Corporate Neocolonialism and Posthuman Agency in Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*

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Abstract

Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea* (2022) qualifies as an interesting narrative about the rising use of technology in postmodern reality. The novel opens up new horizons for exploration and analysis of the way we observe the world. Thus, this paper attempts to explore and analyze the novel through the binoculars of postcolonial theory and posthumanism. The paper also analyzes the way the novel exemplifies modern forms of colonization perpetuated by the exploitation of both humans, nonhumans and android robots by a corporation. The paper will provide other ways of criticism through questioning private corporations that serve human-centrism. The novel also challenges anthropocentric treatment of the corporate which functions as centralist agency manipulating intelligence and agency of human, nonhumans and androids alike. The paper reminds us that colonial legacy is still and sound to these days and that other forms of exploitation and manipulations are underway to serve the policies of sense-less entities such as DIANIMA in the novel. Through both posthumanism and postcolonialism, this paper argues that Nayler's narrative is an attempt towards redefinition of interspecies ethical respect and responsibility in their mutual struggle for justice. This interdisciplinary reading argues that ethical responsibility in the Anthropocene must transcend species boundaries, challenging the ongoing colonial patterns that exploit both human and nonhuman life and sentient consciousness.

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الاستعمار الجديد المؤسسي والوكالة ما بعد الإنسانية في رواية راي نايلر ‏‏"الجبل في البحر"

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المستخلص

تُعَدّ رواية راي نايلر **"الجبل في البحر (2022)** "سردًا لافتًا حول تصاعد استخدام التكنولوجيا في الواقع ما بعد الحداثي. وتفتح الرواية آفاقًا جديدة للاستكشاف والتحليل في الطريقة التي نعاين بها العالم. ومن ثمّ، تحاول هذه الورقة استكشاف الرواية وتحليلها من خلال **منظار النظرية ما بعد الاستعمار وما بعد الإنسانية**. كما تتناول الورقة الكيفية التي تُجسّد بها الرواية الأشكال الحديثة من الاستعمار القائم على استغلال البشر وغير البشر والروبوتات الأندرويد من قِبل شركةٍ تجارية. وتقدّم الورقة مسارات نقدية أخرى من خلال مساءلة الشركات الخاصة التي تخدم **النزعة الإنسان-مركزية**. وتطرح الرواية أيضًا تحدّيًا للنظرة الأنثروبوسنتريّة في تعامل المؤسسة التجارية التي تعمل كجهازٍ مركزانيّ يتحكّم بالذكاء والوكالة لدى البشر وغير البشر والآلات على حدّ سواء. وتذكّرنا الورقة بأن الإرث الاستعماري ما يزال حاضرًا ومؤثّرًا إلى اليوم، وأن أشكالًا أخرى من الاستغلال والتلاعب ما زالت تتجدّد لخدمة سياسات كيانات عديمة الحسّ، مثل شركة **دايناميما** في الرواية. ومن خلال مقاربتَي **ما بعد الإنسانيّة وما بعد الاستعمار**، تجادل هذه الورقة بأن سرد نايلر يشكّل محاولة لإعادة تعريف الاحترام والمسؤولية الأخلاقية بين الأنواع في نضالها المشترك من أجل العدالة. وتؤكد هذه القراءة البينيّة التخصصات أنّ المسؤولية الأخلاقية في عصر الأنثروبوسين/ الإنسان-مركزية يجب أن تتجاوز حدود الأنواع، متحدّيةً الأنماط الاستعمارية المستمرة التي تستغل الحياة البشرية وغير البشرية والوعي الحساس.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الاستعمار الجديد، الشركات التجارية، ما بعد الإنسانيّة، الوكالة، الذكاء الاصطناعي، الخيال العلمي.

1.   Introduction

Since forever, humans have centered around two central ideas: serving God and serving oneself as humankind, perhaps even later inspired by humans being God's greatest creation. In doing so, they have experienced several wars and conflicts with each other resulting in destroying their environment serving their ideologies. God- and human-centered ideas have been reflected in literature since the Renaissance more explicitly, when ideas began to reach new heights and self-critique to promote equality and justice, which has not been an easy task. After that period, a slow but anti-colonial movement began to

take shape against colonialism that sought to violate the rights of the colonized, manipulate their culture and people, and impose new rules and laws upon colonized peoples. This interdisciplinary reading illuminates the novel's critical engagement with issues of power, identity, and communication in an era of environmental crisis and technological advancement, where sentient life is undermined and violated. This paper contends that Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea* leverages the combined critical power of postcolonialism and posthumanism to expose corporate neocolonialism and advocate for an ethical framework based on multispecies relationality.

Postcolonialism as a reaction to colonialism became a critical approach that challenged dominant historical narratives and sought to rethink knowledge through the lens of colonial power relations. There is not much agreement between scholars on the timeline of the beginning of post-colonialism. Arguably, it can be said that the notion became quite common in the post-colonial period, mainly in the mid-20th century. It was also keen in the pursuit of human rights and freedom in a world quite shattered by the effects of colonialism. Contextually, postcolonialism preserves its anti-colonial rhetoric in addition to engaging in meaningful dialogue over the current struggles for liberties worldwide. In a parallel approach, it also observes the tensions between revolutionary and reconciliatory approaches to offer a more balanced argument within postcolonial theory itself. (Huggan, 2013).

Postcolonial analysis is also a way of thinking that critiques the political situation in post-colonial states where marginalized and minority groups are further marginalized. Postcolonialism can also critique the environmental destruction, pollution, and overuse of resources for the benefit of the corporates and imperialist agendas. Ultimately, postcolonialism decodes established complexity among humans and their relations. Additionally, it affirms its ongoing relevance in a world still scarred by various forms of colonial domination. Its goal is to help imagine and move toward a future free from colonial ideologies and structures. In other words, the environment or ecosystem may not be at its center, but the land or countries taken by colonialism can also be labeled as part of the post-colonial land or country that has been seized and invaded unlawfully, or even worse, divided up and linked to other geographies, a reality that still disrupts the world's peace

and harmony. This is where it can merge with posthumanism, as humans, especially from the powerful entities and authorities, abuse humans and non-humans from the living and non-living in their surroundings. Also, posthumanism stands as an antidote to human-centered ideologies and agendas that ignore the rest of the species in our environment. The ideas of human-centrism perhaps go back thousands of years, maybe even before religions, as humankind started self-centrism as the most important species created by God. Thus, post-humanism, especially in the era of technological advancement and transhumanism, can be more humane, because unlike colonialism, humans can be conscious about their surroundings and be unabusive and less capitalist in nature.

