

Personal Empowerment and Political Structures: An Approach to Fantasy Fiction's Engagement with (Post-)Colonialism and Gender

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Introduction

Humanity's imagination is limited. Everything we imagine relates, in some way or another, to something we have already seen. That which we perceive as the reality of the world around us, is what forms the building blocks for the alternatives to this reality we can create. In literature, worlds that are historically and geographically un-related to our world may be imagined, but these secondary worlds¹ are only relatively separated from ours. The structures that underlie these worlds, such as social, political and economic structures, are always related to the same structures that shape 'real world'- societies. Secondary worlds might replicate these structures, and thereby give the image that even societies with a completely different history – in its broadest sense- compared to the ones in our world, are governed according to these same constructs. These texts might reveal which aspects are considered to be inherent to any human society at all.² However, works of secondary world Fantasy fiction might also engage with the social-political (among others) structures that shape societies. The narratives of these works may present a critical perspective, subvert certain structures, or attempt to imagine alternatives to the principles of certain constructs, discarding the idea that these must be inherent to society at all. These works invite a reading through what Dieter Petzold calls the applicative mode, for they "are governed by rules or embody principles that (they implicitly claim) apply to reality as well" (18). By this application, analysing how the principles of a secondary society relate to a real society, we may study what perspectives are presented on specific structures of society.

Some of the specific structures that are increasingly given attention to in current Fantasy studies are those of Post-colonialism, race and their intersection with gender.

¹ A term coined by Tolkien in his Essay *On Fairy-Stories*

² This would not be a general, global perspective, but rather that of a specific group

However, as Helen Young points out in her book *Habits of Whiteness*, these studies mostly consider the elements of a secondary world of one series or work (1), and these elements have yet to be brought into a general framework. What I will do, is offer a structural approach to analysing Fantasy works from a post-colonial perspective. In this approach I will not consider the characters as static elements to be considered alongside aspects of world-building. Instead, I will base my structural approach on the framework presented by Joseph Slaughter in *Enabling Fictions and Novel Subjects*. Although this work is focused on the *bildungsroman* and human rights, he also suggest that “it might offer a methodology for thinking the formal and ideological human rights implications of other, nonhegemonic genres” (1408). This methodology centres around Slaughter’s argument that there is a connection between the political power structures of a society and the development of an individual character through this society. How an individual can receive power, and becomes empowered, reflects the underlying power structures of that society. Who cannot become empowered also reflects these principles. This, after all, supposes that there are some individuals, or individuals in certain positions, who are excluded from society and its power structure. They are the Other to the idealised Self that gains power in society. It matters who has been given the voice and the agency to narrate their own development, and has the opportunity to become empowered at all. Analysing this process of individual empowerment, what enables it and what the obstacles are, shows how a work engages with the political structures of its society. What I will look at is how *A Game of Thrones* and *The Inheritance Trilogy* relate to, or engage with, structures of colonialism and gender by means of the presentation of character empowerment.

Comparing *A Game of Thrones* to *The Inheritance Trilogy* is useful as the societies presented in these works function according to different principles and, as I shall argue,

engage with these structures in different ways through character development. Through these differences I will also show the wider applicability of my structural approach.

Furthermore, *Game of Thrones*, written by George R. R. Martin, is the first book in the Song of Ice and Fire series, which, along with the show based on the books, is one of the most well-known Fantasy works in current (western) society. As especially its treatment of women is one “of the most hotly debated issues” (Frankel, 1), it has a certain cultural impact. I have chosen to analyse only the first book of the series as it is in this book that the characters’ growth into positions of power is most defined. I will also focus on the characters Jon and Daenerys, as they both inhabit outsider positions in relation to the power centre of Westeros, and move from personal powerlessness to a position of power. Their development in these ‘outsider’ spaces can give insights into the political systems of the Self and the Other, the inside and the outside.

The Inheritance Trilogy is written by N.K. Jemisin, and though it is often remarked that the series “is interested in issues of colonialism and the stagnation of a culture” (Okorafor, 184), it has rarely been analysed as of yet. I will focus on the first two novels of this trilogy, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, narrated by Yeine, and *The Broken Kingdoms*, narrated by Oree.³ Both of these characters move from the ‘outside’ space to the centre of power in their world, thereby shifting the narratological power structures. They develop alongside, and often react to and influence, shifting imperialist structures.⁴

A Game of Thrones and *The Inheritance Trilogy* both present completely different societies, but both of those can be brought into a direct connection with ‘real’ world

³ I have chosen not to discuss the last book in this series, as its narrator is a Godling who is not directly connected to any of the societies, and therefore cannot be incorporated into the scope of my argument.

⁴ Summaries of the plots of *A Game of Thrones*, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* and *The Broken Kingdoms* can be found in Appendix A, B and C respectively.

societies, specifically European ones. *The Inheritance Trilogy* presents a family of white-skinned people, the Arameri, who have colonized the other countries in its world. Fantasy as a genre has, like most of Western culture, stayed away from critically engaging with the theme of colonisation up until the twenty-first century (Young, 12). Jemisin's work is one of the contemporary works of Fantasy that do provide a criticising view on imperialism, colonialism, and all the structures related to this. Most Fantasy works, such as *Game of Thrones*, depict a society based on the European Middle Ages, a time before colonialism, but this "fantasy of the Middle Ages has always been the exclusive province of European colonialism, representing the historical legitimization of white, Christian, European domination" (Finke & Schichtman, 107). They might not depict colonialism, but they do reproduce the constructs that underlie it. Therefore, it is the structure of European colonisation and the idea that justified this, that I will focus on.

A result of colonialism in society, reflected in the habits of the Fantasy genre, is that "Europe, European culture(s) and Whites were privileged, valued, over all others in a discourse which is still strong today" (Young, 114). European culture and society still are generally privileged compared to other societies. In Fantasy works, white, European-like people are put in the position of the Self as these are nearly always the protagonist and the dominant societies. (Young, 44). In contrast to this Self there is a constructed Other, who may or may not be colonized. Colonialism is "a form of domination - the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behaviour of other individuals or groups" (Horvath, 46). Such a system in itself might not be in place in Medieval-based Fantasy societies, such as *Game of Thrones*, but in its representation of the Other it can still relate to the framework of thought of colonialism. To justify colonialism the European colonizers put in place "a systematic negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any

attributes of humanity” (Fanon, 182). The colonized people of colour were de-humanized, and often depicted as savages, uncivilized, which justified the image of the superior White colonizer. The Colonized were, then, “constructed as inferior to the colonisers so that ideology and discourse could underpin action” (Young, 114). Depicting people of colour as not human justified the violence of colonialism, and this together shaped the tool of European ‘domination’ in colonialism: supposed inferiority and violence.

It is this ‘tool’ of colonialism that Medieval-based Fantasy works might reproduce, rather than colonialism itself. In contrast to the ‘European’ Self there are the cultures of people of colour, which are presented as the Other which “taps into Western literature’s long history of Orientalism” (Young, 68). This Orientalist perspective on non-Western societies is characterized by four dogma’s, which Edward Said lists in *Orientalism*. First of all, the Western-Self is considered superior and developed, where the Other is undeveloped and inferior. The Other is seen, through Orientalism, as static and cannot define itself, but must be defined by the Western society, and the Orient is envisioned as something that must either be feared or controlled (300/301). Through the habit of Orientalizing non-Western societies these Fantasy works might reproduce the idea of colonialism that people of colour are inferior and can only be perceived through the eyes of the European-Self: they cannot depict themselves.

The connection between inferior and superior seems to define the narrative of colonialism and colonialist or racial ideologies. Gender can be connected to this, as the inequality of men and women is based upon the idea that one of them is superior and the other inferior. In Western society this is generally the perceived superiority and privileging of men: patriachism, which in itself is based upon “a dominant – subordinate pecking order” (Elgin, 112). If these are the structures that underpin general Western society, then power is

used to navigate this relationship between inferior and superior. Therefore, I will begin my analysis by discussing the power relations of the depicted societies, and the position the characters themselves take up in relation to these power centres at the beginning of the narratives. I will then discuss the process of empowerment itself, focusing first on Jon and Yeine in order to contrast the different treatment of gaining power of the narratives. In the third chapter I will consider Deanerys and Oree from an intersectional perspective of gender and post-colonialism. In the fourth chapter I will connect these narratives of development, and the shifting political dynamics, to the perceptions of power, post-colonial and gender structures of society to consider how these can be applied to real-life power dynamics. Through this, I will show that by analysing the process of empowerment of an individual in a secondary Fantasy text, we can study how and in what ways these texts engage with political structures of (post-) colonialism and gender.

