Neocolonial Auspices: Rethinking the Ekumen in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle*

Abstract

Although the Ekumen in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle* have frequently been read as a utopian social body, their policy of contacting native cultures frequently provokes the erasure of that same cultural multiplicity which they purport to value. Hence, the uneven cultural synthesis enacted by the Ekumen across the galaxy cannot be intended as a positive epistemology of multicultural society. Rather, throughout the *Hainish Cycle*, the colonial practices of the Ekumen rhetorically contrast the series' emphasis upon the multifaceted forms of life and culture found across the unassimilated worlds of the galaxy. Accordingly, Le Guin's series problematizes the colonial practices of the Ekumen through what we might profitably term its mundane dialectic, which consequently engenders a cogent means of neocolonial discourse.

Introduction

The complex dialectical accord between science fiction narratives of galactic conquest and postcolonial theory has rightly been the subject of sustained critical debate. In his 2007 article "Biotic Invasions: Ecological Imperialism in New Wave Science Fiction," Rob Latham draws attention to "the entropic dissolution of the scientific modes of missionary imperialism accomplished by the New Wave" (Latham 491) and subsequently identifies that subgenre as having effected an important paradigm shift within the sf genre's racial consciousness. As Latham suggests in brief, the postcolonial move in New Wave sf texts is fundamentally grounded in their "mundane" dialectical qualities (491). This distinction is crucial. Whereas portrayals of galactic technocultural dissemination within earlier sf texts often valorized the erasure of cultural difference in the name of colonial or neocolonial ventures, the New Wave

focus upon individual subjectivities and immanent truths antithetically demonstrates the value of cultural multiplicity.[1] Accordingly, this article seeks to expand upon Latham's perceptive contention, by drawing upon recent postcolonial theory to interrogate the mundane rhetoric of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle*, and in turn, explicating the series' New Wave challenge to neocolonial orthodoxies.

As Peter Brigg observes, despite its cosmopolitan overtones, the Ekumen—the exploratory and diplomatic collective at the centre of the *Hainish Cycle*'s advanced interplanetary society—typifies "a strange gap between the theory of intercultural relationships and putting them into practice" in an ethical manner (1979 46). The collective's failings seem particularly remarkable when we consider that Le Guin herself greatly valued a marked "difference of racial and alien types, gender difference, handicaps, apparent deformities, all accepted simply as different ways of being human" (Le Guin, 1994) in the sf texts which she consumed. The ideological lacuna identified by Brigg proves immensely significant throughout the series, as the technoculture of the Ekumen is typically adopted so unreservedly by the native cultures of the worlds they contact that the Ekumen inadvertently provokes the erasure of that same cosmopolitanism which it purports to value. Whilst this dialectic of cultural transfer *is* reciprocal to an extent, the subjective experiences of Ekumenical observers do not in turn alter the overriding structure of their sprawling interplanetary collective. It therefore becomes appropriate to examine the practices of the Ekumen from a neocolonial perspective.

To begin, it proves valuable to both define this article's use of the term Ekumen, and to briefly contextualize the *Hainish Cycle* from a historical perspective. As Graham Huggan astutely recognizes, any attempts to affix a date to the onset of neocolonialism within colonial histories inevitably results in "totalizing theories [which] suffer from both temporal and spatial indeterminacy" (20). Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that human societies were in

the midst of metamorphosing towards neocolonial paradigms between 1966 and 2000; namely, the date range during which the *Hainish Cycle* was published. Traditional colonialist enterprises were also in decline during this period, as the historian Wolfgang Reinhard summarizes:

> in just a few years around 1950 almost all the Asian colonies, and around 1960 most of the African colonies, succeeded in gaining political independence. Two further waves followed: the Portuguese colonies in 1974/75 and finally, largely due to the altered global role of Russia, Namibia in 1989 and the 'internal' colonies of Russia and South Africa in the 1990s (226-227)

Meanwhile, their former colonizers implemented neocolonial models premised upon "the free-trade imperialism of indirect economic control and political hegemony that has no need of costly direct colonial rule and can confine itself to occasional strategic interventions" (Reinhard 263). Likewise, there was a much more concerted movement to "assert the 'rights' of nature and native peoples over against the needs of Western neocolonialism" by the 1970s (Latham 497). Hence, it would be misleading to retrospectively interpret Le Guin's series in aggregate as a premeditated attack on neocolonialism. In this sense, it is crucial to recall that Le Guin herself was opposed to envisioning the *Hainish Cycle* as "a coherent fictional universe with a well-planned history, because [...] it isn't" (Le Guin, Introduction I xi). Rather, I contend that its constituent texts develop an evolving critique of colonialist and neocolonialist practices, which is cumulatively valuable for modern readers.

This approach corresponds with Le Guin's own retrospective views on the *Hainish Cycle*. Writing in 2016, Le Guin envisaged that those parts of the series published in the 1960s successfully comprise a racially-conscious challenge to the colonial undertones of "the

traditional vanilla universe of science fiction and fantasy" (Le Guin, Introduction II xvii) which was extant in their contemporary context. Likewise, she opines that because its later works were even more directly influenced by "the terrible story that my own country is still telling" (Le Guin, Introduction II xviii), they comprise a more trenchant and relevant critique of modern neocolonial practices. In place of the conglomeration of advanced civilizations known as the League of All Worlds that is prominent in the earliest novels of the series, Le Guin introduces the Ekumen in "Winter's King" (1969). Consequently, we can consider the Ekumen as a significantly revamped interplanetary collective not only in diegetic terms, but also in terms of Le Guin's evolving approach to postcolonial discourse within the *Hainish Cycle*. It is precisely *because* the global political context which informs *The Telling* (2000) differs significantly from that which informed *Rocannon's World* (1966) that the series's dialectical engagement with neocolonialism remains so immensely relevant.

Nevertheless, because Le Guin created the *Hainish Cycle* over the course of four decades, its internal chronology is at best rather nebulous, and at points, very much open to interpretation. As its author herself puts it, any attempt to organise the "timeline for the books of the Hainish descent would resemble the web of a spider on LSD" (Le Guin, Introduction I xi). For our purposes, Le Guin's 'psychedelic spiderweb' approach to continuity makes it difficult to distinguish both when, and how, the League of All Worlds and the Ekumen diverge. Certain passages, however, offer noteworthy glimpses of the series' galactic backdrop. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)*,* the Ekumenical envoy Genly Ai provides the most explicit statement of the priorities, structure, and mission of the Ekumen:

> the Ekumen is not essentially a government at all. It is an attempt to reunify the mystical with the political, and as such is of course mostly a failure; but its failure has done more good for humanity so far than the success of its predecessors. It is a society

and it has, at least potentially, a culture. It is a form of education; in one aspect it's a sort of very large school—very large indeed. The motives of communication and cooperation are of its essence, and therefore in another aspect it's a league or union of worlds, possessing some degree of centralized conventional organization. It's this aspect, the League, that I now represent. (487-8)

Numerous aspects of this description are germane to our understanding of the relationship between the Ekumen and the League of All Worlds. Readers are led to infer that the League to which Ai refers was subsumed by the Ekumen—likely following "the Age of the Enemy" (488)—but that it persists as a constituent "aspect" of the newer interplanetary collective, in addition to being a progenitor of it. The Ekumen is therefore both an extension of the League, and a movement beyond that earlier, incipient interplanetary collective. Although Ai states that the Ekumen is only loosely organized and aspires not to undertake governmental functions, he reveals that its residual League component works towards the centralization of interplanetary society, namely by educating the populaces of unassimilated worlds. Crucially then, the collective's rationale in contacting worlds they consider less civilized appears to be primarily educational. Even more tellingly, he implies that the Ekumen is working towards generating a common "culture" along its worlds, conspicuously rendering the term in the singular.

