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**“ALL DORNISHMEN ARE SNAKES”: ETHNIC AND CULTURAL
REPRESENTATION IN GEORGE R. R. MARTIN’S “A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE”**

Florianópolis

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Dissertação submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras – Inglês e Literatura Correspondente da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para a obtenção do Grau de Mestre em Letras.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Maria Rita Drumond Viana

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Marcelo Vinicius de Souza Trouillet

“All Dornishmen are Snakes”: Ethnic and Cultural Representation in George R. R. Martin’s “A Song of Ice and Fire”

O presente trabalho em nível de mestrado foi avaliado e aprovado por banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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Orientadora

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To my mother, Rita, for always being my “Wall of the North”
To my advisor, Maria Rita, for her understanding and for trusting me when even I didn’t think
I deserved it
To my friends, for standing by me through this Long Night

*“Fantasy isn’t wishful thinking,
but a way of reflecting,
and reflecting on reality.”*

Ursula K. Le Guin, 2012

RESUMO

O trabalho a seguir analisa questões de representação étnica e cultural na série “A Song of Ice and Fire,” de George R. R. Martin. O gênero fantasia no ocidente (aqui entendido como Europa e América Anglo-Saxônica) se desenvolveu de forma contemporânea ao fortalecimento de ideologias eurocêntricas e colonialistas. Essas ideologias afetam a construção de mundos fantásticos, especialmente povos e culturais ficcionais identificados como não sendo étnica ou culturalmente ocidentais. Assim, selecionou-se capítulos onde nações e personagens identificados como não-ocidentais ou pessoas de cor aparecem de forma prominente, e analisou-se como os mesmos são representados. Essa análise foi feita tendo em vista estereótipos atribuídos de forma recorrente a pessoas de cor e suas respectivas culturas na literatura ocidental. Ao final, foi possível constatar que, embora algumas dessas nações e personagens pareçam isentas de estereótipos, outras aparentam ter sido influenciadas de forma negativa por percepções eurocêntricas.

Palavras-chave: Representação étnica e cultural, eurocentrismo, A Song of Ice and Fire, fantasia, estereótipos.

ABSTRACT

The following work analyses issues of ethnic and cultural representation in the “A Song of Ice and Fire” series by George R. R. Martin. The genre fantasy in the west (here understood as Europe and Anglo-Saxon America) developed along with the strengthening of Eurocentric and colonial ideologies. These ideologies affect the ways fantastic worlds are built, particularly those fictional people and cultures identifiable as not ethnically or culturally Western. Thus, the chapters prominently featuring nations and characters identified as non-Western or people of colour were selected for analysis on how those are depicted. This analysis was done taking into account recurring stereotypes attributed to people of colour and their respective cultures in Western literature. In the end, it was possible to note that, although some of those nations and characters appear exempt of stereotypes, others seem to have been negatively influenced by Eurocentric views.

Keywords: Ethnic and cultural representation, Eurocentrism, A Song of Ice and Fire, fantasy, stereotypes.

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ASOIAF – A Song of Ice and Fire

GOT – Game of Thrones

LOTR – Lord of the Rings

POV – Point of View

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the earliest stories told by humankind, from the Sumerian “Epic of Gilgamesh,” and the Norse sagas compiled by Snorri Sturluson to the more modern fairy tales gathered by the Brothers Grimm, one thing that has been a constant is the narrative’s need to go beyond the limitations of the mundane. After all, even a Sumerian who genuinely believed in his gods and goddesses would hardly ever have met someone with the strength of an Enkidu; the same can be said of the old Norse and the elves or the dvergjar of their legends. The Age of Enlightenment may have pushed much of what was once held real into the realm of myth and superstition, but even that has not reduced the appeal of tales that have broken the chains of the worldly and the mundane.

Indeed, such is this appeal that aspects of fantasy might appear even in works of fiction that would not be considered strictly fantastical (BURCHER et al, 2009), such as Shakespeare’s “Macbeth,” whose eponymous character acts on a prophecy he hears from three witches. Still, the notion of fantasy as a genre in its own right would only begin to form in the Western World (here understood to broadly encompass Europe and Anglo-Saxon America) around the seventeenth century (MENDLESOHN; JAMES, 2012). While one might say that for a time fantasy had a reputation for being “children’s stories,” throughout the twentieth century the genre grew in scope and audience. This was, in great part, a legacy of critically – and commercially – successful fantasy works released earlier in the century, such as J. R. R. Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings,” (henceforth referred to as LOTR), Lewis Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland,” C. S. Lewis’ “The Chronicles of Narnia,” and Terry Brooks’ “Shannara” series (JAMES, 2012). Of these three, “LOTR” easily stands out not only for its success, but for its influence on fantasy as a whole. As James himself (2012, p. 8) goes on to argue:

LOTR establishes many of the characteristics of genre fantasy [...] Middle-Earth is subject to THINNING, a decline from its former state, partially due to the actions of Sauron, the *Dark Lord*. The sense of WRONGNESS in the world demands *Healing*, and that is the purpose of the Quest on which our heroes embark. [...] In the course of this quest, the characters reach RECOGNITION, and awareness of their own role in the story of the world, and finally achieve EUCATASTROPHE, a term which Tolkien himself invented to describe the uplifting characteristics of the fairy tale. [emphasis in the original]

The legacy of “LOTR” also includes other fantasy staples, such as the “companions”

that follow the heroes in their journey, as well as the slow travel across the “fantasy-land” (JAMES, 2012; p. 65). The notion of the “secondary world,” a fictional setting where the action takes place and is not necessarily related to the real one, had already been developed by other authors, such as William Morris (WOLFE, 2012); yet Tolkien’s work was arguably instrumental in popularising this trope (JAMES, 2012). Another legacy, less technical perhaps but no less important, is the choice of Medieval European culture and society – as well as other European cultures not related to the historic Middle Ages, such as the ancient Celts – as inspiration for world-building. This inspiration can easily be seen on settings (such as castles and inns), technology (swords and steel armour instead of more modern weapons), character types (knights, kings and bards, for instance), even social classes (as evident by the usually stark differentiation between the nobility and the commoners).

It must be said that Tolkien’s influence is not limited to literary works only, but it encompasses stories told in other media as well; fantasy-themed board and video-games seem particularly prone to emulating his world, and it is not to be ignored that one of the most awarded and profitable film series of all time is precisely “The Lord of the Rings,” released between 2001 and 2003.

With the far reach of “LOTR’s” legacy, it comes as no shock that one of the early 21st century’s most popular Western fantasy works – and the chosen object of this study – is, in its author’s own voice, a direct descendant of Tolkien’s works. First published in 1996, the “A Song of Ice and Fire” series (henceforth abbreviated as “ASOIAF”) by George R. R. Martin has won awards and reached many a best-selling book list. Although its TV adaptation, “Game of Thrones” (or “GOT,” for short), which ran from 2011 to 2019 on HBO worldwide, has certainly helped boost the series’ popularity, to judge from Martin’s own dedication in “A Dance with Dragons” (also released in 2011), his books already had loyal readers beyond his native United States. After all, the fifth book of “ASOIAF” was dedicated, among others, to his fans in Finland, Germany, Spain, Portugal, even in Brazil – the only country outside Europe mentioned in that dedication, in fact.

One of “ASOIAF’s” trademark features is the vastness of its narrative, which features dozens upon dozens of complex characters set on nations and cultures just as detailed. It is precisely the vastness and diversity of its world-building that makes this series such a fitting object of analysis of what seems to be another, less fortunate staple of the genre fantasy: the negative representation of groups that, in a European or Euro-American context,

would arguably be deemed non-normative, specifically those identifiable as not being of European descent or cultural background.

1.1 A WORLD OF ICE AND FIRE

Figure 1: Map of the World



Retrieved from www.aoiaf.westeros.org

"ASOIAF" consists of five books, with two more yet to be published. They are "A Game of Thrones," "A Clash of Kings," "A Storm of Swords," "A Feast for Crows," and "A Dance with Dragons." For practical reasons, in this study they will be abbreviated as "Game," "Clash," "Storm" and "Feast." Furthermore, because the edition of "A Dance with Dragons" used in this study is split into two books ("Dreams and Dust" and "After the Feast"), it will be referred to as "Dance I" and "Dance II."

Like many fantasy heirs of Tolkien's tradition, "ASOIAF" is set in a fictional world that exists separately from our own. This world – which is as of yet unnamed within the story itself –, from its geography to its dwellers and their respective cultures, is shown in detail

throughout the series, always through the points of view of its characters. Much of it remains unexplored, but two continents easily stand out as the settings where the plots take place: Westeros and Essos.

Westeros, a vast landmass lying to the west of the known world, is the stage for most of the series' action. Its earliest inhabitants were non-human, magical races such as giants and the "children of the forest", all of whom were either wiped out or pushed into the far north by invading human tribes from the eastern continent of Essos. It was in the reign of those First Men that the Wall was built, splitting Westeros' far north (thenceforth known as the lands "beyond the wall") and the kingdom of the Stark dynasty (which became known as the "North"). For millennia the First Men ruled the continent, until they too were invaded and conquered by another human nation from Essos: the Andals. While the North, ruled by House Stark, preserved much of the First Men's heritage (as did the Iron Islands, inhabited by the sea-faring Ironborn people), Andal customs and blood prevailed all over the southern half of Westeros.

The cultural differences between Northerners and Andals are not sharp, but they are highlighted throughout the narrative. While the Northerners still largely worship the old gods of their First Men ancestors, the Andals worship the Faith of the Seven, which recognises seven different aspects of a single god; although both can be considered warrior cultures, it was the Andals who brought knightly traditions and the chivalric code (both reminiscent of Medieval European traditions) into Westeros. Physically, there are few differences between Northerners and Andals, as both are light-skinned, sometimes light-eyed; perhaps the one notable difference is that while the former are usually dark-haired, the latter often present blonde, auburn or ginger hair.

Westeros received a third migration wave in the form of the Rhoynar, another people from Essos. Dark-skinned, favouring light armour and spears (in opposition to the heavy armour and swords favoured by Andals and Northerners), with a culture that allowed women far more freedom than the more patriarchal Andal and Northerner traditions, the Rhoynar sharply distinguish themselves from the other people already living in Westeros. While they do adopt Andal customs and mingle with people of Andal heritage, Rhoynish influence remains strong enough to make the kingdom of Dorne in Westeros' far south unique next to its Andal and Northerner neighbours.

Indeed, Dorne is arguably the only Westerosi region to show ethnic and cultural

diversity within its borders. The so-called Salty Dornish, who live mostly on coastal regions, are dark-skinned like their Rhoynish ancestors; the Stony Dornish, by their turn, live further inland and are mostly light-skinned, as they descend directly from the original Andal inhabitants of Dorne; and then there are the Sandy Dornish, who live in Dorne's blazing deserts and whose skin is darker than their Salty cousins'. A fourth group is that of the "orphans of the Greenblood", who preserve the Rhoynish heritage even more strongly than the Salty Dornish.

While Westeros' seven kingdoms existed as separate entities for millennia, they were all united under a single ruler by Aegon Targaryen and his sisters, Visenya and Rhaenys, all of whom were the sole surviving noble house of the Valyrian Empire. Although most Valyrians died in the catastrophic fall of their empire, their blood survived among certain dynasties; in Westeros, it survived through the Targaryens as well as the minor Houses of Celtigar and Velaryon, in whom the "blood of old Valyria" is made evident by their pale skin, silver hair and purple or violet eyes.

Westeros' diversity is shown in quite a wealth of detail thanks to the narrative being told through the points of view of its inhabitants – characters who, as mentioned earlier, are mostly set on that continent. Indeed, for much of the series the reader's only chance at exploring the continent of Essos is through the eyes of Daenerys Targaryen, exiled heiress of the deposed Targaryen dynasty; it is only from the fourth book – "A Feast For Crows" – onwards that we see other Westerosi characters travelling to Essos.

It is never stated on clear terms whether Essos is a larger or smaller continent than Westeros, but its mosaic of people and cultures is arguably much vaster. In the west thrive the Free Cities, heirs of the old Valyrian Empire; in the steppes of the Great Grass Sea, which spans the central plains of Essos, the nomadic Dothraki rule unchallenged; on the shores of Slaver's Bay to the south we find the three cities-state that feed the continent's entire slave trade: Astapor, Meereen and Yunkai. Further to the east, we find the city-state of Qarth, a bustling trading centre and seat of an order of warlocks. Each of these nations has its own cultural and ethnic makeup, as will be discussed on the fourth chapter.

The Summer Isles and the continent of Sothoros (or Sothoryos) are two regions yet to be visited, but whose inhabitants have already featured, even if in minor roles, throughout the series. The Summer Islanders are easily the more prominent of the two, described as tall and black; the natives of Sothoros, however, are simply described as "brindled men", and it is

not quite clear whether they are humanoid or actually human.

1.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF EUROPEAN FANTASY

The history of how fantasy was formed as a genre may help shed some light on how ethnic and cultural representation came to be such an issue within the genre. The earliest notions of fantasy as a separate genre has its roots in the seventeenth century; however, it was not until the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries that fantasy started taking shape as such, owing greatly to literary debates on the distinction between “fancy” and “imagination” (WOLFE, 2012). The Romantic movement may be considered another founding stone of the genre fantasy, especially for its opposition to what it regarded as the austere rationalism of the Enlightenment, as well as its renewed interest in the medieval (SELLING, 2005). While fairy tales had been popular in European literature since the seventeenth century – as symbolised by works such as Charles Perrault’s –, it was in the years of Romanticism that they were studied and read more critically and with more depth, particularly through the lenses of fancy and imagination (WOLFE, 2012). The German literary school was particularly influential, in no small part due to the success of German writers such as the Brothers Grimm and E. T. A. Hoffman.

Not only from Germany came the 18th and 19th century’s most famous fantasy authors, of course; one name that may easily surface to mind is that of Hans Christian Andersen, a native of Denmark. Still, it was German fantasy that, as Wolfe (2012) argues, left the strongest mark on that age’s fantasy literature, to such extent that even British fantasy tales often featured German landscapes, characters and legends. Theatre was another fertile ground for fantasy, whose consolidation as a respected genre was further solidified by the acclaim (and, thus, influence) of works such as Richard Wagner’s opera “Der Ring des Nibelungen” (1848-1874) and Henrik Ibsen’s play “Peer Gynt” (1867).

Here, two points are worth stressing out. Firstly, and perhaps the most obvious, is the predominance of northern European fantasy, which by its turn was heavily inspired by the legends and mythologies of the peoples of those same regions. “Der Ring des Nibelungen,” for example, draws heavily from ancient Germanic paganism as well as Old Norse sagas. It is interesting to point out that even “Beowulf”, perhaps the most important Anglo-Saxon epic, is

actually the tale of a Norse hero – hardly a surprise, given the cultural and linguistic influence the Danes left throughout the British Isles during the Viking Age.

Secondly, if European fantasy was always heavily inspired on European legends, Romanticism further cemented it with its own interest in exploring an idealised European past, which led to the popularisation of medievalist aesthetics (SELLING, 2005). It does not seem far-fetched, then, to assume that it was through Romantic influence that values cherished in medieval literature reinforced, and perhaps even helped shape, many of the character types and settings that would become staples of fantasy, such as the brave warrior hero who fought for his land, people and honour. These tropes can be seen in various literary traditions, naturally, including non-European ones; notwithstanding, Romanticism arguably added a strongly nationalistic facet to European fantasy that would shape it for decades to come.

Looking at the development of European fantasy, it should come as little surprise that writers such as Tolkien, Lewis and their inheritors have built worlds and tales so reliant on Ancient and Medieval European myths, Norse and German in particular (albeit not exclusively). Naturally, it is only understandable that any author would base their stories on the traditions of their own cultures. Nevertheless, the strong ethnocentrism of nineteenth – and twentieth – century European fantasy arguably led to the aforementioned issue of the use of people of colour, as well as their cultures, as templates for antagonistic characters and groups.

1.3 FANTASY AND REPRESENTATION

As it often happens with tropes, the perpetuation or the repetition of this phenomenon may lead, as Hansen (2006) comments, to an effect of verisimilitude, or the relationship between what the narrative tells (in terms of plot, character motivations, etc.) and how believable it will seem to the audience based on said audience’s own “truth.” However, understanding how this effect is created, and the conditions that enable stereotypes to take root, is more complex than simply pointing out individual cases of negative representation. After all, a narrative’s genre may have a particular style that enables or facilitates that – as it seems to be the case with Western fantasy. Additionally, an audience’s perception may be influenced by the social, cultural and historical context in which it finds itself.

Thus we return to Martin’s “ASOIAF,” for much has already been said on the extents

to which the series has inherited Western fantasy's tropes – and how it has subverted them. A research was conducted on articles and theses written on either books or TV show; many are easily available on the internet and can be freely accessed through search engines such as Google Scholar, as well as academic websites such as ResearchGate. Through this research, it could be attested that a high number of works on either “ASOIAF” or “GOT” analyse them through the lenses of gender and feminist studies, focusing specifically on the representation of female characters and gender roles. Additionally, a notable number of articles and theses addressing the depiction of disability can be found. When it comes to ethnic and cultural representation, however, the corpus seems thinner, and even when such articles and theses do appear, they seldom delve too deep into the ways a group or individual of colour is depicted in the story.

In an article published in the Polish anthropological and socio-cultural magazine “Maska,” Marynowska (2014), analyses how the settings – more specifically the cities – in “ASOIAF” are used to embody, either in accordance with or in opposition to, a character's beliefs and morals, as well as to generate a feeling of alienness. From the character Arys Oakheart's point of view, the Dornish city of Sunspear becomes a prison as he is forced to hide his identity as a non-Dornishman (p. 36), while to the Westerosi Samwell Tarly, the Essosi city of Braavos is an exotic place that plays an active role in his own character development (p. 34). Nevertheless, other than these two characters' points of view, Marynowska's analysis focuses on the relationships between Westerosi characters in cities that are not their home, but who are still Westerosi. No mention is made of the numerous impressions Westerosi characters have when visiting the cities of central and eastern Essos – let alone on the implications of a Caucasian, Western-like Westerosi interacting with markedly non-Western settings.

Reiner Emig (2014) does address the role of ethnicity in “ASOIAF's” world-building, acknowledging the predominance of Caucasian characters – particularly those whose point of view is employed to narrate the plot. Still, his analysis is rather superficial in its treatment of race, as it encompasses “ASOIAF's” politics in a broader sense, with ethnicity being but one item among others such as gender and lineage. Hardy (2015), by his turn, makes a deeper (if also scathing) analysis on the ethnic and cultural tropes, specifically orientalism as defined by Edward Said (p. 409), that appear in both “ASOIAF” and “GOT.” He identifies in the way the cultures of Essos – except for the Free Cities, which he identifies

as resembling South-European cities-state (p. 414) – are both described (in the books) and shown (on TV) a number of stereotypes of Asian cultures that are recurrent in Western literary tradition. A few such examples are the ubiquity of slavery, the sheer brutality of the high-born against their slaves, and the culture of deceit and treachery that seems to permeate the Essosi societies. Nonetheless, Hardy's focus seems mostly on cultural stereotypes rather than on stereotypes specifically tied to non-Caucasian phenotypes – although he does acknowledge the relevance of physical appearance in the building of this fictional Eastern "other," especially in GOT (p. 414).

When it comes to discussions on either "ASOIAF" or "GOT" through the lenses of postcolonialism and race, a popular point of debate is the character Daenerys Targaryen's role as a "white saviour" figure. The "white saviour" (HUGHEY, apud HARTNETT, 2016) is a trope for a Caucasian character who saves, rescues, or otherwise helps embattled non-Caucasian characters overcome a great obstacle they would otherwise be unable to. In Daenerys' case, it cannot be ignored that she is a leading character who happens to be Caucasian and whose plot is heavily centred on her self-appointed mission to liberate the enslaved people of (the markedly non-Caucasian/Western) central and eastern Essos. While analysing her through the lenses of gender roles and relations, Hartnett (2016) does discuss the implications of Daenerys, a Caucasian Westerosi character, waging war on the cities and people of Essos in order to build the world she envisions. Drawing from the critique Hardy (2015) had made of Essos as a tapestry of orientalist tropes, as well as Daenerys' perceived masculinisation throughout the series, Hartnett concludes that hers is the "path of the coloniser" (p. 48). Still, her analysis focuses on Daenerys herself and her own interactions with Essosi nations and people, and not on the Essosi themselves.

When it comes to the issue of race in fantasy in general, a wider ground seems to have been covered. Ursula K. Le Guin, a fantasy (and science fiction) author herself, comments, in a postface to "A Wizard of Earthsea," how on her experience as a fantasy reader she often met stories centred on Caucasians – or characters marked as such, in the case of fictional races – led by "white male heroes;" should non-white human characters appear, they would mostly appear as "inferior or evil" (2016, p. 173). While this issue is not unique to fantasy, it is not hard to conclude that the way modern Western fantasy has developed, particularly throughout the 20th century, arguably facilitates settings in which the antagonising of the other is central to the plot – something DiTommaso (1996) attributes to fantasy's

medievalist roots.

A fair assessment demands one to acknowledge that there does not need to be a direct, one-on-one correlation between nations from a completely fictional world and those of our own, “real” world. After all, it may not be in an author’s interest to simply copy what already exists; besides, fictional realms often mingle aspects from wildly different real cultures into one. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that often enough even the “good” nations will yield corrupt, villainous characters. DiTommaso (1996), in his defence of the “race-consciousness” frequently shown by the characters of Robert E. Howard’s “Conan” series (p. 1), claims that one must judge a story’s politics by its own internal logic. He goes on to say that a medievalist fantasy world, by its own nature, will foment racialised politics and descriptions as a way of distinguishing the various nationalities. Additionally, he argues that should there be conflicts between that world’s peoples and factions, it is logical, perhaps even justifiable, for some cultures or ethnic groups (within the story) to be described in biased terms, more so if the story is being told from a character’s subjective, partial point of view. Ward (2003), in an analysis of the “Chronicles of Narnia” and its depiction of the fictional Calormene culture, further reinforces this point by arguing that a fictional world’s own rules and structures should not be equalled to real-world paradigms, nor judged by standards external to the story’s own.

Notwithstanding, there remains the issue that non-Caucasian, non-European cultures and peoples seem to heavily and disproportionately inspire villainous characters and factions. The history and tradition of Western fantasy, as well as the authors’ own background, certainly justifies the preference for European-like settings, culture and individuals; but it hardly justifies the frequent use of non-European-like settings, culture and individuals as villainous foils for them.

Naturally, it would be easy to dismiss it as mere old-fashioned racism, but not only would that be a simplistic assessment, it would also not explain why this practice is repeated in the fantasy stories of the 21st century, which some might argue is a less intolerant age – or at the very least, one with a greater diversity of mainstream voices and world views – than the late 19th to early 20th century. When addressing the apparent Middle-Eastern/Indian influences of the antagonistic Calormen in C. S. Lewis’ “Narnia,” Howe (2017) argues that Lewis looked at those cultures through lenses tarnished by centuries of European fear and suspicion of Islamic invasion. In a similar vein, Howard’s weaving of the nations of Conan’s world was

certainly affected by his condition as a white man in early twentieth-century United States, when views on race and culture were of a far more deterministic and hierarchical nature than they tend to be nowadays (HALL, 2006). Tolkien himself was hardly immune to his own context: as a Caucasian British man born in colonial South Africa and raised in the British Empire's heyday, his views on non-European cultures were certainly vulnerable to ethnocentric bias. It is not redundant to remember that these authors, alongside others, were among the most influential fantasy authors of the twentieth century, authors whose works have had a direct influence in late twentieth and twenty-first century fantasy – be it literary, filmic or even video-game fantasy (JAMES, 2012).

In the twenty-first century, the racial views of a hundred years before are hardly prevalent. Nonetheless, in a Western world embattled with the issue of immigration from Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as with the threat of Islamic terrorism, stereotypes, ethnic-cultural divisions and antagonisms have arguably taken new shapes that are no less dangerous.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The general aim of this research is to analyse the depiction of characters of colour and non-Western cultures in “ASOIAF,” taking into account the issues of ethnic-cultural representation in Western fantasy and culture. Thus, our focus is on perceived stereotypes of real-world, non-Caucasian groups being employed in the narrative's world-building – specifically through the characters and nations outside the “Western” and Caucasian Westeros: the Free Cities, Qarth, the Dothraki, the Slaver Cities, and the Summer Isles. Although it is part of Westeros, Dorne's cultural and ethnic makeup makes it another important object of analysis. As the story is told exclusively through character POVs, our analysis encompasses mostly the chapters that take place either in Dorne or in Essos. This includes the chapters of Daenerys Targaryen, Arianne Martell and her brother Quentyn, Areo Hotah, and Arys Oakheart, as well as those chapters of Arya Stark, Tyrion Lannister and Samwell Tarly that are set in Essos.