Chapter 1: Imagined Origins

In order to analyse the process of empowerment, we must first turn towards the beginning point of this process: the character's origins. How this origin is constructed, and what obstacles there are, is always related to the specific process of empowerment the characters will go through. Therefore, I will analyse in this chapter not only the ways in which the origins of the character have been imagined, and what power structures these societies present, but also how the characters themselves imagine their origins in the narrative. In my analysis I will compare Jon, Daenerys, Yeiwe and Oree, respectively from *A Game of Thrones* and *The Inheritance Trilogy* in order to establish similarities and differences between the characters and the political positions they originate from.

Bastards and Inheriting Power

Jon Snow grows up as a part of one of the most powerful families in Westeros: the Starks, 'Wardens of the North'. The Starks possess a large amount of land and influence, and this only increases in the beginning of the narrative, when Jon's (presumed) father Ned Stark is offered the position of King's Hand. However, even though Jon is part of the Stark household, he does not possess the same amount of power as his brothers Robb and Bran do, for Jon is a bastard. Political power in Westeros is transferred through bloodlines, in which 'legitimacy is crucial' (Larrington, 16): only children of married parents can inherit lands and titles, and therefore Jon "cannot hope to inherit a holdfast nor to find any role within the castle that is commensurate with those of his brothers" (Larrington, 16). Jon's position as a bastard is one defined by in-betweenness, between being a Stark and being a

Snow⁵, and all the political connotations those two names have. The privileges and power Jon has, he has only through his connection to others and Ned's willingness to raise him alongside his other sons. He can never fully possess power for himself because of his position as a bastard.

The obstacle in Jon's development, his ancestry, shows first of all what power is defined as in the world of Westeros and second of all who is excluded from this power, and for what reasons. What makes families as the Starks powerful, and what Jon lacks access to, is that they possess a large amount of lands, and therefore also claim rulership over the people who live on those lands. The Starks even have smaller noble households pledged to them, and therefore the ability to call these, and the 'low-born' living on their lands, to arms. Power, then, is the ability of certain individuals to rule over others and is also attached to the threat of violence when their position is questioned. The Starks' claim to power, to rulership, is however not only enabled by the threat of violence, but also by heritage. Powerful families can trace back their ancestry to some of the first rulers in Westeros and claim thereby to be the rightful rulers over specific lands and people. This idea of the 'rightfully born ruler' reflects the image, though not directly connected to racism, that some people should hold power over others, and are therefore inherently superior to those others. People such as Jon, who have no or questionable connections to these families, can therefore never hold power.

However, Jon's position in the Stark family can be nuanced. In the chapters in which Jon is at Winterfell, the narrative shows that Jon is not just aware that he is a bastard, and all that implies, but also that he himself emphasizes it. "I am no Stark, father" (Martin, 22), he says in the first chapter, highlighting his specific position as a bastard in the contrast

⁵ Snow is a last name given to bastard children born in the North

between 'father' and 'no Stark'. The one chapter in which Jon narrates his own experiences at Winterfell shows him as primarily concerned with establishing his position as an outsider to the family. Both conversations that occur in this chapter, with his uncle Benjen and Tyrion, eventually have as their subject Jon's status as a bastard. However, in the scene in which Jon tells Ned that he is not a Stark, Ned was offering him one of the found direwolf puppies. Direwolves are the sigil of House Stark, and the puppies have a strong metaphorical connection to their masters throughout the books. When Ned offers Jon a puppy, we are shown that he considers Jon to be a Stark, and wants him to have the same privileges as his brothers. In Jon's refusal, however, it becomes clear that he himself does not imagine his position as being the same. He imagines himself only as the outsider through his incapability of obtaining autonomic power.

Yeine, the narrator of *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, is not technically a bastard as her Arameri mother and her Darr father were married, but she is treated as such by her Arameri family. When she meets her Arameri grandfather, the current ruler of the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms, "No one had expected him to acknowledge me as kin, least of all myself" (Jemisin, *THTK*, 7). For the majority of her life Yeine has not been acknowledged as a Arameri because she grew up in Darr, a small, poor colonized country with brown-skinned natives. In this she has been denied the power that is principally hers, being an Arameri, because one half of her parentage, like Jon's, is considered unacceptable by the political structures of their societies. Though the Arameri's political structure is not completely similar to that of Westeros, as women for example have the ability to hold the same amount

of power as men⁶, there is still a focus on bloodlines when it comes to power. Only those of the Arameri family can receive the largest element of power available. This is a sigil with which they can control the Enefadeh⁷, which are mostly used as a military force. The closer to the central line of Arameri rulers a family member is, the more power they can wield over the Enefadeh, who have to obey their orders. This form of power has enabled the Arameri to colonize the rest of the world. The Arameri, as Helen Young argues, present “colonisation and imperialism as a duty [...] a service to the colonised” (133). Like the narrative of European colonization wherein violence was justified by portraying the colonized as ‘uncivilized’, the Arameri justify their violence by claiming that they have brought order to the other countries. They present themselves as superior, those who should rule over the rest of the world, who cannot rule themselves.

What is interesting is that both Jon and Yeine are denied the power of one side of their heritage because of the other side of their heritage, but unlike Jon, Yeine does not emphasize this in her construction of her origin. She does not focus on the power, and the Arameri castle Sky in which this power is centralized, that she lacks. Instead, it is Darr that she constantly constructs as her place of origin. Every building or construct Yeine sees in the Arameri city, she contrast to something of “my land” (Jemisin, *THTK*, 12) and it are Arameri clothes that she describes as “foreign” (Jemisin, *THTK*, 56). Yeine does not define herself or her sense of origin by the structures of power she has been excluded from as Jon does, the idealised Self that cannot be reached: she is not ‘not an Arameri’, she is Darr.

By constructing the Arameri as the Other, the typical European perspective in Fantasy works and Western culture in general is reversed. Though the same constructs of colonialism

⁶ Darr is technically matriarchal, but as Yeine is never presented in the narrative as struggling with the idea that men can hold power or considering them inferior, I have chosen not focus on this.

⁷ A name used for the God and Godlings (children of the Gods) who are enslaved in Sky

are still in place, people from Darr are, for example, called 'savages' by the Arameri several times in the narrative because of the tribal structure of their society, we are not given the same perspective on this. The colonized country of brown-skinned people is constructed as the country of home, of the Self, showing that the Arameri's 'otherization' is just a construct. This also deconstructs the dogma of Orientalism, in which the Other cannot speak for his/herself. In fact, unlike in *Game of Thrones*, both Yeine and Oree actively narrate their own stories⁸ and therefore are enabled to define themselves along their own terms. Yeine's narrative is in itself a reversal of the conventions of the Fantasy genre and the European perspective.

Forced and Willing Travelers

To give an example of a typical Western perspective on societies, we may turn back to *A Game of Thrones* and look at the character Daenerys. Daenerys was born on the Westerosi island Dragonstone, but she was raised in Essos. Essos is separated by the Narrow Sea from Westeros, and in many ways Essos and everything beyond it are the Other from Westeros' perspective. Though Daenerys was raised in the city of Pentos on this continent, we get rather little, if any, information on her upbringing with regards to the culture of Pentos or Essos in general. Instead, more than any character discussed here, Daenerys' origin is an imagined one, rather than the reality of Pentos. When she tells Jorah she prays to go home, she imagines home to be: "King's Landing and the great Red Keep that Aegon the Conqueror had built. It was Dragonstone where she had been born" (Martin, 233), and she refers to going to Westeros as going "back to the Seven Kingdoms" (Martin, 233), despite the fact that

⁸ Yeine remembers the events that led up to her death in order to regain her own identity in death, Oree tells her story to her unborn child.

she herself has never actually set foot on the main continent of Westeros. The Western society is despite Daenerys' upbringing in Pentos constructed as the society of the norm, the Self and the home. Essos, both the dark-skinned Dothraki and the cities Daenerys visits in the later books, are constructed as an Other to the Western society. In the construction of the Dothraki as 'savage' we see the dogma's of Orientalism reflected, an argument that I will return to in a later chapter.

However, it is important to notice that this imagined origin is mostly due to Daenerys' brother Viserys, who "had told her she was a princess" (Martin, 227). Without him, Daenerys would perhaps have a less glorified image of Westeros, but as they did grow up together it is Viserys who dominates Daenerys' perspectives of the world. When Viserys' control over her begins to slip away, he reacts aggressively: "'You *dare*' he screamed at her. 'You give commands to *me*? *To me*?' [...]" "Have you forgotten who you are?" (Martin, 230). Daenerys had "never defied him. Never fought back" (Martin, 231). For most of her young life, Daenerys allowed Viserys to have control over her. This means that where a lack of empowerment for Jon and Ygritte is due to heritage, it is Viserys for Daenerys who dominates her perspective of origin and herself as person, and is therefore the obstacle on her way to empowerment. This is not just because he is older, but also because Viserys is a man: Westeros has a patriarchal structure, and therefore Daenerys, as a woman, is perceived as the subordinate.

