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The 'I' in IR: an autoethnographic account

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Abstract. Autoethnography is a way and method to reflect on the mutual constitution of the self and the social. It allows one to consider how her/his personal and professional subjectivity was constructed and how her/his actions in the world reproduce or change this world. Autoethnography enables one to acquire an agentive role in the world by highlighting one's uniqueness and voice. It also aims to create mutual empowerment among people, ordinary individuals, by means of identification, connectivity, and empathy. In this article I explore some conceptual issues relating to autoethnography and then present my personal account of why I study International Relations (IR) and how I decided to bring myself more openly into my texts and lectures. I conclude by arguing that autoethnography made me more confident in sounding my voice in print and in class, and that, consequently, I became much more aware of the human capacity to make a difference.

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The author in the text

The claim that the author's self is very much unfelt in International Relations (IR) theory has been made by several scholars who call to change this situation.[1] James N. Rosenau, for example, notes that in IR '[o]ne is hard pressed to find a book, or even a paragraph, in which the author sets forth the personal background factors underlying his or her work. Come to think of it, I cannot think of any that do this, though it should be a standard procedure to have at least a paragraph in a preface that tells the reader where the author is coming from.'[2] Rosenau's words

[1] See, for example, Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, 'Expanding Ethnographic Insights into Global Politics', *International Political Sociology*, 1:2 (June 2007), pp. 89–90; Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls: Identity and Voice in the Writing of Academic International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:2 (July 2004), pp. 377–92; Ersel Aydinli and James N. Rosenau, 'Courage versus Caution: A Dialogue on Entering and Prospering in IR', *International Studies Review*, 6:3 (November 2004), pp. 511–26; Christopher Hill, '"Where Are We Going?" International Relations and the Voice From Below', *Review of International Studies*, 25:1 (January 1999), pp. 107–22; Ken Booth, 'Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist', Paper prepared for presentation at the conference Strategies in Conflict: Critical Approaches to Security Studies, convened by the Centre for International and Strategic Studies, York University, Toronto (12–14 May 1994). Available at: {http://www.yorku.ca/yciss/publications/OP26-Booth.pdf}.

[2] Aydinli and Rosenau, 'Courage versus Caution', pp. 517–8.

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reflect his perception that all research is value-laden and that authors should be explicit about the values that guide them. He says that 'explication is the key to knowledge building. It enables others to asses our conclusions because they can retrace the steps we took to arrive at them.'[3] From a somewhat different angle, Roxanne L. Doty asks, 'Where is the soul in our academic writing? Where is the humanity in our prose? Where are we as writers?'[4] Doty stresses the political consequences of detached, allegedly objective, and impersonal writing. She discusses how such forms of writing can construct or reify violent or coercive political realities by objectifying contested concepts and giving them an aura of scientific accuracy.

Indeed, ideals of objectivity and personal detachment, as well as the commitment to a realistic and authoritative style of writing (the so-called omniscient social scientific prose), inform the absence of the author's self from IR theory.[5] This article is part of the effort to change this reality. In writing it, I drew inspiration from works in IR such as those cited above. But I was also influenced by developments in history and sociology, two fields in which the author is ever more a noticeable presence in academic texts.

In history, an increasing number of renowned historians are writing autobiographies.[6] Such works are often not simply personal tales of famous academicians, but also scholarly works in which the autobiographers 'consciously reflect on the ways in which historical experience led them to redefine their own view on the relationship between history and individual life [. . .]'.[7] In sociology since the 1990s, autoethnography has been a growing body of literature in which the participant-observer is the author herself/himself. Employing various modes of textual expression – such as short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose[8] – autoethnographers use their own experiences in a culture to look more deeply and reflexively

[3] James N. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 405.

[4] Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls', p. 378.

[5] To the best of my knowledge, the only volume in IR that is devoted to autobiographies and personal reflections of central IR scholars is: Joseph Kruzel and James N. Rosenau (eds), *Journeys through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty Four Academic Travelers* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989). An ISA panel in New York, 2009, was titled 'Autobiography as a Source for Exploring the Past and Anticipating the Future'. That panel resulted in a book manuscript edited by Kiran Pervez and Naeem Inayatullah, titled, 'I, the IR'. Another related volume is Iver B. Neumann and Ole Wæver (eds), *The Future of International Relations: Masters in the Making?* (London: Routledge, 1997); but this volume does not deal specifically with the personal dimensions of the authors surveyed. Several senior scholars have been interviewed in IR journals, and in these interviews they tell something about themselves. Besides the interview with Rosenau mentioned above, see also: Adam Jones, 'Interview with Kal Holsti', *Review of International Studies*, 28:3 (July 2002), pp. 619–33; Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg, 'Interview with Ken Waltz', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (July 1998), pp. 371–86. See also the 'Theory Talks' interviews at {www.theory-talks.org}.

[6] See, for example: Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Pierre Nora (ed.), *Essais d'ego-histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987); Jaume Aurell, 'Autobiographical Texts as Historiographical Sources: Rereading Fernand Braudel and Annie Kriegel,', *Biography*, 29:3 (Summer 2006), pp. 425–45.

[7] Popkin, ibid., pp. 58–9. See also: Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth About Our History* (Camberwell, VIC: Viking, 1999).

[8] See: Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

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at self-other interactions.[9] Thus, several authors see autoethnography as a method that provides, through the personal perspective and narrative of the autoethnographer, new knowledge and understanding of general social structures and conditions.[10] For example, Eric Mykhalovskiy argues that 'to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience'. This is because 'a whole social organization is needed to create each unique experience'.[11]

But autoethnography is worth pursuing not just or necessarily because it sheds a new light on general social mechanisms and constructs. Autoethnography can offer more than simply a different perspective on broad social reality. Accordingly, the version of autoethnography that I present here conceives of the individual not just as an interpreter of social reality, but as someone who can understand her/himself through thinking about social institutions, practices, and phenomena.[12] In the account that makes up the second part of this article, I seek to understand how my own subjectivity was constituted by the international: meaning, both by academic IR theory and by international political practices and institutions (for example, war, the state). In this regard, I see IR theory as part of the international political system in that it: a) may directly influence state conduct and, b) has 'an input in terms of the creation and reproduction of pictures of the world that inform policy and set the contours of policy debates'.[13]

Now, given that in an autoethnographic account of the type I described above, it is the author who is understood and interpreted (and not social and political reality as such), some readers could be concerned that autoethnography might lead to narcissistic writing. But when one writes about oneself, this does not necessarily mean that the work will be narcissistic. There is a difference between, on the one hand, narcissism and self-indulgence and, on the other, writing about the self. A major difference in this context relates to the purpose of the writing. When I write this autoethnographic account, my aim, beyond understanding myself, is to connect with as many readers as possible and make them, through their emotional response to my personal story, reflect upon their *own* experience as human beings and the construction of their own subjectivity. As a methodology, telling one's personal story can be useful in connecting with the reader: 'I read you, I hear you, I speak you, and thus I am here too. Perhaps story is the soul of empathy – genuine understanding, a shared humanity that reaches across, touches; and in

[9] See: Nicholas L. Holt, 'Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2:1 (2003). Article 2, retrieved from {http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1final/html/holt.html}, p. 2.

[10] See: Leon Anderson, 'Analytic Autoethnography', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35:4 (August 2006), pp. 373–95, p. 390.

