

POSTHUMANISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA: CHALLENGES TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Introduction

The main argument of this paper is that International Relations needs to refocus on the non-human agency to make itself open and responsive to interactions in global life. For this the subject has to go beyond the frontiers of Westphalian notion of sovereignty which often restricts us to think about the international politics with the environment. International Relations (IR) as a craft can resist such erasures by focusing on multispecies engagement as an integral part of academic enterprise in an emergent pluriverse. A pluriverse is a diverse world with multiple realities. An acknowledgement of multiple realities entails that the discipline is not arbitrary including everyday practices that sustain the existence of the international in the first place. It means an engagement beyond the conventional theories of Realism and Liberalism and thinking beyond the Western traditions which has tended to straightjacket us into binary separations such as human non-human or nature/culture. The first step towards acknowledging the multispecies engagement of IR is to understand the non-human agency. This means what is required a posthuman/non-anthropocentric way of thinking about International Relations which Sprout and Sprout (1971) insisted should be moving 'toward a politics of the planet Earth.' (Kavalski & Zolkos, 2016, p144).

A Theoretical and Analytical Engagement

Posthumanism gives an ontological manifestation to IR. It debunks the misconception that man is the most dominant species across the universe. On the contrary beyond the Westphalian system, there is a greater world awaiting us. The world is teeming with problems that has changed the methodological lens of understanding IR. For instance, the SARS Covid-19 pandemic has made the external, internal. With virus (non-human agency) affecting health, education, social life and economies and lockdowns, work from home and social distancing measures imposed on humans, we have seen how the lives of humans and non-humans got entangled. The global climate crises and rising sea-level and temperatures have affected all of us. In his latest work, titled 'After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis (2021), Bruno Latour, the famous French philosopher and anthropologist, deeply introspects how the global pandemic had punctuated our lives. It had exposed the fragility of human existence and the interconnectedness of everything.

A foundational impetus towards the material turn derives from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and particularly the Actor-Network Theory of Bruno Latour. He has given voice and agency to non-living objects. He has provided a prolonged argument for approaching machines and other artifacts as “actants” with volition (Hornberg, 2021, p755). He said “technological innovation has needs and desires” especially a desire to be born. In Latour’s seminal work ‘We Have Never Been Modern’ (1993), the philosopher considers that there is a fundamental deceit at the centre of modernity. Actually, what it means to be modern has lost credibility. The development paradigm in the 21st century does not recognize the importance of ecological conservatism. It’s problematic when IR ignores key agents of change like communities, green social movements, non-governmental organizations and individuals supporting change. For instance, the Standing Rock Movement was a major indigenous-led protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016-17, uniting more than 200 tribes to protect sacred lands and the Missouri River, a vital water source, from potential contamination by the oil pipeline. The Sioux tribe used non-violent direct action establishing camps and confronting security forces. Initially framing it as an environmental protest movement, international media was very slow to cover it. To counter this, the indigenous groups used social media and alternate platforms to bring this issue under wider global attention.

Peter Sloterdijk, German philosopher and cultural theorist, said that human-environment engagement is profound and dates back in history. Humans are a product of their space. Atmosphere is not a backdrop but man’s essential nature. Human history, he writes, is an account of humanity’s spheric enclosures. Humans have always expanded their planetary reach which has led to “uninhabitable boundless space.” Traditional IR has been so state-centric, so worked up with borders and anarchy that it misses out on space analysis – on how cities are macrospheres with souls. Humans build spaces which are dynamic products of co-habitation and technology. Space is a lived experience. Sloterdijk used the term “anthropotechnics” which means architecture and construction materials, smart city infrastructure build by humans have changed at how we look at space. Traditional IR sees a flat world of sovereign states but Sloterdijk sees layered, constructed spheres needing new political concepts beyond anarchy and territory.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that “state apparatus” cannot override climate change which can disrupt our lives within traditional Westphalian law. A classic example from the 20th century was widespread acid rain in Europe where emissions from industrialized nations in Eastern and Western Europe damaged ecosystems in Scandinavia. In his seminal text, *The Three Ecologies* (1989), Felix Guattari

made a public outcry against ceaseless destruction of the earth's finite resources and it is aimed against corporate greed, political dubiousness and individual apathy to engage critically with environmental sustainability.

