

# Feeling for the Anthropocene: affective relations and ecological activism in the global South

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In recent years, the discipline of international relations (IR) has undergone significant ontological, epistemological and methodological shifts. It has moved beyond the rationalist state-centric scholarship and has opened itself to multivarious spaces of enquiry. States are no longer the only anchor for studying IR, and there are new entrants: nature, humans, animals, cosmos, technology, non-living objects and even magic.<sup>1</sup> Against this backdrop, this article seeks to study how recent interventions (mainly the ‘emotional’, the ‘relational’ and the ‘Anthropocene’ turns) in IR scholarship can contribute to studying ecological activism in the global South. Specifically, this article moves beyond the environmentalism of protecting, conserving and preserving the non-human world and discusses how considerations of affective relations between humans and nature then extend our understanding of the Anthropocene. In that vein, I ask: how do emotions shape ecological activism in the global South?

The Anthropocene has emerged as an important anchor for studying IR in recent years.<sup>2</sup> For a long time, ecological activism has treated ‘humans and nature

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<sup>1</sup> Joana Castro Pereira and Judith Renner, ‘Animals in International Relations: a research agenda,’ *International Relations* 37: 3, 2023, pp. 389–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231191294>; Amaya Querejazu, ‘Cosmop-raxis: relational methods for a pluriversal IR,’ *Review of International Studies* 48: 5, 2022, pp. 875–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000450>; Swati Srivastava, ed., *Hybrid sovereignty in world politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Steve Smith, ‘Environment on the periphery of International Relations: an explanation,’ *Environmental Politics* 2: 4, 1993, pp. 28–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644019308414100>; Clara Eroukmanoff and Matt Harker, eds, *Reflections on the posthuman in International Relations: the Anthropocene, security and ecology* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2017); Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, ‘Animalising International Relations,’ *International Relations* 37: 3, 2023, pp. 398–422, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231192345>; Shambhawi Tripathi, ‘But where is the magic? Emotional-relational humans and their untold stories in International Relations,’ *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 51: 1, 2022, pp. 157–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298221128346>.

<sup>2</sup> David Chandler, Franziska Müller and Delf Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene: new agendas, new agencies and new approaches* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

as distinct realms' with a focused call for balanced trade-offs between economic and ecological ends.<sup>3</sup> These environmental sensibilities sustained 'the idea that nature operates independently of human experience, and that humans should respect, preserve, live in tune with, or otherwise honor this'.<sup>4</sup> The Anthropocene cuts through these realms and argues for human-nature interrelatedness, emphasizing how they constitute one another.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing this Anthropocene condition entails thinking about ecological activism differently. The renewed interest in the Anthropocene condition focuses on the *felt* experiences of climate change and global warming, casting shadows on what is deemed a 'good life'. Therefore, IR is opening itself to research on how human activity has become a security threat to natural life.

Despite some communities in the global South not distinguishing between humans and nature, significant scholarly research on human/nature practices of the global South is yet to be done.<sup>6</sup> Most of the research on how humans deal with the challenges posed by the Anthropocene has been influenced by western technocratic fixes.<sup>7</sup> There is also a greater focus on the need for states to do something—and fix the ecological problems.<sup>8</sup> State centrality 'at the expense of embodied knowledge and emotional experience is characteristic of the chauvinism structuring the capitalist creation of knowledge'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, discussions around ecological activism are dominated by ecological movements in the global North, which put great emphasis on 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology, 'ecofeminism', 'eco-socialism', 'eco-miserablism', 'eco-warriors' and 'green parties', among others—and there are barely any discussions around ecological practices of the global South.<sup>10</sup> These scholarly tropes reinforce the belief that humans can fix things, despite how ugly things turn out to be. Therefore, this article seeks to study how human practices about nature from the

<sup>3</sup> Paul Wapner, 'The changing nature of nature: environmental politics in the Anthropocene', *Global Environmental Politics* 14: 4, 2014, pp. 36–54 at p. 37, [https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP\\_a\\_00256](https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00256).

<sup>4</sup> Wapner, 'The changing nature of nature', p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Wapner, 'The changing nature of nature', p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Jens Marquardt, 'Worlds apart? The global South and the Anthropocene', in Thomas Hickmann, Lena Partzsch, Philipp Pattberg and Sabine Weiland, eds, *The Anthropocene debate and political science* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). Through a thorough review of 1,209 journal articles published between 2002 and 2016, Marquardt concludes that 'ideas, worldviews, and concepts from the global South are rarely recognized in the Anthropocene discourse despite the concept's global aspirations'.

<sup>7</sup> Cheryl McEwan, 'Decolonizing the Anthropocene', in Chandler, Müller and Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene*, pp. 77–94.

<sup>8</sup> Matt McDonald, 'Climate change and security: towards ecological security?', *International Theory* 10: 2, 2018, pp. 153–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971918000039>; Matt McDonald, 'In defence of ecological security', *New Perspectives* 31: 1, 2023, pp. 39–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825X221143620>; Justin Joseph, 'State, society and environmental security in International Relations theory', *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 16: 2, 2023, pp. 171–90.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca H. Hogue and Anaïs Maurer, 'Pacific women's anti-nuclear poetry: centring Indigenous knowledges', *International Affairs* 98: 4, 2022, pp. 1267–88, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa120>.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher H. Trisos, Jess Auerbach and Madhusudan Katti, 'Decoloniality and anti-oppressive practices for a more ethical ecology', *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 5, 2021, pp. 1205–12, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01460-w>; Felipe Costa Lima, 'What if the West died? Global South's thoughts on environmental violence', *Sustainability and Climate Change* 14: 6, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1089/scc.2021.0028>; Carmen G. Gonzalez, 'Bridging the North-South divide: international environmental law in the Anthropocene', *Pace Environmental Law Review* 32, no. 2 2015, pp. 407–34, <https://doi.org/10.58948/0738-6206.1765>; Christopher Rootes, 'Environmental movements: from the local to the global', *Environmental Politics* 8: 1, 1999, pp. 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644019908414435>.

global South can provide important interventions in IR research and contribute to alternative (if not newer) ways of doing ecological activism.<sup>11</sup>

Drawing on the recent Anthropocene, relational and emotional turns in IR scholarship, this article conceptualizes affective relations as a frame for *situating* and *sustaining* relations between humans and nature. It takes a cue from the feminist scholarship to argue that emotions and relations are intrinsic to Anthropocene thinking in the global South. Moreover, societies in the global South have predominantly imagined their place (among others) in, and practised, affective relations with nature.<sup>12</sup> Based on the insights from ecological activism in the global South, this article proposes two crucial arguments: first, that the ‘international’, as we understand it in IR, must be reconceptualized to decentre its focus on the ‘national’ and redefine itself as a relational sphere of society, where one worlding (i.e. way of being in the world) is different from the other—allowing for multiple worldings to exist simultaneously. Second, that emotions/feelings play a critical role in situating the nature/human relationships in sustaining this relational sphere. To empirically situate this research in the global South, I draw on insights from the Chipko movement as a historical instance of ecological activism in India. Affective relations have dominated the understanding of Chipko activists in their coexistence with the natural ecosystem. Hugging trees, silent demonstrations, evocative protest slogans, street plays, songs and performances emphasize how feelings act as a non-violent practice and become the sites of resistance in ecological activism. In Chipko, we see how affective relations sustain humans, nature and the state.

