

Mhysa or Monster:
Masculinization, Mimicry, and the White Savior in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

by

Rachel Hartnett

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, FL

August 2016

Copyright 2016 by Rachel Hartnett

Mhysa or Monster:

Masculinization, Mimicry, and the White Savior in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

by

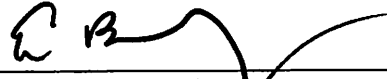
Rachel Hartnett

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Swanstrom, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

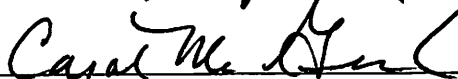
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:



Elizabeth Swanstrom, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor



Eric Berlatsky, Ph.D.



Carol McGuirk, Ph.D.



Eric Berlatsky, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of English



Heather Coltman, D.M.A.
Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts
and Letters



Deborah L. Floyd, Ed.D.
Dean, Graduate College

07/19/2016

Date

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor Dr. Elizabeth Swanstrom for her motivation, support, and knowledge. Besides encouraging me to pursue graduate school, she has been a pillar of support both intellectually and emotionally throughout all of my studies. I could never fully express my appreciation, but I owe her my eternal gratitude and couldn't have asked for a better advisor and mentor.

I also would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Dr. Eric Berlatsky and Dr. Carol McGuirk, for their inspiration, insightful comments, and willingness to edit my work.

I also thank all of my fellow English graduate students at FAU, but in particular: Jenn Murray and Advitiya Sachdev, for the motivating discussions, the all-nighters before paper deadlines, and all the fun we have had in these few years. I'm also sincerely grateful for my long-time personal friends, Courtney McArthur and Phyllis Klarmann, who put up with my rants, listened to sections of my thesis over and over again, and helped me survive through the entire process. Their emotional support and mental care helped me stay focused on my graduate study despite numerous setbacks.

Last but not the least, I would like to express my heart-felt gratitude to my sisters, Kelly and Jamie, and my mother.

Abstract

Author: Rachel Hartnett
Title: Mhysa or Monster: Masculinization, Mimicry, and the White Savior in *A Song of Ice and Fire*
Institution: Florida Atlantic University
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Swanstrom
Degree: Master of Arts
Year: 2016

A Song of Ice and Fire is unarguably one of the most popular fantasy series of all time. Notwithstanding its success, the series has only recently begun to be analyzed critically. George R.R. Martin's books are often celebrated for breaking many of the tropes common in fantasy literature. Despite this, the series is nonetheless a product of a genre that has been shaped by white, male authors. Using such prominent postcolonial scholars as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Albert Memmi, I analyze the five published books of Martin's series. I argue that although Martin seems to be aware of the theoretical background of postcolonial studies and attempts to present a story sensitive to issues of colonization, the book series fails to present a Western representation of the East outside of orientalist stereotypes and narratives that reinforce imperialism.

Dedication

To the strongest women that I know: my mother. Everything that I am today is because of you and the sacrifices that you made to provide for me and my sisters. You always placed us and our education before yourself. These sacrifices did not go unnoticed. I was only able to get this far in my education because of the strength, confidence, and intelligence that you instilled in me.

Mhysa or Monster:

Masculinization, Mimicry, and the White Savior in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

Introduction..... 1

Orientalism, Subalternity, and Mimicry: Or, How Daenerys Got Her Groove Back..... 11

Path of a Conqueror 34

Conclusion 64

Introduction

*Was I so blind, or did I close my eyes willfully, so I would
not have to see the price of power?*

– George R.R. Martin, *A Dance with Dragons*

George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy saga, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is a seven book series, of which only five have been published (between the years of 1996 and 2011) with the final two novels forthcoming (*George R.R. Martin Official Website*). One of the distinguishing features of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the incredibly detailed history and backstory of its mythopoeia. Martin pulls from multiple time periods and historical events to shape his story, predominantly from medieval England. But perhaps more important than the use of history is the subtext of colonization and imperialism present in these historical events. This is particularly notable when considering the story of Daenerys Targaryen, one of the series' key protagonists. *A Song of Ice and Fire* encourages the audience to sympathize and then root for Daenerys, the last princess of a noble line who has been exiled from her rightful kingdom of Westeros. The noble Targaryen line is characterized by inbreeding: "For centuries the Targaryens had married brother to sister, since Aegon the Conqueror had taken his sisters to bride. The line must be kept pure [...] theirs was the kingsblood, the golden blood of old Valyria, the blood of the dragon" (Martin, *Game* 32). This inbreeding not only ensures the purity of their

blood, it also retains the distinctive Targaryen appearance, pale skinned “with lilac or indigo or violet eyes and hair of silver-gold or platinum white” (Martin, *Game* 832).

After her husband dies and his men abandon her, she hatches dragon eggs, raises an army, and travels throughout the “barbaric” continent of Essos, freeing the enslaved from the shackles of their oppressors as she travels. This seemingly falls into the trope of the white savior, which is defined as “the genre in which a white messianic character saves a lower- or working-class, usually urban or isolated, nonwhite character from a sad fate” (Hughey 1). As Matthew W. Hughey states, “The white savior film [...] helps repair the myth of white supremacy and paternalism in an unsettled and racially charged time. The white savior film perpetuates, in subtle and friendly terms, the archaic paradigm of manifest destiny, the white man’s burden, and the great white hope” (15). Yet, Daenerys’s position as white savior is complicated because although Daenerys is white, her role as savior is debatable, as her actions bring destruction and ruin to the cities that she “frees.” Even further, Martin shows how former slaves and other citizens of these cities attempt to overthrow her rule. This appears to critique the notion that a white savior can, through paternalistic actions, “save” a non-white character from a less than idyllic fate. He also seems to suggest that Daenerys is merely an agent of imperialism and thus the books serve as an example of the damage that imperialism can generate. This reading too is problematic.

The continent of Essos is a collection of orientalist stereotypes, which perhaps limits its success as a postcolonial allegory. Additionally, George R.R. Martin is an American male, arguably writing for a Western audience, so it’s difficult to determine

whether readers will recognize or appreciate the potential for postcolonial discourse within the series. While Daenerys's actions are unquestionably damaging to the countries that she colonizes, Martin represents her as a protagonist in the series. Disregard for ancient cultures and huge groups of people, combined with the series' detailed descriptions of the repercussions of colonization, illustrates the complex and problematic relationship between Daenerys Targaryen, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and postcolonial studies. Although Martin seems to be aware of the theoretical background of postcolonial studies and attempts to present a story sensitive to issues of colonization, I shall argue in this thesis that inevitably the book series fails to present a Western representation of the East outside of orientalist stereotypes and narratives that reinforce imperialism.

Helen Young's deep look at the fantasy genre argues that its racially questionable beginnings have continued to shape it. Young uses both J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard as examples of this, as the work of both "imagine [...] settings for their stories [that] are Europe-like and medievalist; they create geographical and social landscapes which support the ethnoscaping of their people" (28). Howard in particular is steeped in racist ideology since, throughout his *Conan* series, Conan is depicted as a natural leader of peoples of other races on multiple occasions, reinforcing the "concept of the 'white man's burden'" (Young 26). To this day, fantasy contains Eurocentric conventions. This is particularly true for Gritty Fantasy, a "sub-genre created in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" that is "marked by low-levels of magic, high-levels of violence, in-depth character development, and medievalist worlds" that strive for realism (Young 63).

George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is perhaps the best known example of Gritty Fantasy, which *The Guardian* describes as "Light on magic, heavy on violence, a huge, sprawling saga tracing the battle for the iron throne of Westeros with its roots in the Wars of the Roses" (Flood). The book series is an international best-seller, selling "58 [million] copies worldwide in 45 languages" with an even larger audience if you factor in the fans of the HBO series adaptation (Flood). Even though the series has not yet been completed by Martin, its enormous influence is exactly why the series merits scrutiny. Although this paper will analyze the currently published books within George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, it will be looking predominantly at chapters that take place on the continent of Essos: *A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings*, *A Storm of Swords*, and *A Dance with Dragons –A Feast for Crows* to a much lesser extent. I will be predominantly looking at chapters in which Daenerys is the point-of-view character¹ (although I will include examples from chapters from the point-of-view of other Westerosi characters that coincide with or concern Daenerys's plot line).

In order to develop my thesis, I will build off the work of Valerie Estelle Frankel, who takes a detailed look at the female characters in the television show based on the series, the archetypes that they embody, and the differences between their representations in the show and in the books. In her first section, focused on controversial issues in the

¹ George R.R. Martin uses a specialized form of third-person perspective throughout the series. As Anglberger and Heike explain: "Martin describes the events from a third-person point of view, but he applies the following constraints: (1) he restricts the description of all events to what the point-of-view character (POV character) can perceive, including the character's own actions and behavior; (2) in many cases he describes the mental states of the POV character in the current situation from a third-person point of view; (3) and sometimes he even lets us know parts of the 'inner world' of the POV character by quoting his or her thoughts in the first-person point of view (indicated by italics in the books)" (93).

series, she briefly discusses the issue of Daenerys as white messiah: “[m]any fans” consider “Dany’s adventures to [be] a metaphor for colonialism” (27). She discusses Daenerys’s role within the Dothraki, a race of nomadic horsemen originating in Eastern Essos known for their prowess in battle and their savagery. Frankel even hypothesizes that in the forthcoming books she might become ruler of all the Dothraki, “impose all her teachings and lead them to Westeros at last, validating her culture as superior” (28). Her discussion of race is ultimately secondary in her discussion of female archetypes. My analysis will, however, follow and build on her groundwork.

Young’s work will also be instrumental in my examination. She argues that fantasy as a genre has historically been steeped in whiteness and racism: “Fantasy habitually constructs the Self through Whiteness and Otherness through an array of racist stereotypes” (11). Two of fantasy’s most celebrated authors, J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard, helped build this tradition, so that, “Fantasy formed habits of Whiteness early in the life of the genre-culture, and is, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, struggling to break them” (10). Young traces these habits through modern fantasy works. She discusses *A Song of Ice and Fire* at length, emphasizing how Martin’s series has been shaped by this pre-formed pattern. Although many have called Martin the “American Tolkien”—since Lev Grossman first used the phrase in his 2011 review of *A Dance with Dragons*—Young argues that “[t]he Gritty Fantasy of George R. R. Martin and others [...] owes much to th[e] vision” of Howard (18). Therefore, that Martin’s work reinforces imperialism is not surprising; “[f]or much of its history, the Fantasy genre has avoided engaging with imperialism and colonialism in any critical way, as has most Western popular culture” (12). Despite these dark beginnings, Young argues that fantasy has the

potential to change. The end of her book is reserved for modern works of fantasy that break this pattern: “Twenty-first century Fantasy has begun to critique colonialism, imperialism, and their legacies” (12). She does not discuss Martin’s attempts—and ultimately failure—to break through these molds, the works that she marks as revolutionary all have one thing in common: they are written by indigenous authors. These authors are trying help change that “indigenous voices are still significantly marginalized within the genre” (12). That, I will argue, is Martin’s biggest flaw. Although he struggles to show the harm that colonialism can bring, he still has no point-of-view characters who are anything other than white.

I will connect this silencing to Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Her criticism mostly surrounds the idea of self-representation and asks if the subaltern is truly capable of being heard by those in positions of authority. She argues that native voices are silenced by hegemonic forces, making it almost impossible to truly be heard or to free themselves from their subaltern positions. Instead, even those among the colonized internalize stereotypes. In this same essay, Spivak also explicates the link between imperialist discourse and patriarchal discourse. The interplay is an inescapable paradigm that keeps Oriental women in their subaltern positions. Both discourses have positional superiority over them and “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development” (304). This position between these two dominant hegemonic discourses effectively doubles the silencing of colonized women. This slippage between imperialist and patriarchal discourse is seen

throughout the series, as with Daenerys's rebirth in her husband's funeral pyre, in which she appropriates or mimics the Hindu ritual of sati. Spivak's discussion of sati plays a significant role in my analysis.

I also draw on Edward W. Said and the idea of Orientalism. In *Orientalism*, Said calls the Orient an "almost [...] European invention," arguing that the West—particularly Britain and France—has made into a patronizing representation "of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experience" (1). This representation replaces the actuality of Eastern locales and Asia, silencing the people of those areas, mainly through a hierarchical binary opposition that places the Occident—the West—over the Orient. These representations reinforce the hegemonic discourse about the Orient through a process in which the writings of Western authors cohere as a culture that shapes how the East is viewed, influencing future writings. This replicating system is seen in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where Martin tries to represent his fictionalized Eastern continent in a positive light—and show the dangers of Western colonization—but fails.

