

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

On making peace with nature: Visions and challenges towards an ecological diplomacy

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(Received 15 May 2023; revised 10 January 2024; accepted 12 January 2024)

Abstract

This article interrogates United Nations (UN) calls that ‘making peace with nature’ should become the crucial mission of the 21st century. It ponders the kind of diplomacy envisioned for such a reconciliation ecology to be credible. Drawing on one of the most promising and less known programmes of the UN system – namely, Harmony with Nature (HwN), which pioneers Earth-based jurisprudence and rights of nature – it conceptualises this diplomatic shift and assesses the conditions under which ecological diplomacy can be productively operationalised in the 21st century vis-à-vis a mere rhetorical appropriation and co-optation by intergovernmental agendas. Building on Indigenous thought and animist epistemologies, programmes such as HwN espouse a new relationship with Planet Earth and make it possible to explore ‘nature’ as diplomatic interlocutor. We argue that existing paradigms of peacebuilding fail to sufficiently capture the diplomatic aspects and complex local dynamics of the human–nature relationship and suggest a reconceptualisation based on an ecological diplomacy that is both expansive and transformative and views this relationship as one of troubled coexistence.

Keywords: diplomatic theory; Harmony with Nature; political ecology; UN diplomacy

Must we blame the diplomats – that is denounce the illusions of diplomacy? We would first have to agree on what we mean when we say ‘diplomacy’... The idea that diplomats today could help us articulate what divides us should not be abandoned. But it needs to be resituated in a new environment.

Isabelle Stengers, ‘We are divided’¹

Introduction

In his State of the Planet speech in 2020, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres denounced humanity’s ‘waging war on nature’ and declared that ‘making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century’.² He repeated this on International Mother Earth Day in 2023, arguing that ‘we must end these relentless and senseless wars on nature’.³ A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, based on global assessments and offering a scientific blueprint to

¹ Isabelle Stengers, ‘We are divided’, *E-flux Journal*, 114 (2020), pp. 1–2, available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/114/366189/we-are-divided/>.

² António Guterres, ‘The State of the Planet’, delivered at Columbia University, 2 December 2020, available at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-12-02/address-columbia-university-the-state-of-the-planet/>.

³ António Guterres, ‘Mother Earth Day 2023’, video message, 22 April 2023, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14OMv-FgQ9o>.

tackle environmental emergencies, also defined the task at hand as ‘making peace with nature’. Accompanied by an explanatory video, UNEP visualised this ‘senseless and suicidal war on nature’ and in similar fashion urged that ‘it’s time to make peace with nature’.⁴

War images and pleas for peace are meant to dramatise and mobilise people about the planetary devastation that continues unabated before us. Still, the choice of language yields insights as to the admission of responsibility, the perceived nature of the problem, the challenges ahead, and the radical change of vision required to tackle the environmental crisis. As we suggest below, it represents a significant shift in *ontology* not only within the UN system but also beyond. Note how a similar and stronger metaphor – ecocide – has already morphed into a concept, legally broached and currently being utilised by organisations and independent experts with recommendations that this crime should be institutionalised and prosecutable before the International Criminal Court.⁵ It is indicative that the times are a-changing. Tarrying with war-on-nature is therefore heuristic. Unlike other wars with abstract enmity that sought to legitimate the use of force (e.g. the war on terror), it declaims humanity’s violence and is meant to be restorative and redemptive. And, to that extent, it should be a welcome admission but also critically scrutinised as to its commitment to ecological peace.

By taking seriously the call and interrogating UN efforts towards peacemaking with nature, this article recognises, on the one hand, that such efforts, if successful, will have a positive and transformative effect on the planet. On the other hand, it recognises that states and humanity at large cannot agree on how best to deal with the problem, contest who has (primary) responsibility, and rhetorically utilise discourses on ecological reconciliation. Ecological peace is a rather broad and ambiguous goal. Even if this peace is possible, who is the ‘we’ in making peace *with* nature and which (problematic) presuppositions are embedded in this subject-positioning? These tensions are already present within the UN system, which paradoxically both institutionalises and marginalises this shift in ontology – i.e. the ontological shift that recognises ‘nature’ as an object of human violence and injustice and as a subject that has ‘rights of nature’ that should be protected. Such ambivalence within the UN system is most notably represented in the Harmony with Nature (HwN) programme – a pioneering programme challenging the dualist separation of humanity from nature and promoting Earth-based jurisprudence and Rights of Nature (RoN). HwN is officially supported by multilateral diplomacy at different levels, i.e. by member states through General Assembly deliberations and resolutions, the preparation and circulation of UN Secretariat reports, and non-state stakeholders participating in periodic meetings and digital platforms. While we recognise and elaborate on the dangers of appropriation and co-optation – shallow reconciliation or rhetorical peace – we nonetheless argue that HwN and RoN remain highly promising pathways and indeed emblematic of the future and broader transformation of diplomacy.

The environmental crisis is a major challenge for both theoretical and practical politics, and so we focus in this article on how diplomacy should be changing to deal with this conundrum. We define diplomacy broadly as the understanding and mediation of difference and management of self–other relationships. Diplomacy operates in the name of distinct yet ambiguous entities that have specific interests and objectives but still share commonalities and pursue common goals.⁶

⁴UNEP, ‘Making peace with nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies’ (2021), available at: {<https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34948/MPN.pdf>} and {<https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>}.

⁵Legal definition of ecocide, available at: {<https://www.stopecocide.earth/legal-definition>} and Tim Lindgren, ‘Ecocide, genocide and the disregard of alternative life-systems’, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 22:4 (2018), pp. 525–49. Beyond the United Nations, see the use of the notion ‘peace with nature’ in relation to the Korean Demilitarized Zone: Eleana Kim, *Making Peace with Nature: Ecological Encounters along the Korean DMZ* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

⁶We draw this definition most notably from the works of James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Costas M. Constantinou, *On the Way to Diplomacy* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996); and Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

We know that diplomacy needs to work persistently and creatively in prolonged (human) conflicts to change entrenched positions and transform strong mindsets that perpetuate conflict. Such work typically entails deep understanding of rival as well as common interests, addressing insecurity complexes, and redressing the causes and effects of violent conflict, all of which require mediation skills in bridging positions and ultimately accrediting and assembling interlocutors and representatives with whom to agree over what kind of peace is just, desirable, or possible.

From this perspective, cultivating a new diplomatic disposition attuned to the ecological and planetary imperative follows on from the recognition that we have failed in our conventional environmental diplomacies and so are in urgent need of recalibrating diplomacy and how it is practised.⁷ A new ontology may have been recognised at certain spaces of the UN and beyond, but the old diplomatic mindset and quarrelling among diverse stakeholders persist as to the way forward. Peace will not break out any time soon. We thus elaborate on the vision but also articulate the challenges faced in multilateral diplomacy at the UN and beyond. At the very least, a diplomacy for the future – a diplomacy that is resituated and worthy of its ecological salt – would need to strengthen its reflexive legacy and prioritise global commons, interconnectivity, and planetary interest, vis-à-vis its more self-serving, conflictual, or sinister side, i.e. as a mere apologist for power and promoter of national and economic interest. An emergent ecological diplomacy, as informed by an increasing decolonial and pluriversal sensitivity, should evolve into a practice that is less state-centric, less logocentric and less anthropocentric, as we explain below. Aspiring to make peace with nature will inevitably lead to also practising diplomacy across species and in the name of biotic collectives. We are currently only at the beginning of articulating the terms and conditions for achieving this highly visionary and ambitious goal.

To conceptualise this diplomatic transformation, our article builds on insights that have valorised diplomacy in the context of political ecology and planetary cohabitation. Within the Diplomatic Studies literature, works have argued for the need to revise diplomatic culture and embed a new diplomatic ethos by way of addressing problems more holistically, more sustainably, and in ways that support cohabitation.⁸ Beyond the International Relations discipline, the value of diplomacy for addressing the ecological conundrum has been highlighted by philosophers of science and of human–non-human relations, most notably, Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour, and Baptiste Morizot.⁹ In the next 50 years, we suggest that the scholarly task of understanding and explaining more-than-human diplomacies will be on the rise, including the need to enhance such diplomacies for human and non-human communities to address modes of coexistence in different spatial and scalar contexts.

Empirically, our article interrogates existing practices of the UN and sheds light on tensions, oscillations, and discrepancies within its environmental agendas. By zooming in on the

⁷ On the failures of diplomacy as an institution to address the environmental crises of the Anthropocene, see Anthony Burke, Stefanie Fishel, Audra Mitchell, Simon Dalby, and Daniel J. Levine, 'Planet politics: A manifesto from the end of IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44:3 (2016), pp. 499–523.

