

# **Challenging Dualisms through Science Fiction**

A Close Reading of the Colonized and Gendered Identity and Body in Ann Leckie's

*Ancillary Justice.*

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## Summary

In contemporary Western Europe and the United States the dualistic system of thought seems to become stronger. Polarities among identities are strengthened, thus, too, when it comes to gendered and national identity. The aim of the thesis *Challenging Dualisms through Science Fiction* is to analyse how a cyborg image in Science Fiction literature can contribute to challenging the dualistic system of thought. After explaining how dualistic thinking and identity are connected, the theories by feminist writers Judith Butler on performativity, Donna Haraway on the cyborg and postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha on hybridity, Third Space and ambivalence will be explained. On basis of these texts, the author does a literary analysis of imagery, language and the protagonist in Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice*. So, it will be argued that the cyborg image is at play on different levels throughout the novel. As such, the author argues that the reader of the novel can become aware of the so-called Third Space, in which dualistic constructions are challenged and where awareness for new possibilities is created.

## Introduction

Over the past few years polarities between identities seem to have increased in contemporary Western countries, by this I mainly mean Western European countries and the United States. For example, the gender of a baby, often either ‘boy’ or ‘girl’, is no longer announced at the birth of a child, but before, at increasingly popular gender reveal parties with all the dualistic connotations that it entails, such as blue and pistols for boys and pink and pearls for girls (Gray). Polarity in national identity among and within countries grows as well. With Brexit, Trump as an openly racist president of the United States and, closer to home, the discussion on Black Pete in the Netherlands, tension is present within Western societies when it comes to what national culture should entail (Kendzior; Tempelman).

As a feminist researcher and a writer, taught in Gender Studies and Literature, I am trained to analyse texts with feminist, postcolonial and literary theories. As such I have seen how constructs such as identities are reinforced in literature, but also how literature can serve as a stepping stone to imagine alternative systems of thought. Professor in Science Fiction and Technoculture Studies Sherryl Vint argues in the introduction of her book *Science Fiction and Cultural Theory* that science fiction (SF) can be seen as a contemporary vernacular theory. SF can be viewed as the application of cultural theory, since both SF and cultural theory bare certain similarities and tensions between what is imagined and what is actualized (Vint 9). Vint then uses Donna Haraway’s ideas on the border between SF and social reality to underscore this idea. Haraway claims that the aforementioned border is an optical illusion. What she means is that SF and social reality are intertwined, therefore in SF there is a possibility to alter social reality by showing other ways of thought than the dualistic way of thought (9). Vint concludes that Science Fiction theory is needed in order to guide ‘us’ “to our science-fictional present, [as] a tool to help us understand our past and to design the futures we want” (10).

With this in mind I want to look closer at how SF novel *Ancillary Justice* can be a guide to a different image of identity and the body. Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice* opens the doors to the Radch empire. The Radch empire stretches out over multiple planets and is still expanding. On one of the planets there is Breq. She is an ancillary, a human body technologically adjusted to one segment of many that belonged to an artificially intelligent ship named *Justice of Toren*. The singular ancillaries together formed segments and these on their turn belonged to the ship. The ancillaries, segments and the ship all share one mind, a hive-mind, until *Justice of Toren* and all ancillaries, except for Breq, are destroyed by the Lord of the Radch. The Lord, Anaander Mianaai, who also shares one mind with more than a hundred ancillary bodies, is at war with herself. Her mind developed schizophrenic characteristics which caused her to have multiple views that are not compatible. *Justice of Toren* got caught up in the war and was consequently destroyed. So now Breq is on her own and looking for justice. While complicated, the artificial intelligent ship with her ancillaries form a unique image of the body and identity. Ancillaries were once human and non-Radchaai, taken against their will to become part of a ship under the rule of the Radchaai; furthermore the ship and her ancillaries all share an identity, but seem to have distinct identities as well. Besides this, gender identity is not significant within Radchaai culture, contributing to a different image of identity.

The reason I chose *Ancillary Justice* as my object of research is mainly because of its narrative on gendered and colonial identity. The Radchaai do not use gendered pronouns, but in order to 'translate' this to English, Leckie chose to use female pronouns to indicate individuals. Besides this stylistic aspect, Leckie also addresses the concept of identity through her narrative. By portraying bodies who not only share a mind, but were once someone else completely, she offers a new approach to the theme of identity. Especially the postcolonial or colonized identity, since these bodies did not choose to become ancillaries. In addition to the

content, the novel has won multiple Science Fiction Awards and has been well received and so reaches a wide audience. Therefore, the idea to alter social reality could reach more readers.

