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When the Subaltern Speaks: Violence, Hybridity, and Decolonization in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest (1972)

Hussein Hasan Halmoosh [1]✉ 0009-0002-9541-1090 **R. S. Az-Zubaidy** [2] 0000-0003-0233-0137

1. Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, Wasit University, Iraq.E-mail: srt20232024.hussein@uowasit.edu.iq
2. Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, Wasit University, Iraq.E-mail: thrashid@uowasit.edu.iq

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Ursula K. Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest (1972) as a speculative representation of colonialism and resistance. The novella portrays a brutal encounter between Terran colonizers and the indigenous Athsheans, where colonialist exploitation threatens their identity, culture, and peaceful nature. Although existing scholarship on Le Guin's work has explored ecological and feminist dimensions, this paper fills a gap in knowledge by examining other aspects, namely, colonial violence, dehumanization, and the process of decolonization. Through thematic and close textual analysis and drawing on the decolonial thought of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, the postcolonial critique of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, and Amílcar Cabral's modes of resistance, this paper reflects on the traditional colonial dynamics to subvert its claim of progress and expose it as an enduring system of exploitation. It further examines resistance as a multi-layered phenomenon that both challenges and replicates colonial power dynamics. While portraying how hybrid identity enables new forms of agency within the process of decolonization, this paper contends that colonial domination goes beyond physical violence and oppression to encompass epistemic violence, cultural transformation, and deformed identity. Ultimately, it underscores the continuing relevance of Le Guin's novella in critiquing imperial legacies through its imaginative futuristic context that transcends traditional colonial structures.

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Introduction

Ursula Kroeber Le Guin (1929-2018) was an American author, poet, novelist, literary critic, and children's literature writer, but she was mostly recognized for her contribution as a science fiction writer. Although she attended Radcliffe College and later Columbia University for her master's degree, her passion and literary interest extend beyond academia into advocating for feminism, anarchism, and environmentalism, exploring imaginative, and contemporary issues. Her early works display her profound engagement with Taoist philosophy, gender dynamics, and social structures. Among her most notable publications are her highly regarded translation of Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way (1997), as well as her prize-winning novels, such as A Wizard of Earthsea (1968), The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), and The Dispossessed (1974). In 2003, Le Guin was honored as a Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writers Association for her critical works and essays that reshaped perspectives on science fiction and fantasy, positioning her legacy as a revolutionary and influential voice in the development of contemporary literature (Bernardo and Murphy 1-5).

Le Guin's novella The Word for World is Forest, which won the Hugo Award in 1973 for Best Novella, stands as a critical exploration of colonialism, violence, and environmental destruction set within her Hainish universe, also known as the "Hainish Cycle." This futuristic fictional universe consists of a series of stories, novels, and short stories, including Rocannon's World (1966), Planet of Exile (1966), and City of Illusions (1967). Le Guin's works fundamentally transformed the landscape of modern sci-fi by imagining a world of human-inhabited planets originally seeded by Hain , whose diverse societies, shaped by evolutionary processes and deliberate genetic engineering, serve as a lens through which she integrates certain qualities of human nature (Klein 86).

Drawing inspiration from contemporary conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the novella showcases Le Guin's concerns about ecological destruction, colonial exploitation, and militarism, presenting them as a warning about the future of the planet as Earth's resources have been worn out and exploited.

The novella portrays the Terrans establishing a logging colony on Athshe, renamed New Tahiti (or World 41), exploiting its forest and subjugating the indigenous Athsheans as an inferior species fit for forced labor. Captain Davidson embodies this violent colonial mindset, having raped and killed an Athshean woman named Thele, Selver's wife, an act that catalyzes Selver's transformation from a non-violent Athshean into a leader of militant resistance. Selver's change started after this incident when he was taken by Raj Lyubov, a Terran anthropologist who befriended and taught him about Terran life, language, and nature. Selver's experience ignites a cultural rapture as the Athsheans begin to revere him as a godlike figure and embrace violence to expel their oppressors. Meanwhile, Lyubov's research on the non-violent nature of the Athsheans is questioned following the uprising, prompting the League of All Worlds envoys, Mr. Lepennon and Mr. Or, to investigate. Lyubov revelations of the Terrans atrocities encourage a decision of the colony's closure. However, it will take three years for the full evacuation, as the planet's colony status remains in political flux. The Athsheans burned down Centerville, and Lyubov died while attempting to rescue a Terran woman, who was killed in an effort to eradicate the Terrans' ability for future colonization. Davidson, refusing to surrender, murders his commander and attempts to exterminate the Athsheans but fails. Selver exiles him to Dump Island, declaring that while Davidson taught him murder, he will now

teach him peace. At the novella's sobering conclusion, Selver acknowledges that while the Terrans will depart, the Athsheans have been irreversibly changed.