⁸ Among others, David Wellman, *Sustainable Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian (eds), *Sustainable Diplomacies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Noe Cornago, *Plural Diplomacies: Normative Predicaments and Functional Imperatives* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Iver Neumann, *Diplomatic Tenses: A Social Evolutionary Perspective on Diplomacy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Alisher Faizullaev, *Diplomacy for Professionals and Everyone* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Sam Opondo, *Diplomatic Para-citations: Genre, Foreign Bodies and the Ethics of Co-habitation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

⁹ Most notably, Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2011); Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Baptiste Morizot, *Wild Diplomacy: Cohabiting with Wolves on a New Ontological Map* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2022). See also Iwona Janicka, 'Reinventing the diplomat: Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour and Baptiste Morizot', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 40:3 (2023), pp. 23–40.

currently under-researched HwN programme and the extent of its institutionalisation within the UN system,¹⁰ we identify attempts to push the borders of mainstream multilateral anthropocentric diplomacies at the UN as ontological shifts. When examining these shifts we do not focus on state practice in international law or domestic regulatory approaches to environmental protection, climate mitigation, and resource extraction.¹¹ Nor do we engage the degrowth advocacy, the alternatives to consumerism, and the resistance to green transitions and persistence of capitalism, important as these initiatives and concerns may be, which are examined elsewhere in this special issue.¹² Instead, in outlining ways in which an ecological diplomacy can be productively operationalised, our projections mingle with the anticipations and expectations of how diplomacy is changing, but also the hopes and challenges that come out of initiatives such as HwN.

Diplomacy, multilateralism, and the ecological imperative

Engaging and moving towards an ecological diplomacy entail traversing and transcending three cherished traditions of modern diplomacy: namely, (1) statecentrism, (2) logocentrism, and (3) anthropocentrism. First, in the 21st century, while retaining its interstate character, diplomacy has already been pluralised beyond state practice, and this trend will continue. Consider how the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is underpinned by aspirations of renewed or enhanced multilateralism, encouraging the participation of non-state stakeholders at the consultative stage, but also in decision-making processes through alliances with states, which nonetheless remain the primary subjects of international environmental law. At the same time, second, there are relational critiques that have reframed ecological problems beyond the absolute logic or 'externally' rationalised points of reference. Although the unsettling of logocentrism was initially linked to problematising unreflective linguistic representation and sovereign rational thinking, it has been subsequently embedded in decolonial debates and Indigenous epistemology to encourage a more holistic and interconnected understanding of the world, recognising the pluriverse that inheres in local ontology. In other words, it valorises plural *logoi* and local world-making that recognises the possibility of making/unmaking/remaking other worlds, but also the possibility of belonging concurrently in ethnic, social, and biotic collectives, as we elaborate below.¹³ Third, there is increasing recognition that the ecological imperative necessitates a practice of diplomacy beyond the anthropocentric lens and agency. This shift towards a more ambitious multispecies diplomacy has been flagged in new materialist and more-than-human approaches to diplomacy that are innovative and promising but still in an experimental phase.¹⁴

As we are asked to speculate on the next 50 years in this special issue, we start by pondering the post-mortem of the past 50 years, i.e. since the landmark UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972). We then proceed to look at the Rights of Nature (RoN) debate,

¹⁰There is very little academic literature on HwN itself; the programme is discussed in only a handful of articles and chapters, and these have been published since 2020 by four experts who are part of the HwN Expert Network (Helen Dancer from the United Kingdom, Giada Giacomini from Italy, and Craig Kauffman and Pamela Martin from the United States). We speculate that as the discourse of 'harmony with nature' will become more mainstream, we will also see a surge in the relevant academic literature.

¹¹With regard to the emerging and future challenges of international environmental law, see Michelle Lim (ed.), *Charting Environmental Law Futures in the Anthropocene* (Singapore: Springer, 2019).

¹²See Cemal Burak Tansel and Lisa Tilley, 'Reproducing socio-ecological life from below: Towards a planetary political economy of the global majority', *Review of International Studies*, 50 (2024), pp. 514–33. For a comprehensive critique and action plan, see Gregory Claeys, *Utopianism for a Dying Planet: Life after Consumerism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022). In relation to the oceans, see Irmak Ertör and Maria Hadjimichael, 'Blue degrowth and the politics of the sea: Rethinking the blue economy', *Sustainability Science*, 15 (2020), pp. 1–10.

¹³On this point, see also Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 80–3.

¹⁴See Una Chaudhuri 'Interspecies diplomacy in Anthropocene waters: Performing an ocean-oriented ontology', in *her book The Stage Lives of Animals* (London: Routledge, 2016) pp. 214–227; Tore Fougner, 'Animals and diplomacy: On the prospect for interspecies diplomacy', *International Relations*, 37:3 (2023), pp. 449–74.

which has issued a major challenge to both logocentrism and anthropocentrism and registered a new ecological ontology and re-envisioning of ‘nature’.

A brief history of the future: Stockholm + 50

Multilateral environmental diplomacy was inaugurated at the landmark Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972), where ecological concerns were first flagged as a major global issue and formally registered within the UN system. The Stockholm Conference was pivotal in establishing the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It also kick-started a series of high-level multilateral meetings (Montreal, Rio, Johannesburg, Kyoto, Paris, Kigali, and so on), the signing of international agreements (conventions, protocols, declarations as well as joint statements and non-legally binding principles), in addition to a series of state commitments on safeguarding the environment.

A new Stockholm Conference – ‘Stockholm + 50’ (2022) – took stock of progress in the last half-century, circulating a key scientific report.¹⁵ The Report offered a scathing critique of multilateral diplomacy and identified a high degree of ‘policy incoherence’. While recognising the challenges of multilevel and polycentric governance, it outlined how, for example, important environmental goals and policies have been pursued in parallel to ‘environmentally harmful subsidies’ that supported at the same time fishing industries, pesticides, fossil fuels, and land ‘development’.¹⁶ Thus, what was being negotiated by states in one platform was subsequently undermined by conflicting goals and rival policy pursuits in other platforms within and outside the UN system. Seeking to reach broad consensus in multilateral agreements further undermined the deepening of goals, undercut the implementation of commitments, or promoted goals that sought marginal rather than *transformative* change.¹⁷ The Report also criticised the common practice in multilateral diplomacy of shifting from hard-law to soft-law instruments in order to accommodate conflicting goals, which ended up undermining accountability and commitments.¹⁸ Even where hard-law instruments had been agreed upon, there was an ambiguous or confining scope of implementation or coordination challenges across legal regimes that impeded environmental governance.¹⁹ Notwithstanding these critiques, the broader complicity of international (environmental) law in treating nature as resource was paramount and indeed a reason for moving to Earth-based jurisprudence.²⁰

The Stockholm + 50 Report identified, in addition, the need to move ‘from urgency to agency’, including the recognition of Indigenous local participation and speaking for the Rights of Nature (RoN). It called for a redefining of the currently instrumental and exploitative relationship of humanity towards nature, placing ‘more emphasis on the intrinsic and relational value of nature’, and indeed heeding understandings that view ‘nature itself as an independent entity or “subject”’.²¹ In this regard, the report underscored the problem of ‘weak multilateralism’, ‘the persistence of coloniality in global institutions’ that needs to be redressed so as to ‘foster renewed multilateralism’.²² It suggested that multilateral diplomacy should be more participatory, less elite-driven, fully

¹⁵The meeting took place under the auspices (and a resolution) of the General Assembly, but it was UNEP that was the focal point and UNEP’s Executive Director who acted as Secretary-General of the meeting, appointed by the Secretary-General of the UN. See ‘Organisational and procedural matters’, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/332/15/PDF/N2233215.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁶SEI and CEEW, ‘Stockholm + 50: Unlocking a better future’, Stockholm Environment Institute (2022), pp. 125–8, available at <https://10.51414/sei2022.011>.

¹⁷SEI and CEEW, ‘Stockholm + 50’, p. 128.

¹⁸SEI and CEEW, ‘Stockholm + 50’, pp. 136–41.

¹⁹Tim Stephens, ‘Global ocean governance in the Anthropocene: From extractive imaginaries to planetary boundaries?’, *Global Policy*, 13 (2022), pp. 76–85.

²⁰See Usha Natarajan and Kishan Khoday, ‘Locating nature: Making and unmaking international law’, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 27:3 (2014), pp. 573–93; Anthony Burke, ‘Blue screen biosphere: The absent presence of biodiversity in international law’, *International Political Sociology*, 13:3 (2019), pp. 333–51.

²¹SEI and CEEW, ‘Stockholm + 50’, pp. 13 and 84.

²²SEI and CEEW, ‘Stockholm + 50’, pp. 129–30.

embracing the input of Indigenous people and genuinely involving citizens in building trust and bottom-up engagement with global institutions.

No doubt, in the last 50 years there has been a proliferation of international forums where the representation of subnational and transnational actors saw a meteoric increase, encouraging the participation of delegations from minority communities, women's organisations, Indigenous peoples, peasant movements, and other marginalised groups. In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, the UN Secretary-General's Report on 'Our common agenda' seeks to boost partnerships with regional organisations, subnational authorities, development banks, and civil society, as well as enhancing the work of the UN Office for Partnerships.²³ Nonetheless, this recognition has often remained symbolic and has not always been translated into meaningful participation, not to mention parallel processes of exclusion and bullying tactics.²⁴ Deepening ecological diplomacy should thus seek to involve a plural representation of humanity. And by so doing, it should acknowledge and learn from the histories of violence as well as the peacebuilding potential of different human communities from different geopolitical spaces, not least peasant communities and Indigenous peoples who have a special connection to the land.

