

False Reality and Frontier Myth in *Waiting For The Barbarians* and *The Tartar Steppe*

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Abstract

In borderlands where different cultures interact, the lines dividing 'the civilised' and 'the uncivilised' emerge both physically and symbolically. As borderlands are ascribed with a litany of meanings about what 'civilisation' is, they are divided by these seen and unseen boundaries. Through this separation, a third space of interaction emerges between two opposing components, in which one culture typically dominates over the other. The dominant frontier settlers' culture always fears the threat posed by the 'barbaric' exterior beyond this space, anticipating a danger to its own existence. Consequently, the mission of the frontier settlers becomes the establishment of a liberated territory for the preservation of civilisation. These encounters between 'the civilised' and 'the uncivilised' produce myths integrated into the dominant culture, such as in the old Western narratives between a courageous cowboy and a treacherous Indian, in which one side is glorified while the other is undermined. The space created within this area offers fertile ground for different narratives, often demonising the inferior 'othered' subject. The representation of the othered subject is embedded into the very culture that produces it. As a result, the study of this representation offers new insights about how such ideas are formed. In this paper, I aim to analyse the frontier myth as developed by Richard Slotkin and frontier orientalism as proposed by Andre Gingrich, focusing on the creation of a liberated territory between two opposing cultures and the recurring myths inherent to imperialist culture, as illustrated in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting For the Barbarians* and Dino Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppe*. I will further analyse the concept of propaganda and underline how it works in effecting the creation of false realities in the aforementioned works in imperialist settings. My objective is to combine Slotkin's and Gingrich's theories and to apply these to the selected works by highlighting the role of propaganda in the creation of a false reality.

Keywords: frontier myth, barbarians, imperialism, border, false reality

TATAR ÇÖLÜ VE BARBARLARI BEKLERKEN ESERLERİNDE ÖNCÜ MİTİ VE SAHTE GERÇEKLİK

Öz

Farklı kültürlerin etkileşim içinde olduğu sınır bölgelerinde, 'medeni olan' ile 'medeni olmayan' arasındaki çizgiler hem fiziksel hem de sembolik olarak ortaya çıkar. Medeniyetin ne olduğu ile ilgili anlamlar, sınır bölgelerine atfedildiği için bu bölgeler hem görünür hem görünmez hudutlarla bölünürler. Bu şekilde meydana gelen ayırım sebebiyle, iki karşıt bileşen arasında, birinin

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diğerine üstünlük sağladığı üçüncü bir etkileşim alanı oluşur. Sınırlara yerleşenlerin daha baskın olan kültürü, bu etkileşim alanının ötesindeki yani dışarıdaki 'barbarlardan' gelecek tehditlerden korktuğu için daima kendi varlığına karşı bir tehlikeden endişe etmektedir. Böylece sınır yerleşimcilerinin görevi, medeniyetin korunması için kurtarılmış bir bölge oluşturmak haline gelir. 'Medeni olan' ile 'medenî olmayan' arasındaki her türlü etkileşim sonucunda, baskın kültürün bir parçası olan mitler ortaya çıkar. Örneğin Amerikan Eski Batı hikayelerindeki cesur kovboy ile hain Kızılderili arasındaki çatışma gibi bir tarafı yüceltirken diğerini küçümseyerek oluşturulan mitler bunlardan biridir. Etkileşimin yoğun olduğu bu üçüncü alan, aşağı görülen ve 'ötekileştirilen' kültürün öznesini şeytan gibi gösteren anlatılara oldukça açık olur. Ötekileştirilen öznenin temsiliyeti, kendisini yaratan kültürün içine işlemiştir ve sonuç olarak da bu temsiliyetin incelenmesi, bu özne ile ilgili fikirlerin nasıl oluşturulduğunun anlaşılmasında oldukça faydalıdır. Bu çalışmada, Richard Slotkin tarafından geliştirilen Öncü Miti ile Andre Gingrich tarafından tasarlanan Öncü Şarkiyatçılığı teorilerini, iki karşıt kültür arasındaki kurtarılmış bölgenin yaratılması ve emperyalist kültürün yinelenen mitleri bağlamında, John Maxwell Coetzee'nin *Barbarları Beklerken* ve Dino Buzzati'nin *Tatar Çölü* adlı eserlerinde incelemeyi amaçlıyorum. Ayrıca propaganda kavramını irdeliyor ve emperyalizmi ele alan bu söz konusu eserlerdeki sahte gerçekliğin yaratılmasında, propagandanın nasıl işlediğini çözümlenmeyi hedefliyorum. Amacım, Slotkin'in ve Gingrich'in teorilerini birleştirmek ve bunları seçili eserlere uygulayarak, sahte gerçekliğin yaratılmasında propagandanın oynadığı rolün altını çizmektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: öncü mit, barbarlar, emperyalizm, sınır, sahte gerçeklik

INTRODUCTION

"We're going to confront the national-security crisis on our southern border. And we're going to do it one way or the other... we have an invasion of drugs, an invasion of gangs, an invasion of people."