For this thesis I pose the question of how the Science Fiction novel *Ancillary Justice* can challenge discourses of the colonized and gendered identity. The underlying goal of this question is to show how the construction of identity and dualisms upon which identities are based can be made to come forward to the reader through the image of the cyborg and open up possibilities for different ways of constructing identity. As such I hope to show that the cyborg figuration can challenge dualisms.

I will work in this thesis mostly with literary analysis. In order to get a good overview in the established discourses on the gendered and postcolonial identity and body in contemporary Western societies I will use literature review to map existing literature on the gendered and postcolonial body. First I will lay out how identity is formed and linked to the body in my theoretical framework. I will also discuss theories of Judith Butler and Frantz Fanon to explain colonial and gendered discourse. My theoretical framework will conclude with Donna Haraway's theory on the cyborg in association with Homi K. Bhabha's theory on hybridity and the Third Space to explain how the cyborg figuration can challenge dualisms. Then I will apply these theories to the novel in the research analysis. Here is where I will apply the method of literary analysis. Literary analysis is used in order to find out how a particular literary text is written and why the way it is written is significant. In the research analysis I will first look at how Leckie uses language and the subsequent imagery within the novel as a cyborg figuration to challenge gender discourse as the Western reader knows it. Some feminists have argued that writing is a masculine profession and that female writers can challenge this by using language as a tool to undermine it (Cutter 325). Therefore, Leckie's language use and the imagery it creates is worth analysing. Then, I will analyse how Breq and

her cyborg identity can contribute to an understanding of hybridity through her performance as both 'feminine' and 'human' and so challenges not only contemporary Western gender discourse, but also Western (and Radchaai) colonial discourse. Breq is not only the protagonist of the story, with a round character, but also the first-person narrator. Both her round character and this type of narrative can create empathy with the reader, causing the reader to be more susceptible to the novel (Keen 216). In this way, I want to argue that through the cyborg figuration created in language, imagery and the protagonist in *Ancillary Justice*, a Third Space is created wherein dualisms can be challenged.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Identity and the body**

Through identity ‘we’ position ourselves in the society we live in. This is done mainly by defining who belongs to the same group according to aspects such as nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and so forth (Woodward, “Introduction” 1). On the basis of these aspects and whether they are similar or different, an individual is marked as either an in- or an outsider in relation to a group. A distinction is made between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. Therefore, identity is formed by difference.

Which aspects matter for the formation of identity and their value depends on the culture it is produced in (Woodward, “Introduction” 2). Identity is a production in process, closely intertwined with representation (Hall “Cultural Identity”, 222; Braidotti 160). Stuart Hall argues that identity is not something fixed, but something that is retold and reinvented every time. This means that identity is fluid and dependent on the representations within culture (Hall “Cultural Identity”, 223-224). These representations are the myriad of symbols and signs that are produced within society that mean something to the people within that society (Hall “Introduction”, xvii).

So far I have explained how identity is formed, however, my research will be about the body and how identity is inscribed on the body. Feminist scholar Anne Balsamo explains through an analysis of theories by anthropologist Mary Douglas, who was specialized in culture and symbolism, that the body is not something natural and independent of identity. Balsamo says that “gender identity can be redefined as a body attribute that is assigned, organized and acquired through the process of social perception” (25). While she speaks of ‘gender identity’, this counts for every kind of identity. So, identity is for a large part inscribed on the body by the culture it exists in, on basis of the differences between bodies.



Systems within culture in which meanings are conveyed and ordered are called classificatory systems. These systems determine what is valued as ‘what to strive for’ or ‘the norm’ and ‘what does not equal the norm’ and thus is ‘worth less’ (Woodward, “Concepts” 38; Braidotti 158). Feminist writer Hélène Cixous argues that the difference in value and thus power between a dualism, such as man/woman, reinforces social divisions. In the case of man opposed to woman, the man is the norm and the woman is ‘other’ (Cixous 90). Cixous shows here how the creation of the dialectics of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is an epistemic violence, which according to Braidotti is needed in order for the civilized white man to remain in power (Braidotti 159). The ‘other’ becomes a source that supports the ‘self’ in its dominant position (Braidotti 167).

Agency is a concept that is used to describe actions that oppose the dominant position with the intention to consciously challenge established relations (Hemmings and Kabesh 30). A person who exerts agency always remains within the established discourse, but is able to identify this discourse in order to challenge it (Davies 51). So, agency can be a way to challenge established dualisms.