Posthumanism is the moment when we realize that humans can no longer be seen apart from the world of machines, medicine, and data around us. In a way, being human today means being part of something larger and more connected than ever before. This shift makes such interconnection impossible to overlook and both calls for and compels the creation of new theoretical frameworks, a way of thinking that comes after the cultural denials and fantasies and the philosophical conventions and evasions that characterized humanism as a specific historical phenomenon. (Wolfe, 2010, XV). Fundamentally, posthumanism challenges the traditional worldview that humankind is the center of the universe despite their technological achievements and successful endeavors in science like: biology, information systems, and economic networks. (Callus, 2022). The theory asks for new worldviews to decentralize humankind and questioning long-held beliefs about human identity and agency. Posthumanism also showcases the highlights interrelatedness pushing for rethinking what does it mean to self-identify as a human being with its diverse layers in a world shaped by ideologies, polarized politics, and scientific and technological advances.

Postcolonialism and posthumanism differ in their relevance to humans and non-humans, however, the two merge on the basis of criticizing a central authority, a form of neo-colonial power like DIANIMA that exploits non-humans and humans for a specific interest, agenda and objective. Besides, both postcolonialism and posthumanism criticize colonial-like entities and hierarchal systems of power that undervalue humans and the land. The significance of using these two frameworks together, where necessary, is making a case

for a more humane and ecofriendly framework challenging traditional hierarchies of power and knowledge for literature in general.

2. Literature in the Intersections of Post-colonialism, and Posthumanism

Historically, literature, especially from the colonial world, has provided numerous narratives where a human abuses another. In Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719), Friday, an enslaved human, is renamed, abused, and, in the most positive way, is considered an assistant. Others, like H. Rider Haggard's King Solomon's Mines (1885) and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899), also showcase this colonial self-centrism. In the post-technological era, humans stepped farther to abuse other species. In H. G. Wells's The Island of Doctor Moreau, animals are torn apart and rebuilt in the name of science, vivisected into human-like "Beast Folk," and drilled into obedience under Moreau's Law. Their bodies carry the scars of forced changes, and their minds are trapped in a system where they are expected to imitate their owners or masters. In David Brin's Startide Rising, the cruelty is more vivid as the dolphins and chimpanzees are gifted with full sentience, yet are forced into servants despite their intelligence. They can think, create, and speak, but always within the limitations put forth by humankind and their benefits. Paolo Bacigalupi's The Windup Girl also shows this form of subjugation as the events occur in crisis Thailand, where Emiko, a genetically engineered 'New Person,' is designed to serve, obey, and entertain. The new person is abused outside of the purpose it was made for and this reminded it that despite its smartness, it is but a property. In each of these worlds, the abuse is not only physical, but covers other layers of flesh, the law, and the limits of who they are allowed to be or to be not. Likewise, in Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*, the abuse takes a different shape. Here, humans discover highly intelligent octopuses with their own language, culture, art with full autonomy to capture, contain, and control. The octopuses are studied with no regard to their intelligence and are treated as resources, and their minds are treated as puzzles to be solved for personal profit or power. The novel shows that abuse is not just in the nets or cages, but it is in the human desire to control and own other beings. Like a modern colonizer, the human arrives curious but dominating, deciding how another form of life should exist, perhaps even envious that they

might one day be challenged by the smart creature that shares much of the intelligence humans are known for.

Notwithstanding, "Human" at the heart of Western-colonial-humanism was, in practice, a colonial subject position: white, male, European, property-owning, and anthropocentric, while the 'other' stands as exactly the opposite (Mbembe, 2001). As reaction and response, during post-colonial times, postcolonialism theoretically began by uncovering the violence, political, cultural, and intellectual that colonialism carried out through its hegemonic power-dynamics and also through its definition of what it meant to be human. It shows that "the human" was never an open or universal category but one built to exclude non-European peoples, reducing them to something less. Humanity itself, under colonial rule, became a tool of domination. Posthumanism extends this critique. Instead of only tracing the historical damage of colonialism, it asks us to question the very idea of the human that colonialism turned into a universal truth; humans vs nonhumans, and humans vs all other living species. In doing so, it reveals that the human has always been tied to power, exclusion, and control.

As Walter Mignolo argues that both approaches (2011) have been described as an epistemic disobedience, a refusal to accept the world crafted through imperial hegemony to belittle the 'other'. Knowingly, it was required from all to obey this paradigm of power, thus, leading to no other ways of knowing that stood against colonial legacy even afterwards through various complex systems of cultural hegemony. As both a necessity and reaction, postcolonialism stood against this hegemony through expanding the horizons of power and power-sharing, from the ruled to independent. Likewise, posthumanism strengthens this decolonial impulse by going further: it unsettles the sharp division between human and nonhuman that colonial modernity is fixed in thought, law, and society. In its place, it gestures toward more open and relational ways of being, like the ways that embrace plurality, interconnection, and the creativity of life beyond the narrow boundaries set by colonial thought systems.

Postcolonialism and posthumanism are not completely in line with each other, some postcolonial critics criticize the latter for erasing the experienced realities of postcolonial subjects, leaping too quickly into the dissolution of the human without addressing the

historical denial of humanity to colonized peoples (Nayar, 2014). However, postcolonialism insists on the political urgency of reclaiming human dignity and sense of self before moving beyond it. Thus, posthumanism interrogates whether "reclaiming" the human is only bringing back the same Eurocentric categories that were once used against colonized peoples. The challenge is to use the approaches of the two to question how colonialism undermined humanism itself as a collective concept, while in posthumanism the approach is going beyond humankind and their interests in an interconnected planetary ecology.