In order to better guide our analysis, the following research questions have been devised, some focusing on the cultures and populations as a whole, others on the characters on a more individual level:

1) On the nations:

1.1 – How are the non-Westerosi nations described in the books in terms of depth and complexity?

1.2 – What is the geopolitics of “ASOIAF’s” world? Are these nations allied or enemies, oppressors or oppressed in relation to (Andal/Northerner) Westeros?

1.3 – Are they described by one of their own, or by an outsider? What are the implications of this perspective?

2) On the characters:

2.1 – How are they described in terms of depth and complexity?

2.2 – Do non-Caucasian or non-Westerosi characters have their own point-of-view chapters? How often are they shown through the POVs of characters who are not of the same cultural background?

2.3 – Are their roles in the narrative necessarily tied to Caucasian/Westerosi characters?

2. TO GO EAST YOU MUST JOURNEY WEST, TO REACH THE SOUTH YOU MUST GO NORTH: DEPICTIONS OF PEOPLE OF COLOUR IN WESTERN LITERATURE

In “Clash”, Daenerys Targaryen’s journey to reach the Iron Throne of Westeros ironically takes her further to the east than she had been until then. In the city-state of Qarth, as she searches for allies and plans her next steps, she comes across a mysterious figure who calls herself Quaithe. From her, Daenerys learns what she must do to reach her goal: “to go north, you must journey south. To reach the west, you must go east [...]” (p. 583). Although we are hardly on a quest to recover any lost dynasty, by switching its cardinal directions Quaithe’s prophecy becomes curiously accurate if what we seek is to understand the ways by which non-Western cultures and people are depicted in Western art, and literature in particular. After all, such ways arguably have more to do with Western perceptions, assumptions and prejudices than they have with factual information on those being depicted.

Historically, from the European perspective Asia (sometimes the north-eastern portion of Africa) has been known as the “east,” while Africa (and, from the Anglo-American perspective, Latin America as well) has been the “south” (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014). It comes as no surprise, then, that Westerners’ perceptions on the people and cultures beyond their own context generally encompasses these two cardinal points in particular.

2.1 THE EAST

European interest in the lands and people beyond the Mediterranean and the Caucasus is far from being a modern phenomenon, as writings by Roman and Greek travellers on Africa and western Asia show (SAID, 1979). Indeed, it was precisely in the days of Classical Greece that the very dichotomy between West and East – as defined from a western point of view – began taking shape. Although the Greeks themselves were not known for calling themselves “Western” or even “European,” it was them who (at least in Western tradition) first designed the lands east of the Greek mainland as a rather monolithic block of civilisations that they identified as starkly different from their own (LOCKMAN, 2004).

While there were indeed distinctions to be made between Greece and its neighbours, they arguably had less to do with facts than they had with the Greeks’ own perceptions of

themselves and those cultures. For instance, while the Greeks considered themselves an unparalleled centre of civilisation and sophistication, they viewed the likes of Persians and Egyptians as having a natural propensity for developing tyrannical regimes, excesses and corruption (LOCKMAN, 2004) – a view that helped justify their inferiority before the supposedly free Greek civilisation (KANTZIOS, 2004). That the Greek cities-state had a history of resisting Persian attempts at conquest cannot be ignored as having had an influence in the Greeks' own attitudes toward them.

The Romans inherited much of the Greeks' world view, including their distinction of those south and east of the Mediterranean as an eastern other who was given to a specific set of moral flaws; ironically, in Roman eyes the Greeks themselves became part of this morally inferior "east" (LOCKMAN, 2004). The split of the Roman Empire into western and eastern halves, and especially the Christian Church's schism between the Catholics of Rome and the Orthodoxes of Constantinople, served as pretext for yet another antagonism between west and east. It was the later half of the European Middle Ages, however, that brought sharper contours to this polarisation, tinting it with even greater antagonism, hostility and preconception. After all, it was in that age that the Muslims rose from Arabia to conquer the near entirety of both North Africa and West Asia, all before invading Europe itself through the Iberian Peninsula and very nearly taking France.

Furthermore, the Islamic expansion was not merely a political threat, but a cultural and religious one as well: should it have spread over the rest of Europe, it would not have meant the loss of autonomy for the native populations only, but likely the end of the Church itself. With the Islamic Caliphates encroaching upon European Christian nations in the west (France), south (the Italian cities-state) and east (the Byzantine Empire), and then with the successive failures of the Crusades, it should come as no surprise that the East, as a geographical embodiment of that enemy culture, became a major source of fear and anxiety for Christian Europeans (SAID, 1979).

It is important to note that, despite all the antagonism, the cultural legacy left by Islamic culture in Medieval Europe was massive. Not only did Islamic philosophers like Ibn Sina (known in Western texts as Avicenna) inspire a revival of European philosophy and sciences, but it was through the Muslims themselves that Europeans "re-discovered" the literature and arts of Classical Greece and Rome – which, in turn, was one of the main sparks of the Renaissance (LOCKMAN, 2004). Unfortunately, over time the debt Europeans owed to

the Islamic civilisation was mostly minimised or simply forgotten, replaced by a preference of Greece and Rome as the roots of European civilisation – in detriment of the contributions of other Asian and African civilisations, as Shohat & Stam (2014) point out –, then buried under the systematic demonisation of Islamic culture.

Naturally, this demonising was not inspired simply by sheer hostility towards that other civilisation; as Lockman (2004) points out, European understanding of Islamic culture did become more complex through the centuries, and they were not so antagonistic as not to acknowledge that their Eastern neighbours had a measure of worth too. A classic example of a Muslim who earned great renown in Christian Europe was Salah ad-Din, or Saladin, the very sultan who wrestled Jerusalem from the Christians and then thwarted the Third Crusade. However, Western understanding remained severely flawed, as Lockman argues, to great extent due to the Europeans' insistence in trying to understand Islamic civilisation as little more than a "distorted mirror image of their own faith" (34). Thus, little did the Christians of Europe care, for instance, that Islam has always treated Jesus Christ with great respect, seeing him as an actual prophet of God; what seemed to matter most to them was that Mohammed was Islam's equivalent of Jesus, and like Jesus claimed himself the Son of God, so was Mohammed supposedly worshipped as God in human form. Such heresy arguably help inspire and justify the attribution of all sort of depravity to Islamic culture, regardless of whether it had any basis on truth or not. After all, as historian Guibert of Nogent (apud LOCKMAN, 2004, p. 35) claims, "it is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken".

This relates to the core of what Said (1979) defines as Orientalism. More than being a mere collection of stereotypes (even though many are quite recurring), it is the framing of West Asian – and, by extension, all Asian – civilisations through the eyes of a Western observer, in relation to said observer's own civilisation; it is the understanding of Asian cultures as extensions or as projections of Western cultures and views. It is also their evaluation and measurement according to Western standards and references, particularly in ways that are propitiated by, or that perpetuate, an unequal hierarchy of power that places the Western as the ideal against which the East is judged. After all, as Said insists, the relationship between East and West had always been one of power, from the time the Greeks resisted and then conquered the Persians, through the Islamic rise and threat to European autonomy, to the colonial empires of Europe submitting their long-dreaded Eastern foes to their own interests.

Another concept that, while not necessarily tied to Orientalism, certainly had similar effects, is that of Eurocentrism. Shohat and Stam (2014) define it as the rationalisation of a supposed cultural, moral, historical and social predominance of Europeans (particularly those of Germanic descent) over the civilisations and populations found elsewhere. Like Orientalism, it attempts to frame the world outside Europe through this continent's own cultural and social standards; but while the typical Orientalist view seems to acknowledge some level of worthiness in its imagined East, the Eurocentrist generally relativises, minimises, erases and denies that worth in anyone who is not Western. This process begins with the very history of Europe, whose origin is more commonly traced back to Greece and Rome, sometimes Minoan Crete (all European civilisations), with little credit being given to the Egyptian, Phoenician or Sumerian legacies to those same cultures. The erasure is not only cultural either; little thought is given, for example, to how ethnically diverse the population of Rome, the empire that shaped much of later European civilisation, used to be. In an anthropological study of ancient Roman remains, Antonio *et al* (2019) found out that the very capital of the empire at its heyday boasted a mostly North African and Arabic population. This is not to mention that even among emperors and empresses there were some whose origin or ancestry were either North African or Arab – Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, Caracalla, Macrinus, Julia Maesa, Elagabalus and Philip the Arab, to quote a few.

Furthermore, the Eurocentric mindset purges Western civilisation of perceived flaws, all while exalting its achievements, sometimes praising them as unique. It holds freedom and democracy as the natural ends to which European values and traditions lead to, consequently holding Western nations as the true bastions of both freedom and democracy. It posits the West as a centre of science and rationality, of humanity and moderation – in contrast to the dogmatism, violence, cruelty, tyranny and overall backwardness it sees elsewhere. At the same time, the Eurocentric mindset ignores societies with equal or greater freedom (some of which were, ironically, destroyed by Europe's own colonial conquests); it ignores or minimises the scientific and cultural achievements outside the West (including those to which Western science itself is indebted to). Last, but not least, it waves aside all instances of tyranny, dogmatism, cruelty and oppression to have blossomed on Western soil as “aberrations” (SHOHAT; STAM, 2014, p. 2-3).

Here it is important to make a distinction between Eurocentrism, or ethnocentrism for that matter, and racism. Ethnocentrism is a set of attitudes and views that favour one's own

ethnic and cultural group over others, albeit not necessarily in a manner that either group as superior (PUZZO, 1964; HOOGHE, 2008). Racism, on the other hand, is the explicit rationalisation of one ethnic group's superiority over others, particularly when tied to perceived racial traits (PUZZO, 1964; SHOCHAT; STAM, 2014). While they can – and do – compliment each other, regarding them as synonyms leads to the erroneous assumption that a Eurocentric individual will inevitably be racist as well, when, as Shohat and Stam (2014) point out, one can be actively anti-racist and have quite the Eurocentric world view, all at the same time (p. 4). Furthermore, Said (1976), Shohat and Stam (2014) all agree that having ethnocentric views is not a behaviour unique to Westerners, or to any “dominant” group in particular; after all, many cultures are bound to view the world, as well as one another, through their own standards and customs. It is the ways Western ethnocentrism has affected the world that arguably have been much greater and, thus, deserving of a more urgent analysis.

The effects of Eurocentric – and specifically Orientalist – views and assumptions on the popular imaginary have arguably been enhanced throughout the 20th century, with the strengthening of mass media culture (SAID, 1976). Centuries of studies, treatises and musings on the so-called East, influenced by (and influencers of) centuries of ethnocentric misconceptions, provided the framework through which film and television, fiction and the news, depicted the 20th century East to contemporary Western audiences. One might argue that the abundance of information sources brought by modern technologies, along with the easier and more widespread access to said information, would have actually had the opposite effect, but that would be ignoring the influence of media on the way people develop their views and opinions. This includes views and opinions regarding certain groups and actors; citing a 1977 United States Commission on Civil Rights report regarding media representation, Treviño (1985) draws attention to the influence of television on people's opinion-making – at least in the North-American context –, as well as its power in showing certain groups or individuals under either a more positive or a more negative light. This is equally true for the ways specific ethnic or cultural groups are shown, both on television and film, as noted by Treviño (1985) himself, as well as Mastro (2017). Although their argument refers specifically to the representation of Latinos and Latin-Americans, Said (1976) certainly would agree that the same is true for “Easterners,” and Muslims in particular, in no small parts thanks to the pitting of an allegedly freedom-loving West against a tyrannical, fanatical Middle East by Western

media.

Listing all the stereotypes ever attributed to the imagined East and its inhabitants – both the positive and the negative ones – would be work for a whole new study, in no small part due to how they seem to encompass virtually every aspect of those societies, from their customs and morals to their views on gender roles. Notwithstanding, a few of the more recurring traits shown by West Asians as depicted in both Western media and literature are worth discussing.

One such recurring trait that has been mentioned earlier is the (West) Asian populations' supposed tendency of developing governments that tyrannise not only others, but also their own people. As many of the stereotypes that will be discussed, this has much to do with the Westerners' perception of themselves as the ideal that, albeit not perfect, is at least superior to others; in this case, if the West is a civilisation that cherishes freedom and that, even when it does set out to conquer or when its own rulers accumulate vast individual powers, it does so with moderation. To the ethnocentric observer, then, it seems only logical that the West's perceived lesser counterpart of the East has to stand as the opposite of the freedom-loving and tempered Western model. As it has been established, this has little to do with facts. To illustrate this with but one example, if some Asian civilisations have been ruled by self-styled "god-kings," so did Europeans for centuries base their own monarchs' right to rule on their religions, both the polytheistic and the monotheistic ones. If the Mongols were infamous for their brutality with which they conquered nation after nation, the European empires' expansion over the Americas and Africa was hardly less bloody and devastating.

That is not to say that even a Eurocentric observer is incapable of acknowledging greatness in the cultures of Asia. From as early as the days of Ancient Greece, to the heyday of the British empire, the achievements of Asian civilisations such as Persia and India have inspired a measure of respect among Westerners (SAID, 1976). The dread Asian tyrants themselves – and, one might add, the Egyptian Pharaohs too – certainly have fascinated the Westerner imaginary for their power and opulence. However, the acknowledgment of those civilisations' worth was coupled with the understanding that their best days were gone, and that their grandeur was nothing but history: to be admired for sure, but never to be mistaken as the Europeans' equivalent, let alone its better. The mighty Asian monarchs, for all their splendour, were also regarded as corrupt and vicious (LOCKMAN, 2004).

Naturally, the flaws of kings and emperors alone could not be blamed for the

perceived degeneration of Asian cultures. After all, for such corrupt and tyrannical monarchs to rule as they did, their own subjects must have been quite lenient towards them. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that the Easterners were rationalised as “lacking in spirit” (LOCKMAN, 2004, p. 12), a trait that would have made them more inclined to accepting subjugation and even slavery. The corrupted and scheming nature of their rulers also came as no surprise under the perception that deceit, trickery and ambiguity were common traits even among the lowest-born Easterner (SAID, 1976). This, along with the understanding that the entire history of Asian nations (particularly the ones regarded as “great”) consists of nothing but a succession of despots, easily justifies the impression that Asians know no better than to live under subjugation (SAID, 1976). The conclusion that it is only through the intervention of outsiders, specifically of Western origin, that those people can achieve a better form of society, namely one that is “free” and “just,” therefore seems almost logical (SAID, 1976; SHOHAT; STAM, 2014).

If the Easterners lack in “spirit” and in strength to fight against their own tyrants, they certainly have a talent for other forms of oppression and violence, or so it seems to the Orientalist imaginary. One institution in particular where their alleged cruelty is made evident is slavery. A logical extension of the notion of Asian populations as inclined to being dominated, slavery was understood as ubiquitous in Asian civilisations, to the point that the figure of the slaves became conventional in depictions of the “East” (SAID, 1976).

Of course, that is not to say that slavery was not a very common institution in certain countries of Asia; in the Ottoman Empire alone – which did become the paradigm of what an “Eastern” culture looked like, especially for modern Westerners (LOCKMAN, 2004) – they were quite numerous. Likewise, it is hard to argue in favour of the notion that enslaved people are ever safe from being abused or tyrannised, regardless of which culture is being discussed. However, the image woven in the West of slaves in the “East” arguably does little justice to their actual experiences and situation. It seems to ignore, for example, that within the Ottoman Empire itself a slave warrior caste such as the janissaries actually earned prestige and political influence (KAFADAR, 1991), or that there were cases of enslaved harem women rising to the position of sultanas (as it was the case of Hürrem Sultan). Evidently, this is poor argument to use in diminishing the damages of slavery, but it does offer a contrast with slavery as practised in the supposedly “freedom-loving” modern empires of the West, which also relied heavily on slavery, but where examples of enslaved individuals achieving any sort of political

power are very scarce.

In regards to “Eastern” slavery, the Western imaginary was particularly concerned with the place and role of enslaved women; one might dare say, however, that this concern had less to do with genuine concern for their welfare than it had with finding pretext to further diminish the “Easterners” in Western eyes. After all, appealing to a woman’s defencelessness before dangerous male others – particularly an ethnic or cultural other – is a rather common trope of masculine fantasies (SHOHAT; STAM, 2014), one that serves both to feed the self’s sense of superiority, and to further degrade the other. This goes in tandem with yet another (white) masculine fantasy, that of racialised male others, particularly those of colour, being sexually violent and perverse (CHITO CHILDS, 2009), particularly to white women (SHOHAT; STAM, 2014). These views must certainly have been justified by the images, popularised in the West through paintings and reports, of enslaved women being bared in slave markets to the lustful eyes of Eastern men, all before being taken to harems where they joined yet another score of eroticised enslaved women (MERNISSI, 2001; LOCKMAN, 2004). It was not lost on the Europeans either that, with the Ottoman Empire encompassing vast regions of eastern Europe, many of those enslaved women were white. It must have seemed only true, then, to imagine the life of women in the East as a hellish experience, lived under the oppression of sexually perverse Eastern men (LOCKMAN, 2004).

This is one of the Orientalist tropes that seems to feature more explicitly in Western art. One example comes from C. S. Lewis’ “The Horse and His Boy,” the “Narnia” book where the Oriental-like Calormen culture and people feature most prominently, we see the Calormene Aravis, barely a teenager, escape a forced marriage with a man decades her senior. In the same story, the Narnian Queen Susan, a native of England, finds herself engaged to the Calormene prince Rabadash, who, despite seemingly courteous at first, is quickly unveiled as a cruel man. Eventually, Susan is spared from wedding him, and Aravis finds freedom (as well as a better husband) in the British-influenced kingdom of Archenland. Another example can be found in David Lean’s “Lawrence of Arabia” (1962), where the eponymous hero, once captured by Ottoman soldiers, is sexually harassed by them – with one of them specifically praising Lawrence’s fair skin. Even before the advent of film, the sexual threat posed by Eastern men to white women was visually depicted in paintings such as Jean-León Gérôme’s “The Slave Market” (1866), which depicts a naked white woman being publicly examined by dark-skinned Arabic men.

It might sound repetitive to say that this perception had much to do with the Westerners' projection of their own perceived flaws onto others, but it might be worth delving a little further in this particular point. After all, Western societies before the 20th century were hardly much (if any) better in their treatment of their own women. As the English writer Lady Mary Wortley Montagu assesses (apud SHOHAT; STAM, 2014), women in the Ottoman Empire were not as oppressed as some European observers might claim, and she goes so far as to describe an Ottoman noblewoman's impression that "husbands in England were much worse than in the East" due to the heavily constraining clothes they made their wives wear (p. 164).

The harem itself was a focus of intense projection of Western male fantasies (SHOHAT; STAM, 2014; LOCKMAN, 2004). While it was hardly a symbol of freedom for women, Mernissi (2001) claims that, while the harem was originally intended as a safe space for women, one where only they could dwell, and where they were respected, in the Western imaginary it was reduced to an erotic prison, full of women entirely at the sexual service of their masters. Furthermore, she adds (p. 17) that

In both miniatures and literature, Muslim men represent women as active participants, while Westerners such as Matisse, Ingres, and Picasso show them as nude and passive. Muslim painters imagine harem women as riding fast horses, armed with bows and arrows, and dressed in heavy coats. Muslim men portray harem women as uncontrollable sexual partners. But Westerners, I have come to realize, see the harem as a peaceful pleasure garden where omnipotent men reign supreme over obedient women. While Muslim men describe themselves as insecure in their harems, real or imagined, Westerners describe themselves as self-assured heroes with no fears of women. The tragic dimension so present in Muslim harems — fear of women and male self-doubt — is missing in the Western harem. (p. 17)

It is certainly not wrong to claim that women do find themselves at social and economical disadvantage in Islamic societies (MERNISSI, 2001). What is rather ironic is how, for all their apparent indignation at how lowly women were perceived to be treated in the imagined East, Western men themselves made a point of seeing those same women as little more than objects, be it of male sexual desire or male rescue fantasies – and in doing so, the Westerners projected their own internalised desires and fantasies. Indeed, the East itself, as a geographical, political and cultural entity, was often feminised in Western discourse, especially when placed in power hierarchies with the West (SAID, 1976). With its mystery and exuberance, but also its perceived innate inferiority, the East was to be bent to the West's will, penetrated by its gaze and its expansion, domesticated by its science and its civilisation,

tamed by the vigour and strength of its culture.

2.2 THE SOUTH

As it has been mentioned, Daenerys' journey after her marriage to the Dothraki Khal Drogo takes her further east than she had ever been before; however, his death leads to the disbandment of his *khalasar* – or nomadic community. Finding herself with precious few followers, yet concerned about them all the same, Daenerys knows that going further east would take her to the domains of hostile *khals*, and so she decides to go south, into the red wastes and whatever lies beyond. As it turns out, Qarth is what lay beyond, and in the opulent city-state Daenerys finds the strength she needed to continue on her journey towards Westeros. That might as well be why Quaithe prophesied that, in order to go north, “she must go south”; likewise, if we are to understand the representation of non-Caucasian people and cultures in Western culture, we should turn our gaze not only to the East, but to the South as well.

It has been argued that Asian civilisations – specifically those in the continent's western half – have been built in the Western imaginary as a “twisted mirror” of the West, places for the westerner to project what they viewed as negative within their own culture as a way to justify a sense of ethnocentric superiority. While this is quite damaging in its own right, one may argue that those to the south of Europe – namely Africa – were subject to even worse views, which by their turn bore even graver consequences for themselves and their descendants; for Africa and its peoples were treated not as a twisted mirror, but as a primitive, savage, inferior counterpart to the West.

As with West Asians, the rationalisation of African people's alleged inferiority in Western thought finds its earliest roots in Ancient Greece, where Egyptians were considered by some as being as inclined to tyranny (both as agents and as victims) as their Persian neighbours (SAID, 1976). Such view had more to do with cultural perceptions; in the strongly multiethnic civilisations of the ancient Mediterranean, skin tone seemingly was not too stigmatised, at least not commonly (PIETERSE, 1992). At the same time, Diop (2010) reminds us that it is in the thought of a Greek philosopher – Aristotle – that we find an example of racial traits being used to justify a people's perceived character, in this case black skin (in reference to Egyptians and Ethiopians) as a sign of cowardice. While Aristotle also

said the same about pale skin, such claim was directed at women, who (perhaps due to leading more domestic lives) were perceived as having a lighter complexion than men.

Unlike with Persians, the Greeks did not seem to foster much antipathy towards the African people they were acquainted with; then again, there were no known major wars between Greeks and Egyptians, Ethiopians or Libyans. Perhaps the first great clashes between a European and an African power were the Punic Wars, fought by Rome and Carthage; while the latter was an economic and military powerhouse of the Western Mediterranean for a long time, Rome's sudden rise challenged – and eventually toppled – it (WARMINGTON, 2010). For a time, Carthage was left as a vassal state, until a period of recovery convinced the Romans to attack it once again to avoid a future challenge to their new hegemony. The Third Punic War was less a war than it was a massacre: Carthage was ritually erased from the map, its site salted and declared cursed, and its former domains became a Roman province (WARMINGTON, 2010). While there were earlier instances of European settlement in North Africa – such as the Greek Cyrenaica and Hellenistic Egypt –, Roman Africa was perhaps one of the earliest (if not the earliest) example of a large colony built in Africa by a European power, and one built specifically to suit the needs of said power. It is not coincidence, for example, that Africa was called the “breadbasket of Rome” (MAHJOUBI, 2010).

While the Roman Empire was hardly what we would call “progressive” in its attitudes towards ethnic-cultural groups it conquered or warred, it was still a highly multi-ethnic society where individuals from various origins and skin tones could rise high in the social hierarchy – as shown by the study of Antonio *et al* (2019), the discovery of the Ivory Bangle Lady (a Roman-African aristocrat whose remains were found in the north of England), and the non-European origin of various emperors. Indeed, depictions of Black people in Roman art were more or less positive (PIETERSE, 1992).