The article is organized as follows: the first section begins with a broad theoretical discussion of the Anthropocene, emotional and relational turns in IR. The second section develops affective relations as a conceptual category in discussing the Anthropocene condition in the global South. Finally, this article draws out important insights from the Chipko movement to situate how affective relations shape ecological activism in the global South.

## **A note on sources and methodology**

This article seeks to make a conceptual contribution to the field of global environmentalism by anchoring on ecological activism in the global South. I draw from sociology, political science, ecology and IR to study how emotions shape ecological activism. I incorporate three recent IR scholarly turns—emotional, relational and the Anthropocene—to conceptualize affective relations in the Anthropocene as a process through which humans and nature come to terms with one another.

<sup>11</sup> The special section in the July 2022 issue of *International Affairs*, ‘Feminist interrogations of global nuclear politics’, guest-edited by Catherine Eschle and Shine Choi, attempted to integrate Indigenous practices around nuclearism and various ecological movements in the global South. For instance, see: Shine Choi and Catherine Eschle, ‘Rethinking global nuclear politics, rethinking feminism’, *International Affairs* 98: 4, 2022, pp. 1129–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia118>; Hogue and Maurer, ‘Pacific women’s anti-nuclear poetry’; Anand Sreekumar, ‘Feminism and Gandhi: imagining alternatives beyond Indian nuclearism’, *International Affairs* 98: 4, 2022, pp. 1189–209, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia122>.

<sup>12</sup> Louise Knops, ‘Stuck between the modern and the terrestrial: the indignation of the Youth for Climate Movement’, *Political Research Exchange* 3: 1, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2020.1868946>.

In doing so, this article first engages with the Anthropocene turn, then proceeds to interpose its insights with relational and emotional turns to study ecological activism. This article draws on the sociological literature on ‘relational affect’ to draw on—and expand—affective relations as an analytical tool for thinking about ecological activism in the global South.

Empirically, this article draws insights from the Chipko movement in India as an illustrative case to study the affective relations between humans and nature, among humans about nature, and *vis-à-vis* the state power. This article has used Chipko as a single case to better understand complex processes through which affective relations shape ecological activism. Unlike multiple cases, where fine-grained detailing cannot be achieved, a singular case is dense and focused in its approach, allowing the researcher to study the event over the long term. Chipko stands out as an important case among global South ecological movements for three reasons. First, the movement began in India in the 1970s and coincided with a worldwide upsurge in environmental activism and awareness. The movement started to take shape about the same time as the landmark work *Silent spring* by Rachel Carson<sup>13</sup> gained prominence and the United Nations held its 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. The Chipko movement was a part of this greater worldwide wave of ecological activism, with some even exemplifying it as ‘environmentalism of the poor’.<sup>14</sup> Second, Indigenous and local groups, especially rural women, led the movement. It illustrates how marginalized and underprivileged groups are involved in environmental conservation. These groups frequently bear the brunt of ecological destruction, making their activism a potent inspiration for comparable movements around the world. Third, Chipko activists used innovative methods like hugging trees to prevent the latter from being felled, representing the affective relational interconnection with nature. Despite these critical factors, there is barely any systematic study of the Chipko movement among the IR scholarship on the environment.

This article relies on primary and secondary sources on the Chipko movement to draw insights on ecological activism. For instance, I have relied on the writings of Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Ghanshyam Sailini, Vimala and Sunderlal Bahuguna, and other prominent leaders of Chipko.<sup>15</sup> I have also relied on Ramchandra Guha and Shekhar Pathak, among others, whose works have documented the movement substantially,<sup>16</sup> and on documentaries about Chipko activists to gain

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent spring* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez Alier, *Varieties of environmentalism: essays North and South* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Chandi Prasad Bhatt, ‘The Chipko Andolan: forest conservation based on people’s power’, *Environment and Urbanization* 2: 1, 1990, pp. 7–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/095624789000200103>; Sunderlal Bahuguna, ‘Environment conservation for survival’, *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 35: 3, 1989, pp. 374–9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556119890303>; Sunderlal Bahuguna, ‘Message from our experiences [*sic*] from the Chipko movement and the anti Tehri Dam movement’, CORE, 31 March 2008, <https://core.ac.uk/display/234718379>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 6 December 2023.)

<sup>16</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *The unquiet woods: ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya* [1990], 2nd impression (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Shekhar Pathak, *The Chipko movement: a people’s history* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2021).

deeper insights into the rationale behind their practices.<sup>17</sup> These sources are juxtaposed to build a coherent story about how embodied practices can help us study affective dimensions of ecological activism. I have focused explicitly on slogans, speeches, songs and the practice of hugging as embodied practices that help tell the Chipko story. It is essential to point out that embodied practice as a methodological approach is nascent, simultaneously making it all the more fascinating and challenging. However, affect and emotions scholars increasingly depend on embodied practices to navigate through affective practice.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on their interventions in studying the affective–discursive space, I have used embodied practices as a methodological tool for the study of the Chipko movement.

## Intersposing the Anthropocene with emotions and relations

### *The Anthropocene turn*

With rising sea levels, the melting of polar ice and the fear that the Earth's temperature will warm by up to 2° Celsius by 2050, climate change, global warming and the environment have been much debated in recent decades. Despite the predominance of the rationalist state-centred study of IR, the recent scholarly interventions, in what has come to be known as the 'Anthropocene turn', add a critical lens to studying ecological practices.<sup>19</sup> They argue for a need to look beyond state-centric research in IR and shift the focus to the conditions of the Anthropocene. They also emphasize the need to broaden 'interest' to move beyond national boundaries and focus on the interests of humanity and the planet.<sup>20</sup>

Discussing the term 'Anthropocene' in 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer noted that it was intended to convey how human existence has 'left geologically significant traces'.<sup>21</sup> Crutzen further defines the Anthropocene as 'a new geologic epoch in which mankind has emerged as a globally significant—and potentially intelligent—force capable of reshaping the face of the planet'.<sup>22</sup> While

<sup>17</sup> *The man who dwarfed the mountains*, documentary, Public Service Broadcasting Trust, 2015, <https://psbt.org/films/the-man-who-dwarfed-the-mountains>; Prasar Bharati Archives via YouTube, 'Chipko Movement: Sunderlal Bahuguna, eco-activist', video, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBuOoYZ-U4A>; Pramod Mathur via YouTube, 'On the fence: Chipko Movement re-visited', video, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlooQxBTrL8>.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Åhäll, 'Feeling everyday IR: embodied, affective, militarising movement as choreography of war', *Cooperation and Conflict* 54: 2, 2019, pp. 149–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718807501>; Felix Rösch, 'Affect, practice, and change: dancing world politics at the Congress of Vienna', *Cooperation and Conflict* 56: 2, 2021, pp. 123–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836720954467>.

