

Local Heritage/ Global Forces: Hybrid Identities in Le Guin's *The Telling*

Sahar Jamshidian

s.jamshidian@malayeru.ac.ir

Department of English Language and Literature,
Malayer University, Iran

Farideh Pourgiv

fpourgiv@rose.shirazu.ac.ir

Shiraz University, Iran

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000), her last novel in the Hainish Cycle, which addresses intercultural communications among her imagined worlds. These relationships, which resemble those of our globalizing world, are analyzed in the light of Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry, hybridity and the Third Space. It is suggested that in this novel, Le Guin criticizes cultural imperialism and rejects both conservative and assimilative attitudes toward the other; instead, she praises hybridity as the culture of our globalizing world. Besides warning against the hegemony of the West in international relationships, through analogy, *The Telling* highlights the ways the developing countries could be responsible for their own colonialism and the annihilation of their own culture. In this context, this paper proposes that the Dovzans, lured by Hain's advanced technology, as an act of self-colonization, impoverish their lives and deny their entire culture by criminalizing the Telling. The article further argues that indigenous peoples and groups of minorities, through hybridity and focus on their difference, not only can survive and conserve their local heritage and identity in the face of intense globalization pressures but also affect the dominant power. Accordingly, Suttu and the people of Okzat-Ozkat are introduced as courageous hybrid characters who finally succeed in asserting their voice in the third space. The article concludes that through bargaining with the Ekumen and remaining faithful to their own culture, the people of Okzat-Ozkat can save the Telling from extermination.

Keywords: Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Telling*; Postcolonialism; Globalization; Homi Bhabha; Hybridity; Third Space

INTRODUCTION

As immigration, tourism, global market, and global consumer culture continue to define our contemporary society, globalizing forces present us with a series of urgent challenges. In the face of globalization, concepts such as identity, heritage, local communities, and indigenous populations seem threatened. As Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (2015, p. xviii) declare, currently the central dilemma of cultural hybridity at the age of globalization is "how to respect, protect and defend the valued 'cultures' of vulnerable minorities while at the same time allowing cultural creativity and cultural openness to thrive nationally and internationally." Despite controversy over the definition of globalization and whether or not it lives up to the reality of our contemporary world, Luke Martell (2016, p. 12) defines globalization as "a process" moving toward the following criteria: 1- "Globalization needs to be *global in distance*," that is, globalization transcends the separating lines between countries on the surface of the map by

compressing the space and shortening the distance in terms of culture, politics, economics, and movement. 2- “Globalization needs to be *globally inclusive* in inputs as well as reach.” Thus, globalization is not “a one-way or very unequal process from one place to another.” 3- “There needs to be interdependency rather than just interconnection.” Namely, two different things that are in connection need to affect one another. 4- People need to have global consciousness and be aware of the globe as one place. The second factor in Martell’s definition makes us question whether or not our reality meets the definition of globalization as a two-way, inclusive, equally integrated process and forces us to acknowledge the presence of power, inequality, and conflict in our transnational relationships.

By presenting the Eukmen as a utopian model for our intercultural relationships, *The Telling* makes us aware of the threats of cultural imperialism at the age of globalization. Cultural imperialism refers to a kind of “*indirect* form of economic, military, political domination which is achieved without significant permanent European settlement” (Kohn & Reddy, 2017). It is concerned with how certain products, fashions, and styles are transformed from the dominant nations to the dependent markets, which lead to the creation of particular patterns of demand and consumption. Such transactions “endorse the cultural values, ideals, and practices of their dominant origin. In this manner, the local cultures of developing nations become dominated, and in varying degrees invaded, displaced, and challenged by foreign, often Western, cultures” (O’Sullivan et al., 2000, p. 74). In doing so, global media discourse “disseminat[e] ideologies and discursive practices [... which] implicit[ly] contribut[e] to the production or reproduction of unequal relations of power” (Hazaea et al., 2014, p. 172). By advancing their culture, politically and economically influential countries urge the less powerful countries to abandon their culture and assimilate into the dominant culture. What we witness today, not only in the United States but also in Canada and the European Union, is the encouragement of the acceptance of “post-multiculturalism” to suggest the need to move beyond current practices of multiculturalism and to find different approaches which promote assimilation, “common national identity, social cohesion, citizenship and civic integration” (Gozdecka et al., 2014, p. 55). For instance, Trump administration’s vision for “American greatness,” according to Julia G. Young (2017), returns America to the 1920s, when assimilation and restriction of immigration based on “national, ethnic, and religious criteria” were emphasized (p. 218).

In addition to the hegemony of the West over non-Westerners and their emphasis on assimilation, some cultural critics propose that the less economically powerful countries also play a role in establishing such unequal relations. In fact, the collapse of colonial powers and the celebration of independence after decolonization should not mask the presence of neocolonialism in the guise of modernization. These critics make such assertions on the grounds that former colonies that have internalized their inferiority dictated to them by the colonizers are still under foreign control and are economically dependent on the former colonizers (McLeod, 2007, p. 7). Similarly, Claude Ake (2012, p. 15) holds the developing countries partly responsible for their subordinate position since they have confused wealth and the technological advancement in the developed countries with the existence of the good life; that is, living in a just, happy, and cooperative society away from exploitation, alienation, and violence. Thus, “in so far as they are made to desire those things which the West passes off as the necessities of development [wealth, advanced technology, military power], they subordinate themselves to the West and accept their inferiority” (ibid., p.16). Therefore, it seems that becoming conscious of different ways the developing countries have been manipulated into internalizing their own inferiority is the first step in fighting against the unjust international relationships. In *The Telling*, Le Guin holds both

the developed and developing countries responsible for establishing unequal power relationships. To mitigate the conflict bred by homogenization and cultural imperialism, *The Telling* introduces hybridization as a key to both preservation and transformation of identities.