### **Gender identity**

In the previous paragraph I lay out how inequality is promoted within a culture through representation and language by emphasizing differences of the body and the identity inscribed on the body. The classificatory system in which language operates has multiple aspects. An aspect I would like to mention in respect to gender identity is what political philosopher Marina Calloni says in light of the *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen*. While the goal of the declaration was to include all human beings, what it did was the opposite: it excluded certain groups, such as women, as citizens. Calloni ascribes this exclusion of women to the conviction of what should be public and political, and what should be private. Rationality was a quality that only men had and that was necessary to be a public,

political citizen; women on the other hand were 'emotional', 'private' and thus 'not suited to become citizens' (Calloni 66). This example shows what consequences one of many stereotypes that constitute gender identity, the body, perception and power can have for women. Granted that women in contemporary Western societies are full citizens, the associations of emotional and private still resonate in the category 'woman'. These connotations can imply that women are not able to consciously act, since they are 'mostly driven by emotions'. Therefore, a woman is not seen as able to exert agency. So how can this identity be deconstructed?

When it comes to the construction of gender identity one of the most prominent theorists is Judith Butler. In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" she argues that gender identity is not something natural and pre-given, just like Balsamo did. Butler argues that gender is something that is performed and constructed throughout history (Butler 404-405). Performance of gender constitutes out of acts that bear meaning (Butler 406). She also says that sex, whether someone is seen as biologically male or female, is something that is mostly determined by culture. She says: "We need to think a world in which acts, gestures, the visual body, the clothed body, the various physical attributes usually associated with gender, express nothing" (Butler 414). So, the body is inscribed by culture, and when the ideology produced by culture falls away, distinctions between bodies do not matter. As such, Butler argues that difference is completely culturally constructed. Thus, the possibilities a body carries are multiple. However, it is important to understand that performing gender is an implicit strategy, not something everybody is aware of doing (Butler 404-405). This means that when awareness of this performativity is raised, alternative gender performances breaking with contemporary problematic gender performances can be achieved (Butler 402).

### **(Post)colonial identity**

As gender identity is formed through the opposites masculine and feminine, the colonial identity is formed through the dualism based on difference in national identity. For postcolonial philosopher Frantz Fanon this dualism consisted of the colonist versus the colonized. He says: “the colonial world is a Manichaean world” (Fanon 6). This means that the world is divided in two. The colonized were physically separated from the colonists, by the division of land in colonized countries, but also by creating a discourse in which the colonized were dehumanized through language (Fanon 4-5; 7).

The dualism bearing difference in nationality is again perpetuated through representation. Theorists Robert Stam and Louise Spence explain that “colonialist representation ... is rooted in a vast colonial intertext, a widely disseminated set of discursive practices” (110). For example, there were colonialist historians who applauded colonialism for bringing civilization to peoples who were backwards and savages, and fiction writers who promoted the idea of colonialism and all the benefits (money, servants) that came with it (Stam & Spence 110).

According to philosopher George Yancy the belief that the white civilized man should bring light to the dark countries was integrated into European culture even before they started to colonise (Yancy 3). He also points out how the idea of humanism rose at the same time of the colonisations. In regards to this, he argues that the Other was deemed as ‘sub-human’ or ‘non-human’ and therefore could be treated with violence and aggression (Yancy 5). So, the colonial identity, like gender identity, was constructed through Western societies and had serious consequences for those who were considered less.

### **The cyborg as figuration**

What constantly returns when discussing inequality created through identity, is the dualisms that are made. Man/woman, self/other, colonizer/colonized. According to feminist philosopher Donna Haraway these dualisms are based on the assumption that there is something pure or whole a person can be (16; 22). This means that a person is wholly feminine, for they are not masculine. The one cancels the other out, because it is something 'pure'. To deconstruct this image of wholeness, Haraway argues for a cyborg image. The image of the cyborg is an image that allows for one being to possess both sides of a dualism. The border between the dualism becomes invisible, which causes the two sides to diffuse and pollute each other. The theory pleads against the illusion of being whole (Haraway 9; 30). Haraway says that it is only then, when 'we' acknowledge that we are made up of parts instead of wholes, that we can begin to form an affinity with each other; that we can see the different sides and respect those differences to form new insights (13).

Closely related to Haraway's theory is postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's theory on ambivalence. He posits that discourse is ambivalent. Bhabha theorizes that an expression is always ambivalent since it depends on its place, time, culture etcetera for its meaning. This space, where the expression passes through (from one person to another, for example), Bhabha calls a 'Third Space' (Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity" 156). He argues that in this space ambivalence happens and that this is the place where possibilities for new concepts open up. In this space the hybridity of culture can be voiced (Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity" 157). Hybridity for Bhabha is the space between the two principles of a dualism, where a concept can impossibly settle and is always blurred by the two opposing points (Bhabha, "Introduction" 5). By voicing hybridity, "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity" 157).

