East vs. West in *Game of Thrones*: Unpacking Edward Said's *Orientalism* in the Fantasy World

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Abstract— *This article examines the way that Eastern and Western Cultures are represented in the TV show Game of Thrones (2007-2019), through the lens of Edward Said's work on Orientalism. Although Game of Thrones is a fantasy TV show that takes place in fictional continents of Westeros and Essos, it has created a clear distinction between the Civilized West and the Exotic East. In many ways, this dichotomy reflects the Orientalist framework that Said identifies in his book Orientalism. The author of this article will argue that the East is portrayed by Game of Thrones as an Exotic, Mysterious and Often Dangerous Other, as opposed to the Western ideals of Order, Power and Morality. Through an examination of the representation of Essos and specifically Daenerys Targaryen's interaction with the Dothraki and other Eastern cultures, the article will critically evaluate how the show reinforces traditional Orientalist tropes, while at the same time subverts them through acts of resistance and complexities. Overall, the author of this article will conclude that Game of Thrones uses the Orientalist framework to both reflect colonial histories, and to prompt viewers to consider what it means to be culturally imperialistic, to have power and to create and maintain one's identity in today's world.*

Keywords— *Orientalism, Game of Thrones, Edward Said, Fantasy, Cultural imperialism, Popular Culture.*

Orientalism by Edward Said (1978) is one of the key works in post-colonial studies and is important in that it looks at how Westerners have viewed the East as exotic, enigmatic and less than during history. Said's major thesis was that Western intellectuals, authors and artists created a false and stereotypical view of Eastern societies portraying them as irrational, uneducated and in need of Western guidance and education. These portrayals, Said argued, were more than just intellectual or artistic products; they reflected Western imperialism and colonial ambitions and the notion of the other as the reason for Western control and exploitation of those regions.

Said defines *Orientalism* as Westerner's systematic way of seeing, portraying and often distorting the Orient (which he defined as the Middle East, Asia and North Africa) and thus creating an exotic, dangerous and mystical representation of the Orient, and thus reinforcing the superiority of Western

nations. The Western Self is represented as rational, progressive and modern while the Other (the Orient) is represented as stagnant, primitive and irrational. Thus, the Orient is often represented as a place of mystery and savagery and therefore needs Western intervention to become civilized; an attitude that justified colonial and imperial ventures of European powers for hundreds of years.

Said's *Orientalism* has contributed to numerous discussions concerning race, identity and power in international cultural contexts. The theory of *Orientalism* is applicable not only to historical colonial relationships but also to the continued ways in which Western media and popular culture continue to represent the East as an inferior and exotic space. Therefore, *Game of Thrones*, a contemporary television program based upon George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire novels, represents an excellent platform to explore

these themes. *Game of Thrones* depicts the fictional continents of Westeros and Essos, and the dichotomous relationship between the civilized West (Westeros) and the exotic East (Essos) mirror the dichotomy that Said describes as existing between the Occident and the Orient.

Game of Thrones depicts Westeros as a familiar yet violent world that viewers can easily understand and connect with, whereas Essos is portrayed as a strange and unfathomable world of mysterious cities, nomadic tribes and hostile environments, and therefore as the Other, in relation to the order and structure of Westeros. Characters, including Daenerys Targaryen who begins her journey in Essos and groups, such as the Dothraki, consistently depict Essos as a disordered and magical place inhabited by irrational and dangerous people. This dichotomy of East and West reflects the same colonial ideology that Said criticizes in his book, where the East is seen as a place to fear and exploit.

