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Could We Not Have Just Left Them Alone?
A Postcolonial Reading of *Horus Rising*

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Abstract

This essay is the result of a study on the science fiction novel *Horus Rising*, by Dan Abnett, which is set in the universe of the Warhammer 40 000 franchise. In the novel, the human Imperium is engaged in a colonizing project of massive proportions: the conquest of a galaxy. Due to the nature of the Imperium's colonial endeavour, the analysis is based mainly on a postcolonial perspective. The aim of the essay is to show how the Imperium uses colonial discourse to justify conquest. My claim is that they violate the diversity and needs of the human race and that the human need of religion is used to resist the conquest. To do this, the justifications and the resistance of the conquest will be investigated, as well as the nature of the human race, i.e. what it means to be human in the novel.

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Introduction

In the science fiction novel *Horus Rising*, by Dan Abnett, the Imperium is expanding from Terra, the cradle of humanity. The immortal Emperor of mankind has united Terra in an attempt to unite the entire human race, which has spread across the galaxy through the millennia and branched off into a number of different races with a variety of physical and cultural characteristics. The mission of the Emperor's armies is to conquer every world in the galaxy, ensuring that their inhabitants accept the Emperor as master of mankind, follow Imperial law and dogma, and to exterminate all alien species.

The Imperium's official stance towards religion is to replace it with secular truth. They are convinced that religion is bad for humanity. Travelling with the armies of the Imperium are the iterators, mortal men and women, who are responsible for bringing the anti-religious enlightenment to the conquered worlds. However, an underground religious movement is slowly growing within the Imperium, hailing the immortal Emperor as their deity. Also travelling with the Imperial armies are the remembrancers, mortals too, responsible for recording the events of the conquest in poetry, art, music, and other artistic forms.

Foremost among the Emperor's armies are the legions of Astartes; a warrior race of humans with superhuman powers, advanced weaponry and technology to ensure victory over their foes. The leaders of the legions of Astartes are called the primarchs, who are even more superhuman than the Astartes. Foremost of the primarchs is Horus Lupercal who has been given the title of Warmaster. He is to function as the Emperor's proxy and general of the armed forces of the Imperium.

The novel describes a colonizing process on a massive scale: the conquest of a galaxy. In its endeavour, the Imperium aims to unite all human worlds and dominate them, simply by virtue of them being human and originating from Terra. This can be seen when the Imperials bring them to compliance. The novel will be analyzed from a postcolonial perspective. The

aim of this essay is to show how the Imperium uses colonial discourse to justify conquest. I claim that in its takeover of other worlds the Imperium violates the diversity and needs of the human race. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the human need of religion is used as a way of resisting the conquest. For this, the justifications and resistance of the conquest will be investigated, together with the nature of the human race, i.e. what it means to be human in the novel. The main focus for this will be the remembrancers, the Astartes and the primarchs. The analysis is divided into three parts: part one focuses mainly on the concept of humanity; part two on the conquest and its justifications; part three on how the conquest is resisted and questioned. A short analytical framework will be presented before the analysis.

Analytical Framework

In the novel, there are several different types of humans, both within the Imperium and outside it. In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* Ania Loomba refers to “othering”, in which other races are constructed as “backward and inferior” (91). This was a justification for colonial conquest and is similarly used as a justification for conquering other cultures in the novel. However, as Loomba also mentions, this justification is insufficient since “[in] reality any simple binary opposition between ‘colonisers’ and ‘colonised’ or between races is undercut by the fact that there are enormous cultural and racial differences within each of these categories as well as crossovers between them” (91). This is the case in the novel, a fact which makes conquest problematic.

The idea of orientalism can also be applied to the Imperium in their dealings with aliens. In “Crisis [in orientalism]” Edward Said describes the phenomenon in the following way:

If one reads a book claiming that lions are fierce and then encounters a fierce lion ... the chances are that one will be encouraged to read more books by that same author, and believe them. But if, in addition, the lion book instructs one how to deal with a fierce lion, and the instructions work perfectly, then not only will the author be greatly believed, he will also be impelled to try his hand at other works of written performance . . . [It] might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness and so forth. (368-69)

Texts such as this, Said argues, “can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (369). When dealing with the supposed fierce lion, the way of dealing with it might actually provoke its fierceness. The phenomenon can also lead to a generalization of other people: “it always rose from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one; . . . a verse from the Koran would be considered the best evidence of an ineradicable Muslim sensuality” (370). In some cases, the practices of the Imperium are similar to this, as they provoke hostility in aliens and then generalize all aliens as hostile.

In *Horus Rising*, there are a number of so-called contact zones; places where different cultures meet. Mary Lousie Pratt coined the term in “Arts of the Contact Zone” where she describes these places as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism” (1). In the novel there are many different contact zones that represent all of these types: in certain spaces cultures meet peaceably, in others they clash or grapple, both on equal and unequal terms. She also refers to Benedict Anderson's concept of the “imagined community”, which is a “strongly utopian” society, “embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize” (4). The Imperium displays some of these characteristics during their conquest, professing good intentions about their mission.

One of the Imperium's purposes with their conquest is to abolish religion, calling itself a "secular culture" (Abnett 59). However, since some people in the Imperium are religious, Mircea Eliade's views on religion from his book *The Sacred and the Profane* are of note. He argues that "a profane existence is never found in the pure state. To whatever degree he may have desacralized the world, the man who has made his choice in favor of a profane life never succeeds in doing away with religious behaviour" (23). This is interesting, since the Imperium's anti-religion almost becomes a new religion. Something that is also represented as important in the novel is a particular passage rite. Eliade claims that there are "passage rites at birth, at marriage, at death" and argues that "each of these cases always involves an initiation, for each of them implies a radical change in ontological and social status" (184). The passage rite is particularly interesting, but there are other rituals in the novel, as well.

Finally, Abraham H. Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied to certain aspects of the novel. According to W. Huitt, the hierarchy of needs is "based on two groupings: deficiency needs and growth needs. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next level" (Huitt). The deficiency needs are of most concern to this study. On the first level, needs such as hunger and thirst can be found. The second level of needs contain the need for safety and security. On the third level, needs of "Belongingness and Love" can be found, or to "affiliate with others, be accepted" (Huitt). The fourth and final level of the deficiency needs contains needs of esteem: "to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition" (Huitt). The third and fourth levels of needs are of concern to this study, because they are essential to the remembrancers: without the third level fulfilled, they cannot begin working on the fourth level and produce material of remembrance. When these needs have been fulfilled, the so-called growth needs become important. Here, the first level concerns cognitive needs, "to know, to understand, to explore" (Huitt). The second level contains aesthetic needs, which can be connected to the remembrancers. The third contains

the need for “Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one’s potential” (Huitt). The final level concerns “Self-transcendence” (Huitt), which can be connected to religion which, as I have mentioned above, plays an important role in the novel.

