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Fictional IR and imagination: Advancing narrative approaches

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Abstract. In the field of International Relations (IR), narrative approaches and an alternative way of writing seem to have gained growing attention in recent scholarship. Autoethnography and autobiography can be taken as primary examples. The article aims to advance this growing scholarship by proposing the concept of fictional IR. The idea is concerned with how to use the imagination in IR. I suggest that fiction writing can become a method for dealing with lack of information and contingency surrounding it. Fictional IR is more than reading and using fiction as a reference source or vehicle for analysis. It can incorporate the employment of fiction writing in IR scholarship. One of the benefits could be to articulate sensitive and complicated problems in a more flexible and imaginative way, making the most of the power of story and imagination. It should be stressed that the focal point is to write fiction; it is not to write about fiction. To support this suggestion, the article offers a short fictional-factual story. By using imagination, creating characters, combining data with fictional narrative, or with one's own experience, I believe that more original and empathetic IR writing is possible.

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Introduction

In the field of International Relations (IR), narrative approaches and, more broadly, an alternative way of writing seem to have gained growing attention in recent scholarship.[1] The article aims to advance this growing scholarship by proposing the concept of fictional IR. The idea is concerned with how to use the imagination in IR. This article is designed, in part, as a response to the *Review of International Studies* forum

* An extended version of the exploration presented here can be found in Sungju Park-Kang, *Fictional International Relations: Gender, Pain and Truth* (London: Routledge, 2014). First of all, I must thank Christine Sylvester, who carefully encouraged me to develop the idea of fictional IR. I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to the editors and reviewers of *Review of International Studies*. It was an overwhelmingly happy and humble experience to read their comments. My special gratitude extends to Stephen Chan and Cynthia Enloe, wonderful storytellers/scholars, for their warm support. Annick Wibben, Mark Lacy, Laura Shepherd, Maria Stern, and Jenny Edkins deserve my special thanks as well. I am also grateful to Minoo Koefoed and Chris Witter. This article is dedicated to the ghosts and families of Korean Air (KAL) Flight 858.

[1] For example, *Review of International Studies* published forum articles on this subject in 2010. Other important examples include, to name a few, Annick T. R. Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach* (London: Routledge, 2011); Naeem Inayatullah (ed.), *Autobiographical International Relations:*

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articles on autoethnography and IR in 2010. I suggest that fiction writing can become a method for dealing with lack of data and contingency surrounding it. Fictional IR is more than reading and using fiction as a reference source or vehicle for analysis. Fictional IR can facilitate attempts to think deeper about concepts such as fact, reality, and truth, but it can also incorporate the employment of fiction writing in IR scholarship. One of the benefits could be to articulate sensitive and complicated problems in a more flexible and imaginative way, making the most of the power of story and imagination in methodological terms. It should be stressed that the focal point is to write fiction, it is not to write about fiction. Writing fiction is *not the same* as writing about fiction.[2]

This article eventually aims to explore the relationship between fact and fiction. How do we know a certain thing is fact? To what extent are fact and fiction entangled? If our realities are full of the unbelievable or fictional, then how can we depict and theorise the reality? These questions are challenging enough to push the boundary between fact and fiction. Indeed, the boundary needs to be called into question as '[i]n the English late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the word ''novel'' seems to have been used about both true and fictional events.'[3] And importantly, '[w]hat we are left with once those boundaries are breached is mythology, *imaginings*; we are left with telling stories.'[4]

As part of a preliminary discussion of fictional IR, it is necessary to briefly follow up this question. From the seventeenth century on, the boundary was established between scientific and literary writings, where science was associated with being true (fact), while fiction was associated with being false.[5] In other words, the comfortable dichotomy of fact-fiction is a historical construction.[6] Indeed, it is interesting to note that the word 'fact' originated from the Latin verb *facere*, which means 'to do', 'to create', 'to represent', or even 'to imagine' and 'to invent'.[7] It is therefore not surprising that scholars problematise the distinction between fact and fiction, for example

I, IR (London: Routledge, 2011); Cynthia Weber, *I am an American: Filming the Fear of Difference* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011); Elizabeth Dauphinee, *The Politics of Exile* (London: Routledge, 2013); L. H. M. Ling, *Imagining World Politics: Sihar & Shenya, A Fable for Our Times* (London: Routledge, 2014); Oded Löwenheim, *The Politics of the Trail: Reflexive Mountain Biking Along the Frontier of Jerusalem* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014). It is also important to note the following developments: the recent launch of *Journal of Narrative Politics* (2014) and the initiatives of new IR journals, such as *Critical Studies on Security* (2013) and *Critical Military Studies* (forthcoming 2015), that receive fiction or poetry in their special sections.

[2] For 'writing about fiction', see among others, Jutta Weldes (ed.), *To Seek Out New Worlds: Science Fiction and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Iver B. Neumann and Daniel H. Nexon (eds), *Harry Potter and International Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); Cerwyn Moore, 'On Cruelty: Literature, Aesthetics and Global Politics', *Global Society*, 24:3 (2010), pp. 311–29; Emma Hutchison, 'Unsettling Stories: Jeanette Winterson and the Cultivation of Political Contingency', *Global Society*, 24:3 (2010), pp. 351–68. See also Christine Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 307–13.

[3] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 1.

[4] Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture: Telling Stories* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 10, emphasis added.

[5] Laurel Richardson, 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edn, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 925.

[6] Svend Brinkmann, 'Literature as Qualitative Inquiry: The Novelist as Researcher', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15:6 (2009), p. 1388.

[7] Maureen A. Ramsden, 'The Play and Place of Fact and Fiction in the Travel Tale', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 36:1 (2000), p. 17. See also Brinkmann, 'Literature as Qualitative Inquiry'.

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in the areas of qualitative research, where the boundary has been consistently challenged, or media studies, where a fusion of objective reporting and imaginative fiction has emerged in the name of new journalism.[8] From my perspective, in broad terms, fictional IR is better understood when one recognises that the line between fact and fiction can be blurred and has been blurred, or at least that fact (reality) and fiction (imagination) are interrelated.[9]

Against this backdrop, firstly, autoethnography and autobiography are discussed as the recent examples of narrative approaches in IR. Throughout the examination, the issue of how they are different from fictional IR is also addressed. This is followed by more discussions of notable writings and fiction/nonficion. The article then goes on to elaborate the concept of fictional/imaginative IR and offers a short story as an example of this scholarship; I actually write fiction based on my research and experience by inventing characters. The article ends with a reflection on fictional IR and imagination by exploring the idea of an 'empathetic IR detective'.