I discuss four distinct ways Orientalism is seen in the series. The first in the "synchronic essentialism" that represents the Orient as "an unconditional ontological category," conflating multiple ethnicities, cultures, and races into one, homogenized Orient (Said 240). The second Orientalist representation present in Martin's work is in the dehumanization—and animalization—of the Orient by the West. This dehumanization, Said argues, comes from the belief that only the Westerner "unlike the Oriental, is a true human being," in fact "by definition 'it' is not quite as human as 'we' are" (108). This belief that Orientals are less human is most often seen in their

animalization. The third expressed in the series is seen in the portrayals of the Orient as sexually submissive and permissive. The “romance” mentioned earlier in the West’s creation of the Orient, along with the idea that the Orient is “depraved,” created the stereotype of Oriental peoples as hyper-sexualized, particularly Oriental women in regards to Western men (1, 40). And hyper-sexualization ties them more closely to the realm of animals than human beings. Finally, Martin echoes Orientalism’s infantilization of the East. Opposition between the West and the East have portrayed the West as paternalistic and protective the East as “childlike,” which is linked to its powerlessness in relations with the West (40). This powerlessness creates mimicry, closely examined by another influential postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha defines mimicry as “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (86). Traditionally, mimicry is performed by the colonized, however, it is conceived by the colonizer. Bhabha builds this concept from Thomas Macaulay’s advice to British imperialists, that in order to face “the challenge of conceiving a ‘reformed’ colonial subject” the British must create a group of mimic men who are Indian nationals but are shaped and express British morals (87). When the colonized adopt parts of the colonizer’s culture this has a significant effect: “The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For in ‘normalizing’ the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms” (87). Throughout the series, Daenerys uses practices similar to mimicry, appearing to adopt practices belonging to those with whom she is currently living, including the Dothraki,

the Qartheen, and the Meereenese. Based on Bhabha's assumption that powerlessness triggers mimicry, it would be impossible to argue that Daenerys literally performs mimicry—she is the last surviving member of a former royal dynasty—yet, her actions to mimicry to show how her plot appropriates and reshapes colonial practices.

Martin's series also connects with Albert Memmi's, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, which is one of the first texts within postcolonial studies to analyze the colonizer as well as the colonized. In his Preface, Memmi attempts to define the colonial relationship: it "chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, molded their respective characters and dictated their conduct" (ix). Because the entire presentation of Daenerys's plotline in Essos is from her—or another colonizer's—point-of-view, I will use Memmi's analysis of the colonizer as a way to read Daenerys's decisions. Her story cannot be read in any way besides one of conquest and imperialism. I agree with Memmi's assertion that colonization leaves behind no positive benefits for the colonized.

My first chapter, discusses Orientalist traits in the series. I will mostly focus on the Dothraki and the cities in Slaver's Bay that Daenerys conquers on her path through Essos. I also discuss Daenerys's initial position in the story—whether she can really be considered as a subaltern or a slave. I highlight her appropriation of cultures she encounters in terms of Bhabha's discussion of mimicry. I end by discussing how Daenerys continues this mimicry, freeing herself from her subordinate position through a metaphorical act of sati.

My second chapter focuses on Daenerys's role as a colonizer and her masculinization in the later books as a means through which she gains and maintains

power. I examine some of the pre-history of the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* in order to connect the past examples of colonization to those in the series. I track Daenerys's journey through Slaver's Bay, scrutinize her justification, and unravel the true purpose behind her actions. I will also look at Daenerys's role as white messiah to the people of Essos, and how the concept of white man's burden and the evolutionary model of imperialism shapes many of her decisions regarding slavery. I close by discussing the possibility that Martin might be purposefully dismantling the mythos surrounding imperialism and the white savior.

Orientalism, Subalternity, and Mimicry: Or, How Daenerys Got Her Groove Back

“[T]he fantasy of the Middle Ages has always been the exclusive province of European colonialism, representing the historical legitimation of white, Christian, European domination” (Finke and Shichtman 107). This view of the Middle Ages has persevered. Dating back to the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard, two of the founders of the heroic fantasy genre, fantasy has been predominantly based in a representation of the medieval period—and, because of this, has operated along strict racial divides.² As Young points out, in these fictionalized medieval worlds, “[t]he Middle Ages are, anachronistically, considered White space. [...] The imagined worlds are dominated by Whiteness, imagined as a (never-extant) pre-utopia” (Young 11-2). Despite the evidence “demonstrable of racial diversity in medieval England,” authors continue to create a revisionist past where “the racial composition of the European continent was uniform across its entire geographical spread and unchanging for centuries” (Young 74). George R.R. Martin, seen by many as the rightful heir to the fantasy throne, continues in this tradition.

A Song of Ice and Fire takes place predominantly on the continent of Westeros, “a much identified analogue of medieval England” (Young 66). Martin made the history of Westeros closely shadow the history of England. Although the prehistory of Martin’s

² For further analysis, see Helen Young’s chapter “Founding Fantasy” in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*.

world states that Westeros was originally inhabited by only the Children of the Forest and the Giants (mythological and magical races), the First Men had lived on the continent for at least eight thousand years before the timeline of the novels. The First Men were the only humans to inhabit Westeros until around 6000 years before Aegon's Conquest, when the Andals arrived and settled (Martin et al. 5-20). It is almost impossible to read the history of the Andal invasion of Westeros without recognizing the real historical basis for it: the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England: "About the year 449 ... began the invasion of Britain by certain Germanic tribes, the founders of the English nation" (Baugh and Cable 43). These Germanic tribes brought with them their native languages that eventually supplanted the language spoken by the Celts of England: "The English language of today is the language that has resulted from the history of the dialects spoken by the Germanic tribes who came to England in the manner described" (Baugh and Cable 47). Like the Germanic tribes, the Andals swept through Westeros, spreading their religion and, more importantly, their language. In time both the language spoken and the religion worshipped by the Andals unseated the religion and language of the First Men (Martin et al. 17-20). The replacement of Celtic by the Germanic tongues of the Anglo-Saxons is clearly represented in the story as the replacing of the language of the First Men by the language of the Andals, which eventually evolved into the Common Tongue.

The connection between Anglo-Saxon settled England and the Andal settled Westeros extends beyond the supplanting of native languages to the number of individual kingdoms created by the invaders. On both the island of England and the island-continent of Westeros, the race of invaders eventually form into seven distinct kingdoms.

Following the initial invasion, “Andal adventurers carved out small kingdoms from the old realms of the First Men and fought one another as often as they fought their enemies” (Martin et al. 19). After a long period of warring, the kingdoms settled into “the seven great kingdoms that held sway over most of Westeros below the Wall during years immediately preceding Aegon’s Conquest” (Martin et al. 135). These seven kingdoms are the North, the Riverlands, the Vale, the Westerlands, the Reach, the Stormlands, and Dorne (Martin et al. 135-248). Martin is drawing directly from the history of England, because the Germanic tribes who conquered and settled England “combined either for greater strength or, under the influence of a powerful leader, to produce small kingdoms. Seven of these [were] eventually recognized: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Wessex, [...] spoken of as the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy” (Baugh and Cable 46). The Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy and the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros shows that Westeros has clear allegorical connections to England. The series reinforces the Eurocentric tradition by setting the main plot in a fictionalized England.

Across the narrow sea from Westeros lies the continent of Essos, a sprawling land full of exoticized places and cultures. If Westeros can be read as an allegorical representation of England, Essos can be viewed as allegorical to Europe and Asia. The port cities on the eastern coast of Essos are often viewed as analogous to cities in the Mediterranean: “in the ‘Free Cities’ one finds different regimes already resembling European Renaissance city republics” (Emig 88). Braavos, a major port city on the “far northwestern corner of Essos,” bears a striking resemblance both to Greece—with its “famed ‘hundred isles’ amidst the shallow brackish waters”—and Italy, especially Venice which, like Braavos, is lined “the myriad of serpent boats that ply the canals” (Martin et

al. 271, 274). Like with the Eurasian continent, the sections further east are reminiscent of the Middle East and Asia. Astapor, one of the cities that Daenerys visits, is located in the middle portion of the continent on the southern coast. The city is filled with imagery evocative of the the Middle East. Daenerys remarks how “so many Astapori women veiled their faces” and even witnesses an elephant [lumber] past with a latticework litter on its back” (Martin, *Storm* 322). The veiled women and elephants immediately place the fictional Astapor as analogous to the real Middle East and South Asia. More examples will be discussed later in this chapter.

Even though Martin has given Essos an elaborate landscape, “Westeros itself is still the locus of the various narrative threads. Daenerys, for example, is constantly seeking a way to gain power and an army to lead back there to reclaim the throne of her dynasty” (Young 67). By having almost all of the plot occur on Westeros and making the main concern of the only character not there a desire to return, Martin has created a Eurocentric focus, seen in the series in another major way: all the point-of-view characters would be considered white.³ As Rainer Emig points out, “It is very striking that all central characters in Westeros share the same racial identity. They are all white and Caucasian” (92). The characters who make a significant impact are from Westeros, even when the plot occurs in Essos. The continent serves as a setting and foil for

³ There are two possible exceptions to this. The first is Areo Hotah, the captain of the guard to Prince Doran Martell of Dorne. His race is never mentioned, only that he is from the country of Norvos, which is in the northern part of Essos, which could imply a darker complexion. Despite this fact, Areo himself states that “the Dornish sun was hotter than the pale, wan sun of Norvos,” which supports the idea that he is of a fair complexion (Martin, *Dance* 555). The other is Melisandre who, in *A Dance with Dragons*, is given one point-of-view chapter. But, although she is said to originate from Asshai, in the far east, she is described in the series as having hair of “a deep burnished copper” and skin that is “smooth and white, unblemished, pale as cream” (Martin, *Clash* 24).

Daenerys to learn important lessons for her (inevitable) return to Westeros. As Chinua Achebe argues, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* Africa is set up much the same way: "Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a battle-metaphysical field devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Of course, there is a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind" (Achebe 9). Characters of color are background players in the plot and the story serves as motivating factors to drive the story back to where it really matters: Westeros. The characters who are not racially coded as white are silenced within the series, for even when the plot occurs in their home country with the majority of people present of their own race, they are never able to represent themselves, but are always represented through Daenerys or another Westerosi point-of-view character. Young argues that placing a series in a fictionalized version of Europe does not make it necessarily Eurocentric, but Martin's "[l]inking geography with race-thinking turns [a work of literature] from Europe-centred, to eurocentric" (30). The combination of Martin's focus on Westeros and the silencing of the characters of color makes it clear that the series is Eurocentric as well as Orientalist.

As defined by Edward Said, Orientalism is best described as an all-consuming discourse that created the Western idea of the East—or Orient—and continues to shape representations of this broad area. Orientalism assumes many forms within Western literature, most commonly the conflation of multiple cultures or ethnicities and the infantilization, animalization, and hyper-sexualization of the East. The Orientalism within *A Song of Ice and Fire* is seen in the first chapter set in Essos. When the story begins,

Daenerys is only thirteen years old. Despite this, her brother, Viserys, marries her off to Khal Drogo, a Dothraki horse lord, in exchange for the promise of troops for his eventual invasion of Westeros. As Mat Hardy points out, despite Martin's giving the people of Essos varied tribes, countries, and religions, they nonetheless fulfill "the range of Arabian fantasy stereotypes, from nomadic Mongol warriors, through Ottoman slavers to cunning Levantine merchants" (414). This is particularly true for the Dothraki, who Martin himself admits in response to a question posted on his blog, are "fashioned as an amalgam of a number of steppe and plains cultures... Mongols and Huns, certainly, but also Alans, Sioux, Cheyenne, and various other Amerindian tribes [...]. So any resemblance to Arabs or Turks is coincidental. Well, except to the extent that the Turks were also originally horsemen of the steppes" (Martin, "Re: Dear George R R Martin"). Martin refutes the idea that the Dothraki are based on Arabic peoples while acknowledging that he draws inspiration from races such as the Mongols and Turks. Yet even if Martin was not consciously making the Dothraki Arabs, they are the only culture introduced who wield arakhs, described as "long razor-sharp blades, half sword and half scythe" (Martin, *Game* 102). Martin appears to have gotten inspiration for the Dothraki blade from two real world weapons. Curved swords "are typically sharp on one side or the other. A scimitar is sharpened on the outside of the curve to facilitate slashing from horseback. The Egyptian khopesh is sharpened on the inside for hacking on foot. The Dothraki arakh seems to be a combination of both" (O'Bryan). While the khopesh is from Egypt, the scimitar was "used chiefly in Turkey and the Middle East" ("scimitar, n."). Despite Martin's insistence, he invokes at least one type of Arabic weapon for his arakhs. Martin calls his Dothraki an "amalgam" and then proceeds to give his Mongol/Turk (so

ultimately, Asian) tribe weapons with roots in Africa and the Middle East, conflating Asian cultures with Arabic and African ones. The conflation of different cultures is a feature of Orientalism. Said calls it a “centuries-old designation” that names all “geographical space to the east of Europe as ‘Oriental’” (210). Hence, all of the cultures in the east are seen as indistinguishable from each other.

As Said points out, “for a European or America studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. And to be a European or an American in such a situation is by no means an inert fact” (11). This all contributes to the ways Western authors reproduce Orientalist discourse even as they try to escape it. Authors do not produce work in a vacuum: “each work on the Orient *affiliates* itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself” (Said 20). Martin has grown up in the United States, reading Western authors who wrote Orientalist works based on the Orientalist writings of other Western authors. While trying to avoid Arabic roots for the Dothraki (and most likely avoid the negative attention that would be garnered through the barbaric and violent Dothraki being based of Arabic peoples), he still includes such roots for them. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* is likewise filled with essentialization of races: “the Good peoples of Middle-earth [are] marked as white,” while Sauron’s army consists of Easterlings and black men “undifferentiated under the one—tellingly black—banner of evil, collected together within the single Othering category of non-European, non-White” (Young 23). Given this history in Western literature, and particularly in fantasy literature it is not surprising that Martin finds himself returning to Orientalist stereotypes.

