

WHAT IS HONOR?

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ABSTRACT

The author argues that honor is a (subjective) right. More specifically, the kind of honor that has most interested theorists, here referred to as personal honor, is a right to respect as an equal. It has the following characteristics: (1) It can be lost, (2) it is single and indivisible, (3) in order that the right be retained the individual must follow certain rules (the honor code), and (4) there is at least one term in the language that always, or at least frequently, refers to this right.

The traditional Western European honor code is compared to that of the Bedouin of the Sinai peninsula, and it is shown that there are profound differences. From this it is inferred that the theory that there is a single Mediterranean concept of honor is mistaken.

The paper concludes with some basic methodological principles to be followed in the study of honor.

Key words: Anthropology, law, Middle East, contract, honor, Bedouin, duel, rights

Introduction

During the years 1976-82 I was engaged in anthropological fieldwork, and lived much of the time among a Bedouin tribe in the Sinai peninsula, a region of Egypt then under Israeli occupation. I worked in the east-central part of the peninsula, an arid plateau – rainfall is less than 50 mm a year – covered with barren hills and gravel plains. There were no hard-topped roads in the area and no permanent dwellings of any kind. The only people who lived there were nomadic Bedouin. They resided in small camps – usually of no more than two or three families – accompanied by their animals: camels and goats, a dog or two to keep away the wolves and hyenas at night, and perhaps a donkey; a few people owned some sheep, though the country was too dry for them to flourish. In 1976 people still traveled only on foot or on camelback, but in the following years a few tribesmen acquired motor vehicles. The authorities had

made some attempt to establish schools in the area, but for a variety of reasons few of the children learnt much. Virtually all the adults were illiterate.

My research concerned the Bedouin's customary law, which is highly developed and which plays a central role in their lives. At the time that I lived with the Bedouin it was the only law that was effective in east-central Sinai. The area was of no interest to the Israeli authorities, no tourists or settlers came into it, no army bases were established there, no policeman ever entered the area, and no dispute among the Bedouin ever came before an Israeli court. The locals, in fact, enjoyed virtually complete legal autonomy, and even offenses as serious as armed robbery and homicide were dealt with entirely by the customary law.

There is no central authority in Bedouin society, and disputes are adjudicated by consent of the parties before judges chosen by the parties. The issue is sharply defined, one party is plaintiff, the other defendant, the procedure (as in Anglo-American law) is adversarial, and the judge must find for one party or the other. The agreement between the parties to go to trial includes the setting up of an effective mechanism, which involves a guarantor, to ensure that they both appear before the judge on the date fixed and that the judge's decision is executed.

In the course of my work I discovered that an important part of Bedouin law is concerned in one way or another with what the Bedouin called 'ard and wjĥ. Unlike some Bedouin words, these were easy to understand. They are the dialectical reflexes of the words 'ird and wajĥ in literary Arabic.¹ The lexica of literary Arabic translate 'ird as 'honor' and wajĥ as 'face'. It turned out that among the Bedouin wjĥ was not only used in its literal sense ('face'), but also frequently as a synonym of 'ard.²

Now the contexts in which the Bedouin use the word 'ard fit in very well with the meaning given in the lexica. If I seduce a man's daughter, it is looked on as an

1 A word here about the transcription of Arabic. The Arabic language, as it is written in books and newspapers and spoken in, for instance, news broadcasts on radio and television, is the same in all Arab countries. But this literary Arabic (as it may be called) is markedly different from spoken (or colloquial) Arabic. Colloquial Arabic is divided into innumerable dialects, some of them so different from each other as to be mutually unintelligible. As a rough analogy one may think of the Arabic dialects as being related in the same way as the Slavic languages are related to each other. Unlike the Slavic languages, however, the various Arabic dialects are unwritten languages; virtually all written Arabic is literary Arabic. Many words in colloquial Arabic have reflexes (equivalents) in literary Arabic. The transcription of Arabic words in this paper is simplified, but sufficiently accurate for those who know the language to be able to identify words. Those unfamiliar with the language may note that the apostrophe that appears, for instance, at the beginning of the word 'ard represents an Arabic consonant (called 'ayn) which has no equivalent in European languages.

