An Introduction to 'Peace, Conflicts and Security in the Anthropocene: Ruptures and Limits'

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Throughout the last two decades, numerous disciplines across the natural and social sciences have witnessed the increasing influence of an emerging set of contemporary theoretical trends that delve into the entanglements between the human and its material milieu (see Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2005). Beyond rigid attributed labels, including new materialisms, Actor-Network theory, speculative realisms and object-oriented ontology, amongst others, the genealogy of these theoretical movements arguably traces back to the confluence of two mutually reinforcing processes. On the one hand, the current unprecedented techno-scientific progress in areas such as Earth System Sciences and Science and Technology Studies has led to compelling narratives on unsettling events, including the potential effects of global warming as well as the uncertain future implications of developments in fields as, for instance, Artificial Intelligence. As a result of these challenges and speculations, the hypothetical finitude of the human being on the planet, far from abstract apocalyptic discourses, has become a strikingly perceptible experience. In other words, the stories about the distinctive, superior and masterful character of the human on Earth increasingly seem to fade, and its future seems unquestionably inextricable from broader beyond-the-human phenomena (see Tsing, 2015). The present age in which the human has compromised its own existence, or at least its position of dominance, to anthropogenic processes that surpass the sphere of human control has been defined by many scholars as the Anthropocene (see Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). On the other hand, the tenets of this growing theoretical rubric claim the exhaustion and incapacity of the post-positivist paradigm, arguably the dominant register within critical theory over the last forty years, as unable to provide analytical tools that enhance the comprehensive understanding of the repositioning of the human in the Anthropocene era (see Bryant, Srnicek & Harman, 2011). To be precise, the limits of textual, discursive and semiotic methodological techniques are exposed as insufficient to capture and examine how Anthropocenic processes of transformation are reconfiguring the role of the human on the planet, let alone the relations with its environment.

Seeking to overcome the impasse of the post-positivist paradigm, recent scholarly developments have intended to articulate an analysis on the ever-changing human-world relations underpinned by what is hereby defined as the paradox of dualism. In short, the

paradox unveils how the unfounded artificial human-made projection of Cartesian dualisms such as subject vs object, mind and matter, cultural/social (as something human, alive and active) vs nature (as something non-human, dead and inert) has led to a cosmological conception that orbits around the centrality of the human being, who supposedly resides at the top of an ontological hierarchy. Paradoxically, the material implications resulting from this hubristic form of thinking, being and becoming on the planet has prompted the ostensible undoing of these dualist constructions, for nowadays, more than ever before, the future of the human is intimately entwined with beyond-the-human processes. To be sure, despite the post-positivist engagement with this quandary, for example the Foucauldian scrutiny of the power relations behind the violent effects of modern dualisms and the supremacy of Man, by deconstructing solely one component of the binary, namely 'the social', and eluding 'the natural', this theoretical exercise ultimately reproduces and perpetuates the dualist cosmology.

In the context of the confluence of these two major processes, the affirmation of the Anthropocene age and the crisis of orthodox post-positivism to account for how this has reframed the position of the human on a planetary scale, recent scholarly interventions have generated a theoretical and practical response centred on beyond-the-human entanglements and relations as the prime condition for possibility. In other words, relations precede the being (see Barad, 2007). In this regard, all beings are rendered vulnerable to the relations that compose them, which erodes and undermines the anthropocentric cosmovision where the human being stands as separated from the world in a position of ontological superiority. Returning to the construction of dualisms, the object, matter and nature are conceived of as constitutive parts of the subject, mind and cultural/social, respectively. The ethical and political disruptions derived from this naturcultural reformulation essentially question the autonomous agential condition of the human being and invoke a sense of modesty sensitised with the complex interconnectedness of beings and events in the world, as well as the forces and (beyond-the-social) power relations that shape the outcomes of this entangled mode of becoming.

