



DECODING THE ORIENTALIST PARADIGM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GEORGE R. R. MARTIN'S *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

Oryantalist Paradigmayı Çözümleme: George R. R. Martin'in *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı* Üzerine Eleştirel Bir Analiz

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ABSTRACT

In his book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, George R.R. Martin constructs a fantasyland of Westeros and Essos in which he employs a Eurocentric perspective through Orientalist tropes. This reveals a cultural, educational, and political dichotomy between his fictional Orient and Occident, depicting a more civilised and superior Westland and a more exotic and barbaric Eastland. Throughout the five books, Essos, which stands for Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, is always associated with barbaric and magical rituals, nakedness, slavery, savagery, and exotic and erotic elements, and is therefore depicted as a more dangerous landscape to live in. Westeros which represents Europe on the other hand, is portrayed as more civilised, educated, and chivalric, bestowed with every so-called superior European and Christian value. In this context, this study attempts to interrogate Edward Said's post-colonial critique of Orientalism to elucidate the manifestations of the Eurocentric paradigm inherent in George R.R. Martin's world-building techniques within his magnum opus, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and to dissect the implications of the Orientalism within the broad spectrum of fantasy literature. To this end, through a close reading of the novels, this article will foreground the contrast between Westeros and Essos, highlighting the central position of Western societies and the otherisation of Eastern cultures by detailing the elements that perpetuate the superiority of the Occident and the inferiority of the Orient in Martin's fictional world.

Keywords: postcolonial, fantasy, orientalism, George R. R. Martin, Orient Occident.

ÖZ

George R.R. Martin, *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı* adlı kitap serisinde, Avrupa merkezli bir bakış açısını oryantalist temalarla işleyerek Westeros ve Essos'dan oluşan fantastik bir diyar yaratır. Bu diyarlar arasındaki kültürel, eğitsel ve politik ikilik, yazarın kurgusal Doğu ve Batı'sı arasındaki farkları ortaya koyar. Batı, daha medenileşmiş ve üstün bir bölge olarak tasvir edilirken; Doğu ise daha egzotik ve barbar bir alan olarak resme-

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dilir. Beş kitap boyunca, Asya, Orta Doğu ve Afrika'yı temsil eden Essos, sürekli olarak barbar ve büyüsel ritüeller, çıplaklık, kölelik, vahşilik, egzotik ve erotik unsurlarla ilişkilendirilir ve dolayısıyla yaşam için daha tehlikeli bir yer olarak betimlenir. Öte yandan, Avrupa'yı temsil eden Westeros, daha medeni, eğitimli ve şövalye ruhuna sahip, her türlü sözde üstün Avrupa ve Hristiyan değerleriyle donatılmış olarak sunulur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, Edward Said'in post-kolonyal oryantalizm eleştirisini irdelleyerek, George R.R. Martin'in *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı* adlı başyapıtındaki dünya inşa etme tekniklerinde yer alan Avrupa merkezli paradigmanın tezahürlerini açığa çıkarmayı ve oryantalizmin fantastik edebiyatın geniş yelpazesinde ne gibi sonuçlar doğurduğunu analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı* serisindeki romanların yakından incelenmesiyle, Westeros ve Essos arasındaki karşıtlık ön plana çıkarılacak ve Martin'in kurgusal dünyasında Batı toplumlarının merkezde, Doğu kültürlerinin ise ötekileştirildiği unsurlar detaylandırılarak, üstün olan Batı ve aşağı olan Doğu anlayışını sürekli kılan unsurlar açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: postkolonyal, fantezi, oryantalizm, George R. R. Martin, Doğu Batı.

Introduction

As Balfe points out, Fantasy is not limited to supernatural and abstract elements and goes beyond the creation of alternative worlds; rather, "Fantasy texts, like all texts, are socially embedded" (2004: 75). This assertion holds true in the context of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. As the epitome of the Gritty Fantasy subgenre, *A Song of Ice and Fire* illustrates the verisimilar medieval society of Europe in a fantastical universe, toning down the magical elements and enhancing the realistic tones and socio-historical contexts of Europe. Hence, Martin also inherits the White supremacist euro-centric perspective and the Oriental mentality of Europe at the time, fictionalising the binary opposition between the West and the East in the imaginary settings of the novels. Westeros, the Western continent in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the representation of Europe is portrayed as a united civilised political entity governed by laws, reason, and integral morals, all of which emphasise the superiority of the West. Essos, on the other hand, the representation of Asia and the Middle East, is portrayed as the 'other,' 'foreign,' 'mystical,' and 'inferior' land that lacks rationality, morality, and civilisation. Martin presents Essos in direct contrast to Westeros, creating a cultural, political, and social dichotomy in which the West occupies a superior position. Martin alienates his fictional East and places white Westerosi characters such as Dany and Tyrion at the centre of the story. He describes Essos from their Eurocentric point of view without