STUDIES ON LE GUIN'S *THE TELLING*

Compared with other novels of the Hainish cycle, *The Telling*, the winner of the Locus Award for the best science fiction novel in 2001, has been less appreciated by critics. Except for a few studies, *The Telling* (TT) has been neglected, especially with regards to the theme of globalization in the Hainish cycle. As a significant writer of soft science fiction, Le Guin has always been engaged with devising cultures, religions, and histories for her speculative societies. Her novels are usually about stories of the encounter between disparate cultures and world views. Being published on September 11, 2000, *The Telling* prophesies the upcoming clash of cultures in the following decades and by holding a mirror to our age, it makes an effort to improve the readers' attitude toward the unknown other and correct our unequal power relations. Discussing *The Telling*, Elizabeth Anderson (2016, p. 194), in "Ursula Le Guin and Theological Alterity," contends that Le Guin, together with other fantasy writers, has used fantasy's potential for creating new divinities for the imaginary worlds to "encourage young adult readers to imaginatively approach their own encounters with religious difference." Likewise, Beth Baker-Cristales (2012, p. 22), in "Poiesis of Possibility: The Ethnographic Sensibilities of Ursula K. Le Guin," analyzes cross-cultural encounters in Le Guin's novels, including *The Telling*. She suggests that the pillars of Le Guin's utopian community are "self-transcendence and the ability to understanding the other." Raffaella Baccolini's "A useful knowledge of the present is rooted in the past" also argues the importance of "recovery of the history" and "the culture of memory" for "the formation of a collective resistance" in *The Telling* (2003, pp. 115-127). She maintains that storytelling and memory are "subversive elements in that they promote hope and the potential for change. In living their culture, the people of the Telling challenge the hegemonic discourse of the Corporation and create for themselves a way to attain freedom" (p. 126). Baccolini and Moylan (2003, p. 7) categorize *The Telling* as "a critical dystopia" by underlining the indigenous people's resistance to the dominant hegemony of the social order.

Still emphasizing cultural interactions, though not in *The Telling*, in "Urbe et Orbe: A Prehistory of the Postmodern World City," Howard V. Hendrix (2005, p. 36) introduces Le Guin's *City of Illusions* (1967), the third novel in the Hainish cycle, as one of the early science fiction novels concerned with the theme of globalization. He maintains that in this novel, "the truth that awakens humanity from the nightmare of false city history — only comes about through the reestablishment of connection, of communication, and the reconciliation of apparent opposites." With regard to Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, the fifth novel in the Hainish cycle, Susan M. Bernardo and Graham J. Murphy (2006, p. 57) briefly point at the newly found relationship between the Anarrestis and the Urrastis and call it a "metaphor for globalization" since the people of Hain, knowing that the origin of all the "hilfs" is the same, consider their galaxy as one place and see no reason for each planet to remain isolated and disconnected from others.

In this article, we also underline the importance of cross-cultural interactions in *The Telling* and argue that this novel furthers the theme of globalization and communication in the Hainish cycle. The idea that this phenomenon in the current situation has shrunk the world into a single place, where people in different parts are drawn close to each other by the advanced media

communication, immigration, tourism, the growth of multinational enterprises, and the like, links globalization to the study of *The Telling*. Contrary to Baccolini and Moylan, what we argue is that even by remembering and memorizing the stories, the Telling cannot be saved unless it interacts with the new culture. The Telling in isolation would be limited to few minority groups living in the peripheral regions and would remain ineffective in challenging the dominant power.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: HYBRIDITY AND THE THIRD SPACE

Considering the connection between the power relation present in our globalizing world and that of colonialism, Bhabha's theories become relevant to the study of globalization and *The Telling*. In *The Location of Culture* (originally published in 1994), Bhabha is concerned with the liminal, interstitial locations between and beyond borders, where different cultures confront each other and issues of unjust power relations, imperialism, assimilation, and oppression arise. For him, the colonial situation is not one of the straightforward oppression of the colonized by the colonizer, but a period of cultural contact and interaction between the colonizer and the colonized; or by extension, between advanced countries and developing countries in the age of globalization. Thus, by introducing hybridity, he emphasizes the agency of colonized people and how they resist the colonial power, which is usually regarded as complete and stable. Therefore, hybridity in cultural globalization suggests interaction between cultures and rejects the idea of fixed and stable identities in favor of more fluid and plural ones.

