# Capitalism against the planet: Posthuman ecocriticism in Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*

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In this article, I examine various dimensions of displacement resulting from the environmental crisis envisaged in the speculative debut novel of the South African author Alistair Mackay: *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* (2022). The theoretical framework is located in the area of posthumanist studies but also involves elements of trauma theory, as the issue of psychological displacement is viewed through E. Ann Kaplan's concept of pre-trauma, a paralysing anxiety about the future disaster evoked by the scenarios of the near apocalypse. I also offer a brief review of the political and economic conditions of post-apartheid South Africa, discussing the country's adoption of neoliberal tenets. Since Mackay's novel represents climate change as the result of ecologically hazardous activities of multinational corporations which stem from their colonial/imperialist commodification of the natural environment, my analysis draws from ecocritical African studies and contemporary critiques of capitalism, thus situating the climatic catastrophe of the Anthropocene in the context of destructive practices of the neoliberalist economy. Furthermore, in this article, I employ the posthumanist perspective (Hayles; Braidotti) to discuss the issue of body augmentation, presenting the reservations of Mackay's characters towards dehumanising effects of integrating our bodies with ultramodern technologies. Finally, a pro-active ecological endeavour of tree-planting is examined in the context of Donna Haraway's notion of the Chthulucene as well as a long-standing African appreciation of the forest—as a biological asset, regulating climate and farming, and as a spiritual one, the abode of deities. **Keywords:** Alistair Mackay, ecocriticism, South Africa, apocalyptic fiction, posthumanism, environment, capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism.

When a protagonist of Alistair Mackay's novel *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* (2022) addresses the progressing environmental disaster engendered by anthropogenic climate change, he alludes to the strategies people might pursue to confront the predicament:

> Maybe madness is the only sane reaction to the madness we've built around us. Look at what we have to cope with now, with our poor little barely-changed-since-we-were-hunter-gatherers brains. Think about how peaceful we felt at the reforestation festival all those years ago, planting trees. We were filthy and gross, but we were happy. Just two days away from the city did the trick. The wilderness helps so much, and we've torn down every wilderness. (*It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* 227)

Possible routes of escape involve various forms of displacement located in different spheres: not only physical and psychological but also technological, political, and ethical. The invoked "madness" refers not just to psychiatric issues but also to religious fanaticism; a tree-planting project is one of the proactive ecological endeavours mentioned in the narrative; newly devised technologies allow improving human unevolved "hunter-gatherer" brains and enhancing living conditions for the privileged elites. In this article, I will employ the theoretical framework derived from posthumanist studies in order to examine the dimensions of displacement evoked by the environmental crisis envisaged in Mackay's speculative novel. I will, among others, investigate whether, and to what extent, the novel captures the specificity of African ecocritical attitudes, which represent "the

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Southern environmentalisms of the poor (often genuinely heroic and authentic)" as different from "the Northern environmentalisms of the rich (always potentially vainglorious and hypocritical)" by means of recognising the existence of "the ecological gap between coloniser and colonised" (Huggan and Tiffin 2). A brief review of the political and economic circumstances of post-apartheid South Africa, where spirited democratisation coincided with the eager espousal of neoliberal tenets, will allow my analysis to relate the climate catastrophe of the Anthropocene to environmentally destructive practices of late capitalism.

Environmental studies concerning Africa usually connect postcolonial and ecological issues, as this correspondence can provide an effective "means of challenging continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance" (Huggan and Tiffin 2). Just as in the previous centuries the colonial enterprise both objectified indigenous people, often using them as a source of slave labour, and illegitimately took possession of their land, often terraforming it to meet the European standards, now "the second colonial pillage" of the neoliberal economy (Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* 244) is equally insensitive to environmentally hazardous activities which cause the suffering of the people and to the undertakings which can precipitate the agony of the planet. The political-economic context also remains the same: Africa still endures "colonially inherited patterns of resource appropriation", which callously despoils its nature, and the external powers still aim "to erase African worldviews about the environment" (Mushonga and Ogude 2, 5). Postcolonial industrial and business models currently pursued on the continent are based, like previously, on extractivism: given "the absence of processes of structural transformation and the persistence of primary commodity dependence", African economies continue to rely on "extractive cores", and foreign profits still arise from "mining, oil and gas extraction and export-oriented agriculture" (Greco 511). The situation is aggravated by the "uneven geographical distribution of climate change effects". Because of Africa's geographic and economic specificity, its population is particularly vulnerable to climatic afflictions (Mushonga and Ogude 12). The actions of multinational corporations are driven by shareholders' profit, totally disregarding the well-being of local communities whose living conditions and traditional occupations they wreck. For instance, as Ogaga Okuyade observes, the operations of Western oil companies in Nigeria, which have often resulted in the compulsive evacuation of local people, have brought "not only social marginalization but also destruction of the ecology and decomposition of culture" ("Ecocultures and the African Literary Tradition" 470). Just as earlier, the all-too-familiar colonialist logic "privilege[d] dominant cultures above colonised ones", creating "the rationale for the colonial attempt to civilise indigenous societies because the lands of the indigenous people are assumed—from Eurocentric arrogance—to be underdeveloped and empty", today capitalist enterprises lead to "development-induced displacement" which is "devastating to the psyche of the displaced" (Okuyade, "Ecocultures" 469–70). It is only natural, then, that "African eco-criticism did not escape the infusion of colonialism or its aftermath, which is still strongly felt both in African politics and environment. This infusion will [...] form the basis of differentiation from eco-criticism in the North" (Okolo 24).[1]