Guattari projects the need for sustainable living and ecological harmony, which he famously names as 'Ecosophy.' It delves into how individuals interact with each other and their environment. It encompasses sustainable practices, promoting inclusion in Nature, preservation and environmental awareness. In essence, it is about comprehending humanity's potential for an open and boundless praxis, free from constraints, divisions and singularities. They have discussed about non-linear, non-hierarchical connections in their prominent work, *A Thousand Plateau* (1980) giving a Kafkaesque drift to their philosophy suggesting open, multidirectional systems of thought and knowledge as a network of rhizomes. For instance, the internet revolution had taken the world by storm. IR have always been profoundly affected by technology.

Ray Kurzweil had predictably declared this age as the Age of the Spiritual Machines. According to Cameroonian philosopher, Achilles Mbembe, our world is changing into a "techno-molecular colonialism." Artificial Intelligence and computational rationality create new systems of power and control. Mbembe said what colonialism had done to society, technology is doing to the Global South – through control and enclosures reducing the world to data and algorithms. For instance, Google and Amazon capture value and data from every aspect of life treating everything as "raw material." Technology has taken over us in such a manner that predictive algorithms are blunting our thinking capacity. Humans are hardly able to live up to the promises of technology itself. China's surveillance and epidemic mapping algorithms were rolled out with military precision. Singapore added the robot dog, SPOT to patrol a public park to enforce social distancing (Lamola, 2020, p9).

Mbembe insists that the planet itself demands that we rethink the ethical foundations of our societies. The ethics of care aligns with posthuman ecologies and emphasize reciprocity, mutual vulnerability and inseparability of human and non-human world. By emphasizing the ethics of care Mbembe moves from necropolitics to geopolitics of care – a vision of politics that values the Earth.

Cudworth and Hobden argue for 'animalising' IR to ensure greater inclusivity. This means including animals in global environmental governance. It is essential that IR develops a more nuanced understanding of animal agency and the role of non-humans in order to move beyond its anthropocentric roots. For instance, Leep demonstrates how migratory tundra swans and northern

pintails can be regarded as more than human victims of toxic warfare as a result of phosphorous texting by the US military in Eagle River Flats, Alaska. Similarly, Rafi Youatt describes the shift of IR's focus to multispecies engagement as "interspecies internationality", a particular way to understand the co-mingling of the geographical with the ecological. War, the global economy, migration or the environmental processes – involve a complex web of species. IR as a discipline cannot be considered through an exclusively human framework. He said sovereignty is not only about borders and states are an ecological practice that form and constrain political life. For instance, both the US-Mexican border and Guantanamo Bay are sites of interspecies practice which "generate hierarchies of life where species are not the sole determinants of worth..." (Youatt, 2020, p2).

Conclusion

Michel Foucault had very evocatively predicted an image of man drawn in the sand implying that Man could be erased as the central and foundational subject of Western tradition. As human species we are always battling differences and multiple interpretations where we are dominant. Any version of the international which excludes a discussion of our relations with the rest of nature is incomplete. The corpus of IR scholarship can never be an only human affair. Though humanitarianism clings to have exclusively human agency and history of political theory has ascribed political will and agency to humans alone, politics is not exclusionist and IR is not a failed intellectual project. For instance, the Isle Royale wolves have highlighted the complex human-animal relationships and influencing cross-border conservation efforts. Their long-term study provides data crucial for understanding predator dynamics relevant to preserving biodiversity in an increasingly changing world.

Cosmopraxis is a term that is often used to describe the position of being open to multiple realities. The view has also been employed by Koen de Munter and Nicholas Note in their analysis drawn from the anthropological work with the Aymara community of Peru. The Aymara traditions and practices represent a radical alternative to Western worldviews. In the Aymara world, things are never specifically good or bad but both good and bad alternately. For the Aymara there is a "moving multiple worlds constituted by the nurturing interrelationships between animals, plants and humans alike." (Cudworth & Hobden, 2025, p 28)

Relational thinking can be an answer to the future of IR that can be a cornerstone of our worldview. It implies states are just not fixed entities but a complex mesh of interactions.