Under the influence of postmodern condition, Bhabha (2007, p. 7) questions the concept of "homogenous national cultures" and focuses on "the postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, [and] the major social displacements" in order to clarify "the more transnational and translational sense of hybridity" in our globalizing culture. Diaspora, on the one hand, is closely connected to the idea of territory, the lost homeland, as well as the hope of finding unity in the Promised Land. On the other hand, the very presence of the migrant in diaspora, or what Bhabha calls "the borderline community" (ibid., p. 12), reveals the fact that cultures are not closed and complete in themselves, but always in the process of becoming and changing since the very practices of constructing meaning related to the formation of identity can take place perfectly in conditions of traveling and movement away from their home. Hence, the mobility and fluidity of the diasporic culture unveils the fact that "cultural practices are *not tied to place* and are *deterritorialized*" (Smith, 2004, p. 256), which undermines the idea of national identity constructed during the high moments of colonialism in the nineteenth century.

Bhabha's anti-essentialist attitude toward culture paves the way for his theories of mimicry, hybridity and the Third Space, which are all tightly related to each other. Using Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's definition of mimicry as a jumping-off point will ease the defining process:

When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that is quite threatening. That is because mimicry is never very far from mockery since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics.

(2001, p. 139)

For Bhabha (2007, p. 127), mimicry as a “form of difference that is almost the same but not quite,” denotes that while the colonized people are encouraged to repeat certain traits, beliefs and values of the colonizers, in actuality, they are able to maintain an element of their own cultural differences. By accepting this idea that cultures can be both imitated and influenced, hybridity becomes a possibility. Since the 1990s, hybridity has been discussed in the context of international media and communication studies, postcolonial theory, and theories of globalization. Cultural critics have opposing views about the concept of hybridity, represented as a way of interaction among different cultures. Some regard it as a way of resistance to dominant (imperial) power while other critics believe it to be “politically suspicious” since it “allegedly lends legitimacy to a corporate rhetoric that frames cultural mixture as a market to be taken by capital, and at the same time elides accusations of economic domination and assorted forms of imperialism” (Kraidy, 2002, p. 323). It should be noted that in this paper, we have limited ourselves to Bhabha’s theory of hybridity since his positive attitude toward this concept is in line with Le Guin’s optimistic vision in *The Telling*. Bhabha defines hybridity as the moment of challenge and resistance against the dominant cultural power. For him, hybridity becomes the moment in which the authority, the self, loses its control over the meaning and finds itself vulnerable to the language of the other. Hybridity of the colonial discourse, thus, disturbs the power relation present in the colonial situation by recognizing the voice of the other in its discourse and proving to be “double- inscript[ed]” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 154). Bhabha contends that hybridity refers to what happens culturally in the Third Space, in the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (ibid., p. 5). Both hybridity and the Third Space are notions defining the colonial experience as essentially a two-way process in which both cultures affect each other, though this exchange might not take place equally. By refusing to conform to the “rules of recognition,” hybridized individuals avoid being categorized as subaltern, othered and oppressed through their ability to make choices and act independently without being determined or limited by an oppressive, controlling authority (ibid., p. 160).

In fact, hybridity and interaction with individuals from other cultures can open up possibilities of survival, resistance, and existence for the oppressed group. Therefore, the colonized in the colonial era, the indigenous peoples and marginalized cultures of the so-called Third World countries in the period of globalization can exercise their agency through hybridity. With regard to the Wadandi people of Southwestern Australia, Guilfoyle, Mitchell and Webb (2015, pp. 86) contend that these marginalized people by emphasizing on their difference and employing “culturally defined methods of adaptation” (CDMA), namely hybridity, can actively control the pace and the direction of change and maintain a strong sense of identity in the face of massive social upheaval.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE HAINISH CYCLE

While Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* (1985) advises returning home and sticking to one’s culture, communication among different cultures is the unifying theme in the Hainish cycle. In these novels, there is an “envoy” or a “mobile,” most often an anthropologist, traveling long distances from his/her homeworld to the world of different kinds of highly intelligent life forms (“hilfs”), and the story is the description of his/her spiritual as well as physical journey, which leads him/her to some development and enlightenment. These mobiles give up their home planets to travel in time-dilation, a condition in which a few days pass for them on board their space ships while decades pass on both the worlds they are leaving and the ones they are going

to. As a result, they have to connect with people who are culturally and sometimes even biologically different, as is the case with the androgynous people in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969).

In this cycle, Hain is the mother planet because all the creatures in other planets originally come from there. Over many millennia, the Galactic Empire headed by Hain expanded far across the galaxy, but because they did not have faster-than-light (FTL) travel or communication, they lost contact with Hain and forgot their origin, so the Empire collapsed. After thousands of years, when Shevek's "General Temporal Theory" in *The Dispossessed* (1974) led to the invention of an instantaneous interstellar communication device called an "ansible," establishing new relations with the lost worlds became a possibility. By analogy, the invention of the ansible and FTL spaceships in the Hainish cycle resembles the advent of airplanes and the internet in our world, which have shortened long distances between different parts of the Earth. The people of Hain try to find lost worlds and invite them to join the Ekumen, the league of all worlds, for which "the motives of *communication* and *cooperation* are of essence" (Le Guin, 1976, p. 10, italics added). The Hainish people, leading the Ekumen, try to communicate with other worlds and teach them their techniques, mostly technological and scientific discoveries, while they wish to learn other ways of life in return. The "envoys" sent by the Ekumen, come to the new world only one at a time on the first contact with any new planet to avoid threatening the homeland of others: "The first voice, one man present in the flesh, present and alone. He may be killed or locked up with madmen. ... One voice speaking truth is a greater force than fleets and armies, given time" (Le Guin, 1976, p. 3).