While, however, *Game of Thrones* often portrays the East as the Other of the West, the show also subverts and complicates these Orientalist tropes through moments of resistance and complexity in its depiction of Essos and its inhabitants. As Daenerys Targaryen journeys from being an outsider in Essos, she demonstrates the complexities of East-West interactions, particularly regarding issues of power, identity and agency. The show encourages the viewer to question whether the Western colonization of the East is morally justifiable and if so, how the simplistic distinction between the rational West and the savage East can be challenged.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the extent to which *Game of Thrones* utilizes Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* in framing the depiction of Essos and the cultures within it. Furthermore, this paper will analyse the representations of the Dothraki and Daenerys' experience in Essos to illustrate the way the show both supports and resists colonial discourse that Said critiques. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that *Game of Thrones* utilizes the East-West dichotomy as a method to criticize and challenge the colonial ideologies that have been a part of history and culture for thousands of years, and to encourage the viewer to rethink their own notions of power, racism and identity.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* defines the Orient as a constructed idea based on Western representations that depict Eastern societies as exotic, irrational and inferior to the West. These representations were often used in justifying colonial domination as well as the so-called civilizing mission. The East is presented by Said as a land of mysticism, disorder and barbarism, different from the rational and progressive West. This East has, according to Said, an exotic difference that makes it incomprehensible and not subject to analysis as are the rational West and its

elements of democracy and capitalism. Characters and cultures from Essos are exhibit this same exoticism. The distinction made in *Game of Thrones* between East (Essos) and the West (Westeros) is not merely geographical but also a cultural, political and moral difference. Essos is rife with cultures portrayed as mysterious or dangerous, as compared to the political systems in Westeros that are ordered and more familiar. An analysis of the representation of Essos, and especially its cultures and peoples, shows how *Game of Thrones* reflects Said's criticism of Western representations of cultures and the treatment of the East as the Other.

From the beginning, Essos is depicted in *Game of Thrones* as a great and mysterious land filled with foreign cultures, strange rituals and dangerous people. This agrees completely with Said's criticism of the construction of the Orient as being a place of the unknown, that is, an exotic and foreign space which remains outside of the rational order of the West. The continent of Essos, with its various scenes, provides a framework for representing the Eastern Other, from the wandering Dothraki to the magical Free Cities of the East. Essos is painted as a land difficult to understand from the point of view of Westeros, with a different set of laws of society and government. The Dothraki, one of the more notable groups from the continent of Essos, are introduced as a fierce nomadic warrior tribe that thought strength and honour above all things. Their ideas of horsemanship, raiding and a severe system of loyalty in social conduct are tumultuous and chaotic compared to the orderly social structures of the nations of Westeros. The barbarity of the Dothraki, their violent conquests, their lack of understanding of the political ideas and governments of the kingdoms of Westeros marks them out as the classical Other in Orientalist thought. They are given the reputation of primitive people, almost animal-like people, whose ideas are presented as equally fascinating and dangerous. It is Said's idea that the savage and uncivilised ideas given to the Dothraki reinforces the Occidental concept of Eastern peoples being devoid of rationality, order, structure and civility. Also, Essos is painted as a land of mystery, and magic, which is a requisite of representations of *Orientalism*. Magic in the sense of *Game of Thrones* is associated with the East, and with the city of Qarth, the Shadow binders of Asshai, and the Red Priestess, Melisandre, who combines the occult with pleasure and vice. These enchanting themes, often associated with Eastern religions and philosophies, suggest the unknown and therefore the mysterious, an aspect of *Orientalism* that is all important. By setting the East as a land of the supernatural, *Game of Thrones* emphasizes the irrationality and unworldliness of Essos. The East is a land where the laws of nature and reason do not apply, where magic forces and decrepit practices reign, and where such beings as

Daenerys Targaryen can ride dragons, a supernatural ability unknown in the rational West. This magical note adds to the exoticism of Essos and is in accordance with Said's (1979) view that the East is often presented as a land of irrationality and mystery. The East as a Land of Danger Besides being exotic and mysterious, Essos is at times represented as a land of danger, which is in accordance with the Orientalist stereotype of the East, which is represented as a land of menace and explosion. This crisis is shown in both the physical conditions of the land and in the people inhabiting it. Meereen, Yunkai, Slavers' Bay is depicted as being without law, with corrupt rulers and complex and often brutal social relationships. The slave trade, which is prevalent in these lands, is another thing lending to the dangerous and repressive nature of Essos. The freed people of Essos are presented as driven and miserable and the masters and slave-breeders, as corrupt and power-mad, which, too, lends to the idea of the East as a land in need of a saviour, of a land where the West must intervene in the interests of bringing order and the establishment of law and justice. The Dothraki are represented as being wild and uncontrollable, too, which enhances the feeling of danger, for they are introduced as a chaotic force sweeping from Essos to invade and conquer Westeros.