giving an alternative voice to the characters originating from Essos. In this sense, through a close reading of the novels and the application of Edward Said's postcolonial theory of Orientalism, this study will mainly focus on the experiences of the Westerosi characters in Essos and their encounters with 'other' people and their 'foreign' land in an attempt to uncover the implicit Orientalism and analogy between Martin's imaginary lands and the real Orient and Occident.

1. Edward Said's Orientalism

Before decolonisation, the term Orientalism referred to the academic studies of Western scholars who had mastered the cultures, literature, and languages of Eastern nations and countries (Macfie, 2000: 1). However, in the following years of decolonisation, Orientalism was challenged by Eastern scholars and critics such as Anouar Abdel-Malek, A. L. Tibawi, and Edward Said, who problematise the Eurocentric representation of the Orient and associate the term with postcolonial discourse. In this regard, Edward Said, in his seminal work *Orientalism*, reconceptualises the term as a multi-faceted political tool of the West by addressing three interrelated definitions of Orientalism.

First, Said endorses Orientalism's traditional definition as an academic discipline, noting that "[a]nyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient (...) either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (2003: 2). However, Said refuses to limit himself to accepting Orientalism as merely an academic school of thought that has no political, social, or economic consequences (Said, 2000b: 101). Rather, he introduces other definitions that underscore the term as a social and political construction originating in the West. According to Said, Orientalism "is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (2003: 2). Within this Western mentality, which is based not only on geographical differences but also on a multi-layered cultural and social dichotomy between the East and the West, the Occident stands for European nations and European culture to which reason, knowledge, civilisation, morality, and power are always attributed. On the other hand, the Orient refers to Middle Eastern countries and other Asian nations, or more broadly, to all nations that are not European.

Thus, the Orient is destined to be seen by a European as the 'other,' the other country, different in every way from the West in that it is seen as less

rational, less civilised, less mature, and less virtuous (Said, 2003: 40). Said asserts that “[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (2003: 1). Although he admits that it would be wrong to think of the Orient as merely a phantasmatic image or abstraction completely divorced from reality, he posits that both the Occident and the Orient are essentially human-constructed paradigms that become real to the West within ongoing European history, language, and traditions (Said, 2003: 5).

As he explains in his article “Arabs, Islam and The Dogmas of The West”, this binary opposition between the East and the West is accepted as one of the main dogmas of Orientalism (Said, 2000a: 104). In contrast to the Occident, the Orient is seen as “aberrant, undeveloped, inferior” (Said, 2000a: 104) to endorse and ensure the superiority of the West. By accepting this mindset of binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident, Western scholars, writers, artists, philosophers, theorists, economists, and politicians uphold this Western mindset through their works, theories, arts, and utterances (Said, 2003: 2). Said emphasises the impact of Orientalism on Western writers: “I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.” (2003: 3).

In other words, through the imposed and preconceived notion of Orientalism, the texts, thoughts, and actions of individuals related to the Orient are being shaped and controlled by the West. For this reason, in addition to an academic field and style of thought, Said further defines Orientalism as: “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient (...) by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” (2003: 3).

As the passage reveals, Said’s Orientalism argument draws on Foucault’s discourse theory, which reflects that discourses and canonical truths in society are created and manufactured by the powerful groups that have the authority to dictate certain ideas and knowledge as essential truths (Burney, 2012: 27). In light of Foucault’s theory, Orientalism might be better perceived as a corporate institution. Consider how the discourse of Orientalism leads Western writers to prefer this imposing knowledge of the Orient produced by the dominant and powerful West to more realistic ac-

counts based on actual evidence about the modern Orient. (Said, 2000a: 104). Through the literary or academic works of these writers, in other words, the ‘Orientalists,’ Orientalism continues to function as a living institution that reiterates and constantly reaffirms itself. Burney points out, “set by set, image by image, trace by trace, the concept or idea gets sedimented and normalised into the cultural discourse of representation of the Orient/Other. This consolidated, sedimented picture signifies the whole reality of the ‘Orient’” (2012: 29). In other words, as a result, Western ideology and assumptions about the Orient become unchallengeable knowledge and universal facts about the Orient.

