For the Night is Dark and Full of Others: A Study of Otherness in HBO's Game of Thrones

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For the Night is Dark and Full of Others: A Study of Otherness in HBO's *Game of Thrones*

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Travail de fin d'études présenté par Gwendoline HORION
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Introduction

On May 19, 2019, an impressive 19.3 million viewers worldwide tuned in to watch the last ever episode of the TV phenomenon *Game of Thrones* across all HBO platforms, setting a new ratings record not only for *Game of Thrones*, but also for HBO's history (Porter). Despite being the lowest rated season of the whole series on IMDb (i.e. the internet movie database) (Katz and Lai), the eighth and final season of *Game of Thrones* still averages 44.2 million viewers per episode across all platforms, including delayed viewing (Fitzgerald). These incredible numbers only seem to confirm the series as "TV's first global blockbuster" (Lotz). Indeed, since it first aired in April 2011, the fantasy drama, based on George R. R. Martin's series of novels *A Song of Ice and Fire*, managed to build an international fan base and gained popularity with each season airing, a fact that is highlighted by the astounding number of illegal downloading. As reported in *Variety* magazine, a report from anti-piracy firm MUSO stated that the seventh season of *Game of Thrones* alone has been illegally downloaded or streamed more than 1 billion times (Holloway), making of *Game of Thrones* "the most pirated television series for the sixth year in a row" (Sharf). The show has had, without contest, an enormous influence on its growing audience, with a strong emotional investment from the viewers' part. Some dissatisfied fans even set up a petition to remake season 8 "with competent writers" (Dylan D.). As psychologist Nancy Berk writes:

> [w]hen viewers take characters on as family, or if a show has become their family ritual or an anticipated positive event, most will experience a sense of loss when the show ends. Like real life, most people want their favorite characters to succeed and their least favorite to be brought to justice. […] *Game of Thrones* – it's a family affair. (Berk)

It is a family affair, indeed – after the show first aired in 2011, many parents chose to give *Game of Thrones*-related names to their babies, a trend that is particularly important in the United States, where no less than 2.545 girls received the name "Arya" in 2018 (Nordine). In addition to its popular success, the series also received critical acclaim from the beginning of its broadcasting, being nominated for 570 awards and winning 317 awards for various aspects of the series such as best actor/actress, writing, directing, costumes, visual effects and so on ("Game of Thrones"). This year alone, the series dominates the drama categories of the Emmy Awards, with no less than 32 nominations (Haasch and Radulovic). *Game of Thrones* also holds several world records from the *Guinness Book of World Records* such as "Most pirated TV show" and "Largest TV drama simulcast" (Gluck).

However, the immense popularity of the show also brought its share of polemics: from the airing of season 1, various fans and critics pinpointed several problematic aspects in the show, especially the treatment – or rather mistreatment – of women on screen. The first issue is related to how much female characters speak compared to male characters in *Game of Thrones*. Indeed, the research group Ceretai collected data over the eight seasons of the series and revealed that, overall, women spoke three times less than men (with variations between seasons) (Pearse and Perasso). These figures are all the more surprising as the series features strong female characters such as Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, or Arya Stark, which prompts journalists Georgina Pearce and Valeria Perasso to note that women in *Game of Thrones* are "seen but not heard" (Pearce and Perasso). While female voices are underrepresented, female bodies are very visible in the series, but often in an over-sexualised way. Indeed, another recurring issue discussed by many on the internet is nudity: anybody who has seen *Game of Thrones* knows that it is extremely rare, especially in the early seasons of the series, to find an

episode which does not feature any kind of nudity. If nudity in itself is not a problem – as long as it is justified in some character's story arc –, the fact that almost only women are shown with full-frontal nudity in the show, and in a completely gratuitous way, sparked off a debate on the show's sexism. To several critics and fans[1], this amount of female nudity is representative of the series' use and abuse of "the male gaze", a term used in feminist theory and first coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975 (Eaton 877-78). The notion of the "male gaze" refers to the depiction of the world – and particularly, of women – from a masculine and heterosexual point of view in visual arts and literature: women are thus presented as objects from which heterosexual men can gain pleasure (Eaton 878). In *Game of Thrones*, and especially in early seasons, female characters seem to be constantly subjected to male characters and viewers, since they are often shown naked on screen for no other reason than to please the male characters/audience. This tendency to show naked women in numerous scenes even inspired the term "sexposition," coined by television critic Myles McNutt in 2011. A contraction of "sex" and "exposition", i.e. the insertion of background information within the main story, "sexposition" is then a technique of exposition which is played with a backdrop of nudity or sex in order to keep the viewer hooked[2] (McNutt). Most of the time, women are the one performing naked in the background. To have a better idea of the amount of female nudity compared to male nudity in *Game of Thrones*, journalist Sara David counted every instance of nudity by gender throughout the seven seasons of the series: out of a total of 144 naked characters, 83.7% were women[3] (David).

[1] Some example of critics addressing the male gaze issue in *Game of Thrones* are Olivia Páez (n. pg.), Evangeline Van Houten (n. pg.), Audrey Renault (n. pg.), Marius François (n. pg.), among others.

[2] The term was inspired by the seventh episode of season 1, "You Win or You Die", in which Petyr "Littlefinger" Baelish remembers his childhood and describes his goals while two naked prostitutes are simulating sexual intercourse in the background (McNutt).

[3] Concerning her analysis, David explains: "I wanted to count both men and women's nipples with equal weight, but it's clear that this show doesn't value them the same way. I counted women as naked if they bared at least one nipple, their buttocks, or genitals. I counted men as naked if they exposed their buttocks

In addition to gratuitous nudity, women in *Game of Thrones* also suffer from an incredible amount of sexual violence, with seventeen scenes depicting the rape – or attempted rape – of a woman (David). George R. R. Martin himself answered to this particular issue in an interview to *The New York Times* in 2014. He explained that rape and sexual violence have always been a part of war, and not including this aspect in a saga centred on war and power would have been "false and dishonest," even though *Game of Thrones* is set in a fantastic universe (qtd. in Itzkoff). However, as Olivia Páez notes: "As one of the biggest shows on television, one has to wonder what message it sends to its audience when the majority of its female characters are subjected to some form of abuse for the sake of the shock factor" (Páez).

On the other hand, several critics praised the show for being feminist: journalist Marie-Claire Chappet, for example, urges the viewers to look beyond the naked scenes and the abusive treatment of women to see how those female characters manage to overcome their victimhood and become powerful (Chappet). She takes the examples of Brienne of Tarth, a powerful female warrior with a rock-solid sense of honour, Arya Stark, the young lady who fiercely rejects the gender roles that society imposes on her, or Yara Greyjoy, the leader of an impressive fleet who is respected by all her crew (Chappet). For Gaby Del Valle, Daenerys Targaryen is the female character who really embodies empowerment: indeed, Daenerys begins as an underdog and embarks in an archetypical hero's journey in which she learns to assert herself in a world dominated by men (Del Valle). Journalist Jordan Lauf, however, regrets that the show is only feminist for a certain kind of women, namely women presenting traits that are generally considered as "masculine" such a "physical strength, bravery, eagerness to fight, brutality" (Lauf).

or genitals. This graph illustrates the percentages each season contributed to the 144 total naked people, as well as their percentage breakdowns by gender." (David)

Lauf also notes that the most "feminine" characters[4], such as Margaery Tyrell and Catelyn Stark "end up dead in the [*Game of Thrones*] world" (Lauf). She explains: "I'm happy to see a show insist that 'masculine' traits aren't for men only, but *Game of Thrones* has left no room to celebrate femininity" (Lauf).

The question of whether *Game of Thrones* is a feminist or sexist show is a heated debate, as shown by the commentaries and articles mentioned above. Even though the question is far from being settled, the show has the merit of being open to debate. Feminism and sexism are not the only issues to be discussed in relation to the show. Indeed, since *Game of Thrones* is such an international TV phenomenon and since every new episode that airs is carefully analysed, every aspect of the show is likely to be a subject of debate as much in scientific papers as on blogs or on online fans communities. The intrigues in *Game of Thrones* being extremely diverse (but at the same time all interlinked), discussions can centre on the representation of women as well as on political power, religious fanatism, historical accuracy, climate change, or the representation of difference. It is the latter discussion, the representation of difference, that is the main focus of this dissertation. Indeed, as noted by writer Brent Hartinger, the *Game of Thrones* world includes a large number of outsiders, misfits and social rejects (153). Gender-nonconformists and LGBT+ characters stand alongside disabled characters as well as overweight people and dwarfs, and these characters are "brought front and center" in George R. R. Martin's saga and in the TV adaptation (Hartinger 154). Because of their differences, those characters are "Others." In *Key Concepts of Post-Colonial Studies*, authors Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define the term "Other" (or "other") as "anyone who is separate from one's self" (169). The concept is particularly important in sociological studies since "[t]he existence of others is crucial in defining

[4] Lauf does not explicitly define what is a "feminine woman" as opposed to a "masculine woman," however.

what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world" (Ashcroft *et al*. 169). In her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, feminist cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed explains that the Other, whom she calls "the stranger," is not "the one we simply fail to recognise, […] simply *any-body* whom we do not know" (21). Rather, she states that the stranger is "*some-body* whom we have *already recognised* in the very moment in which they are 'seen' or 'faced' as a stranger. The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness" (21). For Sara Ahmed, then, the Other comes to be recognised "as a stranger" rather than just not being recognised at all (21). She then argues that

> The stranger is produced as a category within knowledge, rather than coming into being in an absence of knowledge. The implications of such a rethinking of the relationship between knowledge and strangers are far reaching: it suggest that knowledge is bound up with the formation of a community, that is, with the formation of a 'we' that knows through (rather than against) 'the stranger'. (55)

To recognise a stranger as such is then essential to the constitution of the subject since it is by recognising who does not belong (to a dwelling or even to the world) that it is possible to know who belongs (Ahmed 24). According to Ahmed, the recognition of the Other can operate as "a *visual economy*" in which the difference between familiar and strange can be seen, but it also involves "ways of living," i.e. situations "in which we encounter strangers and which allow us to negotiate our way past them" (24). The concept of Other is closely linked to the concept of "othering," which Ashcroft *et al.* describe as "the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'. […] Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects" (171). The term, which was coined by Indian literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak, can be seen in any kind of colonialist narrative, for instance in the homogenisation of the Others into a collective "they" which denies the Others any individuality (Ashcroft *et al.* 171-72).

In this dissertation, the concept of Otherness will be studied through two of the main characters of the *Game of Thrones* TV show, namely Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow. These two characters represent different kinds of Otherness in the show: on the one hand, Daenerys represents displacement, she is an exile who was forced to flee her country and consequently, she has to move through foreign lands and foreign peoples. On the other hand, Jon is the bastard son of a powerful Lord of Westeros and struggles to finds his place in feudal Westerosi[5] society. As a starting point, I will analyse how Daenerys and Jon are depicted as Others in their communities and how their situation affects them and the construction of their identity. I will then study the different peoples these characters encounter during their journeys and see how those peoples are depicted as Others compared to Daenerys and Jon, and/or compared to Westerosi society. In addition, I will try to see how those representations of Otherness affect the viewers of the show. Finally, even though, the focus of this work is mainly on human interactions, I will also very briefly analyse a supernatural kind of Others, i.e. The White Walkers.

[5] Westerosi is the adjective that characterises people or things from Westeros, the main continent in *Game of Thrones*.

Chapter 1: Daenerys Targaryen, the Dragon Queen

In the world of *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys Targaryen – played by British actress Emilia Clarke – is one of the best representations of the outsider. Even though she claims to be the true heiress to the Iron Throne of the Seven Kingdoms and does everything in her power to take back what she considers to be hers, she seems to have all the odds against her. Indeed, her being on a different continent and also the daughter of the previous tyrannical ruler of the Seven Kingdoms (and her being a woman) do not play in her favour in the game of thrones. Daenerys is the only daughter and youngest child of late King Aerys II Targaryen, also known as the Mad King, who was killed during Robert Baratheon's rebellion. Her oldest brother and first heir to the throne, Rhaegar, was also killed in battle during the rebellion. Daenerys was born in Dragonstone, the ancestral home of House Targaryen, where her pregnant mother and her brother Viserys had found refuge after the sack of King's Landing, the capital of the Seven Kingdoms. Her mother died soon after her birth, leaving Daenerys and her older brother Viserys orphans. Helped by loyalists, the last two Targaryen children fled Westeros when Daenerys was still a baby in order to escape from Robert Baratheon's men. Brother and sister went into exile on the continent of Essos and lived for several years in the Free City of Pentos in the house of a Targaryen supporter called Illyrio Mopatis. In the first season of the *Game of Thrones* adaptation, this is where we find Daenerys and her brother, seventeen years after the rebellion and the massacre of their family. Exiled in a foreign land, with no support or money, Daenerys gradually frees herself from her brother's tyrannical authority and into a powerful queen who imposes her rule in a large part of Essos. She then prepares to take back the Iron Throne that was taken from her father.

Like every Targaryen, Daenerys has distinctive physical features that make her stand out amongst all the other characters that she meets. Indeed, Daenerys has very pale skin, silver blonde hair and light green eyes[6]. I will further develop the importance of her appearance later in this chapter. Daenerys is also inseparable from her three dragons, which she considers her children, and to which she owes her nickname "Mother of Dragons."

In this chapter, I am going to briefly analyse Daenerys' situation in Essos right before the beginning of the series and how her unique position in the world of *Game of Thrones* makes her an outsider both in Westeros and in Essos. The second and third parts will deal with the peoples that Daenerys encounters on the Eastern continent, i.e. the Dothraki and the people of Slaver's Bay. I will try to analyse how those peoples are portrayed in the series in terms of costumes and language, and how they are represented as the "barbaric" Others. To do so, I will mainly use the notion of Orientalism developed by Edward Said. I will also focus on how Daenerys interacts with those peoples and how her quest for empowerment eventually transforms into her establishing herself as the saviour, but also the master, of the continent. The last part of this chapter will deal with Daenerys' return to Westeros, her homeland, and I will analyse the notion of home.

Daenerys, a Targaryen in exile

As previously explained, Daenerys and her brother Viserys were forced to leave Westeros after their father's ousting and death. Thus, the last Targaryen children find themselves refugees[7] in Essos, displaced from the land where they were born, to flee the persecution

[6] In the books, however, Daenerys has purple eyes, which is characteristic of her Targaryen family (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 30).

[7] The 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees describes a refugee as "an individual who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a

of King Robert Baratheon for fear of being killed. Indeed, every Targaryen represents a threat to Robert's newly established rule over the Seven Kingdoms, as he gained power through a military *coup d'état* so that he could be challenged by any relative to the former king. However, Daenerys' situation is more than just a displacement caused by political circumstances. In an essay called "Reflections on Exile," cultural critic Edward Said makes a distinction between the terms "refugee" and "exile": according to him, the term refugee "has become political […], suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance," while the term exile, on the other hand, refers to an "age-old practice of banishment" that carries "a touch of solitude and spirituality" (*Exile* 181). Said, an exile himself, explains with poignant words in the first paragraph of his essay how traumatic the experience of exile is:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever. (*Exile* 173)

Thus, for Said, exile is not only the consequence of geographical displacement, it is also the inevitable loss of one's native land and one's past. However, this painful feeling of estrangement from the native place usually goes together with a refusal to belong to the new place. For Said, "[no] matter how well they do, exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphanhood. […] Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously

particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or, who, not having a nationality or being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (qtd. in Kunz 130).

insists on his or her right to refuse to belong" (*Exile* 182). Thus, not only are exiles alienated from their roots, they do not fit in their new environment. The exiles are trapped in-between two worlds, belonging to neither one of them. The same idea of in-betweenness is expressed by French-Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad in his essay "A Land of No Return": for him, "[e]xiles live in limbo between two worlds," foreigners both in their native country and in their new country (Sayad). Thus, to paraphrase Said, Daenerys and her brother have to bear the stigma of political banishment from Westeros, and the stigma of being outsiders in Essos (*Exile* 181).

In order to see in what sense Daenerys is an outsider both in Essos and Westeros, I will first to describe and analyse the different peoples that she encounters on her way. I will also try to understand her reaction to those peoples, beginning with the Dothraki.

1. The Dothraki

The "barbaric" Other

The Dothraki, also called "horselords", are the feared and ferocious people that Daenerys is sold to by her brother at the beginning of season 1. Indeed, in order to take back the Iron Throne from Robert Baratheon, Viserys Targaryen arranges to wed his younger sister Daenerys to the powerful Khal Drogo, a Dothraki warlord. In exchange for Daenerys, Khal Drogo agrees to give Viserys the manpower he needs to reclaim the throne of Westeros. Both in George R. R. Martin's books and in the TV adaptation, the Dothraki people are portrayed as warriors, always mounted on horseback, who live in a region of Essos called the Dothraki Sea, or Great Grass Sea. Even though the Dothraki have a cultural and spiritual capital city called Vaes Dothrak that they visit on special occasions, the Dothraki are a nomadic people, roaming the steppes of Essos in search of villages to

raid and pillage. The Dothraki society is divided into several clans, or hordes, called "khalasars", each of which is led by a "khal", which means "warlord" in Dothraki language. In contrast to other societies who respect ancestry and bloodline, the Dothraki only respect a leader for his physical and mental strength, which implies that power is not inherited but earned in Dothraki society. As Jorah explains to Daenerys: "this isn't Westeros, where men honour blood. Here they only honour strength" (season 1 episode 9[8]). Also, they do not have a specific economic system, which Ser Jorah Mormont explains to Daenerys in season 1 episode 3: "The Dothraki don't believe in money" (1.3). Instead, they take the food, the supplies but also the slaves they need by raiding villages, and they also receive riches from wealthy cities as tribute. The Dothraki are often referred to as "savages", especially by Daenerys' brother Viserys, who considers them as inferior to himself but still recognises their superiority on the battlefield. He explains to Daenerys: "Khal Drogo has never been defeated [in combat]. He's a savage, of course, but he's one of the finest killers alive" (1.1). The Dothraki are not only dismissed as savages by Viserys but also by other peoples living in Essos. When Daenerys with Dothraki riders arrive at the gates of the city of Qarth, she is at first refused entry by the Qartheens, i.e. the inhabitants of Qarth (2.2). Indeed, one of the Qartheens tells Daenerys: "Qarth did not become the greatest city that ever was or will be by letting Dothraki savages through its gates" (2.2). The Dothraki are feared on the whole continent of Essos, boasting a reputation of being fierce and powerful warriors.

