

The Frontier and Its Contemporary Comebacks: A Mythological Apparatus and American Self-Imagination

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In this article we examine the idea of the Frontier as American self-imagination^[i] from the 1940s to the 2010s, using a selection of influential classical Western films (Red River, 1948, The Gunfighter, 1950, High Noon, 1952, Shane, 1953, Rio Bravo, 1959) and a group of contemporary TV-series (Jericho, 2006–2008, Falling Skies, 2011–, Terra Nova, 2011) in which the Frontier ‘comes back’ as organized society becomes absent for one reason or another.^[ii] As in these Westerns, the Frontier, a liminal phase that falls between modern civilized society and nature (Burchell & Gray 1989, 130–131), works as an etiological apparatus that explains how America was made, in the post-apocalyptic^[iii] TV-series The Frontier is re-introduced following a break with the old social order. It becomes thus purification of American-ness and a chance of a new beginning.

Thus, Frontier myth is not used as eschatology, dealing with the end of times, but instead as an etiology, because it occurs after the end of times and is thus a break with the past. We discuss the small community that is based on free enterprise and voluntary co-operation, the focal point of the Frontier located between the nature to be appropriated, and an organized society that is ambivalent in its relationship with the small community. We examine how the Frontier, as an often recurring narrative structure, is used to make claims about ideal, authentic, clean, good American-ness and also its opposites. In this article we first look at the

historical formation of this frontier myth, then its well established, prototypical forms in classical Westerns, and finally its recent uses in contemporary post-apocalyptic TV-series.

Introduction: The Frontier Myth

The American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, wrote in his paper, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, that the "frontier was the line of most rapid and effective Americanization", and the producer of "American, which was an American mind marked by restless, nervous energy" (Turner 1893). However, we are not interested in the Frontier as such or in that specific sense, but rather as a mythical apparatus, which is etiological, as it tells us the origins of the current order, moving from mythical pioneers to the modern federal state. It can be also used for post-apocalyptic and post-eschatological narratives, where the current order is reversed, and mythical times are made to come back.

Turner writes about the actual Frontier, but his writings formed a basis for the later frontier mythology. Thus, while we do not want to make essentialising assertions about American-ness, we do wish to examine the ways in which the Frontier, as an often recurring narrative structure, is used to make claims about ideal, authentic, clean, good American-ness and its opposites.^[iv]

Turner, from his own evolutionary perspective, suggested that American development included the "familiar phenomenon of the evolution of institutions in a limited area [...], the progress from primitive industrial society, without division of labor, up to manufacturing civilization [...]" on the East Coast, and yet what made American development peculiar was the existence of free land. Such development along the frontier meant that American development was not unilineal, but rather the frontier conditions caused a "return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area". (Turner 1893.)

Turner thought that the Frontier was a defining characteristic of American-ness, and he worried about the end of the Frontier. The images of the Frontier have held a strong presence in American culture, and thus, the genre of Western films has also had an enormous impact on these images. Richard Slotkin examines the influence of Frontier myths on American culture and politics and sees Westerns as exceptionally resourceful for studies on the Frontier myths; indeed, at the time the genre was born in the first decades of the 20th century the American West was already deeply mythologized (mainly via dime novels and Wild West shows). The later Westerns built on these beginning, fortifying myths, codes and symbols until the historical Frontier and the Western mythical Frontier were inseparable. Over time, the most memorable images of the historical Frontier were mainly transmitted through the Western mythic landscape. (Slotkin 1995, 231–237.)

According to John G. Cawelti, the West has meant different things to different people, but all the visions "express two general themes that, as it happens, are in fundamental conflict with each other". The first theme, which Cawelti calls "the West as God's country", is a place

where a new and better society can be constructed without the mistakes of the past. In the second theme the West "envisions a territory, where one can flee from the constraints and responsibilities of civilization, to become free, savage, and natural". (Cawelti 2004, 143.) The concept of God's country was originally introduced by the Puritans with their founding of the Massachusetts Bay colony.^{lv} According to Cawelti, since that time, the "hope of founding of a purified religious community in the West has been a continuous thread in [U. S.] history". The small town embodies this same hope, and according to Cawelti, it is not a coincidence that small frontier settlements remain the most common settings for Westerns. There is an innate promise in them, namely, the promise of each developing in to a purified community, "if only the forces of disorder and corruption can be purged". (Cawelti 2004, 143–144.) For Cawelti, there are several counter symbols for this God's Country, which encompass the Indians, Outlaws, land barons, Mormons, Thoreau's Walden impulse and Las Vegas (Cawelti 2004, 145–151).

The tension between "God's country" and some of its counter symbols (Las Vegas, Outlaws, Land barons) is a tension between civility and overt self-interest, as articulated by the sociologist, Robert N. Bellah, in his book, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, 1975. Bellah focuses on this tension. In the Frontier there is no enforced law, but rather a righteousness, however, that rises from the ethics of free entrepreneurship. The concept of starting over means also starting over with the appropriation of resources, and it has two phases: First the claim making of the land, or the Lockean appropriation through work, and secondly, a redistribution among society wherein the principles of just ownership are re-negotiated.