While the novella has received substantial critical attention across various frameworks such as ecocriticism, environmentalism, and feminism, fewer studies have explored its engagement with epistemic violence, hybridity as a form of empowerment, and resistance from a decolonial perspective. David Barnhill, in his essay "Spirituality and Resistance: Ursula Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest and the Film Avatar," offers a comparative analysis of Le Guin's novella and James Cameron's Avatar, highlighting the shared themes of colonial exploitation, environmental destruction, and indigenous resistance. He notes that these parallels offer "a radical critique because it exposes a fundamental way of thinking and system of values that has dominated the world for centuries" (488). Barnhill's analysis emphasizes the role of indigenous spirituality as an integral part of their resistance, particularly in the Athsheans' transformation from pacifism to violence. His reading resonates with this study's focus on speculative representation of colonialism and resistance. However, Barnhill's scope is limited to a comparative thematic analysis and does not consider the dehumanization and cultural deformation that precede the Athsheans' violent struggle, which echoes the same colonial logics imposed upon them. This study addresses these limitations by situating the novella within a wider perspective of postcolonial and decolonial frameworks.

Sneharika Roy's study, "Capitalism, Eco-socialism, and Reparative Readers in Ursula Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest," explores Le Guin's critique of industrial capitalism and colonialism through the contrast between Terran violence and Athshean eco-socialism. Roy

further suggests that the novella anticipates Eve Sedgwick's "paranoid" and "reparative" reading approaches, arguing that the novella is an "uncanny prefiguration of paranoid practices" in which "Le Guin shows how the way out of the paranoid clash of civilisations can be found in two 'reparative' reading stances" (447). The first one involves Selver's reinterpretation and transformation of elements from the oppressor's culture, while the second is reflected in the Terrans' elevation of detached observation over direct intervention, treating their noninvolvement as a moral value. Roy's reading is significantly valuable to this study inquiry, as she asserts that "despite its traditional emphasis on science and technology, science fiction can be a powerful medium to express environmental concerns" (446). However, Roy's analysis is limited by its sole examination of capitalism and eco-socialism without addressing the broader implications of futuristic colonialism and decolonial thought that this study seeks to explore.

Mike Ryder, in his study "Ethics and Autonomy in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Word for World Is Forest," examines the novella through ethical and structuralist frameworks, arguing that Captain Davidson is both a product and an agent of state violence: "Davidson's behavior represents a critical paradox … he is a prosthesis of the state" (288), shaped by what Le Guin terms "irresponsible autonomy." Drawing on Derrida's criticism in his work 1992, The Gift of Death, Ryder contends that true ethical responsibility is based on the subject's awareness of morality and, irreplaceably, that responsibility "demands irreplaceable singularity. Yet only death or rather the apprehension of death can give this irreplaceability, and it is only on the basis of it that one can speak of a responsible subject, of the soul as conscience of self" (293). Thus,

Davidson's violence is not merely criminal but also ontological, constructed by the military apparatus that destabilized his moral subjectivity. Ryder also draws parallels between Davidson's character and Lt. Cally , using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "bureaucratic perversion" to illustrate how state systems deflect responsibility by blaming individual militaries to preserve their legitimacy. His analysis supports the study's objectives by showcasing how the novella's speculative narrative critiques not only colonial exploitation but also the moral collapse of the so-called civilized and rational colonizer. This study expands Ryder's insights by engaging more directly with the colonized degeneration into barbarism, the colonized hybridity, and decolonization.

Aleena Paul and Swathi S. Krishna, in their study "Violence and Taoist Ethics in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest," offer philosophical and ethical consideration of the novella's portrayal of violence, examining it through the lens of Taoist non-dualism. Drawing upon theorists like Galtung and Arendt in addition to Taoist ethics, the authors contend that Le Guin's novella transcends the good and evil binaries by exploring violence as a necessary response to an existential threat that faces the Athsheans, as they write: "Athsheans resorting to violent measures to resist colonial greed and exploitation demonstrates how violence, every so often, proves to be essential for a species' survival" (1). Furthermore, the study links colonial exploitation to environmental degradation, conveying how Terran violence subverts the Athsheans' harmony and ultimately framing violence as a restorative force that aligns with Taoist notions of balance and the unity of opposites. As they note that "from time-to-time violence turns to be the sole means of self-defence for persecuted communities…attesting to the author's Taoist belief in the unity of opposites in nature 'the interdependence and balance among all

entities''' (6). Paul and Krishna study enriches the premise of speculative fiction in its examination of the ethico-moral intricacies of violence and peace in the novella informed by Le Guin's Taoist worldview. However, its emphasis on Taoist ethics overlooks the postcolonial and decolonial aspects of the narrative.