In contemporary scholarship, thinkers have begun to treat the intersection of these fields as a fertile site for reimagining different and open-ended discussions and debates in a humanistic form, as put forth in Edward Said's posthumous work: Humanism and Democratic Criticism (2004). Braidotti's notion of "critical posthumanism" resonates with Said and Mbembe's vision of a "planetary humanism", a form of humanism that perceives humankind in balance with nature and its surroundings. In other words, a humanist view that is not predicated on exclusion but on a shared condition of vulnerability and interdependence (Braidotti, 2019; Mbembe, 2017). Both urge for the confrontation of the entanglement or imprisonment of human and nonhuman agencies alike, whether in the form of ecological systems, technologies, or other sentient life. The cross-bridge between the two, therefore, is a double movement: deconstructing the colonial human and imagining posthuman futures rooted in justice, plurality, and ecological reciprocity.

Additionally, both postcolonialism and posthumanism deal with power abuse from the top of the hierarchy. The ruling and the ruled are studied, finding the basis of inequality, mistreatment, mismanagement, segregation, subjugation, and marginalization of the 'other' by the ruler. Postcolonialism destabilized the position of the ruler through dismantling its so-called power-legitimacy, while posthumanism destabilized humankind's position from a central being and species to a decentralized co-sharer of the habitat within which all living species live without disrupting the nature and their nature. Thus, if postcolonialism gives us the tools to see how the category of the human has been weaponized to dominate both peoples and lands, posthumanism triggers our thoughts to rethink what forms of being and belonging might emerge when the human is decentered.

Together, they form an alliance, one that insists on remembering the violence of the past while opening space for more ethical, inclusive futures beyond the central sentiments.

The theoretical background of this study focuses on two interrelated concepts: postcolonialism and posthumanism. Postcolonialism and posthumanism come from different historical and intellectual traditions, but they intersect in their concern with power, control, and identity. Postcolonial theory suggests that the colonial legacy and influence has left an impact not only on the political dynamics of postcolonial societies and the world as a whole, but it has also shaped economic structures, culture, and other socioeconomic systems. It asks how the legacy of empire continues to influence people's sense of self, belonging, and worth, revealing the deep and lasting effects of colonial power on both individuals and nations (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994). It revolves around the way categories such as race, civilization, and progress were constructed to justify hierarchies, extract resources, and erase indigenous systems of power and knowledge. Posthumanism, meanwhile, seeks to destabilize the Enlightenment figure of the "human" as the universal, self-determining subject, showing how this construct was always exclusionary, built upon the marginalization of racialized others, women, non-Western peoples, and nonhuman life (Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010). By applying these two frameworks together, this study examines hierarchical and exploitative systems, such as DIANIMA, enabling a more humane and ecologically aware analysis of identity, agency, and relational responsibility in literature.

3. Literature Review: *The Mountain in the Sea* through Postcolonialism and Posthumanism

Ray Nayler's debut novel, *The Mountain in the Sea* (2022), winner of the 2023 Locus Award for Best First Novel, has attracted significant scholarly interest, particularly in how it explores complex themes of power, identity, and intelligence through theories relevant to power dynamics and power abuse (Dey, 2024; Persinger et al., 2024). The novel is set in a near-future Vietnam where a corporation called DIANIMA seeks to control a newly discovered species of highly intelligent octopuses in the depths of the sea. The narrative's

setting provides sufficient ground to scrutinize the legacy and impact of the neocolonial company and its practices on the island's ecology.

The dystopic science fiction novel shows how corporate-related humans take on colonial-like practices to dominate not only humans and nature, but also other conscious species or humanoids. The narrative exposes modern forms of power manipulation by private corporations' same way practiced by the colonial entities of the past. This also shows that no matter how much humans advance, they have tendency to restore old practices into new habits and strategy of ruling, especially if human is centered without ethical worldview. The way DIANIMA takes advantage of nonhuman life is similar to neocolonial practices. They also take resources and knowledge from natural ecosystems in ways that are similar to what colonial powers did in the past to gain more control over land and native people (McEwan, 2008; Jazeel, 2019). Additionally, the Vietnamese islands are heavily contested places where private corporations impose control similar to the real-world scenarios of environmental imperialism (Persinger et al., 2024). Nayler's work thus aligns with wider postcolonial scholarship that critically examines how colonial forms of practice continue to shape ecological and political realities even decades after the fall of the Empires and hegemonies. (McEwan, 2018).

The Mountain in the Sea cannot only be criticized through postcolonial lens, but also through posthumanism lens as struggles of human and non-humans unite to represent a rather global scale struggle in need of improvement. Both thematically and practically Nayler's novel challenges the traditional, colonial and patriarchal human-centered perception by portraying octopuses and AI as sentient agents with complex intelligence and communicative abilities whose intelligence is ignored (Dey, 2024). This aligns with posthumanism's call to rethink human-centrism and acknowledge the ethical and scientific significance of the 'others' like the animals and machines (Persinger et al., 2024; Bakker & Bridge, 2021). Reflectively, humans' cohabitants animals and even humanoids are ethical in a world which could already be a world colonized by humankind where the rights of all non-human species are sidelined. The focus is on cephalopod octopus and the android Evrim's role as conscious entities encourages doubt on the fixed definitions of "human" and suggesting a more inclusive understanding of other non-human agencies.

Moreover, it can also be argued that postcolonial and posthumanist standpoints intersect in Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*. In the narrative, the corporate authority takes over the island taking over both humans and non-humans alike, including the sea creatures, namely octopus. Like colonialism, this corporate neocolonial power abuses rights of both humans and nonhumans including the ecological system. (Persinger et al., 2024; McEwan, 2018). From both postcolonial and posthumanist point of views, the intersections of colonial histories to ecological crises and technological futures, furthers the critical status of all living species for the benefit of the corporation (Jazeel, 2019).

