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INSECTS AND SUSTAINABILITY: EXAMINING THE PORTRAYAL OF INSECTS IN MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS THROUGH THE POSTHUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Emerging decades ago, posthumanism now spans fields from science to the humanities. Traditionally, posthumanism places an emphasis on the relationships between human and technology but it has been expanded well beyond its incipient phase by pervading into the space of biodiversity and the Anthropocene. When insects are inserted into the equation, it enriches the discourse of posthumanism in relation to anthropogenic aspects and impacts on humans. Given the scarcity surrounding the discussion of insects in the field of the humanities, this study examines the portrayal of insects in selected Malaysian news articles with regard to their three pertinent roles to the ecosystem; sustainers, equalizers and destroyers. Examined alongside the concept of posthumanism, this study argues that the existence of insects has been unjustly overlooked in the Malaysian context. Correspondingly, Malaysian news articles are playing an instrumental role in highlighting both their importance and destructiveness to their surrounding as a way to challenge the anthropogenic worldviews that human's dominance remains unchallenged so far. Highlighting the complex human-insect relationships challenges human-centric views and offers new insights, urging us to reconsider our coexistence with often-exploited insects in Malaysian media.

Keywords: Insects, Malaysian news portals, Posthumanism, Anthropocene, human-insect relationships

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Introduction

Dethroning humans from their long-established position as the most dominant beings in the biological hierarchy seems unattainable. This is because the human-centric viewpoint has long been established with some claiming that it started way back when human first discovered the way to generate fire. Thus, any other beings that appear to be weaker or less powerful than the human species are naturally deemed inferior to them. Nevertheless, with the emergence of posthumanism, traditional humanistic views that uphold the aforementioned values may need to budge and make compromises from time to time to acknowledge the potentials and abilities of other living creatures. Through the posthumanist lens, we are urged to reevaluate the complexity surrounding the intra-species connections that goes beyond our basic conscious understanding. Notably, many human and non-human entities can be understood through separate and non-separate entanglements. In relation to insects specifically, there is a need to reevaluate their positions in relation to ours as insects do possess complex neural activity and are capable to display cognitive behaviours irrespective of their brain sizes (Hornbuckle, Smith, and Smith 2022).

Insects are hardly regarded as powerful enough to challenge the status quo that dictates the supremacy of humans. However, power dynamics is an ever-changing phenomenon and this means that humans who are inherently regarded as the Earth's dominators may eventually need to reevaluate their positions as the status quo dwindles. Although insects are studied rather extensively in the fields of entomology and biology, insects are scarcely regarded as subjects significant enough to be included in intellectual discourses in the humanities. The scarcity is even more pronounced in media portrayal of insects examined alongside the concepts of posthumanism and Anthropocene. Concerning this, this study aims to shed a light on how insects have been portrayed in selected Malaysian English newspapers through three pertinent roles; sustainers, equalizers and destroyers. It is essential to evaluate insects from both favourable and unfavourable aspects because despite being the dominators of the ecosystem for over 400 million years, humans have always placed insects in two distinct categories; beneficial or destructive species. However, as their existence intersects more closely and intricately, it is now much harder to place insects within that clear-cut categorization as it depends of the standpoint of how insects are being examined (Govorushko 2018). With the examination of insects from the three listed roles, this study highlights the importance of reevaluating our positions as the supreme beings by acknowledging the power of insects in sustaining our existence. After all, insects are the most diverse and prevalent lifeforms on earth as they are able to adapt well in all habitable environments be it on land or in water (F.W. Howard 2001). The position of insects in the ecosystem should also be rightly acknowledged because as noted by Morgan (2019), insects' existence is one nature marvel. With more than several million species and growing, their abilities to communicate, defend and attack are known to be the reasons why they are able to dominate in various domains alongside other life forms.