1 The Different Human Races of the Imperium

The origin of the human race is the planet Terra. In *Galaxy in Flames* by Ben Counter, one of the novel’s sequels, a timeline describes the events prior to the conquest. Between the 16th and 26th millennia, mankind spread from Terra and colonized space. However, between the 26th and 31st millennia interstellar travel was made impossible due to warp storms, effectively separating humanity. When these abated in the 31st millennium, the Emperor of mankind began his conquest (410-11). This time period is the setting of *Horus Rising*.

As Loomba mentioned, a “simple binary opposition between ‘colonisers’ and ‘colonised’ or between races is undercut by the fact that there are enormous cultural and racial differences within each of these categories as well as crossovers between them” (91). This makes “othering” of the colonized problematic, as there are several races of humans in the Imperium as well. The first one is the mortals. Among them are the remembrancers whose task is to record the events of the Imperial conquest. During the first two centuries of the Great Crusade, this had been done by a few individuals in a disorganized manner, “sometimes inspired by their own artistic appetites, sometimes encouraged by the patronage of a particular primarch or lord commander, who thought it fit to have his deeds immortalised in verse or text or image or composition” (Abnett 45). However, the Emperor thought it was important to record and celebrate the conquest for mankind and “[t]he fledgling Council of Terra . . . agreed wholeheartedly” (46). The scale of the undertaking shows its importance: about four million remembrancers were sent to the Imperial fleets “in the first months following the

ratification of the bill” (46). Primary iterator Kyril Sindermann of the 63rd expedition says: “I believe that if mankind does not properly document and witness his achievements, then only half of this undertaking has been made” (147). The Imperium is a society that places great value in its cultural development which is linked to praising the conquest. Poetry, art and music provide the Imperium with a common culture, which gives a sense of belonging, fulfilling the third level of Maslow’s hierarchy. One of the higher growth needs, the need for things aesthetic, such as “symmetry, order, and beauty” can also be fulfilled (Huitt). In this context, the remembrancers are the creators and keepers of the Imperium’s great repository of culture.

Remembrancing is also used to remember other cultures. On the surface of a conquered world, remembrancer Ignace Karkasy writes down anti-Imperial writings: “Many were bold, angry graffiti, splenetically cursing the invaders or defiantly announcing a surviving spark of resistance” (Abnett 95). He writes about the feelings of the defeated, not celebrating the conquest. This recalls Paul Ricoeur's point in *Time and Narrative*: “We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost” (75).

Sometime after their arrival in the 63rd fleet, the remembrancers are given a large chamber on board the expedition’s flagship, the *Vengeful Spirit*:

By their very nature, the remembrancers could not be regimented or controlled the way the military complements of the ship could. They had an unquenchable desire to meet and debate and carouse. By giving them a space for their own use, the masters of the expedition could at least ring-fence their boisterous activities. (Abnett 251)

In this place, known as the Retreat, they can congregate, drink and spend time with each other, fulfilling their need “to affiliate with others” (Huitt). If they were not allowed to do this, they would not be able to produce any material, as the needs “to achieve” and “gain approval and recognition” are on the fourth level (Huitt). This they can do through their artistic abilities. Besides recording the conquest, they perform another informal function: the Retreat is also visited by other people. This is a contact zone where the military and civilian cultures of the Imperium meet, on more or less equal terms. Before they arrived, “there had never been any gleeful society aboard the *Vengeful Spirit* . . . Just quiet after-shift drinking and sullen gambling schools. The remembrancers had brought their bohemian habits to the warship, and the crewmen and soldiery had been drawn to its light” (Abnett 316-17). As Karkasy muses, “[i]t was . . . the finest achievement of the remembrancer programme to date: to remind the expedition warriors they were human, and to offer them some fun” (316). This indicates that being human in the novel is to have a social need. It is also an indication that the Imperium ignores the needs of its subjects, in this case the social needs of its soldiers. However, as the remembrancers are not part of the military, the commanders were forced to indulge them, an opportunity which the soldiers immediately seized.

Being given a space for their own use where they can find inspiration for their artistic sides is almost religious. Eliade speaks of religious places, such as churches: “The threshold is the limit . . . that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible” (25), or in this case from the non-cultural to the cultural. The Retreat is almost a “holy” place where they can indulge their artistic appetites, a cultural temple.

However, the remembrancers are low in the Imperial hierarchy, especially when compared to tax collectors who "had been sent throughout the spreading territories of the Imperium, in a programme of general dispersal that made the mass deployment of the

remembrancers look like a modest operation” (Abnett 370). The regime is more concerned with the acquisition of wealth, even though culture is said to be a priority. Also, before retiring to Terra, the Emperor was head of the War Council, “formed principally of the Emperor and the Primarchs”, which “had been the epicentre of Imperial authority” (46-7). When retiring he founds the Council of Terra which “supplanted [the War Council], taking up the reins of Imperial governance, a body composed of civilians instead of warriors” (47). The hierarchy was changed, which angered many of the Imperium’s soldiery, venting their irritation on the remembrancers. Karkasy discusses the matter with Euphrati Keeler, another remembrancer:

‘The beloved warriors we’ve been sent here to glorify couldn’t be less helpful if they tried ... Every request for access [to the war zone] I’ve made has been turned down.’ (51)

Kyril Sindermann, having gone through the remembrancers’ archives, says that ““Some of it is... patchy, shall I say? Ideal ammunition for those who claim the remembrancer project is a waste of time, funds and ship space, but some is outstanding”” (147). However, after a while they can perform their duties better, the martial class of the expedition finally warming to them due to some success. Despite the discontent they are able to create some good material.

One of the other human races is the Astartes, “genetically enhanced” warriors: “Modified, refined, post-human, the Astartes were superior to anything they had met or would ever meet” (19). Part of their enhancement is that they are “[i]mmortal, but not invulnerable . . . Yes, they might live forever, but they would never get the chance. Immortality was a by-product of their Astartes strengths, but those strengths had been gene-built for combat. They had been born immortal only to die in war” (82). Being immortal warriors is apt, regarding their name: According to Johanna H. Stuckey in “Astarte – Goddess of Fertility, Beauty, War,

and Love” Astarte was a goddess who “seems to have had strong connections with both war and love/sexuality” (Stuckey). It is also ironic, since all Astartes are men.