Oree Shoth, the narrator of the sequel to *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, also leaves behind her homeland, but unlike Jon, Ygritte and Daenerys she does so completely voluntarily. The place she was born and grew up in is the Maroeh, where people have "near-black" (Jemisin, *TBK*, 24) skin. However, when we look at Oree's position in the beginning of

the narrative itself, it becomes clear that we cannot look only at Maroeh as her point of origin. Though the prologue places the young Oree in Maroeh, the beginning of the first chapter presents Oree as a citizen of the Arameri' city Shadow⁹. By contrasting her against a family of tourists, the narrative makes clear that Oree is familiarized with all aspects of life in Shadow. Unlike Yeine, Oree does not perceive Shadow as Other. Instead, the city has become a place that signifies home for her just as much as Maroeh does in the prologue. In this way *The Inheritance Trilogy* moves away from a mere reversal of the colonizer/colonized, Self and Other, bind. Rather, it portrays an identity that refuses such static binary terms and synthesised both cultures into an identity of her own. It is not of insignificance that Oree's journey to Sky started, and was in fact caused by, the Arameri's loss of the power that enabled them to colonize the world: the Gods' magic. Even though they are still in control over the world, the beginning of the falling apart of their colonizing rule allows for hybrid identities, such as Oree's, to develop.

Whether it is the position of a bastard, direct or indirect, or a position in between cultural identities, all characters discussed share a position of in-betweenness. Jon and Daenerys both locate their point of origin in the Western-based society, but for Daenerys this is mostly an imagined origin, whereas Jon's perspective is mostly focused on how he is an outsider to his home. Both societies relate to European perspectives on the world, in which power is defined by ruling over others and violence. The non-Western-like societies are constructed by these holders of power as the Other. Through Oree and Yeine, however, *The Inheritance*

⁹ Formerly known as Sky, the city has been renamed after Yeine created a massive tree to hold up the palace Sky, the branches of which shadow the city below

Trilogy moves away from the typical 'colonized as Other' perspective and allows for a different type of origin, and therefore a different type of empowerment, to be imagined.

Chapter 2: Re-positioning and Empowerment

From their point of origin all of the discussed characters, with the exception of Oree, move towards a new place that has a significantly different power structure than the place they came from. I will analyse how the characters perceive and interact with the new power structure, and how the characters develop and become empowered. In this chapter I will focus on, and contrast, the narratives of Jon and Yeine.

Jon Snow

Jon, first of all, moves away from his home in Winterfell in order to join the Night's Watch. At the Night's Watch, all former relations and positions become irrelevant, making all men equal, and Jon hopes to find a place for himself there. However, he is disappointed by the reality of the wall, where: "the walls were cold [...] and the people colder. No one had told him that the Night's Watch would be like this" (Martin, 178). One of these disappointments is that his uncle Benjen treats Jon like he would any other new recruit. When Jon asks him, three days after his arrival at the Wall and not yet an official member of the Night's Watch, if he can join him on a ranging, Benjen declines: "'This is not Winterfell [...] On the Wall, a man gets only what he earns. You're no ranger Jon [...] if you thought your Stark blood would win you easy favors, you were wrong'" (Martin, 178). When Jon thinks, in recalling this conversation, that "Even his uncle had abandoned him (Martin, 178), it becomes clear that Jon hasn't fully come to understand his position at the wall. He does still believe that, because they are both Starks, Benjen ought to give him attention, a logic of blood-bonds that is relevant at Winterfell, but not at the Wall. Jon, then, has to reposition himself according to the new structure in order to gain power through this structure. This repositioning is exemplified by a conversation Jon has with Noye, the armorer who breaks

up a fight between Jon and four other recruits. “They hate me because I am better than they are” (Martin, 182), claims Jon. ““No. They hate you because you act like you’re better than they are. They look at you and see a castle-bred bastard who thinks he’s a lordling.’ [...]

‘You’re a Snow, not a Stark. You’re bastard and a bully’” (Martin, 182), replies Noye.

Interesting here is that at Winterfell, it was Jon himself who reminded everyone, including himself, explicitly that he is not a Stark, but now he is the one who needs to be reminded of this. Jon has always put focus on the bastard-side of his in-betweenness. Since many men at the Wall are bastards or men who can hold little or no power, Jon believes he is equal to them, and simply the better swordsman. When he is called a bully, he sees this as a “accusation [...] so unjust it took his breath away” (Martin, 182). Noye, however, exposes the difference between what Jon perceives of his own position and the reality of it. Jon has seen himself only as the outsider, a Snow, and has overlooked that he has also gained privilege in being raised as a Stark. This means that Jon has had military training since he was young, unlike others who “have never had a master-at-arms [...] not one in twenty was ever rich enough to own a real sword” (Martin, 183). What makes Jon a bully is that he possess skills that were unobtainable for the others and uses this as a means to hold power over them.

“You leave them nothing. You shame them” (Martin 182), Noye tells him. Jon abuses, through his own ignorance, the unequal power positions. What begins Jon’s journey of development towards empowerment is that by being forced to reposition himself, Jon comes to be aware of the privilege, and therefore the power, he already has. Through this realization, Jon also comes to learn not to use his power by force, as a bully. The Wall, after all, is the most democratic space in Westeros, where all men are equal and a leader has to be elected through voting. By repositioning his perspective on his own identity, he becomes capable to help the others, who eventually become his friends.

Yeine of Darr

Where Jon moves away from the space where power is centralized, Yeine moves towards the main space of power: the castle Sky. The entire (colonized) world is supposedly not ruled from this palace, but from the city below. The Arameri, officially, “do not rule the world. The Nobles’ Consortium does” (Jemisin, *THTK*, 4). This consortium, however, takes the shape of a mock-democracy. Supposedly all regions have chosen representatives to speak for them, but Yeine notes that it “was little more than a puppet show” which “existed only to do the ugly, messy work of world governance the Arameri could not be bothered with” (Jemisin, *THTK*, 60). In reality, the world is ruled solely by the Arameri family. Hypocritical acts such as this are, according to Yeine “the sort of thing that made people hate the Arameri- truly hate them, not just resent their power or their willingness to use it. They found so many ways to lie about the things they did” (Jemisin, *THTK*, 44). Under the pretension of democracy and order, the justification for colonialism, the Arameri actually hold all the power, making the palace Sky the real centre of power. In the palace, after all, the source of their power is located: the enslaved Gods. Only those of Arameri bloodline can enter the castle, because they are the only ones who have been given the ability to control them.

When Yeine enters Sky she, like Jon, has to come to terms with a new power structure. During Yeine’s first night in Sky her cousin, Scimina, orders the enslaved night God Nahadoth to hunt Yeine. This act immediately foregrounds Yeine’s position as practically a bastard and her lack of power. Because she was raised in Darr, she does not have the mark of a full-blooded Arameri, with which she would have been able to counter Scimina’s order. Instead, Yeine can only flee. After this scene, it does seem that Yeine is given some power:

she receives a full-blood sigil and three, though small, countries to rule over. (The fact that Yeine can make these countries pick up trade with Darr in order to improve its position shows both Yeine's continuing loyalty to Darr and the reality of how much power the Arameri have over the world.) However, all of this she receives rather than obtains through her own accomplishments. When Yeine hears that she can become the new 'head of the family', this does present an opportunity for her to gain power: the Family head essentially rules the world. To gain this power, Yeine must engage in a contest against twins Scimina and Relad, which is meant to show which one of them is the strongest. Strength and power are for the Arameri often connected to individual gain, hardness and cruelty. When Dekarta sees Yeine flee when he makes a traitor impale himself, he says: "It is her father's cowardice that flows strongest in her, not Arameri courage" (Jemisin, *THTK*, 109). Yeine herself claims that "I was not Arameri and would never be Arameri" (Jemisin, *THTK*, 111). Yeine denies any Arameri' qualities. She refuses to make the Enefadeh¹⁰ obey her. In her perspective, this "would be wrong" (Jemisin, *THTK*, 76), and she prefers to "ask for what I want, and hope for your cooperation in return [...]and if you say no, accept that answer. That, too, is part of respect" (Jemisin, *THTK*, 78). Like Jon, then, she has the ability to hold power over others through her heritage, but has the wisdom not abuse it. What does make Yeine take an active part in the contest is Darr. Scimina has created an army which will invade Darr if Yeine wins the contest. Again, it is not Yeine's personal gain that motivates her, in contrast to her Arameri family members. Instead, Yeine makes a deal with the Enefadeh. Yeine, as she discovers, holds the soul of the murdered Goddess Enefa in her body. In order to resurrect Enefa, whose power can free the Enefadeh, Yeine must take the stone used in the ritual of

¹⁰ The name for the enslaved God and Godlings

succession. This process, however, would kill Yeine. What the Enefadeh offer her for her death is the protection of Darr. When this offer is made to her, Yeine thinks and says:

They knew my heart well [...] "Revenge against my mother's killer is worth that. I'll take up the Stone and use it to set you free, and die. But not as some humbled, beaten sacrifice [...] I want to win this contest"(Jemisin, *THTK*, 174).