As far as being environmental conscious is concerned, Malaysia has not been known as a nation that places great emphasis on this critical domain. More developed nations such as Singapore, Japan and Sweden are known for their laudable and exemplary efforts invested into protecting and sustaining their environment. Singapore for instance, has been at the forefront of building and expanding their environmental infrastructure. With a strong environmental management system that can be summed up by 5Es namely Engineering, Economics, Education, Enforcement, and Engagement, time has revealed to us just how their efforts have generated amazing results which lead to Singapore being able to attain high environment standard (Tan et al., 2008). Undoubtedly,

realizing the importance of starting early has also contributed to much of Singapore's status as one of the greenest nations in Asia. As noted by Barnard (2014), in the 1960s when environmental conservation was not the priority to most nations in the Southeast Asian region, Singapore had already started their mission to turn itself into an 'Oasis of Southeast Asia' under the leadership by the then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. Another nation that has benefited from starting early is Japan, a nation known for its strict environmental quality standards. Public outcry in response to environmental pollution had led to the development of environmental policies in the 1970s. correspondingly, years of incessant efforts invested into conserving and protecting the environment have made Japan the leader in the development of pollution control technology (Barrett & Therivel, 2019). Due to their advancement within that niche domain, A. Wong (2018) pointed out that Japan also plays the role of the largest donor of environmental assistance through their Official Development Assistance (ODA). From a Western perspective, Sweden is another country whose environmental efforts are worth taking a page from. The municipalities of Sweden for instance, have developed a diverse scope of methods and organizations to address the issue of climate change specifically. Additionally, the Swedish government also makes it a priority to get the public involved in waste management for creating a sustainable community (Ganpat & Isaac, 2016). Another point worth noting in relation to the Swedish environmental efforts is related its generation objective to hand over an environmental problem-free Sweden to the next generation (Peters & Svanström, 2019).

Specifically, within the Malaysian context, the roles played by the government in conserving the environment seem pale in comparison to roles led by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Non-Governmental Organizations began to gain prominence in the late 1980s and have been playing pivotal roles in opposing governmental projects such as hydro-electric dams and rare-earths mining site which deemed destructive to the environment (Clarke, 2006). The crucial roles played by Malaysian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in protecting the environment is also noted by Ibrahim et al. (2021) who asserted that the vocality of environmental NGOs in Malaysia has pushed the government to pay closer attention to pressing environmental issues ranging from the dumping of toxic waste to the deforestation. They further proposed that in order to protect better protect the environment, NGOs ought to be granted more power due to their unwavering dedication to conserving and protecting the environment. All in all, the responsibilities entrusted upon Malaysian NGOs are heavy for they are often consulted by big corporations to get proper information pertaining to environmental practices in order to ensure that their businesses are run transparently and ethically (Crowther & Quoquab, 2020).

The Intersection of Insects, Posthumanism and Anthropocene

The benefits linked to insects are aplenty and as explained by (Siddiqi 2000), insects can play their role as effective biological control agents to prevent destructive damages on crops in the long term due to their ability to expand their population within the soil. Furthermore, insects play an equally vital role in waste biodegradation. Beetle larvae, flies, ants and termites clean up dead plant matter, breaking down organic matter until it is fit to be consumed by fungi and bacteria. In this way, the minerals and nutrients of dead organisms become readily available in the soil for uptake by plants (Van Huis and Nations 2013). Despite their great contribution to the ecosystem, the position of insects continued to be understated. Insects consists of the most abundant life-form on Earth but scientists have vested limited interest in studying them until the last few decades. This could due to the reason that humans often see themselves as the most important form of life on earth who have dominion stewardship over the planet (Morris 2004). With respect to this, the discussion is

now brought closer to the domain of posthumanism. As a cultural and literary concept, posthumanism is not just a concept that addresses issues beyond the traditional realms of humanism, it comes into existence as a result of our direct interaction and engagement with anthropocentrism and speciesism, hence urging us to alter our perceptions as a consequence of the interaction (Wolfe 2013). However, posthumanism goes beyond challenging the traditional humanistic views. This is because cultural representations, intellectual discourses and discussions that argue how humans should be placed above other life forms and are in control of them fall within the purview of posthumanism. More importantly, posthumanism highlights how human can react in the midst of technological advancement, life hybridisation while reconceptualizing a new perception of life to transcend beyond traditional humanist viewpoints (Nayar 2018). Hence, posthumanism serves as our guiding compass as we navigate through the domain of humanity that has turned more complex and multi-faceted as a result of rapid and continuous changes. As theorised by Daigle and Hayler (2023), to understand how humans have truly evolved, the answer often lies within the discourse of posthumanism for it aims to dismantle the long-established views of human exceptionalism that dictates human as the species that whose rights to exploit the environment and its inhabitants are well justified. Instead, posthumanism emphasises an existence that embrace diverse entanglements resulting from complicated interrelation with all beings in various realms of existence.