Certainly, knowledge and power asymmetries that constitute the 'pecking order' of multilateral diplomacy are difficult to challenge.²⁵ While multilateral institutions have been successful in stabilising the effects of political crises and geopolitical shifts,²⁶ they seem less capable of bringing about the transformative change needed to seriously address ecological degradation. A possible solution is seen in 'de minimis multilateralism', focused on purpose-built cooperation around chronic risks.²⁷ This would still need, however, forms of multilateralism that extend global solidarity. The diplomatic system of the 21st century is emerging as a combination of bilateralism, multilateralism, and polyilateralism – the latter flagging the proliferation of state–non-state relations.²⁸

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is a case in point. Being the principal platform for following up and reviewing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, HLPF meets annually at a ministerial level under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and every four years at head-of-state level under the auspices of the General Assembly (GA). While retaining the intergovernmental character of the deliberations, it is also open to major groups and other stakeholders (NGOs, non-profit organisations, local authorities, etc). It is supposed to address the issue of enhanced multilateral diplomacy and speak to the commitment that 'no one will be left behind' in the 2030 Agenda. But it has failed in this regard, criticised for precisely leaving groups behind in the legislative process, for a daunting mandate, weak resources, and the varying quality of the Voluntary National Reviews with few actionable mechanisms.²⁹

Furthermore, while there is both talk and evidence of polyilateralism within the diplomatic practices of the UN,³⁰ in the instances where 'nature' is acknowledged, a discourse of 'care' or 'harmony' with it is invoked that often goes back to the human – an *instrumentalisation* of nature to

²³'Our common agenda', available at: <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>.

²⁴Fiona McConnell, 'Tracing modes of politics at the United Nations: Spatial scripting, intimidation and subversion at the Forum on Minority Issues', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38:6 (2020), pp. 1017–35.

²⁵Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁶John Gerard Ruggie, 'Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution', *International Organization*, 46:3 (1992), pp. 561–98.

²⁷SEI and CEEW, 'Stockholm + 50', pp. 131–2.

²⁸Stuart Murray, Paul Sharp, Geoffrey Wiseman, David Crikemans, and Jan Melissen, 'The present and future of diplomacy and diplomatic studies', *International Studies Review*, 13.4 (2011), pp. 709–28 (p. 712). The term polyilateral was coined by Geoff Wiseman: 'Polyilateralism' and New Modes of Global Dialogue' (1999), Discussion Paper, Centre for the Study of Diplomacy.

²⁹Kenneth W. Abbott and Steven Bernstein, 'The high-level political forum on sustainable development: Orchestration by default and design', *Global Policy*, 6:3 (2015), pp. 222–33; Elisabeth Hege, Lucien Chabason, and Damien Barchiche, 'Review of the high-level political forum: Towards a pivotal institution coordinating the Decade of Action and Delivery', *IDDDI Policy Brief*, N°02/20 (2020), pp. 1–4.

³⁰Geoffrey Wiseman, 'Diplomatic practices at the United Nations', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50:3 (2015), pp. 316–33.

ensure the prosperity of humanity. Even the more ‘radical’ reports utilised by the UN invoke a discourse of protecting ‘Earth *so that* it may sustain us.’³¹ Thus, besides the intense ecological rhetoric, the *modus operandi* of most UN forums is far from a paradigm shift in their treatment of ‘nature’. They remain largely intergovernmental and traditionally anthropocentric forums of diplomacy.

A striking exception is HwN, a UN programme that ironically does not even make it into the chart of the UN system, yet which started operating before the HLPF, in 2009.³² It is arguably the most promising UN programme with regards to a commitment to ecological reconciliation. Before discussing the programme, we offer some preliminaries regarding Rights of Nature (RoN) that have underpinned HwN and the alternative world-making and ontology they envision.

Rights of Nature as an ambivalent ontology

Notwithstanding the Secretary-General’s dramatic call, the UN appears to be riddled with a cognitive and affective form of dissonance regarding its relationship to nature and how best to ‘make peace’ with nature. The dissonance is present both horizontally – across the various entities, agencies, funds, and programmes of the UN – and vertically, within these bodies themselves. For instance, different degrees of emphasis are given to re-envisioning and redefining the human–nature relationship, to the authority and agency of Indigenous people, to the emotional and spiritual relationship one ought to have with nature, etc.

The RoN, for instance, seem to be a contentious issue, so provocative that it is either very prominent in or entirely absent from core UN documents. The Stockholm + 50 Report, mentioned above, contains 30 references to the ‘rights of nature’ compared to UNEP’s Strategy for 2022–5 that contains 35 references to rights, all of which exclusively refer to *human* rights.³³ In addition, the ‘Environmental rights and governance’ section on UNEP’s official webpage has a strong human-centred approach, with no reference at all to possible RoN.³⁴ Similarly, UNEP together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are placing a lot of emphasis on the recently established human right to a ‘clean, healthy and sustainable environment’, hailing it as a ‘landmark achievement’ and acknowledging the interdependent and indivisible nature of human rights.³⁵ Yet whether nature could or should have rights is bypassed. In their collective 2023 publication, barring a quote from a speech made by the UNDP Administrator (not present in the main text), RoN are again evidently absent.³⁶

Although these observations may seem, at first, minor details, they are in fact part of the aforementioned discord between *anthropocentric* approaches and those which strive to strengthen *human–nature* connectedness in a more profound way, reflecting a transformative change or paradigm shift. There seems to be an oscillation within the UN between voices calling for a ‘social contract’ and those calling for an ‘eco-social contract’. To provide yet another example, on the one hand, the Report of the Secretary-General on ‘Our common agenda’, preparing the 2024 Summit

³¹SEI and CEEW, ‘Stockholm + 50’, p. 2, emphasis added.

³²The first resolution on HwN was adopted in 2009 (A/RES/64/196) and the First Interactive Dialogue of the GA on HwN was held in 2011.

³³UNEP, ‘For people and planet: The United Nations Environment Programme strategy for tackling climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste from 2022–2025’ (2023), available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/35875/K2100501-e.pdf>.

³⁴UNEP, ‘About environmental rights and governance’ (2023), available at: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-governance/about-environmental-rights-and-governance>, p. 3.

³⁵This right was recognised by the General Assembly in July 2022 following UN Human Rights Council resolution 48/13, which acknowledged the right in October 2021. OHCHR, UNEP, and UNDP, ‘What is the right to a healthy environment: Information note’, (2023), available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/41599/WRHE.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³⁶The quote reads: ‘Most recently, the General Assembly recognized that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is indeed a universal human right. The entire UN family and key partners like the International Union for Conservation of Nature are now working with countries and communities to help them fully leverage legislation to respect, protect and promote the rights of nature in tandem with human rights.’ OHCHR, UNEP, and UNDP, ‘Right to a healthy environment’, p. 8.

of the Future and planning the next 25 Years, underscores the need to deepen global solidarity yet only highlights the need for ‘a renewed social contract anchored in human rights.’³⁷ On the other hand, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), which has also criticised the inadequacies of the old social contract, has strongly promoted the drafting of a new ‘eco-social contract’: going beyond human rights, it includes a contract with nature so as to ‘protect essential ecological processes, life support systems and the diversity of life forms, and pursue harmony with nature.’³⁸

UNRISD’s promotion of an ‘eco-social contract’ is actually more in sync with how political theorising is shifting beyond anthropocentric dignity and individualistic rights over nature so as to address multispecies justice, interspecies cosmopolitanism, and the rights of earth beings.³⁹ The dominant discourse in international frameworks on environmental governance, however, remains an anthropocentric one, where nature is treated as ‘a service provider’, using an economics-oriented language that ‘recognises the productive value of the environment to humans’, as is, for instance, the discourse underpinning the agendas of the UN Forum on Forests.⁴⁰ The ‘Nature as subject’ discourse, which is one that recognises Nature as a Subject (in capitals) and/or Rights of Nature or Mother Earth, is still very much an emerging one, first adopted in national legal frameworks, notably the Constitution of Ecuador (2008) and the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia (2010), and later in the UN’s HwN.

Why ultimately do RoN seem to be so controversial, wholeheartedly adopted by some and resisted by others? RoN are provocative because they challenge hegemonic ideational and material power structures: first, long-held modernist and masculinist ontologies of nature,⁴¹ and second (as a consequence), major power structures of capitalist extraction, wealth, and trade that the state-centric system and international law entrenched.⁴² Inherently, RoN challenge state-centrism, logocentrism, and anthropocentrism and seek to replace them with polyateralism and relational and multispecies justice approaches. RoN open up debates and shed light on the processes and structures of power and domination embedded in modernist understandings of nature. As Val Plumwood has argued, the Western treatment of ‘human identity as “outside” nature’ and as superior to it is at odds with the cultures of non-Western, non-white others. Ultimately, this dualism treats nature:

as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the ‘environment’ or invisible background conditions against which the ‘foreground’ achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place ... as a terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes.⁴³

³⁷ UN Secretary-General, ‘Our common agenda’ (2021), available at: https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf; see chapter II, pp. 22–34.

³⁸ UNRISD, ‘A new eco-social contract: Vital to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (March 2021), available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/UNRISD%20-%20A%20New%20Eco-Social%20Contract.pdf>.

