Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen

https://www.e-ir.info/2015/09/27/dragons-thrones-and-statebuilding-the-rule-of-daenerys-targaryen-in-meereen/

ZOLTAN SZASZI, SEP 27 2015

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: A Concept Paper Discussing the Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

The word "Dracarys" may be the closest equivalent to a nuclear launch code and the hard power it represents in contemporary high fantasy. However, it takes more than monstrous, flying, living weapons of mass destruction to build up and rule a state successfully and efficiently. This concept paper aims to test various theories of statebuilding and peace-building in a modelled environment, using a well-known story from popular culture as its analysis material.

A Song of Ice and Fire is a perfect sample to demonstrate and test contemporary theories of statebuilding. The universe, the lore and the story combined can work as a perfect model of analysis. It is not quite different from what any regular analysis built on the modelling method would use. A reconstructed model of reality is the basis of any such study, with facts and dynamics artificially recreated as factors, dependent and independent variables and functions to highlight patterns and characteristics in a simplified, modelled world with findings that can hopefully be replicated in a live environment. The material that I use here only differs in one aspect: The model is a given, already created by the author of the series. This paper focuses on a series of interactions in *A Song of Ice and Fire* popular high fantasy series limited in space and time. This chain of events is effectively the new Targaryen rule in the city-state of Meereen starting with Daenerys Targaryen, "The Mother of Dragons" seizing control after the slave revolt against the masters and ending with her flight from the city on the back of one of her dragons. The study consist of two parts: The first chapter, *Government structure* focuses on the main defining elements of the Dragon Queen's rule from the point of view of statebuilding and the second part, *Government Flaws* aims to highlight the possible structural errors in the policies of the *Khaleesi* to decide whether the severe crisis at the end of this period was the fault of her lack of good governance or else it was an unavoidable, natural development. Since this study is a concept paper, the scope is limited and the analysis is compressed with the open-end hypothesis being the following:*Was the rule of Daenerys Targaryen effective in the sense of statebuilding in Meereen?*

Government Structure

To assess the nature and effectiveness of the new Meereenese government under the rule of the Dragon Queen, we must apply a multi-perspective approach to build a working model of the new state. This model consists of two main elements that define the structure of the state and its government. The first one is *internal power structure* based on the concept of domestic power sharing on a scale from democratic to absolute and monarchic societies. The second element is *State efficiency and domestic risks* which signifies the level of presence and control of the government in the domestic society and its struggle with domestic armed factions for dominance.

For the sake of the analysis, we assume that the downfall of the Wise Masters, the slave revolt and the Targaryen conquest of the city means the end of the old slave merchant state and the efforts of Daenerys Targaryen are effectively aimed at building up a new and better state which obviously inherits elements of the old one, like the noble houses and the class system of Old Meereen. Her rule begins with the conquest of Meereen during which a handful of her top officers capture the city with a covert mission with minimal casualties, after which she decided not only to

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen
Written by Zoltan Szaszi

free the slaves of the city but to "stay and rule."[1] During her conquest, the old ruling class, the slave trading noble houses have lost most of their power and their legitimacy, the slaves were freed and become the new underclass of "freed men" and the old monarchic government was overthrown. At this point, the new Meereenese state begins.

The *internal power structure* element of the analysis focuses on the sharing of power and decision-making within the new state. *Berry Buzan* and *Richard Little* have previously theorised the importance of multiple levels of analysis in the international system, sub-state levels included. This element is formulated based on their work. [2] In order to understand the inner mechanism of the city-state, we must see it as a unit, a partially closed political entity embedded into its regional sub-system, with sub-units interacting within it to shape its policies. While the works cited focus on societies that evolved on Earth, in a different historical context, arguably, their theories of the levels of analysis are applicable here as well. Based on their work, it can be said that while in monarchies, the monopoly of power by the ruling Monarch is absolute, in liberal democracies, a significantly larger number of people are involved in the shaping of the outcome of policy making. In the case of Meereen, we must look at individual entities and sub-units to understand the dynamics of domestic politics.