Additionally, other studies such as Crowther and Mraović, "The Word for World is Not Forest" (2006), Dunning and Woodrow, "The Word for World is Forest — Ghosts in the Machine" (2009), Ateş, "An Ecocritical Reading of The Word for World is Forest" (2017), Soleimani et al., "A Study of Ecological Ethics in Ursula Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest" (2024), Kyungok Kim, "The Anthropocene Crisis and the Ecological Dream: Focusing on 'The Word That Means the World is Forest'" (2024), and Medlicott's, "Use Your "Mother Tongue" to Change the World in Advance: An Ecofeminist Reading of Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest on the Occasion of its 50th Anniversary" (2024), offer insightful, philosophical, ecocritical, environmental, and feminist perspectives on the broader field of Le Guin studies. However, they do not primarily engage with the novella from a decolonial framework, which this study employs to examine colonial barbarism, epistemic violence, hybridity as a form of empowerment, and resistance within a speculative colonial context.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on postcolonial and decolonial frameworks to examine The Word for World is Forest as a speculative critique of colonialism and resistance. It integrates the insights of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and Amilcar Cabral, applying them through thematic and close textual analyses. In Discourse

on Colonialism, Césaire proclaims that colonization "works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism" (35). Through unmasking the so-called "civilizing mission" as a façade, Césaire frames colonial rhetoric as a project of barbarism and dehumanization. This inherent violence resonates with Fanon's view of colonialism as a system sustained by force, which cannot be dismantled through a reformist process. He contends in The Wretched of the Earth that "decolonization is always a violent event" and that "it is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject" (1-2).

Additionally, Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak? extends this critique, revealing how colonial authority enacts epistemic violence as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (280-281), thus silencing indigenous voices and obstructing the articulation of agency within the dominant space. This silencing forces the colonized to navigate within the imposed colonial sphere, as he adapts to its terms in a process that inevitably reshapes and deforms identity. It is in this space of negotiation that Bhabha's concept of hybridity comes into play, elucidating the ambivalent cultural interactions situated within this "third space" (53), indicating how identities can be subverted, replicated, or reshaped into new forms of agency.

These theoretical foundations converge in Cabral's account of cultural, political, economic and armed resistance in his essay "Analysis of a Few Types of Resistance," which articulates that decolonization demands the dismantling of all dimensions of colonial domination. Accordingly, the study adopts a theoretical literary analysis to illuminate the colonizer's moral decay, the epistemic dimensions of colonial domination, the

deformation of indigenous identity, and the decolonial process depicted in the narrative. The primary objective is to answer how the novella depicts colonialism's entanglement with colonial barbarism, hybridity and indigenous identity, and how resistance, while necessary to achieve liberation, inevitably reshapes the identity of the oppressed. Ultimately, the paper positions Le Guin's text as a critique of decolonization, revealing it as a process that entails not only political and economic upheaval but also profound cultural and psychological struggles.

Discussion

Colonial Barbarism, Subalternity and the Enabling Power of Hybridity

The Word for World is Forest reimagines a speculative representation of colonialism, illustrating how its structures and dynamics of domination, characterized by hypocrisy, dehumanization, and cultural distortion, continue to persist in altered yet unrecognizable forms. In a parallel critique, Aimé Césaire, in Discourse on Colonialism, exposes the brutal realities behind colonial rhetoric, arguing that its justifications were never about civilizing or enlightening missions but were instead primarily driven by economic and political interests, as he clarifies, stating:

To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law… the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies (32-33).

Similarly, Le Guin's novella frames the colonial power dynamics on planet Athshe as a mission to extract resources for Earth's needs. As Earth

becomes a desolate land lacking any natural regions, Kees, the colony ecologist, warns about the unsystematic natural exploitation of Athshe, stating that this planet will turn out just like Earth, "A desert of cement" (Le Guin: 5) . Also, Captain Davidson considers this planet "a better world than worn-out Earth. And it would be his world. For that's what Don Davidson was, way down deep inside him: a world-tamer" (3-4). This portrayal of Davidson as a "world tamer" embodies the traditional rhetoric of colonial dominance: "We're here, now; and so, this world's going to go our way. Like it or not, it's a fact you have to face; it happens to be the way things are" (4-5). Davidson reflects the same authoritarian justifications used by the traditional colonizers. Davidson's belief in the superiority of the human settlers echoes the white men's colonial attitude that Césaire condemns as "barbarism" camouflaged as progress.