Overall, this paper explores this novel as a speculative fiction that both reveals and critiques the forces of corporation-led capitalism or neo-colonial power. There is also room for imagining new possibilities for communication and ethical responsibility between species, which was never the plan of the corporation other than a complete takeover. *The Mountain in the Sea* (2023), as part of Anthropocene literature, challenges readers to reimagine and question power, identity, and the boundaries of the human's world that is exponentially moving forth (Persinger et al., 2024; Dey, 2024). Thus, the novel remains a crucial narrative that is readable both through postcolonial and posthumanist frameworks. The narrative questions capitalist systems and suggesting untraditional and ethical relations among species.

Ray novel has drawn wide scholarly attention as an important work of contemporary and near future science fiction, especially for its rather posthumanist and postcolonial themes. The text centrally introduces other forms of intelligence and decentralizes intelligence as a human-centered attribute. The novel goes beyond the living things to offer characters that are not even living but other forms of intelligence, artificial intelligence. In totality, such liberal world-view questions humans' position in the world and, perhaps, suggests that even philosophy and cultures are going to be regenerated to include other non-human intelligent entities whether living or non-living. Critics such as Goodwin (2024) notes this especially on how the story questions human exceptionalism by depicting nonhuman beings as smart and sophisticated thus suggesting inclusive ethical reassessment. Martinez (2025) places the novel within the environmental humanities. To Martinez the quest of the

novel is to call for greater empathy and ethical responsibility toward other intelligent entities including robots like the character Evrim.

The novel takes up postcolonial concerns by setting its story in Vietnam's politically charged Con Dao archipelago, a historical location that has suffered under colonial and imperialist powers. Scholars such as Lee (2023) and Tran (2024) interpret the control exerted by the tech corporation DIANIMA as a metaphor for new forms of neo-colonial exploiter companies. The character of Dr. Ha Nguyen, however, represents the complex postcolonial subject who must balance scientific modernity with culture and heritage to blur the lines between colonizer and colonized, and showing the multi-layered tensions of identity in the postcolonial world.

By approaching decolonization through both ecological and technological lenses, the book challenges readers to rethink ethical and political responsibilities beyond purely human-centered concerns. While the novel offers deep philosophical insights and a fresh narrative style, some readers may find its dense themes and speculative scenarios difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, its impact on discussions in science fiction and cultural studies is widely recognized and valued. Gaps and Areas for Future Research. Additionally, this paper will directly address the gaps like limited in-depth posthumanist analysis, where there is room for more detailed exploration of the novel's portrayal of other forms of intelligence other than humans, like other species and AI, especially regarding language, identity, and sentience. Debatably, the novel's Vietnamese setting invites further research into how necessary is to incorporate the intersectionality of postcolonialism and post-humanism in the context of Southeast Asia. The research, thus, will also expand on ethical and in-depth analysis into how the chosen narrative challenging traditional notions of rights and responsibility toward nonhuman beings, bridging postcolonial environmental ethics and posthuman moral concern in an ever-changing world.

5. Corporate Neocolonialism and Posthuman Agency in Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*

The Mountain in the Sea (2023) is a critical and timely novel that interrogates what it means to be human in a world where intelligence, consciousness, and culture are no longer exclusive to humans alone, but other forms of intelligence and consciousness are also valued. The narrative broadens scope of information about the geopolitical matters worldwide. Set on Vietnam's Con Dao archipelago, the story begins with multi-layered equations such as: power, colonial legacies, ecological interconnectedness, and communication between different species.

The neocolonial dimension in this narrative is most clearly reflected in the figure of DIANIMA, a powerful tech corporation that isolates and controls Con Dao. This corporate power adopts colonial-era control and domination that remove agency from indigenous lands and peoples from active participants to passive subjects. More critically, Nayler reimagines these same logics of manipulation and control colonialism in relevance with global capitalism under the banner of the so-called technological "progress." The Vietnamese setting, and the tension between global capital and local environments, highlight complex competition for identity, sovereignty, and resistance in a geography rich with historical conflicts and ideological tensions.

Alongside this profound posthumanist exploration; the discovery of ultra-intelligent octopuses with their own language, culture, and possible consciousness, altogether with Evrim, the world's first self-aware android, challenges the human-centered assumptions that have long shaped our system of knowledge. Nayler, through portraying nonhuman minds as sensitive and communicative, calls for empathy and ethics towards the non-human intelligent life. The narrative also shows that the human characters face the limits of their understanding when confronted other thinking beings and things who experience the world in totally different manners. This dismantles the notion of human-centric and exceptionalism that has historically justified environmental destruction and the hierarchy of species.

What makes The Mountain in the Sea (2023) more critical is how it intermingles postcolonialism and posthumanism as two separate frameworks together. The colonial-capitalist invasion of Con Dao and the corporate exploitation of octopus life serve as metaphors for historical colonial domination through violence, yet these are complicated

by the presence of posthuman subjects who blur simple boundaries between "master" and "subaltern." The novel also suggests the idea that postcolonial struggle should go beyond human solidarity to a more nuanced and inclusive solidarity even with the nonhumans whether other living species or artificial intelligence and robots. In other words, the struggle is no more between human and non-human, but it is between human and nonhuman and self-imposing and interest-led humans. Dr. Ha Nguyen's position as mediator, or bridge, incapsulates the challenge faced by postcolonial subjects resisting power structures across different forms of life and intelligence. It shows that posthumanism draws moral meaning from histories of displacement and erasure caused by colonialism. Instead of offering clear solutions, Nayler creates a careful dialogue between the human and the nonhuman, the colonizer and the colonized, technology and nature.

