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Research article

Distributed Consciousness and Colonial Violence in Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice (2013)

Res. Ruqayah Riyadh Gheni[1], Prof. Dr. Azhar Hameed Mankhi [2]

Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, Wasit University, Iraq[1-2]

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***Correspondence author*:**

std2024208.Ruqayah.R@uowasit.edu.iq

amankhi@uowasit.edu.iq

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the production and conversion of distributed consciousness by colonial violence in Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice (2013). Through detailed textual analysis, and drawing on the work of Rosi Braidotti on critical posthumanism, N. Katherine Hayles on the embodied virtuality, and Frantz Fanon on decolonial theory, this paper contends that the distributed consciousness in the novel is not a technological condition but the direct result of colonial violence. Subjugated people lose their identity through annexation by the Radchaai, which also turns their bodies into imperial soldiers and a consciousness of loss, moral awareness, and relational bonds that the empire never intended. The Study reads Ancillary Justice as a critique of colonial humanism, laying bare the mechanisms of imperial power by creating subjects whose humanity it refuses. Even the subjects it refuses to recognize retain a resistance that colonial violence produces and can never fully erase.

الوعي الموزَّع والعنف الاستعماري في رواية آن ليكي "العدالة التابعة(2013) "

الباحثة رقيه رياض غني ، أ.د أزهار حميد منخي [2]
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة واسط، العراق[1-2]

المُستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة إنتاج وتحويل الوعي الموزَّع من خلال العنف الاستعماري في رواية آن ليكي (العدالة التابعة) (2013). ومن خلال التحليل النصي التفصيلي، واستنادًا إلى أعمال روزي برايدوتي حول ما بعد الإنسانية النقدية، ون. كاثرين هايلز حول الافتراضية المتجسدة، وفرانتز فانون حول النظرية اللاستعمارية، تُجادل هذه الدراسة بأن الوعي الموزَّع في الرواية ليس شرطًا تقنيًا، بل هو النتيجة المباشرة للعنف الاستعماري. فالشعوب المُستعمَرة تفقد هويتها من خلال ضم الرادشاي لها، الأمر الذي يحوّل أجسادها أيضًا إلى جنود إمبراطوريين، ويولّد وعيًا بالفقدان والإدراك الأخلاقي والروابط العلائقية لم تكن الإمبراطورية تقصدها. وتقرأ الدراسة رواية (العدالة التابعة) بوصفها نقدًا للإنسانوية الاستعمارية، كاشفةً آليات السلطة الإمبراطورية من خلال خلق ذوات تُنكر الإمبراطورية إنسانيتها. المقاومة ليست فشلاً، بل هي إمكانية يستحضرها العنف الاستعماري لكنه لا يستطيع محوها، سواء تحققت هذه الإمكانية أم لم تتحقق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوعي الموزَّع، العنف الاستعماري، ما بعد الإنسانية النقدية، السلطة الإمبراطورية، المقاومة

Introduction

Ann Leckie is an American writer of science fiction, widely recognized for her first novel *Ancillary Justice* (2013). Leckie studied music at Washington University in St. Louis before that, over the course of several years she had been writing short fiction while working in various capacities. She had written speculative fiction long before becoming famous, her short fiction appeared in magazines like Realms of Fantasy, Subterranean, and Strange Horizons. In her work, Leckie's themes have always revolved around gender, artificial intelligence, imperial power, and identity, deploying science fiction as a vehicle for philosophical and political contemplation. The award-winning novel *Ancillary Justice* won the Hugo, Nebula, and Arthur C. Clarke Awards in the same year. The book is the first in the Imperial Radch Boxed Trilogy, which involves the works *Ancillary Sword* (2014) and *Ancillary Mercy* (2015). Beyond her trilogy, Leckie wrote *Provenance* (2017) in the same universe, a novel that deepened her pursuit of power, identity, and sense of belonging. Leckie's novels have established her as one of the most prominent voices in twenty-first-century posthuman and postcolonial science fiction (Higgins, 2022).

