

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

WAR AND PEACE IN GAME OF THRONES AS AN EPIC NARRATIVE

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the war and peace themes in the TV series Game of Thrones, which can be considered as an epic a popular culture narrative. Epics' themes are of war, adventure and chivalry and they reproduce discourse on values, morality, war and peace through one or more protagonists. Epics, traditionally, construct war discourse by concepts like just war, war ethics and honor, and peace discourse by absence of war. In this study, Game of Thrones has been examined in terms of war and peace themes via Thematic Analysis. Results revealed that Game of Thrones somewhat differs from traditional epic narratives. Although classical themes like "just war discourse" pops on and off throughout the show, it is also emphasized that war is not a glorious act. Showing conflicting perspectives of the warring parties, narrative of the show refutes many narratives that serves as justification of war. Moreover, in Game of Thrones universe, peace is not built on the absence of war. Narrative emphasizes that non-conflict is not sufficient, but a just administration is necessary for peace. In this context, peacebuilding in the Game of Thrones manifests itself in a way that converges with Galtung's conceptualization of peace.

Keywords: Game of Thrones, Epic, Thematic Analysis, War, Peace

Bir Epik Anlatı Olarak Taht Oyunları'nda Savaş ve Barış**Öz**

Bu çalışma, bir popüler kültür anlatısı içinde bir Epik olarak kabul edilebilecek Taht Oyunları dizisindeki savaş ve barış temalarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Epiklerin temaları savaş, macera ve şövalyelik gibi temalardır ve bu temalar değerler, ahlak, savaş ve barış üzerine söylemi bir veya daha fazla kahraman aracılığıyla işlenir

ve yeniden üretilirler. Epikler geleneksel olarak savaş konseptini haklı savaş, savaş ahlakı ve namus gibi temalarla, barış konseptini ise savaşın yokluğu üzerinden kurgular. Bu çalışmada Taht Oyunları, Tematik Analiz yoluyla savaş ve barış temaları açısından incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar Taht Oyunları'nın geleneksel epik anlatılardan biraz farklı olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Dizinin anlatısında "haklı savaş söylemi" gibi klasik temalar zaman zaman kendini gösterse de geleneksel yaklaşımdan farklı olarak savaşın şanlı bir eylem olmadığı da vurgulanmaktadır. Savaşın tarafların çelişkili bakış açılarını gösteren dizinin anlatımı, savaşı meşrulaştıran pek çok anlatıyı çürütmektedir. Üstelik Taht Oyunları evreninde barış, savaşın yokluğu üzerine kurulmamakta; anlatı, barış için çatışmasızlığın yeterli olmadığını, adil bir yönetimin gerekli olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Bu bağlamda Taht Oyunları'nda barış inşası Galtung'un barış kavramsallaştırmasına yakınsayan bir şekilde tezahür etmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Taht Oyunları, Epik, Tematik Analiz, Savaş, Barış

1. Introduction

Game of Thrones series, which made a big splash in popular culture in the years it was published, was deemed worth researching in different fields such as feminist media criticism (Ferraday, 2015; Frankel, 2014; Marques, 2019; Rohr & Benz, 2020), psychology (see. Cole, 2012), philosophy (Jacoby, 2012), ethics (Amjad & Ashrafi, 2022), politics (Olesker, 2020), international relations (Clapton & Shepher, 2016), and even tourism (Tkalec, Zehir & Recher, 2017) and disability (Ellis, 2014). Upon watching the show, I was impressed by it as a researcher, who studied war and peace, to see a show, an epic nonetheless, showing signs of positive peace; and therefore, intrigued to study this show in a systematical way. With this perspective, and marking the fifth anniversary of the final episode airing on TV, this study has focused on the themes of war and peace in Game of Thrones which is a popular culture product, that can be taken as an epic narrative.

Epic narrative consists of texts describing events and heroism that have historical significance for a culture. While the debate on what is epic in cinema continues (Do Rosário Leitão Lupi Bello, 2012), the narrative itself can be described as epic as long as it meets the criteria of epic in terms of content. Modern examples are built on similar themes of the traditional ones and therefore reproduces discourses about war and peace over and over. This study categorizes epic narrative based on its content, rather than its visuality or cinematic categorization. Traces of imperial and nationalist discourses can be spotted in epic narratives since they are a form of historiography (Heinrich, 1996). This genre usually talks about values like honor and bravery through a protagonist: the heart of an epic narrative is stories and heroes of wars (Oirik, 1994). However, epic narratives are usually built upon the narratives of spectators, rather than the characters themselves (Lovatt, 2013). This is how an epic narrative realizes its aim of reproducing certain meanings for the reader. Epic narratives, which carry great importance to build history for societies, are also a cultural space in which discourses regarding social realities are reproduced over and over again.

Epic narratives, which are traditionally shaped by poetry and sagas, undoubtedly found itself a place in TV and cinema and although its transition to screen resulted in deviations from folkloric epic in terms of its form, it didn't take away its basic characteristics. Since the structure of societies changed, so did these narratives: perhaps they are no longer told on a circle beside a fire, but through TV and cinema as modern world requires; yet still, the tradition of reproducing important values of a certain community conserve its power.