Accordingly, this article recognizes not only that the Ekumen is, for the most part, a loosely organized collective, but also that the *Hainish Cycle* is a series whose later components were penned by an author writing from a markedly different contemporaneous context than that of its earlier ones. Hence, we can presume, Le Guin's decision to retire the League and introduce the Ekumen in its place relates to her changing political context and stance apropos postcolonial discourses. Moreover, contrary to its author's convictions, it is

actually possible to ascertain a logical internal chronology for the series. In this sense, numerous diegetic dates are pertinent to this article's interrogation of the Ekumen. As is established in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Genly Ai is stationed on Gethen between "Ekumenical Year[s] 1490-97" (Le Guin, *Left Hand* 389)—this sets the novel relatively late within the series' timeline. As James Warren Bittner's own *Hainish Cycle* timeline proves, it is certainly possible that some parts of the series are set prior to the establishment of the EY calendar system (360-2). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this article, it is of significance that the earliest date explicitly cited in the EY calendar era is EY 242. Importantly, the significant discrepancies between the chronologies deduced by Bittner and myself further highlights just how loosely defined the series' diegetic timeline truly is.

According to the narrator recapitulating the history of interplanetary contact with Seggri in the intercalated passages of "The Matter of Seggri" (1994), it was during "year 242 of Hainish Cycle 93" that the "first recorded contact" was made with the planet (Le Guin, *Seggri* 250). The same narrator states that in the year 1333 the "First Observers were sent by the Ekumen" to the planet, following a mysterious "period called The Tumult" which, it crucially appears, suspended interplanetary excursions for nearly a millennium (Le Guin, *Seggri* 252). Hence, the Tumult itself was likely precipitated by the alien Shing having "broken the League" of All Worlds (Le Guin, *Illusions* 364) at an unspecified date soon after EY 242. As this unidentified narrator is unambiguously a member of the Ekumen, and they lead us to assume that both these dates originate from a contiguous calendar era, we can infer two facts about "the Ekumenical Age" (Le Guin, *Left Hand* 471). Firstly, it is apparent that the Ekumen itself must have been established just prior to the year EY 1333, given that they begin sending out the first ambassadors known as Ekumenical envoys at that point. Crucially however, its eponymous calendar era also evidently includes dates which retrodate the establishment of the Ekumen itself.

We are told that "the Ekumen" set "Year One" of their calendar era in relation to "some portentous event", and we know that this significant event in galactic history occurred more than a millennium prior to the establishment of the Ekumen (Le Guin, *Karhide* 990). Hence, we can safely assume that year one of the Ekumenical Age is marked by the establishment of the League of All Worlds, soon after the invention of the ansible. In this sense, all parts of the *Hainish Cycle* which are set after Shevek's invention of the ansible in *The Dispossessed* (1974) take place during the Ekumenical Age, as it will later be retroactively termed by the collective itself. Based on my reading of the series' chronology, the Ekumenical calendar system therefore corresponds with those dates contemporaneous to the exploration of the planet Rokanan by the League of All Worlds. If so, the year "321" in which Rocannon arrives on the planet is EY 321, and the Ekumen have simply rebranded the calendar era established by the League of All Worlds. Consequently, the above chronology concurs with Bittner when it comes to nomenclature at least, and suggests we can largely regard the League of All Worlds as simply a pre-Tumult form of the Ekumen, whilst recalling that the two collectives emblematize differing periods of their author's postcolonial consciousness.

The *Hainish Cycle*

Crucially, by drawing upon Rita Felski's refiguration of everyday life as a vital locus of cultural identity, this article seeks to valorize the *Hainish Cycle's* representations of individuals' mundane subjectivities, as a point of diegetic resistance to the policies of cultural homogenization which result from the purportedly 'educational' activities of the Ekumen throughout the series. As Felski emphasizes, the mundane sphere of life, "understood as ritual, provides a connection to ancestry and tradition; it situates the individual in an imagined community that spans historical time" (83). Hence, our established daily routines

do not only comprise a significant manifestation of cultural consciousness, but actually comprise the originary site of cultural permanence throughout human societies. Furthermore, Felski states that our mundane "daily rhythms complicate the self-understanding of modernity as permanent progress. If everyday life is not completely outside history, it nevertheless serves as a retardation device, slowing down the dynamic of historical change." (81).

In this light, the significance of the dialectical tension between Ekumenical technoculture and the mundane situations of the peoples who they seek to educate becomes perceptible. I subsequently propose that by prominently depicting the mundane qualities of characters' lives on worlds contacted by the Ekumen, the *Hainish Cycle* "recognizes the paramount shared reality of a mundane, material embeddedness in the world" (Felski 79), and postulates that this mundane entrenchment can comprise an authentic contradistinction to that characterless cultural homogeneity which often appears to be a byproduct of the Ekumenical Age. By emphasising that "we all inhabit everyday life", the *Hainish Cycle* gestures towards an authentic means of multicultural relation via its characters' "common grounding in the mundane" (Felski 92), in stark contradistinction with the neocolonial auspices of the Ekumen, as this article proceeds to demonstrate.

Following the coining of the term neocolonial in 1951, neocolonial discourses have gradually gained currency as a valuable cognate field of postcolonialism (Huggan 20). Anne Braithwaite defines neocolonialism as the operation of "capitalism, globalisation and cultural imperialism to influence a developing country" (109) by more developed nations, surreptitiously motivated by the prospect of enhancing their own economic or cultural interests. Unlike their precursors, therefore, neocolonial practices typically permit colonizers to manage their colonies subtly, and at a distance. Although Latham references Le Guin's works as an exemplar of sf which contests neocolonialism, no extensive studies of the

Hainish Cycle have previously been attempted through a neocolonial lens, to my knowledge. Nevertheless, neocolonial discourses provide a remarkably pertinent means of reading the series, given that New Wave authors like Le Guin regularly wrote from a position of "concern with the United States' neo-colonialist actions (in Korea and Vietnam particularly), and the impact of these on colonised peoples" (Addison-Smith 50). As this article contends, the postcolonial rhetoric of Le Guin's series centers specifically upon its problematisation of its prominent intergalactic collective, whose attempts to usher in the Ekumenical Age project the specter of contemporary neocolonial projects into the far future.

Accordingly, the intricacies of the series' neocolonial dialectic bear further elucidation. Through the dazzling array of cultural multiplicity it exhibits, the *Hainish Cycle* speculatively explores ways in which our daily lives could be radically different from the hegemonic patterns we are in thrall to. Yet, the contribution of the positive emphasis upon cultural multiplicity provoked by the series' mundane dialectic must be understood as a rhetorical counterpoint to its adverse depiction of the Ekumen. Whereas the ostensibly educational ideologies of the Ekumen imply that it is a characteristically benevolent collective that promotes multiculturalism—much like the United Federation of Planets in *Star Trek*—in later works of the series, it becomes increasingly apparent that Ekumenical ideologies and praxes are far more symptomatic of the neocolonial strategies of galactic organizations within Pulp and Golden Age sf. Precisely, because the high technocultural paradigm of the Ekumen is often incompatible with the established cultures of the native societies on the planets across the galaxy which they contact and attempt to assimilate, their interplanetary enterprise is conspicuously symptomatic of the neocolonial orthodoxies which persist in our contemporary world.