Autoethnography and autobiography

Autoethnography might be taken as the first example of growing narrative approaches in IR. It is a way of writing and research, usually in the first person, that demonstrates multiple layers of consciousness, making connections between the personal, the cultural, and the political.[10] The main aspect of this genre is related to the issue of the self. It is linked to the idea that researchers' experiences can be used as a source in academic writing; it has been particularly developed by feminist writers.[11]

Jean Bethke Elshtain, an influential feminist IR scholar who passed away in August 2013, is a good example. Elshtain offers her 'intensely personal'[12] account of her own political and scholarly formation in an early chapter of the critically acclaimed book *Women and War*. She eloquently and powerfully describes how her sense of international politics and images of civilians/warriors have been constructed since her teens. This intellectual and personal writing is based on a variety of sources, including Elshtain's diary, films she watched, and her family's experience, among others. It ends with her son Eric Paul Elshtain's registration as a conscientious objector in 1985 and Howard Hawks' classic war movie *Sergeant York*, which is followed by the examination of war discourse throughout the rest of her book. Elshtain incorporates

[8] Norman K. Denzin, 'The Facts and Fictions of Qualitative Inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2:2 (1996), pp. 230–41; John Hollowell, *Fact & Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

[9] For more on the discussion of fact and fiction, see among others, Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origin of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Shelly Fisher Fishkin, *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism & Imaginative Writing in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997); Anna Banks and Stephen P. Banks (eds), *Fiction and Social Research: By Ice or Fire* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998); Paul C. Rosenblatt, 'Interviewing at the Border of Fact and Fiction', in Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (eds), *Handbook of Interview Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 893–909.

[10] Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edn, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 733–68.

[11] Ibid., pp. 740–1.

[12] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995 [orig. pub. 1987]), p. 14. The work of feminist IR scholar Elshtain seems to confirm the above observation made by Ellis and Bochner about personal-political-academic writing.

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personal experience into an important piece of scholarly work and can therefore be remembered as one of the pioneering academics who paved the way towards narrative-personal writings in IR.

Now let me turn to the *Review of International Studies* forum articles. Roxanne Lynn Doty suggests that the self is always present in academic writing by virtue of its absence.[13] Autoethnographic IR is an attempt to work on this problem of absence. It challenges conventional formats of IR writing that discourage authors who want to include their selves in their texts.[14] As Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker suggest, by acknowledging that knowledge is relational and social,[15] feminist scholars and autoethnographers, in particular, share a similar understanding of knowledge production and writing processes. One of the criticisms made against autoethnography is the risk of self-indulgence. Indeed, the question of how to make the self has a presence without dominating the story is significant.[16] This seems to be a constant struggle.[17] However, the point I wish to consider is whether scholarly writing and debates could be considered as a way of storytelling.[18] In broad terms, fictional IR and autoethnographic IR can be regarded as an ally in this: they actively pursue the power of story and narrative.

Despite the similarity, however, there are differences between fictional IR and autoethnographic IR. First, there is a critical difference in terms of their position on fiction. Autoethnographic IR distances itself from fictional accounts or novels. Elizabeth Dauphinee, who presents an exemplary autoethnographic work and refuses to be a novelist, makes this position very clear by saying, 'I don't intend for my scholarship … to be dismissed this easily.'[19] Furthermore, she adds that 'if I am a novelist, then I must be in the business of training a generation of novelists masquerading as social scientists behind me'.[20] In other words, Dauphinee seems to make a case for maintaining a line between social scientists and fiction writers. To be fair, she carefully acknowledges the erosion of boundaries in a footnote.[21] But still, according to Dauphinee, novelists can hardly be academics as their evidence is anecdotal.[22] This resistance against fictional accounts is shared by others. For instance, Oded Löwenheim mentions 'a fictive reality'[23] as a method for protecting private information in autoethnography.[24] Although I understand (and support) his good

[13] Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Autoethnography – Making Human Connection', *Review of International Studies*, 36:4 (2010), p. 1048.

[14] Oded Löwenheim, 'The "I" in IR: An Autoethnographic Account', *Review of International Studies*, 36:4 (2010), p. 1029.

[15] Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations: Exploring the Self as a Source of Knowledge', *Review of International Studies*, 36:3 (2010), p. 791.

[16] Doty, 'Autoethnography', p. 1049.

[17] For more on the discussion of 'self-indulgence', see Andrew C. Sparkes, 'Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More?', in Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (eds), *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), pp. 209–32.

[18] Brigg and Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations', p. 790.

[19] Elizabeth Dauphinee, 'The Ethics of Autoethnography', *Review of International Studies*, 36:3 (2010), p. 803.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., fn. 9.

[22] Ibid., p. 817.

[23] Löwenheim, 'The "I" in IR', p. 1031.

[24] Meanwhile, Iver B. Neumann, who holds two PhDs in Politics and in Social Anthropology, offers his reflection on Löwenheim's piece as follows: 'I cannot see why it should be referred to as autoethonographical, not least because there was no writing … going into the data collection.' He instead calls it 'a successful exercise in IR autobiography'. Iver B. Neumann, 'Autobiography, Ontology, Autoethnology', *Review of International Studies*, 36:4 (2010), p. 1055.

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intention, I believe that the suggestion is based on a distinction between academic and fictional writings. By constructing a fictional account, an autoethnographic work could be legitimised as *academic* writing.

Such a distinction might lead to unintended consequences. For example, it could underestimate various IR works that use fiction in their investigations.[25] As fiction does not fit into academic writing, in the end, IR works using fiction as a main source of analysis lack legitimacy as scholarly writing. I believe that IR autoethnographers do not intend this result, but the risk is nonetheless embedded therein. Fictional IR is an attempt to methodologically challenge this distinction. It embraces the power and insight of fictional imagination. More importantly, it stresses that there have already been traditions of fictional or imaginative accounts in IR scholarship. This needs to be noted as a key difference between fictional IR and autoethnographic IR.

Second, related to the above, there is a difference with regard to the main focus. Autoethnographic IR is deeply concerned with the self, while fictional IR is largely concerned with imagination. This does not mean that autoethnography is exclusively and narrowly focused on the self, excluding all other things. From my perspective, autoethnography engages in the self to make connections with others and the world. The self is regarded as a vehicle for exploring a socially and politically connected world.[26] What I suggest is that fictional IR does not have to focus on the self, though using the self remains an option. Fictional IR might use personal experiences and place the self at the centre of the stage. That, however, is not the focal point of fictional IR. What makes autoethnography is the self, 'auto', which is not the case for fictional IR.

Nevertheless, I do not necessarily take the above differences or tensions as being negative. It could be regarded as a constructive tension to create a 'partnership'. From a fictional IR perspective, there are still interestingly similar points that auto-ethnographic IR presents. Dauphinee is concerned with the lack of verification and with speculative data;[27] Löwenheim is interested in how to make others 'feel' IR by focusing on emotions.[28] Fictional IR very much also cares about these issues. In this sense, I hope that conversations can be generated between what I would call potential allies. More broadly, the two both seek to formulate an alternative way of writing in the field of IR by actively using narratives and storytelling.

Another form of writing that is closely related to the self is autobiography. It is a politically and emotionally engaged mode of writing that mixes personal components with research expertise.[29] In the field of IR, the collective project *Autobiographical International Relations: I, IR* is worth noting. It challenges conventional academic writings that take the author's absence as a prerequisite for objective and scientific

[25] For example, along with the works mentioned earlier in a note at the beginning, see Maja Zehfuss, *Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sungju Park-Kang, 'Utmost Listening: Feminist IR as a Foreign Language', *Millennium*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 861–77; Christine Sylvester, 'TerrorWars: Boston, Iraq', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 7:1 (2014), pp. 11–23.

[26] I would say that there is an epistemological risk that one might take 'the self' as something highly autonomous, independent, and individualistic. In other words, the self could be read as a very much separated and singular being, as part of a Western-centric ideology of modernity. See also Doty, 'Autoethnography'.