2 Because the word wjĥ has more than one meaning, in what follows I shall refer mainly to the word 'ard rather than to the word wjĥ. But it should be understood that when I write 'ard I generally mean both 'ard and wjĥ when used in the sense of 'ard. In Bedouin speech the word 'ard is actually used much less frequently than is the word wjĥ in the sense of 'ard; this may be seen from Stewart 1988-90, 2:199, 278.

offense against his 'ard; if a man abandons his companions in a fight, or if he fails to carry out a promise that he has made "in his 'ard," then he loses his 'ard. There is no doubt, I think, that any speaker of a major modern European language who becomes familiar with the language of the Bedouin will conclude that the word 'ard is best translated as 'honor' (or honneur, Ehre, etc.); and this quite irrespective of what the lexica say about the word 'ird in the literary language.

For several years I was satisfied with having found an adequate translation of the terms 'ard and wijh (as a synonym of 'ard). But at a certain stage, when I was working on a detailed analysis of the part of the law that deals with 'ard, I felt that it would be desirable to clarify my ideas about the nature of honor. This is a subject about which a great deal has been written, and which in the last thirty-five years (since the publication of Peristiany 1965) has been a special preserve of anthropologists. I read a good deal of the work of my anthropological colleagues and of others, and discovered that there was no agreement among them as to what kind of a thing honor is; few in fact even considered the question. Historians who wrote about honor were also reluctant to discuss what the word meant. It turned out, in fact, the only people who always tried to face the problem were the jurists. In most countries of continental Europe there are laws that protect the citizen's honor, and lawyers – above all German lawyers – have long attempted to clarify just what it is that is being protected. But even the jurists have never reached anything like consensus, and the simple question "What is honor?" has remained without answer. Is it the same as reputation? Or is it rather a sentiment? Is it a character trait, something like integrity? Or are we forced to say that it is a concept too vague or incoherent to be fully analyzed?

In what follows, I shall begin by saying what I think honor is. I shall then consider the question of whether (as is often asserted) there is a specifically Mediterranean type of honor, and finally I shall offer brief methodological remarks about the study of honor.

The issues dealt with here are all considered at greater length in Stewart 1994, which includes an extensive bibliography.

The nature of honor

The word 'honor' has a similar (though of course not identical) range of meanings in all the major modern European languages. That range is a very wide one, and some uses of the word are not problematic. For example, if we say "It is a great honor to be elected to the Academy of Sciences," it is clear that the word 'honor' is here used to mean a mark of distinction. But if we take a phrase like 'an act incompatible with honor', we feel immediately the difficulty in the defining the term. Our difficulty is perhaps compounded by the fact that disputes about the nature of honor

have not been purely academic: they have frequently been an expression of profound disagreements about fundamental human values.

In the often confused debate on the nature of honor, one central issue can be discerned, and that is the question of whether a person's honor is something extrinsic to the person (like reputation, rank or standing), or something intrinsic (a quality of character, something like integrity), or some combination of the two. The way the word is used seems to offer evidence for all three of these possibilities. Let me give some examples (they come from English sources, but I believe that similar examples could be found in any of the major modern European languages).

(a) At the beginning of World War II, Major-General Percy Hobart, then serving in the British army in Egypt, succeeded in irritating his senior officer to such a degree that the latter had him dismissed from his post and placed on half-pay. But Winston Churchill, after meeting Hobart, decided that Hobart, however abrasive his personality, should be re-employed by the army. "Hobart himself made difficulties, wanting his former seniority in the Army List so as 'to restore my honour'" (Harvey 1992, 749).

Hobart is here viewing his honor as something extrinsic to himself, as being perhaps something like his good name or his professional reputation.

(b) In Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (Volume 1, Chapter 22), the heroine, Elinor Dashwood, has a tête-à-tête with another young woman, Lucy Steele. In the course of the conversation Lucy reveals that she is engaged to be married to Edward Ferrars. Elinor had hitherto had no inkling of this; she had believed that Edward loved her alone and was committed to her. On hearing Lucy's circumstantial account of her engagement, Elinor apparently suffers some momentary doubt, but almost immediately after she feels "revived security of Edward's honour and love, and her companion's falsehood-'Engaged to Mr. Edward Ferrars! [...] surely there must be some mistake of person or name. We cannot mean the same Mr. Ferrars.'"

Here the word "honor" seems to refer to something intrinsic to Edward: it would be possible in this passage to replace "honor" with a word like "integrity" or "fidelity", but a substitution such as "reputation" or "good name" would not fit the context.