When one of the remembrancers, Mersadie Oliton, sees Captain Garviel Loken of the Luna Wolves for the first time, she admires his physique:

He was almost a metre taller than her, and naked but for a loin cloth. She sighed inwardly at the splendour of his physique. The knotted muscles, the old ridge-scars. He was handsome, too, this one, fair hair almost silver, cut short, his pale skin slightly freckled, his eyes grey like rain. What a waste, she thought. Though there was no disguising his inhumanity, especially in this bared form. Apart from the sheer mass of him, there was the overgrown gigantism of the face, that particular characteristic of the Astartes, almost equine, plus the hard, taut shell of his rib-less torso, like stretched canvas.

(Abnett 29)

This scene recalls another first encounter, namely between Robinson Crusoe and his to-be servant Friday in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Seeing Friday, Crusoe admires him: “He was a comely handsome fellow, perfectly well made . . . tall and well shap’d . . . His hair was long and black, not curl’d like wool; his forehead very high, and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes” (162). In these cases, the spectator sees something fine in the other, but also a function: a man of a different race who can perform menial work in the case of Friday, or fight wars in the case of Loken. The differences between mortals and Astartes are also shown: the Astartes are human-like, despite their augmentations, but there is also something that is not human, setting them apart. Humans in the novel “other” those who are different, in a way similar to Crusoe: the Astartes are described as not quite human, just as Friday is European-like, yet not quite European (Defoe 162). This is interesting, since it is one of the conquerors who “others” another conqueror, showing that there are not only differences

between the conqueror and the conquered but differences within their respective cultures as well (Loomba 91).

Another part of the Astartes' enhancement, though more subtle, is their inability to experience fear. Oliton asks Captain Loken about this once, where he replies: "We are immune to its touch" (Abnett 170). She contemplates this:

[Wondering] if it was possible to remove an entire emotion from what was essentially a human mind. Did that not leave a void? Were other emotions compromised by its lack? Could fear even be removed cleanly, or did its excision tear out shreds of other qualities along with it? It certainly might explain why the Astartes seemed larger than life in almost every aspect except their own personalities. (170-71)

Most Astartes are not great thinkers, perhaps as a result of their creation. It is possible that more things than their fear have been removed. Loken once mentions that he is incapable of appreciating poetry (243). However, he is aware that there are things he does not understand which could be part of being human. He also discusses the nature of the Astartes with Sindermann, saying that they are nothing but weapons: "The value of my action has already been weighed by the greater conscience of our commander. I kill until I am told to stop, and in that period, I do not question the killing . . . A weapon doesn't question who it kills, or why" (62). This is how they were made, which says a lot about the Imperium's values: the fact that they have gone to the trouble of creating fearless, enhanced super-soldiers that do not question their work means that they value martial strength and want to conquer the galaxy. They employ diplomacy in the novel but they are not afraid to conquer by force. The Astartes are the means of doing just that.

However, Oliton's reflection provokes the idea that the Astartes' personalities could be seen as sub-human instead of super-human. In this context it is interesting to note that Loken

is different from most Astartes. He spoke to Sindermann because he doubted his role and the conquest. This “flaw” in his character is why he is chosen to join the Mournival, the Warmaster’s circle of advisors. Rogal Dorn, one of the primarchs, says that there is “something very human” about him, “for an Astartes” (136). The other two choices for that position were inappropriate in Dorn’s opinion, one of them “a battle-hungry killer” and the other “a sycophant” (135). Loken can offer “a proper, dissenting opinion” (135). As Dorn says to Loken, “[t]here could be no better Warmaster than Horus, but a man, even a primarch, is only as good as the counsel he receives, especially if he is utterly self-confident. He must be tempered and guided by those close to him” (135).

The Astartes appear to be the main enforcers of the hierarchy of humans. Loken and another captain of the Mournival, Torgaddon, walk past two mortals once: “The necrologists stopped work and bowed their heads as the two captains went by. Torgaddon didn’t spare them a second glance” (110). The situation is not helped by some mortals’ fear of the Astartes. During a conversation, Loken and Sindermann are in one of the flagships’ libraries, where Loken starts to laugh: “Some of the metaphrasts nearby looked up from their study, annoyed at the interruption. They quickly looked down again when they saw the noise had issued from an Astartes” (67). Also, Oliton once asks him what the Warmaster is like, using his given name Horus without any title. This angers Loken:

‘I think he is Warmaster,’ Loken said. His voice was stone hard. ‘I think he is the master of the Luna Wolves and the chosen proxy of the Emperor, praise be his name, in all our undertakings. He is the first and foremost of all primarchs. And I think I take offence when a mortal voices his name without respect or title.’ (44)

He makes it clear that only Astartes are worthy of calling the Warmaster by name. By doing this he is demonstrating his “othering” of mortals, treating them as “inferior” (Loomba 91).

The last human race in the Imperium is the primarchs, leaders of the Astartes legions. Just like the Astartes, they are immortal (Abnett 81). They are even larger than Astartes. Kneeling when captain Loken is sitting down, "[Horus'] head was on a level with Loken's" (195). Rogal Dorn, primarch of the Imperial Fists, describes them as near-divine: "The Emperor has no like, Loken. There are no gods in this hollow universe to keep him company. So he made us, demi-gods, to stand beside him" (134). A clear distinction between other humans and the primarchs is produced here. When Horus was made Warmaster, he was raised "above his brothers, and there had been some stifled objections and discontent, especially from those primarchs who felt the title should have been theirs. The primarchs were as prone to sibling rivalry and petty competition as any group of brothers" (129). This shows that they possess some human characteristics, such as jealousy.

Speaking to remembrancer Oliton, Loken tells of how the primarchs are different: "Each one, so mighty, so huge and so proud. They seemed to embody human characteristics. Angron, red and angry; Dorn solid and implacable; Magnus, veiled in mystery, and Sanguinius, of course. So perfect. So charismatic" (333). The fact that all of them are men says something about the Imperium: male strength is a military norm, which gives associations to aggression. Horus is one of the more interesting primarchs. Just as the others, he has human characteristics: "[Dorn] was resolute where Horus was flamboyant, reserved where Horus was charismatic, and that was why Horus had been the obvious choice for Warmaster" (130). However, Dorn and Guilliman are the ones Horus asks "for counsel . . . Horus desired their approval as a young man might seek the quiescence of older, more accomplished brothers" (129-30). This shows that the primarchs also have a need to "affiliate with others, be accepted" (Huitt).