[27] Dauphinee, 'The Ethics of Autoethnography', p. 812.

[28] Löwenheim, 'The "I" in IR', p. 1027.

[29] Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey (eds), *Autobiographical Writing Across the Disciplines: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 2.

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formats. The project seeks to retrieve the 'I' and explicitly demonstrate its presence.[30] In other words, it is concerned with 'how personal narratives influence theoretical articulations'.[31] As the editor Naeem Inayatullah states, writing comes out of our own needs and wounds[32] and contributors engage in this proposition in their own ways. For instance, in comparing reading books about war and having a tangible experience of blood and death, Stephen Chan asks, '[s]hould academics talk and write on a basis so textually bound and so ontologically naïve?'[33] Lori Amy, for her part, talks about her fieldwork and seminar experiences.[34]

But the most interesting thing is the extent to which the contributors express their tensions about this unconventional autobiographical form of writing. Narendran Kumarakulasingam mentions nervousness about writing without a 'map'[35] and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson says that he just wants to tell 'stories' without trying to make any explicit connections, because that was why his previous attempts failed to produce a contribution to this project.[36] Peter Mandaville, who writes the epilogue, addresses others' angst and procrastination and confesses his own tension that led him to take the easier route to act as a commentator.[37] Their testimonies demonstrate how difficult and experimental this form of writing is.

Like autoethnographic IR, autobiographical IR actively engages in the questions that Roxanne Lynn Doty asks: 'Where is the soul in our academic writing? . . .Where are *we* as writers?'[38] The collection by Inayatullah directly situates scholars as story-tellers.[39] It attends to themes such as emotions and experience and makes the most of the power of story and narrative. In this context, autobiographical IR could be regarded as another potential ally to fictional IR.

However, just like autoethnographic IR, whose main focus is the self ('auto'), there is also a critical difference. That is, its position on fiction. Although the project acknowledges that '[a]cademic writing supposes a precarious fiction',[40] the editor makes it clear that the essays are not fiction.[41] Rather, the project is described as both scientific and trans-scientific. It is important to note that the term 'scientific' is used, as this is one of the most common ways to distinguish academic writing from nonacademic. Again, this is where fictional IR comes in. This article suggests that fiction writing can be used as a methodological tool to deal with IR questions. It does not distance itself from fiction, as autobiographical and autoethnographic IR do. Rather, it is concerned with how to make fiction writing and imagination integral parts of IR scholarship. This would never be an easy task, but it is my hope that the article could work as a modest attempt to start the related discussion.[42]

[30] Inayatullah, *Autobiographical International Relations*, p. 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 8.
[33] Ibid., p. 15.
[34] Ibid., pp. 103–17.
[35] Ibid., p. 30.
[36] Ibid., p. 161.
[37] Ibid., p. 196.
[38] Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls: Identity and Voice in the Writing of Academic International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:2 (2004), p. 378, emphasis in original.
[39] Inayatullah, *Autobiographical International Relations*, p. 383.
[40] Ibid., p. 5.
[41] Ibid., p. 7.
[42] Apart from autoethnography and autobiography as scholarship, I would add that the self has frequently haunted academic publications across the disciplines. Consider acknowledgements or prefaces of books (and sometimes articles). They usually reveal authors' struggles to publish, 'personal' stories, research networks/interlocutors, families and even lovers, all of which could constitute the above auto-scholarship to some extent.

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Notable writings and narrative IR

At this point, a very intriguing project needs to be mentioned. Dauphinee's recent work *The Politics of Exile* presents a positive indication of the conversation I look for. It seems to blur the boundaries between autoethnography, fiction, and non-fiction. Without introduction, conclusion and any other notes or references, this work offers a book-length story or narrative. The book opens with this sentence: 'I built my career on the life of a man called Stojan Sokolović.'[43] It then tells stories about how 'I' – the university professor who works on Bosnia and war and seems to be Dauphinee herself – met Stojan; how Stojan challenged or 'ruined' her research and how war changed Stojan's and his families' lives, as well as the matters of loneliness, love and ethics of writing about war, among other things. Dauphinee ends with a scene where the professor starts to write: 'I am building my career on the loss of a man named Stojan Sokolović, and on the loss of many millions of others, who may or may not resemble him. And one night, he told me . . .',[44] which appears to be the beginning of her previous book *The Ethics of Researching War: Looking for Bosnia*.[45]

This work could read like fiction, autoethnography, or both, or even other forms, depending on the reader. It seems to unsettle what Michael J. Shapiro calls the difference between social science investigators and fiction writers: researchers presume that their subject positions are irrelevant to their inquiries, whereas writers do not.[46] I believe that the uniqueness and strength of this book is the way in which it questions 'walls' between any fixed forms of IR writing. If so, this recent project seems to push forward Dauphinee's earlier acknowledgement of the erosion of boundaries between writings. As Jenny Edkins points out, by blurring the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, this work opens up the possibility of creative practice in IR.[47] I hope that there will be more works like this one.[48]

L. H. M. Ling's *Imagining World Politics: Sihar & Shenya, A Fable for Our Times* is another very interesting work. This project is impressive in the sense that it explicitly

[43] Dauphinee, *The Politics of Exile*, p. 1.
[44] Ibid., p. 208.
[45] Elizabeth Dauphinee, *The Ethics of Researching War: Looking for Bosnia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 1.
[46] Michael J. Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 15.
[47] Jenny Edkins, 'Novel Writing in International Relations: Openings for a Creative Practice', *Security Dialogue*, 44:4 (2013), pp. 281–97. For other discussions of the book, see the 2013 special issue of *Security Dialogue*, in which Edkins contributed this article.
[48] In other fields, ethnographers and sociologists seem to have blurred the writing boundaries much earlier and more frequently. Feminist ethnographer Kamala Visweswaran explicitly states that ethnography is fiction and fiction is ethnography, and furthermore offers a short story. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). For imaginative/fictional writings and experimental ethnography, see among others, Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004). In IR, Christine Sylvester attempts to employ a fiction writing style based on her fieldwork in Zimbabwe. *Producing Women and Progress in Zimbabwe: Narratives of Identity and Work from the 1980s* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 1–16. Cynthia Enloe offers a 'feminist archaeological' account of her childhood in relation to militarisation and femininity, in an unconventional way of writing. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 309–17. Marysia Zalewski's book shows another possibility. *Feminist International Relations: Exquisite Corpse* (London: Routledge, 2013).

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brings imagination into IR scholarship. The title of the book itself – *Imagining* – clearly reflects this endeavour. Written 'in fictional form',[49] the book aims to reconstruct the imbalanced world of IR, where Western/Eurocentric or masculine traditions have been predominant. Moreover, 'in the form of a fable',[50] it imagines a different kind of world, beyond binary distinctions such as West versus Rest and Self versus Other. As part of this experimental writing, Ling has created characters, most notably Sihar (a male ruler) and Shenya (a female priestess) together with Wanda (a PhD student in IR). It appears that Ling tells this fictional story to her imaginary collective audience 'Gentle Friend'.[51]

When it comes to the layout of the book, the degree of imaginative ambition seems to have been slightly restrained. Unlike Dauphinee's work, the book starts with an academic-analytic 'Preface' and ends with 'Questions for Discussion'. This format is however understandable if one takes it as a strategic choice for guiding readers. In short, the book seems to be one of the most creative and interesting works (particularly on imagination) in recent IR scholarship.

