

The Intersectional Bildungsroman and Resistance to Sexism and Racism in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

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Abstract

The following work presents a discussion of what I term the Intersectional Bildungsroman, a theory I have developed following wide reading within the young adult fantasy genre. In this thesis I analyse and explain this theory through the texts of Alwyn Hamilton, Laura Sebastian, and Sabaa Tahir. Specifically, I focus on these authors' treatment of issues such as sexism and racism, issues of continuing importance despite the fact that some people believe we now live in a post-feminist and post-racist age. Each chapter looks at one of these authors and their respective series, highlighting the different historical, cultural, and social influences they have chosen to appropriate in their exploration of the intersectional bildungsroman. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate the way in which these authors have utilised things like the French Revolution, settler colonialism, and rape culture in order to highlight the presence of sexist and racist ideologies. As a result, I hope to prove the validity of the young adult fantasy genre for further scholarship. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the genre offers more than simply escapism from reality, but also serves to comment on current social situations in a way that encourages the audience to engage in real-world action against the sexism and racism they witness and/or experience every day.

Introduction

Towards the end of the twentieth century many engaged with speculations about the twenty-first century. Dreamers and schemers asked questions like: What does the future hold? How will it be different to the twentieth century? Will the twenty-first century be better or worse? Theories and future predictions abounded. Those who subscribed to Y2K believed that computers would not be able to handle the change from 1900 to 2000 dates, which would somehow bring about the apocalypse. Some warned that the twenty-first century would continue to witness temperature changes and extreme weather events, while others speculated that the twenty-first century would usher in both a post-feminist and post-racist age, in which the trials of the twentieth century would be left behind. Suffice it to say, only one of these predictions has materialised by 2020.

Not only did the beginning of the twenty-first century fail to generate Y2K, but it has also as of yet failed to generate a post-feminist or a post-racist society. One need only turn to media outlets to read reports of sexual discrimination in various workplaces or reports of sexual abuse committed by high-ranking officials, both of which prove that we are not yet living in an age where feminism is unnecessary. The same can be said of racism; race-related crimes such as police brutality populate news sites and social media, which illustrates that racist ideology is also still prevalent. It is clear even at a cursory glance that popular culture – which includes film, music, television shows, and literature – also engages with sexist and racist themes. In turn, this demonstrates that sexism and racism have not completely vanished from our societies, as these various mediums each understandably reflect the social and cultural norms of the time in which they are produced.

The notion that popular culture tends to reflect the time in which it is produced is particularly clear through a brief analysis of the history of the Western fantasy tradition. For although there are female fantasy writers present throughout history, the majority of the texts in the traditional fantasy canon have been written by white male authors. Understandably, these male authors tended to target and cater for a male audience, and as a result many of these early fantasy texts perpetuated traditional sex and gender norms, as well as racist norms. Despite the fantasy genre's potential for subversion, male characters tended to enforce ideas of chivalry, bravery, and dominance, while female characters enforced ideas

of meekness, passivity, and motherhood. Racial and ethnic minorities, on the other hand, were commonly positioned as primitive and animalistic in these texts due to misunderstandings of race that continued through to the mid-twentieth century.

But just as in many other spheres, the fantasy genre is no longer primarily male-dominated, and is now more broadly represented by a range of authors from various backgrounds. This shifting representation is particularly evident in the young adult fantasy genre, a subgenre of fantasy literature which has undergone an unprecedented revival following the popularity of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Much of this revival has occurred among female North American writers, with series that include Alwyn Hamilton's *Rebel of the Sands*, Laura Sebastian's *Ash Princess*, and Sabaa Tahir's *An Ember in the Ashes*. What unites each of these authors is both that their texts are positioned as 'coming-of-age' narratives and that they each spend time exploring the way in which sexist and racist ideologies impact their female protagonists. Additionally, these authors all write of their protagonist's attempt to change the world she lives in following her realisation that sexism and racism need not dictate her treatment in society. Combined, these ideas form what I term the intersectional bildungsroman, a theory which I explain throughout this thesis using both the structural and thematic similarities between Hamilton's, Sebastian's, and Tahir's series.

Young Adult Fantasy Literature

Young adult fantasy literature has thus far received little academic attention – if one ignores the prevalence of scholarship on the *Harry Potter* books and films – and as a result there is a scarcity of existing definitions. This has meant that the realms of general fantasy literature and young adult literature individually have been crucial in forming a kind of combined definition.

In its simplest terms, fantasy literature involves a transgression of what the reader understands to mean the 'real world', in that it is based on the reader's ability to recognise a commonly accepted world alongside descriptions and events as related to – or unrelated to – normal conditions (Apter 111). For although realism and detailed description are necessary

to create a coherent fantasy world, some elements of the fantasy tale are left unexplained. This includes the presence of magic or supernatural creatures; an explanation is often unnecessary as the reader expects, upon opening a fantasy text, to suspend their belief in the rational, known world (Mathews 3).

Through unexplained elements like magic and supernatural creatures, fantasy literature illustrates that it is not bound by the same conventions and restraints as realistic texts. But just as fantasy literature subverts some of the normative conventions of physical reality, however, it also has the potential to comment subversively on social and cultural conventions (Jackson 14). This has been the case since the genre's inception, but it has only been since the 1950s with the publication of J.R.R. Tolkien's anti-establishment text *Lord of the Rings* that substantial amounts of fantasy literature have been written and interpreted as subversive (Spivack 7). The tendency to both write and interpret the texts within the fantasy genre as subversive is only increasing as the twenty-first century unfolds. Utilising the genre in this way is particularly common among female fantasy authors, as steadily increasing numbers explore the influence that issues such as sexism and racism have on their heroines and how these heroines transgress these limitations. As is the case with traditional fantasy texts, this occurs in conjunction with the appropriation of real-world historical, social, and cultural contexts (Jackson 3); the difference is that these authors tend to utilise specific contexts which highlight the sexual and racial oppression their protagonists face. This connection to the real world, then, clearly serves as a kind of social commentary.

Despite the potential to act as a social commentary in much the same way as texts like George Orwell's *1984* or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the fantasy genre's critical merits are still contested. This is because many scholars believe that its departure from the real world aligns it with escapism, or the tendency to seek distraction from an unpleasant reality, which they believe to be negative. Serious fantasy scholars, on the other hand, use the term differently. Tolkien, in his essay "On Fairy Stories" writes that he struggles to understand the scorn with which "Escape" is so often used, and instead claims that escape as a rule is very practical (20). "Why should a man be scorned if," he writes, "finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it" (20). Not only does fantasy literature become a liberation from

the prison of the conventions of the real world, but it also offers an escape from habitual assumptions and expectations (Mathews 57; Apter 6). In many contemporary texts the purpose of this escape is to illustrate how limiting and imprisoning the real world is (6). But these texts are not commonly utopic in nature, and thus the purpose of a fantasy text cannot merely be to provide distraction from reality. Reality is not, in its entirety, left behind, and these texts tend not to resolve the problems a reader may seek escape from. Instead, texts such as these appropriate problems in order to deal with them in new ways. While this occurs with any number of issues – dependent on the historical, cultural, and social climate of the time in which a text is written – many contemporary fantasy texts not only appropriate historical occurrences, but also appropriate and magnify issues like sexism and racism (6).

A definition of young adult literature has also generated debate, particularly regarding the intended audience. Some claim that the genre is marketed towards ten- to eighteen-year-olds, others claim it is marketed at twelve- to fifteen-year-olds, and still others claim that it is intended for twelve- to eighteen-year-olds (Hill 3). The specific definition one employs will determine the standard age of protagonists, with most critics accepting that the protagonist's age tends to reflect the age of the intended audience; in any case, protagonists are commonly aged between about fifteen and eighteen years old, which is evident upon wide reading of the genre. It seems clear then, that whatever parameters one chooses, young adult literature is primarily concerned with the problematic period of adolescence, and thus features adolescent-aged protagonists. Regardless of whom the genre is marketed towards, however, recent buying and lending trends in the United States suggest that young adult literature has the potential to appeal to those as young as ten and as old as thirty-five years of age (3). This reflects an upward shift regarding the period of adolescence, a period traditionally associated with the development and cognitive changes of the teenage years; now, however, adolescence is extending into early-twenties for many people (Zdilla 191). Many contemporary young adult novels reflect this upward shift, with an increasing number of texts labelled with a variation of 'Mature content. Not suitable for younger readers'. In most instances, this mature content refers to drug and alcohol use and abuse, sexual references or sex scenes, and violence. This attests to the fact that young adult literature is not simply written indiscriminately for those who fit within the traditional framework of 'adolescence'.

Towards a Definition of the Intersectional Bildungsroman

The Traditional Bildungsroman

Although there is a lack of clarity regarding the intended audience of young adult literature, most critics agree that the majority of texts which feature approximately fifteen- to eighteen-year-old protagonists are concerned with identity formation and development. This is commonly referred to as a 'coming-of-age' or bildungsroman narrative, a tale which encompasses adolescence, education, apprenticeship, and any other texts in which a protagonist demonstrates 'growing up' (Brown 2).

The bildungsroman has a long and complicated history, and has changed and developed since the publication of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's 1795 novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*), the text which is commonly believed to have established the coming-of-age narrative as distinct from other genres. Although there have been some older examples of texts that have been labelled as bildungsroman narratives retrospectively – Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) is one example of this – Goethe's novel ultimately established that the traditional bildungsroman is based on the possibility of human perfectibility. The emphasis, therefore, is on the protagonist's physical, emotional, social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. But the protagonist of this kind of narrative does not begin the text as a ready-made or unchanging hero; he is instead shown in the process of becoming, or growing up (Bakhtin 21). This does not, however, occur against the world's immobile background; rather, the protagonist emerges along with the world, and his development reflects and is reflected by the historical emergence of the world itself (23). Bakhtin's definition of the bildungsroman ultimately transcends the idea that the genre is solely about personal growth, although this is an important part; much like fantasy literature, the bildungsroman cannot be removed from its historical context, which posits that the genre must feature if not a monumental event or historical development then at least an allusion to one.

Although a protagonist's personal growth is not the only element of a bildungsroman narrative, it is the genre's defining feature. In order to quantify this there is a set list of characteristics that traditional bildungsroman narratives tend to follow, of which all but two

or three must be present. These include the influence of childhood, familial conflict, leaving home, self-education, love affairs, and the search for an occupation, a working philosophy, and eventual integration. By the time the protagonist has arrived at this integration following painful soul-searching he has left adolescence behind, and is now able to visit the home he left at the beginning of the novel, where he demonstrates by his presence the degree of his success (Buckley 17-18). These features are commonly accredited to Jerome Hamilton Buckley, and most scholars – despite disagreeing about the nature and function of the genre – accept these characteristics at least as a guideline.

The Female Bildungsroman

Quite problematically, Buckley's definition alludes to a distinctly male bildungsroman, and thus a distinctly male perfectibility. Many feminist critics point out, however, that gender has the potential to modify every aspect of the bildungsroman, due to the fact that the social pressures and expectations, experiences, and options are different for women than they are for men (Brown 2). This is because women are treated differently in society because of systemic sexism. Sexism refers to the prejudice, discrimination, or stereotyping of someone based on their sex due to a belief in the superiority of the other sex. While this can in theory be directed towards men or women, historically women have been subjected to the worst of it, excluded from society, culture, and politics simply because of their biology. This has its roots in the concept of patriarchy, a term which literally means "the power of the father" (Rowbotham et al. 52). Much of this power was expressed by legal statutes, but it was also woven into the social fabric as unquestioned assumptions of social organisation, which subsequently resulted in the oppression of women (Buechler 94). As a result of this, throughout much of history women have been deprived of legal rights and the right to control their own bodies and sexuality, and have been excluded from education and the majority of careers.

Female bildungsroman narratives of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries reflect these attitudes. Whereas the traditional male bildungsroman depicts maturation, female novelists of this period instead present through their female characters "the suppression and defeat of female autonomy, creativity, and maturity by patriarchal gender

norms” (Lazzaro-Weis 17). Many of the genre’s critics refer to this as the ‘growing-down’ of female protagonists (Brown 3). This is because female protagonists – much like their real-world counterparts – were expected, upon maturation, to assume a narrow domestic role determined by their gender; when women who rebelled against these norms were portrayed their stories often ended with a return to the domestic ideal or, if the female protagonist failed to assimilate, in death (3). The message was clear: failure to meet the norm was unacceptable, and death – whether by illness, suicide, or accident – was the only viable outcome.

While women have been speaking out about sexist inequalities for centuries, feminism as a concept that we would recognise today is relatively recent. First coined in France in 1837 as *féminisme*, it now describes a movement which seeks legal, economic, and social equality between men and women, and ultimately calls for the elimination of male power (Rowbotham et al. 56). While this has been more or less continuous since the 1840s, the feminist movement is commonly separated into four distinct eras which are referred to as waves. Although the use of waves ignores earlier thinkers and activists (pre-1840s) and fails to acknowledge the overlap between the various waves, it is the easiest and most commonly-accepted way to define the developments of the feminist movement. The parameters of these waves are also greatly contested, but most accept that the first wave refers to the period from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries. During this time, a definitive women’s movement emerged and women gradually began to demand equal rights (Heywood and Drake 23). This eventually became a campaign to win the vote, and this was achieved first by women in New Zealand in 1893; by the 1930s Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and several other European countries had followed suit. Much like real-world women, female protagonists in fiction of the 1920s and 1930s were granted greater freedom than their nineteenth century counterparts as a result of this. Long-held attitudes and beliefs about the inferiority, intellectual weakness, and emotional dependence of women, however, were more difficult to influence and change, and this was reflected in the struggles of characters from authors like Virginia Woolf, whose Lily Briscoe in *To The Lighthouse* (1927) struggled to come to terms with her own beliefs regarding her ability and those beliefs of the men – and women – around her.

The first wave began the process of creating a female bildungsroman, but it was the developments of the second wave that really helped the genre to emerge as a distinct category. The second wave typically refers to the period between the 1960s and early 1980s; while continuing the work popularised by first-wave feminists, the key debate here was the differences between sex and gender. Utilising Simone de Beauvoir's statement "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" these feminists argued that sex was biological whereas gender was socially constructed, and this had a profound impact on second-wave thinking (Moi 3). This also affected the female protagonist, as coming-of-age narratives emerged which explored the social constructions of gender and sexual politics, such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). But the distinction between sex and gender became woefully inadequate, in that neither of these explains class, race, nationality, or any other factors that contribute to a woman's personhood (35). Many analyses thus ignored the fact that "a sexed human being (man or woman) is more than sex and gender, and that race, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, and idiosyncratic personal experience are other categories that always shape the experience of being one sex or another" (35). Using Buckley's commonly accepted definition as a guideline, Sandra Frieden claims that the heroine of the 1970s and 1980s female bildungsroman leaves her cloistered upbringing and thus separates herself – although with great difficulty – from her familial ties (306). In her journey the heroine makes a series of mistakes, and unlike the pattern of the male bildungsroman these mistakes "are not remediable or socially condoned" (307). The heroine who succeeds makes choices which irreparably sever her bonds with the social structure and which propel her into a life where there are no predecessors (307). Unlike its male counterpart, the female bildungsroman often has an ambiguous conclusion, as if the heroine is not finished her 'becoming', but rather that this is an ongoing process. This is similar to the earlier disconnect authors like Woolf felt regarding the contrast between increased opportunity and static beliefs; the 1970s and 1980s heroine often found herself at odds with a world that was still largely androcentric.

Unfortunately, little scholarship exists on the contemporary female bildungsroman as it has developed into the twenty-first century. It would be safe to assume, however, that due to the way its development up to the 1980s occurred in conjunction with the first and second waves of the feminist movement that this has continued through to the present. The third

wave of the movement is commonly cited as being between approximately 1990 and 2012. Characteristic of this wave is the way the diverse categories of race, age, class, sexual orientation, and nationality were gradually integrated, a fight which began during the second wave as critics recognised that the distinction between sex and gender is not the only issue that influences women. This became more pronounced during the 1990s as more and more people acknowledged this to be the case. Taking into account the diverse range of women's experiences, third wave feminists increasingly recognised the interdependence of people and the validity of arguments and perspectives that once seemed contradictory, building upon the work done by their first- and second-wave sisters (Freedman 6). Rather than debating whether sex or race or any other social category was more important, the connection between these oppressions was acknowledged and utilised in order to reveal the limits of singular labels (6). Another important aspect of the third wave was the development of what Ariel Levy terms 'raunch culture'. This refers to the embrace of a highly sexualised lifestyle in which women reclaimed words such as 'slut' and 'bitch' and dressed as they pleased in protest against what they believed to be the prudishness of second-wave feminism (Levy 33-4). This is often confused as 'post-feminism', and many critics argue that women no longer need to strive for equality because they have already received it.

This theory is cast into doubt, however, when one looks at the conditions surrounding the fourth wave, conditions present throughout each of the previous three waves, but which have been exacerbated by the rise of the internet and social media. This most recent wave is commonly accredited to British feminist Laura Bates' Everyday Sexism Project, an online forum set up in 2012. Here, Bates encouraged women to share their daily experiences of sexism. As the forum illustrates, sexism continues to cross social categories as women of different ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities, and religions responded, and thus the intersectional approach introduced during the third wave is still relevant. Contemporary feminists have also turned to what has been called 'hashtag activism' via social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram which serves to raise awareness and spread information (Phillips and Cree 938-9). Popular hashtags include #EverydaySexism, #CheckYourPrivilege, and #MeToo. Although this looks different to the feminism of the past, these feminists continue to fight for gender equality, equal pay, and freedom from sexual harassment as they recognise the contradictions between their supposed equality and their

actual experiences. The contemporary female bildungsroman, then, must also address these issues, exposing how sex and gender discrimination still affects women in a society that often pretends that these issues have been resolved by previous waves.

The Ethnic Bildungsroman

The ethnic protagonist is also largely ignored by discussions of the traditional bildungsroman. Like gender, however, a protagonist's experiences as a result of racism has the potential to modify almost every aspect of the traditional bildungsroman. While the white male protagonist of a traditional bildungsroman narrative thinks little of the negative effects of racism on individuals and society, the ethnic protagonist is constantly presented with limitations, and is treated differently because of others' perceptions of certain characteristics that supposedly set them apart from the dominant culture and racial majority (Davis 4). The expression of this in literature is largely a result of the continuing influence of race theory in the real world.

Although scholars now widely discredit race theory, it is necessary to analyse some of the history of this theory in order to understand the continuing presence of racial inequality in the twenty-first century (Zamudio et al. 4). Throughout much of history, the notion of race has been used predominantly as a tool for social categorisation (Castle Bell 19). Specifically, individuals were categorised based on physical characteristics such as skin colour, facial features, or hair texture. Various social, cultural, and pseudo-scientific ideas were concurrently assigned to those within these categories, such as the perceived biological inferiority of some racial groups due to their skin colour and cranium size. This idea in particular fast became popular among white Europeans, who used it to justify and sustain their beliefs in their own superiority. But these categories did more than simply affirm what white Europeans wanted to believe; they also justified the exploitation of minority groups. This exploitation eventually became known as 'racism', and ultimately refers to the subordination of or prejudice towards an individual or a group based primarily on certain physical characteristics (Spears 12; Castle Bell 25).

One of the most prominent examples of racism in history is that of the oppression of African-Americans in the United States, an oppression which has also been reflected in

literature. This is particularly clear through the practice of slavery, which involved over ninety per cent of African-Americans up until it was abolished in 1865 (Weisbrot 3). Early texts involving African-American protagonists tended to focus on coming-of-age under the oppressive structure of institutionalised slavery (Japtok 8). These texts were not always written by African-Americans themselves, however; one of the best-selling slave narratives of the nineteenth century, for example, was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel written by white author Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1853. Even once slavery had been abolished, this theme prevailed, and a number of texts written post-1865 described the cruelties of life lived under this system; these texts also sought to illustrate the humanity of the slaves, as the African-American population were still influenced by a pseudo-science that essentially deemed them animals (8). It was not until the early-twentieth century that a significant number of texts began to describe life growing up outside of this. These protagonists – and many of their authors – were still, however, influenced by the race theory that had condoned slavery in the first place; it is one thing to change laws but it is another entirely to shift long-held ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Although slavery was officially abolished, racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and other forms of exploitation remained legal. Prominent authors who wrote about the treatment of African-Americans in the United States throughout this time include W.E.B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston, whose 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is regarded as a seminal text in African-American literature (Gates xi).

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s caused many of the beliefs and attitudes towards African-Americans to shift, however, and this also influenced the portrayal of the ethnic protagonist in literature. This movement is commonly said to have begun with the success of cases known collectively as *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 (Weisbrot 11). Here, the Court rejected separate white and coloured school systems, ruling that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' had no place in the education system (11). The 'separate but equal' doctrine continued to permeate wider society, however, and it was still both legal and customary for people of colour to sit at the back of the bus, to use different restrooms and drinking fountains, and to eat at different restaurants (Dovidio and Gaertner 1). Success in the *Brown* case, however, proved that change was possible, and various groups – including students, laymen, and clergy – engaged in nonviolent protests and acts of civil disobedience; these included the Montgomery bus boycott, a protest against the racial segregation on

Montgomery's public transport system, and the Greensboro sit-ins at a Woolworth department store (Weisbrot 18-19). These kinds of protests were not solely undertaken by people of colour, however; many white people also recognised the unjustified oppression of people of colour, and thus fought alongside them in a show of support. Other marginalised and oppressed people groups also rallied alongside them, including Native Americans and Jews, women, and the LGBTQ+ community, who fought for their own rights as much as for the rights of African-Americans. In each example, these protesters sought legal equality and the right to be free of discrimination, as under the current law they were denied the right to full humanity (3). This was eventually successful, with the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, nationality, colour, religion, and sex (Dovidio and Gaertner 1).