Donald Trump, White House Speech,
15th February 2019 (quoted by Lach, 2019)

Human history is full of conflicts based on binaries, between the self and the other, the similar and the different, black and white, believer and non-believer, civilised and uncivilised, and so on. To explain the existence of 'the other', one creates a notion that differentiates the self from the other, and most of the time, disparages its perceived opposite. Dominant power shapes the image of this 'othered' subject according to its own gains because power needs these kinds of fragmentations to preserve its existence. Expectedly, this results in the centralisation of power and it enables authorities to exercise a strict form of control over their subjects. In *The Tartar Steppe*, Buzzati depicts an empire that demonises and fears barbaric tribes, which form a threat to the 'civilisation' it represents. The Empire constantly anticipates danger coming from the invisible hordes of murderous barbarians. In *Waiting For the Barbarians*, Coetzee also describes a similar picture, with the added instrument of torture which is used to brutalise the native population. Both of these empires fear the invisible yet somehow perceived threat from the 'uncivilised' other, and feed on the image of the murderous barbarian to continue their hold on

society. Their success in creating and maintaining their authority is dependent on the functioning of myths, especially the 'frontier myth', which concentrates the 'civilised' imperial identity as opposed to its 'savage' other. The frontier myth is functional in the analysis of how imperial ideology affects the creation of a false reality, as it helps to uncover the fictitious nature underlying the assumptions of the 'civilised self' about the 'uncivilised other'.

Richard Slotkin, the American critic and scholar who developed the term 'frontier myth', asserts that the earlier American borderlands of the 18th century have been mythologised in the cultural imagination of the Americans, as places of freedom and individuality. Consequently, the image of borderlands suggests more than the sole idea of 'barbarians coming from the borders to attack us', as it can be observed in the quotation from the speech of the 45th US President Donald Trump. Trump declares that the US borders are to be protected for the sake of the American nation as they separate 'us' from 'them'. Trump invokes the centuries-old myth of the 'savages' beyond the border, and underlines the impending threat to 'civilisation', by relying on the perceived differences of race and culture between Americans and Mexicans. Borders need to be crossed not by the 'uncivilised' as it would become a menacing 'invasion' of darkness, but by the 'civilised' to spread democracy and freedom to those who lack these blessings. The frontier myth, although American in origin, is so much ingrained into Western societies that a similar notion, 'frontier orientalism', has been put forward by Austrian scholar Andre Gingrich. Gingrich suggests that the West shapes its identity in opposition to the East, appropriating the perceived differences of 'self' against the 'other'. In this article, the frontier myth and frontier orientalism will be utilised in the analysis of how borderlands are perceived in the selected literary works. In *The Tartar Steppe*, there is an incessant wait for the barbarian attack that never materialises. Fort Bastiani, the military stronghold of the Empire, stands out as a symbol of light against the darkness of the barbarous Northern Kingdom neighbouring it. While there has been a relative peace between the Empire and the Northern Kingdom, the threat and the consequent fear of an immediate attack stay in the memory of the inhabitants of Fort Bastiani. The frontier myth is useful in understanding how this false reality is created. Similarly, in *Waiting For the Barbarians*, the other is demonised and always expected to assault the people of the Empire in Coetzee's work. The 'uncivilised' other is attributed qualities that directly oppose those of the 'civilised' white settlers in the unnamed frontier town, such as being lazy and immoral. Both Gingrich's and Slotkin's theorisations will be utilised in the analysis of these works to understand the functioning of myths about the other, and to underline how these myths shape the false reality created consequently.