To follow up the above discussions, one other genre deserves attention: fictocriticism. According to Anthony Burke, who introduces this genre into the field of IR, 'social science as fiction'[52] takes two forms. One is the novel and short story; Burke situates Dauphinee's recent book within this category. The other is fictocriticism, 'a form that combined naturalistic and self-reflexive modes of fiction with more transparently theoretical work'.[53] It seems to me that fictocriticism is much friendlier towards fiction than autoethnography and autobiography. Fictocriticism, in this sense, can be said to be a stronger ally to fictional IR. In other words, this genre takes on 'the suggestive and allusive modes of fiction and narrative' or 'the imaginative power of discourse'.[54] By doing so, fictocriticism eloquently questions the line between fiction and nonfiction.

One of the leading fictocritical writers, Stephen Muecke, mentions the blurred boundary between criticism and fiction.[55] This is well evidenced by his book *No Road (bitumen all the way)*, in which Muecke tells stories, among others, about people he met, starting with the Aboriginal woman Gloria Brennan, places he travelled and theorists like Roland Barthes.[56] In a flexible form of narration, he juxtaposes his own stories with Australian society and culture.

It needs to be noted that this type of writing is basically placed in New Humanities and multidisciplinary cultural studies.[57] This indicates that fictocriticism, like autoethnograpy and autobiography, is an alternative way of writing imported from non-IR fields. It is this point where fictional IR makes a unique contribution to the discipline. Whereas the related writing above tend to bring insights from other fields (which is good), fictional IR attempts to find insights within the field, which has not been

[49] Ling, *Imagining World Politics*, p. xxvi.
[50] Ibid., p. xxii.
[51] Ibid., pp. 3, 95, 182, among others.
[52] Anthony Burke, 'Narrative, Politics and Fictocriticism: Hopes and Dangers', The Disorder of Things, available at: {thedisorderofthings.com/2013/03/14/narrative-politics-and-fictocriticism-hopes-and-dangers} accessed 28 March 2013.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Stephen Muecke, 'The Fall: Fictocritical Writing', *parallax*, 8:4 (2002), p. 108.
[56] Stephen Muecke, *No Road (bitumen all the way)* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Art Centre Press, 1997).
[57] Heather Kerr, 'Sympathetic Topographies', *parallax*, 7:2 (2001), p. 107.

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actively pursued before. As I will demonstrate later, unlike the conventional wisdom, IR scholarship itself is no stranger to fictional accounts. This is another difference that distinguishes fictional IR from related writings. But still, fictocriticism can be a hybrid genre that juxtaposes fragments and quotations in collage-like arrangements.[58]

Indeed, Burke's essay testifies to this mode of writing.[59] He weaves his personal experience, biopolitical theories, and various speech or news scripts in a narrative form. The essay begins with the moment when Burke's wife, Jenny, gives birth to twins in December 2005. He reflects on machines, science, and modernity that become 'the power to make live' and at the same time 'the power to let die', or to torture and kill in the name of 'hard choices'.[60] Burke seems to go back and forth between the birth of his twin babies and the so-called War on Terror in terms of life and death, 'imagining a more humane and sustainable (geo)politics'.[61] Throughout his writing he consults various theorists such as Hedley Bull, Francis Bacon, and William Connolly, to name a few. Given its interest in fiction-friendly form and narrative power, therefore, fictocriticism must be another ally to fictional IR.

Apart from that, it is encouraging that there are IR scholars who write and publish fiction (on a regular or irregular basis), although not necessarily in scholarly journals. For example, Stephen Chan has published several fictional texts in *nthposition*, an online magazine that is full of poetry, fiction, opinion pieces, and political writings. Chan's most recent fiction seems to be about war, diplomacy, and a cycle of violence between colonists and rebellion, all of which are conveyed in a metaphoric form and open to interpretation.[62] Meanwhile, Richard Jackson has recently published a 'novel' in the context of terrorism studies: *Confessions of a Terrorist: A Novel*.[63]

Taken together, I hope there will be a constructive dialogue between/among autoethnography, autobiography, fictocriticism, fictional IR, and other narrative approaches. This leads me to pay particular attention to the news of a workshop held at the York Centre for International and Security Studies, York University, in 2012 – 'Critical Methodologies, Narrative Voice and the Writing of the Political: The Limits of Language'. Reflections by some of the participants have been collected as a mini-forum on critical methodologies and narrative in IR in *The Disorder of Things*.[64] I can sense that what Elizabeth Dauphinee, who organised the workshop, calls 'narrative IR' is emerging. However, as one non-IR participant, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua from Indigenous Studies, observes, this emergence faces much

[58] Anne Brewster, 'Fictocriticism: Pedagogy and Practice', in Caroline Guerin, Philip Butters, and Amanda Nettlebeck (eds), *Crossing Lines: Formations of Australian Culture* (Adelaide: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1996), p. 92.

[59] Anthony Burke, 'Life, in the Hall of Smashed Mirrors: Biopolitics and Terror Today', *Borderlands*, 7:1 (2008), available at: {www.borderlands.net.au/vol7no1_2008/burke_hall.htm} accessed 3 August 2013.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Stephen Chan, 'The Legend of Sursum Antigone and Under Tao One', *nthposition* (2012), available at: {www.nthposition.com/thelegendofsursum.php} accessed 15 August 2013. For more of his fiction, see {www.nthposition.com/author.php?authid=324} accessed September 2011 and August 2013.

[63] Richard Jackson, *Confessions of a Terrorist: A Novel* (London: Zed Books, 2014). I am grateful to Stellan Vinthagen for this reference.

[64] Available at: {thedisorderofthings.com/tag/methodology-and-narrative-forum} accessed March and April 2013.

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suspicion and resistance within the field. It remains to be seen how narrative IR takes up its challenge and prospects.[65]

Imagination as methodology

With respect to the imagination in academia, the most well known publications are probably C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.[66] Given the importance of these works, it is not surprising that a number of IR scholars have raised the need for an adequate exploration of imagination in the field; for example, in the name of 'the international imagination'.[67] But my question is: why not 'the imaginative international'? That is, imaginative IR writing. What imagination can do is to construct a creative space that is not filled by existing ideas and information. This ironically means that this inadequacy or lack could be the very condition for imaginative thinking. If we know well enough, or too much, there is nothing left for the imagination to work with.[68] It is this paradoxical productiveness that makes fictional IR possible. Allow me to elaborate the methodological legitimacy of imagination below.