Her reasons, then, for winning the contest that is essentially a power struggle, are to avenge her mother's death (supposedly caused by Dekarta) and to protect Darr. Winning itself is connected more to her dignity than to gaining power: after all, she cannot hold power as she will die.

Throughout the novel, Yeine's preoccupation with Darr's safety remains. The only time she actually uses the Arameri's power, the Enefadeh's, is when she meets the leaders of Scimina's army. When they refuse to stop the planned attack on Darr, Yeine lets Nahadoth torture the men: "'What kind of monster are you?' I could not help laughing. That there was no humor in it, only bitter self-loathing, would be lost on them. 'I'm an Arameri' I said" (Jemisin, *THTK*, 246). Yeine uses Arameri power, and claims the name, but she does not use it for her own advancement. She uses the tools, violence and control over others, but from her self-hatred and motivation for using these, it becomes obvious that she is still connected to Darr. Even in this moment, when she is most Arameri, it becomes clear that Yeine doesn't actually reposition herself. She keeps her outsider position as Darr.

In many ways, Yeine's perspective subverts the dogma's of orientalism. Darr is not seen as inferior to the Arameri, but is instead preferred over the cruel, hypocritical Arameri. The people of Darr are not the dehumanized savages that the Arameri, reflective of

European perspectives on people of colour, present them to be. Instead, through Yeine's constant preoccupation with Darr's position in the world, a sympathy is created for the country and its inhabitants, which at the same time does not compromise Darr's empowerment. After all "It was not the prospect of war that frightened me [...]. But an *unwinnable war*" (Jemisin, *THK*, 335). Darr can speak and fight for itself. Through Yeine's sacrifice for her country it is this struggle that forms the centre of the narrative, rather than a struggle between three heirs for more individual power. It is the indirect narrative of the small, poor, colonized nation fighting against the colonizing force.

Learning to Use Power

Both Jon and Yeine take on in-between positions, but the reversal of their movements make for significantly different ways of repositioning regarding the power structures they enter into. In many ways, the Night's Watch has a more equalizing structure of power than the rest of Westeros, or than the Arameri, and because his position as a bastard is no longer relevant, Jon has to reposition himself. He learns not to abuse his power, but instead develops from a bastard and bully to a teacher and protector. Jon's personal growth runs parallel to his empowerment: he learns how to be a leader, and is slowly given the power to be one. The question remains whether the structure of empowerment in the narrative itself truly presents a subversion of Westerosi's politics of power. None of Jon's lower-born friends become vocalizing characters, have their own plot of development, and their appearances mostly take shape of either a comic relief scene, or one in which their support of Jon is the main point¹¹. Their most significant appearance in the first book of these

¹¹ That Samwell Tarly, one of Jon's friends, does get vocalizing chapters and his own development supports my argument, as he is also the only one of his friends who is high-born.

friends, is to bring back Jon when he wants to desert. On a whole the narrative does underpin the general thought of power of Westeros; the higher born governing over the lower-born, who do not get a voice of their own. This type of narrative supports the idea that Finke & Schihtman argue for: the legitimization of European superiority, the idea that there has to be a single ruler who is entitled to rule over others. In Jon's development, however, there is one way in which this is responded to: Jon does not gain power through force, but has to earn it through respect. He does not exercise power over others, as a bully, but gives them the power to choose him as a leader. The empowerment of others is what empowers Jon himself. The idea that the leader controls others through force and violence, that supposed superiority as a ruler enables and legitimizes this, is subverted.

Yeine does reposition herself, but not by submitting to the Arameri structures. Instead she remains focused on helping Darr. In this, her personal development and empowerment are not paralleled as they are for Jon. Instead, Yeine's prospect is that she will not gain any individual power at all. However, in death Yeine can be rebirthed as a Goddess and gain Enefa's power. This structure is reminiscent of the thought presented by Audre Lorde in her essay *The Master's Tools cannot Dismantle the Master's House*: that using the ways of the oppressor will not deconstruct the system. The one time Yeine uses Arameri tools, she doesn't succeed in defeating Scimina, who is the embodiment of selfish, cruel Arameri power. Yeine's general refusal to take part in the game of power, her loyalty to Darr and her respect for the Enefadeh, is what makes Enefa call her a "Worthy heir" (Jemisin, 374), not of the Arameri's colonizing power, but of Enefa's natural power. A power that transcends that of the Arameri, can set the Enefadeh free and literally dismantle the Arameri's house as the Enefadeh's magic no longer holds the castle afloat. Refusing to take part in the structure of power gives Yeine the ability to give a different perspective on the

ideas of inferior/superior that the white colonizers have imposed. Her narrative deconstructs the very systems that justified and enabled European colonization as Yeine's development of empowerment goes against the very idea that the domination over others is the power that has to be gained for empowerment, and therefore the very construct of colonization itself.

Chapter 3: Empowerment and Gender

Daenerys, like Jon, has to reposition herself when she enters a new political structure after her marriage to Khal Drogo. Oree, in contrast, is the only character discussed here that does not change her physical position. As I have argued, Oree has a hybrid identity, being at home in both the colonized country Maroeh, and the Arameri city Shadow she resides in. Instead, what sets off Oree's journey of development is that she finds (unknown to her) the god Itempas, who has been forced to live as a human. Men, then, play an important role in the development of both of these female characters, and analysing these roles can provide insights into the part gender plays in structures of power.

(In)Dependent Power

The first contrast that must be established between Daenerys and Oree, is that Daenerys grew up in a significantly more patriarchal society than Oree: she has been sold to Drogo by her brother. For Oree, there is no evidence in the novel that suggests that women take a more submissive role in society. Unlike Daenerys, Oree is also capable of living independently and supporting herself financially. When she first meets Itempas, she takes him home out of pity, by her own choice. Even though she does take care of him, she is never subordinate to him. "'it's not fair,' I said 'for you to make my life harder'" (Jemisin, *TBK*, 18) Oree tells Itempas when she has to clean the mess he made of her house, knowing he would feel guilty as he "did not like it when the scales between us were unbalanced" (Jemisin, *TBK*, 19). Also "his gaze felt off many things when it touched me, but covetousness was not one of them. Neither was pity. I probably kept him around for that reason alone" (Jemisin, *TBK*, 25). What defines their companionship for Oree is that she as a dark-skinned,

blind woman is not put in an unequal power position to the man in her house. Instead, they live together as equals.

Daenerys and Drogo's bond is not based upon equality, Daenerys was forced to marry him, but Drogo does not hold power over her in the way Viserys does. He does not dictate her behaviour, and during their first night together he asks for her sexual consent. The power imbalance between them is not one between them directly. Instead, it is manifested in the fact that Daenerys only has power because she is Drogo's wife. After the wedding, Daenerys first has to reposition herself according to the power she does have over the Khalasar. Despite the fact that the Dothraki have been established as 'savages' through many of their habits, including public sex and murder, making them an Other to western rational civilization, Daenerys does come to integrate their culture in her sense of identity. The first time she commands the Khalasar, Ser Jorah tells her "You are learning to talk like a queen, Daenerys." 'Not a queen,' said Dany. "A *khaleesi*." (Martin, 227). Favouring the Dothraki word over the Westerosi' term signifies that Daenerys breaks the opposition between the Self and the Other that ruled her sense of origin. In this, she is strongly contrasted by Viserys, who cannot accept Dothraki habits. Daenerys tells him that "that "They are my people now, [...] you should not call them savages, brother" (Martin, 387), but Viserys refuses to change his opinion. Instead, he holds on to his view of the 'savage' people and the 'civilized' Westerosi. When Daenerys gifts him Dothraki' style clothing, better suited for the nomadic lifestyle of the Dothraki, Viserys is enraged and calls them: "Dothraki rags' [...] 'Next you'll want to braid my hair'" (Martin, 393). In Viserys' perspective this is meant to be a ridiculing of a Dothraki habit, but Daenerys does not understand it this way. Instead, she thinks through the logic of the Dothraki, saying: "You have no right to a braid, you have no victories yet'" (Martin, 393). Daenerys has internalized the structures of the

Dothraki, but Viserys has not. Furthermore, Daenerys power position itself is visible in this scene. Viserys threatens her and though she does slap him herself, it is the treat of the power of the Khalasar that enables her to fight back. "Leave me now, before I summon my *khas* to drag you out. And pray that Khal Drogo does not hear of this" (Martin, 394) she tells him. It is the power granted to her by her husband that allows her to escape the domination by her brother. One patriarch is exchanged for another in a system Daenerys does not seem to be able to escape.