The nostalgia for the end of the Frontier can be seen in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and the Paintings of Thomas Cole. Cooper was worried about the vanishing of the Frontier, and Cole's paintings describe a "course of empire", progressing from savagery to decadence, decay, and death (O'Connor & Rollins 2004, 2–4). Turner saw the Frontier as a safety valve for a growing nation, and was worried about its ending (Turner 1893).

The potency of the Frontier as a concept was also manifested in the New Frontier, an adaptation of Turner's Frontier ideal and presented by President-to-be John F. Kennedy in his acceptance speech to the Democratic National Convention in 1960. The New Frontier ideology affected American domestic and foreign policies and was manifested especially in politics involving the Third World countries. The phrase, "New Frontier", referred to a capitalist economy enjoying continuous expansion and growth not powered any longer by free land, but by the possibilities of a modernized economy. Inspired by its survival from both the Depression and World War II, America's postwar status was seen as consummate proof of its pioneer status among modern nations. The history of American progress was seen as an ideal model of modernization and thus the active policies concerning Third World countries were justified. (Slotkin 1995, 489–491.) Cawelti speculates that American actions in Vietnam were actually a continuation of the traditional idea of expanding westward and

establishing new moral communities that then transcended the errors of old societies (Cawelti 2004, 144).

In his speech Kennedy also referred to "uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered problems of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus". He juxtaposed the security of the past with the struggles to come for democracy. (Kennedy 1960.) In Kennedy's speech, there are connections to Cole's 'course of empire', and to Cawelti's idea of the West as a place of purification. Security and plenty has caused America to lose its essence, and it now must to be found in these new frontiers.^[vii]

The mythology of the New Frontier included the concept of a "heroic presidency", further exemplified by Reagan and Bush Senior. The President was presented as a hero acting on behalf of the whole community, an image inspired by the heroes of the Frontier Myth. (Slotkin 1995, 497–499.) Slotkin claims that as Turner's "Frontier Thesis" became the basis of the dominant school of American historical interpretation it has provided an important rationale for the ideologies of both Republican progressives and Democratic liberals (Slotkin 1995, 3).

Frontier mythology was de-articulated from its Western context. Somewhat analogically, Robert B. Ray notes that the frontier mythology and other generic features of movie Westerns were transferred to other settings, such as gangster and adventure films and even musicals (Ray 1985, 70–88). The Frontier theme of the classic Westerns and the Frontier in TV-series in the 2000s and 2010s differs from the New Frontier that Kennedy offered by introducing a break between the old order and the new.

New Beginnings

Jericho (2006), *Falling Skies* (2011–) and *Terra Nova* (2011) utilize the themes of nuclear war, alien invasion and time travel, all recurrent features of the science fiction iconography. Apocalyptic scenarios are likewise common in science fiction literature and films. (Clute & Nicholls 1995, 15–19; 382–384; 881–882; 1227–1229.) According to Kimmo Ahonen, science fiction films want to depict possible worlds, and that goal distinguishes them from pure fantasy. By creating these "what if" -type of scenarios, they communicate the threats of a real world. (Ahonen 1999, 296.)

According to Ahonen, the 1960s dystopian scenarios have replaced utopist themes in science fiction films. He points to the new kind of heroic character, a fighter who struggles to survive in a post-apocalyptic world and defends the honor of a family or a community, as exemplified by *Mad Max 2* (1981). The destroyed world is used as the setting, wherein the generic conventions and iconographies of the Westerns are easily reused. For Ahonen *Waterworld* (1995), with its plot structure borrowed from *Shane* (1953) is an example of the "New Frontier", but in reverse form. (Ahonen 1999, 309.) In these dystopian post-apocalyptic scenarios, the Frontier has gone bad.

The Frontier in the narratives on the old West, as well as the new-born Frontier found in the more recent post-apocalyptic narratives is seen as a natural state, existing before the social contract or appearing between social contracts. Political scientist, Claire Curtis, sees post-apocalyptic novels as focusing "on the very idea and possibility of starting over, with all the potential hope and utopian imaginings that starting over implies" (Curtis 2010, 4). Thus, the end of the world provides needed space for new beginnings. While we agree with this theme, we also would emphasize the purifying function of the apocalypse and the post-apocalyptic condition for American-ness, as instead of starting from nothing, the history that is presented becomes a model for a possible new social contract.

In the comeback narratives of the Frontier, modern society has become absent for reason or another and the established American-ness becomes something to be maintained. Next we discuss the etiological form of the Frontier myth found in classical Westerns, after which we compare that form to the post-apocalyptic version found in modern TV series. In both cases, we pay close attention to the relationships between a hero-protagonist, a small community, and the enemies of that small community, as well as the appropriation and redistribution of resources and the morality emerging from all these settings.