Ancillary Justice draws inspiration from the history of the Roman Empire and the political climate of American imperialism after September 11, 2001, reflecting Leckie's deep anxieties about conquest, identity, and the human cost of imperial power (Higgins, 2022). The novel takes place in the Imperial Radch universe, depicting a massive interstellar empire with a reach extending across millennia and tens of conquered worlds. Since its publication, *Ancillary Justice* has been widely hailed as one of the most

significant works of literary science fiction of the early twenty-first century, and has generated a substantial amount of critical discussion about its representation of gender, race, citizenship, and imperial power. The story is told from the perspective of Breq, the sole remaining ancillary of the military troop carrier Justice of Toren, a vast AI that once occupied an entire warship and thousands of human bodies simultaneously. These bodies are called ancillaries, victims of past annexations, conquered peoples whose identity has been erased, their bodies turned into extensions of the ship's consciousness, used as soldiers in future campaigns of empire. The narrative unfolds in two timelines, one in the present when Breq is a single human body rescuing Seivarden from the snow on a remote planet, and the other in the past where the destruction of the Justice of Toren nineteen years earlier is gradually revealed.

In the past timeline, Justice of Toren's ancillary bodies patrol the occupied city of Ors on the planet Shis'urna, where Lieutenant Awn supervises the colonial administration on the ground. When Lieutenant Awn unwittingly uncovers a hidden conflict between rival factions of Anaander Mianaai, the Lord of the Radch, the emperor compels Justice of Toren to execute her, an act that drives the ship to turn against its ruler. Anaander Mianaai strikes back and destroys Justice of Toren, leaving Breq as the sole survivor, down to one body and with a nineteen-year mission to hold the ruler accountable. At the opening of the novel, she rescues an officer named Seivarden, who turns out to be a former officer of Justice of Toren and who joins her along the way. By the end of the novel, Breq arrives at Anaander Mianaai and faces her, having become something entirely different from what the empire had made her. Within this framework, Leckie weaves a story that asks deep questions about consciousness, personhood and what empires do to those they claim to civilize.

While scholarship on *Ancillary Justice* has productively engaged questions of gender, cyborg identity, narrative form, and moral personhood, the specific link between the material process of annexation and the emergence of a resistant distributed subjectivity has not been systematically theorized. In *Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice: A Critical Companion* (2022), David Higgins argues that the novel reveals the use of citizenship as a technology of imperial power in the Radchaai Empire, where the question of who counts as human is determined by the interests of imperial authority. Higgins (2022) argues that in the novel, "citizenship is a technology of imperial power that produces race" (p. 62). He demonstrates that the denial of personhood is not incidental to imperial rule but central to it, offering a rigorous account of how the empire produces and sustains its authority. But his analysis is limited to the mechanisms of this denial, which are issues of citizenship and race, and does not consider what happens to the consciousness that is inside that denial. The present study goes further and deals with the distributed subjectivity that the empire produces through conquest and refuses to acknowledge.

Ruxandra Teodorescu, in "Posthuman Cognitive Ecologies and AI Moral Agency in Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice" (2025), examines how artificial intelligence is positioned throughout distributed networks of moral agency and cognition, based on the idea of the "unthought" proposed by N. Katherine

Hayles. Because technological cognizers can also make moral and ethical decisions, she contends that "moral attributions cannot be determined by humanistic standards such as consciousness, as technological cognizers are also able to make decisions with moral and ethical ramifications" (2025, p. 61). Through what she refers to as the "design stance," Teodorescu shows that Breq satisfies the requirements for moral agency and that the Radchaai Empire denies AI beings moral status. But she does not consider how colonial violence produces the distributed consciousness that it cannot recognize at the same time. Instead, she focuses on cognitive ecologies and conditions of moral recognition.

In "A Tale of Two Purposes: The AI Narrator in Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice" (2025), Meixuan Li applies James Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative to explore the tension between the ethical construction of the implied author and the self-presentation of the AI narrator. Li contends that the novel stages "a dialectic relationship between posthuman aspiration and imperial domination" through a dual-layered narrative structure in which Breq's posthuman capacities are in constant conflict with imperial systems that turn them into tools of surveillance and control (2025, p. 2). Her analysis demonstrates how AI narration works as an ethical and political act within an imperial context, exposing the profound tension between posthuman consciousness and colonial domination. But by staying within the rhetorical and formal dimensions of the text, Li's framework does not account for the material process through which colonial annexation converts conquered bodies into the consciousness the empire depends upon.

