

Songs the Drowned Men Sing

The Ironborn Mythology and Social Reality in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how religion is represented in popular culture and fictional literature, using George R. R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a case study due to its global popularity and cultural significance. To better understand how the series as a narrative can influence our perception of religion, the thesis focuses on the narrative dimension of religion within the story itself by studying the mythology and social reality of the ironborn.

The study uses qualitative content analysis and theory-informed analysis as its methodology. The ironborn myths are identified and categorized by applying Robert A. Segal's definition for myth as a meaningful story that serves an important purpose for its believers. The thesis examines the social reality of the ironborn with a framework based on cultural studies by focusing on worldview, social structures, and individuals' positions within the culture. Finally, the study assesses how ironborn mythology affects and reflects their social reality.

The ironborn worldview is characterized by their cultural identity as the Drowned God's chosen people, temporal idea of a glorious past, and religious doctrines, norms, and rituals. The faith also functions as an ideology alongside the idea of the Old Way. The different agents of power in the ironborn society form a social hierarchy. Hegemonic status is held by religious authorities, captains, great houses and the concept of masculinity. To achieve agency, the ironborn individuals need to navigate within a network of cultural values, religious ideals, and idealized masculinity.

The myths of the ironborn can be divided into four categories: 1) gods and demigods, 2) priests and prophets, 3) rulers and reavers, and 4) magic and mysteries. These myths highlight cultural values, provide precedents, and reinforce societal structures. The ironborn mythology influences how the ironborn form their identities and understand and create meaning in the world. It does not just affect their place in society but also provides them with cultural tools to uphold or challenge the status quo.

What comes to how religion is represented in Martin's works; the narrative or mythical dimension of religion is shown to have a wide and deep impact on the construction of social reality. This impact is not limited to the followers of faith but to all individuals who operate in society shaped by religion.

Key words: *A Song of Ice and Fire*, cultural studies, fantasy literature, George R. R. Martin, myths, qualitative content analysis, study of religion

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

For a thousand thousand years sea and sky had been at war. From the sea had come the ironborn, and the fish that sustained them even in the depths of winter, but storms brought only woe and grief. "My brother Balon made us great again, which earned the Storm God's wrath. He feasts now in the Drowned God's watery halls, with mermaids to attend his every want. It shall be for us who remain behind in this dry and dismal vale to finish his great work."¹

The world of the ironborn is made of barren islands, stormy seas, steel weapons, and wooden longships—things one can see and touch. But there are also things unseen, which are just as real—ideas and ideals, songs and stories, and myths preached by the priests of the Drowned God. Just as people in the real world experience the reality through social constructions such as cultural narratives,² the same happens in fictional universes. George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is an excellent example of this multilayered narrative worldbuilding and storytelling. Religions and religious narratives do not just serve a decorative function in the story but shape how the characters understand and interact with the world and the society they live in. At the same time these narratives do not just construct social realities in the fictional universe but can also affect how we understand our own world.³

Perhaps counterintuitively, fantasy narratives provide a mirror into our own world. As a genre, fantasy literature is typically characterised by alternative or imaginary worlds with magical or supernatural elements. This ontological separation from our world requires the reader to let go of their assumptions to understand the fictional universe. Because of this, fantasy literature can open opportunities to reimagine social realities and show how different narratives and discourses can be used to shape and maintain political and social structures. It also offers opportunities to challenge societal norms and centre marginalized people. As fantasy often addresses existential and moral questions, it provides opportunities to analyse diverse perspectives and to agree or disagree with the author.⁴ By allowing readers to engage with different perspectives and worldviews fantasy literature promotes critical literacy and thinking.⁵

¹ (Martin 2011d, 28.)

² (Meretoja 2024, 464–465.)

³ (Ostwalt 2003, 29.)

⁴ (Fabrizi 2016, 1–3.)

⁵ (Fredrickson 2016.)

What makes the deities and religions in Martin's world especially intriguing is that the reader cannot know to what extent the beliefs of these religions are "true" and whether one or more of the gods worshiped by the characters actually exists in the fantasy universe.⁶ This contrasts with works such as J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, where the creation story is presented to the reader almost as a historical fact without questioning its veracity.⁷ The way Martin has constructed his universe and is narrating the story guides the reader to approach its religions with an open yet critical mindset.

Another compelling aspect of Martin's work is that the religions depicted in the series do not all have explicit parallels in the real world.⁸ This prevents readers from automatically categorizing the followers of these religions to "us" and "them." In an era of increasing coexistence of different religions and a growing need for mutual understanding, it is important to find ways to broaden and diversify attitudes toward distinct religions and their followers, as well as to enhance understanding between them. With varying point-of-view characters who follow different religions, the reader sees the world and its events through various religious worldviews.

To better understand how a fictional narrative can influence our perception of religion, this thesis focuses on the narrative dimension⁹ of religion within *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Specifically, it studies the myths of the ironborn¹⁰, whose culture and society are deeply shaped by their religion.¹¹ The study involves identifying and categorising the ironborn mythology, examining the characteristics of their social reality, and studying the interaction between the two. Through this analysis, this thesis will show how George R. R. Martin portrays the interplay between the ironborn faith and their social reality, illustrating the

⁶ (Łaszkiwicz 2013, 29.)

⁷ (Neubauer 2019.)

⁸ See e.g. Wittingslow 2015; Castello 2019; Brown 2021.

⁹ According to Ninian Smart, narrative or mythical dimension is one of the main elements of religions (see e.g. Smart 1996). Since I will be applying a broad definition for myth in this thesis (see 'Segal's Definition of Myth') and the studied culture and religion are so deeply intertwined, the terms 'religious narratives,' 'myths,' 'mythology,' 'mythological dimension,' and 'narrative dimension of religion' will be used interchangeably in this thesis, unless referring only to certain narratives or myths.

¹⁰ The Iron Islands is a formerly independent kingdom that is part of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros when the events of *A Song of Ice and Fire* begin. The ironborn is the name that the people of Iron Islands use for themselves, whereas they are most often referred to as ironmen by others (Martin 2011a, 827; Aegon Targaryen 2020, 00:00–00:04).

¹¹ As it is written in *The World of Ice & Fire*: "[the ironborn] stand apart, with customs, beliefs, and ways of governance quite unlike those common elsewhere in the Seven Kingdoms. All these differences . . . are rooted in religion." (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

portrayal of religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and contributing to a broader understanding of the representation of religion in fantasy literature and fictional narratives.

1.2 Source Material

1.2.1 The Book Series (and Beyond)

George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is known for vast worldbuilding, complex plotlines, morally nuanced characters, and gritty portrayal of a medieval-inspired fantasy world.¹² The central conflict in the series revolves around several noble houses competing for control of—or liberation from—the Iron Throne, the seat of power in the Seven Kingdoms on the fictional continent of Westeros. The main religions in the book series—the Old Gods, the Faith of the Seven, the Lord of Light, and the Drowned God—are explored through the multiple point-of-view characters who are followers of different faiths.¹³

Over the last decades, *A Song of Ice and Fire* has been translated into dozens of languages, won multiple awards, and been adapted into successful HBO television series *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) and *House of the Dragon* (2022–), with more series in production. The book series and its television adaptations have reached a vast audience, with tens of millions of copies sold worldwide and similar viewership numbers.¹⁴ Martin's inclusion in *Time* magazine's list of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2011 underlines the significant weight, reach, and cultural impact that his writings carry.¹⁵

The book series—originally intended to be a trilogy—is now planned to include seven books in total, five of which have been written and published so far: *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011). Two more novels—*The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*—are yet to be finished.¹⁶ Martin has released some sample chapters from *The Wind of Winter*,¹⁷ but I will only include the five published books of *A Song of Ice and Fire* in this thesis, as the

¹² See e.g. Garrett 2019.

¹³ (Martin 2011a, 521–522; 2011b, 495; 2011d, 617; 2012, 447–449.)

¹⁴ The books in *A Song of Ice and Fire* series have been translated to over 46 languages and sold over 90 million copies, while *Game of Thrones* series has had tens of millions of viewers, and *House of the Dragon's* episode-based viewership numbers have been as high as twenty million. (Martin 2017; Barnett 2019; Shepherd 2016; Hailu 2022.)

¹⁵ (Hodgman 2011.)

¹⁶ (Acuna 2015.)

¹⁷ The sample chapters can be mainly found online, see e.g. <https://thehawke.github.io/twow-excerpts/>.

sample chapters have not yet reached wider audiences and might still undergo changes before publishing.

In addition to the main series, I will also study other works of George R. R. Martin that take place in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* universe—most central of these being the fictional in-world history book *The World of Ice & Fire* (2014) which Martin has co-written in collaboration with Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson.¹⁸ The companion book details the history of the Seven Kingdoms and the different regions in Westeros and beyond.¹⁹ *The World of Ice & Fire* is partially narrated by Archmaester Gyldayn, written by Martin, and partially by Maester Yandel, whose sections are written by García and Antonsson based on the material provided by Martin. Both Gyldayn and Yandel are intentionally portrayed as partly unreliable narrators, who aim to please the ruling monarchs with their work.²⁰ It must be noted that neither one of them is ironborn and thus their view on the culture, society, and religion is external.

The *A Song of Ice and Fire* book series employs a third-person limited point of view, which means that the narrative voice is external and not omniscient. Events are recounted through characters directly involved in them, describing their experiences, thoughts, and feelings using internal focalization. The book series uses multifocalisation, meaning that the focalization shifts from one character to another with each chapter, allowing readers to gain insights into different characters' perspectives, motivations, and inner workings.²¹ Notably, the viewpoint characters are unreliable—not only in their reasoning but also in their memory.²² The chosen narrative style allows the reader experience the world and the events from the perspectives of the different characters.

¹⁸ Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson are the creators and runners of *A Song of Ice and Fire* domain Westeros, which among other things hosts the largest discussion forum for the series called *A Forum of Ice and Fire*, and a collaboratively edited database of the series named *A Wiki of Ice and Fire* (Westeros 2025). Martin himself has stated that García and Antonsson know more [facts] about his books than he does (Watkins 2012).

¹⁹ George R. R. Martin has also written other stories set in the same universe as *A Song of Ice and Fire*, such as *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* (2015) and *Fire & Blood* (2018), but they are not in the main focus of this thesis.

²⁰ See e.g. Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, viii, 127–129.

²¹ (Busch 2011.)

²² For example, in *A Clash of Kings* Sansa VII she expects the Hound to kiss her, but he does not do it. Later in *A Storm of Swords* Sansa II she thinks back to the events remembering that the Hound had kissed her. (Martin 2011b, 866; 2011c, 222.)

1.2.2 The Ironborn

The ironborn inhabit the Iron Islands, a which is a region of the Seven Kingdoms, located off the western coast of Westeros. The land on the islands is characterised by thin, stony soil that is better suited for grazing than crop cultivation, and fishing is the primary source of sustenance for the ironborn. Even though the Iron Islands are rich in natural resources, such as lead, tin, and iron, the isles have not made their wealth in trade. The ironborn are renowned for their swift longships and seafaring abilities, and their culture is deeply rooted in their tradition of reaving. The ironborn do not share a religion with the rest of the Seven Kingdoms—the main religions in the mainland being the Faith of the Seven and the Old Gods—but worship a sea deity known as the Drowned God.²³

Ever since being conquered and integrated to be a part of the Seven Kingdoms, the Iron Islands have been ruled by House Greyjoy. Nine years prior to the beginning of the story the Lord of the Iron Islands, Balon Greyjoy, had unsuccessfully rebelled against the Iron Throne to gain independence for the Iron Islands.²⁴ This rebellion led to the deaths of his two eldest sons, and his youngest son, Theon, becoming a hostage and a ward of House Stark in the North. The only child left to live with Lord Balon is his daughter Asha. Lord Balon also has three living brothers: Euron, whom he had banished from the Iron Islands; Victarion, who is the Lord Captain of the Iron Fleet; and Aeron, who has become a priest of the Drowned God.²⁵ After a war of succession for the Iron Throne breaks out, Lord Balon recrowns himself the king of the Iron Islands, before dying in unclear circumstances and leaving his own succession and the rule over the ironborn unclear.²⁶

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions

In today's world, popular culture is more consistently present in our everyday lives than ever before, and with it, the representations of religion in within it. Religious themes and elements are frequently featured in popular narratives—even to the extent that we might encounter them more frequently than content from traditional religious authorities. However, their presence and influence can often go unnoticed.²⁷ Fictional portrayals of religion in fantasy

²³ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175–176.)

²⁴ (Martin 2011a, 40; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 190–193.)

²⁵ (Martin 2011a, 828–829.)

²⁶ (Martin 2011c, 256–257, 632–634.)

²⁷ (Clute & Grant 1997, 338; Clark 2012.)

narratives can affect how we perceive and understand different religions, religiousness, and religion as a phenomenon in the real world.²⁸

Even though religious themes and representations are consistently present in popular culture, research on this topic has remained relatively limited compared to the abundance of the subject material.²⁹ The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how religion is represented in popular culture and fictional literature, using *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a case study due to its global popularity and cultural significance. The study of narratives plays a double role in this thesis: First, the motive for the research is that the book series as a narrative takes part in the construction of the concept of religion in the real world. Second, to study the representation of religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire* I will analyse how myths as religious narratives construct the social reality in the fictional world.

The research questions of this thesis are the following:

1. What myths do the ironborn have in *A Song of Ice and Fire*?
2. What characterizes the social reality of the ironborn?
 - 2.1. How is their worldview constructed?
 - 2.2. How are social structures, cultural norms, and power relations organized?
 - 2.3. How are individuals positioned within cultural and societal frameworks?
3. How does the ironborn mythology affect and reflect their social reality?
4. How does George R. R. Martin represent religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire*?

The first research question aims to map the mythology of the ironborn. To identify the myths from the source material I will use a definition for myth given by Robert A. Segal. I will introduce the main narratives in the ironborn mythology, categorized based on main characters or objects of the mythical narratives. At this stage of the analysis, I will not yet place them in the context of the ironborn culture and society but rather reflect on them independently using Joseph Campbells hypothesis of the four functions of myth, to assess what kinds of elements and possible functions can be found from the ironborn mythology.

²⁸ (Ostwalt 2003, 29.)

²⁹ (Clark 2012.)

The second research question is divided into three parts—worldview, society, and individuals—to describe the social reality of the ironborn using theoretical frameworks from cultural studies with some additions from other relevant fields. First, I will showcase the ironborn worldview through the construction of self and otherness, temporality and spatiality, and institutional religiosity. After that I will analyse the ironborn society through ideology, power, and gender. Lastly, I will focus on the ironborn individuals through their identity, social status, and personal religiosity, using the ironborn point-of-view characters Theon, Asha, Aeron, and Victarion Greyjoy as my case studies.

For the third research question I will compare the identified mythical narratives with the dimensions of social reality to analyse their interactions. At this phase I will integrate a wider array of myth theories into my analysis to provide varying perspectives on the roles and functions of the mythical narratives in the ironborn culture and society. I will also focus on how the myths limit, enable, and are used by the ironborn individuals.

Lastly, in Conclusions I will take a step back from the analysis of the in-world universe to reflect on how George R. R. Martin's writings and narratives construct and represent the concept of religion to readers. I will especially focus on how he describes the interplay between religion and social reality, and how the earlier affects and is being used to influence the latter.

1.4 Previous Research

According to Conrad Ostwalt, an American professor of Religious Studies, people encounter religious elements increasingly in literature, televisions and other forms of popular culture³⁰. He argues that this both influences and reflects on how people understand religion.³¹ Terry Ray Clark, an American professor of Religion, assesses that even though popular culture commonly features religious themes, ideas, and values, they often go unnoticed, let alone viewed critically. This growing interaction and significance have led to the formation of a new academic area called 'Religion and Popular Culture', which is diverse and inter-

³⁰ 'Popular culture' has various definition. It can be e.g. used to refer to the parts of culture that have spread widely and taken part by many people (Storey 2009, 5–6) or to the ideas, products, and practices that are widely popular and are spread through modern technology and mass marketing (Clark 2012). Regardless of the chosen criteria, *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its television adaptations are undeniably popular culture due to their global popularity and cultural significance.

³¹ (Ostwalt 2003, 29.)

disciplinary field of study that combines religious studies with cultural studies.³² In popular culture the theme of religion is especially present in fantasy literature since the genre has its roots in ancient mythology and folklore, and the stories often take influence or elements from old myths, legends, and fairytales.³³

Brian Attebery, an American scholar of English and Philosophy, has explored in his book *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* the relationship between fantasy literature and various myths and mythologies. Attebery suggests that fantasy is a literary form that reconnects readers with traditional myths and the worlds they generate. The book examines how myths are incorporated into fantasy stories over time. Attebery also discusses how authors can use myths from other cultures in fantasy stories with respect and postcolonial sensibilities. He argues that the modern fantasy does not necessarily follow traditional patterns but is rather more complicated challenging the reader to think and reflect on the stories.³⁴

Weronika Laszkiewicz, a Polish scholar of English Culture and Literature, has written multiple articles of the connections between myth, religion, and fantasy literature. In her article “Finding God(s) in Fantasylands: Religious Ideas in Fantasy Literature” she states that even though fantasy literature takes place in the author's imagination and includes elements that are not present in the real world, it still engages with real-world issues, such as politics, psychology, and religion. Laszkiewicz writes that authors can address religious themes on various levels and assesses three categories of this: the creation of fictional religions, the inclusion of religious issues and mythological elements into the narrative, and the reflection or critique of real-world religions. She argues that religious themes in the fiction do not just add depth and believability into the fantasy world but also allow the reader to reflect on the realm of sacred. Thus, fantasy literature's engagement with religion demonstrates its relevance beyond mere escapism.³⁵

Laszkiewicz uses *A Song of Ice and Fire* as one of her case studies in the forementioned article while exploring how fantasy literature engages with religious themes. She assesses that the book series with its various religions is an example of a fantasy that uses created fictional religions to enrich its imaginary world. She marks that the characters of the books resemble real people in the way that they question their faith, react to other people's beliefs, or even

³² (Clark 2012.)

³³ (Clute & Grant 1997, 338.)

³⁴ (Attebery 2014.)

³⁵ (Laszkiewicz 2013, 27–29.)

lack faith on higher powers altogether. Łaskiewicz outlines the principal religions in the series, and marks that the ironborn's faith in the Drowned God is connected to their portrayal as fearless sailors who worship the sea. She also remarks that none of the religions in the series seems to be dominant over others or reflect the divine truth, since manifestations of magic and power are showcased by followers of various religions.³⁶ Even though Łaskiewicz only uses *A Song of Ice and Fire* as an example of the creation of fictional religions, the series can be argued to fit the other categories as well, as the narrative addresses various religious elements and the books reflect and critique on real-world faiths.³⁷

The representation of religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire* has been also studied by the Polish Tolkien scholar Lukasz Neubauer. In his comparative piece on Tolkien and Martin, Neubauer contrasts their respective spiritual landscapes. He argues that while Martin's Westeros is teeming with diverse religious traditions it lacks spiritual certainty. Neubauer interprets this as a reflection of Martin's sceptical stance on religious authority and absolute truth.³⁸

Martin's depiction of religion has been viewed critically by Roberta Garrett, a British scholar of Creative Writing. In her article "'A Sly and Stubborn People': Game of Thrones, Orientalism and Islamophobia" Garrett critiques the representation of Eastern cultures and religions, stating that despite Martin's subversion of many fantasy tropes, the series still reflects an Eurocentric worldview and reproduces Orientalist stereotypes.³⁹ Garrett also argues that Martin in general portrays organised religion in a largely negative light, revealing systemic flaws and abuses of power.⁴⁰

Mollie Gossage and Edgar Valles, in their contribution to *Theology and Game of Thrones*, analyse the Targaryen rulers of the Seven Kingdoms in socioreligious context. After contextualising the religious landscape of Westeros, they focus on the relationship between

³⁶ (Łaskiewicz 2013, 28–29.)

³⁷ See e.g. Wittingslow 2015; Vehkajärvi 2016; Riggs 2017; Attali 2017; Clasby 2017; Swank 2017; Hansen 2017; Castello 2019; Erdős 2020; Öztürk 2020; Brake 2021.

³⁸ (Neubauer 2019.)

³⁹ It must be noted that Garrett's critique fits better the television series *Game of Thrones* than the book series. She claims that the eastern continent of Essos is only featured via two separate cultures, which seem isolated and (narratively) less developed, which is not the case (see e.g. Martin 2011a, 28–29, 586–589; 2011b, 422–424; 2012, 93, 205–206), and that women lack positions of power there, whereas in the books the religious leaders of the Ghiscari religion are female (see e.g. Martin 2012, 47, 1105). Also, Martin's usage of the 'white saviour' trope in Daenerys's story line can be read as a critique instead of an enforcement, since as Garrett herself states, Daenerys—even with her good intentions—causes more destruction and suffering to the people she aims to help do to her lack of cultural and societal knowledge. Garrett also speculates that Martin's political views and personal history might have led him to depict the religion of the Old Gods in a harmless light, even though the faith is for example associated with blood sacrifices (see e.g. Martin 2012, 423, 505.)

⁴⁰ (Garrett 2019.)

the ruling family and the dominant religion in the kingdom—the Faith of the Seven. Gossage and Valles showcase how religious narratives have been used to shape identity, negotiate religious dogma, and legitimise power in the book series. They focus especially on the dogma of Targaryen exceptionalism as a form of sacred narrative that constructs and maintains the royal family’s unique social and political position.⁴¹ Their interest on how myth and doctrine are used to generate a legitimising worldview parallels this thesis’s investigation into ironborn religious narratives and their social consequences.

One of the few earlier studies that focus on the faith of the ironborn is Shaun C. Brown’s article “What is Dead May Never Die: The Drowned God and Jesus’ Call to Discipleship”, which compares its theology and followers with Christianity. Brown writes that Martin utilizes Norse mythology and biblical imagery in his books. He argues that both the ironborn and Christians have shown their commitment to their god by dying—a parallel which is highlighted by their practices of baptism.⁴² Brown’s analysis is particularly relevant to the current thesis due to its focus on the ironborn and the motifs embedded in their belief system.

Based on the previous research, it can be said that the representation of religion in popular culture has been increasing during the last decades both in number and in significance.⁴³ These representations are particularly common in fantasy.⁴⁴ Fantasy authors can weave religious elements into the narrative, reconnecting readers with traditional myths, create fictional religions to enrich their fantasy universe, and reflect or critique real-world religions.⁴⁵ Martin has done all of the forementioned three addressing religious themes on various levels. His work has been commended for the diversity of the depiction of different faiths but also criticized for portraying religion in a negative light.⁴⁶ Earlier studies have also shown that in *A Song of Ice and Fire* religious narratives are used to construct social and political realities, shaping identities and legitimising power.⁴⁷

While previous research has examined religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire* from theological, historical, and comparative perspectives, less attention has been paid to the mythology found within the series—particularly that of the ironborn. Much of the existing research focuses on

⁴¹ (Gossage & Valles 2021.)

⁴² (Brown 2021.)

⁴³ (Ostwalt 2003, 29.)

⁴⁴ (Clute & Grant 1997, 338.)

⁴⁵ (Attebery 2014; Laszkiewicz 2013, 29.)

⁴⁶ (Neubauer 2019; Garrett 2019.)

⁴⁷ (Gossage & Valles 2021.)

institutional structures, parallels to real-world religions, or broader cultural and political functions of faith.⁴⁸ However, the narrative content of these religions—the stories that convey their values, explain worldviews, and shape social norms—has not been systematically analysed. This is especially true for the ironborn, whose mythic narratives are essential to understanding their unique cultural identity and worldview.

This thesis aims to address this gap by analysing the ironborn mythology and how it interacts with their social reality. In doing so, this thesis also contributes to a wider conversation about the role of religion in fiction and how stories—real or imagined—can influence how we see and understand religion.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Attali 2017; Brake 2021; Brown 2021; Castello 2019; Clasby 2017; Erdős 2020; Hansen 2017; Riggs 2017; Swank 2017; Wittingslow 2015; Vehkajärvi 2016; Öztürk 2020.

2 Theoretical Approach

2.1 Myth and Mythology

2.1.1 Concept and Study of Myth

The term ‘myth’ has its origins in the Greek word ‘mythos,’ which had multiple meanings such as word, story, or saying. It was used to refer to the stories of gods and heroes in ancient Greece and Rome, later expanding to include narratives from other cultures. Myths are in fact present in all cultures, and are passed down from generation to generation, through spoken word or written text. As narratives, myths provide reasons and meaning to human existence and frameworks to understand the world and our place in it.⁴⁹ Myths also play an important role in the society and they are often connected to religions and set as an opposite to scientific explanations of the world. The mythical and scientific do often address similar motifs, such as natural phenomena, the creation of the world, and the origins of humans.⁵⁰ Myths can also offer answers to the unknown that is out of the reach of science, such as meaning of life and the afterlife.⁵¹

Myth as a concept is studied across many academic fields. In religious studies, myths are often connected with the supernatural and are seen as important medium for understanding the beliefs and practices of religious groups. Myths are one of the main ways religious ideas are shared and passed down. They preserve cultural knowledge and shape worldviews. Myths are not just simple stories but complex cultural products that need to be interpreted. Scholars study what myths mean, how they function within their culture, and how they influence religious beliefs and practices. Myths play a central role not only in religious life but also in how religion is studied. In religious studies, myths are often analysed through their structure, symbols, and role in traditions, giving insights into the cultural aspects of religion.⁵²

Scholars from different disciplines have had varying approaches what it comes to defining and classifying myths. In folklore studies, myths are often regarded as sacred narratives that account for the origins of the world and human existence as we know it. Folklorists typically distinguish myths from legends, which are usually set in a more recent past and may be based

⁴⁹ (Lincol 1999, ix–x.)

⁵⁰ (Segal 2007, 5–6, 8, 17–18.)

⁵¹ (Lincol 1999, ix–x.)

⁵² (Smith, Bolle & Buxton 2024.)

on historical or fictional events, and from folktales, which are more timeless and mainly told for entertainment. Anthropologists, on the other hand, tend to use a broader definition of myth. Their work has involved collecting myths from a wide range of cultures, analysing their meanings, and exploring their roles in human societies from comparative and theoretical perspectives.⁵³

2.1.2 Theories of Myth

According to Robert A. Segal, a scholar and professor in religious studies, theories of myth focus on three main questions: the subject matter of myth, the origin of myth, and the function of myth.⁵⁴ My interest here is especially on the last one, since I want to study how myth construct meaning and build social reality. As South African-born sociologist and anthropologist Percy S. Cohen states, the many theories of myth are not necessarily alternatives for one another but can rather explain different parts of the phenomenon.⁵⁵ In accord with Cohen, I will next introduce various myth theorists and theories which all offer different perspectives to myth, that are relevant to this thesis.

One of the ways myths has been understood by scholars has been to see them as an explanation. For the English anthropologist E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) myths are explanations of the physical world by personalising the forces of the nature for humans to understand and control. Gods *are* forces of nature and active agents in the physical world.⁵⁶ The Scottish folklorist and social anthropologist James Frazer (1854–1941) connected myth with ritual. He saw myth as an attempt to explain and control the natural world, as a developmental step between magic and science.⁵⁷ Both Tylor's and Frazer's views on myth have been criticized for not explaining well enough the social and symbolical dimensions of myths and why myths still exist even after the rise of modern science.⁵⁸

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) studied the functions of religion in the creation of social cohesion and suggested that myths are expressions of collective consciousnesses, which are not necessarily shared by only one groups of people but tend to spread beyond social boundaries. For Durkheim myths are essential parts of religions, and he

⁵³ (Winzeler 2012, 92–94; Smith, Bolle & Buxton 2024.)

⁵⁴ (Segal 2007, 2.)

⁵⁵ (Cohen 2007, 33–34.)

⁵⁶ (Tylor 1958, 368–416.)

⁵⁷ (Frazer 1890, 31–32.)

⁵⁸ (Cohen 2007, 25; Segal 2004, 137–138.)

calls the very idea of the existence of supernatural beings mythical. According to Durkheim myths reflect and reinforce society's values and structures by depicting a similar mythical society which is populated by ideal beings.⁵⁹

For Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), a Polish anthropologist and ethnologist, myths are not just stories but charters for faith, moral, and social action. He refers to myths as sacred narratives that form an essential and active part of culture, which convey a deeper, more meaningful reality through which the lives, destinies, and actions of people are shaped. Malinowski argues that myths express, reinforce, and codify belief, include practical rules, protect and enforce morality, and affirm the effectiveness of ritual. In this way myths actively guide human behaviour and uphold social structure.⁶⁰

Opposed to Durkheim and Malinowski, French social and political theorist Georges Sorel (1847–1922) did not understand myth as a means to uphold a society but rather to overthrow it. He saw myth as an ideology that is needed in a revolution to overthrow the reigning power—the other ingredient being violence. For Sorel the end justifies the means, and for a revolution he supports both violence and myth. Sorel's understanding of myth is not a traditional one, since he turns ideologies—such as Marxism—into a myth.⁶¹ Unlike Sorel, the French anthropologist and philosopher René Girard (1923–2015) saw myth as a way to end societal violence combined with a sacrificial ritual.⁶² However, for both myth serves as a justification for violent act, whether the goal of it is to destabilize or stabilize the society.

