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Weaving Worlds: *Cosmopraxis* as Relational Sensibility

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Abstract

Relationality has become a popular term for addressing diversity, complexity, interconnectedness, and planetary crisis in many academic fields, including International Relations. This article shows that fully embracing relationality calls for a distinct set of tools that are discernable in *cosmopraxis*, an ontological stance derived from Andean thinking that upholds interdependence and co-becoming, being-feeling-knowing-doing, and both-and logics as key principles of existence. Following a discussion of the “relational turn” in academic debates within and beyond IR, we develop our understanding of deep relationality and explain how *cosmopraxis* works to awaken the relational sensibilities we deem key to broadening and invigorating the study of worldly affairs. Throughout the article, we make use of stories about weaving, a key metaphor of entanglement and interconnection, but also a concrete practice that embodies the principles of *cosmopraxis*, to illustrate our main arguments.

Introduction

Although IR is largely concerned with how distinct actors relate in the world, the field continues to face significant challenges when it comes to dealing with difference and multiplicity.¹ Cameron G. Thies’ (2020: 5-6) submission that we recommit to international and global studies in a broader sense elicits an expansive and plural “master identity” consisting of respect for ontological perspectives, epistemological traditions and

¹ Notwithstanding Justin Rosenberg’s (2016) laudable proposal to make it the “big idea” that creates common ground among IR scholars and that fertilizes other areas of study, the author’s own definition of (societal) multiplicity is quite restrictive. While acknowledging its heuristic value, David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner (2017b) and Milja Kurki (2019) point to the need to theorize multiplicity more broadly.

methodologies “developed across the globe,” and openness to “other disciplines that have something to say” about worldly affairs. Within numerous academic circles, including African and diaspora studies, decolonialism, indigenous studies, feminism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, queer theory, and science and technology studies (STS) concerns for the epistemic violence resulting from modern, Western structures of binary thought and action have underwritten analogous calls for critical widening. Actor-network and assemblage thinking, new materialism and post-humanism too have critiqued atomistic existential assumptions for thinking about relations among humans and with nature, and more generally, for addressing the current planetary crisis.

Within the human, natural and social sciences, the language of relationality and relational ontology² has become a familiar way to engage with the diversity, complexity and interconnectedness that characterize our world(s). Yet, one of the main challenges that remains when employing relationality as an analytical tool is how to use it in a fashion that is mindful of the existential assumptions in which it is anchored. Echoing Kimberly Hutching’s (2019: 124) observation that experiments in “being with” at the root of a pluriversal relational ethics can never be fully known, only practiced, this article aims to show how we might “do” relations in a more inclusive, respectful and care-laden way. We take our cues largely from Andean indigenous cosmology, although similarities are observable across a wide range of other (mainly) non-Western traditions that uphold co-being, coexistence and complementarity as basic principles of existence. We argue that embracing relationality in a deep sense calls for a distinct set of sensibilities that are discernable in what we describe as *cosmopraxis*. Simply stated, *cosmopraxis* refers to the experience of moving about multiple worlds as practiced by “people” (including eventually, other-than-humans) and entails relational practices of co-participation in the cosmos (Arnold 2017; De Munter and Note 2009).

² Ontology here refers to “basic assumptions about the nature of existence that are operative within any given tradition of living and thinking” (Trowsell et al. 2019). In this sense, it speaks simultaneously to the question of what exists (or is real) and to our conditions of being. Cosmology, a related concept, might be defined as “a series of assumptions about the origins and the evolution of the cosmos” (Blaney and Tickner 2017a: note 7, 296).

We turn to weaving,³ a key metaphor in relational ontologies, but also a practice that enacts interconnection and co-becoming in its very performance to illustrate many of our arguments. It has long played a role in diverse stories about the origins of the cosmos that are filled with myths and rituals involving interdependence, kinship, and cosmic strings and webs (Haraway, 2016). It is also an intergenerational and a universal craft that provides livelihoods to many women and men throughout the world. Weaving and woven textiles have played a number of transformative and restorative roles too, including female empowerment and resistance, social protest, preservation of ancestral traditions, and catharsis, healing and memory building, especially in contexts of violence and conflict.⁴ In the latter, so-called conflict textiles take on added significance attending to mental health issues associated with war and dictatorship (Arias-López 2017); making political demands to authoritarian regimes; and granting concrete form to horrors that are impossible to express in spoken or written words. Such difficult languages and knowledges act as well to unsettle predominant understandings of violence (Andrä, Bliesemann De Guevara, Cole and House, 2019). In the emblematic case of the Chilean *arpilleras*,⁵ the daily scenes narrated by working class women who were direct witnesses and victims of the atrocities committed during the dictatorship (1973-1990), focused largely on poverty and hardship, police raids, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The quilts' clandestine shipment abroad was fundamental to creating greater international empathy and awareness.

Consider the Colombian *Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz* (Women Weaving Dreams and Flavors of Peace):

³ We use the term weaving throughout the article as short hand for a number of different hand-made crafts, including quilting, knitting, crocheting, embroidering and sewing.

⁴ For a representative sample of recent English language works on textiles, see Andrä, Bliesemann de Guevara and House (2019), Hunter (2019), Mazloomi (2019), MacDowell, Donaldson, Worrall and Swanson (2016), Pérez-Bustos (2017), Bryan-Wilson (2017) and Parker (2010).

⁵ *Arpilleras* are patchwork quilts made from pieces of cloth of diverse colors and patterns that are cut and stitched together to recreate scenes from daily life. Although called differently in distinct countries, they are a common art form in Latin America. See poet and scholar Marjorie Agosin's (2008) account of the *arpillera* movement in Chile.

