

## **ECOFEMINISM ACROSS CULTURES IN LE GUIN'S *ALWAYS COMING HOME***

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In *Always Coming Home*, Ursula K. Le Guin explores a variety of cultures through an ecofeminist outlook—the Kesh with their profound awareness of the environment, the Condors with their rigidity and hierarchy which is regarded as the opposite to the Kesh, and the dominant modern American culture with its destructive technology. In her delineation of these cultures, Le Guin addresses the main areas of debate within ecofeminism such as woman oppression, the patriarchal system, and the place of animal and the environmental abuse of earth. It is an attempt to shed light on the cultural differences through an ecofeminist lens to validate the human's respect to earth and understand the interconnectedness of all life.

Ecofeminism is a widely encompassing ideology touching on diverse subjects. It combines the environmentalist emphasis on reconnection with nature with the feminist main focus on gender equality. This combination produces a feminist view on environmentalism which emphasizes the similar ways nature and women have been conceptualized, devalued, and exploited. It reinforces a profound understanding of the connection between the oppression of woman and nature in patriarchal society. Greta Gaard writes that ecofeminism's "basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (1993, 1). Ecofeminists are particularly interested in examining the dualism that has led to the devaluation of both women and nature dominated by masculine rationalism.

Ecofeminism grows out of radical or cultural feminism; each describes a unique approach to ecofeminism, and each provides a specific use in ecofeminist analysis. Radical ecofeminists focus on the theory of patriarchy which views women as "other" to the male norm and as such has been systematically oppressed and marginalized. They suggest that the oppression of women and nature are interconnected. Traditionally, women have been associated with nature—they are seen to have a biological link with the natural world because of their reproductive ability and life sustainer. Women have been seen as closer to nature because of their physiology, social roles, and psychology. This association creates gender stereotypes that to be feminine is to be passive and intuitive, and to be masculine is to be strong and rational. Radical ecofeminism aims to challenge these dualistic assumptions and call for a radical reordering of society. Spretnak identifies the

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dynamics behind the dominance of male over female as the key to comprehending every expression of patriarchal culture (Spretnak 2006). Cultural ecofeminism is a response to the perception that women and nature have been mutually associated and devalued in western culture. It is an ideology which advocates the positive aspects of a female nature or feminine personality. Cultural ecofeminists express their anger for associating women with nature in a negative way. Culturally, the devaluation of women is viewed as a social construct; it is a manifestation of masculine consciousness. Therefore, Cultural ecofeminists celebrate woman's particular connections to the natural world. It is based on the belief that women have a biological and spiritual link with the non-human world and are therefore closer to nature than men. A vision in which nature is held in esteem as mother and goddess become a source of inspiration and empowerment for many ecofeminists. In "Women in Nature," Vandana Shiva states that women should embrace this bond "not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life" (Shiva 1993, 464). Carol Christ promotes some kind of "mystical awakening in nature" which can provide women "with images of [their] own power" (Christ 1995, 119). Cultural ecofeminists suggest a way of re-visioning nature and women as powerful forces. Their philosophy embraces an ethic of care and human-nature relationships.

Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* is a major work of imagination. It is not a novel in the traditional sense. The story is only one part of the culture presented; plays, poems, songs, music, folk tales and maps are included as cultural artifacts that create a picture of an imagined, future people - the Kesh. The book depicts the dramatic life story of the Kesh woman, named Stone Telling who was born in a Kesh family where she spent her childhood, then moved to live with her father's people—the Condors whose society and culture are completely different from that of the mother.

Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* is a unique text that has been interpreted in widely varying ways since its publication in 1985. It has been frequently discussed as a criticism of political and social studies. Others have approached it through the theories of psychoanalysis and Marxism. It has also attracted a number of feminist readings and has received much attention and appraises from contemporary ecofeminist analyses. Moreover, Le Guin's novel, *Always Coming Home* has contributed to the growth of ecofeminism and has remained an important part of the ecofeminist dialogue. Murphy writes that "The novel that balances and integrates ecology and feminism more evenly and successfully than any other I have ever read is Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985)" (1996, 238). However, none has compared her ecofeminist stance towards the different cultures represented in the novel—the patriarchal culture of the Condors and the

matriarchal culture of the Kesh compared with the dominant modern American culture.

