

THESIS

RACIALIZATION, FEMININITY, MOTHERHOOD AND THE IRON THRONE
GAME OF THRONES AS A HIGH FANTASY REJECTION OF WOMEN OF COLOR

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ABSTRACT

RACIALIZATION, FEMININITY, MOTHERHOOD AND THE IRON THRONE GAME OF THRONES A HIGH FANTASY REJECTION OF WOMEN OF COLOR

This analysis dissects the historic preconceptions by which American television has erased and evaded race and racialized gender, sexuality and class distinctions within high fantasy fiction by dissociation, systemic neglect and negating artistic responsibility, much like American social reality. This investigation of high fantasy creative fiction alongside its historically inherited framework of hierarchal violent oppressions sets a tone through racialized caste, fetishized gender and sexuality. With the cult classic television series, *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) as example, portrayals of white and nonwhite racial patterns as they define womanhood and motherhood are dichotomized through a new visual culture critical lens called the Colonizers Template. This methodological evaluation is addressed through a three-pronged specified study of influential areas: the creators of *Game of Thrones* as high fantasy creative contributors, the context of *Game of Thrones* as a racially preoccupied high fantasy subgenre narrative, and the true implications of *Game of Thrones* social impact and mirroring even as a high fantasy entertainment venture. Through this deconstruction it is argued that: a) mimicry concerning racialized historical patterns present as artistic integrity through the agendas of the artists themselves b) *Game of Thrones* is a valid exhibition of inclusivity and progressiveness c) and a contemporary sociopolitical outline of the cycle of historical oppressions has been established through these creators of fiction, idyllically reinforced by their creations and affirmed by the dominant white societal structure which idolizes and imitates these specific forms of fiction; creating a justified thematic/political symbiosis in which historical politics feed fiction and vice versa.

Through a constructed six points of contention, the Colonizers Template unsympathetically scrutinizes white masculinist supremacist creative structure through cinematic manipulations, signifying direct patterns of behavior in both the real world and the fictive creations made to reflect it. This analysis is conducted on the premise that Daenerys Targaryen is the identified strategic implementer of this template, through which both Eurocentric and patriarchal politics are evident as part of a larger institutional design in favor of whiteness. As a foundation of the racial spectrum to which the Colonizers Template evaluates gender performativity, sexuality politics, and status; Daenerys is positioned as the anchoring embodiment of white femininity and is investigated in two opposingly distinct stages: her rise to power and her maintenance of that power, with her marriage, rape, pregnancy, and her absorption of masculinist stations held by her brothers, husband, and son as the keys that grant her dualistic accessibility to both white masculinist entitlements and nonwhite cultural claims.

With Daenerys as the white idyllic heroine of authoritative entitlement, her oppositional characterization becomes by default, the “othered” women of color within the *Game of Thrones* narrative who are vigilantly deconstructed through ideologies of blackness and Black femininity; reflecting an explicit designation of racialized thematic spaces as one of hierarchal stratagems. Through the deflective white feminine representation exhibited by centric protagonist Daenerys, the creative contradiction of thematic construction in the women of color who are advantageously presented as navigating varying stages of sociopolitical rejection remain in direct conflict with Daenerys positionality in terms of motherhood, vengeance, and justice. As high fantasy extensions of cultural differences and racialized designations, the fictive boundaries within *Game of Thrones* indicate these differences between three distinct groups: the Rhoynar, the Andals, and the First Men, through which a critical cross-examination of the disparate presentation of women of color is made accessible through geographical location, familial paradigm, death and fetishization demonstrated by the distinct narratives of Elia Martell of Dorne, Talisa Maegyr of Volantis, Ellaria Sand of Dorne and Missandei of Naath as

evidence of racial variances and patterned weaponization of creative fiction as deeply interloping sociopolitical reality.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why can women not simply be strong, violent and vengeful in their own right?
- Why must masculinity be involved and why can women of color not escape it?
- What are the cinematic connections that show connectivity and desensitization between cinema and reality?

METHODOLOGICAL TOOL: COLONIZERS TEMPLATE

Evaluated through an examination of a quantified connectivity between high fantasy and historic American realities, this investigation acts as a conduit of systemic fantasy influence upon realism and reality as strengthened by fictive representation. The scope of discussion is limited to the undocumented American high fantasy subgenre of racialized fetishistic enslavement as it adversely effects nonwhite contemporary representations. The exhibition of the *erotica and exotica* alongside *gender performativity* and *the magical negro* trope brings forth a specified body politic which is navigated as an extension of tangible social constructions implemented against Black bodies through a sexual exotic as well as a cultural expectation of white alignment through the functionality of technological Eurocentrism as a racial reinforcement model through bias image creations. From these edifices, the racial and social designations suggest deeper positionalities within the hierarchal allowances for violence and trauma cast onto the Black body by white society. This systemic racial navigation grants evidence to the utility of *possessive investments in whiteness* as an active mechanism of both individual and group white privilege structuring as it reinforces static hierarchal dynamics in their favor, with *Just War Theory* as a direct expression of these privileges on an institutional level through mass action.

As Thomas Schatz describes in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, “to identify a popular cinematic story formula, then, is to recognize its status as a coherent, value-laden narrative system”, further, “its significance is immediately evident to those who produce and consume it” (Schatz, 2007, p.16). Schatz’s proposes that repetitious exposure to individual genre film activates a recognition of specific character types, locales and events in a way that we as audience/viewers understand and interpret as systems of significance. Additionally, these cumulative arrogances and activities associated with this structuring of mental images connects with narrative cinema as *gestalt* or

“mind-set”, as Schatz theorizes, completing a certain type of behavioral and attitudinal systems. By Schatz’s interpretation, because high fantasy is a film genre, it is in fact a narrative system with the central operational components of “plot, character, setting, thematics, style and so on” which designates a film genre as both *static* and *dynamic* (Schatz, 2007, p.16). For the operation of this system of analysis, high fantasy cinema’s subgenre of racialized fetishistic enslavement acts as a “familiar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic components that serves to continually reexamine some basic cultural conflict” (Schatz, 2007, p.16). Moreover, Schatz’s description of the genre experience, relative to the human condition, is characterized according to a construction of fundamental ideals which create a systematic process; through repetition, saying, “we develop expectations which, as they are continually reinforced, tend to harden into ‘rules’” (Schatz, 2007, p.18).

These thematic “rules” begin to signify an explicit and strategic thematic guideline of sabotage in American representation which openly suggests a racially hierarchal archetype with preordained historical significance that perpetuates a contemporary oppressive narrative. Among these racial biases, there develops a momentous connectivity within the intersections of other status’s effected by racial discernment and hierarchy including but not limited to: racialized enslavement, subhuman othering of people of color by whiteness, white supremacy as justifiable terrorism, flamboyant fetishization, multilayered abuses toward women of color, erasure of children of color, and the overt utility of people of color as a means of white benefit. Within the gaps of critical representational deconstruction, race, gender, sexuality and class present as persistently significant.

Though the reality of absenteeism and abusive representation has begun being documented, progress within media engagement has been slow. Visual culture theorists such as Laura Mulvey, have investigated the cinematic apparatus, adding a gendered element to the investigation of cinema, though her methodology lacks the racial strength to be a complete assessment model. Similarly, the Bechdel test, as reviewed by Dr. Helen Young in the Public Medievalist, *Game of Thrones Racism Problem*, Alison

Bechdel both establishes and addresses the physical appearance of women in cinema, analyzing their freedoms from male dependence, and their narrative significance; yet this method does not account for racial representations as they intersect expected gender performances.

According to *The Guardian*, another test, called the DuVernay Test, first posited by New York Times film critic Manohla Dargis following the 2016 Sundance Film, has gained legitimate endorsement from the Black filmmaker whom it is named after, Ava DuVernay. Though it is still in its infancy, the idea for this test was birthed within the racial void created by the Bechdel Test. As developed, the Duvernay Test is manifested as an extension of the Bechdel Test and strives to pinpoint racialized inadequacies onscreen that skew the reflection and exploration of Black visibility, character fulfillment and narrative importance. Even as this test accounts for race, the Duvernay Test has yet to establish racialized gender as significant, another gap in the visual ideologies of representation. With inspiration taken from the Bechdel Test, the media monitoring organization GLAAD formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and founded by LGBT people, developed its own set of criteria to analyze how LGBTQ characters are included within a film. The Vito Russo Test takes its name from the renowned film historian and GLAAD co-founder Vito Russo, whose book *The Celluloid Closet* remains to this day a foundational analysis of LGBTQ portrayals within Hollywood. Though the Vito Russo Test has begun to police the marginalization and erasure of “nontraditional” mainstream sexual roles without consideration toward racialized and gendered characterizations in a way that is truly encompassing of nontraditional representations.

As these three tests exhibit progressive tactics toward narrative correction and accountability, the gaps in each tests interests of focus have highlighted as well as inspired a differing in-depth analysis of contemporary American thematic trends which stems from the hierarchal threads of intertwining race, gender, sexuality and class. This methodological pattern identification, called the Colonizers Template, is resolved to six points of critical inspection inferred from the observed “rules” of American

high fantasy cinema as it intersects escapism through historically oppressive hierarchal tropes with American society which prioritizes race as well as effecting the other statuses of identity: gender, sexuality and class politics. Though the previously discussed texts examine film dominantly, this analysis signifies television, specifically *Game of Thrones (2011-2019)* as exemplified by the American premium cable and satellite television network Home Box Office (HBO) which is owned by Warner Media LLC (once Time Warner Inc.). For this analysis, HBO operates as a multimedia conglomerate on the pedestal of classist accessibility as it navigates a unique television positionality with higher budgets per episode than some films are allotted, feature length episodes and exclusively high definition quality imagery, HBO stands apart from other networks and thus so do their products.

As a division of Warner Media LLC, Turner Broadcasting System has begun to act as an overall sampler of entertainment, sports and news companies that creates and distributes various programs to various audiences with its ownership extending to cable channels and their brand extensions including stations such as CNN, TBS, Turner Classic Movies (TCM), truTV, Cartoon Network and TNT. This expansive network which includes political news, documentary, cartoons, classic film and family networks presents HBO as both a solitary entity and a broadcast station mimicking film sophistication across many popular genres which influence its participation within the television arena by offering cinematic quality at an additional charge. The institutional conditions of production and distribution as Jane Arthurs examines in *Sex and the City and Consumer Culture: Remediating Profeminist Drama* through the conversion of accessible prime-time network television to a more exclusive subscription cable television model complete with differing aesthetics and audience trajectory. As Arthurs discusses, one of the significances of the “multiplication of channels has been a diversification in television’s address to audiences” furthermore, “specialist channels catering to particular social groups or taste cultures have proliferated” (Arthurs, 2003, p. 84). For HBO this high-class mass-market processing develops niche marketplaces which utilizes its exclusivity to filter audiences tastes through obtainability

by only those with the ability to pay, creating a class dynamic of viewership that regulates marginalized participation based on disposable income, limiting audience diversification.

Though the television show *Game of Thrones* has accessed a deep and intrinsic fandom which encompasses over 170 countries, there remains a classist barrier between those who have access and those who do not, creating a secondary concern over the target audience, aesthetics, and themes associated with HBO productions. As HBO exists in a high-quality privatized sphere, the extent to which nudity, strong sexual content, and violence are gratuitously utilized differs irrevocably from the ways in which network television is monitored and rated, granting more storytelling freedom and more aggressive audience connectivity within this hierarchal media distribution. As a multidimensional operational scrutinizer, the Colonizers Template studies *Game of Thrones* as a prevalent American television model with preexisting class bias that allow for a broader specificity with concerns toward rampant racial oppression, gender performance expectation, suppressed sexuality and classism as they manifest representationally within contemporary thematic constructions. This analysis of identifying problematic characterization patterns challenges aggressively the positing of repetitive creative choices which produce contemporary oppression narratives from a coincidental exhibition to a strategic hierarchal sabotage forming codified rules of productive engagement. This analysis characteristically challenges the television show *Game of Thrones* as an adequate high fantasy subgenre implementor of racialization, fetishism, and enslavement through a popular scope of exclusive accessibility through the following specifications:

- 1.) Acts as a hierarchal American racial reinforcement model
- 2.) Is exclusively perpetrated by colonial whiteness acting as both capable of imposing and benefitting from colonization and mass enslavement of an identified “other”
- 3.) Representatively acknowledged characteristically through overtly race-based superiority complexities with possessive claims to dominant whiteness and infallibly white entitled self-positioning
- 4.) Continual reinforcing

and stabilizing of negative connotations of racial formations by the reproduction of a subhuman/enslaved mentality, “othered” identity displacement, socioeconomic and political immobility as well as obligatory docility, in people of color 5.) Women of color as sexually explicit objects who are signified as permanently accessible and disposable through avenues of racialized rape, absenteeism in motherhood and vengeance, rampant abuse, and dire neglect affirmed through continual exertion of possession and preserved dominance by whiteness 6.) Often utilizing a specific person of color and or racialized group to navigate cultured spaces in which whiteness is typically repelled; which ultimately aids in stabilizing white entitlements and complexities. Through this central system of American hierarchal fantasy, the subgenre specificity becomes its own entity worthy of critical dissection to validate the patterned behaviors of race as a utility of whiteness utility with the necessity of Black denigration through escapists mediums with sequentially historic overtones and contemporary consequences.

This contextual deconstruction evaluates the ideologies of image and otherness relative to race and maternity, revealing *Game of Thrones* to be in effect a solidification of the Colonizers Template through its six points as follows: 1.) The creators of the series, D.B Weiss and David Benioff acting as products of American sociopolitical histories and extensions of white supremacist representation and entertainment as a racial reinforcement model under the guise of fantasy fictionality 2.) Colonization and mass enslavement as stabilized by whiteness most exemplified within the characterizations of Daenerys Targaryen under the governance of gender performative and Just War ideologies 3.) Characterizing the Seven Kingdoms through explicit hierarchal domination as defined by the narrative histories of the fictive Rhoynar, First Men, and Andals which activate white entitlements and possessive investments in whiteness prominent in the progression of Daenerys as innately preoccupied with her ancestry from which she derives her political significance 4.) With the Dothraki alongside those shown in

Slavers Bay, enslavement and possession are indicated within the collective negativized stereotypical representations of raced, gendered, and sexualized positionalities assumed by people of color within the narrative universe; which displace the collective potential of racialized identities specifically of the accentuated women of color 5.) Through the divergent social rejections of Princess Elia Martell of Dorne, Talisa (Maegyr) Stark of Volantis, and Ellaria Sand also of Dorne, feminized geographical associations are explored within exotic and erotic sexuality constructions subjective to white violence, negated motherhood, continuous injustice, intangible vengeance and negligent characterizations which affirm the principal efforts of oppression through varying applications of dominance; marked by their societal structuring as enduringly available and similarly disposable 6.) While Missandei of Naath acts as an indispensable cultural compass of the Seven Kingdoms for Daenerys political campaign; through Missandei's talent, the magical negro is utilized as an invaluable tool of white conquering and absent any narrative singularity of her own even as her capabilities are revealed.

LITERARY REVIEW

The progression of interpretational importance through the spectacle and the spectator as they are influenced by historical contexts of hierarchal race and sex, in turn bleeds specific meaning into the fictional characterizations and ideology driving contemporary representational imagery. These real life functionalities and perceptions are conducted invitationally through critically theorizing the ways in which life imitates art, reflecting a circular systemic approach toward stabilizing familiar socioeconomic structures under the guise of cinematic escapism while navigating the larger institutional mapping of expected performativities. These preexisting social constructions of race and sex identify Blackness as a direct construction of conflict relative to American identity; Black womanhood becomes illuminated through its multifaceted subjugation with the connectivity of the audience and image as representational beacons.

In *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Ibram X. Kendi uses the Enlightenment period and the Enlightened thinkers to begin a racial conversation surrounding the definitive history of racist ideals in America through a spectrum of Eurocentrism and whiteness as they form the polarized “other” within the distinguished subhuman positioning of Blackness. Within an American societal structure, racial mystification, distrust, and inherent subjectivity has played a large part in the shaping of the contemporary sociopolitical and economic conditions; conceding to the patterns of generational connectivity, positivism, sexual politics, and hierarchal necessity that signify American ideals.

With the complications of negligence, servitude and misrepresentation offered by Eurocentric American drives, a perpetual state of hierarchal disguise is constituted. George Lipsitz theorizes in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* gives a staunchly detailed account of the ways in which whiteness reaps benefits from exceptionally distinct racial politics

rooted in the utility of white possessiveness which arduously protects these racialized investments and maintains a specific system of privileges. With the prevalent goal of maintaining whiteness, the preoccupation with hierarchal systems of dominance that keeps whiteness in power, exposes other, the direct opposition, which is identified in Blackness. Through a navigation of the modern realities of America, Lipsitz adamantly establishes a historical precedent through toxic white power that directly involves and depends upon the submission of Black people. From this, Lipsitz interrogates the adversity of the white body in the changing tides of racial inequality and sociopolitical reconstruction, localizing on a common goal which threatens whiteness and causes a fervent sabotaging of Black unification through socioeconomic policing and normalization of hatred.

The interloping racial indicators of race breed a distinct fetish mapped by geographic location and colonial submission; aiding in the feminization of conquest and gendered violence. As an unambiguous demarcation, Black women's bodies are hypersexualized as an extension of race, their genitalia are identified as unique, with their physical breasts under subjection and ruled by whiteness. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, Anne McClintock uses metaphorical personifications of regions conquered by colonizers which observes a literal penetration of indigenous women through white captors disguised as pioneers. McClintock succinctly aligns the abusively masculine ravaging of both land and feminine flesh, with these oppressions being deeply intertwined with entitlement, race and explorative grandeur. For Nerissa S. Balce, this fetishistic conquering is prominent in *The Filipina's Breast*, in which she conducts a sharp read of these racially gendered ideologies of negritude as they are displayed through women of the Philippines via the sexualized observations of white explorers. As Balce describes, the women of the Philippines embody the same ascribed bodily politics given to Africans and are attributed equal treatment which enriches their designation as sexualized spoils of war whose treatment serves as a midway point between enslaved African's and slaughtered Native Americans.