But racism did not disappear with the passing of this act. While the pseudo-scientific racism of the past became less common as research proved this and various other race theories to be false, a new kind of racism emerged. This is officially known as neo-racism, and operates according to prejudices based on the cultural differences between ethnic or racial groups, such as the differences between language, religion, or customs (Spears 12). In most cases this claims a cultural basis for what is seen to be low achievement by people of colour, which is based on various unproven factors like "poverty, lack of entrepreneurial traditions, unstable family structures, pregnancy, single motherhood, deficient languages, and anti-intellectualism" (13). Although this neo-racism looks different to the racism of the past it is still racism, due to the fact that its purpose is to maintain racial hierarchies which then leads to the oppression of those outside of the dominant racial and ethnic group (13).

Despite the speculation that the twenty-first century would usher in a post-racist age, this neo-racism is still present in the twenty-first century. Although considerable resources have been invested into attempting to resolve racism, the world is no less burdened by this than it was in the antebellum period in the United States (Hall 575). The most obvious expression of this in the twenty-first century is the Black Lives Matter movement, which emerged following the outrage of the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who was accused of murdering seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012. Although Zimmerman was a civilian, the movement ultimately addresses racial injustices, racialised police violence, and police misconduct in the United States, and highlights the way that race theory and the historic

treatment of African-Americans has been translated into contemporary society (Garcia and Sharif 27).

In spite of this, it is clear that people of colour have found more freedom – at least legally – as a result of the events of the twentieth century. The same can also be said of the ethnic protagonist. One of the most influential definitions of the ethnic bildungsroman in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is presented by Martin Japtok, who uses Buckley's traditional definition as a foundation. He claims that while Buckley's bildungsroman stresses personal development, the ethnic bildungsroman tends to emphasise both personal development and community involvement (26). Closely connected to this, the traditional bildungsroman also perceives conflict as personal rather than social (26). The ethnic protagonist, however, cannot perceive conflict as purely personal, because on many occasions this conflict is connected to their wider ethnic and/or racial identity. The ethnic bildungsroman thus moves away from an "exclusively personality-oriented plot . . . and towards a more political and social vision" (27). It ultimately describes some of the struggles of those whose race or ethnicity renders them unacceptable to the dominant society, through protagonists who attempt to live by an identity defined by themselves, rather than subscribing to an identity defined by the traditional patriarchal Anglo-American power structure (Braendlin 75). This power structure is still present in the twenty-first century, but the ethnic bildungsroman continues to challenge this by "raising questions of equality" with regards to race and ethnicity (Labovitz 25; Japtok 27). In this way, then, it is clear that Japtok's ethnic bildungsroman is influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's earlier definition of the traditional bildungsroman, in that an ethnic protagonist's personal development cannot occur removed from the development of the world.

Intersectionality

Many studies analyse the development of the female bildungsroman and the ethnic bildungsroman separately, but little consideration has been given to the protagonist who is affected by both sexism and racism within a bildungsroman narrative. The idea that an individual is influenced by multiple oppressions is known as intersectionality. Although this term is most commonly attributed to legal scholar Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in the late 1980s,

the articulation of the concept is found much earlier in history; indeed, we see this documented back in 1851, with Sojourner Truth's famous statement "Ain't I a woman?" In this speech, Truth complains of not being seen as a woman because she is black. Black female identity was differentiated as something completely separate from white female identity, and in many instances black women were treated as a different species, rather than as being afflicted by some of the same problems as white women. Because of this, black women – and others – struggled to identify with the development of feminist movements that claimed equality for all, but which really sought to advance the cause of white, middle- and upper-class, straight, able-bodied women.

In the early 1980s, however, towards the end of feminism's second wave, black feminist bell hooks published *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, in which she posits that the feminist movements of the past have missed one crucial point; they may seek to make women the social equals of men, but they rarely define which men they are referring to, forgetting that not all men are equal (18). The same goes for women; the non-white or poor woman would hardly define women's liberation as women gaining social equality with men because she recognises that women do not share a common social status. For these women to become equal to men they must first become equal to white middle- and upper-class women. Hooks argues throughout this text that feminist movements need to shift to encompass those marginalised by a definition that dismisses issues like race and class, factors which alongside sexism alter the way in which an individual experiences oppression (18).

Later in the same decade, this idea was termed intersectionality. Crenshaw, in a 1989 article, explains the term utilising the oppression of African-American women, whose experiences are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination separately, but are instead subsumed by a complex interaction of the two (139). This term has since been adopted by a diverse group of people, including scholars, activists, teachers, and students, and has been developed so that it now encompasses a more diverse range of oppressions including class, age, religion, (dis)ability, and sexual orientation. These oppressions influence an individual in different ways and as such, the way this individual is discriminated against can seldom be understood as shaped by one isolated social category (Hill Collins and Bilge 2). Although this single-axis focus was characteristic of earlier social movements – including that of feminism and antiracist campaigns – intersectionality as

it has developed emphasises that the different dimensions of social life cannot be separated and so must be analysed simultaneously (Brah and Phoenix 76).

The Intersectional Bildungsroman in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

Based on this broad collection of definitions, it is clear that young adult fantasy literature not only exists as a subgenre of general fantasy – and thus employs the elements consistent with this – but it also introduces protagonists who tend to be between approximately fifteen and eighteen years old. As a result of this younger age bracket, the majority of contemporary young adult fantasy texts are concerned in some way with the bildungsroman, due to the fact that adolescence is perceived to be the height of identity formation and development. In many examples of young adult fantasy literature, this formation and development is experienced primarily through liberation from an oppressive structure. Some examples of oppressions that are commonly utilised in the young adult fantasy genre include sexism and racism. The combination of these oppressions and the way they simultaneously impact a young protagonist ultimately points to what I term the intersectional bildungsroman.

Because I have created the intersectional bildungsroman out of various parts of the traditional bildungsroman, the female bildungsroman, the ethnic bildungsroman, and basic intersectional theory, the specifications of the theory have ultimately been defined by analysing the structural similarities between the texts of Alwyn Hamilton, Laura Sebastian, and Sabaa Tahir. Based on the similarities between these texts it is clear that an intersectional bildungsroman narrative follows a pattern. They all feature female protagonists of a similar age, a description of her childhood and/or home life, leaving home, her induction into an anti-establishment group, relationships with those in this group, a love triangle, returning home, and the eventual development of her society as aligned with her personal growth. But Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir each interpret this pattern differently, and they each utilise various historical, social, and cultural influences. The specific combination of these influences ultimately affects the course of the narrative in different ways, but overall they enforce the sexist and racist nature of the society the protagonist lives in.

The first common element of the intersectional bildungsroman is the typical age of protagonists. Due to intended audience, the protagonist – who in the examples to follow is female – must be between fifteen and eighteen years old at the time of the main narrative. She must also be recognisably grounded in the biological and social reality of a woman's life, influenced by traditional notions of femininity and a woman's place in society (Attebery 91). This is common of many young adult fantasy texts, but what elevates the intersectional bildungsroman narrative is that these female protagonists are also recognisably grounded in the physical and cultural reality of a racial and ethnic minority. It is not far-fetched, then, to claim that this female protagonist is influenced by both sexism and racism, as these oppressions converge to create a different kind of subjectivity (Ward 73).

As part of the illustration of the way sexism and racism influence a protagonist we must learn of her childhood and her home life. It becomes evident here that the protagonist is oppressed, illustrated by identity confusion, fear, powerlessness, and feelings of isolation, and it is thus crucial to our understanding of the protagonist's position at the beginning of the series. Her childhood and home life also provide us with a reason as to why she desires to leave her home, another necessary element of the intersectional bildungsroman. Although her life here has not been easy she has mixed feelings about leaving, and it is often difficult for her to leave the place that has until now defined all of her experiences throughout her life. In this way, the physical act of leaving is also a symbolic one; the protagonist proves by this that she is leaving her old identity behind and is stepping into something new and exciting that must change her.

The physical act of leaving is not only a catalyst for identity development but allows for the protagonist to meet new people and develop new relationships that are crucial in aiding her personal development. These new friends are connected to a broader anti-establishment group, and by association the protagonist finds herself part of this group, despite the fact that she did not begin the text with the intention to rebel against the current order of her society. Regardless of the protagonist's initial intention, however, becoming involved with an anti-establishment group is particularly significant in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative because groups working towards a common goal disrupt the isolation associated with oppression, a crucial factor for the protagonist's overall identity development (Moane 115). Not only this, but the people she meets here often help her discover and develop her magical

abilities, and her induction into a broader anti-establishment group ultimately encourages her to take action against her oppressors. As this group works against the systems that create and sustain oppressions like sexism and racism the protagonist is empowered to assist them, ultimately realising – whether this is ever put into words or not – that the changes she has personally experienced regarding her own perception of the sexism and racism within her society must be accompanied by social and political change if they are to last. In this way, then, the protagonist becomes an instrumental part of changing the world she lives in, something she could not do without the help of those around her.

It is clear, then, that relationships with other like-minded people are significant for a protagonist's growth and development. Particularly significant, however, are her romantic relationships because of the way these uniquely assist her confidence in her identity and her abilities. Love triangles, which refer to a situation in which a protagonist is intimate with two separate love interests and is confused about which to pursue, are commonplace in intersectional bildungsroman narratives. Although the twenty-first century has opened up many more opportunities for same-sex relationships to be written about and readily accepted, the majority of texts which fit into the intersectional bildungsroman category – including the three I discuss here – feature heteronormative relationships between a male and a female. This is not to say that all romantic relationships within the intersectional bildungsroman are heteronormative, but rather that these relationships are simply more common in young adult fantasy literature.

As well as being predominantly heteronormative, these love triangles follow a specific pattern. First, the protagonist must demonstrate affection or intimacy towards someone of her own ethnicity; more specifically, she must demonstrate this towards someone from her hometown, the place she leaves at the beginning of the narrative. As she leaves home and forms relationships with others she begins to fall in love with a second character. This second character, as I will illustrate in my analysis of my chosen examples, is of a different race/ethnicity, and he is also commonly a member of the nobility or upper class. Broadly speaking, this first love interest, from the protagonist's hometown, symbolises safety and familiarity, while the second symbolises danger and uncertainty. Because of this, it may seem for much of the narrative that the boy from the protagonist's hometown is the most viable option, while the boy of a different race/ethnicity to her own remains something of an

enigma. In actuality, however, the latter is the only viable option. This is not a random choice, but is one that can be explained quite simply. This first love interest symbolises the protagonist's old life, while the second symbolises her new life and the potential for change and growth. Because the intersectional bildungsroman is primarily about a protagonist developing away from the person she was at the beginning of the series alongside her realisation that neither sexism nor racism should affect how she perceives herself, she cannot be with someone who symbolises her past life. The first love interest may also grow and develop throughout the series, and they may also assist the protagonist's growth, but their position in the narrative ultimately serves to highlight where the protagonist began, at the life that could have been, rather than what is. As a result of this, she must fall for the second love interest, who uses his position as both male and as part of the dominant ethnic group to help her realise that she does not need to be confined by the racist and sexist boundaries the dominant social group places upon her.

As I alluded to earlier, the relationships the protagonist forms with those connected to an anti-establishment group encourage her to take political action against her oppressors. According to Geraldine Moane, political action is a necessary aspect of liberation from oppression because it is necessary for a protagonist to help change some of the social conditions in order to bring about lasting changes to her identity and her perception of herself (115). Although Moane specifically references realistic situations and scenarios in which liberation psychology is practical, it is evident that the political level is functional in relation to young adult fantasy heroines within the intersectional bildungsroman. Broad notions of political action in the real world define it as being "engaged with structures or institutions of power" (160). An analysis of any uprising, revolution, or rebellion in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative immediately illustrates that this too is the case. Here, the protagonist stands between the old, oppressive ways of her society and the hope for a new world in which all people – regardless of sex or race – are equal. Taking a stand against this system is significant; although it is possible for change to occur simply at a personal level, this change is limited if social conditions do not also change (161).

This idea ultimately reinforces Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of emergence, that the protagonist's development must reflect the historical emergence of the world, and vice versa. The intersectional bildungsroman, then, is both about a protagonist's realisation that the

sexism and racism she experiences are socially constructed, and her attempt to change the societal systems that perpetuate oppressive attitudes and beliefs. Although we witness the protagonist's personal growth throughout the series, this is most clearly affirmed as she returns to the home she left at the beginning of the narrative. In theory, this can occur at any point in the series, but it must be preceded by significant character development and growth; indeed, in the texts I study here this occurs in the latter half of the series. In returning home, she demonstrates to those remaining that she has grown away from the kind of person that she was at the beginning of the narrative; significantly, this is also demonstrated to herself. As the series comes to a close, we ultimately realise that the protagonist's personal growth has occurred in conjunction with changes to the political and social state of her country, as we read of a world vastly different to that we encountered at the beginning of the narrative. But although the systems in which sexual and racial oppression occur have been disrupted, it is not simply a case of 'happily ever after'. There must still be the potential for struggle, and the imperfectability of the new society must at least be alluded to. This not only illustrates that the development of the world has not come to an end, but also – according to Bakhtin's theory of emergence – demonstrates that the protagonist herself has not finished developing.

An intersectional bildungsroman narrative, then, differs from many traditional bildungsroman narratives in that instead of focusing on a protagonist's transition into a prescribed role, it emphasises the transgression of boundaries and the defiance of the status quo. This is predominantly demonstrated by the way a protagonist grows in her understanding of the interconnected oppressions which affect her, while also helping to change the world in which these oppressions occur. Although the exact order and interpretation of the intersectional bildungsroman is not always the same, it is clear in the texts of Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir that each of the elements outlined above are present in some way, shape, or form, and I demonstrate this throughout this thesis. Ultimately, the intersectional bildungsroman is especially prevalent in young adult fantasy texts due to the genre's subversive potential, which allows authors to explore issues such as sexism and racism with new perspectives and understanding in such a way that realistic fiction struggles to do due to the limitations of the real world.

Predecessors

Utilising sexist and/or racist themes in young adult fantasy literature is not a new phenomenon, however, and these contemporary authors are all indebted in some way to authors such as Tamora Pierce, Ursula Le Guin, and J.K. Rowling. These authors have each been significant in redefining the qualities of a hero to include female experience, and it is clear that Alwyn Hamilton, Laura Sebastian, and Sabaa Tahir rely on the advancements made by these earlier authors, whether they explicitly express their indebtedness or not (Attebery 89). Tamora Pierce is particularly renowned for her series *The Song of the Lioness* (1983-88), which follows Alanna of Trebond, who disguises herself as boy to go and train as a knight. Alanna must fight the tradition that forbids girls from becoming knights, as well as the idea that women and girls are unable to do anything other than their assigned domestic roles (Kunzel and Fichtelberg 51). While seemingly subversive for its time, Pierce subscribes to a very mainstream feminism in her portrayal of Alanna; for although she is interested in liberation, her tale is equally concerned with heteronormativity and whiteness (Sahn 147). In spite of this, *The Song of the Lioness* challenges “the often contradictory imperatives of gendered development as Alanna seeks a way to reject gender norms without rejecting what she values and desires from her femininity” (147). Alanna realises by the end of the fourth book, *Lioness Rampant*, that her feminine identity and her warrior identity are not mutually exclusive, and that she can simultaneously be both fierce and feminine. Although Alanna is interested primarily in her own personal liberation, her actions lead the way for other women to follow in Tortall, similar to the way that Pierce’s contribution to the development of the fantasy heroine has led the way for female fantasy authors in the twenty-first century.

Another author who has led the way for female fantasy writers is Ursula Le Guin. This is particularly noticeable in *Tehanu*, the fourth book in the *Earthsea Cycle* (1990). Although the first three books of the series focus on the growth of male protagonist Ged, the middle-aged female protagonist of *Tehanu*, Tenar, exposes what it means to live in a society that places little value on women (Clarke 6). Men have all the power in Earthsea, while women like Tenar are relegated to the domestic sphere as mothers and wives, and there is the constant threat of physical violence by men against women and children. The gendered nature of magic is also addressed. Women’s magic is portrayed as both weak and wicked, and the mage’s is a

male power that women do not possess (*A Wizard of Earthsea* 15; 197). “If women had power,” Ged tells Tenar, “what would men be but women who can’t bear children?” (197). With this question, Ged illustrates that men are afraid of female power because its existence would render them less important, but Tenar and her adopted child Therru prove that women do have power, even if the nature of this power is as of yet unknown. *Tehanu* thus presents a repositioning of the series, questioning “the assumptions underlying the construction of the [initial] trilogy, in particular why men were mages and women were not” (Clarke 141). This can ultimately be explained by the predominantly male-focused fantasy tradition, a genre that authors like Pierce and Le Guin revision through female characters who question the traditionally masculine nature of magic and power.

While Pierce and Le Guin deal primarily with the sexism experienced by their protagonists, J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) deals with a female character who serves as an example both for contemporary young feminists and for those who find themselves limited by prejudices towards their race. Hermione Granger emphasises intelligence, compassion, and morality above beauty and male desirability, although Rowling’s world is still very much a patriarchal one in which men are primarily in power. She is just as valuable as either Harry or Ron Weasley, however, and she frequently saves their lives as a result of her intellect. But Hermione is not only a feminist icon; she is also an example to those limited by prejudices towards their race. In a particularly spiteful moment in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Draco Malfoy calls her a “filthy little Mudblood” (86). Ron explains that this is essentially a racial slur as those of muggle-descent are believed to be less adept at magic than those whose parents also possess magic (Gupta 101). Hermione could allow the limitations placed on her due to her blood and her sex to influence her life, but she does not. Consistently throughout the series Rowling uses Hermione to assert both that intelligence and common sense are more important than physical beauty, and to assert that the premise that magical ability is grounded on either sex or race is unfounded. Much like Pierce and Le Guin before her, Rowling here shifts the notion of the hero from employing a predominantly masculine brawn, and instead develops the qualities of a hero to include female experience.

The Intersectional Bildungsroman as Written by Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir

Although none of these twentieth-century authors write intersectional bildungsroman narratives, they all demonstrate the way that young adult fantasy literature has moved away from the notion of the traditional male hero. Authors such as Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir are thus all indebted to authors like Pierce, Le Guin, and Rowling in some way as they continue the recent tradition of writing female heroines who transgress gender norms. But these contemporary authors do not address sexism in a vacuum, and also simultaneously address racism. In order to create a world in which the reader recognises these sexist and racist attitudes, authors like Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir adapt a range of real-world historical and cultural influences that are significant to an analysis of sexism and racism in society.

Each of the coming chapters focuses on the journey of a female protagonist as she begins to understand and overcome the sexism and racism present within her society. In my first chapter, “The Blue-Eyed Bandit in *Rebel of the Sands*,” I accomplish this by analysing the various historical and cultural elements that Alwyn Hamilton appropriates in her series. At first glance the majority of these influences appear to be random and unrelated, but a more in-depth analysis highlights Hamilton’s focus on a range of Orientalist tropes, including that of the cruel despot, the sensuality of the harem, and the uncivilised nature of Ottoman society. I will demonstrate that not only do these tropes assist Hamilton’s construction of a world in which sexism and racism run rampant, but also that their failure to withstand a Western-inspired rebellion ultimately enforces the notion of Western superiority.

My second and third chapters differ from my first in that the texts I focus on here – Laura Sebastian’s *Ash Princess* and Sabaa Tahir’s *An Ember in the Ashes* – are at present unfinished. In my second chapter, “The Captive Queen in *Ash Princess*,” I focus on the various historical and cultural elements Sebastian appropriates in Astrea, a fictional country which has been dominated by white colonisers. Other influences Sebastian appropriates include matriarchy, Stockholm syndrome, the practice of brideprice, and refugee camps. I demonstrate the way Sebastian utilises these influences within a settler colonial narrative to construct a sexist and racist society, and the way in which she criticises the actions of her colonising people; in turn, this serves as a kind of commentary on real-world settler colonialism and Western domination.

Finally, in my third chapter, “The Rebel Slave in *An Ember in the Ashes*”, I analyse Sabaa Tahir’s portrayal of Laia of Serra’s character development. In order to do this, I examine Laia’s interactions with various real-world historical and cultural influences. These include elements of Roman society, the Kashmir conflict, contemporary rape culture, genocide, and refugee camps. Each of these influences highlight the sexist and racist nature of the world Laia lives in, and as she engages with these it becomes clear that her experiences of oppression are primarily a result of her sex and her race. Not only this, but like Hamilton, Tahir also contrasts the West and the East in her trilogy, although this is not accomplished through Orientalist tropes. Rather, Tahir’s appropriation of Roman culture contrasted against her appropriation of elements of Middle Eastern culture acts in a similar way to Sebastian’s commentary on real-world settler colonialism, as Tahir also clearly criticises Western superiority.

Each of these texts, then, not only criticise personal sexism and racism, but they also criticise some of the systems that have created these oppressions. Rather than simply accepting sexism and racism as an inherent and unchanging element of society, Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir instead write of characters who realise that they cannot live their lives bound by oppressive conditions. This is made possible by the fantasy genre’s subversive potential, which ultimately allows authors to write outside of normal conditions and to comment on some of the issues within our own societies in such a way that reaches those as young as ten or twelve years of age.

