

Honor, Obligation, and Consequences of War: A Comparative Study of the Basus War and Homer's Iliad

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Through a comparative study of the Basus War and the Iliad, the themes of honor, war escalation, war duration, war causation and divine intervention are examined. In both narratives, the complex idea of honor in humans becomes a driving force of conflict, where simple quarrels escalate into major-scale wars, and human behavior manifests in their cultural underpinnings. The Basus War stresses tribal customs, centuries-old rivalries, and decisions driven by individuals and their causes, while the Iliad interweaves national honor and down-to-earth nation-state decisions with more universal themes of divine will and greater human history, creating legendary architecture that amplifies ethical and philosophical complexities. It demonstrates how the concepts of honor in warfare are both universal, yet culturally specific, and addresses how people react to, navigate, and make sense of larger social demands and moral conundrums during wartime.

Keywords: Honor, War Escalation, Fate, Divine Intervention, Cultural Comparison.

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1. Introduction

A comparison of epic tales from various cultures demonstrates repeated motifs of honor, fealty, and the devastating results of battle. Two such texts—the pre-Islamic Arabic epic tale of the Basus War and the ancient Greek epic, the Iliad of Homer—constitute particularly rich grounds for comparative study. These two texts reflect the intersection of individual honor and communal warfare, and how the values of society are embedded within the construct of war.

The Basus War from the Arabian Peninsula narrates a conflict between tribes lasting for decades, triggered by a personal insult that escalated into a full-scale tribal feud, ultimately shaping the collective identity of the tribes involved (Shahzad, 2017, p. 112). In a similar vein, Homer's Iliad

portrays the Trojan War not only as a clash between armies but also as a struggle fueled by individual pride, honor, and divine intervention (Powell, 2014, p. 189). According to Homer, the pursuit of honor and eternal glory often outweighed the value of life itself, driving warriors to embrace death for the sake of remembrance (Powell, 2014, p. 63).

This part of this game symbolizes the pursuit of personal honor which leads people into the war, which is an actually similar theme to the Basus War, in which the reputation of the tribe is much more than peace or life. This is the goal of this paper, to compare these two narratives side by side and show the commonality of the symbols of honor and war, as well as become more aware of the culture that influences each epic. The research questions focus on:



- 1- How is honor represented and defended in the Basus War and the Iliad?
- 2- A conflict may simply be an outward representation of an inner struggle and personal grievances mixed with societal expectations may be the bubbles that lead to an inevitable boiling point.
- 3- What do the narratives do to demonstrate the impacts of war on individuals and on communities?

Using close reading, this paper will demonstrate that despite the distance in time, space, and cultural framework from which each epic originated, the universalized human concerns of renown, loyalty, and the cost of conflict remain after centuries of storytelling.

2. Theoretical Framework

The idea of honor and its relation to war has been one of the cornerstones of many cultures and times as a core to epic literature. What gets lost in analysis of honor in both the Basus War and Homer's Iliad is the fact that honor is not so much an individual pride but a social value that informs conduct, legitimates war and organizes relations. These three primary axes which define the framework will be examined regarding the concept of honor, the escalation of war, and the effect of cultural context.

2.1 Honor and Social Expectations

Honor in the Basus War is a communal ideal, developed from familial and tribal status. It indicates that decades-long feuds could erupt from a single insult, through the murder of a camel or a personal offense, because restoring honor is of utmost importance (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 52). Honor is presented here as the driving impulse and the grim aftermath, the result of an expectation to be of service to family and clan.

Likewise, in Homer, war is competitive, since honor (time) and glory (kleos) are the main incentives for the warriors. The withdrawal of Achilles from battle in response to Agamemnon's

insult illustrates the inextricable nature of individual pride and military conflict:

“My honor has been slighted; if I fight, it is for nothing but my own glory” (Lattimore, 1999, p. 112).

The role of honor in both narratives is an external one, it is framed by social norms, rather than feelings of pride; internal emotions are sidelined.

2.2 The Escalation of War

Both wars, the Basus War and in creating conflict in Homer's Iliad, illustrate how localized disputes, whether the instigating cause is be it personal insult or fate of some territory, can quickly spiral out of control to result in an extended, fully-fledged war. But the mechanisms and cultural contexts underlying this escalation differ markedly between the two epics.

A) Escalation in the Basus War

The war here starts with an unimportant act, such as killing of a camel, and this is what we call as the Basus War. This event, though barely deserving of significance, sets off a spiral of revenge that leads to a multi-tribal civil war (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 47).