As Warmaster, Horus is the Emperor's proxy and head of the War Council (Abnett 46-47). This is a great responsibility, making him commander of the armed forces of the

Imperium. In order for it to work smoothly, he needs the respect of his subordinates. To accomplish this, he uses the Mournival as a political weapon. At one point, the Warmaster needs to reprimand a subordinate for a badly performed task, so he lets the Mournival scold the commander. Captain Aximand of the Mournival explains to Loken:

‘He wants us to give them hell, a dressing down they’ll remember and learn from. That allows him to seem the peacemaker. To remain beloved, adored, a voice of reason and calm. By the end, if we do things properly, they’ll all feel suitably admonished, and simultaneously they’ll all love the Warmaster for showing mercy and calling us off.’ (277)

Being a primarch is a great responsibility, but Horus’ responsibility is the greatest. Horus is aware of this burden, perhaps even more so than the other primarchs. The Emperor had once said to Horus: “Make no mistakes ... and they [the stars] will be ours” (353). He interprets this very closely: “‘*Make no mistake,*’ Horus continued. ‘Those three words. Make no mistake. I am Warmaster, by the Emperor’s decree. I cannot fail him. I cannot make mistakes’” (356). Horus’ fear is to fail the Emperor by making mistakes.

To conclude, there are several varieties of humans in the Imperium, showing that diversity is a human trait. They have their own characteristics as well as some similarities, such as the need to socialize with others. The Astartes’ social need will be mentioned later.

2 Conquest

The justifications for conquest are many and varied. The focus of this part will be to show the purpose of the conquest and how the Imperials justify it. As mentioned, the purpose of the

conquest is to unite the entire human race. Warmaster Horus says something that shows the Emperor clearly wants to rule the stars:

‘Those points of light . . . are what we have been waiting generations to master. Imagine . . . every one a human culture, every one a realm of beauty and magnificence, free from strife, free from war, free from bloodshed and the tyrannous oppression of alien warlords. Make no mistake . . . and they will be ours. (352-53)

Exactly how this is to be done is not mentioned. Captain Aximand points out that “we prosecute this crusade according to certain doctrines . . . Laws of life, laws on which the Imperium is founded. They are not arbitrary. They were given to us, to uphold, by the Emperor himself” (352), but it is unclear exactly what these doctrines are. This is similar to what Loomba mentions about the ideology of the British Empire. She quotes Jan Morris, who claims that the British Empire never had an ideology, and that their purpose was unclear: “colonialism had not one but several ideologies, and these ideologies were manifest in hundreds of different institutional and cultural practices” (Loomba 97).

The first and only world to actually be conquered in the novel is a planet called ‘Terra’ by its inhabitants, but is designated Sixty-Three Nineteen by the Imperium. When they arrive, they are immediately contacted by the Emperor of that solar system. As soon as he realizes the visitors are human, he demands to be showed “proper fealty. As Emperor. Of mankind” (Abnett 15). The Warmaster sends one of his captains, Hastur Sejanus, to meet this Emperor. During his meeting with the Emperor Sejanus is killed because he “had not offered the correct fealty. Indelicately, he had suggested there might actually be *another* Emperor” (16). The fact that they kill the Warmaster’s envoy is a clear sign that they have no wish to join the Imperium. When the first attempt at diplomacy fails, the Warmaster orders a second envoy to be sent:

The intent was clear: one hand extended open, in peace, the other held ready as a fist. If the second embassy failed, or was similarly met with violence, then the fist would already be in position to strike. (16)

This shows the Imperium's attitude: on the one hand they want to find a peaceful solution if possible, but on the other hand it is clear that they will use force when necessary, in order to bring others to compliance. During a session with remembrancer Oliton, Captain Loken says that an earlier venture on a planet named Sarosel had been completed without bloodshed (172). This shows a certain flexibility of strategy. Loomba mentions this about European colonialism as well: "violence was readily resorted to wherever necessary, and the enormous difference of strategy in different places indicate the flexibility of colonial ideologies and practices, rather than the absence of the desire for conquest in some colonial ventures" (98). In Loomba's words, part of the process of forming a community is "*un-forming* or *re-forming*" an already existing community through acts like "trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare" (8). Again, this shows the Imperium's flexibility and its limitations: Sixty-Three Nineteen would not surrender freely, so they were conquered through warfare. However, on Sarosel compliance had been reached through negotiation instead, making it a contact zone "where cultures meet" after clashing or grappling "with each other" (Pratt 1).

During the battle for the capital of Sixty-Three Nineteen, Captain Loken's company is the first to breach the palace and reach the 'Emperor'. On his way to the throne chamber, Loken sees walls "decorated with frescoes, showing familiar scenes of a haloed Emperor upon a golden throne. How blind these people are, Loken thought, how sad it is. One day, one single day with the iterators, and they would understand" (Abnett 23). This shows one of the similarities between Sixty-Three Nineteen and the Imperium but, according to the Imperials, they believe in the wrong Emperor. When Loken reaches the 'Emperor's' throne chamber, they engage in a discussion on truth:

‘Your hostility started this’, Loken said. ‘You would not listen to us or believe us. You murdered our ambassadors. You brought this on yourself. We are charged with the reunification of mankind, throughout the stars, in the name of the Emperor. We seek to establish compliance amongst all the fragmentary and disparate strands. You resisted.’

‘You came to us with lies!’

‘We came with the truth.’ (38)

This supposed truth is used as justification for conquering this world, by enlightening the population. In this case, the truth Loken speaks of refers to the real Emperor of mankind, but it is used to refer to other things later, as well. The fact that the Imperials were attacked is also used as justification. However, it is interesting that the Imperium and the ‘Imperium’ of Sixty-Three Nineteen are not very different. The Emperor of Sixty-Three Nineteen rejoiced to see that there were other humans in the galaxy, and also had intentions to start a “Great Scheme of rebuilding . . . and the Imperium of Mankind would stretch itself out again across the stars, as was its birthright” (15). The goal is the same as the ‘real’ Imperium, but he is not the real Emperor according to the ‘real’ Imperials.

One interesting thing about the population of Sixty-Three Nineteen is that they are religious. Their last bastion is located in a mountain range where a group of insurgents have taken shelter. Captain Loken’s company of Astartes are sent to deal with them, and manage to kill all of them. Inside this bastion, they find what appear to be water-silos with bottles strewn around: “At first, [Loken] assumed they were there to collect the water, but there were other items too: coins, brooches, strange doll-like figures of clay and the head bones of small mammals and lizards . . . On the overhang of rock above the pool, ancient, eroded script had been chiselled” (163). He realizes they have found a religious place and that the mountain is full of such chambers. He orders them all destroyed, which is a clear sign that they want to

eradicate religion. When lecturing his junior iterators, Kyril Sindermann says that religious beliefs were only comfort for people and that “[r]eligion damned our species for thousands of years, from the lowest superstition to the highest conclaves of spiritual faith. It drove us to madness, to war, to murder, it hung upon us like a disease, like a shackle ball” (58-59). It can be seen here that the Imperials want to eradicate religion because they believe it leads to war. In the case above, it was religious zealots who rebelled against the invaders in order to protect their last holy place on Sixty-Three Nineteen, an endeavour in which they clearly failed. So, in the opinion of the Imperials religion must be eradicated in order to avoid rebellion.