The Dothraki are shown as a society based upon the blood of the khals, a leadership structure of powerful war lords, an arrangement that is foreign to the Westeros individuals who live under a feudal kingship and more centralized modes of governmental rule. For this reason, the Dothraki are depicted as an existential threat to Westeros, not so much based on their military strength but for their utter disregard for Western values in terms of how government is conducted and oriented. The impression of danger is heightened by the violence and brutality of their raids, including the rape and pillage of innocent towns wights, to enhance their barbarism and the resort that is necessary for Western civilization to tame them. In *Game of Thrones*, however, the danger of Essos is not wholly the province of physical violence, it is psychological and cultural as well. The Eastern cities are depicted as filled with intrigue, corruption, betrayal. The Eastern city of Bravos, for instance, is the home of the Faceless Men, an order of assassins, and is described as essentially a place of secrecy and mystery where danger is to be found underneath the surface and political dealings. The constant fear of being assassinated and betrayed in the cities is part of this impression that Said discusses, wherein the Orient is a space filled with danger, deception and instability, as opposed to the rational, ordered and safe world of Westeros. The Exotic and the Primitive: Evolution of the Dothraki and Daenerys

The Dothraki, as one of the main depictions of the Eastern Other in *Game of Thrones*, play a crucial role in the

Orientalist framework of the series as well. As mentioned, the Dothraki are first presented as a chaotic, primitive people, whose customs are generally regarded as barbaric by the standards of Westeros. The Dothraki way of life, which incorporates various rituals, i.e. the killing of a khal (leader) in order to be a khal oneself, is presented as an inscrutable and savage element of their culture. Within the context of Daenerys' first experiences, the Dothraki illustrate the truest form of barbarism that presents itself in opposition to Daenerys' evolution into a powerful and civilized leader. However, as Daenerys grows in power, her relationship with the Dothraki changes which changes the traditional Orientalist narrative. Daenerys, the princess of Westeros, rises above the role of naive, weak outsider within Essos, and grows into a leader in her own right that can command the Dothraki and unite them under her banner. Thus, this development adds complexity and challenges to the simplistic East/West dichotomy of *Orientalism*. Although they were once savage and un-civilized at the beginning, the final submission to Daenerys, shows us that the East is not just a place to conquer, but a place for power struggle, resistance and cultural blending. Daenerys Targaryen as a character in *Game of Thrones* develops a more complex way of looking at the Dothraki as being totally barbaric and develops a more complex way of looking at the representation of Eastern culture, thus creating an additional layer to Daenerys' story as she represents the Eastern hero's journey, in the West.

Daenerys Targaryen, One of the Main Characters in *Game of Thrones*, Represents A Variety of Ways To Examine How Western and Eastern Identities Are Interwoven and Entangled in Her Journey from Powerless Exile in Essos to Powerful Leader Challenging the Patriarchal Structures of the West and Involves Many Orientalist Themes, While Also Subverts Them, Therefore Developing a Necessary Focal Character to Develop the Series in its Examination of the Themes of Power, Imperialism, Identity. Daenerys' trajectory embodies a classic example of a Western hero's journey, but one which takes place in the exotic and barbaric East, thus enabling her story arc to become a form of vantage point, through which the series provides a commentary on the ideas of colonialism, cultural interfaces, and the difficulties of representing the East. At the outset of *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys Targaryen is introduced to the viewer as a vulnerable, exiled, Westerosi princess, stripped of her family authority and relegated to an alien land. She is, in the beginning, portrayed as weak and passive, and under the arbitrary authority of her brother, Viserys, who is attempting to reclaim the Iron Throne by arranging her marriage to Khal Drogo, the leader of the Dothraki. In this early instance, Daenerys embodies the portrait of the outsider, in Essos, a Westerosi princess innocent of the