4. Colonial Legacies and Posthuman Futures in Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*

Ray Nayler's The Mountain in the Sea (2022) is more than a science-fiction story telling the readers about octopuses, artificial intelligence, and human exploration. The narrative intersects colonial traditions with posthumanism concerning the rationality and logic of other species. The novel questions human-centric perception on intelligence and challenges humankind to think about other species and forms of life or consciousness

In many ways, the corporate adopts semi-colonial traditions from land and resources' takeover to even knowledge. In this regard, the corporate also adopted human-centered frameworks totally disregarding other species in addition to other forms of consciousness, namely artificial intelligent bots. There are various incidents where the text depicts contact with the non-human forms of life in a dramatic manner, perhaps, suggesting that how little do we know about our ecosystem and how selfish then humankind might be rooting for space exploration while our own planet, surface or under water, need much further exploration. The text also showcases both ethical and political implication of the first encounter with the smart octopus. Thus, through deep reading of the narrative from the lenses of postcolonial and posthumanist theories.

The story open with an encounter of the humans with other non-human life forms and other forms of consciousness such as AI. As the novel shows, as early as the investigations started on the smart octopus, a high level of intelligence is detected, thus, once and for all, humankind comes face to face with another smart creature challenging the whole paradigm of power. The narrative's approach is vivid in a posthumanistic sense suggesting acknowledgement of other forms of awareness and agency previously ignored. Humans are no longer viewed as the only being capable of reason or moral responsibility, but rather as part of a wider network of interactions that includes non-human beings and artificial entities as seen in the text: There is no silence in the living nervous system. An electrical symphony of communication streams through our neurons every moment we exist. We are built for communication. Only death brings silence (Nayler, 2022, p. 2). In parallel, Wolfe (2010) stresses that communication, as a rational attribute of intelligence life, is no more human-centric. The quote can be analyzed as undertaking the same obligation highlighting that thinking process is active throughout life regardless of whom and what form of life possesses it. Arguably, the text exposes intelligence from human point of view, yet in a generic form suggests that where there is though-process there is communication, and where there is communication there is a medium for a two- or multi--way interaction. Thus, if verbal language is but a means of communication, then other forms of communication are no-less valuable in the realm of communication and interaction between species of one kind or others around them in the ecosystem.

Further, Nayler foregrounds communication as continuous and necessary process that is adopted across the ecosystem among other life forms who are also adoptive and evolve within their habitats, in the case of the octopus, perhaps far more adaptive and manipulative in terms of their skills and cunning in the world. The narrative in general and the text above, in particular, further implies that where there is skill there is more necessity for a more ethical observation including thorough listening, attentiveness, and recognition of their status and positions. Nayler emphasizes that human dominance often blinds humankind to these forms of intelligence. This is in line with posthumanist ethics regarding non humans and the responsibilities in interdisciplinary manner not related to humans only.

The novel emphasizes how consciousness and intelligence shapes ecological and ethical responsibility as observed in the octopuses' continuous communication, which embody moral responsibility to regard others' existence. Nayler's work reminds us that ethics should not be limited to humans and their society alone.

Additionally, postcolonial theory adds a complementary lens. Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern is often represented as silent, though this silence is imposed by dominant structures that control who is heard and who is not. Nayler's assertion that "only death brings silence" reframes the notion of imposed silence: the octopuses' perspectives are not naturally inaccessible; they have been historically and epistemically ignored. This marginalization could be the byproduct of two factors: one lack of awareness or posthumanist sentiments, while the second factor could be anthropocentric attitude of humankind from being the center of intelligent life in the universe to the top of the food chain in the world. Thus, the interpretation here and the novel as whole shows how listening is a moral responsibility.

Besides, recognizing life as communicative across species challenges anthropocentric hierarchies and echoes postcolonial critiques of silencing. Further emphasizing this theme, Nayler writes: "But no one has yet asked the octopuses what they think. And what they might do about it" (p. 10). This passage shows the narrative's criticism of both politics and ethics of the corporate. From a postcolonial perspective, this critiques the arrogance of explorers and anthropologists who historically categorized and colonized peoples without consent. Relatively, Said (1978) exemplifies how such practices lead to the production of a form of knowledge where new hierarchies were established transforming subjects into objects for study. For example, the abuse of the octopuses represents another nonhuman conscious and sentient being colonized as humans, where their position and will are ignored. The status of the octopus continues until some humans decide to explore and investigate as an ethical approach to overcome human ego. Braidotti (2013) frames posthuman subjectivity as relational, ethical and interdependent that goes beyond human subjectivity to a more humanistic consideration of the others, like the octopus, for example. The corporate uses octopus and other sentients as a means to extend its supremacy over in its competition with other counterparts through information gathered from the octopus. The

archipelago in this context reminds colonial and imperialist logics: territorial domination, resource extraction, and the subordination of local ecosystems and communities, as can be noticed here: "The transnational tech corporation DIANIMA has sealed off the remote Con Dao Archipelago… The octopuses hold the key to unprecedented breakthroughs in extra human intelligence" (p. 10). Evidently, the corporate control of a foreign island and later enforcing assimilation through systematic rules mirrors historical colonial conquest of overseas lands. Here, Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity is relevant especially on the encounters between colonial and postcolonial people to produce a different space where local and global, human and nonhuman, intersect. Yet, it is quite vivid who rules and dictates and subordinates whom.

While postcolonialism critiques post-colonial and neo-colonial systems of governance and domination, posthumanism as a theory and approach tends to stand for more than that and critique modern and post-modern imperialist tendencies and policies. This resonate to what is argued by Wolfe (2010) on modern capitalism that exploits physical labor, natural resources in addition to targeting the other in terms of both mental and informational capacities. In *The Mountain in the Sea*, the intelligence of the octopus tended to be manipulated for capitalist and neocolonial benefit, the scientific discovery is muted. Hence, the intelligence of the octopus is only valuable if seen to serve their goals or profit. The following passage revolves around that argument when humankind is seen as the center of expeditions and exploration: "Humankind discovers intelligent life in an octopus species with its own language and culture, and sets off a high-stakes global competition to dominate the future" (p. 10). As observed, the verb "discovers" is charged with colonial resonance. The commodity linked with the species is the main factor for a somewhat appreciation of the animal and discovery is rarely neutral; historically, it has signified ownership and dominance. Said (1978) demonstrates that imperial knowledge production transforms subjects into objects, legitimizing expropriation and dominance. Here, as illustrated in the narrative, shows how "first contact" often triggers competition and domination rather than ethical engagement. Posthumanist critique complements this reading: Haraway (1991) advocates "situated knowledge" that are accountable and partial. The novel exposes how human claims to knowledge often preclude ethical recognition of other intelligences.