As Sindermann continues, he says that “we have witnessed the cosmos now, my friends ... We have seen the stars from behind, and found no clockwork mechanisms, no golden chariots carrying them abroad . . . The greatest thing mankind ever did was to reinvent itself as a secular culture” (59). Finally, he concludes that religious faith is ignorance and that their mission is to show other human peoples the truth. When saying all of this, he implies the Imperium is more enlightened, and that the population of Sixty-Three Nineteen are ignorant and primitive and that they are in fact saving them by educating them in secularism, making them see the error of their ways. He is “othering” them, constructing them as “backward and inferior” in front of his students (Loomba 91). This inferiority is used as justification for conquest. The truth that he speaks of refers to secularism, which shows that the Imperial ideology on truth is flexible enough to be adapted to a specific situation. This anti-religion, however, almost becomes a religion in itself: during the lecture, Sindermann’s students cheer him on in a near-fanatical manner (Abnett 61).

When the battle for the capital is over, they start to dismantle the mechanisms of Sixty-Three Nineteen (45), replacing them with the Imperial political structures. This recalls Louis Althusser's point that “hegemony” in capitalist societies “is achieved via a combination of ‘force’ and ‘consent’”:

[T]he former is achieved by ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’ such as the army and the police, but the latter is enforced via ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ such as schools, the Church, the family, media and political systems. These ideological apparatuses assist in the reproduction of the dominant system by creating subjects who are ideologically conditioned to accept the values of the system. (Loomba 33)

One of the iterators’ purposes is to educate the masses, facilitating the ideological takeover. Also, one of the generals of the Imperial army attached to the 63rd expedition is placed on the planet: “Rakris had been selected to remain at Sixty-Three Nineteen as governor overseer, marshalling the occupation forces as the world transmuted into a full Imperial state” (Abnett 118). Placing someone loyal to the Imperium there proves that they want to ensure compliance and control of Sixty-Three Nineteen. This is similar to what Loomba mentions about control in British colonies. In some colonies, like India, the native systems of authority were used to enforce colonial authority, while “in countries like Namibia and South Africa ... racial divisions were maintained along with direct and powerful intervention, and with fewer spinoffs of power and wealth among the indigenous population” (97).

Human civilizations are not the only ones to be conquered by the Imperium. Other species are encountered during the conquest as well. The Imperium’s view on non-humans is one of brutal intolerance. When Loken tells his stories to remembrancer Oliton, he tells her of an alien race called the keylekid that the 63rd expedition encountered some eighty years before Sixty-Three Nineteen. Despite being skilled warriors, the keylekid hated war and limited fighting to certain structures called “slaughterhouses”: “War was forbidden on any other part of their world’s surface. They were waiting for us to meet them at a slaughterhouse and decide the matter.” (173). However, the Imperials exterminated the keylekid, ignoring their rules of war:

‘It was suggested that we might meet them and fight them by the terms of their rules . . . There may have been some honour in that, but Maloghurst, I think it was, reasoned that we had rules of our own which the enemy chose not to recognise. Besides, they were formidable. Had we not acted decisively, they would have remained a threat, and how long would it have taken them to learn new rules or abandon old ones?’ (173)

The Imperium justified exterminating the keylekid by saying that they ignored Imperial rules of war, making a pre-emptive strike. This also says something about the human fear of the unknown. They commit genocide for fear that the keylekid might attack them later.

Destroying them without second thought shows that they have no respect for other species, as well being convinced of the righteousness of their own cause.

Responding to a call for reinforcements from a detachment of the Blood Angels legion of Astartes, the 63rd expedition makes haste to a world called Murder. A detachment of the Emperor’s Children legion of Astartes had also responded to the call and arrived before the Warmaster’s forces. The species they encounter on Murder is called the megarachnid, due to their similarity to insects: “[They] were three metres tall, and possessed eight limbs. They ambulated, with dazzling speed, on their four hindmost limbs, and used the other four as weapons. Their bodies, one third again as weighty and massive as a human’s, were segmented like an insect’s [sic]” (225). They were formidable, annihilating the Blood Angels and inflicting serious casualties on the Emperor’s Children. Captain Tarvitz muses on why the megarachnid attack: “It occurred to him that the megarachnid might be attacking because, to them, the humans were hideous and xenos. It was a terrible thought. Surely the megarachnid could see the superiority of the human design compared with their own? Maybe they fought because of jealousy?” (230).

Eventually, when the Warmaster's forces arrive the Imperial forces gain a foothold on Murder. Sanguinius, primarch of the Blood Angels, also arrives with a new detachment of his legion. He is sad, because of his dead Astartes, craving vengeance on the megarachnid: "In the old philosophies of Terra . . . vengeance was seen as a weak motive and flaw of the spirit. It is hard for me to feel so noble today . . . But that is not necessary. Vengeance is not necessary. There is xenos here, implacable alien menace that rejects any civilised intercourse with mankind, and has greeted us with murder and murder alone. That suffices" (336). These attitudes are interesting. What Sanguinius says is in effect that it is wrong to make war on other humans, but aliens are to be destroyed, without remorse or pity.

Tarvitz's musing displays humanity's self-image: they see themselves as superior and therefore have the right to exterminate other species. This attitude clearly shows that the Imperium's ideologies are racist. In "New Ethnicities", Stuart Hall explains that racism "operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constructed categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness" (587). That is exactly what the Imperium does in their dealings with other species. Hall continues and explains that "[j]ust as masculinity constructs femininity as double – simultaneously Madonna and Whore – so racism constructs the black subject: noble savage and violent avenger" (587). However, the Imperials see nothing noble in aliens, only "violent avengers".

After roughly six months on Murder, the Imperials are confronted by representatives of a human civilization called the interex who ask why the Imperials are slaughtering the megarachnid (Abnett 343-44). During a meeting the interex envoy explains that due to their hostile nature the megarachnid had been exiled on Murder, rather than being destroyed. They were "not sentient in a way we could understand. They existed only to reproduce and

develop territory. When we first met them, they infested eight systems along the Shartiel Edge of our provinces, and threatened to invade and choke two of our populated worlds” (365).

