

Juliana Krohn

Dealing with Peace in Times of Planetary Emergencies

From Anthropocentrism towards Relationality and Care

ABSTRACT

The triple planetary crisis (UNFCCC 2022) threatens the very habitability of our planet. Taking this seriously, challenges ways of knowing, being and living in the Anthropocene that contribute to its destruction. Addressing peace in this context, requires alternatives to dominant anthropocentric understandings of peace and related categories. Drawing on emerging concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies as well as on critical, decolonial and feminist perspectives, this paper seeks to problematize the human supremacy of anthropocentric paradigms underlying dominant understandings of peace by investigating possibilities of conceptualizing peace through relationality with the more-than-human rather than its domination (Tynan 2021).

Friedenshandeln in Zeiten planetarer Notfälle. Von Anthropozentrismus hin zu Relationalität und Sorge

Die dreifache planetare Krise (UNFCCC 2022) bedroht die Bewohnbarkeit unseres Planeten in fundamentaler Weise. Sie ernst zu nehmen, bedeutet, die im Anthropozän vorherrschenden Wissens-, Seins- und Lebensweisen, die zu seiner Zerstörung beitragen, zu hinterfragen. Friedensarbeit in diesem Kontext erfordert Alternativen zu dominanten anthropozentrischen Verständnissen von Frieden und verwandten Konzepten. Ausgehend von neueren Ansätzen der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung sowie von kritischen, dekolonialen und feministischen Perspektiven problematisiert dieser Beitrag die dem anthropozentrischen Paradigma zugrunde liegende Vorstellung menschlicher Überlegenheit. Dabei

werden Möglichkeiten ausgelotet, Frieden durch Relationalität mit dem Mehr-als-Menschlichen anstelle von dessen Beherrschung zu konzeptualisieren (Tynan 2021).

| KEY WORDS

Anthropocene; peace; relationality; agency; planetary crisis; more-than-human; human supremacy

Anthropozän; Frieden; Relationalität; Handlungsmacht; planetare Krise; mehr-als-menschlich; menschliche Überlegenheit

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1 Beyond the Anthropocentrism of Liberal Peace towards More-than-human Agency¹

Disciplines researching war, conflicts, peace and their political implications such as International Relations or Peace and Conflict Studies largely work with concepts and perspectives rooted in liberal peace theories. Liberal peace both as a research paradigm and as a practice can be broadly defined as “the dominant form of peacemaking and peacebuilding favored by leading states, international organizations and international financial institutions” (Mac Ginty 2010, 391). Many scholars of peace and conflict studies pointed out that these approaches, which are based on liberal notions such as individualistic freedom, sovereignty, the protection of private property, a capitalist free-market economy, neo-liberal development, linear peacebuilding models and the rule of law, often fail in practice. While liberal peacebuilding may reduce direct violence, as Baron et al. (2019, 199) argue, violence is primarily transformed “in ways that are concealed, monopolized, and structured into the liberal order.” Thus, Liberal Peacebuilding is in a “profound crisis” as Randazzo and Torrent conclude based on David Chandler’s *Peacebuilding: The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1997–2017* (Randazzo/Torrent 2020, 5; Chandler 2017; see also Bargués 2023; Paffenholz 2021; Campbell/Chandler/Sabaratnam 2011; Mac Ginty 2010; Eriksen 2009; Richmond 2006).

The interconnectedness of peace, conflicts and the so-called environment

¹ This text is based on two articles by the author: “Peace on or with Earth? Anthropozentrische Friedensverständnisse und (De)Kolonialität” (Krohn 2024a); “On More-than-human Agency. Problematizing Anthropocentric Paradigms in IR”, draft paper presented and discussed at the CEEISA-ISA 2024 Pre-conference Workshop “Grounding IR: The Land Question in International Politics” organized by Felix Anderl (University of Marburg) and Katarina Kušić (University of Vienna) (Krohn 2024b).

Drawing on decolonial and feminist perspectives that highlight parallels between androcentrism and anthropocentrism and analyze the interconnections between racial capitalism and the colonality of nature, the critique of dominant understandings of and approaches to peace can be expanded to include their underlying anthropocentric paradigm (cf. Ferdinand 2022; Alimonda 2019; Melamed 2015; Federici 2004; Plumwood 1996; Plumwood 1993). While it may be argued that an anthropocentric perspective is an inevitable feature of human subjectivity, it is essential to distinguish between epistemic forms of anthropocentrism and those that are moral, normative—or more precisely, supremacist—in nature. *Epistemic anthropocentrism* denotes positions assuming that knowledge about the world can only be gained from a human standpoint (cf. Borchers 2018, 143). *Moral, normative or supremacist anthropocentrism*, on the

other hand, refers to positions that are human-centered and that assign non-human living beings no or a lesser ethical status than human beings. The latter, that is human supremacy and the devaluation of nature, is prevalent in dominant understandings of peace and related categories as well as in peacebuilding and conflict transformation approaches. It arguably is one of the reasons why peace theory and practice only slowly start to notice the interconnectedness of peace, conflicts, and the so-called environment. However, the majority of recent publications on these issues remain tied to the human-nature divide, distinguishing between violence against ‘the environment’ and violence against human beings, as evident in the recent edited volume *Exploring Environmental Violence* (Marcantonio/Lederach/Fuentes 2024).