It seems particularly apt that the novel discussed in this article—a literary intervention on the issue of anthropogenic climate change chiefly fuelled by the neoliberalist economy—should be situated in South Africa. The country is not only the continent's largest coal provider, supplying as much as 90% of coal burned in Africa (Finkeldey 3), but also its most serious greenhouse gas producer, its $CO_2$ emissions being "twenty times higher than even those of the United States" when measured against per capita Gross Domestic Product (Bond, "Social Movements and Corporate Social Responsibility in South Africa" 1047). South Africa's exorbitant carbon emissions and other forms of pollution result both from the country's customary dependence on electricity provided by coal-fired power plants and the low quality of its coal, which has meagre calorific value and generates high lead, mercury, and sulphur dioxide emissions (Zerizghi *et al.*). Unsurprisingly, business and financial institutions most responsible for fossil fuel-related air pollution in South Africa—like elsewhere—are international key market players and driving forces of the neoliberal economy.

As it happens, South African political transformations that occurred after the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994 did little to remove deep-rooted social inequality. In previous years, local Marxist activists such as Neville Alexander maintained that the struggle to abolish apartheid would also vanquish capitalism because "racial domination and capital accumulation [are] inextricably linked" (Desai 3543). Using the concept of racial capitalism, they recognised that the two formations are not only closely entwined, but that they can work for mutual support.[2] However, despite the ANC's heartening promises, most commentators agree that South Africa's transition has only "reproduced racial capitalism while transforming the dynamics of exploitation and exclusion" (Clarno 34) so that, as Alexander himself concluded, "what we used to call the apartheid-capitalist

system has simply given way to the post-apartheid-capitalist system" (64). In a general critical opinion, despite repealing many apartheid discriminatory regulations such as suffrage laws, South Africa's ANC government retained economic apartheid through its neoliberal policies. Although the ANC openly contested free-market economy models before the 1994 elections, its "largely socialist agenda" was soon "convert[ed] to neoliberal orthodoxy" under unrelenting pressure from the World Bank and other international institutions (Narsiah 30). The Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme, introduced in 1996, observed all "standard neoliberal economic principles [including] deficit reduction, low inflation, trade liberalization, privatization, tax cuts, and deregulation" (Schneider 43). Understandably, the restructuring policy undertaken in the early post-apartheid years "reproduced racial capitalism while leading to important shifts in the racial composition of the elite, the dynamics of exploitation, and the constitution of a racialized surplus population", which all resulted in the emergence of a new Black capitalist class and the growth of Black middle class (Clarno and Vally 3439). Rather than expected general social improvement, the transformation brought South Africa's new democracy "a low-growth, high-poverty, unemployment-ridden, ever more unequal, capital flight prone, volatile, vulnerable, elite-oriented economy" (Bond, "Social" 1038). Neoliberal discourse "has completely overshadowed non-institutional discourses of the marginalised subaltern—the poor and landless black South Africans", voicing the newly adapted ideology of the government and the neo-colonial schemes of international magnates instead (Ndhlovu 133). Needless to say, the colonial extractive patterns, which generated an environmental footprint that is harmful to the land and local communities, have endured, as "the 'historical bloc' around fossil fuels in South Africa remained intact under the ANC" (Finkeldey 38).

The novel examined here, Mackay's 2022 literary debut *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*, voices acute anxiety about human-induced climate change on two levels: it depicts local effects of the crisis, situating these effects in the South African socio-political and ecological context, and represents a planetary scale of the disaster. The book is set in Cape Town and features two interspersing narrative lines: one covers a 15-year span (resuming in the indeterminate near future), which leads up to an undescribed ecological apocalyptic event (or a series of events) called "the Change", the other covers a brief period of time in the aftermath of this catastrophe.[3] The first story, which encompasses the bulk of the novel, recounts the fates of three gay friends, Luthando, Viwe, and Malcolm, before the impending climate disaster. The second focuses on Milo, a child who lives in the slums in a part of the city that now, after oceans have risen, is an island. The stories converge when we learn that Milo is Luthando's son and that the unidentified refugee he takes care of is Malcolm.

The chronological organisation of the novel's main narrative that positions the plot on four-time planes—fifteen, twelve, nine, and two years before "the Change"—allows the reader to witness incremental steps of environmental degradation, which correspond to the rapid process of global warming in the Anthropocene. Focused on the plot and characters based in South Africa, the story presents both regional and global consequences of climate change: unprecedented spells of hot and dry weather first lead to severe droughts, then to wildfires spreading not only through a subtropical zone but also the Siberian tundra and Canadian forests. Concomitant weather phenomena include devastating anomalies such as cyclones and floods. Rising sea levels cause the inundation of vast coastal areas. In Cape Town, downtown skyscrapers are seized by the ocean, and the residential areas shrink, becoming either submerged in water or captured by flames. As the inhabitable land dwindles worldwide, hosts of refugees seek survival through relocation. This rescue option is not available to animals and plants: wildlife perishes en masse and fast.