Oree and Itempas' relationship is not based on a dependence for power. Instead, Itempas brings Oree into situations in which Oree begins to discover her own power: she can create portals through her paintings. This plot of personal development parallels the political happenings in *Shadow*: the power structures are beginning to change. "For centuries, *millennia*, [...] our most sacred and inviolable law: *thou shalt do whatever the hells the Arameri say*. For this to change...well, that's more frightening to us than any shenanigans the Gods might pull. [...] none of us knows what will come after" (Jemisin, *TBK*, 61). Because the Arameri no longer hold their former source of colonized and colonizing power, the Enefadeh, they cannot react to the emerging resistance to their colonial rule. Unlike the other characters discussed, Oree has to reposition herself alongside the shifting political dynamics of her own home and her own sense of self. This parallel between the personal and the political is brought together by Itempas, who enabled the Arameri rule, and enables Oree's development.

Hybridity and Identity

It has been stated before that Oree has a hybrid identity, and this is emphasised by what Oree comes to learn of herself. She is a demon, which means that one of her ancestors was

the child of a God and a human. Her blood can kill a God, which “can be read as indicative of fear of hybridity and impurity” (Young, 24). Yeine’s later resolve that the demons should not be killed or feared because of this, presents us with the image that hybridity can, but should not be feared. Instead, the narrative as a whole disregards any static, binary definitions of right and wrong. Oree is, as the plot develops, given the opportunity to gain more power by joining another demon who means to overthrow the Arameri and kill the Gods to destroy the oppression of the Arameri. However, Oree does not cooperate with him because she finds his ethics disagreeable. Dateh, the other demon, wishes to fill the power vacuum that is being created as the Arameri power falters, but in doing so he merely wishes to flip the position within the exact same power structure based on the justification of the killing of those who are in the bottom position. He wants to uphold the system of colonialism, “the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behaviour of other individuals or groups” (Horvath, 46). The superior/inferior opposition remains, and therefore also the justification of violence upon those in the inferior position. By making Dateh Oree’s enemy, we are shown that nothing based upon this binary, static vision, those in power and those without, can ever lead to true, non-oppressive peace.

Though Daenerys internalizes Dothraki culture, she never reaches Oree’s state of hybridity, in which “it’s unity is not found in the sum of its parts, but emerges from [...] the third space within which other elements encounter and transform” (Bhabha, qtd. In Werbner & Modood). Though she engages with both cultures, they never merge to create a ‘third space’ identity. Instead, the two identities always remain opposed and contrasted with each other. After Viserys’ death, Daenerys needs to negotiate between, rather than synthesize them, her role as Khaleesi and as a Targaryen: she cannot remain in the Dothraki sea. Amidst this negotiation she also begins her “ethical evolution” (Roman), the emergence

of her idea of rulership. This begins when she, after a Dothraki victory, stops the rape of multiple women.¹² Daenerys, however, highlights that the boundaries of her power are strictly defined by what Drogo thinks is acceptable. When the men complain to Drogo, she wonders “If she had dared too much” (Martin, 670). She herself holds very little actual power. When the healer Miri Maz Duur betrays her by causing the death of Drogo and Daenerys’s son, Daenerys wants to know why, as she has saved her from rape. “The fourth was in me when you rode past. How then did you save me? [...] I heard children crying as the riders drove them off with their whips. Tell me again what you saved” (Martin, 760), Mirri Maz Duur tells her. Daenerys’ own visions and actions can never change the habits of the Dothraki, Miri Maz Duur points out to her, as Daenerys does not hold the power to do this. It is only through Drogo’s death that she no longer holds the subordinate power position, but is instead able to emerge with her power to enforce her own ideas, become her own ruler and to no longer be dominated over.

The structure of Daenerys’s empowerment moves from dependent to independent power. Oree has never been dependent, but is enabled to discover her power through a man. During the climax of the plot Oree loses her power by bringing Itempas back to his full strength. However, we cannot simply see this as a narrative of a woman who has to sacrifice her power for a man. Oree is, in this scene, presented with two choices: “Kill, or die. Eat, or be eaten” (Jemisin, *TBK*, 348). She must either kill Itempas, her friend, and join Dateh, or be killed by Dateh. Oree decided that “I chose to live. [...] I chose to fight” (Jemisin, *TBK*, 348). There is a focus on Oree herself, making her own choice for the sake of herself. The power Itempas gains is entirely dependent on Oree using her power. In this way, then, the narrative

¹² It would be interesting to consider Daenerys’ later fight against slavery in light of post-colonialism and the ‘White Saviour Trope’, but this is perhaps less relevant here as rape in *Game of Thrones* is constructed not as a problem of ‘Savage’ cultures, but rather of all patriarchal societies, especially in the context of war.

is a reversal, in which the power of the man is dependent on that of the woman's.

Furthermore, she uses his power as a means to save herself from Dateh as well.

Empowerment for Oree, then, does not mean holding a leadership position over others, but rather not having others hold power over her, where for Daenerys only the latter is applicable. Oree moves away from the definition of power as it has been defined in both Westeros and the world of the Arameri, and from the idea of superior/inferior that this form of power supports.

Chapter 4: Perceptions of Development and Power

There are three main similarities that can be drawn between the developments of Jon, Yeine, Daenerys and Oree. The first is that they all have an 'in-between' identity that they come to understand and develop throughout the progress of their empowerment. Secondly, this progress is started when they have to engage with shifting political structures, either by their own movement or by the political dynamics around them. Thirdly, each of these political structures is defined by a dominating power and a subordinate subject. By engaging with these elements the characters gain power, though the way in which they do this differs. In this chapter I will discuss these differences by moving away from the personal narrative. Instead, I will turn towards the national, political structures that are underpinned, subverted, or treated with a combination between these two, by the character's progresses of empowerment.

Imagining the Other

The in-between position of most of the characters is defined by their relation to physical or mental borders between countries: each part of their identity is manifested through a place. Though they are all imaginary places, these countries can be brought into connection with the power dynamics of real-world societies. Yeine's Darr, as has been discussed, is constructed as a colonized country of brown people whose autonomic power has been taken away by the colonizing Arameri, their traditions deemed savage. The Dothraki, in Daenerys narrative, are also constructed as savages, and though they are not colonized, they do take up a similar position to Darr as the (or one of the) Other in relation to a western Self. Both Darr and the Dothraki, then, relate to the structures of Western colonization in which

darker-skinned people are “constructed as inferior to the colonizers [...] Europe, European culture(s) [...] were privileged, valued, over all others in a discourse that is still strong today” (Young, 114). Though the Dothraki are not a colonized people, their construction as savages underpins the general construct of European colonialism: the idea that they, as dark-skinned people, are inherently not ‘civilized’, less developed than white people. However, though both worlds hold up these similar power structures, we are given different perspectives on this relationship, and apply these perspectives on real-world politics in different ways.

In the narrative of *The Inheritance Trilogy*, people from colonized countries are given the ability to speak for themselves, going against the dogma of Orientalism. This is mostly manifested through Yeine, because although we know that Darr is generally the subordinate in her world, through her perspective we do not view it as such. Although Yeine is actually only half-Darr, it is clear she favours Darr over Sky and considers herself mostly Darr. She constructs Sky and the Arameri ways as Other and often with loathing, as I have argued. What this entails is a reversal of the usual perspective, not in that the roles of colonizer and colonized are reversed, but in that the perspective of the colonized is favoured over that of those in power even while they are being colonized. Yeine, born and raised in Darr, has been given the ability to explicitly define herself throughout the narrative, and what emerges from this is a perspective that does not show colonized people as inferior to the colonizers. The word ‘savage’ is ironically used by Yeine many times in the novel, referring to her own ways, and each time it is clear that this is merely a mockery of the word the Arameri have attributed to her culture. It is actually the Arameri and the family’s abuse of power, that is cruel and dehumanizing. The construct of colonization itself is not changed, but the ideas that underlie it, regarding the colonizer and colonized, are shown to be false. When we apply this to real-world politics, we see a reflection of the realities of European colonization which,

through the reversed perspective, shows that the ideas that enabled this colonization, and are still relative today, are only constructs for justification. The dehumanization of the colonized subjects is deconstructed as Yeiwe can speak for herself and gain power, showing that people of colour and their cultures are not inferior and therefore do not need to be ruled over or spoken for.