In terms of appearance, in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga as well as in HBO's television adaptation, the Dothraki are depicted as copper-skinned people with almond-shaped eyes and dark hair. They typically wear leather trousers and leather armour jackets or light woven-grass shirts, although some warriors prefer riding

[8] From now on, I am going to reference the episodes of the series as follow: (season.episode).

bare-chested. In the series, the riders also paint their bodies and their horses for special occasions, with each clan having a specific paint colour, but the dominant colours of their clothes are earthy browns. Michelle Clapton, the costume designer for the *Game of Thrones* series, explained that she created their costumes drawing inspiration from different peoples such as the Bedouins, some Afghani horsemen, Native American tribes and other African tribes (qtd. in Cogman n. pg.).

Khal Drogo and his bloodriders (season 1 episode 8)

Both the Dothraki's appearance and way of life are often compared to real-life nomadic warriors. In an article analysing the lack of diversity in HBO's adaptation of *Game Of Thrones*, Helen Young notes that the saga's fans often label the Dothraki as Huns or Mongols (744). Other fans pointed out that Dothraki and Native American tribes have a lot in common, notably their nomadic existence, their organisation in tribes (or hordes/khalasars, in the case of the Dothraki), and their remarkable skill at shooting arrows on horseback (Adrienne K.) (Yadav). Indeed, the inspiration for the Dothraki is varied. When asked by a fan if the Dothraki represented Arabs or Turks, with which the

Dothraki also share some common tropes, George R. R. Martin explained on his blog that he got inspiration for the Dothraki from various real-life peoples:

> The Dothraki were actually fashioned as an amalgam of a number of steppe and plains cultures... Mongols and Huns, certainly, but also Alans, Sioux, Cheyenne, and various other Amerindian tribes... seasoned with a dash of pure fantasy. So any resemblance to Arabs or Turks is coincidental. […] In general, though, while I do draw inspiration from history, I try to avoid direct one-for-one transplants, whether of individuals or of entire cultures. […] [I]t would not be correct to say that the Dothraki are Mongols. ("Yakity Yak")

However, that cultural amalgam, instead of being interpreted as a tribute to these fierce warriors, is seen by some fans as a clichéd and stereotypical depiction of belligerent brown people as a group (Adrienne K.) (Yadav). Indeed, the Dothraki seem to only get the roughest tropes from each of the civilisations they are inspired from. For instance, in her book *Winter is Coming*, medievalist and writer Carolyne Larrington carefully analyses the similitudes between the Dothraki and the Mongol tribes that lived in East Asia between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries (192). Larrington notes that, like the Dothraki, the Mongols were a proud nomadic people and fierce warriors who spent most of their lives travelling and raiding villages (192-193). However, Larrington also observes several discrepancies between the Dothraki and the people that possibly inspired them (192). First, contrary to the Mongols, who were literate and notably wrote their own history, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the Dothraki do not seem to be literate (Larrington 192). Indeed, there is no mention of a Dothraki literature, nor of any kind of Dothraki schooling or art in general, either in the books or in the TV adaptation. The mythology and common knowledge of the Dothraki people seem to be passed down orally, often with the addition of the phrase "it is known," which implies a form of folklore or tradition that everyone knows among the Dothraki and that does not require any form of written trace. Larrington also points out that the Mongols appeared to be "a

friendly and amiable people among themselves […], and their women [were] chaste" (193), which contrasts greatly with the representation of the Dothraki. The feast given in honour of Khal Drogo and Daenerys' wedding is a good example of that difference: during the feast, Dothraki women are seen dancing half-naked and howling, while men fight and kill each other so they can have sex with the woman of their choice in front of the whole assembly (1.1). During that scene, Illyrio Mopatis, the rich merchant from Pentos who arranged Daenerys' wedding, explains to Daenerys' brother that "a Dothraki wedding without at least three deaths is considered a dull affair" (1.1). This portrayal of violence and promiscuity contrasts strikingly with the definition Larrington gave of the Mongols earlier, but also with Viserys' and Illyrio Mopatis' urbane attitude, who dispassionately watch the festivities while drinking wine, only quietly giggling at the Dothraki's display of "savagery[9]." The Dothraki appear to be even coarser and more undignified when Daenerys asks Ser Jorah Mormont how to say "thank you" in Dothraki, in order to thank Khal Drogo for his wedding gift, and the knight tells her that such a word does not exist in Dothraki language (1.1).

The problem that this mixture of different cultural influences poses is that the show seems to equate brown-skinned people with savagery and brutality. Indeed, as several critics such as Sesali Bowen and Helen Young noted, racial diversity is very scarce in *Game of Thrones*, most of the cast being white (Sesali) (Young "Game of Thrones' Racism Problem"), and most of the brown and black characters represented, if not all of them, are subjected to white characters, or are represented as inferior to white characters[10]. Several critics, such as Mat Hardy and Carolyne Larrington, note that the representation of the East – which is Essos in the world of *Game of Thrones* – and its

[9] This term in used in reference to Viserys' description of the Dothraki. Indeed, in season 1, Viserys repeatedly calls the Dothraki in general and Khal Drogo "savages," in comparison to his own, supposedly "civilised" attitude.
[10] I will develop further this idea of inferiority later on in this chapter.

inhabitants is quite representative of the Orientalist tradition. Joanne P. Sharp explains in her book *Geographies of Postcolonialism* that the term Orientalism is "conventionally understood to be the scholarly study of the languages and traditions of the Middle East" (16). However, in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains that Orientalism is not a form of knowledge as innocent as this: according to him, Orientalism can also refer to "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" by representing it as a cultural and geographical Other (*Orientalism* 3). Said explains that, in order to show Western superiority over the East, Western writers, poets, painters, etc. produced romanticised representations of the Orient that were by no means "'natural' depictions of the Orient" (*Orientalism* 21). For example, according to Said, Orientals or Arabs are shown to be "gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative,' much given to 'fulsome flattery,' intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals" (*Orientalism* 38). In short, Orientals "in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon [Western] race" so that the West appears to be civilised and culturally and intellectually superior (Said, *Orientalism* 39). Geographer and academic Joanne Sharp, like Said, notes that Orientalism marks the Orient as different from Western society in a number of different ways: the Orient is often represented as being backwards and unchanging while Europe is developed and dynamic (19). Moreover, Orientalism represents an immoral Orient, with unrestrained sexuality and a tendency to laziness (Sharp 20).

According to Joanne Sharp and scholar Mat Hardy, this Orientalist tradition, which appeared at the start of the eighteenth century, is still present nowadays with films and series presenting the same set of Oriental fantasy tropes such as desert settings, deceitful inhabitants, debauchery, etc. (Sharp 25) (Hardy, "Game of Tropes" 410-11). However, Sharp explains that the geography of Orientalism slightly changed over time, with the West becoming no longer just Europe, but also the United States of America, as

the country has become "more influential in the production of dominant images of the rest of the world, particularly through the power of Hollywood" (25). Indeed, in many Hollywood films such as the *Indiana Jones* saga or the *Mummy* films, the protagonists come from the Western world while the villains or the acolytes come from the East (Sharp 25). Additionally, as Hardy points out, in films and novels depicting the East that way, the East is not the main theme of the story but an "exotic backdrop" that allows the Western protagonist(s) to interact with the clichéd Eastern inhabitants ("Game of Tropes" 410). Thus, the Orient serves as a mere pretext to magnify Western society, the barbaric Other contrasting with the civilised West. *Game of Thrones* does not break with the Orientalist tradition and makes a clear distinction between East and West. The separation between the two is not only cultural but also geographical, as Westeros and Essos are two different continents physically separated by the Narrow Sea. What is more, Daenerys' story takes place in Essos most of the time and other Westerosi characters such as Tyrion Lannister or Lord Varys come to join her on the continent. However, since the main arc that connects all the characters in the show is still their fight for the Iron Throne and the control of Westeros, Essos is then only an exotic parenthesis in a greater plot (Hardy, "Game of Tropes" 413).

Furthermore, for Said, Orientalism creates an imaginary Orient that is not culturally varied, but singular. As Sharp explains, "[t]o Said, any or all the cultures in northern Africa, east to southeast Asia and the South Seas can be encompassed by the western geographical imagination into a singular 'Orient'" (16). Thus, in the Orientalist tradition, the Easterners are undistinguishable from one another, they are devoid of individuality and are always considered as a group, contrary to the Westerners. Indeed, in the TV series, it can be quite difficult to recognise one Dothraki warrior from another, except for a few characters such as Khal Drogo. In fact, it seems that nothing is done to

make the Dothraki more recognisable. Their costumes and also their long hair and beards make it hard to identify one particular Dothraki in the series, and only a few characters are named. Joanna Robinson, from *Vanity Fair* magazine, even wrote an article in order to help viewers recognise the new Dothraki characters that appeared in season 6 of the series. Thus, Robinson writes in her article: "Dothraki (and the men who play them!) don't seem too fond of shirts, and between the heavy beards and wigs and the blinding abs, it *might* be a bit of a challenge telling these Dothraki apart in Season 6" (Robinson). This quotation not only emphasises the difficulty in identifying the Dothraki, but also the sexual objectification of the male characters. Indeed, the male Dothraki are described as "hunky" and "handsome" in Robinson's article, and they are praised for their physical appearance rather than for their character's personality (Robinson). It is worth noting that this reification of male characters represents an interesting twist to the Orientalist tradition of representing female characters as erotic, sexualised male fantasies in paintings (Sharp 24).

Thus, the representation of the Dothraki, as well as other peoples from Essos that Daenerys encounters later on in the series, is typical of an Orientalist depiction of the exotic and barbaric Other. Moreover, language is another element of the *Game of Thrones* series further emphasises their Otherness. Indeed, there exist numerous different languages in the universe of *Game of Thrones*. The principal one, which is the "Common Tongue" spoken in Westeros, corresponds to the English language that the readers and viewers of the show can observe. However, even though a lot of people in Essos speak the Common Tongue, probably in order to make the reading and viewing easier for the public, the Dothraki hardly ever use the Common Tongue/English in the TV series and speak in the Dothraki language almost exclusively. The showrunners of *Game of Thrones*,

David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, explain their choice to have the Dothraki speak another language than English as follows:

> - *D. Benioff*: The Dothraki are an alien people to [Daenerys], and she finds herself trying desperately to understand them. So we wanted to feel her distance from her new tribe – to hear their language and comprehend just as little as [Daenerys] does.
>
> - *D. B. Weiss*: If we were ever going to feel what it was like to be in her situation, we needed the sense of disorientation that comes with no understanding a word anyone around you is saying. (Cogman n. pg.).

Their intention in creating a whole new language for the Dothraki people is then clearly to create a feeling of alienation, to make the Dothraki appear as Others to Daenerys and to the viewers[11]. Furthermore, not only do they have a different language to everyone else in the series, but the Dothraki also speak very few lines: in the first episode of season 1, only five very short sentences are uttered in Dothraki, which are not translated by another character or by subtitling. In episode 2, some Dothraki language can be heard as a background noise, and Daenerys speaks one sentence in Dothraki. In episode 4, despite several scenes taking place among the Dothraki tribe, no Dothraki is heard at all. Only when Daenerys becomes more familiar with the new language do the viewers have access to a translation, through subtitles or another character. Also, since the viewers do not know Dothraki, they never have a direct access to what is said in Dothraki. There is always a transformation of the Dothraki language into a Western language, i.e. English, which fits into the Orientalist tradition that was mentioned earlier: the West, as a dominating power, interprets the East in its own terms. As Sharp puts it: "the west

[11] David Benioff and D. B. Weiss called upon linguist David J. Peterson to create the Dothraki language. Indeed, if some Dothraki words and names were already present in George R. R. Martin's books, they did not form a coherent linguistic system. Peterson then created a fully-functional language, with a grammar and a vocabulary, to make the dialogues in the series sound real (Cogman n. pg.). The language was so successful that it is now possible for the viewers to learn Dothraki online or with the book *Dothraki Guide* by Peterson.

[speaks] for the other" (Sharp 110). The "othering" effect of the Dothraki language worked so well that Jason Momoa, the actor who plays Khal Drogo, had difficulty finding other castings after *Game of Thrones*, for people did not realise that he could actually speak English in real life, as the actor explained in an interview (Rhiannon).

Hence, everything is done in the series to make the Dothraki appear as the Other, be it their general appearance, their way of life, their language, or simply their geographical position in the world of *Game of Thrones*. The Dothraki are thus represented as savages, the barbaric Other, which is problematic. Indeed, the Dothraki's close resemblances with various real-life populations – such as Native American tribes – seems to confirm the Orientalist clichés that are conveyed about these already stigmatised peoples. The arrival of a white Westerosi girl among the Dothraki then confirms their status as Others, as I am going to discuss now.

Daenerys amongst the Dothraki

As previously explained, Daenerys meets the Dothraki when she is given into marriage to Khal Drogo in the first episode of the series. From the very beginning of the series, Daenerys is represented as a helpless girl with no agency, who has to obey her brother in everything. For instance, while still in Pentos, Viserys prepares his sister to meet her future husband: Viserys takes off Daenerys' dress and minutely examines his sister's body, while Daenerys remains completely passive. Here, Daenerys' powerlessness is made clear by her inability to react to her brother's actions and gaze. Viserys inspects the "merchandise" he is about to deliver to Khal Drogo. The young girl is naked, subjected to her brother's (and the viewer's) scrutinising gaze, especially the close-ups on her naked breasts, which demonstrates that she is a good that can be sold or exchanged. In the same way, when Drogo comes to see the bride for the first time, Daenerys only wears a very light and revealing dress in order to allow Drogo to see the body of the woman he is

buying (1.1). Daenerys' only value seems to be her beauty and her youth: once she is married to Khal Drogo, Daenerys is at first only used for the Khal's aesthetic and sexual pleasure. The first scenes in which Daenerys appears clearly present her as a victim, both of her brother and of her new husband.

However, the more Daenerys stays with the Dothraki, the more she appropriates[12] their customs and becomes like them. In post-colonial terms, Daenerys is "going native" (or "going Dothraki" in her case). In *Key Concepts of Post-Colonial Studies*, the term "going native" is described as this:

> The term indicates the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native[13] life and customs. The construction of native cultures as either primitive or degenerate in a binary discourse of colonizer/colonized led, especially at the turn of the century, to a widespread fear of 'going native' amongst the colonizers in many colonial societies. […] The threat is particularly associated with the temptation posed by inter-racial sex where sexual liaisons with 'native' peoples were supposed to result in a contamination of the colonizers' pure stock and thus their degeneracy and demise as a vigorous and civilized (as opposed to savage or degenerate) race. But 'going native' could also encompass lapses from European behaviour, the participation in 'native' ceremonies, or the adoption and even enjoyment of local customs in terms of dress, food, recreation and entertainment. (Ashcroft *et al.* 115)

Thus, according to this definition, "going native" could be on the one hand the fear of being "contaminated" by lesser people, notably through sexual intercourse, which would mean that the one going native would lose his/her distinctiveness and superior identity (Ashcroft *et al*. 159). On the other hand, "going native" could also mean amongst other things the "adoption and even enjoyment" of native way of life, like a commodity that could be easily taken in.

[12] The term appropriation that is used here is defined as "the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. It is in general used to describe Western appropriations of non-Western or non-white forms, and carries connotations of exploitation and dominance" ("Cultural appropriation").

[13] In the same book, the term "native" is described as "the indigenous inhabitants of colonies, […] those who were regarded as inferior to the colonial settlers or the colonial administrators who ruled the colonies." (Ashcroft *et al.* 158)

The process of "going native" is analysed by Sara Ahmed in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. In the chapter called "Going strange, going native," Ahmed explains that the process of becoming other, which Ahmed uses as a synonym of going native (120), is a particular form of proximity to strangers (119). Indeed, she refuses to analyse the narrative of becoming as "getting closer" to the Other – as it would imply that the Other is far away – but rather, she describes the process of becoming as a form of closeness with the stranger in which the Western self no longer defines itself against the strangers (119). To clarify her thinking, Ahmed analyses the famous Western film *Dances with Wolves* (1990) starring Kevin Costner. This film is, according to Ahmed, "the classical colonial story of 'going native'" (120). The film tells the story of Union Army lieutenant John Dunbar who travels to the American frontier separating the United States from the "Wild West." There, Dunbar meets a Native American tribe, the Sioux, and a friendship develops between Dunbar and the Sioux tribe. Gradually, the Sioux cease to be strangers while Dunbar becomes native (Ahmed 120-21). This becoming, which is related to the physical proximity of dance, allows Dunbar to discover the truth about the Sioux – they are not the savages that are usually described – but also, it allows Dunbar to discover himself through the mediation of the Native Americans (Ahmed 123).

Daenerys' story mirrors Dunbar's on several occurrences. When Daenerys moves amongst the Dothraki, she is just a white girl amongst a group of savages, even though she has the title of "khaleesi" (i.e. the wife of the khal, the queen). The emphasis is placed on Daenerys' incompatibility with her new people, especially in the second episode of season 1: for instance, she eats with disgust pieces of dried horse meat, which is the traditional thing that the Dothraki eat on the road. Also, Daenerys is so unaccustomed to riding a horse that she needs to be helped off of her horse at the end of the day and her

blistered hands need to be bandaged (1.2). Thus, there is a sense of incompatibility between the Dothraki way of life and Daenerys' fragile nature. However, a shift occurs in Daenerys' character that allows her to see the Dothraki not as strangers anymore, but as "her" people. It is through sex that Daenerys produces that shift: after being taught by one of her handmaidens about the art of lovemaking, Daenerys finds the strength to transform the act – which previously was marital rape – into a face-to-face encounter that eventually becomes making love (1.2). According to author and film scholar Rikke Schubart, that scene is particularly important as it shows that "Daenerys' task is not to transform a beast [Drogo] into a man, but rather to transform her own terror into pleasure, which, later still, becomes passionate love" (Schubart 114). In other words, Daenerys needs to stop thinking of herself as a victim – of her husband and of her abusive brother – and to find her own agency. From that moment on, Daenerys becomes something other than what she was at the beginning and she clearly states it to Ser Jorah in the third episode of season 1:

> - *Ser Jorah*: You're learning to talk like a queen.
> - *Daenerys*: Not a queen. A Khaleesi. (1.3)

Daenerys then embraces the Dothraki way of life, eating Dothraki food, wearing Dothraki clothes and even riding with more ease. Her authority as khaleesi is sanctioned by the whole khalasar, which she repeatedly calls "my people," and her popularity amongst the Dothraki reaches its peak when she becomes pregnant with Drogo's child. Indeed, as the future mother of the heir to the khalasar, Daenerys has to eat a raw horse's heart in front of the whole khalasar in order to prove that she is capable of carrying the future khal (1.6). As she successfully performs this ritual, the horde cheers and chants the future baby's name, while Jorah Mormont, Daenerys' friend and counsellor, whispers: "She truly is a queen today" (1.6). If we come back to the definition of "going native" that was

mentioned earlier, the conception of a child with Khal Drogo marks the ultimate "contamination" of Daenerys by the native.