Modern epic narratives, which can be seen on numerous examples in different genres such as fantasy (Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones), science fiction (Matrix, Battlestar Galactica) and historical narratives (Vikings, Rome), are constructed on themes of war, conflict, adventure, and bravery; and through these themes, reproduce discourses regarding values, morality, sanctity, war, and peace. Although these modern examples of epic narratives which find a place for themselves on TV and cinema differ in their subject matter and heroes, they are still constructed upon themes such as war, conflict, and heroism; moreover, it reproduces cultural discourses through one or more heroes, just like it was in epic narratives such as Iliad, Odyssey, and Gilgamesh.

Game of Thrones can be considered as a narrative that sets the stage for a discussion on what is just war on the silver screen. When the general framework of series' story is considered, it is apparent that while the show is about the power struggles between different parties, at the hearth of it lies the characters: the show presents the reasons behind the thoughts and behaviors of the characters in various ways, so that the audience can form an idea about them and decide which side is right. While there are many battles of many characters, large and small, the narrative basically progresses towards the conclusion through three major battles: Daenerys and Tyrion's battle with Cersei, Cersei's battle with the rest of Westeros, and Jon's battle with the Ice King. All these characters have a reason to fight. This is where epic narrative's function of producing and reproducing discourses come in. In this study by analyzing the narrative, this modern epic's stance on war and peace would be investigated. At first glance, Game of Thrones seems to explore a different path to the idea of war and peace in comparison to traditional epic narratives. This claim, however, is nothing more than an educated guess. Yes, the show clearly leaves a taste in the palate of audience of freedom and equality by showing inequalities for example; however, is it just an illusion, or is Game of Thrones' approach to war and peace truly different as compared to traditional epics? This study aims to find an answer to this question by systematically examining war and peace themes manifested in the show.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

This study aims to analyze the portrayal of war and peace in the popular television series Game of Thrones and discuss the themes in comparison to traditional epics. Since there is important differentiation in the

subjects and stories between the series and the book (Martin, 2011), the narrative of the series (Benioff, and Weiss, 2011-2019) alone will be analyzed in this study.

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), language's sole function isn't to transfer experiences, but also to construct experiences and subjective psychological reality. In other words, language construct a reality for those who see through them; and they are sources we use to explain the world we live in. We aim to examine specifically these sources. Vocabulary people choose to use, speech, correspondences, screenplays, posters, movies, TV series etc. may very well be examined as texts (Arkonaç, 2014; also see. Coşkun & Tekdemir, 2020; Çoker, 2007; Tekdemir & Alparslan, 2019). Accordingly, to achieve an understanding of war and peace constructs in Game of Thrones, the entirety of the show's nine seasons, comprising a total of 73 episodes were analyzed. Utilized analysis aims to detect how war and peace were constructed, and through which linguistic and visual resources they were constructed. Thematic analysis was employed as the primary research method to identify and categorize themes related to war and peace.

2.2. Procedure

The thematic analysis process involved several stages. Firstly, each episode was watched multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding of the content. Secondly, notes were taken during each viewing, focusing on any instances that related to war or peace. Thirdly, during monitoring, speeches and images about war and peace were scanned and coded. These codes were reviewed and organized into potential themes. Fourthly, these themes were refined and consolidated into a final set of themes related to war and peace.

2.3. Analysis

This study relies on thematic analysis as its method. Utilized analysis aims to detect the themes regarding war and peace, and through which linguistic and visual resources they were constructed. By identifying existing themes regarding war and peace, a discussion could be utilized in comparison to traditional epic.

To ensure consistency and accuracy in coding, closed coding based on Galtung's peace conception (1969) was used. This approach involves assigning predetermined codes to specific themes or concepts, rather than allowing for more open-ended interpretation. This method was chosen to ensure that all instances of war and peace were accurately categorized and analyzed.

Identifying patterns and relationships within the data manifests a deeper understanding of the themes related to war and peace in Game of Thrones, as well as any insights into how these themes are portrayed and developed throughout the series.

3. Results

When it comes to war and peace, certain themes are found to be reappearing consistently about war and peace. A theme map is constructed based on the themes that were reached through the analysis (Figure 1).