In March 2000, paramilitaries arrived in the village of Mampuján, an Afro-descendent peasant community located in northern Colombia in the Montes de María region, one of the hardest hit areas of the country's over 50-year armed conflict in terms of killing, sexual violence and forced displacement. Although the initial order was to kill everyone, as the villagers were accused of sympathizing with Marxist guerrillas, approximately 250 resident families were allowed to flee, while a dozen men were murdered. After two years of exile, the *mampujanos* were able to relocate nearby their village. Given the traumas suffered by the community, a group of women sought out help to address their collective healing. It came initially in the form of quilting workshops provided by a female Menonite pastor and psychologist.

Although the women noticed that the quilting helped them relax, in retrospect they found that it did little for their spiritual wellbeing, which they felt required that they remember and recreate what had happened to them, something unaddressed in their quilts.⁶ They therefore set out to make textiles that retold their shared tragedies. The first one, called *Día del llanto* (day of tears) recounts the events of 2000. According to the leader of *Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz*, the organization created by the Mampuján women (and the recipient of several peace awards since), this first attempt at recovering collective memory was extremely painful, producing tears with each stitch. But, as their efforts progressed, individual and communal “mending” started to set in, and the women began to express and to share their sadness more openly. In this way, quilting and chatting became a way to heal.

Perhaps most significantly for our analysis weaving also embodies many of the principles at the core of what we will subsequently call deep relationality understood as *cosmopraxis*. As Donna Haraway (2016, 91) states, it “is a useful practice...and an economic one, but fundamentally, weaving is also a cosmological performance, knotting proper relationality and inter-connectedness into the...fabric”. Indeed, woven textiles defy binary either/or logics as they take on multiple meanings, purposes and existences that are constantly changing. Weavers are equally transformed by this relation as the weavings they help bring into being also “talk back” to them:

⁶ See documentary, “Tela sobre tela,” 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81ZwGT4RWDk>

As the *mamupujana* weavers advanced in their craft and addressed the violence suffered by their community at the hands of Colombian armed actors (including the state), their weavings began to alert them to a larger context of racialized violence and rupture of communal ties to the land. This led them to make several quilts that explore their Afro-diasporic identity and the historical cycles of violence and displacement, beginning with slavery, and of which the armed conflict was one of the most recent installments (Shepard 2019).

In this article, we make use of Thies' (2020) provocation to argue that deep relationality as viewed through the lens of *cosmopraxis* and enacted in weaving predisposes us to cultivate meaningful, caring connections and kinship in our relations with diverse beings across time-space, thus satisfying a crucial ontological requirement of relational and multiple worlds. Such a stance makes no claim to supplant existing traditions within IR nor to advance solutions to "real life" problems in global politics. Rather, it aims to foster more inclusive and communally beneficial intellectual and pedagogical encounters, and to nurture the kind of "aggregation" proposed by Thies as a means of creating purposeful links across scholarly difference while avoiding the pitfalls of compartmentalization or mere synthesis. Our discussion unfolds in three main sections. In the first, we summarize existing critiques of ontological singularity and separation with an eye to talking briefly about relationality and the specific ways in which the "relational turn" has unfolded in academic debates within and beyond IR. The section ends with an explanation of our own understanding of relationality and of how it differs from other uses of the term.

Section two develops the idea of *cosmopraxis*. As a deeper form of relationality, we argue that *cosmopraxis* exhibits several interrelated principles, including processes of co-becoming, being-feeling-knowing-doing and both-and logics. Given that being, feeling, knowing and doing are considered inseparable, simultaneous and cyclical components of existence within deep relationality, we also highlight the need to reconsider isolated categories such as epistemology, ontology and methodology as interconnected and fluid. Third, we lay out a "how" of *cosmopraxis* by examining a series of dispositions that awaken relational sensitivities. These include attention to bodily cues, slowing down reasoning and care. Throughout this section, we return to three "stories" about textiles in order to reinforce key points. While there are certainly other mediums available for observing *cosmopraxis* in

action, we find the specific qualities of weaving particularly well suited. In addition to being a collective and communal endeavor, weaving epitomizes interconnection, co-dependence, carefulness, reconciliation of differences, and constant becoming. Our intention is to therefore to thread the three stories into the fabric of the article as a means of mirroring the act of weaving and *cosmopraxis* itself.

The story of the Afro-descendent women of Mampuján has already begun in the introduction; we will soon hear about the Coroma textiles and the *mochila arhuaca*, two kinds of weavings practiced by indigenous communities in the Andes. Although we do not cite local thinkers nearly enough, in the spirit of acknowledgment rightly claimed by Native American scholars Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) and Zoe Todd (2016), we recognize our debt to those ancestral knowledges and practices that allow us to tell these stories. While our examples are drawn from specific regional and national contexts, Latin America, and Bolivia and Colombia, respectively, we also note that they speak to cosmic practices of use for envisioning alternative ways of relating that are observable virtually anywhere, given the appropriate predispositions to feel or see them.

Relationality

Critical reflection on the atomistic ontology characteristic of Western modernity is widespread and well-rehearsed, thus warranting only brief revision here. Notwithstanding considerable variation in the analytical concerns pursued by distinct areas of study, the literature⁷ also conveys important intersections, two of which are of particular interest to our discussion of relationality. First, ontological divides between culture/nature, subject/object, human/non-human, mind/body, us/them, and so forth are deeply embedded in modern, Western metaphysics and its resulting institutions and practices. The resulting logic of binary separation creates a “god’s eye view” of the world as if it existed outside us, and conditions

⁷ By way of illustration, see Donna Haraway (1991), Bruno Latour (1993), Philip Descola (2013) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014). See too Blaney and Tickner (2017) for a discussion more specific to International Relations.

us to think of opposites in terms of contradiction, differentiation and mutually exclusive “either/or”.