Both Haraway and Bhabha agree that a mixture is needed in order to challenge dualisms. Haraway speaks of a cyborg image and Bhabha calls it hybridity. In a way, the Third Space Bhabha speaks of can be seen as where the cyborg is formed. This ‘hybridity’ and ‘cyborg image’, which I will use interchangeably throughout this thesis, are terms that for both authors create possibilities to challenge dualisms and construct a new way of connecting to one another. Therefore, the cyborg image can be used to challenge the polarizing discourse on identity.

So far, I have explained how identity is formed through representations and difference and how these differences are hierarchically constructed. As such, a man is seen as better than a woman and the civilized colonizer is seen as better than the uncivilized colonized. These constructed dualisms can be challenged through cyborg or hybrid imagery. Following the theoretical framework will be the research analysis, in which I will analyse *Ancillary Justice*. Since, as I will argue, the cyborg image can be found within the novel, it so challenges dualisms based on gender and national identity.

## Research Analysis

### Cyborg figuration in imagery and language

Discourse in Radchaai culture differs in some aspects with that in Western cultures and resonates with other aspects. When it comes to the discourse on gender within the Radchaai culture, it can be noted that this is already a hybrid identity and thus very different from the dualistic discourse on gender within Western cultures. When Breq is back on a Radchaai planet she describes how Radchaai people dress and act:

Short hair or long, worn unbound (trailing down a back, or in a thick, curled nimbus) or bound (braided, pinned, tied). Thick-bodied or thin-, faces delicate-featured or coarse, with cosmetics or none. A profusion of colors that would have been gender-marked in other places. All of this matched randomly with bodies curving at breast and hip or not, bodies that one moment moved in ways various non-Radchaai would call feminine, the next moment masculine. (Leckie 283)

In Radchaai culture gender has no substance, therefore it is not necessary for it to be marked in any way. This image of how the Radchaai are depicted differs from the dualistic image that exists in Western cultures. A hybrid gender image is an image that is in-between the two opposing sides of gender. So, it is not masculine nor feminine, but something in-between. The hybrid gender image exhibits traits from both poles, since it cannot settle on either one. While this image is not prominent throughout the novel, Leckie uses the cyborg image of gender to challenge the dualistic gender norms of Western cultures. By showing all these different marks that mean something for the Western reader in terms of gender, and conflating them, it can become difficult to understand. The bodily movements, for example, appear to be both 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Curves, which are a feminine distinction in

Western cultures, are found on all bodies independent of their sex. So, Leckie uses a cyborg figuration applied to gender to challenge Western gender norms.

Besides this straightforward hybrid image of gender, Leckie uses the cyborg figuration on other levels to challenge established gender norms. The assertion that dualisms are challenged by hybridity is underlined by Leckie's language use through Breq's voice. Throughout the whole novel Breq articulates her difficulty with pronouns when she speaks in a language where gender is signified (Leckie). This is a consequence of the fact that in Radchaai culture gender is not significant. However within the novel all characters are indicated with 'she'. It suggests that all Radchaai are female, but this is not the case (Leckie 104). The word itself must be seen as ungendered. This means that the word the Radchaai use to indicate people is ungendered, but becomes gendered in translation. Leckie did not make an effort to use a neutral pronoun while letting Breq narrate the story, which would make sense to do for readability with regards to the reader who is used to gendered pronouns. She does not make it easy to imagine what people look like when it comes to gender. Because Breq uses 'she' to indicate everyone and 'she' is a word with a lot of associations in Western cultures, it can confuse the Western reader accustomed to gendered pronouns. In a way it creates a dissonance in word and image for the contemporary Western reader. Haraway says that "cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly" (34). Leckie chooses not to translate the gender-neutral 'she' from Radchaai to a gender-neutral 'them' in English, therefore, it is not perfectly translated, which causes a disruption in reading and interpreting the novel. Even when other characters from the novel, who come from a culture where pronouns are gendered, use pronouns, the reader cannot be sure whether the gender from those pronouns correspond with the Western gender of a certain pronoun. In this way, it emphasizes the existence of the Third Space that Bhabha talks about, because the

interpretation of the word 'she' changes through the translation from one culture to another and the reader is made aware of this. It opens up possibilities for the gendered pronouns, because, suddenly, its Western meaning and associations do not apply and the so called epistemic violence is challenged. So Leckie, not translating the Radchaai gender-neutral pronoun to an English (or any other language for that matter) gender-neutral pronoun complicates the understanding of the reader when it comes to how to make sense of the words Leckie uses.