³⁹ See Danielle Celermajer, David Schlosberg, Dinesh Wadiwel, and Christine Winter, ‘A political theory for a multispecies, climate-challenged world: 2050’, *Political Theory*, 51:1 (2023), pp. 39–53. With regard to the rearticulation of cosmopolitanism, Anthony Burke, ‘Interspecies cosmopolitanism: Non-human power and the grounds of world order in the Anthropocene’, *Review of International Studies*, 49:2 (2023), pp. 201–22.

⁴⁰ Helen Dancer, ‘Harmony with nature: Towards a new deep legal pluralism’, *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 53:1 (2021), pp. 21–41 (p. 2).

⁴¹ See Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁴² See Ileana Porras, ‘Appropriating nature: Commerce, property and the commodification of nature in the law of nations’, in Usha Natarajan, and Julia Dehm (eds), *Locating Nature: Making and Unmaking International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 111–33.

⁴³ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 2, p. 4.

The ensuing RoN debate then raises questions of diplomatic recognition and subjectivity. It also speaks to whether the UN embraces, or is willing to embrace, not just inclusive, Indigenous, and interdisciplinary sources of expertise but diplomatic processes that have hitherto been unthinkable and outside the conventional, formal diplomatic structures, which include biotic communities and plural modes of being.⁴⁴

The recognition of interlocutors for nature remains immensely challenging. Figuring out who speaks for nature is a challenge complicated, not least, by contestations over who speaks for humanity. Both 'nature' and 'humanity' encompass a multiplicity of subjects and communities, and so accrediting who speaks for whom is not an easy brief. At the same time, drawing a sharp distinction between 'humanity' and 'nature' has been complicit with the lack of solidarity and sensitivity towards nature, hierarchical positioning, and projection of human mastery. It also, mistakenly assumes a unified 'humanity', when in fact there is prevailing disunity. Such controversies will not disappear soon and clearly complicate the accreditation of interlocutors.

These debates, as we argue below, raise anew the question of *diplomatic subjectivity*: on the one hand, which entities and forms of life 'within nature' are recognised as worthy of engaging with and, on the other hand, who can have a legitimate claim to represent them. If indeed we are moving towards recognising not just the value of biodiversity but 'wildlife self-determination', how are we then to engage such 'animal nations', and how far do we need both scientific and Indigenous knowledge in doing so?⁴⁵ To what extent, can 'interspecies diplomacy' be a viable proposition, perhaps even an inevitable one?⁴⁶ How can 'peace' be communicated and negotiated across species?

Related to diplomatic subjectivity is the wider issue of whether the UN is merely practicing a multilateralisation of sovereignty, with states being the only key actors, or offering evidence of (strong) polyilateralism. In the next section, we delve deeper into HwN to better illustrate the vision but also the vertical and horizontal dissonance that characterises the new shift in ecological ontology.

UN Harmony with Nature: A vision for the future?

The Harmony with Nature (HwN) programme constitutes an ambitious initiative beyond traditional multilateral diplomacy and spearheads the UN's peacemaking aspirations with nature. It is novel in terms of (a) its alternative ontology, its normative and affective relation to nature which underpins its whole rationale and (b) its unusual mode of operation and participation, which ultimately competes for institutional influence and legal purchase at the UN.

First, HwN is a clear example of a shift towards the Nature-as-Subject discourse, underpinned by a recognition of the symbiotic and interconnected quality of the human–Earth relationship, inspired by non-Western spiritual and philosophical traditions. The HwN programme not only stands apart from and in dissonance with mainstream UN programmes focusing on the SDGs, it is also often critical of the slow progress of the SDGs. It espouses a new relationship with the Earth and higher sensitivity over ecological violence and justice. By fostering animist epistemologies, it promotes an envisioning of nature as interlocutor, granting subjectivity to non-humans, promoting experiential and biophilic knowledge that engages and accommodates other-than-human concerns, thus going beyond the anthropocentric diplomacies of the UN. Therefore, despite the fact that the HwN programme is relatively unknown within the UN system, it can be seen as one of a kind and a clear departure from 'business as usual'. Its ambitious and innovative agenda in terms of strong beliefs in the RoN (and the associated ontological shift) and its dedication to

⁴⁴Morizot, *Wild Diplomacy*; Costas M. Constantinou and Sam Opondo, 'On biodiplomacy: Negotiating life and plural modes of existence', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 17:3 (2021), pp. 316–36.

⁴⁵Jessica Bell Rizzolo and Gay Bradshaw, 'Nonhuman animal nations: Transforming conservation into wildlife self-determination', *Society & Animals*, 29:4 (2019), pp. 393–413.

⁴⁶Chaudhuri, 'Interspecies diplomacy in Anthropocene waters'; Fougner, 'Animals and diplomacy'.

implementing Earth jurisprudence in national and international law in non-anthropocentric and beyond-state-centric ways places it on the progressive edge of the UN's environmental governance.

Secondly, although the Plurinational State of Bolivia under President Morales had a fundamental role in pushing for its creation,⁴⁷ HwN is not an intergovernmental forum, with each of the 193 UN member states being represented, but rather hosts a network of independent experts (currently 345) promoting 'interdisciplinary collaborations to advance a non-anthropocentric, or Earth-centered worldview also called Earth Jurisprudence'.⁴⁸ To become a member of the forum, one must be nominated by another existing member and answer questions related to one's expertise in Earth jurisprudence. This underscores the emphasis the programme places on knowledge and expertise, decentralising the role of the state found in conventional practices of UN diplomacy. It is comprised not of the typical state diplomats but of academics, scientists, environmental lawyers, practitioners, grassroots activists, and NGOs and also includes members of Indigenous communities and their knowledge in an equitable manner. Its existence exemplifies the rare utilisation of and need for transprofessional and transformational diplomacy.

Agential potential

The 'Harmony with Nature Knowledge Network' is a highly interdisciplinary forum including eight discipline sections ranging from philosophy, spirituality, and anthropology to law, education, arts, architecture, physics, biology, medicine, etc.⁴⁹ Its core task is to:

increase the availability of tools and resources rooted in human–Earth interconnectedness to inform policy makers and urge societies across continents to reconsider how they interact with the natural world.⁵⁰

HwN tries to achieve this task by facilitating interconnections across states, disciplines, and professions, through its large online library with resources (that take an explicit paradigm shift in terms of their relation to nature) and via its annual Interactive Dialogues, taking place within the UN GA on International Mother Earth Day. The dialogues (which have taken place since 2011) are the highest-level space for interaction – they are hosted live, and anyone can watch them synchronously or asynchronously. They take a polyilateral approach, including governmental representatives and non-governmental representatives. The HwN programme invites researchers, members of civil society, and leaders/representatives of member states and of Indigenous Peoples to report on scientific findings and the 'evolving relationship of humankind with Nature'.⁵¹

HwN has produced multiple reports from UN Secretaries-General advocating for the RoN, arguably participating in the norm construction and diffusion process. The fact that it has managed to enter the formal UN GA through its Interactive Dialogues is itself telling, and it illustrates that despite slow progress, this movement is strong and persistent enough to skillfully utilise small openings of possibility within the UN system rather than relying on the application of pressure from 'the outside'. According to Kauffman and Martin:

one effect of this program has been to produce annual UN General Assembly Resolutions and Secretary General reports that help *construct and strengthen global Earth jurisprudence*

⁴⁷ Craig M. Kauffman and Pamela L. Martin, *The Politics of Rights of Nature: Strategies for Building a More Sustainable Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021).

⁴⁸ 'Harmony with nature', available at: <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/welcome/>.

⁴⁹ The eight disciplines are (1) Earth-Centered Law; (2) Ecological Economics; (3) Education; (4) Holistic Science (includes Biology, Chemistry, Cosmovisions, Geology, Physics, Holistic Food Systems including Fisheries and Water) and Holistic Medicine; (5) Humanities (includes Anthropology, Linguistics, Psychology, and Sociology); (6) Philosophy and Ethics; (7) The Arts, Media, Design and Architecture; and (8) Theology and Spirituality.

⁵⁰ 'Harmony with nature', available at: <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/welcome/>.

⁵¹ United Nations General Assembly, 'Report of the Secretary General on Harmony with Nature' (A/66/302) (2011), p. 1, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/453/14/PDF/N1145314.pdf?OpenElement>.

and RoN norms. The catchphrase ‘living in harmony with Nature’, now common in UN documents, is meant to challenge dominant development norms by prioritizing balance and the functioning of natural ecosystems over perpetual economic growth.⁵²

In their network analysis, Kauffman and Martin found HwN to be the second most central node (out of 14 organisations) in the RoN network, preceded only by GARN (Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature), which shows its impact on a global scale in terms of RoN. The impact of HwN on a country level is also noteworthy: for example, it seems that people from the network are cooperating with state representatives to inspire national initiatives and changes in legal framework provisions and Earth jurisprudence (see, for example, the collaboration with Swiss politicians regarding a parliamentary initiative in Switzerland based on HwN and Resolution 75/220).⁵³ However, whereas previously institutionalisation of norms into international law meant that organisations such as the UN could facilitate political change, the lack of an international framework or a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature (though there are efforts to do so outside the UN)⁵⁴ means that in practice it is up to the pioneering states, which include states such as Bolivia and Ecuador, to try to persuade states such as Russia or Turkey that existing practices are inappropriate or unacceptable. In this case, HwN acts as a network that provides information to audiences such as diplomats, decision-makers, the media, and NGOs, without however any guarantee that there is demand for this information or that it will be taken seriously and transformed into action.