THE FRONTIER MYTH, FRONTIER ORIENTALISM AND FALSE REALITY

Myths are in our collective memory, and they are based on both experience and imagination. They are a part of the discourse that we use every day. French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss suggests that "language is myth" because myth is produced in language and reproduced in collective memory over long periods of time (Strauss, 1955, p. 430). One of the most persistent myths in the western world is the frontier myth. The frontier, the place that divides the civilised (the familiar) from the uncivilised (the unfamiliar), is the area where conflict arises between two

opposing ends. An American historian of the late 19th century, Frederick Jackson Turner, in his theorisation that is commonly known as 'Frontier Thesis', argues that earlier American settlers define the frontiers by drawing a border between their civilisation and the unknown wilderness that stretches beyond it. According to Turner, these settlers are the pioneers of American democracy because they help both to determine the boundaries of the country and to spread the American ideal (1920, p.74). Turner philosophises over the progressive movement of these pioneers who roamed through the mid-western wilderness, stressing that they possess the real 'American' spirit. He states that they symbolise the independent individualism which is the base of American democracy (Turner, 1920, p. 38). Turner relies heavily on myths to support his argument, taking his lead from "a mythical conception of the West as the Garden of the World that had slowly taken form through many decades as an imaginative interpretation of the westward movement" (Smith, 1950, p. 4). This understanding of continuous progress is inherent in Western societies, as scientific advancement is the most valued investment in the USA and many European countries. Turner involves other mythical elements in his theorisation of the frontier, such as rebirth and rejuvenation, which gives rise to the emergence of an ideal America (Limerick, 1987, p. 82). He suggests that the frontier is a space where civilisation and its opposite, the wilderness, meet, and this contact allows the American society to regenerate and renew itself through violence inflicted upon the 'uncivilised' and the surrounding nature. Turner's conceptualisation of progress in mythical terms has been criticised by scholars who deconstructed his work in the twentieth century. One of these scholars, Richard Slotkin, elaborates on Turner's theory and points out that a "frontier myth" arises from this idealisation of nationhood (1998, p. xvii). Slotkin argues that the encounters between American settlers (of European origin) and native Americans in the borderlands provide the basis for such myths to arise as the hero American cowboys fighting against "the savages of the plain" (1998, p. 9). Such myths help to make the general public undermine the violence inflicted upon the native Americans and other oppressed groups because the American settlers are believed to be fighting for the noblest causes of democracy and freedom. Slotkin starts off from Turner's suggestion of the frontier as a space of boundless possibilities and proposes that Turner's theory has given expansionists, like 26th American president Theodore Roosevelt, the ideology they need to develop their aggressive policies, forming the base of American foreign policy onwards (1998, p. 52). Slotkin criticises the ambitious and enterprising spirit of the government policies of the USA, which takes its base from Turner's theory of the frontier: "In America, the frontier myth was continually reshaped and revalued by the ongoing process of adjustment to American conditions." (2000, p. 447) Slotkin suggests that continuous use of violence and aggression is justified in the name of progress by the Americans. The West, symbolising advancement, boldly conquers the East, the undeveloped and the uncultivated. This full authority to exert power over the other is given as a natural attribute to the 'civilised' and it entails the responsibility to correct the ones that are not civilised. For example, bringing democracy and freedom to the ones who lack it is the notion that American presidents followed in their administration during the 20th century and onwards. This can be evidenced in the style of speech that many American presidents use, such as the 43rd American president George W. Bush, who proposed similar arguments when the US attacked Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11

events. Again, the courageous American heroes were taking over the mission of civilising the barbaric nations with their democracy and introducing them to such superior socio-political systems as theirs. Probably by a slip of the tongue or just out of sheer insensitivity, Bush called their war on terror a “crusade” (Waldman, 2001). Thus, he referred to the centuries-old myth of the Crusaders bringing their civilised ideas to the east by invading the oriental land but in fact wreaking havoc on the occupied countries.

The idea that borders divide civilisation and its other is prominent in Western society in general. Andre Gingrich states that always expecting a threat from the other or the “oriental” is inherent in both American and European cultures, because there is a perceived difference in terms of culture between western European countries and Middle-Eastern Muslim countries, which Gingrich defines as “frontier orientalism” (2015, p. 60). This type of thinking creates “an eternal ‘we’ that is in direct, close confrontation with the ‘Oriental’” (p. 61). However, its difference from other types of orientalism is that it is very close, at the border and always posing a threat to civilisation. The West gathers its data from the close encounters that have been made with the East; and orientalist thinking of the East, as Edward Said proposes it, arises out of these encounters, attributing features to the unknown other. Said applies Foucault’s theory of discourse to postcolonial context in *Orientalism* and suggests that the image of the other is created by the language the West uses to describe the Orient, its ‘other’ (Loomba, 2005, pp. 55-56). According to Said, the Orient does not constitute a geographical entirety, it is rather a concept that separates the civilised ‘we’ (as the subject) from the uncivilised ‘them’ (as the object):

A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call “the land of the barbarians.” In other words, this universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. (Said, 2003, p. 55).