Thus, by going native, Daenerys not only becomes a Dothraki but also finds her own agency. However, according to Sara Ahmed, the self-discovery that is involved in the process of becoming is problematic because it positions the Others as a means to this discovery (Ahmed 123). As she explains about the movie *Dances with Wolves*: "The Indians remain other – they remain at the service of a white, masculine story of (self)-discovery. Rather than being annihilated as a threat, they become reincorporated to provide what is lacking in his self" (Ahmed 123). Likewise, Daenerys is empowered by the Dothraki strength, and "uses" the Dothraki to overcome her victimhood and to release herself from her brother's toxic authority. Also, Daenerys seems to only appropriate the Dothraki ways that suit her, and rejects those that do not fit her mindset. For instance, after her brother's death, Daenerys convinces Drogo to cross the Narrow Sea with his horde so that she can take the Iron Throne back for herself, even though the Dothraki traditionally never cross the sea, which they consider are "cursed waters" (1.7). She also does not hesitate to challenge the Dothraki custom of pillaging villages and raping the women, as she is appalled by the practice (1.8). Thus, the Dothraki customs appear to be commodities that she can easily appropriate or discard. In the essay "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," author and scholar bell hooks analyses what she calls "the commodification of Otherness" (21). According to her, "[w]ithin commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). Reacting to that essay, Sara Ahmed explains that the analogy that hooks makes with the process of eating involves the bodily processes of consumption – swallowing, digesting, and expelling the waste (117). Hence, the value of cultural

differences lies in their propensity to be assimilated[14] by the Western body, while the differences that cannot be assimilated have no value and can be discharged from the body (Ahmed 117-18). The analogy used by hooks works remarkably well in Daenerys' situation as she symbolically eats the Dothraki culture in season 1. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Daenerys has to perform a ritual that involves eating a whole horse's heart to show her worth (1.6). For the Dothraki, the horse is not only a means of transport and a source of food, their whole identity as a people is centred around riding horses: their god is called "the Great Stallion" and they call their future leader "the Stallion who mounts the world" (1.6). Actually, the word "Dothraki" itself literally means "men who ride horses" ("Dothraki"). Thus, by eating a horse's heart, Daenerys eats everything that the horse stands for. Sara Ahmed sees a clear link between the consumption of Otherness and agency: she argues "[i]t is the consuming self who has the agency *to become different*, rather than simply *be different* (the authentic stranger, or the authentic spice). […] The consuming subject establishes its agency through an act of incorporating differences as *its differences*." (118). By representing the Dothraki culture as something that can be consumed, the show establishes Daenerys as a consuming subject who has the agency required to *become* different, while the Dothraki can only *be* different.

Thus, living with the Dothraki is an empowering experience Daenerys and she becomes a fierce and independent leader. However, it is important to note that her transformation relies on her othering the Dothraki and her considering them as "her people" but not her equals.

[14] Given that hooks and Ahmed both use the analogy of eating, the verb "assimilate" is to be understood here as a bodily function, i.e. "to absorb (food) and incorporate it into the body tissues" ("Assimilate").

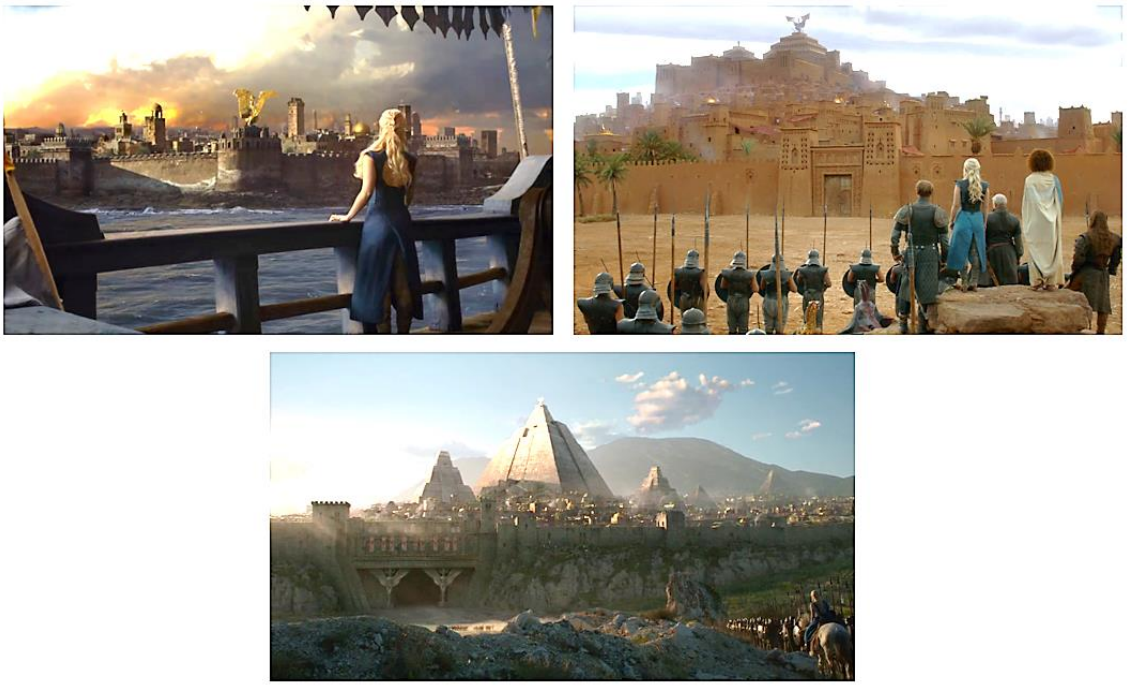
2. The Cities of Slaver's Bay

Slavery in Essos

After the death of her husband Khal Drogo and the magical birth of her three dragons in a gripping scene at the end of the first season, Daenerys' determination to take back the Iron Throne is greater than ever. She then roams through Essos with the few Dothraki warriors and former slaves who did not leave her after Drogo's death in search of an army and ships to go back to Westeros. After a short amount of time spent in the city of Qarth, Daenerys sails to Astapor. The city of Astapor is situated in a region of Essos known as Slaver's Bay, and is, with the cities of Yunkai and Meereen, one of the most important slave cities of the continent. Indeed, if slavery has been officially outlawed in Westeros and is considered an abomination in the eyes of the Westerosi gods (Martin *A Storm Of Swords, Part I* 320), it is still widely practiced on the eastern continent, and the economy of the three great cities of Slaver's Bay relies entirely on the slave trade, as the name of the region suggests. Each city specialises in a specific form of slavery: Astapor is known for its army of castrated warrior-slaves, the Unsullied; Yunkai specialises in sex slaves; Meereen, the biggest city of the three, is renowned for its fighting pits in which slaves fight to the death for the entertainment of the crowd. In these cities, a small wealthy elite called the Masters governs over a population that is largely composed of slaves. Whilst slavery has existed in almost all – if not all – societies in history[15], it is however relatively easy to identify the inhabitants of Slaver's Bay and their trade to the Arab world. Indeed, like the Dothraki, the cities of Slaver's Bay and their inhabitants are depicted in an Orientalist way: as Mat Hardy notes, the Arabian fantasy stereotypes are easily detected in Essos and particularly in Slaver's Bay ("Game of Tropes" 414-15). From the general

[15] According to Orlando Patterson, great societies such as Ancient Greece and Rome, Old English society, Merovingian France, etc. were societies in which slavery had a great economical importance (vii).

landscapes displaying hot and arid lands, desert cities and even pyramids and ziggurats, to the olive complexion and the large tunics of the people of Slaver's Bay, everything is made to evoke the romanticised representation of the Orient, largely inspired by real-life Middle-East and North Africa ("Game of Tropes" 415).



The pyramids and ziggurats in Astapor (3.1), Yunkai (3.10), and Meereen (4.3)

What is more, the slave trade itself is highly reminiscent of the slave trade that was practiced in the Islamic world: Orlando Patterson, the Jamaican historical and cultural sociologist, explains that slavery was indeed a central element in the rise of Islam, as the Arab elites needed manpower to survive and expand, which would not have been possible without slaves (viii). The use of warrior-slaves like the Unsullied of Astapor is particularly telling. As historian Robert J. Haug notes in the essay "Slaves with Swords: Slave-Soldiers in Essos and in the Islamic World," the slave-soldiers were "an important and almost entirely unique aspect of armies in the Islamic world from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries," be it Egyptian Mamluks or Ottoman Janissaries (Haug n. pg.). However, once again the "barbaric" aspect of the Orient is emphasised in the series by

showing a particularly cruel and shocking practice of slavery. In his essay "The Eastern Question," Mat Hardy notes that even though there is no flattering way of depicting the human slave trade, the graphic representation of the excesses perpetrated by the Masters align with the stereotype that Europeans had of the Ottoman Empire, a stereotype reinforced by orientalist paintings, for example ("The Eastern Question" n. pg.). In Astapor, for instance, young boys are taken away from their families, castrated and then trained to make them completely obedient fighters and form the elite army of slaves called the Unsullied. After their castration, the training that the slaves undergo in order to become Unsullied is particularly gruesome, as Missandei, a slave who works as a translator in Astapor, explains to Daenerys:

> They begin their training at five. Every day, they drill from dawn to dusk until they have mastered the shortsword, the shield, and the three spears. Only one boy in four survives this rigorous training. Their discipline and loyalty are absolute. They fear nothing. […] To win his shield, an Unsullied must go to the slave marts with a silver mark, find a newborn and kill it before its mother's eyes. This way, my master says, we make certain there is no weakness left in them. (3.1)

Another example of the Masters' cruelty is shown by their use of crucifixion, historically considered as one of the most brutal and shameful modes of death (Retief and Cilliers 938): in Astapor, slaves are crucified, i.e. chained to wooden crosses, on the "Walk of Punishment" in order to dissuade other slaves from being disobedient (3.3). In season 4, the Wise Masters of Meereen even go so far as to crucify on wooden beams one hundred and sixty-three slave children, one on each milepost leading to the city, in order to intimidate Daenerys and her army (4.1). It is worth noting that the practice of crucifixion as a punishment was widely practiced in the Middle East (the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in Biblical texts is a salient example of the Roman practice of crucifixion in Judea)

("Crucifixion"). Rudolf Peters also notes that crucifixion[16] is mentioned several times in the Koran, the central religious text of Islam, as one of the punishments for banditry[17] (Peters 37), thus closely associating the Middle East and Islam with cruel practices such as crucifixion and slavery.

Not only is slavery shown to be exclusively practiced in Essos, but it is also shown to be economically unsustainable. Indeed, as Hardy argues, the economic system in Slaver's Bay is paradoxical: the trade appears to be lucrative, as the Masters can rely entirely on slavery to survive economically, but the slaves are maimed or even executed at an alarming rate ("Game of Tropes" 416). Then Hardy asks a question: if the slaves, the main commercial commodities of the region, have enough value to build an entire economic system upon their exchange, what is the point in damaging and destroying them? ("Game of Tropes" 416). It is then possible to assume that, even though it is not relevant to the main narrative of *Game of Thrones*, this economical paradox only serves to showcase "Oriental barbarism," especially when compared to Daenerys' abolitionist ideals (Hardy, "Game of Tropes" 416).

Like the Dothraki, the inhabitants of Slaver's Bay also speak a language other than the Common Tongue (i.e. English, for us viewers), which is called Low Valyrian. Once again, in order to accentuate the Otherness of the people living in Slaver's Bay, the showrunners decided to make the actors speak in Low Valyrian, which was also created by David J. Peterson, and to subtitle their dialogues rather than to make the actors speak in English. In addition to showing their Otherness, the fictional language used in Slaver's Bay and the subtitling also serve to highlight the Masters' slyness and misogyny. Indeed,

[16] Here, crucifixion is understood as "exposure of the body of the bandit after his execution" (Peters 37-38).

[17] In recent years, several cases of crucifixion have been reported in countries that practice Islamic law, such as Saudi Arabia (Qiblawi), Sudan ("SUDAN…"), United Arab Emirates ("Crucifixion for UAE Murderers"). Other cases of crucifixion were carried out by Islamic extremists in Syria (Abdelaziz).

when Daenerys negotiates with Master Kraznys to buy an army of Unsullied in Astapor, they use an interpreter, namely the enslaved Missandei, to translate what the Master says to Daenerys as she is not supposed to know Low Valyrian. However, it soon becomes evident that the translation that Missandei provides does not correspond with what the Master actually says, which is shown in the subtitling. In the following dialogue from season 3 episode 3, Daenerys explains to Master Kraznys that she wants to buy the entire army of Unsullied. While Kraznys speaks of Daenerys as an ignorant woman and constantly disrespects her, Missandei tries to translate her master's words in a more appropriate way:

> - *Master Kraznys [in Low Valyrian, subtitled]*: She can't afford them. The slut thinks she can flash her tits and make us give her whatever she wants.
> - *Missandei [to Daenerys, in English]*: There are eight thousand Unsullied in Astapor. Is this what you mean by all?
> - *Daenerys [in English]*: Yes. Eight thousand. And the ones still in training as well.
> […]
> - *Master Kraznys [subtitled]*: The slut cannot pay for all this.
> - *Missandei [in English]*: Master Kraznys says you cannot afford this.
> - *Master Kraznys [subtitled]*: Her ship will buy her one hundred Unsullied, no more, and this because I like the curve of her ass.
> - *Missandei [in English]*: Your ship will buy you one hundred Unsullied, because Master Kraznys is generous.
> - *Master Kraznys [subtitled]*: What is left will buy her ten. I will give her twenty if it stops her ignorant whimpering.
> - *Missandei [in English]*: The gold you have left is worth ten. The good Master Kraznys will give you twenty.
> - *Master Kraznys [subtitled]*: Her Dothraki smell of shit but may be useful as pig feed. I will give her three for those.
> - *Missandei [in English]*: The Dothraki you have with you… The Dothraki you have are not worth what they cost to feed. But Master Kraznys will give you three Unsullied for all of them.
> - *Master Kraznys [subtitled]*: So ask this beggar queen, how will she pay for the remaining 7,877?

- *Missandei [in English]*: So Master Kraznys asks how you propose to pay for the remaining 7,877 Unsullied? (3.3)

This dialogue only confirms the Orientalist trope that associates Eastern people with cunning and unreliability that Edward Said identified (Said, *Orientalism* 38). It not only shows Kraznys' lack of respect towards Daenerys but also towards women in general.

Thus, the depiction of slavery, cruelty, cunning and misogyny in Slaver's Bay reinforces the Orientalist association of such practices with the Orient, and more precisely with Muslims. Indeed, as previously argued, the Masters of Slaver's Bay are easily identified as a romanticised version of Arab slave traders, which poses the question of Islamophobia in the media. In 2017, British actor and rapper Riz Ahmed addressed that particular issue in a speech he gave in the House of Commons. In his speech, Ahmed explains the importance of representing diversity in the media and deplores the absence of representation or the misrepresentation of Muslims in films and TV shows ("Riz Ahmed - Channel4 Diversity Speech 2017 @ House of Commons"). Drawing inspiration from Ahmed's inspiring speech, Sadia Habib and Shaf Choudry, two Muslim cinephiles, created a test in order to measure how Muslims are represented in film and in television programs, namely the "Riz Test" ("About the Riz Test"). The Riz Test can be applied to any film or TV show that stars at least one character who can be identified as Muslim, be it by ethnicity, language, or clothing ("About the Riz Test"). The test is defined by five criteria: "is the [Muslim] character: (1) talking about, the victim of, or the perpetrator of terrorism?; (2) presented as irrationally angry?; (3) presented as superstitious, culturally backwards or anti-modern?; (4) presented as a threat to a Western way of life?; or (5) if the character is male, is he presented as misogynistic? Or if female, is she presented as oppressed by her male counterparts? If the answer for any of the above is Yes, then the Film/TV Show fails the test" ("About the Riz Test"). Even though the test looks quite easy to pass, its creators note that a large number of blockbusters such as the *Iron Man*

films or even the *Black Panther* movie fail the test and contribute to the reinforcement of Islamophobic stereotypes (Choudry and Habib). If we try the Riz Test on *Game of Thrones*, the mere existence of slavery in Slaver's Bay, as well as the irrationality and misogyny of the Masters, makes the series completely fail the test. Considering how an international phenomenon like *Game of Thrones* can reach millions of viewers worldwide, one can only ask oneself how such a problematic representation of Muslims, even though only suggested, can affect the lives of Muslims nowadays.

If the Masters of Slaver's Bay are depicted as cruel and vicious Eastern Others, the slaves themselves form a separate group of social Others. In the book *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson defines slavery as "one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave" (1). According to Patterson, the slave's powerlessness is closely linked to his being a "nonperson," which means that the slave is socially dead (5). Indeed, Patterson notes that slavery is archetypically a substitute for death in war, but also for death as a punishment for a capital offense: instead of being condemned to death, the captive or the offender would become a slave (5). However, even though the slave escapes physical death by submitting to powerlessness, the slave suffers from what Patterson calls "social death," meaning that he no longer has any social existence outside of his master (5). This social death manifests itself both externally and internally. On the one hand, the slave is not only violently removed from his original milieu but also from the social heritage of his ancestors, as he is denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and, by extension, his more remote ancestors and his descendants (Patterson 5). The slave thus becomes a "genealogical isolate" and no longer fits into any legitimate social order in his own right (Patterson 5). On the other hand, the slave is introduced into his master's community, but as a

nonperson: the slave has to go through different rituals, which typically include the symbolic rejection of his past and family ties, the change of his name, which is a way of stripping the slave of his former identity, the obligation to wear some visible marks of servitude, such as collars or tattoos, and the assumption of a new status in the master's household (Patterson 52). These rituals, which vary from society to society, have the same objective: to show the slave's loss of identity and his new status as a nonperson (Patterson 53).