In the discourse of Orientalism, the Orient does not raise its voice against its representations and remains unresponsive and silent, which attests to its submissive nature. As the Orient is portrayed as “incapable of defining itself” (Said, 2000a: 104), it submits to its assigned role of inferiority and the Occident asserts its unchallenged superiority. In this context, Said discusses the passivity of Orientals, who are inhabitants of the Orient, and the defining, powerful role of Orientalists as follows:

One can explain such statements by recognising that a still more implicit and powerful difference posited by the Orientalist as against the Oriental is that the former writes about, whereas the latter is written about. For the latter, passivity is the presumed role; for the former, the power to observe, study, and so forth; (...) The Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about himself. (...) There is a source of information (the Oriental) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist), in short, a writer and a subject matter otherwise inert. The relationship between the two is radically a matter of power, for which there are numerous images (2003: 308).

This power relationship between the Oriental and the Orientalist can be examined through the French novelist Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan. According to Said, Flaubert portrays the Egyptian girl Kuchuk Hanem as a voiceless passive figure who seems unable to announce her presence (Said, 2003: 6). Rather, she submits to the stereotype of an Oriental woman, leaving it to a foreign, wealthy European man to speak on her behalf and portray her as he wishes (Said, 2003: 6). Since the European man is convinced that the Orient is voiceless, he attempts to be the voice of the Orient believing that he has every right to do so because Orientalism as a style of thought, academic field, and social institution rec-

ognises and affirms his superiority. It is this power dynamic between the Oriental and the Orientalist that gives Orientalism its driving force, as Orientalist writers like Flaubert serve as a sustenance of the discourse through their work. Thus, whether intentionally or not, a Western novelist can act as a continuator of Orientalism and convey Orientalist ideology through his words.

The depiction of Kuchuk Hanem as a silent and passive figure invites a deeper engagement with Gayatri Spivak's critical question "Can the Subaltern Speak?", through which Spivak (1988) interrogates whether colonial subjects, whom Spivak identifies as the 'subaltern', can ever truly speak for themselves, or if those voices are inevitably mediated, distorted or erased by the hegemonic structures of the West. Even though both Spivak and Said focus on non-European people who have no voice within Eurocentric studies and discourses, Spivak (1988) extends this critique by showing that the subaltern remain voiceless and completely excluded from representation even in postcolonial narratives that claim to address the oppression of colonial subjects as 'other'. Spivak (1988) argues that "[s]ome of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (1988: 271). In other words, the research and the knowledge produced by Western scholars and thinkers offer a so-called objective truth that tends to preserve the central and superior position of the West. By criticising Western intellectuals such as Deleuze or Derrida, Spivak (1988) attempts to demonstrate the way Western scholars produce a subjective knowledge of non-European cultures, through which political and economic interests of the West are protected. Since subaltern cultures are not included in the process of research either as a researcher or the source of information, the knowledge that the West produces, including postcolonial discourse, remains far from universal truth and functions as another instrument that justifies and perpetuates the colonisation and oppression of non-European cultures.

In addition to Spivak, another contributor to the discourse of Orientalism is Aijaz Ahmad (1992) who criticises Edward Said in various aspects in his essay "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said". Ahmad critiques Said mainly for the ambivalence and contradictory nature of his arguments, in which Said incorporates humanism into his theory by blending Foucauldian discourse theory that has its origins in Nietzsche's anti-humanism and disregards the connections

between humanism and colonialism entirely (1992: 98). Ahmad finds Said's examples of Orientalism's historical roots in ancient Greece also problematic and confusing because positing that Orientalism originates in ancient times means Orientalism predates colonialism, which contradicts Said's claims that Orientalism started during the eighteenth century (1992: 104). Ahmad further points out how Said contradicts himself as follows:

He speaks of the west, or Europe, as the one which produces the knowledge, the east as the object of that knowledge. He seems to posit, in other words, stable subject-object identities, as well as ontological and epistemological distinctions between the two (...) Said quite justifiably accuses the 'orientalist' for essentialising the orient, but his own processes of essentialising 'the west' are equally remarkable (1992: 104).