Although Daenerys Targaryen is a monarch ruling over the city-state of Meereen, she constantly has to face colliding opinions to gain support for her policies. Out of these, a few power-holders and social factions are significant. These are the following: The leader of the religious institutions of the city, a priestess named *Green Grace Galazza Galare*, the head of the most powerful old noble house, *Hizdahr zo Loraq*, the faction of the converted nobility loyal to her rule, the *Shavepates*, led by *Skahaz mo Kandaq*, the captains of the mercenary companies that form a large part of her army, *Brown Ben Plumm* and *Daario Naharis*, the commander of her freed elite slave soldier army, *Grey Worm,* and the new underclass, the *Freedmen*. Since the analysis of this domestic system is compressed, we cannot assess the nature of their influence over the society and domestic politics, only find evidence that the influence of sub-units and individuals does exist in the new Meereen. Two arguments support this claim. The first is that they can function as *policy shapers.* Queen Daenerys chose to close and ban the slave fighting pits in the city, for she had found the practice of pitting slaves against each other for sport morally unacceptable. Virtually all of the above mentioned individuals and factions opposed this policy which eventually lead to a compromise: The Meereenese fighting pits were reopened with the condition that only volunteering *freedmen* were allowed to participate in the fighting events.[3] The other evidence for the importance of domestic individuals and sub-units is that at least one was effectively able to serve as an inhibitor to domestic conflict. Queen Daenerys had been fighting with a domestic armed faction *The Sons of the Harpy* from the beginning of her rule in the city. (This will be later discussed in this chapter) Upon reaching a marriage deal with the de facto leader of the faction of the old noble houses, *Hizdahr zo Loraq*, her condition for the marriage was that *Loraq* achieve 90 days of peace from the atrocities of the *Sons of the Harpy*. Surprisingly, the nobleman could deliver. He used his connections and political capital to stop the armed atrocities. This proves that individuals as well as sub-units like factions and social classes can serve as *shapers* and *inhibitors* to both policies and social processes in the city. Therefore, the *internal power structure* is neither democratic nor purely monarchic, it is a form of *oligarchic structure.* A certain level of public power fragmentation can be observed,[4] which fits the pattern of Medieval European feudal structures and their internal dynamics with domestic elements competing for power. Comparing to the power structure element based on *Buzan* and *Little*'s work to the findings by *Teschke*, supporting the argument that the oligarchic structure of Meereen works as a temporary status quo.

The second element of the government structure model is *state efficiency and domestic risks*. To assess the processes that make up this element, we have to observe the variables that lead to the efficiency of the functioning of the state. Two reversely proportional functions serve as coefficients to this value,[5] one being the *Presence of government* and the other a *conductivity coefficient*. The conceptualisation of statebuilding and terrorism by *Angel Rabasa et al.,* in a simplified and adapted form, serves as a theoretic background for this element of the model.[6]

The *Presence of Government* in this form is the adapted form of the *dimensions of ungovernability* based on the four dimensions as four variables with a value ranging from 0 to 1. (Absolutely inefficient and absolutely efficient, with 0 and 1 being limits that the value of the variable is convergent with but may never reach) These variables are the following, *State penetration of society, Monopoly of the use of force, Control over territory,* and *Independence from external intervention.* Out of these, four variables can be taken from the equation. The Queen has absolute monopoly