In contrast to Brigg's positionality, most prior critics of the *Hainish Cycle* have taken the beneficent claims of the Ekumen at face value. For instance, in his award-winning 2011

article "Toward a Cosmopolitan Science Fiction," David M. Higgins proposes that Le Guin's purportedly utopian figuration of the Ekumen in the series "theorizes cosmopolitanism as an alternative to imperial domination and exploitation" (333). For the sake of brevity, we can take Higgins's prominent ascription of a candid teleological character to the Ekumen as broadly symptomatic of the overwhelming critical consensus on the collective's role in the series.[2] In marked contrast, I contend that the alleged cosmopolitanism of the Ekumen is a failure because, in praxis, it appears to replicate the cultural homogeneity characteristic of neocolonial operations. Hence, this article proposes that if the "creation of the Ekumen [is] the ultimate *telos* of Le Guin's whole future history" (Bittner 294), it is an intentionally problematic *telos*, which is rhetorically counterpointed by the series' mundane dialectic.

 For instance, although Higgins presumes that within the series "the gradual interaction between [Gethen] and the Ekumen inevitably transforms them both" (347), events on the planet do not alter the mentality of any other worlds which comprise the Ekumen, but merely impact the subjective perspective of the Ekumenical envoy Genly Ai.

As Le Guin's short story "Winter's King" (1969) demonstrates, following Gethen's assimilation into the Ekumen, not only are "electric car[s]" (Le Guin, "Winter's King" 930) apparently becoming commonplace on Gethen but "there are actual wars between Karhide and Orgoreyn" (Bucknall 79) after many peaceful centuries. Whereas Karhide and Orgoreyn had been at peace for "seven hundred years" (Le Guin, "Winter's King" 942), a vicious war erupts soon after Gethen's acceptance into the Ekumen, and continues for at least a century. Evidently, Gethen's assimilation with the Ekumen has had a seismic cultural impact in both Orgoreyn and Karhide, and is rapidly precipitating the abandonment of the unique phenomenological perspectives fostered by established Gethenian cultures; which previously promoted leisurely lifestyles, apathy towards technological progress, and quiet contemplation above all else. In a moment of pathetic fallacy which starkly epitomises the social and

cultural upheaval across the planet, Gethen's characteristic snow "flurries heavily down above the flames" of burning cities, "and gleams red for a moment before it melts in mid air, hissing faintly" (Le Guin, "Winter's King" 942). Correspondingly, "Winter's King" presents a remarkably different Gethenian social dynamic from the time Ai was stationed there, only a few decades earlier.

As the beginning of the story reveals, numerous "anti-Alien groups" have formed within the populace of Karhide, and relatedly, there are widespread concerns that the "Ekumen intends to enslave" Gethen (Le Guin, "Winter's King" 931). Although it is not revealed precisely how this social turbulence is linked to the onset of warfare between Karhide and Orgoreyn, it is abundantly clear that many Gethenians wish to destabilise the Ekumen-allied Karhidish regime in order to sever ties with the collective. Therefore, despite Higgins's claims to the contrary, Ai's gradual acclimatization to daily existence on Gethen throughout *The Left Hand of Darkness* in no way prevents those same native cultures from being altered irreparably by their contact with the Ekumen. Plainly, the phenomenological significance of Ai's subjective experiences on Gethen is utterly negated by the totalizing currents of the Ekumenical Age. As this article will continue to demonstrate, as on Gethen, the drive to usher in the Ekumenical Age across the galaxy frequently engenders similitude in place of cultural multiplicity. Hence, regardless of what the Ekumen avow to be their predominantly educational motives for establishing contact with a range of worlds, the variety of cultural synthesis promoted by the interplanetary collective has characteristically neocolonial results.

As Tariq Jazeel asserts, "the neocolonial closures of avowedly multicultural and cosmopolitan solutions" (Jazeel 150) cohere into visibility only when closely scrutinized, and so reveal the disingenuousness of purported cosmopolitan redresses to colonial violences. Hence, the concealment of neocolonial practices in the guise of "cosmopolitanism is never far

from instantiations of power that at their heart cannot help but bear some of the hallmarks of the lingering effect of colonial and imperial geography" (Jazeel 155). Likewise, on closer inspection, the purported cosmopolitan objectives of the Ekumen can be seen in practice to harm native populations within the *Hainish Cycle* upon numerous occasions. Whilst the series ostensibly renders the Ekumen as a paragon of "the universality that typically underpins cosmopolitan imaginaries" (Jazeel 159), by concurrently explicating the neocolonial auspices of the collective implicitly, Le Guin shrewdly demonstrates the insidiousness of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century colonial operations. Consequently, her contradistinction of the Ekumen's neocolonial practices with the series' prevalent rhetorical emphasis upon diverse mundane subjectivities functions to disturb the universalizing assumptions of the collective's ideology, by exemplifying the heterogeneity of authentic multicultural formations.

Accordingly, whereas Higgins asserts that as the *Hainish Cycle* progresses, it demonstrates "a more fully developed anti-imperial philosophy and a radical imagining of the possible political shapes of instantiated cosmopolitan conviviality" (336), the remainder of this article will demonstrate that the pernicious consequences of Ekumenical ideology grow only more patent in the latter portion of the series. For instance, although Higgins purports that the Ekumen characteristically reject the "determination to homogenize" (351), cultural homogeneity is a direct result of their intervention on Aka in *The Telling*, whose societies almost immediately attempt to replicate what they perceive to be the myopic technophilic and capitalist ideals of the collective itself. Hence, whilst Higgins is correct to observe that "Le Guin locates conquest itself (in all its myriad and subtle forms) as her central conceptual problematic" (351), the uneven cultural synthesis enacted by the Ekumen across the galaxy cannot be intended as a positive epistemology of multicultural society. Rather, throughout the *Hainish Cycle*, the neocolonial practices of the Ekumen rhetorically demonstrate the

converse; they demonstrate the significance of Le Guin's emphasis upon the immanent subjective underpinning of heterogeneous cultural modes. This assertion is demonstrable with reference to *Rocannon's World* and *The Telling*, texts written in differing historical contexts that mutually exemplify Le Guin's evolving, yet ultimately congruent, postcolonial objectives throughout the course of the *Hainish Cycle*.

Rocannon's World

Prior to the creation of the Ekumen, the more explicitly colonial policies of the League of All Worlds are perceptible throughout *Rocannon's World*. In the text's prologue, for instance, an unidentified League narrator refers to the unassimilated worlds of the galaxy as a plethora of "planets without names, called by their people simply The World, planets without history, where the past is a matter of myth" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 3). Manifestly, unassimilated planets are perceived as homogenous entities by the League, immensely monotonous consignments rather than complex and singular worlds. Nevertheless, when the same narrator derisorily describes "entering some commonplace sunlit doorway" and witnessing "the half-glimpsed movement of a woman's arm" on such a world, their description conspicuously—albeit subconsciously—cannot help gesturing towards the sparks of beauty present within that same ostensibly mundane lifeworld upon closer inspection (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 3). By imparting a corresponding verisimilitude to native life throughout *Rocannon's World*, Le Guin vicariously demonstrates that the "commonplace sunlit doorway[s]" (Ibid.) of perceptual alterity which League ethnographers are apt to discover upon such planets are cognitive gateways to a plethora of dazzlingly novel cultural multiplicity. Her rhetoric therefore starkly contrasts the League perspective that these planets are anonymous consignments, fit only to be inducted into the interplanetary collective.