The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ creates a “fictional reality” which Said stresses by pointing out the imaginary nature of this creation (2003, p. 58). And, usually in orientalism, the ‘other’ is exotic and far away, therefore it is much fantasised upon. However, in frontier orientalism, the foreign subject is very close at hand and able to cause harm to ‘us’. Consequently, it is ingrained in the thinking of everyday life. Gingrich suggests that frontier orientalism is an essential part of “folk culture” and featured in its myths defining the very fabric of communal and national character of a people, and in Gingrich’s example, it is the Austrian society (2015, p. 63). Frontier orientalism gives the necessary means to dominant power to discriminate against the perceived other, and as in frontier myth, it provides the justification for violence inflicted upon those who are seen as threats to civilisation.

Power creates its own version of reality by utilising the myths about the dangerous, uncivilised other. In the frontiers, this false reality is formed as a result of justifying the self and demonising the other. Since reality can be easily manipulated, it can result in the adoption of distorted interpretations of events, groups of people, nations, and so on. Slavoj Žižek uses the term ‘false reality’ to describe the complex web of social, cultural, political, and economic relations that

shape how people perceive the world. Žižek highlights the manipulation of reality in *Welcome to Desert of Real* with the example of the attack carried out over the World Trade Centre by Militant Islamist Organization, Al-Qaeda: “[...] when we watched on TV screen the two WTC towers collapsing, that it became possible to experience the falsity of the ‘reality TV shows’: even if these shows are ‘for real,’ people still act in them - they simply play themselves...” (Žižek, 2013, p. 37). Žižek suggests that false reality is created by ideology which tampers with public perception and makes people miss the truth behind falsified information. Ideology creates this false reality by latently imposing certain ways of thinking and acting, and people believe that their actions and thoughts are solely their own, without any manipulation whatsoever. What we perceive to be our own is actually a distorted version of the truth, and as a result, we accept specific social norms and power structures as naturally existing. Within the specificity of the borderlands, the imperial power creates its own enemy through patriotic discourse that pervades almost every way of thinking. Individuals are just players in the false reality of an impending doom, which is illustrated in *Waiting For the Barbarians* and *The Tartar Steppe*, because they act out their roles without questioning. Reality, as a result of its easily-manipulated nature, can only be determined if it is real or not, according to the person who has produced it. As in the example Žižek gives, we live in a simulated, superficial world. That is because of power-holders’ mentality changes pursuant to their pragmatics. The ambitious spirit of the West in following its aim of never-ending progress is maintained by the functioning of myths in society, especially the myths about the ‘uncivilised’ other whose existence directly opposes that of the self. The frontier myth and frontier orientalism are useful in understanding how reality is shaped by dominant discourse of power, and the false reality that is created consequentially. *The Tartar Steppe* and *Waiting For the Barbarians* will be analysed by focusing on the functions of myths in the creation of false reality.

BEYOND-THE-BORDER NOVELS: *THE TARTAR STEPPE* AND *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

Power separates two opposing ends by setting them apart in a dichotomous relationship: the strong and the weak, the cultivated and the uncultivated, and as in the example of imperial power, the civilised and the uncivilised. The other is mythologised because of its uncanny, unpredictable nature. Myths about the other in folk memory are embedded so deeply into the Western society that it shapes the dominant discourse. Especially when the ‘other’ is in close proximity to the ‘self’, the danger that the other imposes on the self is perceived to be greater. For example, Dino Buzzati depicts the frontier of a Western empire with a ‘barbarous’ other in *The Tartar Steppe*. Fort Bastiani, the main setting of Buzzati’s work, is situated right across the border with the Tartars’ land, the Northern Kingdom. The soldiers at the fort are in incessant fear of a threat to their land from the barbaric tribes that live across the borders:

Drogo seemed to feel them, the mysterious Tartars, lurking among the bushes, in the crevices of the rocks, motionless and silent with clenched teeth. They were waiting for the dark to attack. And meantime others were arriving, a threatening swarm coming slowly out of the northern mists. They had no bands nor songs, no gleaming swords,

no fine banners. Their arms were dull so as not to glint in the sun and their horses were trained not to neigh. (Buzzati, 1985, p. 105)

The 'barbaric' other always poses a threat to the self. Although these hordes of barbarians are never to be seen throughout Buzzati's work, their existence represents the opposite values of Western civilisation. Similarly in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting For the Barbarians*, the indigenous non-white people are taken as barbarians who are plotting against the ruling Empire. The fear of the other is deeply seated within the social fabric of the little frontier town, in which there is an occasional encounter with the barbarian other:

Once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. (Coetzee, 2007, p. 20)

It is acknowledged that these two works have similarities as Coetzee himself informs the reader that he has been largely influenced by Buzzati's work (Sévry, 1991, p. 208). Pugliese, in her comparative study of these two works, states that they "share some crucial elements in common" as the "similar climate of political claustrophobia and insecurity as well as a sense of looming disaster" underlies the whole premise of the works of these two distinct authors (Pugliese, 2001, p. 58). As well as the political undertones of the setting, both works revolve around the image of the murderous and plotting barbarians living beyond the borders or sometimes infiltrating through those borders, which pose a threat to the foundation of western civilisation because they are not directly under the control of its authority.