B) Escalation in the Iliad

The Iliad is primarily concerned with the rage of Achilles as he weighs his pride and honor against his wrath (Lattimore, 1999, p. 115) but also offers divine justification for the escalation of war. The initial cause “the abduction of Helen” gives rise to a ten-year war, but it is the quarrels between the individual Greek heroes that actually dictate the pace and outcome of battle.

2.3 Cultural Context and the Symbolism of War

Even though both texts are similar in theme, they come from different cultures. In Basus the conflict is tribal Arab society with honour part of family, clan, and social law. Not only will there be violence but your own society will legitimize violence as a means of status retention.

In contrast, the Iliad is rooted in the world of ancient Greek heroism, to a world where personal honor is connected with divine favor, individual glory, and eternal renown. Far beyond a mere lens of history, the epic elevates frames the war as an arena of personal triumph and moral reflection, where even gods take part in deciding the fates of men (Lattimore, 1999, p.210).

Though divergent in approach, both narratives reveal a shared human concern with the matters of status, renown, and ethical systems relating to the context of temasks of war making their comparative analysis valuable to honor and war symbolism story.

3. Textual Analysis

This section examines specific episodes and characters in both the Basus War and Homer’s Iliad, highlighting how honor motivates actions, escalates conflicts, and affects communities.

3.1 Personal Grievances as Catalysts

In tribal societies, personal grievances could never be overlooked since public reputation and collective solidarity required an immediate and forceful response (Shahid, 1989, p. 212).

Similarly, in Homer’s Iliad, the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon over Briseis escalates into a conflict that affects the entire Greek army. Achilles withdraws from battle, declaring that dishonor has stripped him of his purpose:

“I am minded no longer to stay here dishonoured and pile up your wealth and luxury.” (Homer, trans. Fagles, 1990, p. 89)

Both texts demonstrate how honor, though rooted in individual experiences, is socially enforced and capable of shaping the fate of whole communities.

3.2 War as a Social Obligation

The first stroke of the Basus War initiated an inexorable duty of vengeance. According to tribal codes of honor, it was the duty of the leaders and

warriors to react to any slight; not responding to the offense meant indelible humiliation (Stetkevych,1993,p.56). And so war was also seen not as an issue, but something cathartic for their culture, something that was intrinsically linked to necessity and also status.

Hector serves a kind of similar moral necessity in Iliad. Even though he knows he cannot beat Achilles, he chooses to confront him because of his honor and responsibility to protect his family and city:

“Confronting him, knowing I will die; but my honor and my city demand my presence.” (Homer, trans. Lattimore, 1951, p.421) . War here is also a social contract where honour is placed above life.

3.3 Consequences of Honor and War

Both epics emphasize the ruinous outcomes of a culture based on honor codes. Generations of both the Bakr and Taghlib tribes were annihilated by the Basus War, demonstrating how cycles of retribution can exhaust both lives and wealth (Lyll, 1921, p. 77).

Homer in the Iliad describes the sorrow of those who are left behind for the fight for honor comes at a price of many human lives. Mothers, wives and children mourn the dead, emphasizing the psychological tragedy of war : —

“Men are driven by honor and glory — but those left behind are beset with grief and loss.” (Homer, trans. Fagles, 1990, p. 312)

In short, both yarns is a paradox of honor; sustaining identity and cohesion, for a price, violence and suffering.

4. Comparative Discussion

A detailed comparison of Basus War and Homers Iliad with Respect to honour, Duration, Cause, Individual Vs Collective Action, Social Setting, Divine Intervention etc.

4.1 Symbolism of Honor

Honor (sharaf in Arabic, time in Greek) is the primary driver at play in both narratives that

motivates character actions. Basus War honor is a weaving of tribal reputation and family obligation. Culturally, if a person or a family has been insulted, even if it is considered a trivial insult, the only way to restore their honor is through vengeance, and thus decades of conflict may be unleashed (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 52). This story presents honor “destroyed every single time one follows up “ as a social currency.

Honor in the Iliad is tied to personal pride and reputation. The kleos of battlefield appears into the deeds of warriors such as Achilles and Hector to make sure that their name is remember (Lattimore, 1999, p. 57). Through both of those texts, we see that honor is not just an individual trait; what one person does in the face of dishonor can determine what whole communities do in response to those perceived slights.

Similarity, Honor compels actions that otherwise seem irrational, highlighting its universality as a human value in the war narratives.

Gamified Play of Honor vs. Glory Basus War focuses on the honor of the tribe collectively, while the Iliad is about glory through individual exploits, often to the satisfaction of the gods.

4.2 Duration of the Conflict

The Basus War:

One of the more popular of these idioms is the long and protracted Basus War, which some authorities even state lasted some forty years (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 68) The reason it is so drawn out compared to other wars is because it isn't one long war, it's a series of revenge raids, forays and feuds that continued through decades.