The interex is an interesting society. It consists not only of humans, but also of an alien race known as the kinebrach, that had been a major star-faring culture long before humanity (363). The interex humans' first encounter with them led to a long war which the humans won. Instead of being destroyed, the kinebrach were integrated into their society, where they “shared their technological advances by way of exchange. For three thousand years, the interex humans had successfully coexisted with the kinebrach” (363). The envoy explains that most of their inter-species dealings had ended peacefully, with a few exceptions such as the megarachnid (365). The Imperials, however, have an extremely xenophobic attitude. This can be seen when First Captain Abaddon of the Luna Wolves speaks with the interex envoy: “[S]ometimes communication is not enough. In our experience, most xenos are wilfully hostile. Communication and bargaining is not an option” (364). However, in the case of the keylekid the Imperials were the aggressors. Many of the hostilities aliens are claimed to possess may in fact have been provoked by the Imperials. This is where orientalism can be applied to the Imperium. Just as books about lions “can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (Said 369), so the Imperium’s attitudes can create hostility. It may very well be that the Imperium provokes hostility when they encounter new species, meeting them with weapons aimed and loaded and consequently generalize all aliens as hostile. In Said’s words “[Orientalism] always rose from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one” (370). Here, hostility is considered evidence of all aliens’ nature. Being human in the novel may mean to fear the unknown, but also to generalize about it. These views make the Imperials uncomfortable when in the same room as the kinebrach: “There was a smell to them, a distinctive earthy smell that wasn’t exactly unpleasant, except that it was entirely and completely not human” (Abnett 364). In this contact zone, the two

cultures “clash”, as they are very different (Pratt 1). Despite all this, the Warmaster decides not to make war on the interex, at least not at first.

3 Resisting and Questioning the Conquest

It is interesting that there are many different types of humans in the novel, both within the Imperium and outside it. Many people in the Imperium have different skin colors, as an example: remembrancer Oliton’s skin is “like burnished coal” (Abnett 30), whereas one of the iterators is “olive-skinned” (69). There are great differences between the mortals of the Imperium and the population of Sixty-Three Nineteen, as well. Remembrancer Karkasy roams the streets of the capital where he finds an eating house and buys a drink (98-99). Sitting in the eating house he views the other occupants and finds them strange:

Was that what five thousand years of separation did to the divided branches of mankind? He took another sip. Biologically identical, but for a few strands of genetic inheritance, and yet culturally grown so far apart . . . They were a graft from the rootstock, grown under another sun, similar yet alien. Even the way they sat at tables and sipped at drinks (101).

According to Loomba, the Bible was used in medieval Europe to explain and justify conquest: it stated that “all human beings were brothers descended from the same parents” (92). Thus, “[i]f there was a single origin for all humanity, then presumably these fallen people could be brought back into the fold, and converted to Christian ways” (92). This is exactly what the Imperium attempts to accomplish: despite the diversity of humanity, they operate on the basis that all humans have the same origin and can therefore be made to cast off religion and believe in the same ideology. They are virtually attempting to cast them in the same mould as themselves. However, in colonial endeavours “aphorisms such as the impossibility of ‘washing the Ethiope white’ were commonly used to indicate the biological basis and hence

the immutability of race and colour”, which can make this problematic (92). In the case of the Imperium, they try to convert all other humans to Imperial ways, but that may prove difficult. Something that has already been proven here is that the human race shows great diversity. Other human cultures may have grown too far apart to be successfully converted, having their own cultural and physical characteristics. This is a reason why all humans should not be cast in the same mould. Also, by the diversity of its population, the Imperium resists its own conquest. The creation of the Astartes and the primarchs is proof of this, since they actually increase this diversity. By trying to unite everyone and deny them their diversity and culture, the Imperium violates the very nature of humanity. Karkasy realizes this in his drunken state: he meets a group of Imperial soldiers on mission in the capital, to whom he says that “[t]he Imperium will fall asunder as soon as we construct it” (Abnett 108). For this, they beat him close to death.

It has been established that mortals have their own needs and characteristics, just as the Astartes and primarchs do. Mortals have the need to socialize and fraternize, which they do in the Retreat. The Astartes of the Luna Wolves legion have this need, as well. Within the legion, there is a secret society known to only a few. They are forced to meet in secret, because their practices are forbidden. Loken is one of the people who do not condone them:

Officially, there were no warrior lodges, or any other kind of fraternities, within the Adeptus Astartes. It was common knowledge that the Emperor frowned on such institutions, claiming they were dangerously close to cults, and only a step away from the Imperial creed, the *Lectio Divinitatus*, that supported the notion of the Emperor, beloved by all, as a god (246).

When invited to a lodge meeting, Loken is surprised to find several senior Astartes officers to be members. However, they tell him that the lodge’s purpose is “To be a place where we are free to meet and converse and confide, outside the strictures of rank and martial order” (287).

They tell Loken that the Emperor does not understand them: “The Emperor isn’t a god, but he might as well be. He’s so far removed from the rest of mankind. Unique. Singular. Who does he call brother? Even the primarchs are only sons to him . . . he doesn’t understand brotherhood, and that is *all* we meet for” (286). Even if the Astartes are meant to be super-human weapons, there is still some trace of humanity in them that needs nurturing, although it is difficult to discern whether that was the intention of their creation or not. Without the lodge, there would be no such nurturing. When they are not making war, they are preparing themselves for war: “We are warriors,’ said Targost. ’That is all we know and all we do. Duty and war, war and duty. Thus it has been since we were created” (Abnett 286-87). They ultimately convince Loken to join them, after he sees the good things of the lodge. Forbidding the lodge means violating the human nature of the Astartes, something against which they rebel by conducting their meetings. It may be that the Emperor is so set on the goal of uniting mankind that he is blind to the real needs of his subjects, in this case the need to “affiliate with others” (Huitt).

The matter of eradicating religion is interesting. Despite the Imperium’s anti-religious ideology, many people are religious in one way or another. During the battle for the capital of Sixty-Three Nineteen, one of Loken’s sergeants, Nero Vipus, mourns a dead Astartes, saying that he feels “the hand of the ship” is upon him: “The hand of the ship. An old saying. The commander’s flagship was called the *Vengeful Spirit*, and in times of duress or loss, the Wolves liked to draw upon all that implied as a charm, a totem of retribution” (Abnett 24). This is interesting, as Eliade argues that there is no such thing as a completely profane existence (23). The Astartes are particularly fond of rituals. One of the Imperial iterators explains to a group of remembrancers that “before individual missions, the Astartes choose to swear an immediate oath, an “oath of moment”, that binds them specifically to the matter at hand. They pledge to uphold the particular concerns of the enterprise before them. You may

think of it as a reaffirmation, I suppose. It is a ritual re-pledging” (Abnett 142). This is something they always do when going to battle. When Loken joins the Mournival there is also a ritual of initiation, where he has to pledge his loyalty to the Warmaster and the Emperor (83). He is uneasy, because the ritual seems almost occult: they perform it under the light of the local moon, as “No one has ever entered the Mournival, except by the light of a moon” (80). He tells them that “I will not bow to any fane or acknowledge any spirit. I own only the empirical clarity of Imperial truth” (80). They say that they only do it out of tradition and that “We want this moment to be special to you, Garviel” (81). Making it special is in line with Eliade’s claims, as he states that passage rites “always involves [sic] an initiation, for each of them implies a radical change in ontological and social status” (184). Being close to the Warmaster, Loken’s social status is indeed changed, as he can influence Horus’ decisions.