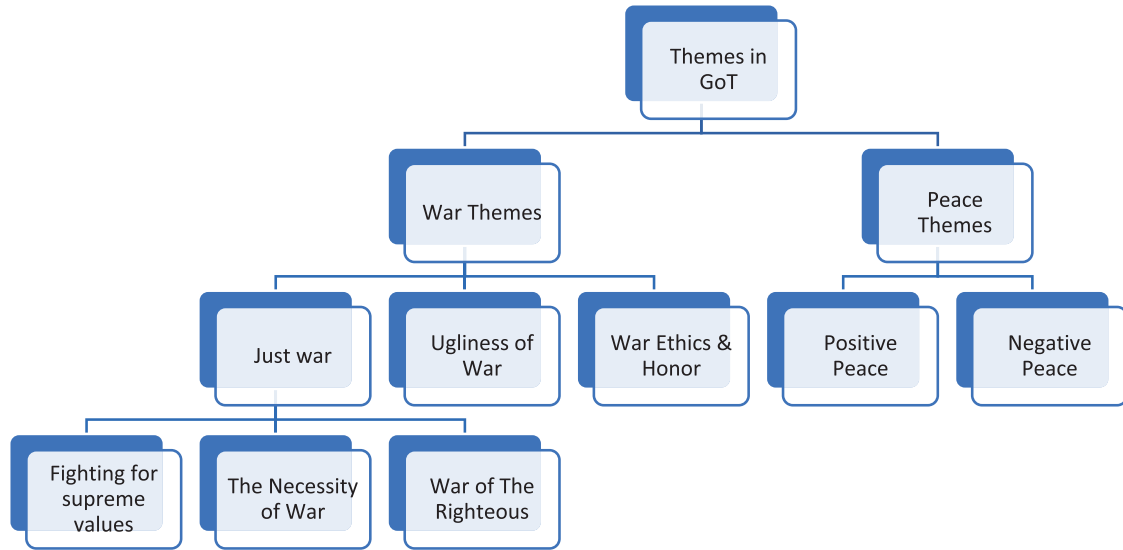


Figure 1: War and Peace themes found in Game of Thrones

3.1. War Themes in Game of Thrones

Analysis showed that Game of Thrones provides three main recurring themes regarding war which are “just war”, “ugliness of war”, and “war ethics and honor”. “Just war” theme is consisted of subthemes called “fighting for supreme values”, “the necessity of war”, and “war of the righteous.” These subthemes signals what is necessary for a war to be just and supported.

3.1.1. Just War

Just war themes can be identified as stories or set pieces that signals whether a war, battle or fight that includes violence is presented as just. There were repeated instances in the show that make audience to question the justness of a certain war or battle. For instance, main wars (Daenerys and Tyrion’s war against Queen Cersei, Queen Cersei’s war against rebellious Westeros houses, and Jon’s war against the Ice King) presented in the show are portrayed differently in terms of their “justness”.

A good example of this theme can be found in Daenerys's storyline. Daenerys is the descendant of a dethroned king, whose entire family save for a cruel brother is slaughtered, and who had to escape her homeland and grow up in exile which brought her great hardship. This storyline gives some sort of "justness" to Daenerys's desire to go to war with Queen. Moreover, Daenerys's hand, Tyrion, who was excluded by his family because of his differences, on the other hand, believes Westeros deserves a leader such as Daenerys, who, he believes, is motivated by a desire to bring justice, as opposed to Queen Cersei, whose cruelty and disregard for others Tyrion has witnessed time and again. Therefore, by showing Queen Cersei's cruelties, Daenerys would seem right in comparison.

Together, Daenerys, who is motivated by taking back what is rightfully hers and going back home, and Tyrion, who grasped the importance of justice through his experiences, wage war against Queen Cersei and her allies in order to take the throne of Westeros. Here, while acknowledging the throne rightfully belongs to Daenerys, the audience sees that she also has an ambitious and cruel side. This is due to the fact that Daenerys dares to wage another war just to take back the throne she believes she deserved, even though she could have ruled as the leader of the people she freed in Essos, which she conquered through great losses. However, in a conversation she had with Tyrion, she emphasizes her main aim isn't to come to power, but to break the wheel of power itself and free the common people from its domination in the process:

Daenerys Targaryen: Lannister, Targaryen, Baratheon, Stark, Tyrell - they're all just spokes on a wheel. This one's on top, then that one's on top, and on and on it spins, crushing those on the ground.

Tyrion Lannister: It's a beautiful dream, stopping the wheel. You're not the first person who's ever dreamt it.

Daenerys Targaryen I'm not going to stop the wheel, I'm going to break the wheel. (Sapochnik, 2011).

Daenerys needs to move from revenge to justice in her character development, but it won't be easy for her as she has suffered great pains and betrayals. Tyrion acts as a compass showing the direction of justice in Daenerys' journey. Game of Thrones underlines that the greed for revenge is an easy trap even for the sincerest people, and wars that we see as justified may not be so justified if we look at it from an objective perspective. In fact, it is presented as a contradiction that Daenerys must declare war to destroy this unjust order and establish a peaceful world for the people, and that dozens of people will die for this cause.

3.1.1.1. Fighting for Supreme Values. Fighting in pursuit of supreme values in the epic narrative is among the explanatory repertoires that strengthen the just war discourse. This theme consists of narratives that gives some kind of justification for war. For example, fighting in the name of freedom is

presented as one of the justifications for war. Many city-states in Essos live on slavery. Daenerys, who is trying to form an army to go to Westeros, negotiates with the powerful city-states of Essos for this. Seeing the state of the slaves during these negotiations, Daenerys thinks that the slaves should be freed, as she had also experienced being bought and sold like goods, and she postpones her main goal of conquering Westeros to help them. She conquers the city-states of Slaver's Bay, Astapor, Yunkai, and Meereen, and frees the slaves present there. Daenerys talks to the slave owners at the head of the city-states that lived on slavery and tries to persuade them to abolish slavery. When the negotiations fails, she follows plans to minimize the conflict with strategic moves, avoids war and achieves success with the least conflict. In the narrative, the justification of these wars is emphasized both in terms of the show underlining she fights for an important value, freedom, and her using war as a last resort. Daenerys' taking freedom and justice to forefront in this way, is translated to the screen with epic, magnificent and glorious scenes, with wide shots and uplifting, mesmerizing musical score, as the slaves are liberated and throw their collars on the ground and walk over (Graves, 2013a). However, the sincerity of Daenerys justice, who sometimes stands closer to the latter on the fine line between justice and revenge, is also opened to question by the narrative. For example, Daenerys is criticized by her advisors because her actions such as crucifying slaveholders and leaving them to rot in the sun on the way to Meereen after the city's conquest and burning the heads of the families favoring the Sons of The Harpy, an opposing organization, with her dragons made them believe that she used disproportionate power and preauthorized revenge over justice. A good leader cannot fall into the trap of vengeance. Daenerys, on the other hand, does not accept this criticism and argues that her decisions provided nothing but justice itself. The narrative once again shows the audience that even just wars are ultimately waged by people with ambition and emphasizes that post-war injustice can cast a shadow over the justness of the struggle.