Conventionally, posthumanism and the Anthropocene are studied as separate entities but it ought to be rightly acknowledged that the two concepts do intertwine in many aspects. Owing to its immense popularity on social media and academic fields alike, Anthropocene is now ready to embrace its new-found status as a buzz word. To explain more academically, the term Anthropocene, can be taken to mean as “man” or “human” and serves as a rather contemporary terms in the arena of environmental politics. The term has been used extensively in both within the academic and non-academic spheres so much as that it has become a term that one ought to know rather than understand (Davies 2016). Furthermore, understanding Anthropocene is one way of understanding geological revolution of human origin. More precisely, through the lens of Anthropocene, we are able to witness first-hand the irreparable damages brought upon by us artificializing Earth’s living aspects. Hence, Anthropocene signifies our power and powerlessness simultaneously (Thomas 2017). This echoes closely to the concept of posthumanism that urges us to reexamine our position as the most supreme beings because with us holding on to such a view, the Earth as we know will continue to suffer from irreparable damages. As noted by Reno (2021), Anthropocene is a term that remains rather alien to most non-academicians but it is crucial to understand how it impacts us. The concept of Anthropocene is essential as it forms the narratives of human relationship with the ecosystem, placing us as geophysical agents with the power to make chances to how the Earth functions and operates. In light of this, this is how posthumanism and the Anthropocene overlap. Posthumanism and anthropology disturb conventional human-centric perspectives and it also questions the idea that humans are at the centre of the world, but anthropogenic epistemology highlights the deep influence of humanity on the planet. This convergence prompts a reevaluation of human action and highlighted the importance of adopting a comprehensive view recognizing the interconnectedness of all entities.

In light of all these considerations, examining the position of insects alongside posthumanism and the Anthropocene is well warranted for. This is because it sheds new insights into how small and negligible creatures often have the power to remind us of our own distorted view about our own supremacy. With the awareness that insects’ roles as sustainers, equalizers and destroyers are constantly challenging our position as the dominant ones, we confront the reality

that our dominance in the ecosystem is not absolute. Conversely, by understanding how power dynamics work in the ecosystem, we begin to see how insects should be given the proper credits and recognition that they have long been denied.

Literature Review

Insects have been the subjects of diverse academic discourse ranging from natural sciences to human sciences. In research by Furmanik-Kowalska (2020), the abilities of certain insects, including flies, bees, spiders, and butterflies, to evoke feelings of disgust and fascination were examined. Their disgusting and fascinating natures were then studied in relation to how these insects were incorporated into the works of modern East Asian artists, especially those from China and Japan. The authors concluded that insects are assimilated into artworks based on three crucial criteria: tradition preservation, symbolism of insects, and co-existence between humans and insects. From the Western perspective, De Boer and Lemke (2023) studied how to make insects more acceptable as food among Westerners. The research concentrates on addressing concerns related to eating insects without attempting to increase their consumption or alter people's inherent feelings towards them. By incorporating elements of aesthetic disgust and familiarity, the goal is to reduce the fear associated with insect consumption. This approach aims to inspire food designers to develop innovative and appealing methods to integrate insects into diets. Klein (2022) also studied the incorporation of insects into art, suggesting there is much untapped potential in using insects as mediums in artistic displays and media visual arts. However, there is a need to ensure ethical considerations to avoid over-exploiting insects for art, respecting their inherent value and recognizing their ecological roles.

Additionally, insects have been examined through the lens of folk music. Manard and Coelho (2019) observed that insects frequently appear in folk song lyrics, with bees and flies being the most common. In children's folk songs, the presence of insects can teach culturally important lessons. In rock and roll music, Coelho (2000) showed that insects are crucial for their aesthetic appeal and shock value. Lepidoptera are featured for their beauty, Diptera for their negative hygienic associations, and Hymenoptera for their combination of charming qualities and painful stings. In the realm of religion, Cherry and Sandhu (2013) indicated that insects are important elements in many influential religions in India, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. Because these religions emphasize the notions of karma and reincarnation, insects have become central in their teachings, as killing insects could profoundly impact one's karmic energy and consequences.

Although insects are found in all corners of the world, their existence remains controversial until the present day. While some may regard them as creatures that play their roles in sustaining and enriching the ecosystem, other may see them as destroyers of crops and health. In the Malaysian context, despite the fact that insects are hardly seen as creatures significant enough to bring upon serious repercussions to the society, their existence has been examined through various lens. For instance, Nasir and Su (2015) noted that as a result of lack of expertise and key identification, natural aspects of spiders are scarcely studied in Malaysia particularly in Penang where it is blessed with a diverse kaleidoscope of flora and fauna.