In *Libidinous Blacks*, Jordan Winthrop addresses African sexuality directly, as he details the assumptive confluences of salaciousness and Blackness in terms of recognizing moral imposition and opposition relative to Eurocentric Christian ideologies instilled by practicing Christians. With dark skin, Winthrop articulates a specified sexual prowess associated with regional compounding and as a prelude to imminent danger through godlessness and brutishness. Jennifer Nash investigates Black eroticization in *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, in which she deconstructs the representation and reception of Black women's bodies in the audience/spectator relationship. Nash analyzes the intersections and implications of the Black female body in its fetishized fixations and the pornographic connotations assumed simply by the presence of the Black body as if it were pre-sexualized. These complications of white visual narrative supremacy made by Nash add a critically emphatic gender expectation upon racialized bodies as socially threatening and simultaneously an influential sexual component onscreen and off. For Nash, the audience is exemplified as an active participant in the social construction of public sexuality which she emphasizes through framing the "erotica and exotica", a defaulted state of surprise and arousal provided by the Black female body which is more heavily exploited due to a lack of mainstream exposure as well as its opposition within the ideal of Eurocentric social art and society by extension.

METHODOLOGIES

This analytical focus upon American high fantasy television's practice of consciousness condemning representation, racialized gendered fetishisms and systemic whiteness as strategically volatile and terroristic through ideologies of repetitively reinforced oppressive iconography.

Subheading 1.1 Erotica and Exotica

In the *Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, Jennifer Nash discusses race, image, and audience, with the Black female body as centric to fetishistic gratification. Nash exemplifies the infamous Sara Baartman, navigating the positionality of Black women as a nexus of double damnation, once for their skin and once because for their sex, compounded by cultural inheritances and historic subjugations. The proposition of a pornographic aesthetic applied to Black women's bodies as dictated by Nash, unravels the moving image as well as its stationary relativity to raced gender performance and sexual exploitation. Through art historian Lisa Collins, Nash argues that the nude image is, "the central subject in Western art since it was constructed as a subject in ancient Greece" (Nash, 2014, p.52). Arguing also that the Western artistic focus on the nude image is, "marked by an overwhelming absence of Black flesh", saying, "when Black bodies appear, they are often simply 'erotica and exotica' or allegories for freedom and its necessary inverse, enslavement" (Nash, 2014, p.52). With this, sex and race are discourses as vast and dire intersections that define the positionality of the "other" which Nash hypothesizes as differences being "constantly discovered and placed in the service of pleasure" further, "the desirability of the Other is stressed; Others avail themselves for desire" (Nash, 2014, p.131). This strategic positioning of Black women denotes a specified connectivity between race, gender, sexuality and stagnant representational roles that dwell deeply in volatile fetishization and exotic curiosity.

Subheading 1.2 Gender Performativity

Valerie Estelle Frankel's preceding work on gender within the *Game of Thrones* thematic narrative detailed in *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* gives weight to the gendered operations of this analysis. Though both *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones and Multiple Media Engagements* and *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords* are valid collections of essays, they are mostly void of adequate focus upon women and even less on race as it individualizes women of color. However, Frankel presents a thorough assessment of dominant white womanhood with a concise critique of women of a few women of color; a distinguishing characteristic of her work. The navigational practice of gender within the Seven Kingdoms, sets Frankel's observations as theoretically pertinent to the ways in which gender is assessed concerning this narrative analysis.

Subheading 1.3 Possessive Investments in Whiteness

With his book *Possessive Investments in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz gives a comprehensive account of how whiteness yields benefit from distinct and deep rooted racially hierarchal politics that whiteness arduously protects through possessive investments in white privilege and steadfast protections of it. Through a thorough inquiry into the contemporary realities that pervade within America society, Lipsitz confirms that there is indeed a problematic whiteness which hides beneath the blame of the "negro"; from this vantage point, addressing the adversity of the white body within the changing tides of racial inequality and sociopolitical reconstruction. Lipsitz uses Richard Dyer to emphasize his conclusion, saying, "white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (Lipsitz, 1998, p.1). With possessive investments in whiteness, Lipsitz builds upon Dyer by "applying racial labels to 'nonwhite' groups in order to stigmatize and exploit them, while at the same time reserving extra value for whiteness", gives evidence to the racial implications laid against whiteness, signifying this as distinct from racial otherization as it vests power within whiteness as an entitled position. The historical

precedent of racialized enslavement and war is made and solidifies a racialized sociopolitical hierarchy, through which Lipsitz distinguishes that, “white settlers institutionalized a possessive investment in whiteness by making blackness synonymous with slavery and whiteness synonymous with freedom, but also by pitting people of color against each other” (Lipsitz, 1998, p.3).

Subheading 1.4 Just War Theory

In *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper Than Swords*, Richard H. Corrigan sanctions Just War Theory as the justification of how and why wars are fought; appearing as a duality consisting of the “right to go to war” and the “right to conduct war”. Corrigan dictates that the justification of war can be either theoretical or historical: the theoretical aspect being primarily concerned with the ethical justification of war and the divergent forms that warfare manifests, while the historical aspect termed the “just war tradition”, deals with the historical acknowledgment of common guidelines or agreements that have been made applicable in various wars compiled across the ages. Here utilized by whiteness as a mass movement toward racialized enslavement.

Subheading 1.5 The Magical Negro

The Power of Black Magic, as written by Cerise L. Glenn and Landra J. Cunningham diligently builds a case for a magical Black character trope positioned as both a proponent of white salvation and a hinderance to the progression of Black identity formation through escapism by the reproductions of stereotypical Black characterizations. In a unique discussion of white dependability and Black servitude disguised as thematically inclusive films, exemplifying the nostalgia of historic roles of Black actors such as Sydney Poitier to echo the placement of Blackness relative to white comfort through accessibility. The magical negro archetype is described characteristically as, “often wise, morally upright Blacks who serve as the moral conscious of white characters” with the focus of their onscreen purpose devoted to the centrality of the white protagonist rather than the development of Blackness (Glenn, Cunningham, 2015, p.137). bell hooks reinforces the observed repetitions of racial relationships, saying “many Whites who

have no contact with Blacks think they know Blacks and their actual status because of the roles played while acting. Because these roles depict a utopian relationship between Blacks and Whites, Whites may believe that these ideal harmonious relationships depict current social status; therefore, racial problems only exist in the minds of Black people. The movie industry produces films that can result in the reinforcement of this liminal status” (Glenn, Cunningham, 2015, p. 137).

INTRODUCTION

Recreation and revolution through moving image representation have become dominantly embedded within the American social structure, even more so through the vast adaptations of literature captivating audiences currently. The power and capability of television as a tool of Black degradation has not lessened yet has simply become less identifiable in its oppressive tactics, creating a distinct pattern of Black subjugation and white controls which maintain explicit hierarchal preferences that exacerbate racialized gender performance, exotic fetishization, and class distinctions. Through racialized and sexualized notions of people of color, onscreen representations have become emboldened by the normalization of white heroism and Black villainy as it intersects the desensitization to and weaponization of prejudices concerning femininity and motherhood with specific harm to women of color. Though the focus remains upon the message, the sender and receiver of the message play a key role in the strength fictional representation holds as a socially influential body of creative functionality.

As Stuart Hall theorizes in *Encoding/Decoding*, the traditional research structure of mass-communications conceptualizes the process of communication in terms of a “circulation circuit or loop” (Hall, 1980, p. 28) Hall describes a sender/message/receiver pattern with the exchange of “understanding” and “misunderstanding” within the “communicative exchange dependent on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the ‘personifications’, encoder-producer and decoder-receiver” (Hall, 1980, p.31). This system as Hall discharges, centers upon its identity dependence focusing upon the varying degrees of identity/non-identity between these codes which “perfectly or imperfectly transmit, interrupt or systematically distort what has been transmitted” (Hall, 1980, p.31). Hall concludes that it is this identity insufficiency between codes that shapes the structural relativities between broadcasters and audiences, the codes of “source” and “receiver” which show alterations that inevitably form a “lack of equivalence” between the

two sides of this communicative exchange. As a designation of social, culture, and political structures within the world; this culmination acts as a “dominant culture order” though the system is neither “univocal nor uncontested” (Hall, 1980, p. 34). Hall compounds this addition by questioning the constructed discourses within the system of dominance with differing “discursive domains, hierarchically organized into dominant or preferred meanings” (Hall, 1980, p. 34). This systemically lopsided relationship of institutional encoding and individual decoding works toward a specific and continuously recycled hierarchy which interferes with societal structure and identity formation.

In *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, Amanda Lotz scrutinizes the broadcaster utility and the audience effects of television within a contemporary context saying, “television is not just a simple technology or appliance like a toaster that has sat in our homes for more than sixty years. Rather it functions as both a technology and a tool for cultural storytelling” (Lotz, 2014, p. 3). Lotz furthers her argument by formulating the modern television console as a “window on the world” as well as a “cultural hearth”, suggesting that it has “gathered our families, told us stories, and offered glimpses of a world outside our daily experience” (Lotz, 2014, p.4). The reinvention of the U.S. television industry is constituted by Lotz through the 1980s digital era and the transitional period of instability revolving relationships among networks, advertising and technology, saying, “Although television maintains the technological affordances of a mass medium that, in principle, remains capable of serving as a cultural hearth around which a society shares media events” (Lotz, 2014, p.5). Though Lotz emphasizes the broadcasting of events such as the Kennedy assassination and the explosion of the Challenger, contemporary transmission of television as a cultural beacon of unforgiving and faithful imagery is plagued with white terrorism and authoritative brutality against people of color, intensified in instances of Black victims.

Through these mass communications, television and media continuously reveal a deliberate interest and an audience reformation that Lotz navigates as a transition from “a mass audience and is

instead more accurately understood as a collection of niche audiences” and is most commonly used to address “fragmented and specialized audience groups” (Lotz, 2014, p.5). As a functional cultural institution, television, acting in paradox persists as an ever-present idea that to most people is still limitedly understood as simplistic. In *“What is Television?”*, Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay meaningfully suggest that there is more to the discussion, with “who you are” specifically in instances of race and gender, accounting for individual perceptions and influence upon the existing understanding of what contemporary television means, how power is derived from it and suppressed by it.

In *Adventures in Media and Cultural Studies*, Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner infer that, in our “media-saturated environments, understanding the relationship between popular culture and society is crucial for developing insights that can help us make sense of our rapidly changing world” (Bucciferro, 2016, p.xiii). Michael Ryan compounds this inference by signifying in *Cultural Studies: An Anthropology*, that, “cultural analysts prompt us to inquire not only into the characteristics of media content, or its effects, but the way mediated engagements can shape everyday life” (Bucciferro, 2016, p.xiii). This effectively installs an ideological notion that media, television by extension, is capable of reshaping social and cultural identities.

In *Theorizing Communication*, Dan Schiller gives diligent examination of the relationships between media projections and social engagement, saying “authors have said that media can contribute to many contemporary social problems, yet the relationship between media and society is multifaceted and often unpredictable” (Bucciferro, 2016, xiii). In the case of contemporary thematic content, both the connectivity and the problematization are increasing evident to those who care to see it.

Though escapism is vested in the freedom from reality which presents in many forms of genre, fantasy maintains a special relationship between audience, fiction, identity and fandom that it is not easily mapped or critiqued and thus serves as an ambiguous point of critical contention. In *The X-Men Films: A Cultural Analysis*, Claudia Bucciferro reviews the real consequences of ingesting thematic

fantasy, saying “cultural products that can be interpreted in a number of ways and can be conceptually linked to real events of great importance, for better or worse” (Bucciferro, 2016, p. xii). As entertainment artifacts suggest, the mere idea of entertainment functions as a light and innocuous pastime rather than an inventory of time, place, and sometimes even a mirror of the world that surrounds them.

Through this cycle of reality inducing fiction and fiction reinforcing reality; the terroristic American hierarchy of dominance is repetitively renewed and made continuous, using white supremacist encoding and colonized decoding as tools of individual and communal disidentification. The focus of this study is situated upon people of color, analyzed through ideologies of Blackness and amplified by otherness as adapted through high fantasy characterizations from George R.R. Martin’s literary series *A Song of Fire and Ice* (1996-) to the television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) transcribed by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss. The Colonizers Template is applied and evaluated as follows:

1.) D.B. Weiss and David Benioff have enacted an active racial reinforcement model 2.) Colonization and mass enslavement are stabilized benefits of whiteness exemplified through the characterization of Daenerys Targaryen 3.) The Seven Kingdoms as signified through overt race-based hierarchy by the Rhoynar, First Men, and Andal histories, activated by white entitlements and possessive investments in whiteness 4.) The nomadic Dothraki and those shackled by masters within the slave cities illuminating the negative stereotypical connotations of racial formations by the reproduction of a distinctly imprisoned mentality 5.) Princess Elia Martell of Dorne, Talisa Maegyr (Stark) of Volantis, and Ellaria Sand of Dorne are inspected through their racialized gender expectations and erotic fetishization, with their otherness seen through neglect, violation, negated motherhood as well as their complete absence of justice and vengeance as affirmed through their continual utility as avenues of white possession and masculine dominance, permanently reinforcing their accessibility and disposability 6.) Missandei of Naath acts as an indispensable racialized narrative compass for Daenerys, whom Missandei

aids in her navigation of the Seven Kingdoms through an invaluable talent that only Missandei possesses and only Daenerys benefits from.

THE CREATORS

Through Stuart Hall's analysis of representation and ideology, Chris Rojek interprets these cultural focuses by a navigation of identity, action and belonging, saying that they are coded in specified ways, questioning who does the coding and why. With the utility of Antonio Gramsci, Hall provides a method of analysis that recognizes the interconnectivity and operations of coding regarding representation in its everchanging forms of engagement. Rojek describes the organization of representative behavioral manipulation as a mere fraction of a more complex whole in which, "ruling groups are themselves subject to forces that are beyond their control. The result is a seminal contribution to the study of culture, power, repression and resistance" (Rojek, 1988, p.49). This examination by Hall exemplifies his contentions with media messages as they are embedded with "presuppositions about beliefs and practices that shape every day perceptions of reality" by reducing hegemony and enacting a politicized approach to media (Rojek, 1988, p.51). As Thomas Schatz proposes in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, film genres are not "organized or discovered by analysts but are a result of the material conditions of commercial filmmaking itself, popular stories are varied and repeated as long as they satisfy audience demand and turn a profit for the studios" (Schatz, 2007, p. 16). For the high fantasy subgenre of fetishized colonial enslavement, this eludes to the ideal of privileged significance, asserting not only what is popular but what is profitable, decided by a white entertainment industry majority at the detriment of people of color. As Schatz suggests, privilege in thematic form is a product of "audience and studio interactions", further, "a film genre gradually impresses itself upon the culture until it becomes a familiar, meaningful system that can be named as such" (Schatz, 2007, p.16).

With the television series *Game of Thrones* as modified by D.B. Weiss and David Benioff from George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice*, the global entertainment system has been strongly

impacted by the series acclaim and viewership following, in effect becoming a system of meaning. In 2016, *Game of Thrones* became the most awarded series in Emmy Awards history with a total of 38 wins; winning a total of 255 awards out of 715 nominations in the last seven seasons, with one left to release. For this HBO series, the budget per episode continues to climb into the upper six figures, reaping revenue from themed merchandise and spinoff series; the power of this fantasy has become quite palpable. The *Al Jazeera* media broadcasting company published an opinion piece on the whiteness of the American entertainment industry, saying, “While I appreciate how Hollywood can bring important stories to a national audience, I question if white directors, writers, artists and producers are feeling more and more comfortable telling stories that center around Black pain, trauma, and resistance, profiting in ways that comparable Black storytellers can't” (Sims, 2017). This is arguably the case with Benioff and Weiss’s adaptation.

As Stuart Hall spoke of the constructionist role of production, the advancement of “narratives and meanings” comes fervently “at the expense of others”; describing the complex treatment of encoding and decoding, saying, the system functions “as a mixture of conscious and unconscious levels and involves perpetual struggle over the specific type of representational practices” (Rojek, 1988, p.53). Alongside Antonio Gramsci’s notion of dominance, Hall’s notion of encoding and decoding provides the encoders representational power and in practice becomes a display of dominance.

Benioff and Weiss are often interviewed about their aesthetic, thematic and their overall creative choices inspirations. In a 2017 interview with Time Magazine, David Benioff is quoted as saying that, the thing that drew he and D.B. Weiss to Martin’s books is that he “makes them so relevant whether the time they were written or now is that it’s about people, and power, and the pursuit of power, and how that affects those without power” (D’Addario, 2017). Though the sustainability of white privilege exists in its ability to claim to be “about people, and power, and the pursuit of power, and how that affects those without power” the creators/encoders are simultaneously unconcerned with damning

people of color beneath hierarchical oppressions, servitude and absence. This pattern begins to dictate a specified thematic content concerning who is worthy of attention and who is entitled to power.

As example, after several successful seasons of *Game of Thrones*, HBO cleared the introduction of another television series showcasing a more overt move toward patriotic homage entitled *Confederate* (2019) to be headed by Benioff and Weiss. These creative formations suggest a very specified encoding framed within a comfortable set of racial rules that exist as multilayers of dualities including encoding/decoding and superior/inferior. The *Confederate* as formulated by Benioff and Weiss, emerges as a dystopian fantasy in which the South won the war and slavery becomes a socioeconomic staple; modeling an affinity for racialized immobility, feminized violence, and freedom as a “white’s only” accessibility. Though the President of Programming for HBO, Casey Bloys publicly whitesplained after news of the impending shows content broke, “I hope that people will judge the actual material, not how it could be or might be. We will rise and fall based on the material. The producers have said they’re not looking to do *Gone with the Wind* 2017,” he said, going further, “It’s not whips and plantations. It’s what they imagine a modern-day institution of slavery would look like” (Andreeva, 2017).

Shortly following the press release for *Confederate*, Will Packer, producer of *Girls Trip* (2017) and *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), released the plot for his own dystopian television venture entitled *Black America* (2019) which speculates the circumstances of America if the Confederacy was defeated and Black people were given reparations to form a new colony; a collaboration with Aaron McGruger of *the Boondocks* (2005-2014) and *Black Jesus* (2014-2015). In his interview with *Deadline*, when the *Confederate* was mentioned, Packer stated that as a Black man “the fact that there is the contemplation of contemporary slavery makes it something that I would not be a part of producing nor consuming.” He added, “Slavery is far too real and far too painful, and we still see the manifestations of it today as a country for me to ever view that as a form of entertainment” (Victor, 2017). While Dr. Helen Young of

The Public Medievalist antagonized the context of *Game of Thrones* as part of this racial obsession saying, “Martin’s novels aren’t aberrations, they reflect a way of thinking about the world that centers on Europe and Europeans and sees Others as either tools to serve the needs of a white person and their power, or irrelevant”. Furthermore, “It’s a way of thinking that is at least as old as the Middle Ages. *Game of Thrones* has racism problems because the world has racism problems” (Young, 2017).