The illusion of separability of humans and nature

If the impacts on and interrelations with the more-than-human world are addressed in these contexts, they are usually referred to as resource scarcity, environmental destruction, or land degradation, to name a few examples. These and other widely used terms and concepts such as ‘human-nature relationship’ reproduce the illusion of separability of humans and nature. Nature is considered not only as *the Other* to the human sphere, but as inanimate matter without (political) agency and only marginal, secondary relevance for peace. Both the prevalence of a supremacist anthropocentric paradigm and the difficulty of rethinking this relationship, or framing it as a relationship at all, thus is reflected on a linguistic level. It also points at larger epistemic questions and the challenge of thinking outside the *epistemic territory of modernity* while being embedded in it (cf. Vázquez 2011). To avoid reproducing the human nature divide linguistically and to refer to the “dynamic patterns of relationships between humans, society, and nature,” this text uses the concept of “societal relationships with nature” (Becker/Hummel/Jahn 2011, 77). It illustrates that these relationships arise from and are shaped by “culturally specific and historically variable forms and practices through which individuals, groups, and cultures shape and regulate their relationships to nature” (Becker/Hummel/Jahn 2011, 77). These forms and practices are necessarily always contested. The concept furthermore points at the fact that there is a dynamic plurality of societal relationships to nature, making the idea of a dominant or ‘right’ way elusive. It is important to note, however, that societal relationships with nature are

embedded within structures of domination, power, and violence, which profoundly shape their prevalence, attributed legitimacy, and visibility. In dominant liberal or modern/colonial² understandings, peace, consequently, is conceptualized as a state or process that can exist solely between human beings, human-made entities such as nation-states, or other types of organized human communities. More-than-human beings and entities are subsumed under the categories of nature or land and redefined as passive resource devoid of agency (cf. Krohn 2024a; Krohn 2023). An obvious example of the latter is a quote from the now 18th edition of an introductory economics textbook:

“Economists classify economic resources into four general categories. Land: Land means much more to the economist than it does to most people. To the economist land includes all natural resources (‘gifts of nature’) used in the production process, such as arable land, forests, mineral and oil deposits, and water resources.” (McConnell/Brue/Flynn 2009, 10)

² The term modernity/coloniality was coined by decolonial theorists of the Latin American research group Modernidad/Colonialidad. It refers to structures, processes, and relations of power, violence, and domination that emerged from European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade and continue to be effective, forming the dark underside of modernity. With the concept of *colonialidad del poder* (coloniality of power) Aníbal Quijano describes a global power structure consisting of Eurocentrism, capitalism, and the idea of the nation-state, based on the racialization of people, the capitalist division of labor, and their control by the state (cf. Quijano/Ennis 2000), as well as the modern/colonial gender system (cf. Lugones 2016). Decolonial theories are rooted in and interrelated with anti-colonial struggles and social movements advocating for decolonization. They are thus always intertwined with material political struggles and practices and cannot be separated from them.

Through its epistemic hubris, the quote underlines the prevalence of supremacist anthropocentrism in dominant understandings of nature and points at three central concepts and phenomena that are prevalent not only in the discipline of economics: *epistemic violence*, the *coloniality of nature* and the *imperial mode of living* (cf. Brand and Wissen 2021; Brunner 2020; Alimonda 2019; Spivak 1988).

Questioning supremacist anthropocentric paradigms by engaging with these concepts, reveals that these understandings and modes of relating to land or nature are based on the exclusion of perspectives that are rooted in various marginalized forms and understandings of relationality to the more-than-human world. This exclusion can be understood as a colonial continuity as Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg academic Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes. Simpson analyzes the violence and impact of European settler-colonialism in the Americas on human and more-than-human beings, lands, worldviews, lifeways, and knowledge:

“Because really what the colonizers have always been trying to figure out is ‘How do you extract natural resources from the land when the people’s whose territory you’re on believe that those plant, animal [sic] and minerals have both spirit and therefore agency?’ It’s a similar answer: You use gender violence to remove Indigenous peoples and their descendants from the land, you remove agency from the plant and animal worlds and you reposition aki (the land) as ‘natural resources’ for the use and betterment of white people.” (Betasamosake Simpson 2020)

In this paragraph, she elucidates the techniques and intellectual maneuvers involved in the historical and ideological constitution of dominant societal relationships with and understandings of nature through epistemic violence, destroying or marginalizing knowledge and worldviews of colonized Indigenous peoples. Simpson underlines the interconnectedness of *epistemic violence* and the legitimization and enforcement of other forms of violence and domination against more-than-human beings and colonized peoples. She also points at their intersection with the universalized Western, capitalist mode of production and living, characteristic of the *imperial mode of living* (cf. Brand/Wissen 2021).