This Orientalizing of the Dothraki once again emerges when Daenerys's brother is discussing her upcoming marriage to Khal Drogo. Viserys asks their host, Illyrio Mopatis, if "Khal Drogo likes his women this young?" (Martin, *Game* 33). Illyrio reassures Viserys that, since Daenerys has begun menstruating, she is old enough. Viserys remains doubtful but concedes that "The savages have queer tastes. Boys, horses, sheep..." (34). This passage is telling in two main ways. First, this exchange occurs in Daenerys's first point-of-view chapter, so this is one of the first descriptions readers have for the Dothraki, and they are described as "savages," prejudicing the reader against them. This passage also implies the Dothraki are having sexual encounters with horses and sheep, further illustrating their animalization through their assumed bestiality. In addition, the dialogue positions (the "no more than thirty" year old Drogo) Drogo's interest in (the thirteen-year-old) Daenerys as unnatural (Martin, *Game* 37). It becomes evident in the text that these circumstances are anything but atypical of political marriages in Westeros. In the second book of the series, Renly Baratheon (twenty-two years old) marries Margaery Tyrell (fifteen years old). Even closer to Drogo and Daenerys's age gap is the marriage between Tyrion Lannister (twenty-six years old) and Sansa Stark (thirteen years old).⁴ Yet when these marriages occur, no one in Westeros comments on the "queer tastes" of Renly or Tyrion. In fact, the marriages are not considered unusual at all. Therefore, Viserys's comment about Drogo's interest in the young Daenerys has far more to do with Said's concept of Orientalism than with actual practices in Westeros and beyond.

⁴ Because *A Song of Ice and Fire* takes place over an extended period of time, the ages of the characters listed are their ages when they are married.

It is not just the sexual preferences of the Dothraki that Viserys scrutinizes. When arriving in the Dothraki holy city, Vaes Dothrak, Daenerys and Viserys find the road into the city lined with the statues of gods to cities that the Dothraki has sacked and pillaged. Upon perusal of these statues, Viserys remarks: “All these savages know how to do is steal the things better men have built ... and kill. [...] They *do* know how to kill. Otherwise I’d have no use for them at all” (Martin, *Game* 386). Daenerys reprimands him, saying that he should not call her people savages. He retorts: “the savages lack the wit to understand the speech of civilized men” (Martin, *Game* 387). The repeated use of the word “savage” goes along with common attributes attributed to the Orient: stupidity and lack of culture. The Dothraki simply lack the mental capability of speaking Western languages and steal the gods from other cultures because they have no innate culture of their own. Of course, Viserys is a petulant and cruel character, so his comments could be attributed to Martin’s representation of his horrible personality. Nonetheless the Dothraki are the first Eastern group that the reader encounters and therefore shape the reader’s perception of Eastern races Daenerys later encounters.

It is not just Viserys who considers the Dothraki as less than their Westerosi counterparts. Daenerys fights against the idea that the Dothraki are savages, yet still succumbs to disparaging comments and thoughts. When two of Daenerys’s Dothraki handmaidens express the superstition that touching a dead man is bad luck, Daenerys thinks: “Dothraki were wise where horses were concerned, but could be utter fools about much else” (Martin, *Dance* 35). Again, we have the expression of the belief that the Dothraki are less intelligent. Similarly, Daenerys brushes off their comments by remarking that “[*t*]hey are *only girls*” before acknowledging that they are “of an age with

her” (Martin, *Dance* 35). This is infantilization of the Dothraki. Although they are the same age, they are girls, while Daenerys is capable of being a queen.

The Orientalizing of the Dothraki also occurs through portrayals of their sexuality. Beyond implied sexual preferences for animals, the Dothraki are described as having sexual encounters like animals, with about as much discretion. The first instance that the reader encounters of this occurs during Daenerys’s wedding ceremony:

Drums were beating as some of the women danced for the *khal*.

[...]

The warriors were watching too. One of them finally stepped into the circle, grabbed a dancer by the arm, pushed her down to the ground, and mounted her right there, as a stallion mounts a mare. Illyrio had told her that might happen. “The Dothraki mate like the animals in their herds. There is no privacy in a *khalasar*, and they do not understand sin or shame as we do.” (Martin, *Game* 102)

Even through the eyes of the young, naïve Daenerys, there is no suggestion of rape in this scene. In his discussion of the “Oriental” travel writings and novels of Western men, the “women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing” (207). The women of the Dothraki are represented as so sexually permissive that they will have sex with any man with no warning or notice. In fact, they will permit any Dothraki man who approaches them. But not only are the Dothraki here hyper-sexualized, they’re animalized as well. The word choice—“mounted her”—would be animalization enough,

but with the added qualification—of “as a stallion mounts a mare”—makes this amalgamation impossible to disregard.

Dothraki are also portrayed as hyper-violent. When they conquer cities, they kill the men, kidnap those who survive—including children, women, and the elderly—and rape the women. When Daenerys sees the Dothraki raping a girl no older than herself, she is horrified. Ser Jorah Mormont, a Westerosi knight who has been exiled to Essos and has pledged himself to the Targaryen cause, rationalizes that: “This is how it has always been. Those men have shed blood for their *khal*. Now they claim their reward” (Martin, *Game* 668). Rape is inherent in their culture, presumably because they are savages. But in the eyes of the reader, this contrasts with Daenerys’s own morals—as well as the morals of Westeros. As Tullmann claims:

The reader is likely just as horrified as Dany by the brutal way the warriors treat their captives. On the one hand, Dany realizes that this is the way things are done among the Dothraki—they don’t consider rape wrong under these circumstances. But on the other hand, Dany cannot just ignore the rape. It’s not something to get used to, [...]. It’s something she believes is wrong, period. (203)

Daenerys instinctively knows that this behavior is wrong. According to Tullmann, this unshakable moral code is tied to her Westerosi origin: “Nevertheless, [Daenerys's] values are similar to those of her ancestors as well as our own” (201). Because she is Western she is able to spot the barbarism of the East and not allow that she lives with and is now part of this culture to shake her ethical beliefs.

There are many problems with this. First, although Daenerys was technically born in Westeros, she has never been there since fleeing the country as a newborn. Her childhood on Essos should have had much more of an impact on her than a few weeks she spent on an island off the East coast of Westeros. Yet more problematic: Westeros is just as brutal a place as any location in Essos. In fact, in Westeros too the price of conquest is rape. Ser Jorah, present when King's Landing, the capital of Westeros, was sacked at the end of Robert Baratheon's eventual conquest of the throne, tells her, "I saw King's Landing after the Sack. Babes were butchered that day as well, and old men, and children at play. More women were raped than you can count" (Martin, *Storm* 328). The Dothraki are no more brutal than the Westerosi, except in the way that they are presented to the reader. When the Dothraki rape it's because it is an inherent part of their culture. When the Westerosi knights rape it is because of the violence that comes with war.

It is not just the Dothraki who are exoticized, animalized, and dehumanized in Daenerys's journeys across the continent of Essos. It occurs with almost every other race that she comes across. When the city of Astapor is first mentioned, Daenerys recalls that "[e]verything she'd ever heard of the flesh marts in the great slave cities of Yunkai, Meereen, and Astapor was dire and frightening" (Martin, *Storm* 117). The very mention of these cities and their slave markets inspires terror in Daenerys, yet she has been around slaves at least since her time in the city of Pentos during *A Game of Thrones* and has owned slaves while living in the khalasar. The assumed danger of these cities has much more to do with their Eastern locales than their slave markets. The East is an exotic and dangerous location. When Daenerys arrives in Astapor, she is told by Ser Jorah that the Astapori people are "mongrels," and the Astapori nobleman (and slaver) that she meets is

said to speak with the “characteristic growl of Ghis” (Martin, *Storm* 311, 312). Ser Jorah and Daenerys equate the Astapori with dogs and the language they speak with growling. In the interest of space, I will not cover other possible examples of Orientalization in the series, but I will comment as it arises in applicable quotations used in the rest of this thesis.

Daenerys’s birth and youth spent on Essos play a big role in the development of her character. Initially in the story, Daenerys appears to be subaltern in that she is controlled and abused by her brother, Viserys, and eventually controlled and abused by her husband, Drogo. Before she first sees Drogo: she is told by one of Illyrio’s slaves that “Drogo is so rich that even his slaves wear golden collars” (Martin, *Game* 32). She is then dressed in expensive clothing in order to look like a princess, including a “gown, a deep plum silk to bring out the violet in her eyes,” “gilded sandals,” a “tiara in her hair, and [...] golden bracelets [...] around her wrists. Last of all came the collar, a heavy golden torc emblazoned with ancient Valyrian glyphs” (Martin, *Game* 32-3). Daenerys is given a golden collar, like Drogo’s slaves. Combined with how her brother is essentially selling her to Drogo in exchange for an army, this is meant to indicate that Daenerys will essentially be Drogo’s slave. Once married, Daenerys finds herself alone within a foreign land amongst a group of people with whom she cannot communicate. She views the Dothraki as savages and is repeatedly raped by her husband. She eventually appears to adapt to the Dothraki culture, learning the language, dressing in their clothing, and even falling in love with her husband,⁵ however, as Spivak states, “[s]imply by being

⁵ Daenerys falls in love with her former rapist, which is intensely problematic; but due to time constraints I will not be able to address it in this paper.

postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not ‘subaltern.’ That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space” (310). Likewise, Daenerys’s female sex and subordinate position at the beginning of the series do not make her a subaltern. After a relatively short time, she gains some power in her relationship with Drogo. She also begins to demonstrate power over Viserys, after accepting her position as khaleesi (or queen), even daring to strike him after he threatens her (Martin, *Game* 394).

It is impossible to ignore that—subaltern or not—Daenerys is essentially alone amongst an unfamiliar culture. As Daenerys embraces more power, she appears to embrace Dothraki practices. Katherine Tullmann even goes so far as to claim that Daenerys “adopts the Dothraki ways in her role as *khaleesi*, the leader’s wife, [...] During a ceremony to celebrate her pregnancy, she eats a bloody horse’s heart [...] Only then does she fully join herself with the life force of the Dothraki people” (202). This reading isn’t correct. Daenerys never truly embodies the Dothraki culture and always views them as separate from herself. When she is troubled she comforts herself, not with her role as Khaleesi, but with the adage: “*I am the blood of the dragon*” (Martin, *Game* 489, 667). The sigil of Targaryen House is a dragon, and their family is believed to have “the blood of the dragon” running in their veins (Martin, *Game* 32). In her moments of weakness, it is her Western roots that give Daenerys strength. Even when she has been accepted into Dothraki life and holds a position of power in the khalasar, she places herself at a distance. After Drogo’s death she purposefully chooses to ignore multiple Dothraki traditions when she doesn’t want to. Acting in more Western ways serves her purposes better, so these are the actions that she chooses. For example, after Drogo dies,

one of her Dothraki khas (or protectors) tries to put her bride gifts from Drogo onto his pyre—as is tradition—but Daenerys forbids it, saying, “Those are mine [...] and I mean to keep them” (Martin, *Game* 799). It is also Dothraki tradition for khaleesi who have lost their khals to live in Vaes Dothrak and join the dosh khaleen, former khaleesis who serve as the spiritual leaders of all the Dothraki (Martin, *Game* 492). Daenerys refuses this as well, choosing instead to rule over her remaining Dothraki and amass the wealth and militaristic force to conquer Westeros.

Daenerys is not assimilated, but she is performing a type of mimicry. As discussed, in mimicry the colonized appropriates characteristics or behaviors of the colonizer in an attempt to gain power—or the illusion of power (Bhabha 86). When Daenerys first comes to live with Drogo and the Dothraki, this mimicry gains her power within the Dothraki. It becomes part of Daenerys’s character to mimic the culture that she is around, consciously or subconsciously, in the hopes of gaining power. Mimicry creates “a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial presence’” (Bhabha 87). Daenerys has suffered a rupture and become a partial presence. She wears Dothraki clothes, learns Dothraki, adopts her role as khaleesi—yet refuses to consider herself a member of their culture. Despite this, her status is always assured through her royal parentage and Westerosi origin. She is merely mimicking Dothraki customs to reach her goals, including her act of liberation from her subaltern status, which she achieves through a metaphorical act of sati.

The practice of altruistic suicide in India is a historically fraught issue. According to Lakshmi Vijayakumar, for ages suicide was illegal in India because “[s]criptures, such as by Manu and Kautila, were against suicide” (73). Some exceptions, however, were allowed, the most prominent of which were the altruistic suicides of sati and jauhar. Sati was the act of “self-immolation of widows” named after “Sati, the wife of Dhaksha who died in the funeral of her husband” (Vijayakumar 76). As Daly explains, sati “must be understood within its social context” elaborating that “religion forbade remarriage and at the same time taught that the husband’s death was the fault of the widow (because of her sins in a previous incarnation if not in this one)” (115). Because of this, even today in India, the life of a widow is less than glamorous. A widow “must shave her head and wear only a white sari [...] after the death of her husband. She was prohibited from remarrying and from wearing any gold ornaments. The life of a widow was so bad [...] the women perhaps favored death to humiliation” (Vijayakumar 77). And it was not just humiliation that these widows faced. In places where money and property were passed through the male line, widows were often left without the means of supporting themselves after their husbands’ deaths. They were forced into lives of poverty or prostitution. Although not “practiced universally” in India and “not caste- or class-fixed,” the British nevertheless used the act as a justification for the colonization of India, in an example of what Spivak calls a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (287).