In both *Waiting For the Barbarians* and *The Tartar Steppe*, the idea of a deadly barbarian impact is inherent in society. The empires expect a latent danger from those barbarians, and this idea goes unchallenged most of the time because it is accepted by the community at large. Slotkin's proposition of the frontier myth is practical in analysing the source of this latent fear of the other, as he suggests that "myth, as much as any other aspect of reality, that creates the 'fatal environment' of expectations and imperatives in which [...] a whole political culture, can be entrapped" (2017, p. 28). The whole atmosphere in both works is intensified with a hatred of the other. This entails the 'civilised' with the mission and authority to correct or at least control the untamed other. Consequently, anticipating a threat from the other, beyond the border, makes the border and the other, subjects of fear and hatred simultaneously. For example, in *Waiting For the Barbarians*, the officers of the Empire unjustifiably detain the natives of the land as prisoners, on account of them being suspects of a non-existent crime. One of these prisoners, the so-called 'barbarian' girl, is harmed for being an 'other' within the Empire, therefore, she is atrociously tortured by Col. Joll. The 'barbarian girl', who is captured and mistreated unlawfully by the Empire's top officer, Col. Joll, symbolises the silent yet apparent menace to civilisation. Her mere existence is a threat to the Empire because of her demonised position in society (Hashemipour, 2019, p. 2710). She just exists as a native person in a town, and her silence is perturbing for the authorities: "You know you are not supposed to be in town. We could expel you at any time and send you back to your people." (Coetzee, 2007, p. 37) In addition, the language she uses is not understood by the antagonistic Col. Joll, which

becomes a reason enough to be labelled as a disobedience to the Empire. If power does not recognise the language spoken in the territory under its realm, then, those people who speak their own language can be seen as barbarians by the ruling power. However, most of the time, the othered subject enters the discourse. These invaders or alien subjects infiltrate through the borders and threaten to change 'our' way of life and make it fit to theirs. To notice and differentiate that danger, authorities find ways to deal with minorities in a society, either by excluding them from the political scene or by demonising and isolating them in the process. Nazi Germany is an example for making ethnical differences a subject of propaganda and dominating ideology. It was not only the German Army who strengthened Hitler's rule over the country during the Second World War, the successfully executed propaganda helped to make Führer's realm reach throughout Central Europe (Balfour, 1988, pp. 121-126). Nazi propagandists played on the common fears of average Germans and thus, they were able to easily manipulate masses into executing the Nazi agenda (Kallis, 2005, pp. 178-182). Nazis used the myth of adversarial and covetous Jewish people because it had been already deeply rooted in the German populace, 'us' against outsider elements that had always waited for their opportunity to strike and damage 'our civilisation'. These othered subjects either live beyond the borders or among us, and their existence is a direct threat to our 'civilised' and 'superior' ways of living. Similarly in Coetzee's work, the natives are oppressed and discriminated against by the ruling powers who rely on the myths about the other against the self. The natives are faced with "the settlers' litany of prejudice: that barbarians are lazy, immoral, filthy, stupid" (Coetzee, 2007, p. 39). Gingrich proposes that speculations about the other, form the prevailing image of the other in society, relying mostly on folk memory. As the natives in *Waiting For the Barbarians* are seen thusly, the myths about their attacks are widely accepted in society. Similar to the frontier myth that relies on the constructed image of the uncivilised 'other' as opposed to the superior values and characteristics of the civilised 'self', frontier orientalism takes its form from this same dichotomy. The myths about the subject of fear and hatred, the 'uncivilised', function so properly that individuals embrace it without questioning.