Let us take Graham T. Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, which is one of the classic, bestselling works in IR and Politics.[69] President John F. Kennedy said that the essence of a decision remains impenetrable even to the decider, the first-concerned party in the event.[70] This uncertainty and contingency is then supposed to grow when it comes to the 'outsiders' of events. This is where imagination comes in. In other words, Allison employed imaginative narrative in his account of the event as an apparent outsider; that was, in part, his attempt to deal with lack of data and contingency or 'puzzles'.[71] However he did this implicitly. He

[65] For more on narrative and IR, see among others, Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies*; Hidemi Suganami, 'Stories of War Origins: A Narrativist Theory of the Causes of War', *Review of International Studies*, 23:4 (1997); Maria Stern, *Naming Security – Constructing Identity: 'Mayan-Women' in Guatemala on the Eve of 'Peace'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Hidemi Suganami, 'Narrative Explanation and International Relations: Back to Basics', *Millennium*, 37:2 (2008). For narrative studies, see among others, Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Susan S. Lanser, 'Toward a Feminist Narratology', in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (eds), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 674–93; Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998); Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002); Barbara Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2004); Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou (eds), *Doing Narrative Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2008); Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (3rd edn, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[66] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [orig. pub. 1959]); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006 [orig. pub. 1983]). See also Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

[67] Justin Rosenberg, 'The International Imagination: IR Theory and ''Classical Social Analysis''', *Millennium*, 23:1 (1994), pp. 85–108. See also Emanuel Adler, 'Imagined (Security) Communities: Cognitive Regions in International Relations', *Millennium*, 26:2 (1997), pp. 249–77.

[68] Muecke, 'The Fall', p. 109.

[69] Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971).

[70] Ibid., p. vi.

[71] Ibid., pp. v, 35, 39, 109, 112, 252.

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did not invent any character and he never called his work fiction either. I would, nonetheless, suggest that Allison's project can be interpreted as almost like fiction. For instance, consider the following statement: 'an imaginative analyst can construct an account of value-maximizing choice for any action or set of actions performed by a government'.[72] Allison returned to this point about 'an imaginative analyst' in his afterword on further research.[73] If one takes out the seemingly scientific and value-neutral term 'analyst', it becomes clear that Allison identifies himself as 'an imaginative writer'; it was only 'camouflaged' with the standard social science wording or values.

One might say that there are various types of data: archival materials, related parties' testimonies, the researcher's direct experience or other kinds of senses such as sound, colour, and smell. A problem occurs when this set of data is not available or not trustworthy; there is a great deal of contingency.[74] For example, it can be said that Sinology, Sovietology, and DPRKology[75] have all been in that category (mainly from 'Western' perspectives during the so-called cold war era). In other words, this lack of data and contingency has already existed in IR traditions. Without data, how can researchers conduct their work?

It is fair to say that they have relied on secondary literature or employed their own guesswork or imaginings based on limited information. When it comes to DPRKology, for instance, there have been debates about the real identity of Kim Il-sung, the founder of North Korea, among South Korean and Western scholars.[76] As the relevant data was never enough, claims that he was a fake or fictional figure have flourished. Indeed, the data problem and contingency seem to have been particularly serious in the case of North Korea. Constructivist IR scholar Alexander Wendt notes that 'very few states today are complete black boxes to each other (North Korea is one of the few whose ''mind'' seems as hard to read as the human mind)'.[77] Wendt's remark suggests that the problems of North Korea-related information and depiction become highly contingent compared to other cases. The former US official at the National Security Council, IR professor Victor Cha, reaffirms this observation.[78]

Then consider James Der Derian's *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*. He points out that people, including academics, have been slow to work on this subject because of a lack of tangible data.[79] Part of Der Derian's attempt to cope with this problem is to be a 'detective', which has been informed by the work of Walter Benjamin.[80] With this contestedness and contingency,

[72] Ibid., p. 35.
[73] Ibid., p. 273.
[74] This does not mean that there is no contingency when data is available or trustworthy. For instance, different evaluations and interpretations of the same data are always possible, which can constitute another level of contingency. The point is that this contingent aspect becomes highly operative when there are problems with data.
[75] DPRK stands for Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the official name of North Korea.
[76] Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
[77] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 222.
[78] Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), p. 16.
[79] James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (2nd edn, New York and London: Routledge, 2009), p. xxxviii.
[80] Ibid.

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one might need to be a detective to approach the case, a detective who pursues convincing evidence and truth based on available information.

In this context, employing fiction writing does not necessarily mean to give up pursuing empirical evidence or fact. Rather, fiction writing is part of that very pursuit, but in a different way, which may require '[e]xperience, empathic projection, inner travel, and research'.[81] The point is to make use of the *limited* information that is already available. The purpose here is 'to go where the recorded story stops and to fill in the vacuum'.[82] I would also add that this methodology partly aims to reconstruct the very notion of fact or truth, which is traditionally assumed within IR to be something that can be established fully in a fixed and stable form. Fiction writing as a methodological tool, in my view, would work better when one takes fact or truth as an ongoing process.

Alongside this, if a particular topic has somewhat mysterious components, then fiction writing could operate as a more effective methodology. As Annick T. R. Wibben points out, it is to engage in political aspects of narratives: 'Narratives both enable and limit representation – and representation shapes our world and what is possible within it.'[83] The key concern is less about arguing or persuading someone, than about activating multiple interpretations and exploring the politics of contestedness.[84] In this sense, if one has an intersecting story about a certain issue (sometimes in a painful way), this could make it more amenable to working with fiction writing. To put it another way, embodied knowledge can be an inspirational source of storytelling, because one's own voice would work as a point of departure for sustainable imagination.

Understanding data and fictional IR

One might then pose a question: to what extent can the data provided by imagination/fiction help IR researchers understand the world? There are two main points. First, the intention of fictional data is to relativise the statecentric data production and subsequently state-oriented construction of the world. The question here is who produces data and for whom. This becomes particularly pertinent when one recognises that information gathering in IR has traditionally been subjected to governmentally imposed secrecy and distortion.[85] If I may paraphrase critical IR scholar Robert Cox's famous statement, data is always for someone and for some purpose.[86] With regard to data that is produced by the state, it is common that the state becomes the very authority in its interpretation. Anyone who challenges that authority is easily marginalised. With fiction writing, I would say that one can problematise this state-oriented construction of the world by offering some space for marginalised, ordinary

[81] Naeem Inayatullah, 'Pulling Threads: Intimate Systematicity in *The Politics of Exile*', *Security Dialogue*, 44:4 (2013), p. 333.
[82] David Barry Gaspar and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 'Afterword', in Guy Endore, *Babouk* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), p. 191.
[83] Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies*, p. 43. Wibben makes a case for a narrative approach from a feminist perspective.
[84] See also Sungju Park-Kang, 'Pain as Masquerades/Masquerades as Pain: Korea and a Woman Spy', in Christine Sylvester (ed.), *Masquerades of War* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2015).
[85] David J. Singer, 'Data-Making in International Relations', *Behavioral Science*, 10:1 (1965), p. 69.
[86] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 10:2 (1981), p. 128.

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people. Of course, this task can be done in the traditional writing format as well. Fictional IR, however, seeks to pursue this task more creatively by using imagination.

Second, and more importantly, fictional accounts aim to expand the very definition of data itself. People and emotions, for example, are treated as data themselves. This is again related to the question of who produces data. I believe that (ordinary) people and emotions are the very data that the state misses. It is necessary to 'reconceptualise' data from a different perspective. If one starts to regard *people/emotions* as *data*, then a different kind of research could be conducted. I believe that fictional IR pursues this alternative research direction. It should be noted that there is growing attention to this form of research in recent IR scholarship. For example, Christine Sylvester's *Experiencing War* project takes themes such as nonstate experience, people, and emotions centre stage[87] and a fictional IR project hopes to advance this kind of scholarship. More specifically, my fiction is focused on *expressing* emotions (rather than *discussing* them) by offering a conversational narrative of characters. In other words, fictional data challenges IR scholars to rethink how to construct the notion and category of data itself.