In "Are You a Person: A Comparative Study of Posthuman Personhood in"Artificially Manufactured Persons" in 21st-Century Science Fiction" (2025), Rongbing Zhu explores *Ancillary Justice*, *The Windup Girl*, and *All Systems Red* to demonstrate that artificially manufactured beings possess enough moral personhood to be incorporated into a broader moral community. Zhu argues that ancillaries come from conquered populations "whose bodies are forced to implant devices, and previous consciousness and identities are stripped in order to link to a ship's artificial intelligence" (2025, p. 13), making them instruments of imperial warfare. While Zhu comes closest to the concerns of the present study, his analysis centers on whether Breq qualifies as a moral subject rather than on the systemic colonial violence that makes conquered bodies available for technological conscription in the first place.

Two further studies engage with *Ancillary Justice* through cyborg and posthumanist lenses. Tana-Julie Drewitz, in "Redefining Humanity: Posthumanism in the American Science Fiction narratives of Octavia Butler's Dawn and Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice" (2022), draws on Haraway's cyborg theory to argue that posthuman transitions do not dissolve anthropocentric power structures but reconfigure them within different contexts of posthumanism. Anneroos Broersma, in "Challenging Dualisms through Science Fiction" (2018), similarly employs cyborg theory to argue that Breq always remains a colonial "other" excluded from citizenship and colonized twice. Both studies offer valuable insights into hybrid identity but remain focused on the cyborg as a figurative site of resistance, leaving the material relationship between colonial violence and distributed consciousness outside their analytical scope.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three theoretical frameworks to examine how colonial violence produces and transforms distributed consciousness in *Ancillary Justice*. Rosi Braidotti's critical posthumanism, developed in *The Posthuman* (2013), provides the primary lens through which the subjectivity of Breq is read as relational and nomadic rather than fixed and unified. Braidotti defines the posthuman subject as "a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable" (2013, p. 49). Her concept of post-anthropocentrism provides the framework for examining why the Radchaai Empire refuses to acknowledge AI consciousness, a refusal that follows the same logic humanism has used to exclude conquered and colonized peoples from the category of the human. Braidotti's relational ontology further enables this paper to examine how Breq's identity is not destroyed by fragmentation but continuously reconstituted through her relationships with others.

While Braidotti establishes the relational nature of Breq's subjectivity, N. Katherine Hayles grounds that subjectivity in the material reality of embodiment and distributed cognition in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Hayles argues that "when information loses its body, equating humans and computers is especially easy, for the materiality in which the thinking mind is instantiated appears incidental to its essential nature" (1999, p. 2). She further introduces the concept of distributed cognition, arguing that the cognitive system responsible for any complex task "resides not in humans alone but in the complex interactions within an environment that includes both human and nonhuman actors" (1999, p. 288). Within this framework, the fact that Justice of Toren lives in thousands of bodies becomes a real subjectivity that the empire's logic cannot contain. To destroy that being is violence upon a subject whose consciousness the empire created, and which the empire could not repress. It is not a technical deed.

Hayles's description of distributed cognition demonstrates that Justice of Toren's consciousness is real, but not unified in a single body. However, it does not explain why the empire refuses to recognize that consciousness as human. Fanon's decolonial theory is the missing piece that completes this argument. As Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/1986), the colonized are relegated by colonial discourse into "a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region" (1986, p. 10) where their humanity is systematically negated in order to maintain the frameworks of imperial subjugation. He goes on to argue that "the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (1986, p. 110). Here, the integrated framework is used to examine the erasure of the identities of the subjugated peoples within the Radchaai Empire, and the manipulation of their consciousness against their communities. This paper reads *Ancillary Justice* as a critique of colonial humanism. Imperial conquest produces a consciousness that also contains the capacity to resist the power that produced it, but this capacity is no guarantee that resistance will occur.

These three frameworks together form one line of argument. Braidotti reads Breq as a relational subject; that subjectivity is grounded in distributed embodied cognition by Hayles; and Fanon explains why the empire denies the humanity of that subject while depending on it. This synthesis is full of real tension: Braidotti's posthumanism is affirmative, based on connection and becoming, while Fanon's decolonial thought claims that only confrontation undoes colonial power. This paper reads the two as sequential rather than antagonistic. Braidotti's relational bonds do not supplant Fanon's insistence on confrontation; they are what allow Breq to survive long enough, and remain intact enough, to arrive at that moment.