Seen in this light, the Ekumen becomes a utopian community that seeks intercultural communication without establishing a hierarchical power relation. The Ekumen tries to build relationships based on mutual understanding and respect, which are mandatory for having fair exchanges of ideas, goods, and knowledge. Hence, Tom Moylan (2003, p. 150) calls the Ekumen "a successful utopian post-state formation." Sandra J. Lindow (2012, p. 184) also refers to the root of the word "Ekumen" and maintains that "The Ekumen has the acumen (wisdom) not to force change but instead to provide essential dialogue and resources, thus creating a community where true, long-lasting cultural change becomes possible." In this respect, the Ekumen's utopian attitude toward others highlights the inefficiencies of our cultural global interactions.

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AS SELF-COLONIZATION IN *THE TELLING*

As *The Telling* progresses, the reader becomes familiar with four groups of people in this story: the Ekumenical envoys from both Hain and Terra, the Unists, who lived on Terra for some time before their collapse, the producer-consumers of the Corporation State in Aka and the people of Okzat-Ozkat, who preserved their old culture despite all the obstacles. Prior to the arrival of the Ekumen, the Akan society is described as one entity without divisions and borders, an isolated community thrown in one corner of the universe apart from other worlds: "Aka's habitable lands were a single huge continent. ... Undivided by oceans, the Akans were physically all of one type with slight local variations. ... among the Akans there *were no foreigners*" (TT 105).

Faced with foreigners, most Akans welcomed the new culture wholeheartedly and followed the foreigners to the extent of extinguishing their own culture while a few others remained faithful to their native culture, the Telling. Suttu, an envoy coming from Terra (Earth), finds the Telling to be a kind of philosophy, religion, history, and culture; a kind of lifestyle practiced in Aka before their encounter with the Ekumen, including "an enormous interlocking

system of symbols, metaphors, theories, ...medicine, physiology, psychology, ...diet, legend, parable, poetry, history and story” (TT 98). The Telling resembles the Eastern religions of Buddhism and Taoism with no coherent set of beliefs, specific creeds or rules. It is a body of stories that has “no Bible, but dozens of Upanishads, a million sutras” (TT 110). Satty realizes that the Telling is not a religion in a sense known to the Terrans. Although it has “a spiritual dimension, . . . [it is not a] religion as an institution demanding belief and claiming authority, religion as a community shaped by knowledge of foreign deities or competing institutions” (TT 105). It resembles “darsana,” which refer to the “schools” or “viewpoints” of Indian philosophy, and it avoids the dogmatism and totalitarian attitudes of the “Judeo-Christian Rationalism,” to use Dr. William Haber’s term in *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971). The Akan people dedicated to the Telling are peaceful. Not believing in the afterlife, like Buddhists, they cherish life in this world and regard it as sacred. They “rejoice in the complexity and specificity, the wealth and beauty of the world, [and] participate in the fullness of being” (TT 134). The essence of the Telling is indeed in harmony with nature and its teachings encourage mindfulness, physical-mental health, and strength. Through the Telling, Le Guin criticizes Westerners’ materialistic, capitalist and imperialistic view of life and warns them against having an over-mechanized, dogmatic society alienated from human nature and the outdoor environment. Nevertheless, her fascination with the East does not lead her to reject Western civilization altogether. On the contrary, she seeks a new synthesis of cultures and a happy meeting between the values of Western and non-Western civilizations.

The Telling, through analogy, represents the threats of cultural imperialism accompanying the era of globalization: Like the immigrants living in the diaspora or people encountering new culture through media, the culture of foreigners affects the Akans. When for the first time, “in the year Redan Thirty, seventy-two years ago” (TT 246), the Ekumen came to Aka in their spaceship, they encouraged the people of Aka to join the Ekumen. They introduced them to the whole nine worlds scattered in the universe. The next ship, which was sponsored not by the Ekumen, but by the oppressive Unists directly from Terra, brought with them “all kinds of information, technological information. They showed [the Akans] how [they]’d have to stop doing things in the old, ignorant ways and change [their] thinking, to learn what they could teach” (TT 248). Although the Dovzans, the dominant group in Aka, did not bargain with the dogmatic Unists and did not barter their souls for technological information, they “had been betrayed into betraying the rest of Aka” (TT 249). “They agreed to deny their entire culture and impoverish their lives for the ‘March to the Stars’ which was an artificial, theocratic goal” (TT 119). Therefore, despite all the cautions the Ekumen envoys exercised while dealing with people from other worlds, the Dovzans acted like the colonizers in their own country and did “an imitation of societies they assumed to be superior merely because they were capable of space flight” (TT 119).