Key Factors Contributing to Its Length:

1- Tribal Codes of Honor:

Honor was the highest virtue in pre-Islamic Arabian society, and any insult to a tribe or family was obliged to be avenged. An act of vengeance

ensued to counter the first offense (like the slaughter of a camel), with both parties forced to keep their pride intact by seeking revenge.

2- Multi-Generational Feuds:

Since revenge was anticipated, sons and daughters did battle, going beyond the lives of the original actors. According to various historical accounts, there were multiple generations involved on both sides of the war, so any peace would be virtually unattainable without official mediation (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 69).

3- Absence of Central Authority:

Tribal societies never had centralized mechanisms of conflict resolution like the formal legal systems of states. It was this lack of arbitration between states which led to even the smallest disputes becoming protracted wars.

4- Intermittent Battles:

The war was not the continuous battle as we think of it but interspersed raids, duels and localized fighting. This stuff came and went, giving the impression of a ceaseless war, when in reality it really was a long series of tit for tats.

The Iliad:

The Trojan War, as described by Homer in his Iliad, takes place over a span of ten years (Lattimore, 1999, p. 3). The multi-generational scope of the Basus War sets it apart from the explosion of mythic events contained in the Trojan War that can fit within a single generation of heroes, providing greater narrative arc for an epic.

Key Details of the War's Duration:

1- Epic Scope:

The span of ten years means he can ignore a lot of what happened, especially the last year of the war.

This selective storytelling stresses the heroics and moral quandaries of key characters such as Achilles, Hector, and Agamemnon.

2- Organization of Battles:

The campaign unfolds in a series of pitched battles, sieges, and duels tempered by rounds of negotiating, brief truces, and divine interventions. The intervals provide a rhythmic pacing to the narrative, time to get to know the characters and to contemplate martyrdom, honor, pride, and death.

3- Mythological Dimension:

The decade-long duration is, in a way, symbolic, as a tribute to perseverance, bravery and both the cosmic and spiritual fight of man and God. Deities regularly intercede, impacting results and occasionally even extending or exacerbating the warfare, contributing to a cosmic dimension to the duration of the war (Lattimore, 1999, p.210).

4- Narrative Focus:

While the war would stretch on for ten years, Homer concentrates on the last year of the war, including the fight between Achilles and Agamemnon, Hector's leadership, and important duels that end the fates of the main players. That means the epic can spotlight the human toll, moral quandaries, and gallantry without chronicling the decade in tedious detail.

Last but not least, the ten years of the Trojan War mimics an epic structure, trimming with realism the mythological piling. The war is prolonged enough to give a sense of scale to the conflict, but it is limited to one heroic generation, distinguishing it from multi-generational vendettas like that of the Basus War. This focus on the last year enables Homer to explore the roles of honor, individual agency, and divine intervention in the making of history. Thus, whereas the Iliad has only the span of a heroic generation, Basus' War is multi-generational. Basus War rhetorical answers with cyclical revenge,

while Homeric epic type is heroic and gives place to the Iliad, of long centuries.

4.3 Cause of the War

The Basus War: Starts due to the murder of a camel, seen as a slight against tribal honor (Al-Jubouri 2001,p.47). Minor acts see measure and due to vengeful cultural imperatives , conflict is freed.

The Trojan War as The Iliad: The Trojan War is an event ignited by personal passion, divine will, and political situation. The triggering event is the kidnapping of Helen by Paris, an insult to King Menelaus (Lattimore, 1999, p. 12). At a basic level, pride, honor, and fate mix personal, social, and cosmic elements.

In short both of these wars are reliant upon honor yet Basus War is the result of a human slight whilst the Iliad weaves the actions of man and the divine.

4.4 Individual vs. Collective Action

War at the basus level, conflicts are raging between whole tribes because when people act, they are never isolated systemically (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 63). Hence the troop mentality, warriors fight for family, and the tribe itself.

Iliad , Individual heroes (e.g. Achilles) affect broad swaths of armies. Personal pride drives decisions (Lattimore, 1999, p. 115), emphasizing the autonomy of the individual within collaborative battle.

Similarity: One man's sin is another man's burden.

Contrast: Basus War appeals to compulsory social obligation vs Iliad subjective choice, heroic code.

4.5 Societal Impact of War

Both epics show tragic consequences:

- Basus War : (Al-Jubouri, 2001, p. 71).long term tribal conflicts. deaths in generations
- Iliad: misery of soldiers and people, lamentation of families (Lattimore, 1999, p501)

Similar reason, High human and social cost of honor terrorism while there is much overlap, difference may be found in that Basus War is concerned with something more specifically social-normative, whereas the Iliad transcends the social, allowing for mythological and divine frameworks.