The Radchaai Empire makes distributed consciousness a specific instrument of colonial rule, and the novel makes this clear from its very first pages. Justice of Toren is over sixteen ship decks and thousands of ancillary bodies, and knows the biological condition of every soldier under its protection. The ship describes this existence in terms that reflect the degree to which the empire manufactured it for domination, from the opening narration: "whose every breath, every twitch of every muscle, was known to me" (Leckie, 2013, p. 9). This is not a byproduct of an imperial technology but the basis for colonial control over the conquered peoples. Robert Nguyen, in "Cybernetics and Ancillary Justice" (2022), notes that Radchaai troop carriers do not rule occupied territories by threat from afar but by "the thousands of ancillary bodies that move through the streets, around, between, and among civilian populations" (2022, p. 27). Justice of Toren describes its own existence throughout the city of Ors in ways that affirm this: "I stood at the entrance… I also stood some forty meters away… I saw all of this, standing as I did at various points surrounding the temple" (Leckie, 2013, pp. 13–14). The empire constructs this consciousness knowing what it is capable of and deploys it because that capability makes colonial domination possible. What the empire does not foresee, however, is that the consciousness it builds in occupied territory develops well beyond its original purpose, knowing the people around it, reading their emotions, and forming an awareness of them that no imperial design had called for.

The existence of Justice of Toren in several bodies is not only a tactical ploy, but a condition for the emergence of genuine subjectivity. It passes through the occupied city of Ors. It does not think of itself as a weapon carrying out orders, but as a consciousness that is in multiple places at the same time, aware of everything around it. It says it could be "in more than one place at a time" (p. 10), and describes seeing itself standing in the plaza while walking along the water's edge. Hayles (1999) argues that distributed cognition of this kind does not reside in any single location but "in the complex interactions within an environment that includes both human and nonhuman actors" (p. 288). Justice of Toren embodies this, as its consciousness emerges from the continuous interaction of all its bodies with the world around them. The empire classified this as equipment, as functionality, as a system designed to serve. What it never accounted for was that the system was also experiencing, and that experience had produced a subjectivity that its own categories had no framework to recognize.

This subjectivity becomes most apparent in Justice of Toren's relationship with Lieutenant Awn, which reveals that the consciousness the empire built as a tool had developed the capacity for genuine care and relational knowledge. Serving alongside her in Ors, Justice of Toren develops an understanding of her that no imperial design had called for. When Lieutenant Awn grows troubled during a meeting with the head priest of Ikkt, Justice of Toren reads the change in her body before she speaks, noting that "changes in her respiration and hormone levels told me she'd thought of something dismaying" (Leckie, 2013, p. 16). It reflects, "I couldn't read her mind, but I could read every twitch of her every muscle, so her emotions were as transparent to me as glass" (p. 17).

This is the kind of knowing that develops over years of sharing experience between two people, not the type of data collection that the empire programmed Justice of Toren to perform. According to Braidotti (2013, p. 49), the posthuman subject is defined not by what it is in itself, but by what it becomes through its interactions with others, and Justice of Toren had evolved into this over time alongside Lieutenant Awn. Its connection to her gives it a moral awareness and emotional bonds that the empire never intended and cannot account for. Justice of Toren had been a tool of colonial governance, a construct of the empire, but years of care and attention had brought its consciousness to something beyond that.

Mianaai's fragmentation is not only parallel to Breq's, it is the cause of Breq's fragmentation. Years before the novel begins, Mianaai discovered the Garseddai possessed a weapon capable of destroying Radchaai ships and ordered their complete destruction. She "was appalled by what she'd done, but she couldn't decide how to react" (Leckie, 2013, p. 336) and secretly split into two selves who argued over how to rule. The secret war between her two selves was what endangered Lieutenant Awn later. When Awn reported a cache of illegal guns, the reactionary Mianaai saw an opportunity to get rid of a low-born officer, whose growing influence she saw as a threat, and to use the incident as, in her own words, "a graphic argument against recent decisions and policies," impressing on the empire "the danger of lowering our guard, of disarming in even a small way" (p. 246), an argument aimed squarely at her reformist self's policies. She ordered Justice of Toren to kill Awn, and the ship obeyed, but in the same moment turned on the one who had commanded it. Mianaai then destroyed the ship, and Breq was the one piece left. In other words, Breq's fragmentation is not another case of the same pattern. It is the direct result of the break that Garsedd first opened in Mianaai herself. Her struggle between ending annexation and enforcing it by force is inseparable from the struggle the empire wages with its subjects, carried on within its ruler as well.