The fundamental mastery of the more-than-human world

According to Ulrich Brand and Matthias Wissen, this mode of living is one of the main drivers of the intertwined ecological and social crises. Consequently, the mastery of, rather than the relation to, the more-than-human world have been fundamental not only to modernity and nation-states, but also to the international system. This becomes particularly evident in peace and conflict theory and practice in which only human beings and human-made entities are considered as (peace-relevant) actors (cf. Blom 2022; Blackbourn 2007). The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in Ukraine in 2023 most probably by Russian forces with its devastating and long-lasting consequences on all beings in its wider surrounding was accompanied by a growing concern for the impact of wars on ecosystems in Peace and Conflict Studies (cf. Krampe/Kreutz/Ide 2025; Tokay 2025). Against this background, questioning supremacist anthropocentric notions and attempting to move towards conceptualizing relational understandings of peace offers opportunities for thinking and doing peace differently (cf. Tynan 2021).

The triple planetary crisis is a concept and framework that has been adopted by the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) to highlight the fact that the three main planetary crises we are facing today are interconnected: climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution. Drawing only on the intersections of these three issues, however, reproduces the human-nature, or nature-culture divide. There still is, as Malcom Ferdinand observes, a

“divide between environmental and ecological movements, on the one hand, and postcolonial and antiracist movements, on the other where

both express themselves in the streets and in the universities without speaking to each other” (Ferdinand 2022, 3).

Movements focused on climate justice are increasingly tackling this divide, which Ferdinand calls “modernity’s colonial and environmental double fracture” (Ferdinand 2022, 3). In the context of peace and conflict studies and practice, however, the intersections—or rather inseparability – of ecological and social issues are only slowly being addressed.

The inseparability of ecological and social issues

The lack of comprehensive or holistic answers to the triple planetary crisis and its impacts points at a need for political practices and theories “otherwise”, hence theories and practices that “bespeak[s] the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped” in the context of dominant peace theory and work (Crawley 2017, 24). Efforts to move towards an *otherwise* beyond supremacist anthropocentric paradigm necessarily extend from theory to practice and must reflect on both. These efforts can offer insights not only into understandings of peace and questions such as who and what constitutes a peace-relevant actor. They also enable a critical examination of the potential shortcomings of dominant approaches in peace work and open up possibilities for transforming them. The *otherwise* then means moving towards more inclusive approaches beyond eco-capitalist attempts of sustainable resource management, depoliticized environmental peacebuilding approaches and romanticizing notions of Indigenous ways of living and restoring the wild. Romanticization, moreover, often goes hand in hand with devaluing supposedly imperfect nature and ignoring questions of social justice, for example in the context of establishing national parks.

In the following, I situate critical reflections on the supremacist anthropocentric paradigm in Peace and Conflict Studies and work in debates about the *Anthropocene* and the triple planetary crisis because of their global, cross-cutting relevance both theoretically and practically. By doing so, I want to address blank spaces in dominant understandings and practices of peace and the limitations of conceptualizing peace based on a liberal and anthropocentric paradigm. Those limitations become particularly evident against the backdrop of the triple planetary crisis, the global rise of authoritarianism and growing inequality, poverty, and injustice.

Drawing on critical, decolonial and feminist perspectives, I consider if and how focusing on concepts and practices that are centering relationality, kinship and care could be useful for moving beyond this paradigm and towards notions of a relational, more-than-human political agency as an *otherwise* to liberal, modern/colonial modes of thinking-feeling-doing peace.

2 From Methodological Nationalism to Planetary Thinking in Peace Theory and Practice

This text is being written at a time when the planetary crisis is already well advanced and disproportionately affects Most Affected Peoples and Areas (MAPA). The term MAPA was introduced to acknowledge and name those communities that have contributed the least to the triple planetary crisis, yet are already bearing its most severe consequences. It is based on an intersectional perspective and serves as an alternative to the complexity-reducing term Global South. MAPA refers to marginalized communities around the globe, situated mainly, but not only in the so-called Global South. From a scientific, materialist and climate justice-oriented perspective, taking the planetary crisis seriously requires focusing on ways of ensuring the best possible life for all beings on the planet and with the planet.

Calling for ways of knowing, living and being *otherwise*

This, according to climate scientists, is only achievable through a profound societal, political, and economic transformation (cf. IPCC 2022). A transformation that requires facing “the end of the world as we know it” (Silva 2014, 84). While Denise Ferreira da Silva’s assessment could be perceived as being dystopian, it calls for ways of knowing, living and being *otherwise*, for a Black Feminist Poethics towards a world beyond the

“historical effects of the colonial architectures that allowed the expropriation of the total value produced by native lands and slave labor (juridico-economic effect) into the mental (moral and intellectual) deficiencies (natural lack) signified by the Category of Blackness every time it is articulated to justify otherwise untenable deployments of racial violence.” (Silva 2014, 94)

She argues that we have reached the end of the world produced by the tools of reason only, a world categorized and compartmentalized by and for the use of the Cartesian Self, or, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2020) put it, for the “use and betterment of white people”. Consequently

“the hope is that the End of the World will emancipate the Thing from Categories (strategies of particularization) as well as from anything that resembles an attempt to give it an Essence” (Silva 2014, 87).