[11] Eric Mykhalovskiy, 'Reconsidering Table Talk: Critical Thoughts on the Relationship between Sociology, Autobiography, and Self-Indulgence', *Qualitative Sociology*, 19:1 (March 1996), pp. 131–51, at p. 140 and p. 141. See also: Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 12.

[12] According to Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on auto- (self), -ethno- (the cultural link), and -graphy (the application of a research process). See: Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, 'Introduction', in D. E. Reed-Danahay (ed.), *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp. 1–19.

[13] Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss, 'Generalising the International', *Review of International Studies*, 31:3 (2005), pp. 451–72, at pp. 454–5. On the relations between theory and practice in International Relations see: Piki Ish Shalom, 'Theory Gets Real, and the Case for a Normative Ethic: Rostow, Modernization Theory, and the Alliance for Progress', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:2 (June 2006), pp. 287–311.

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feeling with the other, we become our own self – the human intertextuality of existence.'[14] On the other hand, many works exist that are supposedly aimed at the general scholarly community but in fact are limited to very small audiences. In addition, many authors are often motivated by considerations of career boost, recycling their own work time after time. In light of this, it seems that in certain aspects, 'conventional' academic writing may be even more narcissistic than writing that tells about self. 'It seems foolish, at best, narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed, at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read and not making a difference to anything but the author's career.'[15]

But why should IR scholars and students who usually occupy themselves with important and general questions of war and peace, poverty, development, gender, and many other social and political issues endeavour to achieve an understanding of their own subjectivity? One reason for this is that by understanding oneself, one becomes more critical toward the scholarly work one produces,[16] and hence one could obtain a higher ethical and moral standard as a writer and teacher (I see teaching as an integral part of a scholar's 'output'). By understanding oneself as a product of a certain culture and a certain structure of knowledge/power, *à la* Michel Foucault, one could be more aware of questions of reproducing such structures, as well as of one's possible role in transforming them. Understanding ourselves could help us to more consciously choose our topics of research, to think about our tendency to emphasise certain dimensions and explanations of international politics, and to better consider the reasons we are sidetracked from other issues and explanations. In addition, an enhancement of scholarly self-understanding can have important effects on the intellectual communities (in the deep sense of the word) we build and significant ramifications in terms of our capacity for agency – both inside and outside academia.

Accordingly, the IR writer's self-understanding carries a great weight of political meaning. One such meaning that I wish to discuss here in more detail concerns how we construe the purpose and essence of the international. I want to argue that by understanding themselves, IR autoethnographers also become more sincerely and authentically aware of and open to the importance and uniqueness of other human beings' experience and subjectivity. Self-understanding can encourage IR authors to think about international politics in more human and humane terms. Equally important, when other IR scholars read about the autoethnographer's process of self-understanding, they may open their hearts and minds to think about the international in a similar manner. In this way, discussing the self of the IR author sheds a new light on the question, 'What is IR for?'[17]

Indeed, narrowly seen, the international is predominantly the realm of states and other corporate actors who 'act' in a sphere of their own. The academic

[14] Peter Mcilveen, 'Autoethnography as Method for Reflexive Research and Practice in Vocational Psychology', *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 17:2 (June 2008), pp. 13–20, p. 19.

[15] Laurel Richardson, 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry', in N. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 1994), pp. 516–29, at p. 517.

[16] See: Jeremy D. Popkin, 'Is Autobiography Anti-academic and Uneconomical? Some Thoughts on Academic Autobiography', *History of Political Economy*, 39 (annual suppl., 2007), pp. 30–47, at p. 33.

[17] See: Alexander Wendt, 'What is International Relations For? Notes Toward A Postcritical View', in Richard W. Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Boulder CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), pp. 205–24.

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discipline of IR is state-centric in that it basically marginalises the ordinary individual (as opposed to the individual leader or other 'prominent'/'official' person)[18] and discusses the state as (still) the main actor in international politics. It is true that on one level, states are more 'important' than ordinary individuals, as they greatly determine the social, political, security, cultural, and economic conditions in which most individuals live. States also 'outlive' individuals in temporal terms, and they constitute a great deal of individuals' emotions (for example, patriotism). They even invoke strong emotions in people who are critical toward them, as my autoethnographic story will show (sadness, fear, awe, anger, shame). Yet, on a different level, individuals are no less important than states and other corporate actors. In fact, perhaps the IR literature allowed the state to become *too* important. In this manner, much IR writing becomes, at least *de facto,* a part of reproducing and reifying the state and the states system.[19]

I want to remind readers that the state (and the interstate system as well) is made of people, and exists *for* the people (or at least, this is how it should be). In modernity, the moral purpose of the state is to augment individual interests and rights.[20] Modern popular sovereignty, as a domestic and international institution, is premised on the need to respect and protect the individual.[21] Moreover, individuals are the ones upon whom political, economic and social power structures operate. People reify and reproduce what are otherwise abstract notions ('states', 'nations', 'the international system', etc). States' very existence or strength is much dependent on individuals' acceptance of them as legitimate organisations. Therefore, because of their ontological centrality in political reality, it is at least interesting to see how individuals experience state power or other phenomena that are caused/induced by the state. My article is an attempt to bring scholars to change, even if just for a few moments, their perspective on politics. I want to show that autoethnography, with its focus on the emotions and inner world of the individual, enables us to *feel* IR. Analytic knowledge of practices such as 'war' or of abstract entities such as the 'state' or the 'international system' misses various important facets and meanings of world politics. When one studies and stories the emotions of individuals within world politics, the international takes on a different meaning. This is a different form of knowledge, which emphasises other aspects of social reality than traditional ways of knowing. Autoethnography endows individuals with the right and the space to tell *their* version of the international, and thus it professes that the international is not the monopoly of states and other powerful corporate organisations.[22]

[18] On this aspect see Alisher Faizullaev, 'Diplomacy and Self', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17:3 (2006), pp. 497–522. Although not 'pure' IR, see also: Max M. Kampelman, 'Politics and the Human Dimension: Hubert Humphrey and Ronald Reagan', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 38:3 (July 2005), pp. 387–90.

[19] See: Edkins and Zehfuss, 'Generalising the International'.

[20] See: Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. 6.

[21] See: Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[22] See: Ute Bühler, 'Who Are We Talking To? An Addendum to Recent RIS Contributions on Discourse Ethics', *Review of International Studies*, 28:1 (2002), pp. 191–97.

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Hence, in my view, people, in the international political context, deserve to be known – to themselves and to others.[23] This is all the more so if we consider how in addition to the 'natural' tendency of the IR scholarship to focus on the state, critical research, especially Foucauldian work on governmentality, has shown how in the expanding neo-liberal global system, people's freedom and uniqueness is ever more deeply constrained. In this system, neo-liberal self-governing subjects supposedly gain more freedom, which stresses their individuality. But what actually happens, according to the Foucauldian literature, is that people are constituted as part of various 'populations'; and an assortment of power technologies, mentalities, and institutions, which often remain unnoticed or taken for granted,[24] erode or diminish the legitimacy of individual distinctiveness. In other words, the right to difference is constantly challenged by disciplining and governing apparatuses. Ignoring ordinary individuals' stories thus becomes a political act in itself and a part of the move toward dehumanising and standardising the political environment.