According to the American scholar of literature and mythologist Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) myths serve four main functions in human society: The mystical function awakens the sense of wonder and deep emotional experience that there is more in the world than meets the eye. For Campbell this feeling is what separates myths from other types of narratives, and it is essential for the other functions of the myth to work. The cosmological function explains the universe in a way that aligns with the life experiences and knowledge of the people who share the myth. The sociological function reinforces social norms and order, passes down tradition, and helps to integrate the individual into the society. Campbell states that the sociological dimension differs greatly between cultures, since it is shaped by environment and history. The

⁵⁹ (Durkheim & Fields 1995, 79, 292, 421–423.)

⁶⁰ (Malinowski 2007, 125, 128–129, 133.)

⁶¹ (Sorel & Jennings 1999, 27–31.)

⁶² (Girard 1977, 70–71, 83.)

psychological function of myth guides individuals through the stages—or even crisis—of life and offers meaning and support through stories and symbolism.⁶³

The French philosopher and historian of ideas Michel Foucault (1926–1984) has a more secular approach to myth. He described myths as functional, imaginary, and complex expressions. They are stories that social groups tell and that shape their understanding of the world and themselves. Myth turns something social into natural, even though it is not natural but a product of history. For Foucault all myths are myths of origin. Myth is not the opposite of reality, but rather how reality shows itself. In this way old religious myths have not just disappeared but been replaced with a new myth of a natural, scientific human. For Foucault myth are not the truth but how the truth showcases in different historical conditions.⁶⁴ The French philosopher and literary theorist Roland Barthes (1915–1980) takes the concept of myth even further away from religion by studying how cultural materials or even people can be constructed into myth, placing myth in the present and not just in the past.⁶⁵

These seemingly incompatible theories about the nature and functions of myth are not necessarily alternatives for one another. In the complex world it is possible to assume that myth can play multiple roles—whether it is to support or challenge status quo, unite or separate people, or work as an explanation or expression. It is fair to say that all these theories offer interesting perspectives on myth and how it relates to the social reality. Most of the forementioned myth theorists seek to address the mythology of the “primitives”⁶⁶. However, in this study I will treat them as theories of any given culture or society—even though that does not necessarily make a significant difference, since the classic myth scholars would have probably seen the mainly illiterate and uneducated ironborn as “savages” as they are.

2.1.3 Segal’s Definition of Myth

In this thesis, I want to use a broader definition of myth to be able to assess the mythical dimensions of religion more thoroughly. Therefore, I am adopting the criteria given for it by Robert A. Segal. He argues that a myth is fundamentally a meaningful story. According to Segal, myths do not need to centre on gods or divine beings, nor must they be strictly set in the past. Instead, a myth can take place in any temporal setting and include various types of

⁶³ (Campbell 1965, 519–522.)

⁶⁴ (Foucault 2021, 14–26.)

⁶⁵ See e.g. Barthes’s “The Face of Garbo” and “Myth Today” (Barthes 1973.)

⁶⁶ Which by itself is problematic, though characteristic for their lived era and its Eurocentric understanding of reality.

characters, such as humans or animals. Regarding the function of myth, Segal notes that scholars see myths as serving important purposes, but there is no single agreed-upon function. He emphasizes though that, according to all theorists, myths are seen as more meaningful than the more light-hearted legends and folktales. Thus, Segal suggests that myths serve an important purpose for their believers, but he doesn't specify exactly what that purpose is. While modern language often dismisses myths as something false or fictional, Segal argues that myths endure as strong beliefs, even if they aren't factually accurate. A myth is a story people firmly believe in, no matter its truth.⁶⁷

It is not self-evident which parts of the ironborn narratives fill the forementioned criteria for a myth. The definition leaves much room for interpretations, especially with the material at hand. It is not always clear whether a possible myth fills even the basic criterion of being a story—for example if it is never told in a narrative form in the books. In this case the deciding factor is whether there is enough reason to assume that the narrative exists in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* universe. The list of the ironborn myths in this thesis is in no means complete nor unquestionable, but it is made with the knowledge at hand from the books. The main criterion that I have focused on is that the narrative is meaningful and seems to serve an important purpose for those who believe in it.⁶⁸

2.2 Cultural Studies

2.2.1 Introduction and Application

The relationship between religion and popular culture is often approached via the lens of cultural studies.⁶⁹ Cultural studies emerged in England during the latter half of the 20th century, particularly within the so-called 'Birmingham School.' In its early years, the field drew from literary studies and Marxism, while simultaneously modernizing it and incorporating a greater cultural awareness. Scholars of cultural studies took part on debates about colonialism, the working class, and women's rights, and they studied individual's relationships with power structures using concepts such as subjectivity, hegemony, and ideology. The field took interest in researching the different forms of marginalization and the ways to resist it. In the course of time, it has been shaped by post-structuralism, sociology,

⁶⁷ (Segal 2004, 4–6.)

⁶⁸ For the whole lists of the myths included into the study see the first appendix of this thesis.

⁶⁹ (Clark 2012.)

postcolonial studies, and feminism. Ultimately cultural studies has extended beyond high culture to research popular culture and mass entertainment.⁷⁰

Cultural studies is an umbrella term referring to interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences, focusing particularly on how, why, and in what ways the social reality is formed. In cultural studies, various cultural practices and traditions are examined primarily in terms of how they intertwine with societal power relations. Cultural studies does not have a single, fixed theory or methodology; rather, it integrates theories and methods from various disciplines—such as sociology, philosophy, religious studies, ethnology, folklore studies, and literary studies—depending on the research focus and questions at hand.⁷¹ Since the 1980s, cultural studies have been one of the key branches of the human sciences.⁷²

A key aspect of cultural studies is the contextualization of the studied phenomena within cultural and social frameworks, as well as a critical and engaged research approach.

According to the New Zealand cultural theorist Simon During, the engaged nature of cultural studies is reflected in three ways: it is critical and political research that often aligns with marginalized groups; it affirms and celebrates cultural experiences, such as fan culture; and it seeks interaction with everyday life and the surrounding world without distancing or objectifying culture.⁷³

In cultural studies culture is understood as a form of collective subjectivity—a way in which a particular community perceives and organizes the world—emphasizing how meaning shapes the understanding of reality and social life. People apply and use different systems of meaning to navigate and interact with the world. They do not experience reality as it is, but rather through their relationships with the surrounding world. These relationships can manifest through religious, scientific, or ideological worldviews. The dominant models in society are not only part of social reality but also actively produce and reinforce it.⁷⁴ Culture can be seen as a space where people create and share ideas, but also as a site of conflict where different ideas are shaped, challenged, and compete with one another.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ (Ilmonen & Ojajärvi 2024, 312–314; Schulman 1993; Hanquinet & Ritzer 2016.)

⁷¹ (Ilmonen & Ojajärvi 2024, 310; Alasuutari 2015, chapter 3.)

⁷² (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 3.)

⁷³ (During 2005, 1, 214.)

⁷⁴ (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 3.)

⁷⁵ (Hall 2009, 122–123.)

To operationalize the approach of cultural studies in this thesis I started with a categorization made by Finnish literature scholars Kaisa Ilmonen and Jussi Ojajärvi. They outline three key conceptual frameworks in cultural studies that help analyse how power and knowledge shape social realities, how identities are formed within these realities, and how individuals and groups can resist or transform them. The central concepts of these categories are the following: 1) discourse, representation, articulation, and conjuncture; 2) power, ideology, and hegemony; and 3) subject and identity.⁷⁶

Based on the source material and my other readings, in this thesis I will approach social reality on three different levels: 1) how the characters perceive the world, 2) how their society is constructed, 3) and how does this all affect them on individual level. These frameworks will be referred to as 1) worldview, 2) society, and 3) individual. I will apply the original frameworks in my thesis with some modifications and different emphases: Since this thesis is about the representation of religion, I chose to have a stronger focus on faith, beliefs, and religion, than a cultural studies approach would necessarily have in general. I have also changed some of the key concepts of the original frameworks based on the themes that arose from the research material.⁷⁷

Table 1 Frameworks for social reality

Social reality		
Worldview	Society	Individual
Cultural identity & otherness	Ideology	Personal identity
Temporality & spatiality	Power	Social status
Institutional religiosity	Gender	Personal religiosity
Intersectionality		

As we can see from Table 1 above, the first framework from Ilmonen's and Ojajärvi's categorisation is changed the most. Even though it still includes the central concepts, they are approached differently, as a framework which is best referred to as 'worldview.' The categories which arose from the source material to construct this framework are cultural identity and otherness, temporality and spatiality, and institutional religiosity. I will introduce and define these concepts in 2.2.2 Framework for Worldview.

The way that I have divided different concepts between the three frameworks is not self-evident, since it could be argued that for example ideology is as much part of a worldview—if

⁷⁶ (Ilmonen & Ojajärvi 2024, 314.)

⁷⁷ For the applied frameworks see Appendix 2 Coding Frames: Social Reality of the Ironborn.

not even *a worldview*—as a societal concept.⁷⁸ However, in this context I have placed it underneath society, since it interacts so strongly with societal factors, and the ideologies in this thesis are foremostly guidelines for how the society should work and be. In addition to ideologies, in the framework for society I will focus on power and gender. I will further discuss these concepts in 2.2.3 Framework for Society.

The last framework focuses on individuals and how they navigate the social reality both as members of a culture and a society and on individual level. The key concepts here are personal identity, social status, and personal religiosity. It is also important to note that intersectionality plays an important role in in the way that the social reality affects the individuals and their subjectivity, which is why I will be also introducing it as a concept in 2.2.4 Framework for Individual.

2.2.2 Framework for Worldview

Worldview has multiple differing definitions, which also vary on how much emphasis they place on religious versus secular. The way it is understood in this thesis is similar to the definition by Mikael Stenmark, a Swedish professor in the Philosophy of Religion. According to Stenmark worldview can be understood as the composition the conscious or unconscious beliefs that guide how people understand how the world is, who they are, and what is their place in the world. It also includes values which tell people how they should live their lives and what is a good life, and contains attitudes towards us and others, or even the world in general.⁷⁹

To study worldview, I will first focus on the concepts of cultural identity and otherness to understand how the people see themselves and the others. Second, I will apply the concepts of temporality and spatiality as tools to illustrate how people understand the world. Lastly, since the worldview which is studied in this thesis is at least partly religious, I will use the concept of institutional religiosity to focus on how religion affect the worldview through beliefs, ethics, and rituals.

Cultural identity refers to a sense of belonging to a certain cultural group, providing unity and a shared sense of sense within the group, while differentiating them from others. Cultural identities are built from various components such as a shared beliefs and values, customs,

⁷⁸ See e.g. Smart 1995, 2.

⁷⁹ (Stenmark 2022.)

traditions, and rituals, language, and symbols. The Jamaican-born sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall defines cultural identity as the way people are positioned by or position themselves within narratives of the past. According to Hall cultural identity is shared by people with common history and ancestry, and it is in constant transformation as it interacts with historical, cultural, and societal processes.⁸⁰

The concepts of cultural identity and otherness are contrasted with one another since as Hall writes, the concept of self is always constructed in relation to the existing or imaginary “other”, both in individual and collective level.⁸¹ Otherness refers to being seen as different from what is considered normal. It highlights how society creates boundaries between “us” and “them,” shaping ideas of identity and belonging. The concept helps researchers understand how people are included or excluded in social and cultural contexts.⁸² Otherness is not just an important concept in cultural studies but also one of the central themes in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.⁸³

Temporality and spatiality—the cultural and societal constructions of time and space—and their intersections have been an increasing interest of cultural studies. Time and space are not just objective categories of the physical world but also dimensions shaped by social meanings, cultural practices, and power relations as well as by the subject who perceives them.⁸⁴

Temporal analysis has been in the centre of academic interest since the 19th century, while spatial analysis arose to challenge it during the latter half of the 20th century. The two perspectives have also been combined by scholars who use the term ‘spatio-temporality’ to emphasize how time and space are interconnected rather than separate.⁸⁵

In social sciences religiosity is used to describe both individual and collective relationship with religion, focusing on the diversity within traditions.⁸⁶ It is commonly described as following the beliefs and doctrines, morals and values, and rituals and practices associated with a divinity.⁸⁷ Even though there is an ongoing debate about the exact definition and conceptual model of religiosity, it is generally understood and accepted as a multidimensional

⁸⁰ (Hall 1990, 223–226; 2019, 64–66.)

⁸¹ (Hall 2017a, 128–129; 2017b, 131.)

⁸² (Miller 2008; Hall 2019, 69–70.)

⁸³ See e.g. Gradišnik 2018, Marques 2016.

⁸⁴ (Simão 2016, xii.)

⁸⁵ (Tally 2012, 15–16.)

⁸⁶ (Darren 2015.)

⁸⁷ (Hood & Spilka 2003.)

phenomenon, which should be studied as such.⁸⁸ In this thesis I will apply a theoretical framework of religiosity by Francis-Vincent Anthony, an Indian professor of Practical Theology, Chris A. M. Hermans, a Dutch professor of religious education, and Carl Sterkens, a Dutch professor of Practical Theology and Empirical Religious Studies.

Anthony, Hermans, and Sterkens distinguished six dimensions⁸⁹ of religiosity by cross-classifying earlier theories. Their framework is based on the three cultural systems defined by the Belgian philosopher Jean Ladrière: the cognitive system, which is used to interpret and understand reality; the normative system, which contains values and norms of actions; and the expressive system, which encompasses the forms that enable the communications of the former two. They cross-classify these three systems with the two social modes: the institutional, which refers to the shared formalized religion, and the personal, which comprises individual expression of religious belief, moral and behaviour. In the institutional religiosity the cognitive system shows as institutional doctrinal knowledge, the normative system as institutional ethical consequences, and the expressive system as institutional formal rituals.⁹⁰ I will introduce the dimensions of the personal religiosity later in 2.2.4 Framework for Individual.

2.2.3 Framework for Society

The second framework focuses on how society is organized and how power operates in everyday life. Cultural studies analyse how ideologies and power structures influence individuals' ability to form identities and make choices. At the same time, it also explores how these power structures can be challenged, especially by marginalized groups, which can lead to social and cultural change.⁹¹ The framework is divided into three parts: ideologies, power, and gender, which all play an important role in the construction of the society. To analyse how power operates and is organized in the society I will focus on political agents, hierarchies, hegemonies, and methods of power transfer.

The British professor of cultural studies John Storey states that ideology—by its most literal definition—refers to a set of ideas or beliefs that are shared to some degree by a specific

⁸⁸ (Cornwall et al. 1986.)

⁸⁹ They have based their dimensions on the earlier work of Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock (see Stark & Glock 1968.)

⁹⁰ (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens 2015, 86–89.)

⁹¹ (Ilmonen & Ojajarvi 2024, 314–315.)

group of people.⁹² American professor of sociology John J. Macionis on the other hand defines ideology more precisely as shared cultural beliefs which are used to justify specific social systems, including structures of inequality.⁹³

For Stuart Hall ideology is about the ideas and language that either help to keep certain form of power and control in place and to accept their position in society, or alternatively it is a route to challenge the status quo through new ideas and visions for the future.⁹⁴ Interestingly, the former is similar to how Émile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski see myth's functions in society, and the latter is a broader version to Georges Sorel's definition of myth as a revolutionary ideology, though it includes also non-violent actions.⁹⁵

Sally Haslanger, an American philosopher, offers a more critical approach to ideology. She argues that ideology is best understood by its functions, which she states is the setting up or keeping up an unjust social order through delusion. Haslanger states that the problem with ideologies is that they cloud how people experience and understand the world—even though unjust social practices are used to oppress a group, neither the oppressed nor the oppressors see it as oppression. She writes that even when injustice is imposed through force there is usually an ideology functioning on the background. She argues that changing social practices is not about changing one's behaviour but the social meanings. For Haslanger ideology is not just about politics but also of culture.⁹⁶

According to Michel Foucault, power has traditionally been seen to work through two roads: either through blatant and direct imposing of force or by softer, more concealed way of being accepted through discourses of ideologies. For Foucault however, the exertion of power is not connected to ideology, but to knowledge. Foucault states that power and knowledge are not opposed as in the binary of force versus ideology but are interdependent: power produces knowledge and knowledge enables power. Every exercise of power involves the creation of certain forms of knowledge, such as administrative surveys or classifications. Knowledge is not mere ideology—a distorted or illusory representation of reality—but constitutive of truth regimes that shape how society functions.⁹⁷

⁹² (Storey 2009, 2.)

⁹³ (Macionis 2010, 257.)

⁹⁴ (Hall 2006, 24–25.)

⁹⁵ (Durkheim & Fields 1995, 421–423; Malinowski 2007, 128–129; Sorel & Jennings 1999, 27–31.)

⁹⁶ (Haslanger 2017.)

⁹⁷ (Foucault, Davidson & Collège de France 2015, 233–237.)

Foucault does not see power as a thing that one has but as something that one does. Power is not something that some possess, and others do not, rather it is exercised across the entire social field through countless connections, relationships, and points of support. The exertion of power may or may not succeed, it is a risk rather than a relation of appropriation. It is a constant strategic and dynamic relation akin to ongoing conflict or “power battle” between individuals. Power is not stable, one-sided, or a monolith. It is not held by one group or class absolutely, though classes may gain advantages. Power relationships are never stable. Power can also never be bestowed on a certain group or an individual, since this would mean that anyone else who uses their power would fall outside society.⁹⁸

Foucault argues that power is not something located in the state apparatuses such as government and police. These state apparatuses are not origins of power but rather concentrations or even support structures within broader networks of power. The apparatuses function within a system of power, and their power depends on and interact within a dispersed system of power. He states that the systems of power should be distinguished from political structures. Systems of power consists of various sources of power and is much more extensive than political power. Foucault reframes power as diffuse, relational, productive, and deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life—not simply repressive or hierarchical. He argues for a micro-physics of power—the analysis of power not at the level of institutions or ideologies alone, but in the fine-grained relations and practices that structure social life. Foucault argues that power is always mobile, strategic, and immanent—not just top-down, but operating through networks, conflicts, and interdependencies.⁹⁹

The structured social system in which groups and individuals are organized in relation to one another is referred to as social hierarchy. The different levels of power and status are based on characteristics such as social class, occupation, and gender. These hierarchies influence social dynamics, such as social mobility, social interactions, and access to various resources. Those higher in the hierarchy receive more privileges, influence, and respect. Social hierarchy as a concept can be used to study the distribution of power, privileges, and responsibilities within a community. While social hierarchies are present in nearly all societies, they differ greatly from one culture to another based on what each culture values. Formal hierarchies are

⁹⁸ (Foucault, Davidson & Collège de France 2015, 228–229.)

⁹⁹ (Foucault, Davidson & Collège de France 2015, 229.)

institutional, officially recognized, and codified, whereas informal hierarchies are based on cultural practices and social conventions, and thus less fixed.¹⁰⁰

Social hierarchies often reflect inequalities in power, prestige, social influence, wealth, and other valued resources. Even though established hierarchies can establish order, minimise conflicts over resources, and increase coordination within the group,¹⁰¹ the system is usually unjust and inequal which can lead to tensions and conflicts within the society. Traditionally hierarchy has referred to a system where the ranked positions of power are clearly aligned by the authority of control and command. Recent studies have approached hierarchy as a more complex nested structure of larger groups and smaller subgroups.¹⁰²

The term hegemony originally referred to a form of indirect control or dominance in international relations. In the early 20th century, Italian Marxist thinker and political leader Antonio Gramsci redefined the concept to analyse power dynamics within a society. He formulated the theory of cultural hegemony as a way to understand class relations and how the dominant class maintains authority not only through coercion but also through gaining consent.¹⁰³

Hegemony theory explores how social norms support and legitimise existing social arrangements by presenting the dominant worldview as natural, unavoidable, and advantageous for all social groups—rather than as constructed ideas that primarily serve the interests of the ruling elite.¹⁰⁴ As Hall states, the aim of a hegemony is not to make everyone the same but rather solidify the existing differences.¹⁰⁵ Hegemony makes dominant ideas appear natural, often making them difficult to question. Today, the term hegemony is often used as a shorthand to refer to the relatively dominant status of a particular set of beliefs and their tendency to become accepted as common sense or self-evident.¹⁰⁶

Gender is often defined as the cultural interpretation or inscription of sex.¹⁰⁷ The cultural constructions of gender vary between societies and periods of time. Currently most societies are constructed based on a cultural understanding of gender binary, in which people are

¹⁰⁰ (Cheng & Tracy 2014, 3; Anderson, Hildreth & Howland 2015.)

¹⁰¹ (Cheng & Tracy 2014, 3.)

¹⁰² (Miura 2025.)

¹⁰³ (Gramsci 1978, 5–7, 12.)

¹⁰⁴ (Bullock & Trombley 1999, 387–388.)

¹⁰⁵ (Hall 2019, 79.)

¹⁰⁶ (Bullock & Trombley 1999, 387–388; Rosamond 2025.)

¹⁰⁷ (Butler 1990, 10.)

divided into two gender categories for gender socialization.¹⁰⁸ According to the American gender studies scholar and feminist philosopher Judith Butler gender is not something natural or unchangeable, but rather a repeating performance. They state that even though the cultural performance of gender can be creative, the society punishes those who do not follow the expected roles or act out of turn.¹⁰⁹

2.2.4 Framework for Individual

The third framework focuses on individuals and how they relate to culture and society. The framework is likewise divided into three categories: identity, social status, and personal religiosity, while also assessing how the social categories intersect with the aspects of worldview. As it will later become apparent from the analysis, the concept of intersectionality is also necessary to understand the social reality of the ironborn, since it allows to study how the various cultural and societal factors intertwine, which is the case for various groups and individuals in the story.

Stuart Hall describes how identity used to be understood as this version of “one true self”, which can be hidden, but that an individual or group can discover to finally know who they really are. He states that much of the internal and external discourse around cultural and individual identity still follow these “old logics”, in which identity the ground of action. Even though Hall admits that this view can have its value on individual or societal level, he sees its logic flawed.¹¹⁰ For Hall identity is not a question of “what we really are”, but rather “what we have become”.¹¹¹

According to Stuart Hall, identity is formed through interaction with cultural discourses and social practices. Identity is a process of becoming, shaped by factors like race, gender, class, and sexuality. These identities are constantly changing as people draw on cultural resources to define themselves and their place in the world.¹¹² Identity is contradictory and composed from multiple discourses. For Hall identity is formed from narratives and representations—it is not something that exists and is told about, but rather it comes to be through narration.¹¹³ Because of his own background, Hall has written a lot about diasporic cultural identity where people

¹⁰⁸ (Nadal 2017, 401.)

¹⁰⁹ (Butler 1988, 531.)

¹¹⁰ (Hall 1990, 223; Hall 2019, 64–65)

¹¹¹ (Hall 2017b.)

¹¹² (Hall 2017b.)

¹¹³ (Hall 2019, 70–71.)

are reinventing themselves and their identities by mixing and hybridizing influences from their ancestral culture and current surroundings.¹¹⁴

Social status refers to individual's rank or place within a group or society, highlighting their relative standing compared to others. It affects how they are perceived and treated by others and what kinds of resources or opportunities they get. Person's status is always relative—it depends on the context and who the person is with, and it is influenced by the society's stratification¹¹⁵ system.¹¹⁶ The German sociologist Max Weber states that people gain honour and respect based on how well they fit the society's values and ideals—for example a capitalist society can value wealth and a religious society piety. According to Weber the social stratification is based on three key aspects: status, class, and power. For Weber the status comes from belonging to a certain group which enjoys specific privileges.¹¹⁷

Today status is usually seen more broadly as a person's general level of respect in a society,¹¹⁸ even though there is no consensus on the exact definition and use of the term.¹¹⁹ The social status of an individual is often determined based on multiple factors, such as family, wealth, profession, and social relationships. Social status can either be ascribed or achieved—or more commonly a combination of those two. Ascribed status refers to inherited position, which is assigned to a person already at birth, such as family background, ethnicity, or gender, whereas achieved status is earned through life by one's own achievements, such as knowledge or skills.¹²⁰ Because social status is based on beliefs about individual's social worth and value, it can make inequality seem fair or natural, making people less likely to challenge the societal hierarchies.¹²¹

The personal religiosity comprises individual expression of religious belief, moral and behaviour. Its three dimensions can be found from the framework of Francis-Vincent Anthony, Chris A. M. Hermans, and Carl Sterkens, which was presented earlier. The three cultural systems are transformed into the dimensions of personal religiosity as follows: the

¹¹⁴ (Hall 1990, 235–236.)

¹¹⁵ The concept of social stratification refers to the way in which people and groups are ranked in a hierarchy (Barkow 2014, 42–43).

¹¹⁶ (Frank 1985.)

¹¹⁷ (Weber 1946.)

¹¹⁸ (Ridgeway 2014.)

¹¹⁹ See e.g. Wasserman & Faust 1994; Pescosolido & Martin 2015.

¹²⁰ (Dinwiddie 2010.)

¹²¹ (Ridgeway 2014.)

cognitive system produces personal belief, the normative system produces moral consequences, and the expressive system produces popular devotion.¹²²

The term ‘intersectionality’ was first used by the American scholar of critical race studies Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and has since become a key analytical framework to approach structural identities of class, race, gender, and sexuality.¹²³ During the beginning of the 21st century the concept has been adapted globally not just in academia, but in policy, activism, and everyday use. Despite various definitions, intersectionality is generally understood as a framework for analysing how multiple social factors—such as class, race, gender, and sexuality—intersect to shape individual and societal realities. There is usually never just a single factor that could fully explain social structures or individual’s experiences, which is why the intersectional approach helps to understand social realities and complex identities. Intersectionality is used especially to study privilege and discrimination.¹²⁴

¹²² (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens 2015, 86–89.)

¹²³ (Cooper 2015.)

¹²⁴ (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016, 16–17.)

3 Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

3.1.1 Approach and Rationale

Content analysis is the most common analysis methods in qualitative research and also currently one of the most popular forms of text analysis in study of religion.¹²⁵ By definition, content analysis refers to the systematic and objective-oriented analysis of various types of data—such as texts, images, or symbols—from a perspective chosen by the researcher, enabling a clear and verbalized description of the studied phenomenon.¹²⁶ Content analysis is particularly suitable for processing unstructured data and it aims to summarize and generalize the studied phenomenon.¹²⁷ This is why it is a fitting methodological tool for this thesis, since the research material is large and unstructured, and would be harder to approach and study through other methods.

When discussing qualitative content analysis specifically, it is distinguished from content analysis (in the quantitative sense), which examines data using statistical methods. Both quantitative and qualitative content analysis rely on coding, where the researcher identifies meaningful elements within the data and categorizes these findings. Content analysis can be conducted inductively (data-driven grouping), deductively (theory-driven categorization), or through a combination of these approaches.¹²⁸ In this thesis the analysis will be done combining inductive and deductive approaches, since the both the theories and the research material guide the formation of the categories.

Qualitative content analysis can be categorized based on the level of abstraction at which the analysis is conducted, as well as whether the researcher aims to describe or interpret the data and the elements found from it. It is thus possible to distinguish two approaches to conducting content analysis: describing manifest content (explicit and observable elements) and interpreting latent content (underlying meanings).¹²⁹ In this thesis the focus is first more on

¹²⁵ (Badzinski, Woods & Nelson 2022, 180.)

¹²⁶ (Krippendorff 2019, 10; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, chapter 4.4.)

¹²⁷ (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, chapter 4.4.)

¹²⁸ (Vuori 2021; Elo et al. 2022.)

¹²⁹ (Graneheim, Lindgren & Lundman 2017.)

the description of the manifest content, later shifting more towards the interpretation of the latent content.

Qualitative content analysis is particularly suited for situations where understanding the meanings within the data requires an interpretative approach. The goal of qualitative content analysis is the systematic description of meanings within the data, making it applicable to the interpretation of various types of material, whether verbal or visual. However, qualitative content analysis does not aim to describe all possible meanings from every conceivable perspective but only those that have been specifically selected. This differentiates qualitative content analysis from many other qualitative methods—especially those rooted in the hermeneutic tradition—that approach data in a spiral manner, gradually constructing a more comprehensive understanding. Qualitative content analysis does not operate in this way; rather, the research questions define the perspective from which the data is examined.¹³⁰

For successful content analysis, it is crucial that the data coding process is conducted systematically; otherwise, there is a risk of overlooking aspects of the data that do not fit the researcher's initial assumptions.¹³¹ In addition to systematicity, flexibility and data reduction are key characteristics of qualitative content analysis. The method's flexibility is particularly evident in tailoring the coding frame to suit the data and research questions. Unlike other qualitative research methods, qualitative content analysis does not aim to expand or open the data but rather to narrow it down to the aspects relevant to the research questions and classify these detailed units into broader but fewer categories.¹³² After coding the data, the goal is to draw research-relevant and meaningful conclusions from its content.¹³³

3.1.2 Implementation

In general, there are no definitive rules or methodological concepts for conducting qualitative content analysis since it is not tied to any specific theoretical-methodological framework, except for content analysis based on grounded theory.¹³⁴ However, it is possible to find guideline models for qualitative content analysis. For instance, Margrit Schreier, a German adjunct professor of Empirical Methods in the Humanities and Social Sciences, has outlined its implementation in the following steps: 1) Defining the research questions, 2) Selecting the

¹³⁰ (Schreier 2012, Introduction.)