<sup>19</sup> Eroukmanoff and Harker, *Reflections on the posthuman in International Relations*; Cameron Harrington, 'The ends of the world: International Relations and the Anthropocene', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44: 3, 2016, pp. 478–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816638745>; Dahlia Simangan, 'Where is the Anthropocene? IR in a new geological epoch', *International Affairs* 96: 1, 2020, pp. 211–24, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz248>.

<sup>20</sup> Chandler, Müller and Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene*; Simangan, 'Where is the Anthropocene?.'

<sup>21</sup> Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, 'The "Anthropocene" (2000)', in Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, eds, *The future of nature: documents of global change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 479–90.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Madeleine Fagan, 'Security in the Anthropocene: environment, ecology, escape', *European Journal of International Relations* 23: 2, 2017, pp. 292–314, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066116639738>.

it is unclear when we entered the era of the Anthropocene, all of humanity's activities—since the discovery of fire, agricultural innovations, colonialism, the Industrial Revolution and the age of high-mass consumption—are considered to have caused the conditions of the Anthropocene.<sup>23</sup> The Anthropocene is a 'condition that we are in rather than ... an external set of problems which we are confronted with'.<sup>24</sup> This definitional clarity allows us to move beyond treating ourselves as the 'security referents'—something that needs to be secured—and focus on our role in creating the conditions we are confronted with today.

The recent 'Anthropocene turn' in IR has focused on the discipline's conventional issue areas, such as security, politics, conflict and governance. For instance, Matt McDonald develops a security discourse on climate change by focusing on vulnerability that includes space (people from the global South), time (future generations) and species (non-humans).<sup>25</sup> In his study of the Iraq War, Matthew Leep discusses the human responsibility towards non-human entities (such as animals) in war zones.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Madeleine Fagan problematizes the nature/culture binary in studying security discourse in which humans are not the central focus.<sup>27</sup> Recent scholarship has also emphasized the 'insider/outsider' aspect of the Anthropocene. Humans as 'insiders' are the agents who must respond to the Anthropocene conditions; simultaneously, humans as 'outsiders' are the problem—and the Anthropocene is the result of human activities.<sup>28</sup> In addition, a recent IR textbook on the Anthropocene has introduced various new research methods to study the Anthropocene, including 'collaging', 'map-making', 'spatializing', 'weather', 'thought experiments' and 'relationality'.<sup>29</sup>

The Anthropocene condition results from the irretrievable consequences of human activities, the capitalist desire for profits, and ecologically destructive policy interventions. The global Anthropocene condition requires global actions. While the worldwide nature of risk has come surprisingly late in IR theoretical discussions, sociologists like Ulrich Beck conceptualized 'risk society'<sup>30</sup> in the early 1990s. However, despite discussions on global risks posed by the Anthropocene condition, there is very little emphasis on the need to study ecological practices of the global South.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the discussions on ecological activism put a great onus on the states to do more, rather than looking at how citizens can actively co-participate in ecological actions. Despite the global appeal of the Anthropocene scholarship, western paradigms continue to take precedence, while the perspectives of the global South remain absent.<sup>32</sup> To move beyond the modernist 'overrepresenta-

<sup>23</sup> Simangan, 'Where is the Anthropocene?'

<sup>24</sup> Chandler, Müller and Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene*.

<sup>25</sup> McDonald, 'Climate change and security'.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Leep, 'Toxic entanglements: multispecies politics, white phosphorus, and the Iraq War in Alaska', *Review of International Studies* 49: 2 2023, pp. 258–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000158>.

<sup>27</sup> Fagan, 'Security in the Anthropocene'.

<sup>28</sup> Chandler, Müller and Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene*.

<sup>29</sup> Chandler, Müller and Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene*.

<sup>30</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk society: towards a new modernity* (London and New York: SAGE, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> McEwan, 'Decolonizing the Anthropocene'.

<sup>32</sup> Simangan, 'Where is the Anthropocene?', p. 212.

tion of Man<sup>33</sup> in Eurocentric conceptions of the world, this article juxtaposes the Anthropocene condition with emotional and relational lenses in IR.

### *The relational turn*

Relationality is at the heart of the Anthropocene debate. Decentering humans and states in IR scholarship requires establishing the relational entanglements between humans and nature. Relationality has been quite prominent in social sciences, especially in sociology, since the mid-1990s, emerging as an opposition and as an alternative to rationalist discourses.<sup>34</sup> Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel Nexon, in their article ‘Relations before states: substance, process and the study of world politics’, draw on insights from relational sociology and argue that processes and relations exist prior to states in the international system.<sup>35</sup> For decades, the constructivist, feminist and critical scholars in IR have challenged the dominant universalistic frame of analysis in International Relations.<sup>36</sup>

Among the recent contributions, the scholars involved with the ‘Doing IR differently’ group seek to broaden plurality, ‘in which IR scholars learn to effectively engage with difference at the ontological, methodological and practical levels’.<sup>37</sup> The relational IR scholarship deprivileges specific dominant knowledge practices (about states, international organizations, wars, political systems, etc.). Instead, it focuses on ‘identifying the significance of causal relations between existentially autonomous variables’.<sup>38</sup> Relationality is about a prior—in the sense that relations are prior to the existence of entities. Relationality seeks to move closer to a pluriversal—moving beyond a ‘one-world’ world and closer to multiple worlds—understanding of IR.<sup>39</sup> In the context of the Anthropocene turn, this would mean ‘embracing interconnection’ and ‘existential interdependence’ between humans and nature.<sup>40</sup> Some relational scholars have sought to move beyond rationalist, state-centric IR and have focused on nature-centric approaches to living across societies. Amaya Querejazu, for example, argues for moving beyond the colonial and humanist IR in the context of Andean tradi-

<sup>33</sup> Anibal Quijano, ‘Coloniality and modernity/rationality’, *Cultural Studies* 21: 2–3, 2007, pp. 168–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>.

<sup>34</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer, ‘Manifesto for a relational sociology’, *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 2, 1997, pp. 281–317, <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>; Nick Crossley, *Towards relational sociology* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, ‘Relations before states: substance, process and the study of world politics’, *European Journal of International Relations* 5: 3, 1999, pp. 291–332, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005003002>.

<sup>36</sup> Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, ‘Critical methods in International Relations: the politics of techniques, devices and acts’, *European Journal of International Relations* 20: 3, 2014, pp. 596–619, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066112474479>.

<sup>37</sup> Tamara Trowsell et al., *Recrafting International Relations through relationality* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 8 Jan. 2019), <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/01/08/recrafting-international-relations-through-relationality>.

<sup>38</sup> Trowsell et al., *Recrafting International Relations through relationality*.

<sup>39</sup> Milja Kurki, ‘Relational revolution and relationality in IR: new conversations’, *Review of International Studies* 48: 5, 2022, pp. 821–36 at p. 826, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000127>.