Marginalisation and challenges

However, despite or perhaps because of its idiosyncratic structure, HwN seems to be marginalised within the UN. It is very thinly resourced in terms of staff and funding compared to other UN entities. Besides HwN’s notable absence from the official UN Chart as mentioned above, no other information regarding the UN team can be found on their website. In its participation in national or international conferences (for example in the Earth Rights Conference 21–2 April 2017 in Sweden), there seems to be a single representative, which suggests that this is a poorly staffed UN programme. Moreover, although the aforementioned representative is officially situated within the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) – which makes sense as DESA acts as the Secretariat for the SDGs – the fact that it is nowhere to be found in DESA’s official website is perhaps first an indication of the extent to which the rest of the UN (de)valorises its work, i.e. how its diplomatic practices are not seen as ‘professional’ enough to be included, and second a stark reminder that intergovernmental processes remain the key players in the diplomatic practices of the UN. Unsurprisingly, HLPF is included in the DESA website, both as a separate tab and under the ‘Intergovernmental Processes’ tab, proving once again that multilateralism is of varying quality and character within the UN system.⁵⁵

Moreover, despite it being an important network node, and a clear paradigm shift in terms of its discourses and practices, HwN is still largely operating within the parameters of the UN. In this sense, although novel and visionary, it is precisely these characteristics that can explain its currently limited possibility of moving from ‘urgency to agency’, beyond speaking to the already converted, thereby rendering it a peripheral programme within the UN. It is essentially acting as

⁵²Kauffman and Martin, *The Politics of Rights of Nature*, pp. 36–7; emphasis added.

⁵³‘First Steps Taken to Protect the Rights of Nature in Switzerland’s Federal Constitution’, available at: <https://www.centerforenvironmentalrights.org/news/first-steps-taken-to-protect-the-rights-of-nature-in-switzerlands-federal-constitution>}.

⁵⁴‘Universal declaration of the rights of Mother Earth’, available at: <https://www.rightsofnaturetribunal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ENG-Universal-Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-Mother-Earth.pdf>}.

⁵⁵DESA website, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/about>}. There are no signs of the relationship between the HLPF and HwN in their formal websites.

a large transnational advocacy network, but it is difficult for scientists, for example, to persuade their/other governments to create new laws or agencies if these governments are not present in the annual dialogues of HwN to begin with, or the presence of the governments is merely symbolic. For instance, in the 2023 dialogues, China was the only country from the P-5 which had a government representative (with the exception of France, which was represented through a general representative of the European Union). HwN currently has limited impact outside the countries that are already active in RoN networks, and also in the UN in general.

Also, although it provides evidence of strong and less hierarchical polyilateralism in the sense of the participation of NGOs, scientists, Indigenous peoples, etc., there is no evidence so far of more transgressive forms of polyilateralism, i.e. of having 'Nature' being represented in the dialogues hosted by the GA (see below, for an example of this practice outside the UN). Operating within a non-intergovernmental framework prevents the network from increasing its power and legitimacy and therefore the chances of having more global impact. The network remains with limited resources and attention while at the same time serving governmental needs to 'tick' the box, be it the 'inclusive', the 'Indigenous', or the 'nature' one.

There is of course a hope and a possibility, in line with 'making peace with nature', that HwN becomes a much larger entity within the UN – perhaps gaining intergovernmental permanent representatives like UNEP, for example. If so, it remains to be seen how far diplomats and/or scientists will become co-opted to promote state agendas and therefore bring in economic, geopolitical, and cultural interests. The HwN could continue to grow, but it could also become so big that it may morph into another existing or new organisation. We do not speculate that the RoN movement will decline in size though – quite the contrary.

Since 2021, Bolivia has been calling for the need to urgently convene an 'Earth Assembly to discuss from a non-anthropocentric and cosmobiocentric vision, the solutions to face the multiple planetary crises so that humanity and Mother Earth, and all living beings, fully advance in Living Well in Harmony with Nature'.⁵⁶ Indeed, this was a prominent feature of the Twelfth Interactive Dialogue of April 2023.

It is not entirely clear what the Earth Assembly would entail, e.g. if it would be a permanent annual meeting/organ of the UN or a one-off meeting. Indeed, during the 2023 dialogue, the Representative of the European Union was against it, insinuating that there already is a General Assembly, reflecting perhaps fears that HwN will become too institutionalised and mainstream. From the concept notes and the debates, what emerges is a call to lift the profile of HwN to a higher-profile event. There are questions on how such a high-level meeting would 'provide a space to learn about diverse perspectives of Member States regarding an evolving non-anthropocentric and Earth-centered paradigm' and 'further reinforce existing multilateral processes and effectively contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond', which alludes again to the weakness of the HwN in not having the intergovernmental support of other institutions.⁵⁷ The fact that there is already an intergovernmental UN Environment Assembly underscores the dissatisfaction with the existing way 'harmony with nature' is addressed within the UN system. So, whereas it reflects a radical departure from 'business as usual', HwN's impact and operation are such that so far it involves more an aspect of improving what is currently being done rather than transforming it from its roots.

Diplomatic transformations: Towards an ecological diplomacy

Given the previous analysis of the promising yet marginalised HwN and the challenges it faces when operating within the UN system, in this section we talk through our positions and projections regarding the future of diplomacy and the more holistic and transformative forms that should be promoted to walk the talk of 'peace' or 'harmony' with nature. While HwN does think outside

⁵⁶'Harmony with nature', available at: <http://files.harmonywithnatureun.org/uploads/upload1284.pdf>.

⁵⁷'Harmony with nature', available at: <http://files.harmonywithnatureun.org/uploads/upload1301.pdf>.

the box, diplomatic initiatives beyond the UN already operate as if there is no box. One such novel example is the ‘Embassy of the North Sea’, established in the Hague in 2018. As stated in its mission, this embassy:

listens to and involves the voices of plants, animals, microbes, and people in and around the North Sea. Founded on the principle that the sea owns itself, the Embassy makes political space for sea-emancipation through connection, imagination and representation.⁵⁸

The embassy has plotted a parallel route to UN Agenda 2030 through interlinked phases: phase 1 (2018–22) has listened to the sea, phase 2 (2023–6) is to speak for the sea, and phase 3 (2027–30) will negotiate on behalf of the sea and the life within it. *Listening* to the sea has combined extensive research teams of marine biologists, scientists, artists, and policymakers. *Speaking* for the sea has already developed forms of political activism that experimented with non-human voices being represented in a Moot court in the Peace Palace in the Hague (note the symbolic location and its relation to peace), while making the case of treating the North Sea as an independent entity. Finally, *negotiating* for the sea will seek to promote and recognise rights of nature, codify them into human law, and oversee their implementation. If this is a sign of things to come, there is more to be said about how diplomacy will be transformed in the future, and indeed how the UN system needs to transform itself to accommodate this new kind of diplomacy.

Embassies like the above have built on the inputs of theorists and philosophers outside the field of diplomacy, who notably presented aspects of diplomacy as essential to reversing the impact and mediating the predicaments of the environmental crisis.⁵⁹ The transformative aspects of diplomacy have also been highlighted by scholars within the expanding field of Diplomatic Studies. In what follows, we build on these insights to suggest that diplomatic transformations concerned with aspirations for reconciliation ecology and planetary cohabitation can be streamlined around four realisations.

First, realising that a range of relationships are diplomatic ones, beyond those that are formally established in international law, and consequently that a plurality of significant others needs to be engaged with diplomatically and not merely governed. Second, realising that understanding ecological interconnectivity and deepening and civilising relationships is an important task of diplomacy, which is increasingly sought following the relational turn in IR. Third, realising that diplomats, whoever they might be called to represent, need to display understanding and solidarity and ultimately serve more than one collective, including collectives that are more-than-human. And, fourth, realising that peacemaking with nature is complex and precarious and constantly needs to be worked on and for, on both macro-diplomatic and micro-diplomatic scales.

Reconfiguring diplomatic relations

The political ecology and planetary imperative means that the universe of *diplomatic* relations will have to be broadened. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) – which supposedly codified international customary law on the matter – is wholly inadequate for the 21st century, as it is totally out of sync with polyilateralism. Notably, it bypasses the key question of which other communities beyond states should have a right of legation. By dropping this *right* – which historically has been suggested by some jurists, such as Le Vayer and Vattel, as a natural right that all free and autonomous communities ought to have – the Vienna Convention also sidestepped the corresponding *duty* to inquire, receive representations, converse, and negotiate with a range of ‘foreign’ others beyond the sovereignty paradigm.⁶⁰ Indeed, learning to review our lives and relationships

⁵⁸ ‘Harmony with nature’, available at: {<https://www.embassyofthenorthsea.com/over/>}.

⁵⁹ Latour’s work is duly acknowledged by the Embassy of the North Sea, available at: {<https://www.embassyofthenorthsea.com/welkom-in-het-parlement-van-de-dingen/>}.