¹³¹ (Badzinski, Woods & Nelson 2022, 182–183.)

¹³² (Schreier 2012, Introduction.)

¹³³ (Badzinski, Woods & Nelson 2022, 182–183.)

¹³⁴ (Vuori 2021.)

data based on the research questions, 3) Constructing a coding frame consisting of main and potential subcategories, 4) Dividing the data into coding units, classifying their meanings within these categories, 5) Testing the coding frame, 6) Evaluating and refining the coding frame, 7) Conducting the actual analysis by coding the entire dataset and then transforming the coding frame so that the obtained information is converted into cases, and 8) Interpreting and presenting the findings.¹³⁵ The application of qualitative content analysis in this thesis is based on Schreier's outline.

According to Schreier, especially while working with large and complex material—such as *A Song of Ice and Fire*—it is important to make two decisions: where to start when building a coding frame and which parts of the material are relevant and which ones are not. In qualitative content analysis the coding frame is built around the key aspects of the study material based on the research questions. These dimensions or main categories of the coding frame define what is included in the study and what is left outside. Once the main categories are decided it is time to focus on the material either deductively using a concept-driven approach or inductively using a data-driven approach. However, it is more common to combine these two approaches by using an abductive mixed method, for example by forming the main categories based on a theory or prior information and later creating the subcategories based on the material.¹³⁶ This was the case in this thesis as well, as the coding frames and the main categories were formed based on the theoretical background. However, the latter as were later adjusted to the source material, which also formed the subcategories.

In qualitative content analysis, once the relevant parts of the material are found and categorized, the next step is to summarize the material by dividing them into further subcategories. Using clear category definitions ensures their understanding and systematic use. Each category definition has four parts: 1) name, which is concise and descriptive; 2) description that clarifies what the name means; 3) examples, whether real or hypothetical, of a typical case; and optional 4) decision rules, that can be used if subcategories overlap. After all the categories have been generated it is important that all details have been settled. If only part of the material was used to generate the coding frame, the process must be repeated with each

¹³⁵ (Schreier 2012, Introduction.)

¹³⁶ (Schreier 2012, 58–60, 84, 89.)

part of the material. A final coding frame should fully represent all variations in the data.¹³⁷ The finished coding frames can be found from the appendices of the thesis.

3.1.3 Strengths and Challenges

Content analysis—especially quantitative content analysis—has been criticized for often approaching the material as if the meaning of the symbols were unambiguous. However, this type of approach overlooks the differences in cultural interpretations and the diversity of possible associated perceptions that the symbols hold. Content analysis always takes place within a specific context, meaning that there can be as many interpretations as there are interpreters. Although researchers base their findings on their data, it is worth questioning how definitive these interpretations and the conclusions drawn from them can be. A text does not have meanings that are set in stone, but the reader always constructs their own interpretations of the meanings of a text. Thus, the analysis can never be purely objective—even in content analysis, the meanings of the data emerge through the researcher’s interpretations.¹³⁸ This was evident also in this thesis. The interpretations of the data were strongly based on the theories and concept definitions which I had chosen, but still my own reading of the text played a role in how I understood and categorised each section of the research material.

However, even though a purely objective analysis is not a possibility, this does not mean that objectivity should not be the goal to reach on as high a level as it is possible. In content analysis, objectivity can be improved by applying relevant theoretical frameworks, using precise definitions and well-structured coding categories to systematically describe the data, and by interpreting the results carefully and justifying. This all being said, one advantage of content analysis is that the researcher’s subjective influence might be smaller than in some other research methods. This is especially the case in studies where the data exists independently of the researcher’s involvement. The data that can be collected without the research process affecting the subject of the study is called naturally occurring data, and the collection of it in this way is referred as unobtrusive measures.¹³⁹ This was also the case in

¹³⁷ (Schreier 2012, 89, 95, 103–105.) For the qualitative content analysis coding frame of this thesis see Appendix 2 Coding Frames: Social Reality of the Ironborn.

¹³⁸ (Badzinski, Woods & Nelson 2022, 183; Krippendorff 2019, 27–29.)

¹³⁹ (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 4; Badzinski, Woods & Nelson 2022, 182–183.)

this study, where the research material already existed and continues to exist independently from this research.

One of the strengths of content analysis is that it is well suited for analysing unstructured data, generating generalizations, and summarizing the studied phenomenon. However, content analysis does not produce final conclusions but rather organizes the data to support analysis. Therefore, it has been criticized for not being able to reach meaningful conclusions when it is used alone.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, as previously noted, content analysis works exceptionally well in combination with other research methods. As in this case, where I am pairing it with theory-informed analysis to make further conclusions from my coded and categorized research material.

3.2 Theory-Informed Analysis

In scientific research, observations made from the data are not results on their own. Rather they act as clues that can lead to deeper understanding when looked at through a specific theoretical perspective.¹⁴¹ Qualitative analysis can be divided into data-driven, theory-informed, and theory-driven analysis, depending on the extent to which theory influences the handling of the data and the research process. In data-driven analysis, the analysis is constructed entirely from the data, without predefined theoretical concepts, and the researcher selects the units of analysis based on the purpose of the study. However, it is questionable whether it is possible to entirely exclude their preconceived notions and theoretical starting points—this issue has traditionally been addressed by carefully outlining the researcher's assumptions and consciously considering them during the analysis. Theory-driven analysis on the other hand is based on an existing theory that defines the research questions, data collection, and analysis. The analysis on its part is used to test the theory. However, the flexibility of the study may be limited if the theoretical framework cannot be used to analyze all the relevant parts of the data.¹⁴²

This study takes a theory-informed approach, where a specific theoretical framework guides the analysis but still leaves space for themes to emerge from the data. The method draws from both data-driven and theory-driven strategies. Theory is brought in at a chosen point to help structure the observations or to offer new ways of looking at them. In this way theory

¹⁴⁰ (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, chapter 4, chapter 4.4.)

¹⁴¹ (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 2.)

¹⁴² (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, chapter 4.2.)

functions as a tool to guide the researcher's attention, without restricting the possibility of insights arising directly from the material. The relationship between theory and data is abductive: it involves a creative back-and-forth between inductive observations and deductive reasoning. The flexibility of the process usually leads to new combinations and perspectives in the research. The goal is not to test the theory but rather use it in a way that could develop it further or even question it. The role of the researcher is central in the process as they decide how to apply theoretical tools while staying open to findings rising from the data.¹⁴³

3.3 Phases of the Analysis

According to Pertti Alasuutari, a Finnish scholar of sociology and cultural studies, qualitative analysis consists of two phases—simplifying observations and solving the puzzle—which are practically intertwined. He divides the simplification of observations into two parts: first, the data is examined from a specific theoretical-methodological perspective, and the aim is to identify the parts that are essential from the standpoint of this perspective and the current research questions. At this stage, the original data is reduced to cover only these "raw observations". In the second phase of simplification, the number of individual observations is reduced by combining them, for example, by identifying features that can be argued to represent the same broader phenomenon or by formulating rules for the entire dataset that link different observations together into a coherent whole, serving as the subject of the study.¹⁴⁴

In this thesis I went through the first phase twice, since it was done separately for the first two research questions. This meant that after having read and listened to all the books belonging to the *A Song of Ice and Fire* universe multiple times, I identified the parts from the books that are relevant for the study. I focused on the chapters¹⁴⁵ of the main series with ironborn viewpoint characters—this includes thirteen Theon chapters¹⁴⁶, four Asha chapters¹⁴⁷, two Aeron chapters¹⁴⁸, and four Victarion chapters¹⁴⁹—and the part about Iron Island in *The*

¹⁴³ (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, chapter 4.2.)

¹⁴⁴ (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 2.)

¹⁴⁵ The first five books of *A Song of Ice and Fire* have 344 chapters in total with 31 different viewpoint characters, the prologues and epilogues included.

¹⁴⁶ A Clash of Kings: Theon I–VI; A Dance with Dragons: Reek I–III, The Prince of Winterfell, The Turncloak, A Ghost in Winterfell, Theon I. (Martin 2011b, 164–186, 377–396, 537–546, 720–735, 800–810, 916–930; 2012, 176–185, 277–291, 461–475, 532–549, 588–601, 662–675, 736–751.)

¹⁴⁷ A Feast for Crows: The Kraken's Daughter; A Dance with Dragons: The Wayward Bride, The King's Prize, The Sacrifice. (Martin 2011d, 226–243; 2012, 364–384, 602–617, 890–904.)

¹⁴⁸ A Feast for Crows: The Prophet, The Drowned Man. (Martin 2011d, 23–41, 379–397.)

¹⁴⁹ A Feast for Crows: The Iron Captain, The Reaver; A Dance with Dragons: The Iron Suitor, Victarion I. (Martin 2011d, 362–378, 608–633; 2012, 811–824, 905–913.)

*World of Ice & Fire*¹⁵⁰. I also used the ‘A Search of Ice and Fire’ webpage¹⁵¹ to search the books for certain keywords, to make sure not to miss relative information from the material.

First, I identified the parts of the narrative that fit the chosen theoretical criteria for a myth and ordered them based on the phenomenon they represent focusing on the manifesting content. In this part I read through the ironborn chapters in *The World of Ice and Fire* looking for narratives that fit the chosen criteria for a myth, which I supplemented with further information from the main book series, *Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*, and *Fire & Blood*. After identifying the ironborn myths, I divided them into four categories and 19 subcategories based on the main character or object of the stories. I also assorted the subcategories into 70 further subcategories based on the elements and storylines in the myths.¹⁵²

Next, I went through the simplifying observations phase again, this time with the framework from cultural studies to find the parts of the material that are relevant for the second research question. To study the social reality of the ironborn I read the 23 chapters¹⁵³ of *A Song of Ice and Fire* with an ironborn viewpoint character and highlighted 576 distinct segments that included 1080 separate raw observations. After this I simplified these raw observations using qualitative content analysis and forming separate coding frames for the three conceptual frameworks introduced in 2.2. Cultural Studies. Later I divided the coding frames into separate categories and subcategories based on the theoretical background and the source material. This was done at a more abstract level by focusing both on the manifesting and the latent content. The first code frame had five categories and 22 subcategories, the second one had three categories and 10 subcategories, and the third code frame had four categories and 12 subcategories. To make the data more manageable I also divided the 44 subcategories into 256 further subcategories.¹⁵⁴

During all of this it is important to consider the characteristics of qualitative research. Alasuutari highlights that, unlike in quantitative research, qualitative research does not seek averages, typical cases, or statistical correlations. Contrary to the proverb, the exception does not prove the rule here, but when simplifying the data, the observations made must apply to the entire dataset. Since the research and its data are not quantitative, it is not possible to

¹⁵⁰ Which includes pages 174–193 in Martin, García & Antonsson 2014.

¹⁵¹ This tool can be found in <https://asearchoficeandfire.com/>.

¹⁵² The coding frame can be found in Appendix 1 of this thesis.

¹⁵³ These chapters are 369 pages in total.

¹⁵⁴ For the coding frames see Appendix 2 of this thesis.

claim that one observation is more common than another. However, it is not necessary to completely discard a single rule or observation, even if it does not cover all cases in the data, if it is possible to find an explanation for what it covers and what it does not, and to formulate a new, more precise rule based on that. Finding these comprehensive rules is central in qualitative analysis, so that raw observations can be reduced to as small several different observations as possible, making the data more manageable.¹⁵⁵

The second phase of analysis, which Alasuutari refers to as solving the puzzle, is commonly called the interpretation of results. In this phase, interpretations are made from the earlier observations based on clues found in the data, as well as other research, literature, and theories. The researcher, in a way, steps back at this stage and returns to the raw observations that have not yet been connected, seeking explanations for the phenomena. Alasuutari states that the more comprehensively the researcher can base their interpretation on various justifications, the more reliable it can be considered—although completely unambiguous answers cannot be achieved in scientific research. When studying cultures or related phenomena, the role of interpretation is often more prominent compared to the combining of observations, as distinct parts of the data often provide different perspectives on the overall subject, making the data non-homogeneous and thus not easily integrated.¹⁵⁶

In this thesis this means that I interpreted the findings from the coding frames. I based my interpretations mainly on the cultural studies approach, myth theories, and the information found in the source material. To answer the first research question of the ironborn myths, I wrote descriptions of the manifesting content from the source material based on the theoretical understanding of a myth, with interpretation of their functions based on a theoretical classification. To answer the second research question of the social reality of the ironborn my aim was to combine the description of the manifest content with interpretation of the latent content, basing my interpretations on the cultural studies approach and knowledge of the source material. For the third research question, I focused more on the interpretation of latent content by applying theories of myths and contrasting the findings about the social reality of the ironborn with the information about their mythology to understand how they interact with one another as an illustration of the representation of religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

¹⁵⁵ (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 2.)

¹⁵⁶ (Alasuutari 2015, chapter 2.)

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Researcher's Position

Due to the nature of my research material, ethical questions are not as central for this thesis as they are in many other studies in the field of the study of religion. As the focus of my research is on fictional religion, the level of sensitivity required is different from that of studying real religions and their practitioners. Similarly, since the characters who are studied are fictional, questions of privacy and anonymity are not relevant in this study. Nonetheless, it is crucial to maintain proper scientific practices, such as precision and diligence, throughout the thesis, and use proper references to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research.¹⁵⁷

It is also important to properly attribute the work to George R. R. Martin—as well as to Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson for their part. Since the ironborn culture, society, and religion are fictional, they should not be used to misrepresent their counterparts in the real world or to promote stereotypes. The research should remain sensitive and focus on the ironborn society as a fictional creation, without drawing unfair comparisons to real cultures. Since this research involves a fictional society, informed consent is not a concern, but ethical issues still arise in how the findings are shared and interpreted. It is also important to avoid making speculative claims that could misrepresent the author's intent. For example, the ideals and values that the characters in the book series hold are not necessarily shared by the author.

The first part of my analysis is in a risk to resemble “armchair anthropology”¹⁵⁸ since I will make my research on the ironborn mythology mainly based on “secondary sources”, as it must be noted that the information about the ironborn in *The World of Ice & Fire* comes mainly from external sources—except for the parts referencing the writings of Archmaester Hake and Maester Theron, who are ironborn themselves.¹⁵⁹ I try to avoid the shortfalls of this methodology by critically evaluating the source materials and by observing the ironborn society through the ironborn point-of-view characters of the main series to better understand the culture and society from within.

It must also be noted that this kind of analysis can never be purely objective. For example, it is possible that the parts of the ironborn society and identity that are more foreign to me are more likely to stand out from the material. It is important to engage in active self-reflection during the research process. For example, my own background, values, and worldview affect

¹⁵⁷ (TENK 2023.)

¹⁵⁸ For the concept of ‘armchair anthropology’ and its history see e.g. Sera-Shriar 2014.

¹⁵⁹ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 176, 214.)

the interpretations that I make from the source material. This is especially true when approaching the material from a cultural studies perspective, which by its nature does not aspire to be neutral or purely objective but rather takes a critical approach on the matter of study. On the other hand, the chosen method—qualitative content analysis—aims to form an analysis that is not only systematic but also more objective, and thus likewise requires active self-reflection to not include subjective views or opinions in where they do not belong.

The parts of my background, that will most likely influence the way I view the research material are my gender as a female, Finnish nationality, and my political views, which are progressive and left-wing. Because of my gender I am more likely to understand the struggles and cultural contexts of the female characters, since I have never been socialized as a man. My political views on the other hand will probably make me more critical towards the conservative values and ideas in the ironborn society, as well growing up in a relatively liberal and secular society. What it comes to my views on religion, I resonate with George R. R. Martin's background and views as someone who has left the church and now identifies as agnostic, but at the same time is still fascinated by religions.¹⁶⁰

Ever since reading *The World of Ice and Fire* I have been intrigued by the vast mythology of the ironborn and how it reflects their worldview. At the same time, I have been increasingly interested in the way humans use narratives to make sense of the world and their lives. And combining these interests made sense in this context. My own academical background is mainly in the study of religion, political science, history, and educational sciences. As a soon-to-be teacher I also find it meaningful to try to find different methods to teach students critical thinking skills and approach complex topics such as religion, culture, and society.

¹⁶⁰ For Martin's relationship with religion see e.g. Hibberd 2011.

4 Ironborn Mythology

4.1 Of Gods and Demigods

Next, I will introduce ironborn myths—which I have categorized based on their main characters and objects—and reflect them on Joseph Campbell’s theory of the four functions of myth. As described in more detail in 2.1.2 Theories of Myth, according to Campbell myths can serve mystical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological functions.¹⁶¹

The ironborn mythology, as far as we know, does not start with the creation of the universe or the earth—it begins with the creation of the seas, the Iron Islands and the ironborn. At the heart of the ironborn belief is the Drowned God, also known as *He Who Dwells Beneath the Waves*¹⁶². This deity, who rules over a court of merlings under the sea,¹⁶³ is central to the cosmological function of the ironborn mythology, explaining their place of the universe. The myths tell how the Drowned God created the ironborn in his image in the watery halls under the sea. The Drowned God made the ironborn to rule over all the seas, plunder and pillage, forge kingdoms, and “write their names in fire and blood and song”.¹⁶⁴ This narrative does not only define their purpose within the world but can also serves a sociological function establishing and reinforcing some of the core values of the ironborn culture, such as raiding, conquest, and venture.

After their own deaths the ironborn will return to the Drowned God’s watery halls, where they shall drink, feast, and enjoy eternal comforts, attended by mermaids who fulfill all their wants.¹⁶⁵ This promise of afterlife can fulfill the psychological function of myth by offering solace and meaning in the ultimate rite of passage. The belief of the ironborn, that their god drowned himself for their sake,¹⁶⁶ for its part, can evoke the mystical function of myth by the sense of wonder that this sacrifice gives, strengthening the emotional connection to the faith. The eternal battle between the Drowned God and the Storm God—a malicious deity who lives in the skies in a cloudy hall and hates humankind, sending down strong storms trying to cast down the ironborn,¹⁶⁷ offers another aspect to the cosmological framework. This dualistic

¹⁶¹ (Campbell 1965, 519–522.)

¹⁶² (Martin 2012, 613.)

¹⁶³ (Martin 2012, 384.)

¹⁶⁴ (Martin 2011b, 169.)

¹⁶⁵ (Martin 2011d, 28.)

¹⁶⁶ (Martin 2011d, 24, 36.)

¹⁶⁷ (Martin 2011d, 32, 39–40; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

narrative explains the challenges that the ironborn face at sea and provides mythical reasons for the harsh conditions of their living.

A central figure in the ironborn mythology is the Grey King, whose very existence encompasses all of Campbell's functions. His name, which he got from his eyes and beard, which were the color of a winter sea, and his rule over the ironborn and the sea itself in ancient times, established his legendary status. The Grey King's marriage to a mermaid, which allows his descendants to live above or below the seas as they chose, serves a mystical function. Since the Grey King had gotten his kingship from the Drowned God he wore a crown made of driftwood. This reinforces the sociological function by legitimizing his rule through divine right and establishing a precedent for the following rulers. The Grey King is said to have done many great deeds, such as warring with the Storm God and bringing fire to humanity by taunting the god until he set a tree ablaze with a thunderbolt.¹⁶⁸ These narratives serve a dual function by contributing to the cosmological function with the explanation for the origin of fire and fulfilling a sociological function by providing a model of a cultural hero.

The Grey King carved the very first longship from the pale wood of Ygg—a demon tree that sustained itself on human flesh. He also taught humans how to sail and weave nets to catch fish. These stories feature elements of sociological function, transmitting practical skills and traditions central in the ironborn life. The Grey King also faced Nagga, the first and largest of the sea dragons who had been so enormous that she was able to drown whole islands and fed on leviathans and giant krakens. After the Grey King had slain her, the Drowned God changed Nagga's bones to stone, which the Grey King used for beams and pillars as he built his longhall on the island of Old Wyk and made a throne of her jaws and a crown of her teeth.¹⁶⁹ These myths provide a mystical and cosmological narrative, explaining the origins of important landmarks while reinforcing the prowess and divine favor of the Grey King.

The Grey King ruled the Iron Islands for a thousand years—or a thousand and seven, depending on the source—until his skin had turned grey. Then he set aside his crown and walked into the sea and to the watery halls of the Drowned God to sit at his right hand. His peaceful descent provides a psychological function by offering a narrative for a complete, heroic life and the beginning of the afterlife. After the Grey King's death, the Storm God drowned Nagga's living fire which had warmed the Grey King's Hall, and the riches of the

¹⁶⁸ (Martin 2011d, 380; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

¹⁶⁹ (Martin 2011d, 380; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

Grey King's court were either stolen or swallowed by the sea, leaving only Nagga's bones to stand on the hills of Old Wyk. The Grey King left a hundred sons behind him who started to war among themselves after his death. Only sixteen of them survived the kinslaying and they divided the islands between themselves. This decline of a golden age serves cosmological function by describing how the social reality of the Iron Islands came to be. All the great houses of the ironborn trace their ancestry on the surviving sons of the Grey King, except for one who claims the Grey King's loyal eldest brother as their forebear.¹⁷⁰ The narrative of the Grey King's sons (and a brother) serves a sociological function by providing a foundational lineage for the great houses of the ironborn, legitimizing later power structures, and explaining the historical divisions among the islands while reinforcing the idea of a shared heritage and collective identity.

4.2 Of Priests and Prophets

The role of priests and prophets in ironborn mythology further illustrates the functions of myth as stated by Campbell. In the ancient tradition even before the recorded history, the priests of the Drowned God are said to have wandered the Iron Islands spreading his word and condemning all rival gods and their followers.¹⁷¹ This narrative primary serves a sociological function by establishing and enforcing religious orthodoxy and shared belief system. Upon the death of a king, these priests summoned the captains of the isles for a kingsmoot to select a successor. This mythological authority to summon kingsmoots has a sociological function, endorsing the political structure and methods of power transfer within the ironborn society.

The most distinguished of these holy men was the prophet Galon Whitestaff, named for his tall white staff made of weirwood—or possible one of Nagga's bones—which he used to strike the ungodly. The mythology surrounding Galon embodies several functions, such as the mystical dimension which enhance his perceived divine power. Galon forbade the ironborn from warring, raiding, and carrying off other ironborn and reunited the Iron Islands into a single kingdom by summoning a kingsmoot to choose a high king to rule over all the salt and rock kings. He crowned the chosen Urras Ironfoot himself. This unification of the ironborn has a sociological impact, promoting social cohesion, order, and collective identity. When Urras's son Erich the Ugly tried to seize the crown after his father's death Galon—despite his advanced age—summoned a kingsmoot to unmake Erich and condemn him to death. Erick

¹⁷⁰ (Martin 2011d, 380–381, Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

¹⁷¹ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

narrowly avoided execution by breaking his father's crown and casting it into the sea, after which a new king was chosen by the kingsmoot.¹⁷² These narratives of crowning and dethroning kings demonstrate the direct influence of religious authority on political legitimacy and the enforcement of moral norms, fulfilling a sociological function.

Ever since the Andal invasion¹⁷³ over Westeros the Faith of the Seven started to gain a foothold on the Iron Islands as well. These events and the era that followed afterwards give an example of sociological function of myth in responding to external cultural threats. After Harmund II Hoare, the King of the Iron Islands, had married Lelia Lannister, the daughter of the King of the Rock, their children were raised in the Faith of the Seven. When their eldest son became king as Harmund III Hoare, known as Harmund the Handsome, he outlawed reaving and taking of salt wives and planned to end the practice of thralldom, angering the ironborn and the priests of the Drowned God.¹⁷⁴

The rebellion against the crown was led by a priest known as the Shrike, and the king was cast down. The Shrike cut off his tongue so he could never again speak lies and blasphemies, and he also lost his nose and eyes. The Dowager Queen Lelia suffered a similar fate since she was blamed for turning her husband and sons away from the Drowned God. After learning of this the westermen conquered the Iron Islands. Their leader Ser Aubrey Crakehall tried to claim the kingship of the Iron Islands for himself, but in less than half a year was captured and sacrificed to the Drowned God by the Shrike.¹⁷⁵ The myth of Shrike's rebellion demonstrates myth's sociological function in resisting perceived cultural weakening and reasserting traditional norms through violent purges. The Shrike's brutal punishments reinforce the faith in exacting retribution and restoring traditional order, thus restoring the society to its central values.

Centuries later a group of priests of the Drowned God gathered in Old Wyk and crowned one of their own to be the King of the Iron Islands. This holy man known as Lodos claimed to be Drowned God's living son. This myth illustrates the mystical and psychological functions. When foreign warships neared the Iron Islands the priest-king called the Drowned God to send krakens to drag down the fleet. After nothing happened, Lodos filled his robes with stones and walked into the sea ensued by thousands of followers to have a council with the

¹⁷² (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 179–180.)

¹⁷³ The Andals are an ethnic group who brought the Faith of the Seven with them from Essos to Westeros.

¹⁷⁴ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 184–185.)

¹⁷⁵ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 184–185.)

Drowned God, his claimed father. During the following years bloated corpses kept washing up on the shores of Iron Island, but Lodos's body was never found. Lodos's myth showcases belief in divine intervention in times of trouble. The lack of Lodos's body among the ones which were washed ashore demonstrates the mystical dimension of the myth, leaving his faith ambiguous and enchanting his legendary status.

Years later a revolt in the Iron Islands was led by a man who claimed to be Lodos the Twice-Drowned who had finally returned from the watery halls of the Drowned God. The resurfacing of Lodos adds to the psychological function of the original myth, offering hope and trust in the higher power. However, the Lord of the Iron Islands, Goren Greyjoy, ended Lodos's revolt quickly and put his followers to the sword. As a reward for this the lord was given permission to expel the Faith of the Seven from the Iron Islands, leaving the isles solely for the Drowned God for a century.¹⁷⁶ The outcome, with the Drowned God's sole domination for a hundred years reinforces the sociological function of the myth by defending and solidifying the dominant religious system.

4.3 Of Rulers and Reavers

The tales of the fearless and cruel salt kings and captains who raided the green lands primarily serve sociological functions¹⁷⁷ by establishing heroic archetypes and cultural ideals in the ironborn society. Some of the famous stories include Dagon Drumm the necromancer, Hrothgar of Pyke with a kraken-summoning horn, Ragged Ralf of Old Wyk, Torgon the Terrible, and Jorl the Whale. The most famous of them however was Balon Blackskin, who wielded weapons in both hands, as blades made by man shattered harmlessly against his skins.¹⁷⁸ During this golden era of the ironborn the reavers went forth to claim riches, wood for their longships, food to sustain them, and salt wives to give them sons. Later, they even started to seek to conquer and colonize.¹⁷⁹ This change illustrates the evolving sociological norms that are embedded within the mythical history of the ironborn.

One of the celebrated High Kings of the Iron Islands was Qhored the Cruel who expanded ironborn domination to all shores of Westeros touched by the Sunset Sea. His reign was marked by brutal conquests, mass abductions, and sacrificial drownings dedicated to the

¹⁷⁶ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 53, 188; Martin 2018, 64–66.)

¹⁷⁷ (Campbell 1965, 519–522.)

¹⁷⁸ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 176–177.)

¹⁷⁹ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 180.)

Drowned God. His campaigns forced coastal people into either submission or exile. These narratives have clear sociological functions in articulating and legitimizing harsh social order and justifying extreme violence and expansion. Although ironborn power declined after his reign, figures like Joron I Blacktyde upheld the fearsome reputation of the ironborn, famously torturing the King of the Reach to death and earning notoriety for ruthless raids, such as the sacking of the Arbor and carrying off every woman under the age of thirty, earning the name Maidensbane.¹⁸⁰ The myths of Joron I Blacktyde serve a sociological function by helping to construct the ironborn identity.

One of the central myths surrounding ironborn governance is the aftermath of the death of King Urragon III Greyiron: The late king's eldest son Torgon was away at sea at the time of his father's death and—due to the hastiness in which the kingsmoot was held—did not get chance to try to claim the kingship for himself. Instead, Urrathon Goodbrother was crowned as king and became later known as Badbrother for his cruelty and impiety. Upon returning, Torgon, with the support of priests, great lords, and small folk alike, overthrew Urrathon and ruled for decades without ever been chosen by a kingsmoot, setting a precedent for hereditary rule.¹⁸¹ This mythical history serves sociological functions in defining political legitimacy and offering guidance how to challenge perceived impiety. The transition to hereditary rule was solidified when Torgon's descendant Urron Redhand violently suppressed a later kingsmoot, establishing a hereditary monarchy and reducing the rock and salt kings to vassal lords.¹⁸² All in all, these mythical narratives illustrate how social norms of governance can be formed, transmitted, and contested within the ironborn society.

The ironborn mythology also features antiheroes—such as the kings of House Hoare. They are remembered for their "black blood" and symbolize ironborn decline. Their reputed Andal ancestry and religious tolerance, including protection of the Faith of the Seven, provoked opposition from priests and widespread unrest among the people. During their reign, raiding gave way to trading, which was seen as shameful by the ironborn. The Harmunds' favor of diplomacy and the Faith of the Seven ended in a rebellion led by the Shrike, who re-established traditional practices. The war and devastation which followed left the Iron Islands impoverished.¹⁸³ These myths serve sociological functions as cautionary tales which

¹⁸⁰ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 153, 180, 210, 215.)

¹⁸¹ (Martin 2012, 374–375.)