The Frontier of Western films

The 1940s and 1950s are considered the greatest years of the Hollywood Westerns (Buscombe & Pearson 1998, 1–3) and we focus our interest here on certain classic Western films from those two decades. As a genre, the Western films have been divided into several sub-genres at various times, but those divisions are not the center of this particular analysis. Along with their retelling and reforming of the Frontier Myth, Western films have reflected on social and cultural concerns of their own (production) time in many ways. Main lines at the period of our perception are reflections on the loss of individual independence and America's postwar adjustment in the 1940s that then made way to the Cold War issues that came into sharp focus in the 1950s. (O'Connor & Rollins 2005, 23; McDonough 2005, 111–112.)

John G. Cawelti sees the mythic Western hero as the outcome of a long evolution that includes elements from real historical settlers, hunters and cowboys, and Wild West legends as well as traits drawn from archetypal mythical heroes reformed through the Puritan imagination. For Cawelti, it is essential that a classic Western hero has a certain reluctance to become involved in violent action, a strong personal code of morality and justice, and a desire for individual privacy as this hero often prefers riding away to bragging about his escapades. (Cawelti 2004, 146–147, 178–185.)

These Western film heroes can be distinguishable into several categories. Lonely riders and cowboys are differentiated from more direct advocates of law and delivering legal justice like sheriffs and cavalrymen. Despite the differences between these categories, it is interesting to examine what is common for these hero types. The defining element of the Western film hero

seems to be that he defends individual farmers and/or small communities against deprivors. Kathleen A. McDonough notes that in many cases, this kind of delivered benefit to the community is only secondary; the prime motive for the hero's actions is personal revenge (McDonough 2005, 101). So at the same time as the hero's individualism is praised, he still becomes the defender of community.

Lonely rider Shane in George Stevens' *Shane* (1953) is a classic example of the Western film hero. He defends small individual farmers' rights against the film's villain, Rufus Ryker, a cattle baron who wants to maintain his monopoly over almost anything economic seen in the film. Shane's motives and his willingness to violent action grow, as he becomes more personally and emotionally attached to the individual farmer Joe Starrett, his wife, and child. Shane is continuously presented as a righteous and just man, but for that type of characters to turn to action, he needs a strong personal motives as well. In the end, Shane's personal attachment combined with the community's benefit ultimately leads to peace in the rangeland via a violent showdown. Robert B. Ray sees the story of *Shane* as a typical tale that reinforces the narrative of a civilization's dependence on its individual heroes (Ray 1985, 73).

A more deviant presentation in the relations between hero and community can be found in Henry King's *The Gunfighter* (1950). The film tells the tale of Jimmy Ringo, a famous gunfighter, who tries to reform and start a peaceful life. To this point, the story is quite usual and compares closely to many of the western classics, such as *Shane* or John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946). In *The Gunfighter*, however, it becomes quickly clear that the threat to the community is caused by Ringo himself. There are vengeance and glory seekers disrupting the peace of the community that Ringo visits in the film, but none of these are presented as main villain. It is the gunfighter himself, or more clearly his violent past that is the villain.

Ringo's former gunslinger companion, Mark Strett, and Ringo's wife, Peggy Walsh, have previously successfully blended into this community. They try to help Ringo, but they are not ready to accept him permanently in a community where he has produced such anxiety. Toward the end of the film, it becomes more and more clear that this kind of hero cannot solve the community's problems in the traditional way as they don't appreciate his personal intentions of settling down. In the conclusion, Ringo is shot, and indeed, he seems to understand it was inevitable.

Alongside this unconventional main hero are some important and strong supporting roles that appear in *The Gunfighter*. Mark Strett and Peggy Walsh have successfully become part of the community and attained positions that strengthen it, Strett is Marshal, and Walsh is the town school teacher. Their decisions are appreciated, but even more are the decisions of a briefly appearing Tommy, who used to be a "rounder" and has now found a woman and started his own individual farm.

As Tommy proudly tells Ringo about all the work it takes to succeed in ranching, that goal is presented also as Ringo's dream and seems as the film moves forward to be the right way to do things. In this narrative even the Marshal's and the school teacher's positions are not seen as being as valued as those of small individual farmers and their families. One point that impacts this order of appreciation is that neither Strett nor Walsh has a real family although Walsh has had a son, Jimmie, with Ringo. This point is further strengthened at the very end of the film when there is a small hint that maybe Strett, Walsh, and Jimmie could become a family as they are seen together at Ringo's funeral.

Land and Resources

In both of the films examined above, *Shane* and *The Gunfighter*, the questions asked about successful and satisfactory living are closely related to landowning and farming. This is a theme that applies to the Frontier of Western films generally. Historically, the possibility of landowning was a major motivation for Western migration, especially after passage of the Homestead Act of 1862.^[1] However it is still notable that other forms of industry (most notably mining) are rarely dealt with in these films despite their great influence on the historical West (Burchell & Gray 1989, 133–136). They are mythically less prominent. Turner (1893) highlights the significance of "free land" in his Frontier Myth, and the Western films also set forth questions about landowning and individual farmers rights as the very center of many Frontier conflicts.