The slaves that are presented in Slaver's Bay indeed fit most of the characteristics enumerated by Patterson: in contrast to the Masters, who are dressed in colourful and expensive fabric, the slaves only wear dull, earth-coloured clothes and are forced to wear big leather collars, both of which symbolise their servitude. In other parts of Essos such as the city of Volantis, the slaves are tattooed on the face to distinguish them from the other citizens and also to prevent them from escaping (Martin *et al*. 269). Besides, they cannot claim any right on their own children, as Master Kraznys explains to Daenerys through the intermediary of Missandei: during their formation, the Unsullied have to kill a slave's newborn baby and to give a silver coin to the baby's owner but not the mother (3.1). However, amongst all the different kinds of slaves in Slaver's Bay, the most extreme form of social death is represented by the Unsullied. As previously explained, the Unsullied go through a particularly violent training from a very young age with the aim of achieving not only extraordinary fighting skills and military discipline but also absolute obedience to their master. Therefore, the Unsullied have no will of their own and their entire existence revolves only around their master's orders. As Missandei explains: "the Unsullied are not men, death means nothing to them" (3.1). To show their absolute lack of humanity, the Unsullied are given a new name once they are castrated, such as Grey Worm, Black Rat, or Red Flea. As Missandei explains, this practice is used "to

remind them of what they are: vermin" (3.5). Indeed, according to Patterson, a man's name is "the verbal signal of his whole identity, his being-in-the-world as a distinct person. It also establishes and advertises his relation with kinsmen" (54-55). This is why the changing of the slave's name has so much significance: not only is the new name "a badge of inferiority and contempt" (Patterson 55), the changing of a name is also "a symbolic act of stripping a person of his former identity" (Patterson 55). The other significant characteristic of the Unsullied is their castration: indeed, making the slave-soldiers physically unable to reproduce is the most extreme form of genealogical isolation. According to Patterson, eunuchs, who were frequent in the late Roman world and in the Islamic world, are also utterly unassimilable into society because castration creates "an anomalous kind of third sex" (321). He goes on: "a castrated man is always considered a freak of sorts" (321). On top of their social death – which is inherent to their slave status – the Unsullied are thus further alienated from the rest of society by their liminality[18], as they are seen as neither male nor female.

Daenerys in Slaver's Bay

Even though Daenerys' first intention in going to Astapor is to buy an army of slaves, the Unsullied, she rapidly changes her mind. Daenerys soon becomes aware of the atrocities that the warrior-eunuchs endure at the hands of their masters during training, but also of the horrendous conditions of life of the enslaved in general. This prompts her to free all the slaves in the city and in Slaver's Bay, putting off her conquest of Westeros. However, even though her intentions are presented as altruistic, the liberation of Slaver's Bay strongly resembles colonisation. As I will explain, rather than annihilating all forms of

[18] The concept of liminality is explained in further details in Chapter 2, Part 1.

oppression by eradicating slavery, Daenerys' campaign in Slaver's Bay replaces one form of oppression with another.

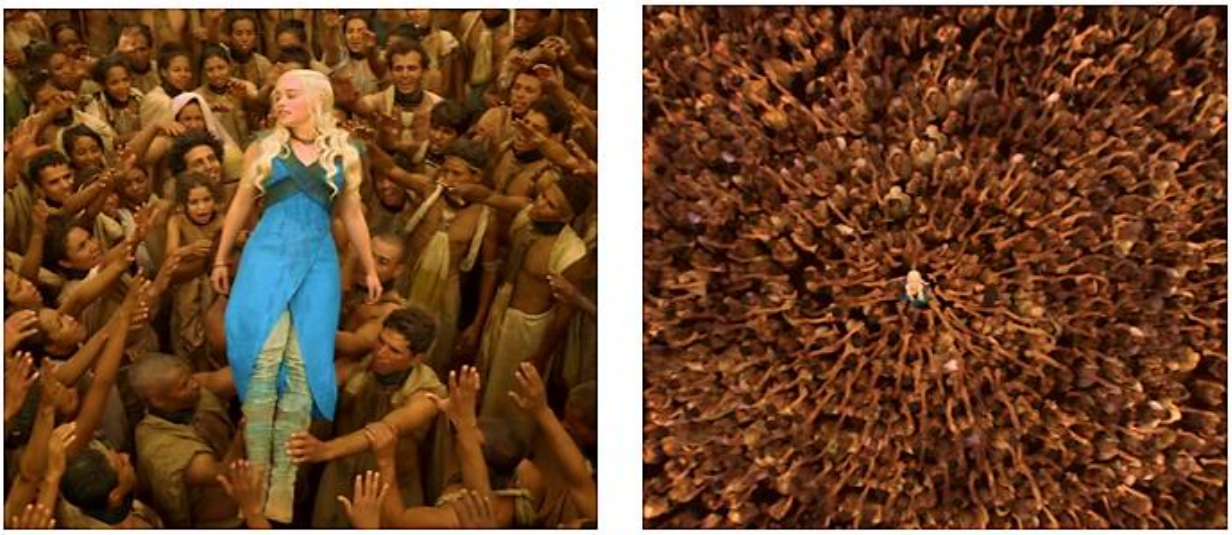
In the book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, the authors Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain that imperialism is based on a binary logic, i.e. a "tendency in Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance" (24). Indeed, the binary oppositions between, for instance, coloniser and colonised, civilised and primitive, or white and black, imply a violent hierarchy in which one term of the opposition is always dominant (Ashcroft *et al.* 24). Thus, in imperialist logic, the terms "coloniser," "white," "civilised," "advanced," "beautiful" and so on are collectively opposed to such terms as "colonised," "black," "primitive," "retarded," "ugly," etc. (Ashcroft *et al*. 24). This binary structure of domination accommodates the impulse to exploit and to civilise those situated at the dominated hand of the binary opposition (Ashcroft *et al*. 24-25). Indeed, during colonisation, the *mission civilisatrice*, or civilising mission, of colonial societies *vis-à-vis* "less developed" societies was often invoked as a justification for intervention or colonisation in those societies (Ashcroft *et al*. 25). As Western societies were supposedly "superior" to other societies, colonisation and the violence that it implies could therefore be presented as "a virtuous and necessary 'civilizing' task involving education and paternalistic nurture" (Ashcroft *et al*. 47). This idea is notably expressed by Rudyard Kipling in the poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899-1902), which Kipling wrote during the Philippine-American war. Kipling's aim was to convince the United States to take up the "white man's burden" of imperialism and to colonise the Philippine Islands for the Filipinos own good, as we can read in the first verse:

> Take up the White Man's burden—
> Send forth the best ye breed—
> Go send your sons to exile

To serve your captives' need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child. (311)

In *Game of Thrones*, the "White Man's Burden" narrative is recurrent in Daenerys' storyline. Indeed, Daenerys often appears as a liberator whose mission is to "civilise" the societies that she encounters by abolishing slavery and freeing all the slaves, even though she does so by using a large amount of violence. For instance, to liberate the slaves in Astapor, she orders her newly acquired army of Unsullied to kill all the Masters and uses her dragons to burn the Masters alive (3.4). Furthermore, after taking Meereen, Daenerys orders to crucify alive one hundred and sixty-three Great Masters of Meereen on wooden crosses using nails outside the city, in response to the slave children that were crucified earlier in the series by the same Great Masters (4.4). As one of her advisers, Ser Barristan Selmy, pleads for mercy for the Masters, Daenerys justifies her decision by saying "I will answer injustice with justice" (4.4). Her answer thus implies that, even though she uses the same cruel methods as the Masters of Meereen, i.e. crucifixion, unlike the slavers, she does so for the sake of justice and higher moral values.

Daenerys thus establishes herself as a messianic figure without whose help the slaves in Slaver's Bay would have been incapable of achieving freedom. One scene is particularly representative of that trope and provoked a lot of outrage among critics and viewers in general. In the finale of season 3, Daenerys has successfully taken the city of Yunkai and has freed the slaves in its walls. She is then joined by an adoring crowd of freed slaves who lift her on their shoulders while chanting "Mhysa," which means "mother" in the language spoken by the slaves (3.10). As the camera zooms out, Daenerys, with her blonde hair, pale skin and light blue dress, is the only white spot in an enormous crowd of grateful brown people trying to touch her and praising her.



Daenerys among the freed slaves of Yunkai (3.10)

Furthermore, whereas Daenerys is distinguishable among the crowd, the slaves seem indistinguishable from one another, since the viewers can only see a sea of brown, a huge mass of faceless people, but no individuals. Several critics, such as Taylor Marvin ("Game of Thrones, Racism, and White Saviors"), Laura Hudson ("*Game of Thrones* Recap…") and A. J. Delgado ("Racism In Game of Thrones…"), point out how problematic and racially uncomfortable the aesthetics of the scene is. Indeed, the contrast between the uniformly dark-skinned slaves and the light-skinned foreigner who effortlessly saves them all perfectly encapsulates what is called the "White Saviour" trope (Marvin) (Delgado) (Hudson). The "White Saviour" trope, which could be considered as the modern-day version of the "White Man's Burden" (Jefferess 5) is a recurrent narrative in contemporary films and series. In the essay "The Whiteness of Oscar Night," sociologist Matthew W. Hughey draws attention to the scarcity of non-white Oscar nominees and winners, and notes that many of the performances by African Americans that won the award took place in a narrative that Hughey calls "White Saviour" films (Hughey). According to the sociologist, the White Saviour film "features a nonwhite group or person who experiences conflict and struggle with others that is particularly dangerous or threatening to their life and livelihood," and "a White person (the savior)

[who] enters the milieu and through [whose] sacrifices as a teacher, mentor, lawyer, military hero, aspiring writer, or wannabe Native American warrior, [who] is able to physically save — or at least morally redeem — the person or community of folks of color by the film's end" (Hughey). This genre, which applies to a number of Hollywood blockbusters such as *The Last Samurai*, *Avatar*, or *The Help*, conveys the age-old racist assumption that non-whites are helpless without the intervention of a white person (Hughey). Another critic, David Sirota, notes that the success of such a trope can be explained by the fact that the White Saviour story line feels especially gratifying for white audiences, who are portrayed as "benevolent messiahs (rather than hegemonic conquerors)," while people of colour are depicted as "helpless weaklings" (Sirota).

Thus, Daenerys' intervention in Slaver's Bay is a clear representation of the White Saviour trope in fantasy fiction, which may explain the enormous success that Daenerys' character enjoys among *Game of Thrones* white viewers. Even though Daenerys' desire to liberate slaves is often praised by many viewers, the colonialist undertones of such a narrative are evident, portraying the freed slaves as a large mass of Others in a white narrative. According to Marvin, "Dany's [Daenerys'] actions represent a top-down, violent attempt to reform a society she knows literally nothing about. In a word it's imperialism[19], 'liberal' qualifier nonetheless" (Marvin). Indeed, Daenerys' imperialistic and colonialist tendencies are acknowledged by Daenerys herself, again in the last episode of season 3. As she waits for the liberated slaves of Yunkai to meet her outside the city, Daenerys talks to her counsellors:

- *Ser Barristan*: They [the former slaves] will come, Your Grace. When they're ready.
- *Daenerys*: Perhaps they didn't want to be conquered.

[19] Even though the terms "colonialism" and "imperialism" are often conflated, the concepts are not equivalent, as several scholars such as Edward Said showed: imperialism is "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" while colonialism refers to " the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Said qtd. in Ashcroft *and al.* 46). However, here, the terms are used as synonyms.

- *Ser Jorah*: You didn't conquer them, you liberated them.
- *Daenerys*: People learn to love their chains. (3.10)

It is worth noting that in the only moment of self-doubt shown by Daenerys, it is only the two other (white) characters from Westeros, Ser Barristan Selmy and Ser Jorah Mormont, who reassure her and tell her that she did what needed to be done for the greater good.

However, Daenerys' liberation of slaves, which is the whole point of her presence in Slaver's Bay, is itself questionable. Indeed, although she officially abolishes slavery in the region, the former slaves are in fact still subjugated to a greater power, i.e. her own. Orlando Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death*, notes that the release from slavery has a particular symbolic logic: because enslavement is "life-taking," as the slave is "natally alienated" and culturally dead, "it follows logically and symbolically that the release from slavery is life-giving and life-creating" (211). In this respect, it is worth noting that, when Daenerys frees the slaves in Yunkai in the finale of season 3, the former slaves call her "Mhysa" (mother), which emphasises the life-giving symbolism of their emancipation as she symbolically "gives birth" to their new identity as freed men and women (3.10). However, as the former slaves are at first elated with Daenerys' intervention, they soon realise that their status has not really changed under Targaryen rule. Indeed, the new world that Daenerys tries to create in Slaver's Bay proves to be as alienating as when slavery was still enforced. For instance, as the new ruler of Meereen, Daenerys hears grievances from the citizens, both former slaves and former masters. She receives a former slave called Fennesz, who used to work as a tutor for his master's children. As Fennesz explains, when he was freed by Daenerys, his purpose as a teacher was taken away from him, and he lost his place in his master's house, forcing him to sleep in the street. He explains: "Even if [the barracks built to shelter former slaves] are safe, what would I be there? What purpose would I serve? With my master, I was a teacher. I had the respect and love of his children" (4.10). Thus, far from giving Fennesz the new life

that Daenerys promised to the former slaves, her liberation campaign only made his life even more precarious by stripping him of his purpose in the community and by making him vulnerable. This precariousness prompts Fennesz to ask Daenerys for permission to sell himself back into slavery to his former master, in order to get his former life back. Fennesz adds that his situation is not an isolated case: "The young may rejoice in the new world you have built for them, but for those of us too old to change, there is only fear and squalor. I am not alone. There are many outside waiting to beg the same of you" (4.10). Reluctant to give in to such a demand, Daenerys eventually agrees that Fennesz can sign a contract of employment with his former master. Fennesz' case is representative of Daenerys' problematic liberation campaign of Slaver's Bay: even though she repeatedly claims that the slaves are free to choose whether they want to stay slaves all their lives or to take arms against the Masters, what she offers in reality is the illusion of choice.

In the article "Wanting Freedom," philosopher Ann E. Cudd explores what it means to be free, what it means to want freedom, and how freedom can be achieved (367). Cudd mainly analyses two different types of freedom[20]: the first one is individual moral freedom, or autonomy, which corresponds to the ability to act in accordance with one's desires and beliefs and to follow one's plan of life (368). The second one, social freedom, refers to "the social conditions that allow and support individual autonomy" (Cudd 368). Cudd argues that, even though autonomy seems to be something that is universally desired, it is not necessarily the case: oppressed people who are not actively resisting their oppression might need to be convinced to want autonomy (377). Indeed, such people are, as Cudd explains, "co-opted into joining into their own oppression" and are even "co-opted into acting in ways that further their own oppression" (377). According to Orlando

[20] Cudd distinguishes between four different types of freedom: metaphysical freedom, political freedom, individual moral freedom/autonomy, and social freedom (367). Only autonomy and social freedom are discussed in the article.

Patterson, this was the case of many American ex-slaves who, because of different methods of oppression such as physical violence and constant degrading, had internalised their condition and developed a sense of self-blame (12). This internalisation of oppression then leads many oppressed people not to oppose oppression as those indirect forces of oppression, i.e. those that work internally, "appear to be choices made by the oppressed" (Cudd 378). This particular situation then creates a moral dilemma, according to Cudd: if the oppressed are making choices, it must be a manifestation of their freedom, so how would it be possible to motivate the oppressed to want autonomy without going against their freedom of choice? (378) To summarise, Cudd argues that "[t]he problem is that in trying to motivate people to want something other than what they now choose, we seem to have to replace their choice with our judgement" (378). Thus, by liberating some of the slaves against their explicit will, Daenerys does not free them, she forces her own notion of freedom on to them, which proves to be as alienating as slavery itself.

The same happens in Astapor with the army of Unsullied: in order to get the army of Unsullied, Daenerys pretends to trade one of her dragons in exchange of all the slave-soldiers available in the city. During the transaction, Daenerys receives an ornamented whip, which symbolises that she is now the new master of the Unsullied. After she makes sure that the slave-soldiers do as she commands, Daenerys orders them to "slay the masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who holds a whip" while she is herself holding one (3.4). It is only after obtaining what she wants and sacking the city that Daenerys throws the whip away. Once again, the freedom that Daenerys offers to the slaves is just an illusion, the Unsullied have no choice but to execute her orders and kill all the masters since she is effectively their master. The Unsullied soldiers, whose free will and autonomy were crushed as part of their training, did not choose to rebel against their masters, they were forced to do so by yet another master. Indeed, even under Daenerys' rule, the

Unsullied never really recover from the social death that slavery entails: when asked if they wished to change their names, the Unsullied, represented by their commander Grey Worm, refuse, stating that their slave names are lucky because they are the ones they had when Daenerys liberated them (3.5). By keeping their slave names, the Unsullied show that the liberation that Daenerys brought them did not have the transformative, "life-giving" effect that Orlando Patterson refers to: they are still "vermin." In the same way, Robert J. Haug notes that, even after their liberation, the Unsullied maintain their identity as a unit which is separate and distinct from the rest of society, patrolling the streets but never mixing with the community (Haug n. pg.). He adds: "[e]ven in freedom, they [the Unsullied] retain a certain social dislocation and aloofness that is a mark of enslavement" (Haug n. pg.).

Thus, even though her intention to stop slavery is praiseworthy, Daenerys' intervention in Slaver's Bay, which she renames the Bay of Dragons, achieves dubious results: in addition to destroying the whole economy of the region, which relied entirely on the slave trade, Daenerys replaces the Masters' rule in Slaver's Bay with her own. After a series of bad political decisions and poor ruling, she becomes more and more associated with the former Masters, as shown by the graffiti on the walls of Meereen: "MHYSA IS A MASTER" (6.1). However, once she achieves a semblance of political stability in the Bay of Dragon – mainly by killing the masters or by burning her enemies alive – Daenerys soon turns back to her primary goal: the Iron Throne of Westeros.

3. Westeros

Daenerys' story is clearly a narrative of going home: what the young Targaryen woman wants is to go back to where her ancestors used to live and to take back what is hers by birth right: the Iron Throne. Indeed, from the very beginning of the series, Daenerys talks

about her "home" in Westeros and how the Seven Kingdoms were taken away from her family by the usurper Robert Baratheon. However, once she gets there in season 7, she does not feel at home, and feels like a stranger in what she used to consider to be her country. At the beginning of this chapter, I briefly examined Daenerys' status as an exile, which made her an outsider both in her native land and in her host country. I will now examine in more depth the notion of "home" and how it is important in Daenerys' perception of Westeros.

In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Sara Ahmed offers an analysis of the relationship between migration and identity by examining the notion of "home." According to Ahmed, a home is not necessarily linked to one's place of birth or one's origins but has more to do with a destination, a future (78). She rejects the idea of a home constructed negatively, which means a home only defined through what it is not, and which is equated with stasis, fixity, identity, and purity (87). Ahmed argues: "[h]ome is associated with a being that rests, that is full and present to itself, and that does not over-reach itself through the desire for something other" (87). This definition of home assumes that there exists a clear-cut separation between what is familiar (home) and what is strange (away), which, according to Ahmed, goes against the fact that encounters with others already happen within the home: to exemplify her idea, Ahmed argues that, if we expand the definition of home to think of the nation as a home, there are always encounters with others within the nation, and not only between nations (88). Thus, home is neither static nor pure: here, it is rather associated with movement and "always involves encounters between those who stay, those who arrive, and those who leave," so that home is never simply the space which is familiar (Ahmed 88). Home can also be composed of different homes in different locations: Ahmed quotes Leena Dhingra, a British Asian actress, who often travels between different locations that she considers as her "homes"

– London, Paris, and India. In her story, Dhingra explains that the place where she feels more comfortable is the airport, an in-between space, because it gives her a sense of purpose and security, a sense that she is "going home" (Ahmed 77). Hence, Ahmed explains that "the space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitance – I am here – but the very space in which one is almost, but not quite, at home" (78). Home is then elsewhere, but it is where one is going: home is, then, not situated in the past (a space where one has been) but rather in the future, there is a sense of movement that is always going forward. Following this logic, refusing to, or not being able to move forward would equate to the impossibility of finding a place where one might feel comfortable and familiar.