<sup>40</sup> Jarrad Reddekop and Tamara Trowsell, ‘Disrupting anthropocentrism through relationality’, in Chandler, Müller and Rothe, eds, *International Relations in the Anthropocene*, pp. 441–58.

tions and recognizing non-western cosmologies' multiple, relational nature.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in his study of collective personhood in Ecuador and New Zealand, Rafi Youatt argued that natural entities acquire legal rights through interactions with human beings.<sup>42</sup> The relational Anthropocene debate emphasizes the logic of interconnectedness between humans and nature, pointing us to the traces of species loss, deforestation, climate change and global warming.

The relational Anthropocene scholarship proposes three implications for better studying IR. First, relationality allows us to move beyond the rationalist nation-state frame of analysis and establish that relations make for the world. Second, the relational thinking in IR challenges the colonial conceptions of modernity, knowledge and ways of knowing, which will now be provincialized to accommodate perspectives from the global South. Third, the 'international', as we understand it in IR, must be reconceptualized to recognize the pluriversal nature of interconnections in/of the world. It must entail understanding where relations are placed at the centre of IR scholarship. And it must entail careful listening, empathy and relational sensibility for IR.

### *The emotional turn*

In the preceding section, we have shown interconnections between the relational and the Anthropocene turn. I now turn to studying ecological activism as a key element of the Anthropocene turn—and argue that emotions are intrinsic to the interrelationship between humans and nature. Environmental movements provide the space for actors to engage in practices that involve explicit displays of emotions<sup>43</sup> and exhibit the interrelationship between humans and nature. But before fully engaging in discussions around the interposition of emotions with the relational Anthropocene, we must situate emotions research in the broader IR scholarship.

Despite the main theoretical discussions in IR being built around various emotional states (for instance, realism on fear, institutionalism on trust, Marxism on human greed and constructivism on affect),<sup>44</sup> the IR scholarship has long treated emotions as having no explanatory value. Moving beyond the rationalist aversion to studying emotions, recent interventions in social sciences have argued that emotions are intrinsic to the study of politics. Drawing on the early scholarly intervention in cultural studies, sociology, history, anthropology and geography, many IR scholars treat emotions as an intrinsic part of the social and political realm.<sup>45</sup> This phenomenon has been called an 'emotional turn' in IR.<sup>46</sup> In recent years several scholars

<sup>41</sup> Querejazu, 'Cosmopraxis'.

<sup>42</sup> Rafi Youatt, 'Personhood and the rights of nature: the new subjects of contemporary Earth politics', *International Political Sociology* 11: 1, 2017, pp. 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olw032>.

<sup>43</sup> Alexa Weik von Mossner, *Affective ecologies: empathy, emotion, and environmental narrative* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Brent Sasley, *Emotions in International Relations* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2013), <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/06/12/emotions-in-international-relations>.

<sup>45</sup> Sasley, *Emotions in International Relations*.

<sup>46</sup> Brent E. Sasley, 'Theorizing states' emotions', *International Studies Review* 13: 3, 2011, pp. 452–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2011.01049.x>; Simon Koschut, 'Emotions and International Relations', in Renee Marlin-Bennett, ed., *Oxford research encyclopedia of international studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).



have looked at various emotional states<sup>47</sup>—such as humiliation, betrayal, anger, nostalgia, revenge, pride and trauma, among others.<sup>48</sup> The emotions scholarship has mainly focused on a state-centric approach, discussing how individual leaders' personal characteristics and their decision-making approaches shape foreign policy. While these studies are instructive, there is still a significant lacuna in the systematic study of how emotions shape ecological activism in global politics.

Ecological activism is replete with emotional practices—making posters, singing slogans and popular appeals are all mediated by emotions. In her *New Yorker* essay on climate emotions, Jia Tolentino writes: 'It may be impossible to seriously consider the reality of climate change for longer than ninety seconds without feeling depressed, angry, guilty, grief-stricken, or simply insane'.<sup>49</sup> In recent years, school and college students have marched globally to express their foreboding about the future. Among the movements that have captured the limelight are Fridays for Future, a youth-led global climate strike movement that began in 2018 and Extinction Rebellion, a UK-founded global environmental movement that demands governments preserve biodiversity and prevent ecological collapse. In 2019, 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, the founder of Fridays for Future, declared in her famous Davos speech: 'I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.'<sup>50</sup> The participants in these protest movements carry placards bearing slogans like: 'Climate justice without borders', 'There is no Planet B', 'Save the planet', 'Climate change is real', etc., which evoke an affective attachment in the onlooker.

As the example above shows, the discussions around ecological activism have focused mainly on how climate activists in western societies have sought to evoke

<sup>47</sup> On humiliation, see Paul Saurette, 'You dissin me? Humiliation and post 9/11 global politics', *Review of International Studies* 32: 3, 2006, pp. 495–522, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210506007133>; on betrayal, see Khaled Fattah and K. M. Fierke, 'A clash of emotions: the politics of humiliation and political violence in the Middle East', *European Journal of International Relations* 15: 1, 2009, pp. 67–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108100053>; on anger, see Todd H. Hall, 'We will not swallow this bitter fruit: theorizing a diplomacy of anger', *Security Studies* 20: 4, 2011, pp. 521–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.625771>; on nostalgia, see Mira Sucharov, 'Imagining ourselves then and now: nostalgia and Canadian multiculturalism', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16: 4, 2013, pp. 539–65, <https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2012.23>; on revenge, see Oded Löwenheim and Gadi Heimann, 'Revenge in international politics', *Security Studies* 17: 4, 2008, pp. 685–724, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410802508055>; on pride, see Aurora Ganz, 'Emotions and securitisation: a new materialist discourse analysis', *European Journal of International Relations*, publ. online Feb. 2023, pp. 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221151038>; on trauma, see Emma Hutchison, *Affective communities in world politics: collective emotions after trauma* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Adam B. Lerner, *From the ashes of history: collective trauma and the making of international politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

<sup>48</sup> In this article, I treat the terms 'emotions', 'affect' and 'feelings' interchangeably. The justification for this usage is mostly practical, and the theoretical engagement with the emotions terminologies is beyond the scope of this article. Although several scholars of emotions attempt to differentiate between the three concepts, it is crucial to remember that, as Sara Ahmed illustrates, separating affect from emotions is like separating an egg—'that we can separate them does not mean they are separate'. Sara Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, emphasis in original); see also Linda Åhäll, 'Affect as methodology: feminism and the politics of emotion', *International Political Sociology* 12: 1, 2018, pp. 36–52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olx024>; Tripathi, 'But where is the magic?.'

<sup>49</sup> Jia Tolentino, 'What to do with climate emotions', *New Yorker*, 10 July 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/what-to-do-with-climate-emotions>.