Dothraki nomadic, violent customs. In Orientalist terms she embodies the Orientalist experience of the West confronting the Easta symbol of the Western world's incursion into the uncivilized, barbaric society of Essos. However, her characterisation as the Westerosi exile also marks out her character as the blank slate, upon which the narrative may conduct its explorations of her transformation into a ruler. In her early contacts with the Dothraki, Daenerys is forced into submission and dependence.

When Daenerys marries Khal Drogo, her union is portrayed as a political arrangement a cultural exchange between the East and the West in which Daenerys is expected to passively accept the role of the foreign princess who was used to aid her brother's quest for the Iron Throne. The Dothraki are depicted as the exotic and uncivilized other who have practices and customs that are viewed as alien and savage by the Westerosi.

As Daenerys develops as a character, she evolves from a passive victim to a powerful leader. Daenerys transforms from a submissive partner to Drogo to a mutually respectful lover. After Drogo's death, Daenerys finds herself as the sole ruler of the Dothraki and a growing army. Daenerys begins to move beyond her role as a foreigner in Westeros and becomes an increasingly complex and hybridized form of herself, as she assimilates into the cultural context of the East. This is the beginning of Daenerys transition toward becoming a ruler who represents a combination of both Western and Eastern styles of leadership, as she transitions from being an outsider to a ruler who is recognized for her authority throughout Essos. The experiences she encounters while in Essos are also significantly different than the patriarchy and violence she had experienced in Westeros. In the East, Daenerys can find power through the diversity of the cultures, people and challenges. Daenerys evolves into the mother of dragons, a leader who controls her dragons and represents her ability to control the chaos of Essos and bring order to the wild East. By Orientalist standards, Daenerys' ascension is reflective of the paradox of Western imperialism: even though the West is often portrayed as the force that must civilize the East; Daenerys' ascension presents the possibility that the East may reshape the West. Daenerys brings together elements of Western-style leadership (e.g., strategic planning, the ability to command) and Eastern mysticism (her dragons, her connection with the Dothraki). On the other hand, Daenerys' leadership in Essos also parallels the colonial mind-set in which Western imperialism is often framed as a benevolent force that saves the oppressed Easterners from themselves. Daenerys' path can be interpreted as an example of the civilizing mission, where she frees the slaves of Slaver's Bay and casts herself as the liberator of the barbaric East. From the perspective of *Orientalism*, Daenerys' actions represent the fulfilment of

the role of the Western hero who orders the chaotic lands and reinforces the notion that the East needs to be intervened upon to be saved.