The antagonist of Daenerys's journey is Cersei Lannister who, at the beginning of the story seems like a one-dimensional evil character. As the plot of Cersei's arch thickens, the underlying reasons for her cruel decisions are associated with reasons such as her devotion to her children, her fondness for her freedom, her survival instinct, and her being pushed aside in favor of the men of the family. Thus, her terrible behavior might be understood if not legitimized by the audience. Queen Cersei acquired the throne "legitimately" by marriage following an uprising and she defends her position and her throne against those who oppose her rule. Cersei Lannister legitimizes her war before the councils of government officials by providing reasons such as the preservation of the current order and of the kingdom. Ultimately, however, his main goal is the well-being of herself and her family. Therefore, in the eyes of the audience, Cersei's war does not meet the criteria of a just war.

Cersei has a great desire to be acknowledged. Her will has never been acknowledged by either her father, who doesn't consider her an heir because she is a woman, or by her husband, whom she was forced to marry. Her children, whom she conceived with the only man she ever loved, her brother Jaime, wasn't acknowledged as they truly are by either law or religion. In this context, it is an indispensable goal for Cersei to finally be recognized as a leader and gain power. Cersei's cruel acts are always based

on her individual desire for revenge in the narrative. As compensation for her suffering since her childhood, Cersei sees her behavior as taking what she deserves. Her backstory allows the audience to gain information on Cersei's process of argumentation, and thus allows the audience to sympathize with her if not totally justifying her war. For example, when Cersei destroyed the temple in King's Landing along with dozens of people inside, the religious extremists' public shaming and sexual abuse of her paved the way for the audience to understand, if not approve, the mass murder she commits as an act of vengeance (Sapochnik, 2016a).

In the epic narrative tradition, defending one's homeland and country is presented as an explanatory repertoire that supports the just war discourse. Cersei is doing exactly that - on paper - as the queen of the land. Daenerys, on the other hand, wants to be a just queen and save Westeros from the cruel rulers, but before she can do that, she must win a war in which thousands die. Cersei's greed for power seems to come from a selfish place and Daenerys' from an altruistic one, but ultimately the two will meet in the same battle. As long as their intentions do not prevent the war and deaths it will bring, it does not matter what they are. Game of Thrones can be said to pose this question to the audience: Which one makes a *war jus ad bellum*? To wage it to defend a throne which one paid a great price for? Or to wage it to take back what one deserves?

In this context, the conflict between Daenerys and Cersei is one of justification and righteousness. The narrative shows how the two discourses collide and how slippery the ground of the just war discourse is. Righteousness, whether at the individual or national level, is perceptual. It can easily be thought that whichever character the audience identifies with the most is right. In other words, the narrative does not promote any of the two warring parties as justified, but by questioning which leader will be just at the end of the war, it emphasizes that what is crucial is ruling justly.

(To Daenerys, who questions his loyalty:) Varys: "Incompetence should not be rewarded with blind loyalty. As long as I have my eyes, I'll use them. I wasn't born into a great house. I came from nothing. I was sold as a slave, carved up as an offering. When I was a child, I lived in alleys, gutters, abandoned houses. Do you wish to know where my true loyalties lie? Not with any king or queen, but with the people. The people who suffer under despots and prosper under just rule. The people who's hearts you aim to win. If you demand blind allegiance, I respect your wishes. Grey Worm can behead me, or your dragons can devour me. But if you let me live, I will serve you well. I will dedicate myself to seeing you on the Iron Throne, because I choose you. Because I know that people have no better chance than you." (Mylod, 2017).

Of course, at the end of the narrative, the fact that Daenerys succumbed to her ambition and harmed the surrendered civilians and soldiers underlines that Daenerys' war is, actually, unfair. At the end of the series, the army led by Queen Daenerys, the Queen's Hand, Tyrion Lannister, and Jon Snow marches into Queen's Landing (the capital of the central kingdom under the leadership of Cersei Lannister). During the siege of the capital, Daenerys, despite having taken over the entire city, was

suddenly filled with vengeance and burned the whole city to the ground with her dragon. Jon Snow, who tried to talk to her about this terrible behavior, saw that Daenerys went insane like some of the rulers in her family before her and found the solution in killing her. Jon Snow's killing of Daenerys is also justified in this context.

3.1.1.2. The Necessity of War. This theme consists of narratives that signal the importance and inevitableness of war. Storyline is constructed in a way, characters opting out for war seems like the only way. For instance, a war that is inevitable is Jon's war against the Ice King. The Ice King rules the beyond the Wall and has an army of the dead. This king, who turns everything he touches into ice and recruits anyone who dies on the battlefield in his army with magic, is powerful enough to bring the world to an end. The Ice King, with his invincible army, is determined to take over first the free lands beyond the Wall that Wildlings inhabit, and then all of Westeros. Jon has organized a war effort to protect Westeros from this great danger from the North. Jon's war is described as a war that, if lost, would destroy the entirety of Westeros. His war is the most altruistic of all wars in the narrative. Because although Jon reluctantly accepts the title "King in the North" when the peoples of the North impose it on him, his main goal has never been to acquire power, but to prevent the destruction of Westeros, over which kings and queens fought to dominate. This war, along with Daenerys' wars for freedom, is one of the wars which is justified relentlessly by the narrative. Early in the narrative, both Daenerys and Jon tried to avoid war. However, it was emphasized that Jon's war was inevitable, and it was underlined further that Jon tried everything to avoid it first. As such, Game of Thrones emphasizes the relativity of just war discourses in wars unless war is necessary for survival.