¹⁸² (Martin 2011b, 186; 2011d, 234; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 181–182.)

¹⁸³ (Martin 2012, 183–185.)

demonstrate the negative consequences of deviation from traditional ironborn culture, identity, and faith.

A brief resurgence under Harwyn Hardhand expanded ironborn dominion over the riverlands but this shifted the kings' focuses from seaborne raiding to territorial conquest. The construction of Harrenhal—the largest castle in all of Westeros—by Harren the Black became the symbol of these ambitions. Its fiery destruction and the extinction of House Hoare did not just mark the definitive collapse of the ironborn mainland but also the loss of their independence.¹⁸⁴ Even though the ironborn might reached its highest point during the reign of House Hoare, their kings did not achieve the same heroic status as other less successful kings, who followed more traditional ways. This underscores the myth's sociological function in placing higher value on traditions over material success.

On the other hand, one of the great heroes of the ironborn is Dalton Greyjoy, known as the Red Kraken, embodies the ironborn archetype of the fearless and ambitious reaver. Rising to lordship as a teenager after early feats of battle, Dalton exploited a Westerosi civil war to lead extensive raids along its western coast. Over two years he continued to raid and seize wealth—including several wives—on the coasts of the Sunset Sea. When the war eventually ended, the Red Kraken refused to stop raiding. He was finally killed in his sleep by a woman named Tess. Without a legitimate heir the ironborn started to fight among themselves and lost their footings on the mainland and the Iron Islands were sacked violently. Even though Dalton Greyjoy's reign led to the devastation of the ironborn he is still remembered as a great hero.¹⁸⁵ This contradiction highlights the sociological function of myth by offering a model for a hero which resonates with the cultural identity of the ironborn.

Another cultural hero whose myth fulfills a sociological function by reinforcing cultural identity and providing a collective sense of purpose and pride—even in defeat—was Dagon Greyjoy. Dagon, who is known as the Last Reaver, is remembered as a legendary raider who embodied the traditional values of reaving and maritime dominance. As Lord of the Iron Islands Dagon led extensive raids on all of Westeros's western coast, raiding and successfully

¹⁸⁴ (Martin 2012, 185–186.)

¹⁸⁵ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 188–190.)

resisting retaliation by retreating to the sea.¹⁸⁶ Even though he was eventually defeated by the Iron Throne, Dagon became a symbol of the defiance and independence of the ironborn.¹⁸⁷

4.4 Of Magic and Mysteries

The mythological narratives concerning magic and mysteries deeply engage with Campbell's mystical and cosmological functions.¹⁸⁸ According to the ironborn, their ancestors found the Seastone Chair when they first arrived at the Old Wyk, even though the islands were uninhabited. The Seastone Chair, that is now used as the high seat of House Greyjoy, is a throne carved of an immense block of oily black stone into the shape of a kraken.¹⁸⁹ The makers of the chair remain a mystery. However, there are multiple stories of its origins. According to some versions the chair was left on the isles by visitors from the unknown lands on the other side of the Sunset Sea, while others believe that it was left there by the first inhabitants of the isles.¹⁹⁰ The discovery of the Seastone Chair in an uninhabited isle creates a sense of wonder, reviving the mystical function of myth, while the various theories of its origins offer alternative cosmological explanations.

There is also a theory that the Seastone Chair as well as the fortress on Battle Isle in Oldtown—which are both made out of similar black stones and share an unknown origin—were made by a race of half humans fathered on human women by creatures from the sea. Maester Theron, who was born on the Iron Islands, has suggested that the legends of merlings are based on this race that he calls the Deep Ones, and that the Drowned God is an interpretation of the sea creatures who fathered them. It is not clear whether this idea is more widely shared among the ironborn, or a theory created by Maester Theron alone.¹⁹¹

Whichever the case, these narratives have cosmological functions as explanations for the mysteries of the sea and the Drowned God, while enhancing the mystical dimension by blurring the lines between the natural, unnatural, and supernatural.

Stories of half-humans are also told of House Farwynd and their smallfolk. They hold lands on the westernmost parts of the Iron Islands, including on a cluster of isles eight days sail from the main Iron Islands, and thus live in one of the most remote locations of the known

¹⁸⁶ (Martin 2012, 599; 2015a, 178, 254; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 104, 141, 190.)

¹⁸⁷ (Martin 2011d, 363; 2012, 371, 812, 910–911.)

¹⁸⁸ (Campbell 1965, 519–522.)

¹⁸⁹ (Martin 2011b, 391.)

¹⁹⁰ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 7, 175.)

¹⁹¹ See Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 214.

world. The other ironborn regard them as a queer folk, and some believe that they lie with seals to give birth to half-human children or are skinchangers who can take the forms of different marine mammals.¹⁹² These narratives have mystical functions, enriching the world with magical and uncanny elements.

Finally, there are persistent tales of lands even further away in the west, of a paradise that lies over the horizon across the Sunset Sea.¹⁹³ Many sailors, such as Alton Greyjoy, named the Holy Fool, have tried to reach this fabled land, but none have returned to tell of their success.¹⁹⁴ Myths like this can serve a dual psychological function by both forewarning and encouraging people to approach the unknown in life. It is up to the individual whether they believe that sailing uncharted water leads to destruction or to paradise.

¹⁹² (Martin 2011d, 384–385; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 176.)

¹⁹³ (Martin 2011d, 384–385.)

¹⁹⁴ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 190.)

5 Social Reality of the Ironborn

5.1 Ironborn Worldview

5.1.1 Cultural Identity and Otherness

According to the ironborn, out of all the peoples of the world solely they were created by the Drowned God and thus are his chosen people.¹⁹⁵ Unlike other men, only they are made of iron, with saltwater running through their veins.¹⁹⁶ This narrative, as understood through the concept of cultural identity being shaped by narratives of the past, sets them apart from all the other people.¹⁹⁷ This self-perception represents them as separate from the rest of the humankind and positions them closer to the creatures of the sea. The beings that the ironborn—especially the Greyjoys—emulate the most are krakens, the legendary rulers of the deep seas, which further articulates this identity, symbolizing their power, endurance, and connection to the sea.¹⁹⁸ The ironborn also have constructed a self-representation of their nature as people: They are proud and willful, and do not go in awe easily.¹⁹⁹ They are also brave and daring fighters, unafraid to face death or battle.²⁰⁰ The ironborn see themselves as hard people, and unforgiving for those who do not manage to live up to the standards of a proper ironborn.²⁰¹

The ironborn identity is showcased in many symbols. Their coats of arms often feature sea creatures, such as fish, kraken, and leviathan; symbols of death such as nooses, scythes, and bones; and central imagery of their way of life, such as longships sailing into sunset and the Storm God raising the waves.²⁰² The ruler of the ironborn sits in the Seastone Chair, which is shaped like a great kraken, and wear driftwood crowns to symbolize that their power comes from the sea.²⁰³ The ships of the ironborn—which arguably hold the most value in their society—tend to bear names to strike fear, such as Ravenfeeder, Thrall’s Bane, and Slaver’s Scream; pay tribute to their heroes, such as Lord Quellon, Dagon’s Feast, and Shrike; and

¹⁹⁵ See e.g. Martin 2011b, 169; 2011d, 32.

¹⁹⁶ (Martin 2011b, 184; 2012, 912.)

¹⁹⁷ (Hall 1990, 225–226; 2019, 66.)

¹⁹⁸ (Martin 2011d, 319, 621–622, 625–626.)

¹⁹⁹ (Martin 2011b, 166–167.)

²⁰⁰ (Martin 2011b, 805; 2012, 286–287.)

²⁰¹ (Martin 2012, 607.)

²⁰² (Martin 2011b, 172; 2011d, 226–227, 284–385, 388–389; 2012, 282–283.)

²⁰³ (Martin 2011b, 391; 2011d, 40–41, 362, 374, 619; 2012, 374–375.)

emphasize the sea, such as Foamdrinker, Silverfin, and Red Tide.²⁰⁴ The ironborn songs hold similar names, such as “The Bloody Cup” and “Steel Rain”,²⁰⁵ and highlight the central qualities and ideals of the ironborn identity.²⁰⁶ The ironborn worldview can also be seen in the titles of the Greyjoy ruler of the isles, who styles himself as “Lord Reaper of Pyke, King of Salt and Rock, Son of the Sea Wind,” and whose words boast “We Do Sow”.²⁰⁷

The cultural identity of the ironborn is strong but narrow, and it does not take much to deviate from it. As Stuart Hall states, the self is always built in relation to an “other”.²⁰⁸ When the ironborn construct an image for themselves, so do they build categories of otherness—in which many of the inhabitants of the Iron Islands find themselves. Since the ironborn are people of the Drowned God, othered and even persecuted are those who choose to worship other gods instead, and those who are deemed ungodly or not godly enough are seen as less.²⁰⁹ One perceived sign of a lost connection to the god is living inland, too far away from the sea.²¹⁰ Scorned as well are those who showcase foreign influence, such as styling themselves and acting as if they were from the mainland.²¹¹ Having maesters, singers, or knights—not to mention a septon—in the household is a sign of deviating away from the ironborn way of life.²¹² Even simple preferences such as love for the written word can be seen as a depravity, that sets the reader apart from the proper ironborn.²¹³ This exemplifies how social values are reinforced through discourse and representation.

There are also those who cannot help to be othered since their fault does not lie in their actions but in their birth. Thralls and salt wives who are captured in raids and taken to the Iron Islands never become ironborn. And even though the children of thralls are born free if they are given to the Drowned God, and accepted as ironborn, they will forever hold a lesser status, as will their descendants. The same way the sons of the foreign salt wives do not share the same status as the offspring of an ironborn rock wife.²¹⁴ Sometimes even having an ironborn ancestry is not enough, when the house one is born into lives separate enough from the rest of

²⁰⁴ (Martin 2011b, 544; 2011d, 363–364; 2012, 812, 905, 907–908, 909–910, 912.)

²⁰⁵ (Martin 2011d, 369.)

²⁰⁶ See e.g. Martin 2011b, 544–545, 919; 2012, 378.

²⁰⁷ (Martin 2011b, 169–170, 186.)

²⁰⁸ (Hall 2017a, 128–129; 2017b, 131.)

²⁰⁹ See e.g. Martin 2011d, 26, 39–41, 368, 618.

²¹⁰ (Martin 2011d, 28–29.)

²¹¹ (Martin 2011d, 38.)

²¹² See e.g. Martin 2011d, 32, 34, 277, 382.

²¹³ (Martin 2011d, 231.)

²¹⁴ (Martin 2011d, 242, 366–367, 620; 2012, 285, 368.)

the islanders. This is the case with the Farwynds, who inhabit the westernmost parts of the Iron Islands and the known world. They are not set apart from the other ironborn only by geography but also by their perceived “queerness” as suspected skinchangers, who can literally take a form of an other, by leaving their human bodies and taking a shape of an animal.²¹⁵

One of the central ironborn discourses of otherness is that of the “green lands” and the people inhabiting them. In their articulation the ironborn are hard and daring, whereas the men of the green lands are soft and afraid.²¹⁶ When a knight from the green lands wears armor in a sea battle, he is seen as “almost ironborn,”²¹⁷ since he matches better the representation that the ironborn have of themselves. Whereas the ironborn see all inhabitants of the mainland inferior to themselves, they have an especially low opinion of the crannogmen who they refer to as bog devils.²¹⁸ Unhuman attributes are also given to people from faraway places, that the ironborn can even name as monsters.²¹⁹ They are also referred to as godless men, wizards and sorcerers, and mongrels, and some can also be separated from the ironborn ideals by their trade of slaving.²²⁰

5.1.2 Temporality and Spatiality

The way in which the ironborn understand temporality and spatiality is constructed through discourse and cultural practices. One of the central pieces of the ironborn worldview is their understanding of the past. According to the narratives of the ironborn, there once was a glorious past, when the ironborn ruled the Sunset Sea and took what they wanted.²²¹ Now those days are long gone. This historical articulation creates a liminal state where the ironborn live with their hearts in the pasts and hands in the present—holding the nets, mining the ground, and some even trading for goods, paying the gold price for their purchases.²²² At the same time the old ways die hard, and many in the isles believe in a new age, or rather in an old one. This narrative of a glorious past influences their present identity and future aspirations. They await the return of the Old Way, for a future when the ironborn will once

²¹⁵ (See e.g. Martin 2011d, 384–385.)

²¹⁶ (Martin 2011b, 166, 924; 2011d, 608–609, 612; 2012, 607.)

²¹⁷ (Martin 2011d, 612.)

²¹⁸ (Martin 2012, 280, 819.)

²¹⁹ (Martin 2011d, 242, 366.)

²²⁰ (Martin 2011d, 368, 396–397; 2012, 821, 912.)

²²¹ (Martin 2011b, 169; 2011d, 395.)

²²² (Martin 2011b, 169–170, 178, 387, 727.)

again rule the western coasts of Westeros, living a life of freedom and conquest.²²³ This emphasis on returning rather than progressing time reflects cyclical components in the collective temporality of the ironborn.

Their spatiality is similarly filled with cultural meaning. As the ironborn themselves, the Iron Islands were likewise created by the Drowned God, making them thus separate from other parts of the known world. The ironborn view the Iron Islands as timeless—the isles are now as they were when their god created them.²²⁴ And they are a hard place—windy, cold, and damp—as are the people who inhabit them.²²⁵ The Iron Islands are not just geographical locations but sacred spaces, which are connected to the ironborn identity. The ironborn see their isles as holy, and the holiest of them all is Old Wyk, the central point of their sacred spatiality. Old Wyk was once the home of the legendary Grey King and still holds the remnants of his longhall, built from the bones of Nagga, the largest of the sea dragons. Old Wyk is the place where the seat of power of the ironborn—the Seastone Chair—was once found, and it is the place where the kingsmoot were once held and are held again.²²⁶

Other than their isles, the sea itself is holy and holds immense significance for the ironborn.²²⁷ It is not just a physical space or even the Drowned God's realm; it also *is* the Drowned God.²²⁸ This perception of the sea as a divine entity demonstrates how spatiality is intertwined with the religious and cultural worldview of the ironborn. The ironborn themselves are from the sea, and in the sea, they wish to spend their afterlife as well, in the watery halls of the Drowned God.²²⁹ Which is why they also wish to die near the sea.²³⁰ The sea symbolizes freedom for the ironborn and allows them to travel far and wide.²³¹ They see the sea as their home, that they should never wander far from.²³²

However, not all seas are the same. The sea that the ironborn hold near them is the Sunset Sea surrounding the Iron Islands. Farther away waters are foreign to them. They look different and act different, and it is not even clear whether the Drowned God can rule them as well or

²²³ (Martin 2011b, 179; 2011d, 28–29, 40–41; 2012, 395, 910–911.)

²²⁴ (Martin 2011b, 167.)

²²⁵ (Martin 2011b, 166.)

²²⁶ (Martin 2011b, 391; 2011d, 38, 40, 362, 387–388.)

²²⁷ (Martin 2011d, 27.)

²²⁸ (Martin 2011d, 37–38.)

²²⁹ (Martin 2011d, 36, 620.)

²³⁰ (Martin 2012, 378.)

²³¹ (Martin 2011d, 170.)

²³² (Martin 2011b, 170, 806.)

not.²³³ Outside his realms are at least the larger landmasses, such as Westeros and Essos, as well as the unknown hells that await people worshipping other gods.²³⁴ This difference between familiar and foreign spaces illustrates how the spatiality of the ironborn constructs clear boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the physical world as well and shapes their understanding of the world.

5.1.3 Institutional Religiosity

The belief system of the ironborn exemplifies institutional religiosity through its structured doctrines, normative values, and formal rituals. The religion is built around their faith in the Drowned God, who is the creator of the ironborn, the sea, and the Iron Islands.²³⁵ The narratives surrounding the Drowned God are various,²³⁶ and they construct an image of a god who is not just a creator and a god of a nation, but also a god of the water and a god of death and underworld.²³⁷ In addition to those central concepts, he is also a dying-and-rising god, who drowned for his people, a gift-giver, and even a trickster, who plays cruel japes on men.²³⁸ The Drowned God is at the same time a supreme ruler and yet a local god, whose dominion are the Iron Islands and the waters surrounding them, leaving large parts of the world outside his reach.²³⁹ The Drowned God is often depicted playing an active role in the events taking place in the world,²⁴⁰ though for many he is as deaf and silent as all the other gods.²⁴¹

The ironborn worldview features also another deity, the Storm God, who reigns over the sky, and is locked into an eternal battle with the Drowned God.²⁴² The Storm God hates the Drowned God and his people, meaning them harm. He is described to be unruly, evil, and vile, a schemer and a murderer, and the master of ravens.²⁴³ Even though the ironborn faith seems dualistic with a battle between good and evil, it is possibly henotheistic or monolatric. Whereas the ironborn mythology only features two gods, they seem to accept the idea of other

²³³ (Martin 2012, 813, 815.)

²³⁴ (Martin 2011b, 810; 2012, 537–538, 819, 908–909.)

²³⁵ (Martin 2011b, 167.)

²³⁶ The description of the Drowned God here has taken influence from Stith Thompson's motif-index (see e.g. Thompson 1955).

²³⁷ (Martin 2011d, 28, 37–38, 382; 2012, 378.)

²³⁸ (Martin 2011d, 23–24, 34–35, 226–227.)

²³⁹ (Martin 2011d, 28–29; 2012, 537–538, 813.)

²⁴⁰ (Martin 2011d, 35–38, 381–382, 617.)

²⁴¹ (Martin 2012, 537–538, 901.)

²⁴² (Martin 2011d, 28.)

²⁴³ (Martin 2011d, 30–31, 41, 373, 384–385, 393.)

deities, even though they do not want other gods or their worshippers in their isles. The ironborn seek to spread the might of the Drowned God over other nations and their gods, but only to reave or rule over them, not to convert them. The world is understood almost as a battlefield—not just between men but between their distinct gods as well.²⁴⁴

The will of the Drowned God is conveyed by his priests who speak with the god's voice, controlling the discourse and thus shaping the way the world and its events are seen and understood.²⁴⁵ For example, when the king of the ironborn dies and is possibly murdered, his brother—a priest of the Drowned God—explains it as a work of the Storm God, who got jealous and in wrath cast him down for his great deeds.²⁴⁶ The priests shape the ironborn discourses and the ironborn discourses shape the priests, representing them as divine messengers, which demonstrates the institutional aspect of their religious authority. Many of the priests are associated with drowning, and a near-death experience in the seas can be understood as a sign of the god's will and surviving such event strengthened their positions as the god's chosen ones.²⁴⁷

The world itself is described as a dismal and dry vale; unlike the underworld—or should I say undersea—where true joy can be found in the watery halls of the Drowned God.²⁴⁸ But first the ironborn must suffer through the losing fight that is life, cruel and full of pain.²⁴⁹ And before an ironborn can truly die, they must first die and return from death, to live rest of their life as one of Drowned God's own.²⁵⁰ As the ironborn say: “What is dead can never die, but rises again, harder and stronger.”²⁵¹ Dying and giving oneself to the Drowned God is understood as a route to eternal life. And to reach this eternal life in Drowned God's watery halls the ironborn believe that it is best to die in water, as they are from the sea and to the sea they shall return.²⁵² This articulates how the faith of the Drowned God constructs their temporality and spatiality even in afterlife.

In addition to the earlier doctrinal knowledge, the faith also enhances ethical norms and rules, which clearly illustrate the normative system of religiosity, such as the importance of family,

²⁴⁴ See e.g. Martin 2011b, 171; 2011d, 242, 277, 371–372, 395.

²⁴⁵ (Martin 2011d, 36–37, 363.)

²⁴⁶ (Martin 2011d, 28.)

²⁴⁷ (Martin 2011d, 34–35, 362.)

²⁴⁸ (Martin 2011d, 28.)

²⁴⁹ (Martin 2011d, 25, 29.)

²⁵⁰ (Martin 2011d, 23–24.)

²⁵¹ (Martin 2011d, 25.)

²⁵² (Martin 2011d, 23; 2012, 378.)

prohibitions against kinslaying, and a guideline to avoid killing other ironborn.²⁵³ The ironborn have strict moral codes what it comes to battles: they condemn the use of poison, sieges and starvations of the foe, and capturing of slaves.²⁵⁴ Vengeance and revenge are seen as proper, as well as robbing the killed for their valuables to pay the iron price.²⁵⁵ Acting against the gods will can lead to curses²⁵⁶. The ironborn worldview accommodates also other supernatural elements such as sorcerers and demons.²⁵⁷ The shared values and moral guidelines guide ironborn individuals and reinforce their social cohesion.

The priests of the Drowned God have a monopoly over the formal rituals,²⁵⁸ which are used to frame and control the events of the world. The rituals themselves highlight the expressive system of religiosity and are a powerful way to construct and convey meaning. Maybe the best example of this is the ironborn practice of drowning, which works as a baptism to the faith. Drowning and then reviving a person is understood as giving their life to the god, and succeeding in it is a sign of Drowned God's favor.²⁵⁹ God's favor can also be sought after with rituals, such as blessing, praying, and sacrificing.²⁶⁰ Many social institutions, such as choosing and crowning a king, are shaped by religious discourse, framing it as the god's will and not just as deeds of men.²⁶¹ The words of the priests of the Drowned God are central building blocks of the ironborn worldview.

5.2 Ironborn Society

5.2.1 Ideology

The ironborn society is shaped by dominant ideologies, which, as John J. Macionis suggests, are sets of shared beliefs that justify certain social systems.²⁶² The central ideology in the Iron Islands is the Old Way, as the ironborn refer to their ancient traditions. The discourse surrounding the Old Way glorifies reaving, conquest, and submission to the will of the Drowned God, advocating a return to ancient customs and values that predate the Seven Kingdoms. This ideology actively constructs and maintains the ironborn sense of cultural and

²⁵³ (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkers 2015, 86–89; Martin 2011d, 366–367; 2012, 370.)

²⁵⁴ (Martin 2011b, 545, 620, 804; 2012, 819.)

²⁵⁵ (Martin 2011b, 920; 539–540.)

²⁵⁶ (Martin 2011d, 363–622.)

²⁵⁷ (Martin 2012, 822, 906–907.)

²⁵⁸ (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkers 2015, 86–89.)

²⁵⁹ (Martin 2011d, 23–25.)

²⁶⁰ (Martin 2011b, 175; 2011d, 25; 2012, 813, 817.)

²⁶¹ (Martin 2011d, 40–41, 362, 382–384.)

²⁶² (Macionis 2010, 257.)

political independence from mainland Westeros, presenting a vision of the restoration of ironborn greatness.²⁶³ This aligns with Stuart Hall's views of ideology as a route to challenge the status quo through new—or in this case, old—visions for future.²⁶⁴

Even though the Old Way is popular among the ironborn, it also faces criticism: it is seen as unrealistic attempt in the era of the united Seven Kingdoms, as well as too costly in lives for the ironborn who hold it.²⁶⁵ Instead of following the Old Way the critiques promote alternatives, such as political negotiations and alliances to gain land and peace.²⁶⁶ This internal conflict highlights how ideology, while powerful, can still be challenged.

Furthermore, the faith of the Drowned God also functions as an ideology, which supports certain power structures, promotes violence and patriarchy, and shapes cultural identities. According to the religious narratives, the Drowned God created the ironborn to raid and rape, claim kingdoms and gain immortality through blood, fire, and song.²⁶⁷ These narratives align with Sally Haslanger's views of ideology as a concept that can potentially cloud how people experience and understand the world. They present an unjust social order as divinely authorized and natural though sanctifying violence and patriarchal norms.²⁶⁸

The relationship between the Old Way and the faith of the Drowned God reveals a complex relationship where both ideologies reinforce each other, even as they sometimes clash over the ultimate source of authority. Whereas the Old Way holds religious values high, it also celebrates strong rulers who take power from the faith to themselves.²⁶⁹

5.2.2 Power

In the ironborn society, power operates as a productive and relational force which is embedded within social structures, as theorized by Michel Foucault.²⁷⁰ The distribution of political agents reveals a network of power, rather than a single centralized authority. For most of its history the Iron Islands have been ruled by a king or various kings, when all the isles were ruled by a salt king and a rock king. Ever since Urron Redhand let his axemen

²⁶³ (Martin 2011b, 170; 2011d, 29, 40–41, 362; 2012, 910–911.)

²⁶⁴ (Hall 2006, 24–25.)

²⁶⁵ (Martin 2011d, 236, 368–369, 391.)

²⁶⁶ (Martin 2011d, 235, 391.)

²⁶⁷ (Martin 2011b, 169.)

²⁶⁸ (Haslanger 2017.)

²⁶⁹ (Martin 2011b, 167, 186, 538; 2011d, 40–41.)

²⁷⁰ (Foucault, Davidson & Collège de France 2015, 228–229.)

loose in the last kingsmoot, the Iron Islands were ruled by one king, until Aegon the Conqueror united the Seven Kingdoms, and the Iron Islands lost its independence.²⁷¹ As a part of the Seven Kingdom the isles have been ruled by a paramount lord. Like the other regions of the Seven Kingdom, the Iron Islands are also a feudalistic society where lords hold the land. The Iron Fleet, which serves under the ruler of the Seastone Chair, represents significant military power in the isles.²⁷²

In the ironborn society the priests of the Drowned God work as his representatives on earth, and thus wield the power given to the god.²⁷³ They are the ones who have the power to shape the religious discourses and the ones who can call a kingsmoot to choose a new king.²⁷⁴ In addition to the formers, the captains wield significant power in the Iron Islands. When an ironborn king is chosen by the kingsmoot, the elective power belongs to the “captains and kings”—who in this context are the one and the same.²⁷⁵ This demonstrates a form of decentralized power which is separate from the traditional territorial control.

The warriors do not only have hard power in the Iron Islands but also softer power. They are idolized and their thoughts and actions are given higher value than those of other men. This is especially apparent in the kingsmoot where the kings-to-be have their champions to stand with them to support their claim. These champions are preferably known warriors.²⁷⁶ This further demonstrates how power is can also be exercised through cultural valuation and social norms. The common folk is traditionally left without power, but they have the potential to challenge the rule and rise in rebellion.²⁷⁷ The various political agents in the ironborn society illustrate Foucault’s argument that the state apparatuses—or in this case the formal political structures—are not the sole origins of power but rather concentrations within broader networks.²⁷⁸

Even though the ironborn society can seem less hierarchical and more meritocratic than some mainland societies in the Seven Kingdoms, the Iron Islands clearly exhibit strong social hierarchies. The Drowned God can be argued to sway the highest theoretical power in the ironborn society—though to be said, he rarely wields it—and even his status is sometimes

²⁷¹ (Martin 2011d, 234, 236.)

²⁷² (Martin 2011d, 363, 618; 2012, 811.)

²⁷³ (Martin 2011d, 363.)

²⁷⁴ (Martin 2011d, 233–234.)

²⁷⁵ (Martin 2011b, 542; 2011d, 366–367.)

²⁷⁶ (Martin 2011b, 543; 2011d, 387–388.)

²⁷⁷ (Martin 2011d, 617.)

²⁷⁸ (Foucault, Davidson & Collège de France 2015, 229.)

contested.²⁷⁹ The ongoing competition between religious and secular authorities reveals a contest in power dynamics, which end with varying results.²⁸⁰

The captains hold electoral power over all the other ironborn and are the supreme rulers on their own decks solidifying their position within the social hierarchy.²⁸¹ Kin of famous captains and blood of great houses have higher social status than sons of thralls and salt wives, similarly as ironborn stone wives and sons have more value than the salt ones.²⁸² Thralls themselves occupy the lowest social rank on the Iron Islands,²⁸³ revealing how these hierarchical structures limit social mobility in the society. And even though it is not the case with all the individuals, since the power structures are intersectional, men generally hold a higher status than women of the same background.²⁸⁴

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony describes well the unchallenged authority granted to priests and prophets.²⁸⁵ They have a hegemony as the representatives of the Drowned God whose rule and power should not be questioned.²⁸⁶ Their interpretations of the Drowned God's will are largely accepted as divine truth, making their influence appear natural and self-evident. Similarly, the elevated status of captains as kings on their own ships and as the only ones who have any power at the kingsmoot—which really is not directly related to their domain—can be seen as a hegemony, as well as the soft power and influence that the warriors wield. The ironborn also give higher value and thus more power to the great houses of the Iron Islands, as well as to old blood and blood of known heroes.²⁸⁷ These hegemonies legitimize existing social arrangements and structures, or solidify the existing differences, as Hall states.²⁸⁸ This also extends to certain ideals like masculinity and “hardness”, are valued in the isles, and the people who seem to personify them are held in higher regard and wield more power.²⁸⁹

In a world where the rule as a rule is hereditary, the Iron Islands stand apart, as power in there changes hands in a multitude of ways—sometimes since some hands are holding axes as well.

²⁷⁹ (Martin 2011b, 167, 179.)

²⁸⁰ (Martin 2011b, 177; 2011d, 31, 33, 617.)

²⁸¹ (Martin 2011b, 542.)

²⁸² (Martin 2011d, 366–367; 2012, 285, 368.)

²⁸³ (Martin 2011d, 382, 620.)

²⁸⁴ See e.g. Martin 2011d, 370, 373.

²⁸⁵ (Bullock & Trombley 1999, 387–388; Rosamond 2025.)

²⁸⁶ (Martin 2011b, 177.)