In this article, the case of Korean Air (KAL) Flight 858 – North Korea's alleged bombing of a South Korean plane in 1987 – is chosen to serve as an example of fictional IR scholarship. According to South Korea, a secret agent woman bombed the plane under instructions from the North Korean leadership, killing 115 people. The bomber, Hyunhee Kim, made her public confession at a press conference arranged by the South Korean intelligence agency. Troubling questions about the truth, however, began to arise: there were no dead bodies and the black box was never recovered. No proper wreckage of the plane was recovered either. Furthermore, the bomber's statements had substantial contradictions that later resulted in reinvestigation campaigns by family members of the passengers. Subsequently, the government reopened the case twice, but ended without producing satisfactory results; among other things, they failed to investigate Hyunhee Kim, the very evidence of the case. It was also revealed that her first confessionary words during the investigation – 'Sister, I am sorry' – were made up by the spy agency as part of the government's propaganda strategy. Thus the case has been regarded as a 'mystery' up until now.

Meanwhile, this case is significant in the context of the ongoing cold war. The case happened in the light of the long-sustained confrontations between North and South Korea since the Korean War. Apart from the question of who sabotaged KAL 858, the case consolidated the cold war tension on the Korean peninsula. More specifically, the cold war component was well evidenced through the UN. The UN Security Council's (UNSC) emergency meetings reaffirmed the conventional cold war 'bloc' politics: the US-South Korea-led faction versus the USSR-North Korea-led faction.[88] It is also important to remember that the US government initially listed North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism through reference to this case on 20 January 1988; the designation of North Korea as a terrorist state accelerated the internationalisation of the case. To sum up, in terms of contested truths, data

[87] Christine Sylvester (ed.), *Experiencing War* (London: Routledge, 2011); 'War Experiences/War Practices/War Theory', *Millennium*, 40:3 (2012), pp. 483–503; *War as Experience: Contributions from International Relations and Feminist Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[88] UNSC, 'S/PV. 2791', New York (16 February 1988); 'S/PV. 2792', New York (17 February 1988).

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problems, and cold war politics, the case of KAL 858 can become a meaningful example of fictional IR.

Now I invite readers to a fictional-factual story in the section that follows. A researcher called Olight Jung (an invented character loosely based on the author), whose life is deeply entangled with the case of KAL 858, is introduced. His name is special. *Olight* is a combination of the Swedish word 'o' and the English word 'light'. The 'o' functions as a prefix meaning 'opposition of', which is the Swedish equivalent of the English 'un'. 'Light' in this name means to make things visible or clear. When 'o' and 'light' are combined and pronounced together it almost sounds like 'alright (all right)', which generates a blurred and paradoxical meaning. *Jung* is considered an ordinary surname in Korea. At the same time, it refers to (empathetic) emotions in the Korean language in broad terms. Together with Olight Jung, there is another main character in this story. The Spirit is introduced as one of the missing persons of KAL 858, who has been wandering around the world between the dead and the living. The character themselves thus directly attend to the key idea of this article.

At this point, I hasten to add that there is one issue I am cautious about: my *capability* to write fiction. Can my writing read like fiction? Can I write good stories as professional writers do? Although in part I want to reconstruct the very conventional lines between fiction and nonfiction writing, this issue concerns me. This is because when one claims to write fiction, even if unwanted or unwillingly, one suddenly is 'competing qualitatively with *real* fiction writers'.[89] I believe that the focus here should not be on the quality of fiction, but rather on the idea of fictional IR itself. This project is not about writing good fiction, but about questioning the boundary between scholarly and fictional writings in broad terms. It is part of an attempt to free fiction from its often derogatory connotation in (scientific and objective) academic settings. Let us then follow Olight Jung's journey now.

Ten years

Seoul, South Korea, 29 November 2002. It was around 7:07 PM. Olight Jung was standing in his room. The room was filled with a strange atmosphere, until his brother came.

'Is everything okay . . .? Who are you?' asked his brother.

No answer.

'Who are you?' The same question again.

No words, no movements.

'Who are you?!' This time, his cheek was hit by his brother.

'I am . . . nothing.' He sounded different. He looked disoriented. He was not like himself.

'Are you alright?' The worried brother rushed into the kitchen. To run away? No. To get water? No. To hide knives. The brother was terrified by what he had just seen. Something horrible might happen. That's it. Weapon-like things had to be out of sight; they could be used by accident, by Olight. The brother then rushed into the living room, and picked up the phone. Fingers were shivering. 'Quick, quick, quick.'

[89] Laurel Richardson and Ernest Lockridge, 'Fiction and Ethnography: A Conversation', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4:3 (1998), p. 331, emphasis in original.

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The brother managed to dial 911, and rushed back to the room again. There, Olight was weeping.

'I am okay. I am alright . . .' Hot and deep tears touched him.

A year ago, Olight was in the US. Everything seemed to be fine. He was selected as an exchange student. He was proud and full of dreams: new friends, a different culture, learning English, and various adventures. He was curious, confident, and ready to enjoy life there. He boarded the plane with all his dreams. Yes, he was flying; his life was flying high. In summer, the plane safely landed in his dream land. The people were kind, the weather was nice, and the campus was beautiful. He felt very lucky and blessed. This will be a golden time in my life, thought Olight.

Indeed . . . until that day. In the central library, a group of people were gathered around a television. They were making noise. What had happened? 'This is the library and people should be quiet. Is it American culture to speak loudly in the library?', he wondered, while watching the television screen. 'America Under Attack.' CNN was delivering the news that nobody had expected: 9/11.

So the War on Terror began. And so did Olight's worries. 'North Korea, Iran and Iraq constitute an axis of evil,' declared George W. Bush. North Korea? A question mark. North Korea had never been an easy issue, so complicated. 'It might be an axis of evil, but it could be an axis of unification.' At least for Olight, from South Korea, that was the North. His concern quickly shifted towards the possibility of an attack against North Korea. According to the US, North Korea was officially a terrorist state as it was on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. To a young South Korean, it looked serious. He hoped that the war would not spread into the Korean peninsula. Any type of attack on the North could easily escalate into a war over the whole peninsula. This tiny land had already suffered devastating war a few decades ago. As with any war, people were killed, buildings were gone, and lives were destroyed. More than destroyed, as the war consolidated the division between the North and South. A land of sad twins, that's the Korean peninsula.

Several months passed. An advertisement from Korea caught his eye. A national thesis competition was being organised by the Ministry of Unification. It sounded interesting. In order to participate in the competition, he decided to leave the US a bit earlier. He packed his books, clothes, things, and worries. The airline company was the same as before but his flight felt different from the previous year. He was flying, but not high enough.

Soon, he was in Korea again and the land was full of joy. The 2002 World Cup had just started and there were cheers, passion, and a fighting spirit. Everything was there. South Korea did extremely well; for the first time, South Korea reached the semi-finals. Olight became so excited on the day this historic match took place. Bang! Something happened, however. The North and the South Korean soldiers exchanged fire over the west coast. Maybe the bullet was jealous of the football. But that was life in Korea. The South Korean team lost the match, perhaps because of this bullet. Olight was disappointed but quickly remembered something he had almost forgotten: the thesis competition.