Here, Ahmad calls into question the inconsistency between Said's professed arguments regarding how the East is misrepresented and oversimplified and his way of articulating the West in a similar style of simplism. In this context, Ahmad argues that diminishing the representation of the Occident to one superior integrated entity acting with common interests without considering the West's cultural political and economic complexities is as problematic as representing the Orient as one essential and unified, inferior and uncivilised geographical and cultural entity. Besides Aijaz Ahmad's critics, Robert J.C. Young in *White Mythologies* (2004) also underlines Said's methodological shortcomings pointing out "Said's inability to provide any alternative forms of knowledge, or a theoretical model for such knowledge" (2004: 168).

Notwithstanding the deficiencies in Said's theoretical foundations and his idealist stance, however, this study claims that the core ideas that Said puts forward regarding the superiority of the Occident, which currently includes not only Europe but also the United States, and the inferiority of the Orient, have remained the prevailing mindset of various Western writers whose fictional or academic works contain the overtones of that exotic, barbaric, uncivilised and eroticised 'other land'. With this in mind, the following section of this paper will attempt to analyse George R. R. Martin's gritty fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* in order to reveal manifestations of Orientalism in the fictional lands of Westeros and Essos.

3. Orientalism in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

'Gritty Fantasy' as a literary subgenre differs from the traditional fantasy genre and high fantasy by reducing magical elements, enhancing violence, sexual and gruesome details that make the tone of a novel darker and more realistic, and shifting the focus more to character development and dialogue than action (Young, 2016: 63). Gritty fantasy is predominantly set in a fictional world that resembles medieval or colonial Europe and features similar political and social dynamics such as feudal systems, religious institutions, imperialism, or the chivalry code in an attempt to make an imaginary world more familiar, believable, and closer to the well-known history (Young, 2016: 63). However, to create a world reminiscent of medieval European society and politics, Gritty Fantasy may also incorporate Eurocentric perspectives or class, race, and gender discrimination of the time in its narrative techniques and story elements (Young, 2016: 63). In this context, George R. R. Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire* can be considered one of the most notable examples of Gritty Fantasy.

The series consists of five novels, but the story is not completed yet for two more books are to be published soon. In the first five novels, however, Martin seems to create a realistic fantasy world, as Gritty Fantasy suggests. He reduces the fantasy elements and allows the events and characters related to magic to fade into the background. Instead, he focuses on politics, the repercussions of warfare and the internal conflicts of the characters and does not shy away from incorporating bloody and sexual elements into the story. In short, Martin creates a fictional world that bears a striking resemblance to medieval Europe in every way. Accordingly, the novels also adopt the socio-political background of Europe and reflect the Eurocentric, segregationist, and Orientalist approaches of the West. The influence of Orientalism is particularly evident in the contextual construction of countries and cultures. The main civilisations in the World of *A Song of Ice and Fire* are found on two continents: Westeros and Essos. The former is geographically positioned in the west, is equipped with every superior feature of European countries, and is situated at the heart of the story. While the latter extends to the East and is depicted as 'the other' land that parallels the Orientalist depiction of the Middle East and Asia.

Westeros, known as "the Seven Kingdoms," has been dominated by feudalism for centuries. Numerous noble lords and their lands are ruled and protected by the monarch's justice. The noble class is bound by certain values, such as the code of chivalry, which is no different from the European

understanding of chivalry, and the 'Faith of the Seven', a religious institution that functions like the Catholic Church. There is also the Citadel, an academic institution where masters resembling medieval scholars conduct scientific research and teach about history, medicine, architecture, and literature. As it is seen, Westeros has its legal system, moral code, religious doctrine, and educational system, which distinguish it as a powerful and proper civilisation in the Eurocentric sense. This is because the educational system points to reason, the code of chivalry and religious institutions speak to the existence of a strong sense of morality and ethics, and the feudal system and strong monarchy can also stand for security, order, and power in a general sense. All of these concepts serve Martin to establish the superiority of Westeros, where the story mainly takes place and from which almost all of the main characters come. By centralising Westeros as a fictional representation of Europe, Martin normalises European norms and values and attributes everything not European to the other continent of Essos. This creates a cultural and political opposition between Essos and Westeros that is reminiscent of the binary opposition between Orient and Occident in Edward Said's Orientalism.