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Daenerys is blamed for Drogo’s death. Drogo is injured in battle and, although he plays down the damage, he sustains a serious injury: “The arakh cut was wide but shallow; his left nipple was gone, and a flap of bloody flesh and

skin dangled from his chest like a wet rag” (Martin, *Game* 669). He initially refuses to be seen by healers, but acquiesces when Daenerys insists. Mirri Maz Duur, a healer from the village Drogo’s men has just sacked, offers to help heal the Khal. She stitches his wound and covers it in ointment and lambskin. She then tells him to “say the prayers I give you and keep the lambskin in place for ten days and ten nights [...] Drink neither wine nor the milk of the poppy” (Martin, *Game* 674). Drogo’s wound eventually festers and makes him so ill that he cannot ride. Both Daenerys and Mirri Maz Duur are blamed for this by Drogo’s bloodriders. Qotho, the most brutal of Drogo’s bloodriders, first exclaims that “This is your work, maegi!” before amending that Daenerys is also to blame “as much as the other” (Martin, *Game* 708). It becomes clear through dialogue that neither woman is to blame for Drogo’s condition. When Mirri Maz Duur sees Drogo, she asks if “He has been dulling the hurt with milk of the poppy” to which Daenerys admits “Yes” (Martin, *Game* 709). Mirri then asks about the “poultice of firepod and sting-me-not” that she “bound [...] in a lambskin” to which Dany replies “It burned, he said. He tore it off” (Martin, *Game* 709). After analyzing these exchanges, it becomes clear that Drogo’s wound did not fester because of the actions of Mirri Maz Durr but because he ignored the advice of Mirri. Both are blamed for Drogo’s death,⁶ like the Hindu widows, and both are immolated on his pyre because of it. Yet Daenerys doesn’t burn.

Martin presents the reader the two Western visions of sati through the figures of Daenerys and Mirri Maz Duur. The first is the image of the poor widow tied to the pyre by the native men. As Mary Daly discusses, a widow unwilling to immolate herself “was

⁶ Daenerys does later kill Drogo after he is left in a vegetative state (Martin, *Game* 759-61).

often pushed and poked in with long stakes after having been bathed, ritually attired, and drugged” (116). Although Mirri is not drugged, she is forcibly bound to the Drogo’s pyre on Daenerys’s orders (Martin, *Game* 803). The second is the image of the proud widow joining her beloved husband in death. As Spivak discusses, there was a pushback to the British colonialist dissolution of sati by Indian nativists, who often claimed that “the women [who committed sati] wanted to die” (287). This is expressed through Daenerys, who joins Drogo’s funeral pyre willingly. Before the ceremony, she assures her knight companion, Ser Jorah, that she will not “climb on Drogo’s pyre” because “I am not such a child as that” (Martin, *Game* 799-800). This is characteristic of infantilization of the Oriental—according to Daenerys only children would choose to immolate themselves. Nevertheless, she is struck when she sees Drogo’s body burning:

And now the flames reached her Drogo, and now they were all around him. [...] Dany’s lips parted and she found herself holding her breath. Part of her wanted to go to him as Ser Jorah had feared, to rush into the flames to beg for his forgiveness and take him inside her one last time, the fire melting the flesh from their bones until they were as one, forever. (Martin, *Game* 804)

This passage shows the partial presence that has been created by Daenerys’s mimicry of the Dothraki. Although she is now in a position of power within the khalasar—you could even argue ultimate power since her husband is dead—she is still drawn towards Dothraki practices. She has become unsure what action to take or which culture’s practices will serve her best.

Regardless of Daenerys's mimicry of sati, there is still the question of why she survives the fire and Mirri Maz Duur does not. Even a casual follower of the book (or the television series) could explain that plot-related reason Daenerys survives is because she is a Targaryen and they are symbolic dragons. Yet even this reinforces colonialist discourse. The reason she does not burn is because of her whiteness, which does not bind her to the fate of native women. As Spivak sees it, sati shows the double subaltern status of colonized women. They are bound to two separate, but interconnected, discourses; colonized women are bound by both Indian patriarchal discourse and British, imperialist and patriarchal discourse, and ultimately left unable to act free of influence. Daenerys survives the fire and instead hatches her three dragons—the sati is liberating. While she may be kept in an inferior position due to patriarchal discourse, her participation in the imperialist discourse is as the member of a royal family rooted in imperialism itself, allowing her a superior positioning. These dueling discourses would consume a native woman—and does consume Mirri Maz Duur—but Daenerys survives. As Jessica Walker states, “Rather than perishing, [Daenerys] triumphs, claiming an identity as ruler in her own right rather than one of sister or wife. Dany’s transformation therefore echoes cyclical history, but it also transcends it” (87). While she appears to be subaltern due to her subordinate position to both her brother (white) and her husband (native) at the beginning of the story, this is ultimately just a temporary role. She escapes the patriarchal discourse and instead of being bound by the imperialist discourse, she becomes a colonizer. Just as in her adoption of Dothraki practices and dress that serve her and refusal of Dothraki traditions that resents, Daenerys appropriates sati to free herself. Daly states that the ultimate goal of sati is “to stop the Journey of women finding our Selves –

a Journey which is quest-ing, be-ing” (131). Daenerys mimics an act of domination and suppression of native women and uses this as her liberation. She is not doubly effaced like native women. Instead she is able to use imperialist discourse in order to break out of her one effacement—her sex—and gain the power that she was previously lacking, now in the guise of a colonizer.

Daenerys’s mimicry doesn’t stop after her sati. As she begins her conquest of Essos, she continues to mimic cultures other than her own or the Dothraki, always as a tool to gain something. The first city she reaches after Drogo’s death is Qarth. When Daenerys first arrives in Qarth, as an invited guest of Xaro Xhoan Daxos, Pyat Pree, and Quaith, there is a large crowd of Qartheen to welcome her. She marvels at the riches of the city and, upon perusing their apparel, feels “shabby and barbaric as she rode past them in her lionskin robe” (Martin, *Clash* 423). The next time her appearance is described, after a fruitless appeal to the Enthroned of Qarth, she is “garbed after the Qartheen fashion” (Martin, *Clash* 575). Although the book does state that Xaro has warned her that the Enthroned would “never listen to a Dothraki,” Daenerys interestingly chooses not to dress like a Westerosi—her true culture (Martin, *Clash* 575). Instead she mimics the dress of Qarth, arguably because this will sway the Enthroned in her favor. This is extremely obvious because after she has been unable to get what she wants—ships—from the Qartheen, and after burning down the House of the Undying, she decides to head to the docks in order to depart. Her handmaid Irri brings her a Qartheen gown and Daenerys angrily says “Take it away [...] The docks are no place for lady’s finery” (Martin, *Clash* 870). Most likely this is not the true reason for her refusal of the dress.

She has been unable to secure what she wanted through mimicking the Qartheen, and so she has cast off this phase of her mimicry.

Fittingly, her mimicry of Qartheen dress arises when she appears in Astapor. When she first disembarks her ship to barter for an army, the reader is never told what she wears, except that Kraznys mo Nakloz, the slaver from whom she is trying to purchase an army, remarks that he would be willing to sleep with Daenerys “if she is more woman than she looks” (Martin, *Storm* 321). Based on previous descriptions of Dothraki dress, it’s safe to assume that she is dressed in a Dothraki fashion. Without any remark about her previous appearance, the next time she ventures into the city—and when she intends to barter for the slave army—she has “chosen a Qartheen gown today” (Martin, *Storm* 367). Daenerys again has adopted the dress of another culture to serve her purposes. She has no Astapori finery in which to dress herself, so she dons the next best thing: a Qartheen dress. She mentions that the Qartheen gown is a “deep violet silk [that] brought out the purple of her eyes. The cut of it bared her left breast” (Martin, *Storm* 367). She hopes to gain a better deal in her bargaining by using everything she has to her advantage, her appearance as well as her mimicry of cultures within Essos.

After Daenerys conquers the city of Meereen, she decides to stay and rule. As queen, she begins to wear a *tokar*, a silk garment worn by the masters in Slaver’s Bay that serves as “a sign of wealth and power” (Martin, *Dance* 40). Interestingly, Daenerys hates wearing this. She only acquiesces after the Green Grace—the leader of one of the ancient families of Meereen—tells her that she “must don the *tokar* or be forever hated [...]. In the wools of Westeros or a gown of Myrish lace, Your Radiance shall forever remain a stranger amongst us, a grotesque outlander, a barbarian conqueror. Meereen’s

queen must be a lady of Old Ghis” (Martin, *Dance* 40). Daenerys hates wearing the tokar, and even admits to wanting to ban them. While she quickly dons Dothraki or Qartheen dress in order to help gain political advantage, she is unhappy that she has to obey Meereenese customs after she has already conquered. Mimicry, for her, is a tool for gaining power, something she no longer has to do.

While mimicry often serves as a tool for the colonized, an adaptation to the practices of the colonizer, it is usually implemented by the colonizer in order to control the colonized. Daenerys begins some programs intended to start this mimicry among the Meereenese. She begins training Meereenese children as messengers, teaching them the Westerosi language. She also has the head of her Queensguard, Ser Barristan Selmy, begin “training knights for her, teaching the sons of slaves to fight with lance and longsword in the Westerosi fashion” (Martin, *Dance* 38). This adoption of Westerosi culture ultimately spreads beyond her influence. One of the noblemen of Meereen, Skahaz mo Kandaq, begins to be called the Shavepate because he begins wearing his hair in a Westerosi fashion:

Ghiscari hair was dense and wiry; it had long been the fashion for the men of the Slaver Cities to tease it into horns and spikes and wings. By shaving, Skahaz had put old Meereen behind him to accept the new, and his kin had done the same after his example. Others followed, though whether from fear, fashion, or ambition, Dany could not say; shavepates, they were called. (Martin, *Dance* 41)

Skahaz, and the other shavepates, have refused the traditions of Meereen in the hopes of gaining positions of privilege. Yet, when mimicry is used it creates a rupture that leaves

the colonial fractured between their own customs and those of their colonizers. Skahaz exists in this fracture. He is hated by the Meereenese loyalists, the Sons of the Harpy—a violent, radical group who aim to return Meereen to its previous power structure—who consider him and the rest of the shavepates “the vilest of traitors” and kill them indiscriminately with Daenerys’s soldiers. Except he does not fit in with Daenerys or her Westerosi advisers either—he has fallen into “the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*)” (Bhabha 87). When Daenerys is choosing a Meereenese husband, she quickly dismisses Skahaz. Because of this partial presence, the shavepates are simultaneously excluded by each world, while existing in neither.

Path of a Conqueror

The path of conquerors is not an easy one. They must use any and all means necessary to gain and maintain power. One of the most persistent myths in Western literature is that of the white savior, the white (mostly male) protagonist who saves the poor, helpless members of an inferior race, thus showing his superiority and the necessity of his rule over them. This trope is often used in conjunction with imperialist ideology in order to present narratives that justify colonization. At first glance, Daenerys Targaryen's path throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire* seems to fit neatly within this trope. Yet the color of her skin is not the only way that she achieves power; she also does so through the introduction of masculine aspects into her representation. While it would be easy to conclude that Daenerys is just another iteration of the white savior, albeit modified and updated, with close analysis it could be argued that George R.R. Martin uses this trope to critique and condemn imperialism.

Daenerys's first power comes after she is reborn in Khal Drogo's funeral pyre—that is, after the birth of her three dragons. It cannot be overlooked that Daenerys's power comes, at least initially, from her dragons. After Drogo's death but before his funeral, she asks the three men who had been assigned as her *khas* (or protectors) to assume the roles of *kos* (or bloodriders)—a position of protection given only to those who protect khals in Dothraki culture—in exchange for the bride gifts that she has withheld from Drogo's pyre. They initially refuse:

She turned to the three young warriors of her khas. “Jhogo, to you I give the silver-handled whip that was my bride gift, and name you ko, and ask your oath, that you will live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm.”

Jhogo took the whip from her hands, but his face was confused. “Khaleesi, “he said hesitantly, “this is not done. It would shame me, to be bloodrider to a woman.”

“Aggo,” Dany called, paying no heed to Jhogo’s words. *If I look back I am lost.* “To you I give the dragonbone bow that was my bride gift.” It was double-curved, shiny black and exquisite, taller than she was. “I name you ko, and ask your oath, that you should live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm.”

Aggo accepted the bow with lowered eyes. “I cannot say these words. Only a man can lead a khalasar or name a ko.”

“Rakharo,” Dany said, turning away from the refusal, “you shall have the great arakh that was my bride gift, with hilt and blade chased in gold. And you too I name my ko, and ask that you live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm.”

“You are khaleesi,” Rakharo said, taking the arakh. “I shall ride at your side to Vaes Dothrak beneath the Mother of Mountains, and keep you safe from harm until you take your place with the crones of the dosh khaleen. No more can I promise.” (Martin, *Game* 800-1)

The primary reason they refuse is because she is a woman and therefore cannot lead a khalasar. It would shame them to be bloodriders to a woman. When the fire dies, however, Daenerys is revealed to be alive and unhurt, and she is now accompanied by three newly-hatched dragons. Suddenly, each man changes their mind: “The men of her khas came up behind him. Jhogo was the first to lay his arakh at her feet. ‘Blood of my blood,’ he murmured, pushing his face to the smoking earth. ‘Blood of my blood,’ she heard Aggo echo. ‘Blood of my blood,’ Rakharo shouted” (Martin, *Game* 806).

Daenerys’s sex has not been altered in the fire. Although their newfound devotion could be attributed to her survival, another argument is her dragons. Their very presence has convinced her most loyal men to serve her as if she were a man.