This subversion of the general discourse surrounding colonialism, in which the colonized have now been given a voice, and therefore a certain power, to represent themselves and to change the dynamic between the 'superior' colonizers and 'inferior' colonized, is not present in Daenerys' narrative. She is, after all, Westerosi and approaches the Dothraki as the Other. However, through Viserys it is shown that holding on the dialectic of superior/inferior too strongly will not lead to empowerment: instead, Daenerys comes to appreciate and internalize some of the Dothraki structures. Despite stepping away from the position of inferiority however, the Dothraki are still in the position of being only seen in relation to the Western power: before Daenerys appreciates Dothraki culture, they are shown as 'savages', especially during her wedding. Daenerys is the one who, eventually, puts the Dothraki in a positive light, and mostly because they are 'her people' now. The idea that Daenerys' personal empowerment is related to her ruling over others, remains. Very few Dothraki ever emerge to have their own distinct personalities or voice, and therefore cannot speak for themselves.¹³ It is Daenerys, the Western person, who speaks for them and appreciates them not for their own culture, but because they are the people she rules over. In this the relation between the Western Self and the subordinate Other is underpinned, as all of Said's dogmas of Orientalism are visible in Daenerys' relation to the Dothraki. They are

¹³ It is interesting to see, however, that in the television show *Game of Thrones* Grey Worm and Missandei, brown-skinned natives from Essos, have been given more prominent parts in the plot.

constructed as savages and their culture – and they themselves, even – therefore as inferior to civilized Westeros. They cannot speak for themselves, and Daenerys considers them from the only two perspectives the Other can be viewed through according to Orientalism: as something to be feared, at her wedding, and after this as something to control. Though Daenerys does not actively enforce the superior/inferior bind, her narrative does still underpin the ideas of Orientalism, and therefore the colonialism that is justified through this.

Both Yeine and Daenerys negotiate between the two countries or cultures that come to define their in-between identities, but neither of them has a hybrid identity as Oree does. Even though Yeine is half Darr and half Arameri, and Oree full-blooded Maroeh, Yeine bases her identity completely on Darr, and therefore she does not synthesize the two cultures into a new, third space identity. Identity, then, is shown by both of these characters as not something that is biologically defined, but rather by a person's own choices and perspectives. Oree, after all, chooses herself to go to live in an Arameri city, where she develops her third-space identity, as I have argued. Oree's hybridity is also enabled by the beginning of the end of the Arameri's colonization, and in this Oree is the only character who lives in a society that is actually becoming 'post-colonial'. It is her narrative that shows what a hybrid, post-colonial identity might entail. The concept of Bhabha's Third Space identity is based on the idea that this identity surpasses the binary oppositions between colonized and colonizer as they are presented in Yeine's and Daenerys' narratives. Oree moves beyond a negotiation between her love for Shadow and her loyalty towards Maroeh. In her hate for Nahadoth, who for her is the manifestation of the destruction the Arameri's power has caused in the Maroland,¹⁴ it shows that the remains of colonialism, and its gruesome

¹⁴ The name of Maroeh before most of the country was destroyed by the Arameri through Nahadoth

consequences, are still relevant to her hybrid identity, just as the remains of colonialism are still prominent in the structures of our world. However, this does not define Oree's identity, nor her relationship to Shadow, a city she clearly loves: she is not presented as inherently connected to the 'colonized' position in her identity, as she moves beyond this. The third Space identity is shown to be a position that both encompasses the realities of the colonized past and its consequences, and at the same time surpasses the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized and the elements related to this.

Defining and Changing Political Structures

Jon is the only character whose in-betweenness is not centred around different countries or cultures, and there aren't any non-white characters at Winterfell, nor at the Wall. Women hold relatively little power at Winterfell, and aren't even allowed to be in Castle Black. Jon's struggle for empowerment is one that exclusively relates to other (white) men: he only compares his situation to Robb and Bran's, never to Sansa and Arya's. The biggest obstacle Jon has to overcome on his way to empowerment is his uncertain birth, his social status. Once he has learned how to overcome this, as I have argued in the previous chapter, he emerges as the single ruler, which is a convention of the Fantasy Genre (Young, 134). Within Westeros conventions Jon subverts the idea of static social classes by earning the respect of those below him in birth, but from a modern perspective the democracy of the Wall is less radical, and overall rather underpins the general conventions of the genre, which has a tendency to privilege white, European men over any other character. Even as Jon dies later in the series, there is an expectation that he will return to life because he is the typical narrator. A white man emerges as the natural, singular leader, for the Commander of the Night's Watch is chosen for life, and therefore the natural holder of power. Those of lower

birth are still in a lower position and for both Jon and Daenerys, the idea of power itself is not changed. It is still defined as holding a superior position over others.

However, gaining power for women in *Game of Thrones* is portrayed in a different way than for men, for Daenerys' biggest obstacle to overcome is her dependence on Khal Drogo for power. The process of empowerment, then, is deeply rooted in the patriarchal structure, in which women are subordinate to men. Despite the fact that Daenerys is shown as a capable leader on her own, whether the patriarchal structure is "presented as good or bad is irrelevant to its survival so long as no alternative is presented" (Elgin, 113). In depicting the main obstacle of a women's empowerment as the man, which can only be overcome by removal of the man, the texts underpins the notion of patriarchy: women, in relation to men, must always struggle for their equal access to power. The books in the *Inheritance Trilogy*, however, do not depict a patriarchal society. For Yeine nor Oree their gender forms an obstacle for empowerment. The equality between Oree and Itempas, instead, rather goes against the idea that the connection between women and men must always be one of an unequal power balance. These narratives present an alternative to the patriarchal system, in which men and women are equal, which Suzette Elgin calls "Androgyny" (112). Even though there is equality between genders in relation to power, this structure still holds up the "dominant-subordinate pecking order that is essential to patriarchy" (Elgin, 112). It still underpins the idea that there must be someone who is the subordinate, and someone who exercises power, and therefore does not completely break the conventions of the patriarchal structure, when we put this in a larger framework that moves beyond the conventions of gender. The positions of this structure are in the *Inheritance Trilogy*, depicted as the colonizer and the colonized, the Arameri and the countries such as Darr and Maroeh.

However, the trilogy does not present the superior/inferior power structure as inherent to society, with no alternatives. The personal narratives of empowerment of both Yeine and Oree move away from such a structure of inferiority, and this parallels the changing power structures of their society. Yeine attempts to use the power, the tools, of the Arameri, but achieves only little with this: the power of the colonizer cannot help the colonized country she is aiming to protect. The master's tools "may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 27). What does allow Yeine to bring about genuine change, then, is her willingness to die, to lose all power, and her eventual death. From that point, Yeine obtains a power that is purely her own. What is significant is that she does not use this power in a way that merely reverses the inferior/superior structure, which reinforces the violence and this very structure itself. She does not overthrow the Arameri, put an absolute stop to their rule, or rule, and therefore take power, for herself. For any such action, at this point, would have to be enforced with violence. She only removes the main source of their colonizing power by freeing the Enefadeh. In this way, the books in the trilogy "work against the imposition of a single rule and ruler, human or divine" (Young, 134). This subversion of the conventions of the Fantasy genre can be contrasted to both Jon and Daenerys. Even though Daenerys does gain her own power, as using Khal Drogo's power will always limit her, she does not actually change underlying structures. Though both characters reinforce the image of a singular, superior ruler, they do present these leaders as someone who should not abuse power, but rather act as a protector of his/her people. However, this also legitimizes the idea that there is a person who is the natural, and therefore superior, leader over others, and therefore should be in power. This leader is, in *Game of Thrones*, always white, and therefore, when

we connect this to real-world politics, underpins the idea that it are white people who always 'naturally' emerge as leaders.

What Yeine does to bring about actual change in the structures of society, is allow this change to take some time: only at the end of the last book in the trilogy, more than hundred years after the events of the first book, we see the last Arameri ruler who willingly gives up her family's power to allow a new form of government to emerge. The progress of this might be slow, but there is a danger in an immediate uprising that is represented by Oree's narrative. Her opponent, Dateh, wishes to take over the tools of the Arameri that they've now lost, the power of the Gods and Godlings, to destroy the Arameri's rule. However, Oree chooses to defeat him and lose her power rather than to join him as she realises that his ethics are just as much based upon cruelty and abusing others as the Arameri's rule was. His violent revolt, any immediate revolt that can at this stage only brought about by violence and war, will only reinforce the power structures put in place by the Arameri. Furthermore, despite the fact that Oree's narrative ends in a at first glance oppositional situation compared to the other characters, as she loses her Demonic powers, we still perceive her as a strong woman who has come to understand her own identity and holds autonomous power over herself. One of the most powerful subversions in this series, presented by both Yeine and Oree, is then, perhaps, a subversion of the very idea of power itself. Both on a personal and a political level, power does not have to mean holding a superior position over others. The narratives deconstructs, in this way, not only the European perspectives on Colonialism and the Other, but by reading in the applicative mode, we can also see a critique of the power that underlies colonialism and that is still enforced today. By continuing to enforce this idea of power, we still think within the same structure

that enabled colonialism. Redefining this tool, however, can lead to the redefining of the binary oppositions that structure society itself, for both the fictional world and ours.