<sup>50</sup> Greta Thunberg, "'Our house is on fire": Greta Thunberg, 16, urges leaders to act on climate', *Guardian*, 25 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate>.

emotions in their protest movements—and influence political attitudes.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, dealing with the ‘affective reality of environmental politics’ would mean engaging in discussions about ‘end of the world’, ‘climate burnout’ and ‘end of nature’.<sup>52</sup> These terms, grouped together as ‘eco-miserablism’, premised on ‘the thought that it is already too late to avert the collapse of human civilization’, have enhanced the post-apocalyptic reading of ecology often associated with defeatism and fatalism.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, Mathias Thaler has argued that eco-miserablism proposes a ‘radical hope’, premised on Jonathan Lear’s notion that ‘something good will emerge’.<sup>54</sup> Despite attempts at broadening the affective lens to ecological activism, there is barely any discussion on the ecological practices of the global South against the Anthropocene condition. Engaging with ecological practices in the global South will enable us to study how emotions and relations are intrinsic to the Anthropocene. To this end, the next section seeks to conceptualize affective relations as a mechanism that allows us to better understand ecological activism in the global South.

## Affective relations and ecological activism in the global South

To conceptualize the notion of affective relations, this article draws on—and expands—the emotions scholarship in social sciences, which argues that feelings are the purveyor of social relations as exemplified in the relations between humans and nature. In recent years, some discussion about ‘relational affect’ has emerged in social sciences. Jan Slaby defines relational affect as ‘not individual feeling states but affective interactions in relational scenes, either between two or more interactants or between an agent and aspects of her material environment’.<sup>55</sup> Peter Merriman and Rhys Jones draw on writings on affect, materiality and relationality to rethink Michael Billig’s notion of ‘banal nationalism’ to show how nationness and national identity shape differential capacities of bodies to affect and be affected.<sup>56</sup> In fact, for feminist scholars, the ‘international’ is emotional and relational.<sup>57</sup> In their analysis, these scholars emphasize that it is possible to move beyond the nation-state frame of analysis and make the case for an animated mutuality between two entities interacting in spatio-temporal settings.

<sup>51</sup> Lena Maria Schlegel, ‘Between climates of fear and blind optimism: the affective role of emotions for climate (in)action’, *Geographica Helvetica* 77: 4, 2022, pp. 421–31, <https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-77-421-2022>; Anne Saab, ‘Discourses of fear on climate change in international human rights law’, *European Journal of International Law* 34: 1, 2023, pp. 113–35, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chado02>; Jasmine Lorenzini and Jan Rosset, ‘Emotions and climate strike participation among young and old demonstrators’, *Social Movement Studies*, publ. online 5 March 2023, pp. 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2023.2178406>.

<sup>52</sup> Knops, ‘Stuck between the modern and the terrestrial’, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Mathias Thaler, ‘Eco-miserabilism and radical hope: on the Utopian vision of post-apocalyptic environmentalism’, *American Political Science Review*, publ. online 18 April 2023, pp. 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542300031X>.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Radical hope: ethics in the face of cultural devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), cited in Thaler, ‘Eco-miserabilism and radical hope’.

<sup>55</sup> Jan Slaby, *Relational affect*, Working Paper SFB 1171 Affective Societies 02/16 (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2016), p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.17169/REFUBIUM-21646>.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Merriman and Rhys Jones ‘Nations, materialities and affects’, *Progress in Human Geography* 41: 5, 2017, pp. 600–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516649453>.

<sup>57</sup> Tripathi, ‘But where is the magic?’, p. 161.

Affective relations in the Anthropocene entail the processes through which humans and nature come to terms with one another. Feeling for nature entails attachments—how our bodies are interrelated with the nature we inhabit. It connotes how our bodies are intertwined in nature, allowing us to feel for nature in the process. Affective relations are paramount in how societies think of their place in nature. In the words of Sara Ahmed, nature is ‘what moves us, what makes us feel’, in the communities not driven by a capitalist-technocratic world-view.<sup>58</sup> Human–nature relations are ‘complex emotional configurations which shape experiences, subjectivities, social structures, and moral questions’.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, placing affective-relational experiences between humans and nature at the centre of our study ‘can provide refuge from, grapple with and ultimately transform a disenchanted world of IR’.<sup>60</sup>

Against climate change and environmental degradation, affective relations become the space where ecological activism is done. In a world where languages, cultures, food habits and practices are diverse and complicated, affective relations become a site for people to affect (and be affected by) others in their angst against ecological degradation and hope for a better future. These capacities to affect and be affected differ for different bodies, depending on historical relations, attachments and embodied practices. Therefore, affective-relational approaches to ecological activism allow us to explore qualities of expressions of intersubjective relations, ecological sentiments and feelings, which are innate to the communities in such eco-habitations.

Feeling and affective expressions with nature frequently emerge through relations, engagements and practices within such ecological spaces. In the global South, there is a predominance of what Bruno Latour calls ‘earthbound people’, who represent an imaginary collective of people who are ‘sensitive and responsible’ as they are bound by and to the Earth.<sup>61</sup> The earthbound nature in societies of the global South inevitably places ecological links in all human communities, allowing them to feel (for) nature. Some societies in the global South have always treated themselves as connected to forests—and are struggling to keep possession of ‘their lands, forests, water, mountains, knowledge, and ways of being’.<sup>62</sup> While affective relations help *situate* and *sustain* relations between humans and nature, they also become the sites of resistance during ecological activism.

For instance, Cristina Inoue has written extensively on the Yanomami, one of Brazil’s Indigenous peoples. Her research shows that the Yanomami believe that ‘the forest is their world’ and their ‘stories, poems, myths, dreams, written texts, and songs’ are expressions which allow them to coexist with the non-human world. In their world, the Yanomami ‘see themselves as one among many of the

<sup>58</sup> Sara Ahmed, ‘Collective feelings: or, the impressions left by others’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21: 2, 2004, pp. 25–42 at p. 27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276404042133>.

<sup>59</sup> Schlegel, ‘Between climates of fear and blind optimism’, p. 422.

<sup>60</sup> Tripathi, ‘But where is the magic?’, p. 158.

<sup>61</sup> Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: politics in the new climatic regime* (Cambridge, UK and Medford, MA: Polity, 2018).

<sup>62</sup> Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue, ‘Worlding the study of global environmental politics in the Anthropocene: Indigenous voices from the Amazon’, *Global Environmental Politics* 18: 4, 2018, pp. 25–42, [https://doi.org/10.1162/glep\\_a\\_00479](https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00479).

peoples and entities of the forest'.<sup>63</sup> The forest 'is part of a cosmological dynamic that encompasses' the interrelationship between humans and other beings: 'it feels pain, complains, and its tall trees moan and cry in pain when burned down'.<sup>64</sup> For the Yanomami, the forest is not an environment that needs preserving, but their home and world.

Similarly, the Irulas, a small ethnic group predominantly inhabiting the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, wholly depend on forest produce and wild animals (like wild boar, rabbit, rat, wild cat, deer and fish) for sustenance. Irulas are known as the 'forest people'; their settlements are located on the edges of the forests. Since their subsistence depends on harvesting and selling snake poison (for medicinal purposes), they offer prayers to snakes as they do so—and release them back into the forests.<sup>65</sup> Irulas are known for their animistic traditions of offering tearful prayers in the Tamil month of Masi for Kanniamma, the snake goddess, who they believe had left them in anger and caused all the misery.<sup>66</sup> The affective relations that the Yanomami of Brazil and the Irulas of India practise help sustain the nature–human interconnectedness. Like the Yanomami and the Irulas, countless communities in the global South depend on forests and affectively engage with nature every day. Affective relations help these communities to show gratitude towards their ecology but also to feel for the threats posed to that ecology.