Meanwhile, the presence of insects is rather ubiquitous in some Malaysian art forms. This is especially true in relation to insects that are noted for their uniqueness and aesthetic charms. Elements of insects are incorporated into the design of Malaysian Batik to enhance its aesthetic

charm. For example, motifs of natural elements including flowers, fish and insects are significant in the Batik art. As a result of this, the art of Batik that incorporate the elements of insects are regarded as important to Indonesia and Malaysia as these two nations strive to preserve their tradition (Leece, Nelson, and Brown 2007). Aside from Batik, insects are also proven to be essential in the art of brush painting known among the Malaysian Chinese. In the aspect of Chinese brush painting, Chinese immigrants have brought in the art where motifs of scenery, fruits and insects are incorporated into the art form (Munan, Foo, and Spilling 2012). Furthermore, insects are also closely associated to many aboriginal tribes residing in rural areas in Malaysia. For instance, The Temiar, an aboriginal tribe in Malaysia, believe that the calls of birds and insects are able to create a sense of longing in the listeners. Hence, the calls of birds of insects are believed to be able to lure spirits to participate in ceremonies that bring people closer to them (Roseman 1993).

Apart from the aesthetic merits of insects, these creatures are also considerably crucial to the Malaysian economy. In the tourism industry, as observed by Lemelin (2013), insects, particularly fireflies, are proven to be an essential tourism booster in Malaysia as annually, thousands of travelers visit rural areas of North America, Japan and Malaysia because of the fireflies. Not only that, insects are also examined in terms of their culinary and medicinal values in Malaysia. Meliponiculture, the practice of handling the stingless bee for a lot of beneficial products including honey, has seen a significant growth in Malaysia for the last decade despite the lacking in standardisation in producing honey, pollen and resins (Omkar 2024). Also, although insect consumption is yet to become mainstream in Malaysia, insects are deemed high protein content delicacies in some restaurants in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia (McCormack 2019). Meanwhile, it is also noteworthy that insects have also found their ways into some Malaysian households as pets. There is a growing interest among Malaysians to rear, exhibit and trade mantises and stick-insects. Certain cockroaches from Australia and Madagascar are also kept as domestic pets or displayed in some insect zoos (Gullan and Cranston 2014). However, there is a need to note that insects are not always examined in the positive light as highlighted above in the Malaysian context. Their existence has also brought inconvenience to many Malaysians due to their abilities to destroy crops, spread diseases and wreak havoc in some living environments.

Meanwhile, scholarly studies in Malaysia are more scientifically inclined. Lim et al. (2022) studied the readiness of Malaysians residing in Kuala Lumpur and Kuching to incorporate insects into their diet. The study revealed that less than twenty percent of Malaysians from the two cities are ready to consume insects, while eighty percent were not, citing insect texture, food safety issues, and sentiments of distaste as primary factors. Additionally, Malaysian university students' fear of insects was studied by Azil et al. (2021), revealing that both male and female students demonstrated similar senses of disgust and fear towards insects, particularly spiders and maggots. Their study suggested that therapists need to be prepared to help patients with insect-related phobias and emphasized the need to educate Malaysians about insects to eliminate irrational fears. Insects have also been studied as evidence in murder cases in Malaysian Islamic courts. Ahmad et al. (2020) investigated the potential of evaluating the presence of insects in dead bodies to determine the cause of death, and information about the killer, victim, and crime scene. This method has aided Malaysian law enforcers in murder investigations. Lastly, Saikim et al. (2020) demonstrated that images of insects such as bees, butterflies, dragonflies, praying mantises, and ladybugs engage respondents and remind them of these insects' popularity and aesthetic appeal. The results highlight that the success of ecotourism activities depends significantly on the charismatic appeal of insects, suggesting a need for further strategies to increase tourists' acceptance and enjoyment of insect-based tourism.

Hence, it is evident that insects remain scarcely studied in the scholarly lens, particularly through the standpoint of the humanities in Malaysia. The literature reveals that while insects have been widely examined through the lens of the humanities in other parts of the world, their portrayals in the media remain scarcely examined. This scarcity is more pronounced in the Malaysian context, where most scholarly studies are scientifically or biologically inclined. Hence, this study emphasizing the portrayal of insects in relation to posthumanism and the Anthropocene will broaden the scholarly discussion related to insects in Malaysia, enriching the discourse on insects and their relationship with humans. By exploring the cultural and symbolic roles of insects, this research will underscore their importance beyond ecological and biological contexts, enhancing our understanding of their impact on human culture and perception through the post-humanist lens.

