

Towards a Global South posthumanism: The more-than-human world in Han Song's *Red Ocean* and Véronique Tadjo's *In the Company of Men*

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Han Song. *Red Ocean*. Véronique Tadjo. *In the Company of Men*. Posthumanism.
Global South. Multiple modernities.

Focusing on two influential ecological novels from the Global South – *Hong Se Hai Yang* (Red ocean, 2004) by Chinese writer Han Song and *En compagnie des hommes* (2017; Eng. trans. *In the Company of Men*, 2021) by Ivorian writer Véronique Tadjo – this essay explores how ecological literature in the Global South offers alternative models of posthumanism grounded in a fluid conception of the self. Drawing on indigenous life philosophies from Chinese and West African traditions, these two novels invite a critique of the dominant narrative of modernity in the contemporary world, driven by an obsession with rapid progression and the primacy of autonomous subjectivity.

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The 21st century has witnessed the rise of ecological literature by writers from the Global South. Drawing on the cultural roots of their traditional philosophies of life, these writers explore posthuman thoughts – either explicitly or implicitly – highlighting the fluidity and interconnectedness of all life forms. This essay examines two influential ecological novels: *Hong Se Hai Yang* (Red Ocean, [2004] 2018) by Chinese writer Han Song and *En compagnie des hommes* (2017; Eng. trans. *In the Company of Men*, 2021) by Ivorian writer Véronique Tadjo.¹ Han Song is among the most famous science fiction writers in 21st-century China. His novel *Red Ocean*, described by the critic Mingwei Song as representative of the Chinese New Wave (2015, 8), offers a version of posthumanism that views fluidity and instability as essential principles of the world, rather than chaos to be controlled by an anthropocentric order. Véronique Tadjo, who grew up in Côte d'Ivoire and has lived and taught across Africa and Europe, is known for giving voice to the traumatic and fragmented experiences of those who are often silenced, both human and nonhuman. Her latest work, *In the Company of Men*, was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 2022. Despite their geographical and biographical divergences, both authors articulate an ecological consciousness in their respective works that transcends Cartesian dualisms and posits a symbiotic ontology of human-nature relations amid environmental crises. This shared epistemological orientation, grounded in non-anthropocentric ethics and anti-essentialist praxis, constitutes a thematic convergence between the two novels. More significantly, their ecological imaginaries instantiate a framework of alternative modernities that challenges the Eurocentric developmentalist teleology underpinning contemporary global modernity.

In recent decades, an emergent epistemic movement among Global South intellectuals has sought to rearticulate modernity's narratives through the prism of non-Western cultural legacies and historically situated experiences. This critical intervention, marked by its pluralistic reimagining of modernity's philosophical foundations, is strikingly captured in *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men*. These two novels explore a form of posthuman thought that transcends Global North centrism, reflecting on the international health and ecological crises that have become more urgent than ever in an era when anthropocentrism and the North-South power imbalance continue to prevail.

Red Ocean and *In the Company of Men* provide an exploration of posthumanism set against the backdrop of ecological disasters. In *Red Ocean*, Han outlines the birth and evolution of aquatic humans alongside the continuously deteriorating natural environment which is damaged by humanity's endless exploitation. By merging human traits with marine creature characteristics, aquatic humans initially serve as tools for terrestrial humans to explore the ocean and rebuild human civilization underwater. However, their biological and cognitive evolution progressively challenges anthropocentric ambitions. With their highly sensitive sensory systems, they become increasingly enmeshed with the natural world, both physically and spiritually, engaging in a dialogue with early Chinese understandings of the soul-body relationship. The interconnectedness between the aquatic humans and the natural world transforms the ecological damage caused by humanity's ac-

tions into pains that the aquatic humans can perceive, understand, and express. This synesthesia embraces a more fluid conception of material bodies, thoughts, psychological connections, and the ecological intimacy that binds the entire ecosystem.