The fair distribution of land and resources, a crucial question in the Frontier of Western films, is further approached in Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948). *Red River* is a film about conquering the frontier and founding an empire, a cattle ranch. The film can also be viewed as an allegory about the political and economic problems of nation-building (Springer 2005, 117–119). We see the main character Thomas Dunson taking his acres from Texas although the Mexican Don Diego has already claimed the whole area for at least six hundred kilometers to the south. Dunson's use of violence is then justified in simple ways, as Dunson's sidekick Groot says: "That's too much land for one man. Why it ain't decent". This vague concept of 'decency' is an interesting one. In the Westerns dealing the era of conquering the West, it can justify overtaking of quite large areas.

However, in the narratives of more progressed times, the theme constantly takes the side of small individual farmers against large ranchers and cattle barons. It seems that the basis of this viewpoint is a question of efficiency. In *Red River*, the rancher Dunson uses the land more efficiently than Don Diego has. In the already mentioned *Shane* the small farmers build their farms on the land of the cattle baron Rufus Ryker. The justification of their farming is explained as being more efficient than Ryker's old ways. Thus, the concept of utilization and free entrepreneurship demand that Ryker must back down. In William Wyler's *The Big Country* (1958) the same questions are approached in the struggle over an important water source on the prairie. The hero's utilitarian solution is the most efficient use of lands resources. He ensures peace by guaranteeing everyone access to the water.

The American philosopher, Robert B. Pippin, sees the founding phase as ethically a quite problematic concept because of its violent nature (Pippin 2010, 29–36). The stories of how land and resources are redistributed from those who took them violently for their own advantage to more efficient, equal and democratic utilization is an attempt to deal with the problems created by the founding itself. The process might again become violent, but that violence is seen now as more righteous. This narrative theme works, therefore, as a justification of contemporary conditions. The problems of conquering the land are less problematized in many Western films that focus on conflicts between the cavalry and Indians. John Ford's influential "cavalry trilogy"; *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *Rio Grande* (1950) tells a story wherein the Indians represent a wild threat to a civilized community and their conquering is justified as the progress of civilization in the spirit of a Manifest Destiny.^[viii]

The End of the Hero and Nostalgia for Lost Frontier

For a final view of the Frontier in Western films, we visit the hero's relationship to community again and bring the aspect of nostalgia into the discussion. Fred Zinneman's *High Noon* (1952) is considered a controversial Western film so it is worthwhile to examine alongside its counterpart Howard Hawks's *Rio Bravo* (1959). Matthew J. Costello points to *High Noon*, based on its reception,^[ix] as a landmark of self-conscious Westerns that comment on the political culture of the Cold War, a sub-genre often referred as law-and-order Westerns. Typically these Westerns address the role of individual responsibility and power in a community through the tale of a lone lawman. (Costello 2005, 175.) *Rio Bravo* is part of this continuity (Slotkin 1992, 402–403) although Costello sees the theme as ideologically less charged than the typical law-and-order Westerns do (Costello 2005, 195).

In *High Noon*, the newlywed marshal Will Kane's plans of retirement are delayed as a band of outlaws are planning to take revenge on him. We follow a story in which members of the community that Kane used to protect refuse to stand with him against his enemies. Some, like Kane's new wife, the Quaker Amy Fowler Kane, wants Will Kane just to escape as all the others in town are so nonchalant about his destiny. In the finale, Kane defeats the outlaws with a little help from Amy, who abandons her religious views to protect her husband. After that scene, Kane throws his Marshal's star irreverently to the ground in front of the people suddenly have gathered and leaves town with his wife.

Rio Bravo is often referred as Director Howard Hawks's and lead John Wayne's version of *High Noon* although the straight intentionality of this explanation is not clear (Slotkin 1992, 391; Costello 2005, 195.), and its themes do come close to those in Zinneman's film. In *Rio Bravo*, Sheriff John T. Chance wants Joe Burdette brought to justice for murder, and this goal sets him against Joe's brother, the rancher Nathan Burdette. The Burdettes keep the small town in their grip with both violence and money. The situation is desperate, but in *Rio Bravo*, Chance is not left alone. He doesn't beg for help, as he doesn't want to put people in danger, and besides his two deputies, he still gets help from many directions. This more

positive view of the community and its morality, when compared to that found in *High Noon*, is strongly highlighted in the film's end. Chance remains sheriff and gives up his emphasized independency when he confesses his feelings to an outsider woman, Feathers, and persuades her to stay with him. Through this rendering both become even more engaged with the community.