### **Colonial discourse and Breq's identity**

What I have argued so far is that a cyborg figuration in imagery and language can aid to challenge established norms. Now I want to continue by adding the concepts performance and agency. Performativity as a concept also returns in Bhabha's theory with regards to ambivalence. He claims that the performative is key in creating a "temporal in-between" in a pre-given history. By doing so, it intervenes in the construction of groups of people as 'self' and 'other' (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 211-212). The in-between can be seen as the Third Space, where, as I have argued before, dualisms can be confronted. Therefore, Breq's performance plays a role in challenging dualisms. However, before I can properly analyse Breq's performance, I have to explain Breq's identity. Breq is an ancillary, whose identity is a complicated one. To see how she challenges dualisms inside and outside Radchaai space, I will first lay out the colonial discourse in Radchaai space to then examine how her identity is formed through this discourse.

In Radchaai discourse, citizenship is very important. In fact, the very word 'Radchaai' means both 'citizen' and 'civilized' (Leckie 49; 62-63). Within Radchaai culture it is considered as their duty to extend this citizenship to non-citizens, despite the fact that their concept of citizenship is not shared by other cultures. To do so, the Radchaai have to use force to impose their values on others. Civilization is brought through the means of annexations,



which allow anything to reach the goal. This means that when someone is a non-citizen and acts against the annexation, this can have grave consequences. Rebellious non-citizens are humiliated, raped, beaten and shot during annexations (Leckie 18). ““But at the end,” says Breg on annexations, ““after all the blood and grief, all those benighted souls who without us would have suffered in darkness are happy citizens. They’ll agree if you ask! It was a fortunate day when Anaander Mianaai brought civilization to them”” (Leckie 156). The Radchaai colonial discourse which states that everything must be done to bring civilization and that this brings happiness is similar to Western discourse on colonization, where the colonized were dehumanized, similar to the non-citizen.

The head priest in an annexed city Ors, explains that even though the Orsians are citizens now, the boundaries that make up the dividing line between people can be ““too easy to create”” (Leckie 18). So not only is a non-citizen dehumanized, but the head priest emphasises how a dualism is literally constructed between citizen and non-citizen on an arbitrary basis. This corresponds to the theory by Fanon on the colonizer and colonized, where a dualistic world is randomly created between the colonizer and colonized, both physically and through discourse. While a physical dualistic world is not relevant here, the dualism in discourse is. Giving the Radchaai colonial discourse on bringing civilization and the head priest’s statement on how little it takes to create boundaries, it suggests of a highly dualistic discourse on who is civilized and who is not and thus who is more human than whom.

So far, I have explained how Radchaai colonial discourse divides citizens from non-citizens similar to Western colonial discourse has divided colonizer from colonized. I have also shown how non-citizens are dehumanized through this discourse, just as colonized peoples were through Western colonial discourse. This colonial discourse is comparable to the

colonial discourse in Western societies. Therefore, the Western reader is familiar with this discourse, which makes it easier to fathom than the discourse on gender.

Now I want to zoom in on the protagonist Breq and her identity with respect to the Radchaai colonial discourse. Breq's body is in multiple ways colonized, first since her body is not Radchaai citizen and second when she is made into an ancillary. Out of the conversation Breq has with a non-Radchaai doctor, it becomes apparent who she was. The doctor says that Breq must be Ghaonish, a planet that was annexed a few centuries before that moment (Leckie 134). During that annexation Breq's body with the former Ghaonish identity was taken prisoner, adjusted and stored in suspension to become an ancillary segment to a Radchaai ship one day (Leckie 63; 67; 134). From that moment on the body was simply a part of the ship, and, according to Radchaai standards 'definitely not human' (Leckie 2; 63; 67; 171; 144). As I argued when analysing Radchaai colonial discourse, non-citizens were seen as barely human, therefore the step for them to be made into parts of a ship is a small step within Radchaai culture. However this also means that Breq's particular body never had the opportunity to become a citizen and thus always remains a colonial 'other', or a non-citizen in Radchaai terms. In a way an ancillary is excluded from citizenship, especially since it is not regarded as human at all and so is colonized twice. The way Breq's body is represented to the reader is as such. Breq lets the reader know as soon as on the second page that she "wasn't a person, [she] was a piece of equipment" (Leckie 2) and while this first statement does not make sense to the reader just yet, it is repeated throughout the novel, remembering the reader of Breq's non-human image.