Similarly, *In the Company of Men* also highlights the broken symbiotic connection between all entities within the ecosystem in the face of an environmental disaster – the Ebola outbreak. Unlike *Red Ocean*, where the pain of the wounded natural world is expressed by the aquatic humans through synesthesia, the natural entities in Tadjó's novel, such as the baobab tree, the Bat, and the Ebola virus, voice their own feelings and thoughts directly as narrators. The anthropomorphization of these natural entities draws on the long African philosophical and literary tradition that holds all things to have a spirit (Ramose 2005). The voices of the baobab tree, the Bat, and the Ebola virus shift the readers' focus from a human-centered perspective on natural disasters to a broader, ecosystem-wide view. In other words, the Ebola outbreak is not only a tragedy for humanity but, more importantly, a manifestation of the destruction of the entire ecological symbiotic system. Through a polyphonic structure that presents the Ebola outbreak from various perspectives, Tadjó memorializes the trauma, suffering, resilience, and solidarity of those affected, while also elaborating on the cultural, social, and ecological implications of the interdependence between different entities.

By incorporating indigenous life philosophies from their respective cultures, *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* offer posthuman imaginations traditionally rooted in the so called Global South, challenging the overly inclusive categorization of bounded and stable human subjecthood that overlooks cultural and social contexts within the existing field of posthumanism. While Cary Wolfe's famous call to "rethink the notion of the human tout court" questions anthropocentrism (1998, 42), it raises the crucial questions of whether human subjecthood is the same across different societies and cultures and how the varying understandings of human subjectivity and the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world in different cultural contexts influence the interpretation of posthumanism. What makes *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* particularly significant as literary works of posthumanism is how they offer alternative posthuman perspectives to address the above questions.

In this article, my contention is that these modes of posthumanism challenge the dominant discourses of modernity in the contemporary world, specifically the concept of singular, universal subjecthood, the notion of progress and industrialization driven by unrestricted exploitation, and the fear and anxiety surrounding an unpredictable and uncontrollable posthuman future. *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* thus offer a more nuanced approach to posthumanist thoughts: instead of being a one-size-fits-all concept, posthumanism is deeply engaged with specific historical, cultural, ecological, and geographical contexts. In this way, these two novels reflect on the rupture between humanity and the natural world caused by an obsession with developmentalism, offering an alternative understanding of humanity, posthumanity, and futurity.

THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

Red Ocean and *In the Company of Men* establish posthuman narratives that emphasize the ecological interconnectedness of the entire system. In these narratives, the authors focus on the connections between different parts of the ecosystem, offering a reflection on the relationship between humanity and nature through the lens of cultures and experiences of modernity emerging from the Global South.

In *Red Ocean*, Han explores the process of interdependence and transformation between different species and substances within the ecosystem. This imaginative portrayal challenges essentialist boundaries between subjects, replacing the stable, all-inclusive human subjectivity established by Descartes with a fluid, ever-changing, and interconnected subjectivity. In the novel, wars and overexploitation have depleted the Earth's terrestrial resources, rendering the land uninhabitable for humans. To explore the oceans and rebuild civilization underwater, terrestrial humans create aquatic humans through extensive genetic editing, combining human traits with those of marine creatures, such as gills and webbed hands. Alongside these physical transformations, scientists also attempt to instill a sense of belonging to the oceanic world in the first aquatic human through spiritual means. However, despite these efforts, the unnamed aquatic human develops a profound longing for life on land, suffering from his inability to partake in terrestrial existence like "normal" people.

As the first aquatic human's sensory system, transplanted from marine organisms, gradually develops, he acquires a heightened sensitivity beyond that of terrestrial humans. This increased perceptual acuity deepens his connection to the natural forces that transcend the human realm. Through this transformation, he becomes acutely aware of the damage humanity has inflicted on the ecosystem through its relentless exploitation and destruction of nature. This realization brings confusion and dissatisfaction with the terrestrial life he once yearned for. Meanwhile, technological advancements lead to the continuous creation of new generations of aquatic humans. Once a symbol of hope for the future of human civilization, the first aquatic human is now rendered obsolete by these newer iterations. As war looms between terrestrial humans and invaders from outer space, the selected aquatic and terrestrial humans carry humanity's hopes of restoring civilization into an underwater city. The first aquatic human, however, is abandoned on land, which is destined to become a barren wasteland.