With the gratuitous use of race, hierarchy, enslavement and violence by Benioff and Weiss that is being replicated through multiple works, gaining momentum, the sentiment that oppressive American histories leave uncanny impressions on creators of fiction and leave a prejudice white centric preoccupation in their wake. Through these systems of repetition, a revelation of the past comes to the present, with former President Barack Hussein Obama stating in his first State of the Union Address, “The past isn’t dead and buried. In fact, it isn’t even past”, these fanatical processes serve as proof (Marabel and Mullings, 2009, p. 634).

THE CONTEXT

Subheading 2.1 Differential Parameters: Ethnicity, Geography and the Seven Kingdoms

Though there are no traditional racial designations identified the original book series or the television series for the fictive world of the Seven Kingdoms (a moniker that is used interchangeably with the term Westeros) which holds strong to a three-tier functioning based on geographical and class distinction that is exponentially exacerbated by racial differences which power the sociopolitical terrain. Within these distinct confines, three ancestral origins are made prevalent: the Andals, the First Men, and the Rhoynar; with the regional distribution isolating people of color into two distinct geographic locations, the “slave cities” and Dorne with exception of nomadic groups such as the Dothraki. For this analysis, the Andals and First Men whose descendants are disseminated into the families of Targaryen, Lannister, and Stark establish characteristics such as pale skin, a mixture of dark and light hair, variant eye combinations as well as possessive investments in whiteness through power and conquest. While the Rhoynar are recognized more closely to native peoples as they appear dissimilar to established whiteness and are exemplified by their unique gender dynamics, politics and physical attributes such as their bronze skin and dark eyes.

Here, the caste system designed recognizes the Andals as the white aristocrats, the First Men as white immigrants and the Rhoynar as an umbrella term encompassing a subordinate range of people of color as both “other” and opposite. While the Seven Kingdoms are dominated by whiteness through the Andals and the First Men, the last of the acknowledged Rhoynar descendants are regulated to the land of Dorne; which is painted as a resistant force to colonization in previsualized Westerosi history and demonstrated by an intergenerational mixing with whiteness causing a unique nexus of Andals, First Men, and Rhoynar, creating a distinct Dornish culture. Considered a mixed demographic, the Dornishmen are characterized as ethnically distinct from the rest of the Seven Kingdoms, being largely

descended from Rhoynar refugees who intermarried with the local population of Andals and First Men roughly a thousand years prior to the series beginning. As a result, their differing customs and traditions in comparison to the other regions of Westeros, act as an oppositional sovereign Kingdom weathering attacks from white dominated regions namely armies of House Targaryen; though always retaining their independence. This localization of people of color and aggression mark Dorne as both racially distinct and formidably resistant; characteristics that make this land and its people targets of dominant white aggression.

In building a racial hierarchy and performative expectation through entitlement Benioff and Weiss create conflicts of entitlement which are carried out through the ideology of Just War Theory and coincide with racial allowances of authoritative power projection within the Seven Kingdoms. As Richard H Corrigan in *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper Than Swords*, dissects the idea that “legitimate authority is of central importance, as it defines who is in a position to determine whether a war should be fought, and who has the right to act on the basis of that judgment” (Irwin, Jacoby, 2012, p.50). This theory traditionally holds that a war can be considered *just* only if it falls into accordance on three accounts: “it brings about the greatest good for the greatest number, is fought for a just reason in a noble fashion and, is waged by a legitimate authority” (Irwin, Jacoby, 2012, p.50). Further, once the recognized legitimate authority has waged war, the rules of a just war dictate that it is then permissible for the soldiers to actively engage with the enemy, however, they are still expressly bound by a code of honor and must conduct themselves in a fashion particularly reflective of nobility. This restriction becomes a defining line of righteousness and audience plausibility, reflecting a continuous moral hope and obligation to make sure that the war does not degenerate into unnecessary savagery and evil. The excesses of war are thus shown in many of the “noble” Andal/First Men families namely the Targaryen’s, Lannister’s, Baratheon’s, and Greyjoy’s, with the excesses of war being restricted to illustrations of the

people like the Dothraki, “who believe that in the wake of battle, rape, slaughter, and pillage are their natural rights” (Irwin, Jacoby, 2012, p.50).

As a tactic of racialized encoding, racialized gender, sexuality, and class politics become collateral damage; falsifying the entertainment structure by forming a specified racial pattern, it is made evident that those who are treated as exotic, other, or foreigner become representative of their race, instituting an explicitly alarming commentary.

Subheading 2.2 Stallions, Dragons, and Complex Feminine Dualities

For processing possessive entitlements, racialized superiorities, and ideal white femininity requires a dissection of Daenerys Targaryen through a framing of dualistic occupations, through which her bloody ascension to power from a sexually brutalized woman to a true and capable conqueror. In Daenerys rise to capability, her marriage, rape, romance and subsequent pregnancy act as key to her becoming not only a Khaleesi (Dothraki Queen, the Khal’s wife) but also the sole heir to her husband’s Khalasar, the force who will service her advancement toward the Iron Throne, a position to which she feels entitled to claim by birthright. Though a Khaleesi’s status varies greatly from khalasar to khalasar, traditionally she could be very influential, riding beside her husband as he leads, or worth less than the Khal’s horse. Even as a Khal’s wife, the Khal’s bloodriders can sometimes share the Khaleesi, but are never permitted to ride the Khal’s horse, a show of their dynamics and the ways in which Daenerys transcends Dothraki tradition.

In *Women of Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance*, Valerie Estelle Frankel investigates the complexity of womanhood, saying that struggle becomes most perceptible when “women are shown with two paths: masculinized women who hate their own sex and feminized women who are ineffectual and victimized”; further, a woman is “handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the pattern of man’s advance in the professions, or by refusing to compete with man at all” (Frankel, 2014, p.183). Frankel also suggests that the women of the audience

as they engage this fantasy and decode its meanings, must also decide their identification with an onscreen female character through a dualistic means; meaning, they must also adopt a “passive or masochistic position” while “identification with the active hero necessarily entails an acceptance of what Laura Mulvey refers to as a certain ‘masculinization’ of spectatorship” (Frankel, 2014, p.183). With Daenerys, this is showcased through the way in which women are exemplified as role models who can employ their skills as “warriors, intellectuals, mothers, lovers, and queens, and when they’re allowed to identify with a sparkling, active heroine, not just the men as rulers of their society” (Frankel, 2014, p.183). As Daenerys occupies all these spaces at differing points, her positionality is actively centered in a feminist iconology anchored by her masculinist subjection within her designated womanhood; while women of color are swept into this frenzy of feminist conflation, their representation culminating as an expression of the negations created by Daenerys ideal white femininity.

In the series premiere entitled *Winter is Coming*, creators Weiss and Benioff present Daenerys, as a pale young virgin being traded transparently against her will by her brother, Viserys for an army of Dothraki. This exchange reveals that, Viserys is the titular head of House Targaryen as the only remaining son of King Aerys II and has begun a campaign for his father’s throne as he and Daenerys have fled for most of their lives as orphans, being hunted by House Baratheon. As Daenerys’s sole guardian since she was a small child, Viserys is the one who instills Daenerys with her knowledge, connectivity, and ancestral (white) entitlements to the Targaryen history and the lands of Westeros. Viserys represents a patriarchal selfishness and entitlement which is emboldened by, “demanding his sister treat him as a King and cower before his temper. Viserys is all greed and ambition. He’s like a child, wanting what was taken from him but having little idea how to rule when he regains” (Frankel, 2014, p.150). Illustrated in the series opening, Viserys sense of investment, privilege and collective ancestry oppress Daenerys from the beginning yet these traits also reveal themselves to be part of her Targaryen inheritance as she begins to embody her own authoritative positionality.

Daenerys future husband, the legendary Khal Drogo, a Dothraki warlord/horse-lord, is shown as an example of his people, spoken of as the fiercest warrior, most skilled, undefeated in battle, unrelenting in combat and is known for his explicitly gruesome savagery. Though the Dothraki have a code of honor which is harshly unforgiving, it is framed trivially as one dissimilar to Just War Theory maintained within nobility. As she awaits her fate, Daenerys is presented draped in a sheer almost flesh color dress, aesthetically eliciting propositions of invitation, defining a specified gaze by which to view her and inclinations of her purpose. Though Daenerys represents a teenage girl, her naked body is made visible through the dress, and Viserys eagerly gropes her making her the possession of two different men within the first episode. Frankel observes Daenerys wedding dress as “likewise nearly skin-colored, emphasizing her nakedness and vulnerability. It wraps around, inviting Drogo to unwrap it” (Frankel, 2014, p.149). These visual cues create Daenerys as both readily accessible and clearly victimized, the location of purity specifically in her white womanhood creates a grossly commodifiable and conquered positioning. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, Anne McClintock scrutinizes patriarchal narratives, qualifying that “to be a virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason” (McClintock, 1995, p.30). For Daenerys, marrying Khal Drogo, bestows upon her the title of Khaleesi and undertakes the Dothraki tongue and dress, allowing a literal transition for her accessibility yet not her social ascription. As Khaleesi, Daenerys acquires a newly specified duality which accesses both whiteness with retained privileges and white feminine allowances of fetishized innocence, as well as cultural tradition through Dothraki customs.

In George R.R. Martin’s 2017 *Time Magazine* interview, he reveals his opinions of Daenerys aesthetic supplementation from his literary collection to the television adaption. As example, Daenerys and Khal Drogo’s wedding night remains a major point of thematic aggression, with the first book of Martin’s series, entitled *A Game of Thrones*, specifics the account clearly saying, “He stopped then, and

drew her down onto his lap. Dany was flushed and breathless, her heart fluttering in her chest. He cupped her face in his huge hands and she looked into his eyes. “No?” he said, and she knew it was a question. She took his hand and moved it down to the wetness between her thighs. “Yes,” she whispered” (Martin, 1996, p.108). For Martin, Daenerys and Drogo’s wedding night is timid, shy, slow, and suspenseful; while the television adaptation displays their interactions as distinct predator/prey animalisms and the audience is forced to watch Daenerys be ravaged as tears roll down her cheeks.

This contemporary Beauty and the Beast tale takes various racial and aesthetic forms of significance with the personified “beast” in Khal Drogo and a distressed damsel in Daenerys, this fuels a tangled web of fear, attraction, and danger. Fairy tale scholar Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1995), chronicles and debates the patterned motifs of man as beast/husband and “daughter-exchanged as-unwilling-wife and their significance as representations of an arranged marriage” (Gjelsvik, Schubart, 2016, p.115). Over the recent years, the historical fantasy and romance genre has flourished with its new ferocity in the white women portrayed as commodities, wives and rulers, with revamped television representations, yet with these progressively conspicuous white feminine archetypes, a reconstruction seems to be under way for white women and Daenerys by example may be the most convincing and sympathetic thus far. The trope, of the “unhappy, forced unions between incompatible mates” has become a thematic staple in which Beauty “tends to personify female erotic pleasures in matching and mastering a man who is dark and hairy, rough and wild, and, in the psychotherapist Robert Bly’s phrase, in touch with the inner warrior in himself” (Gjelsvik, Schubart, 2016, p.115). In *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys and Khal Drogo’s relationship is as much about sex and politics as it is about subservience and dominance.; for Daenerys’s, the task is not to transform the beast into a man, but to transform her own terror into power. Helle Kannik Haastrup details the hybrid fantasy characterization as it effects women, saying that “the seventeen-year-age difference in the novel was

thus reduced to a more acceptable eight years between the actors, yet was replaced by differences in power, size, and ethnicity” (Gjelsvik, Schubart, 2016, p. 116).

With the muscular Hawaiian actor Jason Momoa standing six feet two inches tall, comparably towering over the five feet two-inch British actress Emilia Clarke, the framing of Daenerys as infantilized and sexualized victim is a visually imminent conclusion, yet Khal Drogo must also be exemplified as her opposite. Characterized as a villainous Beast, Khal Drogo, through his culture and positionality as head of the Dothraki khalasar, 40,000 warriors strong is made into a seductively violent beast. Through Benioff and Weiss’s interpretation, Daenerys is repeatedly and violently raped by Khal Drogo on her wedding night and many nights thereafter which are vividly captured onscreen, promoting an empathy and concern in the well-being of her characterization by audiences. Daenerys is created as centric to Khal Drogo’s lust, defining him as a sexually authoritative tool, this only ending when Daenerys learns how to sexually govern him which effectively ends his violation of her and catapults her rise to power through his adoration. In episode two, *The Kingsroad*, there is only one line of Dothraki spoken, it comes when Drogo enters Daenerys tent to rape her once more, throwing her face down on the bed, she turns to him and he struggles with her, showing his lack of concern for her consent, and she says: “Tonight I would look upon your face”, installing her will upon him, key to his demise and her rise.

Daenerys, following her “renegotiation” of her relationship with Drogo, is positioned within the khalasar as a figurehead whose sway over the Khal empowers her and she comes to a point of influence that gives her the authority to stop Khal Drogo’s riders from raping and pillaging during their raids, something that has never been done before, least of all by a white woman. Though rape is a prime element of control on the show, the question of its necessity is often brought up even in acknowledging its historical accuracy. Culturally, philosopher Katherine Tullmann advises that in the end, “we must reject moral relativism. No matter what culture we’re in, some actions are wrong”, when asked, “Which actions are those? ... Rape? Definitely” (Gjelsvik, Schubart, 2016, p. 116).

Though Daenerys cultural transition is initially meant to detach her ancestral claims as a Targaryen, giving all power and royal claims to her brother, Viserys, actions against Daenerys once she is Khal Drogo's wife drives the Khal to kill Viserys as an act of protection in preservation of his unborn heir, leaving Viserys crown claimant to default to Daenerys as last living Targaryen. In season one episode six *A Golden Crown*, Vaes Dothrak, the Holy City of Stallions is introduced while the khalasar celebrates the coming of the child resting in Daenerys foreign womb, a prophecy is chanted to the gods in Dothraki by the Dothraki holy women, Dosh Khaleen, the widows of the dead Khal's crying out, "A boy! A boy! A strong boy! The prince rides. I've heard the thunder of his hoofs. Swift as the wind he rides. His enemies will cower before him. And their wives will weep tears of blood. The stallion that mounts the world!" The prince, called Rhaego, is foretold to be the "Khal of Khals", represented as a stallion like his father, a direct opposition of whiteness, and yet also declared as the ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. Daenerys finds advantageous power in her new life as Khal Drogo's wife and mother of his unborn son which allows her the boldness to shield herself, exemplified when victimizers such as her brother attempt to reduce her to her former vulnerability, saying, "I am a Khaleesi of the Dothraki. I am the wife of the great Khal and I carry his son inside me. The next time you raise a hand to me will be the last time you have hands" (Frankel, 2014, p.151). It is Daenerys proclamation that she is not a queen but a Khaleesi that tethers her to this position through title, giving Khal Drogo pride in her and giving credit to himself for her change because his son grows inside her, "filling her with his fire" (Frankel, 2014, p.151).

It is Khal Drogo's declaration of war in the name of his Queen and his unborn heir after an attack on their lives from the King who sits the Iron Throne, Robert Baratheon, that reintroduces Khal Drogo's resounding savagery as he vows before his khalasar and his Queen with tears and desire in her eyes, "I make this gift to you for what you did. And to my son, the Stallion Who Will Mount the World, I will also pledge a gift. I will give him the iron chair that his mother's father sat upon. I will give the Lands of the Andals. I, Drogo, will do this. I will take my khalasar west to where the world ends and ride wooden

horses across the black salt sea as no Khal has done before. I will kill the men in iron suits and tear down their stone houses. I will rape their women, take their children as slaves and bring their broken gods back to Vaes Dothrak. This I vow Drogo son of Bharbo. I swear before the mother of mountains as the stars look down in witness". This vow powerfully solidifies Daenerys cause and grants the unwavering support of her husband in her siege of the Iron Throne, a vow that she utilizes even when the Khal is no longer by her side.

The prophecy of Rhaego's coming ignites three progressive movements toward whiteness as conducted by Daenerys; first making a white woman the mother of the Dothraki messiah, second solidifying Khal Drogo's devotion to Daenerys through a promise to reclaim the Iron Throne, which allows the third, Daenerys ability to claim the khalasar in the wake of Rhaego and Drogo's deaths. It is not coincidental that the men of color that would have stood as obstacle in Daenerys reunion with whiteness were eradicated from her life and the narrative entirely. Though Rhaego is foretold as the Stallion Who Mounts the World, controlling the Seven Kingdoms by conquest, as power is defined and attributed has a distinctly white capability outside the grasp of Khal Drogo and Rhaego.

As Anne McClintock discusses the role of gender, violence, and conquest, lineage becomes a singular directive flow of cultural distinction and the succession of ethos is distinguished as a uniquely male transference of privilege. By inheriting both the ancestry of Targaryen dragons and the spirit of the Great Stallion worshipped by the Dothraki, Rhaego is designated as incapable of passing on, representing, or claiming privileges of whiteness in his contradictory state of mixed-race personhood and incapable of enacting colonization. Daenerys absorbs Rhaego's prophecy as well as Khal Drogo's promise onto herself and utilizes them as justification in her quest toward the Iron Throne. In the season one finale entitled *Fire and Blood*, the dress Daenerys wore when she wed Khal Drogo becomes symbolic for her connectivity and status as wife of the great Khal, carrying the dragon eggs gifted to her on her

wedding day, which burn with her dress at season's end, "shedding her life with Drogo and reincarnating as Mother of Dragons" (Frankel, 2014, p.149).

Through this rebirth by fire, Daenerys motivations become ideological markers of her ancestry, proposing white entitlements and capability. Richard H. Corrigan suggests that within the reasoning of Just War Theory, Daenerys will to see her homeland steers her toward war and she uses her claimed power to reestablish a Targaryen birthright which she feels has been wrested from her family. Corrigan deduces that Daenerys position is one of unique importance, saying that, "while we can empathize with her plight, we can also question whether her desire truly warrants the death and destruction it will cause (Jacoby, Wiley, 2012, p.51).