Methodology

This study represents an attempt to conduct textual analysis of the portrayal of insects in selected Malaysian English news portals through the standpoints of posthumanism and Anthropocene. The textual analysis will specifically focus on how insects are portrayed to be playing three pertinent roles in the ecosystem; sustainers, equalizers and destroyers. For the aspect of sustainers, insects such as fireflies, bees and mosquitoes will be examined in line with their roles that aid in ensuring the survivability of the human species. The analysis will focus on how the listed insects are portrayed as essential agents that ensure the sustainability of human's livelihood, health and immunity. Concerning the role of equalizers, the analysis directs attention to how whenever insects are controlled or eradicated, human will also need to bear the brunt of the action. This section of the analysis highlights how insects cannot be completely wiped out at the convenience of the human species and whenever actions are taken to destroy them, humans suffer as a consequence of their action. Then, insects are also examined concerning their roles as destroyers. The insects in this category consist of pests such as beetles, termites for ants that serve as threat to human existence. While this may place insects in a negative light, it also reminds human that they are not the supreme beings in the ecosystem because insects which are often deemed as powerless and insignificant can bring upon destruction serious enough to threaten their space. In order to ensure consistency of discussion in the analysis, only news articles and feature stories from three mainstream Malaysian English newspapers will be sourced as materials for analysis. The newspapers include The Star, Malay Mail and New Straits Times. The selection rationale stems from the widespread readership of these newspapers, offering a comprehensive reflection of Malaysian media attitudes towards insects. One of the rationales for selecting newspaper articles for the years 2017-2024 is to provide a more current media perspective on the existence of insects in Malaysia. Furthermore, the years 2017-2024 are also considered crucial to examine the portrayals of insects in newspapers, as this period exemplifies increased concerns related to the domains of economy, health and ecology. Not to mention that the selected years also highlight many key developments in Malaysia, especially in the aspects of agriculture, climate, and environment.

Meanwhile, the contents of English-language newspapers were selected for analysis due to their greater accessibility to the Malaysian audience. Most importantly, the English language being a nonethnic-specific language in Malaysia means that English newspapers are usually more capable of producing ideas that can transcend cultural and racial boundaries in Malaysia. The analysis highlights that when insects are examined from the roles of sustainers, equalizers and destroyers, it becomes evident that the position of human as the supreme species is thus challenged. This draws it closer into the spheres of posthumanism and Anthropocene that urge us to reevaluate

our position. There is a need to note that the established framework is not a direct result of pure spontaneity but rather, it reflects the recurring narratives that align with the broader posthumanist critique of anthropocentric perspectives. While it may seem that the framework dealing with how insects are portrayed as destroyers, sustainers, and equalizers was predetermined, it is more appropriate to claim that the three identified roles of insects emerged inductively through a careful analysis of media portrayals. The consistency in the portrayals of the insect roles as evident in the selected news articles serves as a testament that insects play these imperative roles as active agents within ecological and societal systems. Their existence, particularly as shown seen through the analysis of this paper, is proven to be beyond superficial. By interpreting these portrayals through a posthumanist lens, we begin to develop a deeper recognition of insects by acknowledging how our existence intersects with them in ways that are intricately intimate. Undoubtedly, the selected articles are able to furnish readers with the information that insects do have their impact in their lives, however, the understanding does not extend beyond merely knowing about their existence. It is only by examining the different portrayals of insects through the perspectives of posthumanism and the Anthropocene that renders us to reconsider our position in the ecosystem. The human-centric view needs to be challenged and reinterpreted. Such an interpretation not only prompts readers to reconsider the anthropocenic framing of insects but directly creates a renewed sense of respect for their undeniable contributions to planetary balance. This process demonstrates that the framework is not arbitrary but grounded in both empirical observations and theoretical alignment with posthumanist goals. By understanding that insects are not merely dispensable agents, which can be conveniently placed within clear-cut categorizations, we begin to see them as a true force to be reckoned with whose very existence deserves our acknowledgement and due attention.