Once designed to explore the oceans and seen as humanity's hope, the first aquatic human dies alone on the land he once loved so much – land that also caused him immense pain and confusion. His death, however, is not merely a tragic end but a transcendent experience:

He [the first aquatic human] was exposed to the air drawn from the surface and suffocated to death. His body was quickly processed into ions... In his final moments, he had a beautiful dream. In the dream, he merged with the sky, the earth, and the sea, while the Earth people and the outer space invaders signed a peace treaty. (Han 2018, 276)

In this scene, the first aquatic human's death is portrayed as an experience in which his body disintegrates into ions and fuses physically with other natural entities within the ecosystem. This process evokes a sense of transferability, underlining

the idea that humans are not superior to other entities, but the “agentially intra-acting components” of nature (Barad 2007, 33). Here, nature is no longer seen merely as a resource for human development, but as a community closely interconnected with the first aquatic human, both physically and spiritually.

As the plot progresses, Han’s posthuman narrative evolves from the individual interspecies transformation seen in the death of the first aquatic human to a collective embrace of dynamic symbiosis with the environment. Han shifts the focus from the grotesque depiction of the first aquatic human to a broader, more comprehensive ecological and cosmic context. The symbiosis between the aquatic humans and the ecosystem no longer requires death, as in the case of the first aquatic human, but becomes a new mode of survival for the next generation. With their humanoid bodies now integrated with the vegetative bodies of marine plants, the approach to sustenance for these new aquatic humans merges with that of plants: “They evolved from the descendants of ancient aquatic humans, living in the ocean abyss 6,000 meters deep... No longer requiring food, they instead rely on skin respiration, absorbing elements from the seawater and seabed minerals, synthesizing the energy they need within their bodies” (345).

Instead of relying on the predator-prey dynamics that sustain traditional animal life, the new generation of aquatic humans absorbs nutrients from the seabed minerals and seawater through limbs resembling plant roots. This enables them to maintain their existence through a deep symbiotic relationship with the surrounding natural environment. Their fluid, plant-like bodies embody a relational ontology that emphasizes the interdependence of all species within the chaotic, interconnected natural world – once understood in terms of separations. The permeable boundaries between different forms of life offer a posthuman vision of human subjecthood within enlarged environmental interconnections, moving humanity toward a future characterized by evolutionary co-emergence within a shared field of existence marked by interdependence and mutual sustainment (Ferrando 2012, 10).

The posthuman narrative in *In the Company of Men* is also explored within the context of a degraded natural environment. In Tadjó’s more-than-human world, all entities in nature – animals, plants, and even a virus – are imbued with spirit and are capable of voicing their thoughts. With a polyphonic structure, where each of the novel’s sixteen chapters is narrated by a different character, Tadjó casts light on the suffering and resilience during an Ebola outbreak, presenting multiple perspectives on the epidemic. Through the baobab tree’s narration, the novel showcases an ancestral environmental ethos in which the various entities within the ecosystem are interdependent and coexist harmoniously: “In the past, men used to talk to us, the trees. We shared the same gods, the same spirits” (2017, 28). Here, the baobab tree positions itself as an integral part of the residents’ community, showcasing the interconnectedness between humans and nature. This “dynamic co-evolutionary spiral”, in Katherine Hayles’s terms (2006, 164), mirrors the symbiosis between the residents and the natural world surrounding them.

From the perspective of the baobab tree, the network formed by all entities within the ecosystem has been disrupted by anthropogenic factors, including humanity’s

relentless exploitation of natural resources and the breaking chain of existence: “Men burn our branches and bleed our trunks. To reach and exploit areas where trees of great wisdom grow, they cut us mercilessly... See how our soils are drained of nutrients... Animals can no longer find food... Bats can no longer find their favorite wild fruits” (Tadjo 2017, 23–24).

The baobab tree attributes the environmental destruction to human-centered developmentalism rooted in the ideology of progress. Its narration serves as a stark reminder that while humanity suffers from the Ebola virus, environmental pollution and over-exploitation – products of human activities – also act as an indelible virus within the ecosystem, causing immense destruction to the natural world. This perspective challenges the anthropocentric framework that dominates conventional pandemic narratives, emphasizing how anthropogenic disruptions have hindered the dynamic symbiosis that once existed.