In this light, my *public* reflection on how my subjectivity was constructed or informed both by IR theory and by the state and the states system can be seen in itself as a form of resistance to these structures of knowledge/power, within which various agents and institutions try to conduct my and others' conduct.[25] Autoethnography becomes a counter technology and mentality, which deconstructs the processes through which one became a governable person.[26] Such self-understanding can inspire others to understand themselves too. It can prompt individuals to acknowledge or regain self-worth, to offer companionship and reduce societal estrangement, and to see or recall the humanity and intrinsic worth and distinctiveness of other individuals as well. From my perspective, as a researcher and teacher in a region of deadly and prolonged conflict (Israel-Palestine), this is one of the most important professional purposes that IR scholars should pursue.

Indeed, I believe that as humans we have the basic capacity to connect much more with another individual's private international story than with grand theories and narratives that try, often in vain, to understand the supposedly general laws of international politics, or which maintain that the purpose of international action is to bolster 'state power' or augment the 'national interest'. An individual's experience can be much more understandable, moving, enriching, and engaging than discussions about abstract 'billiard balls'/'black boxes' or 'social constructs'. This is not to say that we should stop researching international politics from the

[23] See in this context the brilliant work of Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler: A Memoir* (New York: Picador, 2003), especially pp. 181–6.

[24] See, for example, these two notable works: Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999). For applications of this approach in IR see, for example: Oded Löwenheim, 'The Responsibility to Responsibilize: Foreign Offices and the Issuing of Travel Warnings', *International Political Sociology*, 1:3 (September 2007), pp. 203–21; Wendy Larner and William Walters (eds), *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also: Mark Salter, *Rights of Passage: The Passport in International Relations* (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2003); Barry Hindess, 'Citizenship in the International Management of Populations', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43:9 (2000), pp. 1486–97.

[25] The term 'conduct of conduct' as a description of modern governmental power comes from Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and the Power', in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 208–26, at pp. 220–1.

[26] I understand subjectivity as related to being a subject of power. See: Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in Dreyfus and Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault,* pp. 208–26, p. 208.

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systemic and state-centric perspectives. I only want to show that there is much to learn and gain – factually, emotionally, and normatively – from incorporating the individual into our works. Again, this comes back to my argument that analytic and macro-level knowledge is not the only legitimate, or even the only desired, one. Subjective and micro-level knowledge that enables us to feel reality should also be considered worthy. Isaiah Berlin's interpretation of Tolstoy's understanding of history is instructive here: 'History, as it is normally written, usually represents 'political'–public-events, as the most important, while spiritual – inner-events are largely forgotten; yet *prima facie* it is they – the inner events – that are the most real, the most immediate experience of human beings; they, and only they, are what life, in the last analysis, is made of [. . .]'.[27]

Therefore, in methodological terms, an autoethnographic account's value lies mainly in its ability to break through the text's linguistic barrier and evoke an emotional and reflective response on the part of readers, to make them interested in the story and think about their own condition and position. Thus, an important criterion for evaluating an autoethnography is to ask whether the author managed to make her/his inner world accessible to the reader and to merge the reader into the story.[28] Other criteria for evaluating such an account could be the authenticity of the story, the aesthetics of its writing style, curiosity raised by the account, the normative worthiness of the story's goals, and the potential of the account to stimulate social action.[29]

Now, despite these positive effects of autoethnography, while writing this article I encountered various cautionary responses from different people, warning me that discussing the self might entail the risk of becoming the target of personal criticism (*ad hominem*). Personally, I think that I am capable of dealing with such criticism or risks (although I certainly do not invite them. . .). But it may also be that people cautioned me about the risks of personal disclosure due to their objection to setting up this kind of writing as a model for others, who might not always be able to handle criticism or who may not want to involve their inner worlds in their writing. These are, of course, fair objections. As opposed to Rosenau's call to make the enclosure of personal information in authors' text a 'standard procedure', I do not want people to feel they are compelled to write about themselves. When you compel someone to write personally, the chances are higher that they might be tempted to modify the story in order to avoid upsetting or insulting other powerful persons or challenging powerful institutions. In these situations, much of the value and power of personal writing is lost. But we should also note that current, 'conventional' formats and models of writing, in their turn, provide negative incentives to authors who *want* to involve their selves in their texts. In this light, with this article I aim not only to tell my own personal story, but also to provide a legitimising instrument for those scholars who *do* wish to introduce themselves explicitly into their works.

[27] Isaiah Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History', in Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (eds), *Russian Thinkers* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), pp. 22–81, p. 33.
[28] Carolyn Ellis, 'Creating Criteria: An Ethnographic Short Story', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6:2 (2000), pp. 273–77, p. 273.
[29] Ibid., p. 275. See also: Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002), p. 87; Kristina Medford, 'Caught With a Fake ID: Ethical Questions About Slippage in Autoethnography', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12:5 (October 2006), pp. 853–64.

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Yet what about disclosing information about others in the author's personal and/or professional life? There is a tension between, on the one hand, providing an authentic and engaging autoethnographic account and, on the other, compromising the reputation, privacy, and trust of others. This is a serious issue autoethnographers should think about 'because one can rarely if ever represent one's self without representing others'.[30] Authors clearly, then, have a special ethical responsibility here, because it is they who 'usually initiate the research relationship, have authority over what gets said and done, and earn prestige and power from their research'.[31]

In clinical spheres such as psychology and medicine, research ethics are prescribed by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). These Boards seek to ensure that 'research conforms to a set of ethical principles guided by respect for persons, beneficence, and justice [. . .] The most basic premise is that the research poses no risk or harm to the human subject participants.'[32] IRBs also usually mandate that participants in the research will give their free, informed, and formal consent. Yet while perhaps applicable to clinical sciences, IRB procedures might not work for ethnographic and autoethnographic works, in which researchers are participants themselves. In addition, although in clinical sciences the interaction between the researcher and the subject of study usually stops at the end of the research (or *should* stop), in ethnography and especially in autoethnography there is often no clear end to the relationships between the author and the characters depicted in the research. In many instances, participatory research involves not strangers but others with whom the researcher is on close terms. Furthermore, IRBs prescribe very strict and formal rules for research, often to protect the university itself from various legal risks. As such, IRB guidelines might become an obstacle to research such as autoethnography, which is based on thinking 'outside the box'.[33]

In light of these difficulties, autoethnographers should look for other ways and methods to ensure that their works remain ethical. First, autoethnographers should weigh seriously whether the disclosure of private information about others is necessary for the argument or purpose of their text: '[W]e constantly have to consider which questions to ask, which secrets to keep, and which truths are worth telling.'[34] If researchers believe that certain personal information about others should be disclosed in the text, then they should inform the other participants in the story about their role and depiction in the work, let them read the account, and obtain their permission for their appearance in the text.[35] Of course, sometimes

[30] G. Thomas Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. x.

[31] Carolyn Ellis, 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 3–29, p. 5.

[32] Caitlin Cahill, 'Repositioning Ethical Commitments: Participatory Action Research as a Relational Praxis of Social Change', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6:3 (2007), pp. 360–73, p. 361.

[33] See also Dvora Yanow's and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea's criticism of IRBs as protecting power holders by setting ever more stringent criteria for what counts as 'evidence': 'Reforming Institutional Review Board Policy: Issues in Implementation and Field Research', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41 (2008), pp. 483–94.

[34] Ellis, 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives', p. 26.

[35] However, according to Couser, 'the ethical stakes are proportionate to the centrality (and vulnerability) of the figure involved and the intimacy and interdependence between the writer and the subject.' Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects,* p. 19.