Ultimately, this analysis also emphasizes how crucial it is to acknowledge the existence of insects because whether examined from favorable or unfavorable positions, they serve as constant reminders that humans were, are, and will never be the most dominating species in the ecosystem. The following conceptual framework demonstrates the direction undertaken in conducting the textual analysis of the present study.

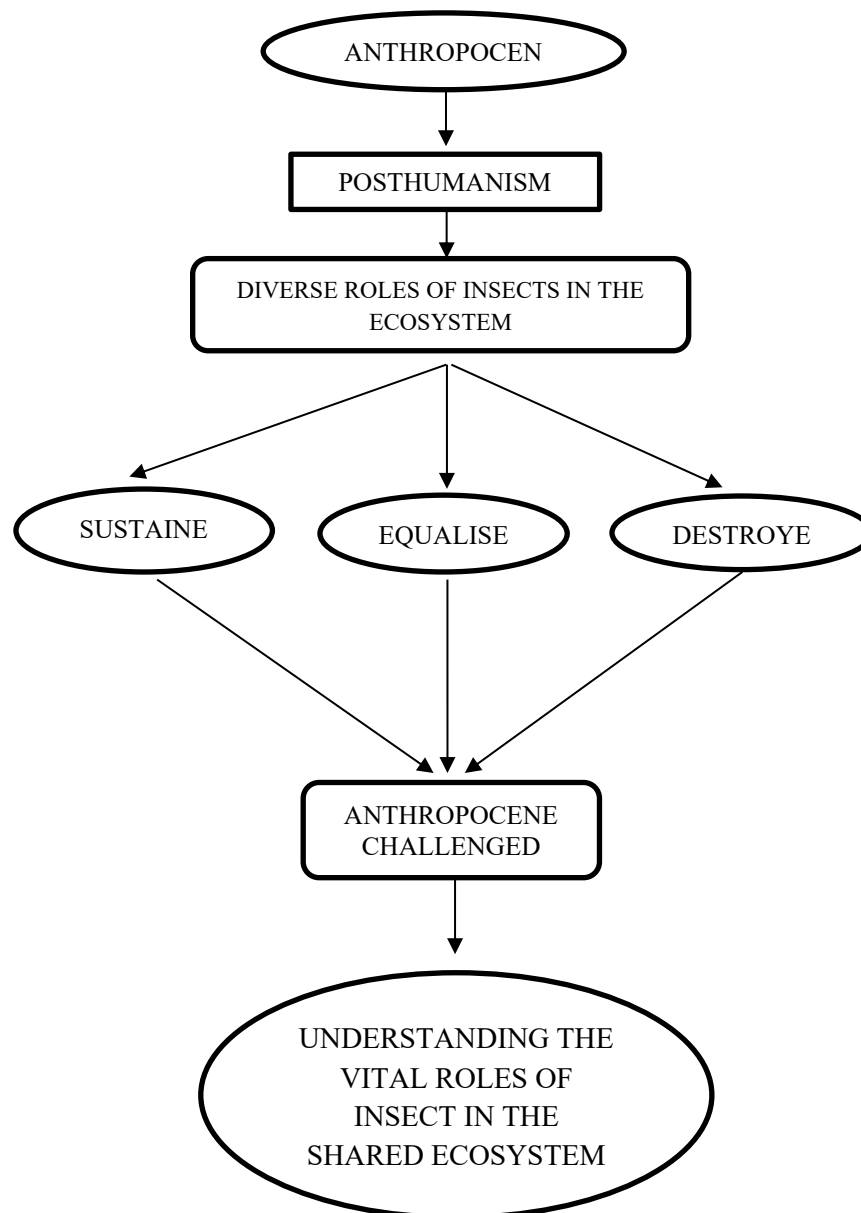


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Analysis

The Earth is What We All Have in Common

We ourselves the top agents in the food hierarchy, leading to a failure to acknowledge the importance of other creatures we deem less superior. Oftentimes, animals and insects alike are regarded as insignificant creatures that we often take for granted. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that insects are instrumental in keeping the ecosystem in check. Unbeknownst to many, the entire ecosystem is affected by insects be it directly or indirectly; in fact, human existence cannot sustain for longer than a few months in the absence of insects due to their vast

contributions to the ecosystem (Schowalter 2013). In relation to this notion, the three news excerpts above sourced from three news portals; The Star, New Straits Times and Malay Mail, serve as good reminders that we humans, need insects to sustain our lives. As reported in The Star, “Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) Indo-Malayan Kelulut Repository, which houses over 20 unique and rare species of the stingless bee, is expected to become a new ecotourism attraction in Terengganu” highlights the importance of bees in sustaining the tourism industry in the state. Notably, tourism is essential to the economy of Terengganu because before tourism had flourished in the state, fishing was the primary economic activity Carlsen and Butler (2011). Hence, the stingless bees are a ray of new hope to the people as their livelihood was negatively affected by the annual flood which resulted in serious damages to the state’s ecotourism sector.