What physically happened to Breq's body had impact on her identity as well. The day that an ancillary is hooked up, a tech medic takes out a frozen body, thaws it and straps it on a table to secure it. This is needed because the body must be alive and conscious, or the hook up will not work. However, the body is clueless as to where it is. One scene in the novel

describes when a body is hooked up. The body cries for help in the language from its original planet and it is terrified up until the moment it is connected to the ship and the ship has control over it (Leckie 170-171). After being hooked up, Breq's body, which is a few centuries old, became part of an artificial intelligent (AI) ship that was a few thousand years old. She became part of and *was* an actual troop carrier, one of the biggest ships in Radchaai space. In the novel it is described how the ship experiences her officers on the decks, the vacuum around her, her fellow ships who have been around for thousands of years too and her ancillaries on the planet Shis'urna (Leckie 9-10). With the hook up scene, it seems that some part of the former identity still remains in the body. However, in the conversation between the doctor and Breq, when the doctor offers to "bring [her] back," indicating to the person Breq's body used to be, Breq replies: "You can kill me, you mean. You can destroy my sense of self and replace it with one you approve of" (Leckie 135). Breq makes it very clear that her identity is no longer the identity of the Ghaonish person that was once her body, however with the hook up scene it can be interpreted that some of that identity still remains and got mixed up with her being a ship.

On the other hand, her identity can also not be seen as the exact same as the ship. It becomes clear how the identity of Breq and the ancillary segment, or, unit 'One Esk' she was part of, had a distinct identity from the ship *Justice of Toren* when Breq philosophizes about her identity. She speaks of I—*Justice of Toren* and I—One Esk and asks herself how the two got divided:

On one level the answer is simple—it happened when all of *Justice of Toren* but me was destroyed. But when I look closer I seem to see cracks everywhere. Did the singing contribute, the thing that made One Esk different from all other units on the ship, indeed in the fleets? Perhaps. Or is *anyone's* identity a matter of fragments held

together by convenient or useful narrative, that in ordinary circumstances never reveals itself as a fiction? Or is it really a fiction? (Leckie 207)

Breq's contemplations end here on a very philosophical note upon which I will return later. What I want to focus on now, is that Breq as part of the segment One Esk had to have had her own identity in order for her to defy the Lord of the Radch. Ships have preferences for officers and can exert their agency in that respect (Leckie 224). However, the ship's AI is made in such a manner that it has a strong need to obey the Lord of the Radch (Leckie 339). Since One Esk has a distinct identity with her own preferences, she seemed able to override this need to obey. For, the moment One Esk finds out that the Lord of the Radch had ordered a different ancillary unit of *Justice of Toren* to kill her favourite lieutenant, which the unit did, One Esk's feelings seem to flush throughout the whole of *Justice of Toren*, upon which that ancillary unit also shoots (that ancillary of) the Lord (Leckie 248). While the ships have ways to express their preferences towards officers, the moment One Esk decides to disobey the Lord of the Radch and shoot her, she uses violence against the Lord to exercise absolute agency, something the ship could never do, because of the way it is programmed. Therefore, One Esk and her parts—among them Breq, have to have an identity that is partially the ship's, but also something of their own. This points at Breq having a hybrid identity, one that cannot settle on either one or the other.

Thus, Breq's body is colonized twice, as a non-citizen and when she is made into an ancillary. With this final step she is fully dehumanized and the reader is reminded of this throughout the novel. This process also had an impact on her identity. It seems that some of the former Ghoanish identity has remained. Then Breq as an ancillary also establishes an identity with the part of her that is a ship. As I have argued, the ship's identity is different from Breq's on her own. Therefore, Breq has not only a cyborg body, but also a cyborg

identity, which arose from the Ghaonish' and *Justice of Toren's* identities and created something new.

### **Agency and the performing cyborg**

Earlier, I said that Breq exerted agency by shooting Anaander Mianaai. However, a big part of Breq's agency comes from being able to perform. The reason Breq is able to assert her agency through performance is because she is a cyborg. As I will argue through the following analysis, Breq's hybridity allows her to consciously choose how to act. On top of that, I will argue that the visibility of her hybridity, or cyborg identity, to the reader, can nudge them to ask the question Breq asked earlier: "Is *anyone's* identity a matter of fragments held together by convenient or useful narrative, that in ordinary circumstances never reveals itself as a fiction?" (Leckie 207). This is after all what Haraway thought the cyborg could do, since "the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality" (9). Breq performs this in multiple ways, of which I will discuss two. The first is her performance on being 'feminine' according to the culture she is in, the second is her performance as 'human'.