(c) In a detective story by Jill McGown (1997) the central characters are two police officers, Lloyd and Judy. We read on p. 405 that "Lloyd had been defending Judy's honour at nine o'clock on Friday." What had happened at that time was that Lloyd met with a senior officer who suspected Judy of tampering with evidence in order to get a conviction. In the conversation Lloyd defended Judy's conduct. Here it is not clear whether 'honor' is being used in an intrinsic or an extrinsic sense: the sentence would make good sense in its context if the author had written 'integrity' (or the like) instead of 'honor', and it would make equally good sense if she had written 'good name' (or the like) instead of 'honor' (though the first substitution is perhaps a little more plausible than the second).



From Otto Hupp, *Scheltbriefe und Schandbilder* (published by the author, Munich-Regensburg, 1930) p. 23.

Defamatory picture (*Schandbild*) issued by the Jews Saydro Straubinger and Isaak, both of Regensburg, against Hans von Judmann of Affeking, in about 1490. This is not the original, but a late sixteenth or early seventeenth century copy that Hupp considers to be accurate. The accompanying text alleges that von Judmann was in breach of his promise under seal to act as surety for Heinrich Schenk von Geyern. It goes on "to warn princes, counts, barons, knights and commoners and all others, that they should beware of this man who is without honor and faith and who breaks promises made under seal." Von Judmann is depicted hanging upside down, with a small devil attacking him. Next to von Judmann is his coat of arms, also hanging upside down. To be hanged upside down was a dishonorable form of execution. The targets of such pictures are frequently depicted as meeting their end by execution in this or some other dishonorable fashion.

Faced with these examples, many theorists have adopted what may be called the bipartite theory of honor. They say that the word 'honor' sometimes refers to an extrinsic quality like reputation, sometimes to an intrinsic one like integrity (or honesty, or good faith etc.), and sometimes to either or both. Now in its simple form this theory is untenable. Consider, for example, the following event, which we will imagine to take place in the late nineteenth century. Two German aristocrats, Graf Bobbi and Freiherr von Poggenpuhl, find themselves alone in a room. They quarrel, and Poggenpuhl calls Bobbi a liar, or grossly insults him with some other words. Bobbi has suffered an affront, and under the law then in force Poggenpuhl has laid himself open to criminal prosecution. But in aristocratic circles it would be unthinkable for Bobbi to initiate such a prosecution: his honor has been impugned, and the proper course for him, if he wishes to preserve it, is to challenge Poggenpuhl to a duel.

In this case it is clear that Bobbi's honor cannot be identified either with his reputation or with his integrity. His reputation is not in danger since there are no witnesses; yet even if both parties were convinced that there was no danger of what happened becoming known to anyone but the two of them, Bobbi's honor would still have been impugned. Bobbi's integrity is also not in danger: if he was a brave, honest, faithful man before Poggenpuhl insulted him, he will remain one after the insult.

Proponents of the bipartite theory have offered complex versions of their theory which attempt to take account of this kind of problem. The variations are numerous, and there is no space here to discuss them. All that need be said is that none of them has been sufficiently convincing to gain general acceptance.

My own theory is that honor is a right (that is, what in continental Europe is called a subjective right). Specifically, it is a right to the respect that is due to an equal.³ Let us consider the examples given in the light of this theory. The difference between the first two examples (Hobart and Jane Austen) arises, it will be seen, from the fact that they imply different views as to what entities a person to, or endows a person with, a right to respect: Hobart is looking on his seniority in the army as that which gives him a right to respect, Elinor is looking on Edward's honesty as that which gives him this right. Since seniority is something that is granted to the general by others, Hobart's honor has an external aspect; and since honesty is an inherent quality, Edward's honor has an internal aspect. In the third example no view is implied as to what entitles Judy to her honor: if we want to speculate, we are free to view it as being based on something external (her superiors' judgment), or something internal (her honesty), or a combination of the two.