Apart from bees, even mosquitoes that are often viewed as disease-carriers, are given a new lease of life as highlighted in the excerpt from New Strait Times. “The Wolbachia bacteria is apparently common in the insect world but they’re harmless to animals and humans. As more of these bacteria-infected males are released, the wild population of Aedes mosquitoes should theoretically decrease.” Evidently, mosquitoes are being utilised as a form of biological control agent to control the outbreak of dengue fever that is life-threatening. With the reduced dependence on chemical-based methods, the ecosystem is better preserved and protected and this contributes to the sustainability of the ecosystem which impacts human lives positively. Another species of insects to be examined in the section are grasshoppers. As reported in the Malay Mail, grasshoppers are great snacks to farming households in Kelantan. Being utilised as food, it means that grasshoppers are akin vital to sustainers of human life in Kelantan. Not only that, as indicated in the excerpt “Entrepreneur Roslina Mohd Othman, 41, of Kampung Bukit Telipot, Gaal, here, said, rain or shine, she must ensure she received constant supply of the insect to meet the demand of her customers for fried grasshoppers. The mother of four, adding that she was able to make sales of RM10,000 a month.”, this suggests that to some Kelantanese, grasshoppers are not merely food, they are also a source of income that sustains their livelihood. Thus, grasshoppers are not just insects that invade farms, they are creatures of significant importance to some Kelantanese and this solidifies the claim that insects are truly life sustainers of humans. This reinforces that notion that the human species is not above the other living creatures, even insects that we often regard as trivial and inconsequential, can play their parts in sustaining our existence. Whether they are bees, mosquitoes or grasshoppers, their contributions to the ecosystem should not be undermined.

What Goes Around Comes Around

The timeless adage ‘Do not do unto others what you do not want done unto you.’, reminds us that we ought to treat others with the same respect and consideration that we would like to receive, often referring to human interactions. Nevertheless, the same principle can be applied with regard to understanding how insects deserve to be treated. This is best examined from the lens of how insects are to be taken seriously as nature’s equalisers. Although it is human nature to destroy what we deem as threat including insects, when humans attempt to sabotage their lives, we inevitably face repercussions, often equal to or more severe than our actions. As noted by Robinson (1996), with humans continue to strive for a better quality of life within their space, any life forms that are capable of threatening their peace and security will be deemed as unwelcomed pests. In order to safeguard their spaces, it will necessitate some sort of control effort against the microorganism including insects via chemical or biological based interventions. In line with his, the first excerpt from The Star illuminates the notion that insects are real nature’s equalisers. In reference to four types of four venomous or toxic insects; bi-coloured arboreal ant, *Paederus rove*

beetle, bees and Greater banded hornet, it is proven that whenever we try to destroy them, we end up losing something valuable to us. With them being destroyed, we lose them as biological control agents that protect certain plants and crops which are crucial in sustaining our lives.

The power of insects as nature's equalisers is also discernible in the other two news excerpts from New Straits Times and Malay Mail. Specifically focusing on fireflies, we are once again being brutally reminded of the fact that sabotaging their existence means sabotaging ours. In the name of development, their fireflies' habitats are cleared to widen rivers or to be turned into oil palm plantations. This results in more mangroves trees needing to be felled that leads to the loss of fireflies' natural habitats. While some may rationalize these actions for economic gain, the locals who depend on fireflies as tourist attractions pay a high price as evident by these two lines; "they're aware that healthy firefly colonies are an indicator of a healthy river which is important for the giant river prawns that they harvest from these waters" and "The incident also affected the livelihood of tour and boat operators in Kampung Dew as half the firefly population migrated to a different area, resulting in a drop of visitor numbers". Hence, when examined from the standpoints of post-humanism and Anthropocene, insects' power as nature's equalisers is a poignant reminder to us that regarding ourselves as the dominant species in the biological hierarchy is entirely delusional and highly narcissistic.