The multiethnic world view the Romans certainly had was, however, mostly lost with the withdrawal of its empire from the more northern and western regions of Europe, and then, with its fall, by the rise of the Germanic kingdoms; the Islamic Arab hegemony over the Mediterranean, during much of the European Middle Ages, only motivated the northern and western European nations to further cloister in on themselves (PIETERSE, 1992). This began to change in the later half of the Middle Ages, when Catholic Europe gradually opened itself (even if relatively little) to the knowledge and then the people from the south and the east. As Pieterse (1992) points out, particularly the ties formed between the Roman Catholic church

and Christian Ethiopians, beginning around the time of the Crusades, not only helped in breaking the North Europeans' "monoethnic" world view, but it also influenced the first known depictions of Black individuals in European art since Roman times – and individuals of renown at that, such as Saint Maurice and the Queen of Sheba. The epic "Las Sergas de Esplandián," written around the early sixteenth century by Spanish poet Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo, might be added as another example of a late Medieval European work of art featuring Black individuals in somewhat positive roles (or embodying values perceived as such), with its character of Queen Calafia. The depiction of Black individuals in positive roles is certainly made more notable in light of the fact that the colour black was, in Medieval European art, associated with evil and demons; while this was not necessarily related to the skin colour, it cannot be ignored that evil figures were often depicted with dark or black skin (PIETERSE, 1992).

Unfortunately, it is also in the late years of Medieval Europe that we see the first instances of non-European traits, such as dark skin and mixed ancestry, being specifically tied to strongly negative connotations – not in aesthetic conventions, but in social policies. During the Reconquista, or the retaking of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims, the Spanish nobility prided itself in its "pure" native lineage, which could be traced back to the Visigoths and Roman-Iberians, and had not been mingled with Moors or Jews. It was then that the expression *sangre azul*, or "blue blood", first appeared, believed by some as a euphemism for light skin (PÉREZ, 2014); after all, under pale skin one's veins (which are naturally bluish) appear much more clearly than under dark or tan skin. This valuing of "racial purity" later inspired the politics of *limpieza de sangre*, which institutionalised discrimination against those of Jewish or Moorish descent in Spain and then in its colonies, preventing those of "tainted blood" from occupying certain offices – even when those individuals were Christian (POOLE, 1999).

Not many decades separate the beginning of the Americas' conquest and the first European conquests in Western, Southern and Central Africa, conquests that further expanded the Europeans' world view after centuries of relative isolationism – but also led to sinister perceptions of that same world, as well as the people and cultures they encountered. After all, it was around that time that the Atlantic slave trade started, specifically targeting Black Africans.

It is worth pointing out that the enslavement and trading of Black Africans did not

start with Europeans; as Inikori (2010) comments, Black Africans found themselves enslaved as the aftermath of wars and raids centuries before Columbus even left for the Indies. What was unprecedented, he goes on to say, was the sheer scale of the slave trade established by Europe's colonial empires and, more gravely, the ways by which it stigmatised the population of an entire continent (as well as those descendants who inherited their physical traits).

A deep analysis of all the forces and reasons that made the Atlantic slave trade as lasting and widespread as it was would require a thesis all its own. To mention but one, we may again resort to Inikori (2010), who ties the mass enslavement of Black Africans to the necessities of the rising colonial and capitalist economies of Europe. After all, the new colonies built over the Americas, with their abundance of resources and vast lands ripe for farming, needed an equally high number of menial workers – and enslaved individuals, who required no salary and could be put to work for as long and hard as their owners wished, became a convenient workforce in that system. While Native Americans were initially the ones to be enslaved, their fast-dwindling numbers after the European invasion, as well as laws that (at least officially) forbade their enslavement, the trade of enslaved Natives grew more difficult – even if Natives continued to fall victim to slavery throughout the centuries (RESÉNDEZ, 2016). Members of the Catholic Church also provided some degree of protection against enslavement, flimsy and contradictory as it might be at times, at least towards those Natives that were to accept conversion to Christianity (RESÉNDEZ, 2016).

With the use of Natives in slave labour made difficult, Black Africans became the European colonialists' alternative target – and if arguments had been made to protect Natives from gratuitous cruelty and exploitation, so were arguments made to justify exploiting Black Africans to the full profit of the coloniser, without a care for their rights, their well-being or even their humanity. Such arguments followed, to an extent, a pattern somewhat similar to the ones made to justify the perceived inferiority of West Asians, at least in the sense of positing Europeans as the positive ideal, and attributing what it viewed as negative aspects of culture, behaviour and even physique to those who were not European.

However, Asian cultures and people, for all the negative stereotypes attributed to them, enjoyed a few advantages in Western eyes. For even if they were regarded as ultimately inferior, Asians – be it Persian or Arab, Ottoman or Chinese – at least received a measure of respect for the acknowledged grandeur and sophistication of their civilisations, and the heights of power they had once reached. The same was not said of African civilisations,

particularly Black African ones. Indeed, the very criteria of what makes a civilisation, as understood by some – such as sophisticated urbanisation and the use of writing systems – show bias that often favour Europeans and rank many Black African nations as inferior (AROWOLO, 2010); in some instances, they also supported racist ideologies (BOTZ-BORNSTEIN, 2012).

It is not that Black African nations were not culturally or technologically sophisticated; until around the conquest of the Americas, no great disparity was perceived between African and European nations in terms of economic or cultural strength, as hinted by the scarcity of technological innovations imported from Europe into Africa, and the Europeans' difficulty in establishing footholds on African soil (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014). The vast wealth taken from the Americas, however, enabled Europeans to further their own progress at a pace no other nation outside their continent could match. With their greater military power, European empires were able to gradually subdue the near entirety of the African continent – and while Europeans were well-acquainted with the history of Asians, the same was not true for the history of Black Africans, and so it was certainly easier to dismiss their cultural achievements. It is hardly a coincidence that those African peoples whose achievements were indeed acknowledged by Westerners – Ancient Egyptians above all, but also the Kushite/Sudanese or the Axumite/Ethiopian – were systematically denied as being Black, and variably considered “red- or black-skinned Caucasoids” (DIOP, 2010).

With their cultural, historical and technological achievements denied, the inferiority of Black Africans was then justified on the basis of politics, science and religion (PIETERSE, 1992). Politics, because many African societies, especially those tribal in nature, did not show the degree of complexity European societies did. Science, because their perceived lack of cultural and technological development was associated to limited cognitive abilities; in essence, Black people were placed outside the human species itself. Religion, because they were branded by the Church as the descendants of Ham, Noah's youngest son, whose heirs were cursed by God to be servants to the heirs of his older brothers – the very brothers regarded as the progenitors of Semites and Europeans. Naturally, just as there were Western voices defending Native Americans from the colonialist brutality, there were those who fought against both the enslavement of Black people and the cruelties they suffered with impunity – and that as early as the 18th century (DAGET, 2010). It is equally true that even in the 18th and 19th centuries there were Black individuals who achieved renown even in Europe, such as

classical composer Chevalier de Saint-Georges and Alexandre Dumas (who was of mixed race).

Nevertheless, the success or acceptance of a few individuals hardly mean this is the standard for others of similar ethnic-cultural background. Worse still, neither the abolitionist movement nor even the granting of civil rights to Black people alone managed to overcome the centuries of stereotypes placed on Black individuals and cultures by the white Western gaze. After all, many of those stereotypes were born from views that had become embedded in the Western imaginary ever since the first European explorers who traversed Africa and brought home their own views on the continent (AYISI & BRYLLA, 2013).

As we saw with Orientalism earlier, listing all the stereotypes applied to Black people would require much more than a chapter, but we can still analyse some of the more frequent ones. We have already seen some of the arguments made in favour of the supposed innate “inferiority” of Black individuals and cultures, but the ways by which they were treated and depicted as such in the arts were just as varied, if not more. Many of those ways can be summed up as a process of animalisation: more than being a simple comparison to specific animals – mainly primates –, it follows a biologically essentialist reasoning to reduce the individual’s character, traits or behaviour to something mostly instinctive and physical, rather than rational and intellectual (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; HOLLAND *et al*, 2018).

Besides its vicious dehumanisation, this notion is particularly powerful for the variety of ways it justifies applying traits seen as inferior to the racialised other. In the case of Black people, it justifies viewing them as less intelligent or less capable of cultural achievements by exaggerating their physicality and, by contrast, diminishing their rationality (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014). It first ties them to an environment of pure, untamed wilderness, then “merges” them with that environment as if they were extensions of it – and thus not only are the people themselves deprived of their individuality (ACHEBE, 2016; DUNN, 1996), but their primitiveness and savagery both become justified (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; PIETERSE, 1992).

It must be noted here that the idea of savagery goes a little further than a vague connotation of brutality or aggressiveness. As Pieterse (1992) claims, the notion of savagery underwent some transformation throughout modern European history: from a concept denoting lack of elements regarded as marks of civilisation (as per the European standard, naturally), such as a lack of clothing or urbanisation, it evolved to mean a stage in human

development, above primitivism and below both barbarism and civilisation. It further transformed to refer to “an inner disposition common to both civilized and primitive humanity” (37), a tendency to rely on instinct and feeling rather than rationality. In all these definitions, savagery was a trait applied by the Westerner to Black people (as well as to Native Americans, albeit perhaps not to the same extent). This seems to be particularly true in works set in Africa (DUNN, 1996); but a tendency to violence (both physical and sexual), to unbridled instinctual behaviours (such as hypersexuality), as well as to being incapable of embracing supposedly “higher” (that is, more European) civilised practices, all appear in the portrayal of Black people in settings far beyond the continent (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; PIETERSE, 1992).

On sexuality in particular it is worth delving a little further, for that was a focus of considerable Western interest (one might say anxiety) and projection. The alleged “savagery” of Black Africans helped support the Western view that they had a natural propensity for uncontrolled sexuality, specifically through certain perceived cultural traits (such as more revealing clothes, or actual nudity) as well as physical ones (such as the notion that Black men had considerably larger penises than men from other ethnic groups) (PIETERSE, 1992). However, the ways by which this affected Black people had their own peculiarities in regards to men and women. The hypersexualisation of men, for one, made them an even greater threat in the eyes of the white Westerner – specifically the *male* white Westerner. As it happened in the Orientalist discourse, branding the Black man as sexually devious and dangerous to women, and specifically white women, served the Eurocentric narrative in the sense that it further demonised the racialised other before the Western ideal.

But if the Asian man was “safely” far away in the east, the Black man, brought into the Euroamerican societies through slavery, was close – and close to white women in particular. As Pieterse (1992) explains, fear of interracial coupling was one of the driving forces between the institutionalisation of slavery in the English North-American colonies, as laws were passed discouraging white women – and white women specifically – from having relations with Black men by forcing them to serve their Black lover’s master. There was, however, no law forbidding white men from having relations with Black women. Indeed, the fact that white men had availability both to white and Black (and, by extension, Native) women was contrasted with their refusal to accept white women freely having relations with Black men. It is no coincidence that much of the anti-Black propaganda in the 19th century –

be it in the USA or in Europe – was based on the perceived threat sexually violent Black men posed to the “pure” white woman; for a white woman to couple with a Black man was a sign of degeneracy on her part (PIETERSE, 1992). It is no coincidence either that, in 20th and 21st USA media (particularly film and TV), couples formed by white men and women of other ethnic groups are vastly more common than those formed by white (Anglo) women and men of other ethnic groups – and even these latter couples are too often dysfunctional or short-lived (CHITO CHILDS, 2009).

Black women, by their turn, endure their own set of damaging stereotypes – and damaging both in the arts and in real-life situations. Although they could find themselves targeted by white women’s jealousy (PIETERSE, 1992), in a male-dominated, patriarchal Western world they were hardly seen as the threat Black men were. However, as women they were even more vulnerable to being objectified and, worse still, to being sexually assaulted. Naturally, white women suffered sexual violence too, but the Black woman’s experience was (and still is) aggravated by the stereotypes attributed to her ethnicity. After all, a tendency to overt sexuality was (and still is) considered a typical trait of Black people and, thus, any act of sexual advance towards Black women, including violent ones, were justified (HOLLAND *et al*, 2018).

Furthermore, at the same time they were regarded as more easily sexually available, Black women were considered – and consequently depicted as – less desirable as partners in serious, stable relationships. This notion is summed up by Abdias Nascimento through the common understanding that, while white women are the best fit for marriage, Black (and, by extension, mixed) women are the best fit for casual sex relationships (2016). This leads to another trope: that, paradoxically to being the target of white men’s (often brutal) sexual interest, Black women’s (and men’s) physical traits are often considered “ugly”; the exceptions appear mostly when a Black woman’s traits are closer to the white ideal of female beauty, such as slender physique, thin lips, small nose and lighter skin tone (HOLLAND *et al*, 2018). Even then, Black women may suffer a greater degree of objectification than white women, especially as their body – and specifically the more sexualised areas, such as the breasts, the hips and the posterior – tends to attract most of the gaze (HOLLAND *et al*, 2018). Even in the depictions that might be regarded as gentle or praising, Black women were still either overtly idealised or even fetishised – and always through the lenses of a white man’s desire (PIETERSE, 1992; CHITO CHILDS, 2009).

Besides those regarding sexuality, two other tropes that deserve some focus, and which are somewhat related, are the infantilisation and the subalternity of Black people. One might say both are rather natural results from one's view of another's inherent inferiority, but they go a little further than that, as both tropes are loaded with condescending, paternalistic colonial attitudes. Infantilisation, for one, is strongly tied to the notions of savagery (as mentioned earlier) and primitivism as stages in the human development. After all, not only were these regarded as the lowest stages, but primitivism in particular was regarded as the stage children – or, more specifically, white children – were considered to be (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; PIETERSE, 1992). As the Westerners' eye identified Black people and civilisations to be precisely at those stages, it followed their logic that they were more like (white) children than fully developed adult humans: more instinctive than rational, with a less developed intellect, naive even.

Indeed, references to (adult) Black Africans as “boys” abound in Western narratives, either literary or filmic (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; DUNN, 1996). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that, when dealing with Black people, more well-meaning white Westerners might fill themselves with a sense of responsibility over them, as if they were charges that needed to be taken care of so they could develop and grow. This is closely tied to the trope of the “white saviour,” but it goes even further than merely “saving” the racialised other from a danger; rather, it is a sort of civilising mission, of bringing order, progress, intellectuality and morality to a people perceived as inferior in virtually every regard – and, worse still, who cannot hope to achieve that without the intervention of a more advanced people and culture. Dunn (1996) identifies that, in film, this is shown through the depiction of Westernised Black Africans as being more “civilised” than those who have not had the chance of basking in Western civilisation; at the same time, however, he notices how even those Westernised Africans are shown to have something of their “innate primitiveness” in them still, a primitiveness that translated as aggression, wantonness, and other vices of Western morality.

Regarding subalternity, Dunn (1996) again identifies that films set in the African continent often depict Black people as servants, often of the lazy type and usually obedient; indeed, the African who is loyal and obedient to his white superior is one of the most common “kind” depictions of Black Africans in Western film. Dates (2010) identifies similar tropes in North-American works. Nevertheless, we may expand the idea of subalternity to one that is narrative in nature, specifically in narratives set in contexts that, at least theoretically, should

place the Black individual at the centre of the story – or at least give them more agency –, yet reduces them to side roles. An example of stories where such issue can be seen are those that intend to tell about a case or situation of racial injustice, but does so through the eyes of a member of the privileged group. This trope seems particularly common in US film, as made evident by works such as “A Time to Kill” (1996), “Glory” (1989), “Mississippi Burning” (1988) and “Crash” (2004). Other than depriving Black actors of a chance to star in lead roles, this practice effectively sidelines Black experiences, places the white experience and gaze at centre stage, and – perhaps more gravely – mitigates or even erases white people’s responsibility in the conflict that is supposedly being deconstructed (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014).

Last, but not least, a point must be made on how the white Western gaze reduces Africa itself, as a land, to tropes and stereotypes. One of these, and perhaps one of the most enduring and popular ones, has been mentioned earlier, and is based on the idea that Africa is an endless, untamed wilderness – or a squalid desert, if one thinks of the Sahara –, full of exotic fauna and flora (DUNN, 1996; PIETERSE, 1992). In more recent decades, owing greatly to media coverage that focus only on these issues, Africa is constructed in the Western imaginary (and certainly that of other regions) through images of poverty, famine, war and disease (AYISI & BRYLLA, 2013). While communities living in little urbanised regions and social, economical and sanitary issues are all part of the African continent’s reality, so are highly urbanised regions, universities, internet... Not to mention that Africa has hosted cities since before even Europe may have (PIETERSE, 1992), as well as the oldest still functioning university (or *madrassa*) in the world, according to UNESCO.

That Africa’s image across the ocean ignores such things in favour of its more negative side has less to do with a concern for fact than with a need to reinforce colonial narratives; after all, as it has been mentioned, the African is often tied to the landscape where they live, almost as an extension of it – and the landscape in turn justifies whatever trait is attributed to them. Thus do the wild, exotic, primitive, hot landscapes of the less “civilised” Africa – and also, in more modern imagery, the war-torn, diseased, famine-ravaged scenes – become a metaphor for the (Black) African’s perceived savagery, primitiveness, violence and overall incapacity for building a “proper” civilisation. This is a view so deeply rooted in the Western imaginary that, even to this day, it has become rather casual: to mention one very contemporary example, during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, predictions were made that the

virus would ravage the African continent while Europe and North America would fare relatively well. Not only were those predictions unfounded on the statistics available at the time (OKEREKE & NIELSEN, 2020), but they were later proven untrue (PILLING, 2020). More damning, however, was Western media's apparent reluctance in showing the human damage caused by the outbreak in either Europe or North America – in contrast with the abundance of scenes of Black African suffering during the Ebola outbreak of years prior, a choice that arguably banalises Black suffering (GATHARA, 2020).

Finally, the African continent may find itself reduced to an abstraction, or a mirror to an (white Western) outsider's psyche and inner conflicts. This notion is addressed by Chinua Achebe (2016) in his now famous criticism of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," whose plot is centred on a European traveller's journey to the African interior and his subsequent psychological turmoil. Achebe maintains that, in Conrad's novel, not only Africa as a continent, but its people as well, are reduced to a twisted mirror for the most animalistic and primitive facets of the human psyche; a "metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril" (21). This is also noted by Shohat and Stam (2014) through the construction of Africa as the "dark continent": a savage, primitive land, without history and eager for the "light" of civilisation, a true trial for the West's conquering impetus. Dunn (2016) is of a similar mind, and he further adds to that by pointing at another trope, common in Western film: the contrasting of Africa as a "dreamland," a place almost pure in its primitiveness and natural beauty, and then as a "nightmare," brutal and harsh. The former, as he goes on to say, is a view more often shown by those characters who do not properly know Africa, while those more seasoned on it knows well its "realities" – realities that often either leave the white character broken, or make Africa into the "white man's grave" (165).

At this point, it is important to comment on the stereotyping of Native and Latin-Americans; after all, if Africa is Europe's south, so is Latin American the south of the USA – and as Black Africans are Europe's "savages," so have Natives often been seen by white Western eyes. Hopefully, commenting on them at the end of the chapter, and in such a brief manner, will not feel as if their representation is less serious; while the historical processes that birthed them differ more or less, the stereotypes applied to Native and Latin-Americans in the white Western imaginary are, more often than not, curiously reminiscent of the ones that, as already discussed, are applied to Black people. Native Americans, for one, were declared

culturally and intellectually inferior for the perceived lacks of their civilisations, and savagery, with all the related traits of brutality and primitiveness, was an accusation often directed at them (RESÉNDEZ, 2016). Conversely, Native Americans are sometimes reduced to the trope of the “noble savage,” a paragon of ideals valued by the Western codes – and who usually show themselves helpful and loyal to the white Westerner (GANJE, 2003), not quite unlike the loyal, Westernised Black African trope identified by Dunn (1996). Notwithstanding, Native Americans do face stereotyping that is not as often seen applied to Black people, namely their confinement to the past, as if their identity no longer existed in the modern world; and the placing of their culture and even themselves as “spiritual guides” to white Westerners, usually in a misrepresented manner (GANJE, 2003).

Latin-Americans – at times warred by, or placed under the US’s sphere of influence –, by their turn, are not usually reduced to the condition of savages, or placed outside the human species by account of their culture or their phenotype. Interestingly, however, a number of the stereotypes applied to them are also shared by Black people, particularly in US media. Treviño (1985) attributes to the Mexican Revolution of the early 20th century the origin of two tropes: the Mexican *bandido*, or outlaw, and the Mexican *peón*, a menial worker who needed saving from criminals by US forces, and who was invariably shown as lazy, passive and submissive. Latin-American sexuality too was exaggerated through white Western lenses, even if to varying extents in comparison to Black sexuality: both men and women of Latin America are often shown as sensual, seductive, attractive, and ever available to white Western romantic interest as the “Latino lover” and the “Latina spitfire” respectively (TREVINO, 1985). At the same time, as Chito Childs (2009) points out, Latin-American men are shown as overly passionate, to the point of aggressiveness and jealousy, sometimes turning out to be criminals; Latin-American women, by their turn, are shown as both easily available and eager for sexual advances – in contrast to white women, who are shown as sexually moderate or even chaste. Additionally, Chito Childs (2009) comments on the depiction of couples by members of different ethnic groups, identifying that couples composed by Latin-American (as well as Black and Asian) men and white women are not only rare, but also show a tendency of being dysfunctional or unhappy. By comparison, couples formed between white men and Latin-American women are both comparatively common and usually depicted as happy and successful.

Finally, it is valid to stress that negative depictions of Black, Native or Latin-

American people are not the exclusive domain of white Westerners, nor their fault entirely. After all, negative stereotyping of dark-skinned people is common in Latin-American culture, and objectification of women is practised even by men of historically oppressed ethnic groups; as Shohat & Stam (2014) remind us, even anti-colonialist discourses sometimes fall guilty of fashioning themselves after “masculinist fantasies of rescue” by playing on the violence suffered by “their” women in the hands of the coloniser oppressor (161). Poncian (2015) too reflects that, even if the white Western gaze magnifies the issues and challenges faced by the nations of Africa, such issues and challenges do exist – and as much as they owe to European colonialism, the Africans themselves have a portion of the blame for the failure of overcoming them. The point here is not to posit the West as the “root of all evil” and Africans, or Latin-Americans, or Native Americans, or Asians for that matter, as the “pure” victims of a conquering evil. Such view, as Shohat & Stam (2014) again point out, is both patronising and eurocentric. What should concern us is the ways by which those outside the West have been constructed through disproportionately negative, and sometimes even false and exaggerated, tropes and stereotypes. More than that, it is how these tropes and stereotypes are more reflective of the West’s own vices and anxieties – as if, to paraphrase Chinua Achebe (2016), the West was Dorian Gray, unloading his physical and moral deformities on the picture of the world around itself, so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate (25).

3. TO THE SOUTH AND ACROSS THE NARROW SEA: DORNE AND WESTERN ESSOS

Thus we come to the analysis of Westeros' own "east" and "south:" the nations and people of Essos and Dorne. As you may remember, such cultures are many and spread over a vast area; we may as well begin with the two that stand the closest to Westeros in geography – and, to an extent, in culture: Dorne and the Free Cities of Essos.

3.1 THE SUN AND THE SPEAR

Long before Aegon the Conqueror melded the kingdoms of Westeros into one, the empire of Valyria was the unopposed power of the world. Setting out of their homeland in the south of Essos on the wings of their dragons, the Valyrians conquered all those they set their amethyst eyes upon – and, one day, those eyes fell upon the Rhoynar. Theirs was a great civilisation, and their cities were both numerous and grand; yet they too fell, crushed and obliterated by Valyria's dragon armies.

However, one of the queens of the Rhoynar managed to escape the Valyrians' wrath, leading her people out of the Rhoynar on hundreds of ships. The queen was called Nymeria, and she led her ships to the shores of Dorne, the southernmost kingdom of Westeros, ruled by the Andals of House Martell. But Nymeria was not interested in violent conquest: instead, she married Mors Martell, becoming the effective ruler of Dorne by virtue of her superior force, and her people began coexisting with the Andals, adopting some local customs but also preserving many of their own. Thus Dorne as we come to know it was born, ruled by the Prince or Princess of House Nymeros Martell, or simply Martell, from the city of Sunspear.