There is no necessary conflict between these three uses of the term 'honor'. It may help here to consider a different right. Let us say that I have a right to receive \$100

3 Honor among unequals ("vertical honor") also exists, but for reasons of space it will only be briefly touched in this paper. For a fuller discussion, see Stewart 1994, 54-63.

from Mr. Orlov. There are all sorts of different circumstances that may have endowed me with this right. I may have sold something to Mr. Orlov for which he is to pay me \$100; I may have entered into an agreement to borrow \$100 from Mr. Orlov; I may have given \$100 to Mr. Orlov by mistake; and so on. In other words, the same right may have any one of a number of different sources, and the fact that in this particular case my right to receive \$100 from Mr. Orlov arises from a sale does not mean that I reject the idea that in some other case my right to receive \$100 from someone may arise from a loan agreement. Thus Elinor, in the particular instance, looks on Edward's right to honor as arising from an intrinsic quality; but there is no reason to believe that she would find anything strange or objectionable in the idea that a man's honor might also arise (wholly or in part) from an extrinsic source such as his rank. Equally, there is nothing wrong with the fact that in our third example we get no clear indication of what Judy's honor may be based on: if I were to say, for instance, "These intimate matters should not be publicized – surely John and Mary have a right to privacy," no-one would demand that I specify whether their right is a moral one or a legal one, and if a legal one, under what paragraph of what code of law.

Any right to respect as an equal may be labeled honor, but personal honor, the kind that concerns me in this paper, has four particular characteristics. The first of these is that it can be lost or extinguished. This is not true of all rights: some are extinguishable (for instance, when Mr. Orlov has paid me \$100 I no longer have a right to receive that sum from him), others are not: thus in most modern jurisdictions, I cannot lose my right to liberty, in the sense that I cannot be enslaved. (In the past, of course, it was in some places otherwise: a captive could, for instance, be enslaved, and a man could be enslaved for debt, or even sell himself into slavery.) Similarly, under certain modern legal systems, every adult person has an inalienable right to respect, i.e., to be treated as having a certain value. This right is not personal honor as I define it.

The second characteristic has already been implied: personal honor is a single indivisible right. In the real world there may be obscurity or disagreement as to whether a particular person is in possession of this right, but in principle at least it is not something of which he (or she) can lose part and retain part, or something that can increase or decrease.

The third feature of personal honor is that in order to retain it one must follow certain rules (e.g., "be generous and hospitable," "keep your promises"). The rules constitute the honor code. If one breaks one of these rules, one loses one's honor. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that there may also be some other way of losing one's honor – it may be, for instance, that the king can by fiat deprive a man of his honor.

The last feature of personal honor is that it is something whose existence is acknowledged by the society in the most explicit fashion. Many – perhaps all – societies respect people who follow certain important rules, and withdraw respect from those who do not; but they mostly do this in the informal fashion that is characteristic of so much of our social life. In order to exclude these cases, the fourth element of the definition is that the notion of personal honor only exists in a society if that society has at least one term (a word or fixed phrase) that when used always, or at least frequently, refers to a type of honor that has all the other characteristics that we have just mentioned.

The importance of this fourth criterion can be illustrated from what I believe to be one of the most telling arguments in favor of the view that honor is a right. This is the institution known as the pledge of honor (German *Ehrenverpfändung*, French *gage d'honneur*). It was to be found in Europe in the late Middle Ages and in the early modern period. The fullest modern accounts of the subject come from Germany, and it may be (though I am not certain) that the institution was especially popular in the Holy Roman Empire. A nobleman who wanted a loan would, instead of offering, say, part of his demesne as security, simply pledge (engage, pawn) his honor. The contract would specify that if the debtor failed to repay the debt on time, then the creditor would have the right to destroy the debtor's honor. The creditor would do this by publishing what was called a *Schmähbrieif*, a defamatory document, proclaiming the debtor's failure to perform. Such a document was often accompanied by a crude – sometimes exceedingly crude – defamatory picture, and in the sixteenth century document and picture would often both be printed.

Historians of law have not analysed this institution in depth, and have sometimes even treated it dismissively as one of those chivalric extravagances so characteristic of the late medieval period. It turns out, however, that the pledge of honor also exists in the customary law of the Bedouin of the Levant and of the sedentary tribesmen of the Yemeni highlands. It is in fact part of the most common form of contract, and among the Bedouin it is the one always used to ensure the effectiveness of an agreement to take a dispute to trial.

The contract involves three parties: A promises something to B, and K guarantees to B that A will keep his promise. K does this by saying of A's promise, "It is in my 'ard (honor)," or "It is in my wjñ (face)." If A does not keep his promise, B will turn to K and demand that he either induce A to do what he is supposed to do, or else do it in his stead. If K does not perform, then A has the means by which to destroy his 'ard or "face," that is to say, the means by which to destroy K's honor. He does so by a procedure referred to as "blackening K's face." This can be done in any one of a number of ways – for instance, by saying in public "May God blacken K's face," or by putting up a black flag, especially in a place much frequented by people, say near a well. When people see the black flag they know that it indicates that someone has

been blackened, and ask who has blackened whom. Thus news of the blackening quickly spreads. Whatever the exact form of the blackening, the final effect is the same: unless K reacts in such a way as to counteract the blackening, it will destroy K's honor. The simplest way for K to counteract the blackening, and safeguard his honor, is by doing what he undertook to do.