In *Always Coming Home*, Stone Telling narrates her bi-cultural identity, not quite Kesh, and not quite Condors. “This meant to me only that I had no father’s mother, no father’s house, and therefore was a half-person” (Le Guin 1985, 10). The result of this is the split identity which compelled her to leave the Kesh society, and travel to the Condor’s world. These contrasting cultures can be seen inside her when she lives with her father's family, the Condors, and tries to become similar to them. Stone Telling narrates, “When I went with Abhao [her father], my heart wanted to be a Condor’s heart. I tried to be a Condor woman. I tried not to think in the language or the ways of the Valley. I wanted to leave the Valley, not to be of it, to be new, living a new way” (1985, 192). Her journeys allow her to eventually embrace a new hybrid identity, for she realizes that her mind “was held inside the Valley, instead of holding the Valley inside it” (1985, 193). She is, as the title suggests, *always coming home*. Through her ecofeminist journey, the protagonist feels akin with the land she knew as a child and feels the masculine socialization has taken her away from her original identity. She is asked to write her life story “as an offering because nobody else in the Valley had lived with the Condor and come back, and so my story is a history” (1985, 192). At that point, Le Guin leaves us with a call to action—a commitment to the ecofeminist cause.

Le’Guin’s *Always Coming Home* presents an ecofeminist perspective which intends to weigh different cultures in relation to each other. She introduces different cultures and comments on the different values of these cultures, directing the readers to perceive and evaluate their current reality. It is the story of two worlds of dueling ideas and lifestyle. Le Guin composes two contrasting social worlds – the Kesh and the Condors. The Kesh people are a mix of hunters, gatherers, and farmers. They have a strong respect for nature. They live peacefully in the Valley. In their view, human beings did not do things accidentally and the evil in the world has been done consciously and deliberately such as the release of radioactive or poisonous substance, the permanent genetic impairment from which they suffer in the form of sterility and congenital diseases. Man should be responsible for what he is doing. Although “the City of the Mind” – entire gestalt machine intelligence – provides them with incalculable treasures of information and technology, they refuse to accept the machines offered to them freely because “they were not disposed to regard human existence either as information or as communication, nor intelligent mortality as a means to the ends of immortal intelligence” (1985, 152). The Kesh culture is presented as a utopian society that is

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communal, matriarchal, and non-hierarchical. According to the Kesh, people must live in balance, referring to their major cultural symbol, the “heyiya-if.” It is the visual form of the idea which pervaded their thought and culture, the connotation of which include “sacredness, hinge, connection, spiral, center, praise, and change” (1985, 45). The “heyiya-if” presents the sacred interconnectedness in relationships and articles such as their art, architecture, and writing. It is the path they follow which is relational rather than hierarchical.

A nearby culture called the Condors is all men of no houses. They are living for themselves. They believe that everything belongs to them; women, animals, things, and the whole world. Their main concern is the development of highly technical weapons because they are living in continuous war. They are trying to expand and conquest as much territory as they can. Their culture is based on dominance and destruction. “The Condor people seem to have been unusually self-isolated; their form of communication with other peoples was through aggression, domination, exploitation, and enforced acculturation. In this respect they were at a distinct disadvantage among the introverted but cooperative peoples native to the region” (1985, 379).

Further, the dominant modern American military-industrial culture is loosely represented in the novel. The novel exists in a future, fragmented United States. It occurs after a disastrous event that has caused environmental destruction and a radical reduction in the population. Le Guin puts *Always Coming Home* into a provisional future that seems very remote from today: “The people in this book might be going to have lived a long, long, time from now in Northern California” (1985, ix). The towns, in *Always Coming Home*, do not have any relationship to our conceptions of today’s state. However, the maps drawn in the novel illustrate an organic relationship between the towns and the environment. The Valley is familiar in its geographical set of features, the flora and the fauna, and so forth. Kesh people live near the Ocean beneath which San Francisco is buried.