⁶⁰ Costas M. Constantinou and Fiona McConnell, ‘On the right to diplomacy: Historicizing and the theorizing delegation and exclusion at the United Nations’, *International Theory*, 15:1 (2023), pp. 53–78.

diplomatically has been suggested as a crucial decolonial move, reversing a biased genealogy that constrained the reach and use of diplomacy and reserved it only for ‘civilised’ sovereigns and courtly aristocratic interaction.⁶¹

The adoption of non-anthropocentric worldviews and aspirations to reconcile with nature as outlined above, at the very least, demands the opening up of diplomatic conduct beyond formalised diplomacy or even the so-called transformational diplomacy that foreign ministries promote in order to partner with NGOs and civilians.⁶² In this respect, the prospect of an ‘interspecies diplomacy’ has been flagged by scholars building on the work already done by ethologists and researchers on human–animal relations, which conceives these multifaceted relationships not merely as ‘social’ or ‘political’, but as ‘diplomatic’.⁶³

Bilateral diplomatic relations between individual species can be a first step towards a more-than-human diplomacy. Recent examples concern the revisiting of the human–wolf and human–elephant encounters as diplomatic ones, engaging them etho-diplomatically and negotiating the terms of possible cohabitations (e.g. through scouting, intelligence-gathering, territorial marking, beehive fences, etc).⁶⁴ However, it is crucial not to stay with these ‘flag animals’ and miss the range of multilateral relationships that stem from biodiversity and complexify life in the pluriverse. As Escobar explained:

We are summoned by place into entanglements with each other and with nonhumans, whether in conflict or cooperation or both, as all of us, willy-nilly, live in coexistence with multiple others through intricate relations that define our very way of being, even if most often we imagine those relations as weak links from which we can easily disassociate ourselves.⁶⁵

Diplomacy is predicated on the recognition of *significant* Others, i.e. Others with whom one chooses *not* to disassociate. While anthropocentric diplomacy has been valorised for promoting friendly relations and strengthening links between humans and between nations, ‘nature’ has been rendered the weakest link in this conventional process, an *insignificant* other or unacknowledged relation. Reconnecting and deepening relations with nature thus speaks to the task at hand. It is a sign of civilisation not to see oneself as being ‘surrounded by insignificant entities’, and in doing so problematically envisioning ‘a society surrounded by nature to be dominated’, or governed modernly or merely scientifically.⁶⁶ A diplomacy for the future will be tasked to recognise and reconnect with the range of diverse ‘significant others’ in nature, as well as to work potentially to transform these relations into stronger bonds. Building on and beyond ‘bestly diplomacies’ that broadly instrumentalise animals to manage human relations or the early ‘zoo-diplomacies’ that employed diplomacy for its metaphorical value in biological symbiosis, works have started to explore the wider relations of more-than-human diplomacies.⁶⁷

At one level of understanding, we could credit biomimicry and learn from the preventive diplomacy of our biological ancestors – the bonobos, the ‘make love not war’ apes – and their innovations in easing tension and conflict management.⁶⁸ But if by interlocutors we mean accredited representatives, actually ‘speaking’ on behalf of nature, this risks anthropocentric regression. That is why,

⁶¹ Opondo, *Diplomatic Para-citations*, pp. 70–6.

⁶² See the US State Department Initiative, available at {<https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/59339.htm>}.

⁶³ Chaudhuri, ‘Interspecies diplomacy in Anthropocenic waters’.

⁶⁴ Morizot, *Wild Diplomacy*.

⁶⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. xvii.

⁶⁶ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p. 209. Further on building relations across species, see Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People* (London: Verso, 2017).

⁶⁷ Cornago, *Plural Diplomacies*, pp. 15–18; Jason Dittmer, *Diplomatic Material: Affect, Assemblage, and Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Halvard Leira and Iver Neumann, ‘Bestly diplomacy’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 12:4 (2017), pp. 337–59; Constantinou and Opondo ‘On biodiplomacy’.

⁶⁸ Deborah Weinstein, ‘The “make love, not war” ape: Bonobos and late twentieth-century explanations for war and peace’, *Endeavour*, 40:4 (2016), pp. 256–67.

nuanced assessing while learning to appreciate the pluriverse – such as cosmovisions operating beyond logocentrism, with openness to non-human alterity and the ability to listen and transform through animist and biophilic knowledge, as in the case of the Embassy of the North Sea – can bring forth novel perspectives on engaging nature more sensitively and equitably.⁶⁹

Key to this is the informalisation of diplomatic representation and practice, that is to say, the recognition that animals with which we already have established relationships, e.g. companion animals, rescued animals living in sanctuaries, everyday encounters in our midst, can ‘speak for’ larger groups or entire species. This has been recently suggested by Tore Fougner, advocating the need for an ‘interspecies diplomacy’, and by means of assessing its prospects, diplomatic agency would have to be reinvented if it is not to remain an anthropocentric exclusivity.⁷⁰ However, ‘the structural limits to the diplomatic agency of the animals’ remains a serious challenge, specifically in the freedom of agency and the credibility of representation (i.e. differences between pets, animals in captivity, and wildlife tourism) as well as how their communication is translated into diplomatic discourse that is transformative and supportive of cohabitation (of which more below).

Enhancing cosmovision and pluriversality

As Christian Morizot explains, a key feature of practising diplomacy with living beings (or ‘wild diplomacy’, as featured in the English translation of his book) is that it is fundamentally a *diplomacy of relations*. A diplomacy of relations prioritises the ethic whereby the good of ‘one’ is secured through the relationship that helps ‘one’ flourish. Yet, for Morizot, this diplomacy of relations opposes a *diplomacy of entities*, whereby ‘one’ stands apart and above from others and in which the relationship is secondary and is only used instrumentally for the interest of one entity.⁷¹ The diplomacy of entities is catachrestic diplomacy, not just an attempt for domination and mastery over others, but an extension and ‘continuation of war against nature by other means.’⁷² Put differently, in a diplomacy of relations lies the potential for transformative mindsets and – while not a making-peace-with-nature guarantee – at least an intermission from war and the minimisation of violence.

To be sure, we can learn more – and learn differently – from our *relationship with others* rather than simply carrying knowledge with us to social and natural environments. This applies even in situations where the structure of the relationship might convey and reproduce ethnological, colonial, and patriarchal biases. The message is therefore to beware not to drop a relationship too quickly, not to disassociate in haste – heeding Haraway’s advice of ‘staying with the trouble.’⁷³ In underscoring that ‘relations of interdependence’ should not be eroded, Stengers warns about the need to remain vigilant of relations that are apparently symbiotic or convivial yet may flip into a ‘relation of capture.’⁷⁴ There are no guarantees, and indeed there should be no romanticisation of the diplomatic encounter, which can on the one hand weave relations that are positive and, on the other hand, forge and retain relations that are exploitative and dangerous. In short, while realising that the web of relations among heterogeneous groups (say, activists, scientists, lawyers, and Indigenous people as in HwN) produces ‘learning and cooperative relations’ that are hopeful in delivering holistic ecological literacy, there are also other ‘challenging’ relationships that can still be valuable and should be worked on.⁷⁵ Crucial in this respect is the understanding that human

⁶⁹ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy’s Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ Fougner, ‘Animals and diplomacy’.

⁷¹ Morizot, *Wild Diplomacy*, p. 298.

⁷² Morizot, *Wild Diplomacy*, p. 317.

⁷³ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁷⁴ Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science Is Possible* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p. 74.

⁷⁵ Isabelle Stengers, ‘Autonomy and the intrusion of Gaia’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116:2 (2017), pp. 381–400; pp. 390–1.

relations with the rest of nature vary across different cultures, as evidenced in the growing and significant literature around the idea of the pluriverse.⁷⁶

The ‘relational turn’ has emerged as a significant new area of study in IR, focusing on processes and the co-constitution of phenomena rather than substances and the interests of autonomous units. Valorising relation as a new ontology or ‘substance’ that disturbs the classical bifurcations of ‘self’ and ‘other’, relational perspectives explore how interconnections in specific spatial contexts should be the starting point for understanding and explaining the world. Of course, it has been difficult to think ‘truly relationally’, beyond or without ‘things’ and ‘backgrounds.’⁷⁷ The practice theory approach has already highlighted a certain ‘folk relationalism’ that diplomatic practitioners adopt in pursuing interests, constantly shifting targets and greasing the wheels, while maintaining transactional systems and producing international orders.⁷⁸ While broadening the universe of diplomacy, practice theory limited itself to professional diplomats and the study of relationality in conventional diplomatic spaces, i.e. foreign ministries, interstate negotiations, and the work of intergovernmental and international non-governmental organisations.

To engage the ecological conundrum more adequately, the diplomatic worldview would need to adopt deeper forms of relationality beyond what we traditionally associate with the international practice turn. This would need to include cosmopraxis that appreciates the web of experiences, the ‘complex plural ethos of interconnections’⁷⁹ as well as ‘amateur diplomacies’ that have deep and nuanced focus on relationality and the ethics of everyday encounter.⁸⁰ Furthermore, if indeed the entities the diplomats represent and speak for are so profoundly interconnected and interrelated that in essence they lack separate existence, this fundamentally challenges the conventional understanding of diplomatic practice as advocacy for the interests of separate entities. But note that this challenge to practising crude advocacy or remaining chained to sovereign instructions also speaks back to the predicament of how to serve the prince while also serving the peace; how to be an advocate for one side while also remaining a mediator between both sides.