Decolonial authors such as Sylvia Wynter (2003), Anibal Quijano (2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004) and María Lugones (2008) associate this particular way of understanding and practicing existence with the “discovery” and conquest of the Americas, and with the second wave of colonialism in Asia and Africa, both of which are deemed decisive moments in the enactment of Western modernity. Under colonialism, difference was coded as racial, gender, ethnic and civilizational inferiority, and “relations” conceived as existing only between (rational) humans, thus othering colonized peoples and severing deep ties with the land, their ancestors and other-than-human beings. Similarly, alternative ontologies such as animism, analogism and totemism, rooted in relationality instead of separation (Descola 2013), and their respective worldings were demoted to the realm of (primitive) myth and belief.

Second, relations and practices are what make reality, not the reverse. According to John Law (2004: 65), “one does not have to buy into Euro-American metaphysics to retain a commitment to out-there-ness.” Rather, seeing that the world “out there” is contingent on humans and other-than-humans bringing it into existence is crucial to understand the power-laden politics that underlie any process of worlding. Law (2011) shows that modern Western metaphysics creates the illusion that the universe is a self-evident, preexisting and fixed space-time box that operates independently of the practices that make it so. This “one-world world” performs itself, among others, through allegedly universal categories such as science, the state, capitalism and globalization. One-world world logics rooted in either/or also operate to negate (via othering) or to “same” (via incorporation and capture) alternative forms of being, thus denying the complexity, entanglements and messiness at the root of our planetary existence, as well as the possibility of multiple and potentially incommensurate worlds.

Feminist physicist Karen Barad’s (2007, 361) “agential realism” echoes these ideas by showing that “scientific practices do not reveal what is already there...what is ‘disclosed’ is

the effect of the intra-active engagements of our participation within and as part of the world's differential becoming.” What makes this author's analysis so powerful is her deployment of quantum physics against Newtonian one-worldism to rethink questions of ontology, epistemology, objectivity and causality. We will return briefly to several of Barad's broader insights about reality and knowledge making in our discussion of *cosmopraxis*.

In keeping with the aforementioned critiques, relationality is an ontology in which entities (or beings) come into existence and are transformed through relations. In contrast to the modern Western ontology of separation and independence, it posits interconnection, co-becoming and the mutual complementarity of opposites as key existential principles, as expressed by Confucian and African terms such as *ying-yang* and *ubuntu*, or the Mayan saying *tú eres yo y yo soy tú* (you are I and I am you).

Defined as such, relationality is apparent in everyday practices throughout the world even though most academic discussions draw heavily on indigenous, aboriginal, First Nation and non-Western cosmologies when discussing it. By way of simple illustration, Tim Ingold (2007) suggests that relationality like the wind comes to us as an experience or a *mingling with*. For example, we cannot see, touch or contain the wind, but we regularly feel its presence in the open air, as we do rain or sunshine. From a relational perspective, the wind only *becomes* in its *blowing*, as fire *is* in its *firing* (Ingold 2007, S31). We too “are human only in contact, and conviviality” with the animate earth and other-than-humans (Abram 1996, 23). However, “the world we describe in our writing is one that has been imaginatively remodeled *as if* it were already set-up within an enclosed interior space” (Ingold 2007, S32). Understanding how one-worldism has operated to create this *as if* world characterized by enclosure and separation and turning ourselves inside-out to repair and renew our connectivity with the cosmos is a vital facet of deep relationality. By the same token, as we discuss subsequently weaving is a matter of connection, co-becoming and constant transformation, not of independence, submission or closure.

Relations, Relationality and IR

Admittedly, talk of relations is nothing new in International Relations⁸. However, as Trowsell et al. (2020) and Kurki (2020) suggest, the ontology of relations prevalent in most approaches to world politics is highly problematic. It prioritizes “things,” be they states, collectives or individuals, reduces its view of relations to those that exist between these “things,” gives preference to “human” things as its main subject matter and is predisposed to “other” some of these things. In response to these shortcomings, scholars of non-Western approaches to IR have examined relationality as practiced by Confucianism (Qin 2018; Kavalski 2018) and to a lesser extent, Daoism (Ling 2014). For example, Qin Yaqing (2018) explains that *Zhongyong* dialectics rooted in the meta-relation between *yin* and *yang* entail a both-and way of thinking that contrasts with a Western logic of binarism, separation and either/or. Like other relational ontologies in which all things are related and self is in the other and vice versa, the principles of inclusivity, complementarity, becoming and harmony occupy center stage in both Confucian and Daoist thinking. But, even though *yin-yang* constitutes the foundation of every form of life, including the natural, social and other worlds such as those inhabited by our ancestors, Qin’s (2018, 113) proposal for a relational theory of international relations sides squarely with a social world comprised solely of human relations.

The field has also turned increasingly to new materialism, post-humanism, assemblage thought and in Kurki’s (2020) case, after an exhaustive and insightful review of these other literatures, scientific cosmology. Assemblage, described by Acuto and Curtis (2014, 3) as a “repository of methods and ontological stances towards the social” is rooted in the idea that worlds, both natural and social, are made up of heterogeneous arrangements or assemblages of relations and processes that are fluid and ever changing. While this underscores the impossibility of talking about reality (including the “things” that are in it) through fixed categories, it also implies that meaning and reality are co-created. Similarly, post-humanism

⁸ Constructivism has long tackled questions of relations via state and other actor identities, ideas and norms, as have post-positivism theories such as post-structuralism that underscore the role of discourses and power in their constitution.

questions the givenness and separateness of binary categories such as human/non-human and is concerned with studying the practices and processes through which they are created and the boundaries between them solidified, as well as the aliveness, agency and co-participation of “things” in world politics (Cudworth, Hobden and Kavalski 2018).

At the risk of generalization and oversimplification, one important distinction that we observe between the representatives of this “relational turn” within and beyond IR, and the actual experience of relationality as it is lived and practiced by communities around the globe, is how “matter” is dealt with. Although the new materialists, post-humanists and assemblage thinkers have attempted to show that inanimate “things” are key actors in relations, that they have agency and that they might even be considered “alive” they continue to be treated as categorical things. In contrast, for relational ontologies such as animism nothing is just a thing; rather, everything in the cosmos, including inanimate “objects” are *beings* with spirituality and the potential to become *people* through the relations that they sustain. Adopting a deeply or robustly relational stance (Shilliam, 2015; Trowsell et al. 2019) means that if the primary condition of human existence are relations, limiting our understanding of relationality to only human relations constrains the ability to understand dynamic processes of co-becoming that determine our being in the world and our worldings.