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen
Written by Zoltan Szaszi

over the state armed forces and has control over the territory of the city. (Although there are armed atrocities, there is no place the legitimate government could not reach with force or no segment of the population that it could not reach with its infrastructure physically) Although there is a severe ongoing crisis at the end of *A Dance with Dragons*, there is no physical foreign intervention happening in the city. Therefore, the variables 2 through 4 can be assessed (For the sake of this compressed model) as having a maximal value (Convergent with 1) and taken away. The only remaining variable, therefore (And the source of all structural problems of the state infrastructure) is the *penetration of society*. The value of this variable is a sum of four part, namely, *presence of state institutions across the territory, presence of infrastructure, presence of grey economy not controlled by the state* and *presence of social or cultural resistance to the state.* The second and third part are not problematic in the case of Meereen. Virtually, the whole state is accessible and organised, easy to reach without any environmental interference or corruption in the state infrastructure. The grey economy virtually does not exist. The whole of the economy is in a severe crisis following the downfall of slave trade and there is no source for organised crime or non-compliant domestic factions to conduct their business in the grey economy. This is due to the nature of the largely unmodernised and undiversified Meereenese economy which primarily relied on slave trade, the same way as all the city-states in *Slaver's Bay* did before the arrival of Daenerys Targaryen. This leaves the first and fourth part to be the main reason behind a low value of *penetration of society.* The reason of governmental inefficiency is the new Meereenese state is a *low presence of state institutions* and *high level of social and cultural resistance*. These findings seem to be in agreement with the available evidence. The Queen rules and enforces law mostly relying on the *Unsullied,* a large legion of freed slave soldiers which are effectively the bulk of her armed forces and also serves as de facto law enforcement in the city. Most of the armed atrocities by the organisation *The Sons of the Harpy* are committed against the *Unsullied,* who are unequipped for city law enforcement duties and also against freed men who the *Unsullied* cannot always protect. Another problem is a lethal pandemic that enters the city around the end of the studied period of time, *the bloody flux*, which arrives with refugees of war from the city-state *Astapor* and which the Meereenese state is absolutely unprepared to deal with. No public health institutions can accommodate the infected population, medicine and food is scarce and public hygiene is low. Only the temples provide a limited level of protection against the pandemic, however, this had not proved to be enough in the case of the other, largely similar city-states that the disease had already infected. Therefore, the critical points in *presence of state institutions* are inadequate law enforcement and public health institutional capabilities. The other critical part is *social and cultural resistance*. The Queen admittedly disregarded the traditions of the former slave-owning Masters, from the fighting pits to slave owning itself. This, combined with public dissatisfaction towards the Queen's rule due to the economic recess that the shutdown of slave trade had brought to the undiversified Meereenese economy had led to high levels of public displeasure, even hostility, towards the government leading to a high level of *social and cultural resistance*.

The *conductivity coefficient,* the function that shows the levels of "domestic terrorism" in Meereen and degrades the efficiency of the government is the aggregated sum of three relevant variables, namely, *adequate infrastructure, favorable demographics* and *invisibility.* The available infrastructure – Communication abilities, weapon storages, bases of operation – of the domestic terrorist faction *The Sons of the Harpy* cannot be precisely measured, although, this infrastructure exists. The Queen and her advisors suspect that many of the old noble houses support the *Sons*, however, no direct evidence can be found to support this claim. The only indirect evidence is that only the old nobility has both the motivation and the means to support the movement. The *favourable demographics* variable, however, has a high level, the above mentioned sources indicate both high social support and substantial recruitment for the *Sons*, making them a human resource-heavy political faction, although, a somewhat financially unstable one. Nonetheless, the most crucial element for domestic terrorism in Meereen is the *invisibility* variable. The city centre virtually consists of the many-story Pyramid-palaces of the nobility, huge structures that can provide ample opportunity for the *Sons* to use them as headquarters, yet even without them, the high level of urbanisation is both a strength and a weakness of the new Meereenese state as the complex structure of the ancient city is ideal for hit-and-run asymmetric operations, especially against the *Unsullied* who are trained for combat on an open terrain and the attackers can appear and disappear within minutes.

Government Flaws

Having discussed the characteristics of the governance of Meereen under Queen Daenerys Targaryen, the second chapter focuses specifically on the structural weaknesses that may have led to the severe governmental crisis which

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen
Written by Zoltan Szaszi

forced the Queen's flight from the city.

This chapter consists of two main elements which are the following, the *degradation of the local sub-system,* and the *hastened statebuilding process* in Meereen.

The *degradation of the local sub-system* around Meereen is an element which combines the concept of levels of analysis put forward by the above mentioned theoretic work of *Buzan and Little* with the *international society* concept of the English school.[7] Before the rule of Daenerys Targaryen, an interstate system existed in which slave owner city-states competed for economic domination in a region which prospered due to the slave trade sustained by the nomadic *Dothraki* from the inner continental territories. The *Old Ghiscari* coastal cities of *Slaver's Bay* had economies primarily built on the slave market. These cities bought "the raw material" and sold trained slaves to other city-states as well as sustained their largely undiversified economies with slave labour. The abolition of slavery and the downfall of slave trade had serious international political implications. The economic system completely collapsed and the other cities moved to military solutions (A naval blockade against Meereen) as an attempt to reinstate slavery and restart the flow of slave trade. This means that from the point of view of inter-state relations, the regional sub-system changed from *Solidarist* to *Fragmented* and the depth of cooperation moved from deep to shallow (From the belief of the mutually prosperous trade relations to coercion) With its remaining economic ties gone and cut off from international trade due to the blockade, it can be argued that the Queen's policies set changes in motion that eventually lead to a shift in the regional sub-system that put her state at a disadvantage.