Daenerys' story illustrates Ahmed's theory: as a Targaryen in exile, Daenerys had to leave her place of origin, Westeros, and went to live in different cities of Essos with her brother Viserys. From the Great Grass Sea of the Dothraki to the Great City of Meereen by way of Qarth, Daenerys travelled to a multitude of cities and regions in Essos. Her exile, which gradually transforms into a conquest, is marked by constant movement, but a movement that is always oriented towards the same place: Westeros. Indeed, like her brother Viserys, Daenerys is deeply attached to her homeland and to the people living there, even though she has never seen them: "This is not my home [Qarth]. My home is across the sea where my people are waiting for me" (2.10). Even when her closest advisers, such as Tyrion Lannister, try to dissuade her from going back to Westeros in order to keep peace in Slaver's Bay, she refuses, claiming that Slaver's Bay, even though she rules the region, is not her "home" (5.8). Although she only knows Westeros through the stories that she was told as a young girl, Daenerys has a strong sense of belonging to her homeland. However, the Westeros Daenerys so desperately wants to return to only exists in her own imagination. Since she left the continent at a very young age, Daenerys

has no memories of the place and can only count on her Westerosi acquaintances to tell her what Westeros is like. Ahmed explains that "the very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory, and the writing of the history of a nation, in which the subject can allow herself to fit in, by being assigned a place in a forgotten past" (77). Thus, thanks to her brother Viserys, Sir Jorah, Ser Barristan and later Tyrion Lannister, Daenerys can imagine what her homeland is like: a place where the people waits for the Targaryens to regain the throne, where her oldest brother Rhaegar would sing to the people and give money to orphanages, where guests are always warmly welcomed. However, as viewers of *Game of Thrones*, we know that Westeros is far from being the ideal land of honourable and courteous men that her advisers describe. On the contrary, it is a country where treason, violence and cruelty are commonplace, where no one is safe, not even on the day of one's own wedding, as the episode "The Red Wedding" (3.9) graphically shows. Thus, Daenerys' representation of Westeros is "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (Ahmed 89). Even though she goes back to the land where she was born, Daenerys cannot feel at home in Westeros as the reality of her homeland could not live up to her expectations: "it doesn't feel like home," she explains to Tyrion (7.2). Westeros then appears to be yet another foreign land in which Daenerys does not fit in, having spent almost all her life on another continent.

If she feels like a stranger in the Western continent, Daenerys is also perceived as one by the people living there. Even after convincing the Westerosi lords – including Jon Snow, who has become King in the North – to bend the knee and to recognise her as their queen, she is still isolated and alone in Westeros. Her isolation is particularly visible during the banquet scene in the episode 4 of season 8: after defeating the Night King and

his army, a banquet is held in Winterfell, in which Daenerys can see friends and family come together to celebrate their victory. However, Daenerys is alone at the head table, watching Jon with envy as he is celebrated by the Northerners. She later explains to Jon: "I saw them [the Northerners and the wildlings] gathered around you. I saw the way they looked at you. I know that look. So many people have looked at me that way, but never here. Never on this side of the sea" (8.4). Her desperate desire to belong in Westeros clashes with the distrust she inspires to the Westerosi people, especially in the Stark sisters, Sansa and Arya, which eventually contributes to make Daenerys sink into madness and leads to her downfall.

Chapter 2: Jon Snow, from bastard to King in the North

Jon Snow – played by British actor Kit Harington – is presented as the bastard son of Lord Eddard "Ned" Stark. Lord Eddard Stark is the head of House Stark, one of the most powerful Houses of the Seven Kingdoms and one of the oldest noble families of Westeros, whose ancestral home is the castle of Winterfell. After the Rebellion, during which Ned Stark fought alongside his childhood friend Robert Baratheon against King Aerys, Ned came back to Winterfell with the newborn Jon, claiming that the child was his illegitimate son from a lowborn mother. However, Jon's true parentage is far more prestigious. Indeed, Jon is the legitimate son of Ned's sister, Lyanna Stark, and Prince Rhaegar Targaryen, the heir to the Iron Throne[21]. After becoming King of the Seven Kingdoms, Robert Baratheon tried to annihilate the Targaryen family, forcing Viserys and Daenerys to flee to Essos, along with other Targaryen supporters. Jon's true identity was then kept secret from everyone, including Jon himself, in order to protect him from Robert Baratheon's wrath. Thus, during the first seventeen years of his life, Jon Snow is raised in the castle of Winterfell, alongside Lord Stark's lawful children, Robb, Sansa, Arya, Bran, and Rickon, and receives the same education as his half-siblings, but is still considered an outsider because of his bastard status. Even though Jon is never mistreated physically, Lord Stark's wife, Lady Catelyn, treats him with contempt and avoids his presence whenever possible, as Jon is the living reminder of Ned's supposed infidelity. In an attempt to become more than just Lord Stark's bastard, Jon leaves Winterfell at seventeen to join the Night's Watch, the military order that guards the Wall, i.e. the gigantic ice structure that separates the northern part of the Seven Kingdoms from

[21] Since Rhaegar was Daenerys' oldest brother, Jon Snow is then Daenerys' nephew. Furthermore, as the closest male descendent of King Aerys, Jon's claim to the Iron Throne is stronger than Daenerys'.

whatever lies beyond. Despite the initial hostility shown by his sworn brothers of the Night's Watch, Jon proves to be a strong leader and battle commander and is eventually elected Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. However, the treason of his sworn brothers prompts him to abandon the Night's Watch and to take back Winterfell from Ramsay Bolton, who had seized the castle. Thanks to his military victory and despite his bastard status, Jon Snow is chosen by the Northern Lords to be King in the North, a title that he soon gives up by bending the knee to Daenerys Targaryen, his lover. Even when Jon discovers his true parentage, which makes him the rightful heir to the Iron Throne, Jon remains faithful to Daenerys and refuses the throne. However, Daenerys' fit of madness and violent behaviour prompts Jon to kill her, a crime for which he is sent back to the Night's Watch.

In this chapter, I will examine how Jon's bastard status makes him an outsider in Westeros society, in the Stark family, but also in the Night's Watch. Based on the theory of liminality, I will also analyse how Jon's supposed illegitimate birth gives him a greater social mobility as well as the ability to see beyond set boundaries. In Part 2, I will discuss the importance of the Wall in the *Game of Thrones* narrative, and the particular position that the Night's Watch occupies in Westerosi society. The third part of this chapter will focus on the wildlings of the north and on the concept of whiteness. It will also deal with Jon's encounter with Otherness and the consequences that this encounter has on him. Finally, I will briefly discuss the series ultimate Others, namely, the White Walkers, and what purpose they serve in the show.

1. Jon Snow, the bastard of Winterfell

From the very first episode of the series, Jon Snow's outsider status amongst the Stark family is made clear to the viewers: after the execution of a deserter of the Night's Watch,

Lord Stark, his lawful sons Robb and Bran, his ward Theon Greyjoy, and Jon Snow come back to Winterfell. On their way to the castle, they find the corpse of a female direwolf, which is a species of wolves that are unusually large and intelligent, and which is the sigil of House Stark. Next to the dead direwolf are five living pups. Jon suggests to Lord Stark that each (trueborn) Stark child should take a pup and take care of it, thus excluding himself from the Stark children. When Bran asks Jon: "What about you?" Jon simply answers: "I'm not a Stark" (1.1). However, as the party leaves, Jon notices a sixth pup near the corpse, an albino baby with white fur and red eyes. Theon mockingly remarks: "The runt of the litter. That one's yours, Snow!" (1.1). Indeed, like his albino direwolf, Jon does not fit into the Stark family, not because of his appearance but because of his parentage. According to Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman, Jon carries what Goffman calls a "stigma," that is "an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated" (5). In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), Goffman explains how, when we first meet a stranger, we tend to categorise him/her in a certain "social identity," which enables us to assume what that person ought to be, what attributes he/she should have, according to that anticipated category (2). He states that "[w]e lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands," and he calls these demands the "virtual social identity" of the stranger (2). However, the "virtual social identity" of the stranger might not correspond to his/her "actual social identity," which is "the category and attributes he [the stranger] could in fact be proved to possess" (Goffman 2). It is the discrepancy between the virtual and actual social identity of a person that constitutes the "stigma," "especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive," Goffman adds (3). Goffman then distinguishes between three different types of stigma: "abominations of the body" that are linked to various physical deformities; "blemishes of individual character"

that can be inferred from a mental disorder, alcoholism, homosexuality, imprisonment, etc.; and "tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion" (4). Because of the assumed inferiority of the stigmatised person, the "normals," i.e. the people who do not bear a stigma (Goffman 5), practice different forms of discrimination, which reduces the stigmatised person's life chances (Goffman 5). Goffman explains:

> We [the normals] construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his [the stigmatised person's] inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning. We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one, and at the same time to impute some desirable but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast, such as 'sixth sense,' or 'understanding.' (5)

Thus, in the world of *Game of Thrones*, which is largely inspired by European medieval society, a bastard such as Jon Snow would inevitably be stigmatised. In *Winter is Coming*, Carolyne Larrington explains that "[w]ho someone is, both in the medieval world and in the world of *Game of Thrones*, depends absolutely on who their parents and their grandparents were" (14). According to Larrington, for lowborn people, parentage only serves as a confirmation of their social role, while the nobility attaches great importance to bloodline (15). As she explains, "[l]ike the medieval aristocracy, the members of the Great Houses [of Westeros] believe that their privilege, their authority and their ideological understanding of themselves as 'noble' is transmitted through blood" (15). This is why illegitimate children, whose ancestry is uncertain, are "the ones to be watched" (Larrington 16). Indeed, being born a bastard carries a very negative social stigma: the status of bastard is associated with a number of "blemishes of the individual character," as Erving Goffman calls them. In the books, Jon Snow remarks that bastards are said to be "wanton and treacherous by nature, having been born of lust and deceit,"

for instance (Martin, *A Storm of Swords, Part II* 171). Because of their illegitimate birth, bastards have not inheritance rights, and do not take their parents' surname. Indeed, to deny them any connection with their noble family, high-born bastards are traditionally given a bastard name which varies depending on their region of birth[22]: thus, bastards born in the North are called 'Snow,' bastards from Dorne are called 'Sand,' those from the Riverlands are called 'Rivers,' and so on (Martin qtd. in Bastard of Godsgrace). As Martin himself explains, having a bastard name such as 'Snow' or 'Rivers' is both a mark of distinction, as it presupposes at least one parent of high-birth, and a social stigma, as their very name makes it clear that they are bastards, and thus, outsiders (Martin qtd. in Bastard of Godsgrace). Hence, high-born bastards always live and progress in an interstice of society: they are not lords or ladies, nor are they commoners, yet they are not ascribed a place of their own. According to Wolfram Schmidgen, a bastard such as Jon Snow can then be described as a "liminal figure" (139). In order to fully understand what "liminal figure" means, the concept of liminality needs to be briefly explained. In anthropoly, the term "liminal," which comes from the latin word *limen* (i.e. "threshold" or "border"), is first used by Arnold Van Gennep, a French ethnographer and folklorist, to describe the transitional phase happening in "rites of passage" (Thomassen 6). Indeed, in his book *The Rites of Passage* (1909), Van Gennep studies different rites of passage, i.e. rites used to mark the passage of a person (or a social group) from one status to another, and identifies a pattern proper to these rites (Thomassen 6). The pattern has a three-fold structure: the first stage consists of "rites of separation," which implies a detachment from fixed practices and routines; the second stage, "transition rites" or "liminal rites," is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty, as the subject is stuck

[22]Martin explains in a piece of correspondence with a fan, that bastard names are only given to bastards with at least one parent of high birth; a bastard born of two peasants would have no surname at all (qtd. in Bastard of Godsgrace).

between the previous stage of life and the next; the last stage, "rites of incorporation," is where all the uncertainties and complexities are resolved and harmony is reached again (Thomassen 6). For Van Gennep, the liminal stage is then a special situation in which the individual (or group) "wavers between two worlds" (18). In 1967, English anthropologist Victor Turner draws inspiration from Van Gennep's notion of liminality and explores it further in the third chapter of *The Forest of Symbols* called "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage." According to anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen, Victor Turner's elucidation of the concept of liminality has the merit of going outside the study of ritual passages in small-scale societies and thus, outside "anthropolgy proper" (14). Turner, like Van Gennep, defines the liminal state as an in-between space, "a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (*The Ritual Process* 94). However, according to Thomassen, Turner not only uses liminality to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also "to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences," by which Thomassen means "the way in which personality [is] shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience" (14). In postcolonial studies, the concept of liminality comes to refer to "the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communial self-hood may be elaborated, a region where there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (Ashcroft *et al*. 130). Homi Bhabha, one of the most important figures in post-colonial studies, reinterprets the notion of liminality in a collection of essays called *The Location of Culture* (1994). In opposition to the manicheanism of the colonial discourse that divides the world into clear-cut categories ('self' versus 'other,' 'us' versus 'them,' 'coloniser' versus 'colonised'), Bhabha argues that there exists an in-between space, the liminal, which is central to the creation of new cultural meanings (1). Bhabha explains that "these

'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1-2). Bhabha focuses on signification and the creation of meaning, and bases his theory on enunciation (2). In Bhabha's work, cultural difference is presented as an alternative to "cultural diversity," the latter referring to an epistemological object ("culture as an object of empirical knowledge"), which merely acknowledges the existence of distinct sets of behaviour, values or attitudes (34). On the contrary, cultural difference is, for Bhabha, "the process of the *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledge*able*', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identifications" (34). Thus, if cultural difference is not "pre-given," it must be uttered in order to come to be known, to be "knowledgeable," as it is through enunciation that cultural difference can appear (Bhabha 34). In other words, while cultural diversity is comparative (it is possible to compare two pre-set cultures), cultural difference is a "process of signification through which statements *of* culture and *on* culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity" (Bhabha 34). Because of what Bhabha calls "the Third Space of enunciation" (36), the meaning of culture can only appear in the liminal, ambivalent space of enunciation, where it is not static and can always be subject to further interpretation, which undermines the idea of a solid and fixed culture in favour of a hybrid form of culture (37). Liminality not only designates the space between cultures but also between identities, places, periods of time, etc. (Thomassen 16). In the introduction of *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha compares the liminal space to a stairwell between binary oppositions, like Self and Other:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the

> temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. (4)

Thus, the liminal space is the place where "hybridrity[23]," of cultures but also of identities, happens (Bhabha 4).

In Westeros, as previously explained, the bastards do not fit in any pre-given social categories and have no choice but to navigate between those categories. In an article analising the place of the bastard in the eighteenth-century English novel, Schmidgen explains that, like the Westerosi bastard, "the bastard [in the eighteenth-century novel] is a creature of the threshold: while he emerges from society, he is not able to take up a position within it and thus remains both inside and outside" (139). His argument is based on anthropologist Victor Turner's definition of "liminal *personae*":

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (Turner qtd. in Schmidgen 140)

As a bastard, the liminal position of Jon Snow in society is awkward and even traumatising. His being an outsider in Winterfell is a source of suffering, and it influences Jon's everyday life, including his relationships with women. When asked by his friend Sam if he has ever been intimate with a girl, Jon explains that he could have had sex with a prostitute, but eventually refused to, so that he would not engender a bastard, like himself. He tells Sam:

> I never met my mother. My father wouldn't even tell me her name. I don't know if she's living or dead. I don't know if she's a noblewoman or a fisherman's wife or a whore. So I sat there, in the brothel, as Ros [the prostitute] took off her clothes. But I couldn't do it.

[23] Ashcroft *et al.* define hybridity as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (118). The authors note that, even though the term is widely employed and disputed in post-colonial theory, hybridity is generally associated with the work of Homi Bhabha in his analyse of the relationship of interdependence between coloniser and colonised, in association with the notions of 'mimicry', 'ambivalence' and 'liminality' (118).

> Because all I could think was, what if I got her pregnant and she had a child, another bastard named Snow? It's not a good life for a child. (1.4)

Hence, Jon's distress is so deep that he refuses to put a child in the same situation as his. However, despite his feeling of loneliness and isolation, his being both inside and outside society allows him to have an unusual social mobility and understanding of social conventions, which will prove to be useful for his personal development as an individual and as a leader.

As Jon rides north in order to become a member of the Night's Watch, he sees for the first time the northern frontier of Westeros, the Wall, which is the location I am going to discuss in the next chapter.

2. On the Wall

The Wall

In the pilot episode of *Game of Thrones*, three men are seen emerging from a massive barrier made entirely of ice. As the three riders slowly move through the frozen landscape, their minuscule black silhouettes sharply contrast with the immensity of the Wall behind their backs. This scene, being the first one of the entire series, not only emphasises the colossal dimensions of the Wall, but also establishes the Wall as being a central element in the *Game of Thrones* universe. Furthermore, the Wall is one of the only locations that are always featured in the series' title sequence[24], even when there is no scene taking

[24] The title sequence that introduces every episode of the series depicts an animated map of the world of Game of Thrones. The map highlights the locations that will be featured in the upcoming episode, which is why the title sequence is never quite the same from one episode to the other. (Sepinwall) However, some locations are constant, namely King's Landing, the capital, Winterfell, the seat of House Stark, and the Wall (Sepinwall).

place on the Wall in some episodes (Sepinwall). These elements contribute to establish the Wall as a prominent landmark in the *Game of Thrones* world.