During the Age of Enlightenment, Europeans’ faith in the power of reason established rationality, advanced technology, and Western intellectualism as transcendental signified upon which all ideas of reality were structured. When others could not live up to Western standards, they were considered as inferior and characterized as mystical, irrational, primitive and superstitious to justify Westerners’ attempts at educating and civilizing them. Similar to the British colonizers, who put Hinduism and Buddhism aside as irrational, “mystic, quietistic, and anti-social” (King, 1999, p. 33), the Dovzans regard the Telling as mystic and superstitious, thus, irrational and inferior to the culture represented by the outsiders. Hence, colonialism is not “just something that happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates with

the collusion of forces inside, but a version of it can be duplicated from within” (Loomba, 2000, p. 12). To this government, which wishes to be “free of tradition, custom and history, all old habits, manners, ... [and] ideas were sources of pestilence, rotten corpses to be burned or buried. The writing that had preserved them was to be erased” (TT 61). However, the Akan government does not achieve its domination over marginalized people only through “coercion,” but they also use “Ideological State Apparatuses,” to use Louis Althusser’s term, such as school, church, family, media, and literature in order to “ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’”; to create subjects who are ideologically conditioned to accept the values of the system (Althusser, 1971, p. 133). The Dovzans, following the Unists, sustain hegemony through religion and sacred places by inventing new words, such as religion, God, gods, and the divine in a society where “no native theism or deism” exists and “god is a word without referent” (TT 102). They create an artificial cult, “God of Reason,” which has “no existence except at this tourist center [The Golden Mountain, a Corporate site for the worship of God of Reason] and in slogans and vague pronouncements of the Corporation” (TT 100).

The Corporate State also uses its media to promote the new capitalist ideals to interminably broadcast its propagandistic programs on TV and radio, which are always buzzing everywhere. To that end, “slogans carved into facades of buildings,” such as “FORWARD TO THE FUTURE. PRODUCER-CONSUMERS OF AKA MARCH TO THE STARS” (TT 7), encourage people to go forward without looking back. In fact, the State has destroyed whatever the Akans had as literature, and what has remained in the name of culture and literature is “standardized” to become propagandist, didactic, educational and political. As Suttty observes: “everything that was written in the old scripts has been destroyed, or if it exists, I don’t know what it is, because the ministry doesn’t allow access to it” (TT 10).

Tong Ov, the Hainish envoy, is truly displeased with what goes on in Aka as an unwanted and unintended result of having a relationship with the Ekumen. He sees the Ekumen indirectly responsible for all the destruction and maintains that “[r]ightly or wrongly, they [Akans] were given the blueprint for a G86” (TT 18), a Hainish jargon for a society in fast-forward industrial-technological mode, and were encouraged to imitate the advanced Ekumenical worlds without seeing the merits of their own culture. Suttty holds the view that the Akans are their own conquerors: “Bewildered by the very concept of foreignness, they let the Dovzan’s ideologues dominate and impoverish them. As the ideologues of Communo-capitalism in the twentieth century, and the zealot of Unism in her century, had dominated and impoverished the Earth” (TT 120). The Akans experience a kind of self-colonization as victims of cultural imperialism.

However, by imagining a utopian community like the Ekumen, in her criticism of cultural imperialism, not only has Le Guin underlined our problematic intercultural communications, but she has also drawn our attention to the role of the developing countries in their own impoverishment. Discussing *The Telling*, Le Guin explains that the motivation behind writing this novel was both her love for the Tao and “the silent enormity” of the destruction of Taoism in China by Chinese people themselves:

The seed of this novel lies, as often with my books, in Taoism, but this time not in ancient texts but in recent history. Chairman Mao drove Taoism as a religion outside China or underground destroying three millennia of spiritual tradition in a decade or two. Trying to grasp this silent enormity, my imagination began to displace it, to tell it as a story. And the *telling of the story* became the central image of the story itself.

(qtd. in Lindow, 2012, p. 158)

Along the same line of thought, Arturo Escobar (2012, p. 52) asserts that ideas of development, reason, and progress at times grow to be so important for the Third World countries that it becomes acceptable for their rulers to subject their populations to an “infinite variety of interventions”; to “think of themselves as inferior, underdeveloped and ignorant”; to “doubt the value of their own culture, deciding instead to pledge allegiance to the banners of reason and progress,” and finally to transform themselves into their own colonizers.