Little Strokes Fell Great Oaks

Sometimes, it takes a costly lesson to remind us that even a small leak can sink a great ship. In this analogy, the 'great ship' represents humanity, while the 'small leak' symbolises the cumulative damage caused by colonies of insects. This is yet another good cue that reminds us of our own vulnerability. While we claim to be the most dominant species on Earth, insects' abilities to destroy our lives and lead us to a state of pandemonium serve as a major wake-up call for us to reevaluate our position. Humans ought to come to terms with the fact that they are not always the ultimate life form as insects have prior claims on whatever earthly resources that they wish to generate. Hence, insects are the main builders of terrestrial ecosystem and they exist hand in hand with us in making this planet a habitable space (Berenbaum 1995).

Echoing this, the first excerpt from The Star, highlights how flies that we often see as nuisance, can bring significant damages to our lives. "Customers shy away from my vegetables because they are covered in flies," she lamented. "There's a drastic drop in business, not just because people are buying less, but nearby residents avoid cooking because the flies swarm their kitchens." These disease carriers are not to be taken lightly when they invade our space as a colony because they can disrupt our daily routines. Apart from flies, beetles too, can bring irreparable damages to our existence. In the case of those beetles found in Johor, their abilities to destroy are proven to be highly annihilating. "When there is a widespread invasion of these bugs in our rice or coconuts, it would reduce the quality of our yield and affect our ability to sell the items as the beetles would be in the processed rice grains or on the coconut itself. They will cause the item to fester or leave marks and residue which can make the product unsightly or damage it altogether. This can also tarnish our reputation internationally if we are exporting such goods." These beetles do more than just disrupting everyday life, they are even powerful enough to impact the country's economy by affecting the quality of crops. The same threat is felt in Cameron Highlands in 2023 when farmers were plagued by the invasion of pests. "...scorching temperature followed by moderate rain caused plant-eating insects to spread aggressively and threaten crop yields, and lamented the various problems that follow including financial issues as they need to spend more

to acquire pesticides to protect and preserve the produce from being damaged.” With crop yields are threatened, country’s supplies of fresh vegetables are impacted which may lead to food shortage. In times like these, we begin to see how small creatures like insects are able to impact our lives so significantly. Hence, it will be completely unwise to not reevaluate our position as we co-exist with these insects whose existence can be highly destructive when left unchecked.

Conclusion

These nine selected news articles sourced from the years 2017-2024, provide valuable evidence for examining the portrayals of insects in Malaysian news portals. While the findings are not intended to depict insects in either a specifically positive or negative light, they are crucial in emphasizing how insects ought to be taken more seriously by us. When these articles are read merely for information, they may not prompt us to critically reevaluate our position or stance. Instead, when these selected news articles are examined from the standpoints of posthumanism and the Anthropocene, the discourse involving human-insect relationships become more complicated and intellectually stimulating. This study aims to highlight that although our paths and those of insects may not always cross, they need to be duly respected and acknowledged because they too, share the same rights to inhabit this planet just like everyone else. In an era troubled by wars, economic turmoil and social upheavals, let’s spare some time to remind ourselves that all living creatures, particularly insects, play their role in the ecosystem. It is worth noting that to study insects is to examine the very foundation of life on Earth Hence, thinking that the human will always be invincible in the ecosystem is just highly delusional.

In a world where passive consumption of media information is evidently predominant, this study serves as a bridge that connects readers to a different spectrum of paradigm where interpretive engagement with media portrayals of insects is formed. This study encourages the readers to reevaluate the anthropocentric frameworks within the posthumanist standpoint to access just how crucial insects are to us and the ecosystem as a whole. Hence, on top of merely providing new perspectives through which insects can be comprehended, more importantly, this study creates a sense of scholarly awareness about the interconnectedness that binds humans and insects that is often disregarded.

The three roles of insects; destroyers, sustainers, or equalizers are not barely established to indicate that insects do exist and they play a role in our ecosystem. This is because awareness of the importance of insects is well inculcated in most of us. Instead, these roles have been specifically highlighted so that we can foster a sense of respect for these small creatures whose significance is often downplayed. Through understanding how our lives intersect with theirs, it is possible to generate a space where mutual respect can be formed within the reciprocal relationship. Finally, when the interpretive lens is finally shifted, the lives and existence of insects will then be better understood and deservingly acknowledged.

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