In both *High Noon* and *Rio Bravo*, the heroes have a different kind of relationship with their community, but both heroes do end up protecting it. Will Kane's reasons are more personal, and finally he despises the whole community he has helped. John T. Chance's actions accentuate a hero's unselfish seek of righteousness and justice; his personal motives derive from his will to protect the law and his community. That's why he is not willing to let Joe Burdette loose simply to avoid more conflict. Both heroes are representatives of the law, so there is no strong reluctance by either character to use violence when needed to protect the community.

Turner was worried about the end of the Frontier (Turner 1893). In many Western films the corruption and destruction of the Frontier seemed to be inevitable. The Frontier existed between a wild nature and modern civilization and both are seen as inferior to the Frontier. The nostalgic aspect comes from an appreciation of the hard work, strong men, and interactions between man and nature that were all associated with the conquering of the West. Heroes represented these features and were often seen as men of the past. In the future order with its comforts offered by organized society, men would eventually become both lazy and spiritless. The new threat, corruption from the inside, was unfightable. Shane in *Shane* rides away, *High Noon*'s Will Kane leaves with spite for his community, and *The Gunfighter*'s Jimmy Ringo came from the wrong place in the beginning. The alternative to the hero's departure is shown in *Rio Bravo* where John T. Chance becomes even more committed to his community. This commitment required his giving up a personal important mythical feature, total independency, and he does so through commitment to a woman. All in all, these Western heroes become unnecessary as there is no longer a need for strong righteous individuals who will fight for justice in a settled, civilized world.

In summary, it can be said that in the Frontier of the Western films heroes were the protectors of small new communities. John G. Cawelti saw the hope of having a pure community embodied in the small town (Cawelti 2004, 150–151) and it is the purification of those Frontier communities that becomes the main narrative of these Westerns. Often the themes concerning the redistribution of the land and its resources are central to this purification. This focus can also be seen as a justification for the conditions of film production time and the praise of free entrepreneurship. Along with their small communities, the roles of small individual farmers and families are highlighted in these films.

In the Frontier the tension between civility and self-interest is an essential element and solved through the actions of a hero whose personal motives combine with the community benefit. The community's sense of righteousness cannot be trusted in an unstable Frontier,^[5] and in a praise of individualism, it becomes the hero who stabilizes the justice. When this goal is

done, the hero becomes unnecessary and must fade. In the iconic end scene of *Shane* where we see Shane riding away into the sunset, highlighted as but a shadow in the distance. The alternative is the hero's infiltration into the community through changes in the hero's character and actions. The modern community after the Frontier has moved onwards and is not a place for strong individuals and thus it leads to the corruption of man as the Frontier dissipates.

The Comeback of The Frontier

The Frontier is that ever transitional state that exists in between nature and organized society. An obvious example of the connections between classical and futuristic Frontier narratives is *The Postman* (1997), directed and starred in by Kevin Costner, where a clear allegory is offered for the post-apocalyptic reconstruction of society by connecting scattered communities to the mail and similar efforts by the U. S. Post Office in the old frontier west now renewed by a modern apocalypse. That connection might be less obvious in such TV-series as *Terra Nova*, but we argue, that clear similarities do exist, the most important of which is focusing on a small community, that is trying to make a living in a situation where organized society is now absent (cf. Ahonen 1999, 309).

In *Jericho* (2006–2008) the small town loses contact with organized society, when atomic bombs explode on the horizon. Later it is revealed that there are two competing U. S. governments trying to claim power, but one is a false government, as it soon becomes evident that it has connections to the nuclear attack and is under the control of a private corporation. In *Jericho*, the Frontier is used as a tool to examine American-ness in during the War on Terror. The society that must be purified is a corrupt federal state that has connections to monopolistic corporations. In the series, the people of the town of *Jericho* start a rebellion against the false government, which is then compared to the American War of Independence and the Civil War.

In *Falling Skies* (2011–) the reason for the collapse of society is an alien invasion, and the Frontier thus becomes a place for resistance. The small community is on the move and tries to evade the attacks of the aliens. The men and some of the women in the community create a military resistance unit that tries to fight the invaders, who have occupied the big cities and try to enslave the children by using a special harness. The remaining human communities become organized as militia units, under a military leadership. The aliens are the deprivers, and the humans are the resource to be appropriated. In *Falling Skies*, the historical allegories also derive from the War of Independence. The name of the community is "Second Massachusetts", the name of a regiment in the Continental Army.

In *Terra Nova* (2011) the earth in 2149 is overpopulated. A rift in space time allows people to travel back in time 85 million years and do one-way colonization of the past earth. It is seen as a solution to overpopulation (and also a clear allegory for the European migration to America). However, a corporation exists that plans to create a way to take resources to earth

in year 2149. The background for *Terra Nova* is a coming eco-catastrophe, caused by the excessive self-interest of big corporations, who are willing to consume the resources of the past earth as the resources of the present become depleted.