Robin D. G. Kelley extends Césaire's proclamation in A Poetics of Anticolonialism when he notes, "Césaire demonstrates how colonialism works to 'decivilize' the colonizer: torture, violence, race hatred, and immorality constitute a dead weight on the so-called civilized, pulling the master class deeper and deeper into the abyss of barbarism" (8-9). In the novella, Le Guin portrays the Terrans' attitude towards the Athsheans through brutal and violent actions. For instance, Davidson, along with some of his comrades, attacks an Athshean village, describing the Athshean's eradication like hunting rats, but "there was more thrill to it; the creechies were a lot bigger than rats, and you knew they could fight back" (85). Their degeneration deepens even further as they rationalize the killing of all the Athshean females, believing, "These things might be built like human women, but they weren't human, and it was better to get your kicks from killing them, and stay clean" (86). Davidson's character conveys the deep decivilized status the colonizers have degenerated into,

as reflected in his words, "The fact is, the only time a man is really and entirely a man is when he's just had a woman or just killed another man… Even if the creechies weren't actually men" (81). This ultimately demonstrates how colonialism oppresses the colonized and decivilizes the colonizers.

However, this barbaric downfall of the colonizers is profoundly associated with the ideological framework that simultaneously dehumanizes the colonized. Frantz Fanon, in his work Black Skin, White Masks, argues that the colonial ideology dehumanizes the colonized while disguising its barbarism in the camouflage of progress, viewing "the black man as the missing link in the slow evolution from ape to man" (1). According to Fanon, this dehumanization is sustained by an ideological and psychological mechanism that allows the colonizers to convince themselves that the colonized are inherently savage, backward, and servile: "He has no culture, no civilization, and no 'long historical past'" (17). Captain Davidson, an agent of colonial rule, embodies the role of the civilized, rational, and progressive colonizer, but his actions and words prove the opposite. In his worldview, civilization and progress come along with domination and control. In a conversation with the camp foreman, Davidson never acknowledges the Athsheans as a human species and never sees or regards their forced labor as a form of slavery. Instead, he perceives them as inferiors and animals, as he says, "'In that Applied History course…, it said that slavery never worked. It was uneconomical.' 'Right, but this isn't slavery, Ok baby. Slaves are humans. When you raise cows, you call that slavery? No. And it works.'" (10). The barbaric actions, such as raping and killing Selver's wife, Thele, the persistent exploitation of the Athshe natural resources, and the extermination of the native

humans, reflect Davidson's perception that they are not humans or even subhumans but rather like animals. This mindset emphasizes Césaire's argument that the colonial practice decivilizes the colonizers and also reinforces his condemnation that this progress is only a camouflage for barbarism.

Moreover, Le Guin illustrates in many occurrences that the Athsheans are viewed by Terrans the same way a white man looks at a Black man. Firstly, the colonizer regards the colonized's physical difference as a sign of inferiority. For example, the camp foreman, in his conversation with Davidson, explains that, "They aren't worth the trouble, Captain. Damn sulky little green bastards, they won't fight, won't work, won't nothing. Except give me the pip" (11). Secondly, the foreman relegates the natives to a mere object or in the same category as animals: "These things weren't even that highly developed, they were just about like snakes or rats" (80). Finally, Le Guin's use of the terms "Creechies" and "Athsheans" echoes Fanon's reference to the terminology the colonizers use when referring to Black people such as "'Dirty nigger!" or simply "Look! A Negro!'" (89), which articulates psychological violence in addition to racial inferiority. However, both sets of words were used to dehumanize and strip the colonized of individual identity, reducing them to something less than humans and much like animals.

Le Guin uses the word "Creechie" whenever a colonizer talks about the Athsheans. However, Dr. Lyubov, even though he is one of the colonizers, stands for the Athsheans and never uses it, as in his statement, "We have killed, raped, dispersed, and enslaved the native humans, destroyed their communities, and cut down their forests. It wouldn't be surprising if they'd decided that we are not human" (62). While colonizers use epistemic violence in labeling the Athsheans as "Creechies" to justify subjugation,

erasure, and slavery, Lyubov resists this rhetoric by rejecting the use of the derogatory term and consistently recognizing the Athsheans humanity. Lyubov's action can be understood through James C. Scott's concept of the "hidden transcripts." In Domination and the Arts of Resistance, Scott proclaims that such acts, often expressed through language, silence, and behavior, form a counter-discourse that challenges the dominant power's legitimacy: "The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript" (5-6). Accordingly, Lyubov's "offstage" forms of resistance to colonial rhetoric, which are based on his direct encounters with the colonized, convey how his ethical choices are influential in opposing, if not undermining, the colonial project.

Although Lyubov operates within the colonial dynamics, his linguistic choice is not passive but an act of resistance from within. This becomes clear in his confrontation with the Terran ecologist, Old Gosse, who cynically remarks, "You know the people you're studying are going to get plowed under, and probably wiped out… A biologist studying a rat colony doesn't start reaching in and rescuing pet rats of his that get attacked, you know" (105). Lyubov's response confirms his resistance position: "A rat can be a pet, but not a friend… I like Selver, respect him; saved him; suffered with him; fear him. Selver is my friend" (105). In that sense, Lyubov's resistance manifests through friendship, language, and moral actions, making it his own hidden transcript within the colonial enterprise. A subversive, subtle counter-narrative that both acknowledges the agency of the Athsheans and internally destabilizes the colonial ideological foundation.