Not all the workers of the Corporation State can deny their own culture for good. Under certain circumstances, some Akans can realize their mistake of ignoring the Telling, which leads to an identity crisis, as is the case with Yara, the official Monitor who spies on Suttu. Yara, whose “face always remained troubled,” is himself a victim of “the March to the Stars.” His grandparents, with whom he was living as a child, had been arrested and later, together with other recalcitrant leaders, were stoned to death in the public square. To make matters worse, his father forced him to witness the stoning: “My father wanted me to see that they had been wrong” (TT 233). Although Yara later grew up as a qualified member of the Corporation, thanks to his father, he remained traumatized for the rest of his life: “He had never left that window looking down into the square. He was twelve years old and stood there watching for the rest of his life” (TT 233). Chasing Suttu to the mountain, Yara gets injured and is forced to stay for a while with his supposed enemies, the people who still believe in the Telling. Due to his contact with these people and Suttu, he realizes both the worth of his own culture, the Telling, and the hostility, dogmatism, and blunders of the foreigners, whom the Corporation State believes to be perfect. Suttu tells him about the destructions brought to her homeworld by the Unists, the religious fanatics mirroring the secular fundamentalist Dovzans; she confides in him and talks about her beloved, Pao, whom she lost in a terrorist attack; she warns him about “the sad and ugly truths” the Akans would find “at the end of the March to the Stars” (TT 239). By sharing grief, Suttu and Yara can connect and translate their different experiences into a common feeling: “They sat quietly. Inside the mountain, in the caves full of being. ... The silence they shared after their words was peaceful, a blessing earned” (TT 240). Through these conversations, Yara recognizes how the Dovzans have been wrong both in their relationships with the Telling and the Ekumen. However, his shame, inability to forgive himself, his “hardness” and inflexibility prevent him from negotiating identity in the marginal space, resulting in a desperate suicidal leap. Hardness is associated with death while softness promises life, as Lindow (2012, p. 169) indicates: in *Tao*, “hardness and stiffness/ go with death; / tenderness, softness, / go with life. / ... The hard and great go under. / The soft and weak stay up.”

Although the connection with the Ekumen provides Aka with a unidirectional route to material progress and dogmatism, *The Telling* does not suggest isolation or withdrawal from the international connections as the solution. It criticizes those societies which are walled in and deny any open relationship with other communities. These communities are “local,” according to Fairclough’s definition (2006, p. 25), like Suttu’s Aunty who cannot function properly in an environment other than her homeland. Worried about her Aunty, Suttu states: “Though there were plenty of Indians and Indo-Canadians here [Canada], plenty of neighbors, Aunty looked small even among them, displaced, misplaced” (TT 3). Believing that one’s own country would perform better in isolation will discourage one from transcending the borders and communicating with others. Ideas such as nationalism, localism, and ethnocentrism have been attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces, to enclose them, endow them with fixed identities and to claim them for one’s own. The hateful Unists as well as the Akans living in isolation on top of the

mountains play the role of such isolated communities in this novel. The Unists are aggressive toward all religions and cultures which do not conform to their way of life. They destroy all the books, monuments and whatever they think of as unholy. They justify attacking public places and killing people by praising them as holy acts, which “*wipe away the filth and let the Lord shine out!*” (TT 5). The Unists “hated the Ekumen and wanted to keep all the extraterrestrials off Earth” (TT 235); they are afraid of change and do not wish to connect with other worlds that think and live differently. Even when they come to Aka without informing Hain, they try to maintain a relationship based on power and make an effort to convert the Akans to their religion and world views: “They encouraged terrorism against the Pales and the ansible installations and anything else the alien demons were responsible for” (TT 235). As for the Akans on top of the mountains, they also represent “local” and closed communities. Suttu thinks that Yara had been right: “They were primitive, dirty, illiterate, ignorant, superstitious. They refused progress, hid from it, knew nothing of the March to the Stars. They hang on to their sack of bean meal” (TT 172). Sticking to their own beliefs, these conservative Akans are not willing to negotiate their identities, like “Dear Takieki” in an old story told by one of the Maz. Takieki was a lonely traveler with a sack of bean meal given to him by his mother. All along his way, he refused to part with this sack no matter how much he was offered in return. Conservative people are afraid of parting with their old cultures; they fear change, cultural instability, and confusion. Confronting other cultures will indeed result in an identity crisis, but perhaps identity is “always changing in space-time” (Tilley, 2006, p.8) and it should not be considered as “a problem to be solved. . . . Instead, the incompleteness of identity needs to be acknowledged” (Huddart, 2006, p. 6).

HYBRIDITY AND THE TELLING

To solve problems of confronting new cultures, Le Guin celebrates hybridity as the culture of our globalizing world. As discussed earlier, one’s belief in hybridity entails a belief in fluidity of all cultures. Similar to Bhabha, who argues that culture and history are never essential or innate, but always something whose apparent fixity is learned in fiction and drama, classrooms and lecture halls, Le Guin has always affirmed the fluidity and the fictive nature of cultures and history. Once more, in *The Telling*, she reveals her anti-essentialist attitude in both the culture and history of the Akan community. What Suttu calls “the Telling” is “a way of thinking and living developed and elaborated over thousands of years by the vast majority of human beings on this world” (TT 98). In fact, this body of words functions as their history, religion, culture and “perception seemed to involve description-telling about the place, or the act or the event, or the person. Talking about it, making it into a story” (TT 104). Thus, the core of their culture is fictional and unfixed. It is a collection of stories always in the process of invention, neither essential in their existence nor related to the place: “Nobody made the world, ruled the world, told the world to be. It was. It did. And human beings made it be, made it be a human world, by saying it” (TT 143). Le Guin’s awareness of the inessentiality of the national cultures allows her characters in Okzat-Ozkat to be open to the new culture and be enthusiastic to negotiate with the off-worlders. Thus, the Akan people in Okzat-Ozkat, as well as Suttu, can be considered as possible spaces where hybrid identity may dwell.