As he had just returned from the US, it was not surprising that he had chosen to write about 9/11 and the Korean peninsula. He worked hard, on his own. Two months later, a call came.

'Congratulations.' Yes, he had made it, he had won the prize in the competition. He was full of joy and surprise. 'Alright! Alright!' His life seemed to fly again. But

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was it really? Five days before the award ceremony, he got another call from the Ministry. 'I am sorry to let you know that you need to revise your thesis.' He was baffled. The problem was with the case of KAL 858. This case was the reason why North Korea was on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. But because there were contested accounts of the case, he stated that the case needed to be reinvestigated. The government didn't like his suggestion, as it was against the official findings.

'If you do not revise your thesis, you will not get your prize,' said the government.

'I cannot revise it just to win the prize,' said Olight. And thus his flight crashed.

A few days passed. 'Strange…' A shivering force surrounded him. He was eating in a college dining hall. He felt chilly. He tried to ignore it and to keep on eating. But it was far from over. It felt weird. No, more than weird. He was frightened. Stopping dinner, he went home. Although it was early to go to bed, there was no option. He would go to sleep, and everything would be fine. Yes, it should be. In bed, silence comforted this unusual evening. The silence, however, did not last long. His body started to shiver. What was happening? A strange voice wandered around in his head. Olight began to say something he didn't know. What was going on? He tried to open his eyes. But he couldn't. He was falling into darkness, a deep darkness. It was out of control. He was not himself. His body kept shivering. He was falling into a deep tunnel. Dark, endless, and lonely.

'No, no, no. I don't want to die, I don't want to die…' Then, a light came on. His brother stared at him, then said something and left. A profound silence followed. He felt peace, a perfect peace. 'I am okay. I am all right…' Tears flowed.

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'Poor Olight,' said the Spirit. But there was no choice for the Spirit. People were not interested in KAL 858 anymore. It was already long forgotten. The government's position was the only explanation and answer. Although there was not enough evidence, once the government said something, that became the truth. The Spirit wanted to know why it was still wandering the earth. There must be somebody who would listen to its story. And then the Spirit found a young student who dared to mention the case in his writing. The Spirit knew that, at the end of the day, the student's writing would not be approved by the government. It also thought that the student would revise his thesis as the government demanded. Why? Because that's what had always happened. Surprisingly, however, the student said no. How naïve! And look at him. He was confused and frustrated. That's why the Spirit decided to approach him. It thought this young student could be the person it was waiting for.

The Spirit was a former South Korean Air Force pilot, who quit the military in 1980, when the Army General Chun Doo-hwan became the president of South Korea. General Chun was responsible for the Kwangju massacre in May 1980; an aspiring unelected dictator, Chun and his aides killed hundreds of people protesting against him. Every morning after that, whenever it put on military uniform the Spirit could smell blood. The Spirit was ashamed to be in the military and left for a civilian airline company.

It was a coincidence that the Spirit was in the cockpit of KAL 858. Its childhood friend was a construction worker. They had grown up together in a small village and became close friends. When they went to high school, the Spirit's family moved to another area. The two friends had to say goodbye, but promised to keep in touch.

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Time passed and they were all busy with their lives. The Spirit had to move several more times and gradually forgot to contact its friend. To their surprise, it was about twenty years later when they met again. They bumped into each other at the airport in Iraq. No matter how long people are separated, dear friends always recognise dear friends. The Spirit had become a pilot and the friend had become a construction worker. The Spirit was on one of its regular flights and the friend had just arrived from Korea. 'What a nice surprise!' They were overjoyed and hugged. The friend said that he had come to Iraq as his company had signed a huge contract with its Iraqi partner. They exchanged their contact numbers. This time, they would not lose each other again.

One day, in 1987, the telephone rang. It was the friend. 'I am going back to Korea on 29 November.' 'That's great. Hmmm, let me see. I am on a flight one week after that. But I could change my schedule and probably join you in the same plane.' And that's how the Spirit came to be on KAL 858. The Spirit still remembers that day, quite vividly. The friend was already in the lounge at the airport. He had several bags. 'These are all presents for my family.' He looked so happy. His colleagues looked the same. Like the Spirit's friend, most of the passengers were construction workers. They were all excited about returning home. Of course they were, as they would be reuniting with their families for the first time in years. The Spirit was also happy. So, the plane took off with hope and joy. The passengers seemed to have many plans: how to greet their families at the airport, what Korean food they would eat first, and how they would say how much they missed and loved their families. Each spoke of their personal plans in turn and laughed.

But, sadly, everything went wrong. The Spirit cannot remember exactly what happened. All it can remember is that it became 'the Spirit' at some point. Since then, the Spirit had tried to figure out what had happened to the friend, the other passengers, and itself. The South Korean government blamed North Korea. The North Korean government blamed South Korea. They were exchanging words, not evidence. The families of the Spirit and the passengers were struggling also. They wanted to see the bodies as evidence. The media should have investigated the case and double-checked the government's findings. But all they did was repeat what the government said. The Spirit desperately wanted to know what had happened; that's the only way the Spirit could rest in peace. There was a self-confessed bomber called Hyunhee Kim. But her words somehow didn't match with what the Spirit knew as the pilot.

'Truth,' that's what the government said. The bomber confessed, the truth was established and the investigation was over. But couldn't they understand that the Spirit was still wandering? Couldn't they understand that the Spirit had no grave? Couldn't they understand that the family of the Spirit couldn't see the body? After all, 'truth' is a word only for the living. The Spirit can't return to its family. The Spirit can't ever do the flight again. The Spirit can't hug its friend at the airport again. 'Truth' is not a word for the Spirit. No, never. 'Truth' is empty, luxurious, hypocritical, and deceitful, as long as the very one who needs it suffers. The Spirit needed someone to tell this story to other people, out there.

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Ten years before, Olight had never thought that the thesis competition would change his life. He didn't buy a ticket for this controversial flight, he didn't plan to pursue the case of KAL 858; he wanted to forget everything about it because it made him so confused. But, for some reason, he could not get off this flight. He flew to the UK to work on the case; Olight became a PhD student. It seemed like some mysterious force was dragging him into this journey. Indeed, to his surprise, he found himself with a PhD dissertation in his hand. It had not been easy; it was almost a miracle. And because something unpredictable had happened, *Good Riddance* (*Time of Your Life*) became his theme song. He listened to the song again and again. He sang the song as if it was a prayer. He displayed its lyrics on the door of his office. As the song said, he wanted to make the best of the test he was facing; Olight wanted to believe that, in the end, it would be all right.

In Korea, they said that the project would not be successful. 'Plus, the case is politically so sensitive. You have gone through this already. Why don't you just let it go? It will ruin your career and life.' They didn't forget to add that they said this because they cared about him. Strangely though, they seemed to whisper, just as in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. 'Why can't you just accept the situation instead of pointlessly insisting on trying to annoy us; at this moment, we're probably closer to you than anyone else in the world.' But sometimes life is not logical, but magical. The confused undergraduate student had become a 'Doctor', in part thanks to this case. On some occasions, he wondered if he was 'selling a tragedy' for his own academic interest.