We can safely assume that the pledge of honor developed independently at least twice: among the Arab tribes and among late medieval Europeans. It cannot therefore be dismissed as an isolated oddity, and any theory of honor must offer some way of making sense of this institution. But consider, for instance, what is (among anthropologists and historians) perhaps the most widely accepted characterization of honor, the one offered by Julian Pitt-Rivers, a well-known British anthropologist, in 1968. He says that honor is "a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others." Obviously, none of these three things is something that lends itself to being pledged. In contrast, a right is precisely what one pledges – whether it be one's right of ownership to something material (e.g., a gold watch) or one's right to something immaterial (e.g., copyright in a popular song). I therefore take the existence of the pledge of honor to be strong support for the theory that honor is a right.

The pledge of honor also illustrates, as I have suggested, the significance of the fourth criterion. I have said that honor (defined as the right of the individual to respect) is probably widespread, perhaps universal, in human societies. Nevertheless, it seems a priori reasonable to group together those (probably few) societies which show such a high degree of consciousness of this right that they have assigned to it a special name. Once such a name exists, it becomes possible to establish a wide variety of new practices. One of them is the pledge of honor, for clearly it cannot exist unless there is some distinct way of referring to personal honor; and the same is true of various other institutions, among them the duel in its classical form (that is, as it was from some time in the sixteenth century up to the first World War). The end result is that societies which have a term referring to honor (that is, honor of the sort that meets the first three criteria) will look rather different from those that do not.

Two more remarks, one about history, the other about sentiment. In my book (Stewart 1994) I discuss at some length the history of personal honor in Western Europe; here I will only say that in my view personal honor first appears in the high Middle Ages, perhaps in the thirteenth century, and that after six or seven hundred years of being quite important, and spreading westward into the New World, and eastward into Russia, it ceases in most parts of Europe to be a significant feature of life after World War I. (In what follows, when I speak of European honor, even if I use the present tense, I am referring primarily to honor as it was in Western Europe before World War I.)

Pitt-Rivers, in the definition quoted above, refers to honor as a sentiment, and the well-known juxtaposition of honor and shame as opposites suggests something similar: shame is an emotion (specifically, an emotion arising from negative self-evaluation), so the implication is that honor is also an emotion. This is clearly false: honor is not something one feels, and the opposite of shame is pride (an emotion arising from positive self-evaluation). But the notion of honor certainly derives much of its power from its close connection with a variety of emotions. The human need to be treated with respect is a powerful one. A friend of mine, a woman of Polish-Jewish origin, spent three and a half years in German labor camps during World War II. She says that with the passage of time the memories of physical suffering – hunger, overwork, beatings – have lost much of their sting; but the recollections of the humiliations that were inflicted on her continue to burn, even after more than fifty years.

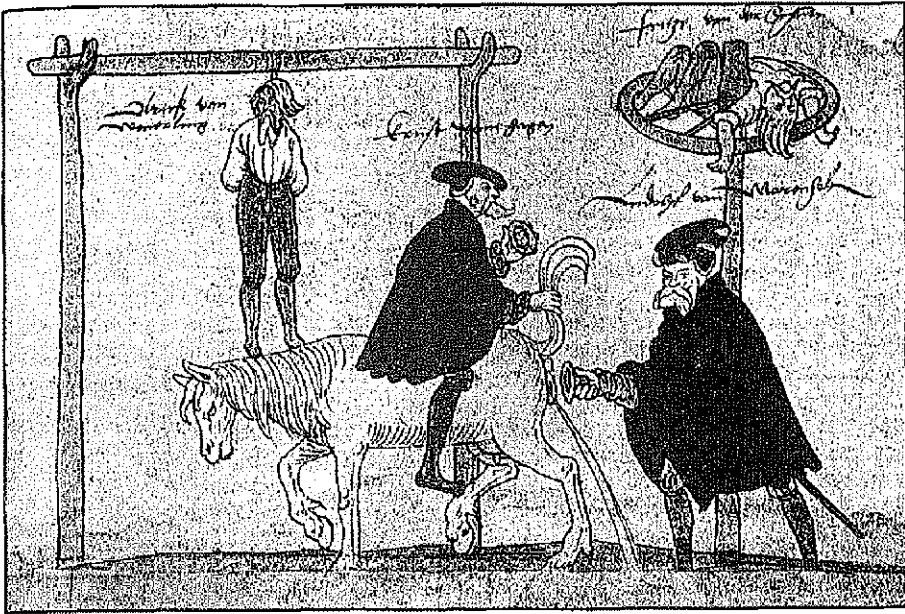
Bedouin and European notions of honor: a comparison