The other, shorter narrative line, dated as "Now", takes place in a menacing, bleak, impoverished residential area called Kapelitsha. This designation is an obvious distortion of "Khayelitsha", the name of a township situated on the Cape Flats in the Cape Town municipal area. It is a densely populated, economically disadvantaged district inhabited by an overwhelming majority of Black Africans, mostly native Xhosa speakers (the name means new home in Xhosa). Although rising sea levels have made Mackay's Kapelitsha an island, it retains its prototype's character of sinister urban slums, exaggerating some of its features. Miserable inhabitants live in austere and insecure conditions in primitive shacks; some of them have moved to occupy dilapidated skyscrapers half-submerged in water, with all windows broken, "hundreds of families per floor" (*It Doesn't* 8). The island is not only repulsive, replete with bloated dead bodies, but highly dangerous. An unguarded child can become prey to hungry dwellers who resort to cannibalism. Provisions are scarce: water can only be taken from collection points where one has to queue for hours and the basic source of food for Milo's family is protein procured from fly maggots. People are active mostly at night because during the daytime "stillness hours" the air is too hot to breathe, and


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quick movement makes one's body temperature rise excessively, which leads to organ failure and death. Adverse environmental conditions cause frequent birth malformations and infant deaths. Milo's father's stories about "alarm clocks and cell phones that they used to have, back when there was lightning [sic] in the walls, and about birds that chirped to let you know the day was starting" (9) indicate two dimensions of nostalgia for the lost world, both for the technologies of civilisation and for the delights of nature.

The effect of the anxiety that Mackay evokes in his readers through such a grim vision of the future resembles a state of "pretraumatic stress" induced by "the circulation of futurist disaster narratives" described by E. Ann Kaplan (3). Drawing from a psychological study of American soldiers deployed to Afghanistan, whose anxiety symptoms—similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—related to possible future calamitous events were examined in terms of "Pretraumatic Stress Syndrome", Kaplan diagnoses that Western cultures are prone to fears about the collapse of civilisation brought by environmental cataclysms. She notes that, as "fear, panic, and anxiety pop up regularly [...] in the media [...], warning people about future disaster and enhancing the sense of pretrauma" (10), the catastrophic narratives impel us to identify "with the futurist depleted, destroyed, suffering landscape" (58). The critic analyses the genre she calls "pretrauma cinema", noting that its "viewers witness probable futurist dystopian worlds as they are imagined on film *before* they happen in reality" and thereby occupy a specific position in regard to the threat of human-induced planetary disaster (24, italics in original). Their identification with characters from imaginary narratives of doom can have two effects: "Anxiety about the future incited by such fantasies may produce traumatic emotions similar to those of PTSD and a disabling uncertainty about one's own future. But engaging in such fantasies may, on the contrary, offer [...] 'memory *for* the future,' less a disabling anxiety than a productive warning to bring about needed change" (18, italics in original).

Mackay's title, *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*, sounds exactly like such a hopeful warning. The connection is emphasised by the fact that PTSD symptoms occur in the novel's characters. Even fifteen years before "the Change", Viwe is in therapy for depression and continual anxiety: thinking about the condition of the planet brings him chest tightness which hampers breathing; he experiences "loss and panic and grief that well up inside him and threaten to blot out his senses" (*It Doesn't* 21). In subsequent years, depression, anxiety disorders, and mental breakdowns become widespread in society, but, given that the world is already collapsing, they are understandable reactions that do not really qualify as *pre*traumatic because, as Malcolm phrases it, "The world's fucking scary these days" (205). In such desperate circumstances, developing a mental condition offers relief through an unconsciously adopted dissociation, a form of psychological displacement for the traumatised subject.

Physical displacement by way of escape to safety and fine living conditions is available only for the chosen few. After "the Change", the elite dwellers of Cape Town reside in an artificially constructed haven of "the Citadel". The Citadel is a city for selected corporate employees, perched favourably on Signal Hill and Lion's Head, two rocky Cape Town landmarks. Its futuristic state-of-the-art design provides the inhabitants with a simulacrum of a dream city. It is protected by security forces, surrounded by flame-retardant walls, and covered by a huge glass dome. It has its own gigantic air conditioning system, which keeps the temperature moderate. It boasts wind turbines, desalination plants, and even irrigation systems to take care of a park and lawns. Supplies, such as grain grown on the Arctic coast, are delivered by corporate ships. As climate changes progress, however, the Citadel becomes merely a temporary solution: its citizens are gradually relocating to corporate territories in the "New Temperate Zones", situated in Greenland, northern Canada, and Alaska. Malcolm, a corporate-employed Citadel resident, is planning to migrate to New Washington, a newly established city in Antarctica, which is fully owned by his company and has the great advantage of being situated "far from the tropical evacuation zones, separated by vast oceans from the refugee crises" (184).