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such permission cannot be granted, as, for example, in the case of deceased or mentally impaired people.[36] In such a situation, permission should be sought from some surrogate decision maker, or be based on trust, intimacy, and long acquaintance between the autoethnographer and the deceased or incapacitated person. In the case of the autoethnography that I present in the next part, the permission of my father, who appears in this story, cannot be obtained because his illness and eventual death did not allow such communication with him. However, in light of the long and loving relationship between us, I believe that my father would have approved what I tell about him. Another person I write about here, a young Israeli soldier I shall call 'Meir' (in Hebrew, 'the one who lights up') also cannot approve his representation in my text as he committed suicide a few years ago. After much deliberation, I decided not to ask permission of Meir's family to write about him. Our long and close relationship and the specific circumstances of his suicide led me to believe that he would not want his survivors to have control over his memory. Yet in order to respect the privacy of his family, I provide a pseudonym that does not hint at his real identity, and I blur other personal details that may lead others to identify him and his family. I also made sure that the details I tell about Meir were already known to his family, in order to prevent any shock that might ensue from an accidental revelation of new information.

In other cases, permission for disclosure of private information cannot be granted because the person involved and the author have a bad or competitive relationship. In this case, the question of reputation becomes salient. Yet there are ways to reduce tension here too. First, when one depicts colleagues or other peers in a negative manner or in a manner that might hurt them in other ways, one should seriously consider using reliable pseudonyms. Alternatively, one can construct composite characters that represent several real individuals in one fictive person.[37] Another method is to construct a fictive reality that is based on or informed by actual events and people.[38] In addition, autoethnographers should make sure to consult with friends and close colleagues about their work, and thus minimise 'negative externalities'. Journal reviewers and editors, who do not always engage with ethical questions in IR research in their capacity as 'officials' of the journal, also have a role in terms of holding the autoethnographic account to what they deem as sufficient ethical standards. 'By remaining open to other people's responses to our moral maturity and emotional honesty [. . .] we engage in the unfinalized dialogue of seeking the good.'[39] Yet far from being exhausted in an introductory essay such as this one, the discussion of ethics in autoethnography should constantly occupy autoethnographers, who must give careful consideration to ethical issues and frame these questions within the overall moral and ethical purpose of their texts. Furthermore, we should be aware to the fact that there are no definitive answers to some ethical questions that may arise in research. Yet the very discussion of these questions is an ethical duty in itself.

Having introduced some theoretical and conceptual aspects of autoethnography to IR readers, I turn now to the part of the article in which I use this method to

[36] Yet Couser notes that 'one cannot libel a dead person, and the right to privacy is also held to terminate with death.' *Vulnerable Subjects,* p. 6.
[37] See: Richardsom, *Fields of Play*, pp. 9–10.
[38] See: Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*.
[39] Arthur Frank, quoted in Ellis, 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives', p. 23.

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interpret myself. I reflect on how the international – real political institutions, events, and practices, as well as IR theory – shaped and produced certain aspects of my subjectivity and identity. Notably, when I talk about 'IR theory' I do not deal with a specific theory or paradigm. Rather, I treat mainstream, positivist IR theory as a social and normative knowledge structure, and I look for some of its fundamental characteristics, as they were taught to me and construed by me during my graduate and post-graduate years. Thus, I examine the 'tone' of the discipline – its spirit, aesthetics, and style, so to speak. In this sense, I treat IR theory as a literary genre. More generally, I adopt Hayden White's standpoint, which sees the scientific style of writing (in his case, it was the discipline of History) as a kind of literary expression and narrative in itself.[40] Or as James Clifford, White's colleague in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, notes, 'Literary devices are inseparable from the telling of "fact".'[41] Highlighting this point is Laurel Richardson's extensive discussion of the alleged conflict between, on the one hand, the supposed objectivity, detachment, and accuracy of the scientific mode of writing and, on the other hand, the supposed subjective, involved, and blurred style of fiction. She argues that, in fact, there is no such sharp distinction between the two modes or styles of writing. 'With no apparent narrator, an illusion of objectivity [in scientific writing] is created. The implied narrator is godlike, an all-knowing voice from afar and above, stripped of all human subjectivity and fallibility. But in fact, science does have a human narrator, the camouflaged first person, hiding in the bramble of the passive voice. The scientist is not all knowing. Omniscience is imaginary, possible only in fiction.'[42]

The personal is international and the international is personal[43]

Author's initial thoughts: *This is harder than I thought it would be. What can I say about myself that will not expose too much or embarrass me? I said before that I think I can handle personal criticism and the risk of personal disclosure. But this is different when you come to actually do the writing . . . So much easier to write about this in general and methodological terms, to advocate the inclusion of the self in IR theory, than to actually bring my own self into this article . . .*

Well, perhaps the best way to start is to jump into the deep water. In what follows, I want to share with you my story of why I study IR.

There are many reasons to choose an academic career in IR. Some believe that IR is a technology of peace, which could lead humanity toward a better future.

[40] See: Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7:1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), pp. 5–27; *Metahistory. The Historical in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

[41] James Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 1–21, at p. 4.

[42] Richardson, *Fields of Play*, p. 18. For a similar critique of the alleged objectivity of scientific writing see: Wolff-Michael Roth, 'Editorial Power/Authorial Suffering', *Research in Science Education*, 32:2 (June 2002), pp. 215–40. For the classic argument about the presence of the poetic in scientific thought and writing see: Giambattista Vico, *New Science* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

[43] This is a paraphrase of Cynthia Enloe's title to chap. 9 of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000).

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Others are simply fascinated intellectually by the complexity of international politics and get great intellectual satisfaction when solving international puzzles. There are those who study IR due to a 'longing for something bigger than [themselves], a world that stretch[es] past the boundaries of [their] own small existence in a certain time and space.'[44] For still others, IR is an emancipatory technology, designed, through critique, to reform the world.[45] And there are those who 'do' IR only incidentally, as this is where the circumstances of their life led them.[46] In one stage or another, you might also continue to do IR due to sunk costs and the fact that you are familiar with it and not with other ways of knowing. I guess that for most of us, some combination of all these factors pertains. This certainly applies to me.

But the more I gain perspective on my (short) career in academic IR, the more I understand that for me one of the major motivations for studying this field of knowledge is that through this pursuit I reframe my own personal experiences and reflect upon my own life. Through theorising IR, I feel that I can, to some extent, make sense of complex and emotionally laden life experiences and trajectories. In this respect, thinking conceptually about IR helped me deal (I cannot find a better word) with one of my deepest fears: my fear of war. IR theory did not reduce this fear, but it gave me a new perspective on this horrible human practice, a perspective that helped me in some ways to emotionally distance myself from this 'institution' of international society, as some IR theorists would call it.

So before I explain how IR theory had this effect on me, let me first reveal to you some of my emotions and experiences with war. I could have made do with just stating that I fear, abhor, and am terrorised by war and other forms of 'organized violence' and that consequently I try to make sense of it. But I think that sharing with you some of my personal experiences and feelings about war could have a stronger effect that may give a deeper meaning to my account of my motivation for studying IR. Of course, there are many works on fear and war in the IR literature.[47] Yet almost all the works I am familiar with discuss fear from a distance – namely, written by supposedly unaffected or uninvolved experts. The narrative I offer below invites readers to become involved and experience fear themselves.