Equally problematic, practices emerging from ontological differences that are unrecognizable within “our” one-world world, for example, human dialogue with knowing and feeling earth beings or spiritual agents, are frequently translated into something more readily familiar like religion (De la Cadena 2015). Awareness of such equivocations (Viveiros de Castro 2014) and the illusion of shared communication that they create is fundamental to “take a step sideways” to colonial science (Shilliam 2017, 278).

An example might elucidate this point better. International repatriation is a commonly used tool for once colonized communities to demand the return of ancestral remains, and ceremonial and cultural items taken from them. The Coroma textiles are one such case:

In 1988, Bolivian textile expert Cristina Bubba learned that ancient weavings stolen from the village of Coroma were being auctioned in the United States and advised both community leaders and the Bolivian government. As a signatory to a UNESCO treaty to stop and prevent the traffic of cultural goods, the U.S. government agreed to track down the textiles and was able to confiscate around 650 of them. A delegation comprised of members of the Coroma community and official government representatives travelled to Washington to identify and reclaim the textiles. They identified 49 as those stolen from Coroma, while the rest belonged to other communities. This was the first of many actions taken to recover other ancestral treasures in Bolivia.

Yet this is only half of the story, one of state actors, diplomatic collaboration and international recognition of the cultural rights of human communities. Given that textiles are repositories of collective historical memory and cultural identity (Bubba Zamora 1998) it is also not hard to recognize their role as actors. What if the Coroma textiles were not just artifacts that “mattered” but beings in their own right? In the late 1970s early 1980s the population of Coroma, suffered a series of misfortunes, ranging from severe drought and cattle starvation to children dying at birth. A covenant of *yatiris* (shamans) performed a ritual with (sacred) coca leaves and inquired into their causes with the spirits, plants and other-than-human beings. They learned that *Los Jach’a tata* and *Jach’a mama* (the founding male and female souls of the community) were unhappy with their “exile” in the North (Bubba Zamora and Albó 2010).

The interruption of the relation and interconnection between humans, weavings and spirits encouraged Coroma’s leaders, under the constant advice of the *yatiris*, to form a commission to travel to the United States and bring back the lost souls/textiles. During their stay, they were able to recognize some of these as their ancestors and to rescue them. Once inventoried and stored in crates, the textiles spent some nights at the Bolivian embassy in Washington, where officials began to feel a different energy. The embassy’s official mascot, a dog, would also sit and bark at the boxed-up weavings as if in deep conversation with them. U.S. customs officers confessed that when they inspected the crates before shipping them back to Bolivia, they perceived something strange and even heard whispers.⁹ In Coroma, the textile souls were

⁹ Personal telephone conversation with María Teresa Campero, former business attaché at the Bolivian embassy in the United States, February 10, 2019.

received with great honors, welcome parties and rituals that lasted more than 15 days (Bubba y Albó 2010: 120). Even though 49 weavings were rescued, many are still missing, leaving a cosmic hole in communal existence, as they are what allow people of the *ayllu* to dream and to obtain the energy they need to keep on living (Bubba Zamora 1998).

In this sense, the theft of the Coroma textiles constituted much more than the loss of sacred ancient objects and history; it was no less than the loss of the communal soul. Repatriation thus entailed the return of national patrimony, but more importantly, the journey home of the lost souls and the restoration of balance. This illustrates that life under relationality entails co-dependence and co-becoming between distinct kinds of beings entangled in a constantly evolving cosmic weaving.

Working from within the existential assumptions of those who practice it is key to going deeper with relationality, a discussion that we turn to in the next section. In the specific case of the Coroma textiles this means recognizing that weavings are historical registers but also textile souls with personhood that participate actively in the lives of the communities they co-create, and with whom communication is possible via cosmic agents such as shamans. Even if we may not be able to see such a world, sensing and more importantly, acknowledging its existence, is possible given the appropriate sensibilities. As we hinted at above, scientific (and pedagogical) practices often work at cross-purposes by keeping us inside our heads, where knowledge is presumed to originate, and in the laboratory and the classroom, thus cutting us off from our own worldly relations.¹⁰ Weaver, storyteller and artist Elvira Espejo describes the problem quite fittingly when she notes that, “in our community school the senses are used to see and know the world in a more comprehensive way...we dance, we sing and we weave while we learn. In contrast, in the ‘traditional’ school the body is forced to keep still while we think to learn” (Mora 2018: 208). This succinct but seemingly accurate portrayal of communal and relational education reflects the embodied and feeling nature of knowledge and learning at the root of *cosmopraxis*.

¹⁰ Niccolini, Zarabadi and Rinrose (2018) draw attention to this pedagogical challenge and offer one possible answer through classroom exercises that make use of yarn to generate embodied feelings of kinship.

Cosmopraxis

From a relational framework of existence, the interrelated experience of being, knowing and doing, which we might loosely associate with the separate categories of ontology, epistemology and methodology,¹¹ is part of a simultaneous and integrated cycle that transpires as relations unfold (being while feeling while knowing while doing). In this sense, knowledge, like existence itself, is an embodied, collective and caring affair derived from relations in which the entire cosmos is involved, including humans and other-than-humans (Cachiguayo 2019). The idea that knowing is located in the feeling heart and not the head (frequently expressed in Spanish as *sentipensar*) and in specific experiences of reality (or standpoints) has a long genealogy in both feminism, and Latin American liberation, indigenous and Afro-descendent studies.¹² In addition to the Andean, Amerindian and Native American contexts, it is echoed in numerous other cosmological traditions that embrace deep relationality, such as Hinduism, Sikh, Buddhism and Islam (Trowsell et al. 2020) and is reflected in common expressions such as “heartfelt thought” that underscore the organic link between heart, stomach and lungs, known as *chuyma* in the Aymara language.