Residential company towns of this kind, an abandoned late-19$^{th}$-century American invention, have reappeared in speculative dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction since the 1990s. While in some narratives, such as Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*, the rationale follows the original concept of tightly controlled shelters for blue-collar workers, in other works, for instance in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, they are closer to the representation of present-day neoliberal disciplinary structures imposed upon capitalist societies. The denizens of such corporate enclaves can enjoy permanence of employment, comfortable living conditions, and protection against any external threats; in return, they remain docile corporate cogs. This parallels a highly effective strategy of late capitalism which, as Mark Fisher puts it, rests on our general belief that "lowering our expectations [...] is a small price to pay for being protected from terror and totalitarianism" (5). In effect, we cannot think of a viable safe political alternative to capitalism. In Mackay's novel, the Citadel corporate inhabitants face the choice

between compliance with the company's policies, along with mounting dependence, and living in the slums of Kapelitsha. The payment for corporate benefits is their indifference to the miseries of the outsiders, a form of ethical displacement. Yet, eventually, Malcolm's conscience does not allow him to remain the company's slave. He does not want to get involved in creating a body-augmenting device that will have an "additional" function of invigilating its users; instead, he sabotages the project, voluntarily renounces his welfare, and leaves the Citadel, planning to join his friend Luthando in the slums.

In Mackay's narrative, "the Change" functions as a nodal point that accentuates the aggravation of another effect of neoliberalism: the rigid stratification of society between rich and poor. As David Harvey claims, neoliberalisation was a political project meant to "re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" and it was "very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation" (19). For Naomi Klein, neoliberal politicians, guided by the Chicago School economic ideology, "were not creating a perfectly harmonious economy but turning the already wealthy into the superrich and the organized working class into the disposable poor" (*Shock* 444). Neoliberal schemes led to "the hoarding of [most] wealth by a tiny minority of the world's population" (Klein, *Shock* 445). The phenomenon was proved by various statistics concerning the distribution of financial resources in many countries that introduced this economic line in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Harvey 14–9). One such country was post-apartheid South Africa, where adopting a free-market economy, exacerbated by a continuing colonial "legacy of the dispossession of the indigenous population" (Ndhlovu 131), resulted in an extremely unequal allocation of wealth. While the elites—old white and new Black—of upper- and middle-class South Africans enjoy financial abundance and the safety of their comfortable houses protected by private security companies, the masses—mostly Black—experience systemic unemployment, destitution, and substandard housing. As Andy Clarno and Salim Vally postulate, the South African struggle with racial capitalism has been lost, and the economic logic born from "the marriage between racial domination and capital accumulation" has brought the country "some of the most egregious inequality imaginable" (3442). *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* hyperbolises social stratification through its dramatic contrast between safe and plentiful lives in the futuristic Citadel and the perilous hand-to-mouth existence in the barren Kapelitsha.

In her work about climatic crisis, Klein points out that social polarisation is also effectuated by the pernicious effects of global warming: although earlier environmentalists usually believed that climate change would be "a great equalizer" affecting all humans uniformly and thus uniting them in preventive efforts, it has an opposite effect, "stratifying us further into a society of haves and have-nots, divided between those whose wealth offers them [...] protection from ferocious weather, at least for now, and those left to the mercy of increasingly dysfunctional states" (*This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* 45). The disparity between the Citadel and Kapelitsha illustrates Klein's prediction of future counteractions to climatic anomalies: "In the wealthier nations, we will protect our major cities with costly seawalls and storm barriers while leaving vast areas of coastline that are inhabited by poor and Indigenous people to the ravages of storms and rising seas" (*This Changes* 43).

Mackay's novel expressly declares that we should seek the roots of anthropogenic climate change in a capitalist economy. The protagonists of *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* are aware that since global warming was caused by exorbitant carbon emissions, the main perpetrators are multinational corporations: "Mom says they are the ones who put us in this position in the first place", concedes Milo (*It Doesn't* 12). Luthando and his group of environmental activists are convinced that taking effective climate action cannot be reconciled with retaining the capitalist world order but would require introducing "an entirely reimagined economic system" in order to "abandon the cult of growth and trickle-down benefits" (72). Refuting their political opponents' claim that only development based on neoliberal principles can provide South African citizens with housing and jobs, the activists assert that "infinite growth is the ideology of the cancer cell" (72). Thirty years of post-apartheid history of the country prove them right: while neo-colonial capitalist projects of resource exploitation are often presented as opportunities for local development and economic benefits, such promises are never fulfilled (see, for example, Mushonga and Ogude; Narsiah; Bond, "The Case for Ecosocialism in the Face of the Worsening Climate Crisis"; Clarno). Instead, capital accumulation incurs huge environmental costs, in the form of carbon emissions, droughts, water and soil pollution, as well as vegetation and wildlife loss. Transnational corporations operating in South Africa either control the state legislature to obstruct introducing ecological strategies (Bond, "Case" 488), lobby local authorities to gain permission for environmentally hostile projects (Bond, "Climate, violence, resource

extraction and ecological debt: global implications of an assassination on South Africa's coal mining belt" 1411), or simply "violate laws by illegally dumping waste or emitting effluents into the water and air" (Bond, "Social" 1045).