The *hastened statebuilding* element highlights the errors of policy solutions aiming at quick results, indifferent towards the required time and organisational capacity to effectively build up a new state. This element is built on the theoretic framework of multiple statebuilding case studies. The statebuilding process of the Targaryen Queen can be seen as a policy somewhat similar to the Wilsonian idea of state-building.[8] Democracy is a concept related to the Western political tradition on Earth. However, in the cited material, Daenerys strongly expressed her wish for equal subjects and the triumph of justice under her rule as well as prosperity for all, which can be labelled as a somewhat monarchic interpretation of good governance. The market economy however, cannot develop in Meereen. It has been discussed that the regional sub-system has been degraded, therefore, even after the shutdown of slave trade, the remaining economic relations of the city virtually disappeared, although, with the new underclass of *Freedmen*, the requirements of a new labour-heavy and more diversified economy are present. There is no evidence that the Queen considered economic shock management and a plan for a working economic policy. The same is the case with security and peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is a crucial part of post-conflict statebuilding with a strong focus on DDR and SSR missions.[9] The security sector reform would require complete overhaul of the structure of armed forces of the state with a strong emphasis on domestic legitimacy, especially in a city-state with domestic terrorism. It is also true that the Queen's armed forces are always 'micro-managed' and manually coordinated, therefore, they can be seen as an illegitimate oppressing force without a strategic plan to counter the asymmetric warfare tactics employed by *The Sons of the Harpy.* Her top ranking military officers, namely, *Grey Worm,* the commander of the *Unsullied, Daario Naharis* and *Brown Ben Plumm*, the captains of her two mercenary companies all respond to her, without a strategic leadership that could coordinate the movements of the armed forces. This leads to reactive, ad hoc decisions, miscommunication and ineffective execution of her orders. DDR would be a crucial element of the peacebuilding process[10] in order to reach positive peace. The previous armed forces of the slave-owning Masters and the fighters of the *Sons* are completely looked over in policy making. Daenerys tries to rather balance out their power by forming new fighting companies from recruited *Freedmen* instead of trying to re-integrate the former soldiers into society, leaving only one option for the unemployed men-at-arms, which is, to join the opposing faction, *The Sons of the Harpy.* The above-mentioned sources do not provide any evidence that would suggest that plans at least loosely analogous to DDR and SSR would have been present under her rule, peacebuilding was focused solely on *negative peace*, the removal of armed conflict from domestic politics.

State-building would also require a functioning government with functional compartmentalisation. In her council, the Queen had *Ser Barristan Selmy,* the head of her *Queensguard*, *Ser Jorah Mormont*, also a member of her Queensguard, who was loosely analogous to a top military adviser until his banishment from the city, the priestess *Green Grace,* who provided some advice on social policies, *Hizdahr zo Loraq*, the head if the noble houses and later fiancé who was more of a lobbyist than a member of the council and her above-mentioned military officers.

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen
Written by Zoltan Szaszi

Economic, social and foreign policy experts were not present in her small council during her rule, compared to the over-represented military sector. This suggests that Daenerys was equipped to *conquer* a city but not to *govern* it.

Conclusion

This study is a concept paper therefore, it can only report preliminary results and directions for further study. The analysis consists of two parts, effectively, two halves of the model of the government and its crises in the new Meereenese state. The first part highlighted that the new state has an oligarchic internal structure and that its weakest point is state infrastructure, especially state penetration, with a high emphasis on the under-organised and partially absent law enforcement and public health institutions as well as social and cultural resistance against the Queen's policies. It is also true that the efficiency of the state is decreased due to the Meereenese version of domestic terrorism conducted by a clandestine organisation called *The Sons of the Harpy* whose main strength are the favourable demographic conditions in the city and their invisibility.

There are two main structural flaws in the new Meereneese government. The first is that it has grown isolated, degrading the regional sub-system around it from solidaristic to fragmented and from deep cooperation to shallow ties. The second one is that statebuilding was hastened under the Queen's rule, with strong emphasis on monarchic good governance but no economic policy to deal with the severe crisis and no peacebuilding process to neutralize conflict in the city.