At the heart of the novella's portrayal of colonial oppression lies the question of whether the Athsheans will be compelled into adaptation that reshapes their identity as a means of survival to resist their oppressors. In doing so, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's premise in Can the Subaltern Speak? offers an intriguing perspective to examine the Athsheans as subaltern subjects. Spivak argues that the colonial project denies the subaltern the possibility of speaking for themselves, not only through literal silencing but also through epistemic structures that erase their subjectivity. They are not solely unheard but also overwritten by dominant narratives. Spivak regards this project as "…asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity" (281). While Spivak emphasizes that the subaltern is silenced and unheard through epistemic violence in the colonial narrative, Le Guin's narrative portrays Selver as a subaltern who is provided with a voice. Lyubov's relationship with Selver suggests an attempt to acknowledge the Athsheans as a human species, challenging the very rhetoric that allows their oppression: "The friendship between them was too deep to be touched by moral doubt. They had worked very hard together; they had taught each other, in rather more than the literal sense, their languages. They had spoken without reserve" (94). As a result, through Lyubov's recognition of Selver's humanity and his rejection of accepting the colonial discourse even in the use of the derogatory term "Creechies," he challenges the epistemic violence Spivak indicates in her study.

Moreover, the Athsheans are depicted as a peaceful society in which concepts such as murder, violence, rape, oppression, and domination are absent from their cultural framework. Attributing this to lack of comprehension would buttress the ideological aspect of colonization that dehumanizes the colonized. On the contrary, it is due to their deep mystical

and natural connection to their forest planet that nurtures this cultural and behavioral disposition, which contrasts with the Terrans' harsh and colonial worldview. This viewpoint is revealed by Dr Lyubov during a discussion he has with Mr. Lepennon. Relying on his years of studying the Athsheans, he concludes that they "use a kind of ritualised singing to replace physical combat" (60). Reflecting on the day when Selver attacked Davidson, Lyubov further notes, "until day before yesterday. Rape, violent, assault, and murder virtually don't exist among them. There are accidents, of course. And there are psychotics. Not many of the latter" (61). Lyubov's words assert the peaceful nature of the Athsheans and affirm that violence is alien to their culture.

It is worth noting that Lyubov's above statement conveys a gradual understanding of the Athsheans relying on his studies and also his encounter with Selver. Responding to Lepennon's inquiry whether the Athsheans are carnivorous and hunt animals, Lyubov affirms this and asserts that the Athsheans are "A human society with an effective war-barrier!" (61) Lyubov adds that they are "a static, stable, uniform society" which "You might say that like the forest they live in, they've attained a climax state", but this does not "imply that they're incapable of adaptation" (61-62). Lyubov's perception of the Athsheans discloses the impact of the colonized on his earlier perception of the Athsheans, like those of other Terrans, as being ignorant, uncivilized, and dehumanized. While indicating Spivak's claim that, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (28), this paper reveals how that very perception is challenged through its exploration of Lyubov's encounter with Selver, who articulates the Athsheans' resistance and asserts their agency.

In response to the colonial claim of the colonized's impossibility to speak, Le Guin's novella delineates Selver's transformation from a muted subaltern into one who is empowered with a voice, though not without consequences. Firstly, his interactions with Lyubov broadened his understanding of the Terrans' perceptions and concepts. Although these are unfamiliar concepts within his worldview, as he states, "The one who taught me said that they kill one another, in quarrels, and also in groups, like ants fighting. I haven't seen that" (33), and further, "I don't know. Do men kill men, except in madness? Does any beast kill its own kind? Only the insects. These yumens kill us as lightly as we kill snakes" (33). This attempt of Selver to comprehend Terrans' cruelty in his own terms signals the emergence of a critical voice. Secondly, while speaking to one of the Athshean elders named Berre, who pities the Terrans and refers to them as "Poor ugly things—great naked spiders they are, ugh!" (137). Berre's words suggest that the Athsheans see the Terrans not only as violent but also as irrational and spiritually degraded. The above displays the gradual accumulation of knowledge the Athsheans have about the barbarity of their colonizers. However, Selver's reply to the elder that "They are men, men, like us, men" (137), demonstrates his internal transformation, as his understanding of the Terran's concepts becomes more complex and nuanced. Selver's progression from a muted subaltern to later a resistance leader indicates his ability to speak, which is developed through his encounter with Lyubov. Thus, Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot speak is not because it is impossible but rather because any attempt is inevitably mediated, appropriated, and reshaped by the dominant discourse.