In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin invokes the rhetoric of the ecofeminist position that views human fate as intertwined with the earth; of her relationships with birds, nature and each other, Le Guin reflects on the web of life, the interconnectedness with nature. Stone Telling’s connection with nature is a successive theme in the novel. She explains how the names of the Kesh’s babies often come from birds since they are messengers. Her first name in the Kesh is “North Owl” because in the month before she was born, an owl came every night to the oak trees outside the mother’s window and sang the owl’s song. Moreover, Stone Telling identifies herself with a stone, a name which she chooses herself because “I have a story to tell of where I went when I was young; but now I go

nowhere, sitting like a stone in this place, in this ground, in this valley. I have come where I was going” (1985, 7). The name “Stone Telling” indicates this sense of interconnection with the world. It is a symbol of the interconnection between inanimate and animate things. A stone is a part but it is only a part of a whole and the reader can only perceive the whole through this part. Her desire to see herself and her gender fused with nature, is part of her feminine spirituality, which view the whole universe as an organic system of interdependent parts. For her, the Valley resembles a body, her own body. Her feet are the sea-channels of the river, the streams are her organs, the rocks are her bones and the mountain is her head (1985, 189).

For Le Guin, the link between women and nature can have both positive and negative connotations. In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin describes the theme of woman-as-nature in a couple of different ways-- woman as earthly caretakers and the identification of woman as nature. In the Kesh’s culture, Le Guin emphasizes the role of woman as caretakers. This representation of dialectical ecofeminism suggests that while women can give birth, both women and men can be caretakers. This is an important tenet to develop in ecofeminist thought in order to stress the idea of equality and equally indebted to the earth. They believe that women, like men; both should contribute to the improvement of the environment, the conservation of natural resources, and the well-being of the society. In the introduction to her book, *Beyond Mothering Earth*, Sherylin MacGregor writes, “women’s mothering and caregiving work mediates the relationship between people and nature and thereby engenders a caring stance towards nature. This rhetoric of ‘ecomaternalism,’ [...] is pervasive in much of the contemporary ecofeminist discourse” (MacGregor 2006, 4).

In the Condors culture, Le Guin analyses the negative perspectives of women that arise from identifying woman with nature. Upholding the theme of woman as nature has its roots in the human psychology and it is reaffirmed generationally by her biological role in both creating and maintaining life. Le Guin writes, “Condors’ wives were expected to have babies continuously, since that is what One made women for, one of the daughters of Terter House had seven children, the eldest of them ten years old, and for this incontinence she was praised by men and envied by women” (1985, 345). One of the problems of identifying women and nature is its inappropriate practical implications which considered women the part of society most responsible for life’s preservation. *Always Coming Home* shows how woman as nature is a fundamental part of cultural feminine’s essentialist problems. It illustrates the deterministic relation between woman and nature. Rather, it re-establishes woman as other.

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Woman as other grows from woman as nature, a cultural construct in masculine consciousness. Le Guin deeply describes the psychology of the woman who is isolated by the presence of that patriarchy and is experiencing the emotional trauma of othering. The “other” maintains its definition as that which is different from the self and thus as inferior to it. The creation of “a master” identity rather than of a simply “masculine” one is the means which allows the creation of the inferior other. The Condors culture is based in this dualistic thinking, and dualistic thinking is for Plumwood more than “a relation of dichotomy, difference, or non identity, and more than a simple hierarchical relationship” (1993, 47), it is the devaluation of the other.