Such origin alone would make Dorne unique among the mostly Andal- and First Men-descended Westerosi kingdoms; however, it would take a long time until the reader was properly introduced to the southern kingdom, for Dorne, its culture and even its people remained absent throughout the first two books and most of the third. That is not to mean that the kingdom was meant to be unimportant, quite to the contrary. Its very first mention comes from a conversation between Daenerys and her brother Viserys, in which he reminds her of how the Dornish Princess Elia Martell, wife of their late brother Rhaegar, had been murdered by the very people who had usurped the Iron Throne from the Targaryens – for which he

counts on Dorne to support his claim for the rule of Westeros. This would have made House Martell one of Daenerys' most important allies; unfortunately, due to her journeys taking her further away from Westeros, many books would pass until she made her first contact with the family of her late sister-in-law. Another hint of Dorne's strength comes from the fact that it was the only of the Seven Kingdoms that could not be conquered by the Targaryens, centuries earlier – with the Dornish being the only ones who managed the feat of bringing down one of Aegon the Conqueror's dragons –, instead being annexed through royal marriage.

Also from “Game” comes that which is perhaps the first physical description of a Dornish, Ashara of House Dayne; in contrast with the more typical Dornish traits seen in later books, Ashara is described as “tall and fair, with haunting violet eyes” (p. 65). Throughout the second book, “Clash,” we hear Dorne and its Prince, Doran Martell, mentioned much more often, namely through Tyrion's chapters; after all, “Clash” sees the start of the War of Five Kings, and even if some underestimate Dorne's military strength, Tyrion knows better than to antagonise the Lord of Sunspear.

It is not until halfway across the third book, “Storm,” that we are introduced to our first prominent character from Dorne: Oberyn Martell. His first appearance also serves as an introduction to Dornish culture: as he arrives in King's Landing to assume his place in the King's council, followed by an entourage of vassal Dornish lords, Tyrion ponders on the three groups of Dornishmen – the salty, the sandy and the stony –, as well as their Rhoynar ancestry – the salty being their closest descendants, whilst the stony were mostly Andal. Then he proceeds to give us a description of the people in Oberyn's retinue:

All three sorts seemed well represented in Doran's retinue. The salty Dornishmen were lithe and dark, with smooth olive skin and long black hair streaming in the wind. The sandy Dornishmen were even darker, their faces burned brown by the hot Dornish sun. [...] The stony Dornishmen were biggest and fairest, sons of the Andals and the First Men, brown-haired or blond, with faces that freckled or burned in the sun instead of browning. (“Storm,” p. 520)

Their clothing and equipment also calls Tyrion's attention – as it should the reader's, for while the average Westerosi noble or knight wears tunics, tabards and heavy armour, usually with sword in hand or in sheath, the Dornishmen

[...] wound long bright scarfs around their helmet to ward off sunstroke [...] wore silk and satin robes with jeweled belts and flowing sleeves. Their armor was heavily enameled and inlaid with burnished copper, shining silver, and soft red gold. They

came astride red horses and golden ones and a few as pale as snow, all slim and swift, with long necks and narrow beautiful heads. The fabled sand steeds of Dorne were smaller than proper warhorses and could not bear such weight of armor [...] (“Storm,” p. 520)

Tyrion also notes how Oberyn rides along with Ellaria Sand, openly declaring her his paramour, something he knows will doubly disconcert and offend the Andal-descended court of King’s Landing: firstly, because Ellaria’s surname marks her as born out of wedlock; secondly, because she herself is introduced as Oberyn’s lover, not wife. This offers yet another glimpse into how unique Dornishmen are; for even though they share the same faith as the Andal part of Westeros and also observe the institution of marriage, they are considerably more welcoming of “bastard” children, and far more open with their romantic relationships – even those not yet made sacred under the Faith of the Seven.

What makes this scene interesting is how, even though it offers but a glimpse of Dornish people and culture, and introduces but one Dornish character of relevance, it does so in a way that seems to summarise much of Dorne, from its demographics (as evidenced by the diversity in the retinue) to its clothing and military codes (as seen in the description of their garments, equipment, and even their horses), including its environment (through the hints regarding its heat) and even some of its people’s romantic and familiar customs (as Ellaria’s presence and status show). Given how this is the first notable appearance of a culture so distinguished from the usual Westerosi the reader has come to know, Oberyn’s retinue may easily be understood as a miniature of their land. More crucially, this might reinforce the perception of Oberyn’s character, temper and actions as being typical to the average Dornishman – especially as we have yet to be introduced to Dorne proper.

Indeed, Oberyn’s traits as we are shown them arguably suggests that. Physically, he could not be a more typical example of his people, at least the part that bore the most Rhoynar blood: “tall, slim, graceful [...] his face was lined and saturnine, with thin arched brows above large eyes as black and shiny as pools of coal oil. Only a few streaks of silver marred the lustrous black hair that receded from his brow in a widow’s peak as sharply pointed as his nose. *A salty Dornishman for certain*” (“Storm,” p. 521). But his looks are not simply a sign of his origin, as they strangely seem to hint at his personality – specifically in the negative connotations they might inspire. By the time Oberyn has his first meeting with Tyrion, the reader is already aware of his epithet as the “Red Viper of Dorne;” it is interesting, then, how his description seems to evoke a sense of leanness, sharpness and agility, almost like a viper

itself. His “widow’s peak” is an interesting choice of trait for him, too; as Porter (2013) points out, such a trait is commonly applied to villainous or antagonistic characters, particularly to Satan himself.

However, his appearance is not why he is known as the Red Viper. As we again learn from Tyrion, there are rumours that he once doused his sword with poison to face a lord who had challenged him – a lord who died not long after the clash. It is also said that, during his time fighting along mercenary bands in Essos, his knowledge of poisons grew vaster; this is confirmed later on, as Ser Gregor Clegane endures a long and excruciating death from poisoned wounds inflicted by the Dornish Prince. Oberyn’s use of poison hardly counts as a positive trait, and not only due to the inherently disloyal nature of its use; even with all the scheming and assassinations of Westerosi politics, poison is not a common choice of weapon. As we learn from Pycelle, Grand Maester (or scholar) of King’s Landing, such is the weapon of “cravens, eunuchs, bastards, and women” (“Game,” p. 254). Interestingly, Pycelle’s comment comes during a conversation with Ned Stark in which they discuss the possibility that Lord Jon Arryn was murdered by poisoning; when discussing the possible culprit, he comments on how Westeros “is not the Free Cities, where such things are common” (“Game,” p. 253). Oberyn’s favouring of poison, then, would further set him outside the typical behaviour of an average Westerosi man.

One might argue that his use of poisons is not necessarily a sign that such is common behaviour among Dornishmen – although Oberyn’s own tale of how his people eliminated a hated invading lord by raining scorpions over him as he slept (“Storm,” p. 909) might weaken the argument. Oberyn’s sexuality, however, is a different matter. Tales of his exploits are easily among the most scandalous rumours regarding him, at least to the average non-Dornish Westerosi: not only is he rumoured to bed men as often as women, but he has had daughters out of wedlock all over Dorne and beyond. The second tale is not unusual, for even the highest lords of Westeros are known to occasionally sire bastard children – including Ned Stark, widely reputed for his honour. The first rumour, however, is much graver. After all, even lords as powerful as Renly Baratheon and Loras Tyrell were careful to avoid and deny the slightest suggestion of homosexual behaviour – as it is hinted that they are lovers.

Oberyn himself never denies any of those rumours; quite the contrary, he is quite open about most of them, especially his sexual appetite – as when he chooses to have a paramour rather than a wife, or when he openly acknowledges every single of his bastard

daughters, or when he casually deems the women of Lannisport “too chaste” (“Storm,” p. 524), or when he tells Tyrion his favoured way of dying was with a “woman’s breast in his his hand” (p. 525), or when he openly comments on how he and Ellaria enjoy sharing lovers between one another (p. 527). It must be stressed that it is not unusual for lords all over Westeros to have rather busy sex lives; Tyrion, for one, is a common frequenter of brothels, while King Robert Baratheon himself fathered many children out of wedlock. What makes Oberynd stand out in this regard is how open he is about it all – and how none of his fellow Dornish lords seem to mind that. Indeed, Ellaria herself is later revealed as the bastard daughter of the influential Dornish Lord Uller of Hellholt.

Yet another important trait of his personality is his temper. Even before his actual appearance, Tyrion’s comments warn the reader that Oberynd is not a man to be taken lightly; indeed, most of the tales regarding him, when not focused on his sexuality, insist that he is dangerous, vicious when provoked, and indomitable. We have a taste of that right at his first meeting with Tyrion, when the Martell relentlessly mocks the Lannister – and without provocation, though his old rivalry towards Tyrion’s family (whom he holds responsible for the murder of his sister Elia during the Targaryens’ fall) certainly is reason enough for him. Oberynd’s temper ultimately proves to be his undoing during the duel with the powerful knight Gregor Clegane: although he dominates most of the fight, Oberynd’s insistence in making him confess the Lannisters’ role in Elia’s murder – coupled with his own arrogance – gives Clegane enough time to react and kill him.

At this point in the story, one may wonder if Oberynd’s character is meant as representative of all the Dornish, and that aggressiveness or hypersexuality are typical traits among them – or, more specifically, the salty and sandy groups. For the other two stony Dornishmen the reader gets somewhat acquainted with (Edric Dayne, whom Arya Stark meets during “Storm,” and Gerris Drinkwater, Quentyn Martell’s friend and companion in “Dance I & II”) have the courteous and tempered behaviour usually expected of Andal or Northerner (First Men) nobility. The same is true for the other stony Dornishman we are introduced to (albeit only through other characters’ memories): Arthur Dayne, the legendary “Sword of the Morning,” hailed by all who knew him as strong, brave and honourable to a fault – the ideal Westerosi knight, so to say. It is true that Lewyn Martell, another Dornish knight we are told about (and a contemporary of Arthur Dayne), is remembered fondly while also being a salty Dornishman; however, that does not change the fact that the Dornish are more commonly

understood, at least by the characters we meet at first, as precisely the type of person Oberyn himself is regarded to be: aggressive, dangerous and sexually promiscuous.

Such impressions go beyond Westeros itself. As he remembers his first impressions on Dorne, Areo Hotah, from the faraway Free City of Norvos, ponders that he thought “Dornish women were lewd” (“Dance I,” p. 589). The relationship between Dornishmen, treachery and poisoning is noted even more widely: Victarion Greyjoy, an Ironborn from Westeros’ western islands, at one point muses on how poison was the weapon of “cravens, women, and Dornishmen” (“Dance II,” p. 247); and Hizdahr zo Loraq from Meereen (which is even farther from Dorne than Norvos) accuses the Dornish Quentyn Martell of attempting to poison Daenerys based on the notion that Dornishmen “are all poisoners” (“Dance II,” p. 405). Next to all this, Cersei’s opinion that “all Dornishmen were snakes” seems almost a logical conclusion (“Dance II,” p. 223).

Still, an outsider’s most thorough impression on the Dornish comes from Ser Arys Oakheart, a knight of the Reach (Dorne’s old rivals), as he muses about the Dornish – and, specifically, the Dornishwoman he then had an affair with – while living among them: “In the Reach men said it was the food that made Dornishmen so hot-tempered and their women so wild and wanton. Fiery peppers and strange spices heat the blood, she cannot help herself.” (“Feast,” p. 271).

Arys’ musings are perhaps the best summarisation of not only the Andal Westerosi’s views on the Dornish, but also of how they are shown to the reader up to that point; but more importantly, it is where we may notice the influence of Eurocentric perceptions on non-Western people most clearly. Martin himself once claimed (2000) that Moorish Spain and Palestine were two sources of inspiration for the creation of Dorne; however, one might be forgiven for identifying Latin-Americans as the closest real-world counterpart to the Dornish, for the ways the heirs of the Rhoynar are described up until Arys’ first chapter are strongly reminiscent of recurring US tropes on their southern neighbours. After all, not rarely are Latinos imagined as aggressive, quick to anger, and hypersexual – this last trait being even more strongly associated to Latinas, as the “spitfire” trope shows (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; CHITO CHILDS, 2009). Even the cuisine of the Dornish seems to bear similarities with Latino (specifically Mexican) cuisine, with its appreciation of pepper and strong spices, as is their association to the perceived fiery temper of Latinos – an association that is also made in regards to Latin America’s hot weather (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014).

It is true that spicy food and heat are two elements often attributed to Asian cultures and landscapes, just as the Dornish people's colourful and flowing garments are strikingly reminiscent of Arabic and Indian clothing – at least as it is often depicted in Western art. One might also point out that deserts, which are one of Dorne's most striking features, are more typically associated in Western art to West Asian settings (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014); then again, deserts are also a common geographic feature of Mexico, let alone Latin-American nations further to the south like Chile and Peru. Yet it is the strong presence of a markedly Western component in Dorne's ethnic and cultural genesis (in this case, the Andal) that brings it closer to Latin America, whose countries also contain strong Western elements in their own ethnic and cultural origins – unlike most Asian countries. Likewise, the strong focus on Dornish women's perceived hypersexuality is more reminiscent of stereotypes on the women of Latin America than on those of Asia.

This focus is hinted at as early as “Storm,” where Oberyn comments on how Ellaria's sexual “appetite” match his own; but it becomes particularly evident in Arys' first chapter, which takes place in the fourth book, “Feast,” and is the first time the reader is taken to a city of Dorne itself. As a member of the Kingsguard, the royal family's personal guard, he had been tasked with protecting Princess Myrcella Baratheon after Tyrion, in a move to appease the Martells, sent her to the city of Sunspear, House Martell's seat and Dorne's main city.

One would be forgiven for feeling as if the story had taken them beyond Westeros; with its heat and dust, exotic food and spicy smells, flowing clothes and arched passageways, Sunspear certainly sets itself apart from the cooler, stonier and sterner cities of the north. The impression we get from Arys, however, is not a positive one: he finds himself a target of the people's hostility and bullying, and from him we learn that but a few days earlier a merchant from King's Landing had been butchered simply for being from that city. Such is not without explanation; for those are the days following Oberyn's death, and the anger of the Dornish at the demise of their beloved lord burned intensely.

However, neither Sunspear nor its inhabitants make up the core of Arys' chapter; such a place is occupied by Arianne Martell, who makes her first prominent appearance. As the eldest child of Doran Martell, she is the heiress of Dorne, destined to be its Princess – or ruler –; as she is introduced, she is also Arys' lover, a relationship that is complicated by her station, by the fact that it is not blessed by the faith, and by his position as a Kingsguard. Of these, only the latest seems to truly bother him, for the Kingsguard are sworn to a sacred vow

of celibacy; he finds himself torn between honouring his knightly code and desiring for his lover – and Arianne certainly does not make things any simpler for him. The scene of their encounter is easily one of the most torrid in the entire series; Arianne’s own attitude towards sexuality is notably open, even unorthodox (for instance, she suggests she would not mind sharing him with one of her cousins). To Arys’ eyes, everything about her is irresistibly alluring, to such extent that “a dragon might have been peering in the window” and he would “never have seen anything but her breasts, her face, her smile” (“Feast,” p. 269).

At that point, it seems evident – maybe less to Arys himself, but perhaps to the reader – that she is seducing him to make the knight a tool to achieve her own goals. After all, during their encounter she reveals she has plans for Dorne and for Westeros itself, plans that involve making Myrcella queen on the Iron Throne – despite the fact that her being a woman meant her younger brother Tommen was crowned king after their elder brother’s untimely death. As a Kingsguard and Myrcella’s protector, Arys is essential to Arianne’s plans; naturally, that would mean going against almost every vow he has sworn, including King Tommen himself. Ultimately, Arianne’s allure proves too strong, and the knight’s honour succumbs to his desire as he pledges himself to her.

An observant reader will have noticed that everything they have been shown of Dorne or the Dornish up to this point has been through the eyes of anyone but the Dornish themselves. This is also true for that which is the first chapter actually set in the southern kingdom, preceding even Arys’: that of the captain of Doran Martell’s guard, Areo Hotah, from the Free City of Norvos. While Areo is sympathetic and staunchly loyal both to his lord and to his “little princess” Arianne, the same is not necessarily true regarding other Dornish; in fact, we learn little of his opinions on Dorne then, and his chapter serves mostly as a window through which we witness Doran’s meeting with some of the Sand Snakes, Oberyn’s bastard daughters.

That one people’s opinions of another are biased should surprise no one. This is openly, albeit briefly, commented upon during one conversation Arya has with a companion called Anguy: when the Stark girl asks him if it is true that “Dornishmen lie,” he – a native of the Marches in the Stormlands, a region neighbouring Dorne – answers that “they’re famous for it,” but also that, “of course, they say the same of us marchers” (“Storm,” p. 598). The extent to which the outsider’s bias influence the ways Dorne and its people appear becomes evident when the reader reaches Arianne’s own chapters. The first deals with her setting in

motion her plan to snatch Myrcella from Sunspear, gather allied Dornish lords and declare her queen of Westeros; her retinue is composed of her closest friends – the knight Andrey Dalt, Sylva of House Santagar, and the low-born “orphan of the Greenblood” Garin – as well as Arys and the knight known as Darkstar, Gerold Dayne. Her relationship with those friends offers one of the most interesting glimpses into her personality, and one that is easy to overlook; for few are the other noble female characters who show such friendship for individuals so below her station as Dalt and especially Garin are. The former was actually her lover once, while the latter is like a brother to her – and not merely because they shared the same wet nurse. Furthermore, she does not seem to care much about the etiquette usually expected of a noblewoman, and has no issue making teasing remarks, and rather crude ones too – such as when Gerold Dayne leaves camp for a moment, claiming he needed to “piss,” and once he returns she jokingly asks him how the experience was.

The Dornish Princess’ sexual independence is another trait that is made evident, such as when she muses on how Gerold Dayne is the most handsome man in Dorne, and how their children would be “as beautiful as dragonlords” (“Feast,” p. 426) – for Darkstar, with his silver hair, pale skin and purple eyes, does resemble a typical Valyrian, contrasting with Arianne’s typical salty Dornish traits. Nevertheless, if Arys’ chapter presents Arianne as little more than a highly sexual person who arouses an almost uncontrollable sexual desire in the knight, in her own chapters we see that sexuality is something she is neither ashamed of nor troubled by, but which is far from being her sole or even main concern. Indeed, her main concerns are making her plan work, have Myrcella crowned, and keep all her friends safe. It is, however, worth noticing that Arys is not the only one who makes remarks on Arianne’s body; Areo Hotah does the same, noticing how, “beneath her jeweled girdle and loose layers of flowing purple silk and yellow samite she had a woman’s body, lush and roundly curve” (“Feast,” p. 59). While such comment is brief and the only of its kind coming from him, one might be forgiven for finding it odd that he refers to her body in such detail, more so after we are led to believe Areo feels an almost paternal fondness for her.

Sadly, Arianne’s plans end up in stunning failure, for her retinue is found by Dornish soldiers sent by Doran (who has plans of his own), Myrcella is severely wounded (by Gerold Dayne, who betrays Arianne and flees), her friends are captured and Arys is killed, in a cruel twist of irony, by Areo Hotah, Arianne’s old protector. Here we see another layer of her relationship with the Kingsguard: she later acknowledges that she did seduce him, at first; yet,

as we find her locked away by her own father in a tower in Sunspear, we see her “weeping, her whole body wrecked by sobs,” at the mere memory of Arys’ death (“Feast,” p. 840). It is equally true, though, that she does not seem to mourn him for long – and, interestingly, nor does she seem to hold any grudge against Areo. Perhaps her feelings for the Kingsguard were indeed earnest while they lasted, even if born of manipulation.

Arianne’s chapters also offer a deeper glimpse into women’s roles in Dornish society – roles that are unique among the kingdoms of Westeros. From as early as the first book we are informed that, in Dorne, the rule of a noble House is inherited by the eldest child, regardless of gender; however, this information appears solely in the appendix section. Even Oberyn makes no mention of this unique custom during his appearance in “Storm.” This changes when we follow Arianne, for her chapters are entirely centred on her efforts to make Myrcella Queen of Westeros on the basis of her being the eldest remaining child of King Robert and Queen Cersei – and, in doing so, guarantee that she herself succeeds her father as Dorne’s ruling Princess. For she had been led to believe, from a letter written by Doran and intercepted by her, that he intends to leave House Martell to his middle child, Quentyn, while fostering his youngest, Trystane, to marry Myrcella and become Westeros’ king – all while marrying Arianne herself off to some lesser lord. While Arianne is not the only noblewoman who resents being ignored and bargained on account of her gender, she is the only one whose claim to authority and independence is supported by the culture where she lives. By contrast, even ladies from powerful Houses such as Cersei, Daenerys and Arya have strived solely to be taken seriously in societies that are notably more patriarchal.

The Sand Snakes offer us further glimpses into the roles allowed to women in Dorne. During Oberyn’s first appearance in “Storm,” we are told that his bastard daughters are many, but we hear nothing more about them until “Feast” and then “Dance,” when they appear in Areo’s chapters and are frequently mentioned in Arianne’s. It is then that we learn of how Oberyn not only acknowledged them, but personally saw to it that each of his daughters was well taken care of. More than that: he allowed and even fostered them to follow whatever path in life they chose, even teaching the older ones how to fight. Thus we meet Obara (the eldest, whose mother is from the city of Oldtown) as a capable warrior, Nymeria (daughter of a noblewoman from the Free City of Volantis) as someone skilled with hidden blades, and Tyene (daughter of a septa, or priestess of Westeros’ main religion) excelling in poisons. Sarella, fathered by a woman from the Summer Isles, is described as having a scholarly

interest in history, and being particularly fond of Oldtown, seat of the Citadel, where the maesters of Westeros are trained. Interestingly, there are hints that the character Alleras, who features in some of Samwell Tarly's chapters in "Feast," is actually Sarella disguised as a man in order to study as a maester; if true, that would make her yet another fighter, as she is proficient with the powerful goldenheart bows of the Summer Isles.

While one may point out that Oberyne is hardly the most respectful man in his treatment with women – he did slap Obara's mother in front of the girl only to teach her a lesson on weakness, after all –, he does stand as the one Westerosi lord, besides Ned Stark, shown to both openly acknowledge and personally take care of his bastard daughters. And the Sand Snakes have certainly not disappointed their father, for they are a force to be reckoned with; so much so that Doran has to take measures to stop them from galvanising all of Dorne into vengeful retaliation against the Iron Throne for the death Oberyne. Still, one might also argue that, for all their strength, as characters they are too closely tied to their father, both by their actions and their traits. They are, indeed, their father's daughters, having inherited not only his "viper eyes," but also his dangerous temper – and, at least in Tyene's case, his sexual appetite. It is not without reason that they are often compared to him, with Arianne even jesting that the three eldest Sand Snakes are "three Oberyne's, with teats" ("Dance," p. 598). The biggest apparent difference between them and their father is their uneasy relationship with his brother Doran; notwithstanding, by the last time we see them in "Dance," setting out to help their uncle in his plot to have revenge upon the Lannisters, it is clear that they are resolved to take Oberyne's place as the Prince of Dorne's main agents.

To be fair, the Sand Snakes are not given nearly as much time as their uncle and cousin to have their personalities described in depth. Doran, by his turn, is a constant and prominent presence in nearly all of the chapters set in Dorne; even so, our understanding of his personality during most of those first chapters is considerably blurred by the fact we only see him through the eyes of others. Thus, at first, he may seem like a shell of a man, aged, crippled by gout, and emotionally weak; though his brother had just been killed, and though many in Dorne cry for vengeance, Doran does nothing. The Sand Snakes then demand him to retaliate and call him cowardly, weak and inferior to his very face when he refuses, yet he does nothing. His own daughter distrusts him: not only did he try and offer her hand in marriage to a number of lords from lesser Houses and even lesser reputations, but, as she discovers from a letter, he seems of a mind to deny her birthright and name her younger

brother, Quentyn, his successor. Contrasted with the fiery and indomitable Oberyn, who saw to it that his daughters grew into strong and capable women, Doran's personality may seem even more perplexing and fragile.

But the Prince of Dorne is far more than he appears at first glance, as we learn when he decides to reveal his schemes to his daughter. For he never forgot about Elia's murder; in fact, he had spent all those years planning his vengeance, slowly and carefully. That he offered Arianne's hand to undesirable lords was intentional; he needed to be seen finding suitors for his daughter, but he knew she would never accept the ones he did present, thus keeping her unmarried until the last surviving son of the Targaryen dynasty (the rumoured lost son of the former crown prince, Rhaegar) returned. Through such marriage, he hoped to ensure Dorne's leadership in the future rebellion against Houses Baratheon and Lannister, the culprits of Elia's murder and Oberyn's death. The death of the Targaryen male heir forces a change in Doran's plans, but their final goal remains the same: to leave Dorne under Quentyn, and make Arianne queen of all of Westeros, on an Iron Throne soaked with Lannister blood.