²⁸⁷ (Martin 2011d, 366–367, 626; 2012, 285.)

²⁸⁸ (Hall 2019, 79.)

²⁸⁹ (Martin 2011d, 239.)

While hereditary rule and divine legitimacy are acknowledged forms of power transfer, the history of the Iron Islands demonstrates a more complex and dynamic exercise of power.²⁹⁰ Traditionally the supreme rulers of the Iron Islands have gotten their power from a kingsmoot, which is basically an election of the king.²⁹¹ Somewhat similarly the ironborn chose their first lord paramount after they lost their independence to the Iron Throne and their old king was killed and his family line ended.²⁹² There have also been instances in the history when the power is seized and taken with force and violence.²⁹³ These varied mechanisms highlight how power is constantly contested and negotiated. In practice, however, the transfer of power is most commonly hereditary in the Iron Islands as well—in the male line.²⁹⁴ This leads us to an analysis of gender as a central aspect in the ironborn societal structures.

5.2.3 Gender

The ironborn society is shaped by cultural constructions of gender and defined by a rigid gender binary. The ironborn culture is characterized by toxic masculinity²⁹⁵, and the niche for a proper man to inhabit is extremely narrow. To be a respected ironborn, the man must be brave and daring, a warrior and a fighter.²⁹⁶ The man should be wise and smart, but not too learned or bookish.²⁹⁷ He should be able to speak convincingly, but not for too long.²⁹⁸ He should be loyal, but not too much of a follower, let alone a servant or a thrall.²⁹⁹ This rigid masculine role, as Judith Butler argues, is a repeating performance where deviance is met with societal punishment.³⁰⁰

The gender ideology actively supports patriarchal structures and the maintenance of a specific social order, as is underscored by ideas such as paying the iron price and taking what he wants—except for slaves, which are forbidden by the Drowned God.³⁰¹ And speaking of taking, the man should take wives, preferably multiple, to produce him strong sons and

²⁹⁰ (Martin 2011d, 363, 366–367.)

²⁹¹ (Martin 2011d, 40, 233–234, 382–384.)

²⁹² (Martin 2011d, 237, 387–388.)

²⁹³ (Martin 2011b, 167, 186.)

²⁹⁴ (Martin 2011d, 235, 631.)

²⁹⁵ Toxic masculinity is often characterised by misogyny, violence, and emotional repression. The concept is increasingly used in academia, even though it is questionable whether it works as an analytic category or not. (See e.g. Harrington 2021.)

²⁹⁶ (Martin 2011b, 387; 2011d, 622; 2012, 371.)

²⁹⁷ (Martin 2011d, 231, 386, 390.)

²⁹⁸ (Martin 2011d, 387–388, 611.)

²⁹⁹ (Martin 2011d, 31, 37; 2012, 373, 823.)

³⁰⁰ (Butler 1988, 531.)

³⁰¹ (Martin 2011d, 620, 628; 2012, 813–814, 817.)

heirs.³⁰² A real man cannot be girly or unmanly, and he must fight with honor—poisoners, thieves, and liars deserve only scorn.³⁰³ In addition, the man must die well, preferably fighting heroically to the bitter end—a death worthy of a song.³⁰⁴ And all of this might not even be enough, if the man is born on the wrong side of the blanket or as a son of thralls or salt wives, and not from the old blood of the isles.³⁰⁵

The ironborn man should also be godly.³⁰⁶ And as much as all the others should pursue the virtues of the Drowned God's people, his priests and prophets share a slightly different ideal. A priest does not have to be a fighter, though it does not hurt, since he is expected to shed blood in the name of his god.³⁰⁷ However, the most important weapon of a priest is his mouth and the words he wields. He must also be able to prove that he enjoys the Drowned God's favor, most clearly by being able to bring back to life the ironborn he drowns in the name of his god. All this however, does not mean that the priests could be soft, but rather the opposite, since it is a harsh god that rules over harsh lands (and waters). The priests must be ready to seize weapons, lead rebellions, and torture and slain the ungodly, to protect their faith, ideals, and way of living.³⁰⁸ This harsh masculinity, which reflects their god, further illustrates the invasive nature of these gendered norms.

Nonetheless, the Iron Islands are a man's world, and nearly all the power in the society is possessed by men. The roles and perceptions of women in the ironborn society demonstrate how gender is a cultural interpretation of sex. Even though the women on the Iron Islands can act in roles that seem to be out of their limits on the mainland, such as stewards of castles, traders, sailors or even raiders, most of them are still limited to the realm of domesticity and family, underscoring the strong gender hierarchy.³⁰⁹ Though at the same time it must be admitted that it is very hard to form an encompassing comprehension of the roles of women in the Iron Islands, due to their societal marginalization which leads to a situation where there are very few female ironborn characters in the story—which is telling by itself.

³⁰² (Martin 2011d, 29–30, 386, 390.)

³⁰³ (Martin 2012, 284, 376, 815, 819–818.)

³⁰⁴ (Martin 2011b, 919; 2012, 366.)

³⁰⁵ (Martin 2011d, 285, 368.)

³⁰⁶ (Martin 2011d, 26.)

³⁰⁷ (Martin 2011d, 39–40; 2012, 895.)

³⁰⁸ (Martin 2011d, 25, 617.)

³⁰⁹ (Martin 2011b, 180, 377–378, 394; 2011d, 227; 2012, 367, 372.)

At least it is known that the women in the Iron Islands can be daughters, mothers, wives, and widows.³¹⁰ As wives they are either rock wives, if they are ironborn themselves, or salt wives, if they have been taken on a raid and are young and pretty enough to avoid thralldom.³¹¹ At the same time, it must be noted that having multiple spouses is limited only for men, and a concept of a salt husband does not even exist. This illustrates how marriage and reproduction are deeply gendered practices that reinforce male privilege and control. It is also debated whether women can be heirs and rulers, or even queens by their own right and not just as additions of their kingly husbands, which highlights the systematic exclusion of women from traditional positions of power.³¹² However, there are a couple of female ironborn who are clearly fighters, maybe even warriors, and thus habit a realm traditionally held by men.³¹³

In addition to specific societal roles for women, there are also social concepts of their characters. Most importantly the women in the ironborn society are defined by their non-maleness, becoming another ‘other’ within the patriarchal framework, who mainly exists in the hidden parts of the society.³¹⁴ Women who take space and are seen are rare and few. Taking part in activities that are deemed manly, such as crewing a longship, seems to be allowed, but at the same time it is seen to change the women to become unnatural, for example by “gaining a man’s appetites.”³¹⁵ This demonstrates how social expectations of gender actively police and stigmatize deviations from established norms. Though at the same time it does seem that the ironborn society is more openly sexual than the main cultures of the Seven Kingdoms, especially what it comes to the high-born girls and women, whose virtue is carefully guarded on the mainland but is not similar concern on the Iron Islands.³¹⁶ However, in some other ways the ironborn woman are treated more like their mainland counterparts than the men of their isles. For example, whereas the ironborn men should always pay the iron price for their decorations, the women can wear ornaments that are bought with gold.³¹⁷

In general, the ironborn view on women is objectifying—especially what it comes to the salt wives taken on raids—and they seem to possess more instrumental than intrinsic value. Foremost a woman is a way to an end for a man to get heirs or gain social status, and not an

³¹⁰ (Martin 2011d, 29, 370; 2012, 373, 607.)

³¹¹ (Martin 2011b, 540; 2012, 287.)

³¹² (Martin 2011d, 35, 37, 238, 243. 376–377; 2012, 375.)

³¹³ (Martin 2011b, 392; 2012, 383, 604.)

³¹⁴ See e.g. Martin 2011b, 386.

³¹⁵ (Martin 2011b, 377–378, 393.)

³¹⁶ (Martin 2011d, 242–243; 2012, 368, 381.)

³¹⁷ (Martin 2011b, 183–184.)

independent actor with their own wants and needs. In contrast a man who loses his agency is less than a man. He also must succeed in multiple sectors of manhood, since failing in one might be enough for him to lose his perceived manliness. No matter what a woman does, she cannot win the status that a man can have—and at the same time a man must do his best not to lose that status. The ironborn gender structure systematically limits female agency and places intense demands on men, reinforcing a male-dominated social and power structures.

5.3 Ironborn Individuals

5.3.1 The Prince of Winterfell

There is a strong conflict between Theon Greyjoy's identity and social status. As the oldest living son of the ruler of the Iron Islands he has seen himself as the future ruler of the ironborn.³¹⁸ At the same time, he has spent half of his life as a hostage in the North ever since his father's unsuccessful rebellion against the Iron Throne.³¹⁹ After having spent years as an outsider in the North as a member of the Stark household without actually being one of them, he returns to the Iron Islands only to find out that he is not seen as a proper ironborn either.³²⁰

Theon yearns to be accepted, respected, and admired.³²¹ Max Weber theorized that individual's social status is defined based on how well they fit the values and ideas of a society.³²² Theon seeks to fit the ideals that could grant him these positions, but at the same time he lacks a deeper understanding of the said ideals, leading to a failure.³²³ One good example of this is his attack on Winterfell and taking over the castle, which backfires in all directions. Whereas before Theon felt an outsider in the castle, after he claimed it for himself, he became actively hated by all the people living there. And his dream of earning status and respect for himself amongst the ironborn does not work either, since he has not truly understood the ironborn culture and way of life, where conquering an inland castle is seen as foolish, instead of brave and daring.³²⁴ His search for immortality and status only leads him to a lower place in life, alienating him from others. Instead of ruling as the Prince of Winterfell,

³¹⁸ (Martin 2011b, 177, 392.)

³¹⁹ (Martin 2011b, 921–922.)

³²⁰ (Martin 2011b, 177, 392–393; 2012, 539, 599, 674.)

³²¹ (Martin 2011b, 541; 2012, 539.)

³²² (Weber 1946.)

³²³ (Martin 2011b, 183, 392–393, 806.)

³²⁴ (Martin 2011b, 806.)

Theon first becomes a despised turncloak and later a tortured prisoner who has lost his own identity and thinks of himself as Reek.³²⁵

At the beginning of the narrative, Theon does not believe in gods and only pretends to follow the Drowned God to achieve political goals.³²⁶ He lacks personal belief and morals but seeks to express popular devotion. He is not a follower of the Old Gods either, but at Winterfell he senses their presence, which helps him to reclaim his identity as Theon Greyjoy.³²⁷ Theon's journey reflect the concept of identity that Stuart Hall refers to as “the old logics of identity”, in which an individual showcases the world masks of false identities while their true self is hidden inside them all along, waiting to be found.³²⁸ When Theon has gone through the whole circle and reclaimed his name as Theon Greyjoy he might finally do it authentically, not as an actor trying to fit into a role they are given. However, Theon's story also fits Hall's description of the formation of one's identity as a process of becoming. There are also elements similar to a diasporic cultural identity³²⁹ in the way that Theon hybridizes influences from the cultures of his childhood and youth.

5.3.2 The Kraken's Daughter

Asha Greyjoy is almost everything that an heir of the Iron Islands should be—she is brave and daring, a skillful sailor and fighter, and she is respected by her fellow ironborn.³³⁰

Unfortunately, she is also a woman.³³¹ Asha is a daughter of a king, a true Greyjoy, and ironborn, which is something that everyone on the isles agrees on. Her status as an heir for the Seastone Chair is contested, however. King Balon himself wanted his daughter to follow him to the throne and many—including Asha herself—agree with him, though many more disagree.³³² Asha's story is best understood through intersectional lenses: her birth and family line, and even her skillset and personality, would make her the heir-to-be, but her gender hinders that all. She is at the same time privileged and discriminated against based on her ascribed status³³³.

³²⁵ (Martin 2011b, 921; 2012, 537–538.)

³²⁶ (Martin 2011b, 175, 386.)

³²⁷ (Martin 2011b, 810; 2012, 674.)

³²⁸ (Hall 2019, 64.)

³²⁹ (Hall 1990, 235–236.)

³³⁰ (Martin 2011b, 381, 391; 2011d, 237–239; 2012, 377, 619.)

³³¹ (Martin 2011d, 37, 390–391.)

³³² (Martin 2011b, 177; 386; 391; 2011d, 32, 37, 235, 236, 619.)

³³³ (Dinwiddie 2010.)

Despite her high birth, Asha does not see herself as a lady; instead, she is coarse in manner and openly sexual.³³⁴ After losing the kingsmoot, Asha flees and considers a career as a pirate, since her defeat has caused her to lose face in the eyes of the ironborn and moreover, she has been married off against her will and is ultimately taken captive.³³⁵ There are many in the ironborn society who disapprove her for not following the expected gender role, and she faces societal punishment for it, similar to Judith Butler's writings.³³⁶ Asha is constantly challenging the performance of gender, with varying success.

Religion does not play a central role in Asha Greyjoy's life. She is culturally a follower of the faith of the Drowned God and references the god quite often. However, she doesn't have strong personal belief.³³⁷ When she is threatened to be burned as a sacrifice for R'hllor, the Lord of Light, she tries to reach for the Drowned God but does not get an answer.³³⁸ Asha faces believers of R'hllor and the Old Gods, and while she does not have faith in the Lord of Light she does feel the presence and the hatred of the Old Gods in the forests of the North.³³⁹ This is interesting dissonance in her personal belief, as her cognitive system presents foreign gods as part of the reality, but she does not choose to have faith in them.

5.3.3 The Drowned Man

Aeron Greyjoy was born the least of four brothers, as he himself thinks, and after suffering abuse and trauma in his childhood he found it hard to take anything in his life seriously. This was until his ship sunk after the Greyjoy Rebellion, and he rose from the sea as a changed man, as Damphair, the Drowned God's chosen prophet.³⁴⁰ Aeron's identity is clearly constructed from the narratives he has told himself of himself and his experiences, as Hall describes in his theory of identity as a process of becoming.³⁴¹

After his return from the watery halls of the Drowned God Aeron gained a new status as a religious authority who even had support to become a king after his elder brother Balon died.³⁴² As in Weber's writings, Aeron gained his status due to his perceived piety in a

³³⁴ (Martin 2011b, 804; 2011d, 243; 2012, 904.)

³³⁵ (Martin 2012, 373, 603, 607.)

³³⁶ (Butler 1988, 531.)

³³⁷ (Martin 2011b, 233, 242; 2012, 365, 375.)

³³⁸ (Martin 2012, 614, 901.)

³³⁹ (Martin 2012, 819, 892, 901.)

³⁴⁰ (Martin 2011b, 176; 2011d, 34–35, 37, 379.)

³⁴¹ (Hall 2019, 70–71.)

³⁴² (Martin 2011d, 37, 39.)

religious society.³⁴³ Aeron however does not see himself as a secular ruler, since he is a priest and not a warrior, and decided not to seek the kingship for himself.³⁴⁴ At the same time, he does use his social status to call for a kingsmoot, to avoid the throne passing for his nephew Theon or brother Euron, who he sees as ungodly, or his niece Asha, who he deems unfit to rule the ironborn for being a woman.³⁴⁵

Aeron favors his brother Victarion to become the next king of the ironborn, but even though he would possibly have the status and the power that comes from it to declare Victarion to be the god's chosen king, it does not fit his belief system. So, he instead asks for advice from his god and hopes that the Drowned God will show his favor on Victarion so that the captains shout his name at the kingsmoot.³⁴⁶ When instead Euron gets elected Aeron temporarily loses the connection to his god and in shock crowns Euron to be the new king.³⁴⁷ After the initial shock has worn out, he tries to make Victarion dethrone Euron, but when this fails, he proclaims to do it himself with the favor of the Drowned God, by raising the smallfolk of the isles with his words to rebel against Euron.³⁴⁸

Unlike Theon or Asha, Aeron enjoys a higher social status than he has faith in himself. As a young man, instead of living the life fit for a son of the ruling family of the Iron Islands he focused on winning pissing contests and mockery.³⁴⁹ As the prophet of the Drowned God, he is given the opportunity to try to take the throne for himself or name the ruler for the isles, but he does not want to make the decisions himself, losing himself in his god. At the same time Aeron thinks that the Drowned God talks through him but wants only to lead the ironborn to the right direction, without telling them what the right choice would be exactly.

From the perspective of religiosity, Aeron is an interesting case, as he similarly represents personal and institutional religiosity as the highest authority in the faith of the Drowned God. He is the sharer and constructor of doctrinal knowledge, the judge for ethical consequences, and the performer of formal rituals. It must be noted that the institutional part of Aeron's religiosity is stronger than his personal religiosity, as the first never falters whereas the latter is showing cracks in his faith.

³⁴³ (Weber 1946.)

³⁴⁴ (Martin 2011d, 39–40.)

³⁴⁵ (Martin 2011d, 32, 37, 39–40, 383–384.)

³⁴⁶ (Martin 2011d, 36–37, 389–390.)

³⁴⁷ (Martin 2011d, 397.)

³⁴⁸ (Martin 2011d, 617.)

³⁴⁹ (Martin 2011d, 34–35.)

5.3.4 The Iron Captain

At the first glance Victarion is the ideal male in the ironborn society, who fits the social values as Weber highlighted.³⁵⁰ He is big and strong, a skillful warrior and a famous fighter, and the Lord Captain of the Ironfleet—the biggest naval and military power on the Iron Islands.³⁵¹ However, Victarion is eaten by a constant insecurity of losing his image. In addition to strength, the ironborn value wits and wisdom, which are characteristics that Victarion Greyjoy lacks.³⁵² He has suffered his fair share of mockery in life, mainly from his brothers, which has made him hate laughter.³⁵³

In addition, Victarion has even greater insecurity that he does not want to make known—his salt wife was impregnated by his brother Euron, who told Victarion that she had come to him willingly, since Victarion's manhood was lacking.³⁵⁴ As kinslaying was forbidden both by the god and Balon Greyjoy, Victarion let Euron go but killed his wife with his bare hands.³⁵⁵ Like he hid the whole truth of what happened between himself, his wife, and Euron, he also hid the fact that the wound he got while fighting was not healing.³⁵⁶

Victarion Greyjoy is deeply and almost personally insulted by behavior or qualities of other men that he deems unmanly—poisonous arrows of crannogmen, perfumed slave boys, and soft and pink maester earn nothing but scorn from him.³⁵⁷ Victarion's identity as well as his social status are built around his perceived masculinity and fitting the ironborn ideals. His identity is built as much around what he is as what he does not want to be, leading to a constant reflection between the sense of self and the other. Even though Victarion enjoys of various social privileges as a warrior, the lord captain, a Greyjoy, and a man, he battles constantly to uphold perceived masculine identity while reinforcing prevailing gender norms.

From the beginning Victarion has faith on the Drowned God, though at the same time he has a strong feeling that he lacks the understanding of his god's plans and will.³⁵⁸ Victarion knows that the Drowned God did not make him to win over people with his words but with his

³⁵⁰ (Weber 1946.)

³⁵¹ (Martin 2011b, 387; 2011d, 32, 37, 390.)

³⁵² (Martin 2011b, 387; 2011d, 390; 2012, 822.)

³⁵³ (Martin 2011d, 625; 2012, 822, 910.)

³⁵⁴ (Martin 2011d, 375, 378.)

³⁵⁵ (Martin 2011d, 365, 366–367, 378, 616.)

³⁵⁶ (Martin 2012, 819.)

³⁵⁷ (Martin 2012, 815, 818–819, 911.)

³⁵⁸ (Martin 2011d, 366–367.)

fighting skills and weapons.³⁵⁹ After losing the kingsmoot for Euron he starts to question the god, and upon sailing to unknown seas he even feels like he has traveled to a place in the world where the Drowned God holds no sway.³⁶⁰ All this changes when Victarion's men find a red priest of R'hllor from the sea, who heals Victarion's wound and foretells the future for him.³⁶¹ After this Victarion enters a new phase in his religious journey as the empowered syncretist worshipping and feeling the favor of two gods.³⁶²

Victarion's journey leads to the formation of an identity similar to Hall's idea of a diasporic identity,³⁶³ as he combines elements of his original culture with those of his new surroundings. This also reflects his personal religiosity, which is also in constant state of change throughout the story. His personal beliefs alter as do his popular devotions, as he integrates the worship of the Lord of Light into the rituals of the Drowned God.

³⁵⁹ (Martin 2011d, 611.)

³⁶⁰ (Martin 2011d, 616; 2012, 813, 816.)

³⁶¹ (Martin 2012, 820, 822, 824, 906–907.)

³⁶² (Martin 2012, 909–910, 912.)

³⁶³ (Hall 1990, 235–236.)

6 Interplay Between Mythology and Social Reality

The ironborn worldview is strongly based on their mythology. Religious myths explain how the seas, the Iron Islands and the ironborn themselves were created, and how the world in which they live functions.³⁶⁴ As Foucault wrote, myths are stories people tell themselves, constructing their understanding of the reality and themselves.³⁶⁵ The religious narratives explain how the ironborn differ from other people and set them apart from rest of the humankind as the god's chosen people.³⁶⁶ Like Malinowski's Melanesian subjects, the ironborn also associate themselves with specific animals, which are related to them as people and through family lines. These quasi-totemic animals symbol and construct the qualities of the people they are associated with.³⁶⁷ Mythology also tells the ironborn their place and role in the world, as well as explains natural phenomena, such as lightning and winds as the Storm God's makings.³⁶⁸ The Storm God is an example of a classical Tylorian myth, in which the forces of nature are the god.³⁶⁹

Many of the central concepts of the ironborn way of life can be found in the mythology surrounding the Grey King. The Grey King took a mermaid to a wife, reinforcing the ironborn tie to the sea; he carved the first longship, setting a precedence of the ironborn rule over the waters; and he taught the men to sail and fish, which are both skills the ironborn would not survive without.³⁷⁰ Myths of Grey King seem to serve similar functions as those of the sibling ancestors in the Melanesian culture which Malinowski describes. He is the forebear of the ironborn, who gave them their methods of local industries—sailing and fishing—and hereditary dignity and societal rankings.³⁷¹

As well as the remarks of Malinowski, the narratives of the Grey King as a shared ancestor of all the great houses of the Iron Islands serve to strengthen the shared identity and kinship unity.³⁷² The ironborn mythology also explains why certain people are othered in the ironborn culture, since the mythical narratives rely heavily on the concept of otherness, as the ironborn

³⁶⁴ See e.g. Martin 2011b, 169; 2011d, 32.

³⁶⁵ (Foucault 2021, 14–26.)

³⁶⁶ (Martin 2011b, 169; Martin García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

³⁶⁷ (Malinowski 2007, 136–137; Martin 2011b, 806; 2011d, 29–30, 38; 2012, 608–609.)

³⁶⁸ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

³⁶⁹ (Tylor 1958, 368–416.)

³⁷⁰ (Martin 2011d, 380; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

³⁷¹ (Malinowski 2007, 137.)

³⁷² (Malinowski 2007, 138; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

are depicted separate from rest of the humankind.³⁷³ This kind of categorization and construction of self and other is present in Malinowski's observations.³⁷⁴ The Grey King's idealized rule can be said to be reminiscent of Durkheim's theory of a mythical society, which reflects and reinforces the values and structures of the real-world society.³⁷⁵

The way the ironborn understand time and space reflects the center myths of their religion. An integral part of the ironborn worldview is the perception of a mythical era, when the ironborn did great deeds and lived life as the ironborn should.³⁷⁶ Mythology also sacralizes certain spaces by connecting them to mythical narratives, such as the Iron Islands which were created by the Drowned God and Old Wyk where the Grey King held his court.³⁷⁷ Again, the functions of the ironborn mythology mirror those stated by Malinowski, constructing a connection between a place and a people.³⁷⁸ Myths also construct meanings for the sea, and why it has such a special place in the ironborn worldview, as the god's realm, as the location of the afterlife, and as the lifeline of the ironborn culture.³⁷⁹ Once again, there are similarities between the ironborn mythology and Malinowski's descriptions of a connection between the primeval past and the immediate destiny of people—death—as the place of origin and return.³⁸⁰

The mythical dimension is strong in the faith of the Drowned God, since the isles are largely illiterate, and the religion lacks written word, complex institutions, temples and shrines. That way the myths do not only construct meaning in the ironborn society but also within the faith and about the faith. The doctrines of the faith of the Drowned God are embedded in the religious narratives. Mythology also guides ironborn values. Especially the myths of Galon Whitestaff offer the ironborn multiple guidelines, such as prohibition of warring, raiding, and carrying off other ironborn.³⁸¹ The ironborn rituals, especially those of drowning, sacrifice, and kinsmoot, have strong mythological connections. Frazer theorized that myths are a pre-

³⁷³ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

³⁷⁴ (Malinowski 2007, 136–137.)

³⁷⁵ (Durkheim & Fields 1995, 421–423; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

³⁷⁶ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–182.)

³⁷⁷ (Martin, García & Antonsson, 2014, 175, 178–179.)

³⁷⁸ (Malinowski 2007, 136–137.)

³⁷⁹ (Martin 2011d, 36, 620.)

³⁸⁰ (Malinowski 2007, 145–146.)

³⁸¹ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 179–180.)

scientific way to try to control the world via rituals.³⁸² The ironborn are clearly trying to affect the physical world through mythical rituals—with varying results.

The ironborn ideologies of the Old Way and the faith of the Drowned God are built on mythical material. The ironborn mythology includes many revolutionary narratives and it is also actively used to justify and motivate their efforts to gain cultural and political independence from the Seven Kingdoms.³⁸³ This combination of myth and violence to revolt against the ruling powers—in this case the Iron Throne—aligns with Georges Sorel’s theory of myth as an ideology and as a means to challenge the status quo.³⁸⁴ If we apply Sorel’s views, the Old Way is not just an ideology affected by the ironborn mythology but a myth in itself.

The ironborn mythology showcases how the ironborn society should be, revering the reavers of old and celebrating religious authorities, who guided the ironborn to their god. The ironborn power structures have strong mythological grounds, as well as the society itself. The Iron Islands as an unite is created through the myths of the Drowned God creating the lands, the Grey King ruling supreme over them all, and later Galon Whitestaff uniting the isles into one kingdom.³⁸⁵ Kingsmoot likewise has its mythical roots, in the myths surrounding the Whitestaff, as well as the contesting the chosen rule can be based on myths of Torgon the Latecomer and Urron Redhand.³⁸⁶ The latter also function as basis for hereditary rule. Dethroning of rulers by raising up rebellions also have precedents in the mythology, such as the Shrike, giving the myths the role of revolutionary ideology such as Sorel’s.³⁸⁷

The relationship between gender and mythology is interesting, since the mythical material varies so much what it comes to the two genders known to the ironborn. Whereas myths tell the ironborn how the ideal man is supposed to be, the women are left in near total darkness. The only women having any role in them are the—nameless—mermaid that the Grey King married; Tess, the woman who killed the Red Kraken; and Lelia Lannister, who is blamed for having turned her husband and son away from the Drowned God. All these women exist only in relation to the male heroes of the stories, as does the fourth female who is mentioned in the ironborn mythology—the monstrous sea dragon Nagga, who the Grey King slew to show his

³⁸² (Frazer 1890, 31–32.)

³⁸³ (Martin 2011b, 167, 170; 2011d, 33, 40–41; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 179, 184–185.)

³⁸⁴ (Sorel & Jennings 1999, 27–31.)

³⁸⁵ (Martin 2011d, 380; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

³⁸⁶ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 179–180.)

³⁸⁷ (Sorel & Jennings 1999, 27–31.)

prowess.³⁸⁸ The myths also promote a masculine ideal. Reavers are glorified, while women are typically shown as possessions or victims. This supports a patriarchal worldview where power is firmly tied to gender. In the ironborn society, as in the ironborn myths, the role of women is supportive and not central nor active.

Theon is an example of someone whose life is strongly shaped by the ideas present in the ironborn mythology. While he strives to fill the ideal of a hero from the stories told, he does not truly understand which are the qualities that the ironborn hold in high regard and value. From the ironborn mythology we can see that the trope of a hero that the ironborn value most is a reaver, who makes the Sunset Sea their own, takes what he wants, and then returns to the Iron Islands with his blunder.³⁸⁹ In his search for greatness and appreciation Theon missed the opportunity to fulfil that role, since his own worldview was not shaped by the ironborn mythology and culture in the same way as of those who have lived their lives in the isles.

In his writings Barthes focuses on how culture constructs myths,³⁹⁰ compared to the ironborn culture where individuals arguably seek to construct themselves into mythic figures “worthy of a song”.³⁹¹ However, in his endeavours to make a name for himself and earn eternal life in songs, Theon misses almost all the characteristics that the ironborn value in their leaders: he does not sacrifice for the Drowned God as Qhored the Cruel, carry off women like Joron I Blacktyde, take salt wives like Dalton Greyjoy, nor does he make the sea his strength as Dagon Greyjoy did.³⁹² Rather he chooses to seek to conquer and rule inland, like the kings of House Hoare, who are remembered for their shameful departure from the ironborn culture.³⁹³

Theon’s lack of understanding of ironborn culture and society lead him to failure. He is lacking the sociological guidance of mythology described by Joseph Campbell.³⁹⁴ However, there is one ironborn myth that might still change the course of Theon’s life—that of Torgon the Latecomer. Like Torgon, Theon is the eldest living son of a late king who is absent from the following kingsmoot. and with the precedent set in the myth, he is in position to challenge the ruling power by declaring the kingsmoot invalid.³⁹⁵

³⁸⁸ (Martin 2011d, 380; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179, 184–185, 190.)