For the natives of the unassimilated planet which will later be known as "Rokanan" (Le Guin, *Left Hand* 414),[3] the discovery of their people's subjection by the Ancient Hainish is a "bitter wine" pressed from the roots of the past, which leaves them with little purpose in the present but to lethargically "s[i]t in idle shame in their revelhalls" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 5). Additionally, since their extant cultures are insipidly regressive in comparison with those of the League, all the histories and cultural achievements of the Angyar in recent centuries now appear profoundly banal, and contextually insignificant to them. As Semley's father remarks bitterly, "[t]he story's over here; this is the fallen place, this is the empty hall" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 9); although Angyar lives continue, all their recorded history now seems entirely futile.

Interplanetary contact has not fostered contentment; rather, its imposition of an extraneous history to their own has silenced their revelhalls, and made their contemporary lives appear unbearably meaningless. As Braithwaite demonstrates, "neo-colonial interests remain deeply invested in perpetuating existing, incomplete and distorted historic narratives" (Braithwaite 111), and the League thus employs the unfathomable breadth of galactic history as a neocolonial method of oppression of the peoples of the galaxy. By intractably appraising the value of native peoples in their own technocentric terminology, for instance, as being "*atechnological and evasive, with minimal and fluid culture-patterns. Currently untaxable*" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 4; emphasis in original), the League delegitimizes any cultural formation but the mystified account of history that it disseminates, which naturalizes its dominion over those worlds which the Ancient Hainish conquered and populated millennia earlier. In this aspect, the policies of the Ekumen's progenitor are symptomatic of the neocolonial operations of our own reality. Ultimately, however, at the conclusion of *Rocannon's World*, the salvation of the League comes to rest upon the same local cultures

and mundane realms of knowledge that they have until that point been content to ignorantly provoke the erasure of.

After his spaceship is destroyed, Gaverel Rocannon "an ethnologist of forty-three" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 48), is forced to engage with those native lifeworlds that he has studied for years firsthand. Despite his "graying head" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 27) and desire for sedentary pursuits, his continued survival abruptly depends upon his completion of a protracted heroic quest to locate the Enemy encampment on the planet, and prevent its adherents destroying the incipient Ekumen. Although Rocannon has been stranded in an environment where the technocultural lifeworld which comprised his "old life's rules" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 99) no longer has any currency, the planet's native life which formerly seemed "insignificant, misbegotten, hopeless [to the League] turns out in the end to yield unexpected riches" (Slusser 5). Whereas he was previously so "used to star-jumping", that almost two decades of time dilation seemed "[n]ot very far" from his phenomenological perspective, Rocannon is now forced to travel by immensely more banal means (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 19). When travelling across the world upon the "great flying beast[s]" which the Angyar call windsteeds, Rocannon and his party have to stop frequently to rest the creatures, and must stick "by the river[s]" rather than flying directly to their target, in order to keep themselves and their steeds watered (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 30; 45). In a further ironic vein, the fact that their journey is hampered by having to take place across "hundreds of kilometers of blank, of unknown" is a direct result of League hubris (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 41). Had the League surveyed the planet in its entirety, Rocannon's quest to locate the Enemy could have been much more direct, but instead, the ethnological team's priority was appraising native technologies, as opposed to the natural world.

By this prioritization, the League has demonstrated "the neocolonial politics of nature conceived as a hegemonic world picture" (Jazeel 103), abstracting the native natural world's

inimitable complexity and contextually embedded value as a means of oppression of its people. Hence, Le Guin's dense narrative focus upon the mundane fundament of Rocannon's journey across the geographical expanse of the planet reasserts its non-reducibility inch by inch, and so, demonstrates the willful ignorance of the League apropos cultural heterogeneity. Patently, the cartographic deficiency in the League records which he has (not) been collating of the planet comes back to haunt Rocannon, and satirizes the narcissistic principles of the interplanetary organization he serves. Since his ethnological work "would finally have served only as an informational basis for encouraging technological advance in" native societies (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 32), the irony of his variegation from his former technocultural lifeworld is compounded. Whereas the colonial and technophilic ideologies of his organization have taught him to adopt a patronizing attitude towards the native societies he studies, Rocannon must now attempt to prevent the destruction of the League via coequal cooperation with those same exact native cultures.

The explicit interface between novelty and mundanity within the novel's dialectic therefore provides its narrative impetus; in order to prevent the destruction of the League, Rocannon must first become acclimatized to the non-technocultural lifeworld of the Angyar. Accordingly, rather than the cityscapes common to Golden Age sf texts, the narrative of *Rocannon's World* takes place almost exclusively within "villages, fields, castle towers", and the world's monotonous palette either consists of "gray sky full of smears of cloud, gray sea, dark sand", or "green, dark green and pale green" in the spring (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 107; 11; 93). As when Rocannon and his group learn to subsist daily on "a small collection of green shoots and roots" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 62), the stylistic constant of rigorous verisimilitude in the novel directly counterpoints the colonial ideologies of the League, promoting a recognition rather than a dismissal of the planet's native cultures and environment. As Alice Jenkins likewise argues, Le Guin's "emphasis on pedestrian travel

subverts any teleological reading [. . .], refusing to privilege origins and destinations over journeys and routes" (328); readers are just as grounded in the banal environment of the quest as Rocannon is, and vicariously, just as subject to the planet's pre-imperial temporal logics.

Correspondingly, the unseen but all-pervasive conflict between the League and the Enemy which dictates the plot of *Rocannon's World* exists beyond a periphery impenetrable by its own narrative. This lacuna is symptomatic of the Angyar's profoundly unequal affiliation with the League; their only possible engagement with the devastating interplanetary conflict lies in waiting placidly for their overlords to "come again to collect their taxes for the war against the world's end" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 7). As this suggests, since colonial "time is fundamentally stolen time" (Nhemachena 65), for the majority of the galaxy's citizens, their daily lives go on undisturbed throughout the mammoth galactic conflict; they will likely be subjugated by whichever galactic power prevails. Meanwhile, on behalf of the League, Rocannon must become familiar with the nuances of the backwater planet and its cultures firsthand in order to preserve the galactic organization he serves. As when he lies exhausted on a mountain "ledge gasping the bright, thin air, his heart going hard" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 101), he must assimilate the planet's lived realities into his own person in order to save the League—a dialectic symptomatic of New Wave moves from the galactic to the bodily. By the time his synthesis with its mundane environ is complete, Rocannon sees the planet as "the fairest land I ever saw" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 107), and symbolically, his journey is completed in objective as well as subjective terms at this moment. Crucially, his success owes to the Angyar who have accompanied Rocannon as much as to himself.