Chapter One: The Blue-Eyed Bandit in *Rebel of the Sands*

At a glance, young adult fantasy texts seem to merely offer escapism from real-world problems. Application of the intersectional bildungsroman, however, proves that these texts have the potential to offer a unique perspective on commonplace oppressions such as sexism and racism. Although these texts rarely resolve these issues, the subversive potential of the fantasy genre allows an author to write of a protagonist who not only rises above the effects that these oppressions have on her personally, but who also assists in destroying the systems in which these oppressions operate.

The first text I analyse which demonstrates this is Alwyn Hamilton's *Rebel of the Sands* trilogy (2016-18). Specifically, Hamilton explores sexual and racial oppression through her sixteen-year-old protagonist Amani Al'Hiza, a character who develops into a powerful heroine by the trilogy's close despite the limitations her society places upon her due to its understandings of sex and race. In order to expose the sexist and racist nature of Miraji, the country in which Amani lives, Hamilton utilises a range of historical and cultural influences, as fantasy literature cannot be removed from the real world. Specifically, Hamilton appropriates the Ottoman Empire, the history and practice of cross dressing, the French Revolution, and Orientalist views of the harem. Analysis of some of the Orientalist tropes Hamilton addresses demonstrate that this text serves not only as a commentary on sexism and racism but also as a kind of commentary on the tension between the West and the Orient. Ultimately, as Amani engages with these influences it is clear that she is affected by the complex intersection of sex and race. Although she struggles against the confines of these at the trilogy's beginning, her identity development by its close suggests not only that she has risen above the effects that these oppressions have on her personally, but also that the world she lives in is changing to become more accepting of women and racial others.

Crucial to an analysis of the way sexism and racism affect Amani is an understanding of the society she lives in. A common trope in many young adult fantasy texts is the appropriation of both patriarchal and patrilineal ideas. This too is present in Miraji, a desert nation whose structure is loosely based on an Orientalist perspective of the Ottoman Empire (1298-1923). On the surface, this is reflected by the use of sultans and sultanas in the place

of the more common use of kings and queens. As a patrilineal society, the Ottoman Empire's existence was dependent on the sultan's ability to provide a male heir, as women were unable to inherit the throne (Imber 75). Not only were property and title inherited by a male heir, however, but power – in the form of political leadership and social authority – was also predominantly held by men, meaning that the majority of women were prohibited from actively participating in social and economic life (75).

Hamilton draws on many Orientalist tropes in her description of Miraji. Primarily, Orientalism refers to a Western discourse, a means of perceiving and understanding a cultural and geographic 'Other', particularly referring to those in the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. In his 1978 book *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that this view came from the European assumption of their own racial and cultural authority (39). This subsequently created much of the Western interpretation of the Orient, including stereotypes such as despotism, explicit sensuality, mysticism, slavery, violence, and corruption, as oppositional to a Western understanding of its own culture. These stereotypes were perpetuated through art, literature, politics, and colonial rule, and in turn informed subsequent generations of artists, scholars, and leaders until Europe's cultural and ideological domination was firmly grounded in Western thought (5). Ultimately, Said accuses the practice of Orientalism of encouraging negative racial stereotypes and prejudice, and of perpetuating the myth that the Orient is an undifferentiated 'other' (Warraq 19).

The first Orientalist trope Hamilton employs is her construction of Sultan Oman as a cruel, despotic ruler who is unrestricted by law or custom. Approximately twenty years before the trilogy's beginning, Sultan Oman decided that he was better suited to rule Miraji than his father. In order to gain this power, he made an alliance with the Gallan army. This army killed his father and anyone else who refused to acknowledge him as the new Sultan, and in return he let the Gallan army set up camp in Miraji and gave them access to all weaponry (*Rebel* 45). This negatively impacted the people of Miraji, particularly those in small towns like Dustwalk which are built around a weapons factory. The people here are cheap labour, and are paid barely enough to survive. This occupation also impacted Demdji – children born of Djinn and mortal women – as the Gallan soldiers have been given the right to kill all those touched with magic (244). Women too have been impacted by the Gallan occupation; the Sultan has allowed for these soldiers to rape and abuse women across the country. That he simply turns

away from this suffering ultimately highlights the beliefs about the position and value both of Demdji and of women in society (157).

This societal structure clearly influences Amani's position in *Miraji* as well as her identity at the beginning of *Rebel of the Sands*. This is immediately clear as we first meet her as she is cross dressing as a male. Cross dressing refers to a complex set of phenomena, and encompasses everything from "an occasional desire to experiment with gender identity to attempting to live most of one's life as a member of the opposite sex" (Bullough and Bullough vii). Many real-world women and literary heroines throughout history have engaged with this practice, and have attempted to pass as men with varying degrees of success. One well-known real-world example is that of Emma Edmonds, the American Civil War's most famous female soldier. Inspired by the cross-dressing heroine of Lieutenant Murray's 1815 novel *Fanny Campbell or the Female Pirate Captain*, Edmonds disguised herself as male and ran away from her home in New Brunswick, where she was engaged to a local farmer. After making her way to the United States, Edmonds began a new life as Frank Thompson, and eventually enlisted in a local militia unit after the bombardment of Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861. Like her heroine Fanny Campbell, Edmonds found that simply by changing her clothing, hairstyle, and voice she was transported to a more privileged world typically reserved for men (Wheelwright 25). This is ultimately because prior to the twentieth century an active, independent life was most commonly understood in male terms, and as a result male dress was used by women in order to gain access to some of the power denied them (19).

Although women's general oppression tended to go unchallenged by such attempts at individual liberation, when these attempts were uncovered and published in various news outlets they encouraged early debates about the distinction between sex – as biological fact – and gender – as that which is acquired as the cultural construction of sex (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 111). This idea has been explored by a range of feminist theorists, including Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. De Beauvoir, for example, posits that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one", hinting that the female sex becomes feminine as a result of cultural constraints and that it is possible for one to be female without being feminine (Moi 3). Butler builds on this, suggesting that gender is performative; that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (*Performative Acts* 523). Typical feminine traits which have been transmitted through

generations include nurturance, passivity, and sensitivity, while typical feminine occupations include teacher, housekeeper, or nurse. These traits and occupations are seen as natural for women because they have been transmitted in such a way that simultaneously maintains and legitimises a seemingly natural gender binary (526). Although the relationship between sex and gender is a complicated one, heroines like Edmonds or the fictional Alanna of Trebond ultimately disrupt the performative nature of gender through their cross dressing, suggesting at the very least that one should not be limited to a pre-determined role simply because of their biological makeup.

Hamilton's construction of Amani also demonstrates the performative nature of gender. *Rebel* opens with a masculinely-dressed Amani buying entrance into a pistol pit in Deadshot, where she plans to win enough money in a gun-slinging competition for passage out of Dustwalk. If it is not clear by the references to the men around Amani that the pit is a male domain, this becomes so as Hasan cries "Good evening, gents!" which suggests that everyone currently in the pit – competitors and observers – is male (6). Amani, as female, must cross dress as male in order to gain admittance to the pit, wrapping her chest to flatten it and lowering her voice to sound masculine. But Amani's cross dressing here does not only point to the fact that the pit is a male domain, but that gun-slinging is also. While Mirajin fathers take pride in teaching their sons how to shoot a gun, Amani mentions that she had to teach herself how to shoot until her "fingers were sore and [her] aim was good enough that [she] could've knocked a shot glass out of a drunk's shaky fingers" (41). With this, Hamilton highlights that guns are masculine, and are therefore only suitable for men to use. This is closely reflected in real-world history, as professions where guns are used – such as in the military or in law enforcement – have traditionally been male dominated; as a result, readers will have little trouble understanding this idea. Less familiar to the average young adult reader, however, is the idea that guns are a common phallic symbol, an object that represents a penis and therefore becomes a visible symbol of masculinity (Dundes 34). As Amani handles this symbol with just as much proficiency as the men she is competing against – shown as she easily advances to the final round of the competition – she illustrates some of the issues with the masculine/feminine binary, while also challenging patriarchal values. This is not, however, her intention as she cross dresses; it is merely a side effect. Much like Emma Edmonds and Alanna of Trebond, Amani instead cross dresses in an attempt to make a better life for herself

and gain some of the privilege denied to her as a woman in Miraji. Winning this competition is Amani's only chance to purchase a life outside of Dustwalk, a life beyond simply marrying her uncle and the domestic confines and powerlessness that come with being a wife and mother in a rigidly patriarchal society. Although cross dressing in Western cultures no longer has the same meaning as it did for women like Edmonds, as Amani rebels against her assigned role she illustrates that it just may be possible to live a life beyond simply accepting the norm – whatever this norm may refer to.

By opening her trilogy with a scene which features a cross-dressing heroine transgressing some of the limitations placed upon her, Hamilton clearly highlights the inherent sexism within Miraji. This is significant for an intersectional bildungsroman narrative that focuses on sexism, but also important is some explanation of the protagonist's childhood and/or home life. Amani reveals to us that her childhood in Dustwalk was not pleasant. The man whom she believed to be her father was abusive towards her mother, Zahia, and he resented Amani's existence because she was not a boy. In response to this abuse he was eventually killed by Zahia, shot in the stomach before she set fire to the house where the three of them lived; as punishment for her crimes Zahia was hung. The events in *Rebel* begin approximately one year on from this event, and Amani's life has not improved. She now lives with her mother's sister, Farrah, along with her husband and their children. Farrah resents Amani's presence in her home and she blames Amani for the shame Zahia brought on her family when she killed her husband. In response, she makes Amani's life unbearable, belittling her, beating her, and starving her (36). She further resents Amani as her husband Asid's intentions towards her become clear: he plans to take her as another of his wives. Although Farrah is the first wife – a position which automatically gives her the most power within the home – she worries that Amani's youth will affect her relationship with her husband (13-14).

Ultimately, Amani's experiences here – especially the fear she feels about becoming one of her uncle's wives – prompt her to leave Dustwalk with Jin, a foreigner she meets during the gun-slinging competition. After a sequence of mishaps and near-death experiences – and a passionate kiss aboard a train – Jin eventually leads Amani to his brother, Prince Ahmed, and his disparate collection of rebels. When asked in an interview done by *The Guardian* if the Rebellion is based on any particular historical revolution, Hamilton replied that it is

primarily inspired by the French Revolution (1789-99). This appropriation is most noticeable when focusing on some of the origins and consequences of the French Revolution.

Although the origins of the French Revolution are debated among historians, it is clear that a variety of forces were at work that eventually led to the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. The oldest theory regarding the Revolution's origins is that it was the result of the Enlightenment, an intellectual and philosophical movement in Europe in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Doyle 30). Although recent historians claim that it is simplistic to cite the Enlightenment as the sole cause of the Revolution, most agree that the political events that occurred in eighteenth-century France were influenced by a circulation of ideas which suggested a different order for the State (31). As a result, many people were eager for societal change by the 1780s (31). These ideas were primarily circulated through the writings of the *philosophes*, a group of intellectuals which includes writers like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Descartes. Their writings advocated for social change, primarily because they encouraged men to judge things according to whether they were useful to humanity or whether they promoted human happiness, rather than simply relying on religion or tradition (81). They also encouraged a change in outlook and an acceptance of reform (81). But it was not until the *ancien régime* collapsed for other reasons that these kinds of attitudes took France in new revolutionary directions (81).

Similarly, Hamilton's Rebellion is influenced by new ideas regarding the nature of citizenship and equality. Ahmed, the Sultan's rightful heir, does not approve of the way his father currently governs Miraji – through cruel despotism, sexist customs, and the oppression of minority groups (*Rebel* 244). Rather, he believes that instead of absolute rule, Miraji should be a democracy, in which a leader is elected by the people. He believes that women should be treated as equal to men, with the freedom to choose the course of their lives, and that their minds should not be wasted simply because of their sex. Finally, he believes that Demdji should not fear being hunted, sold, used for their abilities, or killed, nor should they be treated as inferior simply because of physical traits and supernatural abilities that set them apart from the majority of Mirajins (244). These attitudes and acts against Demdji bear striking similarities to the historic treatment of real-world non-white races by Europeans as justified by a pseudo-science which claimed that these people were both physically and intellectually inferior because of certain physical characteristics like skin colour. Ahmed seeks to change

this, however, and ultimately wishes to bring about equality between male and female, Demdji and non-Demdji alike. Although this is an admirable goal, these beliefs also serve to reinforce Orientalist tropes. More specifically, Hamilton highlights the Orientalist idea that the East – or Miraji as it is at present – is backwards, and thus requires a Western-style rebellion – read ‘invasion’ – in order to bring the country forward so that it more closely resembles some of the countries Ahmed has travelled to.

After hearing Ahmed’s explanation regarding the necessity of the Rebellion, Amani decides to stay and fight with them, and she finds herself inducted into a broader social movement that rebels against the dominant order on a much grander scale than anything she ever accomplished by cross dressing. Not only does this disrupt the isolation that Amani felt in Dustwalk, but this also eventually encourages her to engage in political action against the oppressive social order. This is significant because lasting changes to her identity as it has been influenced by sexism and racism must also be accompanied by changes regarding sexist and racist attitudes, customs, and institutions in the world in which she lives. Although these changes do not occur immediately, they could not occur if Amani remained a lone entity.

Soon after deciding to stay, one of the Demdji rebels reveals to Amani that she too is Demdji, and that the blue eyes she thought marked her as a foreigner are actually a Djinni’s mark. While most Demdji are physically marked by various unnatural hair or skin colours, Amani’s blue eyes have allowed her to pass as human for sixteen years, oblivious to the power beneath her skin. Eventually Amani comes to accept this, despite the fact that she does not know what her power is. Each Demdji is gifted with a supernatural power at birth; these powers include – but are not limited to – shapeshifting, manipulating light, and casting illusions (264). In order to help her discover what power she possesses, Ahmed assigns Delila and Bahi to run her through a series of tests. None of these tests succeed in coaxing out Amani’s power, however, and this is instead revealed as she jumps off a train and falls towards what should be her death. But instead of death, an arm made of sand clamps itself around her wrist, and in this moment Amani realises that her power is sand manipulation. The discovery of magic in a young adult fantasy text often symbolises character growth, and the same is true here as we witness the way that Amani has grown and developed even through this first book. It also becomes clear, as Amani discovers her magic ability, that she is not only impacted by sexism, but that she is impacted by a prejudice which resembles real-world

racism towards someone primarily because of their physical characteristics, which explains some of the prejudice she endured in *Dustwalk* and her mother's actions to keep her hidden from Gallan soldiers. Thus, her identity and character development cannot be understood simply by focusing on sexism, but racism and the relationship between the two must also be considered.

Amani is first offered the chance to use her new-found power as the rebels take action against the Sultan's 'secret weapon'. As they find out, this is not simply a bomb or another explosive device, but Noorsham, a Demdji with the power to summon fire who has been encased in bronze armour in order to render him wholly obedient to the Sultan's commands. By reducing Noorsham to a Demdji weapon the Sultan and his army clearly illustrate the value they place on Demdji life: useful, but still subordinate. It is clear that Hamilton is referencing real-world slavery here; slavery was a significant part of Ottoman society right up until the Empire's collapse during World War One. Although these slaves could be African or white, the overwhelming majority of Ottoman slaves were African, imported from places like the Sudan or Ethiopia, which highlights the presence of racist attitudes among these slave owners (Toledano 6).

Using her newly-discovered Demdji powers, Amani manages to liberate Noorsham by breaking the bronze mask encircling his head. With his freedom, Noorsham turns on the army who once commandeered him before disappearing. This harms the alliance the Sultan has with the Gallan army, and allows the rebels to stake their claim on the desert. In this moment it becomes clear that the rebels may have a fighting chance to change the state of affairs in Miraji. Although this does not bring about radical change overnight, the rebels have now proven that they are a serious threat to the Sultan's power and are not merely voices of dissent in the desert. Ultimately, Noorsham's liberation and the army's defeat symbolise the disintegration of the Sultan's absolute authority, which subsequently paves the way for the revolutionary acts throughout the rest of the trilogy.

Stories about what occurs here with Noorsham travel quickly across the desert, and although the details change, the tale always ends the same, "with a sense that . . . the desert wasn't going to be the same after the battle of Fahali" (*Traitor* 15). But Amani also finds that the legend of the Blue-Eyed Bandit has travelled across the country, until she herself is a story that she hardly recognises. Some of these stories claim that she is male, and that she "can

shoot a man's eye out fifty feet away in the pitch dark. That [she] walked through a hail of bullets in Iliaz, and walked out with the Sultan's secret war plans" (13). But the most outrageous theory of all is that the Blue-Eyed Bandit may actually be female, which again highlights some of the limitations placed on her because of her sex. The stories that acknowledge her as female claim that she tricks her way into people's beds to get information for Ahmed (15). For if the Blue-Eyed Bandit is female then of course she must only have power in her ability to use her sex to seduce men for information. Amani knows that these things are not true, but she still struggles to come to terms with others' expectations about who she is; although it is clear that she has grown away from the girl she was at the beginning of *Rebel* we see that she is still uncertain about her place in the world as both female and Demdji.

Just as Amani's character development continues throughout *Traitor to the Throne*, so too does Hamilton continue to reference Orientalist tropes. Specifically, Hamilton engages with Orientalist sensuality, portrayed here through her appropriation of the traditional Middle Eastern space of the harem, which referred to a separate part of the home where women and children lived in maximum seclusion and privacy (Croutier 17). Traditional Orientalist views of the harem present it as a space of Muslim sexuality and depravity, and this perspective is largely based on the perceptions of Western travellers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Fay 23). They confidently described the harems as "virtual prisons where women were kept to satisfy the lusts of one man", even though these travellers – many of them male – would not have been permitted inside one (23). In spite of this, the women within were reported to be "submissive, not particularly beautiful, [and] rather simple-minded" (23). The lives and bodies of these women were also reported to be highly sexualised, and as a result the harem came to represent the unbridled sexuality of Oriental men as rumours regarding adultery, polygamy, and divorce abounded in Western imagination (24). In this imagination, women were reduced to sex objects by men and were subsequently oppressed because of it, forbidden from any kind of influence or life beyond the harem walls. These ideas were spread across the West not only through the oral or written word, but also through art, with physical representations of bored-looking naked women (such as those portrayed in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' 1862-3 painting *Le Bain turc*), or heavily veiled women (such as those portrayed in Mary Adelaide Walker's 1863 painting *Constantinople during the Crimean War*), maintaining the belief that Oriental women were oppressed in ways

Western women could hardly fathom. Their portrayal in these kinds of paintings justified unfavourable comparisons between the Orient and the West (24). For if the harem represented the unbridled sexuality of Oriental men as expressed by “sexual intercourse outside of marriage, polygamy, easy divorce, and the consequent degradation and oppression of women, then the West could congratulate itself for not having any harems” (24).

Although the historical harem is vastly different to the one imagined by these Western travellers – and is instead representative of a more general patriarchal practice rather than of depraved sensuality – Orientalist perspectives are still present in popular culture and common thought. Like many authors before her, Hamilton utilises this in *Traitor*, as Amani finds herself in the Sultan’s harem. Common in Orientalist writings about the harem is the idea that it is essentially a prison where women are kept for the sole purpose of satisfying the lusts of one man (Fay 23). Hamilton’s harem does this also, but caters instead to the lusts of two men: the Sultan and his heir Sultim Kadir. For Amani, the harem becomes a prison as she is explicitly told she is not to set foot beyond its walls (*Traitor* 181). The combination of bronze and iron implanted beneath her skin means not only that she is unable to use her Demdji powers, but also that she is unable to disobey this command. She soon realises, however, that even if she were able to disobey this command that escape would be near-impossible because the harem is a maze, designed with the intention to confuse its occupants and keep them contained within its walls (191). The women Amani encounters within are hardly aware that they are prisoners, however, and instead relish the luxury and attention they are given. They are described as “impossibly pretty”, “perfect”, and “wrapped in nothing but long linen sheets” (184). As Amani describes the way these girls drape themselves over the Sultim and the way his eyes are fixed on two naked girls it becomes clear that the women within the harem are highly sexualised, little more than objects to be used at his – or his father’s – discretion.

This idea is enforced as the reader discovers how the majority of these women are acquired for the harem. Some of the women come to the harem by choice, but more are prisoners of war, “pale northern women stolen off ships, foreign-featured eastern girls sold as slaves, [and] dark-skinned Amonpourian girls taken in border skirmishes” (206). These women are taken simply because the slavers believe that they have this right, and this is clearly entrenched in their society, ultimately illustrating the value – or lack thereof – placed

on women's lives. As objects rather than people, then, it is very easy for these women to become highly sexualised in the harem, and they are seen as valuable only through what they can offer the Sultan and the Sultim. Specifically, this refers to bearing male heirs. Ayet, for example, feels threatened by Amani's presence in the harem because she has been unable to conceive a child for the Sultim, and she fears that this may cause her to disappear (201). This fear also drives Amani's cousin Shira to drastic measures to ensure her survival: she conceives a child with a Djinni because she knows that Kadir is unable to father a child (382). Shira also knows, however, that it will be she who will be punished if she is unable to bear a child, even though it is the Sultim who is at fault. Women in the Sultan's harem thus become a commodity, useful only in their ability to bear children; if they fail at this, they simply vanish, as though they never existed. Ultimately, Hamilton's portrayal of the harem in this stereotypical Orientalist way is immediately recognisable to readers because of its proliferation in films, literature, music, and television. It can thus be easily used to comment on the kind of society that Amani lives in – one that is not only sexually oppressive, but is also backwards and uncivilised in comparison to countries like Amonpour or Xicha.