In a manner reminiscent of Orientalism's description of the Orient, Essos is depicted as an exotic, irrational, mystical, deviant, and wild land. It is a vast continent that is not unified by a single authority, religious deity, language, or tradition. Instead of one feudal authority, there are several city-states, some known for their slave trade, primitive sheepman villages, wandering tribes of barbarian horse lords, and mysterious magical lands, each with a different religious system, morality, and traditions, most of which contradict the European sense of morality. Because of these diverse nations, cultures and languages, Essos has never been unified as a political or cultural entity. Therefore, it remains in an inferior position of power compared to Westeros, which is ruled by a single king. Although the series focuses primarily on events in Westeros, throughout the series Martin finds a way to describe Essos from the point of view of Tyrion, Dany, and Arya, the main white Westerosi characters in the story, as they make their way to the East and encounter 'strange' lands, people, and customs. All of these encounters convey the Oriental mentality, as these Westerosi characters are constructed as European-like people and have a Eurocentric mindset. As Balfe argues, "construction of the 'Western' characters as the 'good guys' in Genre Fantasy texts can become problematic when these characters encounter 'Other' peoples" (Balfe, 2004: 75). In this case, the 'otherness' of

foreign people and their cultures might be seen by readers as synonymous with ‘bizarre,’ ‘eccentric,’ or even ‘repulsive’ or ‘inferior’ (Balfe, 2004: 75). Thus, from the perspective of these protagonists and their experiences in Essos, Martin describes the exoticism, amorality, infidelity, bestiality, and magical quality of his ‘Fantastic Orient’ (Balfe, 2004: 75).

The exoticism of Essos is largely established around the notion of the ‘unfamiliar’ for the Europeans, such as the non-English languages and gestures, the smells of the people and places, and the animals associated with the Orient, such as camels and elephants. Westeros and some western parts of Essos speak English, known as the ‘common tongue’, as the rest of Essos speaks several vernacular languages such as High Valyrian, Old Ghiscari, or Lhazareen, which few characters in the novel know. Just like Kuchuk Hanem, the inhabitants of Essos are therefore largely speechless in the story and can only be understood through the interpretations and impressions of other Westerosi characters. Even the foods of Essos are portrayed as either too sweet or too hot and spicy for the tastes of the Westerosi. Even the air in a room or the people sometimes smell that way. When Dany, the Westerosi princess who spends her life in exile in Essos, enters a mansion in Pentos, a city-state, she reflects that “[i]nside the mansion the air is heavy with the scent of spices, fire, and sweet lemon and cinnamon” (Martin, 2011: 32). Another time, when they visit Qarth, another city-state in Essos, the dialogue between Dany and her Westerosi guardsman Sir Jorah hints at the distrust the knight has of the people of Qarth because of their smell: “he scowled at the crowd that filled the bazaar ‘I would not linger here long, my queen. I dislike the very smell of this place.’ Dany smiled. ‘Perhaps it’s the camels you’re smelling. The Qartheen themselves seem sweet enough to my nose.’ Sweet smells are sometimes used to cover foul ones.” (Martin, 2005a: 431).

The passage above vividly illustrates the process of alienation of the stranger who directly evokes suspicion and hostility in the mind of a European. Animals such as camels and elephants also emphasise the exoticism of Essos. In Qarth, camels are the preferred mount, but until she visits Qarth, Dany never sees one of these animals. When she first witnesses camel riders, she describes this ‘strange’ scene as “three queerly garbed strangers atop ugly humped creatures that dwarfed any horse” (Martin, 2005a: 202). At first, she cannot even recognise them as animals, preferring to speak of ‘ugly creatures,’ and she does not fail to point out the ‘strange’ clothing of

the camel riders. Tyrion, another nobleman from Westerosi in Essos, has had similar experiences with elephants, in Volantis, another city in Essos:

The first time they passed an elephant, Tyrion could not help but stare. There had been elephant in the menagerie at Lannisport when he had been a boy, but (...) this great grey behemoth looked to be twice her size [...] Volantis was overrun with white dwarf elephants (...) Big grey elephants were not uncommon either – huge beasts with castles on their backs (Martin, 2013: 388).

Tyrion also notes the smell of the city, thinking:

There was the smell. It hung in the hot, humid air, rich, rank, pervasive. There's fish in it, and flowers, and some elephant dung as well. Something sweet and something earthy and something dead and rotten. "This city smells like an old whore" Tyrion announced. (Martin, 2013: 387).