The people in Okzat-Ozkat, under the pressure of assimilation into the new world, learn the new ways, their language and adopt some of their technological innovations. Suttu notices that “the people of the old way placidly accepted new technologies and products, so long as they

worked better than the old ones and so long as using them did not require changing one's life in any important way" (TT 125). As a matter of fact, contrary to what the officials believe about the Telling, about its resistance to change and "refusing to learn anything new, keeping people poor, holding [them] back" (TT 231), as Suttu explains to Yara, the Telling does not "exclude any knowledge, or call any knowledge evil, or anything unholy" (TT 230). She continues that the reason for not including what Aka has learned in the last century from contact with other civilizations is that "the maz didn't have time to start working all that new information into the Telling before the Corporation State took over as [their] central social institution. ...[They] criminalized the Telling. Pushed it underground, where it couldn't develop and grow. Called it unholy knowledge" (TT 230). Despite the harsh and strict prohibition against the Telling, they hold meetings with the Maz secretly and talk about the forbidden poetry, philosophy and stories; they exercise their own yoga-like sport, eat their own food, and write with their own ideographic alphabets. Their refusal to assimilate completely, their efforts to maintain their cultural differences, and their "partial representation" reject the myth of inherent superiority of the Dovzans or the Ekumen, which have made the natives in Aka look different and inferior. Thus, like the colonized on Earth, they are both attracted to the new ways and repelled by them. They mimic but their mimicry comes close to mockery when they learn Dovzan language but keep the worst accent possible. It is worth noting that the idea of mimicry as mockery best works in the relationship toward the Dovzan language and there is no evidence of mockery being involved in mimicking the ways of the Ekumen.

Ironically, it is the people in Okzat-Ozkat, not Yara, who can "bargain" with the Ekumen. As Yara comments on the story of "Dear Takieki," he speculates that "Maybe he can bargain. Maybe he can give the maz some of the bean meal and keep some, and take just a few of the gold coins. Then he could go on walking, and still buy food to eat when winter comes" (TT 251). Contrary to both conservatives and the assimilative Dovzans, the people in Okzat-Ozkat "give some of the bean meal and keep some"; they copy technological ideals of the Ekumen and at the same time make an effort to keep their past and their own culture alive. Consequently, they are neither identical versions of the old Aka nor exact copies of the new culture: They have created a space apart from previous cultures, "a Third Space," resulting from negotiation with the Dovzans and the Ekumen. As a consequence, their hybrid identities are incomplete, discontinuous and always changing, which provide the conditions under which the hierarchy of one over the other is challenged. Hence, they are not passive victims, but survivors. From the very beginning, they see the presence of Suttu on their planet as an excellent opportunity to protect the Telling, so they freely communicate with her and tell her any information she desires. They pin all their hopes on her and take the chance of negotiating with Suttu as an appropriate occasion to save their cultural differences, to save the Telling for their children (TT 253); consequently, their ability to recognize change enables them to survive and gives voice to their otherwise silent presence. To this end, they even plan to use the Ekumen technology to preserve the Telling in computers (TT 213). In return, to support the people of Okzat-Ozkat, Suttu and the other envoys decide to put a price on all the information the Ekumen have freely given and would give to the Akans. Accordingly, the Corporation State is obliged to preserve "the books in the Lap of Silong [the biggest library for the Telling], all the books, everywhere, and all the people who read the books. The whole system. The Telling. They'll have to decriminalise it" (TT 254). Now that the people of Okzat-Ozkat have been successful in establishing a proper relationship with Suttu, they can move further toward the culture represented by the Ekumen and bring more of the new culture into the Telling. Similarly, if the governments apply a more relaxed strategy and

“encourage a more inclusionary and integrative political system,” the ethnic minorities would not counterattack against the mainstream culture and would be more responsive (Keyman and Icduygu, 2005, p. 233).

Not only the people of Okzat-Ozkat but also Sutti enjoys a hybrid identity. Being already a hybrid, her identity becomes even more hybridized after meeting the Akans. Being a historian and a trained Ekumen envoy, Sutti has gone to many places in Terra before coming to Aka. She was born in India and, under the Unists, she and her family moved to Canada. Later, she went to Chile, where she could continue her studies to be an envoy. Therefore, she has confronted new cultures all her life and her worldview has been shaped under their influences. She can read and write several languages, including Hindu, English, Hainish, and Dovzan. She had also studied Rangma before coming to Aka, but her knowledge was limited until she established a friendly relationship with the people of Okzat-Ozkat.

At the beginning of the novel, Sutti is represented as a timid, insecure and self-deprecating woman mourning the loss of her love, Pao. As Lindow (2012, p. 158) suggests, “[i]n Chinese ‘Pao’ is the same as ‘Tao.’ Pao means ‘something of value’ or ‘a little gift’ but more importantly it refers to the Tao Te Ching. ...Sutti is a character who has lost the loving center of her life, Pao and Tao.” Bernardo and Murphy (2004, p. 81) argue that if Taoism is all about balance and harmony, the loss of Pao means the loss of balance in Sutti’s life. So, “the personal arc of the narrative is Sutti’s Taoist search for balance in her life.” Explaining to Yara the meaning of her name, Sutti states that, as a young girl, she understood that Sutti was named for Sati or Shakti, the Goddess, who married Shiva, against her father’s will. However, she “didn't *do* anything, she just *died*” when her father insulted Shiva terribly (*TT* 227). Sutti calls her a “stupid silly woman” and decides “if I had to be Sutti, it was all right, so long as I could be Shiva too” (*TT* 228). She desires to be like Lord Shiva; “the greatest dancer in the universe,” who “dances the worlds into being and out of being” (*TT* 228). Nevertheless, for a long time, Sutti lacks the balance required for such an ecstatic dance since she is overwhelmed with anger and her mind is preoccupied with the Unists’ terrorist attacks and the loss of Pao.