In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin examines the harmful social ramifications that are the results of designating a weaker sex. While she is living in the Condors’ house, Stone Telling becomes ill because she is not used to stay indoors all the time. She mistakenly thought that her father died. Realizing the fact that she is a motherless and now fatherless daughter, she becomes entirely without power in the Condor’s house. Thus, she accepts to be a pretty wife to a Condor man. The scene of the marriage is the most horrible scene in the novel. However, Stone Telling thought that she is lucky to be the second wife in order to avoid the biological determinism which is assigned to her by a patriarchal society. This anti-essentialist ecofeminists point reveals the long struggle of women to break free from the confining role of mother. Since the tradition of domination relies on the inherent link between subjugated women and nature, anti-essentialists assert that adopting essentialist rhetoric places women back in a women/nature trap where gender differences justify subjugation.

Through Stone Telling’s personal history with the Condors’ women, we have been told that the Condors’ women are not inferior as the Condors men believe. They are not thoughtful but quick and perceptive. They are “shrewd and knowledgeable people for all that they were shut inside so many walls” (1985, 340). They are not stupid at all, only ignorant because they have never been anywhere. The Condors men do not allow them to learn. They “will blind the eye or cut off the hand of a woman or a farmer who writes a single word” (1985, 192). For them, women are like animals; they should be left ignorant. Thus, Stone Telling has to forget writing and reading which she has learnt when she was “North Owl” in the Kesh. This extreme denial of women’s autonomy has very much revealed the potential danger of sexism that establishes immediately the Condors as a maldeveloping culture. Le Guin’s criticism of the Condors’ life comes from the belief that prevention of autonomy is a sign of a destructive society.

On the other hand, women in the Kesh's culture, affirm their own autonomy. They are essentially individuals, discrete, and independent beings. They are able to live freely in nature. They can learn how to read and write. Kesh's women are skilled women. Stone Telling's grandmother knows how to spin and weave. The mother joins the "Lamb Lodge," and "learned their arts and mysteries" (1985, 173). Stone Telling herself is good in the art of pottery. She is called "Owl Pot" instead of "North Owl" (1985, 174). Further, when Abhao decides to travel and leave Stone Telling's mother, the mother's independence is revealed in her refusal to wait for him and her insistence to return to her first name. The Kesh women are associated with the roles of nourisher, unifier, possessor of strength and the source of all things. The power of the female is not through aggression and violence, but by means of virtues such as patience, persistence, tranquility, and receptivity.

Domination is a major theme in the novel. As an ecofeminist, Le Guin takes special care in criticizing and deconstructing the logic of domination. According to the ecofeminist philosopher Karen J. Warren, the logic of domination is the logic of the traditional hierarchy which positions men and culture at the top, based on the assumption of strength, and women and nature at the bottom, based on the equivalent assumption of weakness (Karen J. Warren 1996, 18). In *Always Coming Home*, the valley of the Kesh with its sexual equality is juxtaposed to the hierarchal system in the Condors culture. In describing the culture of Kesh, Le Guin states, "The houses were not arranged in any hierarchy of power, value or status; they were called First, Second, etc...numerical order carried absolutely no implication of ranking, rating or importance" (1985, 44-5). Whereas the Kesh people are against any hierarchical system in their society, the Condors are warriors who seek hierarchy and dominance. Stone Telling discovers that everything among the Condors should have a chief, "If two of them were together, one or the other was chief. Everything they did was war. Even when people worked together one of them was chief of the work, as if working were making war; even when children played together one of them told the others what to do, though at least they quarreled about it" (1985, 199). Within Condor culture, people relate to one another within the hierarchical structure. The head Condor man is called "the One" and he is the supreme commander. Those under him are made in his image but they are less valued. Below these men are men of lower class, followed by women, foreigners, and animals. The relation between the Kesh and the Condors culture is between the inside and the outside. The Condors are living outside the world. Stone Telling's father, Abhao, namely Kills, has lived "outside the world, killing it, to show the glory of One" (1985, 201). In contrast, living

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inside the world is living like the Kesh – in a balanced state with other beings, human and nonhuman.