Myths about the other limit the self's perception of anything related to the 'other'. In Buzzati's work, in the very beginning, the protagonist Drogo is depicted as a newly despatched officer from the Royal Military Academy, an officer who has been educated with the propaganda of the Empire to be a killing machine. "This was the day he had looked forward to for years-the beginning of his real life" (Buzzati, 1985, p. 1). By these lines, Buzzati defines the limits of Drogo's character and sets Drogo's purpose. After graduating from the Academy like other officers, Drogo is ready to be assigned to the frontier fort. Thus, once it is announced that his new post is to be a lieutenant in Fort Bastiani, it is the day that his dream comes true. Otherwise, it is not the job of any wise man to accept such a position since it is a dead border where there are no signs of life other than the soldiers guarding it from the largely invisible enemies. Drogo willingly accepts the duty he is given without ever questioning it because he has been immersed in the propaganda of the Royal Military Academy. Drogo, just like other soldiers at the fort, immediately embraces the prospect of a glorious war with the Northern Kingdom, even though there is no sign of an apparent aggression of the Tartars: "It was from the northern steppe that their fortune would come, their adventure, the miraculous hour

which once at least falls to each man's lot. Because of this remote possibility which seemed to become more and more uncertain as time went on, grown men lived out their lives pointlessly here in the Fort." (Buzzati, 1985, p. 68) Even though the soldiers know there is no real threat, they still cannot leave Fort Bastiani which has been the setting of their dreams of glory for years. One of the older officers who has been at Fort Bastiani for many years, Prodocimo, reflects on his stay at the fort: "How should I know? Of course no one will come. But the colonel has studied the maps, he says there are still Tartars, the remains of an old army, he says, roaming up and down." (Buzzati, 1985, p. 66) Prodocimo's indecision reflects the inner dilemma of many other soldiers inhabiting Fort Bastiani, including Drogo. Drogo wishes to be a brave soldier in battle, defending civilisation against the darkness of the barbarians across the border. However, as years go by, not unlike others, he realises that he has wasted his life pursuing this unrealistic dream:

Major Giovanni Drogo, worn with illness and the years, a poor mortal, thrust against the great black gateway and saw the doors fall apart leaving the way clear to the light. [...] Then he saw how unimportant it had been to wear himself out on the ramparts of the Fort, to scan the desolate northern steppe, to strive after a career, to wait such long years. There was no need even to envy Angustina. (Buzzati, 1985, p. 258)

He has kept waiting for the never-coming barbarians and wasted his life for this fruitless pursuit. As he is immersed in the ideology of the Empire, his judgement has been clouded regarding the true nature of events. The frontier myth of the danger coming from the borders, keeps individuals like Drogo on hold, enabling them to fulfil their anticipated roles in society.

Slotkin proposes that frontier myth is not just a historical theorisation but a prominent factor affecting the ideology and the state policy of the USA, and this can be appropriated to other Western countries, namely European countries. Gingrich, taking on from Slotkin's theorisation, suggests that frontier orientalism is common to western European nations. The perceived 'other' who is at the border with the civilisation of the West, is much speculated on by the 'self' who situates itself in direct opposition to it. Frontier myth and frontier orientalism both justify the use of excessive violence in the name of protecting civilisation against barbarity. Especially in *Waiting For the Barbarians*, the Empire gives full control to Col. Joll, the leading officer of the Third Bureau (which reminds the Third Reich of Nazi Germany), in his dealings with the natives. Col. Joll never refrains from going to extreme lengths when he interrogates, or in other words, tortures the native population to get information from them. He is authorised by the Empire to do so, and except for the Magistrate, who has been in charge of the unnamed frontier town until Joll and his officers arrive, nobody questions Joll's actions:

"Those pitiable prisoners you brought in are — they the enemy I must fear? Is that what you say? You are the enemy, Colonel!" I can restrain myself no longer. I pound the desk with my fist. "You are the enemy, you have made the war, and you have given them all the martyrs they need starting not — now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here! History will bear me out!" (Coetzee, 2007, p. 154)

The Magistrate, the only "Just Man" in the frontier town, is also the only person who opposes the brutality inflicted on the natives of the land. He objects to their mistreatment, and in retaliation from the Empire, he is stripped of all his powers and even his dignity: "Believe me, to people in

this town you are not the One Just Man, you are simply a clown, a madman. You are dirty, you stink, they can smell you a mile away. You look like an old beggar-man, a refuse-scavenger. They do not want you back in any capacity. You have no future here.” (Coetzee, 2007, p. 159) The Magistrate is also the only person who is not mystified by frontier orientalism, as he sees the natives as human-beings who deserve dignity and respect from the white settlers of the land. However, his rejection of conforming to the dominant ideology brings him to the margins of society.