While Daenerys' rise to power challenges the stereotype of the passive female within the context of both the societal patriarchies of Westeros and throughout society, her story also complicates the Orientalist view of the East by the West. Daenerys' story does not depict the dominance of the West over the East; however, it does depict a story questioning the responsibilities and consequences of power, along with the moral justification for interference. As Daenerys grows in power and independence, she continues to assume the role of the Western colonial leader not only commanding armies and deposing tyrants but also defining the future of people she claims to be freeing. Daenerys' conquering of cities like Meereen, Yunkai, and Astapor may be viewed as examples of Western colonialism in the East, where the Western mission civil trice meets the desire of the Eastern masses for revolt against their previous rulers. Daenerys' perception of herself as a liberator of slaves and as a ruler who will break the wheel of oppression is like the ideals of Western colonialism: to deliver democracy, freedom and justice to the darkest corners of the Earth. However, as Daenerys' rule becomes more dictatorial, and as her decisions grow more ethically ambiguous, Daenerys' actions reveal the complexities involved in exercising imperial power. The liberator evolves into a progressively more authoritarian ruler and demonstrates some of the same characteristics of the tyranny she previously fought against. Additionally, her methods (e.g., the crucifixion of the slave masters; the execution of those who oppose her) raise questions regarding what the cost of power may be. Therefore, Daenerys' story also subverts the Orientalist discourse. While the West has traditionally represented itself as the civilizer of the East, Daenerys' story illustrates how the distinction between civilization and savagery is not as distinct as often presented. At times, Daenerys exhibits the very characteristics of the East condemned by Orientalist discourse (intensity, randomness, and irrationality); at other times, she exemplifies the Western ideals of liberty and justice. Overall, Daenerys serves as a reminder that the duality of East and West is flexible, and that all forms of power could produce both liberation and oppression. Daenerys' story also subverts the Orientalist framework in several keyways, particularly through her relationship with the Dothraki, specifically with Khal Drogo. Initially, Daenerys' experience with the Dothraki is established as a conflict between the civilized West and the savage East. However, as Daenerys develops as a leader, she learns the customs of the Dothraki and earns their respect, eventually leading them as queen. Daenerys' development as a leader among the Dothraki represents a significant

divergence from the Orientalist mythology of the East as an unassailable and uncivilized space. Instead, Daenerys' rise to power among the Dothraki is a rejection of the concept of the East as an exotic and uncontrollable landscape, and rather presents an image of respect, understanding, and cross-cultural exchange. Thus, Daenerys simultaneously upholds and challenges the notion of the East as the Other, as she triumphed over and formed alliances with Eastern forces during her pursuit of power. Additionally, Daenerys' relationship with the Dothraki is symbolic of the larger power dynamics in play throughout the East/West dialogue. Even though she initially occupies a position of difference as a Westerosi figure, she becomes a hybrid ruler blurring the lines of both worlds. By embracing the East, Daenerys also challenges the Orientalist conception of the East as territory to be conquered and contained, suggesting that East and West can exist in a complex interdependent arrangement, one in which both are equally capable of teaching, learning, and growth. The figure of Daenerys Targaryen and her function in the Orientalists' art show her transformation from the passive princess of Western Europe into the active empress of Essos telling both oriental and occidental news. The career of Daenerys serves as an indictment to the ideas of imperialism, and tells the story of power, resistance and dominion. The complicated relations of Daenerys with the Dothrakians and allied tribes of Essos means a transvaluation of the oriental ideas of East and West, but at the same time gives a far more complicated view of the complicated and varied relations between East and West. While fundamentally the character of Daenerys is a value of the instability of the division between East and West, that proves the truth of the thesis that neither power nor identity are static but in process of reconstruction continually, according to the mutual influence of the various cultures involved.

In the use of the idea of the East, or Orient (Essos), with all its populated characters and diversified landscape Motif of the East is made goodly use of in the play of *Game of Thrones*. The East is usually presented to the characters in the picturesque and exotic but nevertheless barbaric and mystic descriptions of the otherness. But, while the play gives these orthodoxies will, it complicates them by some interpolations of resistance in the uses of the idea of *Orientalism*, by introducing occasions of resistance, subversion and complexity of tale that qualify the dichotomies of East and West, and the so-called culture of the civilized West (Westeros) and the wild East (Essos). The characters and happenings that take place in Essos, are therefore, presented in such a light, that one sees the East itself, not simply the object of domination and control by the West, but as an empire in itself of which the forces of culture and power and some degree of interdependence and

return, and of some moral ambiguity are a part. Through these means the play *Game of Thrones* illustrates the opposition of *Orientalism* by showing that the so-called other is by no means a homogeneous universe, but a varied and complex section of certain happenings where power and moral agency and identity are not static determinations, but in a normal flux. One of the forms of subversion of the Orientalist ideas, is through the Gestalt of complex characters of the East, who almost entirely refuse to subscribe to the stereoscopic hue of the East as one of chaos, fantastic irrationality, and barbarism. Although many of the people of Essos, as for instance, the Dothrakians, the Slavers and others, and the inhabitants and citizens of such cities as Mereen and Bravos etc., are characterized for us at the time of their introduction in the play in largely Orientalist atmospheres, the view is qualified as the dramatic purpose of the play proceeds, so as to bring into the picture of truth-determined agency, moral ambiguity, construction and complexity of the human actions that they are, descriptive of their characters that they develop much in the contrast of the stereoscopic idea of the East as primitive and barbarous.