Transferred to the supremacist anthropocentric paradigm underlying dominant understandings of peace, this calls for de-essentializing the concepts of human and nature, allowing for more-than-human and relational conceptualizations of peace and related concepts such as conflict and violence, but also agency. It also challenges essentialist understandings of climate and nature that are prevalent in many approaches to addressing climate crisis and biodiversity loss. Those approaches not only often fail to take their interconnectedness into account, as the UNFCCC term ‘triple planetary crisis’ shows. They also often fail to address social dimensions and apply planetary thinking by operating in nation-state frameworks that contradict the reality of ecosystems that do not adhere to national borders. International politics of climate change, therefore, often result in human-centered processes mainly concerned with the governance of human affairs, ignoring their existential interconnectedness with other, more-than-human beings.

An example of this fragmented, human-centered approach is the 1.5-degree target in the so-called Paris Agreement from 2015. It was established during the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) and came into force in 2016. With this agreement, the signatory states committed, as a minimum consensus, to limit human-induced global warming to well below 2 degrees, preferably to 1.5 degrees, compared to pre-industrial levels (cf. UN 2015). Several years later, in 2022, while biodiversity is declining at the fastest rate observed in human history, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP 15) produced the lesser-known so-called Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework focusing on biodiversity loss and nature restoration. Unlike the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which has been called the *Paris Agreement for Nature* is not legally binding.

Moreover, in 2023, several scientists concluded that adhering to the minimum consensus of the 1.5-degree target is no longer plausible. Researchers attribute this primarily to insufficient social change, which depends on a range of factors such as the United Nations' climate policy, climate protests and social movements, transnational initiatives, the divestment from fossil fuels, and others (cf. Engels et al. 2023). This dependency in the context of global relations of power and violence and the history of colonialism and global inequity makes the implementation of the necessary measures at the required pace impossible or difficult. Therefore, with six of the nine planetary boundaries being transgressed and a further rapid deterioration of the stability of the Earth system, the lack of an adequate international response to the planetary crisis and its injustices is simultaneously inconceivable and not surprising given global relations of power, violence and domination and underlying legitimizing ideologies (cf. Richardson et al. 2023).

When nation-states deal with issues that have global effects

Speaking about 'the international community' and 'international climate politics', reveals another limitation of liberal and modern/colonial understandings of peace, particularly in the context of climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution: their focus on the nation-state as the main form of political and social organization. In the context of the planetary crisis, *methodological nationalism* necessarily falls short (cf. Conversi 2020; Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002). The ongoing controversial debates surrounding the Nature Restoration Law (NRL), a legislation by the European Union (EU) aimed at restoring degraded ecosystems, habitats, and species across all EU member states' land and sea areas, reveals its limitations (cf. Hering et al. 2023). While from a supremacist anthropocentric perspective, the NRL may not appear to be a peace-relevant issue, it arguably becomes one when moving beyond this paradigm. The NRL then serves as a vivid example of the limitations of methodological nationalism when dealing with these complex challenges.

The political obstacles and debates surrounding the EU NRL illustrate the problems arising when nation-states deal with issues that transcend their territories and have global effects. The Russian invasion of Ukraine also highlights the adverse effects wars have on ecosystems as well as their repercussions on global climate and biodiversity governance. As

ecosystems evidently do not adhere to national borders, political decisions limited to national frameworks can hardly do justice to these systems or tackle the planetary crisis comprehensively. Many birds, fish, and other animals travel from one habitat to another, underlining that migration is a fact, an innate part of inhabiting this planet and living with it. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many species, among them the Greater Spotted Eagles, have been exposed to conflict events. The Eagles had to change their migratory behavior because they could not stop in Ukraine or had to detour around the area for several hundred kilometers, thereby facing higher risks associated with migration (cf. Russell et al. 2024). Apart from these direct impacts on animal migration, the war in Ukraine also impacts animals and other living beings through its wider implications for the governance of biodiversity conservation (cf. Gallo-Cajiao et al. 2023). Efforts undertaken in individual countries to respect, preserve and restore habitats are based on an "overly simplistic concept of territory—like the boundaries of a national park" and are rooted in a supremacist anthropocentric paradigm; therefore, they cannot suffice (Donaldson/Kymlicka 2011, 191). Discussing and acknowledging the limitations of this concept also touches upon questions of property, sovereignty, agency, and the right to self-determination beyond a human-centered world.

3 Peace in the Anthropocene: Understanding and Problematizing Anthropocentrism

As the impacts of the anthropogenic triple planetary crisis are becoming more visible and palpable in countries of the so-called Global North, public, political and scientific interest in these issues increases. With politicians publicly declaring it the greatest challenge of our time, it is moving from the margins to the center of international politics, at least discursively.

A significant research gap

However, a recent survey of articles published between 2017 and 2021 in the top 25 International Relations journals by impact factor reveals a significant research gap:

“The overall rate of articles concerning climate change was 6%. [...] It was also notable that while this time period covered several special issues and ‘fora/discussions’ across the four journals manually assessed, none of these special issues covered climate change” (Moody 2024).