This anthropocentric perspective is further questioned by the narration of the Ebola virus. In *In the Company of Men*, the virus is not portrayed as a faceless invader causing human suffering but as a sentient being with its own voice. The Ebola virus recounts the outbreak from its perspective, asserting that humanity’s relentless environmental destruction, particularly deforestation, has eradicated the natural barriers that once kept humans and viruses at a safe distance. It emphasizes that it is not an external force invading human society, but rather the actions of humans that have driven it into their communities: “I do not like to move; I prefer to stay in the jungle... A man kills an animal and violates nature. He does not know that I have already entered his body, and soon I will be in his family and throughout his community... It is not I who have changed; it is humans who have lost their way” (142–143).

This perspective reinterprets the context, causes, process, and impact of the Ebola outbreak, transforming it from a disaster for human society into a broader systemic destruction of the entire ecological environment. This shift challenges the ontological primacy of human existence typically found in conventional pandemic narratives, emphasizing the “uncanny intimacy” between the human and the nonhuman (Ghosh 2016, 22). More significantly, in this section, the Ebola virus does not use the plural pronoun “we” to express a collective voice but speaks in the singular pronoun “I”, endowing it with a distinct personality. As Tadjo notes in an interview, it is difficult for people to imagine a virus as an individual entity due to its invisibility to the human eye (Bujon and Vessier 2023, 89). The virus’s use of the singular perspective brings the invisible into the realm of the visible, prompting readers to adopt a multi-species viewpoint that transcends the over-rationalization of contemporary modernity.

LIFE PHILOSOPHIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In Han’s *Red Ocean*, the aquatic humans ultimately establish a symbiotic relationship with other entities within the ecosystem by transforming the traditional predator-prey dynamics that once defined their way of survival. In Tadjo’s *In the Company of Men*, the anthropomorphization of a baobab tree, a bat, and an Ebola virus highlights the porous relationships between humans and the natural world. The depic-

tion of the more-than-human world in these two novels is intricately intertwined with notions of life in both Chinese and West African philosophies, navigating readers toward a posthuman imagination that decenters the conventional understanding of the living world and gives voice to the silenced.

The birth, survival, and evolution of the aquatic humans in *Red Ocean* are deeply intertwined with water, a central element in early Chinese philosophy. Originally created by terrestrial humans to explore the ocean, the aquatic humans gradually integrate their material bodies and ways of life into their surrounding environment after moving underwater. By the end of the novel, they physically integrate with the ocean, linking their porous bodies to the inherent unity of all entities within the more-than-human universe. As an essential resource of primordial significance, water is regarded by Confucianism and Daoism not only as a distinct material but also as central to the cosmic schema of creation and the origin of all things in the universe. As the foundational Chinese philosophical text *Guanzi* indicates: “All natural beings are born of water, with water flowing throughout their material bodies and the functioning of life relying on its movement” (Rickett 2021, 24).

Initially, Han presents a desolate world where water is viewed merely as a natural resource to sustain human development, drawing a clear distinction between the human world and the natural environment. This dualism is later transcended through the symbiosis between the aquatic humans and the ocean, where the notions of water shift from being an exploitable resource to the origin and essential element of all life, nourishing and encompassing not only the natural world but also human society and the humanistic spirit. This transformation reflects the values and worldview of pre-modern Chinese society – acting in harmony with nature, flowing freely without force or intention, and always capable of returning to its true state (Miller 2017, 58). It challenges the growing separation between humanity and nature that dominates the discourses of modernity in the contemporary world.

As the deteriorating ocean environment hinders the aquatic humans from extracting enough energy from the seawater to sustain their lives, they choose to relinquish their fleshy forms and merge materially with the sea. Rather than mourning the disappearance of the aquatic humans as stable individual subjects, this integration embraces a new mode of existence in which all boundaries that once defined fixed subjects are dissolved: “The essence of myself and all things in the universe is the same. At the deepest level of all life, from the moment of the Big Bang, a unified universe has already existed. All living beings will eventually discover this, and they will seek it out” (Han 2018, 371).