Ecofeminists researching ecological activism have shown how 'intuitions, feelings, and thoughts' can help draw on women's connection with nature.<sup>67</sup> They equate oppression of women with exploitation of nature; recognize the oppression of animals; aim to be inclusive by acknowledging the inequalities that make this world; and treat nature 'as a living entity, of which we are an integral part'.<sup>68</sup> For instance, Vandana Shiva has written extensively on the ecofeminist strand of Chipko activism by explicitly connecting emotions with human/nature relations.<sup>69</sup> The affective relations lens to studying ecological activism in the global South helps situate how emotions and relations are intrinsic to nature and human interconnectedness.

The ecological insights from the global South allow us to make two important arguments. First, 'international', as it is understood in IR, must decentre its focus on the 'national' and redefine itself as a relational sphere of society. If one were

<sup>63</sup> Inoue, 'Worlding the study of global environmental politics in the Anthropocene'; Simangan, 'Where is the Anthropocene?.'

<sup>64</sup> Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The falling sky: words of a Yanomami shaman* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> TNN, "Irulas much more than a community of snake catchers", *Times of India*, 23 Feb. 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/irulas-much-more-than-a-community-of-snake-catchers/article-show/63035204.cms>.

<sup>66</sup> Dennis S. Jesudasan, 'Seeking the forgiveness of Kanniamma at dawn by the seashore', *The Hindu*, 8 March 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/seeking-the-forgiveness-of-kanniamma-at-dawn-by-the-seashore/article66591127.ece>.

<sup>67</sup> Rhonda Roland Shearer, review of *Ecofeminism* by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva; *Ecofeminism and the sacred* by Carol J. Adams; *Ecofeminism, women, animals, nature* by Greta Gaard; and *Women, the environment and sustainable development: towards a theoretical synthesis* by Rosi Braidotti, Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Häusler and Saskia Wieringa, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22: 2, 1997, pp. 496–501, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/495180>.

<sup>68</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* [1993] (London: Zed Books, 2014).

<sup>69</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying alive: women, ecology, and survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988).

to treat ‘national’ as an imaginary of a socio-political unit of governance—like kingdom, society, clan, tribe, village, among others—then it is easier to dismantle the ‘national’ and replace it with ‘social’ (as a broader space for socio-political relations and governance). I draw on the feminist and decolonial scholarships on emotions, which argue that it is necessary to look beyond the statist praxis and ‘reconstruct the discipline by asking whose relations in the international’<sup>70</sup> are taken seriously. Reconfiguring the ‘international’, which replaces ‘national’ with ‘social’, allows us to think of IR as a relational sphere of society, where multiple worldings<sup>71</sup> simultaneously co-constitute the globe. Second, emotions play a critical role in situating the human/nature relationship and in sustaining this relational sphere. As discussed earlier, relations are always emotional—as they are about embodied experiences felt by two entities (humans and nature). Therefore, emotions both help *situate* and *sustain* multiple worldings in IR. Worldings encompass processes of determining that ‘we’ are in relation to ‘others’, and emotions help sustain those relations. These insights, I hope, will nudge IR scholars to think further, engage and develop these concepts better.

To empirically engage with these theoretical insights, this article examines Chipko as a non-violent ecological movement practised in the global South. This article discusses how Chipko activists used affective relations to evoke the centrality of human/nature relations and engage in ecological activism. Despite all these implications for Chipko’s ability to influence ecological activism, IR scholarship has failed to study and incorporate Chipko’s novel insights about activism. Therefore, the following section draws on insights from the Chipko movement to study affective relations in the ecological activism of the global South.

## **The Chipko movement and ecological activism in the global South**

### *Historicizing the Chipko movement*

The Chipko (tree-hugging) movement began in the Himalayan region of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (later Uttarakhand) in 1973. It was started as a non-violent social and ecological movement spearheaded by villagers, particularly women, aiming to protect trees and forests. The central character of the movement is ascribed to the Hindi term *chipko*, meaning ‘to hug’ or ‘to cling to’, reflecting the primary tactic of demonstrators of embracing (wrapping their arms around) trees that are to be cut for commercial purposes.<sup>72</sup> The movement was successful in its appeal and its approach to bringing awareness about forests and their centrality

<sup>70</sup> Tripathi, ‘But where is the magic?’, p. 161.

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion on worlding, see: Inoue, ‘Worlding the study of global environmental politics in the Anthropocene’; Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue and Paula Franco Moreira, ‘Many worlds, many nature(s), one planet: Indigenous knowledge in the Anthropocene’, *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 59: 2, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329201600209>.

<sup>72</sup> The hugging of trees as a protest act was first demonstrated by the brave people of the Bishnoi community, led by Amrita Devi, who succumbed to death while trying to stop the felling of Khejri trees in 1730. Rucha Chitnis, ‘The original tree huggers: let us not forget their sacrifice’, *Women’s Earth Alliance*, blog post, 22 April 2013, <https://womensearthalliance.org/wea-voices/the-original-tree-huggers-let-us-not-forget-their-sacrifice-on-earth-day>.

in people's lives. Therefore, Guha, a historian, notes: 'Till Chipko, environmentalism was identified with rich countries and the middle class. Peasants, it was felt, lacked the knowledge and understanding of ecological processes, and India itself was too poor to be green'. This contrast with the emerging view of the Chipko as the 'environmentalism of the poor'.<sup>73</sup>

After achieving independence from British colonialism in 1947, the Indian leadership pursued economic development centred around modern industry and agriculture. Once combative against colonial policies, following independence the Indian state retained most of the authoritarian aspects of colonial rule. These included the regressive forest policies that disenfranchised farmers, forest dwellers, pastoralists, women, Adivasis<sup>74</sup>, etc. Despite lofty claims with respect to forest conservation and efforts to turn 33 per cent of India into forests, there was barely any proposal for alternatives in the 1952 'forest policy'—and in most parts of the country, the colonial structure of exploitation persisted.<sup>75</sup> The idea of 'reserved forests' was maintained in the name of 'national needs'.<sup>76</sup> However, forest resources were exploited, and commercial tree-felling was permitted.<sup>77</sup> The state was deemed to be favouring commercial interests at the expense of peasants and forest dwellers' 'subsistence needs for fuel, fodder and small timber'.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, as Guha argues in *The unquiet woods*, Chipko was a peasant movement that sought to reclaim and defend community rights over forests.<sup>79</sup>

The Chipko movement was born in Mandal, a village in the Garhwal Himalayas, on 27 March 1973, when loggers working for the Allahabad-based Symonds & Company were thwarted from felling *angu* (ash) trees. Earlier that year, a cooperative led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt—the Dashauli Gram Swarajya Mandal (DGSM)—had asked permission to fell the same trees for making ploughs and other farming implements in their village workshop. However, the state government had denied DGSM the permission, while permitting Symonds to cut significantly more trees to make sports equipment. In defiance of this unjust treatment towards the local people, Bhatt declared: 'Tell them, we will not let them cut the trees, we will embrace the trees, we will stick with them.'<sup>80</sup> The women and men of the village hugged trees as a protest, and the loggers brought in by Symonds had to retreat from the forest.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Pathak, *The Chipko movement*, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> The term *Adivasi* refers to the heterogeneous grouping of tribes found throughout the Indian subcontinent. The literal translation characterizes them as original inhabitants of India, further affirming the indigenous identity of the tribal population.