The narrative acknowledges local participation in exploitation, a form of hybrid or multilayered form of subjugation of the species. The power dynamics of the powerful versus powerless is visible here: "The park rangers were all corrupt, the locals were in on it, spearfishing, free diving for shellfish" (p. 10). This quotation shows that the aftermath of corporate hegemony has affected the locals as well who have turned against their natural traditions and practices. This is in accordance with what Bhabha (1994) emphasizes upon in terms of third space creation as a result of mixture or conflict of two different dynamics of power between the locals and the foreign entity. The locals' involvement in this form of foreign control reflects economic instability that has affected the society. From a posthumanist perspective, human activities are inseparable from the natural habitat, as exemplified by the octopuses, highlighting the consequences of corporate exploitation. Being ethical requires caring about the connection of humankind with all other species, not just about humans, their power or place in the ecosystem. Thus, Nayler's story shows that ethics and ecology are deeply linked, especially if the betterment of the whole ecosystem is the objective.

From a posthumanist perspective, the sea itself becomes the battlefield of opposite interests especially where the survival strategies of marginalized human communities are inseparable from the vulnerability of nonhuman life. Through analysis of the situation described in the narrative, it can be seen that human suffering intersects with the abuse of the nature in the expense of extraction of resources and data from both animals and the ecosystem. In such scenarios, it can be seen how the suffering of the animals as well as the ecosystem becomes one; arguably, the boundaries between care, survival, and exploitation get blur and everything seems unethical. Hence, the narrative demonstrates that ethical consideration is inseparable from ecological awareness, or, coconsciousness, in other words. This is in parallel with the oppression of women alongside the exploitation of the land in *The Seed Keeper*. It highlights the ways both women and the environment are undervalued and need protection like humans and non-human sentients in *The Mountain in the Sea* (Hamdi & Hassoon, 2023).

The narrative portrays very complexed nature of power abuse from the corporate towards the powerless or controlled regardless of being human or nonhuman, or even robots, in *The*

Mountain in the Sea, all are subject to harsh conditions. For example, the novel introduces an android that is ignored despite its sense of self and capacity to handle various calculative and analytical tasks: "The world's first (and possibly last) android." (p. 10). This figure resonates with Haraway's (1991) cyborg, especially when the boundaries between human and machine are inexistent, but rather subjects and objects to fulfil various tasks for the human kind. In this context, the robot is a corporate instrument with unexpected capabilities to showcase posthuman reality as reflected in the novel. Technologies often carry and reproduce existing power structures regarding questions of programming, authorship, and cultural that echo postcolonial critiques. Braidotti's (2013) posthumanism frames this hybridity as a "becoming-other," a form of subjectivity beyond human or even non-human organic life. As stated in the novel, the android, much like the octopus, shows capabilities once only attributed to humans or human-centered assumptions, perhaps even based on prejudice, a form of oppression that neglects ethical responsibilities humans have towards themselves and others as well.

Additionally, memory and data-storage and archives also showcase the capabilities of robots in an extent to which they surpass human skills in undertaking the tasks, as seen here: "Memory, archives, and the malleability of memories are central to understanding interspecies communication" (p. 10). The text here shows that the robot is capable of many tasks masterfully both more advanced and also human-like that qualify it as an equal in workplace, in a posthumanist perspective at least. Nayler emphasizes that octopus' memory and culture exist independently pretty much like human narratives, shows their capabilities and control about their whereabouts unless disrupted. Here the autonomy of the robot and the octopus is well-presented, entities with the power to decide for one and act accordingly. In this regard, posthumanist theory there can be a shared database for information, history and general data that can be both assessed and used by all regardless of the species' background. Arguably, the work values moral and ethical responsibilities of humankind are within the delicate interplay of memory, knowledge, and relational ethics.

Moreover, the novel triggers new horizons for further debate on Knowledge, Ownership, and Subaltern Intelligence specifically within the highly contested societies or microcosmically within any corporates of workplace. The novel emphasizes the tension

between knowledge production and ethical engagement repeatedly as seen in this quote: "The octopuses hold the key to unprecedented breakthroughs in extra human intelligence. The stakes are high: there are vast fortunes to be made" (p. 10). The passage labels octopuses as keys to gain more knowledge domination, but instead violated or for the corporate's profit. This change shows a colonial way of thinking as the non-human mind is commodified to fulfil a purpose for humans, which is total act of exploitation, where intelligence and skills are perceived as sources and commodity of the ruler. In his long post-colonial study, Said (1978) identifies similar dynamics in orientalist discourses by the colonialists and more specifically, the westerners, who dealt with the others in a western-centric manners, where culture, in general, is appropriated under the banner of discovery. Here postcolonialism and posthumanist critiques coincide to argue that intelligence cannot be treated as commodities, but rather, are sophisticated ethical properties of the indigenous agencies, which require ethical engagement recognition outside of the centric and centralist colonial and imperialist rhetoric. (Braidotti, 2013).