The multiplicities and the fluidity of bodies and identities in *Red Ocean* engage in a dialogue with the early Chinese understanding of the soul-body relationship. In his discussion of the concept of soul and body in pre-Buddhist Chinese thought, Yu Ying-Shih suggests that the notions of *hun* (spiritual essence) and *po* (physical form) together form the Chinese understanding of the soul (1987, 374–375). Michael Loewe similarly points out that the *hun* controls human expression, emotions, and wisdom, while the *po* is the force that maintains the body’s functions (1979, 79). Together, these two concepts, along with the physical body, form the indispensable

components of the complete human subject. As an organic existence combining consciousness and the body, the *po* constitutes a kind of intermediary between spirit and flesh.

The unified view of human subject is further elaborated by sinologist Roger Ames in his influential article “The Meaning of the Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy”, in which he argues that the concept of a bounded individual is not applicable to early China (1993, 157). Instead, he introduces the idea of the Confucian “relational self”, positioning it within the framework of a connected universe to emphasize the inherently social nature of the individual in early Chinese thought (163). This fluid conception of the self offers a new lens through which to understand the dialectical relationship between the material and immaterial aspects of the human subject in *Red Ocean*. As Han traces humanity’s evolving relationship with the more-than-human world in a future where the environment has been severely damaged, he moves from a narrative of exploiting underwater resources based on developmentalism to one in which humans merge with the ocean (both physically and spiritually) for survival. It is in this integration with water that Han introduces an understanding of a fluid, all-encompassing condition, underscoring how traditional Chinese concepts of life contribute to a posthuman imagination that envisions an interdependent and sustainable world for all entities within the ecosystem.

Just as *Red Ocean* centers its narrative around water, a symbol deeply rooted in classical Chinese culture, one of the narrators in *In the Company of Men*, the baobab tree, holds profound cultural significance in West African tradition. In West African culture, the baobab tree symbolizes wisdom, the transmission of culture, and the continuity of life while also embodying the mysteries of spirits, the greatness of Africa, and the perpetuity of African culture (Opoku 2006, 353). The baobab tree’s monologue in *In the Company of Men* reflects its distinctive role in West African society: “Centuries ago, I was the symbol of the deep connection between nature and humanity. I was the tree of wisdom, the one people turned to when they sought answers to the torments of existence” (Tadjo 2017, 21). This symbolic implication endows the baobab tree with a power that transcends time and space, enabling it to spiritually traverse temporal and spatial boundaries, linking the entire course of human history: “We are the link that connects humanity to the past, the present, and the uncertain future” (28). Beyond the limits of time and space, the baobab tree’s narration draws readers back to “a harmonious past” in West African tradition, where no clear line separates “the natural and the supernatural”, “the abstract and the concrete”, or “the physical and the metaphysical” (Obiechina 1975, 155).

This interspecies interconnectedness is further reinforced by the anthropomorphization of the bat and the Ebola virus, linking *In the Company of Men* and its post-human imagination with *ubuntu*, often regarded as the root of all African philosophy by thinkers like Mogobe Ramose (1999; 2005). Ubuntu, a Xhosa and Zulu term frequently translated as “humanity” or “being human”, emphasizes the shared experiences of marginalized groups in ways that empower all entities within the ecosystem, thus preserving collective interests and providing complexity beyond anthropocentric discourse (Ramosé 2005, 270). In this sense, ubuntu underscores the web of rela-

tionality that connects humans to the more-than-human world, positioning humans as an inseparable part of the larger ecosystem.

Tadjo underlines how the concept of ubuntu strengthens neighborly relationships between humans and lifeforms, including animals, organisms, and plants. The sacred web of life highlights the dynamic integration of different material bodies and their cosmic contexts, establishing a shared moral identity between humans and other environmental complexities. This points to the “networked relations” of all entities within the world, where, despite appearing diverse on the surface, they share a similar nature that co-constitutes them regardless of species designation (Wolfe 1998, 34). This lack of distinction between humans and non-humans suggests that defining the Self no longer requires the establishment of the Other. If humans are understood as possessing subjectivity, being the center of action, value, and ideas, then other entities within the universe also possess the same subjectivity, reimagining humans as composites of nature and culture rather than as ontologically separate subjects (Latour 2004, 11).