The most obvious example of this kind of thing is that of Daenerys Targaryen herself. At the first introduction of this character in her adventures into the region of Essos, we find her in the character of a passive princess of Westeros. At the last peripetia of the play, Daenerys Targaryen comes out as a powerful and influential ruler, who rules armies and armies of even Dragons, and finally exercises the respect and loyalty of many of the peoples of those regions. The original character that surrounds Daenerys is that of her indeed being a pawn in the oriental world of the Dothrakians. But little by little this notion is transfigured into a conception of the powerful conqueror and liberator. The whole courses of events that take place in Essos serve to subvert the idea that the East is composed entirely of races of people that are too organized in everything but are simply a badly organized rag-tag of barbaric peoples. But on the contrary, Daenerys is represented to be sufficiently powerful in her organization of the peoples of the Orient. This includes a lying of various divergent people and factions of those regions, in which the Dothrakians the Unsullied, the slaves of this and that and others like them, but subject to the government and authority of Daenerys. This shows that the East is not only a powerful organization, but that by its structures and relations the East is a complex political organization and means of power and social ordering and construction, and peace and order, nay, though representing races of non-European origin, and race blood.

Tyrion's connection with the people of Essos is important because his relationship with those he meets in Essos reflects the complexity of cross-cultural interactions

between East and West. Although at first, Tyrion represents the rational and intellectual aspects of the West, he finds himself learning and adopting some of the methods of leadership and politics found in the East. Through Tyrion, the series shows how Daenerys' advisors in Essos' cities, including Mereen, complicate the West/East dichotomy. Through Tyrion and Daenerys' experience navigating the various political and social systems of Essos, the series suggests that leadership and governance are not limited to specific cultural frameworks, rather, they are influenced by many different factors. This subverts the notion that there are only two types of cultures, which are both hybridized and can result in new styles of governance, strategy, and leadership. Dothrakis are arguably the most Orientalist culture on display in *Game of Thrones*, as they represent the quintessential barbarian hordes. They are a nomadic, horse-based people without formal cities, frequently raiding other places and disregarding all the rules of Westeros' society. In the eyes of majority of the characters from Westeros, the Dothraki are savage, unrefined and unpredictably dangerous. However, the Dothraki do not exist as simply as one-dimensional savages. Daenerys' experiences with the Dothraki contribute significantly to breaking down the Orientalist paradigm that identifies the East as inherently disorganized and barbarous. At first, Daenerys is subject to the Dothraki way of doing things and is treated as inferior to the Dothraki, but over time, Daenerys becomes familiar with their code of honour, their customs, and their loyalty to each other. When Daenerys starts to exert control over them, the Dothraki stop being depicted as a disorganized, uncontrollable force and begin to be represented as having a complex social structure, strict codes of behaviour, and a strong sense of self-identity. The series' portrayal of the Dothraki illustrates how Daenerys was able to move beyond the image of the Dothraki as irrational savages and demonstrates that their strength and ways of living are based on their own complex set of values and traditions. The Dothraki are not simply a thoughtless, destructive force; they are a proud, strong people with their own forms of governance, their own understanding of honour and their own culture that, although unfamiliar to the Westeros (and therefore, the audience) is very meaningful to them. As portrayed in the series, the Dothraki offer a more nuanced view of the East than the simplistic Orientalist view. The series humanizes the Dothraki and provides glances into their value system and beliefs and thus deconstructs the idea that Easterners are barbarians and also challenges the assumptions behind Western views of civilized vs savage. The Dothraki eventually ally themselves with Daenerys after they have recognized her strength and ability to lead, further complicate the Orientalist paradigm by demonstrating that power and respect are not solely tied to