Moreover, although this transformation often signifies ambiguity or compromise, in Selver's case it outlines his acts of resistance, as it is

shaped by the very forces he seeks to dismantle. In doing so, this complex configuration in Selver's identity can be illuminated through Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity. In The Location of Culture, Bhabha argues that the colonial interactions are not simply a one-sided imposition by the colonizer upon the colonized. Instead, these encounters are dynamic, ambivalent, and shared, as both identities are influenced and transformed through continuous cultural negotiation, as a result, a new meaning emerges. This hybridization, or "The production of meaning" (53), occurs within what Bhabha calls the "Third space" (53), a liminal zone where cultural meaning is continually negotiated. As Bhabha explains, "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal… It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (159). Selver's identity, shaped by the intersection of Athshean (colonized) and Terran (colonizer) frameworks, becomes a vivid manifestation of this hybridity. His exposure to Terran's thoughts, especially his time with Lyubov, enabled him to comprehend and adopt what was once alien or foreign to the Athshean society, notably, the violence as a means of resistance. While Selver is not part of the colonial authority, his hybrid identity is part of it, as it is shaped by the exposure to the Terrans' language, ideology, and violence. Accordingly, Selver's hybrid identity can be understood as a form of empowerment that has the potential to destabilize the colonial authority. In doing so, Selver's transformation becomes a critical site of resistance, also empowered by hybridity, he gains the ability to confront, destabilize, and ultimately dismantle Terran colonial domination.

Bhabha further explains, "Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence" (163). Hybridity, then, does not just disrupt the colonial dynamics but also exposes its vulnerability and internal fracture (as in Lyubov's position). Furthermore, Bhabha describes hybridity as "a (strategic) device in a specific colonial engagement, an appurtenance of authority" (163), positioning it as a mode of resistance that transforms the colonized position of oppression into one of empowerment and authority. However, while Selver ultimately speaks, his speech, using the colonizer's language, is shaped by the very colonial dynamics that once silenced it. Indeed, this is part of the colonial process where the colonized are compelled to communicate using the colonizer's language rather than theirs. Selver's resistance, though powerful, is yet mediated by mimicry and entangled in the logic of the oppressor. Selver's character thus embodies the paradox of the subaltern, as he speaks, but only through the frameworks that once denied him speech. To conclude, the novella shows that colonialism acts as a force that simultaneously barbarizes the colonizers, brutalizes the colonized, and deforms indigenous identity through cultural collisions, ultimately exposing the cultural and psychological costs borne by all involved.

Exploring Decolonization Through Cabralian Modes of Resistance

In the novella, resistance takes shape through Selver's hybrid identity, which emerges from his exposure to both the Athsheans and Terrans' cultural frameworks. This hybridity empowers Selver to lead the Athsheans' revolt and bring an end to the Terran's colonial rule. Yet, the form of resistance he adopts, the one that includes violence and mimicry of the colonizers, results in a cultural rupture. While it empowers the Athsheans, it also subverts the foundation of their peaceful society,

suggesting that the path to liberation is not without cultural consequences. In that respect, Amílcar Cabral's 1974 essay, "Analysis of a Few Types of Resistance," offers a solid ground to examine how The Word for World is Forest portrays forms of resistance. Cabral presents four forms of resistance: cultural, political, economic, and armed resistance. Through these forms, Cabral advocates that true liberation is not just about expelling the colonial powers but also about transforming culture itself into a weapon of resistance that empowers the colonized in their struggle against oppression. Dan Wood, in "Imbrications of Coloniality: An Introduction to Cabralist Critical Theory in Relation to Contemporary Struggles," explains that Cabral views resistance not merely as a reactionary, pacifist, or reformist response to imperialism but as a broader revolutionary course that includes cultural, armed, economic, and political aspects that are fused in the process of decolonization. (47). In that sense, resistance for Cabral is not just a mere rejection of the colonial rule but a complex, multi-layered process that seeks to dismantle the colonial structures that continue to shape and deform the life and culture of the colonized societies.

Wood explains that, "Cultural resistance proves fundamental insofar as a decolonial revolution must draw from local cultural resources to forge a new (national) consciousness" (47). In Le Guin's narrative, the Athshean's resistance to the Terrans takes shape in early stages, even before Selver's revolt. The Athsheans, in a form of cultural resistance, cling to their tradition and cultural heritage that is exemplified in their "dreaming" culture, which serves as a fundamental part of their identity. Lyubov understands from Selver that dreaming stands for "the Athshean significance of the word 'dream,' which was also the word for 'root,' and

so hand him the key of the kingdom of the forest people" (100). For the Athsheans, dreaming is a practice that gives them sanity and harmony with the natural world. Dreaming plays a crucial role in their culture, "to balance your sanity not on the razor's edge of reason but on the double support, the fine balance, of reason and dream" (99). And without dreaming, "So many of the men became groggy, confused, withdrawn, even catatonic. Woman, bewildered and abased, behaved with the sullen listlessness of the newly enslaved" (99). Rooted in their identity and dreams as a form of cultural resistance, they lay the foundation for their initial uprising through Selver's transformation into a dreamer or a "Sha'ab" , establishing this new consciousness.