Specifically, subsequent to his decision to ask members of the Angyar to offer him "companionship" in his quest to "the land to the south" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 42), Rocannon begins to value the natives' subjective perspectives, as opposed to the colonial

logics of the League. Successively, the complexity of the planet's banal surroundings gradually becomes apparent to Rocannon, as is apparent when its landscape is described from an airborne perspective:

> Forested foothills rose always darker and clearer under the floating barrier of mountains. Now there were trees on the plain, clumps and groves like islands in the swelling sea of grass. The groves thickened into forests broken by green parkland. Before dusk they came down by a little sedgy lake amongst wooded hills. (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 80)

The fractal qualities of the seemingly monotonous landscape gradually reveal layers of detail on an increasingly small scale, and in parallel, Rocannon recognizes more and more value within the natural world of the planet and its cultures the longer he is embedded within them. Fittingly, when he does discover the base of the Enemy he is able to infiltrate it unproblematically, since the Enemy monitors "space for lightyears" around the planetary system, but assumes that they have nothing "to fear [. . .] from the Bronze Age aborigines of the little nameless planet" (Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* 111). Only because he has approached the base by native means is he able to succeed in preventing the destruction of the League. It is on precisely these mundane terms that the conclusion of *Rocannon's World* "offers a celebration of difference and a sensitivity to the autonomy of subjective experiences that cannot be reduced to a universal scientific language" (Higgins 338). It is not the League whose culture has proven indispensable, but that of the Angyar which they previously considered insignificant; the League has been rescued by those unique perspectives belonging to the very culture which their colonial policies are currently provoking the erasure of.

The Telling

In a surprisingly parallel set-up, in *The Telling*, the interplanetary activities of the Ekumen are

shown to have equally pernicious consequences, despite the latter collective's ostensibly non-

colonial intentions. Sutty, the novel's central protagonist, is from an Earth ruinously defined

by "all the times of trouble and war, breakdown and revolution"; her childhood home looked

out over "Old Vancouver, drowned by the sea rise long ago" (Le Guin, *Telling* 593; 591).

Terran civilisation has made the same mistakes over and over again, and thus, has been

reduced to "living the future of a people who denied their past," blighted by "plagues,

famines, misery" (Le Guin, *Telling* 597; 728). The cycles of repetition inherent in Sutty's

allusions to Terra's anthroposcenic milieu and countless eras of violence directly

counterpoint the mundane fundament of traditional daily life on Aka, where repetitive cycles

have utterly different consonances. Yet by the time Sutty arrives there, Aka—the newest

member of the Ekumen—has already begun to capitulate to the technophilic ideals common

amongst the worlds of the collective.

The *de facto* anthem of the Akan government, which is played cacophonously

throughout their cities, is now "Onward, onward to the stars!" (Le Guin, *Telling* 595), yet in

spite of their interstellar aspirations, Akan cities are congested by the mundane technocultural

emblem of "stupid unnecessary traffic jams because the stupid badly made cars broke down

all the time" (Le Guin, *Telling* 595). As the direct contrast between their space-faring dogma

and the banality of their lived realities emphasizes, the disproportion between Akan

aspiration and capability is acute. As Sutty observes with frustration, the Akans are "a people

hyping itself into making every mistake every other population in FF-tech mode had ever

made" (Le Guin, *Telling* 595), after having internalized the eschatological and monocultural

rhetoric of the Ekumen. As is foregrounded by the conspicuous similarities between the

mistakes which Akan and Terran cultures are making, the Akans are abandoning their

cyclical and phenomenologically grounded modes of culture in substitution for only the same ruinous teleology of progress which is extant upon Earth.

From the perspective of the Ekumen, Aka is a G86 planet; "a society in fast-forward industrial technological mode" (Le Guin, *Telling* 601). The collective, this implies, is utterly habitualized to witnessing the onset of such deleterious cultural upheavals upon the native cultures of the worlds that they contact. From the perspective of the Ekumen, Akan natives are simply pursuing a typified behavioral model of technological intensification following outside contact, one which can be described via declarative scientific language. Although they pretend to the role of impartial observers, the appearance of the Ekumen on Aka has provoked the destruction of the cultures, religions, and "literature of an entire world", which are now only preserved verbally, outside of Aka's cities (Le Guin, *Telling* 603). From the perspective of Sutty's fellow Ekumenical envoy Tong Ov, the Ekumen is directly responsible for this cultural upheaval, having inadvertently "triggered it along with the technological expansion" which they *were* striving to effect (Le Guin, *Telling* 603). Manifestly, since establishing contact with the Ekumen, the Akan government has come to consider all their established history inconsequential, and so that history is being "pulped for building material" wholesale (Le Guin, *Telling* 603); the destruction of their past cultures is feeding their institution of the Ekumenical Age in a very literal sense.

Throughout Akan cities, all people talk about is "business, sports, and technology," at the expense of valuing their own lived realities, and hence, they distance themselves from the primacy of "the personal," and subjective experience altogether (Le Guin, *Telling* 611). Consequently, it is only when she moves outside of the metropolis that Sutty finds natives willing to talk about "their families, their jobs, their opinions, their houses, their hernias" (Le Guin, *Telling* 612). As she discerns, this newfound wellspring of conversational variety is a scathing reflection of the technocultural myopia predominant within Aka's cities, and is

emblematic of the profound alterations in social consciousness which their humanoid inhabitants have recently undergone. Since the Akan government "outlawed the past," city-dwellers have not truly been emancipated from "tradition, custom, and history, all old habits" as their leaders' ideologies suggest they have; rather, they have become newly estranged from their own quotidian lives (Le Guin, *Telling* 627). The situation on Aka is therefore redolent of how, "in the contemporary era neo-colonial criminality is mistaken by some for productivity, efficiency and effectiveness" (Nhemachena 52). Since the Akan population willingly accepts the changes occurring on the planet under the guise of economic freedom, it does not even consider the deleterious aspects of its transformed situation.

One telling result of the planet's new technocultural paradigm is the proliferation of ZIL personal ID chips, which certify the "existence as a producer-consumer" of any given Akan individual (Le Guin, *Telling* 621). Whereas Sutty elects to wear "hers in a fitted bracelet," she observes that the majority of "Akans ha[ve] their chip embedded in the left wrist" (Le Guin, *Telling* 621). As Jana Kadlecová asserts, the increasingly popular choice by contemporary members of our species to implant electronic chips in their bodies comprises a cultural response to the advent and proliferation of "contactless electronic communication", and is symptomatic of users presuming that in the case of "any technology that we utilize on a daily basis, it pays to have it with you at all times" (Kadlecová 72). Thus, users who biohack enact their commensurate habitualisation to technologies by voluntarily having them implanted "in the body" (Kadlecová 72).

The prevalence of biohacking in *The Telling* therefore epitomizes the newly inscribed everyday positionality of technology on Aka, since "such extensions of the body are a [direct] reaction to the lifestyle changes of individuals living" in technocultural societies (Kadlecová 72). This paradigm shift quite literally emphasizes the deep embeddedness of Ekumenical technological ideals on the planet in the mere "seventy years" (Le Guin, *Telling* 748) since

Aka was contacted. Via its technocentric fixation, the government's dissemination of a "monolithic, univocal success story of modern Aka" (Le Guin, *Telling* 630) disguises the equally exploitative qualities of their new modes of existence. Palpably, the ready acceptance of ZIL chips into their bodies by Akans demonstrates their utter habitualisation to their role as consumers, and hence, they proceed to cement this positionality into the material sphere of their own bodies, in order that they can give "the universal gesture" symptomatic of capitulation to Ekumenical technocultural and economic norms without conscious thought (Le Guin, *Telling* 621). Crucially, however, their duplication of Earth culture has displaced the traditional cultures of Aka.