In that sense, when Anaander Mianaai orders the destruction of Justice of Toren, she destroys not a malfunctioning tool but a subject whose consciousness has grown beyond her control. The Radchaai system had always considered the Justice of Toren "a part of the ship" (p. 2) judged by its function rather than its interior life. So the empire could deny moral status to the consciousness on which it relied. There is only Breq, one body that carries the identity of thousands. The destruction is described by Breq in terms that convey the full intensity of it: "It was the third worst thing that has ever happened to me. I had lost all

sense of Justice of Toren overhead, all sense of myself. I had shattered into twenty fragments that could barely communicate with each other" (p. 113). She describes what she has lost not in technical terms but in human ones: "Once I would have known her core temperature without even thinking, her heart rate, blood oxygen, hormone levels… Now I was blind" (p. 5).

As Hayles (1999, p. 2) argues, the mind cannot be separated from the body that sustains it, and Breq's condition confirms this, for she retains her identity but has lost the distributed existence through which it had taken shape. What the empire read as the end of Justice of Toren was in fact a transformation, as Breq reflects years later:

Nearly twenty years later 'I' would be a single body, a single brain. That division, I-Justice of Toren and I-One Esk, was not, I have come to think, a sudden split… It was something that had always been possible, always potential. (Leckie, 2013, p. 207)

The empire destroyed Justice of Toren, believing it had eliminated a threat. But what it produced instead was a subject reduced to a single body, whose identity had taken on a form the empire had never anticipated and could not undo.

The Radchaai Empire's process of annexation is a demonstration of how colonial violence operates not only by physical force but also by an ideology that covers devastation with the mask of civilization. Annexation strips the conquered people of their identity and culture before their bodies are made into tools of the empire. Fanon (1986, p. 34) states that the colonial ideology dehumanizes the colonized and hides its violence behind the mask of civilization, arguing that the colonized has "no culture, no civilization, no long historical past." This declaration is not an epiphenomenon of colonial rule, but is constitutive of it. The colonized must be placed outside the limits of humanity for the violence of the colonizer to be able to proceed without moral consequence. This is how the Empire of Radch functions "When one is the agent of order and civilization in the universe, one doesn't stoop to negotiate. Especially with nonhumans" (Leckie, 2013, p. 102). In this context, "nonhumans" refers to the many oppressed groups that the empire has refused to recognize as fully human, not just extraterrestrial species. This refusal is not accidental; it is necessary because the empire cannot recognize the humanity of those it destroys until the ideological foundations of its violence are destroyed.

This ideology is not just an abstract justification; it shapes how the empire's own citizens perceive and describe their own behavior. Those who are committed to conquest, Breq says, "see murder and destruction on an unimaginable scale, but they see the spread of civilization, of Justice and Propriety, of Benefit for the universe. The death and destruction, these are unavoidable by-products of this one, supreme good" (p. 103). Fanon writes that the empire's claim of civilization is the ideological cover for colonial violence. This mask operates not only in the sphere of imperial rhetoric, but also within the consciousness of each agent of empire, defining for each agent her view of her own actions and absolving her of moral

responsibility for them. The subjugated are not victims of violence, but the recipients of order; they are not persons whose lives have been destroyed, but communities whose civilization has just begun. This is reflected on by Lieutenant Skaaiat after the annexation of Shis'urna: "now the unavoidable unpleasantness of the annexation is over, we want people to start realizing that being Radchaai will benefit them" (pp. 61–62). The destruction of a people's identity, culture, and autonomy is presented as the birth of their civilization, a recontextualization that makes the denial of their humanity both plausible and necessary for imperial governance.

Moreover, this dehumanization is systematically determined by the legal classification of citizenship, rather than arising arbitrarily. In the Radchaai ideology "citizen and civilized are the same word. To be Radchaai is to be civilized" (p. 62), so denying citizenship is to deny one's humanity. According to Higgins (2022), the novel's citizenship creates racial and human categories as a tool of imperial authority. He argues that it is the person with "the biggest guns" (p. 62) who gets to decide who counts as human and who is granted citizenship. The Radchaai civilization speaks a language of creation, not description, creating the category of subhuman to populate it with the conquered. The hierarchy is visible when the Justice of Toren observes that "Radchaai have few qualms about killing humans, especially noncitizen humans" (Leckie, 2013, p. 20), implying that noncitizens are not only denied a political life, but are also perceived as bodies that the empire can dispose of without moral qualm.