Bedouin⁴ 'ard (or wijh) is personal honor in the sense in which I have defined it: it is a losable right to respect (a man who has lost it is treated as having no value), it is single and indivisible, and in order to retain it one must follow the dictates of a certain code of behavior. Every adult man has honor unless he has lost it; the Bedouin will also occasionally refer to the honor of a tribe as a whole, but women do not have honor.

A number of scholars have adopted the theory that there is a distinctively Mediterranean notion of honor, i.e., that the people who live on or near the shores of the Mediterranean, whether Christians or Muslims, have a body of ideas about honor which are substantially similar, and which are substantially different from those of other peoples (e.g., the Germans or the Iraqis) who live at a distance from the inland sea. This theory is, I believe, without foundation. On the one hand, the ideas of honor among the Arab peoples who border the Mediterranean in the south and east are (so far as our evidence goes) different in important respects from those of the Christians whose lands border it to the north and west; and on the other hand, ideas of honor among the Italians and Spaniards are not very different from those among the Germans or the English, and ideas of honor among Arabs on the Mediterranean shores are (it would seem) quite similar those of Arabs who live elsewhere.⁵ Our in-

4 Here, and in what follows, the term 'Bedouin' means the Bedouin of central Sinai and those other Bedouin who resemble them in the relevant respects. Broadly speaking, this means the Bedouin of Sinai, Transjordan, Palestine, and probably much of northern Arabia and the Syrian desert.

5 I can say nothing of the Turks, Persians, Afghans, and other Muslims to the east since I do not know their languages.



From Hupp, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Defamatory picture issued on 25 May 1542 by Levin de Wendt, acting in behalf of Claus Frydach. The men depicted and named are four of the five noblemen who went surety for the two noble sureties of Frydach's debtor, Duke Henry the younger of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel. The accompanying text sets out the allegations against them and declares them "faithless and without honor" etc. In the picture two of the men are shown as being executed in a dishonorable fashion, one hanging, the other broken on the wheel. A third, Ernst vom Hagen, is shown riding backwards on a female equine, probably a mule. This too reflects a dishonoring punishment, and is a recurring feature of these pictures (sometimes the animal is a sow). Vom Hagen holds his seal in his left hand, and with his right hand lifts up the animal's tail so that the standing man, Ludolf von Warenholtz, can apply his seal to its organs of excretion. This motif is a common one that indicates how little value is to be attached to the seal of the person so depicted. We may understand that vom Hagen has either already done, or will soon do, the same as von Warenholtz.

formation about ideas of honor in the Arab world is spotty, so this last statement is made only in a tentative fashion; but in what follows I shall show that at least one group of Arabs who live on or near the shores of the Mediterranean – namely, the Bedouin of Sinai – have a notion of honor that differs in certain profound ways from the European concept.

We may begin by noting that the Bedouin word for honor, 'ard, lacks the wide range of meaning that its European equivalents have. Generally speaking, it means one thing, and one thing only: personal honor. Occasionally it is used in a context where it is not meant literally (as, for instance, in a certain phrase where the words 'his 'ard' means 'his womenfolk'), but in such cases the relationship between the basic sense of the word and the secondary one is transparent.

In the major modern European languages one of the main sources of difficulty in analysing the concept of honor has been that the word 'honor' (and its equivalents in the various languages) can refer to the right to respect (or outward manifestation of respect) of a superior, particularly (but not only) a superior in rank. This kind of honor – which I referred to above as vertical honor – is something of which one can have more or less, and which may rise or fall. The Bedouin words 'ard and wjĥ 'face' cannot be used to refer to vertical honor. This fact is important for the many analysts of European honor who (like myself) have considered it necessary to make a sharp conceptual distinction between vertical honor and horizontal honor (i.e., the right to respect as an equal, of which personal honor is a particular sub-type). Bedouin usage shows us that the distinction is not an arbitrary one; and not only Bedouin usage, for it would appear that both in literary Arabic and in the dialects, the word 'ird and its reflexes, when used to mean honor, means only some kind of horizontal honor.