Doran's apparent faintness is but a mask as well, although one that owes much to his actual personality. That he takes so many insults from the Sand Snakes without barely a stern word is more a sign of love for his brother's daughters than meekness; that he simply exiles Arianne's co-conspirators when they were guilty of actual treason, a crime punishable with death under Westerosi law, is a show of leniency towards his daughter, whom he knows cares deeply for her friends. Arianne's own act of treason leaves him hurt and disappointed, rather than enraged or embittered; as they meet after her days-long captivity in her tower, she certainly tests his patience, yet he never snaps at her despite his numerous warnings. That Doran seems to content himself with sitting idly even in face of Oberyn's death is severely misleading, for his silence belies the many plans he weaves to achieve his goals and his vengeance. As he himself tells the Sand Snakes,

I am not blind, nor deaf. I know that you all believe me weak, frightened, feeble. Your father knew me better. Oberyn was ever the viper. Deadly, dangerous, unpredictable. No man dared tread on him. I was the grass. Pleasant, complaisant, sweet-smelling, swaying with every breeze. Who fears to walk upon the grass? But it is the grass the hides the viper from his enemies and shelters him until he strikes. ("Dance I," p. 596).

Still, Doran's care is not limited to his family, and his carefulness does not aim only at efficiency; for the Prince of Dorne cares deeply about his people, and is unwilling to send

them to a war they cannot win – for he knows his land is not strong enough to rise in rebellion against the Iron Throne. This is easily one of the traits that most starkly sets him apart from other lords. We see a multitude of lords marching their armies like pieces of a game, taking villages and razing plantations for strategic gains. We see Robb Stark, the valiant and honourable heir of Winterfell after Ned’s death, unite the North in war against the Lannisters to avenge his father. While some of these lords seem more just or considerate than others, one attitude they all seem to share is paying little mind to the people that their marching and warring condemn to a routine of death, rape and destruction – people who, it is worth stressing, are mostly low-born. Doran, however, has learned well from the story of the old Princess Daenerys Martell, a story he himself learned from his mother:

As the children splashed in the pools, Daenerys watched from amongst the orange trees, and a realization came to her. She could not tell the highborn from the low. Naked, they were only children. All innocent, all vulnerable, all deserving of long life, love, protection. “There is your realm,” she told her son and heir, “remember them, in everything you do.” [...] It is an easy thing for a prince to call the spears, but in the end the children pay the price. For their sake, the wise prince will wage no war without good cause, nor any war he cannot hope to win. (“Dance I,” p. 595-96).

His views become evident again later on, albeit sprinkled with a measure of doubt and uncertainty. As he tells Areo, “until the Mountain crushed my brother’s skull, no Dornishman had died in this War of the Five Kings [...] Tell me, Captain, is that my shame or my glory?” (“Dance I,” p. 599).

The Sand Snakes do not seem impressed by Doran’s words or ways, but Arianne has clearly changed after the confrontation with her father in “Feast.” If once she antagonised and resented him, as we see her for the last time in “Dance” (and in the series as it stands) she stands by him, pleading with her cousins to support him. If once she seemed, as Areo ponders, more Obery’s daughter than Doran’s, it is now hinted that she may be taking lessons in patience and strategy from her father.

Finally, a mention must be made on Quentyn, Doran’s middle son, who makes his first appearance in “Dance I.” We meet him as he is on the way to Meereen in the Slaver’s Bay, where he is meant to speak with Daenerys and forge an alliance between her and House Martell – specifically through marriage. While he does offer interesting insights into many of Essos’ lands and people, all we see of Dorne through him comes from memories and musings; even those are mostly centred on his own life and feelings. It can be said, at the very least, that he adds to the diversity of Dornish characters we come to know; for while the likes of

Arianne, Oberyn and the Sand Snakes are fiery and unbound, passionate and at times dangerous, Quentyn is closer to his father in temperament, being generally calm and considerate with his friends. However, unlike even the Prince of Dorne, he is beset with insecurities, be it regarding his looks – there are reasons he is jestingly called “Frog,” after all – or his success. In such a merciless world (and, especially, in a setting as brutal as the Slaver's Bay), he could have been an interesting character, perhaps even a sympathetic one; alas, his story is cut short when he tries to earn Daenerys' trust by taming one of her dragons – failing to realise that not everyone is meant to “dance with them.”

3.2 THE DAUGHTERS OF VALYRIA

When the Doom shattered the Valyrian Peninsula with fire and ash, the empire of the dragonlords was brought to an end as abrupt as it was thorough; for not only the city itself was swallowed and its people killed, but its dragons fell like flies, and much of the knowledge it had gathered across the centuries lost. Yet even the Doom could not completely erase Valyria's legacy, for the colonies it had built over the western reaches of Essos survived and thrived on their own, becoming the nine cities-state known as the Free Cities: Tyrosh, Lys, Pentos, Norvos, Qohor, Braavos, Myr, Lorath and Volantis.

Of all the cultures outside Westeros, the Free Cities – and individuals who count them as their origin – might be the ones that feature throughout the series the most regularly, and also the ones with the closest ties with the Seven Kingdoms. Ironically, however, few are the cities that actually appear in any of the characters' chapters. Still, the cultural and historical ties shared between them and their people enable an observer to form a general picture of their ways – and, more importantly, understand the interesting crossroads they find themselves at, a crossroads that bears curious parallels with real-world cultures as perceived by a Western eye.

The first time we witness a Free City is in Daenerys' very first chapter, as she lives along with her brother in a mansion owned by Illyrio, a wealthy magister of Pentos. Although we see little of it, its many towers, as well as the wealth of Illyrio's household, suggest a level of sophistication that even in Westeros is usually only seen in the largest cities and richest castles. Such impression is not without due reason, for there is not a Free City – from Volantis with its mighty fleet to Qohor that once withstood a massive Dothraki army, from Lys of the

many beauties to Braavos with its powerful Iron Bank – that is described as poor or weak. Some, like Myr, are known for the quality of their crafts, which are sold all over the world; others, for their impressive architecture. Braavos, for instance, is the site of the Titan, a colossal statue of granite and bronze whose legs form the maritime entrance to the lagoon where the city itself lies.

The Free Cities' sophistication is also made evident by their culture and technology – some of which was inherited from Valyria itself. It is among them that the last smiths who can work the legendary Valyrian steel can be found; additionally, while each city speaks a variant of the empire's old language, it is not hard to find fluent speakers of High Valyrian – a language still used across Essos as a “lingua franca.” Even games that become popular in a particular city-state may find themselves entertaining people across the world – as it is the case of “cyvasse,” a table game invented in Volantis, but which we see being played in lands as far apart as Dorne and Meereen. Curiously, while we become used to the Westerosi (specifically those of Andal or First Men ancestry) reproducing patronising opinions about other cultures, we see this reversed when we follow Tyrion to Volantis. There, as he discusses the city-state's ruling system, which involves elections (exclusively among the nobility), he hears of how “some in the Free Cities think that [the Westerosi] are all savages;” those who do not instead think that they are “children, crying out for a father's strong hand” (“Dance I,” p. 421).

If the Free Cities' reach extend across the world, so does the world gather at the Free Cities – for they are easily the most cosmopolitan places we see in either Westeros or Essos. And among the Daughters of Valyria, Braavos (ironically, the one city-state not built by Valyrians, but by their escaped slaves) embodies that like few others. As Arya wanders its foggy canals, she comes across temples consecrated to a multitude of gods from a variety of faraway lands. Such diversity is in Braavos' own genesis; after all, the Braavosi themselves are a “mongrel folk, the sons of slaves and whores and thieves” whose “forebears came from half a hundred lands,” bringing their many gods along (“Feast,” p. 722). It is there, through Arya's eyes, that we are offered a glimpse of the diversity of people who walk the docks of a Free City:

[...] The boisterous Tyroshi with their booming voices and dyed whiskers; the fair-haired Lyseni, always trying to niggly down her [Arya's] prices; the squat, hairy sailors from the Port of Ibben, growling curses in slow, raspy voices. Her favorites

were the Summer Islanders, with their skins as smooth and dark as teak. (“Feast,” p. 724).

The people of the Free Cities too travel as far and wide as their goods; many are the Braavosi, or Tyroshi, or Lysene, or Myrish individuals found both in eastern Essos and in Westeros itself – and not simply as background characters, deprived of lines or interactions of their own. For if there is an activity that the people of the Free Cities seem as adept at as commerce, it is mercenary work. Almost every mercenary company found throughout the series is commanded (alone or jointly) by someone from the Free Cities – such as Vargo Hoat of Qohor, found in Westeros; Mero of Braavos, captain of the powerful Second Sons; and Daario Naharis of Tyrosh, who has pledged himself to Daenerys. While it is true that mercenary companies are always diverse in the origin of their members, hardly any other origin is shared as frequently as the Free Cities – who are also counted as the homelands of many a noble who graces the courts of Westeros. Petyr Baelish, one of the Seven Kingdoms’ most influential and wealthy politicians, has Braavosi roots; Mellario, Doran Martell’s estranged wife and mother of his three children, hails from Norvos; Cersei herself starts a friendship (and, eventually, a dalliance) with Taena Merryweather, the Myrish wife of one of her vassal lords; even Lord Varys, the Iron Throne’s spymaster and another of Westeros’ most influential figures, is from the Free Cities.

The highly diverse cast of characters from the Free Cities tell as much about them as the descriptions we hear from those who visit them. Their ethnic composition, for one, may be varied, but it certainly bears some shared roots – with Westerosi in particular, for characters from the Free Cities are rarely distinguished from them when it comes to looks. Mero, for example, has “pale green eyes” and “red-gold beard” (“Storm,” p. 576) according to Daenerys, who later ponders if certain “tall, blue-eyed and fair” soldier of hers is from either Lys or Volantis (“Dance I,” p. 35). The Lysene, many of whom appear throughout the series, are easily distinguished by their pale-blond hair and light eyes. Daario, a Tyroshi, has blue eyes and is described as “fair where Ser Jorah [a Northern Westerosi] is swarthy” (“Storm,” p. 582). Even Sansa, a red-haired and blue-eyed Northerner youth, easily passes as half-Braavosi at one point. Only the Myrish might stand out for their looks, as Taena is described as having “olive skin [...] huge dark eyes and thick black hair” (“Feast,” p. 150); on the other hand, the red priest Thoros, also from Myr, is not described as having a different skin tone than the average Andal Westerosi. This is perhaps the first and most evident sign of the Free

Cities' "Westernness."

Nevertheless, if they share so many similarities with Westeros, they share just as many with the cultures we see further to the east. Perhaps the most striking one is slavery; while Braavos expressly forbids the employment or traffic of slaves, its sister cities do not seem as loathe of the practise. Indeed, slaves seem to be as essential and ubiquitous a class there as knights in Westeros, being employed in a variety of occupations. As we learn from a slave trader in Meereen, "in the Free Cities [the slaves] will be tutors, scribes, bed slaves, even healers and priests" ("Storm," p. 984). One particular role determined upon the slaves is that of eunuch; while slavers from the Free Cities seemingly do not make eunuchs as often as those from further east, the most prominent we meet throughout the series comes from Lys: Varys, the Iron Throne's spymaster. Also from Lys come the main providers of "bed slaves," especially trained in the arts of sex – such as Doreah, one of Daenerys' first handmaidens. That city, along with Volantis and Tyrosh, especially thrive on slave trade, and their populations are composed mostly of enslaved people.

It is true that slavery – especially in its most brutal forms – is a practice often associated with Asian cultures, as we have seen earlier with Shohat & Stam (2014) and Said (1979); however, even in the Middle Ages there were European societies that relied on slavery, notably the Byzantine – which thrived on the eastern and southern reaches of Europe, with domains stretching over portions of Asia and North Africa. Here we may find an interesting parallel between Byzantine and Free Cities' societies, for both had the eunuch as a somewhat prominent type of slave – even if eunuchs are associated, in Western art, to Eastern societies in general (TOUGHER, 2009).

Interestingly, there does not seem to be any predominant origin among slaves in the Free Cities. While it is hinted that they are mostly captured from weaker nations – such as the Island of Naath, Missandei's homeland –, we meet enslaved individuals who count even the Free Cities themselves as their background, such as Doreah and an unnamed Unsullied warrior, both of whom are Lysene. Such is true for all slaves we see in Essos; however, the Free Cities do not yield tales of abuses endured by slaves as horrifying as those we hear (and witness) from the continent's eastern regions. Naturally, one is free to assume that a slave's life in western Essos is not meant to be good; as we visit Volantis in the company of Tyrion and Quentyn, we see slaves labouring under intense heat, or collared, or used for sex... In other words, we see them being put to do menial tasks. What our eyes do miss is the sight of

slaves enduring violent punishment or being tortured, at least in public – something that, as we shall see later, is an almost mundane sight in the cities of Slaver's Bay. That is not to say that brutality is not part of life in the Free Cities; however, that we see less scenes of gratuitous violence there than elsewhere in Essos seems to indicate that, in the cities-state, at least some degree of restraint and standards can be found.

On the other hand, the Free Cities' attitudes towards magic arts hardly differ much from what we see in eastern Essos – and that we find those same arts being practised there, by itself, sets the Daughters of Valyria even further apart from the Seven Kingdoms, where magic is not only uncommon, but generally rejected. It is in Volantis, for example, that we see Benerro, high priest of the god R'hllor, stand before a crowd and conjure flames from his own fingers, then use those same flames to write words in the air; in Braavos, we follow Arya as she trains with the Faceless Men, assassins whose strange arts allow them to completely alter their appearance in ways that should not be humanly possible. Varys, by his turn, offers us a glimpse of how grim the arts practised in the Free Cities can be:

He gave me a potion that made me powerless to move or speak, yet did nothing to dull my senses. With a long hooked blade, he sliced me root and stem, chanting all the while. I watched him burn my manly parts on a brazier. The flames turned blue, and I heard a voice answer his call [...] (“Clash,” p. 646).

Betrayals and assassinations seem even more common than magic. As it has been mentioned earlier, Grand Maester Pycelle tells us quite early in the series that the powerful in the Free Cities may always expect to be quietly eliminated by rivals; while this could be dismissed as mere stereotyping, the Free Cities as we are shown (at least through the eyes of those who do not count them as home) seem to indicate otherwise. It is hardly a good sign that one of the most feared order of assassins we hear of, the Faceless Men, is from Braavos (the other one being the Sorrowful Men of Qarth in the far east). Arya's own training under them requires her to complete a series of small assassinations within the city itself. In Pentos, a prince – or ruler – whose reign is marred by hardship may find his throat cut, as Illyrio rather nonchalantly explains to Tyrion at one point. His conversation with Tyrion shows an interesting contrast between cultural attitudes: while the Lannister claims that, in Westeros, it is considered a “grave breach of hospitality to poison your guest at supper,” Illyrio retorts that it was the same in Pentos, but also that, “when a guest plainly wishes to end his own life, why, his host must oblige him” – and then proceeds to comment, just as nonchalantly, on how

a fellow Pentoshi magister had been poisoned not long before (“Dance I,” p. 29).

Perhaps most alarming is how so many of the more prominent characters from the Free Cities are regarded, and sometimes actually shown, as ambiguous, unreliable, manipulative, even treacherous – which, one might be reminded, are traits often applied to Easterners by the Eurocentric eye (SAID, 1979). In this regard, Varys’ name is easily the first to come to mind: there is not a shortage of (Westerosi) characters, from Ned Stark to Pycelle, who regard or openly call him untrustworthy and dangerous, with an agenda of his own, and with a view of all those around him as mere pawns. Tyrion, perhaps the one who holds the spymaster in the highest regard, openly claims his uncertainty on whether Varys is the “best friend he has in King’s Landing,” or “his worst enemy” – a sentiment that is reciprocated (“Clash,” p. 242). One might assume that this suspicion comes from his very job as a spymaster, and especially from the fact that he is a eunuch; Varys himself understands that, as he makes clear when he tells Ned Stark that “a eunuch has no honour” (“Game,” p. 633). Whatever suspicion that might have been had about Varys is then seemingly justified when he murders Pycelle and the then regent of Westeros, Kevan Lannister – right before revealing his master plan of putting a new prince, one whose upbringing he was personally responsible for, on the Iron Throne.

A defence can be made of Varys based on what he professes to be his ideals; after all, to Ned Stark he claims to serve “the realm,” whose peace he wants to ensure (“Game,” p. 636). The prince he seeks to enthrone is one he claims to know that “kingship is his duty, that a king must put his people first, and live and rule for them” (“Dance II,” p. 493). But if Varys’ ways can be excused by his ideals, the same cannot be boasted by the likes of Illyrio, who once sought to manipulate Daenerys as he manipulated Viserys; or Salladhor Saan, the mercenary pirate whom Davos Seaworth counts as a friend, but who ultimately looks only after himself; or Vargo Hoat, the Qohorik mercenary captain who turns against his own employer for a more favourable deal; or Daario, whose loyalty even Daenerys, for all her infatuation with him, suspects – and who, in fact, joined her by double-crossing his own mercenary allies.

Taena Merryweather, by her turn, is a more complex case: while she is never shown actually harming anyone, still she loyally aids Cersei in her schemes and manipulations, making herself friendly to other noblewomen only to spy on them. At first, Cersei herself seems suspicious of the Myrish noblewoman, whom she first describes as “ambitious” and

“smelling of sin” (“Feast,” p. 150), though she later concludes that Taena was truly her friend. Notwithstanding, one would be forgiven for being wary of how quickly Taena, whose husband is but a minor lord, seems to seduce (literally and figuratively) the Lannister Queen, becoming her confidante and one-time lover.

A further note must be made on the way Taena is shown, for not many other characters are depicted in as alluring and sexual manner as her. And it is not as if we know her through the eyes of a (heterosexual) man, who may be conditioned to seeing a woman as an object of desire; for we only see her through the eyes of Cersei. And Cersei herself is taken with the Myrish noblewoman from the moment she first sees her, taking notice of Taena’s “long legs, full breasts, smooth olive skin, ripe lips” (“Feast,” p. 150); then again, later, of her lips, “full and dark” (p. 257) as well as her perfume, “a musky scent that spoke of moss and wildflowers” (p. 256). Taena certainly knows how attractive she is, and seems to have no issue with it either; her revelation that she was no virgin when she married her Westerosi husband surprises even Cersei. When the queen at last makes her advances on the Myrish noblewoman, she openly welcomes it. One could be forgiven for drawing parallels between Taena and some of the female Dornish characters (specifically Arianne and Ellaria) in regards to how their sexuality is depicted; likewise, it cannot be ignored that, just like the Dornish women we see, the Myrish noblewoman is dark-skinned – something that arguably evokes stereotypes on dark-skinned women’s sexuality (CHITO CHILDS, 2009).

It is only fair to stress that not all characters from the Free Cities we meet are treacherous, or manipulative, or murderous; Arya, for one, considers the Braavosi a “kindly folk, by and large, more like to help the poor blind beggar girl [herself] than try to do her harm” (“Dance II,” p. 75). Areo Hotah and Lady Mellario, both from Norvos, are held in very high esteem by the Martells. Areo, indeed, is the only character from the Free Cities to have his own chapters so far in the series; unfortunately, most of what we hear from him regarding his homeland is related to his training and service first to Mellario, then to Doran. Mellario herself is only ever mentioned, and has yet to make an actual appearance. Of the others born from either of Valyria’s daughters that we get acquainted with, however, there is hardly one who is neither a mercenary, or a pirate, or a politician – and hardly anyone to trust. And as the Romans both acknowledged their kinship with their eastern Greek neighbours and regarded them as too influenced by those further to the east (LOCKMAN, 2004), so do the Free Cities, for all their ties with Westeros, are shown as more akin to their own neighbours of Essos.

4. BEYOND THE RHOYNE AND THE SEAS OF SUMMER: SOUTH AND EAST ESSOS

As we have seen, for all their differences both Dorne and the Free Cities also have many ties to Westeros, be it cultural, economic, or political. The same can hardly be said of the people and nations we find even further south and especially east. While the continent's utmost east remains unseen – with many and rich nations said to exist beyond the so-called Jade Gates alone –, we are still given the chance to meet many an Essosi nation as we travel beyond the Rhoyme into the heart of Essos.

4.1 LORDS OF THE GREAT GRASS SEA

In the aftermath of Valyria's fall, almost four centuries before King Robert's enthroning, many were the states and cities that fell as the world order shifted – and many more that rose. But not only empires or kingdoms were born from the ashes of the old world; in the vast steppes of the central and northern Essos, a civilisation of nomadic warriors shook the continent to its very core, grinding cities who had stood for aeons into dust beneath the thunder of their horses. Such are the Dothraki: equipped with light leathery armour, armed with bows and “arakhs” (or swords), but with an unrivalled mastery of horse-riding and the strength of a culture where virtually every adult man is a warrior, the so-called “horselords” have earned the fear and respect of all those who live in Essos and beyond.

The Dothraki are one of the very first people we are introduced to, as early as Daenerys' first chapter in “Game,” and remain a presence – albeit with declining prominence – throughout most of the series. Daenerys' entire arc in the first book is tied to them, and most of it has her living among them; this offers us an intimate and comprehensive look into their culture. It is hardly an overstatement to say that the Dothraki are one of the most solidly detailed cultures in the entire series.

As it happens with the Dornish, we meet the Dothraki, and then ride along with them, through the eyes of an outsider, in this case Daenerys. We meet her just as she is about to be offered as bride to Drogo, Khal (or chieftain) of that which is deemed the largest and strongest “khalasar” (or nomadic clan) of the Dothraki, in exchange for his help in her brother Viserys' bid to retake the Iron Throne. Like the others of his people, Drogo has the skin “the

color of polished copper,” “dark almond eyes,” and “thick black hair” (“Game,” p. 35; p. 37; p. 108); however, the cruelty and coldness in his face scare her, and it does not get better during their wedding ceremony. As she sits next to her husband, watching throngs of his people celebrating with abandon, she contemplates that never had she seen a “people so strange and frightening” (p. 101). For someone raised amid the silks, pillows, stone buildings and courteous manners of the Free Cities, such is not an unusual reaction before Dothraki’s leathers, furs, bare skins, lack of moderation and love for the open air. When Drogo takes the exiled princess to their bed, she could not have been more terrified; however, the fearsome Khal never hurts her, not even touching her body before a long while, and not making love to her until she expressly shows herself comfortable with the act.

It is important to point out that Daenerys found herself in a situation she could not escape, not then; she was expected to fulfil her duties as a Khal’s wife – a Khaleesi –, which included satisfying her husband and entirely adapting to his culture. It is also worth taking into account that, as she grew up, her only references in love were an abusive brother and noblemen (such as Illyrio of the Free City of Pentos) who only cared for her as far as she was needed for their own personal goals. Notwithstanding, Daenerys makes great efforts to adapt to the Dothraki and be a worthy Khaleesi; eventually, she grows fond of her new people, embraces many of their customs, learns their views and beliefs, and falls deeply in love for Drogo.

Understanding Daenerys’ attitudes towards the Dothraki is important, for even though she remains an outsider – after all, she never forgets her Targaryen heritage, or the kingdom she is meant to reconquer –, her views are not quite blurred by negative bias. The contrast with her brother makes it even more evident; while she becomes a great rider and a Khaleesi respected by the whole khalasar, Viserys fiercely repudiates everything about the horselords, who mock him for being weak and a bad rider. Daenerys’ one disagreement with the Dothraki ways comes when she finds the warriors of her khalasar raping the women of a conquered village of the Lhazareen people; but rather than attribute it to the Dothraki culture as a whole, she simply decides that her warriors must not take any woman without her express permission – and Drogo loves her dearly enough to ensure her will becomes law in his khalasar.

Daenerys’ eyes, then, provide us a relatively clear and wide window into the ways of the Dothraki. From their first appearance, we are hinted at how important horses are to their

culture, but it is not until the Targaryen Khaleesi lives among them that we understand how much; for horses are not simply the beasts on which they fight and on whose backs their people move across the steppes. The Dothraki avoid any water that their horses will not drink (which is why they are not known as seafarers); they expect each of their own to be capable riders at all times, even pregnant women, and will go so far as to abandon a Khal who for some reason finds himself unable to stand on horseback. The stars themselves are believed to be horses on fire, while the night sky is an afterlife steppe where the souls of their dead ride for eternity; the very first man is said to have come out of the lake known as the Womb of the World riding on a horse; and the highest god to which they pray appears to them as the “Great Stallion.” During her pregnancy, Daenerys is taken to a ritual where she eats a stallion’s raw heart, and it is then that her child is prophesied to become the “stallion who mounts the world,” the mythical leader who shall unite all the khalasars and conquer the entire world for the horselords.