³⁸⁹ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 176–177, 188–190.)

³⁹⁰ (Barthes 1973.)

³⁹¹ (Martin 2011b, 169, 545, 919.)

³⁹² (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 153, 180, 210, 215.)

³⁹³ (Martin 2012, 183–185.)

³⁹⁴ (Campbell 1965, 520.)

³⁹⁵ (Martin 2012, 374–375.)

Asha's struggles also reflect the ironborn mythology. Even though she encompasses many of the traits valued in the stories, she unfortunately lacks the most important one—manhood. Asha wants to be an independent actor in her own story, but that is not the part of women in the ironborn narratives. Especially gaining the driftwood crown as a woman is an uphill battle, since all the tales of only feature male rulers. Even Asha's political agendas face backlash because of the ironborn ideals conveyed in their mythology: Asha argues for peace and diplomacy, which are condemned unfit for the ironborn based on their mythical lore.³⁹⁶

For Aeron the precedent set in the ironborn mythology helps him to understand and make sense of the world and his role in it. Like the Drowned God himself, Aeron also drowned—and rose to live a new life as the god's chosen one. Like Galon Whitestaff, Aeron wields significant political power in the Iron Islands, is the one to summon the kingsmoot, and crown the chosen ruler. Like the Shrike, Aeron later seeks to raise the Iron Islands to a rebellion against a king that he deems ungodly and to cast him down. Even the support that Aeron had to be crowned himself is grounded in the recounts of the crowning of the priest-king Lodos and his return as Lodos the Twice-Drowned, who like Aeron, had seen the watery halls of the Drowned God. Aeron's conviction that “no godless man may sit the Seastone Chair” and his plan to overthrow Euron bears not just echoes of Sorel's revolutionary myth,³⁹⁷ but also of the idea proposed by Girard of ending a time of instability with an act of a violent ritual.³⁹⁸

Victarion faces pressure from the ironborn ideals that are conveyed in the myths. On the other hand, he matches the idea of a warrior and reaver, who leads the ironborn to fights and riches. However, at the same time he, unlike many of the mythological heroes, lacks wives and heirs. Victarion could also gain more power if he adapted some ideas from the ironborn myths. With his military power Victarion could be able to seize the power for himself like Urron Redhand did, but he rather submits himself to the ruling of the kingsmoot and restrains his murderous urges towards his brother in fear of the Drowned God's wrath, avoiding the taboo of kinslaying, first forbidden in the Iron Islands by Galon Whitestaff.³⁹⁹ Victarion's magically healed hand bears similarities to the myth of Balon Blackskin,⁴⁰⁰ perhaps leading him himself to become a myth in a Barthesian sense.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁶ (Martin 2011d, 235, 391.)

³⁹⁷ (Sorel & Jennings 1999, 27–31.)

³⁹⁸ (Girard 1977, 70–71, 83.)

³⁹⁹ (Martin 2011d, 234, 236; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 179–180.)

⁴⁰⁰ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 176–177.)

⁴⁰¹ (Barthes 1973.)

7 Conclusions

7.1 Summary and Evaluation

The aim of this thesis was to contribute to the understanding of how religion is represented in popular culture and fictional literature, using George R. R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a case study due to its global popularity and cultural significance. To better understand how the series as a narrative can influence our perception of religion, the thesis focused on the narrative dimension of religion within the story itself by studying the mythology and social reality of the ironborn.

The study used qualitative content analysis and theory-informed analysis as its methodology. Qualitative content analysis proved to be a good tool for analyzing the large and unstructured data of this study. Coding frames made the raw observations manageable and helped to organize and simplify the observations. Theory-informed analysis was a flexible way to combine theoretical frameworks with themes that arose from the material, and made the research feel very natural. Even with the usage of qualitative content analysis, the main challenge of this thesis was the sheer number of raw data—but at the same time, it is one of the strengths of the study. I think it was valuable to include all the ironborn viewpoint characters in the study, since they provided very distinct perspectives to the ironborn society and religion. Cutting off some of the chapters or point-of-view would have left some interesting perspectives outside this study and led to a narrower view on the researched culture and society.

The ironborn myths were identified and categorized by applying Robert A. Segal's definition for myth as a meaningful story that serves an important purpose for its believers. The myths of the ironborn were divided into four categories: 1) gods and demigods, 2) priests and prophets, 3) rulers and reavers, and 4) magic and mysteries, and they exemplified all four functions of myth theorized by Joseph Campbell.⁴⁰² Even with the defined criteria for a myth, it was not self-evident which parts of the research material should be included in the ironborn mythology. The vagueness of certain of the criteria increased the subjectivity of the analysis. I feel that the deep understanding of the research material helped to guide the decisions. On the other hand, it would have been interesting to apply an existing myth theory in this study and

⁴⁰² (Campbell 1965, 519–522.)

see how different criteria and functions for a myth would have changed the results of the study.

The thesis examined the social reality of the ironborn with a framework based on cultural studies by focusing on worldview, society, and individuals' positions within the culture. The ironborn worldview is characterized by their cultural identity as the Drowned God's chosen people, who stand apart from the rest of the humankind, even othering those within the culture who do not fit its ideals. Their temporality and spatiality are likewise shaped by religious narratives, idealizing a glorious past and setting the Iron Island apart from other landmasses and offering multiple meanings to the sea, connecting it to their god, way of life, and afterlife. The institutional religiosity of the ironborn features structured doctrines, such as knowledge of the gods, religious authority, and life and afterlife. The normative system enhances ethical norms on the taboo of kinslaying, morals of battle, and the ideal of paying the iron price, among others. Formal rituals, such as drownings, sacrifices, and blessings, in the Iron Islands are performed by the priests of the Drowned God.

The ironborn society is shaped by two dominant ideologies—the idea of the Old Way and the faith of the Drowned God, which at the same time support and compete with one another. The central goal of the Old Way is to return to the traditional lifestyle of the ironborn and gain independence from the mainland Westeros, whereas the faith of the Drowned God provides ideals for ironborn individuals and society to strive towards. There are multiple agents of power in the Iron Islands who form a social hierarchy within the ironborn society. On the top are rulers, priests and lords, followed by captains and warriors, with the common folk and thralls at the bottom. Hegemonic status is given to the prophets as the Drowned God's voices on earth, to captains as the choosers of the new kings, to the great houses and descendants of heroes, and to the concept of masculinity. Power in the society is transferred via multiple methods, such as kingsmoots, seizing of the power, and hereditary rule in the male line. These male-dominated social structures and ideals have led to a strict and narrow idea of masculinity, while at the same time limiting the roles that women can have in the society.

To achieve agency, the ironborn individuals need to navigate within a network of cultural values, religious ideals, and idealized masculinity. Ironborn mythology influences how the ironborn form their identities and understand and create meaning in the world. It does not just affect their place in society but also provides them with cultural tools to uphold or challenge the status quo. Even though the studied sample of the ironborn culture and society was fairly

narrow, since all the studied individuals came not just from the same social background but also from the same family, they offered different perspectives on how the individuals are both affected by and affect the social reality of the Iron Islands.

In my opinion, the alterations of the original framework, such as adding the concept of otherness and having a higher emphasis on faith and religion worked well in this study. Overall, the cultural studies approach felt very relevant to the analysis of this material, since the mythological worldview clearly affects how the ironborn experience reality and make sense of it. Cultural studies also offered various—yet somewhat overlapping—ways to analyze societal power relations. Even though the power structures in question were fictional, analyzing them critically was a good exercise to apply in real life and train critical thinking.

Finally, the study assessed how ironborn mythology affects and reflects their social reality. And as I expected, the connection between the ironborn myths and social reality was very strong and multidimensional. I want to emphasize that with the information at hand, it is impossible to determine whether George R. R. Martin created first the myths or the descriptions of the social reality of the ironborn. For this reason, this study treats myths as both reflecting and affecting the social reality. Based on the years of publishing, most of the myths were created after the main story has been written. However, Martin has developed his fictional world beyond what is seen in the books. Moreover, as an author he identifies himself as a “gardener” rather than as an “architect”, meaning that he is a writer who plants narrative seeds and watches what grows.⁴⁰³ Nonetheless, within the fictional world, the mythic narratives construct social reality and at the same time social reality defines what mythic narratives are born.

George R. R. Martin’s writings address religions and religious themes on many levels. Not only has he created numerous detailed and well-built religions in his world, he has also included various religious issues in the narrative, such as the power struggle between the religious and secular authorities, the presence or absence of personal faith, and coexisting and conflict between different religions and their followers. The narrative or mythical dimension of religion is shown to have a wide and deep impact on the construction of social reality in the story. Religion is not just an individual question but also a collective system of meaning. The

⁴⁰³ (Martin 2022.)

impact of religions and religious narratives and discourses is not limited to the followers of faith but to all individuals who operate in society shaped and affected by said religion.

Comparing Martin's ironborn with his Dothraki and Ghiscari characters which were explored in Roberta Garrett's article, there are multiple similarities. Garrett critiques Martin's depiction of the Eastern cultures as seemingly less developed and more misogynist than those of the Seven Kingdoms.⁴⁰⁴ However, that depiction suits the ironborn culture even better. The role of women in the ironborn society is extremely limited, as discussed in earlier in this thesis,⁴⁰⁵ whereas *Dosh khaleen*—the widows of Dothraki leaders—hold high status and wield significant power in the Dothraki culture and the Ghiscari religious authorities, healers, and other figures are female.⁴⁰⁶ In addition to the Iron Islands, the mainland Westerosi cultures and societies notably lack equality,⁴⁰⁷ whereas the most equal societies what it comes to gender are actually Eastern and Southern ones.⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, the ironborn are arguably one of the most hostile societies towards foreign influence, scientific progress, and cultural and societal exchange of knowledge in general.⁴⁰⁹

The problem does not thus seem to be so much within Martin's fictional world but our own real one. The Westerosi cultures are read—and arguably written—as fantasy versions of European historical societies—the same cultures and societies, which have held a hegemonic status during centuries. As European cultures enjoy wider and more versatile representations in the media, singular negative or critical portrayals are not as detrimental as with other cultures that do not hold similar position. Additionally, Western cultures are often represented as the advanced ones and their fantasy representations are thus understood as historical, whereas representations of other cultures in fantasy literature are not necessarily read similarly, since their representations in the media in general are often outdated.⁴¹⁰ This is

⁴⁰⁴ Garrett 2019.

⁴⁰⁵ See 5.2.3 Gender in this thesis.

⁴⁰⁶ (Martin 2011a, 390–391; 2012, 37, 47, 1105.)

⁴⁰⁷ Similar to the Iron Islands, the Seven Kingdoms has never been ruled by a reigning queen—the closest case being the crowning of Rhaenyra Targaryen, whose rule was contested, lead to a civil war because of her gender, and whose reign is usually dismissed in recounts of history (see e.g. Martin 2011c, 492; 2011d, 276–277).

⁴⁰⁸ For example, both the Rhoynar and the Summer Islanders have had ruling princesses (see e.g. Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 22–23, 279).

⁴⁰⁹ See e.g. '5.1.1 Cultural Identity and Otherness' in this thesis.

⁴¹⁰ The duality of the “developed” West and “primitive” East is not just a historical idea (see e.g. Segal 2004 for how various prominent scholars of their time systematically referred to “primitives”), but a dominant articulation which is still present—if not always as blatantly—in discourses today.

especially clear in the case of the ironborn, whose culture is mostly similar to that of Vikings, who are historical people.⁴¹¹

Reading Martin's books, it becomes obvious that he is not writing about utopias, but rather of flawed societies and imperfect people. The story is not black and white, a battle between good and evil, right and wrong, or the "developed" and the "primitive". All of Martin's cultures and societies have their challenges, inequities, and blind spots, and he often presents various conflicting viewpoints for the reader to ponder.⁴¹² Instead of presenting how he thinks things should be, Martin tends to do the opposite and then present the consequences and effects of these situations.⁴¹³ This does not mean that Martin would never write of the potential that people, ideologies, and institutions have for good,⁴¹⁴ but he is definitely more focused on the opposite.

This critical approach can be seen in the way that Martin writes religions as well. They are not solely good or bad, but a combination of both and much more. Religion is not a monolith in *A Song of Ice and Fire* but rather a complex and versatile phenomenon. The religions of the book series exist in constant interaction with social realities shaping one another. Rather than focusing on whether religions are represented as good or bad in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it might be more fruitful to focus on how they are represented. As Gossage and Valles noted in their article, in Martin's world religious narratives, dogmas, and discourses are created and used to create legitimacy, solidify power, and convert moral codes.⁴¹⁵ The same is evident in the Iron Islands, where mythical narratives shape the culture and society of the ironborn.

7.2 New Perspectives

This study focused on the in-world effects of narrative—specifically, how the myths of the ironborn affect the ironborn. It would be very interesting to pursue a parallel study in our own world to examine how *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a narrative influences its readers to learn whether reading the books affects a reader's views and understanding of religion as a phenomenon or not—and, if so, what kind of effect it might be. Earlier studies have already

⁴¹¹ (Aegon Targaryen 2020, 00:00–00:27.)

⁴¹² See e.g. Jon's and Ygritte's debate over the Wall and land (Martin 2011c, 556–560).

⁴¹³ See e.g. how Martin writes torture as a method of interrogation (Martin 2011d, 826–830) and of war from the perspective of a common soldier (Martin 2011d, 533–536).

⁴¹⁴ See e.g. the building of sewers and providing of clean drinking water for the common people in Kingslanding (Martin 2018, 259).

⁴¹⁵ (Gossage & Valles 2021.)

shown that reading fictional narratives about discrimination, such as the *Harry Potter* series, can reduce readers' prejudices toward real-world minority groups.⁴¹⁶ Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that the representation of religion in fantasy literature can affect people's understanding and attitudes towards religion in the real world as well.⁴¹⁷

As religions are more than just their mythical dimensions, it would also be very interesting to focus on the other dimensions of religions, for example dogmas or institutions, and study how they affect and reflect the construction of social reality in societal and individual levels. And what it comes to comparative studies, changing the studied religion could also provide new perspectives, as well as conducting similar studies on other fantasy books series, to get a more comprehensive picture of the representation of religion in fantasy literature.

A Song of Ice and Fire also has a large and active fandom. In addition to countless works of fanfiction there is also a wealth of fan art depicting events, places, and characters from the books. There are also various active online book clubs and fan forums, not to mention content creators, who at their best, regularly produce deep theoretical analyses of the series. This active and participatory fan culture encourages critical engagement with the books—even outside academic contexts—and raises further questions about what *A Song of Ice and Fire* means to individual readers and broader communities, and how the fictional narratives change and affect the readers who engage with it.

⁴¹⁶ (Vezzali et al. 2015.)

⁴¹⁷ (Ostwalt 2003, 29.)

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Coding Frame: Mythology of the Ironborn

The following coding frame was used to categorize ironborn myths based on the main character or object.

Category	Subcategory	Anchor Example
GD Gods and Demigods	GD-1 Drowned God	"‘We did not come to these holy islands from godless lands across the seas,’ the priest Sauron Salt-Tongue once said. ‘We came from beneath those seas, from the watery halls of the Drowned God who made us in his likeness and gave to us dominion over all the waters of the earth.’" (The World of Ice and Fire, The Iron Islands.)
	GD-1.1 Creation of Seas	
	GD-1.2 Creation of the Ironborn	
	GD-1.3. Drowning of the God	
	GD-1.4 Afterlife	
	GD-1.5 Eternal Battle with the Storm God	
	GD-2 Grey King	“The Grey King's greatest feat, however, was the slaying of Nagga, largest of the sea dragons, a beast so colossal that she was said to feed on leviathans and giant krakens and drown whole islands in her wrath. The Grey King built a mighty longhall about her bones, using her ribs as beams and rafters. From there he ruled the Iron Islands for a thousand years, until his very skin had turned as grey as his hair and beard. Only then did he cast aside his driftwood crown and walk into the sea, descending to the Drowned God's watery halls to take his rightful place at his right hand.” (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
	GD-2.1 Kingship over the Sea and the Ironborn from the Drowned God	
	GD-2.2 Marriage to a Mermaid	
	GD-2.3 Battle against the Storm God	
	GD-2.4 Fire for Humanity	
	GD-2.5 First Longship from the Demon Tree Ygg	
	GD-2.6 Teaching Sailing and Fishing	
	GD-2.7 Slaying of the Sea Dragon Nagga	
	GD-2.8 Building a Longhall, Throne, and	

	Crown from Nagga's Bones GD-2.9 Thousand-Year- Reign over the Ironborn GD-2.10 Decent to the Watery Halls GD-2.11 Decay after his Death GD-2.12 Hundred Sons and Their Civil War GD-2.13 Dividing of the Isles and Forming of the Great Houses	
PP Priests and Prophets	PP-1 Galon Whitestaff PP1.1 Weirwood or Nagga's Bone Staff PP1.2 Reuniting the Iron Islands, First Kingsmoot PP1.3 Dethroning of Erich the Ugly	"It was Galon who decreed that ironborn must not make war on other ironborn, who forbade them to carry off each other's women or raid each other's shores, and who forged the Iron Islands into a single kingdom, summoning the captains and the kings to Old Wyk to choose a high king to reign supreme over salt kings and rock kings alike." (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
	PP-2 Shrike PP-2.1 Rebellion against King Harmund the Handsom PP-2.2 Mutilation of Harmund and the Dowager Queen Lelia PP-2.3 Capturing and Sacrificing of Aubrey Crakehall	"The Shrike himself tore out the deposed king's tongue, so he might never again speak 'lies and blasphemies.' Harmund was blinded as well, and his nose was cut off, so 'all men might see him for the monster he is.'" (The World of Ice and Fire, The Black Blood.)

	PP-3 Lodos	“On Old Wyk, the priest-king Lodos
	PP-3.1 Drowned God’s Living Son	turned to his god, calling on the krakens of the deep to drag down Aegon's warships.
	PP-3.2 Crowning of the Priest-King	When the krakens failed to appear, Lodos filled his robes with stones and walked into the sea to ‘take counsel’ with his father.”
	PP-3.3 Calling the Drowned God for Krakens	(The World of Ice and Fire, The Greyjoys of Pyke.)
	PP-3.4 Descending to the Watery Halls	
	PP-4 Lodos the Twice-Drowned	“One such revolt convulsed the Iron Islands, led by a man claiming that he was the priestking Lodos returned at last from visiting his father.” (The World of Ice and Fire, The Greyjoys of Pyke.)
	PP-4.1 Return from the Watery Halls	
	PP-4.2 Unsuccessful Revolt	
RR Rulers and Reavers	RR-1 Balon Blackskin	“Most infamous of all was Balon Blackskin, who fought with an axe in his left hand and a hammer in his right. No weapon made of man could harm him, it was said; swords glanced off and left no mark, and axes shattered against his skin.” (The World of Ice and Fire, The Iron Islands.)
	RR-1.1 Steel-Shattering Skin	
	RR-2 Qhored the Cruel	“At thirty, he defeated the Lords of the Trident in battle, forcing the river king Bernarr II to bend the knee and yield up his three young sons as hostages. Three years later, he put the boys to death with his own hand, cutting out their hearts when their father's annual tribute was late in coming. When their grieving sire went to war to avenge them, King Qhored and his ironmen destroyed Bernarr's host and had
	RR2-1 Conquest and Domination over the Sunset Sea	
	RR2-2 Mass Abductions and Sacrificial Drownings	

	him drowned as a sacrifice to the Drowned God, putting an end to House Justman and throwing the riverlands into bloody anarchy.” (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
RR-3 Joron I Blacktyde RR-3.1 Torturing of the King of the Reach RR-3.2 Sack of Arbor	“Joron I Blacktyde captured Gyles II Gardener when their fleets clashed off the Misty Islands. After torturing him to death, Joron had his corpse cut into pieces so that he might bait his fishhooks with 'a chunk of king.'” (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
RR-4 Urrathon Badbrother RR-4.1 Victory in Kingsmoot and Slaying of his Rivals RR-4.2 Reign of Cruelty and Impiety RR-4.3 Overthrowing and Death	“To their dismay, the captains and kings chose Urrathon Goodbrother of Great Wyk instead. The first thing the new king did was command that the sons of the old king be put to death. For that, and for the savage cruelty he oft displayed during his two years as king, Urrathon IV Goodbrother is remembered in history as Badbrother.” (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
RR-5 Torgon the Latecomer RR-5.1 Missing the Kingsmoot RR-5.2 Overthrowing of the Badbrother RR-5.3 Naming of an Heir after a Long Reign	“When Torgon Greyiron returned at last to the Iron Islands, he declared the kingsmoot to be invalid because he had not been present to make a claim. The priests supported him in this, for they had grown weary of Badbrother's arrogance and impiety. Smallfolk and great lords alike arose at their call, rallying to Torgon's banners, until Urrathon's own captains hacked Urrathon into pieces. Torgon the Latecomer became king in his stead, and

	ruled for forty years without ever having been chosen and proclaimed at a kingsmoot.” (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
RR-6 Urron Redhand	“Hundreds came, amongst them the salt kings and rock kings of the seven major isles, and even the Lonely Light. Yet scarcely had they gathered when Urron Redhand loosed his axemen on them, and Nagga's ribs ran red with blood. Thirteen kings died that day, and half a hundred priests and prophets.” (The World of Ice and Fire, Driftwood Crowns.)
RR-6.1 Violent Suppression of a Kingsmoot	
RR-6.2 Reducing the Rock and Salt Kings to Vassal Lords	
RR-6.3 Establishing Hereditary Monarcy	
RR-7 Kings of House Hoare	“Their foes claimed their blood was black as well, darkened by the "Andal taint," for many of the early Hoare kings took maidens of that ilk to wife. True ironborn had salt water in their veins, the priests of the Drowned God proclaimed; the black-blooded Hoares were false kings, ungodly usurpers who must be cast down.” (The World of Ice and Fire, The Black Blood.)
RR-7.1 “Black Blood”, Andal Ancestry, and Religious Tolerance	
RR-7.2 Departure from Ironborn Traditions	
RR-7.3 Rebellion and Devastation of the Isles	
RR-7.4 Ironborn Domination over the Riverlands	
RR-7.5 Construction of Harrenhal	
7.6 Destruction of House Hoare	
RR-8 Dalton Greyjoy	“In his fifteenth year, whilst fighting in the Stepstones as a sellsail, he saw his uncle slain and avenged his death, but he took a dozen wounds and emerged from the fight
RR-8.1 Early Feats	
RR-8.2 Rising to Lordship	

	RR-8.3 Raids during the Civil War of the Seven Kingdoms	drenched head to heel in blood. From that day forth, men called him the Red Kraken.” (The World of Ice and Fire, The Red Kraken.)
	RR-8.4 Raids after the Civil War	
	RR-8.5 Assassination	
	RR-8.6 Following Civil War of the Ironborn	
	RR-8.7 Sacking of the Iron Islands	
	RR-9 Dagon Greyjoy	“Almost a hundred years had passed since Dagon Greyjoy sat the Seastone Chair, but the ironborn still told tales of his raids and battles. In Dagon's day a weak king sat the Iron Throne, his rheumy eyes fixed across the narrow sea where bastards and exiles plotted rebellion. So forth from Pyke Lord Dagon sailed, to make the Sunset Sea his own." (A Dance with Dragons, Victarion I.)
	RR-9.1 Raids on the Western Coast of Westeros	
	RR-9.2 Defeat by the Targaryens	
MM Magic and Mysteries	MM-1 Seastone Chair	“Maester Kirth in his collection of ironborn legends, Songs the Drowned Men Sing, has suggested that the chair was left by visitors from across the Sunset Sea, but there is no evidence for this, only speculation.” (The World of Ice and Fire, The Dawn Age.)
	MM-1.1 Finding of the Seastone Chair	
	MM-1.2 Left by Visitors from the Other Side of the Sunset Sea	
	MM-1.3 Left by the First Inhabitants of the Isles	
	MM-1.4 Made by a Half-Human Race	
	MM-2 Deep Ones	“These Deep Ones, as he names them, are the seed from which our legends of merlings have grown, he argues, whilst
	MM-2.1 Fathering of Half-Humans	

<p>MM-2.2 Legends of Merlings</p> <p>MM-2.3 The Real Drowned God</p>	<p>their terrible fathers are the truth behind the Drowned God of the ironborn.” (The World of Ice and Fire, Oldtown.)</p>
<p>MM-3 The Farwynds</p> <p>MM-3.1 Birthing of Half-Human, Half-Seal Children</p> <p>MM-3.2 Skinchangers</p>	<p>“The Farwynds there were even queerer than the rest. Some said they were skinchangers, unholy creatures who could take on the forms of sea lions, walruses, even spotted whales, the wolves of the wild sea.” (A Feast for Crows, The Drowned Man.)</p>
<p>MM-4 Unknown Land West of Sunset Sea</p> <p>MM-4.1 Paradise That Lies over the Horizon</p> <p>MM-4.2 Alton Greyjoy, the Holy Fool</p>	<p>“He told of a wondrous land beyond the Sunset Sea, a land without winter or want, where death had no dominion.” (A Feast for Crows, The Drowned Man.)</p>

Appendix 2 Coding Frames: Social Reality of the Ironborn

Ironborn Worldview

Category	Subcategory	Definition	Anchor Example
CI Cultural Identity	CI-1 Essence	Core ideas that define what it means to be ironborn as a distinct people.	“What rose can harm the krakens of the deep? We have taken their shields from them, and smashed them all to pieces. Who will protect them now?” (A Feast for Crows, The Reaver.)
	CI-1.1 Drowned God’s People		
	CI-1.2 Of Salt and Iron		
	CI-1.3 Krakens		
	CI-2 Character	Common traits valued in ironborn culture, that are often seen as essential to being a proper ironborn.	“Ironborn captains were proud and willful, and did not go in awe of a man’s blood. The islands were too small for awe, and a longship smaller still.” (A Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
	CI-2.1 Proud and Wilful		
	CI-2.2 Hard and Unforgiving		
	CI-2.3 Brave and Daring		
	CI-3 Symbols	Symbols that the ironborn use, create, and value.	“Theon's father numbered among his titles the style of Lord Reaper, and the Greyjoy words boasted that We Do Not Sow.” (A Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
	CI-3.1 Heraldry		
	CI-3.2 Artifacts		
	CI-3.3 Ships		
	CI-3.4 Songs		
CI-3.5 Titles			
CI-3.6 House Words			
OT Others	OT-1 In the Isles	Groups of individuals in the Iron Islands who are viewed as different or inferior by the majority.	“These were not the kin of famous captains nor the blood of the great Houses of the Iron Islands. These were the sons of thralls and salt wives.” (A Dance with Dragons, Reek II.)
	OT-1.1 Ungodly		
	OT-1.2 Foreign Influence		
	OT-1.3 Thralls and Salt Wives		

	OT-1.4 Insignificant Ancestors OT-1.5 The Farwynds		
	OT-2 Greenlanders OT-2.1 Proud Lords OT-2.2 No Proper Sailors OT-2.3 Soft OT-2.4 Separate Groups	Familiar people living outside the Iron Islands, especially on the mainland.	“Though the men of the Shield Islands called themselves sailors, they crossed the seas in dread and went lightly clad in battle for fear of drowning.” (A Feast for Crows, The Reaver.)
	OT-3 Outlanders OT-3.1 Godless Men OT-3.2 Monsters OT-3.3 Wizards and Sorcerers OT-3.4 Mongrels OT-3.5 Slavers	Foreign people who originate farther away from the Iron Islands.	“He surrounds himself with godless men and monsters, worse than before.” (A Feast fir Crows, The Iron Captain.)
HF Temporality	HF-1 Glorious Past HF-1.1 The Old Way HF-1.2 Conquest	Cultural, societal, and narrative perception of past.	“When we still kept the Old Way, lived by the axe instead of the pick, taking what we would, be it wealth, women, or glory. In those days, the ironborn did not work mines; that was labor for the captives brought back from the hostings, and so too the sorry business of farming and tending goats and sheep.” (A Clash of Kings, Theon I.)