If we turn now to the Bedouin code of honor, we can, as expected, find many differences of detail between it and the European code. I mentioned above, for instance, that to seduce a man's daughter is looked on as an offense against his 'ard. Now in Europe this would have been true only as long as the daughter was unmarried; once she was married, to seduce her would primarily, perhaps exclusively, have been an offense against her husband's honor. Among the Bedouin, however, the ties of a woman to her agnates (i.e., those to whom she is related in male line) are much stronger in certain respects than her ties to her husband, and even the seduction of a married woman is, from a legal point of view, an offense not against her husband, but against her close agnates (her father, her brothers, her paternal uncles and cousins and so on). This is not to say that her husband will be indifferent – far from it (I knew of husbands who killed their wives' lovers, though never their wives); merely that Bedouin law does not view the seduction as an offense against the husband's 'ard.

Here, however, I do not wish to enter into details of this kind, but rather to note two profound differences between Bedouin notions of honor and European ones. The

first lies in how a man's honor may be impugned or lost, and the second concerns the question of how a man should react when his honor has been impugned.

(a) In Europe many of the classical attacks on a man's honor are directed directly against the man himself, as when (let us say) von Poggenpuhl calls Graf Bobbi a *Schweinehund* or slaps him in the face. Among the Bedouin acts of this kind are not considered offenses against 'ard. If one Bedouin man insults or strikes (however lightly) another, then the victim may bring an action against the perpetrator (and in the case of a blow, he may by law retaliate in kind); but the victim's honor is not at stake, i.e., if the victim does not bring an action, or brings one and has his claim rejected by the judge, he does not thereby lose his honor (as he would if his 'ard were at stake: see (b) below). In fact – and this is the crucial point – no offense committed directly against a Bedouin man can endanger his honor. In principle, the only thing that can harm a Bedouin's honor is his own failure to meet any one of a small class of special obligations (several of which have already been alluded to).

These obligations fall into two classes. One consists of the duty to take action if a woman for whom one is responsible (usually a sister or daughter) is sexually interfered with. The other class contains all the remaining items of the honor code. Of these, by far the most important in practice is the duty to do whatever one has undertaken to do when one gives one's guarantee; among the others are the duty to assist a traveling companion if the latter is attacked, and the duty of a man whose brother has died leaving a minor son or sons to manage his nephews' property on their behalf.

The distinction between the two classes lies in the consequences that follow when a man acts in violation of one of these duties. In the second class of case he is liable to be blackened by the victim of his misdeed: so for instance the nephews, when they grow up and discover that their uncle has embezzled their property, may blacken him if he refuses to make good their losses. The blackening does not in itself dishonor a man. What has dishonored him is his failure to do his duty. The blackening is merely a public accusation to the effect that a man has dishonored himself. In practice it is only very rarely that men are blackened. To the extent that it is even threatened or hinted at, it is usually in the context of the guarantee.

The first class of honor obligation that has been mentioned – the duty of a man to preserve the chastity of his female agnates – is distinguished by the fact that if a man fails in this duty he is most unlikely to be blackened. If I fail to take action against a young man who had sexual relations with my daughter, my daughter is not going to blacken me: in all likelihood my daughter consented, and has no interest whatsoever in causing trouble. If she did not consent, and I learn of what occurred, then almost certainly I will take action; but even if for some reason I do not, it is still virtually inconceivable that my own daughter would blacken me. It is far more probable that some other agnate (e.g., my brother, my paternal cousin) will act in my stead, since

not only the girl's father and brothers are dishonored by a sexual offense against her, but also her other agnates.

Consider now the contrast with Europe. A European may (like a Bedouin) lose his honor by his own failure to do his duty to another. This occurs, for instance, when a man breaks his word or cheats at cards. But the main thing demanded of a European in order that he retain his honor is to insure that he is treated with the proper respect by his equals: he must not permit any attack upon himself, whether verbal or physical, nor must he allow himself to be placed in a position of inferiority (duels were fought when two gentlemen walking in opposite directions encountered each other in the street, and neither was willing to allow the other to pass by on the wall side). This kind of exaggerated sensitivity about one's own status does not exist among the Bedouin, and, as I have said, a Bedouin does not view a slight, an insult, or a physical attack as being in any way connected with his 'ard.