The role of horses in the Dothraki’s society and world view is only one sign of how dogmatically they make sense of the world around them. Daenerys’ Dothraki handmaidens, Irri and Jhiqui, often speak in maxims and in reference to traditional beliefs of their people, reinforcing the presumed obviousness of that with the phrase “it is known.” In later years, Daenerys herself would ponder on how the “Dothraki were wise where horses were concerned, but could be utter fools about much else” (“Dance I,” p. 34). Indeed, they do not show many (if any) of what has been traditionally seen as markers of civilisation in Western thought (PIETERSE, 1992): they seem to have never adopted cultural traits, knowledge, or even technologies from any of the countless people they conquered, they actively disdain scholarly pursuits, even their clothing is simplistic and revealing. Their dogmatism is such that they always make a point of leaving any conquered city an empty ruin, ever faithful to their nomadic lifestyle. They only have one city, near the lake known as the Womb of the World: Vaes Dothrak, the seat of the “dosh khaleen” – widows of former Khals, priestesses and mediators – and a bustling trade hub that receives traders from the farthest horizons, be it the Free Cities or the more mysterious lands of the far east. For all its apparent simplicity, Vaes Dothrak provides one of the best glimpses into the people and cultures from the Essosian areas we are never taken to:

Dany liked the strangeness of the Eastern Market too, with all its queer sights and sounds and smells. [...] She enjoyed watching the people too: dark solemn Ashai’i

and tall pale Qartheen, the bright-eyed men of Yi Ti in monkey-tail hats, warrior maids from Bayasabhad, Shamyriana, and Kayakayanaya with iron rings in their nipples and rubies in their cheeks, even the dour and frightening Shadow Men, who covered their arms and legs and chests with tattoos and hid their faces behind masks. The Eastern Market was a place of wonder and magic for Dany. (“Game,” p. 586-7).

But what gave the Dothraki their fearsome strength and reputation was the value they place in the figure of the warrior. As we ride along with them, we do not see a single male – except, perhaps, children and the very elderly – who is *not* a warrior and a rider. Indeed, martial prowess is essential for any self-respecting Dothraki, and that serves as the basis for many of their practices, habits, even their politics. For instance, no warrior cuts his hair unless he has been defeated in battle, so the length of one’s braid serves as a badge of prowess for all to see, and they ornate it with a bell for each slain foe. Drogo himself has an extremely long braid full of bells, signalling both his invincibility and the sheer number of warriors he killed. Khals can keep their position for as long as no one can defeat them; each is accompanied by a few “bloodriders,” their most loyal brothers-in-arms, who may even split and inherit a khalasar among them when the Khal dies – as it turns out to be the fate of Drogo’s own when he dies from poisoning.

Khalasars do not seem to be necessarily bound together by lineage or blood ties; a defeated Khal’s khalasar simply gets absorbed into that of the victor, often as slaves, and may again get split later just as easily. Maybe that is part of why they seem to preserve so little history, even through oral means; of their past, only their superstitions and beliefs are told, even the names of their ancient Khals seemingly forgotten by time. The only trace of history they seem to have preserved are the statues of gods and heroes from cities ransacked throughout the centuries, all placed along the “Godsway” that leads to Vaes Dothrak. Strength seems to be, indeed, their favourite currency; as we hear from Rakharo, one of Daenerys’ bloodriders, “it is the right of the strong to take from the weak” (“Game,” p. 758). Trade is an activity considered beneath a warrior; Vaes Dothrak’s markets have been built by foreigners, and are barely used by Dothraki. They do, however, have a custom of exchanging gifts.

A good overview of their culture is important when analysing the lords of the Great Grass Sea; because for all the abundance of detail we are given about their customs, practices and beliefs, the Dothraki are also oddly shallow. Worse than that: when taken into account that they are one of the rare dark-skinned peoples featured prominently across the series, the way they are depicted seems to mirror harsh Eurocentric perceptions of cultures outside the

Western context.

Our very first meeting with the Dothraki in their own element, and during one of their traditional celebrations, hardly leaves a favourable impression on them. As we have seen, Daenerys feels wary, intimidated even, by the people among whom she was destined to live. Her marriage to Drogo is a boisterous affair; that his people eat and drink with sheer abandon is one of the party's tamest details, for just as the spirits are high, one of the warriors begins having intercourse with a woman right then and there, under the open sky and before everyone's eyes – eyes that do not bat an eyelash to the scene. They remain just as unfazed when another warrior makes an advance on the same woman, prompting a fight that ends with the loser disembowelled, and the winner mounting yet another woman – “not even the one they had been quarreling over” (“Game,” p. 103). This is not even an atypical series of events; as Daenerys is informed, sex in public was as normal among the Dothraki as killings in their weddings.

The horselords' lack of restraint over either violence or sexuality is a very common thread in the tapestry of Daenerys' chapters in “Game.” She even seems to embrace some of it, at least the latter; there are two instances where she nonchalantly makes love to Drogo in the open, in front of any who might be nearby. Those, at least, are scenes of kindness; a much rougher treatment is endured by the women of the Lhazareen, whose villages Drogo “harvests” after slaves to sell in the larger cities. Daenerys does intervene in their favour, but, by then, many had been raped, under open sky and before the eyes of anyone passing by. After Drogo's death, those same Lhazareen women who had till then been protected by the Khaleesi's authority find themselves victim of even greater violence. Ironically, when Drogo himself vows to “rape the women and enslave the children” of the Westerosi during his pledge to take the Iron Throne for her, Daenerys does not seem fazed (“Game,” p. 594).

The Khaleesi herself is not immune to sexual threats. As her relationship with Drogo evolves into one of relative love and respect, one might forget that her first days with her Dothraki husband were a far cry from that. After all, no loving or respectful relationship would have her be glad, during their nightly sexual encounters, that he could not see the “tears that wet her face,” that she could “use her pillow to muffle her cries of pain,” or have her body “bruised and sore, hurting too much for sleep” (“Game,” p. 228). Indeed, one might wonder what would have been of Daenerys had she not resigned to her fate and learned both to appreciate the realities of her new world, and love her husband for what he was.

That she finds herself in a vulnerable position as a woman amidst a nation of ruthless warriors, by itself, is hardly cause for great concern; but the image of a white woman finding herself vulnerable amidst a nation of ruthless, sexually aggressive dark-skinned men is one that is not at all unique. As Shohat & Stam (2014), Mernissi (2001) and Lockman (2004) all point out, such imagery is rather recurring in Western art. Chito Childs (2009) further elaborate on how white female characters often experience a form of “punishment” when paired with a non-white male character, be it through the revelation that he was a dangerous individual all along, be it by getting herself killed. While Daenerys experiences neither betrayal from Drogo nor death, her marriage with him finds a horrific end: as she attempts to reverse his death, she partakes of a ritual that causes their unborn child to mutate into a monster and die, leaving her barren – and still failing to bring the fallen Khal back.

Death, as well as brutal retaliation, is certainly common during Daenerys’ life among the khalasar. The man who attempts to assassinate Daenerys is dragged to death behind their horses, naked and tied; a warrior who ignores her orders to avoid the Lhazareen women is unceremoniously shot in the throat; after the battle against the Lhazareen, Drogo is found next to a pile of decapitated heads as tall as he is. Daenerys’ own brother, Viserys, is killed by having molten gold spilt over his head – a death that was probably earned, but which is made no less brutal by that –; later on, the Khaleesi herself has Mirri Maz Duur, the Lhazareen priestess who caused Drogo’s death, burned alive in his funeral pyre. There is, evidently, violence to be witnessed elsewhere throughout the series; but the sheer disregard for human life shown by the Dothraki, as well as their sadism in disposing of enemies, is not often matched in either Westeros or the Free Cities.

The only boundaries the Dothraki seem to place on their actions and desires are those set by their customs – and let none accuse the horselords of not taking their codes seriously. Daenerys’ authority is respected (at least as far as it goes) by all in Drogo’s khalasar; when she decides that Mirri Maz Duur must tend to the Khal, his bloodriders do nothing to stop her, despite their angry reservations about her being a “maegi,” or witch – all because Daenerys is the Khaleesi of their sworn chieftain. This respect, naturally, ends the moment Drogo is given as dead. Furthermore, every Dothraki respects the “dosh khaleen,” widowed Khaleesi whose visions and arts are considered prophetic; they are, in fact, the only women shown to wield any measure of authority in Dothraki society – at least without needing a Khal by their side. Vaes Dothrak, as the dosh khaleen’s home and the Dothraki’s only city, also serves as a sort of

neutral ground for all warriors, with blades being forbidden in it, and with the shedding of blood being considered a heavy crime. This does not necessarily prevent killings, though; for it is in Vaes Dothrak that Drogo kills Viserys, the molten metal ending the exiled prince's life without actually spilling his blood.

Seeing the world through the eyes of a Dothraki might have given them greater complexity, or at the very least allowed us to see a wider variety of emotions and feelings coming from one. However, for all we see of them (especially in "Game"), and for all they follow Daenerys throughout her entire journey, the Dothraki cast is surprisingly shallow. Drogo is the one truly prominent Dothraki in the story, or the one whose actions bear somewhat of an impact on other characters; he is also the only one to show a certain complexity of emotions, as capable of brutally eliminating his foes as he was of being kind and utterly trusting to his wife.

It is not that Daenerys is not close to other Dothraki. Shortly after her wedding, she is given three handmaidens who seldom leave her side; one is Doreah, an enslaved young woman from the Free City of Lys, but the other two, Irri and Jhiqui, are Dothraki. While Doreah dies during their crossing of the desert in "Clash," Irri and Jhiqui stand by Daenerys' side throughout her journey, from the red desert to the Great Pyramid of Meereen itself. No one can accuse the Khaleesi of not caring about them both, but that care does not allow either of them many opportunities to make their feelings and thoughts known – except, perhaps, when they make pointed remarks about some of the things they see and hear about. Although the two handmaidens remain physically close to Daenerys most of the time, and although they are not rarely mentioned in her chapters, Irri and Jhiqui, who have followed her since she was a shy and uncertain newly-wed Khaleesi, remain little more than servants and background characters. The closer Daenerys ever seems to get with either of them, in fact, is when she takes Irri for her own sexual relief. While the first time that happens is mostly accidental and leaves Daenerys feeling guilty, we later find the Khaleesi actively summoning Irri to sexually satisfy herself while her then lover, Daario Naharis, is unavailable.

Daenerys' very own bloodriders – Rakharo, Aggo and Jhogo – are no more prominent in her story, or even closer to her, than either Irri or Jhiqui. This is particularly perplexing, given what we learn about the bonds between a Khal and their bloodriders; we see Drogo's relationship with his own as one of camaraderie, loyalty and friendship, yet Daenerys' bloodriders serve as little more than field advisors, scouts and lesser commanders.

Even in those roles they get diminished once she is joined by Ser Barristan Selmy, the self-exiled Westerosi Kingsguard who meets her in her final chapters in the second book (“Clash”); and then by Daario Naaharis, captain of the Stormcrows mercenary company, who almost whimsically decides to join the Targaryen in the third book (“Storm”).

This is, perhaps, where we see the limitations of Daenerys’ outsider eyes; for even though she grows to embrace Dothraki culture during her life with Drogo, and cherishes the little khalasar that follows her to Meereen, she does keep some distance between her Dothraki companions and herself. This becomes obvious when one looks at her choice of “inner circle:” Ser Jorah Mormont, for example, meets her almost at the same time as Irri or Jhiqui, and initially as Viserys’ vassal, not hers; yet the Westerosi knight quickly becomes one of her closest companions and confidants. Barristan Selmy too becomes not only an advisor, but a friend to Daenerys, in a rather short span of time; he too is a Westerosi knight, although one may argue that his knowledge of the Khaleesi’s late elder brother, Rhaegar, makes him a naturally interesting companion to her. Daario is neither Westerosi nor someone who knew Daenerys’ family, but he is a mercenary, treacherous and dangerous – yet even he manages to become closer to her than any of her older Dothraki companions do.

There could be some level of inconsistency in her treatment of her Dothraki allies, too. One might say that she never gets too close to them because they are but servants, and specifically servants of a culture that is not her own (unlike Jorah or Barristan), or even that they are themselves too subservient (Irri herself sees nothing wrong in Daenerys using her for sex). This could have led her to grow accustomed to seeing them as servants and nothing more. It might be that Daenerys, simply, has always seen the Dothraki through patronising lenses, and favours the company of more culturally refined individuals such as Barristan. However, neither cultural differences, nor social standing, seem to have mattered much to Daenerys when she befriended Missandei, the young girl from the remote Island of Naath whom she first meets as a slave, and who joins the Targaryen as a loyal companion. We certainly learn more of Missandei’s life and feelings in two books than we learned of Irri’s or Jhiqui’s in four. Be as it may, even after riding along with the horselords for so many fields, there has been little to see from them other than martial prowess, brutality, unbridled lust and dogmatism. They are, as the Eurocentric eye holds those non-white cultures regarded as not technologically or scientifically sophisticated, the quintessential “savages” (SHOHAT & STAM, 2014; PIETERSE, 1992; DUNN, 1996).

4.2 SONS OF THE HARPY

Much has been said about the power and glory of ancient Valyria; however, long before the first dragonlord took flight, the skies of Essos were dominated by the harpy, banner of the Empire of Ghis. With their great cities of pyramids and powerful legions, the Ghiscari were the undisputed force of eastern Essos; it took even the Valyrians a series of wars to completely defeat them. Once they did, however, they thoroughly dismantled the Ghiscari empire, either enslaving or killing their people, leaving only a few cities of the once mighty civilisation standing – cities that, ironically, outlived Valyria itself. Three of them – Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen – eventually reached the age of King Robert Baratheon’s reign as important trade hubs of eastern Essos.

Yet it is neither their ancestry, nor their age, that makes those three cities truly stand out; it is for their role in the slave trade that they are known across the world, and it is from slave trade that they have built their wealth and strength. Furthermore, and similar to how it is with the Dothraki, the way the Ghiscari are depicted mirrors some recurring tropes to be found in how the Western eye depicts those to the east.

Our first visit to the so-called Slaver's Bay has us following Daenerys to the city of Astapor, where she means to buy Unsullied, the legendary slave-warriors, for her own army. The city itself is not entirely without charm, despite its heat and the eerie red colour of its bricks; at one point, Daenerys witnesses people spending the afternoon in loving embrace on the nearby river banks, and Missandei assures her Astapor is beautiful at night, with its pyramids ornate with colourful lanterns. But the Khaleesi is blinded to whatever beauty the city may have by what she sees of the Unsullied; through the translation of Missandei, she learns from their master, Kraznys mo Nakloz, more about their training and abilities: of how they are “chosen young, for size and speed and strength,” of how the ones she was inspecting had been “standing for a day and a night, with no food nor water,” and how they would remain so until they fell dead (“Storm,” p. 313). To further establish the Unsullied’s stoicism, Kraznys lashes one’s face and then slices another’s nipple off with a sword, receiving no reaction from either. The so-called “Good Master” goes on to explain that they are castrated as boys so they are easier to discipline, and so they stay “pure,” unswayed by temptations of the flesh; not only that, but they have no names of their own, instead receiving alias such as

“Black Rat” and “Brown Flea” every new day (p. 317).

As if that was not unsettling enough, we then learn more about how they are trained, and how they are deemed fit to be a proper Unsullied:

Those who cannot [remember their daily names] are culled in training, along with those who cannot run all day in full pack, scale a mountain in the black of night, walk across a bed of coals, or slay an infant. [...] To win his spiked cap, an Unsullied must go to the slave marts with a silver mark, find some wailing newborn, and kill it before its mother’s eyes. [...] The dogs are harder for them, it must be said. We give each boy a puppy on the day that he is cut. At the end of the first year, he is required to strangle it. Any who cannot are killed, and fed to the surviving dogs. (“Storm, p. 318).

Incidentally, the “silver mark” is not for the mother, but for the mother’s owner; all to ensure the Unsullied grows to be unfailingly “strong.”

Yet that is not the end of the horrors Daenerys witnesses in Astapor. As a gesture of hospitality, Kraznys invites her to watch an exhibition in the fighting pits, a form of entertainment that is very popular in all the three slaver cities; that specific night, he says, a special game will be played as a bear is unleashed against three boys, “one rolled in honey, one in blood, and one in rotting fish,” with a wager to be made as to which gets eaten first (p. 321). On the day she is to complete her acquisition of the Unsullied, Daenerys walks by Astapor’s Plaza of Pride and watches as slaves are punished:

At first glimpse, Dany thought their skin was stripped like the zorses of the Jogos Nhai. Then she rode her silver nearer and saw the raw red flesh beneath the crawling black stripes. *Flies. Flies and maggots.* The rebellious slaves had been peeled like a man might peel an apple, in a long curling strip. One man had an arm black with flies from fingers to elbow, and red and white beneath. (“Storm,” p. 377).

Astapor is the inspiration for Daenerys’ vow to end slavery, but it does more than that; it sets the tone for the entire culture around the Slaver’s Bay. For the red-bricked city is not alone in its vicious treatment of slaves; the Meereenese, for instance, greet the Dragon Queen’s march to their city by nailing a “slave child up on every milepost along the road from Yunkai, [...] still living with their entrails hanging out and one arm always outstretched to point the way to Meereen” (“Storm,” p. 775). Of Yunkai we do not have the chance to see much, as Daenerys’ attack is so fast that the Yellow City yields before she actually enters it. Judging by how its slaves all choose to abandon it in order to join a queen they had never even heard of before, one may assume their living conditions were far from decent.

At this point, it is not an exaggeration to assume that not only is slavery a widespread practice among the Ghiscari, but also that visiting unspeakable brutalities upon the enslaved, effectively treating them worse than most animals, is the norm. Like the Free Cities, the three slaver cities evoke the recurring tropes of Eastern reliance on slavery and brutality towards those beneath them in the social hierarchy, as Said (1976) and Lockman (2004) describe them. But Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen are starkly set apart from the Free Cities, and quickly too. For it is already during Daenerys' first visit that we are told the Ghiscari, who actually resulted from the mingling between the ancient Ghiscari and the people they enslaved, have skin the hue of "amber" and "bristly black-red hair" ("Storm," p. 314), notably different from the mostly light-skinned people of the Free Cities – even the Braavosi, who, like the people of the Slaver's Bay, have very mixed roots.

The sheer cruelty with which the Ghiscari treat their slaves also finds no match in the Free Cities; indeed, a coldly pragmatic observer might question why the slaver masters treat their slaves so brutally and so cheaply. They are, after all, their belongings and their merchandise. Mutilating them (like Kraznys does) or throwing their lives away so wantonly thus proves a considerable waste of coin. A cynical observer might simply conclude that being unpleasant is but the norm among the people of Slaver's Bay, at least those who make up their nobility. Hardly anyone Daenerys comes across in either Yunkai or Astapor shows a measure of respect or mere cordiality: Kraznys, for his part, seems incapable of speaking to her other than through the crassest insults, all under the assumption that she cannot understand him; whereas Grazdan mo Eraz, one of Yunkai's "Wise Masters," patronises the Dragon Queen to no end and casually threatens to sell her as a bed slave. We later have the chance to glimpse other Wise Masters through Quentyn's and Tyrion's eyes, particularly one called Yezzan zo Qagazz. While the Lannister (almost sardonically) considers him one of the "nicer" masters, the Martell tells us of how he has a "passion for grotesques," having as slaves a "boy with the legs and hooves of a goat, a bearded woman, a two-headed monster from Mantarys, and a hermaphrodite who warmed his bed at night;" we also learn of how the Wise Master used to own a giant he liked to watch having intercourse with slave girls ("Dance I," p. 376). The apparent moral corruption of the Ghiscari nobility – and, particularly, the scarcity of any redeeming element within it – also finds few parallels with its counterpart from the Free Cities, but the opposite is arguably true in regards to depictions of Eastern nobility in Western art (SAID, 1976).

It calls the attention that even the physicality of the Slaver's Bay characters seems designed to inspire unpleasantness, even revulsion. One common trait among them, for example, is that many of the masters are described as obese, with Kraznys further described as having a sickening scent and a beard glistening with oil. Yurkhaz, the high commander of the Yunkish army besieging Daenerys' Meereen, is described by Tyrion as a "human prune," so old and frail he looks. Yezzan, as Quentyn tells us, is so morbidly obese he must be carried around by slaves, and as he has no control of his bladder, he always "smells of piss, a stench so sharp that even heavy perfumes could not conceal it" ("Dance I," p. 376). Daenerys often remarks on the masters' flamboyant hairstyles too, although this at least can be regarded as mere personal bias.

And for all their posturing, the masters of Slaver's Bay are arguably rather pathetic. They proudly flaunt their descent from Ghis when their customs and their culture are, at best, a cracked reconstruction. They pretend to be the inheritors of ancient Ghis' mighty lords and generals when, as Jorah comments, all they have is "old names and fat purses" ("Storm," p. 329). In their eagerness to emulate the past, many of them share the same names; of Astapor's featured Good Masters, only one is not named "Grazdan," which is also the name of the first Wise Master Daenerys meets, and even Quentyn mentions how most Yunkish masters seem to be named "Ghazdan, Grazdan, Mazdhan, or Graznak" ("Dance I," p. 376). Yurkhaz zo Yunzak, supreme commander of Yunkai's army, is described at one point as a hero, and moves on a "palanquin so huge it required forty slaves to carry it" – all while being a frail old man ("Dance I," p. 376). Once defeated, the "Great Masters" of Meereen, who taunted Daenerys with the dead slave children, are reduced to a "contemptible herd of old men with shrivelled balls and spotted skin and young men with ridiculous hair," the women "either soft and fleshy or as dry as old sticks, their face paint streaked with tears" ("Storm," p. 980). Yunkai, which calls itself the "Queen of Cities," has crumbling walls and towers; Astapor's Plaza of Pride has fountains smelling of brimstone, and the city's population appears a lot smaller than it must have once been, again denoting decadence in a city that boasts itself as great. This decadence too is hardly matched by any of the bustling Free Cities, but it is certainly a recurring theme among Eastern civilisations as depicted by the Western eye (SAID, 1976).

To be fair, Daenerys' stay in both Astapor and Yunkai is relatively short – and, as it has been mentioned, she does not even enter the later –, so one might argue that we look at these cities through too narrow a window. The same is not true for Meereen, which Daenerys

decides to rule as queen after conquering it. Meereen is larger and stronger than its two harpy siblings; while no actual measure is given, it would not be far-fetched to assume it is on par with some of the wealthier Free Cities, and its Great Pyramid – whence Daenerys rules – is certainly impressive.

More importantly, it is in Meereen that we are given the chance of a deeper look into the Slaver's Bay's society and people. There, for example, we meet those who – at least in the beginning – seem to be the very first Ghiscari characters who are neither unpleasant in their manners and looks, nor (openly) ruthless. One of them is even a Great Master, Hizdahr zo Loraq; at that point, Daenerys has been learning to navigate the city's politics in a more sensible manner, even opening herself to negotiating with the former masters. Hizdahr is perhaps the first Great Master whom the queen allows to get closer to her: “tall, very slender, and with flawless amber skin” (“Dance I,” p. 44), his physique alone would set him apart from most Ghiscari nobles we had seen till then, but his polite demeanour and rather progressive views make him one of the most nuanced of all Ghiscari we meet. While he still upholds tradition, he acknowledges to Daenerys that, before her conquest, Meereen had been “dying,” its rulers “old men [...] and crones” who “sat atop their pyramids [...] talking of the glories of the Old Empire whilst the centuries slipped by and the very bricks of the city crumbled all around them” (“Dance I,” p. 347).

Hizdahr is not the only Meereenese noble who shows sympathy to Daenerys. A whole faction was born of nobles who fully embraced her cause, going as far as to shave their heads and their traditional Ghiscari hairstyles as a show of forsaking the old ways. The so-called Shavepates, led by Skahaz mo Kandaq, are among her most fervent supporters within Meereen, and fully uphold her anti-slavery politics. Ironically, Skahaz is physically more akin to the masters Daenerys had fought in the past, with his “odious face – a beetled brow, small eyes with heavy bags beneath them, a big nose dark with blackheads, oily skin that looked more yellow than the usual amber of Ghiscari” (“Dance I,” p. 41). Serving as a mediator between Daenerys' intended reforms and the wishes of the traditionalist nobles, there is the Green Grace, Galazza Galare, high priestess of the Temple of the Graces, with her green, “sad eyes, full of wisdom” (p. 342). It is from her that we learn more of Meereen's past, namely how the destruction of resources by Ghiscari and Valyrians endangered the city; she goes as far as to claim that “it was these calamities that turned [her] people into slavers” (“Dance I,” p. 235). While the Green Grace herself does not excuse the brutality committed against slaves

for so long, her tale provides the first instance of Meereen (and a slaver city for that matter) being shown under a different, more sympathetic light.