Drawing on the cultural roots of life philosophies in early China and West Africa, *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* construct a posthuman narrative that views humans, animals, plants, and other natural entities to be part of the same web of life, all mutually dependent on one another. This “nature-culture continuum” challenges the Cartesian logic that separates humans from animals and justifies the destruction of other members of the planetary environment as a modern worldview (Braidotti 2013a, 22). Instead, it envisions a Global South posthumanism that is both interconnected and sustainable.

TOWARDS A GLOBAL SOUTH POSTHUMANISM

When these two words, posthumanism and Global South, are connected, they are always associated with the centuries of colonial plunder, the more recent geopolitical dominance of the Global North, and the plight of exploited laborers (Craighead and Sibanda 2022, 2–3). Although these posthuman narratives identify the Global South’s position at the periphery of the current global order, and the trauma and violence inflicted on its more marginalized groups, they simultaneously fix the peripheral and marginal in the position of the one being observed. How, then, does the Global South participate in these posthuman narratives besides being a silent object to be watched and expressed? Rosi Braidotti combines African humanism alongside other neo-humanist perspectives, including Vandana Shiva’s anti-global neo-humanism, Avtar Brah’s diasporic ethics, and Homi Bhabha’s subaltern secularism, to form an alternative vision of the subject beyond ahistorical Eurocentric subjecthood (2013b, 18). Braidotti’s framework of re-traditionalization provides a conceptual and methodological example to activate the potential of traditional thoughts from the Global South in posthumanism.

Both *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* are set in the context of environmental disasters brought about by the rapid development of human society, questioning the anthropocentric developmentalism haunted in the current global condition. These two novels do not stop at depicting the tragic plight of humanity under

the deterioration of the natural environment but instead further focus on the causes that lead to this environmental degradation. In Han's novel, the reason terrestrial humans create aquatic humans to explore the underwater world is the continuous deterioration of the terrestrial environment resulting from humanity's endless exploitation. Tadjó's novel, through the voice of the baobab tree, points out that the outbreak of Ebola stems from humanity's relentless encroachment on the living spaces of other species.

The critique of human activities that harm the natural world prompts a reflection on the modernity narrative, which is driven by an obsession with rapid development and the primacy of autonomous subjectivity. This critique evokes a longing for a vision in which different species coexist harmoniously. Through various cultural images, *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* trace the cultural roots of the close interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world in their respective traditions, transforming this longing for harmonious symbiosis into a form of cultural nostalgia.

In Han's work, the sensitive sensory system of the first aquatic human continuously makes him feel the damage caused to the ecosystem by human activities. As the degradation of the ecological environment gradually evolves into a sensation recognized as pain by his nervous system, it becomes a torment that lingers within his physical body. This empathy for the experiences of other species communicates the view of life in traditional Chinese philosophy, pointing out that although humans and the natural world differ in form, they are essentially the same as they all originate from water. Although the terrestrial humans' original purpose of modifying the first aquatic human's body was to turn him into a tool for developing the ocean, it unintentionally allows him to break free from the alienation between the human body and the ecosystem in the industrial era. Through water as a medium, a profound connection is reestablished between humans and the natural environment. In this regard, the destroyed world has already become part of the first aquatic human's material body.

The baobab tree functions for Tadjó as a cultural figure akin to the griot in West African tradition, serving as a storyteller, musician, and poet who preserves common knowledge and cultural heritage (Newell 2006, 59). It constantly yearns for the restoration of the close connection between humanity and the natural world, a bond that existed in the golden past but was disrupted by the forces of modernization. *In the Company of Men* concludes with the baobab tree's hope for the restoration of the cosmological network in which humanity and nonhuman life forms are closely interconnected, or as the baobab tree puts it: "Humanity's fate will join us" (Tadjó 2017, 167). This conclusion reconciliates the long rupture within the modern world, which revolves around anthropocentric goals of exploitation, progression, and domination.