Fortunately, the rebels are able to break Amani out of the harem, and she becomes "the girl who had made it out of the palace alive, who had stood toe to toe with the Sultan and escaped" (497). In this moment Amani proves how far she has come since the beginning of the trilogy, that she is brave, powerful, and strong, as well as capable of outsmarting the Sultan when she escapes. Although previously she had to dress as male in order to prove these things, that she demonstrates bravery, power, and strength dressed as female shows her realisation that she can possess all of these traits while still revealing her gender, ultimately illustrating that she refuses to allow the societal expectations for her sex to limit her. Amani demonstrates this further when she steps up to lead the Rebellion following Ahmed's capture. In the final pages of *Traitor*, Amani claims each layer of her identity: "I was Demdji. I was the Blue-Eyed Bandit. I was their friend. I had learned strategy from Shazad. I had been among the enemy. I hadn't left them when Jin had. And they believed me when I said that I could lead" (570). Although able to defy gender norms by cross dressing, the girl we met in *Dustwalk* at the beginning of the series would never have had the confidence to step up and lead a rebellion against the dominant social order; that she is able to do this now highlights again how she has grown. But this does not mean that her character development

has come to a close, as even now she is still plagued by doubts about her abilities as she takes charge of the Rebellion in Ahmed's absence. She doubts that she has "changed from that selfish Dustwalk girl as much as [she] thought" and she questions her ability to make decisions and give orders on behalf of the Rebellion (*Hero* 80; 166). She does not wish for the lives of her friends or the fate of her country to be in her hands. Although she has been with the Rebellion for almost a year by this point she still does not believe that she is enough for them; "They needed more than a girl from Dustwalk. They needed their prince. They needed his general. The best I could do was try to bring the real saviours back" (199). For although she has proven her worth to the Rebellion's cause, she does not believe that she deserves to play a significant part in this beyond that of 'follower'. For being one of many offers a kind of security, but when one is elevated above this the stakes become much higher. The imprisonment of Ahmed, Shazad, and several of the others who helped Amani establish her place in the Rebellion causes her to regress to the uncertain girl the reader thinks she has left behind. For although Amani has proven that she is capable of leading the remaining rebels, she is still plagued by the old fear that she is not enough because of where she has come from and who she still believes herself to be.

Amani confronts these beliefs when she returns to Dustwalk alongside some of the other rebels in the final book of the trilogy. The protagonist's return home, in which she encounters one of her primary oppressors from the beginning of the trilogy, is a significant part of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative because it reinforces how far she has come. As Amani confronts Aunt Farrah she realises that the voice whispering doubts in her ear, demanding to know who she thinks she is for daring to take over a rebellion and give orders in the place of a prince, is the voice of her aunt (222). As Farrah reminds her yet again that she is nothing, Amani finds that these words do not affect her as they did in the past, and they fail to make her feel small, angry, or powerless (220). Amani realises that she knows who she is now: a Demdji, a rebel fighter, and an advisor to a prince. She tells her aunt: "My name is Amani – or the Blue-Eyed Bandit, if you're feeling formal. . . . And not anything else" (223). Following this assertion she pauses, "to make sure she understood that [her] name was not *bitch* or *worthless* or anything else before [she] stepped away from her" (223). Although this is not her intention in returning home, Amani proves in her confrontation with Farrah that she is not the same person she once was. This does not, however, imply that she is finished

developing; although the traditional bildungsroman tends to demonstrate this, the intersectional bildungsroman presents a more accurate view of identity: that it is fluid and changing, and does not arrive at a conclusion. In spite of this, this scene between Amani and Farrah demonstrates that Amani has ultimately come to accept who she is, and she can now fully sever herself from the lies that hindered her from becoming a great rebellion leader.

Amani's acceptance of herself also influences her relationship with Jin. Although it is clear that the two of them are in love, prior to this scene with Farrah this is not shown beyond rather tame making-out; this is primarily held back by the fact that Amani is unable to let go of her past, and therefore finds it difficult to step into something new and potentially frightening. Farrah's voice, convincing Amani that she is worthless, invades almost every area of this relationship, and Amani does not believe that Jin should bother pursuing her, despite his best attempts to convince her otherwise (285). As a result of this she is unable to commit to the kind of relationship that the reader knows both of them desire. This all changes after Amani's confrontation with Farrah, however, and we witness a shift the night before the battle of Izman. Amani and Jin are making out, in much the same way as times previously, when "finally the last of the space between our bodies vanished. I came apart in his hands, and he in mine. Both of us shattering into sand and dust and sparks, until we were both just infinite stars tangled together in the night" (422). Although not explicitly mentioned, sex is heavily implied here. When incorporated for more than edginess, sex in young adult fiction is a pivotal act, used not only to advance the plot but also to trigger further character development after the fact; it follows, then, that Amani has not finished developing, thus reinforcing this aspect of the intersectional bildungsroman (Stone 464).

Amani and Jin's relationship also clearly satisfies another important element of the intersectional bildungsroman. As explained in my introduction, the protagonist of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative encounters two love interests. This first love interest tends to be from her hometown; regarding Amani, it initially seems that there is the potential for a romantic relationship with Tamid, particularly when he proposes at the beginning of *Rebel*. It is clear that Amani feels affection for her friend, but this resembles more of a *philia*-type love rather than an *eros*-type. As the trilogy unfolds, it becomes clear that any kind of a romantic relationship between them is impossible as Amani leaves Dustwalk and seems to cut all ties with her hometown. But Amani's leaving is not the only reason that their

relationship never develops into anything romantic. Ultimately, Tamid symbolises Dustwalk – or the life that Amani seeks to get away from – while Jin, on the other hand, symbolises the potential for a new life away from the restrictive confines of her past. Jin is, therefore, the only viable romantic option, and he is particularly significant as he aids her character development. He does not fear her nor take advantage of her because she is Demdji, and he also does not underestimate her because of her sex. Instead, he helps her see that she is not the same girl that he met in Dustwalk, and in stereotypical romance fashion he makes it clear to her that even if she was, he would have fallen in love with her anyway.

Following on from Amani and Jin's sexual encounter we witness Amani develop into a heroine who is sure of herself and her abilities – both Demdji and human. This is ultimately illustrated in the rebels' success at the battle of Izman. With this battle won, the Sultan dead, and there being no way that Miraji can ever go back to the way it was in the past, it is possible – just as it was with origins – to make a comparison between the outcomes of the Rebellion and the outcomes of the French Revolution. In both examples each brought about changes that completely transformed society, altering beyond recognition their country's political and social structures. One of the most obvious changes brought about by the French Revolution was the change from royal absolutism to a constitutional, representative government, which was ultimately a precedent for democracy (McPhee, *The French Revolution* 179). This did not signify stability, however, and France alternated between empires, monarchies, and republics through until 1870, because the people of France remained divided about which political system best reconciled authority, liberty, and equality (180). Although unresolved, the kinds of freedoms fought for in the Revolution could not easily be forgotten, and it was clear that whatever political system France chose it could not return to the *ancien régime*.

Hamilton mirrors some of the consequences of the French Revolution as she describes the consequences of Ahmed's Rebellion following the battle of Izman. The most obvious change to the old system in Miraji is symbolised by an election. Ahmed decides that the people of Miraji deserve the opportunity to choose who governs them. In total, a dozen men put their names forward, but Ahmed wins easily and becomes Miraji's first elected leader for the next decade. But this does not mark the end of trouble for Miraji, and those who brought about these changes "wonder out loud if they might always be fighting for freedom against men who desired power" (*Hero* 503). The next elected Sultan – another prince – is a power-

hungry man, who begins taking the lives of anyone who disagrees with him, and he soon declares that he will rule not for a decade but for his whole life, just as his father had (502). The tyrannical Sultan is, however, eventually dethroned and replaced by Shazad, and democracy ultimately triumphs. Hamilton's *Rebel of the Sands* trilogy, then, is clearly positioned as a Western narrative with liberal democracy offered as a remedy to Orientalist despotism. In turn, this highlights Western superiority, as Hamilton's Ottoman-inspired country essentially collapses as a result of the introduction of new 'Western' ideas.

This shift away from the *ancien régime* in France also brought about a number of other changes to social and political life. Although many changes occurred, most relevant to a comparison between the outcomes of the French Revolution and that of Hamilton's Rebellion is the change in the legal status of women. Although women did not gain full political rights as a result of the Revolution, their legal status did shift as a result of discussions centred on equality and citizenship, even if little changed in the public sphere (Abray 248). In 1791, the law regarding inheritance shifted to grant both male and female children equal rights; prior to this only male children stood to inherit anything from their fathers (McPhee, "The Economy" 463). Other legislation gave women a voice in the administration of property, while also acknowledging the mother's role in decisions affecting her children (Abray 248). Revolutionary divorce legislation in 1792 also affected the legal status of women, and it became possible to obtain a divorce both quickly and easily. Under this law, both sexes would be treated equally; this not only empowered wives, but it also meant that women gained a stronger position within the family (McPhee, "The Economy" 463).

These changes were a step in the right direction, acting as a precedent for the modern-day feminist movement, but several contemporaries found these changes lacking. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, was attracted to the French Revolution because of the Enlightenment ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, seeing in it the chance to attain more liberty and equality than ever before (VRM 50). As the Revolution unfolded, and Wollstonecraft realised that this liberty had affected men more than it had women, she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which argued that men and women both deserved the same rights. This was because she believed that any differences between the sexes was not due to anything biologically innate, but was instead the result of different education: while men were offered various opportunities to engage their attention, women

were instead taught “that beauty is [their] sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” and thus were perceived as silly or superficial (118). Following on from this, Wollstonecraft advocated for equal education for men and women, and she assisted with a number of reforms not only regarding female education but also political and economic rights. In spite of this, changes to legal status were the only concrete advancements made during this time, and although contemporaries like Wollstonecraft saw the potential for radical changes to women’s lives out of the contexts of the revolution, this ultimately fell short.

Hamilton also writes of changes to women’s status following the rebels’ success in the battle of Izman. Unlike the limited advancements of the French Revolution, however, the advancements made in Miraji by the end of *Hero* demonstrate a significant shift in status and opportunities, and thus seem to accomplish the kind of radical change that Mary Wollstonecraft saw the potential for in late-eighteenth century France. This is primarily illustrated by Shazad’s rise to Sultana. Consistently throughout the trilogy, Shazad demonstrates that she exists outside of traditional gender norms, just as Amani does. Shazad is able to do this because her father recognised her potential to be a great leader and warrior, and he taught her how to wield any weapon she chose. She quickly surpassed most of the men around her in terms of skill, courage, wisdom, and strength, ultimately illustrating that these qualities are not solely reserved for men (206). When she met Ahmed in the marketplace one day she finally realised the war she was meant to fight, and she became his general, a position not typically available to women in Miraji due to the belief that women belong in the private sphere of the home (206). The success of the Rebellion, however, paves the way for women who wish to become soldiers, and a garrison is set aside specifically for this purpose. But this does not mean that everyone readily accepts these changes; the captains, for example, struggle to accept Shazad as their leader, and they also struggle to accept their new female recruits (496). In spite of this, it is clear that attitudes regarding the position of women in society are changing, and it is implied that other areas where women are restricted will also begin to change as a result of shifting notions regarding the understanding of acceptable masculine and feminine pastimes.

The developments in Miraji ultimately prove that Bakhtin’s theory of emergence – that the protagonist’s development must be reflected in the development of the world – is equally

relevant to the intersectional bildungsroman as it is to the traditional bildungsroman (24). As we witness throughout the trilogy, Amani develops from the seemingly-powerless girl we meet at the beginning of *Rebel* into a fierce warrior-type heroine. With the help of the Rebellion – particularly Shazad and other Demdji – Amani realises that she does not need to be restricted by the gender norms that bind her at the beginning of the trilogy and which prompt her to cross dress in order to gain access to male power and acceptance. She also realises her value as Demdji as her powers save the Rebellion on multiple occasions. Her growth in this way highlights an acceptance of her sex and her Demdji ‘race’, alongside the realisation that neither of these need dictate the way she – or anyone else – should behave or be treated in society.

Amani’s personal character development is also clearly paralleled by the development of Miraji as a country. Although a protagonist’s rising above personal oppression does not necessarily equate with ending systemic oppression, an attempt to end this oppression is crucial to an intersectional bildungsroman narrative. As a result, the protagonist’s participation in an anti-establishment movement that seeks to change the current social conditions is necessary; in turn this enforces the personal change that has occurred within the protagonist, and allows others to experience the freedom she herself has experienced. Miraji’s development is primarily illustrated in the aftermath of the battle of Izman. The rebels’ success here affects the state of affairs for both women and Demdji, changing the opportunities open to them and influencing their treatment in society. Women, for example, are no longer prohibited from traditionally male domains, and this is clearly illustrated by Shazad’s role within the military and her rise to Sultana. The fate of Demdji, on the other hand, is little mentioned, but it is clear by Amani’s presence in society in the final chapter that she and other Demdji no longer need fear for their lives. The death of Sultan Oman and the removal of the Gallan mean that Demdji can now enjoy the rights and protection of citizenship not previously available to them under the old Mirajin system.

Ultimately, despite the fact that Alwyn Hamilton employs Orientalist tropes in such a way that reinforces historic notions of Western superiority, her trilogy is an effective example of the subversive potential of fantasy literature. This is because her narrative demonstrates not only Amani’s realisation of her own power and value regardless of the sexism and racism she has experienced but also because it demonstrates the possibility of a world in which

systemic sexism and racism have consciously been disrupted. The disruption of these systems does not, however, mean that Miraji is 'fixed', absolved of its past crimes against certain groups of people. This is the final element of the intersectional bildungsroman: that unlike Buckley's definition of the traditional male bildungsroman, the ending of an intersectional bildungsroman must be somewhat ambiguous, as is the case regarding Amani's character development. The final chapter of *Hero* illustrates that Miraji's development has not reached a conclusion, and that the battle of Izman has not marked the end of trouble for Miraji. For although the changes in Miraji bring about increased opportunities for women and freedom for Demdji, it is one thing to grant opportunity, and another entirely to shift long-held attitudes and beliefs. Aligned with Bakhtin's theory of emergence, then, Amani's personal character development has also not yet come to an end, ultimately presenting us with a more accurate view of identity development than that of the traditional male bildungsroman, which implies the finality of the protagonist's coming-of-age.

Chapter Two: The Captive Queen in *Ash Princess*

Alwyn Hamilton's trilogy is not the only narrative which features a protagonist who rises above sexism and racism while simultaneously assisting in destroying the systems in which these oppressions operate. Laura Sebastian's *Ash Princess* trilogy (2018-20), for example, also explores these oppressions through a female protagonist who ultimately develops into a powerful heroine despite the limitations her society places upon her. In this chapter I analyse the significance of this through the framework of the intersectional bildungsroman, the requirements for which I outline in my introduction. That both *Rebel of the Sands* and *Ash Princess* can be analysed using this framework prove that there are many similarities between them, but there are also several significant points of difference. *Ash Princess*, for example, features different historical and cultural influences to *Rebel of the Sands*, as well as a greater emphasis on its female protagonist's home life and her romantic relationships. These differences are important to highlight, because they demonstrate that the framework of the intersectional bildungsroman is not a limitation but is rather a means of understanding a protagonist's growth.

Like Hamilton in the previous chapter, Sebastian highlights the importance of appropriating various real-world historical, cultural, and social influences. In order to expose the sexist and racist nature of the world in which her sixteen-year-old protagonist Theo lives, Sebastian utilises a range of these kinds of influences. Most significantly, Sebastian appropriates a basic understanding of settler colonialism, which not only serves as a commentary on the broader realms of sexism and racism but also cause this trilogy to function specifically as a criticism of white supremacy and domination, in much the same way that *Rebel of the Sands* acts as a commentary on the tension between the West and the East. Other influences Sebastian appropriates include matriarchy, Stockholm syndrome, the practice of brideprice, and refugee camps. As Theo engages with each of these influences it becomes clear that she is affected by both sexism and racism. Although she struggles against the confines of these oppressions, her character development by the end of *Lady Smoke* suggests not only that she is beginning to understand her identity differently, but also that the world she lives in is beginning to shift to become more accepting of women and racial others.

As I explore in the previous chapter, the kind of society a protagonist lives in is significant to an intersectional bildungsroman narrative as it tends to provide a clear explanation of the way in which sexism and racism affect her. Sebastian's protagonist Theo lives in a society based on a medieval patriarchal monarchy, in which a king-like figure is at the head of government and power is held and transferred through the male line. Although Astrea was once a matriarchal monarchy and matrilineal society it is now – as a result of the Kalovaxian siege – governed by the Kaiser. This siege and the subsequent creation of an entirely new society bears many similarities to real-world colonialism. Although not a perfect fit – as is to be expected when appropriating a real-world influence into a fantasy world – it is clear that Sebastian draws on some of the practices and theories assigned to colonialism in her description of Kalovaxian-ruled Astrea.

Although many countries colonised other nations – like the Spanish and the French – the impact of this on history and the world today is particularly noticeable when analysing British colonialism between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colonialism as a practice, however, does not in itself refer to something specific, and instead serves as a blanket term for many distinct and interacting practices and contexts. Included within this are colonies of occupation, plantation colonies, and settler colonies. Although these types all relied on an unequal relationship between coloniser and colonised and commonly all involved the exploitation of land, labour, and other resources, there are some obvious differences between them (Free 876). British residents of colonies of occupation, such as India and Hong Kong, for example, were not only temporary but were also predominantly male (876). Due to the short period of time that merchants, missionaries, soldiers, and administrators spent here, they tended to form only “a thin white line” of control over the indigenous populations they encountered before leaving (876). British plantation colonies, like those in the Caribbean, on the other hand, were only marginally more permanent. This is because predominantly upper-class male plantation owners often spent months or even years away from the colonies in Britain, where it was likely their wives and children permanently resided (876). Although the British were significantly outnumbered by indigenous people in this kind of colony, they were often able to generate a labour force by importing Africans and Indians; much of the results of these labours were then used for trade and export to benefit Britain (876).

In some instances, occupation and plantation colonies became settler colonies. This kind of colony was distinct from the other kinds outlined above because it was characterised by the emigration of large numbers of British men, women, and children to the colony, with the intention to remain there permanently. These settlers were made up of various social classes and occupations, and sought not only to build futures for themselves, but also for their descendents (Free 877). Rather than adapt to already-established conditions and communities, these settlers preferred to construct their own ethnic communities here, creating “pockets of Britishness” all over the world (Hixson 4). This was most commonly accomplished at the expense of indigenous populations, who were displaced so that large amounts of settlers could remain on the land and easily assert their dominance (4). This was not often met with outright cooperation by indigenous groups; resistance – such as pragmatic violence – and attempts at negotiation were much more common, and any resulting cooperation was often coerced (Free 877). These kinds of interactions were vastly different across the various colonies, but were fundamental to settler identity because they ultimately determined the cultural and political shape of the new nation (877).

Sebastian not only appropriates these physical practices in her trilogy, but she also draws on some of the theories that assisted and were further developed by the spread of colonialism. Specifically, she refers to the racial hierarchy between white people and people of colour. This hierarchy can be directly linked to the rise and spread of colonialism; although the identification of distinct races can be traced back to some of the earliest civilisations, a clearly-racialised social structure used to promote human difference did not properly emerge until European explorers reached the Western Hemisphere and began colonising (Omi and Winant 61). Each of the diverse types of European colonies were influenced by this early race theory – as well as also being commonly motivated by the chance to improve their economies and expand their influence – but settler colonial narratives in particular are significant to an analysis of the development of “the presumed superiority of white racial identities” (Bonds and Inwood 719). This is clearly shown by the ongoing structures of genocide and indigenous displacement that were present in many settler colonies, because these practices and the way in which they were justified were foundational in establishing some of the specific processes that separate humanity into distinct racial groups, groups which are ultimately connected to a broader hierarchy that continued the subordination of non-white racialised bodies (719-

21). Settler colonialism, then, is clearly part of the history of race theory, a theory which we still witness the effects of today despite the fact that it has been widely discredited.

As well as developing and perpetuating racist ideology, settler colonialism also drew on sexist ideology. Much of European culture prior to the rise and spread of colonialism was rooted in a kind of patriarchal tradition which drew opposite boundaries between rationality and science, and irrationality and nature, with the former the realm of men and the latter that of women (Ward 79). Sociologist Raewyn Connell connects this idea to settler colonial identity by saying “With masculinity defined as a character structure marked by rationality, and Western civilisation defined as the bearer of reason to a benighted world, a cultural link between the legitimization of patriarchy and the legitimization of empire was forged” (186-7). The rationality of the imperial power thus became associated with masculinity, while the chaos of the natural world over which mastery needed to be asserted became associated with femininity (Ward 81).

But the chaos of the natural world was not the only element affected by sexist ideology; indigenous women themselves were also affected by this kind of thinking, in a way that differed to the experiences of white women. While both white women and indigenous women were perceived to be representative of nature and of culture, there were some significant differences in the perception of this culture by male settlers, and this influenced their treatment in a settler colonial narrative. White women, for example, represented civilisation, while indigenous women ultimately represented the primitive society that settler colonialism intended to destroy and replace. Closely aligned to this, indigenous women were also commonly represented as being either “the Indian princess, an extension of the noble savage” or “the easy squaw” (Acoose 39). Janice Acoose likens this princess to Pocahontas, a “good Indian who laid down her life for a European man”; the squaw, on the other hand, is promiscuous, dirty, and savage (39). This dehumanisation not only separated indigenous women from white women – who were perceived to uphold a superior culture and civility – and from indigenous men – who were perceived as hunters, warriors, and nomads – but also rendered them particularly vulnerable to various forms of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (LaRocque in Ward 85). Due to the intersection of sex and race, then, indigenous women were uniquely situated in a settler colonial narrative, and this had the potential to affect their treatment in this kind of society (85).