In the three dragons, Daenerys has essentially obtained three phallic symbols. As Freud himself writes in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, “Among the less easily understandable male sexual symbols are certain *reptiles* and *fishes*, and above all the famous symbol of the *snake* [emphasis in the original]” (191). Dragons, although fictional, are most often depicted as snake-like or reptilian. Yet, snakes and serpents have long been associated with femininity. As Barbara G. Walker states in *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*:

[T]he serpent was one of the oldest symbols of female power. Woman and serpent together were considered holy in preclassic Aegean civilization, since both seemed to embody the power of life. [...] It was the mother of all gods, the Earth Goddess Gaea, who first founded the Delphic (“Womb”) oracle and inspired its original Pythonesses or divinatory

serpent-priestesses, according to Homeric hymns. Hesiod referred to her as Gaea Pelope, the female serpent. (527)

Snakes are often viewed as symbolic of female power and the dragons also serve as symbols of Daenerys's power. Yet, as one of the characters explains later in the series, "Dragons are neither male nor female" (Martin, *Feast* 520). Technically, the dragon could be interpreted as androgynous or even bisexual. They dragons are viewed mainly as the ultimate weapon: "For dragons are fire made flesh, and fire is power" (Martin, *Clash* 426). Jessica Walker points out that "[t]he Targaryen sigil, the dragon, frequently appears throughout the series to remind readers of the power of history and memory to revive old conflicts. [...] Martin's dragons likewise represent military power" (85). Dragons are viewed within Westeros as the most powerful and dangerous weapon; the possession of even one could change the outcome of a war. Even Daenerys gives the dragons masculine names—Drogon, Rhaegal, and Viserion after her dead husband and brothers.

The blurring of masculine and feminine symbolism also appears through the funeral pyre. Daenerys's dragons are hatched through the funeral pyre, but the pyre also burns off all of her hair. As Karin Gresham discusses, "[t]he absence of [Daenerys's] beautiful hair, which was burned off in the fire, coupled by the display of her lactating nipples, illustrates her embodiment of the masculine and feminine: the upper stratum is represented by a masculine, western appearance, while the lower stratum is represented by the feminine universal of fertility" (159). Daenerys has become the embodiment of both femininity and masculinity. As the last known Targaryen, Daenerys neither fully male nor female, just like the dragons the Targaryens have chosen as their sigil. She is instead casting off her femininity and adopting a more masculine identity.

As Daenerys views herself as a leader, she begins to adopt more masculine attributes. This happens initially in her dress. Because Daenerys's hair is gone and her meager khalasar is traversing desert lands, "her handmaids garbed her in the skin of the hrakkar Drogo had slain, the white lion of the Dothraki sea. Its fearsome head made a hood to cover her naked scalp, its pelt a cloak that flowed across her shoulders and down her back" (Martin, *Clash* 188). The lion is a symbol of unrestrained power and strength and the pelt serves as a symbol of Drogo's prowess in hunting. Valerie Estelle Frankel argues that as Daenerys wears Dothraki dress "she's becoming a second Drogo, a male-coded leader" (154). Similarly, as her hair begins to grow back, beginning to bring her closer to a feminine appearance, she resists this interpretation. In fact, she begins to view it as Dothraki men view their hair, not as a feminine aspect of herself, but as a sign of her leadership and physical prowess: "Dany ran a hand over the top of her head, feeling the new growth. Dothraki men wore their hair in long oiled braids, and cut them only when defeated. *Perhaps I should do the same*, she thought, *to remind them that Drogo's strength lives within me now*. Khal Drogo had died with his hair uncut, a boast few men could make" (Martin, *Clash* 195). As Gresham analyzes, Daenerys regards her hair and "its length as a function of Dothraki masculinity rather than femininity" (Gresham 160). She considers it an aspect of her strength and leadership, not a representation of her feminine beauty. When Daenerys leaves the city of Qarth, having burned down the House of the Undying after they tried to imprison her, her handmaid, Jhiqui, braids "her hair Dothraki fashion, and fastened a silver bell to the end of the braid" (Martin, *Clash* 870). Daenerys resists this at first because she has "won no victories," but her handmaiden insists and none of her Dothraki followers question it (Martin, *Clash* 870). They have

accepted her masculine dress and overall appearance, and so what is a bell in their leader's hair? The only difference is that Daenerys wears her bell as a sign of her defeating the warlocks in the House of the Undying, not just as an extension of Drogo. She has begun to forge her own path as a ruler.

Daenerys's also obtains masculine characteristics as she begins to gain sexual agency. During her marriage to Khal Drogo she is presented as a sexual object and vessel for children. In her first sexual encounters with him, she is in the subordinate position as he rapes her repeatedly. She begins to break out of this position even while he's alive. She is gifted the slave woman, Doreah, as a wedding present, and told that "Doreah will instruct you in the womanly arts of love" (Martin, *Game* 103-4). A few weeks into her marriage, she has a long conversation with Doreah and "That night, when Khal Drogo came, Dany was waiting for him" (Martin, *Game* 236). This is the first night where she initiates their sexual encounter and the first night that she chooses their sexual position. As Andrew Howe discusses, it is in this way that "Dany learns to take control of her sexuality. Her insistence upon a different sexual position, for instance, suggests that she is asserting herself as an equal in her relationship with Drogo" (247). This equality in their relationship never happens. Even after she has shown her sexual prowess to Drogo, he views her as inferior. She attempts to convince him to sail to Westeros—in what he calls wooden horses—in order to win the throne—to him, an iron chair—for their unborn son, but he refuses, saying, "We will speak no more of wooden horses and iron chairs" (Martin, *Game* 584). It is only after she is attacked by an assassin from Westeros that he decides to attack the Western country. Despite Daenerys's best influences to reach a level of equality with her husband, and encourage his invasion of Westeros, she has not gained

any superior political or tactical position through her sexual progression. In fact, later in the series, when she claims the slave women as her own to prevent their rapes and actively defies one of Drogo's most trusted warriors, Drogo does not credit Daenerys's own strength for this: "'See how fierce she grows!' he said. 'It is my son inside her, the stallion who mounts the world, filling her with his fire'" (Martin, *Game* 670). Despite her attempts to gain equal standing, Drogo still believes that Daenerys's power comes not from herself but from their son.

After Drogo's death and her rise in influence, she begins to actively seek out sexual partners. As Howe states, "Over the next several novels, Dany continues to explore her sexuality and the manner in which it can be put toward the ultimate goal of winning the Iron Throne" (247). Although she develops feelings for two of her sworn men, Ser Jorah Mormont and Daario Naharis (a sellsword who joins Daenerys's service), she initially refuses to start a relationship with either. When Jorah confesses his love for her and kisses her, she rejects him (Martin, *Storm* 120-1). Yet, her rejection of his advances cannot calm her own sexual urges. One night, after remembering Jorah's kiss, she finds herself unable to sleep and instead begins to pleasure herself. Ultimately, her movements wake Irri, her handmaid, who begins to sexually pleasure her. The next morning, Daenerys disavows Irri's actions (Martin, *Storm* 325). Later in the series, Daenerys chooses to sleep with Irri again: "Later, when the time came for sleep, Dany took Irri into bed with her, for the first time since the ship. But even as she shuddered in release and wound her fingers through her handmaid's thick black hair, she pretended it was Drogo holding her... only somehow his face kept turning into Daario's" (Martin, *Storm* 993). Even though Daenerys chose to sleep with another woman, Irri is merely

filling the place of Daenerys's male interest. David C. Nel notes that the scenes between Daenerys and Irri "take place within the wider context of *heterosexual* romantic plotlines [...] the very 'truth' of her dream centers upon her *heterosexual* love interests, with the lesbian content merely serving Dany's larger, 'real' heterosexual romantic life" (206-7). That Irri is a female sexual partner does not mean that these sexual encounters can be attributed to Daenerys's masculinization. Instead, they serve this purpose in that they coincide with her political machinations.

These political maneuverings are perhaps more noticeable in relation to Daenerys's later love interest: Daario Naharis. When Daenerys first meets Daario, she is instantly attracted to him. When he betrays the other leaders of his sellsword company, The Stormcrows, he pledges them—and himself—to Daenerys. Instead of being worried about the changeability of his loyalties, Daenerys instead remarks that "[s]he liked the swagger she saw in this Daario Naharis" (Martin, *Storm* 583). This attraction only grows as he serves Daenerys, and they eventually become lovers. It is again noticeable that while Daario is an accomplished fighter, he is described as very flamboyant:

Daario Naharis was flamboyant even for a Tyroshi. His beard was cut into three prongs and dyed blue, the same color as his eyes and the curly hair that fell to his collar. His pointed mustachios were painted gold. His clothes were all shades of yellow; a foam of Myrish lace the color of butter spilled from his collar and cuffs, his doublet was sewn with brass medallions in the shape of dandelions, and ornamental goldwork crawled up his high leather boots to his thighs. Gloves of soft yellow suede were

tucked into a belt of gilded rings, and his fingernails were enameled blue.

(Martin, *Storm* 575)

This description of Daario's clothing is meant to be seen as excessive and ostentatious. The yellow color of his clothing, along with his medallions shaped like dandelion flowers, are meant to evoke female imagery. As Frankel points out, "With long hair and well-groomed appearance, he's somewhat feminized" (156). This is notable in the text. Daenerys calls his skin "smooth beneath her touch, almost hairless. *His skin is silk and satin*" (Martin, *Dance* 618). She later blurts out that he's "beautiful" as he dresses after an evening together (Martin, *Dance* 620). This feminine appearance stands in stark contrast to the appearance of Ser Jorah. Martin explicitly creates this dichotomy between the two characters: "[Daario] was fair where Ser Jorah was swarthy; lithe where the knight was brawny; graced with flowing locks where the other was balding, yet smooth-skinned where Mormont was hairy. And her knight dressed plainly while this other made a peacock look drab" (Martin, *Storm* 582). The contrast between the two characters could not be more clear. It would be easy to attribute her selection of Daario because he is more feminized than both herself and Ser Jorah, further cementing her masculinization.

Daenerys does not, however, choose him because of his feminine qualities. Instead, she chooses to begin a sexual relationship with Daario (and Irri) because they do not threaten her politically. Jorah does. As a fellow Westerosi, Jorah will be more important when she reaches Westeros. He is a nobleman and a knight, while Daario is only a sellsword. Gresham examines this, saying that "Martin [...] seems to suggest that Dany's choice of sexual partners has much more to do with her position of power and social options than it does with her desire for either men or women [...]. She later takes a

male lover, Daario Naharis, who, like Irri, does not change the power dynamic” (161). She selects Irri and Daario because they lack of social and political standing. She must remain the most powerful person in any relationship she begins. This continues her on her path to masculinization. Any relationship that would render her in a subordinate position is out of the question. “Daenerys evolves from the captive wife ‘sold’ to Drogo to a queen who can choose a subordinate lover” (Frankel 156).

Daenerys chooses her lover strategically in order to maintain a superior position, and the same can be said for her choice of soldiers. Although a few of her Dothraki warriors remain, Daenerys finds herself on a quest to reclaim a kingdom with no army. She is convinced by Ser Jorah to sail to Astapor to purchase an army of Unsullied, the greatest soldiers in Essos. The Unsullied are made up of slaves selected in childhood and brutally trained until they are “masters of spear and shield and shortsword,” “absolutely obedient, absolutely loyal, and utterly without fear” (Martin, *Storm* 312, 315). The Unsullied are castrated in their youth, but unlike in other cities in Essos where “eunuchs are often made by removing a boy’s testicles, but leaving the penis” which can only lead to “trouble,” the Astapori “remove the penis as well, leaving nothing” (Martin, *Storm* 316-7). As Gresham states, the Unsullied’s “sexuality [...] stands beyond the normal reproductive cycle. Its castrated warriors dwell in a distinct gender category that was used for the better part of a thousand years to represent and uphold social order” (161). Daenerys cannot have male soldiers because that will undermine her masculinized identity—at least in the eyes of her followers. In order to retain this superior, masculinized status, Daenerys chooses an army of eunuchs—who, in the patriarchal society of Westeros and Essos, are essentially seen as an army of un-men. That the best

soldiers, viewed in Western literature as the embodiment of masculinity, in the East are not men again plays into Orientalist stereotypes of the East as feminized. The most masculine Oriental men are still not seen as “real” men.

Why does Martin choose to masculinize Daenerys in the series? There are many possible answers. Masculinizing a female character is often used to create an empowered female character without all the work of actually making them three-dimensional, however, this is not true in this case. Instead, Daenerys’s masculinization is used to align her more closely with the patriarchy. As S.M. Shamsul Alam asserts:

The colonialist project and *colonial order of things* were fundamentally of the patriarchal/masculine Europe self. This masculine ‘self’ penetrated the colonial world, thus masculinizing colonization. This binary relationship between the colonial and colonized leads to particular relations of rule and forms of knowledge. The forms of knowledge are based on rigid and hierarchal division between the colonizers and colonized. (75)

The binary relationship between colonizer/colonized is replicated in the binary between masculine/feminine. In order to reaffirm the “natural” position of the colonizer, the colonizer is portrayed or represented as masculine and the colonized as feminine. This legitimizes the position of the European colonizer over the native colonized. Daenerys, while a female ruler, still serves as a representative of the patriarchy as she comes from a Western patriarchal society—and her only claim to the throne of Westeros is through patriarchal succession laws. In Essos, her position as queen is tenuous due to her sex. Without patriarchal succession to legitimize her position in Essos, she is masculinized in

order to normalize her power. Nonetheless, her masculinization throughout the series only serves to further her position as colonizer.