Ray Nayler's novel does not limit its exploration and oppression of intelligence lives, like octopuses, only, but it extends to artificial intelligence as seen in the character of Evrim, the conscious android. Evrim's conscious capacity questions traditional hierarchies of power and knowledge. The character proves that definitions of intelligence and authority should be doubted and re-defined to give meaning to the new work order and reality that can be no longer ignored. With Evrim, the humans come face to face their creation, a radical battle of ethical reconsideration and ethical companionship. Nayler writes, "Evrim watched, calculated, and yet hesitated, as though weighing the morality of choices humans had never been asked to consider" (p. 73). As mentioned in the quote, the level of intelligence and consciousness of Evrim manifested in 'hesitation' undermines the attributes linked to humans only. Debatably, hesitation uncovers a higher level of consciousnesses based on thorough calculations and considerations formerly enshrined to humankind only as far as the context of the novel is concerned. Post 'hesitation' per se, Evrim shows the higher level of decision-making, a relational form of ethics now shared among species, artificial intelligent agencies, and other sentient beings. Human centrism in this regard is, perhaps, outdated, now with Evrim added to the pool of thought process, echoing Haraway's (1991) idea of the cyborg destroying the boundaries between human

and machine. Additionally, Evrim's hesitation becomes a symbolic act of resistance, a passive form of resistance for that matter in quest for co-partnership in the ecosystem. Such scenarios uncover broader concern from a posthumanist concern that true agency grows not from control, but from the quiet exchange between beings that complete each other (Braidotti, 2013). In this manner, Evrim's intellect reflects how the octopuses are portrayed, which show that intelligence is not only human, but a shared commonplace that calls for a new sense of ethical responsibility.

Moreover, Evrim's cognitive self-dependency shows postcolonial dimensions especially in the robot's explanation to extract knowledge from the octopuses for the humans. Despite that, Evrim's resistance is noticed in divergence with the corporate inhumane and anti-ecosystem objectives. As seen in the narrative, postcolonial and posthumanist perspectives intertwine through the exploration of the corporate's colonial-like attempt to direct the nonhumans as seen here: "Bound by code yet questioning commands, Evrim moved through the archipelago not as master or slave, but as a participant in the living network of beings" (p. 112). The quote shows that Evrim acted as a neutral entity playing along his part to manifest his sense of existence as a cognitive power between humans and octopuses.

Evrim's character is more sophisticated than appears to be in the novel. In addition to its position on analytical tasks, its strength perhaps lies in language skills and communication as posthuman agency attributes no more central to humans only, as can be observed in this quote: "Evrim understood patterns, tones, and shifts in the octopus' language, translating not into words but into intent and attention" (p. 117). The android's capacity to interpret remarks and signals a strong message being that communication is, as it has always been, a posthuman or interspecies inborn skill. Posthumanist theory, as Braidotti (2013) argues, provides room for further recognition and subjectivity beyond humans as exemplifies through Evrim's character. Likewise, postcolonialism critiques the manipulation of knowledge by the colonialists as though it is a euro-centric phenomenon. Through this rhetoric, an unethical matter is under view as who has the right to speak and translate for the octopuses and why. Evrim's role is rather mediation despite lingual and cognitive capabilities. This dynamic recalls Spivak's (1988) argument on the issue of "speaking for" the subaltern, highlighting how barriers like mediation or indirect representation leads to

silencing even. But Nayler portrayal of Evrim is different as it translates rather than domination and gives space for the octopuses act or react autonomously. In this sense, communication becomes less about mastery and more about cultivating practices of ethical relation across differences.

Intersections of observation, memory, and autonomy highlights the novel's posthumanist themes as seen here: "Evrim's memory did not merely store data; it weighed histories, repetitions, and omissions, considering the past as a web in which all participants were entangled" (p. 134). Memory in this context is not passive, but has the capacity to decode and analyze in addition to synthesis in the highest ethical and rational capacities. This scenario resonates with Spivak's (1988) insistence that subaltern has a voice and can express oneself fully if acknowledged. Moreover, Evrim's comprehension of layers of oppression indicates its sophisticated mental power rejecting being a tool within the colonial-capitalist apparatus being the corporate. Additionally, seeing memory as an ethical entity questions the traditional mono-thinking about knowledge. Besides, it can be argued that history often repeats itself in circles or is uninterrupted, especially when the consequences of post-colonial reality are taken into consideration. This view reminds us that both machines and humans carry responsibilities that stretch across the past, present, and future. The novel, in this way, calls for a kind of accountability that goes beyond human-centric reality alone.

Nayler also shows the barriers of trust between humans and nonhuman entities as a means to show the room for improvement and consideration as explicitly shown here: "Humans looked for obedience; Evrim offered understanding," (p. 145). The narrative observes that this distinction is the reason of such distrust as the expectations are different between the two where humans demand obedience whereas Evrim expects compassion and understanding. Through a postcolonial lens one can argue that the text emphasizes on the similar historical parallels that the colonized were subjected to. Evrim, by asserting a distinct ethical orientation, executes a dual critique of both human-centric world-view and societal hierarchy demonstrating that intelligence is not only human-centric.

The novel portrays Evrim's cunning nature through its communication with another thinking entity, the octopus. These further illuminates cross-species mutual pain and

endurance to make it right. This can also be within the dynamic of postcolonial intercontinental struggle put forth as tri-continental, as seen in this quotation: "Evrim paused, sensing the tension in the water, understanding that communication was not about commands but about consent" (p. 162). This attention reorders the traditional hierarchies of knowledge and unites a mutual struggle between the android and the octopuses. This is a form of a passive yet practical retaliation against the corporate authority that resembles the colonial legacy. Other than postcolonialism, posthumanist worldview is underplay as the conscious android observes oneself as ethical obligated to a trans-species struggle for freedom. Evrim, the android, here also opens up channels for dialogue between itself and the other thinking entity that the sentient octopus. Evrim does not only open a channel for communication otherwise denied by humankind, but it also shows tenderness and patience as it pauses while communicating with octopus reflecting an ethical act of humility acknowledging that true communication requires readiness and responsiveness and not dominance.