The involvement of capitalism in the environmental degradation of the planet has been profusely examined, and the discussions have touched the core of the capitalist economy. Fisher, for instance, claims that "[t]he relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidental nor accidental" because this system's inherent need for growth means that "capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability" (18–9). Nancy Fraser believes that capitalism is "the sociohistorical driver of climate change" inasmuch as it "harbors a deep-seated ecological contradiction, which inclines it to environmental crisis" (78). She argues that this system intrinsically relies on nature, "both as a tap for production's inputs and as a sink for disposing its waste", but it manipulates society through the discourse which, on the one hand, establishes economy as a realm of imaginative and profitable human activities and, on the other, presents nature as essentially worthless "stuff", "infinitely self-replenishing and generally available [...] in commodity production" (82). Klein rearticulates this antagonism by stating that "our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life" (*This Changes* 19).

When neoliberalism expresses its disapproval of environmental protection measures, it often resorts to denialism, either by negating the veracity of scientific data concerning global warming, by challenging the claims of corporate accountability, or, at least, by shifting responsibility onto individuals, all in an effort to protect the economic interests of the elites.[4] Yet occasionally the capitalist hostility towards ecological pursuits can take on more aggressive forms, which "systematically sabotage [people's] collective response to climate change" (Klein, *This Changes* 17). The promotion of sustainability is often censured as socialism. Attitudes antagonistic to pro-ecological enterprises are especially common in new African democracies, whose authoritarian governments "often perceive the struggle for environmental justice [...] as political dissent and an act of treason" (Mushonga and Ogude 13). If they consider it necessary, the authorities deploy security forces to repress resistance. Clarno discerns sad irony in this modus operandi: although neoliberalism demands the state's complete withdrawal from the economy, it actually "requires state intervention to support market competition and to address the crises that it generates" (11).

In the last several decades, international corporations have often conspired with corrupt African governments against environmental defenders. A representative example is the false accusation and persecution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. Saro-Wiwa, a writer, environmental activist, and minority rights defender, campaigned against Shell petroleum company, whose crude oil extraction in the Niger Delta led to continuous environmental degradation of the local area. He also protested against the involvement of Nigeria's military government, which conspired with Shell "to devastate the ecosystem and consequently impoverish [his native local] people of Ogoni" (Cliff 60). The writer was sentenced to death by a military tribunal on a trumped-up murder charge and executed, along with his eight compatriots. His prison diary, posthumously published as *A Month and a Day*, became an important stimulus to mobilise "his Ogoni people for their emancipation from the shackles of neglect, exploitation and ecocide" (Cliff 62). As Rob Nixon argues, we need to be mindful of Saro-Wiwa's opinion that "environmentalism needs to be reimagined through the experiences of the minorities who are barely visible on the global economic periphery, where transnationals in the extraction business—be it oil, mining, or timber—operate with maximum impunity" (112).

When capitalists coalesce with African states to accomplish their neo-colonial agendas, they also make extensive use of the media to launch defamatory campaigns disparaging ecological movements. Instances of such populist anti-environmental propaganda are seen in the sections of Mackay's novel set in the earlier stages of the climatic cataclysm. The first strategy of South African media presented in the novel is meant to dilute the problem by using scientific jargon which "obscures the truth [and] downplays the cause of [...] destruction" (*It Doesn't* 136). Subsequently, we find that news coverage of protest actions in the country shows "[n]o empathy for the outrage people feel", belittling the causes of demonstrations but focusing on the "inconvenience to the middle class" instead (66). The authorities officially join in the smear campaign when the president of South Africa accuses the protesters of "being sponsored by foreign non-profit organisations who want to undermine the national development plan [and] destabilise [...] democracy" (72). Counter-demonstrations are organised, with slogans such as "*Environmental Protections Kill Jobs!*" (71, italics in original). The government colludes with corporations to encourage the polarisation of society about the issue, setting ecology directly against the economy. Environmentalists are obviously at a disadvantage: the "big corporates [...] have deep pockets. They can buy


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supporters" (96). They can easily afford to hire "the best post-truth consultants in Africa" who deploy "the silent army of misinformation [...], manipulation [and] fake news" (78), so they easily manage to publicly discredit Luthando, attaching to him the false label of a dangerous criminal.

*It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* also addresses another fallacy of neoliberal discourse on ecology: that environmental threats can be averted through some forms of extreme technological intervention which Western scientists will develop in a short time. Apart from the already mentioned achievements that facilitate human survival in the Citadel, Mackay introduces to his novel the theme of body augmentation. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles points out that it is not by coincidence that late twentieth-century films set in apocalyptic surroundings often feature "cybernetic life-forms" because the awareness that the Earth is "rapidly becoming uninhabitable by human beings" drives the contemporary tendency towards "the displacement of presence by pattern" (36). Hayles considers this "pressure toward dematerialization, understood as an epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence" (29) as responsible for gradual changes affecting the material structure of the human body and our cognitive processes. Mackay's novel illustrates this scientific trend. While the planet is gradually turning into an inhospitable inferno, company engineers are continuously working on new forms of body augmentation. The access to the devices they design is restricted. Some of them, such as microchips implanted in wrists for identity and banking purposes, are obligatory for the Citadel denizens; others are distributed commercially, so they are attainable only for the corporate-employed elite. Popular merchandise in the novel is an AR implant linked directly to the brain, which allows users to switch the input fed to their corneas between external stimuli, i.e. seeing with their eyes, and internal projections, which include news, messaging, social media, a navigation system, etc. Other applications, more thoroughly integrated with the brain, enable the users to record their dreams or block nightmares. Antidepressants have been replaced with mental wellness apps, which can balance neurotransmitters.