Western models of authority, but can be gained and respected within non-Western contexts. Although Daenerys' rise to power in Essos could be seen as a story of resistance against Eastern barbarism, it also critiques Western imperialism. Daenerys starts her journey in Essos as a ruler who wishes to free slaves and eliminate oppressive governments, thereby identifying herself as a hero who will break the chains of tyranny. However, as Daenerys continues her journey, the series examines the complexities and contradictions of her actions. Daenerys' attempts to free the East through conquest leads to questions regarding the ethical implications of intervention, and the implications of applying Western style governance.

When Daenerys arrives in cities such as Mereen, Daenerys had to make decisions regarding how to reconcile freeing the people of the East from slavery and oppression, while still dealing with the consequences of removing existing power structures and imposing her own ideas of justice. The people of Essos, particularly in Mereen, are not so easily freed by Daenerys as she may think. Daenerys' attempt to rule such a vast and divided area of the world, illustrate the complexity of the East, as well as the limitations of Western style imperialism. Daenerys' well-intentioned efforts to bring freedom to the people of the East, and to impose her own brand of justice, are often hampered by the harsh realities of power, governance and cultural resistance and demonstrate that the simple binary paradigms of oppressor/oppressed, civilized/barbaric are insufficient to describe the complexities of the East. *Game of Thrones* uses Daenerys' actions and experiences to question the idea of the civilising mission, and to reveal the potential for violence and unintended consequences in every imperialistic endeavour. A subversive critique of the tendency to romanticize Western imperial intervention into Eastern societies is demonstrated through the portrayal of Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*. The notion that Western civilization can be imposed upon Eastern societies without consequence is challenged through Daenerys' experiences. Through this, the portrayal of Daenerys challenges the Orientalist tropes that have historically been used to portray Eastern societies, where the East has been presented as a passive recipient of Western imperialism rather than an active agent. Through this subversion of Orientalist tropes, a more complex understanding of the dynamics of power, resistance and the ethical implication of Western imperialism is provided. The subversion of Orientalist stereotypes is seen in the portrayals of Daenerys Targaryen and the Dothraki as well as the portrayal of Bravos, the largest city on the continent of Essos. Unlike most cities in Essos which have been depicted as chaotic, disorganized and uncivilized, Bravos is a city-state that has an advanced economy, complex political structures and

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institutions as well as its own values and belief systems. The city of Bravos is also the home of the Faceless Men, a group of assassins whose views and actions provide an alternative perspective of how individuals can think about and live by their identities, individualism and moral codes.

The Faceless Men's actions and philosophies of their way of life also represent an alternative to the traditional Western ideals of what defines heroes and what represents justice. When the Faceless Men were first introduced into Arya Stark's story, they appeared to be mysterious and perhaps not entirely trustworthy. As the story continued however, it was evident that the Faceless Men had a philosophy to their existence that questioned the idea of the concept of an individual identity and the sanctity of one's personal freedom, two tenets of Western ideologies. The method that the Faceless Men use to achieve their goals was defined as both perilous and liberating and therefore offered a commentary on the Western notion of the inviolability of personal identity. Through this representation of identity within the culture of Bravos there is a very thoughtful critique of *Orientalism* and the fact that Eastern cultures do not fit into the stereotype of being mystic and irrational. Instead, Eastern cultures offer different ways of thinking about the concepts of power, identity, and morality.