While discourse on gender is not significant for the Radchaai, discourse on gender does exist on other planets, which Breq visits. So in order to manoeuvre in these cultures to not stand out too much, she has to 'perform'. Just like Butler claims everyone does when it comes to gender identity. Breq must consciously act in accordance to certain gender norms. An example of this is when Breq is on the planet Nilt, where she is confronted with a culture where gender is significant. The scene is one of the first scenes in the novel and also immediately addresses the concept of gender. It begins with Breq finding a former officer of hers named Seivarden wounded in the snow. She decides to help Seivarden by entering a tavern to ask for transportation and a medical kit. In the tavern the following happens:

Behind me one of the patrons chuckled and said, voice mocking, “Aren’t you a tough little girl.”

I turned to look at her, to study her face. She was taller than most Nilters, but fat and pale as any of them. She out-bulked me, but I was taller, and I was also considerably stronger than I looked. She didn’t realize what she was playing with. She was probably male, to judge from the angular mazelike patterns quilting her shirt. I wasn’t entirely certain. It wouldn’t have mattered, if I had been in Radch space. Radchaai don’t care much about gender, and the language they speak – my own first language – doesn’t mark gender in any way. This language we were speaking now did, and I could make trouble for myself if I used the wrong forms. It didn’t help that cues meant to distinguish gender changed from place to place, sometimes radically, and rarely made much sense to me.

I decided to say nothing. After a couple of seconds she suddenly found something interesting in the tabletop. I could have killed her, right there, without much effort. I found the idea attractive. But right now Seivarden was my first priority. (Leckie 2-3)

When performance of gender is examined a few things stand out. The first is the way Breq is addressed by the patron. Since the patron calls Breq “tough little girl” mockingly, it can be assumed that the Nilters also live in a patriarchal culture where being a ‘little girl’ is not usually associated with being tough, similar as in contemporary Western societies. The second is Breq’s narrated reaction to this. She says that the patron does not know what she is dealing with and later on that Breq could kill her easily. This implies that the Niltern (and Western) associated gender norms of being a non-violent woman does not apply to Breq and thus create a different discourse on how women can be. In this way, the representation of Breq in the scene “define[s] quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman” (Haraway 37). The third and last

remark on this scene in regards to gender performance is what Breq narrates she can do (kill the patron) and what she actually does (say nothing). While saying nothing implies a sort of conformation to gender norms, in conjunction with what she could do and what seems attractive to her, it rather suggests agency. Agency is something that is not deemed as feminine, since men are active and women passive (Calloni 70). Therefore it could be said that while Breq performed according to gender norms of the society she was in, it was an act of agency and not subservience. On top of this, her act of agency can also create a dissonance with the reader. By performing as 'feminine', Breq acts in a way that is recognizable for the contemporary, typical, norm-abiding Western reader. The narration, however, says something completely different, namely that Breq is performing and is therefore capable of 'masculine' traits. By creating a dissonance in words and actions, Leckie, again, confuses the reader by holding Breq's gender identity in a Third Space and opening up alternatives for what gender identity means.

The same effect is created by Breq's performance as human. For Breq to come close to Anaander Mianaai she has to pose as a human for twenty years. While she has a human body, her 'natural' conduct is everything but human. This comes into view when the head priest in Ors says: "The very thought of you near was terrifying, your dead faces, those expressionless voices" (Leckie 19). On top of that, Breq narrates multiple times that she has to consciously 'put on' an expression when facing others (Leckie). In the end, when she is uncovered as an ancillary, she says: "I could be my ancillary self again. Unsmiling. No satisfaction in my voice" (Leckie 337). The way this is phrased hints that Breq is glad to be her 'ancillary self' again, since she could not have been it for a long time. Therefore, her passing as human can be seen as something she consciously has to choose again and again and thus is, like the performance of femininity, an act of agency.

Breq's passing as human could also be called mimicry. Mimicry is one way through which the ambivalence of colonial discourse becomes clear, according to Bhabha. While mimicry can be seen as reformation of the colonized subject to something closer to the norm, it can also be seen as a distorting strategy. Bhabha says: "mimicry is like camouflage, ... a form of resemblance that differs/ defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically" ("Of Mimicry" 131). By only resembling a part of an identity, again, the wholeness of the 'identity' is challenged (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry" 131). Since Breq used mimicry as a tool to come closer to her goal, and to survive, it can in *Ancillary Justice* not be seen as a reformation. According to Haraway it is needed to claim the tools that were used to mark a person as an 'other' to survive (Haraway 33). She says this specifically about writing, however I think it can be applied to Breq using her humanness as a tool to survive. She was marked 'other' because she was not human, but ancillary. So for her to use her human body to appear more human is mimicry as camouflage and not reformation.