Without disavowing the seeming ruptures offered by the conversations of the Anthropocene age, parallel debates are problematising some of the key underlaying assumptions concealed in this fetishised conception of entanglements, namely the celebratory, emancipatory and all-encompassing projection of a relational world. On the one hand, in defence of the still valuable insights from post-positivism, some authors have denounced the depoliticising effects of the Anthropocene, with its focus on the non-human and how this interacts in a constitutive mode with the human. In short, the nullification of future political possibilities in Anthropocenic intellectual encounters responds to the overlooking of violent relational events such as patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism as the result of processes of dispossession and subtraction, thus recognising an ontological separation between the non-human and the human as a sine qua non condition for re-politicising transformative alternatives (see Swyngedouw & Ernstson, 2018). From a different angle, other accounts point to how an all-embracing affirmation of a relational cosmos intensifies the normative ethos of being (see Colebrook, 2019). To be relational or not to be. This rather elitist and redeeming positionality is embedded in the political ecologies of universalising story-telling interventions like the Anthropocene, which then risk reproducing the same exclusionary logics of modern projects such as liberalism and capitalism, which paradoxically have precipitated, according to Anthropocenic narratives, the current socionatural crisis endangering humanity.

The present special issue aims at unpacking how all of these theoretical disruptions and collisions unfold in the discipline of International Relations, particularly in the domain of Critical Peace and Conflict Studies. Illustrative of the manner in how these theoretical and practical configurations are increasingly taking hold in the discipline, the 2020 pan-European International Studies Association (EISA) conference, which was postponed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, was designed under the title 'The Politics of Nature'. The introductory blurb to this academic event included the following quote based on Édouard Glissant, a key figure of Caribbean contemporary thought and an essential piece of the philosophical relational edifice: 'Planetary thinking is, indeed, only possible through attentiveness to particularities of critical 'entanglements', to use Édouard's Glissant term, of the relations of power.'[1] In addition to this, the first textbook on 'International Relations in the Anthropocene' has been launched in 2021 (see Chandler, Müller & Rothe, 2021), also indicative of the extent to which these discussions are gradually becoming a noticeable part of the plethora of International Relations literature (see Grove, 2019; Kurki, 2020).

The particular field of Critical Peace and Conflict Studies has not eluded these growing generative sensitivities, which have puzzled authors for over a decade. With the goal of systematising the outcomes of these recalibrating imaginaries, two grand sets of contributions can be distinguished. On the one hand, some authors have focused on how the vibrant role of objects, matter and even infrastructure, namely the built environment, might shed light to renewed forms of thinking and seeing peace, conflicts and security. In a conspicuous analysis of the implications of the revitalising role that critical infrastructure plays in the context of protection and securitisation, Aradau (2010) suggests that security infrastructure is not opposed to or independent from people, but it is instead materialised through a constitutive friction between the human and the non-human, the material and the immaterial. In a similar vein, Weizman (2007), via a ground-breaking scrutiny of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, argues through the concept 'politics in matter' that the built environment, the massive infrastructural systems and the environmental conditions, of a human or non-human origin, are not just the background of conflict. Rather, they constitute a fundamentally political space that enables and enacts the processes of Israeli repression and domination. On the other hand, some authors have centred on how the ontogenesis of beings and their modes of becoming hinge on rhizomatic relations, entanglements, interactions, interconnections and clashes, which are ontologically constitutive events. In critical peacebuilding literature, Brigg (2013, 2018) asserts that relationality as an analytical tool entails giving greater conceptual importance to relations over entities by attending to the effects of interactions and ex-changes. The author stresses that relations bring entities and things into being. Accordingly, with the goal of eroding the assumptions of a top-down, linear, liberal peace, the prime position of a peacebuilder resides in the acknowledgment of its absence of authority and capacity to know over the recipient of peacebuilding, for its position will be the product of ex-changes and interactions. Brigg therefore emphasises the need to recognise other forms of thinking, doing and knowing as constituencies of peacebuilders' forms of thinking, doing and knowing (see also Torrent, 2021).