Conclusion

It is in the process of empowerment that the individual and society meet and merge, for it is society that either enables or counters this process, and it is the individual who in turn engages with these expectations or obstacles and responds to it. It is because of this constant interaction between society and individual, that the process of empowerment can provide a useful starting point for researching structures, such as those suggested by gender and post-colonialism, and how they function in society. Seeing a character's empowerment as a process throughout the novel, creates the understanding that political power structures themselves are not static either. Rather, they are constantly challenged, changed, and even apparent stability in structure is actually a constant process of renewing, and therefore validating, these structures. Texts themselves engage with this as well, even if they present secondary worlds, for they still reflect, reshape or in another way engage with the way in which we think societies are structured.

In this process it is not only the social or collective part of the process that is of importance, but also that of the individual. Who is allowed to speak, to become empowered, and how does his/her identity relate to society? We have seen a bastard boy become a teaching and protecting leader, a woman of a poor, colonized country become a goddess. Another woman, banned from her land of birth and dominated over by her brother, eventually rises out of the ashes as the Mother of Dragons, and a blind woman who becomes a blind woman aware of her own origins. All of these characters perceive themselves to be in an in-between position, and it is from this position that they may perceive both what is an obstacle and what is an advantage in their way to empowerment in their respective societies. Jon is the only character for who this in-betweenness is not

defined by different cultures, but exclusively by social status. His narrative presents the idea that an outsider can gain power in a political space outside of the society that won't enable him to gain power. Jon, as it were, replicates the power he longed for at Winterfell at the Wall, not by surpassing but by understanding his own position. However, the 'outsider' role in this narrative is only relative, as Jon inhabits spaces where power is predominantly accessible to white, high-born men, a group he himself mostly belongs to. His development, when we connect it to structures of our world, underpins and validates the structure that white, European men will emerge as the natural, singular leaders who should hold power over others.

Since there are no spaces in Westeros where women can be equal to men, Daenerys most significant obstacle for empowerment must be her relation to men. Even if they, like Khal Drogo, do not explicitly put her in a subordinate position, her power still depends on theirs. This reflects the reality of patriarchy, but in this reflection also presents this as inherent to society: it might be fought against, but the structure itself is inescapable. Furthermore, even though she internalizes Dothraki culture, there remains a unequal balance between this part of her identity and her imagined origin, Westeros, which still holds a stronger part in her sense of self, for it is the Dothraki culture that is, as it were, added to her already shaped Westerosi identity in the narrative. Though she appreciates parts of the culture and the people, the Dothraki are also just a means to an end as she needs an army, a force of power, to return to Westeros. Her perspective presents the idea that Non-Western cultures are always viewed as the Other, as the narrative replicates the dogma's of Orientalism, and if their cultures are internalized into the Self, than this is because Daenerys choses to see it as valuable. The Non-Western society cannot be perceived as an autonomous society, a Self, but is always relative to the 'European'- Self.

This binary bind is opposed in Yeine's narrative and completely subverted in Oree's. Yeine views the colonized country of Darr as her origin and autonomous place of Self, whereas the European power centre is the Other. Yeine has the opportunity to become a singular Arameri leader, by winning the contest, but rather chooses to change the very source of colonizing power by helping the Enefedah free themselves. The empowerment that follows this decision at the end of the book, from dead mortal to Goddess, reflects Yeine's development throughout the book: the reverse movement, compared to Jon and Daenerys, allows her a different perspective on power. This movement is continued and developed in Oree's narrative, as she breaks the binary opposition between Self and Other. This occurs first of all in her hybrid identity, in which these oppositions can no longer be drawn but are instead mixed into a new, emerging Third-Space identity. Even in her personal relationship to Itempas it is clear that she is not subordinate to him, nor dominant, but rather approaches him as an equal. This personal position parallels her interaction with the political situation around her. She refuses to merely reverse the positions of colonizer and colonized, as she understands that these do not change the political power structures that underlie this bind.

What I have shown is that each of these narratives present the idea that there is a bind between superior and inferior, which can be colonial, class, gender, or all of these, which underlies society, and power is used as a tool to navigate these oppositions. The narratives of *Game of Thrones* engage with some of these structures, but do not subvert them: Jon is raised like a high-born, wants a superior position, and obtains a superior position over lower-born men. The struggle of gender can only be temporally overcome by Daenerys by the removal of men, but in this very struggle it is clear that this opposition remains a part of society. Furthermore, she is presented as Westerosi, and when she does

engage with the 'savage' culture of Dothraki, this still upholds the oppositional bind of the 'superior' Western position that is deciding for the 'inferior' culture. The concept of power as a means to engage between these oppositions, remains relatively unchallenged, being thought of in both the militarized sense, and as rulership over others. In relation to real-world politics, these narratives repeat without critique, and therefore validate, Orientalist perceptions of the Non-Western cultures, and though patriachism is shown as an obstacle, it is also shown as an inescapable obstacle for women.

The narrative of *The Inheritance Trilogy*, however, subverts these structures. Even though the colonized countries of people of colour are still put in the inferior position in the political society, throughout Yaine's narrative it is this 'inferior' position that is privileged and Yaine, eventually, does not choose to use the tool of power to navigate a constant struggle between these oppositions. Instead, she opens up space for change. Oree, after this, refuses to think and exist in these binary oppositions at all, between colonizer and colonized, men and women, Self and Other. *The Inheritance Trilogy* subverts the very idea that these oppositions between inferior and superior must be inherent to society at all, and therefore presents the idea that even our current society has the possibility of moving away from the structures that resulted from European colonialism. The works make aware of the idea that power has been defined as something that puts a person in a superior position over others, and that this inherently validates and keep this opposition in place. However, by changing this very tool, by changing the very idea of power itself, through development, we can subvert and overcome this structure.

In some of my footnotes I have made suggestions for further studies into this topic, as I have made the decision to not discuss those aspects here. One of these aspects has to be a comparison between the books of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the television shows based

on it, as certain choices were made in the process of adaptation which relate to colonialism and gender, such as the role of Grey Worm and Missandei, or Daenerys' wedding night, in which she no longer consents to sex, but is raped instead. Daenerys' development in the other books of the series in relation to Orientalism is also worth looking at as she tries to destroy the system of slavery, which is illegal in Westeros. Such an analysis could, perhaps, be an extension of my argument that Westeros is depicted as more 'civilized' and therefore superior. For *The Inheritance Trilogy*, furthermore, I have chosen not to analyse the third book nor the position and influence of the Gods and Godlings beyond their relation to Yei and Oree. Analysing how the Gods and Godlings, who do not have national identities or connections, but have each chosen the human appearance of a certain race, and the elements of chaos and order they represent, could enhance my argument on how the trilogy moves beyond simple oppositions between Self and Other and does not privilege European people or cultures. Theories and concepts of Post-colonialism, gender, and their intersection, discussed here might be discussed singularly in connection to the texts, as such an approach would further develop the general thesis presented here, and provide a more detailed understanding of how a certain concept of power relates to a character's development.

However, my intention has not been to give such an in-depth analysis of a singular concept or work, but rather to present the idea that analysing the process of empowerment can work as a method to understand how ideas of (post-)colonialism and gender function in secondary worlds in Fantasy texts. For this purpose I have chosen two works that engage with these structures in different ways, in order to analyse the most significant similarities and differences. The empowerment of the characters of *Game of Thrones*, as I have argued, reflects the underlying power structure of inferior/superior, in social status and gender,

presenting this as the reality of society. It therefore also underpins the apparent inescapability of these structures, as power is only shown to be that which gives the character rulership over others. In the first two books of the *Inheritance Trilogy*, however, the empowerment of the characters shows that even though a society might come from a position where the binary oppositions between dominant and subordinate are perceived as inherent, such as the Western society of our world after European colonialism, it can still move towards a future, and a concept of personal and political power, that moves beyond these oppositions. It opens up a space for its readers to imagine what this new structure might be.

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Appendix A

Summary of the plot of *A Game of Thrones*

Note: I will mention only the events of the plot relevant to the characters Jon and Daenerys.