Working to develop such software, Malcolm is also hoping for the ultimate goal: "We're only a few years away from being able to upload human consciousness to the cloud [...]. Then we'll be free from our biology. No more meat cages. No more death. We can live forever" (*It Doesn't* 140). His anticipation corresponds to a transhumanist fantasy propagated by people like Hans Moravec and Ray Kurzweil who maintain that "transferring our mind into a machine" is a form of "baptism into posthumanism, [...] computerized purification [which] will bring blessed release from the worldly struggles and disappointments, the horror, the pain, and all the misery that organic life brings" (see Dinello 24). Yet, for Viwe, the vision of the eternal existence in which human consciousness, devoid of the body, is "suspended in an endless dream state with no relief" (*It Doesn't* 140), mulling over the same thoughts within its own limits, represents a hopeless limbo. He believes that "[w]e are flesh and blood and consciousness, mixed. You can't separate the data from the hardware [...]. We are animals. Small and frightened. [Our bodies] aren't prisons. They are life rafts. And they are so easy to sink" (162). This belief that transience is an indispensable feature of the human condition affiliates Viwe with Hayles, who declares: "my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival" (5).

A similar opinion is advocated by Rosi Braidotti. Despite perceiving our current posthuman condition as a state which "force[s] a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems" (*The Posthuman* 89), Braidotti postulates that the posthuman subjectivity is "*materialist* and *vitalist*, *embodied* and *embedded*, firmly located somewhere" (*The Posthuman*, 51, my italics). Even though the main characters of *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* are geeky computer programmers, they are distressed by the possible dehumanising effects of integrating human bodies with ultramodern technologies. Luthando is so anxious about engaging in what he calls "virtualling" that he feels the need to do regular "digital detoxes" (*It Doesn't* 212). Even Malcolm, who is enthusiastic about digital enhancements and disembodied consciousness, reaches a breaking point when he works on an application named "Unsuffering", which is supposed to control one's mental well-being by means of neutralising traumatic memories. Thinking about the traditional Japanese pottery technique through which broken objects are glued back together with gold—which actually highlights and elevates the traces of cracks—he determines that suffering is an indispensable aspect of the human condition. Finally, when he asks himself the rhetorical question: "On the spectrum from apes to machines, which

end is more frightening?" (231), he rejects the opportunities offered by the virtual and disembodied version of the posthuman late capitalist existence in the Citadel. He instead opts for the uncertainties of Braidotti's vitalist embodiment, which he will experience in the impoverished, barren Kapelitsha. The decision is irrevocable: in order to remove his cognitive augmentation, he must get the implant in his temple removed. Those who, like Malcolm, choose to restore their embodied humanity to its fullness have to undergo the simple but bloody surgical procedure of retrieving a microchip. This generates an acute state of "Disconnection Sickness" that lasts several weeks. Their brains have to re-adapt to the bareness of the physical world and learn "how to construct meaning from only five senses, how to control muscles and memories without augmentation", while their neural systems are trying to "pour [...] ideas and feelings into amputated hardware, ghost networks" (44).

The procedure of ripping out the microchip is performed by the Shepherds, members of a religious sect that flourishes in Kapelitsha. The Shepherds follow a strategy often pursued by religious movements that appear in various cataclysmic times and threaten the safety of existence and destabilise society.[5] They disseminate the belief that humanity lives in the End Times and the environmental apocalypse is God's punishment. Even though their disapproval of new technologies (such as body augmentation which their followers must jettison) is logically connected with the causes of climate change, they ascribe the catastrophe to a false cause, namely the moral decay of humanity. They define "morality" by evoking selected Christian principles that focus on sexual chastity, and their slogan of repentance is manifested through attempts to enforce heterosexual norms and marital fidelity. Processions of fanatics march through the streets, burning the effigies of reprobates and lynching fornicators. The official penalty for adultery or homosexuality is death. But Viwe spots hypocritical gaps in this ostensibly strict moral course. When a troop of radicals captures an adulterous couple, they punish only the woman. It is not surprising given that the Shepherd militia groups are all-male and, since their principles are based on a patriarchal religious system, introducing double standards of propriety is not unprecedented. On another occasion, when the crowd attacks Luthando, accusing him of being a "sodomite" and claiming that being gay is "un-African", he responds: "Africa's full of gays, always has been. What's un-African is this Bible of yours. You think you're fighting for traditional African values, but you're fighting for a book that was brought in on ships by the colonisers" (166). It appears deeply ironic that an African religious group finds a spiritual answer to a calamity caused by the environmentally reckless actions of a capitalist Western economy in a system of belief acquired from their former Western oppressors.