(b) It was because of the intimate connection between violence (the duel) and honor that in Europe the honor code functioned largely outside the law and indeed (at least formally) in contradiction to the law. Among the Bedouin, in contrast, the notion of 'ard functions, to all intents and purposes, solely within the law. If a dispute concerns honor, it comes before a special type of judge known as a *Manšad*. In such cases, the plaintiff will be claiming that an offense has been committed which impugns his honor: he might, for instance, be a guarantor who asserts that he has been wrongfully blackened. If the judge finds for him, the plaintiff will receive amends which are also called a *manšad*. The amends may consist either of money or of symbolic elements (e.g., public retraction, white flags set up in public places), or of a combination of the two. What is most important is that the judge, in awarding a *manšad* to the plaintiff, removes the shadow that was cast on the plaintiff's honor by the impugment. A man who has been blackened for allegedly failing to fulfill a certain duty loses his honor unless he either carries out that duty or receives a *manšad* within a reasonable period of time.⁶

Assume now that I am a Bedouin whose honor has been impugned – let us take it, for instance, that my daughter has been seduced. As was once the case in Europe, in order to restore my honor I must act against the offender. Seduction is considered to be a serious sexual offense, and in this kind of offense against honor (but only in this kind), I and my agnates are allowed to respond with violence against the seducer and his agnates: we may (if we can catch them) beat them (but not kill them) and seize

6 I stated above that in principle the only thing that can harm a Bedouin's honor is his own failure to meet any of small class of special obligations. The reason for the presence of the words "in principle" is that we can imagine a case where a man is wrongfully blackened but is not awarded a *manšad* (let us say because of some failure of the judicial system). I have never heard of such a case, but if it occurred, then we would have to say that the man had lost his honor without any failure to meet an obligation.

their property. But this action (even if it is possible – they may have fled) is neither necessary nor sufficient to restore my honor. The only thing that will do that is to bring the seducer to court and to get from him a *manšad*.

The second contrast between the Bedouin and the European honor codes lies therefore in the means by which honor, having been impugned, is made whole again: in the one case by legal proceedings before an impartial judge, in the other by the exercise of violence.

Method

I should like to conclude with three simple observations about method. If we write about honor in an alien society – whether it be one that is remote in time, like sixteenth century Italy, or remote in culture, like the present-day Bedouin – the methodological principles are the same. The first one is that we should state whether, when we refer to honor, we are referring to a concept that exists in the alien culture or to a concept of our own that we are using in describing that culture. Both courses are legitimate; the important thing is to make it quite clear which one is being followed.

Perhaps I may illustrate this first point from my own research. In describing the customary law of the Bedouin I make use of the notion of honor, and class together a variety of offenses as offenses which constitute an impugment of honor. In doing so I am following the Bedouins' own conceptual scheme: as we have seen, they have their own word for honor ('ard), and they themselves group together offenses which constitute an attack on a man's honor: all and only such offenses come before the class of judges called *Manšads*.

Contrast with the notion of honor the notion of a contract, which I also use in describing Bedouin customary law. The Bedouin themselves do not have any word or expression that has the same, or even roughly the same, meaning as 'contract'. Despite this, I consider that the concept is helpful in describing Bedouin law, and as long as I make it quite clear to my readers that it is not a Bedouin concept, I see no harm, and much advantage, in making use of it.

My next observation about method is this: if, in describing an alien culture, we use a concept that is not native to that culture, then the concept we use must be reasonably clear. Jurists are by no means in agreement as to the exact nature of contract, but the concept is sufficiently well understood for it to be usable in describing Bedouin law. Honor, in contrast, is a murky and disputed notion, and my second methodological point is this: if we use the notion of honor in describing an alien culture in which such a notion does not exist, then it is essential that we first explain exactly what we mean by the word 'honor' in that description.

My last observation concerns the case where the alien culture does have a word that (in our view) can properly be translated as 'honor'. Let us say we are investigating fifteenth century Italy. It will not do simply to say that the word *onore* was at that time used in just the same way as it was in Italy in the twentieth century. Even if this were true (which I do not believe to be the case), it would still have to be proved, and the only way to do this is by offering a large range of examples. My third methodological point, then, is this: if we are using a term that is in the material, then we must explicate it on the basis of very careful textual analysis.

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