Central to this hierarchical framework is the patriarchal system which is developed throughout the novel. It is regarded as an ideological system that devalues women along masculine lines. Stone Telling's father is an example of a patriarch who has established the original hierarchy, othering his wife, his daughter, and the primitive habitat he is visiting. Le Guin portrays Abhao as an ambiguous character who is entirely convinced of his role as natural dominator. He only gives order and he expects others to obey him. Stone Telling narrates when she tries to take the scarf off her face, he orders her to put it on. It was not just order-shouting, but nervous anger. He ordered, "Keep it on, over your face!" (1985, 198); at her father's outburst, Stone Telling is able to see clearly his charade of power. Further, when she married, her husband is another patriarch who does not let her go anywhere because she belongs to him. He is only convinced of his role as biologically determined superiority. He even rapes her when she told him that she does not want him.

Le Guin's portrait of the Condors classism and sexism generates normative dualism such as male/female, culture/nature, and reason/emotion. As a result of culturally constructed gender bias, the masculine is identified as the superior one. This leads to devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, and nature, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, and culture. Thus, a value hierarchy is constructed which rank male above the female, culture above nature, reason above emotion. In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin challenges the male's supremacy of reason, rationality, and logical correctness in order to develop ethical views that do not maintain harmful value dualisms and hierarchies. Plumwood emphasizes this fact describing male rational framework as seriously incomplete without the additional components of caring, concern, and respect based on a relational connection (1998, 299).

The novel privileges communal values over hierarchical ones. Le Guin acknowledges that the lack of hierarchy is a key principle of the Kesh culture and this concept is essential to the well-established societies. In the novel, Le Guin also shows how the Kesh language reflects their non-hierarchical culture. She emphasizes the fact that language constructs reality, an issue discussed by radical feminists who believe in the importance of language to one's understanding of reality. Stone Telling's story about her life with first the Kesh and then the Condors reveal the subtle aspects of language which place humans in cultural norms. The Kesh believes everything is interrelated- there is no difference between nature and culture. Kesh's language does not have any provisions "for a relation of

ownership between living beings" (1985, 42). Nobody owns another person or animal. The Kesh language doesn't have a verb form of "to have" that allows anyone to actually possess something. Le Guin creates a language with no hierarchical categories, and shows how the Kesh are considered an organic part of the environment.

At another point, The Condors believe man is separate from nature. He is either outside it or above it. Their language reveals and constructs the hierarchical nature of their culture. This difference makes it impossible for Stone Telling to understand Condor dynamic power of language because her thought is contained in the Kesh communal language. In her journey to the Condors, she acquires a new name bestowed to her by her father: "Terter Ayatyu" which means "woman born above other" or "well-born woman" (1985, 152 ). Her new name reflects the hierarchical oppressed identity of the Condors. The Condors language reflects their reality, which is to a large extent built upon the language habits of their people. In one instance, Stone Telling learns a word that her father teaches her to say to the Condors men who are working on building a bridge across the river near her home. In describing the behavior of these men when they hear this word, Stone Telling says, "I heard my high, thin voice and saw ten strong men obey it, over and over" (1985, 32). It is an order that should be obeyed. Stone Telling's experience demonstrates the power of a single word and the sense of power she felt over these men simply by reciting one word that they had to obey.

Moreover, Le Guin compares between the Kesh's view of equality for all people and the Condors' subjugation of certain groups on the ground that they lack the superior characteristic of the dominant groups. Whereas the Kesh honored and revered the female as life-giver, the Condors diminish the importance of the female. The Condors' women are characterized as essentially unreliable, untrustworthy, and morally irrelevant, an inferior domain to be dominated by a superior rational male. Stone Telling's first encounter with constructions of gender differences and sexism is in the Condors House where she is kept inside its walls all the time because women are not allowed to go outside.