A significant aspect, in this regard, is the diplomat’s ability to translate the heterology of animals into diplomatic knowledge.⁸¹ The role of ethologists becomes important, as interpreters and mediators who have specialised knowledge of animal communication, behaviour, and human–non-human encounters. However, turning heterology into knowledge that is not a mere instrument of power and governmentality but a means of empathy and self-transformation, requires resituating the critical humanist ethos that was born out of the Renaissance and was much invested in early modern diplomacy but has since dimmed by linking diplomacy exclusively with statecraft and its self-centred pursuits. This ‘profound humanist spirit’, as Edward Said put it, essentially means that ‘the interpreter’s mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign “other”. And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter’s

⁷⁶See Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Marisol De la Cadena and Mario Blaser (eds), *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Joan Pedro-Carañana, Eliana Herrera-Huérffano, and Juana Ochoa Almanza (eds), *Communicative Justice in the Pluriverse* (New York: Routledge, 2023); Martin Savransky, ‘The pluralistic problematic: William James and the pragmatics of the pluriverse’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 38:2 (2021), pp. 141–59.

⁷⁷Milja Kurki, ‘Relational revolution and relationality in IR: New conversations’, *Review of International Studies*, 48:5 (2022), pp. 821–36.

⁷⁸Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ‘Relationalism or why diplomats find International Relations theory strange’, in Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann, (eds), *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 284–308.

⁷⁹Amaya Querejazu, ‘Cosmopraxis: Relational methods for a pluriversal IR’, *Review of International Studies*, 48:5 (2022), pp. 875–90.

⁸⁰Opondo, *Diplomatic Para-citations*, pp. xxxv–xxxviii.

⁸¹See Fougner, ‘Animals and diplomacy’. On heterology as a means of developing diplomatic knowledge, see Costas M. Constantinou, ‘On homo-diplomacy’, *Space and Culture*, 9:4 (2006), pp. 351–64 and Noé Cornago, ‘Diplomatic knowledge’, in Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr, and Paul Sharp (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy* (London: Sage, 2016), pp. 133–41.

mission.⁸² Extending this mission to non-human others, to fostering cosmologies that appreciate experience, spontaneity, and forms of agency in all units of nature, should become a defining task in the Anthropocene.⁸³ This can be done by extending our understanding of language, appreciating how animals – like humans – also speak through their practices.⁸⁴ It is by restoring faith to this kind of *diplomatic* mission that logocentricity is lessened in interspecies encounters and cosmovision and pluriversality enhanced.

Representing/mediating biotic collectives

Diplomacy has been associated with the regulation of the relations of diverse groups or communities. Critical approaches have defined it as, *inter alia*, ‘the mediation of estrangement’, or ‘the handling of the other’, or the representation and negotiation of ‘necessarily ambiguous identities.’⁸⁵ However, acting on behalf of states and following the reason of state (*raison d'état*) became the dominant principle, from its early Machiavellian origins to Cardinal Richelieu to Kissinger.⁸⁶ Based on the idea of the state as an organic entity, serving its interests and ensuring its preservation took precedence over all other objectives and interests. It also provided moral force and justified actions that would have been unethical in non-state contexts. Even though we have begun to recognise the significance of the diplomacy of non-state actors, *raison d'état* still left us with a legacy of prioritising entity-centred diplomacy and instrumentally rational ends that often justify whatever means.

Within the English School of IR, however, diplomatic theorists from Watson to Sharp have rightly underscored how diplomatic conduct and decision-making also traditionally employed a *raison de système*, i.e. the prioritisation of the preservation of international order or the system within which states existed. From this perspective, diplomatic thinking has been suggested as a distinct mode of reasoning, combining state logic and system logic, especially when professional diplomats are called upon to tackle complex problems the irresolution of which may lead to the outbreak of violence or the perpetuation of it.⁸⁷ Indeed, if *raison d'état* has granted diplomacy a self-serving and sinister reputation, it is *raison de système* that has valorised diplomacy as a force that can maintain or restore peace.

Although thinking about reconciliation ecology through the *raison d'état* or the *raison de système* are clearly inadequate, thinking of the system more broadly in terms of protecting the integrity of *eco-systems* is indeed promising. This would certainly entail the recognition of complex entanglements within ecosystems and thus acting on behalf and by reason of biotic communities. In broaching the term ‘sustainable diplomacy’, David Wellman has reflected on the praxis that goes beyond one’s social entanglements to the relationships that people have with the land, the ecological location but also the biotic communities that exist and transgress the more ‘visible’ and recognised social communities.⁸⁸ Biotic community constitutes, in this regard, the totality of living organisms that interact with each other – cooperatively, antagonistically, or symbiotically – in a particular geographic zone. Biotic communities are not fixed but constantly create and recreate new collectives.

⁸²Edward Said, ‘Preface’, in *Orientalism*, 25th anniversary edition (London: Vintage, 1979), p. xvii. On the humanist legacy of diplomacy, see Costas M. Constantinou, ‘Between statecraft and humanism: Diplomacy and its forms of knowledge’, *International Studies Review*, 15:2 (2013), pp. 141–62.

⁸³Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Cosmologies of the Anthropocene: Panpsychism, Animism, and the Limits of Posthumanism* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁸⁴Eva Meijer, *When Animals Speak: Toward an Interspecies Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

⁸⁵Der Derian, *On Diplomacy*; Neumann, *Diplomatic Tenses*; Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*.

⁸⁶Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), chapter 3.

⁸⁷Adam Watson, *Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 200–15; Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, pp. 44–6.

⁸⁸Wellman, *Sustainable Diplomacy*, pp. 22–5.

As part of his commitment to ‘multinaturalism’ – recognising that people appreciate a plurality of nature and see themselves as belonging to multiple biotic communities or collectives – Latour suggests that more-than-human collectives should be assembled in a way that one can verify the process of inclusion–exclusion and without silencing or reducing the excluded into *insignificance*. The exercise of an ecological diplomacy is therefore to seek to find an *oikos*, the most viable dwelling that is possible for all possible collectives.⁸⁹ This is where tracking, scouting, intelligence-gathering, and ‘thinking like the other’ become important. While realising the value of representing the collective, ensuring its existence and well-being, diplomacy is also about constant inquiry into other collectives, ensuring that their existential concerns are also addressed, making *propositions* back to one’s own collective about the needs of other collectives. This is what renders the ecological diplomat not just a representative but also a mediator, a civiliser of practices with an eye on the co-habilitation of collectives.

From this perspective, Stengers finds that formal state diplomacy is seriously lacking, requiring a new ethos to engage the environmental conundrum. She suggests that ‘what diplomacy requires – the ability of a group to ponder the way it formulates its obligations, its ability to make common sense of what maintains it and what it has to maintain – is precisely what is undone by the chains of dependence’ to a single collective will and governmental desire. She laments that ‘today the diplomats are not equipped to cultivate the art of consultation they depend on’ and consequently wants diplomatic inquiry to ‘reactivate the feeling of interdependence.’⁹⁰ To that extent, diplomats would need not only to represent but to interrogate the claims and obligations that their collective has towards others, mediating rather than turning differences into oppositions, thus enhancing the possibility of peace.

Negotiating peace and coexistence

The diplomatic disposition outlined above should not be viewed as aiming at or promising to deliver some kind of universal or liberal order peace-with-nature. Critical Peace and Conflict Studies have taught us to remain vigilant of rhetorical claims to peace, peace bereft of justice, pax masked as reconciliation ecology. Indeed, ‘diplomatic peace’ as already pursued by practitioners within UN forums offers a nuanced understanding regarding the potentiality of qualitatively different peace formations in multilateral contexts. Diplomatic peace can range from restraint to compromise to polylogue, with the latter making possible dynamic and hybrid forms of peacebuilding that are adaptive to local conditions and much more promising for ecological purposes.⁹¹

For Stengers, what makes diplomacy interesting is not that it valorises ‘the necessity of peace’ – it does not, at least not always – but that it projects the possibility and eventuality of peace. To that extent, the diplomat’s peace is not a norm that transcends one’s interests and values, but an agonistic quest in the midst of potentially belligerent regimes, whose mode of existence might always bring them to war with each other. Thus ‘the diplomat’s commitment, the requirements her practice assumes, the obligations that put her at risk, make her the representative not of a general and hollow ideal of universal peace, but of possible peace, always local, precarious, and matter for invention.’⁹²

There is a serious caveat here following on from UN calls for making peace with nature. ‘Peace with nature’ cannot be a total and comprehensive peace; it is bound to be a localised and precarious peace. The danger regarding the unreflective pursuit of a universal peace based on a single biophysical nature is that such a peace is a distinctly modernist project – a ‘mononaturalist’ ideology. It constitutes nothing less than war by other means, given how such peacebuilding fails to

⁸⁹ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, pp. 211–13.

⁹⁰ Stengers, ‘We are divided’, p. 4.

⁹¹ Markus Kornprobst, ‘Diplomatic peace’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 18:4 (2023), pp. 475–508.