It is clear from the very beginning of *Ash Princess* that Theo lives in a conquered country, and as the trilogy progresses we see that many of the elements that make up the society she lives in point towards an appropriation of various aspects of settler colonialism. This is confirmed as we read of how Sebastian's colonising people – the Kalovaxians – arrived in Astrea ten years prior to the beginning of the trilogy with the intention to construct their own permanent community here. Much like many accounts of real-world settler colonialism, the Kalovaxians forcibly removed the Astreans from the land in order to accomplish this. This is most noticeable through the Kaiser's acquisition of the palace where Theo and her mother lived. Following the siege, the Kaiser claimed this space as his home after killing Theo's mother and the majority of her court, and he and his wife now occupy the very rooms she and her mother once called home. This was not a random act of cruelty, however, and was instead necessary in order to establish unquestioned Kalovaxian dominance in Astrea. Although once a symbol of peace, the palace now symbolises Kalovaxian authority, providing a stark reminder to the remaining Astreans that they now live in an oppressive world of bloodshed and brutality.

Similar to many real-world examples of settler colonialism, the Kalovaxians also exploit the indigenous people they encounter in Astrea. Although the Kalovaxians occupied numerous countries before settling here, Astrea was the first country they encountered with Spiritgems. To the Astreans, Spiritgems are sources of great power, but the Kalovaxians treat them simply as sources of beauty that enhance physical characteristics, giving the wearer glowing skin, flushed lips, and shiny hair (5). To gain access to these Spiritgems the Kaiser ordered the removal of thousands of Astreans from their homes and jobs and forced them to mine for the gems in caves. This is a dangerous task, because the power in the mines is so great that it often kills those working in them. As a combined result of lives lost during the siege and the lives now lost in the mines, the Astrean population has been decimated from approximately 100,000 people to 20,000 people (59). This much smaller population allows the Kaiser to assert and maintain control of Astrea, firmly discouraging any act of rebellion.

As is the case with real-world settler colonialism, the exploitation and elimination of the Astrean people clearly illustrates a kind of racial hierarchy. Sebastian demonstrates that this is a hierarchy between two peoples: the first resembling white settlers and the second resembling many of the darker indigenous populations they encountered. The Kalovaxians,

for example, have pale skin, delicate features, light-coloured eyes, and hair ranging in colour from flaxen to blond. Astreans, on the other hand, have either tawny or olive skin, dark mahogany or black hair, and dark eyes. Drawing on the developments to white supremacy and dominance as a result of real-world settler colonialism, Sebastian's Kalovaxians conquer Astrea under the assumption that this is their right, with complete disregard for the Astrean people already living here. Racism, then, is an issue in conquered Astrea, and as Sebastian writes of the influence that this has on her protagonist Theo it is clear that she is ultimately critical of white supremacy and Western domination.

But racism is not the only oppression that is connected to settler colonialism, and it is not the only oppression that Sebastian utilises throughout *Ash Princess*; the trilogy is also heavily influenced by sexist ideology. This is most obviously expressed by the juxtaposition between patriarchy and matriarchy, which Sebastian uses in *Ash Princess* to highlight the gendered nature of settler colonialism. Despite the fact that most of the world the trilogy is set in is patrilineal and premised on some kind of overarching male dominance, Astrea's bloodline is instead traced through a female heir, and this society is governed by a female ruler. The clear dichotomy between patriarchal Kalovaxia and matriarchal Astrea also highlights the tradition of viewing the imperial power as masculine and the chaos of the natural, unoccupied world as feminine. Because patriarchy tends to place men in a position of power over women in the majority of situations, the Kalovaxians believe that it is their right to enter onto this land and do whatever they please, such as murdering its queen, enslaving its people, and exploiting its resources. In doing this, the Kalovaxians not only discredit the Astrean matriarchy, but they also clearly demonstrate the power that men have over women.

Some of the potential consequences of this patriarchal power and dominance are sexual, physical, and psychological abuse against indigenous women (Razack in Ward 83). Sebastian demonstrates this in *Ash Princess*, with the physical and psychological abuse that Theo undergoes clearly highlighting her position at the beginning of the text while also confirming that her treatment in her society is a result of a combination of both her race and her sex; sexual abuse is not mentioned in this early stage, but we find out in *Lady Smoke* that Theo was never abused in this way by the Kaiser or his men, although other Astrean women were (223).

Theo is, however, affected by psychological abuse, and this clearly impacts her perception of herself and her identity. Early on we read that her name was taken from her when the Kalovaxians came and conquered her country. Names are an important marker of identity, because they allow an individual to recognise both themselves and others as individual subjects (Althusser 173). Forenames, for example, tend to indicate both a person's sex and gender, while surnames commonly indicate family affiliation and ethnic identity (Pilcher 764). Both of these are significant in creating a person's identity as well as a sense of belonging. Theo's full name – Theodosia Eirene Houzzara – signals both of these things. Her first name, Theodosia, serves as a marker of her individuality, while Eirene Houzzara symbolises both her family and her ethnic identity as it refers both to her mother's name and to a feminised form of Houzzah, the Astrean Fire God whose blood runs through her veins (Ash 266). The Kaiser takes this away from Theo when he and his army conquer Astrea. Instead, Theo becomes Lady Thora, a "hollow thing with no past and no future. No desires. No anger. Only fear. Only obedience" (30). Robbing an individual of their name is primarily an expression of control, which is here used by the Kaiser in order to assert dominance. Renaming her simply Thora is significant. Not only is Thora a Kalovaxian name, which isolates Theo from her family and ethnic group, but she is also given no surname, highlighting her individuality and isolation.

This is not the only name given to Theo after the siege; she is also given the nickname Ash Princess, title of the first book and of the trilogy. This is a play on her mother's nickname. Queen Eirene was known as the Fire Queen, a name fuelled by the legend which claims that Theo's ancestors were descended from Houzzah. Although her mother's crown was made of black gold and set with rubies, Theo's is made of ash, and is ultimately another belittling appropriation of her mother's reign. Theo must wear this crown every time her presence is required at a formal Kalovaxian event; this reminds everyone – including Theo herself – not only of her position in Kalovaxian society, but also of how Astrea has fallen. In this instance, then, this nickname is used to abuse and ridicule her, ultimately reminding her of her outsider status and further highlighting her isolation (Pilcher 771-2).

As well as psychological abuse, it is evident that Theo is affected by physical abuse. Early in the first novel she reveals that she is often punished for the actions of Astrean rebels, that "Each time Astrean pirates sank one of the Kaiser's ships, each time one of the mines tried to

revolt, each time a slave spit at their master”, this was carved onto her skin as a kind of record (36). In the majority of instances this occurs publicly, and she is whipped and beaten until she blacks out from the pain (13). According to philosopher Michel Foucault, public displays of punishment – such as torture or execution – were most effective when present within societies whose sovereign held all of the power over its citizens (53). In these kinds of societies, criminal acts were believed to deprive the sovereign of this supreme power, and as a result torture and various methods of execution were designed as a public ritual in an effort to restore the hierarchical order between the sovereign and its citizens (48). As the audience observed the sovereign’s power and superiority over its citizens through the body of the condemned, they were thus deterred from committing similar crimes and societal order was ultimately restored (58).

But the Kaiser’s power in *Ash Princess* is not only demonstrated as the Theyn whips and beats Theo; this is also demonstrated after the fact, as Theo is forced to wear clothing that draws attention to the ugly, monstrous scars on her back. We witness this as Theo is dressing for the Kaiser’s banquet, held to celebrate her coerced killing of Guardian Ampelio. The vermilion dress the Kaiser sends for her to wear to this banquet is both sleeveless and almost entirely backless, which not only exposes her scars but also sends the message to all those in attendance that “Astrea is defeated. Astrea is broken. Astrea is no more” (36). Ultimately, as everyone – including Theo herself – is frequently reminded of these public punishments this reinforces the power that the Kaiser and his court have not only over Theo herself, but also over everyone else within Astrea.

As a result of this physical and psychological abuse Theo demonstrates some of the symptoms of Stockholm syndrome. Although ‘Stockholm syndrome’ was first used in reference to the response of hostages to their captors during a bank robbery in Stockholm in 1973, the term is now applied to a wide range of situations outside of abduction or hostage-taking cases. This is because the power imbalance characteristic of the syndrome, as well as the emotional bonds associated with this imbalance, have been witnessed in other situations; as a result, the label is now often also applied to abused women and children, prisoners of war, and victims of human trafficking (Adorjan 454). More specifically, the term can be applied to situations in which mind control or brainwashing are involved (463). It refers to a condition in which victims express loyalty to their captors or abusers, despite the fact that

these captors use various methods to terrify or frighten their victims, in order to make them helpless, powerless, and submissive (458). This expression of loyalty is often an attempt to minimise abuse, because a victim's will to survive tends to be stronger than any impulse to hate their captor. But this loyalty is not disingenuous, and in many instances victims believe that their feelings towards their captors are authentic, particularly in prolonged periods of abuse (458).

Theo demonstrates the kind of brainwashing associated with Stockholm syndrome early in the trilogy. When the Kaiser calls her to his throne room to kill Ampelio he attempts to catch her out with the statement that the rebels are trying to restore her to her "rightful place as Queen of Astrea" (19). Mention of the Astrean rebels seems to genuinely terrify Theo, and she exclaims: "I'm not anyone's queen, and there is no Astrea anymore. I am a lady now, by Your Highness's mercy, and a princess only of ashes. This is my rightful place, and the only one I desire" (19). Theo knows from experience that as long as she expresses loyalty to the Kaiser above anything or anyone else then she will be kept alive (20). In this situation, then, there is an obvious power imbalance, and it is clear that the Kaiser's long-term physical and psychological abuse has created fear in Theo and has caused her to be submissive and weak. Most significant to this analysis of Theo's Stockholm syndrome, however, is the fact that Theo has been brainwashed into projecting positive feelings towards the Kaiser; this does not only occur publicly, however, but we also witness Theo's internal struggle with these thoughts and feelings as she ultimately betrays his trust later on in the text. For although he ordered his men to execute her mother, enslave her people, and conquer her country, she has been conditioned into believing that the Kaiser's actions were for the best, and that he is kind and merciful to continue to spare her life.

This wide range of influences not only highlights Theo's position at the beginning of the narrative – fearful, powerless, and weak as a result of sexual and racial oppression – but they also demonstrate a clear picture of her childhood and her home life. These are not, however, the only elements of the intersectional bildungsroman satisfied at this early point in the text. The scene that ends in Ampelio's death is significant for several reasons. Firstly, this is because Ampelio calls her by her real name, a name that Theo has not heard spoken aloud in ten years. In this moment she is reminded who she is: Theodosia, Queen of Astrea. Although she recognises that she does not deserve this strong name because she is not a strong person,

this is the person she must be – or pretend to be – in this moment, not the hollow and weak Lady Thora.

Secondly, this scene is significant because it destroys her perception of Astrea as home, and she realises that she can no longer treat it as such. Her connection to this place is severed, and her perception of the world in which she lives – and of herself – begins to shift as she resolves to find a way to save herself rather than rely on someone else to do this for her. Much like leaving home in *Rebel of the Sands*, then, Ampelio's death acts as a catalyst for character development to occur; because leaving home is a pivotal part of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative, however, Theo must still leave Astrea at a later point in the text.

Severing the connection to home – whether this is literal or figurative – allows for the building of new relationships. Following Ampelio's death Theo reconnects with Blaise, who invites her to meet him in the kitchen cellar later that night, where they will be able to talk uninterrupted. Here, he tells her that he is going to rescue her. He wishes to take her to one of the countries accepting Astrean refugees, like Sta'Crivero, but Theo tells us that this is not how she pictured her rescue occurring: she imagined Ampelio coming to her "with anger and armies and a plan to retake Astrea" (58). Instead of leaping at the chance of freedom, Theo tells Blaise that she would like to stay in Astrea with the Kalovaxians. Blaise is visibly shocked by the loyalty she is expressing to her captors, and Theo realises how ridiculous she sounds. She continues by telling him that if she stays in Astrea, living amongst the Kalovaxians, she can figure out their plans in order to give the Astreans a chance to take their country back (62). Theo explains that her friend Cress often accidentally gives her information about the work undertaken by her father – the Kaiser's second-in-command – and that the Kalovaxians do not see her as a threat, that instead she is "just a broken girl to them, a bleeding trophy from another land they've conquered" (66). With a vehemence that shocks her, Theo ultimately promises Blaise that they will repay the Kalovaxians for everything they have done to them and their people. In this moment, she mentions that she does not sound like herself; or at least, she does not sound like Thora. Theo wonders here if she is beginning to sound like Theodosia. But who is Theodosia? This is a question that we do not yet have an answer to, but it is clear that Theo's perception of herself despite the oppression she has been subject to is shifting. Finally, as they are saying goodbye, Blaise embraces Theo, and Theo notes that not only is this the first time in ten years that anyone other than Cress has embraced her "with

genuine love and comfort”, but that “he smells like Astrea. He feels like home” (69). In this moment, Sebastian introduces us to our first love interest, a character of the protagonist’s own ethnicity who symbolises both comfort and familiarity.

But romantic relationships are not the only kind of relationships present in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative; this kind of narrative also features other people that the protagonist eventually considers friends, people who tend to be connected to the series’ anti-establishment group. Just as Jin introduces Amani to the rebels in the hidden camp, so too does Blaise introduce Theo to two of the rebels working closely alongside him: Artemisia and Heron. It is significant that Theo builds relationships with others as well as Blaise because groups working towards a common goal disrupt the isolation associated with oppression (Moane 115). It is clear, then, that the isolation Theo experienced as a result of physical and psychological abuse is beginning to change as she finds people like herself, other Astreans who desire change from the current dominant discourse.

But it is not enough for Theo to simply join this anti-establishment group; rather, she must use her skills or her position in society to become a crucial part, and this eventually empowers her to transgress her beliefs regarding her race and her sex in ways that she never would have been able to do if she were acting alone. Amani, for example, is crucial to Ahmed’s rebellion because of the skills she brings; Theo, on the other hand, becomes crucial because of her non-threatening status among the Kalovaxians, which allows her to glean information off them in order to help advance the political aims of the rebellion (68). Erik, Søren’s illegitimate half-brother, for example, inadvertently tells her that two thousand Kalovaxian troops plan to sail for the Vecturia Islands; Theo notices that these ships are “armed to the teeth with cannons” and so deduces that this is not a social visit (123). She passes this information along to Blaise, who sends word to the Vecturians that the Kalovaxians are coming for them.

Another way Theo assists the rebellion is by seducing Prinz Søren. It becomes clear that this is working when he sends her a note, and Theo observes that this is the kind of note Cress receives from potential suitors (104). Although the feeling is not yet reciprocated by Theo, we see that there is the potential for him to become the second love interest because he is of both a different race and social class. When Søren questions Theo as to why she did not reply to his note, she purposefully exposes some of the scars on her back. Søren apologises for

these before hurrying off, and Theo knows that she has him in a position to leap to her rescue. As the first book progresses, it becomes clear that Søren cares enough about Theo to go against his father, and Theo tells Blaise that she thinks she can make this occur publicly so as to cause a rift in the Kalovaxian court (145). Her mind begins to formulate a plan: a rift like this would “become uncrossable” if Søren were to be killed and one of the Kaiser’s personal guards framed for this. In the ensuing chaos they can flee, going off to “gather enough allies to come back and destroy [the Kalovaxians]” (146). Despite concluding that Søren is her enemy, Theo eventually realises that she does not hate him. She even goes so far as to say that she *likes* him, and that although she will still kill him when the time comes, she will feel guiltier about it than she first thought (169).

It is clear, then, that Theo and Søren’s relationship is a complicated one. It is crucial for an intersectional bildungsroman narrative, however, because it not only satisfies the romantic element of this theory but it also aids her in her acceptance of her converging identities. Although Theo struggles with the feelings she is developing for Søren, their relationship shifts the night Søren sneaks her onto his boat where they have a picnic. While they are eating he begins asking her the Astrean words for things like cake, wine, and kiss (203-4). As Søren repeats the Astrean word for kiss – *aminet* – he leans over and kisses her. She is surprised at how much she wants this kiss, and she realises that she wants him to kiss her not “as Thora, the broken girl, or Theodosia, the vengeful queen. Just Theo, both and neither” (204). As she and Søren sit on his boat beneath the stars she begins to wonder if she can be that girl, even just for a moment (204). This is a significant moment for Theo, because the Kaiser forbids any use of the Astrean language. Although Søren’s interest in the Astrean language may fall into the category of exoticism – a fascination with people, places, languages, and other cultural practices depicted as foreign or ‘other’ – Theo does not interpret it in this way. Instead, Søren’s acknowledgement of her heritage here restores value to her ethnic identity. This is one of the primary functions of this second love interest, who uses his position both as male and as part of the dominant racial group to help her realise that she does not need to be confined by the racist and sexist boundaries that the dominant group places upon her. Although at this point Theo is unable to admit that she loves Søren back, this becomes increasingly clear as their relationship develops throughout the first two books in the trilogy.

As Blaise also appears to be a legitimate love interest it is clear that Theo is positioned firmly in the middle of a love triangle. But when Theo kisses Blaise we see that it is a different kind of kiss to those between her and Søren. Kisses with Søren are “filled with hope and giddiness, with the exploration of something new and beautiful” (315). Although she recognises that she loves Blaise, this does not “feel like plunging into ice water the way it does when [she tries] to pull apart [her] feelings for Søren” (315). She assumes that this is because she and Blaise were always going to fall in love, even if they lived in a world without the Kalovaxians. As we witness as the trilogy progresses, however, it becomes clear that Theo’s assumption here is a mistake. For although many traditional bildungsroman narratives focus on a protagonist’s transition into and acceptance of a prescribed role, the intersectional bildungsroman places more of an emphasis on transgressing boundaries and defying the status quo, and focuses instead on change and growth. Because Blaise represents the status quo, and Søren does not, if this element of the intersectional bildungsroman is consistent then Søren is the only viable romantic option.

Throughout all of this, Theo is growing and developing away from the person we meet at the beginning of the text. One of the ways she illustrates this is when the Kaiser calls her into the throne room in order to answer for the murder of the Theyn and the attempted murder of Cress. Instead of succumbing to fear, Theo squares her shoulders and looks the Kaiser in the eyes, thinking to herself: “I am not a Princess of Ashes anymore, though, and I am not Lady Thora. My name is Theodosia Eirene Houzzara, and like my mother and all my foremothers before her, I am a Fire Queen, with the blood of a god in my veins. Even if it is only for a few moments more” (370-71). This reclaiming of her identity is significant as it symbolises not only her acknowledgement of her ethnicity but also of her sex, as she accepts her position as a queen who must fight back against the patriarchal Kalovaxians in order to make a lasting change to her oppression. These words also ultimately result in Theo’s imprisonment, but she is not worried as she knows that Søren will come and rescue her, smuggling her out of the palace to his boat. As Theo leaves Astrea on this boat at the end of the first book another element of the intersectional bildungsroman is satisfied. As we know, leaving home is a significant part of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative because it acts as a catalyst for growth; although Theo has already begun this process – shown as she reclaims her identity – leaving home allows for this to occur in new ways.

Although at the end of *Rebel of the Sands* it is clear that Amani has chosen Jin as her love interest, the same cannot be said of the end of *Ash Princess*. Throughout *Lady Smoke* Sebastian continues to confuse readers about whether Theo will choose Blaise or Søren. Although the intersectional bildungsroman posits that the protagonist must choose the love interest which symbolises growth – in this case Søren – Sebastian continues to convincingly place Blaise in a position where it seems as though he may be chosen. This is first illustrated when Theo and Blaise ‘sleep together’ on Dragonsbane’s ship. Theo realises that this will have Dragonsbane’s crew whispering that they are lovers, but she does not seem to mind this because she acknowledges that this will be supported by the crew, if only because Blaise is Astrean; this is important, because gaining the crew’s support is necessary if she is going to lead them (12).

It is clear, then, that Theo’s ‘romance’ with Blaise is little more than a political alliance, and Sebastian confirms this as she writes of Theo’s feelings for Søren later in the text. This follows Søren’s stereotypical confession that he loves her, regardless of who she was or is (416). This in itself is not significant as Søren has confessed his love for her before, but it is the first time that Theo genuinely – and confidently – admits that she loves him back. She realises that when Blaise said he loved her only days before, the words “were a balm for a wound he hadn’t delivered yet” while Søren says this “like he’s breaking the chains that bind [them] together and hoping [she] will stay anyway” (416). This is significant; as we know, Blaise symbolises her past life, the life she could have had if the Kalovaxians had never invaded. Søren, on the other hand, symbolises growth and possibility, while also using his position as both male and as part of the dominant ethnic group to help her realise that she does not need to be confined by the racist and sexist boundaries the dominant social group places upon her.