	HF-2 Present HF-2.1 Decay and Weakness HF-2.2 Uphold of Traditions	Cultural, societal, and narrative perception of present.	“No longer may we ride the wind with fire and sword, taking what we want. Now we scratch in the ground and toss lines in the sea like other men, and count ourselves lucky if we have salt cod and porridge enough to get us through a winter.” (A Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
	HF-3 Hereafter HF-3.1 Return of the Old Way HF-3.2 Freedom HF-3.3 Conquest	Cultural, societal, and narrative perception of future.	“We shall sweep over the green lands with fire and sword, root out the seven gods of the septons and the white trees of the northmen ...” (A Feast for Crows, The Drowned Man.)
PL Spatiality	PL-1 Iron Islands PL-1.1 God’s Creation PL-1.2 Hard Place PL-1.3 Living in the Past	Constructed societal, cultural and religious understanding of the Iron Islands.	“Windy and cold and damp. A miserable hard place, in truth . . . but my lord father once told me that hard places breed hard men, and hard men rule the world.” (A Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
	PL-2 Old Wyk PL-2.1 Most Holy PL-2.2 Kingsmoot PL-2.3 Grey King’s Hall PL-2.4 Origin of the Seastone Chair PL-2.5 Hill of Nagga	Cultural and religious qualities and characteristics of Old Wyk.	“Seek the hill of Nagga and the bones of the Grey King’s Hall, for in that holy place when the moon has drowned and come again we shall make ourselves a worthy king, a godly king.” (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)

	PL-2.6 Nagga's Cradle		
	PL-3 Sea PL-3.1 As Drowned God PL-3.2 Drowned God's Realm PL-3.3 Afterlife in the Watery Halls PL-3.4 Holy PL-3.5 Home PL-3.6 Freedom	The sea as a physical and spiritual space, and how it is viewed and understood.	"The sea was stirring too. The waves grew larger as the wind rose, sending plumes of spray to crash against the longships. The Drowned God wakes, thought Aeron. He could hear his voice welling from the depths of the sea." (A Feast for Crows, The Drowned Man.)
	PL-4 Foreign Places PL-4.1 Westeros PL-4.2 Essos PL-4.3 Summer Sea PL-4.5 Paradise Beyond the Sunset Sea PL-4.6 Unknown Hell(s)	Locations beyond the Iron Islands and how they are viewed.	"The last time Victarion had spent a night ashore, his dreams had been dark and disturbing and when he woke his mouth was full of blood. The maester said he had bitten his own tongue in his sleep, but he took it for a sign from the Drowned God, a warning that if he lingered here too long, he would choke on his own blood." (A Dance with Dragons, The Iron Suitor.)
Institutional Religiosity	IR-1 Drowned God IR-1.1 Creator and Maker IR-1.2 God of a Nation IR-1.3 God of Water	Roles and qualities of the Drowned God, the central deity in the ironborn religion.	"My god, he prayed, speak to me in the rumble of the waves, and tell me what to do. The captains and the kings await your word. Who shall be our king in Balon's place? Sing to me in the language of leviathan, that I may know his name. Tell

IR-1.4 God of Death and Underworld		me, O Lord beneath the waves, who has the strength to fight the storm on Pyke?" (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)
IR-1.5 Dying-and-Rising God		
IR-1.6 Trickster		
IR-1.7 Active and Influential		
IR-1.8 Gift-Giver		
IR-1.9 Supreme Ruler		
IR-1.10 Local God		
IR-1.11 Silent		
IR-2 The Storm God	Roles and qualities of the Storm God in the faith of the ironborn.	"Was the storm raging when he fell?" Aeron demanded of them. 'Aye,' the youth said, 'it was.' 'The Storm God cast him down,' the priest announced." (AFfC 1, The Prophet, 28.)
IR-2.1 God of Sky and Storms		
IR-2.2 Enemy of the Drowned God		
IR-2.3 Enemy of the Ironborn		
IR-2.4 Evil and Vile		
IR-2.5 Murderer		
IR-2.6 Scheming		
IR-2.7 Unruly		
IR-2.8 Master of Ravens		
IR-3 Other Gods and Religions	How other deities and religions are	"We shall sweep over the green lands with fire and sword, root out the seven gods of the septons and the white trees of
IR-3.1 Faith of the Seven		

IR-3.2 Old Gods IR-3.3 R'hllor IR-3.4 Monolatry or Henoteism	viewed by the ironborn.	the northmen ...” (A Feast for Crows, The Drowned Man.)
IR-4 Organization IR-4.1 Prophets and Priests IR-4-2 Drowned Men	Religious figures and authorities in the faith of the Drowned God.	““You belong to the god now,’ Aeron told him. The other drowned men gathered round and each gave him a punch and a kiss to welcome him to the brotherhood.” (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)
IR-5 Life IR-5.1 Dry and Dismal IR-5.2 Cruel and Painful IR-5.3 Losing Fight	Cultural perception of life and living.	“That was the way of this cold world, where men fished the sea and dug in the ground and died, whilst women brought forth short-lived children from beds of blood and pain.” (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)
IR-6 Death IR-6.1 Death and Rebirth IR-6.2 Final Death IR-6.3 Afterlife	The role and meaning of death, re-birth, and afterlife in the ironborn worldview.	““You have drowned and been returned to us. What is dead can never die.’ ‘But rises.’ The boy coughed violently, bringing up more water. ‘Rises again.’” (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)
IR-7 Magic IR-7.1 Wizards and Sorcerers IR-7.2 Curses IR-7.3 Demons	Ironborn views on the supernatural elements.	“It was not the god who spoke. Euron is known to keep wizards and foul sorcerers on that red ship of his. They sent some spell among us, so we could not hear the sea.” (A Feast for Crows, The Reaver.)

IR-8 Ethics	Ethical views	““Will it come to war between
IR-8.1 Family	and rules of the	them?” asked the maester.
IR-8.2 The Iron	ironborn.	‘Ironborn must not spill the
Price		blood of ironborn.” (A Feast
IR-8.3 Conflict		for Crows, The Prophet.)
IR-8.4 Kinslaying		
IR-8.5 Vengeance		
IR-9 Rituals	Rituals related	“He had decided then that he
IR-9.1 Drowning	with the faith of	would slit her throat and toss
(Baptism)	the Drowned	her in the sea, a blood sacrifice
IR-9.2 Conversion	God.	to the Drowned God.” (A
IR-9.3 Turning		Dance with Dragons, The Iron
Holy		Suitor.)
IR-9.4 Blessing		
IR-9.5 Praying		
IR-9.6 Preaching		
IR-9.7 Sacrifices		
IR-9.8 Kingsmoot		
IR-9.9 Crowning		
IR-9.10 Wedding		

Ironborn Society

Category	Subcategory	Definition	Anchor Example
ID Ideology	ID-1 The Old Way	Set of ideas and	“It had been to bring
	ID-1.1 Goals	values that explains	back the Old Way more
	ID-1.2 Ideals	how the ironborn	than for the empty vanity
	ID-1.3 Related Ideologies	society should be constructed and	of a crown that Lord Balon had staged his
	ID-1.4 Critique	which goals they	great rebellion.” (A
	ID-1.5 Alternatives	should pursue.	Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
ID-2 Faith of the Drowned God	ID-2.1 Worldview	The ironborn religion as a political and societal	“War was an ironman’s proper trade. The Drowned God had made
	ID-2.2 Ideals	resource.	them to reave and rape,
	ID-2.3 Authority		to carve out kingdoms and write their names in
			fire and blood and song.” (A Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
PO Power	PO-1 Political Agents	Actors in ironborn	“The captains and the
	PO-1.1 Kings	power dynamics,	kings raised Euron up,
	PO-1.2 Lords	including the	but the common folk
	PO-1.3 Captains	holders, challengers,	shall tear him down. I
	PO-1.4 Iron Fleet	and executors of	shall go to Great Wyk, to
	PO-1.5 Warriors	power.	Harlaw, to Orkmont, to
	PO-1.6 Priests		Pyke itself. In every town
	PO-1.7 Common Folk		and village shall my words be heard. No godless man may sit the Seastone Chair!” (AFfC 29, The Reaver, 617.)
PO-2 Methods of Power Transfer	Cultural and political mechanisms through	“Asha, my two tall sons fed the crabs of Fair Isle.	
PO-2.1 Divine		I am not like to wed	

	PO-2.2 Hereditary	which power	again. Stay, and I shall
	PO-2.3 Choosing	changes hands.	name you heir to the Ten
	PO-2.4 Naming		Towers. Be content with
	PO-2.5 Taking		that.” (A Feast for
			Crows, The Kraken's
			Daughter.)
	PO-3 Hierarchy	Vertical power	“The common men
	PO-3.1 God vs. Men	relations within	crowded together in a
	PO-3.2 Religious vs.	ironborn culture,	crescent around the base
	Secular	structured by	of the knoll, with the
	PO-3.3 Kings vs. Men	theology, gender,	thralls, children, and
	PO-3.4 Captains vs.	class, and authority.	women toward the rear.
	Lesser Men		The captains and the
	PO-3.5 Great Houses vs.		kings made their way up
	Other Families		the slopes.” (A Feast for
	PO-3.6 Free Men vs.		Crows, The Drowned
	Thralls		Man.)
	PO-3.5 Rock Marriage		
	vs. Salt Marriage		
	PO-3.6 Men vs. Women		
	PO-3.7 Commander vs.		
	Followers		
	PO-4 Hegemony	Cultural systems or	“You warn a servant of
	PO-4.1 Priests	discourses that	the Drowned God, boy?
	PO-4.2 Captains	naturalise and	You have forgotten more
	PO-4.3 Warriors	sustain the authority	than you know.” (A
	PO-4.4 Great Houses	of specific groups or	Clash of Kings, Theon I.)
	PO-4.5 Masculinity	ideals.	
GE Gender	GE-1 Ideal Man	Culturally	“I can't say how many
	GE-1.1 Culturally	constructed and	heads I've crushed
	Ironborn	idealised roles and	against my anvil neither,
	GE-1.2 Good Family	characteristics for	but there's some widows
	Line		could. I could tell you all

GE-1.3 Warrior and Fighter	males in the ironborn culture.	the deeds I've done in battle, but I'm eight-and-eighty and won't live long enough to finish. If old is wise, no one is wiser than me. If big is strong, no one's stronger.
GE-1.4 Brave and Daring		
GE-1.5 Big and Strong		
GE-1.6 Unyielding		
GE-1.7 Godly		
GE-1.8 Wise		
GE-1.9 Loyal		
GE-1.10 Has Wives and Heirs		
GE-1.11 Proper Trade		
GE-1.12 Proper Death		
GE-2 Anti-Ideal Man	Culturally	“No true man killed with
GE-2.1 Womanly	stigmatised	poison. At Moat Cailin
GE-2.2 Thrall or Servant	characteristics that	the bog devils had loosed
GE-2.3 Weak or Craven	deviate from the	poisoned arrows at his
GE-2.4 Niggardly	ideal of ironborn	men, but that was to be
GE-2.5 Garrulous	masculinity.	expected from such
GE-2.6 Reader		degraded creatures. Serry
GE-2.7 Fool		had been a knight,
GE-2.8 Kinslayer		highborn. Poison was for
GE-2.9 Poisoner		cravens, women, and
GE-2.10 Thief		Dornishmen.” (A Dance
GE-2.11 Liar		with Dragons, The Iron
GE-2.12 Slaver		Suitor.)
GE-3 Roles of Women	The different social,	“No woman has ever
GE-3.1 Daughters	familial, and	ruled the ironborn.
GE-3.2 Mothers	political positions	Gwynesse is seven years
GE-3.3 Wives and Widows	women can	my elder, but when our
GE-3.4 Stewards	traditionally or	father died the Ten
GE-3.5 Thralls	potentially hold in	Towers came to me. It
GE-3.6 Traders	ironborn society.	will be the same for you.
		You are Balon’s

GE-3.7 Sailors and Raiders		daughter, not his son.” (A Feast for Crows, The Kraken's Daughter.)
GE-3.8 Warriors		
GE-3.9 Heirs and Rulers		
GE-3.10 Queens		

GE-4 Qualities of Women	Traits, values, and stereotypes	“‘This girl forgets herself,’ snarled
GE-4.1 Not Men	associated with	Pinchface Jon Myre.
GE-4.2 For Peace	women in ironborn	‘Balon let her believe she
GE-4.3 Scheming	culture.	was a man.’ ‘Your father
GE-4.4 Paying the Gold Price		made the same mistake
GE-4.5 Attractiveness		with you,’ said Asha.” (A
GE-4.6 Sexuality		Feast for Crows, The Iron Captain, 374.)

Ironborn Individuals

Category	Subcategory	Definition	Anchor Example
TH Theon Greyjoy	TH-1 Identity	Identities	“I was Theon of House Greyjoy.
	TH-1.1 Hostage	that Theon	I was a ward of Eddard Stark, a
	TH-1.2 Stark	has	friend and brother to his
	TH-1.3 Prince	possessed,	children. “Please.” He fell to his
	TH-1.4 Ironborn	considered,	knees. “A sword, that’s all I ask.
	TH-1.5 Legend	or pursued	Let me die as Theon, not as
	TH-1.6 Member of the Nightwatch	for himself.	Reek.” Tears trickled down his
	TH-1.6 Reek		cheeks, impossibly warm. ‘I was
	TH-1.7 Ghost		ironborn. A son ... a son of
TH-1.8 Theon		Pyke, of the islands.’” (A Dance with Dragons, A Ghost in Winterfell.)	
	TH-2 Social Status	The roles	““Ten years a wolf, and you land
	TH-2.1 Ward of House Stark	given or	here and think to prince about
	TH-2.2 Stranger to the Ironborn	considered	the islands, but you know
	TH2.2 Heir of the Iron Islands	for Theon	nothing and no one. Why should
	TH2.3 Prince of Winterfell	and how	men fight and die for you?’ ‘I
	TH2.4 Flawed Character	other people	am their lawful prince,’ Theon
	TH2.5 Turncloak	perceive	said stiffly. ‘By the laws of the
	TH2.6 Reek	him.	green lands, you might be. But
	TH-3 Religiosity	Theon’s	we make our own laws here, or
	TH3-1 Unbeliever	personal	have you forgotten?’ (A Clash of
	TH3-2 Feigned Faith on the Drowned God	beliefs and	Kings, Theon II.)
	TH3-3 Believer, not Follower of the Old Gods	relationship	“Will the old gods hear me if I
		with	do? They were not his gods, had
		religions.	never been his gods. He was
			ironborn, a son of Pyke, his god
			was the Drowned God of the
			islands ... but Winterfell was
			long leagues from the sea. It had

	TH3-4 Believing in the Drowned God?		been a lifetime since any god had heard him.” (A Dance with Dragons, The Prince of Winterfell.)
AS Asha Greyjoy	AS-1 Identity AS-1.1 Ironborn AS-1.2 Greyjoy AS-1.3 Heir of the Iron Islands AS-1.4 Fighter AS-1.5 Captain and Sailor AS-1.6 Woman, not a Lady AS-1.7 Bold AS-1.8 Openly Sexual AS-1.9 Pirate AS-1.10 Queen	Identities that Asha has possessed, considered, or pursued for herself.	“I can protect myself. Nuncle, I am a kraken. Asha, of House Greyjoy.” (A Feast for Crows, The Kraken’s Daughter.)
	AS-2 Social Status AS-2.1 King’s Daughter AS-2.2 Heir of the Iron Islands AS-2.3 Captain and Fighter AS-2.4 Respected and Followed AS-2.5 Woman, not a Ruler AS-2.6 Defeated AS-2.7 Wife to Erik Ironmaker AS-2.8 Captive	The roles given or considered for Asha and how other people perceive her.	"No woman will ever rule the ironborn, not even a woman such as Asha.” (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)

	AS-3 Religiosity	Asha's	"Asha had never shared her
	AS-3.1 Weak Faith on the Drowned God	personal beliefs and	uncle Aeron's faith in the Drowned God, but that night she
	AS-3.2 Cultural Follower of the Drowned God	relationship with	prayed as fervently to He Who Dwells Beneath the Waves as
	AS-3.3 Praying for the Drowned God	religions.	ever the Damphair had." (A Dance with Dragons, The King's
	AS-3.6 Believer, not Follower of the Old Gods		Prize.)
AE Aeron Greyjoy	AE-1 Identity	Identities	"Nine sons were born from the
	AE-1.1 Least of Four Brothers	that Aeron has	loins of Quellon Greyjoy, and I was the least of them, as weak
	AE-1.2 Damphair, Chosen by the God	possessed, considered,	and frightened as a girl. But no longer. That man is drowned,
	AE-1.3 Prophet	or pursued	and the god has made me
	AE-1.4 Not-a-Ruler	for himself.	strong." (A Feast for Crows, The
	AE-1.5 Weak and Foolish		Prophet.)
	AE-1.6 Hard and Strong		
	AE-2 Social Status	The roles	"In the name of the Drowned
	AE-2.1 Highest Religious Authority	given or considered	God I summon you. I summon all of you! Leave your halls and
	AE-2.2 Should-be-King	for Aeron	hovels, your castles and your
	AE-2.3 Kingmaker	and how	keeps, and return to Nagga's hill
	AE-2.4 Followed and Revered	other people perceive	to make a kingsmoot!" (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)
	AE-2.5 Feared	him.	
	AE-2.6 Mad		
	AE-3 Religiosity	Aeron's	"The water was icy cold, yet he
	AE-3.1 Believer and Follower of the Drowned God	personal beliefs and relationship	did not flinch from his god's caress. A wave smashed against his chest, staggering him. The
	AE-3.2 Priests and Prophet	with religions.	next broke over his head. He could taste the salt on his lips

	AE-3.3 Chosen by the Drowned God		and feel the god around him, and his ears rang with the glory of his song.” (A Feast for Crows, The Prophet.)
	AE-3.4 Feeling Doubt		
	AE-3.5 Preacher of the Drowned God		
VI Victarion Greyjoy	VI-1 Identity	Identities	“The Drowned God had not shaped Victarion Greyjoy to fight with words at kingsmoots, nor struggle against furtive sneaking foes in endless bogs. This was why he had been put on earth; to stand steel-clad with an axe red and dripping in his hand, dealing death with every blow.” (A Feast for Crows, The Reaver.)
	VI-1.1 Ironborn	that	
	VI-1.2 Lord Captain of the Iron Fleet	Victarion	
	VI-1.3 Follower of the Drowned God	has	
	VI-1.4 Fighter and Warrior	possessed,	
	VI-1.5 Strong	considered,	
	VI-1.6 Loyal and Dutiful	or pursued	
	VI-1.7 Insecure	for himself.	
	VI-1.8 Not with Words		
	VI-1.9 Freer of Slaves		
	VI-1.10 Liberator of the Ironborn		
	VI-1.11 Chosen of Two Gods		
	VI-1.12 Suitor		
	VI-2 Social Status	The roles	“There’s no one braver than my nuncle, no one stronger, no one fiercer in a fight. And he counts to ten as quick as any man, I have seen him do it ... though when he needs to go to twenty he does take off his boots.” That made them laugh. “He has no sons, though. His wives keep
	VI-2.1 Lord Captain of the Iron Fleet	given or	
	VI-2.1 Fearsome Warrior	considered	
	VI-2.2 Godly	for	
	VI-2.3 Should-be-King	Victarion	
	VI-2.4 Dutiful Follower	and how	
	VI-2.5 Slow-Witted	other people	
	VI-2.6 No Heir nor Wife	perceive	
		him.	

VI-2.7 Heir for the Seastone Chair	dying.” (A Feast for Crows, The Drowned Man.)
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VI-3 Religiosity VI-3.1 Believer and Follower of the Drowned God VI-3.2 Uncertain VI-3.3 Syncretist	Victarion’s personal beliefs and relationship with religions.	“He wondered if this was how his brother Aeron felt when the Drowned God spoke to him. He could almost hear the god’s voice welling up from the depths of the sea. You shall serve me well, my captain, the waves seemed to say. It was for this I made you. But he would feed the red god too, Moqorro’s fire god.” (A Dance with Dragons, Victarion I.)
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Appendix 3 Summary in Finnish

Songs the Drowned Men Sing

Rautasyntyisten mytologia ja sosiaalinen todellisuus *Tulen ja jään laulussa*

Johdanto

Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on osaltaan lisätä ymmärrystä uskonnon representaatiosta populaarikulttuurissa ja fiktiivisessä kirjallisuudessa. Tarkastelun kohteeksi on valittu George R. R. Martinin fantasiakirjasarja *Tulen ja jään laulu* (*A Song of Ice and Fire*) sen kansainvälisen suosion ja kulttuurisen merkittävyyden vuoksi. Jotta on mahdollista ymmärtää, millaista kuvaa uskonnosta kirjasarja narratiivina tuottaa, tutkin tässä tutkielmassa rautasyntyisten myyttisiä narratiiveja ja niiden vuorovaikutusta näiden sosiaaliseen todellisuuden kanssa.

Tutkimus tarkastelee rautasyntyisten myyttejä ja analysoi, millaisia merkityksiä ja rakenteita ne tuottavat heidän kulttuurissaan. Tavoitteena on vastata neljään pääkysymykseen: 1) Mitä myyttejä rautasyntyisillä on? 2) Millainen on heidän sosiaalinen todellisuutensa? 3) Miten myytit rakentavat ja heijastavat tätä todellisuutta? 4) Millainen on George R. R. Martinin uskontorepresentaatio *Tulen ja jään laulussa*? Toista tutkimuskysymystä tarkastellaan maailmankuvan, yhteiskunnan ja yksilöiden näkökulmasta.

Aiempi tutkimus *Tulen ja jään laulu* -sarjasta on käsitellyt muun muassa sarjan historiallisia elementtejä, fiktiivisiä kieliä, sukupuolen esityksiä ja yhteiskunnallisia valtasuhteita, mutta uskontoa on tutkittu vähemmän mytologian näkökulmasta. Erityisesti rautasyntyisten myyttisiä kertomuksia ei ole systemaattisesti analysoitu, vaikka ne ovat keskeisiä heidän kulttuurinsa ja maailmankuvansa ymmärtämiseksi. Tämä tutkielma paikkaa tätä tutkimusaukkoa tarkastelemalla rautasaarelaiten mytologiaa ja sen suhdetta sosiaaliseen todellisuuteen, ja samalla se osallistuu laajempaan keskusteluun uskonnon roolista fiktiivisissä kertomuksissa.

Aineisto

George R. R. Martin on yhdysvaltalainen scifi-, kauhu- ja fantasiakirjailija, jota pidetään yhtenä aikamme vaikutusvaltaisimmista ja menestyksekkäimmistä kirjailijoista. Hänen tunnetuin teoksensa *Tulen ja jään laulu* on seitsemänosaiseksi suunniteltu fantasiakirjasarja, josta on tähän mennessä julkaistu viisi kirjaa: *Valtaistuinpeli* (*A Game of Thrones* 1996), *Kuninkaiden koitos* (*A Clash of Kings* 1998), *Miekkamyrsky* (*A Storm of Swords* 2000), *Korppiin kestit* (*A Feast for Crows* 2005) ja *Lohikäärmetanssi* (*A Dance with Dragons* 2011). George R. R. Martin on kirjoittanut myös muita samaan maailmaan sijoittuvia teoksia. Tämän tutkielman kannalta olennaisin niistä on Martinin Elio M. García Jr.:n ja Linda Antonssonin kanssa kirjoittama *The World of Ice & Fire* (2014), joka on Martinin luomaa fantasiamaailmaa ja sen alueita, kansoja ja historiaa esittelevä fiktiivinen tietokirja.

Eräs *Tulen ja jään laulun* keskeisimmistä alueista on Seitsemään kuningaskuntaan kuuluva Rautasaaret, jonka asukkaat nimittävät itseään rautasyntyisiksi. Rautasyntyiset palvovat Hukkunutta jumalaa. Tämän karussa saaristossa Westerosin länsirannikolla asuvan kansan kulttuuri on perinteisesti pohjannut merenkulkuun ja ryöstelyyn. Rautasaaret oli aikanaan itsenäinen kuningaskunta ja he ovatkin toistuvasti pyrkineet itsenäistymään Seitsemästä kuningaskunnasta. Rautasaaria hallitsee Greyjoyn suku ja kertomuksessa käsitellään heidän sisäisiä valtataisteluitaan. Kirjasarjassa on neljä rautasyntyistä näkökulmahahmoa: Rautasaarten hallitsijan poika Theon, tämän sisar Asha sekä näiden sedät Aeron, joka on Hukkuneen jumalan profeetta, ja Victarion, rautalaivaston ylikapteeni.¹

Uskonto on keskeisessä asemassa *Tulen ja jään laulu* -kirjasarjassa. Sarjan maailma sisältää useita uskontoja, jotka vaikuttavat kertomuksen tapahtumiin sekä yksilöiden että yhteiskunnan tasolla. Erityisen mielenkiintoisia näistä uskonnoista tekee se, ettei lukijalle yksiselitteisesti selviä, ovatko näiden uskontojen jumalat todellisia vai eivät, mikä ohjaa lukijaa lähestymään näitä fiktiivisiä uskontoja avoimin ja kriittisin mielin. Toisin kuin monissa muissa fantasiakertomuksissa, myös uskonnolliset instituutiot ovat Martinin maailmassa vahvasti läsnä.

¹ *Tulen ja jään laulu* käyttää ulkoista kertojaa, joka seuraa tapahtumia eri hahmojen näkökulmasta (*multifocalisation*) luvusta toiseen. Näin lukija saa monipuolisen kuvan uskonnon vaikutuksesta yksilöihin ja yhteiskuntaan.

Fantasia sijoittuu määritelmällisesti vaihtoehtoiseen tai kuvitteelliseen maailmaan, jossa on maagisia tai yliluonnollisia elementtejä.² Tästä huolimatta – tai kenties juuri sen vuoksi – fantasiakirjallisuus tarjoaa mahdollisuuden tarkastella erilaisia näkökulmia ja kyseenalaistaa perinteisiä näkemyksiä uskonnosta, sukupuolesta, etnisyydestä ja vallasta.³ Erityisesti uskonto ja uskonnolliset elementit ovat usein läsnä fantasiassa, sillä genren juuret ovat myyteissä ja kansansaduissa.⁴ Fantasiakirjallisuus voi käsitellä uskontoa monin eri tavoin, kuten sisällyttämällä tarinaan uskonnollisia teemoja, luomalla fiktiivisiä uskontoja tai kritisoimalla todellisia uskontojärjestelmiä. Fantasiakirjallisuus vie lukijan vieraisiin maailmoihin ja kannustaa kriittiseen ajatteluun, jotta lukija voi ymmärtää näiden maailmojen sisäiset säännöt ja rakenteet.⁵

Teoreettinen viitekehys

Myytit ovat tärkeitä kulttuurisia kertomuksia, jotka liittyvät usein uskontoihin ja käsittelevät asioita, joihin tiede ei kykene vastaamaan, kuten elämän tarkoitusta tai kuolemanjälkeistä elämää. Ne antavat ihmisille keinoja ymmärtää maailmaa ja omaa paikkaansa siinä.⁶ Myyttejä on määritelty ja tutkittu monilla eri tieteenaloilla. Käytän tässä työssä Robert A. Segalin myytille antamaa määritelmää, jonka mukaan myytti on merkityksellinen kertomus, jota sen uskojat pitävät tärkeänä riippumatta sen totuudellisuudesta. Monista myytin määritelmistä poiketen Segalin mukaan se voi sijoittua mihin aikaan tahansa ja sisältää minkälaisia hahmoja tahansa.⁷ Rautasyntyisten myyttejä määritellessäni keskityn erityisesti niiden merkityksellisyyteen kulttuurissa ja yhteiskunnassa. Olen ottanut tähän tutkielmaan mukaan myös myyttejä, jotka eivät esiinny kirjoissa narratiivisessa muodossaan, kunhan on ollut riittävästi aihetta olettaa, että sellainen on olemassa Martinin universumin sisällä.

Kulttuurintutkimuksella tarkoitetaan monitieteistä humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellistä tutkimusta, joka on kiinnostunut erityisesti siitä, miten, miksi ja millaiseksi meitä ympäröivä todellisuus ja sen valtarakenteet muodostuvat. Kulttuurintutkimuksessa on keskeistä tutkittavien ilmiöiden kulttuurinen ja yhteiskunnallinen kontekstualisoiminen sekä tutkimuksen kantaottava lähestymistapa.⁸ Yksi kulttuurintutkimuksen keskeisistä käsitteistä

² (Fabrizi 2018, 3.)

³ (Fredrickson 2016; Fabrizi 2016, 1–2.)

⁴ (Clute & Grant 1997, 338.)

⁵ (Łaszkiwicz 2013, 27–29; Fredrickson 2016.)

⁶ (Lincol 1999, ix–x.)

⁷ (Segal 2004, 4–6.)

⁸ (During 2005, 1, 214.)

on merkitys, joka tarkoitetaan yleensä sitä symboliikkaa, jonka jokin tietty ryhmä liittää niihin esineisiin ja toimintoihin, joita he käyttävät identiteettinsä ja kulttuurinsa ilmaisuun ja toteuttamiseen. Ihmiset soveltavat ja käyttävät erilaisia merkitysjärjestelmiä jäsentäessään maailmaa ja toimiessaan siinä.⁹

Kulttuuri ymmärrettiin eräänlaisena kollektiivisena subjektiviteettina, eli tietyn yhteisön elämänmuotoa ja tapaa hahmottaa maailmaa, korostaen todellisuuden ja yhteiskuntaelämän merkitysvälitteisyyttä. Kulttuurintutkimuksessa ajatellaan, että ihmiset eivät koe todellisuutta sellaisenaan, vaan niiden suhteiden kautta, joita heillä on ympäröivään maailmaan. Nämä suhteet voivat olla esimerkiksi erilaisia uskonnollisia, tieteellisiä tai ideologisia maailmanselitysmalleja. Yhteiskunnassa vallalla olevat mallit ovat paitsi osa sosiaalista todellisuutta myös tuottavat ja uusintavat sitä.¹⁰

Sovellan tässä tutkielmassa Kaisa Ilmosen ja Jussi Ojajärven luomaa mallia kulttuurintutkimuksen kolmesta viitekehystä. Ensimmäinen viitekehyksessä tarkastelen maailmankuvaa ja sen osia. Toisen viitekehys keskittyy siihen, miten yhteiskunta on järjestynyt ja miten valta toimii jokapäiväisessä elämässä. Kolmas viitekehys keskittyy yksilöihin ja heidän suhteeseensa kulttuuriin ja yhteiskuntaan.¹¹ Koska tutkimukseni käsittelee uskonnon representaatioita, keskityn analyysissäni myös uskon ja uskontojen merkitykseen. Ensimmäisessä viitekehyksessä keskityn kollektiivisen identiteetin ja toiseuden tuottamiseen, ajallisuuteen, tilallisuuteen ja uskomusjärjestelmiin. Toinen viitekehysten jaan kolmeen osaan, jotka ovat ideologia, valta ja sukupuoli. Kolmas viitekehys jakaantuu niin ikään kolmeen kategoriaan, joita ovat identiteetti, sosiaalinen asema ja henkilökohtainen usko. Nämä edellä mainitut kategoriat muodostuivat osin teoreettisen viitekehysten ja osin tutkimusaineiston pohjalta.