In all these cases, American-ness becomes something that a small community has to maintain. The common denominator for these TV shows is the destruction of organized society and the process of organizing a new society (emphasized in *Terra Nova*) or maintaining at least some of the old organization and its values (both *Falling Skies* and *Jericho*). The small community is the place where the struggle occurs and the purification, and marks the quest to maintain the freedom of individuals from oppressors.

Living Together As a Small Community

As in the classical Westerns, the old order the founders support is challenged by the small community, while in the comebacks the issue is usually a maintenance of the old order of the organized society that has been lost, the struggle against outside threats (aliens, zombies, false Americans), and a purification. That is a struggle against inner threats – or finding a way to live the right way as a small community. This theme is reflected specifically in *Jericho*.

An inhabitant of the town, Stanley Richmond, owns a farm that provides the city with corn. One day he notices that his crops are threatened by vermin. He asks the town's shopkeeper, Gracie Leigh, the cost of insecticide, who asks for half of the crops in return. Stanley does not take the deal. He asks for help from the town's Mayor, Johnston Green, who wants Stanley to share the crops with the townspeople. This is not acceptable to Stanley either. Finally Stanley's girl friend, Mimi Clark (who was originally a tax collector sent to investigate Stanley's tax issues), organizes the theft of the insecticide without Stanley knowing about it. Stanley gets caught, and returns the insecticide to Gracie. Finally, the townspeople come voluntarily and without any demands to help Stanley with the harvest, Gracie gives the insecticide to Stanley, and the crops are collected before they are consumed by the vermin. A sense of trust is thus created between the townspeople, but without anybody's right of ownership being questioned. In *Jericho*, the balance between civility and self-interest means voluntarily co-operating for common goals, not questioning anybody's right to privileged ownership, and not demanding excessive prices during times of hardship.

In both *Terra Nova* and *Jericho*, big corporations are seen as threatening the small community and its rights. In *Jericho*, the *Jennings & Rall* Corporation tries to claim supplies from the town with a government mandate, using its sub-company *Ravenwood*, which specializes in security services. However, the very demand of the fruits of the town's private enterprise reveals the company does not have any such mandate, and the townspeople start their resistance.

The corporations here can be compared to the Founders who had only self-interest, but not civility. In *Falling Skies*, the equivalent are the aliens who are seeking to enslave all humans

with the help of bio-engineered harnesses that will control the nervous systems of the enslaved and make them feel connected to the community of aliens. A small community forms the basis of the resistance against such overt self-interest. The corporations and aliens have similarities to the old world of the East, which is clearly allegorized in these series.

Heroes and The Right Way

As in the classical Westerns, it is the hero's inner quest for righteousness that guards community justice, and similarities can be found in the comebacks too. Both in *Jericho* and *Terra Nova*, the male protagonist gets a second chance as the old social order becomes lost. In *Jericho*, the ideal family's black sheep, Jake Green, returns to his hometown just when the bombs explode. He tries to stay on the right path. In *Terra Nova*, Jim Shannon tries to find his place in the newly formed frontier society, and as he demonstrates his skills, he is nominated as sheriff. Jack and Tom are outsiders, but their stories are about finding one's place in a community. There is a similarity in their stories to the stories of the heroes in the Westerns, who give up their mythical qualities when they join the community they have helped.

In both cases, the crime committed by the protagonists is not really a crime. Jake was falsely accused of manslaughter, which led him to acting in bad ways, Jim's crime was having a third child, forbidden by the authoritarian government, and trying to hide her existence. The real criminal of course is the government, and its disappearance gives the protagonist the chance to start over.

In *Falling Skies*, the protagonist Tom Mason is a former history teacher who inspires the community with stories from the war of independence. Historical allegories from the War of Independence, the Civil War and World War II are very prominent in *Jericho*. Settlement of the past earth in *Terra Nova* is a very clear allegory for the colonization of America, and the corporation from the year 2149 that is trying to exploit the resources is seen as analogous to the British colonial administration. In *Jericho*, Emily Sullivan, who is a teacher, notices how the false government sponsored by *Jennings & Rall* tries to rewrite history. Their reason for the nuclear attack and the collapse of United States is a too soft foreign policy. The importance of history for coming social organization is acknowledged.

Often the models for the right protagonist's choices are found in the American (military) history. One good example is the *Rangers*. The term of course has many references— park ranger, Texas Rangers, Roger's Rangers in the War of Independence, the elite infantry unit in WWII and the modern U.S. military, and also the wilderness-wandering rangers found in fantasy literature. In *Jericho* the inhabitants of the town form their own rangers to defend their town against outside threats. They patrol the outskirts. The rangers protect the citizens, their livelihoods, and the fruits of their work, or in other words, private property. A connection to American military history is created, as it is revealed that the protagonist Jake,

who leads the Jericho rangers, had a grandfather and father who were Army rangers in WWII and the Vietnam War.

In a stressful situation, Jake sees his grandfather in a vision. He tells Jake to start a rebellion against the false government. This is a way of redeeming his place in the father-son-continuation and an accepted member of the small-community-as-ideal-America. This example shows the difference between the non-historical heroes of the old Westerns and the new heroes who struggle to redeem their places in the society. These historical models teach about the original heroism and how the good society was once made.