Much of the analysis of the intersectional bildungsroman in *Ash Princess* has thus far centred primarily on Theo’s romantic relationships. Political action is, however, just as important to this kind of narrative because it is necessary to change the social conditions in order to bring about lasting changes to a protagonist’s identity (Moane 115). This is demonstrated in *Ash Princess* as Theo begins seducing Søren in order to further the aims of the Astrean rebellion. In *Lady Smoke*, however, political action becomes a focal point as Dragonsbane’s ship travels to Sta’Crivero, where King Etristo has offered to host the Astreans,

as well as the heads of countries from all over the world as they come to meet Theo and offer their forces in exchange for her hand in marriage (32).

It is clear, then, that Sebastian appropriates the real-world tradition whereby political alliances are formed and/or sealed by marriage. Throughout the text, she specifically references the practice of brideprice. Popular Western understanding often positions marriage payments within Asian societies, but they are also found in the history of many Western countries, particularly in those that have – at any point – practiced the custom of arranged marriages (Anderson 152). Specifically, brideprice encompasses transfers from a groom's family to the bride's (152). It is commonly understood and perpetuated – particularly in Western societies – that brideprice is a husband's direct payment to a bride's parents for the right to her virginity and reproductive capabilities (158). In turn, we can make the mistake of viewing it as an outdated, sexist process that women have no power over and which limits their control over their bodies (170). In actuality, however, the payment of brideprice does not entail the 'purchase' of a woman's reproductive capabilities, nor does its rate change dependent on whether a woman is a virgin or not; it instead – according to French anthropologist Philippe Rospabé – acknowledges a husband's permanent debt to his wife's parents, particularly to her father (Graeber 131-2). It is, therefore, essentially a kind of tax on young men, payable to older men, rather than a grossly sexist custom (Hudson and Matfess 14).

Real-world brideprice, then, is clearly much more complex than a traditional Western understanding of the sexist nature of marriage payments. In spite of this, just as Hamilton highlights an Orientalist view of the harem rather than a more historically accurate one, so too does Sebastian reference the perceived sexist nature of marriage payments. Although the most common form of payment in a marriage transfer is money, Theo's brideprice payment consists of troops to fight the Kalovaxians, given from the groom's country to Astrea. In exchange for these troops, Theo is expected to share Astrea's Spiritgems, and to allow her groom to co-rule Astrea once her country has been reclaimed. Theo does not consent to this, and although Dragonsbane tells her that she can decide whether or not to gain allies in this way, it is clear that Theo does not have any choice at all: there are no other options available to her, and so she must agree to this if she ever wishes to drive the Kalovaxians away from her country and save her people.

More specifically, however, Sebastian highlights the importance of the concept of virginity. Before Theo even meets her potential suitors she is interrogated by King Etristo who seeks to find out whether or not she is still a virgin, because this will determine how many troops each of the other countries offer; the more troops offered, the better the Astreans' chances of reclaiming their country. King Etristo apologises if Theo takes offense to his line of questioning, but tells her that he must ask, as "most men of high birth would never take a sullied woman for a wife" (152). She questions whether or not she would be considered sullied if she had lost her virginity as a result of rape. King Etristo simply shrugs and tells her that she must undergo an examination "to ensure her virtue" (153). He promises that it is a simple procedure, and that his wives and daughters have all undergone it. Despite knowing that King Etristo has never been subject to this examination, Theo challenges him: "You've undergone it yourself, Your Highness? . . . That makes sense. If highborn men should only marry chaste women, then surely highborn women should only marry chaste men" (153). Here, Theo confronts one of the key issues with the concept of virginity, that although it can technically refer to both men and women, it is predominantly applied to women; in other words, men and women are held to different standards. As Theo is not only stripped of agency but is also reduced to her virginity, this highlights again the gender issues of this fictional space, issues which are still present in our real-world society today, and are thus recognisable to a young adult audience.

This conversation also illustrates a kind of turning point for Theo's character. At the beginning of the trilogy, the same conversation would have caused her to cower and readily accept whatever she was told, particularly if the Kaiser or another authority figure was speaking to her. After what she has been through in the first book – killing Ampelio, risking her life to gain information for the rebels, and leaving Astrea – and the way she is growing to accept her position as rightful Queen of Astrea, it is clear that she is developing into someone who is not afraid to question sexist attitudes and expectations. This is significant because it shows her realisation of the social nature of these attitudes and expectations, rather than her belief in them as biological fact.

Just as Sebastian highlights racist attitudes in *Ash Princess* through her appropriation of settler colonialism, so too does she do this in *Lady Smoke* by utilising the theory and practice of the refugee camp. Refugee camps are spaces which are set up to contain people who have

been forced to leave their home countries because of violence, war, or natural disasters (Ramadan 65). These camps are commonly located in secluded or marginal areas (such as border territories or wastelands) and are clearly separated – often fenced off – from their host society; in many instances they are not even represented on official maps (Turner 141). This creates an obvious distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, one which is important to maintain to prevent the contamination of the host country (141). Because of this, it is clear that the camps are also characterised by social exclusion, in that the inhabitants do not belong to the host culture or society; although they are provided with humanitarian aid in the form of food, water, shelter, and medical treatment, they are deprived of political agency (143). Because refugee camps are intended to exist merely as temporary spaces until a lasting solution can be found to their situation or it is safe for them to return home, this notion tends to go unchallenged. In practice, however, the camps often become “a permanent-temporary reality” for millions of refugees, a temporary transition period where inhabitants may live for decades (Ramadan 66).

Although refugee camps are complex places – and one which I have explored only in the way that it is relevant to *Ash Princess* – Sebastian’s refugee camp references these ideas and practices, while criticising some of the key ideas behind them such as racist ideology. Immediately clear when Theo and her friends arrive at the camp is its separation from Sta’Criveran society. She realises that while the capital’s wall is designed to keep people out, the wall of the refugee camp is made to keep its inhabitants inside; it is, in essence, a carceral space. Much like real-world refugee camps, then, the Sta’Criveran camp also highlights an obvious distinction between inside and outside (182). To the Sta’Criverans this is an important distinction to maintain, because they believe that the refugees are cursed (302). Racist attitudes are clearly present here; because these refugees are not Sta’Criveran, they are second-class citizens, and this is illustrated in the state of the camp and the lack of value placed on refugee labour. Although Sta’Crivero has been kind enough to offer those fleeing the Kalovaxians a ‘safe’ place to live, they do not wish for them to contaminate their society.

It is easy to focus on the fact that refugee camps are places of confinement, seclusion, and stagnation, but they also have the potential to simultaneously “be places where diverse norms, language and forms of social organisation meet at the crossroads” (Turner 143). Sebastian demonstrates this as Theo and her friends follow Sandrin through the streets of the

camp. As Sandrin speaks, Artemisia notes that she hears six languages, all combined into one: Astrean, Gorakian, Kotan, Tiaven, Lyrian, and Yoxian (190). These are countries which have all been conquered by the Kalovaxians, and all of which have refugees in the camp. As well as this, these refugees have created their own form of social organisation, despite being excluded from the political order of Sta'Crivero. The refugee camp is 'governed' by a group of elders, each representing one of the countries present in the camp, in order for every group to be represented and to have their voices and customs acknowledged (193).

In spite of this seemingly redeeming feature, Theo is shocked by what she witnesses in the camp, and this eventually causes her and the rebels to liberate it before returning to Astrea to try and affect change to the broader situation there. While talking with Erik one night after visiting Søren in prison, Theo realises that they may have enough people to take back one of the Astrean mines (342). They would then be able to attack another mine, free more people, and recruit more warriors; by the time they went around all of the mines they would potentially have a fighting chance against the Kalovaxians. They put this plan into action, and at the refugee camp two thousand people agree to fight. Two weeks later the ships carrying the refugees arrive on the shores of Astrea, and Theo gives a speech in front of all the warriors assembled: "Today we tell them *enough* and we begin to take our revenge. . . . Today, we show them what we are made of. For Astrea. . . . And for Goraki and Yoxi and Manadol and Tiava and Rajinka and Kota. We will rise, together, and we will show the Kalovaxians how wrong they were to ever think us weak" (442). This speech is met with "cheers so loud they are deafening" from the refugee warriors assembled, and ultimately motivates them in the succeeding battle against the Kalovaxians.

Not only is it necessary for Theo to return home if she ever wishes to change things for her people, but this is also necessary for her own personal growth. Just as Amani demonstrates to Aunt Farrah that she is not the same selfish girl who left Dustwalk at the beginning of *Rebel of the Sands*, so too does Theo demonstrate to Cress and the Kaiser that she is not the weak and timid girl they thought they both knew at the beginning of the trilogy. This is primarily illustrated during the battle for the Astrean Fire Mine. Suddenly, after many hours of fighting, the battlefield falls silent, and Søren notices a yellow flag flying in the distance. He explains to Theo that this means that the Kaiser wishes to speak to her (457). Theo, accompanied by Søren and Art, goes to meet the Kaiser and Cress. As we have

witnessed throughout the trilogy, Theo has steadily become more defiant towards the Kaiser, and this encounter is no different. Here, she demonstrates that she is going to stand her ground for her people, and not leave with anything less than what she desires. Although she admits to the reader that she is bluffing, she demands that the Kaiser and his armies leave Astrea, and that if they do so then they will let them go peacefully (461). The Kaiser laughs at this, but because Theo stands her ground and does not let him break her, the meeting ends with the Kalovaxians' retreat from the Fire Mine, and the Astreans are left with a piece of paper saying that they now own the mine (470). This does not mean that the fight against the Kalovaxians is over; Theo knows that they will be back, but she also knows that they will be ready for this when this happens. Ultimately, this battle is a victory for them, and it proves that they can successfully make a stand against the Kalovaxians (481). Not only this, but it also proves that Theo herself can successfully stand against the Kaiser.

Despite being unfinished, it is clear that Sebastian's trilogy – like Hamilton's – is an effective example of the subversive potential of the fantasy genre. This potential is utilised in several ways. Firstly, Sebastian presents us with a minority character – Theo – who is visibly affected by sexism and racism within a settler colonial narrative at the beginning of the text. Theo begins challenging some of the sexist and racist ideas and practices that affect her; as a result, by the end of *Lady Smoke* it is clear that she is no longer the weak, uncertain character we meet at the beginning of the trilogy and that she is developing into a heroine who is not afraid to stand against her oppressors. Concomitantly, Theo is attempting to end the systemic oppression of her people; this is a crucial element of the intersectional bildungsroman because acting against systemic oppression is necessary if her personal development is to have any lasting effect, and this ultimately confirms the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of emergence. Not only this, but Sebastian's trilogy also acts as a commentary on some of the issues with real-world settler colonialism and Western domination, while positioning her white colonisers and the ideas behind their actions as problematic. Ultimately, then, the subversive potential of the fantasy genre allows for a refocusing of historically-dominant discourse, while also highlighting possibilities.

Chapter Three: The Rebel Slave in *An Ember in the Ashes*

Much like Alwyn Hamilton's *Rebel of the Sands* trilogy and Laura Sebastian's *Ash Princess* trilogy, Sabaa Tahir's *An Ember in the Ashes* series (2015-20) also features a female protagonist who rises above sexism and racism while assisting in destroying the systems in which these oppressions occur. As Tahir's series progresses, seventeen-year-old Laia of Serra ultimately develops into a powerful heroine despite the sexist and racist attitudes and limitations she comes up against. In much the same way as the previous two chapters, I analyse the significance of this through the framework of the intersectional bildungsroman. This framework not only allows us to highlight the similarities between these three series, but it also allows us to take note of any differences between them. *An Ember in the Ashes*, for example, presents us with several points of difference to *Rebel of the Sands* or *Ash Princess*. Not only does this series feature different historical and cultural influences, but it also presents a different perspective on political action. Again, these differences are important to highlight and discuss because they demonstrate the purpose of the intersectional bildungsroman; it is not, as some may deduce, a means of limiting an author's work, but is instead a way to analyse a protagonist's growth through her changing understanding of the sexist and racist ideologies present within her society.

Like the previous two trilogies, Tahir's series appropriates various real-world historical, cultural, and social influences. These influences not only act as a commentary on sexism and racism, but also cause this series to function as a criticism of Western domination, in a similar fashion to Sebastian's *Ash Princess*. Tahir accomplishes this by utilising different influences, however, including some of the elements of Roman society, the Kashmir conflict, contemporary rape culture, genocide, and refugee camps. As Laia engages with each of these influences it becomes clear that she is impacted by a combination of both sexism and racism. Although she wrestles with the confines of these oppressions, her character development by the end of *A Reaper at the Gates* suggests not only that she is beginning to understand that her perception of herself does not need to be determined by sexist and racist attitudes and practices, but also that the world she lives in is in the process of shifting to become more accepting of women and racial others.

As we well know from Hamilton's and Sebastian's trilogies, an analysis of the kind of society Laia lives within is significant to understanding the sexism and racism she experiences here. Tahir's society is made up of a blend of Western and Eastern history and culture; although these histories and cultures are very loosely utilised, the contrast they create is effective because it ultimately highlights some of the issues with real-world Western domination and superiority. This is immediately noticeable in her description of the dominant Martial Empire which broadly resembles the Roman Empire (31 BCE to 476 CE) in its presentation and form. The most obvious reference to this is that Tahir's Martial Empire is ruled by an emperor, who acts as the country's supreme authority figure. This alone is not enough to create a link between Martial and Roman society, however, and Tahir's society also resembles a Roman-like structure due to the class separation between its citizens such as that between the patricians, plebeians, and slaves.

One important division in Roman society was that between the patricians and the plebeians. In ancient tradition, the term 'patrician' referred to the members of the aristocracy or upper class, and they were primarily responsible for political, religious, and military leadership (Mitchell 2-4). 'Plebeian', on the other hand, referred to a much lower class who were not involved in the tasks of government (4). They were typically average, working-class citizens – artisans, labourers, or merchants – who worked hard to provide for their families and pay their taxes (4). In essence, then, the patricians held all of the power in society, while the plebeians held little.

Tahir's division between the Illustrians and the Plebeians is equally significant as that between the patricians and the plebeians in the Roman Empire. Although Tahir alters the name of her aristocratic class, its origins are still Latinate; the Latin root of Illustrian is *illūstris*, which means highborn or noble (Glare 830). Based on an understanding of the Roman patrician class, then, Tahir's Illustrians are those in the upper classes, those with wealth and influence and who control almost all elements of Martial society. Tahir's Plebeians, on the other hand, are a working-class people, and much like the Roman plebeians are commonly artisans, labourers, or merchants. Unlike the Illustrians, Tahir's Plebeians have no money, no influence, and no family to back them. Here, then, Tahir highlights an obvious contrast between the rich and the poor.

Another important distinction in Roman society was that between Romans and non-Romans, particularly non-Roman slaves. Many of these slaves were taken as war captives from the losers in battle (such as from the First Punic War), and this was often used to justify the Roman Empire's cultural superiority (Dilke 54). These slaves were present in households, agriculture, the military, and in a large range of services across the city (54). In spite of this, they had no legal rights, and as such they were not allowed to own property, nor were their marriages recognised (55). For many of the wealthier Romans, such as the patricians, slaves became a status symbol, and the amount of slaves one owned came to directly reflect a family's wealth (55). It is clear, then, that slaves were little more than their master's property, a commodity to be used and abused however this master desired.

Although only a portion of Tahir's Scholars are enslaved by the Illustrian Martials, the general position of Scholars in society bears many similarities to the status of these real-world slaves. Just as many of the slaves in the Roman Empire were taken as war captives, the Scholars have been positioned in the lowest level of society since they were conquered by the Martials five hundred years before the beginning of the series. Not only do they have few legal rights, but they are also forbidden from owning property and learning to read or write; "the mildest transgression results in enslavement" for those not already enslaved (*Ember* 36). In spite of this very close similarity, Tahir claims that her Scholars are primarily inspired by a 2007 *Washington Post* article by Emily Wax titled "Living a Half-Life While Waiting for Those Lost," according to an interview done with Anthony Breznican in 2016. The article describes the difficulties of several women in the occupied Kashmir region whose husbands were taken away by Indian security agents and have not been seen or heard from since. This is the primary element of the conflict that Tahir utilises, but before this is analysed it is important to understand the broader situation in Kashmir that led to these forced disappearances, and how Tahir utilises this in the position of her Scholar people in Martial society.

Britain withdrew from the Indian subcontinent in 1947, and since this time there have been significant issues in the Kashmir region. Although this conflict has primarily been between India and Pakistan as both nations desire full control over the area it has also significantly affected the Kashmiri people, as confusion over occupancy and governance has resulted in political uncertainty and deadly conflict (Geelani 37). This political uncertainty has ultimately resulted in the country's underdevelopment, a lack of proper healthcare and

education, and corruption throughout all levels of society (37). Since 1947 many Kashmiris have been frustrated by the state of this region, and this frustration reached a crescendo in 1989 as the movement for Kashmiri independence developed into an armed insurgency (Bhat 79). Since this time, an estimated 800,000 Indian troops have been deployed in the region, making it one of the most highly militarised areas in the world (79). These troops are not only deployed on the contested borders, however, but are also present in civilian areas where they control all space and movement (Mathur 5). In this situation, human rights abuses are common and occur on a massive scale against the civilian population. These are carried out by the Indian armed forces, and include forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and rape (5). Ultimately, this oppression highlights the control that India – and to a lesser extent Pakistan and China – has over the Kashmiri nation and its people.

Although the Martial and Scholar people are not engaged in a territorial conflict in the same way that India and Pakistan are over Kashmir, it is clear that the Scholars live in a world of oppression as a result of Martial occupation and control; indeed, the Scholars are oppressed in much the same way as the Kashmiri people (which in turn bears many similarities to the position of slaves within the Roman Empire), and it also seems as though their treatment under Martial rule bears many similarities to the treatment of the Astreans under Kalovaxian rule in *Ash Princess*. But unlike Sebastian's trilogy, Tahir's series cannot accurately be described as a kind of settler colonial narrative. For although this initially seems to be the case regarding the Martial invasion of the Scholar Empire – particularly as Laia reveals the specifics of Scholar oppression – this is not primarily justified by racial superiority; rather, the Martials were instead manipulated by the Nightbringer, the greatest of the jinn, who sought revenge against the Scholars for what they did to his people (349). In spite of this, Martial domination of the Scholars now resembles racism because the Scholars are clearly treated as inferior, and are restricted from all positions of power primarily because of their race. But not only can racism be used to describe the treatment of Laia and the rest of the Scholar people, this can also serve as a broader criticism of Western domination and control. Ultimately, this provides us with a glimpse into the kind of world that Laia has grown up in, a necessary element of the intersectional bildungsroman because it justifies her actions against the Empire throughout the rest of the series as she seeks to overcome the oppression she has experienced.

Although there are many general similarities between the position of the Kashmiri people in society and the Scholars, Tahir specifically mentions the stories of women whose husbands have been captured by Indian armed forces as inspiration. These are commonly known as forced disappearances, which the European Convention of Human Rights defines as “the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty committed by agents of the State” (Schabas 136). In the Kashmiri region, these kinds of disappearances became increasingly common following the uprising for independence in 1989, and they have continued through to the present. While some of these men are killed for being suspected extremists, many more simply disappear, never to be seen or heard from again (Qutab 257). Most of these disappearances occur without warning, and in many accounts there seems to be no plausible reason given for the disappearance. There is often no official acknowledgement of the disappearance by the police, armed forces, or any other agency, and family members are given no further information as to the whereabouts of their loved one (261). More often than not, searches for the disappeared prove fruitless, and families never find out the fate of their husbands, brothers, or sons (271).

Tahir’s appropriation of forced disappearances is evident as we read of the raid on Laia’s house and the capture of her brother Darin. This occurs because Darin is suspected of working with the Resistance, the series’ anti-establishment group. Throughout the raid, Darin refuses to answer the Mask’s questions about his involvement with the Resistance, and as a result the Mask threatens to take him away for interrogation. Although Laia is already terrified by the late-night invasion of her home, the thought that Darin may be taken away intensifies this fear. She has witnessed enough raids to know that when someone is taken away by a Mask they never return, and family members and friends never learn of their loved one’s fate; she is reminded “of the couple that lived next door: raided, imprisoned, and sold into slavery three weeks ago. *Book smugglers*, the Martials said. Five days after that, one of Pop’s oldest patients, a ninety-three-year-old man who could barely walk, was executed in his own home, his throat slit from ear to ear. *Resistance collaborator*” (8). This again highlights the kind of world that Laia has grown up in, one in which forced disappearances are common.

In this scene and the pages following, Tahir reveals the way that Laia perceives herself, which is ultimately caused by her oppression as a female Scholar. Here, Laia is faced with two choices: try and save Darin and likely get herself killed in the process, or heed Darin’s advice

to run and leave him to fend for himself. As Laia thinks about these choices, she recognises that she is powerless against the Mask who has invaded her home; her experience of oppression has led her to believe that she will always fail if she tries to oppose the Martials, and this ultimately explains why she runs instead of trying to fight for her brother. As we witness in the pages following Darin's disappearance, Laia berates herself for her cowardice and fear in this moment, although she does not yet realise that these feelings are the result of the powerlessness produced by oppression rather than an innate character flaw.