This survey, moreover, shows that if articles focus on environmental issues at all, they focus on climate change only, not on biodiversity loss or other related ecological issues, again pointing at the divide between climate crisis and biodiversity-related challenges. Similarly, political and public debate on the EU Nature Restoration Law mostly focuses on biodiversity while disregarding the significance of the law and thereby nature restoration for mitigating the progression of and adapting to climate change (cf. Decler/Cliquet 2023).

What scientists and practitioners regard as a promising research agenda or as viable mitigation and adaptation strategies and mechanisms to address these challenges also depends on their *locus of enunciation* and on the underlying paradigms that shape how they define and interpret the terms and concepts used to describe what is currently happening on a planetary scale (cf. Diniz de Figueiredo/Martinez 2021). Climate change, climate crisis or climate catastrophe, biodiversity loss or sixth mass extinction, environmental pollution or pollution crises are but a few terms used and critically discussed in this context. As mentioned above, the United Nations speak of the “triple planetary crisis” to highlight that the climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity and the escalating levels of environmental pollution are pressing global problems that cannot be considered and addressed separately (UNFCCC 2022). Other paradigms like Planetary Health stress the interdependencies between human, sometimes even more-than-human and planetary well-being (cf. Rockström et al. 2023; JYU.Wisdom community 2021). Concepts and approaches focusing on social-ecological transformation highlight the fact that the planetary crisis, modes of production and living and ensuing inequalities are inseparably linked. Therefore, some researchers locate the greatest chance for a livable future in the agency of civil society, which, in turn, is also strongly influenced by various historical and current forms of injustice, inequality and relations of power, violence, and domination. Consequently, the researchers suggest placing climate justice, a demand primarily introduced to politics by social movements, at the center of theoretical and practical efforts (cf. Engels et al. 2023). In the context of International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies and related fields, however, the planetary cri-

sis is increasingly framed as a security risk, e. g. with regard to *land grabbing* or potential conflicts and wars over resources. Current approaches address this through the concept of *environmental violence*, thereby reproducing the illusion of separability between the categories of human and nature (cf. Marcantonio/Lederach/Fuentes 2024).

An increasing securitization of the discourses on the planetary crisis

Environmental problems in general have been increasingly addressed as peace-relevant issues at an international level since the end of the Cold War (cf. Ide 2020). In addition, the classification of the climate crisis as a security risk by entities like the United Nations Security Council is gaining attention, although there is no direct or necessary connection between climate change and conflicts (cf. McDonald 2018). The increasing securitization of the discourses on the planetary crisis, however, potentially leads to depoliticization while the rights of future generations of human and more-than-human beings on and with the planet receive little to no attention (cf. McDonald 2018, 174). Hence, the focus mainly lies on aspects that can be understood as symptoms of supremacist anthropocentric societal relationships with nature and related structures of power, violence, and domination (cf. Krohn 2023).

Placing climate justice at the center of efforts, as suggested by Engels et al. (2023), brings to the forefront discourses on the unequal impacts of the planetary crisis on Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA). Debates about the reasons for these unequal impacts often focus on European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, and their historical and current impact on understanding and tackling the planetary crisis at various levels. There is, however, no monocausal explanation for the triple planetary crisis. The fact that European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, as both historical and ongoing phenomena, nevertheless exacerbate the impacts of the climate crisis, has been recognized in the sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) after more than three decades (cf. IPCC 2022).

European colonialism also plays a role in the context of scientific debates about the *Anthropocene*. The term *Anthropocene* was proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000) to designate a new geological epoch following the Holocene (the post-glacial geological epoch of the last 10,000–12,000 years), in which human activities have become one of the

largest (geological) influencing factors on Earth. Although the International Commission on Stratigraphy Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy rejected the proposal for an Anthropocene Epoch fourteen years after the term was popularized by Crutzen and Stoermer, the concept has long since taken on a life of its own and has been taken up by various disciplines (cf. Witze 2024).

Obscuring underlying relations of power, violence, and domination

The concept of the *Anthropocene* and its uncritical use across numerous disciplines and discourses, however, are being criticized by People of Color, Indigenous, and Black scholars because the term obscures underlying influential relations of power, violence, and domination. This, in turn, distracts from the impacts of colonialism, capitalism, and the patriarchy in the context of the planetary crisis by following a universalizing and essentializing logic that indiscriminately refers to *anthropos*—and thus to human beings—as a homogeneous group acting as a geological force. However, as the discussion around the concept Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA) indicates, those who have contributed the least to the current state of the planet are disproportionately affected by its consequences. Proposals for alternative terms or concepts to the Anthropocene include, as described by Donna Haraway (2015), the *Plantationocene*, *Capitalocene*, the *Cthulucene*, or the *White Supremacy Scene* (cf. Mirzoeff 2018). The methodological and discursive homogenization and essentialization of the *anthropos* through the concept of the *Anthropocene* can be understood as a form of epistemic violence (cf. Brunner 2020; Spivak 1988) which renders invisible a multitude of other experiences, knowledge systems, and worldviews.