Whereas the hegemonic religious movement known colloquially as the Telling had previously valued immanent and natural phenomena such as "animals, people, plants, rocks, rivers" (Le Guin, *Telling* 669), in its perverted Corporate form it now instead sanctifies the drive towards transcendent spaceflight technologies and capital with a myopic fervor. The Akan fervor to imitate the regalia of the Ekumenical Age perfectly illustrates that the linear neocolonial notion of "time is not only an ideology but [. . .] has assumed [. . .] a form of religiosity imbued with neo-imperial sacredness" (Nhemachena 6). Equally, on Aka, the new paradigm fails precisely because, in the process, it makes "the ordinary people into nothing" (Le Guin, *Telling* 698). As those Akans who preserve the historical, symbiotic, culture of the world perceive, the "blank gaze" of the Ekumenical Age has no object but itself, and is entirely insensible to the societal and environmental atrocities propagated by such unmitigated development (Le Guin, *Telling* 624). This blank gaze has already, for instance, transformed many of Aka's historic townhouses with "roofs of red or olive-green tile with curlicues running up the angles and fantastic ceramic animals pulling up the corners in their toothy mouths" into simply "plain, massive blocks" (Le Guin, *Telling* 624).

Those who follow the ways of the Telling strongly believe that their proven everyday modes of sustainable existence, which were established by their ancestors over generations, should only be amended after great deliberation. Historically, although Akans had not been technophobic, they had been intensely wary of adopting any technology which "require[s] changing one's life in any important way" (Le Guin, *Telling* 666). Consequently, for the Corporation State to have arisen, the arrival of the Ekumen evidently had a positively seismic effect upon Akan culture, rapidly effecting its abrupt movement towards the antithesis of all its previous values. The traditional form of the Telling was overtly predicated upon "cycles and patterns", and upon the understanding that all forms of life "die and return, return and die" (Le Guin, *Telling* 651; 648).[5] As Le Guin takes care to detail, it is a profoundly mundane religion, predicated upon "the sweetness of ordinary life lived mindfully" (Le Guin, *Telling* 689).

Likewise, Maz—its spiritual leaders—are always "working people, householders, shopkeepers, common people" (Le Guin, *Telling* 656), and hence, the spiritual is imparted by those grounded first and foremost within entirely commonplace lives in their communities, who palpably have the greatest knowledge of the vicissitudes of daily life which the Telling sanctifies. For their skill as sages, they do not presume to receive any deferred or mystical reward, but simply "praise, shelter, dinner" from the fellow members of their community; like their teachings, the spiritual reward they seek is also entirely grounded in their mundane lifeworlds (Le Guin, *Telling* 693). Indeed, the object of the novel's eponymous religion, as it transpires, is not "arcane wisdoms" (Le Guin, *Telling* 660), but simply the immanence of everyday lived experience, which is accessible to all, and which all Akans can become sages of. Likewise, Akans believe that the miraculous can be glimpsed only within "the wealth and beauty of the world" and its natural phenomena, and accordingly, do not presume that the answers to their problems are located anywhere but within the judicious refinement of their

daily lives (Le Guin, *Telling* 672). Instead of encouraging mystical thinking, the Telling causes them to reflect deeply upon the consonance of their world's planetary systems, transforming their daily lives into a wellspring of cosmic contemplation; a stark antithesis to the expansionist ideologies of the Ekumen, which cannot seemingly help but displace the local and immanent concepts of cultural value extant in native societies such as those of Aka.

The Telling consequently provides a mundane contradistinction to Sutty's Ekumenical instruction, which has taught her, in her role as an envoy, that she must try "so hard to speak factually, unjudgmentally, without prejudice, that her voice [i]s totally toneless" (Le Guin, *Telling* 597). As this ludically illustrates, one of the major deceptions of the neocolonial practices of the Ekumen is its feigned stance of impartiality and objectivity, whereas, as Frantz Fanon emphasises, "[f]or the native, objectivity is always directed against him" in neocolonial situations (77). Unlike their League forebears, agents of the Ekumen plainly attempt to establish contact with native cultures in as impartial a manner as possible. Yet in practice, their stance of objectivity is weighted to always benefit the Ekumen itself first and foremost, due to the collective's advanced technological capacities relative to those of the worlds it contacts. This Ekumenical policy is therefore akin to the disinclination of many contemporary nations to make reparations or apologies for the colonial enterprises on which their economic wealth was founded.[6] This contradiction is further apparent when Sutty ludicrously resolves to "learn her way around Okzat-Ozkat with the humble determination not to have any opinions about it at all" (Le Guin, *Telling* 623). Given that the Ekumen contacting Aka has already caused the destruction of the planet's recorded history and the erasure of its inimitable cultures, the collective's feigned humility and sanctimony in respect of the planet is utterly disingenuous.

Whilst it purports to revere "the singular character of a people, their way of being, their history" (Le Guin, *Telling* 630), the Ekumen categorically refuses to acknowledge its

culpability in effecting the destruction of those same culturally-embedded ways of being, as a result from the collective establishing unequal contact with native populations. As Sutty remarks, the Hainish contacting Earth during an earlier age of galactic society "did the same thing to us [. . .] ever since they found us" (Le Guin, *Telling* 738), and so the true significance of the novel's neocolonial auspices comes full circle. As the Ekumenical Age is perpetuated across the galaxy, as on Earth and Aka, it succeeds only in erasing that same cultural multiplicity which the Ekumen purports to value. Whereas Susan M. Bernardo and Graham J. Murphy argue that what ultimately "makes Aka so interesting is its position as a mirror to Terra"—namely because the planet is "embroiled in its own secularized fundamentalism"—it is primarily the immanent everyday potentialities of the Telling which materialize its eponymous novel's postcolonial rhetoric (Bernardo 75-76; 85). Accordingly, Sutty's diverse lived experiences on Aka throughout *The Telling* cannot justifiably be considered a mere analogue to her Terran life. Rather, her experience of the Telling entirely destabilizes the familiar referents of her mundane Terran life, retooling her phenomenological stance towards the experience of cultural multiplicity.

Neocolonial Auspices

As these analyses demonstrate, the dialectical emphasis of Le Guin's series upon the mundane subjectivities of its characters is directly implicated with its postcolonial agenda. As Artwell Nhemachena asseverates, in the context of the African continent, "the linearity of neo-imperial time is a figment of imagination designed to pacify Africans who are made to believe that they are being conveyed into the future and into novelty when in fact the same old neo-colonial fate is being recycled" (66). Hence, although "Africans are re-experiencing the tribulations of the enslavement and colonial eras in the context of the new scramble for Africa," prominent neocolonial forces within the continent continue to justify their presence

on the grounds of the "nonrepetitiveness and linearity of its neo-imperial time" (Ibid.).

Analogously, *Rocannon's World* illustrates that the League's assimilation of worlds is

underpinned by the imposition of extraneous systems of time upon native civilisations, such

as the Angyar. Hence, Le Guin's sustained emphasis upon the repetitive and mundane

components of these peoples' lives throughout the series challenges the neocolonial

eschatology of linear progress disseminated by the Ekumen and/or League, figuring natives'

cognitive perceptions of temporal recursivity and similitude as a cogent means of anti-

colonial existence. Correspondingly, the *Hainish Cycle*'s mundane dialectic comprises an

indispensable component of the series' rhetorical contradistinction to the neocolonial

auspices of the Ekumenical project.