In *Falling Skies* and *Terra Nova* the community is organized in a military fashion, and power is centralized and held by military leaders and as in *Jericho*, leadership is assigned to the mayor, who is chosen by the townspeople. In all three series, there is a tension between the protagonist's charismatic or exemplary leadership and the community's leader's more or less legalistic or authoritarian leadership. The leadership in all cases is reserved for men only. Through leadership, tension of individual freedom and the community's power over individual is closely examined. Leadership is something that the small community needs, but there is constant negotiation going on about the limits of that power. There are also connections made to the idea of a heroic Presidency, where the leader stands for the whole community (Slotkin 1995, 497–499).

Contrary to the classical Westerns, in all three series, the male protagonists and their family relations are the focus. In *Jericho*, Jake's relationship with his mother, father, grandfather and girlfriend are central, as the emphasis in the grandfather-father-son continuum. In the two other series, the protagonists are fathers themselves. In *Falling Skies* the family is a blended one, as Tom and the community's doctor, Anne Glass, get together after both learn their spouses are dead. Focusing on the family can be explained by the continuity the family creates. It is a narrative vehicle likely required by the serial format, but the way the family is represented also exemplifies the family values that emphasize the nuclear family with a "breadwinner husband, full-time mother and homemaker, and their dependent children" (Fogel 2012, 10.) Jennifer M. Fogel writes, that "the most successful images of family continue to be bound to a performance of familialism that reaffirms the values deeply rooted in the nuclear family" (Fogel 2012, 289).

Even though women's agency is not limited to the household (in all three series there are female characters, who take part in combat, for example), as spouse of the male heroes women seem to occupy roles that do not require leaving the community too often (*Jericho*'s Emily Sullivan is a teacher, *Terra Nova*'s Elisabeth Shannon and *Falling Skies*' Anne Glass are doctors). It is also noteworthy that the struggles outside these families rarely affect their family relations. The children are in danger of straying, and the father-hero deals with such issues, and the wife's supportive role is not questioned.

The Frontier Now and Then

We locate the Frontier in that location where organized society is absent and a small community is struggling for its survival. There are two striking differences between the classical Westerns and the contemporary post-apocalyptic TV-series of the 2000s and the 2010s. The first is the hero's relationship with the small community and familialism; the second difference is the role of history as a model for the right way of living in a small community.

For Kathleen A. McDonough, the Western hero's benefit to the community is only secondary to hero's motive for actions of personal revenge (McDonough 2005, 101); in the TV series the hero's story is about redeeming his place in the community. To adapt to the small community the contemporary frontier hero does not have to give away any of his mythical features, but instead he must show that the sins committed during the time of the old order will not affect his adaptation to the new society. In *Terra Nova*, Jim's crime is having a third child; in *Jericho*, Jake is falsely accused of manslaughter. In *Falling Skies*, however, Tom does not have a past that must be redeemed; he is already an exemplary leader.

In *Jericho* and *Falling Skies*, history shows the way to right conduct. Such a model is not present in the classical Westerns, except as an idea about the Frontier; in the post-apocalyptic narratives history resurfaces in one way or another. In the post-apocalyptic scenarios the Frontier state reminds one of a Hobbesian state of war, and the new social contract is seen as an improvement to this condition. However, it is not a start from nothing, as the new contract is based on historical models that clearly demonstrate what is worth saving from the established American-ness (cf. Curtis 2010). The return of the Frontier thus works as purification – a filter that lets the best parts of the past come through and be part of the new order.

As the classical Westerns reflected on the loss of an individual's independence, the post-apocalyptic scenarios of the 2000s and 2010s seem to be more interested in family values and finding a way to live in a small community. The object of such nostalgia is the lost small community. The small community is the keeper of the real American-ness, and it is threatened by the overt self-interest of the big corporations that also threaten the freedom those living in these small communities. However, the Frontier can also become a dystopic critique, as for example, in the contemporary film *Winter's Bone* (2010) directed by Debra Granik. Here organized society is absent, and offers no help to the girl who is determined to learn her criminal father's murderer, and neither does the small community, which protects these murderers.

This case is somewhat similar to *High Noon* (1952) where Marshal Will Kane confronts his enemies alone when his trusted small community turns its back on him. In this case, the individual is the protector of ideal values, as the small community has lost its right way. The idealized status of the small community is turned upside down, while individual heroism is preserved. Still, what is a hero without a community? Through Frontier American-ness, the idealized American community and the American dream continue to be celebrated, but also criticized by revealing its shadowy darker side.

The ways that organized society ends in the three TV series reflect the fears of the 2000s and 2010s (terrorism, eco-catastrophe, and government corrupted by corporate interests), but the end is also a chance for a new start. What is similar in the Frontiers of the classical Westerns and post-apocalyptic start-overs is the idea of decency as its relationship to resources. Overt self-interest is bad, but the individual right to property is never questioned.