Kathryn Yusoff (2018) criticizes the political *White Geology of the Anthropocene* as a selective perspective because environmental issues are being addressed only now that they affect white people while marginalized communities, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have been suffering from the massive environmental impacts of so-called modernization, progress, and capitalism for centuries. Malcom Ferdinand (2022, 8) notes: “With the concept of the Anthropocene, Crutzen and others promote a narrative about the Earth that erases colonial history.” This erasure of colonial history involves a “denial of coevalness” (Fabian 2014, 173), which is based on a linear understanding of time that rele-

gates colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade—and thus the people affected by these processes, their experiences, knowledge, and ways of living and being—to the past. Thus, debates about the Anthropocene are often depoliticized because they disregard the continuities of alleged past events. Not dealing with this past makes the ongoing impact of past events on various communities invisible, which, according to Vázquez, is a form of depoliticization:

“Modern systems of domination are not just about material exploitation; they are also about a politics of time that produces the other by rendering it invisible, relegating the other to oblivion. There is an intimate connection between oblivion and invisibility. The destruction of memory, as a result of the modern politics of time produces invisibility. In turn, invisibility is tantamount to de-politicization.” (Vázquez 2009, 2.2)

Rebecca Abena Kennedy-Asante from the *Black Earth Collective* summarized this in a speech held at a *Fridays for Future* climate strike in Germany in 2019:

“For us, this event is called Fridays for Past, Present, and Future because the Global North is stealing our past, our present, and our future from us and our families.” (Dziedzic/Kennedy-Asante 2019; transl. J. K.)

Here, the ambivalence of the *Anthropocene* concept and the different implications associated with the definition of its beginning become particularly apparent.

Simon Dalby (2013, 564) argues that locating the beginning of the *Anthropocene* in the post-World War II era and the subsequent nuclear militarism is most appropriate for debates on international environmental security and peace. However, the securitization of the discourses on the planetary crisis perpetuates moral anthropocentrism and obscures other interconnected issues. Setting the beginning of the *Anthropocene* at the Second World War overlooks the constitutive role of European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade in shaping the supremacist societal relationships with nature of colonial modernity. The so-called “Orbis Spike” as proposed by Lewis and Maslin (2015, 175)—dating the beginning of the *Anthropocene* to 1610, linking it to European colonialism and its impacts—on the other hand, offers the possibility to analyze the interdependencies between European colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the planetary crisis. This opens up the potential for address-

ing, analyzing and problematizing supremacist anthropocentric paradigms through highlighting

“the severing of relations through the brutality of colonialism coupled with an imperial, universal logic. Through this, we might then begin to address not only the immediate problems associated with massive reliance upon fossil fuel and the nuclear industry, but the deeper questions of the need to acknowledge our embedded and embodied relations with our other-than-human kin and the land itself.” (Davis/Todd 2017, 776)

Processes of homogenization and hierarchization

These diverse relationships with land and other more-than-human beings were destroyed, suppressed, or significantly altered by European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, as well as the ongoing colonial continuities. As Ferdinand (2022, 3–20) argues, European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade led to processes of homogenization, hierarchization and valorization of all living entity. These processes solidified and created not only separations and hierarchies between nature and culture, humans and the environment, but also among humans through processes of racialization, as well as among animals by differentiating between wild and domesticated animals. Furthermore, these processes were accompanied by dynamics of othering, creating an illusion of separability and non-interdependence. As a result, Ferdinand argues, the colonial history of the world was separated from its environmental history, leading to the aforementioned separation between ecological and social issues.

Héctor Alimonda (2019) uses the term *coloniality of nature* to describe the societal relationships with nature altered by colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the ongoing coloniality. He defines two levels on which the coloniality of nature manifests itself and is rooted in: firstly, the level of biophysical reality, which becomes evident, for example, in altered ecosystems resulting from the exchange of plant and animal species during colonization, particularly in Abya Yala through the so-called *Columbian Exchange*. Secondly, the level of sociocultural dynamics which influence human relationships with nature. The appropriation and exploitation of nature and its legitimizing reinterpretation as a resource through the mechanisms of colonialism are considered fundamental to the colonial project and the genesis of European modernity (cf. Ali-

monda 2019; Coronil 2000). The coloniality of nature describes the onto-epistemic structuring of dominant societal relationships with nature in colonial modernity, in which the value of nature as inanimate matter without agency depends solely on its utility for a certain group of human beings. In this “settler-colonial ontology of land” (Reibold 2022, 1), more-than-human beings and entities constitute individual private property, primarily serving their (*white*) owners through intensive, industrialized management and commodification based on a monocultural paradigm. It also ties the management and commodification to (imperial) modes of living and capitalist modes of production within the frame of nation-states. They are thereby rendered irrelevant for peace unless their private property is contested or damage to this property occurs, causing adverse effects for human beings.