The riders beyond the Wall (1.1)

Not only is the Wall a central element in the series, it is also what prompted George R. R. Martin to write the entire saga. Indeed, in an interview to the magazine *Rolling Stone*, Martin declared that, before the political intrigues and wars, the inspiration for the Wall "predate[d] anything else" ("The Rolling Stone Interview"). Martin declared that the idea of the Wall came to him in 1981 (i.e. ten years before he started writing the saga) while visiting Hadrian's Wall, the Roman fortification that separated the Roman Empire from the northern Ancient Britons ("The Rolling Stone Interview"). He explained:

> I stood up there [on Hadrian's Wall] and I tried to imagine what it was like to be a Roman legionary, standing on this wall, looking at these distant hills. It was a very profound feeling. For the Romans at that time, this was the end of civilization; it was the end of the world. We know that there were Scots beyond the hills, but they didn't know that. It could have been any kind of monster. It was the sense of this barrier against dark forces – it planted something in me. But when you write fantasy, everything is bigger and more colorful, so I took the Wall and made it three times as long and 700 feet high, and made it out of ice. ("The Rolling Stone Interview")

Indeed, the resemblance between the Wall of *Game of Throne* and Hadrian's Wall is striking, as historian Brian de Ruiter extensively analyses in his article "A Defense against

the 'Other': Constructing Sites on the Edge of Civilization and Savagery" (de Ruiter n. pg.). Furthermore, the Westerosi Wall has many more equivalents in our history, such as the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall, the Mexico-United States barrier, or even the American frontier theorised by Frederick Jackson Turner, the latter being the main focus of historian Michail Zontos' article "Dividing Lines: Frederick Jackson Turner's Western Frontier and George R.R. Martin's Northern Wall." However, instead of detailing the similitudes between Martin's Wall and other existing walls, I would like to analyse the Wall focusing on its original purpose and how it helped to define the Seven Kingdoms as a nation by creating the figure of the Other.

In the southern part of Westeros, the Wall is described as the end of the world by several characters such as Tyrion Lannister ("I just want to stand on top of the Wall and piss off the edge of the world" (1.2)), and Pyp, a brother of the Night's Watch, who tells Jon that he was sent "at the end of the world" for refusing a lord's advances (1.7). The lands that lie beyond the Wall are mostly uncharted and no one knows how long the continent is in its northernmost part, nor what creatures inhabit them, which effectively makes the Wall the end of the world, or at least the *known* world. According to the legend, the Wall was built hundreds of years before the unification of the Seven Kingdoms by Aegon I Targaryen[25], during a period known as The Long Night, in order to protect the realm against monstrous creatures called the White Walkers[26] and other creatures (Martin *et al.* 11-12). The Night's Watch was then created to guard the Wall and to protect the realm should the threat appear ever again, and nineteen castles were built on the side of the Wall to accommodate the brothers of the Watch (Martin *et al.* 12). However, for

[25] Aegon's Conquest, or simply the Conquest, refers to the conquest and unification of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros by the Targaryen family, led by Aegon Targaryen and his dragon. The Conquest happened around 300 years before Robert's Rebellion and is used as a historical touchstone (Martin *et al.* 31).
[26] For a discussion on the White Walker, see Part 4 in this chapter.

thousands of years, the White Walkers did not show themselves, leading the Westerosi people to consider the White Walkers' existence merely as a myth or a fairy tale. Indeed, the creatures that the Wall was supposed to hold back are always referred to stuff of legend used by nurses to scare little children, like the story that Old Nan tells Bran while he is bedridden (1.3). Few people still believe in the White Walkers and they are generally laughed at for believing in such nonsense. Tyrion Lannister, for instance, mocks Jon Snow for believing in "grumkins and snarks[27] and all the other monsters [Jon's] wet nurse warned [him] about" when Jon tells him what the Wall was originally built for (1.2). Thus, over the course of time, the main purpose of the Wall changed: it is not a protection from monsters anymore (even though the viewers know that the threat is real), but rather it became imagined as a barrier that keeps undesirables out of the national territory. Hence, as a border delimiting who can or cannot enter the national space, the Wall contributed to imagine the Seven Kingdoms as a nation. Indeed, according to Sara Ahmed, nations are invented as "familiar spaces, as space of belonging, through being defined against others who are recognised, or known again, as strange and hence strangers" (97). The stranger then appears as a figure that comes to encapsulate everything that the nation is not, which consequently implies that the figure of the stranger allows the nation to be (Ahmed 97). In Ahmed's words: "[t]he stranger appears as a figure through the marking out of the nation as dwelling, as a space of belonging in which some bodies are recognised as out of space" (97). Essential to Ahmed's argument is Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation: in his famous work *Imagined Communities*, Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson explains that the nation is *imagined* because, despite

[27] The expression "grumkins and snarks" is often used, both in the *Game of Thrones* TV series and in the books. Both terms refer to mythical creatures that appear in Westerosi nursery stories, and would be the equivalent to our ghosts, ghouls, vampires, and so on. ("Grumkins and Snarks")

the fact that the members of a nation will never know all of the other members, they still have in common "the image of their communion" (6). This implies that nationality, nation-ness and nationalism are "cultural artefacts" whose meaning has changed over time (Anderson 4). Following Anderson's definition of the nation, Ahmed then explains that the boundaries of a nation are not only geographical or geopolitical but also discursive (98). Indeed, according to her, nations do not refer to something that simply exists, rather "nations are produced and constructed as places and communities in which 'a people' might belong" (98). This implies that, in order to exist, a nation also requires the definition of who or what does not belong: it is then the differentiation between the familiar and the strange that produces national identity (Ahmed 99). Hence, in order to know who one is, one has to know who one is not first, which implies that the strangers are not external to the formation of national identity, on the contrary, "the nation requires strangers in order to exist" (Ahmed 100). It is worth noting, then, that the Wall is the only place where encounters with strangers can take place: indeed, the Seven Kingdoms are surrounded by water except in the northernmost part of the realm where the Wall delimits the national territory. This means that, except for the peoples living north of the Wall, the Seven Kingdoms do not have any immediate neighbours against which they can define themselves[28]. The Westerosi Wall, then, is not only a physical barrier keeping out the wildlings, i.e. the peoples who live beyond the Wall, but also a discursive boundary. South of the Wall, Westerosi people frequently define themselves in opposition to the wildlings. Indeed, the wildlings are frequently referred to as "savages" by the southerners, and they are also attributed violent and cruel practices. In the pilot episode, when a ranger of the Night's Watch finds numerous cut-up corpses arranged in a geometrical pattern on the ground, his superior unjustly blames the wildings for the massacre. He says: "What do

[28] The continent of Essos, which was discussed in Chapter 1, is separate from Westeros by the Narrow Sea.

you expect? They're savages. One lot steals a goat from another lot, before you know it, they're ripping each other to pieces" (1.1). Theon Greyjoy expresses the same feelings towards them: "All wildlings are liars and savages with no loyalty to anything or anyone" (2.6). The derogatory term that the southerners use to call them, i.e. wildlings, is a proof that the peoples beyond the Wall are considered as inferior and uncivilised. Indeed, the Collins dictionary defines the term "wildling" (also spelled "wilding") as "an uncultivated plant, especially the crab apple, or a cultivated plant that has become wild" or "a wild animal" ("Wilding"). The definition not only emphasises the wilderness associated with the wildlings, but also the fact that they are like undomesticated animals or even like plants, i.e. sub-humans. In calling the wildlings that way, the people south of the Wall implicitly position themselves as superior and more civilised beings. Indeed, while talking to Osha, a wildling girl who successfully passed south of the Wall and who is now a prisoner in Winterfell, Theon Greyjoy reprimands her for not calling him "My Lord" (1.7). He tells her: "You're not living in the *wilderness* anymore. In *civilised lands*, you refer to *your betters* by their proper titles" (1.7, my emphasis). This sentence perfectly encapsulates the idea of the wilderness of the far north as opposed to the civilisation of the southern part of Westeros. As Brian de Ruiter notes, the dichotomy between the people living south and north of the Wall is mirrored by the difference in landscape (de Ruiter n. pg.). Indeed, while around Winterfell, the lands are green and fertile, the lands beyond the Wall are covered in ice, uneven and treacherous (de Ruiter n. pg.). The contrast in landscape is best seen when, in season 3, Jon Snow and Ygritte, a wildling, climb on top of the Wall and look on both sides of the Wall: in the north, only ice and snow can be seen, while the south is green and only lightly touched by winter (de Ruiter n. pg.).

The Wall, then, comes to represent both the geographical and the cultural boundary between "civilised southerners" and "wild northerners," between "us" and "them", that helps to shape the national identity of the Seven Kingdoms. Hence, if the Wall was originally a purely defensive construction, it gradually became a way of distinguishing between different "types" of human beings, the wildlings being considered as inferior to the people in the south of Westeros[29]. However, in order to fully understand the importance of the Wall, it is necessary to also take into account a third category of people, not belonging to the Seven Kingdoms nor to the lands beyond the Wall, but belonging to the Wall itself, which are the brothers of the Night's Watch.

The Night's Watch

As previously explained, the Night's Watch is the military order created after the Wall was constructed in order to guard and maintain it. The brothers of the Night's Watch are nicknamed 'the crows' or 'the black brothers' because of their distinctive black clothes. This is why new recruits are said to 'take the black' when joining the Night's Watch ("The Night's Watch"). The brotherhood is divided into three different orders, each having a precise role to play on the Wall: the builders are charged with the maintenance of the Wall and the castles that are built on it; the stewards provide day-to-day service, such as cooking meals, hunting, maintaining the weapons, tend to the horses, etc.; the last order is the rangers who are the main fighting force, scouting the lands and forests north of the Wall should any threat appear. All the brothers of the Night's Watch are under the orders of the Lord Commander, who is elected democratically by his brothers ("The Night's Watch"). Indeed, in contrast to the Seven Kingdoms, the Night's Watch is a meritocracy: birth and wealth are not relevant on the Wall and anyone can rise in rank, as Benjen Stark,

[29] I will further discuss this point later in this chapter, Part 3.

Jon's uncle, tells Jon Snow on his first visit on the Wall: "Here, a man gets what he earns, when he earns it" (1.3). Taking the black is an engagement for life: desertion is punishable by death, as the execution of the deserter by Ned Stark shows the viewers (1.1).

Once a glorious and respected order as it served a great purpose, the Night's Watch has declined over the years and the number of brothers has drastically decreased. Indeed, at the beginning, the Night's Watch was a respectable place where noblemen could volunteer in order to protect the realm but also to distinguish themselves ("The Night's Watch"). It is still considered an honour to serve in the Night's Watch in the region of the North, and Ned Stark even encourages his bastard son Jon Snow to join the order (1.2). However, the threat of the White Walkers seems to have disappeared, meaning that less and less people voluntarily join the Night's Watch. The order then has to rely on criminals, traitors or disgraced nobles to fill its ranks: to take the black has become a punishment, it is an alternative for the usual punishments reserved to thieves, rapists, etc. When Tyrion sees the new recruits of the Watch, he remarks: "Ah, rapers. They were given a choice, no doubt. Castration or the Wall. Most choose the knife" (1.2). In the same way, when Lord Eddard Stark is found guilty of treason by King Joffrey Baratheon – King Robert's son –, he is at first sentenced to join the Night's Watch (however, King Joffrey choses instead to have him beheaded, which starts a civil war) (1.9). Thus, the Night's Watch has gradually become a remote prison in all but name, where undesirables and rogues are sent in order to keep the nation morally and socially pure. The process of sending criminals, i.e. outcast and stigmatised[30] people, in a remote place, as far as possible from society, can be linked to the notion of purification of space. Indeed, according to geographer David Sibley, the term "purification" in this context suggests "a

[30] The term stigmatised is used here in reference to Erving Goffman's theory of stigma. In Goffman's terms, criminals and traitors can be said to suffer from "blemishes of individual character" (Goffman 4), which alienates them from the "normal," i.e. the rest of society that does not bear any stigma (Goffman 4).

distaste for or hostility towards the mixing of unlike categories, an urge to keep things apart" (409). This means that, in an integrated society, collective action is taken against "groups who appear to threaten the perceived spatial and social homogeneity of localities" by erecting boundaries between the community and those excluded from it (Sibley 410). Thus, sending to the Wall people who do not fit (or who do not fit anymore) into any social category, such as lawbreakers, disgraced nobles, and bastards, becomes a way of keeping the society of the Seven Kingdoms integrated and homogeneous. Furthermore, as Sara Ahmed explains, a neighbourhood[31] – and by extension, a nation – can be compared to a healthy body, that is "fully integrated, homogeneous, and *sealed* […]. This implies that a good or healthy neighbourhood does not leak outside itself, and hence *does not let outsiders (or foreign agents/viruses) in*" (25, my emphasis). She explains that it is the perception of danger coming from the outside that allows the neighbourhood, or nation, to be imagined as an organic and pure space: indeed, the potentiality of an attack coming from outside contributes to the solidarity and social homogeneity of a nation (25). Thus, the Night's Watch offers dual benefits: on the one hand, the order purifies the national space from its unclassified, and thus undesirable, people by relocating them in the most remote and isolated place of the realm. On the other hand, those outcasts serve to protect the nation against danger coming from the outside and thus to keep nation pure from any foreign agents. The Night's Watch is then both a protection against *internal* and *external* threats to the integrity and homogeneity of the nation.

The origins of the recruits are irrelevant on the Wall. Indeed, who one is in the Night's Watch is not determine by who one was in Westeros, but rather by what one does. As Lord Commander Mormont explains to the new recruits, to join the Night's Watch is to abandon your former life and to begin a whole new one:

[31] Ahmed uses the term "neighbourhood" to refer to a habitat or a place of dwelling (25).

> You came to us as outlaws, poachers, rapers, killers, thieves. You came alone, in chains, without friends or honour. You came to us rich and you came to us poor. Some of you bear the names of proud Houses, others only bastard names or no name at all. It does not matter. *All that is in the past*. Here, on the Wall, we are all one House. […] *Here, you begin anew*. A man of the Night's Watch lives his life for the realm. Not for a king, or a lord, or the honour of this House or that House, not for gold or glory, or a woman's love, but for the realms and all the people in it. (1.7, my emphasis)

Thus, when joining the Night's Watch and taking their vows, new members have to give up their pasts, their names, their possessions, their allegiances and everything that used to define them. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Carolyne Larrington explains that, like in medieval societies, bloodline and rank are crucial elements to define one's identity in Westeros (15). It is the membership to a (noble) lineage that gives one the sense of who one is, as identity is not linked to individuality but rather to the belonging to a certain social group (Larrington 18-19). Thus, stripping the new recruits of their past can then be understood as a form of social death[32]. Indeed, sociologist Jana Králová identifies three facets of social death: loss of social identity, loss of social connectedness, and losses associated with the disintegration of the body (237). If the third characteristic cannot be said to apply to the brothers of the Night's Watch, the first two characteristics – loss of social identity and loss of social connectedness – perfectly describe the brothers' situation. In the eyes of Westerosi society, the brothers are stripped of their former identities and thus become "non-persons," a term that suggests "a loss of social identity and of social integration, triggered by a person's inadequacy in the eyes of others" (Králová 239). The brothers also suffer from a loss of social connectedness as they cease to take an active part in Westerosi social life and are confined to the most isolated part of the Seven Kingdoms. The oath that the new recruits have to take in order to join the Night's Watch emphasises their social alienation:

[32] Orlando Patterson's theory on social death in relation with slavery is discussed in Chapter 1, Part 3.

> Night gathers, and now my watch begins. It shall not end until my death. *I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children. I shall wear no crowns and win no glory. I shall live and die at my post.* I am the sword in the darkness. I am the watcher on the walls. I am the fire that burns against the cold, the light that brings the dawn, the horn that wakes the sleepers, the shield that guards the realms of men. I pledge my life and honour to the Night's Watch, for this night and all the nights to come. (1.7, my emphasis)

This oath summarises the Night's Watch philosophy: their only duty is to protect the realm, whatever the cost. It is because their duty is more important than anything else that the brothers are forbidden to marry, to have children, and to hold lands or titles. As Maester[33] Aemon explains to Jon Snow: "Love is the death of duty. […] What is honour compared to a woman's love? What is duty against the feel of a newborn son in your arms? Or a brother's smile?" (1.9). When new recruits join the Night's Watch, not only do they give up everything they had (possessions, titles, names), they also renounce the possibility to perpetuate their bloodlines, which make them genealogical isolates in a world where genealogical bonds are essential. The idea of social death is also visible on the brothers' clothes: the colour black that the brothers always wear is commonly associated to death and mourning in western societies ("Black Color Psychology and Meaning"). However, the brothers' social death also allows them to start a new life and to create new social bonds within the Watch. Indeed, the Night's Watch is often described as a family (the term "brothers of the Night's Watch" emphasises that aspect of the Watch) in which every member is responsible for himself but also for the group. A striking example of that solidarity appears at the end of season 1 when Jon Snow tries to leave the Wall in order to help his brother Robb in the south and avenge his father (1.10). Jon has just taken his vows and has then become an official member of the Watch, which

[33] Like the Night's Watch, the Order of the Maesters is a secular organisation whose members swear to serve. The maesters are intellectuals, political advisers, healers, historians, private tutors, etc. Even the smallest noble families have a maester to educate the children and to tend to medical issues, among other things ("Maesters").

means that he should be executed for this act of desertion. In the woods, Sam, Pyp, and Grenn, Jon's sworn brothers, stop him to take him back to the Wall:

- *Pyp*: We're taking you back to where you belong.
- *Jon*: I belong with my brother [Robb].
- *Sam*: We're your brothers now. (1.10)

Thus, the only way to survive in the Watch is through friendship and mutual assistance: as strangers within their own nation, the brothers of the Night's Watch can only rely on each other and create what Sara Ahmed calls a "community of strangers" (84). The newly formed community provides a sense of fixity that the brothers' new status does not offer, which is why, even though the different members of the Watch are very different from each other, their social alienation brings them together and creates a new family of strangers.

Thus, the Night's Watch occupies an ambiguous position within the Seven Kingdoms. Indeed, although the castles occupied by the sworn brothers are located in the realm, being south of the Wall, the Night's Watch is in every way opposed to the mentality and way of life of the Seven Kingdoms, as was previously demonstrated. At the same time, the Watch cannot be assimilated to the wildlings living north of the Wall, as they define themselves in complete opposition to these "savages" and protect the realm against them. The Night's Watch then belongs to what philosopher Sam Azulys calls an "interzone" (217). He explains that "the Crows, living on the border, do not belong to the savage world north of the Wall, nor to the supposedly civilised world that stops at the monumental ice rampart. They are condemned to stand in that interzone, the terrestrial equivalent of limbo, where all possibilities seem to have frozen for eternity"[34] (216-17,

[34] Original quote: "Les Corbeaux, habitants des confins, n'appartiennent ni au monde ensauvagé de l'au-delà du Mur, ni à celui prétendument civilisé qui s'arrête devant cette monumentale muraille de glace. Ils sont condamnés à stationner dans cette interzone, équivalent terrestre des limbes, où l'horizon des possibles semble s'être figé pour l'éternité."

my translation). Azulys' definition of the "interzone" bears close resemblance to the concept of liminality that was developed earlier in this chapter: the Night's Watch is between and betwixt, perpetually on the threshold. However, where Azulys sees "frozen possibilities," i.e. the impossibility for the Night's Watch to evolve, it is on the contrary possible to see that the liminality of the Night's Watch makes it a unique institution in the Seven Kingdoms where change can take place, as it will be shown later in this chapter.