Subheading 2.3 A True Dragon: Ancestry as White Power

The histories of Westeros actively achieve their own position as an expository character, woven throughout the series with flashbacks, prophecies, dreams, and magical interventions; defining the perception of characters. Through these histories, the Targaryen family tree stands among a legendary few influential white noble families, standing almost alone in their magical monopoly that magnifies and validates their power as something divine and laced with flippant bouts of madness, causing a bloody violent characterization. Through their dragon connectivity, great leaders of House Targaryen such as Daenerys grandfather King Aegon I, infamously known as Aegon the Conqueror, was the founder and first King of the Targaryen dynasty, whose rise to power set a violent tone for his descendants. Aegon the Conqueror is said to have ridden his most powerful dragon, called Balerion the Great Dread, into the region of King's Landing and in doing so conquered all of Westeros with "fire and blood", uniting the realm under his rule apart from Dorne. Alongside his sister-wives, Visenya and Rhaenys, this victorious stride establishes the Targaryen House moniker as one of "fire and blood", their sigil represented by a three headed dragon on a battlefield, reflecting power and magic as unrelenting pillar of the Targaryen dynasty. Through this fiery slaughter at King's Landing, the throne is claimed as Targaryen property and

a throne forged by Aegon the Conqueror from over a thousand swords surrendered to him during his takeover, comes to legend as the Iron Throne, continually serving as a metonym referring to the monarchy that rules the Seven Kingdoms and the authority of the monarchy, a major source of contention throughout the series.

For Daenerys, the birth of her dragons marks a return to her ancestry as there have been no dragons since the time of Aegon the Conqueror. Though Daenerys dragons are born of dire necessity, sacrifice, and opportunity, their dormancy until this convergence of desperation signifies an irony specifically within the ceremonial sacrifice itself. It is not until the Targaryen dragon's rests on the funeral pyre of Khal Drogo alongside the live burning body of a healer of color named Mirri Maz Duur, whom Daenerys sacrifices as punishment, is Daenerys able to awaken her dragon eggs and walk into the roaring flames for the first time. It is not until the clouds of smoke clear in the morning that Daenerys is found naked, covered in ash, with her infantile dragons actualized, perched upon her naked flesh that a renewed sense of motherhood and power are vested upon her within these dragons, through her Targaryen ancestry.

Subheading 2.4 Motherhood vs Womanhood: A Recurring Thematic Racial Discrepancy

Femininity, motherhood and resurrection as shown through the narrative of Daenerys, introduces a quantified opposition residing within nonwhite femininity, nonwhite motherhood and overt injustice. The strategic structure of these conflicting components suggests a bias toward the eminent damnation of women of color within the Seven Kingdoms through the positionalities of the oppressor and the oppressed completed as a feminized critique of racialized thematic patterns. These differences which set Daenerys apart from other white women and women of color determinedly create a hierarchal designation of white allowances and privileges which are not afforded nonwhite women even within high fantasy genres; a spectrum of analysis to be determined through sociopolitical

allowance and rejection antagonized through the framing of Daenerys Targaryen, Princess Elia Martell, Talisa (Maegyr) Stark, Ellaria Sand and Missandei of Naath as a spectrum of raced gender inquiry.

Within high fantasy genre, the commonality of tropes is vast yet understood, with the proponent of absence as a popular motivation through situational depravations that compel the protagonist or hero toward a specified destiny; among which orphaning, widowing and or killing the children of the protagonist/hero are presented as the most utilized. These designations identify the child/mother relationships as being of the most influential staples of thematic characterization, fostering a systemic thematic agenda and a consequent ideological connection. The idealization of motherhood has been reconstituted and utilized as a recurring and racially specified character arch, commonly aligning behavioral adaptations to feminine absences whether it be mother, spouse, or child. These designated reliance's often represent masculinity as heroic centrism and femininity as the ever-revolving character whose fate is simply meant to motivate and alter the often-male protagonist. In the traditional high fantasy narrative, though there may be linear and lesser storylines of aids and guardians, the hero stands alone against Evil, and the retention of a maternal figurehead is deemed a weak and distant memory which is often replaced by an influential maternal surrogate.

Though the exemplified characters of color are not Black, their racial ambiguity relative to white feminine certainty is made comparable to Black feminist iconologies, through which femininity and motherhood are particularly distinguished historically and thematically and will be interrogated as such. With nonwhite women, societal opposition to whiteness and Eurocentric femininity are necessary to create otherized womanhood and femininity which is wholly dependent upon the sanctity and clarity of white womanhood and motherhood to define itself. As Patricia Hill Collins discusses in *Black Feminist Thought*, the “intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender and sexuality could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence” (Collins, 1990, p.69). Here, through the controlling images of Black women, Cheryl Gilkes contends that it is Black women’s assertiveness and their use of

expressed racism that poses a threat to the established status quo. In turn, as punishment, “Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images” which Collins views as the historical symbols of mammies and matriarchs to help justify American Black women’s oppression. Collins names an ideology of dominance through these stereotypical images and signifies them as distinct in meaning, saying Black women are but a key in maintaining intersecting oppression” (Collins, 1990, p.69). For bell hooks, a large part of this conflict is that dominance must always attempt to objectify the identified subordinate group, saying that as subjects, “people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history”; while as objects “one’s reality is defined by others, one’s identity created by others, one’s history named only in ways that define one’s relationship to those who are subject (Collins, 1990, p.71).

For women of color, these social dependencies intersect their maternal ideal, in which they are accused of “failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters” and much more (Collins, 1990, p.173). Collins argues that the institution of Black motherhood acts as a sequence of “renegotiations” within the relationships of Black women amongst themselves, with Black children, and with the Black community, creating a dynamic and dialectical institution in which Black women strive and struggle to “define and value our own experiences with motherhood” (Collins, 1990, p.176). The credence that Black identities are rarely present, autonomous, or developed exacerbates the restrictions of Black motherhood to very precise spheres of absence, abuse and oppression with mainstream projections deliberately showcasing Black maternal dissociations as definitive entertainment. Though there is typically a navigation of good, bad, and evil; *Game of Thrones* suggests unstable moralities, questioning ethics, and the presentation of racial maternal comparatives through the exemplary showcasing of white women such as Catelyn Stark, Cersei Lannister, and Daenerys Targaryen as integral point-of-view characters within the series who are

commemorated for their actions regarding their children and are uplifted as fiercely loving mothers yet mothers of color are given no such considerations or empathy.

As servants of an integral purpose within The Seven Kingdoms, women of color are presented as the diligent weavers of the story arcs of their white counterparts as the subject/object model entails, often providing women of color with subtle and dismissive roles. For example, the first women of color shown embodying the positions of “other mother” or maternal surrogates are the Dothraki handmaids gifted to Daenerys on her wedding day, Irri and Jhiqui. In season one, the handmaids act ever presently as guiding forces to Daenerys Dothraki transformation and acclamation in customs for which they provide her with aesthetic, linguistic and sexual guidance, the tools she will need to become a convincing Khaleesi as well as a formidable conqueror. The non-white women surrounding Daenerys are interchangeably forgettable once she has absorbed from them the cultural traits needed to survive, thus Jhiqui is not mentioned again following the season one finale, assumed a deserter, while Irri betrays Daenerys and is violently executed. The timing of Irri’s demise as the only woman of color on the show at the time marks her death as significant, even as it only appears in the DVD extras, as Frankel describes, her “offscreen sacrifice certainly seems a prelude to Talisa’s brutal onscreen death” and the murder and misuse of many others (Frankel, 2014, p.30). With this racial comparative the message becomes clear, women of color are discarded when they are no longer needed by whiteness and as a woman of color, the inability to provide life and safety for one’s self or children becomes dishearteningly evident through *Game of Thrones* characterizations with definitively no mothers of color or children of color to speak of.

The thematic gratuity of nonwhite womanhood and its accompanying subjugation, vengeance, and injustice within the television series becomes reflective of oppositional presentations of white womanhood, entitlements, vengeance and achieved justices illustrated through Daenerys duality of her enslaved/enslaver positionality as well as her Targaryen ancestry. The subsequent sections unravel the

characterizations and narratives of relative women of color through varying proximities of maternal refusal while simultaneously navigating the inclusive and progressive illusions of Daenerys white womanhood as she journeys toward the Iron Throne.

Subheading 2.5 Princess Elia Martell of Dorne: Sexual Geography and Colonial Terrorism

In *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship*, bell hooks discusses the power of looking through a critically intense perspective of Black spectatorship through the “gaze”, which is observed as a gesture of resistance seeking to challenge authority. From an infantile state hooks says that as children we are conditioned to be punished relative to looking; describing this pre-spectator experience as one making the child “afraid to look but fascinated by the gaze. There is power in looking” (hooks, 1974, p.681). As a racialization of this ideology of looking, hooks details the history of the right to gaze through the implementation of master/bondsman hierarchies of oppression, saying that the “politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that the slaves were denied their right to gaze” (hooks, 1974, p.681). For Princess Elia Martell of Dorne, it is not her inability to look, but her inability to be looked at that signifies her as a unique avenue of the *Game of Thrones* narrative. Though she is integral to the overarching storyline, Princess Elia never actually appears within the narrative which as Collins suggests signifies the control of Elia as object by the dominant narrative acting as subject, creating an intensity in the dominance of the narrative as her presence is voided and completely constituted by the subject. Without being able to view Elia, her objectification goes unopposed and her utility through this lack of looking acts to control not only onscreen representation but also supplanting the potential for decoding through Black spectatorship, forcing the Black spectator to function on narration provided by the encoders. The aggressive violence that befalls Princess Elia Martell as representative of Dorne, acts as both a regional conquest of the elusively uncolonized Dorne, eradication of noble Rhoynar ancestry as well as a specific racialized abuse of nonwhite femininity through sexuality and maternity.

Though politically arranged marriages have remained a long held historical and thematic tradition, the exemplified strategic unions of Princess Elia Martell of Dorne to the crowned Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and Princess Daenerys Targaryen to Khal Drogo are made comparably distinct in their progression and intent. In *The Power of Indifference. Violence and Visibility in Modern History* historian Martha Hodes investigates interloping political tensions of race and sex during the American reconstruction period, documenting the interloping relationship relativity concerning Black women/white men and white women/Black men which she hypothesizes as heavily influenced by respectability narratives. Hodes navigates the ideological patterns of white women as politically and sexually protected by white men, identifying discrepancies in the ways Black women are aggressed and unprotected compared to white women; recognizing Black male political benefit and subsequent aggression from white men as attributed to Black men's developing relationships with white women. Hodes resolves that, "whether true or untrue, what comes through consistently in the testimony is the way in which extreme white anxiety over sexual liaisons between white women and Black men was linked to fears of Black men's political and economic independence", a fear that leads to the death of Khal Drogo and his male heir (Hodes, 1993, p. 407). Through the ideology of "pornotropics" in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality*, Anne McClintock describes colonial conquest, aligning race, region, and fetishistic gendered violence; saying, "women serve as boundary markers and threshold figures; they facilitate the male plot and the male transformations, but they are not the agents of change, nor are they conceivable heirs to political power" a fact that is prominent within the series (McClintock, 1995, p.70).

With Princess Elia Martell and (then) Princess Daenerys Targaryen, the racially gendered discrepancies between white women and women of color through parallels of rape, motherhood and vengeance are defined through their differing interracial unions. With Princess Elia, her marriage to Rhaegar attempts to politically unify the Seven Kingdoms and bring Dorne under Targaryen influence in

peaceful alliance though the narrative damage becomes catastrophic. As often recited through exposition, during the siege of King's Landing after Prince Rhaegar is killed at the Battle of the Trident by Robert Baratheon, Princess Elia's door is kicked down by white (Lannister) soldiers, her toddler daughter Rhaenys is excessively stabbed to death and her infant son Aegon is torn from her breast, his head bashed in as Elia is forced to watch until she is violently raped by her son's killer and bludgeoned to death. The body of Princess Elia as it lay demolished and conquered outside her home of Dorne, is dominated on its behalf, her children's slaughter ending all connectivity and intersection; while her death marks the elusive Dorne as defeated, racially distinct and forever unprotected.

Frankel situates rapists within the *Game of Thrones* narrative as integral to the gendered conflict, saying of Princess Elia's rapist, "Gregor Clegane, the Mountain That Rides, and Ramsay Bolton, bastard lord of the Dreadfort, are both known for rape and savagery," further, "when the Targaryen's fell, Clegane raped Princess Elia and murdered her children with a savagery that permanently taints his reputation" (Frankel, 2014, p.11). Though Clegane's reputation is "tainted", Princess Elia's vicious murder and demise even in exposition are always more about the men and politics surrounding her attack without ever focusing on her personhood or politics specifically. Through McClintock's gender assessments of conquering by gendered violence, with Princess Elia, the "knowledge of the unknown world was mapped as a metaphysics of gender violence not as the expanded recognition of cultural difference" additionally saying that "in these fantasies, the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration" (McClintock, 1995, p.23). Even after Princess Elia of Dorne is raped and murdered, plundered and penetrated permanently, and the thirst for vengeance on her behalf by her brother Prince Oberyn drives House Martell toward extinction, the white narrative benefit of Princess Elia's marriage to Prince Rhaegar remains an indispensable chronicling tool.

From the series beginning, though his siblings are the focus and he is long dead, Prince Rhaegar's actions prior to his death have been a constant thematic speculation of political entitlement.

The parentage of Jon Snow, who is thought to be the bastard son of Lord Eddard Stark and an unknown woman, continues throughout the show, revealed in season seven to be an elaborate farce to protect the secret child of Prince Rhaegar and Eddard's sister Lyanna Stark. Through this revelation, it is made clear that Rhaegar ran away with Lyanna who was betrothed to the future King Robert Baratheon, who initiated a rebellion during which his wife Princess Elia and their children are murdered as well as Rhaegar himself. The bombshell of the show's penultimate season becomes the fact that Rhaegar prior to his death, annulled his marriage to Princess Elia without her consent or knowledge, in turn marrying and impregnating Lyanna; making Jon Snow the heir to the Iron Throne with his true born name being Aegon Targaryen, the same name as Prince Rhaegar and Princess Elia's slain son. The irony of Prince Rhaegar annulling his marriage to Princess Elia of Dorne, leaving her and his children undefended so that he could possess a white noblewoman and protect their heir who is given a name formerly possessed by his previous son is disturbingly palpable, suggesting an active white replacement for the nonwhite Prince Aegon as well as Daenerys who is no longer the logical heir to the Iron Throne.

Though Princess Elia is raped, murdered, and betrayed through her politically inclined marriage to Prince Rhaegar, with no justice or consideration, while Daenerys' rape turns to love, her mixed-race child is traded for three dragons, and she achieves vengeance at her own hands, beholding the means to conquer and protect herself. These specified distinctions between gender, race, and politics create an implicit bias in favor of white wives and white children over wives of color and mixed children, allowing for a distinct expectation of bias characterizations concerning race, gender, sexuality, and class as they unfold throughout the narrative.

Subheading 2.6 Talisa Maegyr Queen Consort: Bloody Racial Retribution

For *Game of Thrones*, one of the only negativized, consensual, nonpolitical marital unions thus far have been that of Talisa Maegyr and the King in the North Robb Stark, the investigation of which is focused upon how Talisa is positioned as both opposing and aiding whiteness as well as her maternal

surrogacy and exotic otherness. Within Richard H. Corrigan's parameters of Just War Theory, this traditional code of war ethics, is presented strongly within, Robb Stark, son of Eddard and Catelyn Stark, as he struggles to stabilize and maintain the northern quadrant of the Seven Kingdoms; a plan to which Talisa's involvement proves devastating. Within the narrative of *Game of Thrones* House Stark is renowned as a historic icon and communal pillar revered for their conduct of loyalty, honor and codes of war; for Robb the strength of his moral character embodies his ancestral nobility. As elected King by his peers on the premise of his ancestry, Robb advocates firmly that there can be no justice under an unjust ruler and that, "the people of the North should not be subject to the whims of a tyrant King who violates the basic rights of those he would rule" (Jacoby, Wiley, 2012, p.52). For this reason, Robb, at the behest of his bannermen, decides to establish an independent state in the North separate from the rest of the Seven Kingdoms, actively protesting the successor of King Robert Baratheon, the young Joffrey Baratheon, who symbolizes white masculine sadism, privilege and entitlements. It is King Joffrey's "unjust" rule that becomes the basis for rebellion and Robb as a desirably formidable opposition as he fights "a war to ensure that his fellow Northerners have a just King", vesting Robb as iconic symbol of white male goodness, a guiding light in a world falling toward darkness (Jacoby, Wiley, 2012, p.52). However, Robb's journey becomes a transition paved by Talisa acting as philosophical compass, a fate that is changed from the novel to the television series.

For the literary version, George R.R. Martin illustrates Robb's wife as a young white girl by the name of Jeyne Westerling, described in *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity, and Resistance* by Valerie Estelle Frankel as one of the most influential differences and divergences from Martin's characterizations. Frankel defines Westerling as "a submissive ninny" saying her family are Lannister bannermen and that Jeyne is an "awkward fifteen-year-old, 'a pretty enough child' but 'not a girl to lose a Kingdom for'" (Frankel, 2014, p. 62). Further Frankel posits that Robb falls for Jeyne because he's so overcome by grief on hearing of his brothers deaths that he allows her to "comfort him", saying that

“when his honor kicks in belatedly the next morning, he offers to marry her to restore her honor, though his honor as a King in a marriage alliance with the Frey’s is forfeit” (Frankel, 2014, p. 62). Through this action, Robb becomes trapped, deciding to protect Jeyne’s honor above his own; a moral preservation that makes Robb a great and vulnerable King. The definitive differences that construct Jeyne Westerling from the novels and Talisa Maegyr of the television series in large part change Robb’s iconology from good to questionable through the opposition of the women he marries. For Martin’s version, the Westerling family remain loyal to House Lannister and Jeyne’s mother doses her with contraceptives each day, so she never falls pregnant with Robb’s child; meaning when Robb subsequently dies at the Red Wedding, the Lannister’s pardon and reward the Westerling’s and Jeyne does not accompany Robb to the wedding, as it’s feared her presence will offend the Frey’s, so she survives unscathed.