Broadening the scope of peace-related efforts

Métis scholar Zoe Todd and Heather Davis (cf. Davis/Todd 2017, 763) nevertheless advocate for a decolonization of the *Anthropocene* concept as well as an inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing. Despite their criticism, they argue that the concept at least provides a new framework to address the horrors of the planetary crisis and to revive our severed relationships with the earth. In the context of peace, the *Anthropocene* then can serve as a concept that brings to the forefront questions of its supremacist anthropocentric underpinnings. It can broaden the scope of peace-related debates and efforts, directing them away from methodological nationalism and securitization towards relationality and planetary thinking. Critically engaging with the *Anthropocene* also opens up possibilities of addressing modern/colonial societal relationships with nature and imperial modes of living and their manifestations in thinking and doing peace (cf. Lakitsch 2023). Following Davis and Todds (2017) suggestions also (re)directs the theoretical and practical focus to decolonial, Indigenous and feminist perspectives, which highlight the vital role of relationality and care in these contexts.

4 Relational Peace and Practices of Care

Thinking about relationality and care in the context of peace is neither new nor something entirely marginal. Yet, these perspectives, often

rooted in Indigenous, feminist and decolonial knowledge, have long been silenced and marginalized. Tiokasin Ghosthorse, an Indigenous rights activist and host of the *First Voices Indigenous Radio*³ suggests that “we have to stop with the idea of creating peace on earth and begin with creating peace with Mother Earth.” Some decades earlier, at the outbreak of World War II, Elin Wägner and Elisabeth Tamm—Swedish suffragettes and peace activists—wrote a pamphlet titled *Peace with the Earth* (Wägner/Tamm 2021). Although these words and this article were said and written in different contexts, one being the settler-colonial context of modern-day America, the other being Europe between two World Wars, they both reflect longstanding traditions of thought on relational societal relations with nature and their relevance for societies, politics and peace. They are calling for a paradigm shift toward relationality, care, and the recognition of the more-than-human world.

Engaging with these debates might seem like merely a philosophical exercise. Yet these issues, which also led to what Alfonso Múnera (2005, 108) has named “hierarchical geographies of race”, pointing at connections between climate, territory, and racialized groups, still have very real effects. In *Fish, Kin and Hope*, Zoe Todd describes the impact supremacist anthropocentrism has on indigenous worlds and ways of living. In this text, Todd offers an understanding of fossil fuels that is radically different from dominant societal relationships with nature and underlines its central relevance for peace by showing how extracting fossil fuels not only perpetuates violence against kin, it also leads to a process of weaponization:

“The fossil fuels which animate the political economy of my home province are a paradoxical kind of kin—the bones of dinosaurs and the traces of flora and fauna from millions of years ago which surface in rocks and loamy earth in Alberta act as teachers for us, reminding us of the life that once teemed here when the place that we know as Alberta was home to myriad species who made life, made worlds, within lands and waters I now know as pehonan. But, the insatiable desire to liberate these long-gone beings from their resting place, to turn the massive stores of carbon and hydrogen left from eons of life in this place, weaponises these fossil-kin, these long-dead beings, and transforms them into threats to our very existence as humans in prairie metropolises like my home town.” (Todd 2017, 104)

These effects can also be traced and analyzed in various discourses and practices in international relations and politics, in peace and conflict

³ <https://firstvoicesindigenousradio.org> [20.02.2023].

studies and related work. One of them being racism tied with colonial imaginaries of nature in a speech held by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell at the European Diplomatic Academy in 2022. In his speech, Borrell used the metaphors of garden and jungle to distinguish Europe from the rest of the world. Europe, “the garden”, is in danger because “the jungle could invade the garden”. As a solution, Europeans must actively engage with the rest of world, otherwise it “will invade us, by different ways and means” (EEAS Press Team 2022). In his apology following a public international outcry, Borrell insisted that the use of this metaphor “has no racist, cultural or geographical connotation” (Borrell 2022). However, the speech reveals how

“a particular way of separating humans from nature (the nature-culture divide); and the distinction and boundary policing between ‘us’ (civilized, modern, developed) and ‘them’ (uncivilized, underdeveloped), those who practice other ways of worlding (the colonial divide)” (Escobar 2020, 75)

is still prevalent and influential in international politics—be it intentional or not.

Political implications of attempts to move beyond supremacist anthropocentric paradigms

Attempts to move beyond supremacist anthropocentric paradigms underlying not only dominant societal relationships with nature but also understandings of peace, therefore, has significant theoretical, but also political implications. It affects the design and implementation of peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts or the development of policies by questioning common actor concepts and by expanding them to include more-than-human beings. In the field of international law, ongoing efforts strive for regulations that make it possible to recognize ecocide, the damage or destruction of ecosystems, as a criminal offense before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Similarly, various initiatives concerned with the rights of nature argue for ecosystems such as rivers to be declared legal subjects with inherent value independent of human interests, which was already successful in countries such as Colombia, India, or Canada (cf. Putzer et al. 2022). However, such initiatives also run the risk of addressing only the symptoms of the underly-

ing disruption of relationships with land and (other) more-than-human beings and of reproducing colonial continuities by excluding Indigenous perspectives and rights (cf. Krenak 2022; Tănăsescu 2020). They, therefore, require careful, power-critical approaches that center ownership, reflexivity, and accountability.