Metodologia

Sisällönanalyysi on yksi suosituimmista tekstianalyysin muodoista uskontotieteessä.¹² Sillä tarkoitetaan aineiston, kuten tekstien tai kuvien, systemaattista tarkastelua tutkijan valitsemasta näkökulmasta.¹³ Analyysi voi olla määrällistä tai laadullista, ja se on mahdollista toteuttaa joko induktiivisesti eli aineistolähtöisesti ryhmitellen tai deduktiivisesti eli

⁹ (Alasuutari 2015, luku 3.)

¹⁰ (Alasuutari 2015, luku 3.)

¹¹ (Ilmonen & Ojajärvi 2024, 314.)

¹² (Badzinski, Woods & Nelson 2022, 180.)

¹³ (Krippendorff 2019, 10; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, luku 4.4.)

teorialähtöisesti kategorisoiden, tai sitten abduktiivisesti näitä tapoja yhdistelemällä.¹⁴ Laadullinen sisällönanalyysi keskittyy aineiston merkityssisältöön, ja se voidaan luokitella aineiston ilmeisten (*manifest*) sisältöjen kuvaamiseen ja aineiston piilevien (*latent*) sisältöjen tulkitsemiseen.¹⁵ Sisällönanalyysi soveltuu erityisesti strukturoimattoman aineiston käsittelyyn ja se pyrkii tiivistämään ja yleistämään tutkittavaa ilmiötä. Se ei kuitenkaan itsessään tuota lopullisia johtopäätöksiä, vaan järjestää aineiston analyysin tueksi.¹⁶ Analyysin keskeisiä vaiheita ovat tutkimuskysymysten määrittely, aineiston valinta, koodausrunгон rakentaminen ja testaus, aineiston koodaus, tulosten tulkinta sekä johtopäätösten teko.¹⁷

Tässä tutkielmassa sovelletaan Pertti Alasuutarin laadullisen analyysin mallia, joka koostuu kahdesta toisiinsa kietoutuneesta vaiheesta: havaintojen pelkistämisestä ja tulosten tulkinnasta.¹⁸ Toteutin ensimmäisen vaiheen kahdesti erillisten tutkimuskysymysten vuoksi. Aineisto kerättiin George R. R. Martinin *Tulen ja jään laulu* -kirjasarjasta ja siihen liittyvistä teoksista, keskittyen rautasyntyisten näkökulmalukuihin ja mytologisesti merkitykselliseen sisältöön. Ensin tunnistin rautasyntyisten myytit aineistosta teoreettisten kriteerien perusteella ja luokittelin ne kertomuksen päähenkilön tai aiheen pohjalta neljään pääkategoriaan ja 19 alakategoriaan.¹⁹ Toisessa pelkistämävaiheessa luin läpi *Tulen ja jään laulun* 23 rautasyntyisten näkökulmalukua etsien niistä kohdat, jotka käsittelivät rautasyntyisten sosiaalista todellisuutta. Tämän jälkeen kategorisoin tekemäni 1080 raakahavaintoa kulttuurintutkimuksen viitekehyksien ja aineiston pohjalta tekemiini kolmeen erilliseen koodausrunkoon, joihin tuli yhteensä 12 pääkategoriaa ja 44 alakategoriaa, jotka jaoin vielä 256 alempaan kategoriaan aineiston käsiteltävyyden parantamiseksi.²⁰

Analyysin tulkintavaiheessa pyrin tekemään aineistosta tulkintoja käyttäen kulttuurintutkimuksen viitekehystä, myyttiteorioita ja lähdemateriaalia sen merkitysten ymmärtämiseen. Myyttien analyysissä keskityin niiden ilmeisen sisällön kuvaamiseen, kun taas sosiaalisen todellisuuden tulkinnassa painotus oli myös aineiston piilevissä merkityksiin. Mytologian ja sosiaalisen todellisuuden välisen suhteen kohdalla keskityin enemmän piilevien

¹⁴ (Vuori 2021; Elo et al. 2022.)

¹⁵ (Graneheim, Lindgren & Lundman 2017.)

¹⁶ (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, luku 4.4.)

¹⁷ (Schreier 2012, Introduction.)

¹⁸ (Alasuutari 2015, luku 2.)

¹⁹ Myyttien koodausrunko löytyy tämän tutkielman ensimmäisestä liitteestä.

²⁰ Sosiaalisen todellisuuden koodausrungot löytyvät tämän tutkielman toisesta liitteestä.

sisältöjen tulkitsemiseen. Tässä kohtaa on huomattava, että tutkijana ja tulkintojen tekijänä oma asemani vaikuttaa tekemiini johtopäätöksiin.

Analyysi

Rautasyntyisten mytologia

Rautasaarelaisten mytologia voidaan jakaa neljään kategoriaan: 1) jumalat ja puolijumalat, 2) papit ja profeetat, 3) hallitsijat ja ryöstelijät, sekä 4) magia ja mysteerit. Rautasaarten uskonnon keskiössä on Hukkunut jumala, meren ja rautasyntyisten luoja, joka on ikuisessa sodassa Myrskyn jumalan kanssa.²¹ Harmaan kuninkaan, joka on Rautasaarten legendaarinen hallitsija ja rautasyntyisten esi-isä, mytologia on täynnä kertomuksia tämän uroteoista.²² Mytologiasta löytyy myös kertomuksia uskonnollisista hahmoista: Galon Whitestaff kutsui koolle ensimmäisen kokouksen, jossa Rautasaarille valittiin ylin kuningas ja Shrike johti rautasaarelaiset kapinaan turmeltuneena pidettyä hallitsijaa vastaan.²³ Pappiskuningas Lodos katosi seuraajineen mereen etsiessään Hukkunutta jumalaa, ja vuosikymmeniä myöhemmin Rautasaarilla puhjenneen kapinan johtaja nimettiin Lodokseksi, joka oli viimein palannut jumalansa vetisistä saleista.²⁴

Rautasaarten mytologiassa on myös useita kertomuksia hallitsijoista, jotka ovat retkillään ulottaneet rautasyntyisten valtaa pitkin Westerosin länsirannikkoa, ryöstäen, raiskatun ja kaapatun.²⁵ Näitä sankarikertomuksia värittää raakuus, kuten veriuhrin Hukkuneelle jumalalle.²⁶ Mytologiasta löytyy myös selittämättömiä mysteerejä, kuten Rautasaarten hallitsijan valtaistuimen alkuperä, uskomuksia merenalaisiin olentoihin ja puoli-ihmisiin sekä kertomuksia merentakaisesta paratiisista.²⁷

Rautasyntyisten sosiaalinen todellisuus

Rautasyntyisten maailmankuva

²¹ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 175.)

²² (Martin 2011d, 380; Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 178–179.)

²³ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 179–180, 184–185.)

²⁴ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 53, 188; Martin 2018, 64–6.)

²⁵ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 176–177.)

²⁶ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 153, 180, 210, 215.)

²⁷ (Martin, García & Antonsson 2014, 7, 175–176, 214.)

Rautasyntyisten mukaan kaikista maailman ihmisistä vain he ovat Hukkuneen jumalan luomia ja siten hänen valittu kansansa.²⁸ Tämä alkuperä tuo heidät lähemmäs meren olentoja kuin muita ihmisiä. Rautasyntyiset pitävät itseään ylpeinä ja itsenäisinä, urheina ja kuolemaa pelkäämättöminä taistelijoina ja kovina ihmisinä.²⁹ Rautasaarelaisten symbolit, kuten vaakunat, laivojen nimet ja arvonimet kuvastavat heidän väkivaltaisia ihanteitaan sekä yhteyttään mereen.³⁰ Kulttuurinen käsitys rautasyntyisyydestä on varsin kapea, toisettaen kaikki, jotka eivät siihen sovi – olivat nämä sitten kotoisin Rautasaarilta tai muualta. Toisia ovat esimerkiksi muiden jumalien palvojat, mannermaisen elämäntavan harjoittajat, maaorjat ja suolavaimot jälkeläisineen sekä syrjäisten saarten asukkaat.³¹

Rautasyntyisten ajallisuuden keskiössä on käsitys loisteliaasta menneisyydestä, jolloin rautasaarelaiset hallitsivat merta ja rannikkoa, vieden muilta mitä halusivat.³² Nykyhetki nähdään kulttuurin alennustilana, joka päättyy vanhan elämäntavan palatessa. Rautasyntyisten tilallisen käsityksen mukaan Hukkunut jumala loi Rautasaaret, jotka erottuvat täten muusta maailmasta. Rautasaaret ovat karu ja julma paikka elää, mutta myös jumalan luomana pyhä.³³ Eriyisen pyhä saarista on Vanha Wyk, jossa Harmaa kuningas ainakaan piti hoviaan ja jossa kuninkaanvaalit on sittemmin pidetty.³⁴ Rautasaarten tapaan myös meri on pyhä. Rautasyntyisten käsityksen mukaan meri on paitsi jumalan luoma, myös tämän valtakunta ja rautasyntyisten koti sekä tie vapauteen.³⁵ Kaukaisempiin paikkoihin rautasyntyiset suhtautuvat epäluuloisesti.³⁶

Rautasyntyisten mukaan heidän jumalansa on paitsi luojajumala ja meren jumala, myös vesien, kuoleman ja kuolemanjälkeisen jumala, joka hukkui heidän tähtensä.³⁷ Hukkunut jumala ottaa aktiivisesti osaa maailman tapahtumiin ja antaa lahjoja valituilleen, mutta samaan aikaan hänen valtakuntansa on rajattu eikä hän aina kuule tai vastaa rukouksiin.³⁸ Myrskyn jumala on puolestaan pahantahtoinen olento ja Hukkuneen jumalan sekä rautasyntyisten vihollinen, joka pyrkii juonillaan näiden tuhoon.³⁹ Rautasyntyisten uskonto on

²⁸ (Martin 2011b, 169; 2011d, 32.)

²⁹ (Martin 2011b, 116–117, 805; 2012, 286–287, 607.)

³⁰ (Martin 2011b, 169–170, 172; 2011d, 226–227; 2012, 812.)

³¹ (Martin 2011d, 38, 242, 384–385, 368.)

³² (Martin 2011b, 169.)

³³ (Martin 2011b, 167; 2011d, 382–384.)

³⁴ (Martin 2011d, 40, 362.)

³⁵ (Martin 2011b, 170; 2011d, 28–29, 37–38; 2012, 378.)

³⁶ (Martin 2012, 815–816.)

³⁷ (Martin 2011b, 169; 2011d, 23–24.)

³⁸ (Martin 2011d, 34–35; 2012, 813, 901.)

³⁹ (Martin 2011d, 28, 393.)

mahdollisesti monolatrinen tai henoteistinen, sillä heidän maailmankuvansa tuntuu mahdollistavan muiden jumalien olemassaolon, jonkin Hukkunut jumala on ainoa, jota heidän kuuluu palvoa.⁴⁰

Hukkuneen jumalan edustajina maan päällä toimivat tämän papit, jotka myös suorittavat uskon rituaaleja, kuten rukouksia, saarnaa ja siunauksia.⁴¹ Rituaalien voimaa merkityksen antajana ja välittäjänä kuvaa kenties parhaiten rautasyntyisten kasteena toimiva hukuttaminen. Hukutetun henkiin virkoamista pidetään merkinä jumalan suosiosta ja hukuttautuminen itsessään tulkitaan jumalalle omistautumisena.⁴² Rautasyntyisten käsitys elämästä on synkkä, ja he uskovat, että todellinen riemu on tavoitettavissa vasta kuolemanjälkeisessä elämässä Hukkuneen jumalan saleissa, joihin päästäkseen kuolema on paras kohdata merellä.⁴³ Uskoon kuuluu myös eettisiä käsityksiä ja sääntöjä, jotka esimerkiksi korostavat perheen merkitystä ja kieltävät sukusurmat sekä tarjoavat ihanteita oikeanlaiseen elämäntapaan.⁴⁴ Rautasyntyisten maailmankuvassa on tilaa myös ylliluonnollisille elementeille, kuten kirouksille, velhoille ja demoneilla.⁴⁵

Rautasyntyisten yhteiskunta

Rautasaarilla vallitsee kaksi ideologiaa: vanhan elämäntavan ihanne (*the Old Way*) ja Hukkuneen jumalan usko. Ensimmäinen näistä ideologioista pyrkii vanhan merenkululle, ryöstelylle ja väkivallalle pohjaavan elämäntavan palauttamiseen.⁴⁶ Sen keskeisiä tavoitteita on itsenäistyminen Seitsemästä kuningaskunnasta sekä poliittisesti että kulttuurisesti.⁴⁷ Vanhan elämäntavan suhde Hukkuneen jumalan uskon kanssa on ristiriitainen, sillä se ihannoii toisaalta omistautumista jumalalle ja toisaalta vallan riistämistä jumalalta omiin käsiin.⁴⁸ Hukkuneen jumalan usko puolestaan tukee ideologisesti tiettyjä yhteiskunnallisia valtarakenteita, kannattaa väkivaltaa ja patriarkaattia.

⁴⁰ (Martin 2011d, 242, 371–372, 395.)

⁴¹ (Martin 2011d, 36–37, 380; 2012, 816.)

⁴² (Martin 2011d, 25.)

⁴³ (Martin 2011d, 29, 33; 2012, 379, 819.)

⁴⁴ (Martin 2011b, 807; 2011d, 363.)

⁴⁵ (Martin 2011d, 616–617; 2012, 907.)

⁴⁶ (Martin 2011b, 170; 2011d, 395.)

⁴⁷ (Martin 2011b, 170; 2011d, 29, 40–41, 362; 2012, 910–911.)

⁴⁸ (Martin 2011b, 167.)

Vallan legitimiteetin ajatellaan usein Rautasaarilla tulevan jumalalta.⁴⁹ Käytännön tasolla se on useimmiten tullut perinnöllisesti tai kuninkaanvaalin kautta.⁵⁰ Valta on voinut vaihtaa käsiä myös nimeämisen kautta tai sen anastamalla.⁵¹ Suurimman osan historiastaan Rautasaaria on hallinnut yksi tai useampi kuningas.⁵² Seitsemän kuningaskunnan osana valtaa siellä on pitänyt lääninherra ja tämän vasallit. Hukkunutta jumalaa maan päällä edustavat tämän papit, joilla on uskonnollinen auktoriteetti.⁵³ Myös kapteeneilla ja sotureilla on valta-asema, joka tulee ilmi erityisesti kuninkaanvaalin aikaan.⁵⁴ Rautasaarten merkittävin sotilasmahti on rautalaivasto.⁵⁵ Myös ilman valtaa perinteisesti jätetty rahvas voi mahdollisesti haastaa vallitsevan yhteiskunnallisen tilanteen nousemalla kapinaan.⁵⁶

Hegemonisessa asemassa yhteiskunnassa ovat Hukkunutta jumalaa edustavat papit, vaalivaltaa käyttävät kapteenit, kunnioitusta nauttivat soturit, arvostetut vanhat suvut sekä maskuliinisuuden ihanne.⁵⁷ Hierarkisissa rakenteissa jumala on ihmisen yläpuolella, uskonnollinen ja sekulaarinen valta kamppailevat keskenään.⁵⁸ Kuningas hallitsee alamaisiaan, vain kapteeneilla on valta kuninkaanvaaleissa, vanhoja sukuja pidetään muita suuremmassa arvossa.⁵⁹ Kiviavioliittoa arvostetaan yli suola-avioliiton ja maaorjat ovat kaikista alimmassa asemassa.⁶⁰ Yhteiskunnan tasolla miehillä on naisia suurempi valta, vaikka intersektionaalisuuden myötä näin ei ole välttämättä aina yksilöntasolla.⁶¹

Rautasaarten kulttuuria kuvastaa hyvin toksisen maskuliinisuuden käsite. Miehininen ihanne on hyvin kapea, ja sen täyttääkseen miehen on oltava urhea ja vahva soturi, älykäs olematta oppinut, uskollinen muttei seuraaja – saatikka palvelija tai maaorja.⁶² Miehen tulee ottaa mitä hän haluaa, oli se sitten vaimoja tai rikkauksia, ja saada lapsia, mieluiten poikia.⁶³ Ja ennen kaikkea hän ei saa olla millään tavoin naisellinen.⁶⁴ Naisten kohdalla näiden kulttuuriset

⁴⁹ (Martin 2011d, 363, 366–367.)

⁵⁰ (Martin 2011d, 40, 631.)

⁵¹ (Martin 2011b, 167; 2011d, 237.)

⁵² (Martin 2011d, 234, 236.)

⁵³ (Martin 2011d, 363.)

⁵⁴ (Martin 2011b, 542–543; 2011d, 366–367, 387–388.)

⁵⁵ (Martin 2011d, 363, 618; 2012, 811.)

⁵⁶ (Martin 2011d, 617.)

⁵⁷ (Martin 2011b, 177; 2011d, 239, 366–367, 626; 2012, 285.)

⁵⁸ (Martin 2011b, 167, 177, 179; 2011d, 31, 33, 617.)

⁵⁹ (Martin 2011b, 542; 2011d, 366–367, 382, 620; 2012, 285, 368.)

⁶⁰ (Martin 2011d, 366–367, 382, 620; 2012, 285, 368.)

⁶¹ (Martin 2011d, 370, 373.)

⁶² (Martin 2011b, 387; 2011d, 31, 231, 386, 390.)

⁶³ (Martin 2011b, 183; 2011d, 386.)

⁶⁴ (Martin 2011b, 183; 2012, 815, 818.)

ihanteet eivät ole yhtä selviä, ennen kaikkea siksi, että heidän yhteiskunnallinen roolinsa on vaatimattomampi. Nainen voi olla tytär, vaimo, äiti tai leski.⁶⁵ Naiset voivat joskus kuitenkin täyttää myös perinteisesti miehille varattuja rooleja, kuten toimia tilanhoitajana tai purjehtia pitkäveneellä – jopa olla taistelijoita.⁶⁶ Poliittinen valta yhteiskunnassa on kuitenkin miesten käsissä.⁶⁷

Rautasyntyiset yksilöt

Rautasaarten kuninkaan pojan Theon Greyjoyn identiteettiä värittää kuulumattomuus: hän haluaisi kuulua Starkin perheeseen mutta on taloudessa panttivankina; rautasyntyiseksi hän on puolestaan viettänyt liian suuren osan elämästään saarten ulkopuolella, eikä häntä hyväksytä kruununprinssiksi.⁶⁸ Theon haluaisi olla ihailtu ja kunnioitettu, mutta hän ei täysin ymmärrä kulttuurisia ihanteita, joita hän pyrkii täyttämään ja epäonnistuu siksi tavoitteessaan.⁶⁹

Talvivaaran prinssin sijaan Theonista tulee ensin halveksittu petturi ja myöhemmin kidutettu ja identiteettinsä menettänyt vanki.⁷⁰ Kertomuksen alussa Theon ei usko jumaliin ja esittää tunnustavansa Hukkuneen jumalan saavuttaakseen poliittiset tavoitteensa.⁷¹ Hän ei ole vanhojen jumalien seuraaja, mutta Talvivaarassa hän tuntee näiden läsnäolon, joka auttaa palauttamaan hänen identiteettinsä Theon Greyjoyna.⁷²

Theonin sisar Asha on puolestaan isänsä valitsema perillinen, jonka sukupuoli nousee esteeksi tämän nousulle valtaistuimelle.⁷³ Naiseudestaan huolimatta Asha täyttää monia rautasyntyisten ihanteita: hän on rohkea taistelija, taitava merenkävijä ja nauttii muiden arvostusta.⁷⁴ Syntyperästään huolimatta Asha ei pidä itseään hienona naisena, vaan on käytökseltään karkea ja avoimesti seksuaalinen.⁷⁵ Hävittyään kuninkaanvaalit Asha pakenee ja harkitsee piraatin uraa, sillä tappion kokeneena hän on menettänyt kasvonsa rautasyntyisten silmissä, minkä lisäksi hänet on naitettu vastoin tahtoaan ja lopulta siepattu vangiksi.⁷⁶ Vaikka Asha on kulttuurisesti Hukkuneen jumalan seuraaja, hänen uskonsa tähän on heikko. Häden

⁶⁵ (Martin 2011b, 176; 2012, 373.)

⁶⁶ (Martin 2011b, 180, 377–378; 2012, 383.)

⁶⁷ (Martin 2011d, 37, 235.)

⁶⁸ (Martin 2011b, 392, 921; 2012, 599.)

⁶⁹ (Martin 2011b, 806; 2012, 539.)

⁷⁰ (Martin 2011b, 921; 2012, 537–538.)

⁷¹ (Martin 2011b, 175, 386.)

⁷² (Martin 2011b, 810; 2012, 674.)

⁷³ (Martin 2011d, 37.)

⁷⁴ (Martin 2011b, 381; 2012, 369–370.)

⁷⁵ (Martin 2011b, 804; 2011d, 243; 2012, 904.)

⁷⁶ (Martin 2012, 373, 603, 607.)

hetkellä hän kuitenkin rukoilee jumalaansa – saamatta vastausta.⁷⁷ Myös Asha tuntee Pohjoisessa ollessaan vanhojen jumalien läsnäolon.⁷⁸

Rautasyntyisten hallitsijan nuorin veli Aeron piti itseään neljästä veljeksestä vähäisimpänä; kunnes hän haaksirikkoutui ja nousi merestä Hukkuneen jumalan profeettana.⁷⁹ Aeron on korkein uskonnollinen auktoriteetti Rautasaarilla ja hänen puoleensa käännetään kuninkaan kuoltua.⁸⁰ Aeronille itselleen tarjotaan kruunua mutta hän kieltäytyy vedoten osaansa Hukkuneen jumalan palvelijana, ja kutsuu sen sijaan koolle kuninkaanvaalit.⁸¹ Aeron kannattaa uudeksi kuninkaaksi veljeään Victarionia, mutta tämän nimittämisen sijaan hän luovuttaa vallan kapteenien ja jumalansa käsiin.⁸² Kun uudeksi kuninkaaksi julistetaan Aeronin toinen veli Euron hän kokee epäuskoa ja tuntee menettäneensä yhteyden jumalaansa.⁸³ Alkujärkytyksen jälkeen Aeron kuitenkin päättää käyttää asemaansa hyväkseen ja pyrkii nostamaan rautasyntyiset kapinaan Euron vastaan.⁸⁴

Victarion on rautalaivaston ylikapteeni sekä vahva ja ihailtu taistelija, joka toimi veljensä oikeana kätenä tämän hallitessa.⁸⁵ Yhteiskunnallisesta asemastaan huolimatta Victarion kokee epävarmuutta, sillä hänen hidasylyisyytensä on ollut tunnettu naurunaihe, minkä lisäksi Euron sai hänen suolavaimonsa raskaaksi pilkaten Victarionia tämän puutteellisesta miehuudesta.⁸⁶ Victarion jätti Euronin henkiin, sillä Hukkunut jumala tuomitsee sukusurmaajat, mutta tappoi vaimonsa omin käsin.⁸⁷ Victarion uskoo Hukkuneeseen jumalaan, vaikka hänestä tuntuu, ettei hän ymmärrä tämän tahtoa, ja kuninkaanvaalin jälkeen hän kyseenalaistaa uskonsa tähän.⁸⁸ Kohdattuaan valon jumala R'hllorin papin Victarion muodostaa uuden synkretistisen uskon itselleen ja kokee olevansa kahden jumalan valittu.⁸⁹

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⁷⁷ (Martin 2011d, 233; 2012, 614, 901.)

⁷⁸ (Martin 2012, 891, 901.)

⁷⁹ (Martin 2011b, 176; 2011d, 29–30.)

⁸⁰ (Martin 2011d, 25, 33, 38.)

⁸¹ (Martin 2011d, 39–40.)

⁸² (Martin 2011d, 37, 382–384.)

⁸³ (Martin 2011d, 397.)

⁸⁴ (Martin 2011d, 617.)

⁸⁵ (Martin 2011b, 387; 2011d, 32, 363.)

⁸⁶ (Martin 2011d, 378, 390; 2012, 822.)

⁸⁷ (Martin 2011d, 365, 378.)

⁸⁸ (Martin 2011d, 366–367, 616; 2012, 816.)

⁸⁹ (Martin 2012, 909, 912.)

Uskonnolliset myytit selittävät Rautasaarten ja rautasyntyisten alkuperän sekä heidän erityisen asemansa Hukkuneen jumalan valittuna kansana. Ne määrittävät rautasyntyisten identiteettiä, sekä oikeuttavat niiden toiseuttamista, jotka eivät vastaa rautasyntyisten ihannetta. Myytit selittävät rautasyntyisten keskeisiä arvoja, elämäntapaa – kuten merenkulkua ja kalastusta – sekä luonnonilmiöitä. Rautasyntyisten ajallisuus ja tilallisuus on rakennettu myyttisistä aiheista, kuten kertomuksista menneisyyden loistosta, meren erityisestä asemasta ja kuolemanjälkeisestä elämästä.

Rautasaaret yksikkönä on syntynyt myyttisten narratiivien ympärille: Hukkuneen jumalan luomiskertomus, Harmaan kuninkaan valtakausi sekä Galon Whitestaffin rautasyntyisten yhdistäjänä. Myytit oikeuttavat kuninkaiden ja pappien valtaa, tukevat yhteiskunnallisia rakenteita sekä tarjoavat malleja vallan haastamiseen. Sekä Vanha elämäntapa että usko Hukkuneeseen jumalaan ovat myyttiseen aineistoon pohjautuvia ideologioita, jotka ylistävät sotureita ja uskonnollisia johtajia mutta sivuuttavat toiset, erityisesti naiset, joiden roolit rajoittuvat miesten kautta määriteltyihin aseisiin.

Rautasyntyisten mytologia vaikuttaa siihen, miten yksilöt ymmärtävät itsensä ja paikkansa maailmassa. Myyttien tuntemus voi tarjota yksilöille työkaluja navigoida rautasyntyisten valtarakenteissa, siinä missä niiden ymmärtämättömyys voi johtaa toiseuden kokemukseen. Myytit vaikuttavat siihen millaisia rooleja ja mahdollisuuksia yksilöille tarjotaan, ja rakentavat säännöstöä, joiden mukaan he toimivat yhteiskunnassa.

Johtopäätökset

George R. R. Martinin fantasiamaailmassa *Tulen ja jään laulu* esiintyy useita fiktiivisiä uskontoja, jotka näyttelevät keskeistä roolia tarinassa. Tässä tutkielmassa olen kartoittanut ja esitellyt rautasyntyisten kulttuurissa esiintyvät myytit sekä analysoinut niiden merkitystä maailmankuvalle, yhteiskunnalle ja yksilöille. Tätä varten sovelsin Rober A. Segalin myytin määritelmää ja kulttuurintutkimuksellista lähestymistapaa suorittaakseni laadullisen sisällönanalyysin.

Rautasaarelaisten myytit heijastavat kulttuurisia arvoja, tarjoavat esikuvia ja vahvistavat yhteiskunnallisia rakenteita. Rautasaarelaisten mytologia vaikuttaa siihen, miten he rakentavat identiteettiään sekä ymmärtävät ja luovat merkityksiä maailmassa. Mytologia ei ainoastaan määritä heidän paikkaansa yhteiskunnassa, vaan tarjoaa myös kulttuurisia työkaluja vallitsevan järjestyksen ylläpitämiseen tai haastamiseen. Mitä tulee siihen, miten uskontoa

kuvataan Martinin teoksissa, käy ilmi, että uskonnon narratiivinen eli myyttinen ulottuvuus vaikuttaa laajasti ja syvällisesti sosiaalisen todellisuuden rakentumiseen. Tämä vaikutus ei rajoitu vain uskonnon harjoittajiin, vaan ulottuu kaikkiin yksilöihin, jotka toimivat uskonnon muovaamassa yhteiskunnassa.

Tämä tutkimus keskittyi kertomusten vaikutuksiin fiktiivisessä maailmassa – siihen, miten rautasyntyisten myytit vaikuttavat rautasyntyisiin. Olisi erittäin mielenkiintoista tehdä vastaava tutkimus meidän omassa maailmassamme siitä, miten *Tulen ja jään laulu* kertomuksena vaikuttaa lukijoihinsa. Tämä tutkimus on osaltaan valottanut sitä, miten uskontoa kuvataan Martinin fantasiakirjoissa. Toivon, että löydökseni voivat olla hyödyksi Martinin kirjallisuutta käsittelevissä jatkotutkimuksissa, samoin kuin muissa fantasiakirjallisuutta ja myyttejä koskevissa tutkimuksissa.