3.1.1.3. War of the Righteous. One of the themes that appear and help the just war discourse in epic narrative is essentialist good/evil narratives. Justification of war is mainly due to its representation of the main war: the war of the good against the evil (Attebery, 1980). Therefore, which side of the good/evil dichotomy the characters stand on is important in terms of perceiving the war as just. The aim of the epic narrative is ultimately for the characters to become symbols (Lovatt, 2013). In order for the heroes to become symbols, what they symbolize must be understood by the audience, and the stance of these heroes must be exhibited in the narrative. Game of Thrones is no exception in this regard. In fact, it is rather successful in creating transparent and multi-dimensional characters which prevents the audience to identify them with only one of the sides on the good/evil dichotomy. The "good" and "evil", which are the basis of the epic narrative, are too embedded in the characters for them to represent as only one side. However, especially in the context of protagonists, the grayness of good and evil has decreased, and the characters' personalities have become closer to the symbolic expression targeted in the traditional epic narrative. In this context, although our understanding of traditional representations of the good and the evil characters are subverted by the middle of the narrative, by the end of the series, the main characters reproduce an essentialist narrative of goodness as they complete their development. The characters are shaped according to the "goodness" in them. Tyrion Lannister started the story on the side of what could traditionally be painted as the "evil" family and finished on the side of the good. While Tyrion Lannister was a character who was pushed to the side of evil due to his environment and life events, he was

able to choose the side of the good after meeting the oppressed people and witnessing their stories. Because from the very beginning, he carried a goodness in his essence.

With a similar plot twist, Daenerys Targaryen is painted as an innocent and righteous character at the beginning of the story, but at the end of the story her inner evil takes over her. It should not be overlooked that this seizure of evil happened very suddenly, and that Daenerys could not escape from the insanity inherited from her ancestors, paints insanity and evil as something inherent within a person, with an essentialist perspective.

On the other hand, Jon Snow is presented as a representation of human goodness, who never loses the goodness inside him even if he makes human mistakes, even having to sacrifice his love to achieve good ends. Jon Snow, who waives his claim to the throne at the end of the story, has been constructed as a “wholly good” character. Jon Snow’s representation of pure goodness is evident in his fictionalization in the persona of Jesus. There are several examples in the series that will strengthen this persona. For example, just like Jesus, he was killed by his own people and came back to life three days later. Another confirmation of this persona is in the threatening letter of the cruel Ramsay Snow to Jon Snow. In his letter, Ramsey dared Jon Snow four times to, “Come and see!” just as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse called out to Jesus. Moreover, being the only character who was punished at the end of the narrative with exile, became the character who paid the price for other people’s sins, just like Jesus. So, in that sense, even though Jon Snow’s war is portrayed as “righteous” he was the only living character that was punished for their actions in the war.

3.1.2. The Ugliness of War

Game of Thrones emphasized the ugly face of war many times. This theme consists of narratives that remind audience how terrifying, horrible and brutal war is regardless of whose war it is or how justified it is. So much so that the fact that Jon’s war is presented as necessary, and therefore justified, does not make his war any less ugly than the others. In fact, while both the victories and defeats of Daenerys and Cersei are conveyed to the audience in epic and magnificent scenes, Jon’s most famous battle, The Battle of the Bastards, which will not be forgotten for many years to come in television history, is transferred to the screen with a terrifying and claustrophobic visual narrative that creates a suffocating effect on the audience. It presents the ugly and harsh face of war to the viewer so brutally that the audience can easily view war as an abominable phenomenon even if it is justified. The director of the episode, Miguel Sapochnik, stated that this scene was shot to “make the audience feel what it is to be in a battle” (GameofThrones, 2016) and as a result of this aim, the episode is horrific, breath taking and hard to watch. Contrary to the epic narrative tradition, Game of Thrones does not convey the war as a grandiose act - for the most part. On the contrary, it highlights that war is full of violence, blood, pain and fear with scenes such as the corpses forming human-sized heaps, the soldiers escaping in fear crushing each other, Jon being caught in the stampede and unable to breathe. Jon emerged victorious from this war, but he does not seem satisfied with his victory as the mud of the war and the weakness

created by anger are all over him (Sapochnik, 2016b). Similar patterns repeat frequently throughout the series. The commanders who emerged victorious from the war are brought to the screen exhausted, dirty and unhappy.