The demonisation of the natives in *Waiting For the Barbarians* and condemnation of the Tartars in *The Tartar Steppe* are similar to the scapegoating of the Jews in Germany, as they rely on myths. These myths are effortlessly employed by the power of ideology to manipulate the public perception about the deviant other. Drogo, Col. Joll, and Prosdocimo spend all their time guarding the outposts of their empires against non-existent enemies. Dedicating their lives for such a meaningless goal may be explained with how they are intoxicated by the power's propaganda. For example, in *The Tartar Steppe*, Drogo is the only one among the officers who voluntarily enrolls to guard the fort. And in *Waiting For the Barbarians*, the antagonist, Col. Joll, hides his savagery against the locals behind his wrinkled forehead and dark glasses. His perception of truth is merely related to whether it matches with his understanding or not. For Col. Joll, to torture locals is true because he assumes that these uncivilised savages can be civilised only through torture: “I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see this is what happens first lies, then pressure, — — then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.” (Coetzee, 2007, p. 10) He inflicts immense pain on his victims, and when the victim can no longer withstand this pain, they agree to whatever crime he is accusing them of. Col. Joll wills the prisoners into admitting to his own beliefs and undermines the truth. Subversion of truth as Joll executes it, is intentionally employed by the Empire to control both its subjects and the concept of enemies in the subjects' minds. For example, a local or a landless peasant might be a bandit in public perception if the authorities wish it to be. All mythical and off-the-border beings threaten the power of the Empire because they are outside the reach of the Empire's propaganda measures. Foucault suggests that what we conceive as truth is determined by a number of institutions that govern the circulation of knowledge (2002, pp. 148-150). Law, ethics, customs, schools, medicine, and so on, establish the acceptable forms of knowledge, and they exclude and even deem any kind of knowledge contradicting their own as 'irrational'. Foucault explains this with the concept of 'discourse', by which he refers to the power that demarcates our way of thinking. It can be said that the discourse relating the native subjects in both *The Tartar Steppe* and *Waiting For the Barbarians* is feeding from social and state institutions in their respective societies. The 'truth' about the barbarian other is constructed by the dominating powers and no room is left to challenge this readily accepted truth. Consequently, the natives are pictured as dangerous beings and this knowledge is almost never questioned by the 'civilised' in these works. And when it is questioned, it is usually disregarded or in the case of the Magistrate in *Waiting For the Barbarians*, this act is severely punished. Coetzee illustrates the functioning of propaganda not on the main character but on the antagonist, Col. Joll. Col. Joll is contrary to the

protagonist, the Magistrate, for he is cruel and heartless; he is completely indoctrinated with the nationalist propaganda. His “black glasses” and “cold hands” are portrayed like the grim reaper due to his merciless and remorseless actions against the native inhabitants of the Empire (Coetzee, 2007, p. 61). Col. Joll, representing the Empire and its fascist agenda, is immersed in its propaganda. Similarly, Drogo, who is also under the spell of the falsity of an impending attack from the unseen enemy, keeps himself bound to Fort Bastiani for life, wasting his most precious years waiting for the enemy that never comes.

Imperialist propaganda works in numerous ways to shape the understanding of the general public about what to believe and how to think. European colonists needed an ideology to justify their actions in the invaded lands. History of European colonisation from the 17th century onwards, was written mostly from the perspective of the colonisers themselves (Lehning, 2013, pp. 82-89). The reality of invasions and wars was constructed without considering the impact left on the ‘conquered’ people and land, through both historical and fictional texts. Imperialist and colonialist ideology is used to create a reality with these texts, where damage to the conquered land and people is mostly non-existent but the exertion of power and the interplay of dominant discourse with an oppressed object are observed. Today, through globalisation, such realities are being created with the help of mass media. Baudrillard suggests that this rewriting of history is the creation of a false reality with the use of communicative technologies such as media and cinema (1994, pp. 20-26). Baudrillard purports that strong states like the USA can harvest the power of mass media and control the public’s perception of everything as they did during the Gulf War. Baudrillard asserts that the Gulf War did not take place, at least not in the way it was presented by the US media (1995, pp. 14-16). The background story was supported by a bombardment of images provided by the US military, with aeroplanes flying and dropping bombs and Americans watching them on TV as they continue their daily lives. The reality created thusly exists nowhere but in the media. Although the sophisticated technology of the late 20th and early 21st centuries does not exist in either *The Tartar Steppe* or *Waiting For the Barbarians*, a false reality of murderous and invading barbarians is created by the dominant ideology and executed with the help of imperial officers. Institutions of the Empire, such as the Royal Military Academy in *The Tartar Steppe* and the Third Bureau in *Waiting For the Barbarians*, help to maintain the centralised power’s authority over all its subjects as its officers exert power over the local populations. For example, the Royal Military Academy is where soldiers are trained for their future posts. They are educated on the art of war, and they are simultaneously immersed in the political ideology of the Empire:

It is because of the Tartars that they have built the walls of the Fort and there use up great stretches of their lives; it is because of the Tartars that the sentries pace up and down day and night like clockwork. And some of them feed their hope every morning with new faith; others keep it hidden in the bottom of their hearts; others again – believing it lost – are not even conscious of harbouring it. (Buzzati, 1985, p. 115)

The Third Bureau functions similarly, with the added instrument of brutal force inflicted upon native populations. The general public is already made to fear the natives, which gives this institution its unquestionable power:

Officers of the general staff were sent on tours of the frontier. Some of the garrisons were strengthened. Traders who requested them were given military escorts. And officials of the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard were seen for the first time on the frontier, guardians of the State, specialists in the obscurer motions of sedition, devotees of truth, doctors of interrogation. (Coetzee, 2007, p. 17)

One of the Third Bureau's most prominent officers, the abominable Col. Joll, executes his power to the utmost extent by employing his methods of 'interrogation'. These institutions help power to maintain its authority over its subjects by making the public live in constant fear of the other.

Power creates its own reality in the works analysed in this article. "The road has been abandoned and no one will ever come from the north." (Buzzati, 1985, p. 56). This sentence gives us the clue of a non-existent enemy created by the power of dominant ideology. The fundamental goal of ideology is to control individuals' actions and thoughts, and so ideology aims to maintain its hegemony on its own people as well as on others within its reach, through false reality. In *Waiting For the Barbarians*, false reality results in mindless destruction for both those who incite violence and those who oppose it; they torment the Magistrate, trivialise him, and then ruin the lives of people in his town by leading them to despair: "In the shelter of our homes, with the windows bolted and bolsters pushed against the doors, with fine grey dust already sifting through roof and ceiling to settle on every uncovered surface, film the drinking water, grate on our teeth, we sit thinking of our fellow-creatures out in the open who at times like this have no recourse but to turn their backs to the wind and endure." (Coetzee, 2007, p. 198) In *The Tartar Steppe*, although there is no evidence of torture and mutilation, almost all officers are exposed to propaganda (intentionally or unintentionally) of power. Therefore, they have to guard a gothic isolated fort from (never-appearing) enemies called Tartars. These kinds of propaganda manipulate reality too. It cannot be traced or identified as real or not. Žižek's proposition that people act themselves in real life, rather than living authentic lives, can be applied to the analysis of the false reality created in the two works studied in this article. The myth of the menacing 'barbarians' invading the land of the 'civilised' is functional in creating and maintaining false realities. For example, at first, Drogo is willing to serve at the fort and defend the Empire. However, as his years go by in the fort, he recognises that the idea of invading barbarians has been created by the Empire and he understands, right before he dies, that it is pointless to wait for them. The Magistrate, as an official of the Empire, has come to serve his people who turn their backs on them too quickly. After experiencing many years in service, the Magistrate too realises that there are no barbarians or enemies but only native people living there. He sees the wrongness of the Empire in demonising these people as villains and he opposes their mistreatment. However, this rebellious act is punished severely by the Empire, whose officers strip him of his power and dignity.

CONCLUSION

Waiting For Barbarians and *The Tartar Steppe* are two masterpieces that show us how propaganda manipulates public perception and how the masses tend to believe false realities. Power creates myths about the borderlands and their inhabitants, shaping them in the public mind as in

the best form that serves its interests. Since every act or understanding related to society has a political meaning to it, naturally the ideas that shape the public mind are heavily influenced by the political agenda of states. In both of the books analysed in this study, the Empires propagate their own understanding through their subjects and play on the myth of an ever-present danger from a non-existent enemy, materialised in the image of the native, non-white populations. What is real and what is not real are all determined by power (or dominant ideology) through propaganda, and this creates a kind of false reality, whose truthfulness is usually not even questioned. However, sometimes imperial subjects question the validity of their reality, as in the case of Drogo and the Magistrate, and when they do that, they are immediately thrown out of the system that bore them. They understand the futility of their existence and in the Magistrate's situation, this provokes animosity from others. These individuals come and go, and power maintains its dominance on all the others because manipulating public perception through age-old methods such as myth-making, have always become successful. The persistence in believing in myths and refusal to question reality, as illustrated in these texts, will perpetuate the system that uses myths in public understanding, and dominant ideologies will always remain unchallenged.

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