While Breq can perform as human perfectly, she is not human and does not want to be so. This becomes clear when she can be her 'ancillary self again'. This is where her cyborg identity, again, challenges a dualism, namely the idea that being human is a whole identity opposed to being non-human. So Breq seems like a human, but is in fact just part human, which allows her to pass as human. At the same time, here too, the dissonance between image and language is established. Breq's human performance and the narration paired with it, causes the same disruption in Breq's 'colonial' identity as it did in her gender identity.

By constantly creating these contradicting images of Breq's identity, Leckie makes it difficult to grasp who Breq is and how her identity is constructed. In this way, Breq is a cyborg in identity and body, which remains in Bhabha's Third Space where it is hard to comprehend, but causes opportunities for new constructions.



## Conclusion

In this thesis I began with proposing that gendered and national identities in contemporary Western societies are polarising and that SF could play a role in envisioning what other ways are possible for people to relate to each other. In order to find out what kind of role, I asked the question how Ann Leckie's Science Fiction novel *Ancillary Justice* can challenge discourses of the colonized and gendered identity.

To answer this question I first laid out a theoretical framework, wherein I explained that identity is inscribed on the body through representation and is mainly constructed through difference, which results in dualisms as per example man/woman and human/nonhuman. These dualisms are represented within Western cultures as hierarchical. This means that one side of the dualism is deemed as better, and thus as the norm, as opposed to the other side of the dualism. For gender identity the norm is to be masculine, where the feminine qualities are seen as inferior. For colonial identity the norm is to be civilized, where being non-civilized is seen as less. I also argued that colonial discourse dehumanized those colonized. I explained that according to Judith Butler gender is a performance and to be aware of this performance and to act to challenge it is a way to subvert the discourse on gender. Another way to subvert dualisms is through a cyborg or hybrid image, as posited by Donna Haraway and Homi Bhabha. This theory relies on the argument that dualisms assume wholeness. The cyborg embodies both sides of dualisms and so its image challenges the idea of wholeness by emphasising partiality.

Leckie uses a cyborg/ hybrid image in order to challenge gender norms. She does this by depicting a cyborg figuration of gender in Radchaai culture. On top of this the language she uses further confuses the image of gender for the reader. I argued that the imperfect translation of the ungendered Radchaai pronoun to 'she' can emphasize the existence of the

Third Space, because the meaning is lost in the interpretation and new interpretations are potential.

Leckie additionally challenges gender discourse by using her protagonist Breq. Breq is a cyborg in the literal form, both physically and mentally, for she was once part of a hive mind. I reasoned that because of her unique cyborgism she is able to consciously perform. By performing femininity, and at the same time expressing masculinity towards the reader, she can assert agency and challenge gender norms further by constantly portraying her hybridity, leaving the reader confused on how to imagine gender identity. Through the performance of being 'human' she also challenges other dualistic norms that are established in Western societies, such as colonial discourse which perpetuates in contemporary societies through the creation of the 'self' and the 'other' on basis of national identity. As the colonized are dehumanized in Western societies, so is Breq throughout the novel as being a part of a ship. However she is able to perform as human perfectly and again the reader is made aware of this performance. This dissonance of performing as human, but not being human can confuse the reader in interpreting Breq, at the same time it distorts the idea of what being human means. This cyborg image can again place the reader's mindset in the Third Space. Throughout the novel Leckie portrays Breq as containing polarising sides of dualisms in Western societies. She is both feminine and masculine, both human and non-human and thus a cyborg image that creates prospects for new constructs.

So, the cyborg image in *Ancillary Justice* returns in multiple ways. First through language and imagery and second through the portrayal of Breq. As such, Leckie constantly unhinges ideas of wholeness that are established in Western societies through dualisms. Thus, as a SF novel, it challenges dualistic ideas of the body and identity by using the cyborg image to transport the reader to the Third Space, where perhaps new possibilities await.

Still, there are factors that have played a role in writing this thesis that must be mentioned. First, this thesis was written within a limited time and with a word-limit. This means that in order to create a coherent whole, I needed to make choices. While I tried to reflectively write this thesis, my own preferences and state of mind can never be turned off. Therefore, the choices I made for the used theories are not the only choices that could be made with respect to the subject, neither the way that I used these theories. Second, in my method I used only a small amount of concepts that can be used when discussing a novel. For further research it could be useful to use other literary concepts to examine the cyborg imagery, such as the structure of the novel. Also, certain themes that can be examined within the novel, have remained unmentioned. Examples of these themes are the division in body and mind, mental illness and themes on class-inequality. So, in this thesis I have examined a part of the novel, but much remains unexamined.

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