflicts, etc. made it possible for social and cultural anthropologists to link the issue of violence to the particular social worldview, mythology, religion and value system. Thus the violence appeared as an integral part of culture. From this point of view, the processes taking place within the society, in particular the forms of violence identified in the relationship in frame of traditional society is displaying the voluminous material on the topic.

During research, it is of great importance to analyse the forms of behavior in the microcosm, as a result of which, in some cases, the restoration of a complete picture of the dynamics of changes of attitude towards a specific manifestation of violence is possible, in particular, the legal perception of society. The fact generally considered as violence might not be perceived as such from the anthropological perspective, since it concerns the system of values and worldview of each specific group or society. Among Georgian researchers, N. Khizanishvili and S. Makalatia were the first to draw attention to this issue, they regarded the habitual blood feud as a "divine duty" of community members (Makalatia: 1985; 76), considered it mandatory (Kekelia ed. 1988, 102) and thus, a manifestation of violence was

associated with the specific historical and social circumstances. This is already an indication of the necessity to consider the changable definition and conotation of the term within the space of its usage. If the manifestations of violence is considered without taking into account this point of view, then we will only touch on its instrumental side and external form, which most often excludes rational elements. An example is the custom of cutting off the dead man's right hand and other similar manifestations practiced in the late middle ages East mountainous parts of Georgia. The description of the rite with its technical aspect without analyzing it within the context of the time and social structure of the communities, do not make it possible to understand its essence. Therefore the code of honor, the system of social values and religious beliefs must be taken into consideration. The most of the modern social anthropologists working on the problem of violence are recognizing it as a rational phenomenon of culture and pointing out that the cultural dimensions of violence are more significant than its instrumental manifestations, which are often considered without a general analysis of the context and therefore present to us as unreasonable actions. According to Anton Blok, violence is nothing more than a historically developed and changeable form of interactivity and communication (Blok 1998, 3). So, any manifestation of violence is characteristic of a certain stage in the development of society and is associated with the corresponding system of values.

From this point of view, the materials of the ethnographic life of traditional societies are the most interesting. The correlation of traditional customary law and violence has entered in the sphere of interests of social and cultural anthropologists. The forms of violence traditionally legalized by customary law remain viable for a long time. There are frequent cases of official legitimization of customary law. From the Georgian reality, an example of this can be cited in the book of law of King Vakhtang VI, which says: "These blood sentences that we wrote were approved long ago and we did not add anything" (Enukidze ed. 1955, 58). Such legalization and, at the same time, suppression in traditional societies is carried out by customary law and taboo. It is difficult to imagine a social group where certain forms of violence are not tolerated. This mainly concerns measures of restraint and punishment directed against their own members. In relation to this, the problem of violence is

associated with the problem of identity. Membership of a specific group, especially in the mountainous regions of Georgia, was considered as a membership to a sacred community group, and is not only a matter of honor, but also a sacred duty, and expulsion from it is considered as a loss of honor, dignity and, thus, personal identity. Therefore, one or another member of the group prefers to sacrifice himself and obey the laws of the group, than to resist them. In this case, the acceptance of the forms of violence allowed in the group becomes not only justified and permissible, but also obligatory. If a person does not submit to the values recognized by his group, he/she himself/herself may become a victim: whoever refuses, for example, a blood feud, he/he loses his/her status and position in society. His/her position gradually deteriorates and an unbearable moral sanctions are followed from the side of the own group (unless worse measures are taken) that forces him/her to either break away from the group, or submit to its order.

The main reason for the confrontation between the community and its members are the actions directed against the unity and integrity of the community. The reasons that could become the subject of such a confrontation are: the appropriation of common lands; the appropriation of the estates of neighbors or other members of the community and the allotment of the land border; opposition to the divinities of the community and the preference of personal interests to the interests of society; failure to fulfill obligations to the divinities of the community; violation of popular (customary) law and making a decision based on personal views; appropriation of livestock from members of their community; violence against members of their own community; violation of customs and traditions of community etc. These reasons, together with the betrayal of the community, oaths, violation of various rules of the clan could become the basis for especially grave crimes directed against society. According to D. Jalabadze, over time, the lightening of the punishment characteristic of such crimes indicates the weakness of the quality of crimes, which should have been associated with a decrease in the importance of the community (Kekelia ed. 1991, 16). A community, like any social union, tends to preserve itself by setting certain norms and restrictions for its members. As violent and irrational as these rules may appear at first glance, they contribute to the identification and

reinforcement of the sense of belonging of the group members and, therefore, are rational and have a function. The structure of a community, social rules and every manifestation of its existence can be considered as a symbolic expression of its essence. The instrumental side of the manifestation of violence also has such a symbolic character, which turns it into a ritualized form of communication. The condition for the existence of the community was its cohesion, and therefore it tried, by certain norms, sometimes established by the force, to eradicate possible tendencies of weakening of its internal ties.

Despite the use of force, such actions contain positive goals and are aimed at strengthening and demonstrating relations within the group.

Most scholars view humanity and violence as inseparable concepts. In some cases, violence appears as a necessary condition for development and progress. If we perceive culture as an external environment processed by a person, then violence is one of its elements, which, together with other elements of culture, represent the vital necessity of a person.

Often, the use of forms of violence has a very rational explanation. For example, according to S. Makalatia, the basis of the custom of blood revenge, on the part of the clan, was the need to compensate the loss of manpower and a soldier and, in case of dissatisfaction, enmity began for generations until one of the parties demanded reconciliation. (Kekelia ed. 1988; 133).

At the same time, explaining violence only in practical terms would be one-sided. According to Peter Kloss (1997), the task of anthropologists is to present the general utilitarian, instrumental, functional and practical aspects of violence and in this way to show its full social face.

Violence is not an immutable fact, it is a historically developed cultural category. Over time, traditional, historically formed many forms of violence lose their functions, some are experiencing transformation, in parallel with this, new forms with new means and goals are being formed, the explanation of the meaning of which makes it possible to see the trends of societal development. Sometimes these changes are caused by the changes in the general context and are reflected in the implementation of the new rules of customary law. An example of this is the

adoption by the Arkhot community in 1937 of a decree on changing the rules of blood feud (Makalatia 1984; 89-92). On the basis of this decision, the murderer's cousins and relatives were exempted from responsibility for the murder. It was assigned only to the killer and his family. The term of blood feud expired with the death of the murderer and the revenge ceased (Kekelia ed. 1988, 137). This example clearly shows the change in values, and how the new level of development of perceptions and values determines the permissible and unacceptable forms of violence and turns them into the norm, restricts or prohibits them. At first, changes are implemented slowly with a lot of resistance. As for the blood feud, based on data from 1986 in Pshavi (Kekelia ed. 1988, 145), because of blood feud, murders or facts of injuries were quite rare or not recorded at all. M. Kekelia gives an example of the fact that the mother of a murdered son is already against retaliation (Kekelia 1988, 146). The main reason for these changes is the transformation of traditional society. The change is associated with the modification of economic, political, ideological foundations and is reflected in the new symbols and values.

Analysis of Georgian ethnographic data makes it possible to observe the processes of transformation of certain forms of behavior into violence or the processes of transformation of certain forms of violence into the norm. This creates the basis for the conclusion that the identified forms of violence on the part of a person against nature, a person against another person, a society in relation to a person and a society in relation to another society correspond to the value systems characteristic of a certain period of the cultural and historical development of society. Thus, the reconstruction of the historical dynamics of forms of violence is possible only by showing the historical dynamics of the value system.

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