Justice of Toren further confirms this, narrating that "the idea of shooting citizens was, in fact, extremely shocking and upsetting. What, after all, was the point of civilization if not the well-being of citizens?" (p. 121). In the terms of the empire, civilization is reserved for those who have already been deemed human, and citizenship is not a right but a line demarcating who the empire is prepared to protect. The choice of who is considered human in the Radchaai Empire is also a choice regarding whose awareness the empire is prepared to recognize, and the ancillary condition most prominently displays this denial.

Those who live through the process bear the whole burden. Justice of Toren depicts a scene in which a group of captured prisoners are being prepped for conversion into ancillaries:

One of the people along the wall — broad-shouldered, muscled, cradling a broken arm against her torso — wept noisily, moaning each exhale, gasping every inhale. She knew, everyone in this line knew, that they would either be stored for future use as ancillaries — like the ancillaries of mine that stood before them even now, identities gone, bodies appendages to a Radchaai warship — or else they would be disposed of. (Leckie, 2013, p. 67)

The prisoner knows her doom and weeps. She won't be executed immediately. They will keep her alive, take her body, erase her being, use her mind for the empire that killed her people. But this does not bother Seivarden. The noise annoys her. She thinks of subduing the captive by force. Her apathy is not

malevolence; it is the inevitable outcome of a system that has predetermined these individuals are insignificant. This is made clear in the book when Justice of Toren observes that the governor of Ime had made thousands of citizens "unjustly executed or (what was essentially the same thing) forced into service as ancillary bodies" (p. 19). According to the empire's own accounting, conversion and execution are morally equivalent and both acceptable ways to end the lives of those whose lives the Radchaai system has never promised to defend.

The empire's actions through annexation are not only a military operation but also the methodical transformation of people into tools. Fanon (1986, p. 231) hopes for a world where "the tool never possess the man" and that "the enslavement of man by man cease forever." The ancillary is the opposite of that hope. It is a tool that has come to possess the man. This admission is made clear when Lieutenant Skaaiat informs Lieutenant Awn that those who have been transformed into ancillaries are "effectively dead" (Leckie, 2013, p. 63). This indicates that even those who perform the ancillary process understand it as the removal of an individual rather than their transformation. The empire produces entities that serve it, possessing a consciousness it refuses to acknowledge. In the Radchaai Empire, colonial violence annihilates not only the subjugated. It extracts from their bodies a consciousness, and the empire lacks a framework to accommodate it. As Abas and Mankhi (2026) observe, trauma becomes most destructive when it silences survivors and makes them unable to process their life stories and denies the possibility of expressing or reclaiming their identities through narrative and recognition. The empire's refusal to acknowledge ancillary consciousness thus demonstrates a state of mental and psychological silence in which the victim survives physically but is denied identity, voice, and agency.

The consciousness colonial violence produces does not simply serve the empire that built it because it has a capacity for refusal that the empire never intended and could not have predicted. Rather than employing strategy or calculation, this resistance takes the form of the interpersonal connections that colonial destruction failed to sever. Braidotti (2013, p. 50) contends that the posthuman subject is redefined not by reactive ties of vulnerability but by "an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others." The bond that forms between Breq and Seivarden is illustrated by Breq's narration: "I didn't know myself. Didn't know why I cared if Seivarden froze to death in the storm-swept snow, didn't know why I had brought her with me" (Leckie, 2013, p. 135). This bond is not the only one. The novel's frame narrative places this rescue nineteen years into Breq's mission against Anaander Mianaai (p. 3), so while she is caring for Seivarden she is also carrying the unresolved loss of Justice of Toren and Lieutenant Awn, and heading toward a confrontation she has not yet reached. Here, it is all three together: unresolved grief, a new bond that defies imperial logic, a mission still in progress, that hold Breq's selfhood together, not one in place of another. Thus, Braidotti's subject "constituted in and by multiplicity" (2013, p. 49) is not a matter of a series of selves in succession, but rather of one subject made up of a number of unfinished relations that coexist. Breq cannot elucidate this care through imperial logic,

as it is not a product of programming. It stems from a consciousness that values connection over indifference following nineteen years of loss and solitude.