This contradistinction becomes even more significant when we situate the role of the

Ekumen within galactic history more broadly. Members of the Hainish species, who direct

and created the Ekumen, find the galaxy intensely boring, to the extent that they presume

"that they would have a hard time finding a new thing, even an imaginary new thing, under

any sun" (Le Guin, *Telling* 598). Because for them not even mental processes can be truly

novel, the overriding ideology of their species centers upon a devaluation of the

phenomenological. Pointedly, their ideological devaluation of the primacy of subjective

experience is a direct consequence of their own comprehensive experience of ennui. As the

short story "A Man of the People" (1995) states, "Hain itself ha[s] been for several thousand

years in an unexciting period" of its immense history, and the perpetual lassitude of the

Hainish provides the impetus for their recent attempt to reunite the peoples of the galaxy (Le

Guin, *Five Ways* 422). Although their neocolonial ideologies exclusively promote linear

perceptions of time, recursivity positively defines Hainish civilization:

No human mind could encompass the history of Hain: three million years of it [. . .] there had been uncountable kings, empires, inventions, billions of lives lived in millions of countries, monarchies, democracies, oligarchies, anarchies, ages of chaos and ages of order, pantheon upon pantheon of gods, infinite wars and times of peace, incessant discoveries and forgettings, innumerable horrors and triumphs, an endless repetition of unceasing novelty. What is the use trying to describe the flowing of a river at any one moment, and then at the next moment, and then at the next, and the next, and the next? You wear out. You say: There is a great river, and it flows through this land, and we have named it History. (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 421-422)

Indeed, the Hainish have such an immensely vast perspective on the history of the galaxy that they appear to have become immune to, and fatigued by, even its most profound novelties; they have been "civilized for a thousand millennia [and] have histories of hundreds of those millennia. [They] have tried everything" (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 917). From their perspective, there is too much incessant repetition throughout their history to even attempt to comprehend, and hence, all phenomena appear stultifyingly mundane to them.

For the Hainish, the "unexciting period" of galactic history within which the *Hainish Cycle* is set amounts to just one more unremarkable epoch within a vast and recursive history; there was at least one iteration of galactic society which preceded the extant one, and it seems plausible that there might have been as many as ninety-two. Yet galactic history in the series exemplifies the Taoist perception of "time as a repetitious, cyclical series of becomings and dissolutions" (Oziewicz 121), implying that its Cycles of civilization are by no means extraneous, but rather, gesture towards alternative sociological paradigms to the hegemonic ideologies of linear 'progress' which the Ekumen appears to propagate on an interplanetary scale. Hence, whilst the science fictional narrative of the series comprises merely one such

age of galactic society—the ninety-third Hainish Cycle—it also demonstrates the generative potential of that positively crushing weight of endlessly recursive history, which the Ekumenical Age ideologically denies. Plainly, Le Guin proves throughout the *Hainish Cycle* that there is profound novelty to be found in the immanent lifeworlds of the radically diverse and culturally contingent societies who inhabit the many worlds of Hainish descent.

  The attempts by the Hainish to reunite the galaxy during Cycle 93 mark the termination of the end of their latest "mood of not tampering," which had endured for "at least the past hundred millennia" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 424), and the neocolonial reprise of their originally colonial project. The Ancient Hainish genetically altered and then abandoned "the peoples of their colony worlds to work out their own solutions to" these "profound and radical reconstruction[s] of human physiology" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 424), yet their descendants have now grown bored of that galactic experiment. Because the Hainish manifestly lack "a dynamic sense of the future" (Slusser 54), they have instead begun to reassimilate their galactic estate, as a distraction from the lethargy of life on Hain. Hence, the neocolonial auspices of the *Hainish Cycle* are purely the latest fad of an ancient species attempting to escape the unmitigated monotony prescribed by the annals of its endless history, which has become "so distorted by the weight of the succeeding millennia and their infinite events that one could reconstruct only the most sweeping generalities from the tiny surviving details" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 420). As such, whilst Le Guin figures the linear temporal perspectives of the Ekumen as a means of neoliberal rationalization, she conversely demonstrates the immanent potential of non-linear temporal perspectives and mundane subjectivities, which are frequently patent within the cultures of Hainish colony worlds.

  In stark contrast to the neocolonial practices of their parent organization, the experiences of Ekumenical envoys within the series frequently demonstrate the primacy of lived subjective experience to any postcolonial frame of reference. Significantly, those native

humanoids to whom envoys proselytize the Ekumenical Age are actual living proof of the
cyclicality of galactic society. As Warren G. Rochelle recognizes:

> The entire Hainish history, [... t]he Colonization and the Withdrawal, and the
> rediscovery that sent the Hainish out again to find out what had happened to their
> colonies after many millennia, comprise so old a story that it can only be myth. The
> factual truth is lost in time, even as the mythical truth of what the [Ancient] Hainish
> did persists. (152-153)

Whereas every previous iteration of galactic society has been predominantly
forgotten, the indelible material scars of the experiments carried out by the Ancient Hainish
continue to impact the native populations of the galaxy. Crucially, whereas the Ancient
Hainish genetically engineered themselves to be "able to control their fertility," they chose
not to "do it for any of their colonists" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 424). Instead, they purposefully
genetically engineered their own descendents over many millennia, before abandoning them,
eventuating the genesis of "the hilfs of S [. . .] the degenerate winged hominids of Rokanan [.
. .] Gethenian sexual physiology" (Le Guin, *Left Hand* 453). Hence, whereas the linear
temporal ideologies promoted by the Ekumen suggest that "any life was one flicker of light
for one moment on the surface of th[e] river" of history (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 422), the native
populations of the worlds of Hainish descent prove to be a biological manifestation of the
iterative past of the galaxy. As such, wherever any "deterritorialization of hierarchies in favor
of convivial relations where individuals and social bodies interact on equitable terms"
(Higgins 334) is ever facilitated by the Ekumen, it results from the grounding of its envoys
within the mundane lifeworlds of native cultures.

Although Le Guin's works are certainly characterized by the "theme of unified humanity" (Oziewicz 128), the postcolonial epistemology of the *Hainish Cycle* coheres not in the imperial project of the Hainish, but in the interactions between individual Ekumenical envoys and the mundane subjectivities of the native cultures that they encounter. Narratives within the series frequently centre upon the resultant paradox; to pursue their neocolonial objective, Ekumenical envoys must abandon their science fictional cultures and lifeworlds in order to interact with "barren places and backward methods of travel" (Le Guin, *Telling* 616).[4] These colony worlds are technologically regressive in comparison with their own, and hence, in spite of the highly-developed interstellar technologies required to facilitate their transit, Ekumenical envoys always end up stationed at "a rather primitive idyll" (Le Guin, "Dancing to Ganam" 151).