Comparing these preliminary results with the open-end hypothesis of the study—*Was the rule of Daenerys Targaryen effective in the sense of statebuilding in Meereen?*— it can be concluded that it was not. The severe and overlapping crises were all directly or indirectly caused by her policies and she was ultimately unable to formulate policies that would have been able to cope with them. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the rule of Queen Daenerys was an ultimate failure as many aspects of effective statebuilding have returned positive results. To fully assess the dynamics of the Meereenese state, these results should be further studied and tested. One thing however is absolutely certain based on this study, which is, dragons are not enough to build up and govern a state.

References

George R. R. Martin: A Storm of Swords. Bantam Books, 2011.

George R. R. Martin: A Dance with Dragons. Bantam Books, 2012.

Barry Buzan, Richard Little: International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Barry Buzan: From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation. Cambridge University Press, 2004.pp. 125-137.

Benno Teschke: Geopolitical Relations in the European Middle Ages: History and Theory In: International Organization 52, 2, Spring 1998, IO Foundation and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology pp. 332-335., 1998.

Angel Rabasa, Steven Boraz, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Theodore W. Karasik, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Kevin A. O'Brien, John E. Peters: Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and reducing terrorism risks, RAND Corporation, 2007.

Assem Dandashly: The Holy Trinity of Democracy, Economic Development, and Security: EU Democratization Efforts Beyond its Borders -The Case of Tunisia In: Freie Universität Berlin, July 2012.

Jeremy Ginifer: The Challenge of the Security Sector and Security Reform Processes in DemocraticTransitions: The Case of Sierra Leone Centre for International Co-operation and Security, University of Bradford, Department of

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen
Written by Zoltan Szaszi

Endnotes

[1] *George R. R. Martin:* A Storm of Swords. Bantam Books, 2011. pp. 786-995.

[2]*Barry Buzan, Richard Little:* International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations. Oxford University Press, 2000. pp. 76-78.
The authors discuss the levels of analysis in the international system, from individual to systemic levels. It is their concept of sub-unit and individual level of interactions and processes upon which this first element of the model is built.

[3] *George R. R. Martin:* A Dance with Dragons. Bantam Books, 2012. pp. 324-1030.

[4] *Benno Teschke:* Geopolitical Relations in the European Middle Ages: History and Theory In: International Organization 52, 2, Spring 1998, IO Foundation and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology pp. 332-335., 1998.
The author discusses shifts in power and changes in domestic structures in medieval Europe until the High Middle Ages. The struggles of the Three Orders and the „Feudal Revolution" of the Carolingian Empire shows the same patterns as the internal power dynamics of Meereen.

[5] *This study is a concept paper, therefore, it cannot use complex methodology to render values to the functions and variables. It merely adopts statebuilding theories to observe and define dynamics in the Meereenese city-state.*

[6] *Angel Rabasa, Steven Boraz, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Theodore W. Karasik, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Kevin A. O'Brien, John E. Peters:* Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and reducing terrorism risks, RAND Corporation, 2007. pp. 41-55.

[7] *Barry Buzan:* From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation. Cambridge University Press, 2004.pp. 125-137.

[8] *Assem Dandashly:* The Holy Trinity of Democracy, Economic Development, and Security: EU Democratization Efforts Beyond its Borders -The Case of Tunisia In: Freie Universität Berlin, July 2012.
The author discusses the Western ideas of statebuilding in which the „holy trinity" play a crucial role. As this example is a loose analogue to the statebuilding process studied in this paper, it can be used a theoretic ground for discussing the policies of the new Meereenes state.

[9] *Jeremy Ginifer:* The Challenge of the Security Sector and Security Reform Processes in DemocraticTransitions: The Case of Sierra Leone Centre for International Co-operation and Security, University of Bradford, Department of Peace Studies, UK 12 Dec 2006. pp. 796-798

URL: http://www.tandfonline.com.remote.library.dcu.ie/doi/pdf/10.1080/13510340601010693 (Accessed: 28 May 2015.)

[10] *Joanna Spear*: From Political Economies of War to Political Economies of Peace: The Contribution of DDR after Wars of Predation United States Foreign Policy Institute, George Washington University , USA 24 Jan 2007 pp. 172-173.

Dragons, Thrones and Statebuilding: The Rule of Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen
Written by Zoltan Szaszi

Written by: Zoltán Szászi
Written at: Corvinus University of Budapest
Written for: Marton Péter, PhD
Date written: June 2015