On her journey to Okzat-Ozkat and later to Mount Silong, as a result of communicating with people of the Telling, Sutti matures and becomes stronger and much more confident. Now she is ready to understand the meaning of her name and fulfill her wish. She realizes that “Sati is Shiva, and Shiva is Sati. You are the lover and the griever. You are the anger. You are the dance” (*TT* 212). She understands the purpose of her mission: “[s]he had come to Aka to learn how to sing this world’s tune, to dance its dance; and at last, she thought, away from the city’s endless noise, she was beginning to hear the music and to learn how to move to it” (*TT* 91). On the way to Mount Silong, she can reconcile with the death of Pao; she accepts her absence and lets her body feel the warmth of Kieri’s, a young woman accompanying them on this pilgrimage. In addition, she comes to believe in her abilities and power as a responsible envoy capable of saving the Telling by helping the people of Okzat-Ozkat negotiate with both the foreigners and the Corporate State. Excited by the Telling’s undogmatic and unbiased nature, its tolerance toward other ways of life, and its thought-provoking stories, Sutti calls on all her courage to begin bargaining with the Corporate State for the sake of Yara and Pao. The memory of Yara and Pao, the victims of secular and religious fanaticism, urge Sutti to cooperate with the people of Okzat-Ozkat in saving the more tolerant Telling (*TT* 264). As emphasized throughout the novel, the Telling is based on achieving the right equilibrium between the pairs of opposites and there is “[n]o hierarchy of Nature and Supernatural. ...Dark/Light, Evil/Good, or Body/Soul” (*TT* 95) in this system of thought. Similarly, through exchange and interaction between different cultures,

the hybrid identities reach harmony and a balance in the Third Space, where there is no longer the binary opposition between us and them, but a hybrid identity in the liminal space.

CONCLUSION

In the Hainish cycle, in general, and in *The Telling*, in particular, Le Guin becomes more responsive to the challenges of intercultural communications at the age of globalization. She reflects the struggle between the local and the global forces in the clash between the Akans and the Ekumen community. By presenting the Ekumens as a utopian community with the aim of establishing connection with others without overpowering them, Le Guin draws the attention of her readers to the threats of cultural imperialism, assimilation and unjust power relations present among the Westerners and the less economically powerful countries. With terrorism on the rise since September 11, 2000, when *The Telling* first appeared in hardcover, the pressures of cultural imperialism and assimilation are felt even more, hence, revisiting stories, like *The Telling* which encourages hybridity and promotes indigenous peoples' interactive pluralism despite homogenizing effects of globalization, could be rewarding at present. As noted earlier, this novel suggests that besides Westerners, the people of the developing countries by experiencing feelings of inferiority are responsible for the establishment of unjust power relationships. The Dovzans, who mistakenly preferred the foreigners' automatizing, dogmatic advanced technology to their own nature-harmonious culture, turned out to be their own colonizers by accelerating the annihilation of their local culture.

Against the homogenizing power of the Dovzans, *The Telling* also tells the story of a society that both changes and maintains a connection with its past as a place. The people of Okzat-Ozkat negotiate their identities in the face of worldwide modernization and the globalization of culture and economy. Contrary to the nationalists' isolationist belief in fixed identities in enclosed spaces, Le Guin's novel presents a belief in the fluidity of all cultures and provides a model of globalization based on hybridity. Shaped in the Third Space, hybridity becomes the narrative of exchange between disparate cultures. In this liminal space, by simultaneously practicing the Telling and connecting to the Ekumen, the subjugated others in Okzat-Ozkat can perform a feat and resist the Dovzan's imperial power. Furthermore, through interaction with the people of Okzat-Ozkat and for the sake of Tao and Yara, Sutti matures to be a more balanced, responsible envoy, who at last learns how to dance to the tune of this new liminal space. Thus, both the people of Okzat-Ozkat and Sutti, as hybrid identities, benefit from interacting with the other and devise new identities for themselves in the third space. Similarly, the marginalized people of the developing countries, the indigenous people of the developed countries, and the immigrants living in diaspora can preserve their local culture despite their interaction with the dominant global culture.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sahar Jamshidian is currently an assistant professor at Malayer University, Iran. She is interested in cultural studies, ethics and the relationship between self and the other in both postcolonial and feminist contexts. Her recent publication is "The Chronotope of Third Space in Bharati Mukherjee's 'The Management of Grief'" published in *Cogent Arts & Humanities*.

Farideh Pourgiv is professor emerita of English Literature at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Iran and the editor of *Persian Literary Studies Journals*. She has contributed to *World Novel*, (2008) *Alice in A World of Wonderlands* (2015). She has also published many papers and supervised MA and PhD dissertations.