Rather than a view of the world and its meaning constructed from the outside, relational ontologies then reflect a “moving, ‘multiple world’ constituted by nurturing relationships between animals, plants and humans alike” (Munter and Note 2009, 99). According to authors such as Munter and Note (2009) and Arnold (2017), *cosmopraxis* is better suited to describe this condition, even though we customarily refer to it as a cosmovision, by which we unwittingly reduce it to the status of a belief or a culturally inflected interpretation of the world. Although developed within the Andean context of the Aymaras, the term refers more generally to relational practices of co-participation, learning how to act in the cosmos (Arnold 2017: 10-16) and walking through space-time, or in Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2008, 100)

¹¹ Epistemology refers to how we know and how we represent reality. In turn, methodology sets “the context within which particular practices of knowledge production might make sense” (Jackson 2011: 32) and can thus be likened to an existential practice.

¹² Arturo Escobar (2014, 2020) develops and discusses *sentipensar* in depth. See too, Anzaldúa (1987), López Intzín (2013), and Ruiz-Trejo and García-Dauder 2019.

words, “looking back and forward to the future-past” to move into the “present-future.” It “does not refer to an abstract knowing or viewing,” but “rather, almost literally to going about the different contexts that make up the multiple world practiced” (Munter and Note 2009, 101).

In light of the above, we maintain that *cosmopraxis* exhibits three interrelated components: relations of interconnection and co-becoming between all types of actors, both human and other than human, animate and inanimate, and the spaces created in-between them; simultaneity, inseparability, and cyclicity of being, feeling, knowing and doing; and both-and logics rooted in existential complementarity. We now turn to a brief discussion of each of these. From a relational perspective the world(s) is(are) comprised of myriad relations and practices and their respective worldings, all of which are characterized by interdependence, entanglement and change. The idea that actors are actors due to their relations, that these relations are constantly evolving, and that actors are always becoming is encapsulated in Haraway’s (2008) idea that we are all involved in relations of co-becoming with many. According to Anna Tsing (2019, 237-8), the touching between worlds or friction created through such relations sets off emergent and shifting ontological frames, the result of which are “cosmopolitan” connections rooted in the comings together and apart of distinct actors.

Feminism, postcolonialism, decolonialism and queer thinking have all gestured to the epistemic potential of embodied knowledges emerging from the in-between spaces created as a result of such interactions. However, from the vantagepoint of *cosmopraxis* this does not exhaust what it means existentially to be in the middle, given that partial connections (Strathern 2004) also open up places of encounter between different worlds, including the spiritual world. In Andean thinking, *taypi* is the space in the middle where encounters between opposites (or antagonists) take place. But it also means structure, process and transition towards a becoming, and the in-between place where *ch’ixi* (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018) – which we liken below to both-and logics -- occurs. The concept of *taypi* is thus useful to grasp how relations between distinct actors change and resignify identities, and connect different times and spaces. Although *taypis* occur naturally within relationality they

can also be deployed as diplomatic tools in order to facilitate encounters and engagements with difference. Consider the following:

The Coroma textiles were considered sacred members of the Bolivian community because they were living spiritual beings and storytellers who co-became with the ancestor humans who wove and wore them, thus allowing past, present and future to be connected. Their theft and conversion into valuable relics suitable for auction in the United States, and ancestral patrimony in the eyes of the Bolivian state was resolved through the creation of a *taypi* with the help of the *yatiris*. This mediation between partially connected worlds entailed both cosmic diplomatic conversations between the shamans and the spirit-textiles and “official” ones between the two governments.

When our understanding of existence shifts beyond ontological singularity and moves towards plurality, as suggested by the existence of *taypis* and reflected in the notion of the pluriverse, the frontier between mind/body and epistemology/ontology also dissolves, as being and knowing (and doing) become part of the same process. This underscores the second component of *cosmopraxis*. Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 37-39) describes such a fusion as *la facultad* (faculty) to see, know, feel and be that takes place through a distinct kind of reasoning that is activated by the body, not the head and is rooted in sensitivity and aliveness to the world. Echoing feminist readings of embodied and situated knowledges (Harding 2004) this suggests that knowing is a corporal experience. One of the main results of Western modernity, according to Anzaldúa, is that people lose touch with other worldly beings, including spirits and ancestors, thus hampering their *facultades*.

From an Andean perspective, the process we describe as being-feeling-knowing-doing entails an ensemble of interconnected bodily organs exercising their *facultades* simultaneously: *las manos haciendo, la boca hablando, el corazón sintiendo* (hands doing, mouth speaking, heart feeling) (Cachiguango 2019). It is a cosmic affair, in which humans, nature, ancestors and divinities all participate. And it is permanent, ever-evolving and

circular, in the sense that existential cycles of being-feeling-knowing-doing begin, end and start over again in a constantly changing dynamic.¹³

Existential complementarity, a third component of *cosmopraxis*, is exemplified in both-and logics recognized in STS, queer theory and quantum thinking as an alternative to modern, Western metaphysics and its either/or binaries, as discussed previously. Scholars hailing from these theoretical schools variously show that different worlds overlap with each other and exhibit complex, entangled relations resulting in fractional realities that are best described as more than one and less than many (Law 2004, 61-2); queer subjectivity fails to qualify as either one sex, gender or sexuality or the other, but that customarily resides in-between or across all of them (Weber 2016, 3); and quantum entities such as light exhibit both particle and wave properties notwithstanding the distinct nature of the two phenomena.