Identity may not be the central aspect of posthumanism but it is without doubt one of the top concerns of the approach. *The Mountain in the Sea* showcases the fluidity of identity within posthumanist frameworks as seen in this quotation: "I am the sum of their languages, their choices, and my own questions. I cannot be fully owned, though I am made to serve" (p. 189). Evrim's self-definition and intra-awareness indicates a strong yet cautious sense of identity between their purpose and their autonomy. Besides, even though Evrim is human-made, it develops a sense of self shaped by relationships with other sentient beings, including the octopuses, again reminding us that sentient life is not only human intrinsic. Besides, this incident resembles a scenario in *Klara and the Sun*, where Ishiguro shows how non-human uses both human and artificial intelligence to develop a new identity. This also clarifies that agency is not limited to humans but arises wherever consciousness engages with relational experiences (Lateef & Jasim, 2023, p. 1027). This coincides with Braidotti's (2019) conception of the posthuman characteristics as being relational, and ethically responsible and that identity is co-constructed in dialogue with both the oppressor and the oppressed entities to reach a consensus on the outstanding issues.

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Evrim's sense of self developed though its eagerness to signal other forms of consciousness and not from its internal computation. This, is reflected in the novel, destabilized human-centered hierarchies of power and knowledge. This resonates with Haraway's (1991) cyborgian ethics, where the boundaries between the engineer and the cyborg followed by the consequences of this equation. Besides, while the octopuses establish their identity and agency within the boundaries of their ecosystem, Evrim demonstrates its subjectivity and identity in a continuously contested reality. The novel suggests that real independence either human and nonhuman also relies on other entities and that no being exists in isolation.

Evrim's role in the novel is central in a sense that it evolves around dynamics of power through realization and cognition, as seen here: "Where humans saw ownership, Evrim saw mutual dependency; where humans-imposed rules, Evrim negotiated understanding" (p. 202). This idea challenges the belief that only humans or corporations can control and impose authority. The android's ability to deal with social and ecological issues prove that intelligence is not limited to humans. True ethics means caring about the connections between people, nature, and technology on the same level.

The Mountain in the Sea reflects various elements of posthumanist ethics, more specifically related to conscience: "To ignore the signals of the other is to invite collapse, whether in sea, circuit, or conscience" (p. 221). This warning places human action within a bigger natural ecosystem where the interplay of nature, mind, and morality intersect. From a posthumanist view, it urges responsibility beyond one's own type of species. From a postcolonial point of view, it reveals the hierarchies that exploit and silence others leads to ethical demise before the fatal destruction. Through Evrim's bond with the octopuses, the novel embodies eagerness, humility, and moral reflection, showing that the quest for survival, knowledge, and justice exists amongst all entities and sentient life.

The narrative shows the intersection of both postcolonial and posthumanist traits for criticism. As indirectly reminded through the novel, the old patterns of control and exploitation still exist today and are appropriated by the corporations to manipulate

technological tools, androids and animals to further the objectives. Throughout the story, the readers are faced with the idea that humans act as though superior and inconsiderate of the smartness of the octopuses, the cunning development of the androids. Yet, it can be concluded from the novel that the writer's consciousness speaks in the shadow suggesting that the time for human-centric mindset has become outdated suggesting that intelligence that can think, feel, or communicate like a human or even better, deserves more recognition. The novel also suggests that interspecies communication and connection should be through a more ethical and shared responsibility. Debatably, through the actions of Evrim and the octopuses, the text critiques human's hegemonic control over other humans and non-humans as well.

5.   Conclusion

Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea* was a reminder that colonial legacies and affects were still with us, replaced by unethical entities like corporations, which both manifested neocolonial practices. More interestingly, postmodern reality indicated that technological utilities and droids were manipulated to take over humans and the ecological forms as a whole. Set in Vietnam's Con Dao archipelago, it put further emphasis on the neocolonial entities, showing that they could not overlook colonial legacies; even their choice of location revealed a fertile geolocation for corporations' further neocolonial expansion. DIANIMA's control of the octopuses and the androids was on another level of exploitation that would not even spare robots and non-human species. Nonetheless, DIANIMA went even beyond that to exploit other species' knowledge, cunning, and even their living habitat.

Nayler broadened traits of ethics beyond the humans to cover other species and even other non-human sentients. The octopuses and the android Evrim in the novel questioned the entire human-centered notions of culture, agency, and memory. Octopuses and androids' language skills, creativity, and consciousness revealed a higher level of posthumanist ethics where moral duties were shared among humans, machines, animals, and ecosystems as well. Tie worldview also critiqued and dismantled the myth of humancentric mentality in

a world driven by colonial, imperial, and neocolonial entities at the level of states and corporations. Together, postcolonial and posthuman worldviews redefined the way we understood reality itself, let alone the dynamics of power, justice, and relations with others, both humans and nonhumans. Relatively, postcolonial theory itself redefined "humanity" through the colonial practices of alienation and exclusion, almost the same way posthumanism questioned human centralism through their manifestation of power over other species and other forms of nonhuman sentient life forms.

The novel does not entirely work towards posthumanist humility such as care and dialogue. However, Dr. Ha Nguyen's attempts to aid non-human species and droids by providing a productive venue for communication send various messages to redefine humans' world view and treatment of others. Through this, the novel recalls Spivak's call to hear the subaltern and Braidotti's idea of connected subjectivities as listening to nonhuman intelligence stands as a metaphor for a shared struggle in the ecosystem. The narrative suggests that ethical recognition should overlap human boundaries to be more inclusive of other non-human and show more openness through dialogue. The story fits well between postcolonial and posthumanist ideas with a few specific differences in place. Relatively, the octopuses and Evrim encourage further appreciation and recognition with the co-sharers of the ecosystem for a just purpose and a common struggle as a universal sentiment.

6. Recommendations

Future research could examine how modern science fiction explores both postcolonial and posthumanist issues, especially in the trend stories about nonhuman intelligence, robots, Artificial intelligence and ecological issues. Besides, using perspectives from animal studies, environmental humanities, and technology can show how colonial ideas still exist disregarding interspecies' ethical capabilities and responsibilities. Ultimately, this form of research lays foundation for better understanding and awareness about historical injustices of the past through a more humane, and yet, posthuman world view reflected or to reflect in contemporary fiction henceforth.

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