Jon as a brother of the Night's Watch

As a bastard, Jon does not fit in Westerosi feudal society, as was previously explained. His best chance to feel accepted and also to prove himself is then to join the Night's Watch, an order that rejects the strict class stratifications that are implemented in the Seven Kingdoms. Indeed, as his uncle Benjen tells Jon: "No bastard was ever refused a seat there [in the Night's Watch]" (1.1). Jon has an idealistic vision of the military: he strongly believes in the Watch's mission to protect the realm and is even mocked for his conviction by Jaime Lannister (1.1) and by Tyrion Lannister (1.2). His admiration for the Watch comes from his father, Ned Stark, according to whom "it is great honour" to serve on the Wall (1.2), and also from his uncle, Benjen Stark, the First Ranger of the Night's Watch, for whom Jon feels the greatest of respect (1.1). Then, Jon's romantic vision of the Watch, combined with his being an outsider in Winterfell, creates in the young man a strong sense of belonging to the brotherhood, even before leaving Winterfell. For instance, when saying goodbye to his brother Robb, Jon affirms that the colour black, in reference to the sworn brothers' clothes, has always been his colour (1.2). In the same way, when Jaime Lannister makes fun of the Watch, Jon takes offense and defends it:

> - *Jaime [ironically]*: Let me thank you ahead of time for guarding us all from the perils beyond the Wall – wildlings and White Walkers and whatnot. We're grateful to have good, strong men like you protecting us.
> - *Jon*: We've guarded the Kingdoms for eight thousand years.

- *Jaime*: …Is it "we" already? Have you taken your vows, then?
- *Jon*: Soon enough.
- *Jaime*: Give my regards to the Night's Watch. I'm sure it will be thrilling to serve in such an elite force. And if not… it's only for life. (1.2)

Jaime and Tyrion Lannister are the only people to prepare Jon for the brutal reality that awaits him in Castle Black, i.e. the main castle of the Night's Watch. Little does Jon know about the Watch's decrepitude and about his future sworn brothers. This is why his arrival in Castle Black is such a shock to Jon Snow: he realises that what he has always been told about the glorious Night's Watch and its valiant members might have been true once, but is not the reality anymore. As Maester Aemon tells Tyrion Lannister, "[the Night's Watch] has become an army of undisciplined boys and tired old men. There are less than a thousand of us now. We can't man the other castles on the Wall. We can't properly patrol the wilderness" (1.3). Not only is Jon unimpressed by the other recruits, who are mostly rapists and thieves, he also clings to the notions of class and rank which he was trying to escape by joining the Night's Watch in the first place. Jon thinks that he is better than his fellow recruits because of his (partly) noble birth. Indeed, Jon proves to be the best of the recruits at fighting with a sword and at riding a horse, but he does not realise that the other recruits did not grow up in a castle or get any proper education like Jon did in Winterfell. Furthermore, when Jon takes his vows, he is ascribed the post of steward and not ranger, which is a bitter disappointment for him. Feeling that the post of steward is beneath him, he protests to Maester Aemon: "Do you take me for a servant?" A remark to which Maester Aemon simply answers: "We took you for a man of the Night's Watch. But perhaps we were wrong in that" (1.7). Jon then struggles to adapt to his new life on the Wall and to let go of the social codes that he has known all his life. However, Jon receives help from an unexpected character who is neither a bastard nor a member of the Night's Watch, that is Tyrion "the Imp" Lannister, the queen's dwarf brother. Even

though Jon and Tyrion seem to have hardly anything in common, Tyrion feels that their situations are quite similar. As a dwarf born in a noble family, Tyrion knows what it feels like to suffer from discrimination and rejection from one's family and from people in general. Tyrion's own father, Tywin Lannister, hates him because of his deformity and would love to disown Tyrion if he could prove that Tyrion was not his son (3.1). In Tyrion's opinion, "all dwarves are bastards in their fathers' eyes" (1.1), which makes his situation not so different from Jon's. Tyrion then takes it upon himself to help Jon find his way in the world and in the Night's Watch. According to Erving Goffman, Tyrion is a "sympathetic other," i.e. a person who bears a stigma and who can then provide moral support but also the feeling of being accepted to another stigmatised person (20). Not only does Tyrion encourage Jon to embrace his difference ("Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like armour, and it can never be used to hurt you" (1.1)), he also helps Jon realise that his situation in the Watch is not as bad as he thinks. When Jon complains that the other recruits hate him because he's better than them, Tyrion points out that some of them are orphans, others were sent to the Wall because they stole food for their starving families, others were disowned by their parents (1.3). What Tyrion teaches Jon is perspectivism: Sam Azulys explains that, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, perspectivism is essential to life (213). Azulys states that "raw facts are inaccessible since we necessarily approach reality from an act of interpretation that is, at the same time, an act of appropriation"[35] (213, my translation). Perspectivism is then the capacity to multiply one's viewpoints and to be more nuanced about what one thinks to be "real," as reality is always subjective (Azulys 214). Once Jon learns from Tyrion that his reality is not necessarily the same for everyone else, Jon's life amongst the brothers of the Night's

[35] Original quote: "Pour le philosophe de la volonté de puissance, les faits bruts sont inaccessibles car nous abordons nécessairement le réel à partir d'un acte d'interprétation qui est, en même temps, un acte d'appropriation."

Watch becomes easier. However, it is Jon's encounter with the wildlings that will definitely convince Jon that the world as he knows it might be more complex than what he thinks.

3. Beyond the Wall

The wildlings of the north

As previously explained, the wildlings are the people living north of the Wall and who are considered as lawless "savages" by the people of the Seven Kingdoms. They are not a unified people but rather are composed of dozens of different tribes and clans, some of them being nomads, others settling in small villages or in caves. However, once in a while, those clans will unite under the leadership of a "King-Beyond-the-Wall" in order to get organised and pass south of the Wall. As Mance Rayder, the current King-Beyond-the-Wall, explains, these clans speak a variety of languages (including the Common Tongue), and they are often fighting one another, which makes his unifying task difficult (3.2). As opposed to the derogatory name that the Westerosi people use to call them, the wildlings call themselves "The Free Folk" because they are free from the artificial social conventions that exist in the Seven Kingdoms. Indeed, contrary to the Seven Kingdoms, the wildlings do not recognise hereditary political authority and they do not have a system of social class like in feudal Westeros. In fact, the wildling society operates a kind of democracy among themselves: Mance Rayder is not king because his father was before him but because the people chose him as their leader. As Ygritte, a wildling that Jon Snow encounters beyond the Wall, explains: "We don't go serving some shit king who's only king because his father was. […] We chose Mance Rayder to lead us" (2.7). In contrast, the wildlings call the people south of the Wall "the kneelers" as a way of mocking their

tendency to kneel before a king or a lord as an act of submission. Thus, the wildlings define themselves against the "southerners" (i.e. people south of the Wall), as much as the Seven Kingdoms define themselves against the wildlings, which reinforces the discursive boundary that the Wall represents. The wildlings regularly raid the lands south of the Wall in search of weapons, tools or sometimes women ("Inside the Wildlings"). However, because of the increasing threat posed by the White Walkers, more and more wildlings try to pass the Wall in order to find refuge in the Seven Kingdoms, like Osha in season 1 or Mance Rayder's unified peoples in season 3 and 4. From occasional raiders who were displaced from their lands, the wildlings then become unwelcome migrants, desperately trying to find a safer place to live in than the monsters-infested north.

Critics and fans have often compared the wildlings to peoples such as the pre-Roman Britons or Scots, because of the association between the Westerosi Wall and Hadrian's Wall (de Ruiter n. pg.) (Corless). Others have studied the similitudes between the wildlings and Native American tribes, who were driven out of their lands by European settlers and forced to live in exile in their own lands (Zontos 92-110). Both readings seem equally valid, knowing that George R. R. Martin strongly rejects any strict equivalence between his fictional world and the real world. In this work, however, the comparison is made between the wildlings and "white" immigrants as it allows for a greater discussion on race and on the idea of "whiteness" in particular. Indeed, physically speaking, the wildlings are similar to the Westerosi people: they are fair skinned with brown, blond or red hair. The only thing that tells them apart from the southerners is their clothes, which are made of fur, leathers, and animal bones, used to protect them from the extreme cold.

A group of wildlings (5.8)

The fact that the wildlings are depicted as fair skinned people is worth mentioning since, as Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek note, being "white" is often equated with "the norm from which the Others are marked" (293). To have white Others then seems unusual, knowing that the other figures of the cultural Others in *Game of Thrones* are more than often represented by people of colour[36]. This idea of superiority of the "white" originates from colonialism as a way of justifying the imperial enterprise (Ashcroft *et al.* 198). Indeed, in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define race as follows:

> 'Race' is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups. The notion of race assumes, firstly, that humanity is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features that are transmitted 'through the blood' and permit distinctions to be made between 'pure' and 'mixed' races. Furthermore, the term implies that the mental and moral behaviour of human beings, as well as individual personality, ideas and capacities, can be related to racial origin, and that knowledge of that origin provides a satisfactory account of the behaviour. (198)

Thus, the idea of race was particularly important to the rise of colonialism since it allowed to distinguish between naturally "civilized" and "primitive" races based on people's skin colour (Ashcroft *et al.* 198-99). In race theory, three major "races" are generally

[36] See Chapter 1, Parts 1 and 2.

distinguished: the white, or "Caucasoid"; the yellow, or "mongoloid"; and the black, or "negroid" (Ashcroft *et al.* 199-200). The postulated existence of these three races not only permits to establish a hierarchy between the races, but it also establishes the superiority of Europeans (i.e. the "white race") as a biological characteristic (Ashcroft *et al.* 200). The concept of race was also used to group together the "inferior" races under imperial rule: Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin give the example of the "races" of Britain as seen by the English (202). For instance, although the Irish were seen as physically similar to the English, Irish culture was "alien and threatening," with shocking behaviour and animal-like clothing (Ashcroft *et al.* 202). In the seventeenth century, the Irish were attributed behaviours like cannibalism, witchcraft, violence, incest and so on, much like the traits attributed to Africans in the nineteenth century (Ashcroft *et al.* 202). It was then argued that the Irish, but also the Welsh and the Scottish, were racially different from the English and had their origins in Africa, which explained their "Africanoid" traits (Ashcroft *et al.* 202). As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain: "[t]he linking of the Irish and Welsh with Africa demonstrates remarkably clearly how imperial ideology operates to exclude and marginalize colonized peoples, whether in Britain or the Empire" (203). This example already shows how the idea of "biological races" is biased since it can be manipulated in order to fit imperialist agendas.[37] In the same way, despite the wildlings' likeness to the southerners and their being "white," the wildlings are still considered as primitive and inferior to the people of the south. In short, they do not belong to the same race. This situation is reminiscent of Irish people immigrating to the United States in the years before the Civil War. In *The History of White People*, historian Nell Irvin Painter explains that in the United States, although race as colour has always played a dominant role,

[37] However, as Ashcroft *et al.* note, race is not specifically an invention of imperialism and is used as a general tool to classify people (198). The authors note that "'racism' is not so much a product of the concept of race as the reason for its existence" (199). Hence, the idea of race comes from the hierarchical categorization that is implicit in racism, and not the other way round (Ashcroft *et al.* 199).

"[h]atred of black people did not preclude hatred of other white people – those considered different and inferior – and flare-ups of deadly violence against stigmatized whites" (n. pg.). Irish immigrants, for example, would be treated as "racially different" (Painter n. pg.) despite their "whiteness." They would be compared to apes and paired with black people because of their difference (Painter n. pg.). Social historian David R. Roediger explains in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* that when the Irish immigrants arrived in the United States, they were described as "*[l]ow-browed* and *savage*, *grovelling* and *bestial*, *lazy* and *wild*, *simian* and *sensual*" (133). Their supposed racial difference came from the assumption that the Irish were Celts, who could be described as "a particular race separate from and inferior to the Anglo-Saxon English" (Painter n. pg.). This draws an interesting parallel with the history of Westeros and the different peoples who invaded it. Indeed, like the Anglo-Saxon peoples invaded the territory of England and Wales inhabited by the Celts in the fifth century ("Anglo-Saxon"), the first human inhabitants of Westeros, the First Men, were invaded by the Andals, another human people coming from Essos (Martin *et al.* 17). Even though there is no mention of a hierarchy between the First Men and the Andals, it is worth noting that the wildlings are proud to be direct descendants of the First Men (Martin *et al.* 147), while the people of the Seven Kingdoms are generally considered as descendants of the Andals despite their mixed ancestry[38] ("Cultures and peoples"). It could then be argued that the difference between the wildlings and the southerners come from their different ancestry. This distinction between what could be called various "shades" of white, some being inferior to others, raises the question of what it actually means to be "white." Indeed, in recent years the question of "whiteness" has become a popular field of study, with for

[38] Like the Celts and the Anglo-Saxon, First Men and Andals intermarry in most of the Seven Kingdoms. However, the Stark family and the Northerners in general are also descendants of the First Men, although in a lesser extent than the wildlings, as the Andal invasion did not reach the region of the North for centuries (Martin *et al.* 19).

instance Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), and so on. Indeed, according to Nakayama and Krizek, "'[w]hite' is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain" (291). The authors note that "we do not know what 'whiteness' means" (293) because the central position of the concept, its "everything-ness," makes it culturally invisible and unquestioned (292). According to them, "[t]here is no 'true essence' to 'whiteness'; there are only historically contingent constructions of that social location" (293). "Whiteness" is then a discursive formation since "[w]hatever 'whiteness' really means is constituted only through the rhetoric of whiteness" (Nakayama and Krizek 293). In the same way, Ruth Frankenberg states that "[w]hiteness changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence. Rather […] it is a complexly constructed product of local, regional, national and global relations, past and present" (236). She states for example that Jewish Americans, Italian Americans, and Latinos have been viewed as both "white" and "non-white" depending on the time period and on the political standpoint (11). Thus, the wildlings' skin colour does not seem relevant in the determination of their "race": they are considered "savages" because they are discursively constructed as such.

Yet, compared to the Dothraki or the people of Slaver's Bay who were discussed earlier, the wildlings are presented as "less Other" than these Eastern peoples. Indeed, while the peoples of Essos seem to embody absolute evil (particularly the Masters of Slaver's Bay), the wildlings are rough and violent but at the same time capable of developing deep friendship, as is shown by Jon's relationship with Tormund and the friendship between Bran Stark and Osha. Furthermore, although Mance Rayder claims that the wildlings in his army speak seven different languages (3.2), the wildlings that are

shown in the series use the Common Tongue, i.e. English, when talking to each other and to strangers such as the brothers of the Night's Watch. In contrast to the Eastern populations of Essos, the wildlings' words do not need to be translated at all, which does not convey the same feeling of alienation as the Dothraki language does. This implies that the viewers can more easily identify themselves to the wildlings than to the Eastern peoples. In addition, the actors who play the wildlings are also significant: while the Dothraki and the people of Slaver's Bay are portrayed by actors who were virtually unknown to the public[39], the actors playing the wildlings were already well-known before *Game of Thrones*. Ciarán Hinds, the British actor who plays Mance Rayder, had already played in many films and TV series in which he had major roles, such as Julius Cesar in HBO's television show *Rome* (2005-2007), or Albus Dumbledore's brother in the *Harry Potter* saga (2011) ("Ciarán Hinds"). Mackenzie Crook, who plays the wildling Orell, is also a well-known actor of British comedy, having played the pirate Ragetti in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films (2003-2007) and Gareth Keenan in the British version of *The Office* (2001-2003) among other roles ("Mackenzie Crook"). The wildling Ygritte, who has a prominent role in Jon Snow's story, is played by Scottish actress Rose Leslie who had already appeared in the famous British TV series *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015) ("Rose Leslie"). Again, since the actors playing the wildlings are familiar to the viewers, the wildlings themselves seem more familiar and it is easier for the audience to identify with them. These elements contribute to the representation of the wildlings as more familiar or "less strange" Others than the Dothraki and the people of Slaver's Bay and seem to imply a differentiation between different kinds of Others, some being stranger than others. The wildlings are then in an "in-between" where they are below the people of the Seven Kingdoms but still above the Otherness of the peoples of Essos.

[39] Although he had played in other TV series before *Game of* Thrones, Jason Momoa became internationally famous thanks to his role of Khal Drogo, the leader of the Dothraki (Woodward).