This becomes even more ironic when we consider that traditional African animistic beliefs celebrate a strong connection between humans and nature. Cajetan Iheka notes that various societies on the continent "are drawn to an ethics of the earth" and that "certain nonhuman forms, including animals [and] plants, [...] are considered viable life forms worthy of respect" (7). Tanure Ojaide, in turn, observes that "[i]n the religions of Africans, nature became an integral aspect of their spirituality [...], thus giving the environment a spiritual dimension" (vi). Since indigenous African people depended on plants and animals for nourishment and shelter, and since they held some natural elements like trees, rivers, or mountains sacred, they lived in a state of equilibrium with the environment. However, "with the coming of Christianity and Islam to Africa, the natural world became a servant of man rather than a partner because of an aloof God, leaving man to control and exploit nature. The result of the Western and Islamic intrusion into Africa [was] the massive environmental degradation of the continent" (Ojaide vi). Accordingly, Iheka argues that ecological attitudes in the neoliberal, neo-colonial times must be founded on abandoning the anthropocentric perspective: "Whereas the project of decolonization proceeded primarily along human lines, [...] the challenge to neoliberalism or late capitalism must include a recognition of nonhumans as companions in a precarious world" (Iheka 5).

Such de-centring of the Anthropos figure aligns with Donna Haraway's proposition in *Staying with the Trouble.* She suggests that the answer to the predicament of the Anthropocene, or the Capitalocene, is what she calls the Chthulucene, an ethical project based on intra-action and response-ability; it rests on "unexpected collaborations and combinations, [...] hot compost files" (4), and is sustained by the rejection of "human exceptionalism and bounded individualism" (30). One of the ways in which this collective effort, this enterprise of "being in this together" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* 85), manifests itself in Mackay's novel is the activity of planting trees. Fifteen years before "the Change", Luthando, Viwe, and Malcolm participate in a "reforestation festival" (*It Doesn't* 17), a large community event organised by eco-activists, which is not only an environmental endeavour but also "an act of decolonisation" (18), a reaction to Western degradation of African nature. As Luthando notes, "the white man laid waste to our forests and now we must put it right" (18). In subsequent years,

Luthando single-handedly engages in illegitimate tree-planting in Cape Town on his "one-man reforestation crusade" (56). Paradoxically, this activity, also called "guerrilla gardening", is not legal in South Africa. Instead of being considered a public service, as trees supply oxygen and counteract climate change, it is censured by authorities as defacing property. Luthando has an affection for trees, as they make him calm and happy. He admires their "magic" of "creating life from sunlight and water" (90) and associates them with a long-standing African appreciation of the forest. As a biological asset, they regulate the climate and farming; as a spiritual one, they are the abode of deities.

This motif was seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a foundational African prose text that portrayed the forest as an important eco-habitat and a sacred realm (Ernest-Samuel 78–9). The subversive, anti-establishment potential of tree planting, in turn, corresponds to the activity of the Green Belt Movement, which was founded in 1977 by Wangari Maathai. Intended to oppose deforestation and consequent land erosion that resulted from the Kenyan government's promotion of corporate interests, the movement was responsible for planting and nurturing over 51 million trees. Apart from the environmental aspect, their actions, which involved thousands of African women, were meant to confront the male hegemonic schemes that crushed poor rural communities in Kenya. The activists managed to make "a ready symbolic connection between environmental erosion and the erosion of civil rights", in which "each tree planted by the Green Belt Movement stood as a tangible, biological image of steady, sustainable growth, a dramatic counterimage to the ruling elite's [...] plunder of [...] finite natural resources" (Nixon 133). In this way, it gave numerous people "a revived sense of civic agency" (133). Displacing anti-colonial and feminist initiatives onto the innocent ground of environmental practices, Maathai and her followers "foreground[ed] the concerns of women and the exploitation of the environment by patriarchal and capitalist structures" (Iheka 128).

Mackay's novel, like the Green Belt Movement's activity, shows that "land cultivation [can be seen as] an alternative to the destruction that patriarchal systems enact" (Iheka 126). Meditating on the unlawfulness of his guerrilla tree planting, Luthando determines that the very concept of proprietary rights to land is ludicrous because land "existed long before people and our ideas about ownership and rights. It doesn't belong to us. If anything, *the soil owns us*" (*It Doesn't* 53, my italics). Correspondingly, the ethical foundations of Haraway's project of "staying with the trouble" stipulate that "[u]nlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene [...] [H]uman beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story" (Haraway 55).

Luthando also finds out that the very action of terraforming, along with consequent environmental degradation, has always been central to the colonial enterprise. He discovers that early colonial courts in America resolved the disputes over land ownership on the basis of its exploitation: "If you wanted to retain the land in its natural state, that didn't count, but if you wanted to turn a forest into a plantation, it was all yours" (*It Doesn't* 97). The logic of this approach was based on a major tenet of capitalism: the myth of growth. As Tim Jackson points out, the organisation of a capitalist society relies on the conviction that social progress is synonymous with economic expansion, which is measured by rising GDP (17). But although capitalist rhetoric has long been assuring us that "growth is the irreducible norm" (12), the necessity of constant progress is, in fact, a "thermodynamic impossibility" (79), an illusion based on a false premise that we live on a planet with infinite resources. Nonetheless, capitalism asserts that the human "struggle for life" should always be translated to "an inevitable competition" and that it "embed[s] this competition into the institutions of culture: the rules of the market, the ethos of business, the norms of consumer society" (157).