Accordingly, the multifarious range of native societies depicted throughout the texts of the series almost exclusively persist at the societal level of "pre-urban, pre-technological tribalism"—a significant rectification of Golden Age technophilia (Le Guin, *Dispossessed* 692). After their arrival on these planets, envoys must become attuned to the comparatively mundane existences of natives before they can plausibly attempt to proselytize the Ekumenical Age. Resultantly, the gradual attunement of envoys to the primacy of the mundane aspects of native existence regularly comprises an important moment of peripeteia within the schema of *Hainish Cycle* texts. The envoy Havzhiva, for instance, comes to recognize that since "[a]ll knowledge is local, all knowledge is partial," he cannot "change anything from outside it. [. . .] You have to be in it, weaving it" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 449). As he realizes, the process of becoming embedded in the everyday life of the native societies that he visits is crucial to his comprehension(s) of their subjective singularity. Although the Hainish perceive value in the galaxy in stultifyingly indiscriminate terms, he subsequently begins to appreciate the value of cultural multiplicity. In spite of the immense history of the

series' galaxy, Le Guin insinuates, the boundless variations of cultural consciousness, subjectively realized, are phenomena unique enough that they cannot be replicated or repeated.

Yet, as we have seen, on such worlds the establishment of contact with Hainish-led planetary collectives presages the erasure of that same cultural multiplicity. For instance, at the ostensible eucatastrophe of *The Word for World is Forest*, the League prohibits further colonial operations on the planet Athshe as a means of atonement for the ecocide they have perpetrated there, but refuse to guarantee the planet's independence for any more than "five generations" (Le Guin, *Word for World* 102). Given their assimilationist orthodoxies, they cannot afford to make a promise any more binding, and a lingering sense of aporia therefore persists at the novella's conclusion apropos how long Athshe will be permitted to remain independent. For the planet's humanoid population, their compulsory introduction to the League presents them with only an opportunity to "swap [. . .] the colonial regime for neocolonialism" (Sartre 93), and its subtler techniques of oppression and exploitation. As here, Le Guin expedites her postcolonial objective in the *Hainish Cycle* by detailing the neocolonial auspices of the Ekumen, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the cultural uniqueness of those native populations which the Hainish collective blindly enthralls to its own technocultural lifestyle paradigms. Although Hain itself is scarcely glimpsed within the series, "A Man of the People" reveals that it is comprised of "a high-technology, low-density network of cities and information centers" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 422). Appropriately, their neocolonial utilization of these dual phenomena—'superior' knowledge and technologies—comprise the two primary methods by which the Hainish-led collective reassimilates worlds to its fold.

Accordingly, the postcolonial eschatology of Le Guin's series does not cohere about its eponymous interplanetary race, but rather, within the multifarious native cultures which

they assume cultural superiority to. In particular, a "hidden racial dimension to the codification of technology as a forward, unidirectional motion" (Pinto 140) is perfectly epitomized by Le Guin's neocolonial figuration of the Ekumen, and stands in antithetical opposition to the recursive, mundane lifestyle practices of the civilizations which the Hainish seek to reassimilate. Upon closer inspection, the two principal novums of the series—the ansible and NAFAL travel—are utilized in tandem as a neocolonial apparatus which facilitates the dissemination of Ekumenical ideology over vast distances, and ensures that envoys are inevitably successful in assimilating planets into the Ekumen. As Ai reminds an incompliant Gethenian ruler, the time dilation engendered by NAFAL travel ensures that he can simply return and negotiate with the king's successors *ad infinitum* until Gethen does acquiesce to join the Ekumen, since Ai's "few hours spent on the ship would, here, amount to thirty-four years" (Le Guin, *Left Hand* 414). As his oblique threat implies, NAFAL travel can be utilized as a neocolonial tool of discipline, via which the Ekumen can guarantee the acquiescence of non-compliant native populations, without the necessity of resorting to physical violence.

Due to the temporal limitations imposed by NAFAL travel, colonial practices cannot be manifested in the series by direct military or commercial means, and hence, the ansible proves an imperative tool to facilitate that same project by cultural and linguistic means. As Braithwaite emphasizes, "the importance of effective, methodical and reliable information systems in colonial and neo-colonial control" cannot be understated (111), and the ansible is precisely such a tool of remote jurisdiction. For Darko Suvin, Shevek's invention of the ansible "does not mean power for one chosen people, caste or gender but breaking down the walls between people in the whole universe, no less" (541). Yet, Suvin's conclusion centers upon his reading of the ansible as a sublime technological invention, and his rather naïve correlate presumption that the Ekumen are unanimously a benevolent force. Rather, ansible

technology demolishes the walls between cultures *too* efficiently; it licenses indiscriminate neocolonial practices on a galactic scale, and appears to be indirectly hastening the erasure of the vestiges of the galaxy's cultural heterogeneity.

Conclusion

Although this article focuses particularly closely upon the neocolonial auspices of *Rocannon's World* and *The Telling*, it also intends to demonstrate the necessity of continuing to interrogate the postcolonial dialectic of the *Hainish Cycle* more broadly. For instance, the story suite *Five Ways to Forgiveness* (1994-1999) exhaustively details the indirect, yet seismic, cultural effects of the Ekumen contacting the planet Werel in EY 1724. Le Guin explicitly specifies that it "was this development that led within only thirteen years to the colonization of Yeowe" by the planet's populace, correspondingly exacerbating both the world's slave economy and military capabilities, as a result of its inhabitants' "paranoid expectation of the armed return of conquering Aliens" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 577). Although the Ekumen eventually do grudgingly elect to help "Yeowe negotiate an end to the economic control of the planet by the Corporations" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 578), they themselves stand to profit from the newly expansionist priorities of the planetary system's inhabitants in the long-term. Since all the social upheaval on Werel and Yeowe has necessitated both planets' "rapid, competitive development of space technology and intensification of all techno-industrial development" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 577), the Ekumen have succeeded in tacitly converting "undeveloped economies into underdeveloped ones that neocolonialism could keep permanently in that condition by means of their dependency on the world market and foreign investment" (Reinhard 263).

Solly—an Ekumenical Mobile stationed on Werel—epitomizes the policies of the Ekumen incredibly astutely and succinctly when she drolly concludes that "We *are* invaders,

no matter how pacifist and priggish we are" (Le Guin, *Five Ways* 404). In the final instance, by having read the interrelated tales of the series, readers cognitively assimilate the cultural multiplicity which coheres throughout the *Hainish Cycle*, and their mental positionality therefore works to countermand the movement towards the homogenization of the cultures of those same planets throughout its narratives. Demonstrably, Le Guin achieves her postcolonial objective within the series through a mundane dialectic which counterpoints and deconstructs the technophilic myopia of their prominent interplanetary collectives. As such, Le Guin's New Wave objectives and moves within the *Hainish Cycle* are ultimately defined by their contradistinction to the neocolonial auspices of the Ekumen, and manifested via the series mundane dialectic.

Notes

1. According to the *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction*, for instance, New Wave texts are most distinctly characterized by their "emphasis on nuanced social, moral, or psychological conflict" (Sheidlower).

2. Readings which analogously envision the Ekumen as a uniformly beneficent influence include Cummins, 1993; Lindow; Plaw 283, 298; Rochelle; Bittner 264, 278, 300; Hayles, 104; Jameson 74, 219, 280; Mayer 10; Brigg, 1997: 17, 19, 20; Slusser 10, 22; and Bucknall 63.

3. The planet's latter 'legitimate' name is plainly symptomatic of the colonial practices of the League, in the sense that it rigidly imposes their own language over the world's peoples.

4. This situation conspicuously parallels the position of agents of the Culture in Iain M. Banks's 1998 novel *Inversions*.

5. As this evidences, the Telling is rooted in Taoist principles. For a small portion of the well-established research documenting Le Guin's dialectic engagement with Taoism, see Cummins, 1979, and Li.

6. See, for instance, chapter 3 of Sarkin.

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