5. Role of Fate and Divine Intervention

Perhaps most telling of the differences between the two epics is the degree of fate and divine intervention involved in the Basus War, especially in comparison to Homer's Iliad. Both epics deal with human actions by men motivated by honor and social codes, but the Iliad's supernatural powers are more direct and influential than the human-centered Basus War.

5.1 Divine Intervention in the Iliad

The role of the divine is most pronounced in the Homeric epic, and also in the (i.e. Homeric) Trojan War narrative. The gods — like Zeus, Athena, and Apollo — are not just determining fates; they often interfere for moral, personal, or political reasons (Powell, 2014, p. 178). For instance:

What this shows is even in the great battles of Grece and Troja, while Athena gives her support to the Greeks and Apollo stands with the Trojans, the fact that what man does it subject to the will of the gods (Powell, 2014,p.181)

- * The workplace for heroes becomes heavily influenced by omens, prophecies, and divine favor, inextricably tying personal honor to the cosmic order (Graziosi & Haubold, 2005, p. 94).
- * But above all divine action is the agency of Fate (moira), from which even the strongest hero can not escape; the ultimate reality of life and death (Silk, 2004, p. 56).

But the Iliad will not permit us to see war as anything other than human tragedy wrapped up in cosmic drama made more dramatic by divine actors, by actors reenacting human tragedy made more tragic still for us, for Achilles, for Hector, for Priam, for all of us.

5.2 Human-Centered Conflict in the Basus War

In contrast, the Basus War is nearly a war of men. Outcomes are determined by:

- * Personal choices such as who takes revenge against whom, or who steps in to mediate quarrels.
- * Honor codes like in tribes, which require retaliation for slights.
- * Man-made codes of behavior, regulating proper behavior in war (Al-Jubouri, 2001,p.47).

There is no god meddling in the way that there is in the Iliad, and although one comes across references to omens or other signs of the supernatural among the culture, these never function like divine order that determines the outcomes of battles. It is Earthly duty, and human action, not alien or divine agency that is the motivator for war, rooting the conflict in realistic tribalism.

Conclusion

We have analyzed different aspects of the war through the multidimensional lenses of the Basus War and the Iliad—honor, cause, duration, escalation, agency, impact on society, and fate/opening of doors to divine intervention. Honor is at the center of both accounts, driving characters to make certain decisions, crafting demand from society, and rationalizing revenge/heroism. Honor in the Basus War is primarily tribal and collective, while in the Iliad it is personal and heroic, often individual and tethered to divine watchfulness.

Even though the causes of both wars are most commonly seen to come from personal grievances “a camel’s killing in the Basus War and Helen’s abduction in the Iliad “they quickly turn into war between all societies involved. Basus War shows how small human sins, blown out of proportion on the wings of social codes and inter-generational duties, can lead to conflicts that last decades. Unlike, the Trojan War spends a full decade in the midst of human pride, political ramifications, and divine turmoil to create a well-organized epic tale in which fate, and the gods, control the outcome.

Both wars are examples of how a wounding first grievance propels a larger, longer war. While the Basus War's motivations are primarily due to social and cultural customs calling for revenge between families and generations, the Iliad depicts mutual grudges, pride of Greek warriors and divine interventions into wars having an effect in the course of conflict and level of fighters as well as their armies. Additionally, both texts demonstrate the interplay of the individual and collective, yet the Basus War presents obligatory civic obligation and in contrast, the Iliad shows that agency is amplified in shared-live combat.

In both cases, the devastating toll of conflicts driven by honor is signaled through social consequences. The Basus war entails cyclic vengeance resulting in massive casualties and social dislocation while Iliad soldiers and civilians die alike; the divine element provides an additional moral-philosophical horizon for human suffering.

Most importantly, the contrast between fate and divine providence reflects a seedbed cultural difference. Conflicts between the Basus Pit are deeply humancentered, and resolutions depend not on firepower, but on social custom, honor codes, and human choice. The Iliad, on the other hand, contains cosmic and divine elements showing that human actions or free will are often directed or constrained by gods and fate, raising the romance to a mythic and philosophical plane.

Although both epics illustrate similar themes of honor, the complexity of human decision-making and the social impacts of war, these ideas are contextualized by different cultures. The Basus War highlights different characteristics of war and human nature than the Iliad, including the historical realities of the pre-Islamic era- collective guilt, generations of vendetta, and the cycles of revenge, as well as a lack

of divine intervention paralleling the Iliad, and a mythological nature that comes in contrast to the semi-historical Iliad. In tandem these narratives are rich in comparative vantage for what various societies perceive as the causes, conduct, and consequences of war: universal and divergent human subjectivity set against honour and fate.

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