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Notes

^[i] This article is based on a paper given at the John Morton Centre Conference “Bridging North America: Connections and Divides”, Turku 29 August 2014. We would like to thank the Editorial Staff of *WiderScreen* and the two anonymous referees for their very useful comments.

^[ii] The selection of 1940s–1950s classical American Westerns is based on the Imdb list of 50 best Western films, which is further based on user reviews (*Imdb* 2014). Themes that are exemplified by the films presented in this article can be found in the other films as well. The three TV series were chosen because they exemplify similar themes. *Falling Skies* is running for the fifth and last season, and *Terra Nova* was cancelled after its first season (*BBC News* 2012). *Jericho* was cancelled after its first season, but a fan campaign convinced the network to continue it (*TV Guide* 2007). It was cancelled again after its second season.

^[iii] Apocalypse, from gr. ἀπο-κάλυψις, uncovering, revelation; etiology, from gr. αἰτί-α, responsibility, guilt, blame, credit, expostulation; eschatology, from gr. ἔσχατον, for the last time, and finally, best of all, at the latest (See Liddell & Scott 2010, 24, 99, 319).

We use the term ‘post-apocalyptic’ in a broad sense, namely, to refer to such scenarios where the organized society and technological infrastructure provided by it have become absent due to human actions or external factors. In *Terra Nova*, the organized society is absent because the people have time travelled to the past, but the reason for that time travel is a natural disaster and poor living conditions. The end of times works also as a prerequisite for the absence of organized society in *Terra Nova*.

As Maria Manuel Lisboa points out, apocalyptic scenarios are often ‘near misses’, as they are ‘near-universal annihilation[s] with just enough life left intact (at least one human being of

each sex, sufficient land, water, and resources) to guarantee a reasonable likelihood of a new beginning'. (Lisboa 2011, xxv).

^[v] We do not use 'myth' to refer to transcultural and transhistorical Jungian or Campbellian myths, like John G. Cawelti (2004) does, but like Robert B. Ray (1985, 15) we do wish to emphasize the Barthesian view on myth as a naturalization of the contingent.

To Roland Barthes, myths are not defined by the objects of their messages, but by the way they utter their messages. Myths can be almost anything that can make the historical, or contingent, appear as natural or as necessary. (Barthes 1972, 117, 142.) The Frontier as a mythical narrative technique would then be a way of naturalizing present American-ness by telling us how the old order has been reversed (etiology), or how the times will end (eschatology).

Scholar of religion, Russell T. McCutcheon, points out that myths are entangled with social formation, "as a rhetorical device in social construction and maintenance [myth] makes this rather than that social identity possible" (McCutcheon 2000, 200). Building on Bronislaw Malinowski's theories, he states that 'myth is a vehicle whereby any of a variety of possible social charters is rendered exemplary, authoritative, singular, unique, as something that cannot be imagined differently' (McCutcheon 2000, 200). McCutcheon points us toward looking at identity construction in different social contexts and also the limits in the ways of using The Frontier.

Building on Barthes and McCutcheon, we see myths not as a political substrata for ideology, but as a naturalization of contingent (also by repeating images and narrative structures that are identifiable as 'archetypal'), and we see them as inherently both political and ideological. They limit the field of imagination and its possibilities. Thus, the study of myths is the studying of what-goes-without-saying and the field of possibilities for imagining America.

^[vi] Sociologist of religion, Catherine Albanese, sees that Puritanism has had very large impact on American religion and culture. Its central features are the idea of the covenant and millennialism – waiting for the second coming of Jesus, the end of times, and the chance of starting over (Albanese 2013, 94–95, 273–300).

^[vii] The mythology of the New Frontier can be found also in the introductory speech of the original *Star Trek* series (1966–69), uttered by William Shatner: 'Space: The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.'

^[viii] The Homestead Act of 1862, signed by President Abraham Lincoln and the first of several Homestead Acts, enabled landowning to other than wealthy people in the Western territories of United States (*The Homestead Act of 1862*).

^[ix] Ford's trilogy is heavily influenced by the British pre-war empire genre, and thus besides reflecting on the dreams of America's postwar adjustment, it also portrays many Imperialist

ideals. Besides seeing Indians as a wild threat, the first two parts of the trilogy also illustrate them as honorable fighters and to some extent as victims. (McDonough 2005, 111–113; Slotkin 1995, 334–336.)

^[ix] *High Noon* was a big commercial and critical success. Still, it was somewhat criticized because of its pessimistic views of community and its moral. Part of this criticism may have stemmed from the blacklisting of the film's screenwriter, Carl Foreman. (Slotkin 1992, 391; Costello 2005, 175.)

^[x] Community's misguided sense of justice is perhaps most frankly depicted in William A. Wellman's *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943) where a posse ends up lynching three innocent men.