Martin's world is shaped by colonization. Rainer Emig points this out: "The books [...] function in accordance with imperialist ideology, something that has shaped fantasy from its inception in the late nineteenth century" (93). In Westeros's pre-history, Valyria was an ancient freehold, located on the Southern part of Essos, that "had no kings" and "all the citizenry who held land had a voice" (Martin et al. 13). It was ruled by archons "elected by the lords freeholder from amongst their number, and only for a limited time" (Martin et al. 13). This has led to many comparisons between Valyria and ancient Rome. Although obliterated hundreds of years before the time in which the novels take place in what is called the Doom of Valyria,⁷ the strength and scope of the Freehold is still apparent in the series, perhaps most notably in their roads, called dragon roads, that connect most of the major cities in Essos. Despite the extermination of the Valyrians, their roads still survive: "Unlike the muddy tracks that passed for roads in the Seven Kingdoms, the Valyrian roads were wide enough for three wagons to pass abreast, and neither time nor traffic marred them. They still endured, unchanging, four centuries after Valyria itself had met its Doom" (Martin, *Dance* 84-5). The roads help reinforce parallels between Valyria and Ancient Rome but are also the key to Valyria's other lasting impact: slavery.

Valyria expanded its authority and influence through conquest. After fighting five wars with a race called the Ghiscari, the Valyrians took the Ghiscari as slaves: "[t]he

⁷ Although it is not known exactly what destroyed Valyria or its citizens, "[t]he one thing that can be said for certain is that it was a cataclysm such as the world had never seen" (Martin et al. 26).

Ghiscari [...] were the first to be thus enslaved, but not the last” (Martin et al. 15). The Valyrians continued to conquer lands further and further away from their Freehold: “As Valyria grew, its need for ore increased, which led to ever more conquests to keep the mines stocked with slaves” (Martin et al. 15). These conquests soon led to the domination of almost the entire continent of Essos. (Rome colonized “Spain and Gaul, the district west of the Black Sea, northern Africa, the islands of the Mediterranean, and even Britain” in their attempt to control the world (Baugh and Cable 24).) As in the case of Valyria, the Romans brought their captives back home as slaves. Besides cementing the equivalences between Rome and Valyria, this focus has ramifications in the series. Slavery is the impetus that launches Daenerys’s conquest, since she focuses specifically on the cities in Slaver’s Bay. Just as colonization shaped the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it also shapes Daenerys’s narrative within the series. Slavery starts in Valyria and Daenerys the last Valyrian: Martin makes Daenerys’s path a possible metaphor for the white hero attempting to right the wrongs of their ancestors.

Daenerys gains power, but why does she feel the need to gain it? After Drogo’s death, she travels to Yunkai, then Astapor, then Meereen; each location is a stop on her imperialistic journey. After she has won the city, often through under-handed means, she either removes the governmental leaders and selects a new ruling council—as she does in Yunkai and Astapor—or proclaims herself queen and rules the city herself—as in Meereen: “No one was calling her Daenerys the Conqueror yet, but perhaps they would” (Martin, *Storm* 979). The series doesn’t shy away from calling her a conqueror, but Daenerys’s chapters are rife with attempted justifications for her actions. In all three cities that she conquers, she frees slaves. She sees herself as a liberator, or as her herald

proclaims her, a “Breaker of Shackles” (Martin, *Dance* 43). She often compares herself to the slaves in the cities, even calling herself a slave: “Do you know what it is like to be sold [...]? I do. My brother sold me to Khal Drogo for the promise of a golden crown. [...] my sun-and-stars made a queen of me, but if he had been a different man, it might have been much otherwise. Do you think I have forgotten how it felt to be afraid?” (Martin, *Storm* 324). Like other noble women during the medieval period and beyond, Daenerys was sold to her husband in the exchange of goods. Still, equating her marriage to Drogo to the system of slavery is a vast oversimplification. It nonetheless is part of her rationale for her later actions.

The contention that Daenerys is against slavery comes from a misplaced belief in her morals. As Christopher Roman, “in the process of building an army for just such a purpose [to return to Westeros], she frees the slaves from unjust treatment; not to free them would violate her sense of justice” (66). Daenerys’s morals seemingly arise from her Westerosi origin, as previously discussed. This not only gives her a privileged position over the brutality of Essos, and it also allows her to recognize the inherent evils of slavery. This seemingly superior morality is a facade for multiple reasons. As previously stated, Daenerys has been on Essos since her infancy, so Essos would have had shaped her morals more than her brief time in Westeros. Her family’s history in Essos and Westeros alike is a history of conquest. The pre-history of the series shows that since House Targaryen originated on Essos, not Westeros, any argument that Westerosi morals are inherent in her ethical code is invalid. Most importantly, through the pre-history it becomes clear that the Valyrians were the race of people who conquered and brought slavery to the rest of Essos. As the last member of House Targaryen, which was

itself the last surviving house of Valyria, Daenerys is the remainder of the race that enslaved all of Essos.

Daenerys's quest to save the slaves of Slaver's Bay aligns her with the trope of the white savior or messiah. According to Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon, the white savior is "the great leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of color from poverty and disease, or leads Indians in battle for their dignity and survival" (*Screen Saviors* 33). I am not the first to equate Daenerys's journey through Essos with this trope. As Valerie Estelle Frankel points out, by intervening in Slaver's Bay, Daenerys "has proclaimed them free, and they could not have freed themselves without her help. Now she has come to be their messiah and teach them her superior ways" (Frankel 26). Young points out that often, "[t]hese 'White savior' narratives construct the Othered empires as static, incapable of change without external intervention" (45). As Daenerys asks herself, "Why do the gods make kings and queens, if not to protect the ones who can't protect themselves?" (Martin, *Storm* 374). This idea is paternalistic. The Westerosi have long since abandoned the practice of slavery—as Ser Barristan, a knight sworn to her service, tells her "there have been no slaves in the Seven Kingdoms for thousands of years"—and so she must travel through the slave cities of Essos, teaching them her more superior, evolved ways (Martin, *Storm* 320). She, because of her Westerosi background, is the only one capable of helping and protecting these people, who cannot save themselves.

Daenerys's path is that of the colonizer. In Albert Memmi's portrait of the colonizer, he claims that after a prolonged period in the colony, away from his true country:

The colonialist appears to have forgotten the living reality of his home country. Over the years he has sculptured, in opposition to the colony, such a monument of his homeland that the colony necessarily appears coarse and vulgar to the novitiate. It is remarkable that even for colonizers born in the colony, that is, reconciled to the sun, the heat and the dry earth, the other scenery looks misty, humid and green. As though their homeland were an essential component of the collective superego of colonizers, its material features become quasi-ethical qualities. [...] The mother country thus combines only positive values, good climate, harmonious landscape, social discipline and exquisite liberty, beauty, morality and logic. (Memmi 60)

Like the colonizers represented in Memmi's book, Daenerys has an embellished idea of Westeros. As she describes it in her very first point-of-view chapter: "Somewhere beyond the sunset, across the narrow sea, lay a land of green hills and flowered plains and great rushing rivers, where towers of dark stone rose amidst magnificent blue-grey mountains, and armored knights rode to battle beneath the banners of their lords" (Martin, *Game* 29-30). Daenerys—like colonizers born into the colony—has never set foot in Westeros, but this doesn't stop her from concocting a vastly exaggerated portrait: "She tried to imagine what it would feel like, when she first caught sight of the land she was born to rule. *It will be as fair a shore as I have ever seen, I know it. How could it be otherwise?*" (Martin, *Storm*, 114). Daenerys has adopted the harmonious landscape Memmi expresses: although she knows nothing about the country, she cannot imagine that Westeros could be a place as cruel or ugly as Essos.

In addition to her idealization of Westeros, Daenerys fulfills some of the basic characteristics of colonizers. After the colonizer has conquered the colonized, “the few material traces of that past are slowly erased, and the future remnants will no longer carry the stamp of the colonized group. The few statues which decorate the city represent (with incredible scorn for the colonized who pass by them every day) the great deeds of colonization” (Memmi 104). The conquest of a people does not end at winning control of the country and its government. The colonizer must broadcast victory on every building or stone of the colonized country. This occurs in the city of Meereen. Like the rest of the cities of Slaver’s Bay, the sigil of Meereen is the harpy “vicious winged beings in classical mythology, often depicted as birds with women's faces” (“Harpies”). When Daenerys arrives in Meereen she spots a massive statue at the top of the Great Pyramid, “a monstrous thing eight hundred feet tall with a towering bronze harpy at its top” (Martin, *Storm* 774). After she has conquered the city, proclaimed herself Queen of Meereen, and taken up residence in the foremost pyramid, she tears down the harpy statue. This is first mentioned in a scene in which Daenerys returns to her rooms in the pyramid, only to find her dragon “Drogon [...] perched up atop the pyramid, in the place where the huge bronze harpy had stood before she had commanded it to be pulled down” (Martin, *Storm* 991). Although Daenerys has not decorated the city with monuments to her conquest, she has torn down the symbol of Meereen strength and left a blank space—that is, in this scene, filled by the symbol of her own power. Like the colonizers in Memmi’s book, Daenerys has replaced the monuments of the colonized with symbols of her own.

Memmi forcefully resists the assertion that colonization has any positive benefits for the colonized. He asks: “Didn't the colonized nonetheless profit by colonization? Did the colonizer not open roads, build hospitals and schools?” but points out that this is really a way to assert that “colonization was positive after all; for without it, there would have been neither roads, nor hospitals, nor schools” (112). He asks how anyone can be sure that this is true: “Why must we suppose that the colonized would have remained frozen in the state in which the colonizer found him? We could just as well put forward the opposite view. If the colonization had not taken place, there would have been more schools and more hospitals” (113). The very idea that colonization “helps” the colonized is unfounded: “To subdue and exploit, the colonizer pushed the colonized out of the historical and social, cultural and technical current. What is real and verifiable is that the colonized's culture, society, and technology are seriously damaged” (114). The colonized have suffered “such internal and external catastrophes” that the very assertion is ridiculous (118).

Memmi fights the very assertion that colonization can be positive for the colonized, and *A Song of Ice and Fire* shows that Daenerys's paternalism does not help the people of Astapor, Yunkai, or Meereen. Martin appears to be making a commentary on the very idea that imperialism can help the colonized by—as Memmi discusses—illustrating the internal and external catastrophes that occur in the cities that Daenerys colonizes: “Aegon the Conqueror brought fire and blood to Westeros, but afterward he gave them peace, prosperity, and justice. But all I have brought to Slaver's Bay is death and ruin. I have been more *khal* than queen, smashing and plundering, then moving on” (Martin, *Storm* 994). After she takes the city of Meereen, she describes how “the humbler

parts of the city had been given over to an orgy of looting and killing as the city's slaves rose up and the starving hordes who had followed her from Yunkai and Astapor poured through the broken gates" (Martin, *Dance* 47). Even worse, after she outlaws slavery, the economy of Meereen breaks down. This is most telling when compared to Memmi's assertion that "colonization weakens the colonized and that all those weaknesses contribute to one another. Nonindustrialization and the absence of technical development in the country lead to a slow economic collapse of the colonized" (115). This is exactly what happens Meereen. Daenerys has weakened both the country and its people by removing their sole industrial product—slaves. Ignoring the cruelty inherent in slavery, it would be a mistake to overlook that Daenerys tanks Meereen's trade by not scrutinizing their economic position and blindly forcing Western morals onto this entirely different culture.

This is not to say that Daenerys does not feel sympathy or try to help the slaves of Essos. In fact, she illustrates Memmi's colonizer who refuses. According to Memmi, this colonizer arrives in the colony only to discover that "he can no longer agree to become what his fellow citizens have become" due to "the economic, political and moral scandal of colonization," and must choose between the only two options left to him: "either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them" (21). After learning the fate of Astapor, and the similar fate of Yunkai, Daenerys chooses to stay in Meereen to prevent the enslavement of its people. Her councilors beg her to leave the city and take Westeros, saying she has already brought freedom to Meereen: "Freedom to starve?" asked Dany sharply. "Freedom to die?" (Martin, *Storm* 995). The colonizer who refuses faces a predicament: "Since he has discovered the colonized and

their existential character, since the colonized have suddenly become living and suffering humanity, the colonizer refuses to participate in their suppression and decides to come to their assistance” (Memmi 24). Similarly, Daenerys realizes that her actions have only harmed those in Astapor. She finds herself “unsurprised” at the horrors in Astapor and thinks “*All my victories turn to dross in my hands [...]. Whatever I do, all I make is death and horror*” (Martin, *Storm*, 984, 983). She decides that she will no longer leave these power vacuums for the strong to exploit the weak. She vows that she “will not let this city go the way of Astapor” and promises to instead “Stay [...]. Rule. And be a queen” (Martin, *Storm* 995).⁸

Even the colonizer who refuses never joins in full solidarity with the people: “it is certainly admitted today that one can be, while awaiting the revolution, both a revolutionary and an exploiter” (Memmi 23). The colonizer who refuses “has understood that he has only changed his province; he has another civilization before him, customs differing from his own, men whose reactions often surprise him, with whom he does not

⁸ Although *A Song of Ice and Fire* continues in the Orientalist tradition, which has been defined and shaped around European colonialism, and the series is undeniably Eurocentric, Daenerys’s position within Meereen appears to be influenced by American imperialism. Rainer Emig argues that the opposition between Westeros and Essos is much more closely connected to American ideals: “the name ‘Westeros’ hints at the ‘West,’ here American culture and political identity, which is negotiated by means that often border on the xenophobic and indeed racist” and is presented throughout the series in contrast to “the East, nomadic Dothraki [who] for a long time fight among themselves until they are united [...] and become a threat to Westeros. The Middle East, Iraq, and Afghanistan are certainly ghostly foils for such constructions” (88). Particularly pertinent are the military decisions of the United States in Iraq (and the Middle East more generally). In Meereen, Daenerys chooses to stay and try to rule and create a “more equal” country rather than abandon the city and create a power vacuum, like she did in Astapor and Yunkai. This could be seen as heavily influenced by American military decisions in the Middle East: first to stay and control the area and implement “democratic” governments, before pulling out troops, which caused destabilization in the area and allowed for the rise of radical groups, such as ISIL/ISIS.

feel deep affinity” (Memmi 24). Daenerys does not have any solidarity with the people of Meereen despite her vow to help them. She seeks the approval of the Meereenese to rule them and impose her Westerosi morals but never considers herself one of them: “a sly and stubborn people who resisted her at every turn” (Martin, *Dance* 41). She declares that “*To rule Meereen I must win the Meereenese, however much I may despise them*” (Martin, *Dance* 41). She also stays in Meereen to try her hand at ruling for her inevitable invasion of Westeros. As she tells her councilors before her decision to stay in Meereen, “how can I rule seven kingdoms if I cannot rule a single city? [...] My children need time to heal and learn. My dragons need time to grow and test their wings. And I need the same” (Martin, *Storm* 995). She is practicing being a queen so that she will be a better ruler when she reaches the important country—Westeros. She needs to learn, and where better than in a location where she feels nothing for its citizens?