<sup>75</sup> Pathak, *The Chipko movement*, pp. 64–70.

<sup>76</sup> Ashok Swain, 'Democratic consolidation? Environmental movements in India', *Asian Survey* 37: 9, 1997, pp. 818–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645699>.

<sup>77</sup> Swain, 'Democratic consolidation?'.

<sup>78</sup> Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, 'Ecological conflicts and the environmental movement in India', *Development and Change* 25: 1, 1994, pp. 101–36 at p. 104, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1994.tb00511.x>.

<sup>79</sup> Guha, *The unquiet woods*.

<sup>80</sup> Pathak, *The Chipko movement*, p. 100.

<sup>81</sup> This article does not engage with the historical intricacies of the Chipko movement, but seeks to touch upon parts of the movement to give the reader a contextual understanding while discussing ecological activism through Chipko. For a comprehensive historical study of the Chipko movement, refer to Pathak, *The Chipko movement*; Guha, *The unquiet woods*.

Due to the success of the Mandal protest, the message of the Chipko movement began to percolate through local society. The linkages between nature (i.e. forests) and humans were immanent throughout the protest movement as it spread across other parts of the Himalayan belt. The protests in Mandal soon spread to Phata and onwards to Rampur, and the movement's success was followed by protests in the village of Reni, by women and led by Gaura Devi. These protests brought women to the forefront of the Chipko movement. In the following decade, protests against commercial forestry and the contractor system, and in support of reclaiming community rights, swept through the Himalayan region, mainly coordinated by Gandhian and left-wing activists.<sup>82</sup> Chipko also spread to southern India, with communities in parts of Karnataka state launching the Appiko protest movement (the Kannada word *Appiko* loosely translates as hug/cling to) in September 1983 against the felling of trees in forests around Kalasa in the Western Ghats. Chipko's success as a movement is evident in its far-reaching effects on India's environmental policy. Chipko has also inspired other environmental protesters around the world; for instance, in 2008, environmental protesters in Japan adopted the Chipko movement's non-violent tree-embracing practices to stage a protest against the felling of trees on Mount Takao.<sup>83</sup>

With this historical overview of the Chipko movement, I now seek to employ an affective relations frame in understanding how ecological activism is done in the global South. I argue that Chipko represented affective relations between humans, nature and the state. In Chipko, the affective entanglements allowed activists to feel for nature and act in the face of state power. Affective relations helped activists understand how their livelihood depends on forests and how they should fight to protect them. The next part of this section looks at how Chipko activism focused on affective relations between humans and nature, among humans about nature, and *vis-à-vis* the state power.

### *Affective relations between humans and nature*

The Chipko movement focused on the importance of nature's role in human lives. Given the substantive role forests played in local lives—with the dependence on green leaves and grass for animal fodder, dry twigs and branches for cooking fuel, timber for making agricultural implements, and nuts, fibres and herbs for human consumption—Chipko was not merely an act of resistance, but an act of survival for these communities. As much as they protested the unjust treatment of state officials towards them, they were using affective relations to present their case. In doing ecological activism, the Chipko activists hugged trees to protest their felling by axemen, applied bandages to the trees, tied sacred threads and vowed to protect them against their destruction.<sup>84</sup> By wrapping the trees in bandages, for

<sup>82</sup> Gadgil and Guha, 'Ecological conflicts and the environmental movement in India', p. 104.

<sup>83</sup> Express Web Desk, 'Three environmental agitations inspired by the Chipko Movement', *Indian Express*, 26 March 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/three-environmental-agitations-inspired-by-the-chipko-movement-45th-anniversary-5112185>.

<sup>84</sup> Pathak, *The Chipko movement*.

instance, the activists demonstrated how trees had been hurt and needed to heal, just as wounded humans would be helped to heal by the application of bandages. Every such act undertaken in the Chipko movement shows the emotional attachment that Chipko activists have to the forests, on which their livelihood depends. Bhatt notes: 'If we are not in a good relationship with the environment, the environment will be destroyed, and we will lose our ground. But if you halt the erosion of humankind, humankind will halt the erosion of the soil.'<sup>85</sup> In an article published in the north Indian local newspaper *Amar Ujala* in 1974, these sentiments are reflected: 'Our being alive and healthy is connected to trees being alive and healthy. If trees remain, the mountains remain, and so does the country.'<sup>86</sup> Interconnections between humans and nature further propelled these activists to affectively push forth the narratives of dependence on forests for their livelihood and of a sense of desire to fight against ecological degradation.

### *Affective relations among humans about nature*

In the Chipko movement, people, regardless of gender (but primarily women), chanted evocative slogans to build solidarity among themselves. With their slogan *Van jaage, vanvasi jaage* [Forests arise! forest people awake!], these activists propelled a popular enthusiasm for protecting forests. Poets and singers like Sailini and Girish Tiwari composed songs to be sung aloud during marches, processions and meetings. Sailini's songs urged the local community to take their future into their own hands by joining the movement to save forests. They evoked a sense of grief and anguish at the exploitation of forests, and at the same time, they pushed forth joy and hope in the nature/human relationship. In one such poem, translated here, Sailini notes: 'To weave garments for barren earth, Plant new trees and make new forests. To save the Earth from impending danger, Come one come all and get together.'<sup>87</sup> Tiwari writes: 'The Himalaya is rousing you: Awake, my child, don't let me be auctioned, don't let them cut me down.'<sup>88</sup> In another instance, the Chipko activists sing: 'What will you do after you have destroyed us? You will repent. If you know what's good for you, nurture us, protect us ... we feel pain just the same as you.'<sup>89</sup> Songs and slogans expressing the centrality of ecology in human livelihood both affect and are affected by others in the movement. The practice of singing created emotional solidarities, helping people connect through shared anxieties and hopes.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Shepard, "'Hug the trees!'" Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Gaura Devi, and the Chipko movement', 1998, [http://www.markshep.com/peace/GT\\_Chipko.html](http://www.markshep.com/peace/GT_Chipko.html). Excerpted and adapted from Mark Shepard, *Gandhi today: a report on Mahatma Gandhi's successors* (Arcata, CA: Simple Productions, 1987).

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Pathak, *The Chipko movement*, p. 155.