A few months later, he was contacted by the family association of KAL 858.

'Congratulations, Dr Olight Jung. As you may know, this year marks the 25th anniversary of our case.'

'Yes, of course, I know.'

'Then we wonder if you would give a talk about the case during the memorial ceremony.'

Seoul, South Korea, 29 November, 2012. 'When I was invited to come here today, I didn't know what to say. I am not an expert on this case. YOU are the experts, because this case is your life. You have lived this case yourselves. I am no more than a researcher who has just documented your stories a little. So, how could I possibly stand in front of you and your loved ones, who have been missing for 25 years, and give a "lecture"? That is nonsense, that is not right.' Olight paused. People stared at him. 'But I've decided to join you today, just to share my part of the story with you. Most of all, I don't know what the truth is. The official findings say this case is North Korea's bombing. Other people say, this case is South Korea's manipulation. It could be both, or something else. I don't know who is right. I don't know the truth. Searching for the truth is not what I tried to do. My point was to show how complicated this case is. I wanted to say that truth can be always contested and that we need to be humble.'

Then he talked briefly about what he had found. People listened carefully. 'Lastly,' he said, 'let me finish with this little story. After my PhD defence in the UK, I moved to Sweden. I packed my books and things, and sent them by air mail. Unfortunately however, they were lost. I called the delivery agent many times, again and again. I was desperate but the agent said they were gone. I had lost them. I was so frustrated. I couldn't do anything for a while. Then some time later, I felt cold when I got up in the morning. And I thought, "My books and things... Where are

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you? I don't know how cold and lonely you are…" Then, I was struck by this idea: Ah, isn't this the same? Those families, they have woken up in the morning like this for 25 years. Thinking, "Where is my daughter? My son, my mother, or my father? How lonely and cold are you?" I think this means something. I have finished my PhD, I can now forget and move on. But it's like, "Please, do not forget." That's why my things have been lost, I believe. I will remember this case as my own, as my lifetime homework … Thank you for listening.'

Quiet music followed. People laid flowers on the pictures of passengers. The memorial ceremony ended and he was about to leave. Someone approached him.

'Excuse me. Dr Olight Jung?'

'Yes. Hello.'

'Thank you for today. If I may, can I talk to you for a second please?'

'Of course, are you a family member?'

'Well, kind of … Anyway, it's very nice to see you.'

'Yes, good to see you.'

They walked together. Olight felt very comfortable with this person, although he didn't know why.

'It's interesting to hear your story. I wonder if you could tell me how you first became interested in the case?'

'Well, it's … complicated. It just happened. Yeah, I think it just happened … And what about you? Did you lose your daughter or son?'

'…'

'Oh, sorry. I shouldn't have asked.'

'No, not at all. It's just, you know, it's just always difficult to talk.'

'Yes, I understand.'

'Anyway 25 years, it's long time. Huhhh … I don't know how I went through all that.'

'I guess other families see the same thing. I am sorry.'

'No, you don't have to be sorry. Look at other people. They are not interested. For other people, this case was already finished a long time ago …'

They both said nothing for a few minutes. It started snowing quietly.

'It's a bit early, isn't it?' Olight broke the silence.

'You know … I am sorry about that day, 10 years ago. I didn't mean to scare you.'

'Excuse me?'

'No, nothing.'

'10 … years?' asked Olight.

'No … I just thought to myself.'

It was getting dark. The white snow was falling. They kept on walking.

Towards fictional and imaginative IR

With the above story, regardless of its quality as fiction, one might want to become an 'empathetic IR detective'. Like detectives, IR researchers conduct investigations based on (sometimes limited) evidence or data. Indeed, this comparison between a researcher and a detective is nothing new. In the social sciences, Robert O. Keohane

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identifies a researcher as a detective.[90] As mentioned, James Der Derian calls his IR investigation a detective work or story. In this context, I would say that every IR researcher is a detective in one way or another. The point, however, is that at some point we struggle (as detectives do). Struggles can be for our own benefit or for that of others as well. This is where empathy comes in: to try to feel or understand others. International and human affairs, not always, but very often, are riddled with wars, financial crises, natural disasters, and mysterious losses (for example, the recent case of the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370). Anyone could suddenly become a victim of these pained situations, and it would be wrong to neglect the importance of empathy.

My particular focus here is on the element of imagination. Being empathetic includes the effort to situate ourselves within others, to move myself into others' places, to use my imagination. Indeed, various attempts to define empathy address this point. According to Suzanne Keen, a narrative theorist whose work investigates empathy in literature, empathy is 'a *vicarious*, spontaneous sharing of affect' that could be generated by witnessing, hearing, or reading another's situation.[91] *Oxford Dictionary* supports this definition: 'the ability to *imagine* and share another person's feelings, experience, etc.'.[92] In other words, empathy enables us to feel what someone else is likely to do 'by *imagining* being in that other person's position'.[93] It should be noted that empathy has already been explored in IR scholarship.[94] While building upon previous works, what I am trying to do here is to bring new attention to imagination. Without moving ourselves somewhere else, without locating ourselves in others, we cannot be empathetic. Being empathetic is being imaginative. This idea is well positioned with the main theme of this article: how to use the imagination in IR.

I would like to emphasise that the goal of empathetic detective work is not necessarily to 'solve' problems. The goal is to actively and humbly engage with the impossibility or incompleteness of knowing. The crucial question I want to explore here is how one might discuss the unknowable in an intelligible manner. The key is to make an effort, to do our best in our own way. I am by no means saying that 'problem-solving', which is a primary aim of conventional IR, is not important. My point is that researchers do not have to pretend to be 'objective and neutral scientists' whose emotions or struggles are entirely erased.

In a word, this idea is about imagination. That is because, first, IR researchers are not detectives in occupational terms (and therefore imagination is needed) and, second, being empathetic is part of being imaginative. To become a detective like this one has to use imagination in an empathetic way: to feel others' needs and

[90] Robert O. Keohane, 'Beyond Dichotomy: Conversations Between International Relations and Feminist Theory', *International Studies Quarterly*, 42:1 (1998), p. 196. See also Cameron G. Thies, 'A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations', *International Studies Perspective*, 3:4 (2002), pp. 351–72; Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, 'Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence', *Political Analysis*, 14:3 (2006), pp. 250–67.

[91] Suzanne Keen, 'A Theory of Narrative Empathy', *Narrative*, 14:3 (2006), p. 208, emphasis added.

[92] Jonathan Crowther (ed.), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 392, emphasis added.

[93] Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (eds), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. xxxiii, emphasis added.

[94] Most notably, Christine Sylvester, 'Empathetic Cooperation: A Feminist Method for IR', *Millennium*, 23:2 (1994), pp. 315–34.

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concerns. It is to struggle, to get frustrated, and, sometimes, to enjoy research as a process. This does not necessarily guarantee successful research results or tangible progress in the immediate future. Nonetheless, making the effort does matter because, in the end, I would say, IR is about understanding other people's feelings, making relationships between oneself and the world. My suggestion is that one way of becoming an empathetic IR detective is to employ fiction writing. By using imagination, creating characters, combining data with fictional narrative, or with one's own experience, I believe that more original and empathetic IR writing is possible. It is my hope that this article will be regarded as one such modest attempt, a small step towards fictional and imaginative IR.

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