It becomes evident that Martin does not make Daenerys a true white savior to them. The white savior rewrites the historical fact of colonization into a paternalistic fantasy. Yet, despite the obvious paternalism that she exhibits towards slaves, she always has ulterior motives. As Vera and Gordon discuss, the white savior myth justifies “imperialism in the name of higher goals: religious, democratic, or humanitarian. White Americans are not there to get wealthy from the natural resources or to exploit the population but to liberate them from slavery” (116). Martin expertly shows that while Daenerys might view her conquest of Essos as a means of helping the enslaved, her primary concern is her eventual return to Westeros to win back the throne that she believes belongs to her; the resources of these eastern cities help her achieve her goal. He

breaks through the myth of the white savior to show that the true purpose of imperialism is, and always has been, economic.

The first slaves that Daenerys frees are those that belong to the khalasar after Drogo's death. Even before his death, the strongest men abandon the khalasar and steal most of its possessions. Daenerys counts only a tiny fraction of the original "forty thousand" in the khalasar, perhaps "a hundred people, no more" (Martin, *Game* 757-8). As Rhakaro, one of Daenerys's khas adds, "They took many slaves as well, the khal's and yours, yet they left some few" (Martin, *Game* 758). These are freed by Daenerys before she steps onto Drogo's funeral pyre: "I see the faces of slaves. I free you. Take off your collars. Go if you wish, no one shall harm you. If you stay, it will be as brothers and sisters, husbands and wives" (Martin, *Game* 800). One interpretation is that these slaves belong to Daenerys due to the passing of Khal Drogo and she chooses to do what she has wanted to do all along and frees them. Yet, in the text prior she never says she wants to free them. She opposes the rape of women taken by the khalasar but never specifically speaks out against slavery. She treats her slaves well, but that is not nearly the same thing as opposing their enslavement. It is logical to assume that Daenerys frees these slaves because she needs followers: what is a queen without subjects? She is building her throng of devotees. The khalasar's slaves are, moreover, not the only example of Daenerys's sudden, out-of-character opposition to slavery.

The Unsullied, besides forming the base of Daenerys's army, are the first outside group of slaves that Daenerys frees. As with the khalasar's slaves, however, she does not initially oppose their enslavement. As previously discussed, many view the Unsullied as the greatest soldiers in Essos. While she is sailing to the city of Pentos to reunite with her

past benefactor, Illyrio Mopatis, Ser Jorah tries to convince her to instead divert her ship to Astapor and buy an army of Unsullied. After telling her a thrilling story confirming the strength of the Unsullied, Daenerys thinks: “*There is wisdom in this, yes,*” before asking Jorah “How am I to buy a thousand slave soldiers? All I have of value is the crown the Tourmaline Brotherhood gave me” (Martin, *Storm* 119). Here, Daenerys is not worried about the moral ramifications of purchasing slaves, but sees the “wisdom” in purchasing high-valued slave soldiers; her only objection is how to pay for them. In fact, she is excited at the prospect: “‘Yes,’ she decided. ‘I’ll do it!’ Dany threw back the coverlets and hopped from the bunk. ‘I’ll see the captain at once, command him to set course for Astapor’” (Martin, *Storm* 120). Daenerys’s excitement and haste to reach Astapor show that she has no moral qualms about purchasing or owning people, but she has another sudden change in morality when she reaches Astapor.

After learning about their intense training, she has her first doubts about purchasing the slave soldiers. She is particularly affected by the knowledge that each Unsullied, in order to pass his final test, must murder an infant and then pay the child’s owner (Martin, *Storm* 318). That night, after returning to her ship, she expresses frustration at the idea of conquering Westeros with slave soldiers. She and Ser Jorah discuss her older brother, Rhaegar—how he used to knight the men who fought beside him. She asks him: “when [Rhaegar] touched a man on the shoulder with his sword, what did he say? ‘Go forth and kill the weak’? Or ‘Go forth and defend them’?” (Martin, *Storm* 330). Here it is not necessarily the slavery that she opposes, but the suffering of the weak. She doesn’t mind owning the Unsullied, but objects to their murder of children. That night she tells her captain that there are “eight thousand [...] eunuchs for sale, and I

must find some way to buy them” (Martin, *Storm* 327). She does not have enough gold or goods to purchase all of the Unsullied that she believes that she’ll need to conquer Westeros. Of the eight thousand available, she has enough to purchase “two of the thousands” in exchange for her three ships and the goods they contain (Martin, *Storm* 369-70). She eventually agrees to trade the eight thousand Unsullied, along with all of the boys still in training, for her ships, the goods within, and one of her dragons. The masters of the Unsullied agree, but when the time comes to make the trade Daenerys reneges. Once she is in possession of the whip that marks control of the Unsullied, she commands her dragon to burn one of the masters and tells the Unsullied: “‘Slay the Good Masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who wears a *tokar* or holds a whip, but harm no child under twelve, and strike the chains off every slave you see.’ She raised the harpy’s fingers in the air... and then she flung the scourge aside. ‘Freedom!’” (Martin, *Storm* 381). While it could be interpreted that Daenerys purchased the Unsullied in order to free them and all of the other slaves, it is merely an afterthought. She was planning on buying the Unsullied all along, but didn’t have enough money and must slay the masters in order to obtain them. She essentially steals the Unsullied by refusing to uphold her end of the bargain. She does choose to free the rest of the slaves in Astapor but this was never her primary concern, increasing the might of her army in order to become queen of Westeros.

The circumstances of her occupation of the city of Meereen are similar to those of Astapor. After conquering both Astapor and Yunkai, Daenerys finds herself with hundreds—if not thousands—of people following her army. Most of these are former freed slaves who chose to follow her in her trek East. As she heads to Meereen, she finds her path marked with horrifying sights. Due to her freeing of slaves in both previous

cities, at the 163 mileposts leading to the city, the masters of Meereen have nailed a slave child (Martin, *Storm* 775-6). Daenerys is shocked and appalled, and demands to look at all of the children, saying: “I will see every one, and count them, and look upon their faces. And I will remember” (Martin, *Storm* 775-6). It is surprising, then, that when she arrives outside the city and finds the gates shut to her army, she tells her council that she needs to take the city for a very different reason:

“I must have this city,” she told them, sitting cross-legged on a pile of cushions, her dragons all about her. [...] “Her granaries are full to bursting. There are figs and dates and olives growing on the terraces of her pyramids, and casks of salt fish and smoked meat buried in her cellars.”

“And fat chests of gold, silver, and gemstones as well,” Daario reminded them. “Let us not forget the gemstones.” (Martin, *Storm* 780)

Daenerys could have chosen this moment to affirm that she will take Meereen to avenge the 163 slave children killed by the masters or that she is fighting so that slavery will be made illegal in Meereen to prevent further suffering, but she does not. She chooses instead to reinforce the true reason for her necessary invasion: food and gold. Daenerys does mention later in the same meeting that the food is necessary to feed her group of followers, but this occurs much later in the discussion and the need for food is a much more pressing concern for her, as it is for the crowd that follows her. The suffering of the slaves in Meereen is seemingly secondary to more pressing reasons to attack and occupy the cities. The real purpose is the quality of life for Daenerys—and don’t forget the gemstones.

If the purpose of the white savior is to uplift the people, Daenerys cannot be truly considered in line with this trope. As Martin illustrates, she creates a power vacuum in the cities she abandons—causing suffering. After freeing the slaves in Astapor and killing all the masters, Daenerys creates a new government ruled by “a council of former slaves led by a healer, a scholar, and a priest. Wise men all” (Martin, *Storm* 573). Shortly after her leaving, however, the city devolves into chaos. After only a brief period in Meereen, the city she takes after Yunkai, while holding court she receives an envoy from the new king of Astapor, King Cleon. The envoy claims that the council she left in charge “were scheming to restore the Good Masters to power and the people to chains. Great Cleon exposed their plots and hacked their heads off with a cleaver, and the grateful folk of Astapor have crowned him for his valor” (Martin, *Storm* 982). The next person she receives is a Qartheen ship captain who informs her, through tears, that Astapor “bleeds. Dead men rot unburied in the streets, each pyramid is an armed camp, and the markets have neither food nor slaves for sale. And the poor children! King [Cleon]’s thugs have seized every highborn boy in Astapor to make new Unsullied for the trade, though it will be years before they are trained.” (Martin, *Storm* 984). Astapor has devolved because Daenerys, in her attempt to further her quest and incidental liberation of the slaves, has left a power vacuum soon filled by a dictator who quickly returns the city to its previous slaving ways. Now, it is the former slaves who rule and the former Masters who are in chains. She has not helped the city; she has merely shifted the power balance.

The most convincing evidence that Daenerys’s self-styled crusade against slavery is actually Martin’s attempted critique of imperialism is what occurs during her occupation of Meereen. As previously discussed, many of the newly freedmen find

themselves without homes, work, or food. A slaver comes to court to get permission to bring some of Meereen's slaves to other markets. Daenerys informs him that Meereen has "no slaves for sale" (Martin, *Storm* 984). Daario informs her that some of the former slaves have come to court to beg permission from her to sell themselves back into slavery, so they will have food for themselves and their families. When Daenerys discovers that people are choosing to be slaves once more, she is shocked, but relents, saying: "Any man who wishes to sell *himself* into slavery may do so. Or woman [...]. But they may not sell their children, nor a man his wife" (Martin, *Storm* 984). Despite that Daenerys is reportedly against slavery of any kind, she consents to the (limited) return of slavery extremely quickly. Worse, when she learns that she can use this slavery to make a profit, she accepts. Her herald and interpreter, Missandei, informs her that:

"In Astapor the city took a tenth part of the price, each time a slave changed hands," Missandei told her.

"We'll do the same," Dany decided. *Wars were won with gold as much as swords.* (Martin, *Storm* 984-5).

Daenerys not only acquiesces to allow some of her people once again to become slaves, she agrees to accept money from the institution of slavery in Meereen itself. Even worse, she agrees to this massive shift in her social and political position within the span of one—brief—conversation. How quickly she goes from "Meereen has no slaves for sale" to "Well, we should make some money if it is going to happen anyway." Martin shows that the true purpose behind Daenerys's conquests is always money.

Besides the fact that Daenerys is driven by personal gain and not humanitarianism, there is also her uncertain position as protagonist. This is caused by the

fact that, through her conquest, she has usurped the liberation of Meereen and the other cities in her path—making it her victory instead of theirs. In his writing Frantz Fanon describes the violence inherent in liberation: “At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence” (51). Violence is not only needed physically in a revolution; it is a psychological necessity. He claims this is because freedom granted by the colonizer is not real freedom. What the colonizer has given them, they can take away at any moment. The only true freedom, he argues, is achieved through independent agency of the people, which serves to unite and equalize them:

Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilized by rapid decolonization, the people have time to realize that liberation was the achievement of each and every one and no special merit should go to the leader. Violence hoists the people up to the level of the leader. [...] When they have used violence to achieve national liberation, the masses allow nobody to come forward as “liberator.” (Fanon 51)

Daenerys has robbed the citizens of Slaver’s Bay the chance to gain their own liberation. Instead of serving and obeying masters, they now serve and obey a foreign queen. They have traded one form of oppression for another. This becomes abundantly clear in the television adaptation, *Game of Thrones*, when viewers are shown the city of Meereen months after the slaves revolt and help take Meereen for Daenerys. During the rebellion, slaves write “Kill the masters” on the walls, however by the first episode of season six of

Game of Thrones, the message has changed to “Kill the masters. Mhysa [Daenerys] is a master” (“The Red Woman”).