<sup>87</sup> Bharat Dogra, 'Chipko poet and his songs', *Himal Southasia*, 1 Nov. 1989, <https://www.himalmag.com/chipko-poet-and-his-songs>.

<sup>88</sup> Pathak, *The Chipko movement*, p. 175.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Pathak, *The Chipko movement*, p. 177.



### Affective relations vis-à-vis the state

In the face of state power, the Chipko activists resorted to hugging trees as a political weapon. This signified the role non-violent Gandhian movements can have as an 'emotional force without any materialist base'.<sup>90</sup> Affective relations vis-à-vis the state power are visible in the protest tactics. Given how the state has been represented as having a monopoly over violence, the activists sought to use slogans and songs to engage with the state power affectively. To present their anguish towards the state power, the activists shouted: *Vanon ki raksha desh ki suraksha* [Protection of forests is protection of the country]; *Jangalon ki loot band karo* [Stop looting the jungles]; *Aa gya hai lal nishaan, van sampada ke luteron savdhan* [Here comes the red flag, looters of the jungle beware!]; and *Agar nahin neelam rukega, jungalon mein toofan machega* [If there is no stop to auctions, there will be a revolution in the forests], among others.<sup>91</sup> The non-violent activists marched between villages and cities to the beats of drums, shouting slogans and songs that depicted their oppression by the state power.

The Chipko movement provides exciting insights into the affective relations between humans and nature, among humans about nature, and vis-à-vis the state power. Chipko has effectively proposed an act of resistance through interposing one's body between trees and the axemen. Embracing the trees as an act of ecological resistance tells us something fundamental about ecology in everyday life. Shiva discusses the nature/human relationship by equating forests with the role of a teacher, eliciting the message of interconnectedness, diversity, integrity and plurality.<sup>92</sup> Through slogans, poetry and protests, the Chipko activists professed the role of forests in their everyday lives, which further helped create a bond between humans and nature, between humans about nature, and vis-à-vis the state. In their hugging of trees, singing and sloganeering, the activists affectively engaged with each other, the environment around them, and the state power.

### Conclusion

Given the lacuna in research on ecological activism in the global South, this article began its inquiry with how emotions shape ecological activism. Against the backdrop of efforts to move beyond the rationalist technocratic fixes, which emphasize the state's role in fixing things, this article has examined alternative ways of doing ecological activism based on a global South perspective. I have drawn on the three recent IR turns—namely relational, emotional and the Anthropocene—to conceptualize affective relations in the Anthropocene as an analytical tool to understand how ecological activism is done in the global South. In interposing the scholarship of the Anthropocene turn in IR with the relational and emotional

<sup>90</sup> Vandana Shiva and J. Bandyopadhyay, 'The evolution, structure, and impact of the Chipko movement', *Mountain Research and Development* 6: 2, 1986, pp. 133–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3673267>.

<sup>91</sup> Pathak, *The Chipko movement*.

<sup>92</sup> Uma S. Nabhi, 'Environmental movements in India: an assessment of their impact on state and non-state actors', *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 62: 1, 2006, pp. 123–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492840606200106>.

scholarships, one can gain important insights into how human–nature interconnections are sustained in the global South. More specifically, emotions and relations are intrinsic to the thinking around the Anthropocene condition. This article has argued that affective relations in the Anthropocene entail the processes through which humans and nature come to terms with one another. It connotes how feeling for nature is embodied in its participants. Affective relations play a critical role in ecological practices of the global South, as evidenced in the cases of the Yanomami of Brazil and the Irulas of India. Their interconnections with the forests have allowed them to think of themselves as one of the many species that inhabit nature.

With the onslaught of the Anthropocene condition, the insights from the ecological practices in the global South show us the need to decentre human greed<sup>93</sup> and refocus on ecological needs. These insights allow us to reimagine ourselves (as important stakeholders in society) at the centre of ecological activism, rather than expecting governments and corporates to do more. These insights also direct governments to rethink ecology as being centred around communities—allowing them the space to sustain with nature rather than driving policies that propel ecological imbalance. The article has drawn from the global South to make two arguments: One, that ‘international’, as it is understood in IR, must decentre its focus on the ‘national’ and rethink itself as a relational sphere of society. Two, that emotions help *situate* and *sustain* multiple worldings in IR. These insights hope to propel scholars to engage and think of new ways in which IR itself could be reconceptualized and reimagined. This article has drawn on the affective relations logic to argue that humans and nature are constantly interacting with one another in their spatio-temporal settings.

Empirically, this article has drawn insights from the Chipko movement in India as an alternative way for doing ecological activism in the global South. Challenging the conventional wisdom that the global South is too poor to think about the environment, Chipko’s grassroots activism has enabled an awareness of environmental degradation in the global South. In Chipko, this article has placed affective relations between humans and nature, among humans about nature, and *vis-à-vis* the state power, as a way of doing ecological activism in the global South. It has looked at how emotions were evoked in Chipko, through the practices of hugging trees, silent demonstrations, protest slogans, songs and other performances. It has shown that the affective embrace of trees has allowed people to do ecological activism *differently*. Unlike several postcolonial social movements where women were ascribed secondary roles, Chipko has empowered women and people from marginalized communities to actively engage and participate as important stakeholders in ecological activism. Furthermore, the discussion on Chipko has pointed out to us how feelings could act as a non-violent practice and become the site of resistance in the face of state power.

<sup>93</sup> R. P. Pathak, ‘Environmental challenges and Gandhian solution’, *Indian Journal of Political Science* 65: 3, 2004, pp. 367–76

This article has three important implications on how IR scholars, policy-makers, and ecology activists can better engage with each other. For IR scholars, it has pointed to new ways of thinking about affective relations in the ecological activism of the global South—and it has thereby nudged newer thinking around how different societies think of and do ecological activism globally. It clearly pushes IR scholars to move beyond the rationalist, state-centric frames of doing IR and move towards pluriversal multi-worldings in thinking about the global. For the policy-makers, this article has provided a way to come to terms with how communities think of their environments. It has made a case for policy-makers to listen to, empathize and engage with communities that depend on forests and other eco-habitats. Policy-makers should recognize their discursive agency.<sup>94</sup> As evidenced in Chipko, local communities understand their problem better—and governments must allow them spaces to engage in their ecological management. Local communities seek to become important stakeholders of forest rights, as they have been for centuries. And governments must make an effort to listen and understand their viewpoints—and not be merely driven by profit motives. Like Ecuador's legislation about nature, which recognizes explicit rights for 'Nature, or Pacha Mama',<sup>95</sup> this article encourages governments to think of ways to integrate nature into their everyday lives. Finally, Chipko has provided the ecological activists with new ways of thinking about doing ecological activism that highlight the human–nature interconnectedness. While activists need to demand that the states must do more, it is also necessary to re-emphasize how communities can be placed at the centre of ecological solutions.

<sup>94</sup> Navnita Chadha Behera, 'The "subaltern speak": can we, the experts, listen?', *International Affairs* 99: 5, 2023, pp. 1903–27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad181>.

<sup>95</sup> Youatt, 'Personhood and the rights of nature', pp. 47–8.