Through the camels and elephants, Martin draws an analogy between his fantastic East and the Orient; Qarth, with its many turban-covered camel riders, palanquins, and persimmons can be identified with Arabia and Egypt, or Volantis, as a great city with many elephants in it, may recall India. Through these analogies, however, Martin perpetuates Orientalism, as he also associates these cities with unpleasant smells and impurities, implying that even sweet smells can hide the hostility and ugliness of these lands. These descriptions of the Westerosi characters illustrate Martin's Orientalist attitude toward the real East, which inspired his Essos.

In addition to exoticism, there are other Orientalist tropes used to describe Essos: Infidelity and Obscenity. Since the religion of Westeros and the sense of Western morality are not prevalent in the societies and nations of Essos, the natives of the land seem to care less about the concept of chastity, and magical rituals are generally not considered obscenity. In Qarth, for example, Dany dresses in the fashion of the Qartheen, and must leave one of her breasts uncovered (Martin, 2005a: 575). Another time, Dany watches a performance by Qartheen dancers whose naked bodies are shaved and oiled, and their erotic performance involves sexual tension and an explicit "act of love" (Martin, 2013: 223). Qarth is also famous for its mages and warlocks, as are many other cities in Essos, such as Braavos, known for its faceless men who are assassins who change faces, or Asshai, the house of Shadow Binders. In short, as in Westeros, where reason rules the realm, scholars abhor magic, nobles mock it, and reverends forbid it,

the people of Essos are seen as immature and immoral infidels for resorting to magic. Again, this reflects the Oriental mentality, which associates the East with magic or any form of irrationality.

Brutality is another manifestation of Orientalism. Accordingly, Essos is characterised by various forms of savagery and bestiality. The Dothraki people are an unsettled horse-people tribe most overtly characterised by barbarism in the series. They are an ‘uncivilised’ nomadic warrior clan who raid their hordes in a vast moor and wilderness called the ‘Dothraki Sea’, sleep in tents, plunder cities and delight in killing men and raping women – a part of their culture that is in direct opposition to the chivalry code of Westeros and Europe. In the first novel, Dany is forced into marriage by Khal Drogo, ruler of a large horde of Dothraki. When she first meets her future husband, Khal Drogo, and his brown-skin barbaric people, she is horrified: “[T]he terror grew in Dany until it was all she could do not to scream. She was afraid of the Dothraki, whose ways seemed alien and monstrous, as if they were beasts in human skins and not true men at all” (Martin, 2011: 98).

Furthermore, Dany learns during her wedding that “[a] Dothraki wedding without at least three deaths is deemed a dull affair” (Martin, 2011: 98). Killing and raping, then, seem to be normal occasions in Dothraki ceremonies. After the wedding, Dany witnesses the Dothraki plundering several times, confirming their cruelty. The portrayal of the Dothraki people once again underscores the Orientalist assumptions of the West towards Asian cultures. On the one hand, there is Dany, a beautiful Western princess with whom the reader is meant to sympathise, as she is familiar in every way, speaking, acting, and reacting in English like a European. On the other side is a man who is obviously not European, as he has brown skin and does not speak English but is portrayed as a beast in human skin. Such a juxtaposition implicitly confirms Europe’s Orientalist assumptions towards real nomadic Asian cultures such as the Huns or Mongols, as such a contrast is meant to emphasise the strangeness and monstrosity of the Dothraki, who have a similar lifestyle to the nomadic Asian peoples. Seeing the barbarity of the Dothraki people only from Dany’s perspective and having no viewpoint among the Dothraki ultimately pushes the reader to denigrate the foreign and non-European.

Another Orientalist term that characterises Essos is antiquity. According to the story of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Essos was once the cradle of many civilisations, but they all either collapsed or disappeared throughout history. Essos is an ancient land where religions first appeared and spread west-

ward; in the present day however, the continent has lost its ancient glory to the West, turning into a desolate place and a graveyard, full of crumbling ruins of ancient civilisations and debris of old beauty. During her travels through Essos, Dany frequently comes across ancient ruins accompanied by a mystical and eerie atmosphere. Consider when Dany and her soldier temporarily spend the night in one of the ruined cities:

How long the city had been deserted she could not know, but the white walls, so beautiful from afar, were cracked and crumbling when seen up close ... Yet they found bones too, the skulls of the unburied dead, bleached and broken. "Ghosts" Irri muttered. "Terrible ghosts. We must not stay here *Khaleesi*, this is their place." (Martin, 2005a: 195).