Daenerys herself begins to see the nobles through more nuanced lenses; if one of her first decisions as Meereen's queen was to execute a Great Master for every slave child she had seen on the road to the city, she now found herself fond of the noble children she had taken as hostages to ensure her opposition's cooperation. If once she was adamant about ending all the Ghiscari traditions she deemed violent, she eventually allows the fighting pits to be opened again, realising that was what fighters and public alike wished. Last, but not least, she even accepts marrying Hizdahr, after being convinced that such a union would appease her opposition – in particular the murderous Sons of the Harpy –, and that Hizdahr himself would be her loyal ally.

What could be the examples of how reasonable and sensible a noble from the Slaver's Bay could be are, nevertheless, undermined by the eerie feeling that Hizdahr's solicitousness and the Green Grace's insistence that Daenerys embraces Meereen's traditions (from her dressing style to her marriage with Hizdahr, and him only) are simply a subtle way to bring the old order back, one concession at a time. This feeling is further reinforced during the reopening of the fighting pits, attended by Daenerys, Hizdahr, and her closest allies: firstly, when one of them is poisoned eating food that was meant for the queen; secondly, when Drogon appears and Hizdahr immediately orders him killed. The "queer look" that Daenerys sees in his face, "part fear, part lust, part rapture," and the ways he "licks his lips," only add to the suspicion ("Dance II," p. 187-8). Later on, when the Meereenese takes over the city's rule as Daenerys has disappeared on Drogon's back, he wastes no time in surrounding himself with his own people, waving each of the queen's allies aside.

Of course, whether Hizdahr and the Green Grace truly plotted against Daenerys, that is not yet known with certainty. Even if they did not, it hardly changes the fact that the entire world of Slaver's Bay, with all its characters, is one of sheer brutality and treachery. That is not to say that a society built upon (and sustained by) slavery can be expected to be morally upstanding; it is the virtual lack of any redeeming quality or character that cannot be ignored. Jorah Mormont, for one, was exiled from Westeros for selling fellow Northmen as slaves to Essosi traders – yet Daenerys for a long time trusted him and held him dear, even knowing the reason of his exile. The Free Cities, where slavery is also a pillar of society and trade both, are never depicted in such horrifying manner as the three cities of Slaver's Bay – and they also

provide the story with characters who are morally complex, rather than the vicious slavers we meet in Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen.

It is equally worth pointing out that, for all of Daenerys' efforts in ending slavery and making the slaver cities fairer for its non-noble population, she fails astoundingly. In Meereen, famine and poverty reach such levels during her reign that some former slaves beg to be sold again to Qarth and the Free Cities, while others return to the service of their former Meereenese masters in exchange for meagre pays. Also in Meereen, she has to reopen the fighting pits, where people kill each other for sport, when fighters complain about losing their income source; she even allows the "follies," where non-combatants such as disabled and elderly people fight, as they provide another way for the impoverished to earn coin. Of Astapor, which Daenerys left under the rule of three low-born citizens, the last we hear is a landscape of deep nightmare: between the famine and the political infighting, many have resorted to cannibalism; a deceased leader was disinterred and used as a morbid "rallying banner" by a priestess seeking power – only for herself to be impaled and left to die in a public square –; others have resorted to mass suicide... all while the entire city was consumed by fire and disease.

A lesson can be taken from Daenerys' attempts at intervention that an outsider with little knowledge of a given culture cannot hope to repair it single-handedly, especially not overnight. Likewise, a lesson can be taken that Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen are simply not ready for values such as freedom, justice and kindness; that violence, slavery and oppression are so ingrained in their society that even a "Mother of Dragons" is powerless to achieve any meaningful change. At the end of "Dance II," as she wanders across the Dothraki Sea, lost, Daenerys comes to the realisation that "Meereen was not her home, and never would be. It was a city of strange men with strange gods and stranger hair, of slavers wrapped in fringed *tokars*, where grace was earned through whoring, butchery was an art, and dog was a delicacy" ("Dance II," p. 471-2).

One might say that the slaver cities' shortcomings become even more apparent when contrasted with Westerosi values: while treachery is also part of Westeros' society, Barristan Selmy – a knight as famous for his skill as for his chivalry – feels that at least in the west *some* honour can still be found. Interestingly, at one point he even begins training a group of formerly-enslaved children in the ways of Westerosi knighthood; while he seems hopeful that they may one day become squires and even knights, the "strange looks" they give him put in

check just how seriously they take his lessons.

On the other hand, it is from a Westerosi too that we learn there might not be that many differences between slavery in Slaver's Bay and serfdom in Westeros. As Tyrion – who spends a considerable stretch of “Dance” enslaved – tells us,

The life of most slaves was not all different from the life of a serving man at Casterly Rock, it seemed to him. True, some slaveowners and their overseers were brutal and cruel, but the same was true of some Westerosi lords and their stewards and bailiffs. (“Dance II,” p. 262).

It is true that Westeros is the stage of exceedingly brutal scenes throughout the series; yet there stands a considerable difference between the Seven Kingdoms and the three slaver cities. For most of the more vicious violence we see in the former take place during the War of the Five Kings, as the realm is torn apart by marching armies, mercenary bands roam freely and the people starve; and even amid that chaos, we see glimpses of honour and kindness, of peace and justice. As for the cities of the harpy, there seems to be no time for justice, honour or kindness in sight – be it in war or in peace.

4.3 OF MILK MEN, FEATHERY PRINCES, AND RED GODS

Last, but not least, there are two people which, despite not enjoying much prominence throughout the series, deserve our attention: the Qartheen and the Summer Islanders.

The city-state of Qarth lies on the eastern fringes of Essos, further to the east than any other place we visit in the series – and, like most Essosi locations, we meet it in the company of Daenerys. Vast and wealthy, it is surrounded by three imposing walls, one taller than the other, each embellished with murals that impress even Daenerys, who grew up in the wealthiest Free Cities. It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that Qarth is a match for the greatest of the Daughters of Valyria, or perhaps more than a match: for in Qarth, with its colourful buildings, life-like statues ornate with gems, and towers taller than any she had seen, each of the lavishly dressed citizens looked like “lords and ladies” to Daenerys’ eyes (“Clash,” p. 423). Xaro Xhoan Daxos, one of the city’s “merchant princes,” owns a mansion that makes Illyrio’s (himself a Pentoshi magister) look like a “swineherd’s hovel” (426). Still,

there are interesting parallels shared both by the heiresses of Valyria and by the eastern jewel.

For instance, the folk of Qarth physically resemble that of the Free Cities more than any of its neighbours – or the ones we know of, in any case. While Dothraki, Lhazareen and Ghiscari all have dark skin, ranging from amber to copper, the Qartheen are tall and pale, enough that the Dothraki mockingly call them “milk men.” Also unlike most of their neighbours, the Qartheen are shown to have greater emotional sensibility, as suggested by how they consider the act of weeping a “mark of the civilized man” (“Clash,” p. 576), often making a show of that, sometimes at the slightest distress. Even their assassins, the Sorrowful Men, are known to weep and apologise to their target for killing them.

One might say they share a similarity with their Dothraki neighbours: their attitudes towards nudity and sexuality, which are rather liberal next to most other cultures we meet. For instance, it is usual for their children to walk naked on the streets, and their women’s clothing usually leaves a breast exposed; furthermore, Qarth’s highest wall is embellished with murals depicting sexual scenes that make even Daenerys blush. Nevertheless, the Qartheen’s openness regarding sexuality seems to be of a more artistic disposition; for unlike the rulers of the Great Grass Sea, they do not appear to engage in sexual acts in public, before the eyes of all. More importantly, in the (admittedly brief) time we spend among them, we see nothing that matches the sort of sexual violence we witness among the Dothraki.

Another similarity shared between Qarth and its fellow Essosians lies in its use of slaves, as well as its active participation in their trade. Even there, however, a stark contrast can be made, for the Qartheen show no explicit evidence, not even a hint, that they make a habit of treating their slaves with the brutality of Ghiscari or Dothraki. Furthermore, their politics are shown to be as complex as those of the western cities-state, perhaps more – though no less dangerous or murderous –, with different factions vying for influence. Still, that Qarth’s rule pertains to a caste of “Pureborn” nobles who can trace their ancestry to the city’s founding brings it closer to the likes of Meereen or Yunkai, whose nobility makes a similar claim. More curiously, the Qartheen’s pride in their own history and tradition easily rivals that of Astapori or Meereenese; as Daenerys is told just as she arrives there,

Qarth is the greatest city that ever was or ever will be. [...] It is the center of the world, [...] ancient beyond memory of man and so magnificent that Saathos the Wise put out his eyes after gazing upon Qarth for the first time, because he knew that all he saw thereafter should look squalid and ugly by comparison. (“Clash,” p. 422).

Such claims are contrasted – just as it happens in the slaver cities – with the fact that, for all its splendour and wealth, the Qarth we meet is lesser than it must have once been, as suggested by the fact that the seat of the Pureborn contains murals depicting “scenes of the city’s vanished glory” (“Clash,” p. 575). Qarth’s lost grandeur is perhaps symbolised more powerfully by that which is arguably its most striking element: its warlocks, mages whose power and wisdom are “revered all across the east” (“Clash,” p. 425). They stand out not only because they are an actual order of magic-practitioners in a world where magic is faded and practised mostly in secret; they are an order of mages with actual political power in that which is one of the greatest centres of civilisation we know of. Yet, as we learn from Xaro, their power has waned considerably where once they were mighty, to the point it has become a common saying, in Qarth, that a “warlock’s house is built of bones and lies” (“Clash,” p. 425). When she seeks out the Undying Ones, the mightiest among Qarth’s warlocks, Daenerys first meets them as they once must have been, kingly and strong and beautiful; beneath the glamour spell, however, they appear “wizened, wrinkled and hairless,” the skin and even their eyes turned blue from drinking the potion known as shade-of-the-evening (“Clash,” p. 705).

Notwithstanding, they still wield some power; their invitation to Daenerys is revealed to be a trap, and they very nearly kill her – only being thwarted by Drogon. And that is but one of the treacheries she has to face while in the “greatest city that ever was or ever will be;” for, in another parallel with Meereen, there is hardly anyone in Qarth that Daenerys can trust. Xaro, who showers her with solicitude and gifts, ultimately turns out to be interested only in marrying her to make use of her dragons. In Xaro’s defence – and in another point of divergence with the Meereenese –, he never truly betrays her, nor does he attempt to kill her. Some time later, when he meets her again as Queen of Meereen, he even claims to have convinced Qarth’s rulers not to move against her for ending the slave trade.

Heading to the seas of the south and the west, we reach the Summer Isles – or, rather, we hear of them, for so far in the series we have not had the chance of actually visiting them. Of its people we know more; whenever one of them appears, it certainly attracts the observer’s attention, be it for their very dark skin – which Taena of Myr compares to ink (“Feast,” p. 586) –, for their bright and colourful feathery garments, or for their unique “swan ships.” Dunn (1996) might acknowledge that the Summer Islanders, the only unambiguously black population in the series, are far from being the simple-minded savages that black people

are often made to be in Western art. Still, the Summer Islander characters that do appear are not exempt from a more critical eye, and their scarcity means there are few examples against the argument that they too embody Eurocentric tropes centred on black people.

The first Summer Islander we meet is Jalabhar Xho, an exiled prince who has been granted asylum in Robert's court. Even by the time Ned Stark arrives in King's Landing, early in the series, Jalabhar has been there for a while, every now and then petitioning for Robert's aid in retaking his throne, which he claims was wrongfully usurped from him – and always receiving a refusal. Curiously, despite the Summer Islander prince featuring (with little prominence, true) in various books, we have yet to see him speak, let alone have a glimpse of his thoughts and personality. Outside the archery tournament he participates in "Game" (which he fails to win), he mostly appears through other characters' remarks: Arya, for example, remembers him as one of the "most colourful figures at Robert's Court" along with the red priest Thoros of Myr ("Storm," p. 307); Jeyne Poole, a friend of Sansa Stark who lives with her to King's Landing, shows herself frightened by his looks, with his "cape of green and scarlet feathers" and his "skin as dark as night" ("Game," p. 294); even Quentyn thinks of him as an "amusing curiosity" of King Robert's court ("Dance II," p. 304). Cersei, by her turn, has a more scathing opinion, deeming him "little more than a wellborn beggar," whose appeals Robert had tolerated for so long because the "notion of conquering the Summer Isles had appealed to him" ("Feast," p. 496). The last we hear of him, he finds himself tangled in Cersei's schemes as he is mentioned as one of her rival Queen Margaery's alleged lovers, an accusation that earns him imprisonment. For all the time he has been present in the series, he has served as little more than a token character, an embellishment in the court of King's Landing, devoid of even a voice of his own.

There are two other Summer Islanders we meet early in the series who have far more voice and prominence than Jalabhar (even if they remain rather minor characters themselves). The first is Chataya, owner of a brothel in King's Landing whom Ned Stark meets while searching for Robert's bastard children. It is from her that we learn a little more on the Summer Islander culture, specifically that her people

[...] Hold that there is no shame to be found in the pillow house. In the Summer Isles, those who are skilled at giving pleasure are greatly esteemed. Many highborn youths and maidens serve for a few years after their flowerings, to honor the gods. [...] The gods made our bodies as well as our souls, is it not so? [...] And they give us desire, so we might mate and worship them in that way. ("Clash," p. 238).

This explanation comes right after we meet Alayaya, one of her brothel's workers, also a Summer Islander – and, indeed, her daughter, whom Chataya personally recommends to Tyrion as he visits her. Chataya and Alayaya make it possible for him to visit his lover, Shae, in secret; he grows especially fond of the younger Summer Islander, later claiming that “a braver, sweeter, more innocent girl he had seldom met” (“Storm,” p. 56). Unfortunately, their involvement with Tyrion proves to be Alayaya's undoing: after being taken as hostage by Cersei (who mistakenly believes she is Tyrion's lover), she is “tied to a post, scourged, then shoved out of the [Red Keep's] gate naked and bloody” (p. 56), all as revenge against Tyrion. Afterwards, she is only mentioned through conversations with Bronn and Oberyn, both of whom claim to have spent a night with her; of Chataya, we hear no more.

It would be easy to condemn the fact that the only black female characters we meet for most of the series are prostitutes, which seem to reflect the perception of black women as more sexually accessible than others (HOLLAND *et al*, 2018; CHITO CHILDS, 2009; PIETERSE, 1992), and best fit for casual sex rather than committed relationships (NASCIMENTO, 2016). Almost as easy would be to counter that the comparatively liberal sexuality of the Summer Islanders is not necessarily bad, especially as we never see them being sexually threatening to other characters – which is a trope particularly attributed to black male characters (CHITO CHILDS, 2009; PIETERSE, 1992). The main issues with how Chataya and Alayaya are depicted lie not in their sexuality *per se*, but in how their role within the story is limited to them serving the needs of male characters, usually sexually. And as liberal as the Summer Islanders are towards sex, we never see either Chataya or Alayaya actively pursuing a relationship with anyone. Curiously, not even Jalabhar is shown, not even rumoured, to engage in a sexual relationship with anyone, despite the long time he is said to have been in King's Landing – something Chito Childs (2009) might recognise as an unwillingness, recurring in Western media, to show black male characters in relationship with white women.

There are other Summer Islander characters we meet on occasion, but mostly in passing, appearing only for as long as their conversation with another character lasts. One exception is Alleras, the young Citadel acolyte Samwell Tarly meets in Oldtown – and who, as it has been mentioned, might in fact be Sarella Sand, one of Oberyn's daughters. Nevertheless, he himself explains that he is but half-Summer Islander, his father being a

Dornishman; despite wielding one of the goldenheart bows that is typical from the Summer Isles, he gives no indication that he ever actually lived there, so one may question how much of his world view, customs and beliefs are inherited from his Summer Islander heritage.

Coincidentally, it is through Samwell Tarly that Summer Islanders have that which is possibly their most prominent moment in the entire series so far. After all, it is them who take him (as well as his Free Folk companion, Gilly, her baby, and Maester Aemon, his brother of the Night's Watch,) from Braavos to Oldtown on the swan ship "Cinammon Wind," and such a long voyage allows plenty of time for these Westerosi to get acquainted with them. His initial opinion is not exactly favourable – and, curiously, it mirrors some traditional Western preconceptions regarding black people, as all he thinks of when picturing the Summer Isles is a place where "the men were black, the women were wanton, and even the gods were strange" ("Feast," p. 740). The same is arguably true for Gilly, his companion from beyond the Wall of north Westeros (a region inhabited by descendants of the First Men who preserved their old ways more faithfully than the Northerners), and who at one point admits to fearing that Kojja Mo, daughter of the ship's captain, was monster for being so black," and with "teeth so big and white" (p. 747).

These, however, only indicate their own biases; once they become more familiar with them, Samwell and Gilly quickly befriend the ship's crew – a feeling that is evidently mutual; for the women take a great liking of Gilly's baby, and there is none who do not treat the dying Maester Aemon with great care. When Aemon dies, they honour him by joining the improvised funeral Samwell prepares for him, even though the Maester was a stranger to them; later, they help Samwell face his feelings for Gilly – a source of conflict for him, for his oath to the Night's Watch forbids him from marrying –, and mock the Westerosi for what is deemed their emotional awkwardness.

Tarly's days with the "Cinammon Wind" offer a few further glimpses into Summer Islander culture as well. We learn, for example, that the crew has many women in it, unlike crews from any other culture we meet throughout the series – something that might hint at women being allowed more prominent roles in Summer Islander society. Moreover, we see confirmation of Chataya's words on her culture's attitudes towards sexuality, as Samwell remarks that making love to one another is the Summer Islanders' way of mourning – answering "death with life" ("Feast," p. 749).

The last culture we shall explore is one that is not tied to any specific ethnicity or

nationality; for it is a faith, one whose exact origins are never given, but whose influence is felt throughout the story: the cult of the Lord of Light, R'hllor. His worship is easily the one that features the most after the Faith of the Seven, Westeros' official religion; and if the Westerosi's prayers are sent mostly to the Seven or the First Men's gods, so is R'hllor the most popular deity in the Free Cities – and possibly in regions beyond; while we have seen no Temple of Light in Slaver's Bay, Qarth or the Dothraki Sea, Melisandre, a red priestess of the Lord of Light, claims to be from Asshai, a city further east than even Qarth.

Still, throughout the series we watch as R'hllor's influence slowly spreads from Essos into Westeros, be it through a few "missionary" priests – such as Thoros of Myr – or, more prominently, through the efforts of Melisandre. For the red priestess of Asshai has managed to convert Stannis Baratheon, one of the Iron Throne's claimants after Robert's death, and become one of his most important advisors. It is through her that we are able to learn some of the Lord of Light's tenets and rituals – and understand just how different they are from the Faith of the Seven. For while Westeros' religion is centred on the worship of a creator's seven aspects, R'hllor is regarded as the one god embodying all that is good, in opposition to a "Great Other" who is the personification of all that is evil. Also uniquely, the red priests preach about the coming of a hero, Azor Ahai reborn, fated to be R'hllor's champion in a prophesied final battle against the Great Other. Melisandre considers Stannis to be such hero, and goes to great lengths to elevate him as such, while Benerro, the red priest Tyrion sees in Volantis, seems to believe Daenerys is Azor Ahai.

Such messianic figures and prophetic beliefs would be enough to set R'hllor's faith apart from the Faith of the Seven, but there are other characteristics that further reinforce its foreignness within the Westerosi context. Firstly, there is the fact that, while the septons and septas of the Seven have been shown so far to work only through prayer and faith, the Lord of Light's red priests have actual magic powers – which they attribute to their god, and which allow arts such as prophecy, clairvoyance, fire conjuration, even resurrection (as shown by Thoros of Myr). Secondly, the priesthood of R'hllor is at least partially composed of enslaved individuals – at least in the temples built on lands where slavery is permitted. Thirdly, and perhaps more crucially, R'hllor's faith allows, and even encourages in times of great need, human sacrifice, specifically by fire. At one point, we see Stannis consider sacrificing his own nephew, bastard son of his brother Robert – and a child, it should be mentioned – to ensure R'hllor's favour, for noble blood, according to Melisandre, makes for a more potent sacrifice.

It is true that Melisandre is the only red priestess we come across who actually offers human sacrifices to R'hllor; still, of the other three priests we become acquainted with, one (Thoros of Myr) is ever in the company of Westerosi who mostly pray to the Seven, and the other (Benerro and Moqorro) appear far too briefly. Thus, as she is the most prominent of the god's agents across the series, Melisandre becomes our main reference of how a red priest operates, while her Westerosi converts offer us the best glimpse of how the Lord of Light's faithful are. The impression, however, is hardly the best, be it for the constant sacrifices, for Melisandre's use of magic to harm Stannis' rivals (including his brother, which is assassinated by a shadow birthed by her from his seed and life force), or for the passion of R'hllor's converts, which borders on the fanatical. For instance, when Stannis is informed of his rival Robb Stark's murder in the Red Wedding, his allies – and especially his wife, Selyse – are quick to attribute it to the Lord of Light's intervention:

‘It was the Lord's wrath that slew him,’ Ser Axell Florent declared. ‘It was the hand of R'hllor!’
 ‘*Praise the Lord of Light!*’ sang out Queen Selyse, a pinched thin hard woman with large ears and a hairy upper lip. [...] ‘*No man may withstand him!*’ the queen cried. (“Storm,” p. 722-3).

It is also true that much of what we see of both Melisandre and the worship of R'hllor between “Clash” and “Feast” – the second and fourth books respectively – is through the eyes of Davos Seaworth, who is as loyal to Stannis as he is to the values of his native Westeros. As we are given a glimpse into Melisandre's mind in her own chapters, her character and beliefs are given greater depth; if Davos' eyes made it seem as if she was wilfully cruel in her ways, it then becomes apparent that she truly believes everything she does is for a greater good. Therefore, it seems logical that there seems to be little hint of regret or displeasure for all the sacrifices she made in the name of her cause. Whether her prophecy on Azor Ahai, or her warnings on the Great Other, will ever prove true, it remains to be seen; what seems certain is that, as Stannis' campaign brings him closer to seizing the Iron Throne, so does the Lord of Light's word grow stronger on Westerosi soil.

5. FINAL REMARKS: BLOOD OF DRAGONS OR BREAKER OF CHAINS?

One of Daenerys's most interesting aspects is the conflict between her desire to achieve power while also building a more just land (as exemplified by her epithet of "Breaker of Chains"), and the ghosts of her Targaryen heritage – a heritage of conquest, violence and madness. It seems fitting, then, that the conflict of one of the series' most important characters illustrates so well the question proposed at the start of this study. How much has "ASOIAF" inherited from Western fantasy's issues regarding ethnic and cultural representation? How successfully has the series overcome them?

Having now sailed from Dorne to Qarth, ridden across the Dothraki Sea, wandered the Free Cities, crossed Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen, and sailed on the Summer Islanders' swan ships, we are better equipped to attempt an answer to that question. Before that, however, it is important to return to the six questions proposed for the analysis of "ASOIAF's" chosen characters and cultures – three specifically referring to the cultures as a whole, and three regarding individual character

On the cultures:

a) How are the non-Westerosi nations described in the books in terms of depth and complexity?

It is not easy to find anywhere in the series a character, place or culture that is not described in richness of detail. This, however, does not spare all cultures from seeming simplistic, easily reduced to essentialist images.

This is very easily seen in the cities of the Slaver's Bay. Astapori, Yunkai'i and Meereenese appear quite prominently in both the third and the fifth books, and we do hear much of their architecture, clothing and hairstyles; yet there is little we learn of it other than that their entire society is based on slavery, that public and gratuitous brutality towards slaves is the norm, and that they pride themselves in their Ghiscari heritage. Their politics are reduced to a cluster of posturing nobles so shallow even their names are virtually the same. Daenerys' days in Meereen allow us to see more of the Ghiscari cities: we learn the cultural importance of the fighting pits, as well as some of their religious traditions and political factions, even some of their history; the discovery that the city's adoption of slavery was a form of avoiding ruin, while not a justification, does add a layer of complexity to Meereen's culture. Yet all these things are still related to slavery and violence, arguably doing little to

change the impression of those three cities, supposedly the heirs of an ancient and sophisticated empire, as anything other than giant slave markets.