3.1.3. War Ethics and Honor

War ethics and honor is one of the themes that supports the discourses of war. However, in terms of the reproduction of repertoires such as honor, valor and bravery, discourses in Game of Thrones get rather tricky. Honor is one of the most important values for the people of Westeros, and war won with honor by honorable warriors carries weight for them. In this context, not the narrative but people of Westeros reproduce the discourse of honor. This allows for a construction of an illusion regarding the concept of honor in real life within the narrative. However, the narrative itself emphasizes that the concept of honor is just a fairy tale, emphasizing the fact that even knights who are supposed to be honorable actually lack honor or that some people who are seen as dishonorable actually uphold high values in their own right. For example, knights and soldiers, who are symbols of honor in the traditional epic narrative, try to plunder and rape, take bribes, etc. in different scenes. It is emphasized that the acts of so-called honorable people such as kings, knights and heroes are simply not so honorable.

Sandor Clegane (to Sansa Stark): "Look at me! Stannis is a killer. The Lannisters are killers. Your father was a killer. Your brother is a killer. Your sons will be killers someday. The world is built by killers... so you better get used to looking at them" (Marshall, 2012).

Meanwhile, emphasis is made on honor being just a fiction in the game of war and honor has no impact on who is successful in war. In fact, the honorable ones are often defeated and/or failed in their endeavors. For example, Ned Stark of House Stark lost his head precisely because he acted honorably (Minahan, 2011a) and Rob Stark's inability to expect another to act dishonorable caused him to make mistakes that would cost him his own, his wife's, his unborn child's, and his mother's life (Nutter, 2013). In the Battle of the Bastards, his honor made Jon Snow fall into the trap of his adversary Ramsay Snow, and almost caused him to lose the battle. In another episode, Bronn wins a duel he entered as the champion of Tyrion. When the challenging party Lysa Arryn accused him of fighting dishonorably, Sir Bronn points to his dead opponent and remarked: "Yeah. He fought with honor." (Minahan, 2011b) and attributes his success to the very fact that he was dishonorable.

Jamie Lannister, who has earned himself the nickname "Kingslayer" with his infamous act of killing the king he swore to protect with a backstab, is viewed by the characters as the ultimate example of dishonor. However, from his perspective, he acted honorably because he ended the cruelty of a tyrant and saved thousands of people from suffering (Graves, 2013b). The characters in the show doesn't find this argumentation convincing, because as stated above, honor is still a worthy value for the people of Westeros. However, in the last episode of the show, we see Jon Snow, who is the symbol of honor and goodness mirror the Kingslayer's actions by killing Daenerys and becoming

the “Queenslayer”. This dishonorable act by the most honorable character on the show that brought Westeros peace, should not be taken as simply irony. This also shows that the narrative emphasizes the idea that the concept of honor is a fictionalized tale to support the just war discourse as an explanatory repertoire.

3.2. Peace Themes

On the contrary to the tradition of epic narrative, Game of Thrones doesn’t reproduce strictly negative peace discourses. In fact, one may even claim that it stands closer to Galtung’s positive peace conceptualization. When we define peace within the boundaries of negative peace, it would have been achieved with the end of the war (Galtung, 1969), but it is possible to encounter signs of positive peace in Game of Thrones as well as negative peace.

3.2.1. Negative Peace

This theme consists of narratives, storylines and set pieces that explain how negative peace is achieved or how negative peace feels like “peace”. Instances that show an end of or absence of fight or battle are good examples of negative peace. The people of Westeros usually view peace as the absence of conflict and often treat it as a political strategy, as a ceasefire or agreement by groups acting for common goals. As Petyr Baelish, one of the important characters in the show illustrates by saying: “We only make peace with our enemies, my lord. That is why it’s called ‘making peace’” (Minahan, 2011a), peace is viewed as ceasefire. The belief that peace can only come from the absence of war and competition is common in Westeros.

In another example, in an effort to persuade the Wildlings to fight against the Ice King, Jon Snow tries to establish peace between the Savages and the Northerners (Sapochnik, 2011). Of course, what Jon Snow means as peace here is when enemies temporarily stop fighting each other in order to unite against a greater danger. However, according to Galtung’s conceptualization, peace is more than that, and the narrative highlights this from time to time.

3.2.2. Positive Peace

Positive peace also requires the absence of conflict but that alone is not enough to establish peace (Galtung, 1969). Therefore, this theme includes instances where the show clearly exemplifies that a more structural change is needed for positive peace to achieve peace and the difference between absence of war and positive peace. For instance, when the mother of the Stark family, Cat, stares at the empty plain in front of the window of the castle where she grew up, her uncle Brynden Tully comes up to her and she tells her uncle about her childhood days, waiting for her father to return from the war. This is what Brynden replies Cat with: “It often comforts me to think that even in war’s darkest days, in most places in the world absolutely nothing is happening” (Benioff, 2013). This scene supports the positive discourse

of peace in that it emphasizes that non-conflict can create an illusion of peace, and that the absence of conflict in a region does not directly indicate peace, by giving the example of a lady who experienced the absence of conflict when her own father was at war.

On the other hand, the establishment of equality and justice is necessary for positive peace. For example, after the slaveholders' revolt in Mereen, Tryion offered to give them a 7-year habituation period to abolish slavery while negotiating with them, upon which the advisers of Daenerys who were formerly slaves, Grey worm and Missandei, strongly opposed him, pointing out that there can be no peace in a place where slavery exists (Sackheim, 2016). Thus, the narrative emphasizes that if equality and justice are not provided for the peoples, peace will not be achieved.