Building on these rationalities, the special issue aims to interrogate and dissect three main questions. First, the contributors have inquired into how the biogeophysical affirmation of the Anthropocene age as well as the resulting ostensible fade of the

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[1] See full source here: https://eisa-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PEC2020-Call-for-Sectin-Proposals.pdf

culture vs nature dualism can move forward Critical Peace and Conflict Studies. Second, the articles also scrutinise how this arguably small area of study can contribute to the forces, practices and interventions that shape a world conceived as bound to interconnectedness as the prime condition for possibility. Third, the collection critically examines the limits, faultiness and potential theoretical and political resistances that the Anthropocenic rubric might encounter, as well as how Critical Peace and Conflict Studies might address these challenges in theory and practice.

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The special issue partly hints at the potential of nuancing the gaze at the role that matter, objects and nature play in the peacebuilding milieu as well as uncovering an analytical lens underpinned by a seeming over-arching interconnectedness of beings and events in conflict-affected scenarios. On the one hand, Bargués (this special issue), through the instrumentalisation of pragmatist philosophers such as James and Dewey, points to a shift from an intrusive, ideal, even unreachable, notion of the liberal peace towards interventions that put a premium on the material elements of the everyday of war-torn societies. The author stresses how from new materialist or socionatural perspectives that recentre objects in the picture, one might obtain valuable insights of conflict and peacebuilding dynamics. In a similar vein, Hardt (this special issue) brings together a wide range of theoretical sensitivities, including new materialisms and posthumanism, to provide an account on the mode in which peace, conflict and security questions have been approach in Anthropocenic debates. The author suggests that this discussion invites rethinking fundamental aspects of Critical Peace and Conflict Studies, including time, agency and scale. On the other hand, Mateos (this special issue) reflects upon the troubled situation in the Niger Delta as the expression of complex, interconnected and co-emergent human and beyond-the-human ecologies. Seeking to surpass the limited scope of post-colonial and 'resource curse' analyses, rooted in anthropocentric historicist arguments, the author uses Moore's world-ecology lens to shed light on a mesh of intertwined violent political encounters that configure the day to day of the region, including the oil economy, the local resistances and the role of the territory, among others.

Alongside this constructive exploitation of Anthropocenic frameworks of analysis, the special issue also offers a cautionary word against the fetishisation of beyond-the-human entanglements as a revelatory form of thinking and seeing peacebuilding processes and conflict-affected contexts. Pareja-Alcaraz (this special issue) shows scepticism about the novelty of the so-called new materialist approaches. Through an eco-critical scrutiny of the environmental dimension of conflicts in the South China Sea, the author describes the material sacrifice of nature in conflict dynamics and cooperation frameworks as well as how conflict resolution mechanisms have relegated nature and ecological considerations to a marginal position. Finally, Mújika (this special issue) problematises the depoliticising character of the Anthropocene conversation. In the interplay between ecofeminism and new materialisms, the author attempts to repoliticise the silences that naturcultural narratives conceal by redefining the concept of the Anthropocene into the Manthropocene, alluding to the patriarchal and masculinising politics behind discussions on conflicts and war.

Admittedly, International Relations is just living the dawn of the poetics of the Anthropocene, which seem determined to mark the pace of politics and debates of the 21st century. As a mode of an exploratory journey, this special issue has attempted to

open up in a critical, even provocative manner, the future of peace, conflict and security theory and practice. Whilst a reconsidered role of objects, matter and nature along with their constitutive entanglements with subjects, mind and culture have proven to offer a novel arena to look at a very particular set of events in the current distressed age, namely peacebuilding processes and conflict-affected scenarios, the collection also expresses scepticism about glorifying the possibilities of conceiving these instances as deterministically relational, which would then reproduce exclusionary modern ontological cuts. The hope and the purpose of the guest editor and the authors reside in moving forward our ever-expanding, unruly and vulnerable area of Critical Peace and Conflict Studies.

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