Diffraction is an increasingly popular methodological approach, coined initially by Haraway and developed further by Barad (2007, 2014), to trace both-and realities in the physical and the social worlds.¹⁴ At the root of the latter's feminist-physicist analysis is concern with the relational nature of difference, in which absolute separation between opposites is inconceivable, but rather, distinct phenomena are cut together-apart in a simultaneous process of differentiating and entangling (Barad 2014, 168-9). As a metaphor, diffraction therefore "queers binaries and calls out for a rethinking of the notions of identity and

¹³Barad's (2007) concept of onto-epistemology, which has gained purchase among many scholars who self-identify as "relational" reflects a similar condition of entanglement between reality and the ways in which we go about knowing it, that makes ontology and epistemology inseparable. Given that humans are only one "part of the universe, but they do not have exclusive birth rights to knowing" (Barad 2007, 79) the author also argues that they should be ethically accountable for the world-making effects of their knowledge practices. Nonetheless, her analysis engages with just one facet of ontology as we define it -- what exists (or is real) in the world -- leaving unexplored related questions about being-ness.

¹⁴ As Barad (2007) explains, diffraction is both a metaphor for patterns of difference and a physical phenomenon consisting of the behavior of light waves when they encounter an obstruction. Although undoubtedly fascinating, the author's reading of feminist and natural science (and quantum) based definitions of diffraction against each other is beyond the scope of this article. In consequence, our discussion is limited to the term's metaphorical use.

difference” (Barad 2014, 171). The resulting entanglements or partial connections reinforce the above-mentioned idea, echoed too by relational ontologies that beings and things do not have to be one or the other, but can be both and more. In other words, difference is neither the opposite of sameness nor a synonym for separation or otherness.

The *mitá y mitá* mestiza consciousness described by Andalazúa (1987) as neither one nor the other exclusively, but two in one body, both male and female, rational and spiritual, Northern and Southern is likened by Barad (2014) to the “queer” behavior of electrons (that fail to behave only like particles but also exhibit wave behavior). In bidding farewell to the dead, the “Chicana” “Andean” or “Maori” and the “European” sides of distinct selves customarily partake in simultaneous practices of praying to god or Christ and communing with the ancestors, thus underscoring the both-and types of existence created through relationality (De la Cadena 2015; Salmond 2013, 2014). This example suggests that although “cosmopolitan” versions of Western concepts such as religion exist, they are customarily not only that (Tsing 2019, 238).

As Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) explains, relations between complementary and interconnected opposites result in a type of becoming that she calls *ch'ixi*, in which neither subsumes the other. Rather, the two live in communion (and sometimes, conflict) and coexist without blending completely together. For instance, firewood can be on fire and not on fire at the same time, and a stone can be black and white without becoming grey, or black, white and grey simultaneously. In the duck-rabbit Gestalt image, both duck and rabbit exist on their own, and yet both are part of the same image, even though they never fully fuse into a third and distinct duck-rabbit. Similarly, *chi'xi* allows many peoples to live inside and outside Western modern institutions such as capitalism and the nation-state at the same time. This is a distinct way of understanding encounters of difference that transcends notions such as hybridity which might only see the coming together of black and white as resulting in grey. Instead, what *chi'xi* suggests is that in-between spaces or *taypis* created through entanglement, interconnectedness and friction, allow things to become both black and white but not grey, or eventually, all three. Similar to diffraction, it enables us to understand beings,

both human and other than human, as fractional (more than one and less than many) and in constant co-becoming.

Both-and creates a distinct platform from which to generate analytical tools, as this next story suggests:

In the Sierra Nevada of Colombia, weaving constitutes a crucial activity for the Arhuaca community. The *mochila arhuaca* is a handwoven bag with a single strap used by Colombians (and foreigners) of all class and racial stripes. Indeed, its widespread use has practically converted it into a symbol of national identity. The *mochila* is regularly sold by the men and the women of the Arhuaca community and is indeed one of their main sources of livelihood. However, it is not just that. Arhuacan girls are taught by their mothers and grandmothers to weave from an early age, given the centrality of the *mochila* to their existence in both a cosmic and an economic sense. Weaving is a practice through which Arhuacans maintain cosmic balance. From the creation of each bag's circular base, which represents the *tierra* (land) or universe -- which are roughly synonymous -- to the spiraling nature of the weave and its circular enactment of time, the use of specific patterns, and regular "chatting" with ancestors, both weaver and *mochila become* in relation to each other. Given that the *mochila* results from the weaver's being-feeling-knowing-doing, when it senses her disconnection with the cosmos, imbalance or sadness, it resists being woven and her stitches do not advance as easily. In short, the *mochila arhuaca* is *both* an indigenous handicraft that is regularly sold for economic gain, *and* a living spiritual being that is fundamental to the community's existence in the cosmos. What happens to its spirituality and energy when it becomes a transactional thing? As explained by Ana, there is a "trick" for harvesting the life out of the *mochila* and recycling its spirit-energy, consisting of hiding the last string used in its making within its woven crown and using the remaining piece to start all over again.¹⁵

The "How" of *Cosmopraxis*

At the root of the "relational turn" is concern with how to think about relations, how to relate

¹⁵ Personal conversations with Ana, a member of the Arhuaca community of the Sierra Nevada, May-December 2019.

in a pluriverse characterized by multiplicity, variation and interdependence, and more significantly, how to communicate carefully and respectfully with other worlds even when we are unable to understand or even see them completely. Notwithstanding key distinctions, its representatives share the conviction that mobilizing relationality may help us “do relations” differently and ultimately in a better way. Nonetheless, Karen Tucker (2018, 224) makes the important point that the lack of “methodological reflection” within fields of study such as International Relations “leaves unaddressed the vital question of how scholars might actually practice...disruptive, multi-ontological, decolonial” science.