In the last episode, we see that not everything magically falls into place after Daenerys' death. In order to establish positive peace, justice must be served. Those who caused Daenerys' death stand trial. Tyrion is appointed as the hand of the king despite his wishes, and Jon Snow pays for Daenerys' murder by spending the rest of his life on exile beyond the Wall. The condemnation of a character like Jon Snow, who in a traditional epic narrative would be glorified because of his heroic acts, however violent they may be, to a sad and lonely life is perhaps a sign of positive peace. In a traditional epic narrative, violence is justified through the protagonist being rewarded at the end, even if they had to commit murder to achieve peace. Punishment of Jon Snow at the end of Game of Thrones, on the other hand, can be seen as an emphasis on the necessity of justice to build positive peace.

Moreover, the last episode also discusses how new leadership could be established and preserved. Those who survived the battles form a council and discuss who would be the best appropriate leader. In fact, even though it is found hilarious by the leaders, even the possibility of democracy is discussed. A ruling style that is not based on blood ties is determined in order to establish a more just order from then on. Through the emphasis on equality, another requirement for positive peace is established. Talking about the damaged buildings, the people with clean water problems and the danger of famine at the meeting of the new cabinet also supports the positive peace discourse by emphasizing that non-conflict is not enough for the establishment of peace and that efforts should be made for the people to live in prosperity.

4. Discussion

When it comes to idealization of war, we can talk about a long history. For example, Plato mentioned the criteria of just war in Republic (Syse, 2010). The texts of St. Augustine, one of the first to use the concept of just war in Western culture, date back to the first century (Mattox, 2006). Concepts such as just war (*Jus ad Bellum*) and war ethics (*Jus in Bello*), which nurture the war culture and ensure the legitimation of war in various ways, have found a place in our cultural life for centuries (Özerdem, 2013). In many cultures, war is constructed through various discourses as something that is sometimes inevitable and sometimes encouraged (Atalay, 2015; Baştırzi, 2015; Özerdem, 2013). In many religions, murder

is denounced and even prohibited in the scriptures, while war that will kill thousands of people is considered holy if it is done in the name of God. Moreover, the view that war, war discipline and military morality instill values that uplift people is also culturally widespread (James, 1995).

Establishing certain rules and principles about the conditions under which war can be justified is an important task for the political world, as war is an expensive business, and it is difficult for even the strictest governments to wage war without popular support (Özerdem, 2013). Thus, discourses about war and peace are important in terms of forming the reality of society. When it comes to a legitimate war, the people will do their best to protect their freedom or defend their homeland. In other words, the more justified the war, the more supporters it will have. Of course, this justification may vary according to the *zeitgeist*; it can be manipulated from time to time or lose its credibility through time because of variables such as how strongly the perception of righteousness is felt and whether or not the gains are superior to the losses. For example, the United States' war on Iraq after the attack on the Twin Towers was highly supported by the American people at first, but in the following years of the war, especially after the increased casualties, this rate dropped drastically. While the American people initially saw the war as legitimate, as time passed, they began to think that there was not enough reason to go to war (Coe, 2012). In other words, the discourse of righteousness in war can sanctify or legitimize war; discourses of purpose such as homeland defense and freedom can make war desirable, or discourses about the horrors of war can make war an avoidable phenomenon.

In traditional epic narratives, war discourse is built on just war repertoire and the audience support the hero or heroes of the story because their war is just, and their reasons are righteous. The justification of war actually emerges from the idea of the fundamental opposition between Good and Evil (Attebery, 1980). For example, the Lord of the Rings, which is one of the most important examples of epic narrative and which paved the way for the fantastic epic narrative in contemporary TV and cinema, tells the story of the conflict between good and evil in both the book and movie trilogy: the audience never questions the righteousness of war the fellowship of the ring, which represents the light, wages against darkness, and said war is translated to the big screen in the most glorious way possible (Tolkien, 1968/2001; Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003). Almost every one of epic narratives that came after the Lord of the Rings followed this formula on screen (Bells, 1984).

Another repertoire that is used in epic narratives to support war discourse is war ethics which is a consensus about actions that can be considered fair in principle (Özerdem, 2013). Today, war ethics is determined by international war law. In epic narrative, war ethics (for example rules like proportionality, not torturing prisoners of war, not killing civilians, not backstabbing, etc.) determine a warrior's honor. Even though they are doubtful the opposition will follow the same rules, the honorable party risks defeat over dishonor. In the epic narrative, war is a glorious and lofty business as long as it is waged with dignity, the ethics of war is not strayed from, and it is carried out for a valuable virtue. The act of war itself is also conveyed in glorious forms. Heroes who are successful in the art of war are glorified, and features such as agility, alertness and strength in one-on-one combat are praised.

Moreover, the epic narrative presents war as a test one needs to pass in order to gain peace. The famous Latin saying *si vis pacem para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for war) is a clear example of this approach. Thus, epic narrative justifies war through painting it as a tool to reach peace, which is a worthy value like honor and freedom.

The handling of war in this way, the judgement of whether or not it is waged for just reasons and within the framework of certain rules, systematic discourses about categorizing wars, determining and limiting war acts, has transformed war into a concept with limits, and has made it a *game* in which the powers are tested fairly.

However, in *Game of Thrones*, which is considered as an epic narrative in mass media, “just war” themes can be found from time to time, it also emphasizes that war is not a glorious act by utilizing “ugliness of war” themes. Compared to traditional epic narratives that praise ethics of war and honorable war, *Game of Thrones* presents a narrative that reveals ugly side of war. Moreover “war ethics and honor” and “war of righteous” subthemes shows that the moment we get involved in war, honor is no longer important; eventually, frustration, chaos, and unhappiness would be upon us.