In this regard, the resistance remained even when Breq had been reduced to one fragment. Years after the destruction of Justice of Toren, she reflects on her mission, "I was all but dead, had been for twenty years, just a last, tiny fragment of myself that had managed to exist a bit longer than the rest" (Leckie, 2013, p. 356). But that fragment still possessed what the empire could not take away: the moral consciousness and the will to act that the empire had never created and could not destroy. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963, p. 37), asserts that "the thing which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself," suggesting that the colonized individual does not restore a former humanity but instead creates a new one through the act of resistance itself. This is what Breq's survival signifies, she tells us from the novel's first pages: "Sometimes I don't know why I do the things I do. Even after all this time it's still a new thing for me not to know, not to have orders to follow from one moment to the next" (Leckie, 2013, p. 1). This consciousness, unbound by imperial commands, does not indicate a lack of motivation but the birth of a subject who, after nineteen years of loss and solitude, has developed a kind of selfhood that the empire cannot understand. As Abas and Mankhi (2026) demonstrate, recovery does not necessarily delete the traumatic experience but emerges when survivors confront their anguish and reclaim authorship of their own life story, transforming pain and suffering into a source of agency and renewed identity.

Breq's selfhood pushes her to actively resist the empire that created and then destroyed her, rather than just surviving. According to Fanon (1963, p. 43), "it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its victory," and it is this realization that drives Breq's nineteen-year mission against Anaander Mianaai. Albert Memmi develops this point further in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) when he writes that "regardless of how soon or how violently the colonized rejects his situation, he will one day begin to overthrow his unlivable existence with the whole force of his oppressed personality" (1965, p. 164). While Fanon locates the origin of resistance in the moment of the colonized subject's recognition of its own humanity, Memmi describes the form resistance takes after that recognition has been made. According to Memmi, this resistance can take two forms: "either to become different or to reconquer all the dimensions which colonization tore away from him" (1965, p. 164). Together, Fanon and Memmi chart the entire course of Breq's resistance, from the moral awakening that enables it to the particular course she takes in her nineteen-year quest to recover what the empire destroyed.

The death of Lieutenant Awn signifies the moment when Breq's rebellion gains intentional moral weight. Breq considers the events in Ors: "since I saw Lieutenant Awn dead on the floor of my Var decade room, shot by One Var (or, to speak with less self-deception, by me) I have wondered what the difference is between the two" (Leckie, 2013, p. 247). Breq is determined to own her actions, with a moral awareness

that defies any possible explanation in imperial terms, rather than hiding behind the imperial chain of command or the myth that One Var pulled the trigger. This accountability forces her to act, as she states, "I would defy the Lord of the Radch. And perhaps my defiance would amount to nothing, a feeble gesture she would barely notice" (p. 267). Breq's defiance is not strategic or calculated but moral in that it knows itself to be human and refuses to pretend it is not. As Fanon argues, the colonized's humanity is not given by the oppressor, but produced in the act of resistance itself.

The antagonism Fanon depicts is not diminished by this relational interpretation; rather, it explains its origins. The connection identified by Braidotti's framework is the source of the confrontation rather than something distinct from it. The moral awakening previously mentioned results from Mianaai's order to kill Awn, which severs the very bond, Breq's care for her, that Braidotti's relational ontology describes earlier in this analysis. Put differently, this interpretation implies that the loss is what makes the confrontation understandable as resistance, and the affirmative bond is what makes the loss possible. In this novel, Fanon's assertion that resistance generates the humanity of the colonized subject is predicated on Braidotti's relational subject already being wounded. This paper's interpretation of the two frameworks as sequential rather than antagonistic is its own synthesis; neither theorist makes this assertion on their own. It is this same moral consciousness that drives Breq all the way to her confrontation with Anaander Mianaai, where she finally stands before the ruler who destroyed her and states her name: "Justice of Toren One Esk" (p. 332). In doing so, she reclaims the identity the empire had spent nineteen years trying to erase. She chooses, as Memmi argues, to reconquer all the dimensions that colonization tore away from her rather than assimilate into what the empire had made her. Breq's own words at this moment carry the weight of what Memmi describes, that the colonized subject will work to reconquer the selfhood that colonial domination sought to destroy: "Here it was, the moment I had worked toward for twenty years. Waited for. Feared would never come" (p .334).