⁹² Stengers, *Comspolitics II*, p. 387.

recognise the politics played in the name of nature and the complexity and multiplicity of existence found within nature. Beware of peace breaking too soon. Or, as Latour explains,

in abandoning mononaturalism, political ecology does not promise peace. It is only beginning to understand what wars it has to fight and what enemies it has to learn to designate. It is finally discovering the dangers that made it subject to a threat of pacification worse than the evil it was fighting.⁹³

What seems to worry both Latour and Stengers is the rise and increasing use of ‘experts’, who inform debates on political ecology but often provide dogmatic views on what is to be done combined with highly limited cosmopolitical visions. To that extent, the threat of war is valid if in the recommendation of a particular course of action the existence of the collective the diplomat is called on to represent is at stake. The diplomat is therefore charged also to explain the cost of peace in particular local contexts, not to accept peace at any cost, and to be able to propose alternative peace formations.

Consequently, the value of diplomacy is not in the making of a miracle of peace but rather that it will seek to civilise practices, reduce antagonisms, and make all participants aware of the consequences of their decisions.⁹⁴ To that extent, diplomacy does not take ‘wordly cohabitation as a given’ but rather works and struggles to deliver tentative peace formations and ‘folds of coexistence’.⁹⁵ Put differently, diplomacy keeps ‘staying with the trouble’, to return to Haraway’s felicitous motto. Recognising that forms of violence against biotic communities will continue, diplomacy commits to making visible the violence to those who remain unaware or unconcerned about its impact on *less significant others*, while at the same time seeking pathways to peaceful – less harmful, less asymmetric, and more equitable – forms of coexistence.

Conclusion: Reconciliation ecology and troubled coexistence

In this paper, we have interrogated existing practices of the UN as they relate to their ecological agenda and peacemaking-with-nature claims. Our analysis has shown that the UN’s peacebuilding aspirations are promising but currently far from nature-responsive and fraught with contradictions, oscillations, and policy incoherence. Through the SDGs, the UN has established a comprehensive and multifaceted agenda for the future. From one perspective, this agenda is ambitious and innovative, clearly promoting not just multilateralism but polyilateralism, in the form of networks of diverse actors beyond UN member states that share common values and interests and work together to achieve common goals. The UN has a definite role in the facilitation of negotiations at an interstate level for an equitable distribution of resources and reformed productivity within a sustainable framework. From another perspective, however, the UN system displays incoherence among different programmes, constrained ability to move the agenda from the global to the national and the local level, and weak implementation–compliance mechanisms on what has been agreed. At the same time, there is an unresolved and underdiscussed debate about what the pronounced ‘war on nature’ entails and what is the best way to achieve ‘peace’. These tensions and questions are rarely explicitly debated in public UN forums, let alone formally recognised. Yet we contend that these conversations should be held (if not resolved) in the future; they deserve greater attention and formal recognition as they affect and are affected by asymmetries of power and are likely to influence the legitimisation strategies of the UN vis-à-vis its future environmental policies and agendas.

Research in Critical Peace and Conflict Studies has taught us that beyond irenic pronouncements and agreements, the quality of peace to be reached matters: i.e. that not all forms of

⁹³Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p. 219. On this point, see further Bruno Latour, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002).

⁹⁴Stengers, *Another Science Is Possible*, p. 154.

⁹⁵Philip Conway, ‘The folds of coexistence: Towards a diplomatic political ontology, between difference and contradiction’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 37:3 (2020), pp. 23–47.

pacification constitute 'genuine peace'; that imperial pax or hegemonic stability are problematic forms of peace; that we ought to be sensitised not only to the absence of war/violence (negative peace) but to creating conditions that support freedom, welfare, and justice (positive peace).⁹⁶ Considerable work has already highlighted the spatial dimension of peace, such as, looking beyond high-profile peace settlements at how peace is implemented on the ground, while keeping in mind questions of scale. Moreover, it is important to appreciate that peace formations can and do often entail zones of conflict, and vice versa.⁹⁷

In this regard, 'peace with nature' can only be an incessant process of *continuous negotiation* and *relational understanding* in places where species meet – not merely a grand and logocentric peace settlement to be imposed from 'above' or 'outside'. This underscores forms of diplomacy that are not necessarily 'professional', tasked with negotiating *the way to* an eventual peace. Rather it envisions diplomacy more as a disposition and temperament, *the way of* active peace, preventive of violence, pursuing everyday and relational peace, not assuming or proclaiming shared existence but negotiating troubled coexistence.

An ecological diplomacy can and should work in parallel to an interstate environmental diplomacy, the way parallel-track or multi-track diplomacy works in conflict resolution. Irrespective of the cynicism and transactional politics that interstate environmental diplomacy often exhibits at the UN, the HwN programme remains a beacon and displays how rights of nature, law, and policy are currently being pursued and variably (and often successfully) implemented in local contexts from around the globe: from a range of advocacy campaigns to national law and federal acts to local regulations to court decisions to commitments in official documents and policy formulation.⁹⁸ This rich tapestry of polyilateral action highlights, we suggest, that future actualisations of 'harmony' or 'peacemaking' with nature will constantly need to be addressed in their spatial and scalar dimensions and assessed in specific local contexts rather than in global and abstract peace settlements. Pursuing and emplacing an ecological diplomacy can bring about islands of peace within zones of conflict and/or refocus diplomatic efforts on sites of conflict within proclaimed peace zones.

From this perspective, the HwN programme should be credited as novel and fully supported in its ecological diplomacy agenda and practices within the UN system. Yet it is also limited when compared to the more transgressive polyilateralism of projects, such as the Embassy of the North Sea, that display readiness to embrace multispecies diplomacy. Our conceptualisation of these diplomatic transformations allows, we suggest, a re-envisioning of reconciliation ecology in a productive and relational way that goes beyond a mere rhetorical appropriation and co-optation by intergovernmental agendas. Like other aspirational projects of reconciliation ecology, such as 'win-win ecology' and the 'half-earth project', advocating the practical implementation of RoN and influencing state practice will not materialise through the work of a single institution. Instead, just and effective diplomacies emerge at various scales through the confluence of 'long-term processes of open, representative, multi-level, normative discussions, negotiations, and adaptive governance'.⁹⁹ They are aspirational ideas, contested within and across the UN, yet inspire diplomatic praxis in different fields of operation.

Our speculative conclusion is that diplomacy – both as a field of study and as a practice – will increase in importance in the next 50 years. Finding pathways to reconciliation ecology and environmental justice will require genuine commitment to reconfiguring diplomatic relations to *connect with, understand, and meaningfully engage* diverse human and non-human communities,

⁹⁶ Among others, Oliver Richmond, 'A post-liberal peace: Eirenism and the everyday', *Review of International Studies*, 35:3 (2009), pp. 557–80; Roger Mac Ginty, 'Hybrid peace: The interaction between top-down and bottom-up peace', *Security Dialogue*, 41:4 (2010), pp. 391–412.

⁹⁷ Among others, Annika Bjorkdahl and Susanne Buckley-Zistel (eds), *Spatialising Peace and Conflict: Mapping the Production of Places, Sites and Scales of Violence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁹⁸ For a range of activities, 'Rights of nature law and policy', available at: {<http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/rightsOfNature/>}.

⁹⁹ Erle C. Ellis and Zia Mehrabi, 'Half Earth: Promises, pitfalls, and prospects of dedicating half of Earth's land to conservation', *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 38 (2019), pp. 22–30 (p. 28).

some of which are currently not represented or only achieve token representation in global forums. Diplomatic inquiry will have to complement scientific knowledge to reveal how human and non-human communities are variably and asymmetrically affected by the Anthropocene, and more significantly those who are existentially threatened by it. As we gain knowledge about our complex interrelationships with nature, our own community of belonging will be broadened, going beyond human communities, seeing biotic community as an equally valid if not ecologically realist approach to sustainable diplomacy. To be sure, the management of state relations and supranational governance will remain crucial facets of diplomatic practice – as will be the challenge to move IR and diplomacy beyond the ‘terrestrial trap’, the study and understanding of relations beyond Earth, including ensuring that these new relationships will not create new colonial forms of domination.¹⁰⁰ Still, a diplomacy for the planetary future should be concerned with deepening relationships with human and non-human others beyond the sovereignty paradigm, negotiating modes of coexistence, and devising ways of cohabiting and mutual thriving within the pluriverse.

Walking the peace talk with nature represents a major and noble aspiration that aims to transform global politics. Yet, as we explained in this article, it is currently immersed in considerable ambiguity and ambivalence. This will need to change, and indeed we believe that it will change. The reconciliation discourse should shift from one that abstractly invokes either peace or war *with* nature, to one that critically engages our troubled coexistence *in* nature: to our diplomatic relations – or lack of – across species and biotic collectives, and to how a diplomacy for the future could help us to re-envision and renegotiate this troubled coexistence in a less violent and more convivial manner. This involves interrelated webs of praxis, spatially and contextually assessed, which we suggest will have profound effects on the study and practice of diplomacy in the next 50 years.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000172>.

Acknowledgements. For their insightful comments and suggestions, we would like to thank the three reviewers of RIS. We also thank the RIS editors for giving us the opportunity to contribute to this special issue and for their recommendations and steering.

Funding statement. Research for this paper has received funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement number: 857636 – SInnoPSis – H2020-WIDESPREAD-2018-2020.

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¹⁰⁰On this point, see ‘The terrestrial trap: International Relations beyond Earth’ in this special issue.