The protagonists of Mackay's novel are aware that they are being bullied by the late-capitalist economy, which demands that they continuously increase consumption, although their needs are more than satisfied. Malcolm considers the irony of using the name "progress" to describe socially and environmentally harmful late-capitalist operations, such as the accumulation of wealth among the elite, replacing human employees with machines, or destroying nature to develop industry. "We aren't progressing; we're metastasising", he concludes (*It Doesn't* 189). He fantasises about alien civilisations in the universe and determines that those that did not perish in environmental disasters must have "survived by learning humility", abandoned the myth of growth, and, instead of "fetishising expansion", learned to "exist in equilibrium with their ecosystems" (189). Jackson's denunciation of the myth of growth invokes Buddhist philosophy when he disagrees with the capitalist dogma saying that power lies "in the endless stimulation of desires achieved only through dominion over others", and postulates that, in truth, it "lies in our ability not to be ruled by our cravings" (161). Indeed, only the willpower to control


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our consumerist desires can help us keep a state of equilibrium with the natural world through a considerate, sustainable existence. Ironically, *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* represents sustainability as a fundamental requirement of a post-catastrophic reality by means of an unsavoury symbol of a fly farm. A staple of Milo's family diet is protein obtained from fly maggots raised on human excrement. In order to secure a regular food supply, the family has to bolt the outhouse to guard their waste, which Luthando takes to the farm every day.

*It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* is a sombre apocalyptic vision that shows the prospective effects of "precarious worldings made terribly more precarious by fossil-burning man making new fossils as rapidly as possible in orgies of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene" (Haraway 55). Mackay envisages the long-term effects of neoliberal thought in which "*capital is* […] *a relation to nature*—a cannibalistic, extractive reaction, which consumes ever more biophysical wealth in order to pile up ever more 'value'" (Fraser 83, italics in original). It follows the economic logic whereby rich entrepreneurs reap profits and pass "the environmental costs to those who must live with—and die from—the fallout, including future generations of human beings" (Fraser 83). Yet the book also, as its title suggests, offers hope and sketches possible routes of escape through various forms of displacement. Mackay agrees with posthumanist thinkers that the answer to the "im/possibility of metabolizing the trauma" brought by the ecological catastrophe, and of "transforming the self from victim to survivor", is "a way of un/doing the self, of touching oneself through touching all others, taking in multitudes of Others that make up the very matter of one's being in order to materially transform the self and one's material sense of self" (Barad 237). We can see this in the final fantasy of the dying Milo, who fully unites with nature:

> My body tingles and sprouts. Little green tendrils come alive in the heat and extend from my fingertips, my toes, the backs of my knees. *Plants are the thing to be.* They don't envy; they don't doubt; they don't worry about their parents. I can hear them, the way they talk to one another. I grow long vines from every bone. Leaves spread over my skin, basking in the sunlight. Roots push down into the earth. They grow deeper and deeper, twisting and forking, anchoring me to the rock, holding me steady. I can't move. *My body turns to soil.* My skin glows green, photosynthesising. Sunlight courses through my veins. I am whole, I think. I am everything. (*It Doesn't* 257, my italics)

We can also see this in Luthando's reflection which connects sustainability with homosexuality: "gays are probably the best thing to ever happen to this planet. We reduce overpopulation. We save the world from the toxic masculinity that got us into this mess—domination and conquest instead of nurturing, feminine qualities. We're nature's attempt to self-correct" (156).

The reading of *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* proposed in my article situates the novel's apocalyptic vision in the context of the devastating actions of the neoliberal economy, which was so enthusiastically, and so recklessly, adopted by South Africa after apartheid. Mackay insistently shows that the climatic catastrophe of the Anthropocene has ensued directly from ecologically pernicious practices of neo-colonial imperialist capitalism, a system that was founded on the myth of inevitable growth and which assumes that the natural environment is inexhaustible. In this way, as I claim, the novel corresponds both to the critiques of capitalism (such as advanced by Fisher, Fraser, or Klein) and to the environmental studies concerning Africa (such as undertaken by Iheka or Okuyade). Mackay's narrative also depicts various forms of displacement—ethical, psychological, physical, and technological—that result from this neoliberal cannibalistic commodification of nature. In relation to the last category of displacement, my discussion invokes Hayles and Braidotti to address the way in which the novel represents the futility of posthuman fantasies of enhancement and power that deny our embeddedness in the material world. As I demonstrate, Mackay aligns with Haraway's ethical project of response-ability, which is manifested through his characters' involvement in the intra-action of tree planting.

**Notes**

1. For a more extensive discussion of contemporary African (and postcolonial) ecocriticism, see, for instance: Okuyade (*Eco-Critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes*; "Ecocultures"), Rob Nixon, Cajetan Iheka, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, and Amitav Ghosh.
2. The concept of racial capitalism was also theorised by Cedric J. Robinson (largely in his 1983 book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*). Unlike Alexander, however, Robinson describes the notion as a universal, not locally contextual, quality of capitalist formation. For differences between Robinson and Alexander, see, for example, Clarno and Vally.
3. Mackay draws inspiration from Namwali Serpell's 2019 historical/science-fiction novel *The Old Drift*, which also refers to a catastrophic event as "the Change".

4. As Klein notes, "Overwhelmingly, climate change deniers are not only conservative but also white and male, a group with higher than average incomes" (*This Changes* 40).
5. One might think, for instance, of the Lollards, initially led by John Wycliffe, whose criticism of the Roman Catholic Church was, among others, a reaction to an outbreak of the bubonic plague in the mid-14th century.

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