Although peace is a very important value for humanity, it is handled differently in different cultures and its definitions are not universal (Galtung, 1981). Some cultures consider peace at the societal level, while others seek peace at the individual level (Galtung, 1981); while some disciplines examine peace in the context of international relations, some disciplines think that peace can be found in interpersonal relations (Barash & Webel, 2018); and while some religions believe that peace can be achieved by fighting for its sake, some religions believe that it can be achieved through inaction and calmness (Özerdem, 2013). The tradition of defining peace in terms of the absence of war (*absentia belli*) is deep-rooted in Western culture (Özerdem, 2013), and many studies have shown that people most commonly define peace as the absence of war (Gibson, 2012; Özerdem, 2013; Van der Linden and Licata, 2011; Van der Linden, Bizumic, Stubager, and Mellon, 2011). However, this approach can only illuminate one side of the coin in the definition of peace constructed by Galtung’s conceptualization. Galtung illuminates the two different understandings of peace through his categorization of peace: negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to a social situation in which direct violence is not observed, while positive peace is a situation in which no type of violence (including cultural and structural violence) is observed and at the same time social justice and equality become the norm (Galtung, 1969). A similar diversity to the discourses of war also applies to discourses of peace. Peace can be desirable, a sign of weakness, or the ultimate goal. On the other hand, discourses about war and peace are not located at opposite ends on a straight line; positive (or negative) discourses about both peace and war can dominate at the same time (Van der Linden et al., 2011). In other words, while peace is a desirable goal, war can still be seen as inevitable. Such dilemmas can strengthen the discourse of achieving peace through war (*si vis pacem para bellum*).

As such, in many epic narratives, the discourse of peace is constructed through *absentia belli*, with Galtung’s conceptualization, negative peace. The end of the conflict between the parties is presented as

peace; it seems achieving negative peace is enough for katharsis. The happy endings in epic narratives are examples of this approach. In *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1968/2001; Jackson, 2003), the narrative ends when Sauron dies, and Aragorn becomes King and the Fellowship of the Ring disbands after the ring is destroyed. Yes, peace has come to Middle Earth, but how the conflict and rivalry between the peoples is resolved is not explained, and no clue is given on how to establish post-war social justice. In this respect, peace appears to be a process established as the end of war. In another epic narrative, *The Matrix*, when the war between robots and humans ends, there is a conversation about peace between the Oracle and the Architect, who discuss how long the peace will last (Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999). Here, too, peace is defined in terms of the absence of war. This reproduces the negative discourse of peace that defines peace as the absence of war. When we look at the discourses on war and peace in epic narratives from a broad perspective, we can see that epic narratives reproduce discourses on war and peace with various explanatory repertoires. When it comes to *Game of Thrones* as a modern example of epic narrative, this study will explain where the discourses on war and peace differs from and where they meet the traditional epic narrative by exemplifying explanatory repertoire used to construct the discourses on war and peace.

Epic narratives in both the written and visual arts have been producing tales of justified war. At the end of these wars, the good prevailed, and the bad got punished. Many people lost their lives, but this fact was seen as an insignificant detail, the natural result of the war game: After all, the final victory belonged to the good ones. Since the good ones are always the ones that finally achieve peace and victory, the epic narrative in a sense feeds the theories of just war and reproduces the discourses about just war, because discourse, in a sense, allows us to re-establish the relations we have established with the world live in again and again.

Game of Thrones as an epic narrative slightly differs from traditional epic narratives in terms of peace. In *Game of Thrones*, peace is not only built on the absence of war; it is also emphasized that non-conflict is not sufficient for peace, but a just administration is necessary for peace. Both “Positive Peace” and “Negative Peace” discourses can be found in the narrative which is a nice diversion from traditional epic narratives.

5. Conclusion

In summary, *Game of Thrones* has made serious contributions to the context of popular culture in terms of war and peace and has taken a step that will transform the perspective of war and peace in the epic narrative. Although at some points the show tried to revive traditional epic narrative and did not hesitate to reproduce dominant discourses on war and peace, the narrative contains many explanatory repertoires that will oppose especially just war and negative peace discourses.

After the death of Daenerys, the leaders of the houses that were left without leadership gathered and chose a new leader among them. This chosen leader is Bran Stark, who acquired miraculous powers throughout the story and can see everything that happens at any moment, the past and the future. When characters are discussing who should be the new King in the last episode, Tyrion Lannister proposes Bran Stark and addresses the leaders:

What unites people. Armies? Gold? Flags? No. It's stories... There's nothing in the world more powerful than a good story. Nothing can stop it. No enemy can defeat it. And who has a better story than Bran the Broken? The boy who fell from a high tower and lived... He's our memory. The keeper of all our stories. The wars, weddings, births, massacres, famines, our triumphs, our defeats, our past. Who better to lead us into the future? (Benioff & Weiss, 2019).

There truly is nothing in the world more powerful than stories and as discourses on war and peace in our stories stays the same, so will our understanding of war and peace. Game of Thrones entered the field of popular culture as a narrative with the potential to bring a new perspective on discourses of war and peace, and while it may not have subverted epic narrative entirely, it, at least, paved the way for questioning some of the discourses on war and peace.

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The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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