Le Guin's discussion of the Condors' subjugating groups involves both women and animals. The identification of woman and animal go deep in the Condors' thought. Both are contemptible and unimportant and are subject to the same exploitation and devaluation. The Condors are barbarous and inhuman in their treatment of animals. Stone Telling narrates that, in her journey to the Condors, she saw two of the men "kill a strayed ewe by the path, without giving her any word, cutting off her legs for food and leaving the head and hooves and

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entrails and fleece..." (1985, 190). Stone Telling, as a Kesh woman cannot tolerate the suffering of animals because she believes that their emotions, intelligence, behavior, and feelings seem to resemble her own. The Condors' vision of what an animal means is, for an ethical perspective, a radical and subversive drama at its best. They believe that animals are considered to be devoid of feelings, desires, and interests. They are different from and inferior to man. Ultimately, this separation justifies the Condors' infliction of pain and death onto them.

On the other hand, the Kesh elevates the status of animal in general cultural regard. In the world-view of the Valley people, all domestic animals are considered, in the Valley term, "pet" which means "people living together" (1985, 419). Animal-human interdependence and collaboration are the central preoccupation of the Kesh. They attempt to know about animals' habits, lives, emotions, natures, as much as can be done from their own perspective. They advocate respect for animals on their own terms. "The sheep was not a symbol of passive stupidity and blind obedience as it is to us..., but rather was regarded with a kind of affectionate awe, as an intrinsically mysterious being." Goats are kept as "commensals and for milk." A good deal of poetry is addressed to cows, pointing out how much easier "to get along with they are than human beings" (1985, 414-415). Chickens are always kept for eggs, meat, and company. By its mortality, animals are related physically with human beings, and all other beings on earth. This interconnectedness is fundamental in the Kesh's thought. In the Kesh, "everybody belongs to everybody" (1985, 367). The ecofeminists Karen Warren and Jim Cheney explain that "ecological feminism is a feminism which attempts to unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement in order to bring about a world and worldview that are not based on socioeconomic and conceptual structures of domination" (Karen Warren and Jim Cheney 1996, 244).

Moreover, Le Guin compares the feminine spirituality of the Kesh with the masculine rationality of the Condors. The Condors are "very skilled artisans in metal and machinery, and excellent engineers" (1985, 349). Their city is the compound of the "the City of Man" and the City of Mind." It is an era of human existence that "followed the Neolithic era for some thousands of years in various parts of the earth [...]" (1985, 152) in which computer network, the solar system, and technical experimentation are considered the basic parts of their culture, namely, civilization. Their city does not have any connection with the natural physical world, "The city has no relation to plant life at all, except as it was the subject of their observation, a source of data" (1985, 150).

In the novel, Le Guin explicates the fact that contemporary U.S. culture is much closer to the Condors' attitudes and beliefs than to the Kesh's point of view. Le Guin uses Stone Telling's narrative voice to show the evils of a society in which the imposition of technology directly endangers the land and lives of people. Technology becomes an increasingly significant part in people's life, which develops an antagonistic effect on nature. Le Guin writes

My impression, however, is that this period in which we live, our civilization, Civilization as we know it, appeared in Valley thought as a remote region, set apart from the community and continuity of human/animal/earth existence—a sort of peninsula slicking out from the mainland, very thickly built upon, very heavily populated, very obscure, and very far away. (1985, 153)

The novel examines our want to incorporate technology and the want to be free from it. Technology operates as part of the logic of domination inasmuch as it stands for culture. It becomes the instrument of control, an extension of man/culture essentialism. This stresses the separation between human beings and nature. Therefore, the image of the Earth with its physical nature is discarded for the sake of man-made machine. Le Guin expresses her fear of human and earthly destruction as a result of man's identification with technology. Le Guin's satire of the relationship between humans and technology shows that while humans control technology, it is our main tool of self-destruction. Stone Telling comments that "I have come to think that the sickness of Man is like the mutating viruses and the toxins," and the reason is the fact that "It is a sickness of our being human, a fearful one" (1985, 386).