In this way, *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* construct a mode of posthumanism that does not lead to a fearsome, unpredictable future but instead opens a path to return to a familiar and harmonious past. *Red Ocean* ends with the aquatic humans choosing to merge with the ocean, while *In the Company of Men* concludes

with the reconstitution of a new relationship between all forms of life. Both novels unfold a new future with an open attitude towards the transformation of humanoid bodies and the accompanying dismantling of the current order of human societies, in contrast to the feeling of unease about a posthuman future that humans cannot predict and control haunting many Western dystopian novels. The point of this difference shows that posthuman imagination does not necessarily drive terror and anxiety, it can also be understood as a cultural nostalgia yearning for returning to tradition.

This form of posthumanism proposes a framework of alternative modernities – a claim that dominant trajectories of exploitation and development cannot encompass experiences of modernity in the Global South – to question the generalization and universality of contemporary discourse on modernity. Structured along the axis of Enlightenment rationality and humanist individualism, contemporary dominant modernity premises a conceptual and historical attachment to a linear development logic and the idea of a unitary and bounded human subjecthood. This essentialist understanding of subjecthood rests on a hierarchical and dialectical vision of Otherness, pointing to a political and cultural conservative position indicated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari that chastises all differences as threats (1987, 356).

Red Ocean and *In the Company of Men*, however, lead readers beyond the contemporary modernity narrative in which the distribution of agency surrounds one all-inclusive subjective. By showcasing the emotions and thoughts of other entities within the ecosystem, these two novels reconstruct pluralistic forms and existence that have long been excluded from human-centered modern narratives. The foregrounding of the more-than-human world aligns with Arif Dirlik's concept of "multiple modernities" (2003), which recognizes the possibility of different developmental trajectories grounded in diverse historical, cultural, and ecological contexts. This approach disrupts the dominant, singular narrative that development must equate to the endless exploitation of natural resources to serve humanity's interests. As the posthuman imaginations in *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* suggest, humanity is an integral part of the ecosystem, alongside other natural entities such as plants, animals, water, and mountains. Development, therefore, can be redefined as the collaborative progress of all life forms. This vision of symbiosis dismantles the myth of human uniqueness and presents an alternative form of cosmopolitanism that blends a nomadic subjectivity with a pan-human perspective (Braidotti 2013b, 8), opening the door to a posthuman future that values sustainability, collective interdependence, and ecological harmony.

CONCLUSION

Red Ocean and *In the Company of Men* propose an alternative mode of posthumanism that broadens the understanding of human subjectivity, challenging the anthropocentric elements embedded in the "singular modernity" of the contemporary global condition (Parry 2023, 32). Drawing on indigenous life philosophies from Chinese and West African traditions, these two novels emphasize the cultural im-

plications of symbiosis between humanity and non-human entities within the ecosystem: it embodies an alternative to the dominant discourses of modernity by foregrounding interconnectedness, hybridity, and alliances in the formation of modern subjectivities.

This form of Global South posthumanism marks a clear departure from what Braidotti describes as “Euro-universalism”, which abstracts European modern experiences, rooted in a specific historical context, into a universal concept and normative ideal presumed to be applicable across time and space (2013b, 18). *Red Ocean* and *In the Company of Men* thus answer the question of how the Global South participates in posthuman narratives, not as a passive object to be observed and represented. These novels highlight the fluidity and interchangeability of identities while emphasizing humanity’s interconnectedness with the more-than-human world, complicating the dichotomies inherent in dominant modernity discourses. A new vision of cosmopolitanism thus emerges. Rather than viewing the Other with suspicion, it embraces a nomadic subjectivity that transcends narrow, egocentric perspectives. Rather than fearing unpredictability, it reconnects the human past with the posthuman future. Rather than reinforcing the binary of Global South/Global North and human/non-human, it foregrounds the instinctual unity of all entities within the world. This new cosmopolitanism proposes an expanded vision of modernity that accommodates the diverse ways in which different cultures understand their relationship with the natural world.

NOTES

¹ Both novels are cited after original.

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