For David Benioff and D.B. Weiss however, the television adaptation reconstitutes Robb’s honorable nature through a distinct contrast made in the characterization of Talisa Maegyr as Jeyne Westerling’s replacement, inherently racializing and sexualizing Talisa. This addition of race transforms the narrative to depict a specified designation of femininity; one of distraction, destruction and lacking innocence. As Robin Bernstein analyses in *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights*, “racial innocence” proposes, “the construction of the Black child as impervious to harm, and therefore excluded from innocence’s claims to protection” (Cecire, 2015, p.168). This suggests that racialized temporalities often form negative designations of “anticipation (not yet) and foreclosure (already-over)” (Cecire, 2015, p.164). Natalie Cecire delves deeper into this ideology through virtue, revealing that “Innocence is constituted as temporally prior, whether to knowledge, to experience, or to culpable action” and subsequently, “marked” bodies are rarely innocent ones. This past participle positioning of “marked” which Cecire says “grammatically formalizes the time past: in the case of Blackness in particular, ‘markedness’ is conceptualized as having been marked, as being experienced and belated, not early” (Cecire, 2015, p.169). This is made apparent, not through a childlike

presentation but through a character assessment of her as racialized, sexually adult and absent of innocence.

Through Carol Pearson's work with fictional models, there is a popularly recurring archetype in the fairy tale princess or ingénue (French for virtuous and candid), which proposes that "innocents assume they will be cared for by the universe and other people, because they are so special and so good", yet this archetype is unattainable to Talisa Maegyr as she disrupts the narrative morality through her racialization, in a way that Jeyne Westerling could not (Frankel, 2014, p.183). For example, George R.R. Martin suggests that the sexualization displayed in love scenes featuring Talisa were "written with a more complex and exotic backstory", in which Talisa is introduced with an independent professional identity as a healer from the Free City of Volantis unlike any other woman presented before her (Frankel, 2014, p.62). Of Talisa's origins, Frankel says that she fled, "a world of slavery and privilege to become a saver of lives", first presented in season two episode eight entitled, *The Prince of Winterfell*, Talisa reveals that after a slave saved her little brother, "I decided two things that day. I would not waste my years planning dances and masquerades with the other noble ladies. And when I came of age I would never live in a slave city again" (Frankel, 2014, p.62). Talisa embodies a proficient positionality that makes her stand out to Robb on the battlefield as she mends his soldiers, signifying a her as a caregiver who's nurturing later influences her maternal surrogate relationship with Robb. Though Catelyn Stark is positioned at her son's side, the young King's severe entanglement with her mother cause him to struggle in making a name for himself separate from her advice, allowing a distance between the two through which Talisa is inserted. When Robb and Talisa meet, Robb is already betrothed to the daughter of another white noble family, the Frey's, yet when Robb meets Talisa for one of the first times, he acts on his impulses and disregards his duty by following his romantic heart in a contemporary and unbelievable development for a man in his position. It then becomes the fault of Talisa that Robb is undone, stripped of his morality and honor, forfeiting the very basis of his right to rule and his ability to

conduct a *just* war. Through this imprudent marriage, Robb's downfall is solidified and an argument of not only love but sexualized racial implication is made permissible. While this union is presented as one of agency not usually seen within the series, the union of Robb and Talisa is fraught from the beginning directly due to the damning of Robb's political marriage in alliance with Walder Frey by refusing to marry one of his daughters, in effect Talisa becomes the problem.

In critical observation, Frankel calculates that though it is refreshing to see the show present a romantic love scene, rather than the repetitively normalized rape and abuse which viewers have become accustomed to each week; the conversations surrounding Talisa and Robb's sexual encounters, denotes an eerie context for their relationship dynamic. For Robb, his attractions to Talisa are distinguished by saying she's "not like other girls," referring to her robust and self-assured demeanor, and her willingness to speak her mind to a King, characterizations tied to her culture and geographical origin; ultimately setting the totality of Talisa's value within the limitations of her otherness (Frankel, 2014, p.63). From this observation, Talisa's "worthiness" of Robb's affections, coincide her othered state, as directly combating the normalized trends within the Seven Kingdoms; in doing so, producing Talisa as formidably "unlike regular, silly, simpering women (like the poor unnamed, unknown Frey girl, who might not be so keen on being married to a stranger either)" (Frankel, 2014, p.63). This negotiation of Talisa dictates an implicit bias of racial and cultural consequences for the series view of "marked" women such as herself; Talisa's "markedness" and state of protection become not only relative to her attitudes but also encompassing her class through infantilization and race fetishization by which she is able to bewitch Robb away from his duty, leading him to his death.

Talisa and Robb's clandestine nuptials are distinguished from the marriages of Khal Drogo and Daenerys as well as Princess Elia Martell and Rhaegar Targaryen by directly defying the politics of marital duty and hierarchal expectation. While inheritances of wealth, military and prestige are commonly expected currency of marital contract, Robb stands to gain nothing tangible by breaking his previous

betrothal and subsequently losing the honor of his word by choosing Talisa, gaining no riches, no army, simply marrying the woman of his choice. Though portrayed as an independent, intelligent, working woman with compassion, a woman in Talisa's position does not survive the Seven Kingdoms, especially if she is presented with no ancestral House, no legitimate name, and no wealth before Robb uses his white savior complexities and entitlements to pull her from her independence into a character utterly irrelevant outside Robb's storyline. During the series, Talisa and Robb's relationship remains romantically sexual, yet it is her insertion between Robb and his mother Catelyn that make her ability to influence him more effective. As Talisa becomes closer to Robb, she becomes his confidante through sexualized deliberations, acting as his compass and conscious, and aiding his manhood through the mystique of her otherness. With respect to her worldly perspective and the knowledge she transfers to Robb, Talisa's council allows for a renewed maternal influence which Robb craves. Richard H. Corrigan argues that, Robb "has many motivations for waging war, but the desire that actually leads him to action must be to see his *just* cause fulfilled" (Jacoby, Wiley, 2012, p.52). Though Robb's honor is called to question upon his marriage to Talisa, his righteous ideological constitution remains a callback to the relativity of his family name and a large part of his being named King, a title and honor to which he clings.

However, for his betrayal of Walder Frey, Robb and all whom he holds dear are targeted for bloody retribution in an event infamously named the Red Wedding, the same wedding Jeyne Westerling avoids (and survives) in Martin's literary version. In season three episode nine entitled *The Rains of Castamere*, Robb, Talisa, Catelyn and their bannermen gather at a wedding hosted by Walder Frey who's unnamed daughter has been promised to Edmure Tully, Robb's uncle, to rebuild alliances between the Starks and the Frey's through marital alliance. Following the wedding, the reception is depicted as dark and calm under the pretense of friendship and merriment, a perceptibly pregnant Talisa glowing as she and Robb discuss baby names brings an element of sudden horror to the Stark narrative. Once Catelyn

notices the doors closing around them and that the Frey guests are wearing chainmail, she turns to her son and as Frankel describes, Talisa is “stabbed repeatedly in the belly, an image of particular violence against women”, with her reimagining as a woman of color completing the racialized gender script as Talisa and her child die in front of Robb heightening their turmoil as Robb and Catelyn are slaughtered as well (Frankel, 2014, p.30). The creators reimagining of Talisa as a pregnant woman of color adds “another layer of tragedy to the already explosive scene”, yet, the true goal becomes to further reinforce “a world in which women of color are subject to increasingly disturbing and repulsive forms of violence” without regulation or regard (Frankel, 2014, p.30). Talisa dies marked by her race, unprotected, and denied motherhood, with her child as just another child of color dead and detached from narrative succession, ironic. Corrigan describes Robb as a figurehead of the North, saying that Robb exists under the parameters of a “legitimate authority and conducts warfare in noble fashion”, further, he treats his prisoners “humanely, not engaging in excessive violence, showing consideration for civilians and for his own people. His intention, however, is suspect” (Jacoby, Wiley, 2012, p.59). It is the shift of Robb’s societal view specifically by his countrymen that transforms the utility of Talisa Maegyr as a symbol oppositional to *just* morality. The innocence Jeyne for the independence and exotic of Talisa allows the former to survive lovelorn but unscathed, while the latter dies a horrific death, her child slaughtered in her womb without consequence, and the significance of Robb’s honor made relative to his marital unions, distinctly faulting Talisa over Jeyne.

Subheading 2.7 Ellaria Sand: Paramour, Bastard, and Mother of the Sand Snakes

Through Princess Elia Martell, Dorne is mentioned as a noteworthy aspect of the history of the Seven Kingdoms, yet, it is not until season four episode one titled *Two Swords* that Prince Oberyn first appears and Dorne is brought into the active narrative. As Oberyn embodies Dorne, his introduction is one of racialized entitlement, confidence and calm bravado; with his expressions of love of country and culture are made evident through his presentation. As a visually unexploited avenue of thematically

unresolved tensions, Obery'n's appearance offers a glimpse of true diversity to consider outside of the enslaved in the slave cities and the Dothraki. Obery'n along with his bastard paramour Ellaria Sand provide a rich and underdeveloped first look at an entirely unseen geographic region complete with rich and diverse politics. Through the projection of Robin Bernstein's calculations of "racial innocence", the racial otherness/nonwhiteness of Dorne is navigated as a holistic absence of innocence through cultural and geographical means; signifying whiteness as interchangeable with innocence, and those of color inherently denied it. Bernstein theorizes that the social positioning and perception of racially "marked" bodies act as a designation "requiring explanation" and somehow "acquired by experience", while whiteness is taken as an "originary state" of being thus, forming otherness as "antithetical in that sense to innocence" (Cecire, 2015, p.169). This system suggests that the temporality of racial innocence is in part relative to the formation of an encompassing "environmental innocence" created by the geographic and political differences amid Dorne and Westeros. As an extension of these distinctions, the display of Dornish women and children is compared to that of normalized Westerosi women and children; exemplified most venomously through the polarization and feud of Ellaria Sand and Cersei Lannister, with their children as their most valuable weapons, displaying the discrepancies and allowances of motherhood with Dorne as a diverse focal point.

In *Two Swords*, on the arm of Prince Obery'n in King's Landing, Ellaria's first appearance becomes a dynamic revelation of the boldness and autonomy of Dornish women. With Ellaria played by a sensational Swiss-Indian actress by the name of Indira Varma and Prince Obery'n portrayed by Chilean actor Pedro Pascal, the racial comparatives of the couple are obvious and unique when held next to those in King's Landing. In season four episode eight *The Mountain and the Viper*, Obery'n battles Sir Gregor Clegane the man who brutally raped and murdered Princess Elia and slaughtered her children in a trial by combat; his brutal death before Ellaria's eyes proves to be a pivotal catalyst to her characterization thereafter. Ellaria, in her grief assumes the mantle Prince Obery'n's cause, vowing to

atone for the death of Princess Elia, her political movements and those of her children on her behalf reflecting calculated and unrelenting revenge.

In season five, Dorne is introduced as an active narrative location diversifying the standards set previously, producing an abundance of new freedoms considered “uncivilized”, immodest, immoral, or simply savage in comparison to the dominant narrative rules of the Seven Kingdoms. Through Bernstein’s assertion of racial innocence, Dornish women and their children oppose their white counterparts simply based in the racialized assumptions of their absent or “belated” innocence. Ellaria stationed in Dorne rather than King’s Landing where she is introduced, evolves as she gains strength from her seat of comfort and maintains a rare position of protection as a woman of color. Ellaria’s prideful embodiment of both her bastardization and paramour statuses, signify her as outside of Westerosi etiquette. As Dorne recognizes unique attitudes toward familial rights and spousal responsibilities of women Ellaria takes unique pride in her label as a bastard, in Dorne called a “Sand” whose utility acts as a representative of geographic location and perception of ethnicity; for example, the bastard Jon Snow is named a “Snow” for the northern region of Westeros. Ellaria is shown seductively carrying herself confidently in King’s Landing, never faltering in her identity assertion, even when Cersei Lannister attempts to shame her upon their first meeting, a moment that challenges the preconceived rules of propriety within the Seven Kingdoms. When Ellaria is introduced by her bastard name, Cersei replies that she has never met a Sand, looking down her nose at the brown woman, to which Ellaria responds that she has “10,000 brothers and sisters” as a daughter of the city of Dorne. Alongside her bastardization, Ellaria vehemently clings to the positivity of her sexuality exemplified through a visit to a King’s Landing brothel where both Ellaria and Prince Oberyn choose men and women to entertain them and a sex worker addresses Ellaria as a “lady”, to which she replies that she is a bastard and will be titled as such. This remains a singular prideful first in the *Game of Thrones* framework, as a claim to bastardy is typically considered a hierarchical marker of inheritance, ancestral

claims, class and reputation; most often uttered offensively. Through Ellaria's Dornish ethnicity and political understanding, these challenges and compromises beautifully characterize the true diversity of Dornish culture, providing a broad avenue of otherness.

As a paramour, Ellaria's position as the unmarried lover of a noble, in Dorne differs from Westerosi mistresses by public acknowledgment of a paramour as an official relationship, usually considered as a marriage in all but name, affording a degree of formal social standing that may be kept privately or publicly. Though Ellaria Sand is considered Prince Oberyn's wife, they were not allowed to ever legally marry due to the discrepancies of their stations, Ellaria presenting as "beneath" the station of a Prince of Dorne. For ancestral traditions, few held over from the ancient Rhoynar, among which an expressed equality of inheritance laws that enabled many women to become politically and sexually powerful through their ethnic and geographical bonds as daughters of Dorne. The sexual multiplicity demonstrated by both Ellaria and Prince Oberyn also calculates an openly sexual functioning within Dornish culture, showcasing same sex lovers as well as multiple partners and reinforcing the paramour as a fluid sexual positioning valid in both male and female parties, exemplified by Oberyn and Ellaria's boldly consensual thirst for sexual pleasure and the voracity of their appetites. Ellaria's strength drawn from her identity as a daughter of Dorne drives her vengeance, yet it is not until season five when she is returned to Dorne and amongst her daughters that she is truly proficient.

With Dorne as permanently severed from the united realm, this narrative location acts as an inevitable resistance and problematized otherness. Through Rob Nixon's examination of *Slow Violence and the Environmental Poor*, the conservational encompassment of destructive processing systems is detailed within his methodological employment, termed "slow violence", as investigated through a dire enclave in the ecological break of ethnicity and politics. As Nixon scrutinizes, there exists an "unspectacularizable" and imperceptible environmental destruction, here localized in Dorne. Nixon ascertains that, "because the 'slow violence' of the environmental destruction occurs gradually and out

of sight...dispersed across time and space, it is (wrongly) typically not viewed as violence at all” (Cecire,2015, p.165). In Dorne the geography as well as the uniquely mixed civilization and distinguished culture is “out of sight, out of mine”, an ideology that minimizes the violence done as a side effect, effectively failing to recognize this violence as slow violence or even violence at all.

As James R. Kincaid describes in *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*, “Innocence is a matter of absence” referring to them as a “set of *have nots*” eliciting the absence “of knowledge, of experience, and of culpability”, further, “their equal capacity to rupture innocence means that putting innocence at stake renders each of them suitable for any of the others” (Cecire,2015, p.169). Robin Bernstein contends in *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights*, “innocence is not just a quality residing in bodies or subjects”, but something that must be “actively performed and reinforced through the repudiation of social categories like race, class, and gender” (Cecire, 2015, p.169). This sanctioned “unknowing” of innocence is only made obtainable by those with bodies deemed “unmarked” by race. With Ellaria and her children, their “markedness” is solidified by outside critiques, engraving their oppression through gender expectations and ethnic politics, creating a specified authority within Dornish women that determines their womanhood as one void of softness, and protection unless self-protected.

Ellaria’s position as a mother, is incredibly rare as she is acknowledged as the only woman of color to be shown maternally and whom audiences can see be developed even outside the presence of her lover. As Frankel details, “Oberyn’s many bastard daughters, the dazzlingly deadly Sand Snakes, are all variously talented and vicious”, and though Oberyn fathers many children in the books, onscreen only Obara, Nymeria, and Tyene are presented, positioned as a violent force to be reckoned with often referred to as a collective rather than unilaterally (Frankel, 2014, p.140). This compact and interchangeable position erases the opportunity for multiple women of color on screen by resolving them to a singular identity as the Sand Snakes a combination of their bastardized surname and the

nickname of their father “The Red Viper”. Though Ellaria biological mothers one of the three Sand Snakes shown, her maternal influence amongst all three is indisputable.

The investigation of Oberyn’s favorite daughter, his namesake Obara, showcases her ability to exist against the normalized gender expectations, as leader of Dorne’s army on behalf of her uncle Prince Doran Martell. Under the tumultuous relationship of Prince Doran and Ellaria, House Martell crumbles from its very foundations as Ellaria demands vengeance through unadulterated violence and Prince Doran resists as a *just* and productive ruler. Here, a presentation of Dornish masculinity is established as gendered combatant and Corrigan’s navigation of Just War Theory in Dorne is racialized with definitive boundaries of motivation distinguishing Ellaria’s claiming of the “right to go to war” and Prince Doran possessing by birthright the “right to conduct war”. This struggle for power divides familial solidarity and further designates Prince Doran as opposite his late brother, Prince Oberyn, whose temper and passion made he and Ellaria compatible. When confronted by Ellaria for his weaknesses in failing to avenge the death of Prince Oberyn, Prince Doran explains his love and envy of his brother, attempting to convince Ellaria that a death in a trial by combat is a *just* death and cannot be justly punished. He reveals that “many in Dorne want war. But I've seen war. I've seen the bodies piled on the battlefields. I've seen the orphans starving in the cities. I don't want to lead my people into that hell”, a *just* decision that is legally his as the ruling heir of Dorne. Ellaria’s opposition to Prince Doran’s authority as replaced by her own need for vengeance, creates an *unjust* premise for violence in her actions as well as those of her daughters by extension. When Ellaria attacks Prince Doran, she solidifies her fate as irrationally cruel, immoral, and seductively intoxicating, a dangerous trope to which Tyene, Nymeria, and Obara all embody and employ as well.