In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin captures the tone of the twenty-first century ecofeminists. The novel focuses on the ecofeminist concerns of technological annihilation. Technological annihilation is a concern that grew from the original ecofeminist sentiments of the 1970s, which focus on developing nations' struggles with technology. It includes a concern for human and earthly destruction by nuclear warfare and the danger of an overly militaristic society. The ecofeminist author Noel Sturgeon, who was present at the Nevada nuclear protests in 1970, explains that "in this political context, 'the environment' served feminists as a medium for the connection of critiques of militarism, capitalism, and neocolonialism" (1997, 145). The ecofeminist activists rally for the future of their children against destruction, deaths, and deformities looking to secure a more peaceful future.

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The Kesh people are only interested in the kind of technology which is necessary for human beings. They do not reject technology, only those facets of it which goes against the nature of things. The Valley has computer terminals that are programmed for routine issue of weather forecasts, train schedules, and some types of agricultural advice. To most people, this information is only taken as a “natural thing” that is made for human benefits. It is the technology which acts in accordance with nature. Le Guin calls it “the Exchange” (1985, 152). It is the useful and necessary link to such undesirable elements such as earthquakes, fires, and foreigners. Le Guin comments,

To construct [...] a battery to power a flashlight was not an easy matter, though at need it was done: the technology of the Valley was completely adequate to the needs of the people. To construct a tank or a bomber was so difficult and so unnecessary that it really cannot be spoken of in terms of the Valley economy. (1985, 380)

Callicott defines this technology as “technology that blends with and harnesses natural forces, as opposed to technology that resists and attempts to dominate and reorganize nature”( Callicott 1994, 11).

This does not mean that the Kesh culture is backward. The increasing prominence of technology can be traced in their culture. They provide their people with information on any level; from simple game playing to the heights of pure theoretical knowledge. They also can exchange information and knowledge with other people from different parts of the world. Le Guin states, “In settled human groups with well-established cultural interchange patterns such as the people of the Na Valley, instruction in computer use was part of ordinary education; in the Valley this principally involved learning TOK [...] as a worldwide lingua franca for traders and travelers and people wishing to communicate with people of another language directly or through the Exchanges [...]” (1985, 151). Their goal is to live a healthy life by selecting from technology thoughtfully and carefully what completely adequate implements of their culture.

The Condors also is one of the very technologically advanced cultures, but a culture enthralled with destruction. All their time and effort are sacrificed for one purpose—getting materials and making the great weapons. Their first great weapon is a huge machine like a hut made of iron plates that fires large shot and fire-bombs. It was named “Destroyer,” that is “[...] to lead the army, making a path for the soldiers called The Way of Destruction” (1985, 350). They also build another flying machine which is highly valued and enjoyed by the young warriors. It is sent

to drop fire-bombs on the forests and villages. They spend all their wealth for making destructive machines. Their plan is all for war. It is an obsession with dominance at all costs. The Condors believe that their army can never be subdued. The head Condor “sent one army northwest into the Six Rivers country to subdue the river towns, and another down along the Dark River to bring in tribute from the people there, and then another one [...] far to the southwest again to conquer the Valley and bring back cartload of Valley wine on roads that the enslaved peoples were to make” (1985, 341).

Le Guin representation of the destructive culture of the Condor is similar to the contemporary U.S. militarism with its destructive technology. The Condors’ devotion to war and conquest is connected to American war-based economy. This is shown in the amount of money spent on the arms race. The cost of making, maintaining, and operating such weapons are as immense that it impoverishes the planet’s substance and leaves the great majority of humankind to live in poverty. The U.S. policy rationalizes murder, war, and violence. The attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center towers compounded by the United States’ invasion of Iraq and its war in Afghanistan open the gate for new warfare. The effect of war is evident in creating imbalances in power in favor of capitalism, besides its catastrophic effect on the environment. Le Guin ironically states that “Destruction destroys itself” because “what we call strength it calls sickness; what we call success it calls death” (1985, 380). She emphasizes the damaging effects of war and the deadly intent of nuclear weapons which are considered the largest current threat to the earth’s ability to sustain life.