Jon amongst the wildlings

As a northerner, Jon grew up with the tales of savage wildlings raiding the North to steal and rape. However, until joining the Night's Watch, Jon had never even seen a wildling in the flesh. It is only when Lord Commander Mormont leads the Night's Watch beyond the Wall to investigate the mysterious disappearance of several sworn brothers that Jon can have a first-hand experience of the wildlings' Otherness. On their first stop north of the Wall, the brothers ask for hospitality and information to Craster, a wildling who lives in a fortified homestead along with his nineteen daughters. Craster is considered to be an ally of the Watch because he lets the sworn brothers sleep under his roof, one of the only shelters to be found north of the Wall, and he provides information to the Watch. While staying in Craster's keep, Jon and his brothers discover that Craster marries his daughters and incestuously fathers other children with them (2.1). Since there are no other men in the keep except Craster, Jon wonders what the wildling does with his sons and soon discovers that Craster disposes of his new-born sons by offering them to the White Walkers (2.2). Thus, the first wildling that Jon meets is particularly sordid, which seem to corroborate the prejudiced belief that the wildlings are lawless and immoral savages. However, Craster is one of a kind and is not representative of all the wildlings, which can be seen when Jon joins Mance Rayder's army. Indeed, after their stay at Craster's keep, the sworn brothers keep going north to find the wildlings camp and Jon volunteers to join Qhorin Halfhand, a senior ranger of the Watch, in a mission to neutralise some wildling lookouts. Qhorin's party finds a group of wildlings, fight them and kill them, but Jon hesitates to kill one of the wildlings when he realises that Ygritte, the wildling, is a woman (2.6). Qhorin leaves Jon alone with Ygritte and orders him to kill the wildling, but Jon is unable to do so and instead, he makes her his prisoner. She escapes but Jon recaptures her and gets lost in doing so, finding himself alone with the wildling in a land he does not

know. Ygritte is a "spearwife," i.e. a warrior woman, and she continuously provokes Jon, mocking him for pretending to know what he is doing and for being a virgin. As Sam Azulys argues, Ygritte represents a double form of Otherness for Jon since she is a wildling and a woman (208). For Azulys, "according to the standards that are in effect in the patriarchal society that Jon comes from, [Ygritte is] a being who is radically different from him, closer to nature and more animal than men are"[40] (208, my translation). Ygritte is a woman who breaks the traditional codes and subverts the received gender roles of the Seven Kingdoms: indeed, she is a warrior who is able to fight for herself and who does not take orders from anyone except Mance Rayder. In fact, while Jon and Ygritte are together, the gender roles seem to be reversed: she is the one in control, even protecting Jon and teaching him how to survive beyond the Wall, while Jon looks helpless and afraid and is repeatedly sarcastically praised for being prettier than most girls (2.7). During their wandering in the far north, Ygritte prides herself on being free from social codes such as the Night's Watch vow of celibacy or the never-ending war between the Night's Watch and the wildlings:

> - *Jon*: My father was Ned Stark. I have the blood of the First Men. My ancestors lived here, same as yours!
> - *Ygritte*: So why are you fighting us? (2.7)

The time that Jon spends with Ygritte and the love affair that emerges from it help Jon to realise how absurd some established customs can be. It is also during that period that Ygritte says for the first time her famous line "You know nothing, Jon Snow" (2.7), which emphasises Jon's ignorance about the wildlings and about the world in which he lives. According to Azulys, Ygritte's catchphrase refers to the Socratic maxim "I know that I

[40] Original quote: "Pour Jon le puceau, Ygrid est une double figure de l'altérité : elle appartient à un peuple de sauvages et c'est une femme donc, selon les critères en vigueur dans la société patriarcale d'où il est issu, un être radicalement différent de lui, plus proche de la nature et plus animal que ne le sont les hommes."

know nothing" (209). Azulys explains that, with that sentence, Socrates expresses the need to distinguish between knowledge on the one hand, and opinion or belief on the other (209). Indeed, while belief only needs to be uttered to become truth, knowledge needs to be validated by a careful reasoning (209). The sentence, then, is an invitation to test the limits of one's knowledge: "to know that one knows nothing is then a way of recognising that one needs to reject one's beliefs and replace them with rational knowledge by showing discernment and thinking critically"[41] (209, my translation). Thus, when Ygritte tells Jon that he knows nothing, it is as much an observation as it is an invitation to think critically about what he has always been told about the wildlings. Jon's beliefs are challenged even further when he meets Mance Rayder and the other wildlings. After Ygritte escapes a second time and lures Jon into a trap, Jon becomes the wildlings' prisoner and is led to their camp. There, he is received by Mance Rayder, the King-Beyond-the-Wall, and claims that he wants to become a wildling and help them to pass the Wall (3.1). Mance trusts Jon and accepts him among his army, and he replaces Jon's black cloak, the symbol of Jon's belonging to the Night's Watch, by a wildling cloak (3.1). From then on, Jon lives with the wildlings and adopts their way of life: like Daenerys among the Dothraki[42], Jon "goes native" with the wildlings. As Sara Ahmed explains about the character of Dunbar in *Dances with Wolves*, "[Dunbar's] proximity to those who were defined as strangers to civilisation and civility, breaks down his identity as a soldier policing the borders of empire (he gets too close to 'see' the border)" (121). In the same way, Jon's proximity to the wildlings forces him to reconsider his identity as a brother of the Night's Watch: are the wildlings so different from the people of the Seven Kingdoms that they can be left to die north of the Wall? Jon then slowly "goes wildling"

[41] Original quote: "Savoir que l'on ne sait rien est donc une manière de reconnaître que l'on doit rejeter ses croyances pour leur substituer un savoir rationnel en faisant preuve de discernement et d'esprit critique."
[42] See Chapter 1, Part 2.

and, like Daenerys, it is through sex that Jon's vision of the wildlings changes. Indeed, for Jon it is unthinkable to have sexual intercourses with anyone, not only because of his Night's Watch vows, but also because his bastard status traumatised him so much that he does not want to impose the same burden to a child. Thus, Jon's virginity is dictated by the arbitrary social norms which state that a man of the Night's Watch should not father children and that any children born out of wedlock is condemned to be marginalised in feudal Westeros. However, while with the wildlings, Jon begins to see those social conventions for what they really are, that is arbitrary conventions. When Ygritte takes Jon to a cave and seduces him, she clearly says that she wants Jon to prove he is not a "crow" anymore by breaking his vows (3.5). Not without hesitation, Jon gives in to Ygritte's advances and makes love to her, thus rejecting his vow of celibacy. Through sex, then, Jon becomes something else than what he was when he first met Ygritte and the wildlings. After they made love, Ygritte remarks:

- *Ygritte*: A maid. You were a maid!

- *Jon*: I was a man of the Night's Watch. (3.5)

Jon's use of the past tense ("I *was*") shows that he acknowledges that a change occurred in him and that as a consequence his identity is forever changed. It is worth noting that Jon is not the only character who has gone native among the wildlings: indeed, Mance Rayder himself is a former man of the Night's Watch who went to live beyond the Wall where he rose to become King-Beyond-the-Wall. Like Jon, Mance became the wildlings' defender, the only King able to unite ninety tribes and clans into an army strong enough to take the Wall. But unlike Jon, Mance is unable to overcome the differences between wildlings and men of the Night's Watch: Mance takes the wildlings' side against the Night's Watch while Jon sees both parties as potential allies.

However, after successfully climbing the Wall with Ygritte and reaching the southern lands, Jon escapes his wildling companion and goes back to Castle Black. Indeed, Jon tries to convince himself that his life with the wildlings has not changed him, as he says to Ygritte before leaving her: "You always knew who I was, what I am. I have to go home now" (3.10). Jon even goes as far as organising the defences of Castle Black against the wildling attack during which Ygritte is killed (4.9). However, his wildling experience has had a deep effect on Jon, whether he likes it or not: back in Castle Black, Jon uses the term "Free Folk" instead of wildlings, prompting another member of the Watch to tell that Jon "even talks like a wildling now" (4.1). In the same way, Tormund, a wildling with whom Jon climbed the Wall, tells him: "You spent too much time with us, Jon Snow. You can never be a kneeler again" (4.10). Indeed, as anthropologist Katy Gardner states, "those who step across cultural and geographical boundaries are, in varying degrees, likely to find themselves transformed. As we physically move, so do our personal and social boundaries shift" (qtd. in Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 132). Thus, even though Jon does not want to recognise at first that he has changed, his social identity is inevitably transformed as a result of his stepping across boundaries. It is only after he is chosen as the new Lord Commander of the Night's Watch and after Mance Rayder's death that Jon takes Mance's place as an active protector of the wildlings. As Jon realises that the wildlings are only the victims of history ("They [the wildlings] were born on the side of the Wall. That doesn't make them monsters" he tells Ser Davos (5.1)), he takes the decision to let the wildlings pass through the Wall so that they can escape the White Walkers. Jon succeeds where Mance Rayder failed: in contrast to Mance who still considers the Wall as solid border that separates the natives from the strangers (in Mance's case, the wildlings would be the native), Jon sees the border as a porous one. As Sam Azulys explains, Jon does not abandon the idea of a border but rather changes his

perspective on it: for him, the Wall becomes an interface that allows for exchange, or as a transit zone (219). From that moment, Jon becomes a staunch advocate of the wildlings and at the same time places himself as the only person capable of making things change. Indeed, as Sara Ahmed argues about Dunbar's story, going native

> allows the reassertion of the agency of the dominant subject. The story remains organised around his ability to move and to overcome differences (his 'difference' from them). […] His agency is central to this fantasy of overcoming; *not only can he make but he can unmake the border between self and other, between natives and strangers*. (124)

The same remark can be made about Jon's story with the wildlings: his discoveries (about the wildlings, about the world in general, and about himself), which are mediated through the wildlings, allow him to do what others cannot do and see past the borders. Jon has unique position as an illegitimate child and as a member of the Night's Watch since, as previously explained, those two distinctive social positions are characterised by their liminality. This liminality not only allows Jon to have a greater social mobility (between low-born and high-born, and between the wildlings and the Seven Kingdoms), but it also allows him to see beyond the discursive boundaries between those Manichean categories of people. By doing so, Jon then appears as a saviour, defending the oppressed at the risk of his life. However, the other brothers of the Night's Watch consider Jon's ability to overcome the difference between the wildlings and the southerners as a threat to their identity as a group. Indeed, it is their shared purpose that unite all the different sworn brothers: their duty to defend the Wall against outsiders defines who they are. When Jon shares his plan to let the wildlings through with his brothers, Ser Alliser Thorne, a ranger, objects: "We've been fighting them for thousands of years" (5.5). Jon's pact with the wildlings is seen as a betrayal of the Night's Watch identity, which prompts several sworn brothers to kill Jon Snow. Jon snow is stabbed to death while his brothers repeat the pledge "For the Watch" (5.10). Jon is left to die alone in the snow below a wooden sign

where the word "Traitor" is written, but he is later brought back to life by Melisandre, a red priestess of Asshai[43].

Jon Snow's body beneath a cross-like placard (6.1)

Jon's death and resurrection as a sacrifice to save the wildlings clearly show Jon as a "Christ figure," i.e. a "figure in the arts who resembles Jesus" (Malone qtd. in Kozlovic). According to Anton Karl Kozlovic, who specialises in the interface between religion and film, various characteristics are typical of a Christ figure, such as the character's centrality in the narrative, his/her being an outsider in the community, the presence of a betrayer associate, a decisive death and resurrection, the imagery of the cross, and so on (Kozlovic). In Jon Snow's case, the analogy seems obvious: Jon is the one who sacrifices himself for the greater good, that is to save humanity from the White Walkers, no matter the differences between people. The wildlings even come to see Jon as a divinity, as Tormund tells Jon: "They [the wildlings] think you're some kind of god. The man who returned from the dead" (5.3). After his brothers' treason, Jon leaves the Night's Watch,

[43] Melisandre, nicknamed the Red Woman, is a priestess of the God of Light and a close adviser to Stannis Baratheon, a pretender to the Iron Throne. The Red Priests and Priestesses possess various supernatural abilities, such as prophetic visions, the ability to cast deadly shadows and the ability to resurrect people ("Red Priest").

stating that he already gave his life for it (5.4), and decides to help his sister Sansa to take back the castle of Winterfell from the Boltons with the help of the wildlings. Thanks to his military victory and his leadership qualities, Jon is proclaimed King in the North by the Northern Lords (5.10). Against his vassals' opinion, Jon decides to form an alliance with Daenerys Targryen, the Dragon Queen who has just arrived from Essos, in order to defeat the White Walkers together. However, when Daenerys asks Jon to bend the knee and to recognise her as his true queen, Jon refuses because he does not want to betray the Northerners who chose him as their leader. Jon finds himself in the same situation as Mance Rayder who refused to kneel and died for it, along with numerous wildlings (5.1). It is Tormund, the new leader of the wildlings, who convinces Jon: "You spent too much time with the Free Folk. Now you don't like kneeling. Mance Rayder was a brave man. A proud man. The King-Beyond-the-Wall never bent the knee. How many of his people died for his pride?" (7.6). Instead of standing his ground at all costs, like Mance did, Jon decides to bend the knee: again, he sacrifices himself and his title of King in the North in order to have a better chance to save mankind from the White Walkers. Furthermore, when Daenerys sinks into madness and burns the whole city of King's Landing, it is Jon who kills her to protect the people of Westeros, thus sacrificing his lover's life for the good of humanity. Thus, Jon's Christ figure is consistent until the very end of the series. After Daenerys' murder, Jon is sentenced to exile on the Wall in the Night's Watch, right where his journey started. However, since the Night King and all the White Walkers died during the Battle of Winterfell (8.3) and since the wildlings are now generally accepted south of the Wall, the Wall itself and the Night's Watch are no longer relevant, and Jon is free to roam the northern lands with the wildlings, free from any of the social conventions of Westeros.

4. The White Walkers

The White Walkers are the monstrous creatures made of ice that live in the northernmost part of Westeros known as the Lands of Always Winter. They have a humanoid appearance, but their skin is white or grey, their hair is completely white, and they have distinctive blue eyes. The White Walkers follow the Night King, probably the most powerful White Walker, who possess a number of supernatural powers such as the ability to turn living humans into White Walkers (like Craster's sons (4.4)) and the ability to turn dead people into "wights," i.e. the zombie warriors that fight in the White Walkers' army, as can be seen in the episode "Hardhome" (5.8). The White Walkers are presented as the ultimate Others, the ones with whom no negotiation would be possible, the ones who are completely unassimilable. As a matter of fact, the White Walkers are simply called "the Others" in George R. R. Martin's series of books, which emphasises their absolute difference with the other characters of the series[44].

The Night King and other White Walkers (8.3)

[44] In the audio commentary of the first episode, the producers D. B. Weiss and David Benioff explain that they chose to change the name to White Walkers in order to avoid confusion, so as not to mistake 'the Others' for the adjective 'other' (1.1).

In season 8, Bran Stark explains that what the White Walkers want is to erase their world, they want "an endless night" (8.2), but it is not entirely clear why. As journalist Gil Kidron notes, *Game of Thrones* constantly plays with the notion of good and evil and blurs the boundaries between those two notions (Kidron). Indeed, some characters who were considered evil at the beginning of the series, such as the wildlings or Jaime Lannister, gradually prove to be not so evil after all, and vice versa (Kidron). Despite the White Walkers apparent desire to kill every human being on Westeros, Kidron points out that a lot of other characters that are not considered as "evil" also kill many people, for good or bad reasons (Kidron). Daenerys is a good example of a "good" character who burns entire cities in an attempt to end slavery, which would be considered a "good" reason. Since we do not know what the White Walkers' motivations are, it is hard to tell if they are truly evil. In any case, the White Walkers' threatening presence in Westeros can be said to serve at least one purpose: to unite people faced with adversity. Indeed, it is because of the White Walkers that Mance Rayder manages to unite dozens of different tribes of wildlings into one army. In season 3, Mance says to Jon:

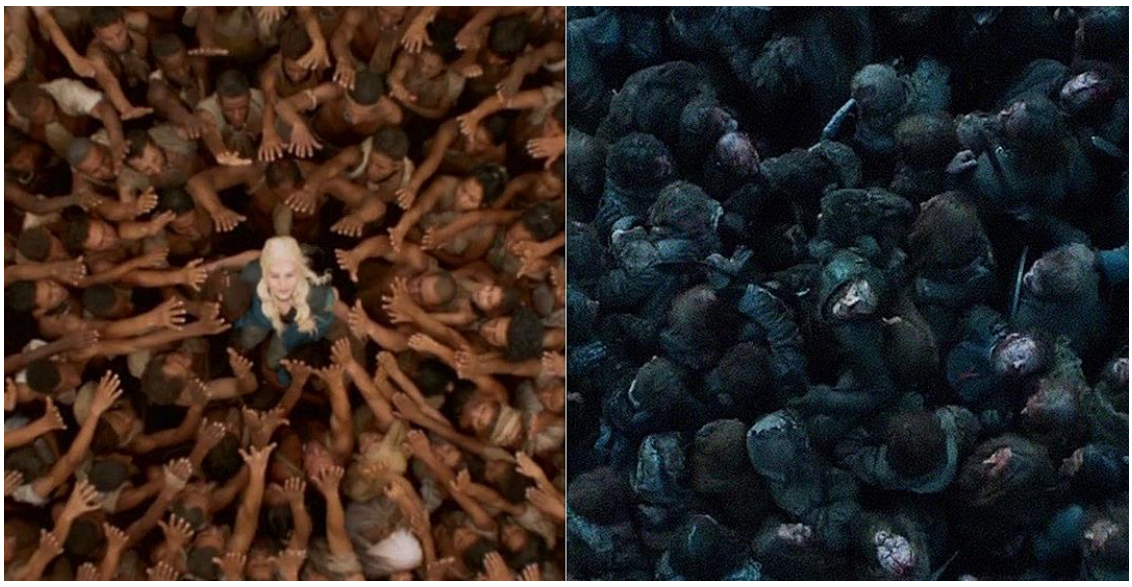
> Do you know what it takes to unite ninety clans, half of whom want to massacre the other half for one insult or another? They speak seven different languages in my army. The Thenns hate the Hornfoots, the Hornfoots hate the Ice-river clans, everyone hates the cave people. So, you know how I got moon-worshipers and cannibals and giants to march together in the same army? I told them we were all going to die if we don't get south. 'Cause that's the truth. (3.2)

In the same way, Jon Snow convinces the Lords of Westeros to join forces against the army of the dead (7.7). As Sara Ahmed explains in *Strange Encounters*, a community needs the figure of the Other to define itself as a community: "[i]t is the very potential of the community to fail which is required for the constitution of the community" (26). Indeed, quoting Matthew Crenson, who specialises in political science, Ahmed explains that an external attack is what is needed to activate the sense of fellowship that is latent

in a community (25). In the same way, the threat that the White Walkers represent for the human beings of Westeros encourages them to overcome their differences and to come together against these supernatural Others. After all, as Jaime Lannister remarks in season 1, all men are "nothing but sacks of meat and blood, and some bones to keep it all standing" (1.2).

Conclusion

In this dissertation, the analysis of two protagonists of the *Game of Thrones* TV series has shown how Otherness can present itself in a multitude of ways. Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow, who are Others themselves, have two very different ways of dealing with Otherness. Indeed, while Daenerys overcomes her victimhood and becomes very assertive, imposing her rule and her values to the peoples she meets, Jon on the other hand works in a liminal space, in the "in-between" that separates the strange from the familiar, and tries to find the best of both worlds. In other words, Daenerys breaks former boundaries in order to establish new ones that fit her vision of the world as opposed to Jon who tries to blur those boundaries and eventually annihilate them altogether. Daenerys' and Jon's stories seem to mirror each other in several occasions, which is emphasised visually in some scenes such as the "crowd" scenes in which both protagonists emerge in the middle of a faceless mob.



Daenerys amongst the freed slaves of Yunkai (3.10) and Jon amongst his soldier on the battlefield (6.9)

These two scenes look very similar to each other in their cinematography and camerawork, yet they also visually illustrate Daenerys' and Jon's different attitudes:

Daenerys really stands out in the adoring crowd (3.10) but Jon, after being trampled by his men, emerges from the crowd and is unrecognisable amongst all those people covered in mud (6.9). Thus, Jon and Daenerys are opposite yet similar in a number of ways, like the two faces of the same coin, each of them representing a part of the "Song of Ice and Fire" that George R. R. Martin created. Their coming together in seasons 7 and 8 eventually leads to their mutual cancellation, with Daenerys' murder and Jon's peaceful return north of the Wall with the wildlings. If this finale might seem anticlimactic to some viewers, it is nonetheless an important commentary on society as a whole: Daenerys' clear-cut boundaries and colonial mentality do not seem viable in a world where Otherness is everywhere. Indeed, Others have always existed and will probably always exist; however, it is up to us to decide whether or not we want to break down the Wall that separates us.

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