Ironically, while in proportional terms we see less of the Free Cities than of the slaver cities, the former feel arguably much more complex. In the brief time we spend in Volantis, for example, we learn of its politics and some of its culture, such as the fact that R'hllor's faith is strong there. Through the characters who count the Free Cities as their homeland, we learn how dynamic their economy is, how expansive their cultural and commercial influence, and how cosmopolitan their culture. Through Arya we learn that the people of Braavos abhor slavery, welcome a multitude of beliefs, and an even greater diversity of heritages; we even learn of the civilians' smaller habits and customs, such as that they are a "kindly folk" – and see confirmation of that by how even a blind Arya manages to get by on the Braavosian streets unmolested. This helps avert the Free Cities' reduction to little more than a cluster of trade centres that lean on slave labour and also serve as breeding ground of Essos' mercenaries.

Qarth is an interesting case: even though it only appears in one book, afterwards being rarely mentioned, the time Daenerys spends there allow us to see much of the city and its people, including many of their customs, its complex politics, even some of its history. Even more interestingly, Qarth defies overt simplifications: it is an important commercial centre, but also the seat of a whole order of mages – who vie for the city's political supremacy along with nobles and merchants. Its people employ slaves (which, by some standards, including Eurocentric ones, is a sign of backwardness), but also show considerable artistic sophistication (which, by those same standards, is the sign of an advanced civilisation). The same defiance is not shown by the Dothraki, who, for all that we are shown of their customs and ways, are rather perplexing for how simplistic their culture appears to be. After all, there seems to be hardly anything to Dothraki culture other than warring and horses; they have pillaged dozens of ancient cultures, and yet preserved nothing but broken statues whose names fell into oblivion; their only city is a commercial bridge between civilisations that otherwise do not even brush against one another, yet they do not participate of the trade; we learn some of their religious beliefs and myths, to be sure, yet even they have mostly to do with horses and warring.

And for its lateness in appearing in the series, Dorne and its people are certainly shown in a wealth of detail, particularly their culture – and the ways it diverges from the

dominant Andal Westerosi customs. More interestingly, we see Dornishmen of various ways of life, from nobles (like Arianne) to landed knights (like Andrey Dalt) to commoners (like Garin). Likewise, we see representatives from almost all of Dorne's internal groups – salty, stony and the orphans of the Greenblood, with only the sandy Dornish not appearing prominently. It is true that the stereotypes on the Dornish (as they are seen from Westeros to the eastern reaches of Essos) are many, and to a less attentive eye the Dornish characters we are introduced to may confirm those stereotypes. This could even be true of their alleged fondness for poisoning their foes (a trait shown by both Oberyn and Nymeria, and hinted by Tyene); but their fame as hot-tempered is not supported by the likes of Doran, Quentyn, Ellaria, Garin or Andrey Dalt. The same can be said of the alleged “lewdness” of Dornish women; after all, that the Andal and Northern Westerosi (and, perhaps, some of the Free Cities, as Areo Hotah's impression seems to suggest) have stricter codes on sexuality, specifically women's sexuality, is hardly the Dornish's business. It seems safe to say, then, that of all those cultures not of mostly Andal and First Men descent, Dorne stands out both for its depth and its complexity.

Standing as its antonym, the Summer Isles stand out for how little we learn of it, in spite of almost every book featuring at least one Summer Islander. Other than their attitudes towards sexuality, their ships, their bows, their apparent friendliness and the fact that they allow women in their ships' crews, we learn virtually nothing about Summer Islanders' beliefs and customs.

b) What is the geopolitics of “ASOIAF's” world? Are these nations allied or enemies, oppressors or oppressed in relation to (Andal/Northerner) Westeros?

It is curious how, with all the civilisations we come across, their politics are mostly contained within their own respective continents; while we see many battles and wars being fought, we have yet to see Westerosi armies marching upon Essos, or Essosians invading Westeros. It is true that, in “Dance I & II,” we see the Golden Company, Essos' strongest mercenary company, landing in Westeros; but mercenaries hardly stand for any specific culture, less so an Essosi one – especially when said company is fighting for an alleged lost heir of the Targaryen dynasty.

Perhaps, then, a more valid discussion can be made regarding the level of sophistication and political or military strength seen in each civilisation. While no actual

measure is given, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that the Iron Throne (even amid the storm of civil war) stands atop the strongest nation in the world; after all, it is one that rules the near entirety of a continent. Perhaps the only civilisation to span over a territory nearly as large is the Dothraki – whose prowess in war is feared and respected by all, the Westerosi included. But the Dothraki are fractured into dozens, perhaps hundreds of autonomous khalasars, and with their political system being as solid as the current strength of a Khal, the only role they play in continental politics is as the occasional threat to other nations' borders. Furthermore, their little apparent knowledge on things such as metallurgy or engineering seem to indicate little technological sophistication on their part.

The Summer Islanders are shown to be proficient sailors, and their famed goldenheart bows hint at how sophisticated their crafting is; however, we see too little of their civilisation to make a proper evaluation. The slaver cities are the inheritors of a once great empire, but as we have seen, there are hints that they are a shadow of their former selves – with Meereen perhaps being the exception. The Free Cities are easily among the greatest urban centres in the world, powerful and wealthy, and their crafts are famed over Essos and beyond the Narrow Sea for their quality; Qarth, by its turn, may not be the most prominent power in the continent, but its size and sophistication make it no inferior to the Daughters of Valyria. While Dorne is part of Westeros, it is also one of its weakest kingdoms if we are to trust Doran Martell's word – although it is possible he was merely understating Dorne's strength.

An interesting detail is that both Westerosi and Essosi underestimate each other, to an extent. If, on one hand, many in Westeros think of the easterners as prone to murdering and betraying and anything else they consider “strange,” on the other we have more than once seen people in the Free Cities, or even in the Slaver's Bay, refer to the westerners as “savages.” While this shows that prejudice and stereotyping are common in all corners of the world, it hardly refutes the fact that some of those corners do find themselves in a much more sophisticated level (be it technological, political, urban or cultural) than others – and that the more sophisticated ones tend to be closer to the west.

c) Are they described by one of their own, or by an outsider? What are the implications of this perspective?

Of the cultures we have analysed, the only one with its own point-of-view narrator

was Dorne. While it is true that this only happened late in the series, and after we had been introduced to a number of Dornish characters, that is precisely what allows us to see the difference that the point of view makes in how a culture or a character appears. Had we known Arianne only through Arys Oakheart's eyes, we might have been led to believe that there was little more to her personality than being sexually very active and unbound; her own chapters, however, show that she is much more than that – and *also* that her sexuality is something she sees as natural, rather than as an uncontrollable or destructive thing (as a “wild and wanton” person might be). Had we seen the Sand Snakes only through Areo Hotah's eyes, we might have concluded they were entirely unreliable, with little care for even their family – while Arianne again shows that, even if their means differed, they liked and respected her. Had our only reference of what a Dornishman is like remained Oberynd as seen through Tyrion's eyes, we might have expected that to be the image of a typical man of Dorne – something that Doran, Quentyn, Garin and Andrey Dalt refute. That is not to mention how both Oberynd and Doran stand out among the lords of Westeros for arguably positive traits: the Red Viper for taking responsibility for all his bastard children, and the Prince of Sunspear for the care he shows for his people, even the lowborn.

Unfortunately, this insider's view is a privilege none of the other analysed cultures have been given. Of the Free Cities, the one point-of-view character is Areo Hotah, but his chapters are wholly concerned with Dorne, and so he tells little about his own homeland; of the Qartheen we see relatively much, but mostly impressions of a passing traveller – in this case, Daenerys; and of Summer Islanders, we see and hear of even less. The same is true for the Ghiscari and the Dothraki – even if the latter are shown to us through one who actually embraced much of their culture.

A point must be made regarding the slaver cities and the Dothraki, especially after claiming, in the previous item, that they were the two cultures depicted in the least flattering ways. One might argue that the lack of Ghiscari and Dothraki point-of-view characters might be why these cultures seem so simplistic, or shown with such focus on their more negative traits and so few redeeming facets. This might be true for the slaver cities; as Daenerys' Meereen chapters hint, there is more to them than their slaver culture. Notwithstanding, unless Daenerys was delirious all the way through the Slaver's Bay, the scenes and acts of gratuitous brutality she witnesses – such as the shredded slaves in Astapor, or the disembowelled children on the road to Meereen – are not the effect of an outsider's bias, but actual

happenings. This is even truer for the Dothraki and their ways: an observer who sees them as but savages would surely make their culture seem simplistic and excessively violent, yet Daenerys' attitudes towards them are certainly not so dismissive or patronising (at least not while she lives among them).

On the characters:

a) How are they described in terms of depth and complexity?

Throughout "ASOIAF," it is not hard to find characters (even outside those with their own POVs) who can be considered round, with well-developed backgrounds, personality traits and motivations. This is particularly important for characters from outside Westeros, for they often offer the windows through which we may catch glimpses of their own cultures; Chataya, the Summer Islander brothel owner of King's Landing, is one example of that, as are Oberyn Martell, the red priest Thoros of Myr, and so many others.

Just as importantly, a greater complexity means that many characters avoid being reduced to essentialist caricatures of their own respective cultures. Khal Drogo, for instance, is introduced as a fearsome, cruel-looking warlord before being revealed as a rather caring husband too; Ellaria Sand might easily be imagined as Oberyn's match in temper, had we not seen her begging the Sand Snakes not to lose themselves in their desire to avenge their father's death; and we could have been excused for thinking every single citizen of the slaver cities was cruel, petty and vulgar, had we not met Hizdahr, Skahaz or the Green Grace more closely.

Of course, not every side or minor character receives as much development, and remain rather flat. In itself, that is not an issue; however, when too many characters from specific cultural or ethnic groups appear flat, they risk being reduced to stereotypes. This is especially a problem for Summer Islanders, most of whom appear too briefly to enjoy greater development as characters, and who thus function up as little more than supports for the (usually Caucasian) POV character. The one Summer Islander who does appear at least once in four out of five books, Jalabhar Xho, appears in the narrative just as he does in the court of King's Landing: an exotic item, one that stands out, but receives no more attention than a passing curiosity.

Of the Free Cities' characters, it could be said that a number of them is either a manipulator or has ambiguous loyalties; still, that does not mean their personality or motives

are not well-developed. Varys is easily one of the most ambiguous characters in the entire series, yet he does seem to genuinely strive for a fairer society – unlike Illyrio or Daario, who seem more interested in their own personal profit. Taena is a Myrish woman whom even Cersei (who befriends her) deems cunning and ambitious; Thoros is Myrish as well, yet he fights along with a band of warriors who tries to bring order in an increasingly chaotic Westeros. Further east, we find Xaro Xhoan Daxos, who is clearly interested in taking advantage of Daenerys, but who never truly moves to harm her – and who, as it has been mentioned, later seems somewhat supportive of her.

In a cast so wealthy with more or less round characters, it is even more astonishing how so many Dothraki and Ghiscari characters appear so flat. Irri and Jhiqui, two of Daenerys' oldest companions, do little more than serve her smaller needs and whims; other than when they briefly quarrel over Rakhro's attention, or in the rarer occasions when they express an opinion regarding a particular decision by the Khaleesi, we hear nothing about their feelings, or their past, or even their desires. Missandei, another of Daenerys' servants, and one whom we meet much later than Irri and Jhiqui, is far more forthcoming about speaking of herself – then again, even Missandei does little beyond serving her Targaryen queen. Daenerys' bloodriders are more silent than her handmaidens, and her own khalasar – which follows her after Drogo's death – is more silent than even them.

The Ghiscari are much more talkative and active, to be sure, but no rounder. Of the many Astapori, Yunkai'i and Meereenese we come across (at least before Hizdahr, Skahaz and the Green Grace), there is not a *single* one who is not markedly arrogant, brutal in their treatment of slaves, and outside what might be considered physically attractive. It is true that Daenerys' view on the people of Slaver's Bay becomes quite biased, quite quickly; not to mention that she does not meet that many citizens in either Astapor or Yunkai. It is just as true, however, that what we see of the Ghiscari through both Tyrion and Quentyn is no different; in fact, as we learn more about the other Yunkish lords besieging Meereen, and about what happened in Astapor from one of its own survivors, we only receive further confirmation of the early impressions.

b) Do non-Caucasian or non-Westerosi characters have their own point-of-view chapters? How often are they shown through the POVs of characters who are not of the same cultural background?

As we have seen, there are two (salty) Dornish characters with their own chapters (Arianne and Quentyn Martell), as well as a Norvoshi (Areo Hotah); ironically, while both Arianne and Quentyn are Westerosi, they are not Caucasian – and while Areo is not Westerosi, he is most likely Caucasian. This is due to the fact that most people from the Free Cities are such, and also that his skin tone is never described whereas virtually every other character with dark skin is specifically described as such – which, by its turn, hints at light skin being the “default” skin type to most narrators. A case could be made that Daenerys is not truly Westerosi, at least not culturally, having spent her entire life in Essos; yet she did receive a Westerosi education, and is usually regarded by Essosian characters as Westerosi. A similar point could be made regarding Melisandre; while she is described as pale and red-haired, by “Dance I & II” all we know of her is that she came from Asshai, which lies in the farthest east of Essos. However, given the mystery of her past, that might not even be true, and she could be from anywhere between the Free Cities and Qarth (whose people is also described as pale), or even Westeros itself.

Thus, beyond those of Arianne, Quentyn and Areo, there is not a single chapter that is not told from the perspective of an Andal or Northerner Westerosi (Daenerys herself being descended of a Valyrian Westerosi dynasty), and none told by someone who is neither Westerosi, nor Caucasian. Because of that, most of the time a non-Westerosi or non-Caucasian appears (with the exception of the salty Dornish, most of whom appear in Arianne’s and Areo’s chapters), it is invariably through the eyes of an Andal/Northerner Westerosi.

c) Are their roles in the narrative necessarily tied to Caucasian/Westerosi characters?

It is another of “ASOIAF’s” trademarks (and another consequence of their complexity) that many side or minor characters often have their own goals and plots that are not forcibly tied to those of the point-of-view character – even if they happen to cross one another. For example, Arya happens to meet the band of which Thoros of Myr is part by accident, and even when they part ways, we are assured that the red priest’s mission goes on. Varys, who features in the chapters of various characters, has many agendas, many of which do not even fully concern those respective characters. Drogo, by his turn, does as he wishes, and it is not until Daenerys is almost murdered on the orders of the Iron Throne that her ambition to march towards Westeros becomes his own. That is not to talk of Oberyn, Doran or the Sand Snakes, all of whom have their own goals that are not centred on any of the

characters in whose chapters they feature.

Naturally, most characters will be tied, at least to some degree, to their own respective POV counterparts. Daario, for instance, is quite close to Daenerys, whom he (supposedly) serves, just as Hizdahr is; however, neither of them exists solely to support Daenerys, or to propel her story forward at their own expense. The same cannot be said, for example, of Daenerys' Dothraki followers, or Chataya and her daughter Alayaya (whose participation in the story lasts only as long as Tyrion needs them), or the Summer Islander crew of the "Cinnamon Wind" (who do little other than support Samwell and Gilly in whatever way they need), or even Taena (who likewise does little more than support Cersei, sexually even).

In the first two chapters, we saw the many ways by which the Eurocentric eye reframes those outside the so-called "West" in ways that speak more of its own views and biases than of actual facts. We also saw how European – and, by extension, Euro-American – fantasy inherited much of that Eurocentric world view. Finding an answer to the question of "ASOIAF's" role in that legacy, however, like most conflicts within George R. R. Martin's own world, is not so simple.

To begin with, outside of Andal and Northerner Westeros there is hardly a culture that can be claimed as a direct correlation to any specific real-world civilisation, as most seem to be based on an amalgam of cultures and histories. Nonetheless, a geographical parallel may still be identified, particularly one centred on a West-East divide, since Westeros (the western continent) is the seat of the kingdoms more clearly based on medieval European cultures, while Essos (the eastern one) hosts others that mostly do not seem to bear such influence. Another parallel is of ethnic-racial nature: firstly, because all ethnic-racial groups in the series (except, maybe, Valyrians) resemble those that can be seen in the real world; secondly, because there is a clearer relation between ethnicity and culture, as most Caucasian groups within "ASOIAF" belong to European-based cultures, while those that are not (at least not markedly so) contain Black or brown-skinned populations; and thirdly, because all Black and brown populations live to the south and the east of the Caucasian nations.

It is true that the Free Cities have a (mostly) Caucasian population while being a Essosi civilisation; equally is the fact, as we saw in Chapter 2, that the West-East divide in European literature was not always between Europe and Asia, but also between Western and

Eastern Europe. To the Western European eye, its Eastern European counterparts certainly had a degree of kinship – both cultural and ethnic – with it, but also with people from further east, from cultures that appeared strange, perhaps even frightening. Likewise, no Westerosi observer denied the Free Cities’ wealth and power; at the same time, however, the Daughters of Valyria might seem somewhat corrupted, with their apparent penchant for assassinations, their mage practitioners, their eunuchs and their use of slave labour – four elements that are rather commonplace the further east you go in Essos, especially the three latter.

But it is the Dothraki and the Ghiscari – the “East” of “ASOIAF” – that, unfortunately, seem to embody Eurocentric preconceptions of its imagined East to the fullest. We have already seen how both these cultures have shown little of themselves other than violence, gratuitous brutality, despotism, and large-scale use of slavery; of the Dothraki in particular we have also seen unbridled, destructive sexuality. All these are eerily reminiscent of the picture that for centuries were made of Asians – and Arabs in particular – as inherently inclined to tyranny, as cruel slavers, and as sexually predatory. Furthermore, it cannot be ignored that the faith of R’hllor (while not being tied to either Ghiscari or Dothraki) is an eastern religion with arguably violent practices, whose adepts venerate it with an almost fanatical ardour, and which is seen slowly spreading into Westeros itself. One could certainly be forgiven for being reminded of real-world conceptions regarding “eastern” faiths, and Islam in particular.

There is more to be said about the traits commonly seen among eastern Essosi people, and their sexual violence in particular, for such trope is commonly applied to dark-skinned men in general – which the Dothraki are. This is not the only racial trope that appears to have been woven into the fabric of “ASOIAF’s” world; it is worth remembering that the Ghiscari are specifically described as “mongrels” – the only culture featuring in the story to show such high level of miscegenation as to be described with that word. Even the Dornish, a diverse people in their own right, are never considered to be “mongrels.” Furthermore, it calls the attention that many dark-skinned (or non-Westerosi) characters are shown to be highly sexual – and particularly women, such as Taena of Myr, Arianne Martell, Tyene Sand (who, despite being described as blonde, is still Dornish), Chataya and Alayaya; then there is Irri, who, despite not being particularly sexualised, is twice used by Daenerys for relief.

At this point, one may be reminded that Qarth lies even further east than Dothraki or Ghiscari; indeed, that city shows a level of sophistication and nuance not seen anywhere else

to the east of the Free Cities. This, however, only makes the choice of depicting Ghiscari and Dothraki the way they are even more problematic – for the Qartheen, unlike Ghiscari or Dothraki, are pale-skinned. While it is true that even in East Asia there are people with pale skin, it is equally true that whenever a people in “ASOIAF” shows phenotypes not too typical of Caucasians (be it the olive skin of the Myrish or the almond eyes of the Dothraki), they are described as such – and we are given no hint that the Qartheen do not resemble Westerosi.

An argument could be made that nothing within “ASOIAF” necessarily point at any particular ethnicity being inherently superior to another; even slavers do not seem to show much preference for any ethnicity in particular, as we see slaves ranging from blonde Lysene to black Summer Islanders. A more attentive reader, however, will have noticed that, as we learn from Daenerys, the people of Naath – who, judging by Missandei’s appearance, are dark-skinned – are considered to make the best slaves for their general pacifism. The same reader will also have noticed how Valyrian traits – which include pale skin and fair hair – are sometimes considered the most attractive, as made evident by Arianne Martell’s opinion on Gerold Dayne being the most handsome man in Dorne, and her musings that their children, should they inherit his “dragonlord” looks, would be beautiful.

As it has been mentioned before, the depiction of Ghiscari or Dothraki is perplexing when contrasted with the level of nuance given almost every other culture – more so given how Martin often plays with the ways different cultures stereotype one another. For example, if the Westerosi are known to look even at the Free Cities with certain air of superiority, so do the people of Essos more than once refer to Westerosi as savages. This play on stereotyping is done very well with the Dornish: there is no shortage of comments regarding the “lewdness” of Dornish women, or the “bad temper” of Dornish men, or the general treacherousness of them all. Our initial impressions on Obery, the Sand Snakes and Arianne – impressions given through characters who were not Dornish themselves – might have confirmed all that. However, as we actually see things through a Dornish character, and get more closely acquainted with that people, we see how those stereotypes speak more of those who believe them than of those they refer to. After all, the Dornish can hardly be blamed if Andals and Northerners have such an austere code on sexuality, or teach their women to be demure and submissive, or are ashamed of children born out of wedlock.

Indeed, most of the stereotypes applied to the Dornish curiously resemble those applied to Latin-Americans – particularly the “spitfire Latina” and the “hot-tempered, macho

Latino.” Regardless of whether Martin intended that or not, he certainly does a very good job at subverting those – and others too; for if US media often reduces brown characters to roles of reduced importance, in Dorne they are independent noblewomen, strong warriors, intelligent tacticians, powerful princes, and so on. Just as importantly, these characters are not reduced to “idealisations,” morally flawless individuals who excel at everything they set themselves on doing; they have their flaws and limitations, and that only makes them more human. That Martin accomplishes all this is certainly to his credit – even if, at the same time, we are reminded that Dorne, for all its cultural and ethnic uniqueness, still *is* part of Westeros, and heavily influenced by Andal culture.

Perhaps the same could have been said of the Summer Islanders, had they been given a little more prominence. After all, they avoid many of the stereotypes often applied to Black characters – such as being uneducated, aggressive or sexually predatory. More importantly, the Summer Islanders are not reduced to the role of “primitive” civilisation; while we see nothing that makes them stand out as a nation, there is nothing that makes them necessarily less sophisticated either. They are reduced, however, to purely supporting roles, and very brief ones at that; some might even say their participation within the series feels tokenistic for the most part. It might also call one’s attention that, of the three more prominent Summer Islander characters in the first two books, two (both women) are almost entirely defined by the fact that they are prostitutes.

We have seen how the biases of each point-of-view character heavily influences the way those they interact with, as well as their surroundings, are described. One could further point out that both the culture and the people of (Andal and Northerner) Westeros are shown to have their own questionable moments and customs; for instance, there are acts of brutality committed in the Seven Kingdoms that could match even those we seen in the Slaver’s Bay. This could be argued with the fact that many of these acts of brutality happen during wartime, and by the hands of individuals infamous for their violence. However, this would require a deeper analysis of the chapters set in Westeros, and focused on Westerosi characters – which is to say, the near entirety of “ASOIAF.” The scope of this thesis required a specific focus on the desired cultures and characters; but, more than that, it was felt that such analysis would be more honest. After all, analysing a non-Caucasian, non-Western-based culture by using a Caucasian Western-based nation as a point of reference is precisely what the Eurocentric view is about.

Furthermore, it must be noted that, if the analysis presented in this thesis seemed to encompass too many objects, it was not due to a lack of planning. It was felt that the wide scope of the story made it necessary for its analysis to be just as wide-reaching; after all, a single culture hardly offers a precise panorama of how non-Caucasian or non-Western people and cultures are depicted in “ASOIAF.” Had Dorne been the sole focus of this research, one might have been led to believe that Martin’s depiction of non-Caucasian people is untroubled by questionable choices – which, as the Dothraki and the Ghiscari prove, is not the case. Likewise, had our eyes focused only in the slaver cities, or the Dothraki, or even the Free Cities, we would have missed the complexity and strength of Dorne and its characters.

Finally, discussing issues of race and representation is ever a source of conflict for myself; dismissing such debate as unnecessary or “whiny” is not a recent attitude, and so it is not easy to stand strong and optimistic that a significant change can be made any time soon. More crucially, in face of today’s challenges, representation – more so in fictional stories – might seem even less of an issue; after all, as someone from Westeros would say, “words are wind,” and action is what matters. But it is the wind that moves the ship which may bring either war or wealth; it is the wind that births the storm which razes cities and rouses the sea in rebellion. Respecting the strength of this wind is one of the first steps we must take if we hope to stand before all the forces attempting to maintain a discriminatory status quo like the words of House Martell: unbowed, unbent, and unbroken.

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