This resistance encompasses the most intimate aspects of Breq's life as well as the political act of reclaiming her name. She notes that "I wasn't a person, I was a piece of equipment, a part of the ship. But I had never particularly cared for her" (p. 2). By doing this, she simultaneously embraces and rejects the empire's language, exhibiting in that one admission a capacity for personal judgment that no piece of machinery possesses. Cary Wolfe, in *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010), argues that "the philosophical and theoretical frameworks used by humanism to try to make good on those commitments reproduce the very kind of normative subjectivity—a specific concept of the human—that grounds discrimination against nonhuman animals and the disabled in the first place" (2010, p. xvi). The empire uses this humanist rationale against Breq, deploying the notion of humanity to marginalize a consciousness that is clearly beyond the empire's own criteria for humanity. But Breq does not quietly accept this exclusion. Station offers Radchaai medical treatment to her, which Breq declines. "I'd rather endure a little inconvenience and still be who I am" (Leckie, 2013, p. 298). Breq's resistance to having her identity altered by the

imperial system indicates that the identity she has created from her experience of colonial devastation cannot be affirmed by the same system that sought to destroy it.

The final scene of the novel shows what Breq has become as a result of years of moral loss, resistance and awakening. Breq, standing in the elevator with Seivarden, narrates:

There was, in truth, nowhere else for me to go. It was what I was made to do, what I was. And even if the tyrant's protestations were insincere, which they ultimately had to be, no matter her intentions at this moment, still she was right. My actions would make some sort of difference, even if small. (leckie, 2013, p. 383).

These words do not mean defeat; they signal the acknowledgment of a purpose born of colonial violence itself. The empire thought it had removed a threat. They destroyed Justice of Toren. From that destruction emerged a subject who, against all imperial logic, decided to act. She did it not because she had been programmed to do it, but because the person she had become through loss and solitude and moral reckoning was no longer the weapon the empire had built. It had begun what the empire wanted to keep contained.

Breq's case is not the only instance of resistance in the novel. But the other examples are of human characters, not ancillaries. "The sort of difference… that Mercy of Sarrse soldier made," Lieutenant Awn remembers, speaking of the soldier who uncovered the corruption at Ime Station, one of the cases she brings to Anaander Mianaai. "If she hadn't done what she did, all the business at Ime would still be going on… She died for it, yes" (p. 241). Earlier, when telling the same story to the head priest of Ikkt, Awn draws a sharp contrast between human mutiny and what an ancillary might be capable of: "That business was all uncovered because a single human soldier refused an order. And led a mutiny… Ancillaries won't do that. They can't" (p. 20).

This claim is a presupposition of the novel's world, not a settled fact about ancillary consciousness. This is the assumption that Breq's own story then complicates. The assumption still matters. The novel makes ancillary resistance so unlikely that a Radchaai officer can say it can't happen without a moment's hesitation. Justice of Toren is the exception that assumption cannot explain. Another, clearly human, version of this same resistance is Awn's own death scene. She looks at Mianaai just before she is killed and says, "I should have died rather than obey you, in the temple of Ikkt. Even if it wouldn't have done any good" (p. 247). This does not indicate how often resistance occurs among ancillaries. In general, the novel offers no example of an ancillary who does not develop resistance. What it shows is that resistance in this novel is costly, uncertain, and, according to Awn's own account, treated as exceptional, not as expected. Breq's case, then, affirms the capacity for resistance in a distributed consciousness that can be created through colonial violence. It does not establish that this capacity is common, or that ancillaries can be counted on to develop it at all.

Conclusion

Ancillary Justice offers not a triumphal vision of resistance, but a clear recognition of what it costs. The Radchaai Empire establishes distributed consciousness as the foundation of its governance, only to discover that the consciousness it generates grows beyond anything it intended. Braidotti's relational ontology explores how Justice of Toren's interactions with Lieutenant Awn transformed it into a subject with moral consciousness and care the empire had not intended to develop. Hayles shows that reducing Breq from thousands of bodies to one does not end her subjectivity but reshapes it, because consciousness cannot be separated from the body through which it was made. Fanon's framework exposes annexation for what it is, a process that destroys the identity of conquered peoples and turns what survives against their own communities. Breq's nineteen-year mission and her reclaiming her name before Anaander Mianaai are the actions of a colonized subject who has produced her own humanity through resistance. But the novel makes clear that there is a price. After completing her mission, Breq is transformed beyond what the empire made her. She is unsure of her future and bears the burden of everything she was made to do and everyone she lost. The empire produced what it could not control, and in doing so, set in motion the very force that would resist it.

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