Laia regrets her response here almost immediately, and she resolves to find the Resistance, whom she believes are partly to blame for Darin's capture in the first place (25). The Resistance, however, admit no responsibility for this and refuse to help her. In desperation, Laia admits her familial connections to the Resistance, hoping that once they hear that her parents were Mirra and Jahan of Serra – the greatest leaders in the Resistance's five-hundred-year history – that they will have to help her find Darin (72). Mazen, the Resistance's current leader, does not believe her story, however, and so Laia explains exactly what happened to her parents and older sister Lis, who were killed for their roles in the Resistance after being betrayed by one of their friends (70). It is clear, then, that Laia's childhood was punctuated by the loss of her parents at the hands of the Martial Empire, and this explains why she lives with her grandparents at the beginning of the text; in turn, another element of the intersectional bildungsroman is satisfied.

Although Laia presents Mazen with details no one outside the Resistance could know about her parents, he does not believe her because she is nothing like them; she is not fearless or charismatic like her mother, nor is she brilliant or serene like her father (70). Laia has already admitted this to the reader, but it pains her to hear it from someone who fought alongside Mirra for twenty years and who knew her much better than Laia ever did. Laia confesses to us: *"I know I'm not like her . . . I cried and cringed instead of standing and fighting. I abandoned Darin instead of dying for him. I'm weak in a way she never was"* (71). Ultimately, Laia believes that she is weak and powerless, the complete opposite of her mother. Despite his reluctance to believe Laia's story, however, Mazen eventually decides to help her find her brother, but only if she spies on the Commandant of Blackcliff Military Academy in return (75).

In spite of her fear, Laia agrees to become a spy, and as a result she is sold to a slaver and locked inside a ghost wagon headed for Blackcliff. In this moment, she recognises that there is no turning back, and that she is now truly leaving home. This satisfies another of the crucial elements of the intersectional bildungsroman, because leaving home acts as a catalyst for identity formation and development. Even before this, however, we can see that Laia is beginning to grow; she is still the same fearful and powerless character we met at the beginning of the series, but her desperation to save her brother coupled with the realisation that going to Blackcliff is the only way to get the Resistance to help her forces her to push through the fear and agree to become the Commandant's house slave.

But any growth Laia experiences in this moment is diminished as she arrives at Blackcliff and is taken to meet the Commandant. The Commandant asks Laia for her name, but when Laia responds the Commandant quickly informs her that she is wrong: "You have no name. No identity. You are a slave. That is all you are. That is all you will ever be" (116). Robbed of her name, Laia is instead reduced to 'Slave-Girl'. As we witness in *Ash Princess*, robbing someone of their name is primarily an expression of control through taking away an individual's sense of personhood, and is used by the Commandant here to assert her dominance over Laia. Although Scholars do not often take surnames because family affiliation is dangerous in the Empire, forenames are important because they allow someone to identify themselves and others as individual subjects (Althusser 173). In this moment, the Commandant reduces Laia from a subject to an object, and she becomes the Commandant's property. This is affirmed when the Commandant carves a "thick-lined, precise *K* stretching from [her] collarbone to the skin over [her] heart" (185). This is similar to the way in which animals such as cattle or horses are branded in order to indicate ownership. Ultimately, removing Laia's name and branding her like one would an animal are dehumanising acts of racism, acceptable simply because this is the way that Martials have treated Scholars for the past five hundred years.

As we know from analysis of *Rebel of the Sands* and *Ash Princess*, the development of relationships with other like-minded individuals is a significant part of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative, because these kinds of relationships disrupt the isolation associated with oppression and ultimately encourage acts of rebellion. In the previous texts, these were primarily formed within an anti-establishment group, but as Laia spends little time with the

Resistance she is forced to seek friendship elsewhere, if only to make her time at Blackcliff more bearable. When Laia arrives at the Commandant's house she meets Kitchen-Girl, who we eventually find out is called Izzi. The relationship that develops here becomes an invaluable one for several reasons. The first is because Izzi offers her help in gathering information for the Resistance. Laia is reluctant at first to allow this, because she knows that the Commandant will use any friends she makes against her. Desperation wins, however, and Laia accepts this offer, allowing Izzi to help her find a way to sneak out of Blackcliff so that she can meet with the Resistance at the Moon Festival in Serra. Later, she also helps Laia look for a secret entrance into the school. But Izzi's friendship does not only help Laia placate the Resistance, it also helps her feel less isolated and alone; because Izzi has been at Blackcliff for most of her life she understands Laia's experiences as the Commandant's slave. Most importantly, however, Izzi offers Laia hope that she will make it through her time at Blackcliff because after ten years as Kitchen-Girl she is still able to smile and laugh.

Laia's relationship with Izzi is not the only one she develops after she leaves home. Despite the fact that Laia's interactions with the Resistance are limited to the occasions she offers them information, it is clear that she develops feelings for Keenan, Mazen's second-in-command. Tahir reveals this the night Izzi and Laia sneak out of Blackcliff to the Moon Festival in the Scholars' Quarter, where Laia is scheduled to meet with the Resistance. Following Laia's encounter with Mazen, Keenan sheepishly asks her if she would like to dance with him. As the warmth of his body envelops her, she acknowledges a dizzying desire in the pit of her stomach (260). This is the first time that the two of them have had a chance to talk away from the Resistance, and it is clear that Laia is falling in love with him.

An important element of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative is the presence of a love triangle, or a situation in which the protagonist acknowledges romantic feelings for two distinct love interests. Just as this occurs in Hamilton's and Sebastian's trilogies, so too does this occur in Tahir's series. The presence of Elias' point-of-view suggests right from the beginning of the narrative that he may become a love interest, and this is confirmed the night he disguises himself as a Tribal boy and follows Laia and Izzi into the Scholars' Quarter for the Moon Festival. Prior to this scene we are aware that he feels something – possibly romantic – for her, and this is demonstrated as he cares for her after the Commandant brands her. When he sees Laia amongst the crowd of festival goers he notes that she is beautiful and that

he wants “to touch her skin and talk to her” (263). When he spots Laia again after her meeting with the Resistance he asks her to dance with him. Laia accepts, noting that he leads the dance “with a grace that is effortless and sensual all at once” and that he makes her laugh in a way that only Darin could before he was captured (268-70). In spite of this, she does not admit feeling anything for him until much later in the text, after Augur Cain reveals her innermost thoughts and desires (413). It is clear, then, that there is something between the two of them, and Elias – as a wealthy member of the dominant racial group – becomes firmly positioned as the second love interest.

By the time we reach the scene at the Moon Festival it is clear that Laia is affected by a racism primarily illustrated by the actions and attitudes of the Martials towards the Scholars. But sexism also plays an important role in Laia’s oppression. Although we witness the gendered nature of occupations in Laia’s description of the conditions in Serra – men work in the public sphere while women look after the home – Laia realises the extent of this sexism as she arrives at Blackcliff and discovers rape culture. The term ‘rape culture’ first emerged during the second wave of feminism, and refers to a society in which sexual violence is normalised by common beliefs or attitudes (Field 174). These include the stereotypes that men are traditionally dominant and violent, and that women are traditionally passive and are meant to be dominated by men (174). Another commonly-held belief in a rape culture is the thought that sexual aggression in men is biologically determined, rather than a learned behaviour as a result of toxic masculinity (174). In response to this, women are socialised into believing that it is their responsibility to take precautions against this sexual aggression. They are taught that this is because men cannot control their sexual desires, rather than that sexual violence is an enactment of dominance and control as men attempt to prove their masculinity (Bryden and Madore 299). This notion is damaging because it removes responsibility from rapists for their actions; any attack subsequently becomes the victim’s fault, or something which could have been prevented if they were dressed differently or were sober (Field 175).

Tahir clearly references this rape culture as she describes Laia’s experiences at Blackcliff. Initially, the slaver who sends her here does not want to purchase her because she is “too small, too young, [and] too pretty” and as a result “won’t last a week in Blackcliff” (*Ember* 98). Eventually he gives in, however, and he even offers Laia some advice: “When she gives you a task, carry it out quickly and well. She’ll disfigure you in the first few weeks, but you’ll thank

her for it eventually – if the scarring’s bad enough, it’ll keep the older students from raping you too often” (101). Just as it occurs in the real world, it is clear that the slaver believes that rape is related to a woman’s physical appearance, such as her natural beauty or the clothes she is wearing. This is a widespread belief throughout Serra, and even the Commandant acknowledges that “beauty’s a curse when one lives among men” (278). As the first book progresses, we read that it is common for the older students to sexually assault female slaves (278). Laia herself is almost raped by Marcus Farrar, and he attacks her so brutally that she nearly dies. The Commandant offers no sympathy for this act of violence, telling Elias that “any injuries she’s sustained are the result of her own foolhardiness” (315). The Commandant asserts that it is Laia’s fault that she was almost raped; any fault on the behalf of the men at Blackcliff is ignored as they cannot control their sexual desires.

Laia’s experience of sexism here at Blackcliff is altered by her experiences of racism in a Martial-dominated society. This is demonstrated as we compare her to Helene Aquilla. Although Helene also faces sexism at Blackcliff in the form of lewd remarks and threats of sexual violence, nothing ever occurs out of this. I believe that this is because, although her sex does not offer her any kind of protection, her position as a member of the dominant racial group does; this is likely assisted by the fact that she is one of the best Masks in her class, and proves a formidable opponent for anyone who may wish to dominate and control her. Laia, on the other hand, is not only female but is also a Scholar, a people we already know to be cruelly oppressed by the Martials and which results in their powerlessness in society. As a result, neither Laia’s sex nor her race protect her, and sexual assault against Scholar females is not only portrayed as inevitable but also goes unchallenged. Although somewhat simplistic in its presentation, it is clear that through this Tahir highlights the complex correlation between race and sex, particularly the way that a female of the dominant racial group is treated differently to a female of the subordinate racial group.

Throughout all of these experiences, Laia struggles with her culturally-assigned identity and her own personal self-construction. This is, in part, a result of her experiences of sexual and racial oppression, but can also be attributed to her mother’s identity; Laia feels overshadowed by who Mirra was and believes that she will never be like her because she is not brave, fierce, or strong. Augur Cain highlights this towards the end of the first book: “You fear you will never have your mother’s courage. You fear your cowardice will spell the doom

of your brother. . . . You are full, Laia. Full of life and dark and strength and spirit. You are in our dreams. You will burn, for you are an ember in the ashes" (403). Although Laia is reluctant to believe this, Augur Cain shows us that she does not need to fear failing to live up to her mother's name; he also shows us that despite the oppression she has experienced at Blackcliff because of her sex and her race she has emerged stronger.

We witness this shift in Laia's perception of herself when she challenges Mazen after learning from Elias that Bekkar – the prison Mazen has told Laia her brother is being kept – does not have death cells (399). Born out of the frustration of having no idea where her brother is, and the realisation that Mazen has betrayed her, Laia confronts him, "My brother . . . he's not in Bekkar, is he? Is he alive?" Mazen tells her that "where the Martials took your brother, no one can follow. Give it up, girl. You can't save him" (408). This is another reference to the real-world 'disappeared'; Laia's frustration here reflects the frustration many Kashmiri women feel at not knowing where their family member is, while Mazen's answer highlights the unwillingness of authority figures to assist in any way. Despite Mazen's assertion that Laia cannot save Darin, the book ends with her declaration that nothing will stop her from finding and rescuing him (438). In this moment she does not doubt, nor does she hesitate. She tells herself that she is the Lioness's daughter, and that she has her strength and bravery (438). But this is not the end of Laia's character development, and we witness her struggle with feelings of fear and powerlessness throughout the next two books in the series.

Like Sebastian, at the end of the first book Tahir also leaves us confused about which love interest Laia will choose. This is despite the fact that Cain all but confirms Elias' success in this realm when he voices what he sees in Laia's heart: "I know you're falling for a Resistance fighter named Keenan but that you don't trust him to love you back. . . . Your heart wants Keenan, and yet your body is alight when Elias Veturius is near" (402-3). Prior to this, it seems as though Laia will choose Keenan because they are both Scholars, and Keenan's position as a Scholar means that he represents the safe and familiar; but when Keenan kisses her several pages after Augur Cain voices his thoughts, Laia must try and convince herself that she wants Keenan. She keeps seeing Elias in her mind, however, and when Keenan releases her she cannot meet his gaze, guilt-ridden by her confusion (413). This confusion is significant as it demonstrates that Laia is still plagued by self-doubt and does not fully trust herself to

make decisions concerning her future. In turn, it proves that she has not finished coming-of-age.

Tahir continues to confuse us throughout *A Torch Against the Night*, which opens with Laia and Elias running for their lives through Serra's catacombs. The two escape – not before Elias is poisoned by the Commandant – and are eventually caught up by Keenan and Izzi. By this point, Laia and Elias have spent weeks alone together, and Laia attempts to combat any awkwardness by introducing both Keenan and Elias to each other as her friends, nothing more (113). We know this is not the case, however, as Laia confesses that although Elias may have been just a friend when the two of them left Serra, now she does not know what he is (131). Laia does not know what Keenan is to her either, and countless times throughout the second book we witness her doubts about her feelings for him. It becomes clear, however, that she does love him as the two of them eventually have sex in the cellar of a Resistance safe house; being a text primarily targeted towards teenagers, however, this is only implied as Laia tells us she makes “the concoction of herbs that Pop taught [her] about – one that slows a girl's moon cycle so that she cannot get with child” (304). Sex in young adult fiction is a pivotal act because it triggers character development; although we have already witnessed some character growth in Laia we know that this growth is going to continue. Her love for Keenan is further cemented as she gives him her most treasured possession: her mother's armlet. Knowing that Keenan understands what the armlet means to her, Laia intends for this to show him that he is loved and that he is not alone. This has disastrous consequences, however, and as Laia hands over the armlet, Keenan morphs into the elusive Nightbringer, ancient enemy of the Scholars (360).

Keenan is subsequently ruled out as a legitimate love interest, a factor which is significant for an intersectional bildungsroman narrative because disguised as a Scholar he ultimately symbolised familiarity and safety, and thus was uncondusive for Laia's character growth. It is not far-fetched, then, to assume that Laia and Elias' relationship will continue to develop. This seems particularly likely as Elias' position as both male and as part of the dominant ethnic group has been instrumental in helping her become who she is, someone who is beginning to refuse to allow the sexist and racist boundaries placed upon her by the Empire to define who she is. Tahir complicates this, however, as Elias dies from the Commandant's poison right before Darin is rescued from Kauf Prison (397). He is

subsequently bound to the Waiting Place, but Laia and Elias still manage to sneak time together throughout *Reaper*. Elias visits Laia in a 'dream', for example, and although this scene is written from Elias' perspective it is clear that they both still desire one another physically and emotionally (186). This is confirmed as Laia travels to the Forest of Dusk. Here, she notes that what she feels for Elias is different to what she felt for Keenan, and that in spite of everything that has happened she pictures a future with him (290). When Elias finds Laia in the Forest, he tells her that they will find a way to be together, and that he loves her no matter what happens to him (317). This statement has more weight than what we could have accredited it at the time, as by the end of *Reaper* it seems as though Elias has let go of any remaining aspects of his humanity. Despite fighting against this up until this point, it seems as though he has fully surrendered to Mauth, as is required of the Soul Catcher. As a result of his acquiescence to this identity he refuses to help Laia defeat the Nightbringer, and he even forgets her face because this is "as it must be" (417). This is a fantasy realm, however, and as a result we know that anything is possible because our belief in the natural order of things is suspended.

While Tahir is dealing with these love interests she also utilises the notion of genocide, which, like her appropriation of the forced disappearances in Kashmir originated from reading articles during her time at *The Washington Post* ("The Empire"). Specifically, she appropriates the Darfur genocide, which refers to the mass slaughter of Darfuri men, women, and children in Western Sudan since 2003. This was not referred to as genocide until 2004, however, when UN Human Rights Coordinator Mukesh Kapila declared that "the only difference between Rwanda and Darfur is now the numbers involved" (Prunier 127). Kapila's comparison here clearly references the Rwandan genocide of 1994, and this provoked wide-spread debate about whether the term's application for Darfur is reasonable.

Much of this confusion stemmed from the fact that there is little consensus on the definition of genocide. Most people associate the term with an event in which state or official authorities deliberately kill most or all members of an ethnic or religious minority simply for being part of that group, like the Holocaust (Rubinstein 2). Indeed, many scholars emphasise deliberate killing as a primary – even essential – element. Others, however, highlight that deliberate killing is only one of a range of genocidal tendencies, and they instead emphasise the destruction of the national group as a sociocultural unit (29). This destruction targets the

essential foundations of the life of national groups, and includes “the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, . . . personal security, liberty, health, [and] dignity” (Lemkin 79). Although the intention is ultimately to annihilate the national group themselves, this is not always accomplished primarily by mass murder (79). In spite of the confusion surrounding a definition of the term, it is clear that genocide is a racist act, in that racism refers to “the systemic subordination of certain racial groups by those groups in power” and is expressed through prejudice, racial comments, and other unfair treatment (Castle Bell 25).

Despite confusion about the definition of genocide, it is clear that the situation in Darfur can be described as such. Conflict between the Arab and non-Arab peoples has existed in the region for decades, and in 2003 this sparked a rebellion as a recurring drought exacerbated tensions between the two peoples as they competed for the same limited resources (Jones 371). In response to these rebel groups and their attacks on government, police, and military bases the government in Khartoum equipped the Arab militia, the *Janjaweed*, to counterattack the rebels’ actions. In June 2003, the *Janjaweed*’s focus shifted to civilians, and they began attacking African villages (Daly 283). These attacks did not solely involve mass murder, and also included bombings, torching buildings, raping women and girls, killing livestock, and abducting men and boys (284). The specific tactics used varied from village to village, but the ultimate goal was the same, according to M.W. Daly: the “destruction of settlements and property, depopulation of the land through the death of the men, death or spoliation of the women, and the flight in terror of survivors” (284). By the beginning of 2005, up to 300,000 people had died, up to 2,000 villages had been destroyed, and approximately two million people had been forced into refugee camps; many of those displaced eventually died as food supplies ran short, and “genocide by attrition” replaced direct killing (Jones 373).

Although the situation in Darfur proved that genocide refers to more than simply the mass murder of an ethnic minority, Tahir primarily capitalises on this element in her appropriation of this in *Torch*. Despite citing Darfur as an influence in the podcast “The Empire and the Resistance of Sabaa Tahir,” this is likely because genocide is still understood primarily in reference to mass murder; similar to the way Alwyn Hamilton’s appropriation of the harem employs popular Orientalist beliefs, so too does Tahir employ a common understanding of genocide. In spite of this, there are several similarities between the situation in Darfur and

the situation in the Empire. Firstly, much like the conflict between the Arabs and non-Arabs in Darfur, conflict between the Martials and Scholars has been ongoing, and recent events – the fall of Gens Taia and the rise of Emperor Marcus Farrar and the Commandant at the end of the Trials – exacerbate the tensions between the two people groups. In response to this tension, and the rising rebellion, the Martials turn from attacking rebels to murdering Scholar civilians – men, women, and children who have nothing to do with the rebellion. Tahir highlights this in several places throughout the second book. When Keenan and Izzi catch up with Laia and Elias, for example, they bring with them news of what has been happening in Serra since the end of the Trials. Keenan tells us that the Martials have begun rounding up Scholars by the thousands, and that although some are enslaved, many more are killed, all because of the bombing at Blackcliff and the subsequent rebellion (116). Laia confronts this reality three nights after she and Keenan have sex in the safe house as they “stumble upon a half-dug mass grave of Scholars. Men. Women. Children. All tossed carelessly within, like offal” (307). We know that these acts have been ordered by the Commandant, who uses the rebellion as “the perfect excuse for her to exterminate [the Scholars] like she’s always wanted” (116). As the Commandant is working as an advisor for Emperor Marcus Farrar, it is clear that these attacks against the Scholars are government-sanctioned, and that the Scholars have been chosen primarily because of their ethnic and racial identity. Through her utilisation of this influence, Tahir again criticises notions of Western superiority, highlighting that racism in any form is ultimately unfounded, based on nothing that the Scholars themselves have done.

Alongside references to real-world influences and the continuation of the love triangle, Tahir also continues Laia’s character development throughout *Torch*. Interestingly, this character development is closely connected to the development of her magical ability. Although it is common for the discovery of magic in young adult fantasy texts to broadly symbolise growth, Tahir asserts that the discovery of magic in her series specifically acts as a metaphor for Laia’s development of confidence in herself (“The Empire”). Because magic only tentatively shows up in *An Ember in the Ashes*, we know that Laia does not reach a point where she is confident in her abilities or her decisions, despite the fact that she undergoes some significant character growth throughout this first book. The presence of magic in the series’ second book, however, suggests that Laia is beginning to develop this confidence.

Laia first discovers her power – invisibility – as she is trying to hide from a Tribesman who wishes to hand her over to the Martials for a reward. Much like Amani's magic, this emerges in a moment of panic, as Laia wills herself to disappear: "*I'm nothing, nothing but a pile of furs, nothing important. You don't see me. You don't see anything*" (81). Sure enough, the Tribesman sees nothing, even as he stares right at her. As soon as Laia thinks about the impossibility of this, however, her invisibility fails, and the Tribesman blinks and grabs her. Laia's magic, then, ultimately reflects the notion that self-confidence and doubt cannot coexist, one being the antonym of the other; in much the same way, magic and doubt cannot coexist, which explains why her magic disappears whenever she begins to question this ability. Indeed, she questions this because she does not understand it; although she eventually realises that this is the result of her coming into contact with the efrit in Serra, she does not understand its cause beyond this (249). As a result, we witness her struggle to maintain her magic several times more throughout *Torch* and even into the series' third book *A Reaper at the Gates*. Because of the connection Tahir draws between Laia's magic and her identity, it is clear that Laia continues to doubt herself as she struggles to harness and control this magic. This is not for lack of trying, however, as she tells Keenan that she has spent every free moment attempting to force herself into invisibility until she feels like she will go mad from thinking the word disappear (293). Eventually, however, Laia is able to control this magic enough to use it at will for short periods of time, and this is demonstrated in the rescue of Darin and the liberation of Kauf Prison. Because Laia's access to her magic is intricately connected to her development of self-confidence, the fact that she is able to use it intentionally to break into Kauf symbolises that she has grown into a character who is confident and courageous despite her fear, and that she is no longer willing to allow the oppression she experiences as both Scholar and female to alter her perception of who she really is. As a result of this, the discovery and development of magic can be directly connected to the theme of personal growth in the intersectional bildungsroman.