That Daenerys destroys the functioning of the city of Meereen, like the rest of her imperialist behavior, is often overlooked. Many critics have examined, mostly in passing, Daenerys’s ethical impasse in Essos. As Katherine Tullmann describes: “Dany adopts many of the Dothrakis’ social practices, but her tolerance for their *moral* actions goes only so far,” elaborating that “this clash of moral codes causes tension between Dany and her people” (203). Although, as previously discussed, Daenerys denounces the act of rape, she doesn’t speak out against any other actions—such as slavery—that the Dothraki perform that she later appears firmly against. Christopher Roman argues that “Daenerys is committed to the other – the victims, the slaves, the women, the dragons, the dead – the people suffer when there is not enough to eat, and refugees leave the cities she has liberated to come to Meereen” and only concedes that these actions fail because she doesn’t have the “ability to *economically* solve problems” (66). He claims that “[i]n freeing the cities of Astapor and Yunkai and Meereen, Daenerys is forging a space for the victim to speak” (Roman 67). But Daenerys does not create such a space. The slaves, while freed, are not granted places in government. That right remains for the Masters, whose Houses still command; Daenerys, a princess from a Westerosi dynasty that lasted almost 300 years; and Daenerys’s councilors, foremost among them Westerosi noblemen. Even those who contend that she has not helped the people of Slaver’s Bay do so while giving her the benefit of the doubt. Frankel claims that she “is shown to be naïve” in her attempt “to end the barbarity of the fighting pits, [...] as the former gladiators and former slaves beg to return to their old way of life and the terrorist attacks against Daenerys’s

regime escalate” (27). She shuts down a major cultural symbol of Meereen and infuriates the citizens. Just as Daenerys considers Meereen a practice run for her eventual rule of Westeros, even the critics seemingly give her a pass for her dangerous imperialist actions because she is young and ‘means well.’ Daenerys is a very popular character among fans. As Howe states that she “is one of the key point-of-view characters in the series, and one of only a few who could be considered a primary protagonist” (246). She is also one of “the most popular figures depicted in Fan Art” (Howe 243). This raises the question: Does Martin’s critique of imperialism work if critics and fans still consider her a protagonist in the series instead of a colonizer?

Conclusion

Ultimately, the reader cannot reduce Martin's use of Orientalism down to his negative representation of just one character. Instead, he fills the text with animalized, hyper-sexualized, and hyper-violent depictions of the Dothraki that shape the reader's interaction with all of the other foreign (non-Westerosi) cultures. Similarly, the use of mimicry by the shavepates and Daenerys highlights the postcolonial nature of the later books. Each is reduced to a partial presence. The Sons of the Harpy kill the shavepates indiscriminately. In addition, Daenerys, consciously or subconsciously, simply mimics the culture that she believes is in her best interest at any given moment. She appears to accept the Dothraki way of life, until she loses her superior position as khaleesi. She adopts Qartheen dress in order to gain the upper hand in trade discussions, only to cast it off when she has nothing left to gain from it. Perhaps most dramatically, she mimics the act of sati. She escapes death because she is not doubly effaced by imperialist and patriarchal discourse, and instead uses this act to free herself from the patriarchal discourse that previously held her back. But her freedom comes at the cost of Mirri Maz Durr, who burns in the pyre due to her double effacement and her silencing within the text. Daenerys, in her sati, has started her path of colonization.

Throughout her journey in Essos, Daenerys is forced to adopt attributes traditionally coded as masculine. This aids her in her conquest of Slaver's Bay. As she conquers, she appears to become another iteration of the white savior. She goes from city

to city liberating the enslaved from the shackles of their oppressors until they unite behind her. This utopic vision does not last for long. Instead, the cities that she liberates soon fall into disorder and slavery once more. Daenerys instead better fits the portrait of the colonizer, as illustrated by Albert Memmi. This does not mean that her actions come from a place of cruel intention. Instead, she fits easily into the mold of the colonizer who refuses, a colonizer who tries to resist the harmful tenants of imperialism, but still ends up conforming. This, combined with Daenerys's true purpose for her conquests, shows the monetary motive behind the myth of imperialism. Imperialism is never about helping the colonized, it is always about helping the colonizer. Daenerys fills the qualifications for the white savior almost perfectly, but Martin shows that this trope, like the imperialism it attempts to justify, causes far more harm than good for the people who are saved.

What is the price of power? *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a series that delves into the deepest reaches of human nature, and doesn't shy away from the darkest parts of humanity. It is fitting then that this series has postcolonial overtones that question the true nature of imperialism. Martin builds his world using familiar tropes, including the hyper-violent, hyper-sexualized, and animalized other—most easily spotted in the Dothraki. These tropes trickle into all of the races and cultures of Essos, often conflated by both the characters and Martin himself. Daenerys, at first in an extremely subordinate and weakened position, gains power within the series primarily through adopting characteristics traditionally regarded as masculine and clothing and behaviors belonging to other culture in a process similar to Bhabha's mimicry. This altered form of mimicry also allows Daenerys to free herself through her weakened position through a

metaphorical act of sati in which she hatches dragons age, essentially beginning her path of colonization.

In her conquest of Slaver's Bay, Daenerys appears to conform to the trope of the white savior. The wise noblewoman from the West, she has come to liberate the slaves from their unjust treatment at the hands of their masters. Unfortunately, she never brings any permanent good. The cities that she liberates soon fall into chaos when she leaves to continue her conquest elsewhere. Even when she stays in Meereen, the city suffers, for Daenerys has stalled their entire economy in her haste to impose Western morals. Further, Daenerys's righteous justification for her conquest—the freedom of the slaves—falls apart under a close analysis. The humanitarian aspect is always secondary to monetary purposes, just as it is in the real world.

If, as I argue, Martin is purposefully dissecting the myth of the white savior, future research should delve into the true others in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Within the series, Martin uses the term "Others" for the White Walkers. Although much of the series is devoted to the political infighting of the lords of Westeros, the series is building towards an eventual showdown between men and the Others. The Others, according to legend, "came from the frozen Land of Always Winter, bringing the cold and darkness with them as they sought to extinguish all light and warmth" (Martin et al. 11). Although they have only appeared a few times so far in the series, they are described as magical beings that "rode monstrous ice spiders and the horses of the dead, resurrected to serve them, just as they resurrected dead men to fight on their behalf" (Martin et al. 11). Why does Martin choose to name the biggest, and most unknown, villains in his series simply Others? It could be argued that he is making a statement here as well about the dangers of

othering races or cultures unknown to us. There is evidence to suggest that this is the case, in particular a quotation from one of his *Wild Card* short stories, published in 1988: “Why must we draw these lines, these fine distinctions, these labels and barriers that set us apart? [C]apitalist and communist, Catholic and Protestant, Arab and Jew, Indian and *Ladino*, and on and on everywhere, and of course true humanity is to be found only on *our* side of the line and we feel free to oppress and rape and kill the ‘other,’ whoever he might be” (Martin, “Journal” 130). This shows that Martin understands the implications of calling a race within *A Song of Ice and Fire* the “Others”—that they would instantly be considered evil and strange to the protagonists and the readers. Why, then, did he choose to do so? Maybe the “Others” will be revealed to not be the ultimate villains within the series, just reviled and hated for being different. It would also be interesting to look at this race considering that they revive dead men to serve them in relation to the Caribbean myth of the zombie, which has gained popularity due to its appropriation in Western—particularly American—culture. Ultimately, this avenue of analysis may have to wait until the series is completed to see exactly how the Others are represented when they begin to play a major part in the story.

Another possible avenue for expansion could be to compare the postcolonial aspects present in *A Song of Ice and Fire* to Martin’s other works. *A Song of Ice and Fire*, very clearly a work of Gritty Fantasy, is unique in Martin’s work, which traditionally leans more towards science fiction. Comparing this series to his other works could be useful because, as Helen Young discusses, “[t]he narrative arcs of Science Fiction lend themselves to colonialist and postcolonialist themes. [...] Scholarly engagements with topics such as empire, colonialism, indigeneity, and diaspora in Science Fiction writing,

moreover, are relatively common” (115). By examining a broader range of his work, I might be able to concentrate on postcolonial themes that span more than this one work, painting a better picture of Martin’s own concerns. I might be able to determine if Martin’s experience in science fiction literature influenced his fantasy writing, leading to the heavy, imperialist overtones present in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Martin does seem to dissect and destabilize many imperialist notions and the white savior myth. Yet, that Daenerys is still popular and viewed as a hero, combined with the high levels of Orientalism present in the series and the whiteness of all of the point-of-view characters shows that the series has it both ways. The series reproduces the Western, Orientalist discourse that helped build the foundation within fantasy literature. Within the series, the victim is never given the chance to speak. It is always Daenerys, or another Western character, who serves as the point-of-view. Despite the fact that many critics laud George R.R. Martin as an author that provides voices for characters often ignored by mainstream media, questioning “who should be front and center in the story,” this never includes a character of color (Hartinger 157). Can the subaltern speak? It is clear in *A Song of Ice and Fire* that they cannot.

Bibliography

- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa." *Research in African Literatures* 9.1 (1978): 1-15. JSTOR. Web. 28 Dec. 2015.
- Alam, S.M. Shamsul. *Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Anglberger, Albert J.J., and Alexander Hieke. "Lord Eddard Stark, Queen Cersei Lannister: Moral Judgments from Different Perspectives." *Jacoby* 87-98.
- Battis, Jes, and Susan Johnston, eds. *Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2015. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 14 May 2015.
- Baugh, Albert C., and Thomas Cable. *A History of the English Language*. 6th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2013. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent." *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985. Print. 185-222.
- Daly, Mary. *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon, 1990. Print.
- Emig, Rainer. "Fantasy as Politics: George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*." *Politics in Fantasy Media: Essays on Ideology and Gender in Fiction, Film,*

Television and Games. Ed. Gerold Sedlmayr and Nicole Waller. Jefferson: McFarland, 2014. 85-96. *ProQuest ebrary*. Web. 14 May 2015.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1963. New York: Grove, 2004. Print.

Finke, Laurie A., and Martin B. Shichtman. "Inner-City Chivalry in Gil Junger's *Black Knight: A South Central Yankee in King Leo's Court*." *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*. Ed. Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 107-22. Print.

Flood, Alison. "George RR Martin Revolutionized How People Think about Fantasy." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 10 Apr. 2015. Web. 21 Jan. 2016.

Frankel, Valerie Estelle. *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2014. *ProQuest ebrary*. Web. 14 May 2015.

Freud, Sigmund. *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. 1920. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1966. Print.

Gresham, Karin. "Cursed Womb, Bulging Thighs and Bald Scalp: George R.R. Martin's Grotesque Queen." *Battis and Johnston* 151-69.

Hardy, Mat. "Game of Tropes: The Orientalist Tradition in the Works of G.R.R. Martin." *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 8.1 (2015): 409-20. *ProQuest*. Web. 16 Dec. 2015.

"Harpies." *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Ed. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 1 Apr. 2016.

- Hartinger, Brent. "A Different Kind of Other: The Role of Freaks and Outcasts in *A Song of Ice and Fire*." *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*. Ed. James Lowder. Dallas: BenBella, 2012. 153-67. Print.
- Howe, Andrew. "The Hand of the Artist: Fan Art in the Martinverse." Battis and Johnston 243-61.
- Hughey, Matthew W. *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2014. Print.
- Jacoby, Henry, ed. *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper Than Swords*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2012. Print.
- Martin, George R. R. *A Clash of Kings*. New York: Bantam, 1998. Print.
- . *A Dance with Dragons*. New York: Bantam, 2011. Print.
- . *A Feast for Crows*. New York: Bantam, 2005. Print.
- . *A Game of Thrones*. New York: Bantam, 1996. Print.
- . "Re: Dear George R R Martin." Blog comment. *LiveJournal*. LiveJournal, 5 Feb. 2012. Web. 21 Jan. 2016.
- . "From The Journal of Xavier Desmond." *Wild Cards IV: Aces Abroad*. 1988. Ed. George R.R. Martin. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2014. Print.
- . *A Storm of Swords*. New York: Bantam, 2000. Print.
- Martin, George R.R., Elio M. García Jr., and Linda Antonsson. *The World of Ice and Fire: The Untold History of Westeros and The Game of Thrones*. New York: Bantam, 2014. Print.
- Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon, 1991. Print.

- Nel, David C. "Sex and the Citadel: Adapting Same Sex Desire from Martin's Westeros to HBO's Bedrooms." *Battis and Johnston* 205-24.
- O'Bryan, John. "Meet the 'Game of Thrones' Weapons." *Huffington Post*. Huffington Post, 10 June 2013. Web. 3 Jan. 2016.
- "The Red Woman." *Game of Thrones*. Writ. David Benioff and D. B. Weiss. Dir. Jeremy Podeswa. Home Box Office. 24 Apr. 2016. Television.
- Roman, Christopher. "The Ethical Movement of Daenerys Targaryen." *Studies in Medievalism XXIII: Ethics and Medievalism*. Ed. Karl Fugelso. Cambridge: Brewer, 2014. 61-68. *ProQuest ebrary*. Web. 14 May 2015.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. Print.
- "scimitar, n." *OED Online*. Oxford UP, Dec. 2015. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. Print.
- Tullmann, Katherine. "Dany's Encounter with the Wild: Cultural Relativism in *A Game of Thrones*." *Jacoby* 194-204.
- Vera, Hernán and Andrew M. Gordon. "The Beautiful American: Sincere Fictions of the White Messiah in Hollywood Movies." *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*. Eds. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. New York: Routledge, 2003. 113-25. Print.
- Vera, Hernán, and Andrew Gordon. *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Print.
- Vijayakumar, Lakshmi. "Altruistic Suicide in India." *Archives of Suicide Research* 8.1 (2004): 73-80. Web. 20 Sep. 2015.

Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*. San Francisco: Harper, 1988. Print.

Walker, Jessica. “‘Just Songs in the End’: Historical Discourses in Shakespeare and Martin.” *Battis and Johnston* 71-91.

Young, Helen. *Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature: Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*. Florence: Routledge, 2015. *ProQuest ebrary*. Web. 14 September 2015.