When remembrancer Oliton sets foot on the surface of Sixty-Three Nineteen for the first time, she has an almost religious experience: “For the first time in her life she was standing on another soil. It seemed to her quite momentous, as if a ceremonial band ought to be playing” (Abnett 70). She is awestruck by being on another planet than her birthplace and starts composing a remembrance in her head on this: “She’d use the novelty and unfamiliarity of her first planetfall as a theme around which her remembrance would hang” (71). This is comparable to one of Eliade’s theories. He claims that there are so-called “privileged places” for nonreligious people, such as “the first foreign city he visited in youth ... all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the “holy places” of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life” (24).

Sindermann once talks about the value of non-religious faith: “[T]o bear the torch of truth aloft and shine it, even into the darkest places . . . *That* is what we can harness our boundless faith to” (Abnett 60). In the case of the Astartes, their religious behaviour is not

considered a threat, since they use the rituals to strengthen their loyalty to the Imperium. However, there are other people within the Imperium who have chosen a religious way of life, despite the threat of persecution (104). The religion is called the *Lectio Divinitatus*, which “insisted humanity adopt the Emperor as a divine being. A God-Emperor of Mankind” (104). According to Eliade, “[t]he sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from “natural” realities” (10). It is not strange that some people believe the Emperor to be a god: the Astartes of the lodge say that he is unique and far removed from other humans or, in Eliade’s words, “wholly different”. Primarch Dorn said that the Emperor had no like and created the primarchs, so-called demigods to keep him company. After leaving the tavern on Sixty-Three Nineteen, remembrancer Karkasy finds a religious fane that he enters. Inside the fane, he contemplates why humans believe in divine powers: “Maybe it was one of mankind’s basic impulses, the need to believe in another, higher order . . . Perhaps it was a part of mankind’s genetic character to need, to hunger for, a spiritual solace” (Abnett 105). In Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the highest level of needs contains “Self-transcendence: to connect to something beyond the ego” (Huitt), which can be possible through religion. By outlawing religion, the Imperium tries to deny its subjects this possibility. In Loomba’s words, “colonialism . . . reshapes, often violently, physical territories, social terrains as well as human identities . . . Anti-colonial struggles therefore had to create new and powerful identities for colonised peoples and to challenge colonialism not only on a political or intellectual level, but also on an emotional level” (155). Here, they use a human need, namely religion, to create an anti-colonial identity to make a stand against the conquest. They raise none other than their ruler to divine status, who “refuses any worship offered to him” (Abnett 104). This puts their identity very much at odds with the Imperial ideology.

Even the Warmaster’s name has a religious origin. In one of her articles at *Ancient Egypt Online*, Jenny Hill claims that the Egyptian god Horus “seems to have begun as a god

of war and the sky”, among other things (“Horus”). Additionally, on the bridge of the Vengeful Spirit hangs Horus’ banner with his symbol, a great eye, and the decree: “I am the Emperor’s Vigilance and the Eye of Terra” (Abnett 112). Comparing this to the Horus-god’s eye-symbol, this is religious: in another article, Hill claims that the symbol was known as the “all seeing eye” and was a “symbol of protection” (“The eye”). This may be a deliberate scheme by the Emperor; to let his subjects know they are being watched and that he keeps vigilant through Horus. As can be seen, religion is an important feature of the lives of humans in the novel. By outlawing religion, the Imperium violates the human need for self-transcendence. Other examples of the Imperium’s violation of human nature have already been mentioned, proving that the Emperor is blind to the real needs of his subjects.

Many of the things the Imperials do could be seen as questionable. On Sixty-Three Nineteen, they rob the inhabitants of the possibility to rule their own world. The contact zone where the Imperium and the population of Sixty-Three Nineteen meet is definitely marked by an asymmetrical relationship. They show a great desire to rule all human-occupied worlds and to educate all humans in secularism. However, as they do this by force the indigenous population is left unhappy. Perhaps it would have been better for both sides if the Imperium simply had established diplomatic relations. In “Arts of the Contact” Zone, Pratt refers to a man named Guaman Poma, an indigenous Andean, who wrote a letter to his conqueror, King Philip III of Spain. In this letter he expresses his disapproval of Spanish colonialism in the Andes and argues that for the best result “[t]he Indies . . . should be administered through a collaboration of Inca and Spanish elites” (2). This is not the case with the Imperium, as they install their own governor and leave the indigenous population out of any administrative matters concerning their own society. When the Imperial architect presents his plans for the rebuilding of the capital to “local dignitaries”, remembrancer Ignace Karkasy is present, contemplating the situation of the locals: “[There were] no smiles on the faces of the invited

locals, just hard, drawn looks of forbearance. The choice between compliance or death didn't make compliance any more pleasurable. They were defeated, deprived of their culture and their way of life, facing a future determined by alien minds" (Abnett 88). Their view recalls a few lines from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, where he satirizes colonialism:

[A] crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither; at length a boy discovers land from the topmast; they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see a harmless people, are entertained with kindness; they give the country a new name; they take formal possession of it for their king; they set up a rotten plank, or a stone, for a memorial; they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple more, by force, for a sample; return home, and get their pardon (322).

The Imperium may be said to be a form of "imagined community". During a senior staff meeting after their victory on Sixty-Three Nineteen, the Warmaster says that the Imperium is "duty-bound to leave them better than we found them . . . especially upon worlds, as here, where we have been forced to inflict damage in the promulgation of our message" (Abnett 116). In other words, they profess good intentions and consider themselves to be doing something good. In the eyes of the conquered they "systematically fail to realize" their good intentions (Pratt 4). To them, rebuilding the city in the Imperium's image is just an act of mockery. However, no one but Loken actually questions if what the Imperium is doing is right. When discussing truth with Loken, the 'Emperor' says:

'If our philosophies are so much at odds, you could have passed us by and left us to our lives, unviolated. Yet you did not. Why? Why did you insist on bringing us to ruin? Are we such a threat to you?'

'Because the truth-' Loken began.

‘–is amoral. So you said, but in serving your fine truth, invader, you make yourself immoral’ (Abnett 39).

This placed a seed of doubt in Loken’s mind, not knowing how to answer him. During his very first session with remembrancer Oliton, she asks him ““Could we not have just left them alone?”” (44), which makes him more confused. When speaking with Sindermann about truth, he voices his doubts for the first time: ““If we encounter a person, a society in this cosmos that disagrees with us, but is sound of itself, what right do we have to destroy it? I mean... could we not just leave them be and ignore them? The galaxy is, after all, such a broad space”” (64). He realizes that humans have the right to be human in their own way, with their own cultures. Sindermann considers Loken having been given a rare opportunity to use his doubts, namely in influencing the Warmaster’s decisions: ““[O]nly a weapon which questions its use could be of any value in that role. To be a member of the Mournival, you need to have concerns. You need to have wit, and most certainly you need to have doubts”” (68).