One problem that we identify in this article is that many of those who claim relationality as a heuristic device fall short of embracing it deeply and from within the existential assumptions of those who practice it. As authors such as Isabelle Stengers (2010, 3) have shown, the question “what can and do we know” entails a significant dose of academic and scientific censorship in that legitimate and relevant objects of knowledge are regularly separated from what are often described as speculation and belief. While it may well be that “natural” phenomena, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, monsoons, forest fires, pandemics and other non-human events, force our recognition and respect as *reals*, given their power to take human lives (Law and Jobs 2018: 9), spirits, ancestors and woven textiles, normally do not. From the vantagepoint of relationality then, our goal must be “to advance a methodology that is genuinely open to the existence of other forms of otherness; one that precisely refuses to place a bet either way when it comes to the question *what is?*” (Salmond 2014, 170). If our worlds are indeed already interconnected, entangled and diffracted, then *cosmopraxis* and its enactment in weaving, may offer us clues as to how to cultivate the sensitivities required for doing just this.

As suggested above, weaving embodies many features of deep relationality as viewed through *cosmopraxis*. We discuss several of the most important aspects of this craft here. First, it is grounded in many kinds of relations and it entails relating, even though most of us may not see weaving mainly in this light. Starting with the most obvious, a physical relation exists between the weaver and the needles and threads that she chooses to weave with, and a

proper form of relating with her woven textile is required in order for the weaving to advance. In many global contexts, this relation is also a communal and an inter-generational one, as people customarily come together to weave and specific knowledges (techniques, styles, designs and patterns) are regularly exchanged between weavers of varied ages. Both facets of the relation between the weaver and the woven textile, and between her and the community, entail a disposition that might be described as “curious playfulness,” which Haraway (2016, 16) likens to string figure games. These require “holding still in order to receive and pass on,” are “played by many...as long as the rhythm of accepting and giving is sustained” and they have no winners or losers. By tapping into feelings and play, weaving circumvents many common inhibitions, including perhaps those of students and scholars to adopt defensive measures to fend off criticism of their peers, and of “scientific” methods to discard things as unimportant or irrelevant for producing knowledge or for offering explanations.

As the stories we have drawn from the Coroma and Mampuján textiles and the *mochila arhuaca* illustrate, weavings are also relations of co-becoming in which both weaver and woven textile undergo constant transformation. In the case of Mampuján, as in all other instances of conflict textiles, strings, threads and stitches play a profoundly therapeutic function (Arias López 2017, Ordoñez Narvaez 2018) by allowing for the collective recreation and resignification of horrific and unspeakable experiences that words are unable to describe. In this co-becoming, as suggested previously, the *mampujanans* have given shape in their textiles to distinct practices of violence occurring in various times, thus retrieving memories not only of the Colombian armed conflict, but also of slavery and their African ancestors. In this fashion, their weavings have become “living monuments” (Shepard 2019: 77) to justice, reparation, healing, and even to long-forgotten rituals, customs and forms of being.

Notwithstanding such mending properties, the ontological existence of textiles themselves is rarely taken seriously (Pérez-Bustos 2017). Still, as suggested by the Coroma textiles and the *mochila arhuaca*, in many relational communities weavings are also living beings that become people through their relations with weavers, a process that also occurs in the co-transformation of clay and other material “things.” In the Andean context, from a young age,

women (in particular) learn to tell living from dead wool, and how to introduce the breath of life into the being that emerges from the textile through their stitching (Arnold and Espejo 2013). Such relations between humans and other-than-humans underscore the co-dependence that exists among all beings and the active roles played by textile-people in the maintenance of the cosmic balance. As noted previously, nurturing the spaces or the *taypis* that are opened up in between beings as a result of such co-becoming in space and in time, also creates cosmic links between what happened yesterday (past), what might happen tomorrow (future) and what is happening in the here and now (present).

Second, weaving is not just an ontological site of co-becoming, transformation and worlding, but a being-feeling-knowing-doing in which embodied, heart-felt knowledges are acquired, practiced and shared. While we customarily eschew the importance of the heart or the belly as acceptable sites from which to conduct scientific inquiry, myriad everyday experiences (including dreams, daydreams, déjà vu and spirit energy sensing) bring us into contact with phenomena, beings and worlds that we do not necessarily understand and that produce epistemic jolts and disconcertments normally experienced in the body. Mingling with the discomfort (Verran 2002) instead of explaining away cosmopolitical or worldly encounters (Stengers 2004), such as the barking of dogs when the Coroma textiles were stored at the Bolivian embassy in Washington or the strange energy and voices perceived by U.S. customs officials when the textile-souls returned home, constitutes an important step towards activating deep relationality.

By its very nature, weaving slows down our reasoning (Stengers 2004). It is an activity that requires careful planning in the choosing of threads and patterns, that refuses to be rushed, and that often demands going backwards to undo stitches or to repair mistakes in order to move forward. By challenging us to be creative and slowing down our will to produce maximally, it also prevents us from mechanically reproducing what we learn or what we think we know, therefore offering a means of resisting the “consensual” ways in which reality is presented and thoughts and actions mobilized (Stengers 2004, 2). In this way, slowing down helps to unpack discomfort, including the emotional and physical pain, suffering and sadness endured by victims of violent conflicts.

Cultivating such a *facultad* is also a matter of care. Echoing Pérez-Bustos (2016, 171), the stories we have told about woven textiles illustrate their caring role in sustaining life in a broad sense: they are a source of material sustenance when sold, they support the emotional well-being of those who weave them, they nurture the collective “social fabric” and they help to maintain the life of the cosmos. Understood as a vehicle for relating and for making kin, care is also a “vital requisite” in “interdependent worlds,” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012: 97) that acts to connect and to entwine being, feeling, knowing and doing.