The child of 1973

Thomas Hobbes called himself the 'twin of fear' because his mother gave early birth to him when gripped with fear upon hearing the news of the approach of the Spanish Armada in 1588.[48] Similarly to Hobbes, who was accompanied by the fear

[44] Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls', p. 377.
[45] See: Wendt, 'What is International Relations For?'
[46] On such scholars, not in IR, see: Ronald J. Pelias, 'The Academic Tourist: An Autoethnography', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9:3 (2003), pp. 369–73.
[47] See, for example, Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991). The various works of Ole Wæver on securitisation are also important in this regard.
[48] See: Torbjørn L. Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory*. Second edition (Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 101.

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of war from the moment of birth, I too sensed this dread from early childhood. I was born and grew up in a violent place. Born in Jerusalem, Israel, in 1970, my first childhood memory is of my father leaving me and my mother in the middle of the street on our way to the synagogue on the Jewish High Holiday of Yom Kippur, 1973, rushing to join his battalion in the Sinai to fight the Egyptian army. The sudden and penetrating scream of the civil defense sirens, the hurried leaving of my father, my mother's fear, military vehicles appearing in the street out of nowhere, people rushing in panic – this was my first encounter with war. In mid-1974, after long months of reserve service in the Sinai, my father finally returned physically safe from the Yom Kippur War, although most of his brigade was wiped out in the onslaught of the Egyptians across the Suez Canal ('The Jerusalemite Brigade'). Nightmares and other post-traumatic symptoms have tormented him ever since. As a child, and even now, it was frightening for me to discover that war continued to rage inside my strong and proud father, even after he returned from the battlefield. I remember how, when we walked in the street and a military jet flew overhead (not a rare thing in Israel…), my father would anxiously raise his eyes to the sky. He was looking for Egyptian MIGs, and he would tell me how the MIGs descended on the Jerusalemite Brigade in the Canal. He had a booklet of military aircraft silhouettes that he kept in his library. I found the booklet one day when I was twelve or thirteen and memorised the different shapes. Whenever I hear the words 'the Jerusalemite Brigade', I think of these silhouettes and tears fill my throat.

My childhood memories of school are of the constant drills in running into bomb shelters to the sound of sirens screaming without any warning (the teachers, presumably, knew beforehand), of our being taught about Israel's wars and the Holocaust in the same breath; and of the weeks-long rehearsals every year for the War Dead Memorial Day and Holocaust Day ceremonies.[49] Although I did not experience the physical brutalities of war like children in other conflict-torn areas (of my own country and in other states), the fear of war, violent death, and sudden violence hovered over me and was constitutive in my growing up. A straight line of fear ran through childhood – from the early memory of the Yom Kippur War, through those dreadful school drills, my father's searches for MIGs, the duct tape my parents put on the windows of our apartment in preparation for a surprise air raid, my grandparents' stories of survival in Auschwitz and the Ghetto in Budapest, and the constant outpouring of TV documentaries showing in great detail, on the one hand, the horrors and atrocities of the Holocaust and, on the other hand, the bravery of Israeli soldiers in war.

As I grew up I also became aware of the Cold War through the thrillers of Frederick Forsyth and John le Carré; of the wars of antiquity through historical movies (which my father, an historian, encouraged me to see), and of the wars of the future through the science fiction of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. Amid this cultural and literary socialisation into the phenomenon of war came real war, again: the First Lebanon War in 1982 (every week for a few months we prepared gift packages to the soldiers that the school sent to the front); the Falkland War

[49] On how the Israeli-Arab conflict is reflected in Israeli school textbooks see: Daniel Bar-Tal, 'The Rocky Road toward Peace: Beliefs on Conflict in Israeli Textbooks', *Journal of Peace Research*, 35:6 (November 2007), pp. 723–42; Elie Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks 1948–2000* (Westport CT.: Greenwood, 2002).

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(which gave the impression that war is something universal and routine); the First Palestinian Intifadah; and the 1991 Gulf War (accompanied by the threat of Holocaust-like extermination by Saddam Hussein's chemical and biological weapons). War – and the fear inherent in it – always lurked close to me during my childhood and adolescent years.[50]

You promised a dove
A branch of olive
You promised peace at home
You promised spring and flowering
You promised to keep promises
You promised a dove.

We are the children of winter '73.[51]

But despite these promises following the Yom Kippur War, I too became a soldier, like my father before me. I was drafted to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in 1989, precisely at the height of the first Palestinian uprising, and was sent to serve at the headquarters of the occupying brigade of the Palestinian city of Hebron.

There,

With my own eyes and with binoculars
Through night vision special equipment
In video and stills
On air photos and maps,
I saw.

The odor of sewage running out freely in the streets
The suffocating smoke of burning barricades
The stench of fire powder and army camps
The burning smell of tear gas
And the fumes of military vehicles' diesel fuel,
I smelt.

Freely in the open air
From the inside of a military jeep
In military radio communication
From fellow soldiers' bragging,
I heard.

I saw, smelt and heard what James Ron aptly called Israel's 'savage restraint' toward the Palestinians.[52] I also experienced Palestinian brutality and revenge, and on several occasions narrowly escaped death. Thankfully, I never killed a person,

[50] Fear, of course, was the result of many of the 'objective' realities I described. But it should be noted that at least in Israel the 'security network' consciously inflates threats in order to augment its interests and position in society. See: Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, 'Israel's "Security Network" and Its Impact: An Exploration of a New Approach', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 38:2 (May 2006), pp. 235–61.

[51] Shmuel Hasafri, 'Winter '73'. Composed by Uri Vidislavski. Performed by the Israel Defense Forces Education Corps Band, available at: {http://il.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ_z11muYKs&feature=related} This song was one of the symbols of the Oslo Agreements period in Israel. There are several videos of the song on the 'YouTube' website. Some of them show pictures or scenes from military life. I have chosen to refer readers to this version, in which a girl translates the lyrics into sign language and the soundtrack ceases in the middle of the song. The use of sign language carries, for me, a universal meaning for the song, and the sudden stop of the sound in the middle symbolises the decline of hope, which this song tells about.

[52] James Ron, 'Savage Restraint: Israel, Palestine and the Dialectics of Legal Repression', *Social Problems*, 47:4 (November 2000), pp. 445–72.

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nor injured one. But to my horror and shame, I admit that besides being frightened and repulsed, as a young soldier I felt that participating in this 'low intensity conflict' was also thrilling.[53] I experienced a sense of power. To see the fear in the eyes of Palestinian youths captured in a chase after stone throwers. To blatantly disobey traffic laws while driving in Hebron in a military jeep. To impose curfew. To send a military force to 'restore order' after Palestinians threw a Molotov cocktail on Israeli settlers' cars. To feel above the law.

In the 1990s, I felt war's shadow ever more close to me. In 1992, my best childhood friend was killed in Southern Lebanon, where the IDF maintained a 'security zone'. My wise and courageous friend – my companion on those long and simmering summer afternoons of a Jerusalem working class neighbourhood in the 1970s – was torn apart by 'friendly fire'. One of his comrades mistook him for a Hizbullah fighter one misty night, when they were laying an ambush in the 'security zone'. 'He had a defeated face', wrote his mother in an internet site.