*Always Coming Home*, set in a future United States, contaminated by environmental toxins, and divided between a hierarchical Condors culture and a communal and matrilineal Kesh culture. By juxtaposing the two worlds of the Kesh and the Condors, Le Guin takes her protagonist on an introspective journey during which her critical examination of new cultures leads her to question her own. Stone Telling’s narrative examines the Condors war and dominance strategies from the inside. She reveals its militaristic and materialistic way of life. When Stone Telling has lived with the Condors, she is able to compare between them and the Kesh, seeing the Kesh as “the norm” and the Condors as “the extreme.” When we are introduced to the Condors, the narrative works to create some sort of revelation as the Condors’ culture is shown to be closer to contemporary U.S. militarism than the Kesh. Le Guin’s narrative approach is so powerful that it questions “the boundaries between polar opposites” (Byrne 1993, 352). Her aim is to evaluate objectively the principles, values, and attitudes of her own culture to suggest possible paths towards a better society.

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Le Guin's ecofeminist insight of the logic of domination and its stake in human nature deconstructs concepts of gender, culture, and war in order to conceptualize a departure from the human tradition of dominance. What she is trying to do is to develop a better alternative society in which there should be a balance between male and female. She seeks a reintegration of reason and emotion in order to experience nature as a whole without the polarization of one over the other. Eugenia Gatens-Robinson states, "The ecological agenda of healing the earth cannot succeed as long as the deep separation is maintained between instrumental reason and the 'reason' of emotion and spirit" (Gatens-Robinson 1991, 207). Although Stone Telling's grandfather spent most of his time with the warriors, her grandmother had never put him out. She let him to live in her household "partly because she thought he needed her, and partly, ...because since her hands had become crippled she was ashamed of doing less work in the house and town, and she thought he might work in her place" (1985, 175). Stone Telling also expresses her yearning to be a Condors woman because her father is a Condors and she feels that she is part of him. She says, "I was holding the Condor in my heart" (1985, 180). Le Guin emphasizes that we cannot deny the existence of male, but we should recognize the importance of the female.

In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin attempts to awaken the readers to the disastrous realities of our current relationship with the earth and the environment. She demonstrates even more clearly a kind of ecological ethic through her metaphor of the structure of the "Nine Houses" (1985, 49) of the Kesh society; the five houses of the earth which includes the earth itself—rocks and dirt, streams and lakes, all human beings, domestic animals and birds, and plants; and the four houses of the sky – rain, cloud, wind, and still air. The Kesh people are regarded as individual species in a functioning ecosystem, developing a sense of harmony with nature and with other people, and creating both stability and autonomy. Le Guin allows space for individual parts of the society to function without being dominated by a single centre of power. It is an abiding concern which develops some sort of environmental pride that identifies humans with the land.

In *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin gathers bits of cultures in a chaotic manner. She demonstrates "Bits, chunks, fragments. Shards. Pieces of the Valley, lifesize" (1985, 53). She presents a world view made up of the fragments that appear in multiple cultural artifacts: architecture, songs, poems, maps, and storytelling. For her, cultures are relational, not independent from others. She uses the Kesh's symbol "Heyiya-if" to show the importance of intersecting, rather than division, isolation, or independence. In the novel, Le Guin does not simply show binary opposition between the Kesh and the Condors but provides multiple cultures

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act in collaboration with each other. She shows how culture is affected by those around her, and depends on interrelations with those around her. Through this interrelationship, there is still difference, but also an exchange happens. Stone Telling's narrative shows an individual in process. In her journey of coming home, Stone Telling experiences two different cultures which open cognitive and affective spaces that lead to new perception and possibly changed behavior. She also encourages the reader to perceive and evaluate the realities and potentialities of their culture in new ways.

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