In addition to weaving itself, the curation of textiles, conflict-related and otherwise, is another promising avenue to promote “caring” from within academia. Weavings are “object witnesses” that hold tremendous potential for unsettling existing knowledge about violence and repression, and for producing bodily discomfort and empathy towards the atrocities suffered by others (Andrä, Bleisemann de Guevara, Cole and House 2019). In this fashion, once woven, textiles become beings with the capacity to “speak” and to provoke emotional reactions in others without the mediation of spoken or written words.¹⁶ For example, even without prior knowledge of massacres in Colombia or the plight of the disappeared in Chile or Argentina, a person in New York or the Congo might easily relate to a textile’s stitched voice, with which it becomes a *taypi* that creates a cosmic bond between its human weaver and those humans that see and feel it, potentially enacting a whole new process of co-becoming.

Third, our stories illustrate that weavings are customarily more than “just” textiles, highlighting the both-and logics at the core of *cosmopraxis*. In the case of the Coroma textiles, the weavings are at once historical artifacts protected by international law and in need of repatriation, living keepers of the ancestor spirits, storytellers, and vessels to the past, and thus connectors to the future, making them an integral part of the social, political and cosmic community. Similarly, the *mochila arhuaca* is many things at once, ranging from a

¹⁶When such encounters include some form of corporality on the part of audiences, such as reading out-loud the names and personal anecdotes of the disappeared on messages written by family members and hidden in the back pockets of many Chilean *arpilleras*, or sewing them onto blank handkerchiefs, the results are eventually even more powerful. See André, Bleisemann de Guevara, Cole and House (2019).

local handicraft and symbol of “Colombianness” to a means of recreating the cosmos through its circular weaving process and its patterns. As she makes a *mochila*, the weaver (re)visits distinct worlds but never returns to the same point, given that spiraling time unfolds relationally and thus entails permanent co-transformation. Additionally, the completion of each of these cosmic performances leads to a new one, as the energized threads used to finish off a *mochila* breathe life into the next one. In the case of the Mampujan quilts, as we have already hinted at, textiles are a living testimony to violence and its victims, a tool to overcome trauma and suffering, and a path to empowerment through entrepreneurship, among others.

Viveiros de Castro (2014) describes the challenges of such both-and realities characteristic of deep relationality and *cosmopraxis* in terms of equivocation, which occurs when beings or people located in distinct worlds see the same thing differently. For instance, while an atheist or a non-Catholic might consider communion bread just “bread,” for a devote Catholic that same “bread” is the body of Christ. Similarly, in the eyes of a foreign tourist or an ordinary Colombian, a *mochila arhuaca* might be a handwoven bag, while for the Arhuaca community that same bag is a living being. Working within the existential assumptions of deep relationality leads us to expect such equivocations as a common occurrence and to equip ourselves with the appropriate sensitivities to treat them with care and respect, rather than ignoring or willing them away.

Conclusion

Our current existential and planetary crisis underscores the need to envision other ways of understanding what goes on in the world and of relating. As Thies (2020) reminds us, although it claims to study relations that take place around the globe, the field of International Relations still falls short of embracing ontological, epistemological, methodological and disciplinary inclusivity whole-heartedly. In this article we contend that deep relationality, as practiced by scores of peoples across the globe, is a useful way to talk about worldly affairs in a more profound sense of how we exist in and with the world, how we relate and ultimately, how we create our worlds (Omura, et. al. 2019; De la Cadena and Blaser 2018).

Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in “seeing”, “listening”, “thinking” and particularly “being” otherwise, embracing deep relationality as our point of analytical departure allows us to sidestep dominant “one world” ways of reasoning and doing. As discussed previously, *cosmopraxis* exhibits relational principles such as interdependence, entanglement, co-becoming and complementarity. By engaging with the interrelated experiences of being, feeling, knowing, and doing as a simultaneous moment of existence that evolves cyclically through our relations with other beings in the cosmos, it poses a meaningful alternative for talking about ontology, ethics, epistemology and methodology that needs to be more fully explored with an eye to enriching existing scholarly debates. In turn, *cosmopraxis* provides a set of sensibilities for engaging more fruitfully with multiplicity and difference, given its adherence to both-and logics rooted in existential complementarity.

We refer to a number of stories about weaving and textiles throughout the article to show by way of example how deep relationality understood as *cosmopraxis* works. Threads and strings comprise relations and become weavings that transform us, keep us company, give us advice and connect our worlds. As our stories suggest, textiles produce *taypis*, spaces and processes of mediation, diplomacy and relating. In this way, *taypis* provide us with tools to engage with difference deeply by co-becoming with it. Textiles are also *chi'xi*, in other words, they are textiles but they are also much more than that. In this sense it might be said that weavings offers us a roadmap for dealing with the complexities of the cosmos. No less important, weaving is a simple and powerful analogy – largely because it is practiced virtually everywhere -- that allows us to understand that there are ways of doing things differently.

How does this all relate to IR? As we have attempted to illustrate, enabling other dimensions of reality is a key contribution of deep relationality that we as academics can develop with an eye to retrieving other ways of knowing and of addressing questions relevant to world politics. For instance, problems such as war, conflict, security, globalization and cooperation that make up the “stuff” of our field, are all anchored in relations whose understanding is potentially limited when viewed through an ontological lens of separation and binary opposition (Trowsell et al. 2020). Arguably, *cosmopraxis* may not be well suited to a

traditional (positivist) research agenda. However, its mainstays, which include mingling with epistemic discomfort instead of rubbing it off or explaining it away, learning to slow down, practicing care and learning to see and think in terms of both-and, are of direct relevance for envisioning more plural research and teaching strategies, and for combatting distinct forms of scientific censorship that regularly suppress alternative academic imaginaries.

In short, we may not agree with each other's worlds, but interconnection, interdependence and entanglement do mean that we need to be able to relate across our differences. Doing so with respect continues to be one of the key challenges that face us today, both within and outside of academia. While *cosmopraxis* is just one alternative for cultivating relational sensibilities, and perhaps not a very conventional one at that, the question is ultimately: "could you work within or with this other-wise? Or can you at least acknowledge its explanatory adequacy without feeling that you have sacrificed your intellectual integrity?" (Shilliam 2017, 291).

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