Jon

At the beginning of the book, Jon watches his father, Eddard Stark, behead a deserter of the Night's Watch with his brothers Robb and Bran. After this beheading, the family heads back to their castle, Winterfell. They are stopped on the road, however, by the discovery of a dead direwolf, who is surrounded by her new-born pups. The Starks take the puppies, as there is one puppy for each of the Stark children except Jon. When everyone returns to the road, however, Jon walks back as he hears the crying of – and finds- another pup. Back at Winterfell, the King and Queen of Westeros have arrived and there is a feast at the castle. Jon, because he is a bastard, is not allowed to sit at the family's table, and instead spends his time talking to Benjen Stark, brother to Ned and man of the Night's Watch. Jon begs to go with Benjen to the wall, and eventually Jon does indeed travel with him to Castle Black. Here, Jon trains with the other new recruits, mostly low-born boys and men sent to the Wall as punishment. Jon beats them all in swordfight, and as revenge they beat him up. The armorer who puts a stop to this explains to Jon that he bullies the other boys, and Jon begins to teach them how to fight better during the next training. When Sam Tully, a fat, craven boy, comes to the Wall and gets bullied by the other recruits and Master-at-arms, Jon tells his now friends to help and protect rather than bully Sam. A little while later, Jon and his friends (including Sam) take their vows and become official members of the Night's Watch. Jon is disappointed when he is given the position of Steward to the Lord Commander, but Sam tells him that this might be because the Lord Commander – Mormont- wants Jon to become the next Lord Commander. A little after this event, bodies are found that belonged

to men of the Night's Watch, and during the night these bodies come alive and attempt to kill Mormont. Jon – and his wolf- rescue him by setting fire to the body. To thank him, Mormont gifts Jon his own longsword, the bear of House Mormont reshaped into the Stark Direwolf. Then, Jon receives news of his father's beheading. He plans to desert the Night's Watch in order to help Robb revenge their father, but during his journey to Winterfell his friends find him and convince him to return to Castle Black.

Daenerys

At the beginning of the book, Daenerys is sold into marriage by her brother Viserys to the Dothraki horselord Khal Drogo. Her wedding feast is characterized by deaths and sex without restraints, which scares Daenerys. One of her wedding gifts is a trio of Dragon's eggs, supposedly turned to stone. At the end of the night, Drogo takes her away from the rest of his people, the Khalasar, and she consents to having sex with him. In the following weeks, Daenerys gets used to her new position as Khaleesi and the lifestyle of the Dothraki. One time she orders the Khalasar to stop so she can enjoy the view, and Viserys is enraged by this order. He threatens her, and as a response Drogo's bloodriders (who function as guardsmen) threaten Viserys and make him walk behind the Khalasar, which is considered to be a great dishonour to the Dothraki. Eventually the Khalasar arrives at Vaes Dothrak, the city of all the Dothraki Khalasars where no blood ought to be spilled. Viserys complains about the fact that Khal Drogo has not given him an army yet to return to Westeros with, and when Daenerys invites him for dinner and attempts to give him clothing, he is again enraged. Daenerys strikes him with a belt and tells him to leave, or she will send the bloodriders upon him. Viserys leaves. Daenerys gets pregnant with a son who is prophesied to be the Khal who brings all Khalasars together, during a Dothraki ritual. After this Viserys comes in, drunk, and demands Drogo to give him the crown he was promised when he married Daenerys off to

Drogo. Drogo responds by throwing a pot of melted gold over Viserys' head, and he dies. After this, the Khalasar moves on to a trading city, where Daenerys nearly drinks poisoned wine, but Ser Jorah stops the attempt at murder. The Khalasar moves on again, while Daenerys convinces Drogo that they must conquer Westeros. Then, in a raid on a town, Daenerys decides to put a stop to the rapes that are happening around her, including that of the sorcerer Miri Maz Dur. When one of the men of the Khalasar objects, Drogo fights and defeats him, but does get hurt. Miri Maz Dur offers to treat the wound and Daenerys lets her. However, the wound gets infected and Drogo dies. Daenerys asks Miri Maz Dur if he can be brought back: Miri Maz Dur agrees, with the warning that it will cost another life. (Daenerys presumes that of Drogo's horse.) During this night Daenerys's child is born in the tent where Miri Maz Dur brings back Drogo, but the child is still-born. Drogo is technically living again, but he does not respond in any way to the world around him, so eventually Daenerys kills him with a pillow. She binds Miri Maz Dur to his funeral pyre, and then climbs onto it herself with her three eggs. When the fire has burned, Daenerys is still alive, and her dragon eggs have hatched.

Appendix B

Summary of *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*

After an attempt on her life, during which her mother was murdered, Yeine is requested to travel to the capital of the world – Sky, from her homeland Darr, to meet with her Arameri grandfather Dekarta. Dekarta is essentially the ruler of the entire world. Upon her arrival there, she is met by T’vril, a servant, who shows her around the castle Sky until they encounter Scinima. Scinima is a full-blood Arameri and at her side is the enslaved Night-God Nahadoth. Scinima orders Nahadoth to capture Yeine, and Yeine flees towards the scrivener of the palace in order to receive the mark which will protect her from the enslaved God. She then meets a small boy who is actually an enslaved godling, Sieh. When Nahadoth attacks Sieh in order to get to Yeine, she stabs him with her knife and Nahadoth snaps out of his madness. Yeine, after this, receives the mark on her forehead. The next day, Yeine gets told she is to be one of Dekarta’s heirs, together with her cousins Scimina and Relad. The three of them must fight, in an indirect political manner, to decide who will be the next heir. In the days that follow, Yeine meets with both of her cousins: Relad warns her that Scimina will use her weakest point, that which she loves most, and indeed Scimina threatens to destroy Darr. Yeine also attempts to learn more about her Arameri mother, who grew up in the palace, and the enslaved God and Godlings themselves. One of the things she learns is that she is connected to the history of the Arameri’ rulership. In the beginning of the world there were three Gods, Nahadoth, Itempas and Enefa, but Itempas became jealous of the relationship between Nahadoth and Enefa. He killed Enefa using demon’s blood, and gave Nahadoth and the children of theirs who fought against Itempas in the war that followed Enefa’s death, to the Arameri. Enefa, however, did not completely die as she is the one who created life and death, and without her the universe would fall apart. Her soul was preserved in a stone,

used in the Arameri succession ceremony. That soul has been put in Yeine's body by Nahadoth in order to bring Enefa back to life in this new body. For this to happen, Yeine must touch the stone, but this will result in her death. Yeine agrees to this plan, but only if the God and Godlings protect Darr, and she tells Relad that she will use the stone to transfer Dekarta's power to him, rather than Scimina, so Relad will block most of Scimina's army. She does this after her own attempt to stop Scimina's army, when she brings Nahadoth along and orders him to torture and kill some of the leaders, fails. At the succession ceremony, however, the scrivener of the Arameri is revealed to have been possessed by the God itempas, who was the one who set the planned murder of Yeine and her mother in motion in an attempt to prevent Enefa from returning. This time, he succeeds in killing Yeine. But, as the stone holds Enefa's power of life and death, and therefore kills all living creatures who touch it, it also works in the reverse and brings Yeine back to life. She is rebirthed as the Goddess Yeine, having taken on Enefa's power though her own identity remains. She frees Nahadoth and the Godlings from their slavery and punishes Itempas by turning him into a mortal, and as his power collapses so does the castle. Luckily, Yeine's rebirth has caused a great tree to grow from the city of Sky, and the palace is held up by its branches. It is the beginning of a new era.

Appendix C

Summary of *The Broken Kingdoms*

Oree Shoth is a blind woman from Maroeh who lives in the Arameri city Shadow, ten years after the birth of the Goddess Yeine. She can see the magic of the Godlings who are now free to live in the city. One day, the body of a dead Godling is found in an alley by Oree, leading to distress in the city. Oree also finds a strange man in a garbage bin and decides to take him home with her. When Oree is harassed by city guards at the stall where she sells trinkets because they suspect she has magic, this man, whom she has called Shiny and who refuses to speak, stands up for her. A few days later, the guards are looking for him and come across Oree, who is drawing with chalk on the street. When the guards step on the drawing and threaten her, Oree unknowingly uses her magic to open a portal and cuts off the guards' legs. She and Shiny are saved by Oree's former lover, the Godling Madding. At his house, Shiny reveals to Oree that he is Itempas, punished by Yeine to live as a mortal, and that everything the Arameri have said about his history – that Enefa was a traitor who wanted to kill him – was a lie. Then, the house gets attacked and Oree, Itempas and other Godlings are sucked into a void through black holes in the sky. When Oree is pulled out of this void, protecting herself by creating paintings of existence from her memory, she is met by someone who tells her she is in the House of the Rising Sun, a new cult of Itempas followers. In the following days, Oree is reunited with Itempas/Shiny, and discovers the motives of the leader of the cult, Dateh. He is a demon (a child of a God and a human, or a descendant of one) who wants to use Oree's blood, who is also a demon, to kill the Gods and take their power. Oree and Itempas/Shiny escape the house, but are then brought to the Arameri. They offer Oree relative freedom, though she will have to give them her blood. Oree eventually accepts, but then, during the night, Dateh arrives at the castle. He is the one

who has killed Godlings by eating them and taking their power, and he offers Oree the choice to eat Itempas and rule with him, or to die. Oree uses her power to turn Itempas into a God again for a moment, and he kills Dateh. After these events, Oree goes to live in a small Amn town, the only demon allowed to live, with Itempas. Her magic, after defeating Dateh, has completely disappeared. After a long time, their friendship turns to love and Yeine arrives to tell Itempas to leave: he cannot have happiness during his punishment. Oree remains not entirely alone, as she is pregnant with Itempas' child.