As Ellaria murders Prince Doran, with his dying breaths he begs Ellaria to spare his son Trystane to which she replies, “your son is weak, like you. And weak men will never rule Dorne again”, creating the illusion that eradicating all the men of color (in this instant the remaining heirs of House Martell),

will in effect create a better world, conflating the characterization of nonviolence for weakness. This series of actions default Ellaria and her daughters as the remaining representatives of Dorne, creating a gendered Dornish coup.

The love Prince Oberyn bore Ellaria and his daughters remains a rarity of tenderness and trust unseen in characters of color; here, the reliance of the feminine archetype upon the masculine intensifies the connectivity of Oberyn through his daughters, implying that even Dornish women can be defined by their patriarchal dependence. In season five episode four *Son of a Harpy*, while committing themselves to the task of taking control of Dorne and avenging their father, Obara reveals that when she was a child, Oberyn came to take her to court, saying, "I'd never seen this man, and yet, he called himself my father. My mother wept, said I was too young... and a girl. Oberyn tossed his spear at my feet and said, 'Girl or boy, we fight our battles- but the Gods let us choose our weapons'. My father pointed to the spear, and then to my mother's tears. I made my choice long ago." Though Obara is presented with the most development and is loosely identified as the leader of the Sand Snakes with Nymeria as her lieutenant and confidant, Tyene is Ellaria's clear favorite as the last of her biological offspring, and the trio presents as formidably calculating. In season five episode seven entitled *The Gift*, while imprisoned in Dorne, the Sand Snakes are jailed alongside an avaricious Westerosi sell-sword named Sir Bronn who along with Sir Jaime Lannister, brother and lover of Cersei, have snuck into the city to rescue Princess Myrcella from the Martell's following the death of Prince Oberyn in King's Landing. Through expressed boredom, Obara and Nymeria are shown sparring with each other, while Tyene exudes sexual seduction, enticing Bronn, whom she sparred with previously, bearing her breasts and flirtishly entrancing him until he begins to succumb to the poison she has exposed him to. Tyene toys with him as he begins to fade due to the poison, at the last second light heartedly tossing him the antidote as he narrowly avoids death while Tyene appears sadistically amused, a Dornish femme fatal. This skill with poisons is another extension of Oberyn's legacy as he too was noted for dipping his

daggers in poison and often described as impetuous much like Obara, whereas her sisters are described as calculating and fierce. Named for the last warrior Queen of the Rhoynar who saved her people by bringing them to Dorne, Nymeria is described as having inherited her father's cunning character and is also seen as the most observant and manipulative of the Sand Snakes. Instead of charging head-on into a situation relying on brute strength like Obara, Nymeria stands back and observe her enemy's weak points, then moves with precision, for which she is said to be more like her uncle Prince Doran as well as in her demeanor and decision; even her weapon of choice, the bullwhip, exemplifies her premeditated, controlled, and competitive nature.

The Sand Snakes inheritances from their ancestry and their devotion to their mother is framed unhealthily with Ellaria seemingly acting as puppeteer and immoral compass, culminating in murder, choosing gender and maternal bonds over all else. As Frankel describes, the Sand Snakes are adored by their court for their beauty, saying “they are mistresses of poison, no less deadly for their demure qualities”, also revealing that the elegant Nymeria “was sure to have a dozen blades concealed about her person” and even a brush of Tyene’s fingers can mean death, though she dresses as “the most chaste of maids” in concealing white lace. Telling his daughters that they should wed or have affairs if they wish but if they find themselves stuck with “a fool or a brute, don’t look to me to rid you of him. I gave you the tools to do that for yourself”, Prince Oberyn sets a specific tone for his daughters that is only seen within Dornish culture, whose women are wonderfully self-sufficient and commanding (Frankel, 2014, p.140-141). With these reinforcements both parental and cultural, the Sand Snakes act as environmental products with inherited scores to settle. Through the reputation of the Sand Snakes, the manifestation of ruthless women of color is solidified in the same breath that mothers of color are made possible; activating the first images of capable women of color as simultaneously immoral, lacking conscious and innocence. As Bernstein’s ideological inferences toward racialized innocence suggest, the ways in which children of color navigate not only their familial dynamic but also their individually raced

and gendered freedoms under social scrutiny is difficult to clarify. Though the Sand Snakes are the only children of color revealed, their ruthlessness can be too easily transcribed to the same inherent animalism displayed by the Dothraki.

Through Princess Myrcella, daughter of Cersei, a politically arranged marriage to Prince Doran's son and heir Prince Trystane calls for Princess Myrcella to be relocated from her home in King's Landing to the culturally immersive Dorne, calling back to the introduction of Daenerys Targaryen in the series premiere. Princess Myrcella in her whiteness appears as a physical and ideological contrast, murdered by Ellaria Sand with a poisonous kiss as vengeance against Cersei and her family for the death of Prince Oberyn. Through the extension of rival innocence as a generational comparative, Cersei and Ellaria are established as fierce mothers and their children as extensions of their own cultural definitions. The death of Princess Myrcella, triggers another rapid exchange of calculated retaliations by Cersei upon Ellaria and the Sand Snakes that effectively destroy Ellaria by bloodily ripping her children from her. Season seven depicts the Sand Snakes being systematically murdered on Cersei's orders while Ellaria's favorite, Tyene, is saved for last, killed before her mother's eyes as Cersei calmly revels in watching the two struggle within restraints upon opposing walls by thick chains, shouting from gagged mouths through tears, defeated.

House Martell from the series inception has been positioned as cursedly unresolved, their sense of vigilante justice reinforced as volatile and rash, forever opposing normalized whiteness. It is through racial innocence Princess Myrcella is avenged by her mother as an extension of white justice and white motherhood while Ellaria and the Sand Snakes are made expendable and eternally undeserving of impartiality. Though Ellaria and her daughters remain the only such bond shown between women of color, the demise of their plot as well as the haphazard writing and handling of their characterizations reinforces the inevitability of their downfall and simultaneously desensitizes audiences from empathizing with them due to their murderous capabilities.

Subheading 2.8 Daenerys as Colonizer: The Unsullied, Dothraki, and Covert Colonialism

With the transformative view of Daenerys Targaryen in her post-victim state of power, the positions of dominance, race and gender within *Game of Thrones* are exercised through white feminine innocence, victimhood, white entitlements, white privilege as well as Just War Theory to create a conflicting ideological stance pitting white womanhood and its claims to entitlement against marginalized women of color and their implied incapability. Through Daenerys position as a former victim, she continues to utilize her initial sympathetic stance, completing her disguise as a Westerosi Khaleesi, who has yet to be formally named as an enslaver and conqueror due to her gender perception. Placed adjacent to the raced, gendered and classed characterizations of Princess Elia Martell, Talisa Maegyr (Stark), Ellaria Sand and the Sand Snakes; an expression of white imposition bolstered by possessive investments and entitlements create a thematic spectrum of altered states of sociopolitical rejection victimizing women of color through a hierarchal establishment. As expressed by U.S. historian George Lipsitz in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, white supremacy acts through white benefit attached to identity politics which secure preferences over minoritized individuals including the expansion of war, inheritance and wealth as opportunistic intersections of whiteness and advocating white power dynamics.

Lipsitz utilizes the work of film critic Richard Dyer to emphasize his own conclusions of systems of white dominance, saying, “white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular”, which Daenerys character construction does effortlessly (Lipsitz, 1998, p.1). Furthering this claim, Lipsitz asserts that “if white racism manifested itself exclusively through hostility and exclusion it would be easier to understand and to combat”, additionally creating “a possessive investment in whiteness that entails embracing people of color and their cultures in condescending and controlling ways” (Lipsitz, 1998, p.118). As Lipsitz conceptualizes the identity of whiteness and white desire he also reveals the racialized stereotypes in both art and life that recurrently position people of color as

“sources of inspiration or forgiveness for whites, and the white fascination with notions of ‘primitive’ authenticity among communities of color, all testify to the white investment in images that whites themselves have created about people of color” (Lipsitz, 1998, p.118). For Daenerys, her ancestry marks her royal claims, bolstering her entitlements toward the Iron Throne. In a culmination of specified captivation, primitivity and prevailing assumption of the “other”, white ideological preservation utilizes a white feminine mystique which signifies a unique gendered access to Daenerys allowances as she campaigns through the slave cities following the deaths of her rapist turned soul mate Khal Drogo and their sole heir Rhaego.

In Essos, within the slave city of Astapor, Daenerys finds a stringent master/slave dichotomy equipped with collars, whips and chains, finding her army, in a renowned group of obedient enslaved soldiers called the Unsullied. Introduced in season three episode four entitled *And Now His Watch Is Ended*, the Unsullied army is introduced by a beautiful, downcast woman with an iron collar around her light brown throat, identifying herself as Missandei of the island of Naath. Missandei is revealed to have been enslaved as a young child and taken from her home in Naath to Slaver's Bay where she was eventually bought and put to work as an interpreter for the slaver-master Kraznys mo Nakloz, one of the “Good Masters” of Astapor, the ruling elite of slave-traders. It is this talent with linguistics that signifies Missandei to Daenerys, her ability to speak nineteen languages becomes an invaluable navigational tool, causing Daenerys to purchase her alongside the Unsullied which in combination create a formidable front for a Targaryen political coup. Missandei begins her significance as an interpreter between her master, Kraznys and Daenerys during their solidification of terms and payment for the Unsullied.

Upon presentation, the Unsullied stand at attention in the blistering sun, faces and bodies covered in heavy armor, dehumanized statuary. These soldiers are characterized as slave-eunuchs who have been trained from birth to fight, notorious for their utter discipline, their incredibly coordinated massive phalanx formations, and their willingness to face overwhelming odds, even in the face of death.

As both Daenerys and Kraznys salivate over the possibilities of their transaction, Missandei explains to Daenerys that the Unsullied are trained beginning when the boys are five years old; usually selected as infants and castrated then though any enslaved boy up to the age of five may be later selected to be made into an Unsullied, and then castrated. Missandei emphasizes the training regimen undergone by the Unsullied as utterly brutal, with only one out of every four boys surviving through to completion; they are made eunuchs as not to succumb to bloodthirsty or sexual urges during battle; their actions only going as far as their orders, and nothing more.

When Daenerys asks if the men are well trained, Kraznys replies through Missandei with a scoff, "The Unsullied are not men. Death means nothing to them. Tell this ignorant whore of a Westerner to open her eyes and watch." Krazny approaches the Unsullied, beckoning one forward, cutting off his nipple as the soldier stands eerily calm, exemplifying that the Unsullied are not men, nor are they human based on their tolerance of pain. Daenerys and Missandei both appear deeply disturbed, to which Kraznys responds, "She's worried about their nipples? Does the dumb bitch know we've cut off their balls?" As the soldier falls back into the ranks, Krazny throws the flesh into the dirt saying, "Here, I'm done with you." To which the Unsullied responds promptly, "This one is pleased to have served you", deeply characterizing the dynamic between them. With Missandei as translator, Kraznys details the "right of passage" for the Unsullied saying that, to win his shield an Unsullied must go to the slave marts with a silver coin, find a newborn and kill it before it's mother's eyes, saying, "This way we make certain there is no weakness left in them". Missandei interprets for Daenerys saying, "She is offended. She asks if you pay a silver coin to the mother, for her dead baby" to which Krazny hisses, "what a soft mewling fool this one is. Tell her the silver is for the baby's owner, not the mother".

The shock factor of this scene is tangible, yet it is strategically set to show that Daenerys would be a better master than Kraznys based on her evident empathy and his lack thereof. It is this assertion

that anyone would be better than Kraznys or another man like him, which allows for the conflation of Daenerys as a savior rather than a master herself.

By these negotiations, Daenerys is able to kill Kraznys, wield his whip and use the Unsullied to kill all the remaining slave masters; an impossible command disguised as a choice. The order Daenerys gives for the Unsullied to revolt against their previous oppressors and claim their “freedom” assumes a differing meaning when it is considered that she owns these men, thus exposing a clear weakness in the illusion of choice within Daenerys framing. This conclusion becomes a perceptual technicality that skews her actions while sympathetically illuminating her as a freedom fighter and a rare feminine victor overcoming male oppression. Throughout the trade of the Unsullied, Missandei is utilized as a translator for Daenerys under a false pretense of necessity, as Daenerys pretends to be ignorant of the language the masters speak, she later reveals as her mother tongue. Kraznys is shown speaking harshly about Daenerys as a “slut”, a “whore”, a “cunt” and it is not until just before she orders one of her dragons to incinerate him that she speaks the language he has used to insult and mock her, finally shedding her disguise and presumed victim status.

With this immense undertaking of deception, Daenerys gains 8,000 Unsullied, each one denied the chance to create a family or know their own, while also confirming racial order as a monitored and maintained facet in favor of whiteness. Though race is a constant thematic tool of *Game of Thrones* overall, it also works vehemently to regulate gender and sexuality within the tangled narratives of the Unsullied who are exemplified for their lack of phallus, men in a world that only recognizes violently sexual masculinity as worthy of power and praise, giving voice to an uncharted and underdiscussed avenue of manhood. It seems that because they are castrated, their swords become what makes them men, blood and violence become their purpose and aggressive hypermasculinity a simultaneous byproduct. Though race is not applied distinctly to the Unsullied, the only exemplary member whose face is seen and whose emotions are given voice is Grey Worm, a man of color who becomes the chosen

leader under Daenerys employ. With this promotion, the invitation opens to the inference that because Grey Worm represents the Unsullied, they also look like him, a man of color. Grey Worm's rise to notoriety is made significant as his relationship with Daenerys is reflective of a grateful loyalist rather than an enslaved soldier and his acceptance becomes the validity necessary to argue that Daenerys is not an enslaver but a liberator who maintains free men within her ranks. The solidification of this bond is made upon their first official meeting when Daenerys asks the Unsullied to choose a leader and He steps forward. When Daenerys asks his name, he replies, "Grey Worm", a name given to him as a young boy by the masters of Astapor, who named the Unsullied after vermin to remind them of who they were. Daenerys appears distraught and tells Grey Worm that he and his men may choose new names for themselves as part of their new "freedoms", and Grey Worm promptly defends his choice saying, "Grey Worm' gives this one pride. It is a lucky name. The name this one was born with was cursed. That was the name he had when he was taken as a slave. But Grey Worm is the name this one had the day Daenerys Stormborn set him free". The savior is solidified. Through sociopolitical understanding, historical knowledge and extensive language skillsets, Missandei gives Daenerys active access outside of her original realm of capability, an alliance more valuable than either anticipates.

In season three finale entitled *Mhysa*, which is old Griscari translated as "mother", Daenerys comes to the brutal slave city of Yunkai, run by masters and developing under the labor of people of color in chains, allowing another grandstand attempt to showcase her humanity and influence. Daenerys arrives in this city with an army of Unsullied, three adolescent dragons, and an ironclad entitlement motivating her toward the Iron Throne, reinforcing white feminine complexity and again showcasing her as the hero as the people of Yunkai shed their collars apprehensively at her behest. Though enslavement is prevalent within this high fantasy narrative, the slave cities distinguish the enslaved as racialized in presentation, highlighting a sea of brown bodies in chains. George R.R. Martin himself comments of war and enslavement as staples of the Game of Thrones narrative that "slavery in the ancient world, and

slavery in the medieval world, was not race-based. You could lose a war if you were a Spartan, and if you lost a war you could end up a slave in Athens, or vice versa. You could get in debt and wind up a slave. And that's what I tried to depict, in my books, that kind of slavery". Suggesting that, "the people that Dany frees in the slaver cities are of many different ethnicities, and that's been fairly explicit in the books. But of course, when David [Benioff] and Dan [Weiss] and his crew are filming that scene, they are filming it in Morocco, and they put out a call for 800 extras" a factor that changes a major dynamic of the slavery portrayed onscreen (Frankel, 2014, p.27).

Daenerys most notable scenes in the show's lifetime becomes her submersion within the brown enslaved peoples, her white skin signifying her as opposite oppression. In this significant scene Daenerys separates herself from her personal guard and begins to walk amongst the formerly enslaved people numbering in the thousands, and as she does so, they begin to reach out to touch her as if she were Christ. Daenerys then allows herself to be lifted atop the shoulders of these people of color, with the crowd chanting "Mhysa", endowing Daenerys as a maternal figurehead in a world where women of color do not get to be mothers, let alone worshipped for it. Luz Delfondo notes in *Why More Feminists Should Watch Game of Thrones*, that the series' racial diversity is overtly problematic, and Daenerys as "the little white girl adventuring amongst the brown people" in Slaver's Bay, makes many viewers uncomfortable in Mhysa when "the brown-skinned slaves raise her to the skies, calling her "mother" in the trope of the "great white savior" (Frankel, 2014, p.26). Delfondo explains that as Daenerys proclaims the people free, she exacerbates her savior complexity by emphasizing that "they could not have freed themselves without her help. Now she has come to be their messiah and teach them her superior ways" (Frankel, 2014, p.26). A commonality of Daenerys behavioral pattern as she moves toward the Iron Throne.

In season five episode nine *The Dance of Dragons*, Daenerys comes under attack in the city of Meereen and her favorite dragon, Drogon, comes to her aid, whisking her away from certain death

leading her to a hillside from which she is eventually taken by unknown Dothraki. In season six episode one entitled *The Red Woman*, Daenerys is presented to a Khal named Moro who challenges not only her status as Queen but her claims to Dothraki culture. Khal Moro and his khalasar reproduce the libidinous nature of the Dothraki as rapists and murders, reestablishing the masculinist brute, reminding the audience of Daenerys feminine fragility as well as her permeating whiteness. Any time Daenerys appears onscreen with a Dothraki male, she is discussed volatily and relentlessly saying things like, “You think she’s got white pussy hair, too? You ever been with a girl with white pussy hair?”, “I’ll ask Khal Moro for a night with you. What do you think?”, “Pretty eyes, but she’s an idiot”, or “She doesn’t have to be smart to get fucked in the ass”, all the while Daenerys understands everything and says nothing though she speaks fluent Dothraki.