Then, in spite (or perhaps, because) of the Oslo peace process, in the 1990s countless Palestinian suicide bombers hit Jerusalem. Dozens of people were killed in places I used to frequent, on buses I used to ride. I will never forget the time I missed the bus to campus in August 1995, a bus that twenty-five minutes later was blown to pieces by a suicide bomber. I ran after the bus but the driver did not stop. So I had to wait for the next one. I cursed my bad luck, as the bus ran only every half hour, knowing that I'd be late that day. Twenty-five minutes later, when I was on my way to university, the radio announced the terrible news. Suicide bombers continued to hit more busses I could have ridden and more locations I could have been. In September 2001, a year after the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifadah, I left for Toronto to take a postdoctoral fellowship at the Munk Centre at the University of Toronto. Only a few weeks before that, a student of mine was killed in a suicide bombing in a Jerusalem pizzeria. When I came to Toronto, I felt like a refugee. And then, of course, came the attacks of 9/11.

The postdoc years in Toronto were wonderful. But every day, while working, I regularly checked Israeli news websites to see if 'everything was okay' at home. These were the high years of the Second Palestinian Intifadah, and on many occasions when I opened my web browser, tormenting news paralysed me for hours. One attack was especially painful: the 2002 bombing of the Hebrew University's cafeteria at the Mt. Scopus campus. This was a place I ate in every day during my student years. This was in the middle of the university, a place of wisdom and study that I had believed was off limits to violence, one of the single sane locations in a fanatical city. I realised that war is everywhere. Yet the worst was still to come. In 2003, when I returned from Toronto, my beloved Meir committed suicide during his military service.

Meir was a young relative of mine whom I had loved from infancy. I was told about his suicide in an early morning hour, while in bed. They found his body lying in a dark bomb shelter in a kibbutz next to the Gaza Strip border. He was shot in the head through the mouth. He did not write a letter, so I will never know

[53] On this aspect in war see: James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). See also: Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

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for sure why he killed himself. But he left many diaries, which I read during his *Shiv'aa* (the Jewish week of mourning), and there he wrote about what eventually led him to commit suicide. I often find myself thinking about his last minutes, trying to understand what went through his mind before he squeezed the trigger of his rifle. Although suicide is always a complex, lonely, and unreachable act, I think that he was very frustrated at being 'only' a medic in the armoured corps. He wanted to be a commando fighter in the IDF navy's seals, but was turned down. He was extremely disappointed and offended, believing he could have contributed much more. He hated his posting and desperately wanted to apply for relocation, or even to be released from the military before the end of his mandatory service. But he feared negative societal implications, and moreover, was too fearful to challenge his parents and the military establishment. He died because he could not find his place. A few weeks before his death, we talked about these issues. I told him I wished I had applied for exemption during my mandatory service. I told him that he should not worry about his future should he be released – he was such a bright and talented young man. All this was in vain. We had this last talk in the forest, right outside my home, where we so often used to ride together on our mountain bicycles – the Jerusalem Forest, just below the Mt. Herzl War Cemetery. Meir is buried in that cemetery now.

I think of him every day. I sometimes go to visit his tomb. When we buried him, his gravestone was the last in the row of the newest section of the military cemetery. Now there are at least eight new rows of tombs there, the harvest of the Second Lebanon War (2006). The military cemetery is so quiet and well-groomed. It is green and full of flowers, a strong contrast to the dusty and summer-scorched city of Jerusalem that sprawls outside. Small pebbles lie on the tombstones, a testimony to someone's visit, a way people tell their dear ones that they came to see them. I went to his tomb a few days ago. I could not stop weeping and shivering, seeing all these tombs of young men. I did not want to put a pebble on his tombstone. I caressed the gravestone. I leaned my bicycle against it.

I am so afraid. There are things I cannot even write about

Meir, like many of those who lie next to him, was a victim of the war system and the militaristic culture in my country.[54] A system in which war and all that accompanies it (heroism, masculinity, intolerance, short-sightedness, vanity, glorification and veneration of force and power – I could go on and on) becomes part of so many people's identity and ontological security.[55] Meir's death made

[54] I do not want to imply that all these soldiers died in militaristic adventures. Some of Israel's wars were Just Wars. But many conflicts and wars were not. On Israeli militarism, revenge, and the Second Lebanon War see: Oded Löwenheim and Gradi Heimann, 'Revenge in International Politics', *Security Studies*, 17:4 (October 2008).

[55] On this aspect in the Israeli-Arab conflict see: Amir Lupovici, 'Discourse, Identity, and Security: Israeli Deterrence in the Second Lebanon War', *Politika* (in Hebrew) 17:1 (Winter 2008), pp. 73–96. See also: Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:3 (September 2006), pp. 341–70; Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Identity, Social Action and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2007).

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me despairingly aware of the deep internalisation of the war culture in my country.[56]

Above war

The personal experience I depict here is not necessarily general, not in Israel nor elsewhere. Nor do I wish for security or strategic analysts to experience the calamities and misfortunes of war on their own body and soul (although some might [cynically?] say that in fact this could be an educating experience).[57] Furthermore, I did not start to study IR theory *because* of these experiences and history. But what I wanted to convey through this personal story is that such experiences and life history inform the way I approach the study of international politics. I grew up with war's shadow and fear; I lost loved ones to the war system and culture; violent death was around me. In light of this, for me one of the major motivations in studying war through the lenses of IR theory is to give meaning to the terrifying reality of war.

Some may say that social science in general, and IR theory in particular, is not the right venue for my search for a meaning. Social scientists provide explanations for social phenomena, identify patterns, and trace the genealogies of social systems. They do not deal with philosophical questions of meaning. But this is precisely my point: the emotions that war stirs in me compel me to look for a meaning. On second thought, perhaps meaning is much too complex and illusive a concept. I cannot see meaning in a child's plight, in death in war, in the concept of 'friendly fire', in the dread of being torn to pieces by a suicide bomber, or in the suicide of a young soldier. The world, after all, goes on. Rather than meaning, I want theory to help me master my fear of war, to be the philosopher king of my own self.[58] I think that through IR theory I can clarify – at least to myself – some aspects of war's nature. Such 'pure academic knowledge – that is to say, research and writing for the sake of creating knowledge, of creating understanding, of making a highly complicated world more intelligible to *yourself* and your students – is in itself an accomplishment.'[59]

The accomplishment that Kal Hoslti speaks of above translates for me into an ability I acquire to somewhat emotionally isolate myself from war by becoming an external observer of it. Even though paradoxically I get to know war more

[56] On suicide in the IDF see: Ehud Bodner, Elisheva Ben-Artzi and Zeev Kaplan, 'Soldiers Who Kill Themselves: The Contribution of Dispositional and Situational Factors', *Archives of Suicide Research*, 10:1 (January–March 2006), pp. 29–43. They find that excessive motivation to excel in the army mainly accounts for the suicide of combatant soldiers, whereas personality weaknesses may have an impact on suicide among non-combatants. This motivation to excel in service is, of course, greatly a cultural product. See: Uta Klein, '"Our Best Boys': The Gendered Nature of Civil-Military Relations in Israel', *Men and Masculinities*, l.2:1 (July 1999), pp. 47–65.

[57] For a political scientist's account of his own participation in the Iraqi War see: Russell A. Burgos, 'An N of 1: A Political Scientist in Operation Iraqi Freedom', *Perspectives on Politics*, 2:3 (September 2004), pp. 551–6.