After the initial encounter with the interex, many opinions are raised within the Warmaster’s inner circle on what to do with them: ““the people of the interex are of our blood and we descend from common ancestry, so they are lost kin. But they differ from us in fundamental ways, and these are so profound . . . that they are cause for legitimate war”” (349). This refers to them coexisting with aliens. However, the Warmaster initially tolerates the interex, which angers Captain Abaddon so greatly he gets into a violent argument with Horus. However, when the argument has cooled down Loken speaks with Horus: ““I know why we ought to make war upon the interex, sir,’ he said. ‘What interests me is why you think we shouldn’t”” (352). At this point, Horus’ own doubts start to surface: he reveals his fear of failing the Emperor and of making mistakes, claiming that the undertaking on Sixty-Three Nineteen was full of mistakes: ““Our first endeavour. My first as Warmaster. How much blood was spilt there, blood from misunderstanding? We misread the signs and paid the price

... [They] could have been brought to compliance without bloodshed” (356). He also claims Murder was a mistake. The interex had beacons around Murder, broadcasting a message: “[They] left us warnings to stay away, and we ignored them” (357). However, Captain Aximand tells Horus they were right to attack the megarachnid on Murder, since the Imperial philosophies demand that aliens be exterminated. Horus questions this: “We annihilate . . . They find a means around such drastic measures. Which of us is the most humane?” (357). His doubts concern both the conquest of humans and extermination of aliens. When dealing with the interex, he wants to make an informed decision before acting.

The Imperials are invited to Xenobia, an interex world, to continue their diplomatic talks. After a while, Horus holds a meeting with his closest staff where he is urged by most of his advisors to make war on the interex: “Unless they show a willingness to adapt, they must by necessity be regarded as enemies to our cause” (386-87). However, Horus wonders if the Emperor’s laws are too strict. The laws by which they conduct the conquest, he says, were “formulated in a time when every alien form we met was hostile, every fragment of humanity that was not with us was profoundly opposed to us. War was the only answer” (387). He is not at all willing to go to war with the interex, thinking that times have changed since the start of the conquest. However, during a dinner party the Imperials are accused of a crime (395). Fighting breaks out and Captains Loken and Torgaddon are forced to herd the Warmaster to safety. When conducted to relative safety, Horus breaks down: “He glared up at the night sky, threw back his head and screamed a curse at the stars. Then his voice fell to a whisper. Loken was close enough to hear his words. ‘Why have you tasked me with this, father? Why have you forsaken me? Why? It is too hard. It is too much. Why did you leave me to do this on my own?’” (405). This shows that despite being a “demigod”, there is still something human in Horus: he cannot shoulder the burden the Emperor shouldered. Afterwards, he is determined to make the interex pay for their violence. The novel ends with Loken explaining to

remembrance Oliton what they will do about the interex: “I imagine attempts will be made to broker peace. The priority is low, for the interex are marginal and show no inclination to get involved in our affairs. If peace fails, then, in time, a military expedition will be drawn up” (412). When faced with hostility, the Imperials revert to their violent behaviour. This may be a human feature: violence. Despite their best efforts to be civilized, they revert to violence when faced with violence.

Conclusions

To be human in the novel means many things. To begin with, there is not only one race of humans, but several. The first of these is the mortals, the race to which the remembrancers belong. They represent the artistic class of the Imperium. Despite their official status, they are considered low. The Astartes are the superhuman warriors of the Imperium, enhanced to be strong and immortal. Their appearance is mostly human, but their physical size is greater. Their personalities, however, are subhuman: their capacity for fear has been removed and they do not question the conquest. In this respect, Loken is unique, as he expresses doubts about it. The third race of humans is the primarchs. Their size is even greater than the Astartes'. They all display some human characteristics: Dorn is resolute and reserved, whereas Angron displays anger. Being the leaders of the Astartes legions gives them a great responsibility. They are described as demigods, but Horus' breakdown shows they have a core that is still human. What is common for all humans is that they have a need to socialize, in accordance with Maslows' hierarchy of needs. The Astartes are no exception, but for them social gatherings are forbidden, which makes their secret lodge a crime against the Emperor.

The purpose of the conquest is to unite humanity and abolish religion. Religious people are considered ignorant and backward, in accordance with Loomba's idea of "othering". The Imperials "other" those who are different, thereby justifying conquest. However, there are different types of humans in the Imperium who "other" each other, as well, making this justification problematic. On Sixty-Three Nineteen, the Imperials justify conquest by saying that they were attacked and that they want to educate them. They would have preferred not using violence, but they use it if needed, which shows their will to dominate and the destructivity of the human race. As can be seen in their dealings with aliens, they are also racist. They generalize all aliens in a way not unlike orientalism, claiming they are all hostile and inferior. However, these hostilities may in fact have been provoked. When they destroyed the keylekid, they did it for fear that they might become a threat to them. The humans of the Imperium apparently fear the unknown, destroying it rather than trying to understand it. Horus doubts this approach and tries to change it, but mankind's violent nature is stronger.

Uniting mankind may be a fine goal, but in their quest the Imperials commit horrible crimes: they destroy entire species and rob humans of their independence. The fact that humanity is a species with great diversity makes their conquest a violation of the very nature of humanity: they want everyone to follow the same laws and dogmas. The nature of the Imperium is at conflict with its ideology: the Astartes and primarchs have been created, making them different from other humans, thus increasing the human diversity. In the end it may prove impossible to convert the entire human race to believe in the Imperial ideology due to this. Since humanity is a species with great diversity, it may be said that that is part of being human in the novel.

Eliade's thoughts on religion in combination with the Imperium's religious sides show that humans cannot abandon religion, even when dedicated. This shows that religion is a human need in line with Maslow's highest need: self-transcendence. The fact that some

Imperials are religious is proof that they are resisting the conquest: they use their own need to create an identity which is at conflict with the Imperial dogma. Mortals and Astartes have part of this in common. However, their spiritualities differ: the Astartes are ritualistic. Their rituals are considered harmless, since they do not use it against the Imperium, whereas some mortals are members of a religion called the *Lectio Divinitatus*. They believe the Emperor to be a god, and want the Imperium to raise him to divine status. This is considered a threat, since the Imperium believes religion may lead to rebellion. To be human in the novel is to be religious, which makes the attempt to abolish religion a crime against the nature of the human race.

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