It is worth noting that Le Guin's portrayal of the Athsheans "dreaming" invites comparison with the Aboriginal peoples' concept of "dreamtime" or "dreaming," which, in their traditions, refers to the spiritual and cosmological era of creation. Although Le Guin does not explicitly allude to Aboriginal tradition, the thematic resonance between the two proposes a comparable structuring of cultural and cosmological meaning. Furthermore, "In the Dreamtime, the natural world—animals, trees, plants, hills, rocks, waterholes, rivers—were created by spiritual beings/ancestors. The stories of their creation are the basis of Aboriginal lore and culture" ("Dreamtime and Dreaming," par. 3). Dreaming is a structuring force that links the Aboriginals to their land, ancestry, and meaning. Toni Swain (1993), in his work A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being, explains that dreamtime is not defined by linear temporality but through the sacred continuity that is rooted in the land "The words that I find most applicable in English are Abiding Events. Collectively, I suggest these form an Abiding Law… the true significance of the concept behind the word is not temporal but

spatial" (22). For Swain, dreaming is a form of Aboriginal ontology, in which "Abiding Events" create and sustain all aspects of culture, law, life, and meaning. Likewise, the dreaming of Athsheans governs their ethical conduct, moral lines, ecological balance, and social harmony.

A dreamer or a god in the Athshean culture is someone who introduces new knowledge or experience to their society. However, Selver is a different kind of god or dreamer because the change he introduces (violence) is unfamiliar, unprecedent, and irreversible, "Selver was indeed a gifted interpreter, but that gift had found expression only through the fortuity of a truly foreign language having been brought into his world" (106). Selver, as established earlier, is a hybrid subject who delivers a new meaning, altering in that process the Athshean culture: "Selver had brought a new word into the language of his people. He had done a new deed. The word, the deed, murder. Only a god could lead so great a newcomer as Death across the bridge between the worlds" (106-107). Through his journey across the Athshean communities, "He had gone from city to city speaking to the people of the forest, telling them the new thing, waking them from the dream into the world" (116). Selver not only condemns the Terrans' brutality and atrocities but also transforms the collective trauma into a mobilizing power of resistance: "They had listened, they had heard and had come to follow him, to follow the new path… All had been done as he said it should be done. All had gone as he said it would go" (116). In doing so, he translates the experience of violence into a collective consciousness of resistance.

These actions established what Cabral proposed as "[a] political resistance." (78). Selver mobilizes the Athsheans in a form of political resistance; his speeches are not an isolated incident but a new

consciousness that creates a united movement against the colonizers. In that sense, a decolonial movement does not just reject colonialism but also seeks to cultivate a renewed consciousness that is rooted in the indigenous practice. Cabral asserts that political resistance is necessary "to unite, to create national consciousness little by little, because we departed from a point in which we didn't have a national consciousness" (79). Selver advocates that the suffering that the Athsheans have endured and resistance are inevitable acts for liberation. At this moment, Selver becomes a political leader, transferring his knowledge and new consciousness to his people, teaching them that revolt and violence are necessary for survival. Le Guin illustrates Selver's transformation from the peaceful Athsheans to an image of Captain Davidson the barbaric colonizer:

Was he speaking his own language, or was he speaking Captain Davidson's? That which seemed to rise from the root of his own suffering and express his own changed being, might in fact be an infection, a foreign plague, which would not make a new people of his race, but would destroy them (107).

According to Cabral, colonialism is mainly economic, and through dominating others economically, "it redoubles political domination and prolongs the forces of the imperialist or colonial State in our land, … For this very reason, we should say that the first objective of our resistance and struggle… is to liberate our land economically" (91-92). Deforestation and forest destruction are major themes in Le Guin's narrative. The Terran's main aim in the New Tahiti colony is its natural resource, so the main purpose is an economic benefit: "But men were here now to end the darkness, and turn the tree-jumble into clean sawn planks, more prized on Earth than gold…. So, the alien forests became wood" (7). However, in

terms of economic resistance, the initial passive state of the Athsheans causes them to overlook the Terran exploitation of their forested world, but as the new consciousness arises through Selver, they change their perspective upon their world and how to stop the colonizers' economic exploitation. As in Selver's words, "He said the yumens are from outside the forest. That's quite clear. He said they want the forest: the trees for wood, the land to plant grass on.' … 'That too is clear, to those of us who've seen them cutting down the world" (44).