As it stands, Essos, as an archaic land, is reminiscent of the Orient, which is also seen in Orientalism as the land that was once powerful but now ancient, fragile, and near death. This representation underscores and acknowledges the power shift and eventual superiority of the West over the East.

Aside from the 'other' land's antiquity, barbarity or exoticism, the passivity, silence, mystery and strangeness of the people who come from Essos or any other continent out of Westeros are also prevalent throughout the story endorsing the alienation of the people of the 'other land'. Although numerous characters from Essos are introduced as active figures who contribute to the story with many dialogues and actions, almost none of these non-western characters's inner thoughts, feelings or motivations are truly reflected without the lens of Westerosi character's inner judgements towards them. The narration style of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is third-person limited omniscient where the story is told from outside narrator's point of view which is limited to only one character's thoughts, feelings and experiences for each chapter. Accordingly, the events in each chapter are narrated through one character's experience that is limited by his or her own interpretations of the events, which constitutes an unreliable narrator for the story. Since almost none of these points of view include people from Essos or any other land but Westeros, those characters from Essos never attain a chance to reflect directly their motives, mindsets, and emotions that help readers to arise sympathy and empathy towards them. The lack of any sufficient inner thoughts of non-Westerosi characters throughout the series destines them to remain foreign, untrustworthy and ultimately silent be-

cause readers are meant to meet them through the eyes of Westerosi characters.

Melisandre who comes to Westeros from Asshai, which is the easternmost of the world, is the only exception, since her point of view, inner thoughts, motives and emotions are finally introduced in *A Dance with Dragons* (2013), the fifth book of the series, in a single chapter. Up until that point, however, even Melisandre is always regarded by other points of view as an untrustworthy, dangerous and exotic woman, a priestess who worships a different god, a witch who performs evil magics, a possible threat to the main Westerosi characters in the story. Jalabhar Xho, the exiled prince of Summer Isles is another non-Westerosi character who lives in the king's court in Westeros where most of the main events occur; however, he is not given a single line of dialogue throughout the events. Xho who is described as a dark-skin man who constantly wears a colourful feather cloak, similar to a stereotypical description of a ceremonial African garment, is always at present in the court yet never speaks with any of the main characters, and never takes any action that contributes to the story. In this sense, it is reasonable to assert that omitting Jalabhar Xho changes nothing in the story since he only functions as a colourful decoration in the king's court. In fact, during one of the royal weddings in the court, Sansa, the bride and the point-of-view character of the chapter, briefly dances with Xho; yet again, he is not given a voice since Xho says something in his native language that Sansa cannot understand rather than speaking the common tongue (Martin, 2005b: 389). Therefore, Xho remains a voiceless, passive and unassertive character, preventing readers from developing a deeper understanding of his personality if he has any, which reminds the question that Spivak (1988) addressed: "Can the subaltern speak?"

Conclusion

According to Edward Said's Orientalism, Western writers who have been raised and educated in the Western mindset that suggests they view reality through the Eurocentric lens do not have free thought when viewing the Orient. Orientalism, as a European way of thinking, as an academic field, and as a political discourse, was created, shaped, and maintained by the powerful West to preserve its superior position and define the East as an inferior Other. With this in mind, this study analyses George R. R. Martin's fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* with the conclusion that the novels exemplify the Orientalist mentality of Western writers, as Martin uses Orientalist tropes in creating and shaping his fantasy lands and cultures. As

Orientalism implies, Martin divides his fictional world into two halves, depicting the Occident as Westeros which is the superior one in terms of political power, integrity, and reason, and representing the Orient as Essos which is the inferior one in every sense. Through the experiences of the Westerosi characters in Essos, Martin illustrates the barbarism, immorality, infidelity, and immaturity of the cultures of the East. He associates Essos with exotic and 'strange' animals, foods, smells, places, and traditions all of which are portrayed as either derogatory or threatening elements. By creating an alternative fictional world in which the East and the West share a similar power dynamic and dichotomy with the discourse of Orientalism, Martin validates Said's argument regarding the minds of Western writers constructed through Orientalism.

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