[58] On the aspirations of IR scholars to become involved in actual decision making, the 'Kissinger Syndrome', see: Ekkehart Krippendorff, 'The Dominance of American Approaches in International Relations', in Hugh C. Dyer, Leon Mangasarian (eds), *The Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 28–39, at p. 32.

[59] Jones, 'Interview with Kal Holsti', p. 619. Emphais added.

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intimately by making it the subject of my research, my fear of war and my anger against those who initiate and participate in it (including myself as a soldier) are partially transformed into a cynical distance that enables some mastering of my own emotions. According to Jenny Edkins, for Jay Winter and George Mosse (separately), 'memorial practices cover over the trauma [of war] by reinstating what we call social reality, the comforting collective fantasy that provides answers where there are none.'[60] In a similar manner, IR theory enables me to provide an account in which war becomes supposedly understandable. It also helps me to pretend that I do not live in Israel, in Jerusalem.[61] By thinking about war conceptually, I become a member of a transnational community of scholars, who are in a certain way 'above war'. My identity is thus changing through the process and my emotions and traumas are calmed as I find solace in supposed answers to terrible questions. The bus I take to university might explode one day; an Iranian nuclear bomb, or, for that matter, 'just' a Hizbullah – or Hamas – launched Katyusha rocket, might fall on my head; or I might suffer a whole range of other violent calamities. But theorising war is a way – meagre as it is – that I can escape some of war's stressful emotional effects.

In mainstream IR, it is the 'state' that makes war against other states or non-state 'actors'. The horrible, grotesque, and disorderly reality of war on the ground is barely visible in models and theories that conceive of war as 'the continuance of policy by other means', or in other cases as a 'social construct'.[62] Individual suffering from war, although acknowledged and sometimes used to legitimise the study of war (in order to find a 'cure' for it), is usually not the focus of research.[63] IR scholars of various stripes personify the state. Some really mean that the state is a distinctive person, others just use the 'state as a person' argument as a useful fiction.[64] In any case, fictive or real, when the state is the main subject of research, war becomes to some extent not the author's own personal problem or passion, but a practice or institution belonging to another plane of reality – the international one.

Unlike Joseph Heller's Yossarian or Jaroslav Hašek's Švejk, two famous fictive characters for whom war is a personal problem in every aspect,[65] IR theory invites or tempts me to see war as not directly my own predicament but mainly the state's or even the state's system's. Even if it is my own state's wars that I study, IR theory brings me to see these wars as the *state's*, not so much mine. Moreover,

[60] Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 94.

[61] For a similar line of thought see Doty, 'Maladies of Our Soul', p. 377. See also: Arie M. Kacowicz, 'The State of International Relations in Israel: The Development of a Discipline in a Unique Setting'. Paper presented at the 48th annual convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago IL. (28 February 2007).

[62] Jaroslav Hašek's, *The Good Soldier* Švejk is an enlightening satiric view of war as it is 'on the ground'.

[63] See: Steve Smith, 'Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11: Presidential Address to the International Studies Association, February 27, 2003, Portland OR', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48:3 (September 2004), pp. 499–515.

[64] See, for example, Alexander Wendt, 'The State as Person in International Theory', *Review of International Studies*, 30:2 (April 2004), pp. 289–316; Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*; Faizullaev, 'Diplomacy and Self'; Löwenheim and Heimann, 'Revenge in International Politics'.

[65] For a discussion of these two novels see: J. P. Stern, 'War and the Comic Muse: The Good Soldier Schweik and Catch-22', *Comparative Literature*, 20:3 (Summer 2007), pp. 193–216.

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seeing war as the state's diminishes the guilt that arises out of my own personal participation in it or my indirect contribution to it. Thus, for example, such a perspective would have allowed me, after writing an article on Israel's 2006 war of revenge in Lebanon,[66] to more easily ignore the probability that some of the students in my IR classes who served as reserve soldiers during the war might have committed (legal or illegal) war brutalities in Lebanon. Such state-centric thinking about war reduces the need to confront hard moral questions. In other words, IR's focus on the state is founded on Rousseau's understanding of war: that war is 'constituted by a relation between things, and not between persons'. But war is always made by persons who believe or want to believe that war is 'between things' and not between real people:

> Death in war begins
> With one young man
> Descending the stairs.
>
> Death in war begins
> With closing a door in silence,
> Death in war begins
> With opening a window to see.
>
> Hence, do not weep for the one who goes,
> Weep for the one who descends the stairs of his house,
> Weep for the one who puts his last key
> In his back pocket.
> Weep for the picture that remembers instead of us,
> Weep for the paper that remembers,
> Weep for the tears that do not remember.
>
> And in this spring,
> Who will stand up and say to the dust:
> From man you came and to man you shall return.[67]

And when I study other states' wars, I even further isolate myself from any personal investment in it. Such disengagement from the personal dimensions and predicaments of war offers me some relief. The process of becoming an 'expert' on war, a scholar who studies it, partially demystified war for me, as I come to believe I understand some facets of the beast. Conceptual categories, models, theories, and paradigms hide the abyss that lies beneath the word 'war'.[68] When I was a child and a young man, war was always something very mysterious and dark to me. War compelled me to think about death and destruction, or even forced me to become familiar with these horrors from the outset. As an IR specialist, I found that some of war's mystery and darkness can be dispelled by looking at war from a distance.

[66] See: Löwenheim and Heimann, 'Revenge in International Politics'. The author of the current text is Oded Löwenheim. Gadi Heimann's motivations for co-authoring 'Revenge in International Politics' are to be found with him and are not necessarily similar or identical to mine.

[67] Yehuda Amichai, 'From Man You Came and to Man You Shall Return'. In, *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry, 1948–1994*. Selected and translated from Hebrew by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), p. 384.

[68] 'We should ever wonder about that sense of security and gratification that accompanies man in his speech, as if he really passes his thoughts or feelings on [. . .] a bridge of iron, and he does not even know how shaky is this bridge of words, how deep and dark is the abyss beneath it, and how much of a miracle is every safe step.' Hayyim Nachman Bialik, 'Exposing and Covering in Language' in *All the Writings of H.N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1937), pp. 191–3, at p. 191 (in Hebrew).

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From a distance, wars seem 'incredibly absurd and wasteful [. . .] petty squabbles blown out of all reasonable proportion.'[69]

Moreover, theoretical language and academic culture themselves have a relieving emotional effect. Studies on bicultural bilingual people have found that different emotions and mental conditions are associated with the use or hearing of each of the languages the person speaks.[70] In this light, we can think of academia in general and IR in particular as a distinctive culture with its own language. War is *analysed* in this culture, becoming a subject of rationalistic research. IR theorists who deal with emotions coolly discuss other people's emotions, almost never their own. This is similar to the study of the wars of the state (as opposed to the wars of actual people). Again, the IR theorist gets to stand above the subject of research. You are taught almost from your first day in university not to allow personal 'biases' and emotions color your writing and thinking. You need to write in a sterile and soulless voice, and this style of writing eventually 'becomes absorbed into the fabric of our beings'.[71] You become passionate about becoming dispassionate.[72]

Down, in the streets of Baghdad

At this point, some readers may be confused. It seems that I advocate – or at least do not object to – theoretising that does not involve the author. I talk about the attractiveness of impersonal writing, of distanced and detached perspective and language. But I started this article with a call to bring the author *into* IR theory. There may appear to be a contradiction between my two lines of thought.