In addition, Cabral describes armed resistance as "a response to armed oppression, to colonialist aggression" (139), noting that it is "more visible than other types of resistance" (139). Le Guin's narrative heavily illustrates the Athsheans' armed struggle, which she justifies as necessary violence. The portrayal of the Battle of Centerville, where Selver leads a coordinated attack that kills not only the soldiers but also the Terran women colonists, is shocking and deliberate. This revolt aims to push away the Terrans, just as the Terrans have sought to exterminate Athsheans, "as nests of stinging ants must be burned out of the groves of cities" (45). Selver and the Athsheans have killed and murdered the Terran men and women, ensuring the colony's collapse. Fanon, in The Wretched of the Earth, asserts that violence becomes a means of reclaiming humanity, a necessary evil to break the chain of oppression: "Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence" (44). However, revolt entails a change in the Athshean culture. Le Guin refers to it by highlighting the tragedy of a peaceful society being driven to adopt the very tactics of its oppressors, further reinforcing Cabral's idea, as Wood explains, "to take up arms is also a form of cultural resistance, a cultural expression" (49).

In this regard, the use of force is not merely a political approach but also a cultural response to colonial domination.

In this context, from cultural, political, and economic perspectives, the Athsheans' armed struggle functions as a crucial tool for achieving liberation. Cabral reinforces this idea when he states, "Our armed struggle, we say, is a form of political struggle that seeks to liberate our land from imperialist-colonial economic exploitation. This is our fundamental objective: to liberate our land's productive forces from oppression, from imperialist-colonial domination" (148). Additionally, Cabral argues that armed struggle is not merely political but also "an expression of our cultural resistance" (139). In the novella, the final attack reflects the four forms of resistance that Cabral outlines. It begins with Selver mobilizing the Athsheans in the form of cultural resistance that is built on his dream, as the narrator explains, "They had come because they followed Selver because they were driven by the evil dream and only Selver could teach them how to master it. There were hundreds and hundreds of them, men and women" (113).

Le Guin's use of the phrase "evil dream" symbolizes the shared trauma and moral rupture and the tragic necessity of adopting violence as a form of resistance, even at the cost of cultural transformation. Le Guin neither fully condemns nor glorifies this shift, reflecting her concerns with the ethical weight of decolonization. Furthermore, to weaken the Terrans, the Athsheans destroy their infrastructure and target the colonial economy. This can also be seen as a form of economic resistance: "While the ex-slaves, two or three at a time, did those things which they judged must be done first: break the water-pipe, cut the wires that carried light from Generator House, break into and rob the Arsenal" (113-114). Through these acts, resource extraction and logging are effectively terminated,

thereby disrupting the core objective of the Terrans' colonial expedition on Athshe.

All these forms of resistance culminate in armed resistance, as the Athsheans revolt, perpetuated through political unity and cultural transformation, eventually leading to armed resistance that results in the sabotage of the Terrans' economy. Nevertheless, as the traditional colonial dynamics flourish through resource extraction, slavery, and forced labor, the Terran's prosperity is also built upon other planets' exploitation, especially the Athsheans. At the end of the novella, the Terrans leave, and Lepennon states, "Then the forests of Athshe will be as they were before" (168). While this indicates an advanced stage of postcolonialism culminating in the departure of the colonizers and the change in the planet's ecology, the Athsheans' introduction to violence will mark a permanent rupture in the Athshean society that cannot be reversed.

Conclusion

To conclude, Le Guin's novella serves as a captivating allegory for futuristic colonialism, resistance, violence, and the irreversible transformation of both the colonizers and the colonized. The narrative reinforces Aimé Césaire's argument that colonialism is not a civilizing force but a mechanism of dehumanization and a vehicle for barbarism. Le Guin's illustration of Captain Davidson encapsulates the colonial discourse that justifies violence in the name of progress. While Selver's transformation into a hybrid subject embodies a necessary violence. Selver's journey from being a muted subaltern, as Spivak critiqued the colonial inscription of the colonized, to becoming a radical resistance leader, to the extent of being, as stated in the novella, of using Captain Davidson's words or language (p. 107), brings out Bhabha's notion of

hybridity. Selver's new consciousness, as Cabral's framework conveys, indicates not only a necessary revolt against colonial domination but also the cultural cost of resistance. The Athsheans, once a benevolent society, learn the concepts of murder, violence, and cruelty, irreversibly altering their culture in the necessity of survival. Eventually, Le Guin's narrative critiques the cyclical nature of violence, warning that even in the act of overthrowing oppression, the colonized may inherit the very violence that they seek to dismantle. The novella does not offer an idealized vision of resistance but a sobering recognition of its consequences. In doing so, The Word for World is Forest remains an influential futuristic speculative text that condemns colonialism and acknowledges the heavy toll of liberation, which, once taken, leaves both the colonizer and the colonized changed.

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