Conclusion

The *Game of Thrones* television series provides a detailed and complex narrative of the continent of Essos and its people that combines some conventional representations of Eastern peoples and societies in the context of Orientalist stereotypes, while also providing a more complex, and multi-faceted representation of Eastern cultures and peoples and systems of power. The use of the Dothraki and Daenerys Targaryen and the city of Bravos illustrate that the television series provides a critical analysis of the Orientalist theme not only in terms of the complexities of cultural hybridity, but also in terms of the moral and ethical implications of the adoption of Western values by the East. Daenerys' experiences on the continent of Essos illustrate the subversion of the Orientalist trope of the West civilizing the East. Initially introduced to the audience as a person requiring protection and rescue in the barbaric East, Daenerys develops into a self-sufficient and powerful leader who will alter the very land she had previously been subjected to. Daenerys' relationship with the Dothraki and her leadership of the people of Essos illustrate not only the imposition of Western imperialistic ideologies, but also the complexities and contradictions present within any imperial project. In addition to confronting opposition, grappling with moral ambiguities, and challenging the existing power structures, Daenerys' experiences represent the ability of identity, power and cultural exchange to transcend the simplistic East-West dichotomy. Because of Daenerys' experiences on the continent of Essos, the East is illustrated as not simply a passive object of Western intervention, but as an active participant in shaping the course of events that occur.

Furthermore, the Dothraki, generally represented in traditional Orientalist themes as the archetypal barbarian horde, are presented in *Game of Thrones* as being more sophisticated and multi-dimensional than in their traditional representations. Although the Dothraki appear to be a violent and uncontrollable force when first introduced, the television series later illustrates them to have a strong sense of honour, loyalty and complex social structures. This development complicates the monolithic representation of the East as irrational and uncivilized and illustrates the Dothraki to be a people possessing their own code of conduct, values and agency. By illustrating the Dothraki as both barbaric and honourable, the television series complicates the Orientalist paradigm and enables a more nuanced understanding of Eastern cultures. In addition to the Dothraki, the city of Bravos, a place of great political intrigue and philosophical ideals, further illustrates the way the East is represented. A place of culture and intellectual pursuits, Bravos diverges from many of the common Orientalist stereotypes concerning the East (such as the East being mystical, chaotic, or stagnant) and illustrates a rational and moral society that offers opportunities to question Western concepts of identity, individualism, and justice. The Faceless Men represent a critique of Western values of morality and offer an illustration of the fluidity of identity and the complexities of justice, both of which are demonstrated in the manner they illustrate alternative perspectives on power and morality. Consequently, Bravos becomes one of the central sites in the television series where the concept of Western values and their legitimacy are challenged and interrogated, as well as the complexities of cross-cultural engagement. Ultimately, through the use of characters, locations, and storylines, *Game of Thrones* illustrates the interaction between the West and the East as far more than simply binary; instead, the television series illustrates the East as a space of resistance, agency and cultural hybridity, as Eastern characters and cultures do not merely submit to Western control, but also reshape the conversation of power, identity and justice. Ultimately, the television series critiques Western imperialism by illustrating the complexities of the moral and ethical implications of the adoption of Western values by Eastern societies, including how such an action may lead to unintended consequences, cultural conflicts, and exacerbate pre-existing power inequalities.

In conclusion, *Game of Thrones* is a television series that has successfully engaged with and critiqued *Orientalism*

with its rich and complex characters, as well as the diversity of cultures located throughout the continent of Essos. While the television series utilizes Orientalist tropes to construct a narrative of Western dominance over the East and Eastern savagery, the television series also subverts and complicates these tropes, demonstrating that the East is a complex, active agent in defining its own identity and resisting Western domination. Through characters such as Daenerys and the Dothraki, and locations such as Bravos, the television series rejects and challenges simplistic understandings of the East and offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between the West and the East. *Game of Thrones* ultimately conveys that both the East and the West are fluid and multi-dimensional in their perceptions of one another; how these perceptions interact with each other is dependent on several factors including power dynamics, personal identity and cultural exchange. The show also serves as a prompt for viewers to be critical of their own assumptions regarding how the West portrays the East, and to think about the implications of imperialism, representation and identity politics. Ultimately, the show presents an opportunity to evaluate the multi-dimensionality of cultural identity through the lens of the imperialism narrative.

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