When brought to Khal Moro, Daenerys says nothing until he reaches out to touch her and she recoils with a hiss, “Do not touch me. I am Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons”; Daenerys begins to shield herself in the claimants and privilege she has learned to prop herself up, creating a platform from which she demands respect. Khal Moro retorts, “You are nobody, the millionth of your name, Queen of Nothing, slave of Khal Moro. Tonight, I will lie with you, and if the Great Stallion is kind you will give me a son. Do you understand?” Smiling, Daenerys says confidently, “I will not lie with you. And I will bear no children, for you or anyone else. Not until the sun rises in the west and sets in the east. I was wife to Khal Drogo, son of Khal Bharbo”, causing an immediate mood shift, the mere mention of Khal Drogo becomes Daenerys saving grace again. Daenerys previous marriage to Khal Drogo remains the sole factor that saves her from a violent rape simply because she is the widow of a Khal, thus leaving Khal Moro to decide to deliver Daenerys to the Dosh Khaleen, the collective widows of the dead Khals, in the holy city of Vaes Dothrak to live out her days as she should have done upon Khal Drogo’s death.

Once in the holy temple, Daenerys is positioned vulnerably and at the mercy of a dozen Khals whose harshly sexual and demeaning behavior allow an easily placed hatred to permeate within the context of Dothraki men as representative men of color threatening white womanhood jeopardizing their innocence. Even as victim, Daenerys calmly and confidently interjects her insults, saying, "I have been here before. Right there, on that spot, I ate a stallion's heart. And the Dosh Khaleen pronounced my child the Stallion Who Mounts the World." Khal Moro asks, "And what happened? You trusted a sorceress, like a fool. Your baby is dead because of you. And so is Khal Drogo." Daenerys ignores him saying, "This is where Drogo promised to take his khalasar west to where the world ends. To ride wooden horses across the Black salt sea as no Khal has done before. He promised to kill the men in their iron suits and tear down their stone houses. He swore it to me. Before the Mother of Mountains, as the stars looked down in witness." The Khal's scoff, Moro saying, "And you were dumb enough to believe him." Daenerys eyes the fire burning inside the temple unphased saying, "And here, now, what great matters do the Great Khals discuss? Which little villages you'll raid, how many girls you'll get to fuck, how many horses you'll demand in tribute. You are small men. Under you, the Dothraki will be a small people. None of you is fit to lead them. But I am. So, I will." Daenerys arrogance angers the Khal's with her foreign imposition, her entitlement, and her confident attitude, Khal Moro says, "All right. No Dosh Khaleen for you. Your choice. Instead, we'll take turns fucking you. And then we'll let our bloodriders fuck you. And if there's anything left of you, we'll give our horses a turn. Have you ever seen what a horse does to a woman? This is a thing you should see before you die. And you will. Right before you die. You crazy cunt. Did you really think we would serve you?" And with that volatile admission, Daenerys says, "You're not going to serve. You're going to die", tipping the pits of fire lighting the room, incinerating the entire temple and all the Khals inside, emerging from the flames to the remaining collective Khalasars outside unscathed, naked and skin kissed by flames, the entire horde beginning to bow before her as the flames rise higher into the night.

Through this mass murder Daenerys is freed of her victimization, absolved of guilt, and inheritor of tens of thousands of Dothraki; assuming the positions of the dead Khals just as she did the dead masters, Khal Drogo, and her Targaryen ancestors. Daenerys effective history of eradicating male leaders is made justifiable by the politics of gender aiding in the guise of her gender subordination and defense of her ascension which distracts from the body count she has acquired alongside her claimants. With the remaining Dothraki whose Khals lay dead, Daenerys takes it upon herself to become their sole source of guidance, her first act of leadership being a call to action, eerily reminiscent of the call that Khal Drogo made to his khalasar on Daenerys behalf. She says, "Every Khal who ever lived chose three bloodriders to fight beside him and guard his way. But I am not a Khal. I will not choose three bloodriders. I choose you all. I ask your oath, that you will live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm. I will ask more of you than any Khal has ever asked of his khalasar! Will you ride the wooden horses across the Black salt sea? Will you kill my enemies in their iron suits and tear down their stone houses? Will you give me the Seven Kingdoms, the gift Khal Drogo promised me before the Mother of Mountains as the stars looked down in witness? Are you with me, now and always?!" Though the speech is profound and grounded in Dothraki folklore, with Daenerys as the giver of the speech, calling for the protection, sacrifice, and obligatory devotion of the entire khalasar as they have no masters for the first time, invoking an oath she has no right to. Daenerys is literally asking for the lives of these Dothraki people in exchange for the Iron Throne, promising absolutely nothing in return; once again commanding a group of people who have never had a choice, only masters to decide for them, that they will follow her because she has granted them their freedom, even if she intends to take it back.

Daenerys possessive investments in whiteness drive her ambitions just as her feminine characterization supplants her enslaving patterns by positioning her as victimized rather than the victimizer; completing a distinct disguise. Frankel dissects Daenerys repossession tactics through the

Unsullied, saying adamantly that Daenerys “ends the practice of killing and torturing children to make Unsullied and thus forever transforms the Unsullied”, further, she turns the Unsullied from “victims into protectors as she evolves” (Frankel, 2014, p.156). Frankel also points out Daenerys attractiveness as a leader to the Unsullied specifically as she bares a deep resemblance to the goddess worshipped by the Unsullied called “the Lady of Spears, the Bride of Battle, the Mother of Hosts” who is described as seeming to “echo Daenerys herself” (Frankel, 2014, p.156). With these resemblances in addition to the many names and guises that follow Daenerys through the series, a regulation of the power of her positional identity begins to fortify her savior complexity and her ever evolving heroism; which enables her to move between regions and conquer under the titles displaying her “right” to rule and seize at her discretion. With the process of naming signifying vast entitlements which grow and strengthen as she conquers, Daenerys guise of protective entitlements begins with her assertions of herself first as a Princess of the House Targaryen, Daenerys first of her name; yet upon becoming more powerful, her elongated moniker is transformed to Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of the Rhoynar, the Andals and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains, and Mother of Dragons. These designations place Daenerys claims to her Targaryen ancestry, as impermeable, as well as maternal, and a liberator of slaves, including the Dothraki and those of the “slave cities” as her subjects.

In *Game of Thrones Finale: The Powerful Women of Westeros*, Scott Meslow suggests that though Khal Drogo is dead, Daenerys power “still comes from her husband” though “she chooses to use it in unprecedented ways” (Frankel, 2014, p.151). Khal Drogo’s attribution of the title Khaleesi as well as the transference of Dothraki culture opens the floodgates of possibilities for Daenerys competence to fortify a protective armed force with which to colonize, transforming the Dothraki completely and all others who stand in her way or under her banner.

Though whiteness as Lipsitz describes, “never works in isolation: it functions as part of a broader dynamic grid created through intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality”, Daenerys elevated white establishment furthers the ideological framework that invests a large part of her identity which drives her toward the Iron Throne (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 73). Lipsitz describes these identity constructs as working in concert giving them “their true social meaning” through which Daenerys reconstructs colonial paradigms in sociopolitical concentrations (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 73). As she follows Corrigan’s Just War analysis, Daenerys title of claimants rooted in ancestral whiteness solidifies in her own mind, her right to “go to war” as well as the right to “conduct war” in a way that others like Ellaria Sand do not possess. Through the process of building of her army, Daenerys conquests begin to reveal the true differences of her introduction as victim to a masculinized power then disguised as a benevolent mother positioned as opposite all those she meets by exacerbating their racial, gender and class differences to aid the necessary positivity of Daenerys as an enslaver cloaked as an innocent savior.

Subheading 2.9 Missandei of Naath: Magical Black Characterization Aiding Colonial Femininity

From Astapor onward, Missandei becomes a constant source of knowledge and skill for Daenerys to utilize during her campaign, gain nuance and added guidance. As an enslaved woman of color with historical, linguistic and cultural experience throughout Slaver’s Bay and the Summer Isles, Missandei proves to be one of the single most influential characters in a capacity that Daenerys can never truly culturally experience. In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, author bell hooks analyzes racial contact and developing relationships between Black and white people, witnessing that many white people who have no contact with Black people believe that they know Black people and their social reality based of the roles played while acting, rendering escapist fiction educationally responsible for racial understanding. hooks further proposes that the utopian manipulation of these fictional racial relationships allow white people to idealize a nonexistent harmonious relationship between themselves, Black people and current social status, therefore designating the awareness and existence of racial

issues solely to the minds of Black people. This visual transcription motivates the existing film industry to continue to support and fund the creators who can reinforce this liminal status, resulting in a unique Black experience both on and off screen, the culmination of which brings to fruition the classification of the “magical Negro” trope.

As dissected in *The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film*, Cerise L. Glenn and Landra J. Cunningham delve into the recesses of “mythification” concerning race, advocating for the acknowledged existence of thematic race within cinematic imaging structures. The focal point of their argument being the debasement of Black acting roles alongside the perpetual glorification of white heroism, theorizing that these racial designations are “not only isolated roles for the viewer but symbolically used so that Whites do not have to consider the moral implications or validity of these roles” (Cunningham, Glenn, 2007, p.137). This suggests that there exists an intensified arena disguising and manipulating the roles of Black people into positions of utility with specified dependence upon them with an equally definite weight of worth (and screen time) steeped in their ability to be utilized by and for whiteness.

For *Game of Thrones*, the magical aspects are strong, and the women of color depicted function as innate connective threads to the overall narrative in varying stages of sociopolitical relativity and white utility; with Princess Elia Martell, Talisa Maegyr, Ellaria Sand and Missandei of Naath all exhibiting white utility and simultaneous racial “markedness” subject to gendered hierarchal norms. As an aid to whiteness, both Talisa and Missandei are exemplified, with Missandei being the most prolonged and extensive. Though Talisa is presented for Robb Stark as a comforting confidant with her sexual mystique, she is not allowed the latitude or developmental depth to rival Missandei as the greatest utilized magical Black character with the least self-benefit or development. Born in Naath in the Summer Islands, Missandei was enslaved as a child and embodies the “markedness” and belated innocence of Bernstein’s theory, from which Daenerys white complexity and entitlements have “freed her”. Though Missandei is

not built as a standalone character, it is easily arguable that without her, Daenerys geographical movements as a conquering Queen would be improbably haphazard and uninformed as it is Missandei who transforms Daenerys into a formidable colonial power.

In *"No Bad Nigger": Blacks as the Ethical Principle in the Movies*, K. Anthony Appiah outlines the thematic "magical negro" as "the noble, good-hearted Black man or woman", often categorizing Black characters as saints whose good nature is quintessential to the character structure of their normalized white counterparts in crisis (Glenn, Cunningham, 2007, p.137). With Missandei, this magical negro dynamic allows her "freedom," a liberty she has Daenerys to thank and whose protection she must also maintain. First presented as an enslaved translator for the masters of Astapor, Missandei is suggestively positioned as silenced and her eyes downcast, an introduction that transforms when Daenerys realizes Missandei's value. In the ways that the masters speak to her she flinches at the harshness; giving perfect gendered and emotional contrast to Daenerys, inevitably creating a distinct audience perception of good and evil.

In *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*, Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki dichotomize the magical racial relations of cinematic characterizations by erecting three pillars of conceptual repetition assessing that the "magical negro" relative to the fictive white character, usually the lead; exists to (1) assist the white character (2) to help them realize and employ the spirituality (3) and to offer a specified "folk wisdom" which they can use to benefit their character dilemmas. When Daenerys acquires Missandei and figuratively sets her free while wholly enslaving her to a new purpose, a campaign toward the Iron Throne; Daenerys political motives become the focus, and Missandei's advisory knowledge and wisdom assume the position of background noise. Though Daenerys is often accredited as one of the most revered characters in cinematic fiction, this is often without acknowledging that Missandei's back is the cultural bridge on which Daenerys accesses are made as she conquers the slave cities. Just as Irri and Jaqui created the guise of Khaleesi by instilling

Dothraki language, dress, sex, and general customs upon her, Missandei magnifies this by transferring her knowledge of more than nineteen languages and the cultures and customs of all the regions Daenerys means to conquer.

North of the cities of Yunkai and Astapor in the city of Meereen, another slave city which Daenerys takes after killing all its slave masters, yet uniquely in Meereen she seats its throne within its Great Pyramids as its ruling Queen with Missandei prominent amongst her inner circle. Through this action, Daenerys adds another claimant to her title as Queen of Meereen and in doing so inspires an insurrection of underground former enslavers called the Sons of the Harpy. Named for the traditional heraldic symbol of the slave-masters in the Ghiscari cities of Slaver's Bay, the Harpy conceal their identities with golden masks with horned faces resembling harpies and terrorize Daenerys campaign by killing Unsullied and others she loves. This self-authorized occupation and assumed sociopolitical control of policy across Slavers Bay which Daenerys renames Bay of Dragons, eventually brings the city and its new Queen under siege; but before she can be executed, Daenerys flees on dragon back and becomes displaced from her advisors and army, being taken as a slave of Khal Moro. In her wake, Missandei as she remains in Meereen, becomes an even more important member of Daenerys counsel in Daenerys absence, inheriting a city in turmoil.

With Daenerys removed from the narrative, a power vacuum begins as the former masters throughout the land rise to reclaim their former hierarchies, with Yunkai and Astapor leading the charge as Daenerys first conquests in Essos. Daenerys remaining council is composed of: Tyrion Lannister, Daenerys political advisor who's Westerosi upbringing, even as a "dwarf" has been one of privileged, white, male, entitlement that influences his political strategy heavily; Grey Worm as commander of the Unsullied, and Varys, a former enslaved child, eunuch and skilled manipulator who commands a network of informants over multiple continents. Missandei becomes the only feminine influence between these three men, her unique vantage intersecting enslavement and racialization as well, as she remains

pivotaly unmatched in what she has to offer. It is Missandei's positionality makes her politically necessary within this system of dominance with common goals of superiority, she becomes a force of good for this dark narrative. Frankel upon closer inspection of the use of Missandei reveals that even though her narrative importance is palpable, she "never embarks on an independent character arc to date", yet, "it is hoped she may do so in the future" (Frankel, 2014, p.30)". Daenerys absence in season six, remain the only moment to date for any developmental independence for Missandei from the wants and needs of Daenerys, though arguably Tyrion assumes the position of white antagonist anchor in Daenerys nonappearance which influences Missandei's behaviors, giving her an opposing entity, whose white male embodiment creates an urgent nuance in Missandei's position. The temporary ruling dynamic becomes a revolutionary body as Missandei, Grey Worm and Varys connect to their childhoods as stolen and enslaved children; swiftly removed from innocence, enslavement becomes a concrete and haunting personal nostalgia, thus the decisions made are arguably more in favor of those who were enslaved by the former masters. The negotiations of the remaining slave masters bring Tyrion to arrange a summit, agreeing to meet and hear the demands of the former masters to end the bloodshed drowning the slave cities, a strife that has begun to bury its citizens in hate. In this meeting, Tyrion agrees to an arrangement allowing for a weening period to delay and still end slavery over a duration of several years; as oppose to abruptly stopping the process altogether, which caused a socioeconomic and political spiraling of chaotic disruption. Though Tyrion is the only member of this council who has not been enslaved, the only member with no true connectivity to the people whose fate he is at liberty to decide as an outsider; it is he who argues that slavery and war cannot both be prevented, seemingly doing what he believes is *just*. To which, Missandei adamantly asserts prior to and during this meeting, her distrust for the men Tyrion was choosing to sit with as well as actively recognizing that Tyrion was ultimately returning the masters their perceived "property", sending human beings back to shackles with their children and the hope that one day they may be free again. These moments of deliberation

read as heavily discerning, as the focus remains a common opposition, a white privileged male telling people of color, specifically former enslaved people, that the choice *must* be slavery, a hard pill to swallow.

If as Frankel suggests, the principle of fictional women should revolve around the desire to “form bonds of sisterhood and work as a team”, the parameters that Missandei and Daenerys test become even more significant in Daenerys absence as Missandei readily works on her Queen’s behalf and never even thinks of seizing power for herself (Frankel, 2014, p.34). The gendered navigation of these two women acts as a predetermined course of intent and effectiveness toward sisterhood, which contributes widely to Daenerys guises and influences the hierarchal intersections of race and class working to regulate femininity and innate bonds of sisterly love. Though Missandei no longer wears a collar or falls subject to the master’s whip, enslavement comes in many forms and abuse has many faces. Missandei is the fashioner of Daenerys persona as she aids in the expansion of Daenerys claimants, not only announcing her but often literally becoming her voice but also filling in the cultural knowledge gaps of whiteness that allow Daenerys to move through the Seven Kingdoms tactfully. As a Khaleesi, Daenerys is given the cultural allowances to move through Dothraki spaces by mastering the horse, wearing her hair and clothes like them and speaking their language fluently, yet to conquer, Daenerys needs Missandei’s knowledge to absorb a wider cultural understanding, the same way she has accessed her claimants, and for this Missandei becomes her shadow, whose characterization is never far from Daenerys necessity or utility.

For Missandei’s singular moment of true freedom in which Daenerys is not in her foremost concern (or even in the scene), the series conveys a rare glimpse of true pleasure, a consensual sexual moment with Grey Worm who has loved Missandei for years mostly from a silent distance. Though this moment is tender and long overdue, Grey Worm’s Unsullied designation, renders his sex and thus his sexuality dissimilar from those that have been previously introduced sexually within the show. This

scene becomes an exceptionally significant first look at masculinity in a man of color as it interlopes nonwhite femininity for the first time in sexual cohesion, a rare thematic distinction of non-reliance upon the phallus through the sexualized castrated male. This moment in effect also highlights Missandei's genuine nonexploitive sexual pleasure ignited by Grey Worm. Though their relationship has yet to blossom from this interaction (and may never), it signifies the rarity with which Missandei's participation within the *Game of Thrones* narrative breaks from Daenerys priorities, distinguishing their "sisterhood", as lopsided and Missandei as almost nonexistent without Daenerys as foreground. It is evident that with Missandei as the provider of ethnicity and Daenerys as its beneficiary, their relationship becomes a soft, more discreet master/slave dynamic, one which allows their relationship to be admired, the same trick which allows the enslaved to think they are free, a trait Daenerys masters in her campaign toward the Iron Throne. Missandei's "freedom", devotion, and wisdom become key parts of her constructed identity, emboldening her as a multifaceted necessity to Daenerys and preserve her advantage throughout her political crusade.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ANALYSIS

The identification of *Game of Thrones* as an evidentiary visual sampling of racialized fetishistic enslavement American high fantasy subgenre with the Colonizers Template as a tool of visual theoretical decoding; the focus of this analysis remains the exposure of regulatory racialized oppressions as they intersect nonwhite maternity and femininity through gender performative expectation and sexuality. Through a comparative spectrum of progression showcasing Daenerys Targaryen as the beginning and the end, white feminine complexity becomes identifiable in the ways women of color are constructed as oppositional components of irrevocable difference. As a localization of oppositional characterizations, Daenerys duality is dissected through both her gendered victimization early on and her later racialized development into a mass enslaver and in cooperation with the beloved nature of her character, becomes necessary to address.