Addressing the implications of supremacist anthropocentric paradigms through Indigenous, decolonial and feminist perspectives opens up different forms of thinking, speaking and approaching the triple planetary crisis in the context of peace. Questioning and transforming these paradigms might seem unfeasible, yet it remains urgent and possible since

“the argument here is not that colonial expropriation has exhausted the creative capacity of lands and bodies but only their present and future capacity to produce and reproduce (as dead labor) surplus, that which is the soul and blood of capital” (Silva 2014, 95).

Hence, “the end of the world as we know it” (Silva 2014, 84) denotes the necessary end of imperial modes of living, of capitalist production, and of thinking, feeling and doing peace while remaining entangled in a supremacist anthropocentric paradigm. On the other hand, aiming for pluriversality (cf. Kothari et al. 2019) and thereby a diversity of understandings of peace, of ontologies can contribute to transforming societal relationships with nature and to (re)establish relations with more-than-human beings, regarding them not as inanimate matter but as agential beings with their own rights, perhaps even as kin:

“With the awareness that one’s breath is shared by all surrounding life, that one’s emergence into this world was possibly caused by some of the life-forms around one’s environment, and that one is responsible for its mutual survival, it becomes apparent that it is related to you; that it shares a kinship with you and with all humans, as does a family or tribe. A reciprocal relationship has been fostered with the realization that humans affect nature and nature affects humans. This awareness influences indigenous interactions with the environment. It is these interactions, these cultural practices of living with a place, that are manifestations of kincentric ecology.” (Salmón 2000, 1331–1332)

Thinking-feeling with the Earth and about peace based on notions of kinship and relationality inevitably centers ethics of care (cf. Tynan 2021, Escobar 2016). It widens understandings of peace to encompass relationality and care as “everything that we do to maintain, continue and

repair ‘*our world*’ so that *we* can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto 1993, 103, emphasis in original). The *we* here is a more-than-human *we*, it refers to a society that is co-created and maintained through human and more-than-human agency (cf. Watts 2013). Reconceptualizing peace through relationality with the more-than-human—rather than through its domination—therefore, offers the potential to (re)design peace policies and programs in a way that serves all beings on this planet.

5 The Ambivalent Politics of Care and Relationality: Toward a Reflexive Framework

While the turn to relationality and care offers important pathways for rethinking dominant paradigms in Peace and Conflict Studies and practice, these approaches require critical scrutiny. Taking relationality and care seriously in the context of peace also requires moving away from pain-based, essentializing research in which the “subaltern can speak, but is only invited to speak her/our pain” (Tuck/Yang 2014, 813). Yet, in Western academia in general, and in peace and conflict research in particular, “the archive on pain just grows and grows” (Tuck/Yang 2014, 813). At the same time violence continues to appear to be “someplace else, something else, and perpetuated by someone else” (Brunner 2016, 94). This obscures the violence inherent to dominant understandings of peace and supremacist anthropocentrism. It also obscures the failings and violence inherent to many peacebuilding efforts and thereby points at the importance of approaches that are critical of structures and dynamics of power, violence and domination and aim at their transformation.

Failings and violence inherent to dominant understandings of peace

Ahenakew (2016, 337) cautions with regard to Indigenous theories that there are considerable “paradoxes and limitations of translating insights between Indigenous and non-Indigenous spaces.” There is no universal model that can be “grafted” from Indigenous knowledge systems and transferred to dominant Western epistemologies (Ahenakew 2016). Such processes risk instrumentalizing Indigenous or other marginalized knowledge systems in ways that strip them of their contextual integrity, political significance and ontological grounding—thereby reproducing

epistemic violence. It also risks a continuation of exclusions through academic gatekeeping and paternalizing peace research and conflict transformation approaches. Centering relationality and care in a depoliticized manner might lead to a reinforcement of existing inequalities. Such a paradigm shift, therefore, also requires structural transformation of organizations and institutions.

Similarly, concepts of care are not inherently progressive or emancipatory. As Peterie and Broom (2023, 53) analyze with regard to informal care work, care “is at once reified as an inherent social good, and minimised, devalued, and pushed to the margins.” Without critical engagement with the political and economic structures in which they operate, concepts and models of care risk becoming complicit in reproducing social inequalities. Both relationality and care, when abstracted from questions of power, risk obscuring underlying power asymmetries and legitimating forms of paternalism, coercion, or structural violence—particularly in peacebuilding contexts. Consequently, efforts to move beyond the supremacist anthropocentric paradigm and to reconceptualize peace and conflict theories and peacebuilding approaches must critically engage with structures of power, domination and violence that shape knowledge, relationships, institutions, and politics.

Reconceptualizing peace through relationality

Nonetheless, when embedded within a reflexive analytical framework and implemented through practices based on accountability, reconceptualizing peace through relationality is a promising alternative to extractive and supremacist anthropocentric theories and practices. In the context of escalating ecological and geopolitical crises, such a paradigm shift has the potential to advance peace and conflict theory and practice in ways that are onto-epistemologically pluriversal, ecologically sustainable and socially just. As such, they represent a significant and timely contribution to the advancement of critical peace research and practice that is attentive to both structural and epistemic dimensions of violence and transformation.

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