The liberation of Kauf Prison is also an important moment for the Scholar people. A month after this event, Laia and Elias are discussing what occurred here and what their future may hold. Laia is quick to point out that she did not accomplish this alone; although she is no longer connected to the Resistance because of Mazen's betrayal in *Ember*, she still has a community of people around her who are crucial to the kind of political action she engages

with. Granted, this is a small community – made up of Elias, Afya, Tas, and the Skiritae – but they provide Laia with the essential support she needs to defy the Empire and rescue her brother. Here, she proves that the Scholars are not powerless despite the oppression they experience from the Martials because of their race, and that they can rise up and defeat them in order to bring about lasting change to their society.

Although the liberation of Kauf is symbolically significant for the Scholar people, they are still heavily oppressed throughout *A Reaper at the Gates*. Most notably, this is highlighted by Tahir's appropriation of refugee camps. As we know from an exploration of the influence in Sebastian's *Lady Smoke*, refugee camps are spaces set up to contain people who have been forced to leave their homes because of violence, war, or natural disasters (Ramadan 65). They are commonly places of confinement and seclusion, and Tahir highlights this in her portrayal of the Scholar refugee camp outside the Mariner city of Adisa. Immediately clear when Laia and Darin arrive at the camp is its separation from Mariner society and the apparent poverty of the Scholars here. This shocks Laia, because she had heard that the Mariner king had worked with her mother to protect the Scholars, giving them "work and homes and a permanent place in Mariner society" (*Reaper* 82). This is not what Laia witnesses, however, and as she wanders the streets of Adisa she notes that there is an obvious distinction between the camp and the city: "The camp was dingy tents and sucking mud. Adisa's cobbled streets are lined with houses of azure and violet, more alive at night than during the day. The camp was full of young Scholars with jutting collarbones and swollen bellies. . . . What kind of king would allow this? Is there not space in this massive city for the Scholar souls freezing beyond its gates?" (132). The state of the camp and its residents clearly illustrates racial prejudice. For although the Mariners have been kind enough to offer the Scholars fleeing the Martials a place to live, the obvious difference between the camp and the city highlights that they believe Scholars to be second-class citizens because of their racial identity. Because of this, it is clear that this camp – much like real-world refugee camps – is characterised by social exclusion, in that the inhabitants do not belong to Mariner society or culture; although they are provided with food, water, and tents for shelter, they are ultimately deprived of political agency.

Laia's encounter with the refugee camp is significant for more reasons than because it continues to demonstrate the way in which the Scholars are an oppressed people. Here, Laia

encounters Musa, who orchestrates Laia and Darin's capture by Captain Eleiba. As we learn later, Musa wishes for her to help him resurrect the northern Scholar's Resistance. He tells her that he organised their capture at the refugee camp so that he could prove that she is the leader he hoped her to be based on the stories he has heard from the Empire, someone who would never let her people suffer while she cowered (126). This is a clear contrast to the raid in *Ember*, when Laia cowers instead of staying to fight for Darin, and in this scene Tahir demonstrates the way that Laia is developing courage and resilience, growth which could not occur if she had not already begun to develop confidence in herself and her abilities.

Although Laia clearly proves these things in this moment, she is reluctant to agree to lead the northern Scholar's Resistance. In part this is because she wants nothing to do with the Resistance following Mazon's betrayal in *Ember* and Keenan's betrayal in *Torch*, but this is also because she does not believe herself to be a leader. For although she clearly demonstrates that she is capable of this at the refugee camp when she protects her people from the Mariner invasion, she is afraid of the responsibility that leadership entails. Regardless, Laia finds herself thrust into this role, and as she begins acting for the good of her people rather than for the sole purpose of rescuing Darin this sends her character development in an entirely new direction. As a result, Tahir presents us with a more definitive movement of rebellion in *Reaper* than that presented in either of the first two books. For although Laia was connected to the Resistance in *Ember* and although she engages in rebellious acts in *Torch* (such as the liberation of Kauf Prison), this is ultimately weak political action because it is not actually motivated by the desire to change the overall situation in which oppression occurs. This begins to change in *Reaper* as Laia steps into the role of Resistance leader, and thus satisfies this essential element of the intersectional bildungsroman.

We witness evidence of Laia's growth and development in this way as she petitions King Irmand for support. Although Laia does not believe herself worthy to speak to a king, King Irmand tells her that he will hear her request, in honour of her late mother. Laia is terrified in this moment, but a reminder of the darkness she faces causes her to square her shoulders and meet the king's gaze. She tells Irmand of "all that the Scholars have lost . . . of the Empire's war on [her] people, the Commandant's genocide, the horrors of Kauf. And then, though Musa warned [her] not to, [she] speak[s] of the Nightbringer" (260). She finishes her tale by

telling him that if he wishes for his people to survive then he must prepare his armies, as the Nightbringer and the Martials are also a threat to the Mariners' freedom. Princess Nikla tells her father not to listen to Laia, warning him that Laia is nothing but "a little girl selling stories" (260). If this encounter had occurred in either of the previous books, then Laia would likely shrink away from the conflict and acquiesce; indeed, she does this in *Ember* when she accepts Mazen's observation that she is nothing like her mother (71). Now, however, as a result of the growth that she has undergone since the beginning of the series, she instead chooses to fight back, reminding the king and his daughter just what she has accomplished: "Don't you belittle me. . . . I am the daughter of the Lioness. I destroyed Blackcliff. I saved the life of Elias Veturius. I survived Commandant Keris Veturia. I survived the betrayals of the Resistance *and* the Nightbringer. I crossed the Empire and broke into Kauf Prison. I rescued my brother and hundreds of other Scholars. I am *not* nothing" (260-1). Laia's encounter with Princess Nikla here not only demonstrates that her perception of her identity has shifted since the beginning of *Ember*, but I believe that this is also what encourages King Irmand to agree to assist the Scholars in exchange for Serric steel.

In this scene with King Irmand and Princess Nikla, Laia realises that she is the only voice that her people have, and that if she does not fight for them then no one will (260). Despite her issues with the leadership position that she has found herself in, Laia clearly demonstrates here that she is the right person for the job. She further proves this when Antium, the Empire's capital, is under siege by the Karkauns and she risks her life to get as many Scholars into the tunnels at the Mariner Embassy as possible (419).

As we know from Hamilton's and Sebastian's texts, Laia's intersectional bildungsroman narrative cannot solely explore her personal growth away from the cowardly, fearful girl we meet at the beginning of the series into a courageous, selfless leader, but must also feature the development of the world in which she lives. This is otherwise known as Bakhtin's theory of emergence, and by the end of *Reaper* it is clear that Laia has not only grown personally, but is also beginning to disrupt some of the systems in which sexual and racial oppression occur. In the chaos of the Karkaun siege, for example, Emperor Marcus is killed by Helene, which forces his wife, Helene's sister Livia, into the position of Empress regent because his newborn son Zacharias is far too young for this kind of responsibility. Using the assistance that she and the Scholars gave to Livia and her son as leverage – without which they would

not have survived – Laia petitions Livia for the freedom of her people. Despite recognising that this will not be well-received by the Martials as the exploitation of Scholars essentially provides the backbone of the Empire, Livia grants this request, decreeing that “every Scholar who escaped the tunnels is now a freeman” (446). The novel ends with Laia and Helene, Scholar and Martial, realising that their ultimate goals are similar, and as a result they agree to help each other; Laia agrees to help Helene take down the Commandant, who has claimed the crown for herself, while Helene agrees to help Laia protect her people from the Martials and the Nightbringer. Not only does this demonstrate that the world they live in is beginning to change both politically and socially, but this also acts as a commentary on race relations, specifically that interactions between different groups need not be premised on the perceived dominance of one group and the inferiority of another.

Despite the fact that some of the elements of the intersectional bildungsroman as outlined in my introduction are yet to be satisfied – such as the return home to confront a primary oppressor – it is clear that Tahir’s trilogy fits within this framework, while also demonstrating the subversive potential of the fantasy genre. Like Sebastian, Tahir presents us with a female protagonist – Laia – who is visibly oppressed because of the sexism and racism within her society at the beginning of the series. As Laia goes on a journey to rescue her brother we witness her begin to challenge some of the sexist and racist ideas and practices which affect her, while simultaneously realising that she must attempt to change the situation for her people as whole if she wishes for her personal development to last. It is clear that Laia is no longer the same cowardly character she was at the beginning of the first book, and has instead developed into someone who is courageous enough to stand against her oppressors not only for her own personal freedom, but also for the freedom of her people. While this is enough to ground the text within the intersectional bildungsroman, Tahir’s series also engages with some basic commentary on historic notions of Western domination and racist ideology, in a similar fashion to Sebastian in *Ash Princess*. Again, this confirms that the subversive potential of fantasy literature allows for a refocusing of historically dominant discourse.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have argued for the intersectional bildungsroman, and have ultimately created a framework for this theory based on the composition and structure of Alwyn Hamilton's *Rebel of the Sands*, Laura Sebastian's *Ash Princess*, and Sabaa Tahir's *An Ember in the Ashes*. But the intersectional bildungsroman – which has been created out of various parts of the traditional bildungsroman, the female bildungsroman, the ethnic bildungsroman, and basic intersectional theory – is more than a simple guideline, however, and instead also assists us in identifying the interconnected oppressions that impact a protagonist. But the intersectional bildungsroman as a theory is not a means for limiting an author, however, and is instead a valuable social commentary on issues such as sexism and racism. In this way, then, the intersectional bildungsroman ultimately promotes change by informing a young audience about the continuing relevance of these issues today.

Buckley's definition of the traditional bildungsroman posits that all but two or three of the elements he outlines as essential must be present: the influence of childhood, familial conflict, leaving home, self-education, love affairs, and the search for an occupation, a working philosophy, and eventual integration (17). Similarly, the intersectional bildungsroman as outlined in my introduction also presents us with a list of necessary elements, including mention of the protagonist's childhood and/or home life, leaving home, the induction into an anti-establishment group, relationships with those in this group, the presence of a love triangle, returning home, and the eventual development of society aligned with the protagonist's personal growth. The intersectional bildungsroman differs to Buckley's outline of the traditional bildungsroman, however, in that I believe that each of these elements must be present in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative. The texts of Alwyn Hamilton, Laura Sebastian, and Sabaa Tahir all suggest that this is the case. For although each of these necessary elements are expressed in different ways they are still present, all working together to highlight the effects that oppression has on an individual and the way in which this individual fights back.

The first element of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative we encounter in the texts of Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir is mention of the protagonist's childhood and/or home

life. Inclusive in this is an explanation of the kind of world the protagonist lives in, which often includes mention of the oppressive systems which bind her. Although vastly different, Amani, Theo, and Laia each live within oppressive social structures that are all based on real-world systems and practices, such as the Ottoman Empire or settler colonialism. Early on in the text we must also learn of her life within this structure. Amani, for example, is abused by her aunt and is clearly oppressed because of her sex as we witness her cross dressing in *Deadshot*; she does not yet recognise racial oppression because she is unaware that she is not of the racial majority. Theo and Laia, on the other hand, are from the outset both visibly oppressed by sexism and racism as they each live within societal systems which both limit women to certain roles because of their sex and promote the dominance of one racially-constructed group at the expense of all others.

The protagonist's position and understanding of her personal identity at the beginning of the series becomes clear as we read of each of these explanations. Consistent among all three of these protagonists are feelings of isolation, fear, and powerlessness, which significantly are all common signs of oppression. In spite of these feelings Amani, Theo, and Laia are all motivated by an event to leave home; Amani, for example, fears the consequences of harbouring a fugitive and the threat of marrying her uncle, while Theo and Laia are ultimately motivated to leave as a result of the death and/or capture of loved ones. Although this tends to occur in the first half of the first book in the series – as is the case with Amani and Laia – it is still practicable for this to occur at the end of the first book, as it so happens with Theo.

As the protagonist leaves her home she must find herself inducted into a broader anti-establishment movement. Jin leads Amani to his brother's rebel camp, for example, while Blaise helps Theo escape the Kaiser and join the Astrean rebels, and Laia finds the Resistance because she believes that they are the only people who can help her find and rescue her brother. As we know, these relationships the protagonist forms are significant because they disrupt the isolation clearly associated with oppression, and thus contribute to her overall identity development. Other relationships – particularly romantic relationships – also help disrupt this isolation, while assisting her confidence in herself and her abilities. An essential trope utilised in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative is that of the love triangle. In the texts I have studied this is clear, although the degree to which this is explored differs. While

the situation in Hamilton's text barely meets the requirements to be referred to as a love triangle, it is clear that Amani is faced with a choice between Tamid and Jin at the beginning of *Rebel of the Sands*, and it is clear that although the feelings are not reciprocated Tamid cares deeply for her as he asks her to marry him. Sebastian and Tahir, however, make their respective love triangles plain: Theo struggles to distinguish her feelings for Blaise and Søren, while Laia wrestles with feelings for Keenan and Elias.

Although Amani, Theo, and Laia find themselves in different romantic situations, they each follow a kind of pattern. In all three instances we witness the presence of a love interest from the protagonist's own ethnicity and from her hometown (Tamid, Blaise, and Keenan), as well as the presence of a love interest from a different ethnicity and higher social class (Jin, Søren, and Elias). This first love interest symbolises familiarity and safety, while the second symbolises danger and uncertainty. In spite of this, Jin, Søren, and Elias are the only viable romantic options in each of these series, due to the fact that they ultimately symbolise the protagonist's growth and the transgression of boundaries. Because a significant part of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative is about a protagonist's realisation that neither sexism nor racism should dictate how she perceives herself, she cannot be with someone who symbolises her past life and ultimately stasis, or an unchanging state of equilibrium. As a result, she must fall in love with this second love interest, who uses his position as both male and as part of the dominant racial group to help her realise that she does not need to be confined by the racist and sexist boundaries the dominant social group places upon her. Jin, for example, helps Amani see that she is not the same girl he met in *Dustwalk*, while Søren validates Theo's ethnic identity, and Elias helps Laia see that she is strong and powerful in her own right despite dominant discourse that says otherwise.

Romantic relationships and/or relationships with those in an anti-establishment group ultimately encourage a protagonist to take action against her oppressors, action that she would have been unable to undertake if she were alone. As I have demonstrated, this is one of the most significant elements of the intersectional bildungsroman, because it is necessary to change some of the social conditions – particularly those associated with sexist and racist attitudes and practices – in order to bring about lasting changes to a protagonist's perception of their identity. As a result, political action in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative is closely aligned with Bakhtin's theory of emergence. This posits that a protagonist's personal

development – their realisation that sexism and racism are socially constructed – must reflect and be reflected in the historical emergence of the world in which they live, that the world must also shift to reflect the protagonist's changing perception of herself. Firstly, the protagonist most obviously demonstrates how she has grown when she returns to the place she grew up and encounters one of her primary oppressors. Amani, for example, returns to a deserted Dustwalk and encounters her Aunt Farrah, and she demonstrates that she is not the same selfish girl she once was, while Theo returns to Astrea and demonstrates to the Kaiser that despite all he did to her she is no longer afraid of him. Laia, on the other hand, has not yet returned to Serra, nor has she re-encountered one of her primary oppressors such as the Commandant, but the events of the first three books have definitely set a precedent for this to occur.

If Bakhtin's theory is to be followed, the world the protagonist lives in must also shift in a way that reflects how she has grown. Again, this is evident in each of the three series I focus on: Amani's personal growth is paralleled by the development of Miraji as a country, Theo's growth is paralleled by the refugees' defeat of the Kalovaxians at the Fire Mine, and Laia's growth is paralleled by her alliance with Helene and their vow to bring down the Commandant and save the Empire. But this new society is not – or will not be – perfect, nor is it free from some of the issues that plagued it at the beginning of the narrative; this not only highlights that the development of the world is not static, but also, according to the theory of emergence, highlights that the protagonist herself has not finished developing, and thus presents us with a more accurate view on the nature of identity development than that of the traditional male bildungsroman. Ultimately, then, the intersectional bildungsroman is not only concerned with the way a protagonist grows in her understanding of the world around her and the interconnected oppressions which affect her, but is also concerned with the way this protagonist affects change in this world based on these realisations.

Although none of the elements repeated above specifically refer to the fantasy genre, it is clear that genre plays an important part in an intersectional bildungsroman narrative. As I mention in my introduction, the feminist and civil rights movements brought about a range of legal changes and opportunities for women and people of colour. But legal equality differs from actual equality, in that the thoughts and attitudes of individuals or groups are just as significant as the laws of any given society. For although the legal position of women and

people of colour throughout most of the world has improved significantly since the height of these movements, we are continuing to witness sexism and racism in the twenty-first century. The expression of these things has simply become much more subtle in comparison to sexism and racism in the twentieth century, but they are still clearly present as we hear stories of sexual discrimination in the workplace or of police brutality against people of colour.

Indeed, it is because of this subtlety that the subversive potential of the fantasy genre is necessary for an intersectional bildungsroman narrative. Rather than adhere to this subtlety, female fantasy authors are instead able to magnify issues such as sexism and racism in ways that realistic texts are unable to, due to the fact that realistic texts are bound by the limitations of the real world. As Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir demonstrate, however, this does not mean that fantasy texts are completely removed from the real world. Instead, successful fantasy texts such as these draw on a range of recognisable historical, social, and cultural elements from the real world.

Although the intersectional bildungsroman itself seems to be a recent phenomenon, fantasy authors have been using the genre's subversive potential in order to magnify issues such as sexism and racism for decades. This includes authors such as Tamora Pierce, Ursula Le Guin, and J.K. Rowling, each of whom write of female characters who fight back against the personal oppression they face and who ultimately liberate themselves from their specific oppressive societies. Although in the past the fantasy genre was predominantly male-focused, by writing in this way these authors have aided the development of the fantasy hero so that female experience is now included. It is because of this that authors like Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir are indebted to the developments made by these earlier authors.

In spite of this indebtedness, these contemporary texts differ to the texts of Pierce, Le Guin, and Rowling in several ways. One of these is that these contemporary texts all comment on wider issues relating to racism. While I cannot claim that this is true of every text which follows the pattern of the intersectional bildungsroman, I can claim that this differs to the texts of Pierce, Le Guin, and Rowling. Hamilton, for example, comments on Orientalism in such a way that reinforces historic notions of Western superiority; this seems contradictory to the work she does regarding the destruction of a racist institution, but it ultimately shows that these ideas are still very much present in the twenty-first century. Sebastian and Tahir, on the other hand, clearly demonstrate that they disapprove of the historic comparison

between white Europeans and people of colour, and of the comparison between the West and the East respectively. Although many would protest the continuance of these primitive attitudes into the twenty-first century, that these authors magnify them in such a way that makes them easily recognisable to their audience ultimately highlights that they are still present in our 'progressive' contemporary society. It is significant that authors like Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir bring these issues to the attention of contemporary readers, because without acknowledgement of these issues or of the fact that we – as a society and as individuals – are responsible for perpetuating these ideas, we could witness these mindsets continue into the next century.

Another way these contemporary texts differ to earlier texts is in the motivations of their protagonists. Protagonists like Alanna and Hermione – while they realise that sexism and racism should neither limit nor define them – do not seek to change the systems in which these oppressions occur, and thus have little impact on the oppression that others in their worlds face. Protagonists like Amani, Theo, and Laia, however, are focused not only on rising above their own personal oppression, but are also focused on affecting changes in society regarding sexism and racism, because they realise that lasting changes to their personal identities cannot occur if the world they live in does not change. Indeed, if we look at our own societies we can see that this is the case. For although the feminist and civil rights movements significantly improved the personal and social lives of women and people of colour worldwide, they ultimately failed to completely destroy the broader systems in which these oppressions occur; this is why we still witness forms of sexism and racism today, however subtle they may have become.

Although we as a society are hesitant to admit that sexist and racist structures prevail today, texts like Hamilton's, Sebastian's, and Tahir's all openly acknowledge these structures by magnifying some of the issues associated with sexism and racism. But rather than writing of protagonists who journey into the acceptance of a prescribed role – one of the characteristics of both the traditional male and female bildungsromans – these authors each focus on change and growth and the transgression of boundaries, sending their heroines through a collection of trials that ultimately result in a shift in their perception of their identity as they realise that they are strong and courageous despite what they have been told. This shift not only affects the protagonist personally, but also results in a shift in the world in which

she lives. Ultimately, this is the primary purpose of an intersectional bildungsroman narrative; that is, to demonstrate to the reader the importance not only of acknowledging the continuing presence of oppressions like sexism and racism in the twenty-first century, but also to demonstrate the importance of accompanying personal growth regarding oppression with social and political action against the systems in which oppression occurs. For authors such as Hamilton, Sebastian, and Tahir make it clear that this combination of elements is necessary if we ever wish to witness any lasting changes to our real-world society.

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