As the creators of this significant character, George R.R. Martin, David Benioff and D.B Weiss have revealed in interviews, Daenerys is not only a fan favorite but also a vessel with which to convey a progressive feminine iconology to show that they are capable of strong heroines. The issue then becomes that the characters doted upon by the creators such as Cersei Lannister, Brienne of Tarth, Arya Stark, and Olenna Tyrell are not only fierce women of honor, villainy, and love but that their complexities are both allowed and praised within the indulgences of their whiteness, specifically in their white womanhood. Women of color are not even considered by their creators, most ironically in the case of Talisa Maegyr (Stark) who was created as an entirely new character to the narrative as introduced into the television series by D.B. Weiss and David Benioff. The scarcity and contextual function of people of color on *Game of Thrones* in general is appalling, yet the problematic utility of women of color presents as the origin story of racialized thematic structure relative to families of color and healthy collective connectivity. For example, though Daenerys rape and child loss define her

throughout the series, the ways in which she can capitalize upon her oppressions through her whiteness is unparalleled, starting a speculative dissection of racialization that provides a hierarchal expectation of not only gender and race but also their oppositions and intersections. With Princess Elia Martell, Talisa Maegyr (Stark), Ellaria Sand and Missandei of Naath, this analysis weaves a complex tale of social rejection propelled by racialized femininity and maternity. As examined between Daenerys victimization and ascension, these four women provide a white combative structure which dictates a comfortability with women of color being utilized for white benefit and being absent otherwise.

As Patricia Hill Collins suggests in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, the differing types of maternal designations such as othermother, surrogate and birth mother play a large part in these four women as analyzed through their functionality as otherized women who are each denied the opportunity to create and sustain families of their own. As a major contributor toward the construction of a thematic racial bias, the characterizations of men of color who rape, women of color who are raped and how their unity is plotted against forms a dissociative outline of the fetishistic tropes that reserve women of color for white men and men of color as violently outside domestic consideration. Effectively, the argument of a structural break through familial bonds is solidified by the ideology of racial innocence as Robin Bernstein dictates its eradication of children of color through their unprotected status, a trait that also murders women of color who would be mothers. This inherently means that if there are no children of color are born and no women of color survive, the entirety of nonwhiteness would be eradicated and whiteness would have no opposition. As chronicled through these four instances, when children of color die violently it is at any stage, as they rest in their mothers' wombs, suckle at her breast or fight for their honor, there is no escaping. It is not only the thematic pattern of racialized oppression that comes to question but also the overall intent of its implementation. This analysis is as much about the characterizations as it is been about how those characterizations translate back to audiences through the cycle of encoding and

decoding. This dual concern manifests as an addressing of a cycle between the two by suggesting a specified relationship between the viewer and the visual which illustrates fiction as inspired by reality and reality as affirmed by fiction.

These escalating intolerances are pragmatic fortifications of otherness, relying on the “markedness” and belated innocence Bernstein asserts in *Racial Innocence: Performing Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, affirm that what anchors the assumptions of hierarchal race and the white necessity for authoritarian distinction and savior potentiality are rules of difference lodged against the other. As illustrated through the current aggression of Immigration laws, the children of color being ripped from their parent’s arms calls out the same supportive white American saviors who vacation and visit the countries these detainees are from, while children lay in juvenile prison camps, coincidentally becoming lost within the legal system without consequence, sexually abused and neglected. The irony of most prominently persuasive political arguments is usually strategically vested within the safety and well-being of American children, with frequent mention of these children as *our* children, yet swiftly applying the label of *other* to children who do not fit an American framework of potential, nonwhite children being most vulnerable. *Game of Thrones* exemplifies this plot point repeatedly by capturing, enslaving, castrating and killing children of color; with Princess Elia’s children, Daenerys son, Talisa’s unborn child, as well as the Sand Snakes, all presented as unprotected, unavenged and past the point of innocence, to which the reality of children of color is confirmed and confined. These protection-less positionings convince audiences that the conditions are normal and that these roles are necessary and definitive.

Racialized innocence as Bernstein demonstrates is influenced through various modes of performance onstage and in everyday interactions with modern material culture aiding the conceptualization of childhood, explicitly inferring scripts of innocence quintessentially in Blackness and whiteness. With the construction of these patterns in America being unambiguously defined from the

mid-19th to the early 20th centuries, Bernstein maintains that the phenomenology of “racial innocence” is a directly responsive emergence from racial arguments such as pro-slavery vs. anti-slavery, and are covertly reoccurring through, and residing within objects and systems such as children’s toys, literature, media advertisements and ultimately their physical bodies. These bodily absorptions and classifications based in race act strongly and successfully through media spectatorship, with multimillion-dollar franchises like *Game of Thrones* desensitizing audiences to oppression, viciousness, and authoritarianism in beautifully crafted thematic works so that racisms, sexism, brutality, and murder can be done with righteous impunity and often in the name of country, law or God. This revelation comes forth through the depictions of the Unsullied as well as many people like Missandei who are given tragedy as childhood, subjugation as certainty, and their autonomy stolen. The contemporary societal example remains young Black children profiled, feared, assaulted and murdered by police officers on camera, with witnesses, and using excessive force, a normality that has become nothing short of an epidemic. These fatalities push toward the adaptation of the unprotected, “marked” child and evolves into an even lesser protected “marked” adult who only magnifies as a potential sociological threat.

Through performance and historiography, Bernstein presents a revolutionary methodological argument by validating the viability of the role of performance studies and amplifying the role that it should play within archival research. With the demarcation of archival artifacts as “scriptive things,” Bernstein positions “material culture” as more than a simplistic object, but also as a thing “that prompts meaningful bodily behaviors” (Bernstein, 2011, p.71). The case made by Bernstein is that “scriptive things contain massive historical evidence” and that “by reading things’ scripts within historically located traditions of performance, we can make well-supported claims about normative aggregate behavior” (Bernstein, 2011, p.80). By rooting her methodological questions within a framework of performance studies, Bernstein is able to beg the questions: “What historically located behaviors did this artifact invite? What practices did it discourage?” (Bernstein, 2011, p.8). With the American histories of

oppression, people of color are often affected by and embedded with these encoded scripts and archival connectivity, revealing the significance of continuity striving for redefinition.

As transcribed by audiences and scholars, *Game of Thrones* resonates as a text worthy of dissection, further, commonalities of critique often fall within the realms of race and gender, with varying degrees of accusatory invention. For example, in the article *Game of Thrones and the Good Ruler Complex*, Laurie Penny reviews that though being mightily entertaining, *Game of Thrones* is “racist rape-culture Disneyland with Dragons”, labeling the show as a grossly mishandling race and gender, saying also that simply identifying *Game of Thrones* as “problematic” is much like saying that “Mitt Romney is rich: technically accurate, but an understatement so profound that it obscures more than it reveals” (Frankel, 2014, p.178). Penny specifically antagonizes Daenerys subplot by questioning her positioning as a thirteen-year-old princess, virginal, with unparalleled fairness, who uses her whiteness as a motif of the series creates a distinguished positioning for active authoritative whiteness. With Daenerys, Penny suggests that her use is regulated to her “magical blondness” enriched by “baby dragons to free all the slaves in the Mystical East”; pointing out the “enormous teetering pile of ugly stereotypes” and saying that though some of these accusations are not “immediately obvious, see me after class and we’ll go through it step by step” (Frankel, 2014, p.178). Though credit is often given to Martin’s exceptional literary series characterizations, Weiss and Benioff’s rendition is a visually riveting elevation, operating with more than thirty first-person narrators, half of which being women, but excludes people of color in general; specifically, women of color by exploiting them and only allowing space for them outside of narrative centrality, positioning them as clinging to whiteness for protection and relevance.

Through these insights and connections, the integrity of *Game of Thrones* continues to be subjectively linked to the perspective of viewership with some fans becoming increasingly disturbed each week by fetishizations and microaggressions; and others praising the shows racial diversity and strong female leads. For example, fans such as Tucker Cummings in *From Gunsmoke to Game of*

Thrones: A Brief History of Prostitution on TV, see the show as revolutionary with commentary such as, “Too often, TV shows lack a strong, relatable, and realistic female character. Thankfully, despite being ‘a show for boys’, *Game of Thrones* is jam-packed with amazing female characters. Watching Daenerys transform from a weak noble pawn to a powerful leader is truly inspirational” (Frankel, 2014, p.181). This assertion presents an exemplified yet common conflation of erasure and progression that solidifies the language of strong women to mean strong *white* women.

Through Princess Elia, Talisa, Ellaria and Missandei, the inability for women of color to access and activate the same areas of privilege as white women is made insultingly palpable thus it is far less of a surprise when Daenerys prevails than when Missandei aids in the maintenance of Meereen in her absence. Similarly, watching Ellaria and her daughters take a violent stance and assert power against a believed injustice only to be murdered by Cersei, creates a similar pattern of inequality based in race and gender. While other fans like Andi Zeisler in *Does It Really Matter Whether Game of Thrones Is Feminist?* contends with the notion of audience desire saying that, “when people talk about wanting to see ‘strong female characters’, this is what we’re talking about. Not an army of superhuman, you go-girl ass-kickers with no complicating romantic lives or moral failings, but a glorious array of faceted, complex, problematic, not sure-if-they-can-be-trusted human being” (Frankel, 2014, p.181). Further, Zeisler asserts that the women of *Game of Thrones* pass the Bechdel Test for diversity and functionality “so fast they break the sound barrier”; with notable characters like Brienne of Tarth, Arya Stark, Olenna Tyrell and Melisandre, stating that “they are what more TV shows and movies, for that matter need to look like so that we don’t have to look so assiduously for sparks of feminism in the ones that we have” (Frankel, 2014, p.181). Debatably, the white women constantly inserted into the *Game of Thrones* feminist archetype: Arya, Olenna, and Brienne as well as Cersei and Daenerys, are specifically chosen and positioned as a springboard for otherizing the few women of color who appear onscreen while also acting as a cloak of conflated thematic inclusivity.

In a 2017 interview with *Rolling Stone Magazine*, British born actress Emilie Clarke, who plays Daenerys Targaryen, explains how she's grown more aware of inequality around her off and on set. In this interview, Clarke accredits her time playing the role of Daenerys to her eyes being opened; exemplifying the ways her fictional identity and thematic plot position transfer to her real life in a post-Brexit England, saying "I feel so naive for saying it, but it's like dealing with racism, you're aware of it, and you're aware of it, but one day, you go, 'Oh, my God, it's everywhere!'" The fiction icon articulates her comparative awakening to oppression by commenting on the ways she experiences sexism saying, "Like you suddenly wake up to it and you go, 'Wait a f—ing second, are you... are you treating me different because I've got a pair of tits? Is that actually happening?' It took me a really long time to see that I do get treated differently. But I look around, and that's my daily life". Clarke attributes her feminine strength to her childhood, mentioning, "I spent my life with a very, very strong mum, working mum, feminist mum, wore the trousers, brought home the bacon but I never heard the word 'feminist.' Never was I told 'It's going to be tough out there because you're a girl.' So, it was never that I ever saw that there was an inequality between men and women. And it's only as I've got older, being in the industry, that I say, 'Huh! Why are you talking to me funny? Why are you treating me differently?' And that's fueled Daenerys for me." (Li, 2017). The effortless conflation of Emilie Clarke's interpretation of racism and sexism under the same umbrella of oppression marks the next sequential step in a problematic system of erasure; effectively altering the mentality surrounding the creators, the actors and who they believe their characters to be, thus how those characters are perceived.

Dr. Helen Young of *The Public Medievalist* interrogates the fact that there are only three sources of semi-developed characters of color onscreen who she identifies as Missandei, Grey Worm, and Khal Drogo saying, Game of Thrones doesn't just have a "diversity problem," it has a racism problem. Dr. Young questions the lack of well-developed characters of color, encompassing the racial improprieties into an "iceberg of racism" described as reflecting "the race problems of modern-day America, it reflects

white privilege and a racist Eurocentric way of thinking about the world that goes back to the Middle Ages” (Young 2017). She also avows that “Daenerys’ travels in Essos are the main vehicle for characters of colour to be included in either the show or the books (the Dornish story arc is the other, and it has its own problems)” further, “the problem is that her narrative is essentially a ‘white saviour’ plot, a common trope where a white outsider saves a community of colour from some sort of terrible plight, gaining prestige, power, and self-awareness in the process” (Young, 2017).

As a narrative war on people of color *The Root* published an article entitled *The Black Persons Guide to Game of Thrones* which describes *Game of Thrones* as, “an all-encompassing analogy for white America and should be studied in the same way seventh-grade English teachers make their students dissect *Animal Farm* or *Lord of the Flies* to understand society” (Harriett, 2017). For Daenerys, her white importance rests in the fact that she was born capable of riding dragons, the dragons acting as dragons “her privilege to save the slaves” saying that “after she frees them from lives dedicated to fighting in wars for their masters, they decide to spend their lives fighting for her—their “queen”—and help her ride her privilege dragons all the way to the Iron Throne” (Harriett, 2017). As white privilege rears control over the *Game of Thrones* narrative, it is most viscerally shown through the dual perceptions of Daenerys through the subjective interpretations of the racial variances experienced and observed by viewers of color. Through this specified audience, racialization and connectivity of community, characterizations become more heavily weighted in importance and affect, furthermore, the goal of thematic structure quantified within the subgenre of racialized fetishistic enslavement is to racially reinforce and dismember group sentiment in marginalized collectives. Though constantly reflecting on the connective threads to historic periods, the allocation of oppressive adaptations and accesses are often absent, an oversight that must be rectified.

As vividly stated by Kwame Ture (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, concerning liberation as a marginalized racial group,

“the stakes are simple: if we fail to do this, we face continued subjection to a white society that has no intention of giving up willingly or easily its position of priority and authority” (Ture, Hamilton, 1992, p. xv). Furthermore, “if we succeed, we will exercise control over our lives, politically, economically and psychically” and “we will also contribute to the development of a viable larger society” (Ture, Hamilton, 1992, p. xv). Just as *Black Power* claims access to differing modes and avenues of racism but does not claim to present a cure for racism, the conversation of otherization and hierarchal racial discrepancies does not act as blueprint for the systemic issues that marginalize people of color today; but does effectively spotlight issues that are all too often housed in the shadows.

Toward an Afrocentric systematic construct as suggested in *Black Power* it is said “Black people in America have no time to play nice, polite parlor games especially when the lives of their children are at stake”, also considering that as Black people, we “must respond in our own way, on our own terms, in a manner which fits our temperaments” and that the “definitions of ourselves, the roles we pursue, the goals we seek are *our* responsibility” (Ture, Hamilton, 1992, p. xvii). Pointedly this defining of the Americanized space of social defamation and reward that bleeds into various other aspects of influence, unveils the comparative benefits of whiteness capable and deliberately paired with prestige, status and material benefits, focusing on the potential for co-optation and racial reindeer games. French existentialists Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus poised the question: “Can a man condemn himself? Can whites, particularly liberal whites, condemn themselves? Can they stop blaming Blacks and start blaming their own system? Are they capable of the shame which might become a revolutionary emotion” (Ture, Hamilton, 1992, p. xvii)?

In *The Wretched Earth*, Franz Fanon made seamlessly clear the fact of Black Power as a new force in the world, here Black power and thus liberation lay within identifying one’s oppressor. The Colonizers Template begins a steep journey toward holding accountable hierarchal race relations as a socially accepted crux and negates the racial impacts on gender performative scripts and suffering, by

masking these sleights as unabashed and ambiguous progression. For white power, Ture and Hamilton propose that within white supremacy, “participation of Black men in the white man’s wars is a characteristic of colonialism”, yet we are unable to critique our subjugation and thus inept to free ourselves from it (Ture, Hamilton, 1992, p.25).

With *Game of Thrones*, the popularity and overtly expressed racism and sexism stem from white entitlements created by brutal American histories of enslavement and murder rooted in strategic otherness, giving the indication that the artistic choices made by fictive creators and the ways in which narratives effect audiences are both subliminal and overt. With this, it is evident that to rise to the occasion, a declaration must be made that marginalization will no longer be the means that tears asunder and the subjugating fortification of entertainment culture as an active agent of white supremacy is confirmed.

This revolutionary act of reclamation for Black personhood, Black nationality, and deracialized inalienable freedoms, gives weight to the words of the Angela Davis who once said beautifully, “The only way we can get justice is demand it and to create a mass movement which will give notice to our enemy that we will use all means at our disposal to secure justice for our people” (Mullings, 2009, p.461). This compilation of observations laid by this analysis as detected by the Colonizers Template serves as an active notice, identifying the creators of this narrative, the context of their oppressive injustices, and the implications of their work as a system of problematic exploitation of minoritized groups. Alongside the imperative notion that white narratives of femininity are openly acting as a visual and thematic sleight of hand, sanctioning confidently the dire lack of accessibility found for women of color. This inaccessibility continues to deny women of color motherhood, families, justice and retribution alongside the stunted projections of enslaved children, unapologetic rampant rapists, and fractured allegiances to white women, utilizing the otherness of women of color as silent props, swiftly erasing them from human considerations.

As a society, though phrases like “post-racial” and “post-feminist” are used as descriptors, we have not escaped oppression or slavery, even in a world desperate to bury the unpleasant nature of its otherness, unable to escape a history that has ceased to be left to the past. We are at war. With the acknowledgement that we are living in an era in which racism is so natural and so smooth that white hoods no longer find themselves needed, because bigotry has a public face and public value, these issues are maintained and recycled through media as it reinforces reality and is mirrored back into creative fiction through societal influences. The assertion of control concerning the portraits of people of color as left in the hands of white entitlements is a fate worse than complete erasure, one which forces people of color to participate in their own downfall simply to show that they exist. As a declaration of cognitive fictive assessments as a weapon of mass destruction in the wrong hands, this analysis contests the scripted and marginalized participation of racially bias narratives on the authority that their effect upon society has yet to be thoroughly assessed and is continually expanding and taking new shapes.

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