To own to the truth, I am confused too. On the one hand, the detached and impersonal mode of writing in conventional IR enabled me to cross over the abyss called 'war'. IR theories diminished my sense of awe about the eruption of war, eased my fearful perplexity on why people are ready or willing to kill each other with such ferocity and with such varying technologies and means (think, 'MIGs', 'suicide bombers'), and dulled my sense of pain in the face of the cruelty of war. On the other hand, I find this way of dealing with war as increasingly frustrating. The abyss is still there, no matter how hard I try not to look down. A few months ago I had this recurrent dream for some period: coming back from an International Studies Association conference in North America I board the wrong plane and land in Baghdad's airport. Jerusalem is considered by many a dangerous place. But Baghdad – that is a whole different story. I find myself walking in Baghdad's market, fearful to the bone, anxiously looking everywhere around, trying, much like my father's searches for MIGs, to identify beforehand the suicide bomber or the booby-trapped car. Suddenly the expected – but yet amazingly shocking – huge explosion occurs. Dozens of people are instantly killed. I feel the

[69] David McNeil, *The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (University of Delaware Press, 1990), p. 25–6.
[70] See: David Luna, Torsten Ringberg and Laura A. Peracchio, 'One Individual, Two Identities: Frame Switching Among Biculturals', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35:2 (August 2008), pp. 279–93.
[71] Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls', p. 380.
[72] James N. Rosenau, 'Mapping and Organizing the Journeys', in Kruzel and Rosenau (eds), *Journeys through World Politics*, pp. 1–12, at p. 7.

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blow of the explosion, my body trembles while I'm asleep. The scale of the carnage is immense. Blood stains my conference suit. An obnoxious odour of scorched human flesh fills the air. Body parts are all over the street. I flee into the alleys; somehow manage to find my way back to the airport, escaping death, only to land in Baghdad again the next night.

Baghdad of my dream is, of course, a real and metaphorical place at the same time. It is the place where life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. And the disturbing part is that an IR theory – the democratic peace theory – may have contributed to the return to this Hobbesian state of nature in Iraq.[73]

What I mean to say is that IR theory, although sometimes underrated in terms of its impact on reality, is something beyond a detached (and detaching) intellectual project. Doty quotes Anthony Lake, who said in the context of the Vietnam War 'that the "bloodless" abstractions and 'disembodied and dehumanised terms' that constitute the language used in both the classroom and in foreign policy bureaucracies enable policies that disregard real people and result in immoral consequences.'[74] Similarly, Carol Cohn criticised the 'techno-strategic' language of nuclear defence analysts in the 1980s, a language that allowed people to disregard or repress thoughts about the irrational and immoral aspects of nuclear strategy. Worse still, Cohn notes that after spending a summer seminar with leading nuclear experts and defence analysts, her own thinking about this subject was changing – 'and I had to confront a new question: How can *I* think this way?'[75] A similar understanding came upon on me as well, especially after becoming acquainted with Foucault's concepts of disciplinary and governmental power. I realised that the illusion of solace, the omniscient voice, and the detachment provided by theory were constructing my own subjectivity in deeper senses than I imagined or wanted. I was becoming like those 'defense analysts' that Cohn writes about – capable of talking and writing matter-of-factly, without any compassion, about a horrid practice and reality. The Baghdad dream, I guess, was some kind of a rebellion against this, reminding me that war cannot be escaped by my simply turning into a detached theoriser.

So what to do? You may of course say that IR theory is not designed from the outset to help theorists deal with their fears and emotions, and that there are other ways and methods that could be helpful in this regard (for example, psychotherapy, friendship, philosophy, art, literature). Some may add that as a publicly paid intellectual, in a state-owned university, I should not 'use' theory for such personal purposes. Yet, I do not think there is an inherent contradiction here. In fact, I think that my research could be bettered – and, consequently, my personal conflicts and pain alleviated – if I will allow my inner world to be present in my research more explicitly instead of running away from it. I think that my writing, as well as much of IR theory, could become more influential and have a deeper impact on the real world if it involved more personal input and dimensions.[76] I

[73] See, for instance: Christopher Hobson, 'A Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East: US Democracy Promotion and the "War on Terror"', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 59:1 (March 2005), pp. 39–53.

[74] Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls', p. 381.

[75] Carol Cohn, 'Nuclear Language and How We Learned to Pat the Bomb', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12 (Summer 1987), pp. 687–718, at p. 688.

[76] For 'complaints' about the limited effect of IR theory on policy see: Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Why International Relations has Failed as an Intellectual Project and What to do About it', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30:1 (2001), pp. 19–39; Joseph Lepgold and Miroslav

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increasingly become convinced that instead of repressing fear through detached writing, it is better for me to face my fears directly, to expose them, to incorporate them explicitly in my writing, and to use these emotions and personal experiences as a means to engage my readers and my students, to try to touch *their* emotions, subjectivity, and imaginations. This is not to say that IR texts should exclusively deal with the inner, personal world of the author. People who prefer to remain detached should continue to do so. But others who do wish to include themselves to varying degrees in their texts should not be discouraged.

After all, so much of social science prose is often very boring, dogmatic, formalistic, and unsurprising. I want to make a confession here: throughout my years in academe, I, as Laurel Richardson says, have 'yawned my way' through numerous supposedly exemplary articles and books.[77] In a sense, reading beyond the 'border of boredom'[78] served my project of detaching myself from my fears of war, as I sometimes literally put these fears to sleep. Some texts are boring because of the theoretical analysis or cases studied. Others are boring because they are written according to well established and conformist formats, 'engaging' through numerous footnotes the ever expanding literature (often only to pre-empt critical reviews). But many are also boring because of the impersonality of the text. The impersonal way of writing does not create in the reader the emotional response that connects them to the text. The impersonal text does not carry the reader into it, does not invite the reader to *experience* or *imagine* the reality the author depicts or explains. When imagination is barred and personal connection between reader and text is missing, boredom, as Virginia Woolf implied, is often the result.[79]

Indeed, it could be well argued that this is precisely what distinguishes social science from art, poetry, or literature. Social scientists usually avoid raising emotions and imagination in their reader because in this way they risk antagonising the reader, who will consider the text subjective and biased. In a sense, it is better to be boring than to be dismissed as unscientific in this way.[80] But from my perspective, there is some 'organized hypocrisy' here.[81] Perhaps at the beginning of

Nincic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: International Relations Theory and the Issue of Policy Relevance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Stephen Walt, 'The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8 (2005), pp. 23–48.

[77] Richardson, *Fields of Play,* p. 87. Kal Holsti finds that new generations of IR scholars do not want to be 'constrained by the intellectual agenda of their predecessors. So it may be that the older issues – the issues of war, peace, and order – which were the normative core of International Relations for 250 years became boring compared to exciting new problems.' Jones, 'Interview with Kal Holsti', p. 622. Holsti also talks about his impression that many young scholars are bored by IR's traditional theories and empirical fields of study in his article 'Along the Road of International Theory in the Next Millennium: Four Travelogues', in Robert M. A. Crawford and Darryl S. L. Jarvis (eds), *International Relations – Still an American Social Science? Toward Diversity in International Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 2001), pp. 73–100, at p. 81.

[78] See: Heikki Patomäki and Colin Wight, ' After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 44:2 (June 2000), pp. 213–37, p. 215. On boredom in the IR field see also: Henri Vogt, 'On the State of the IR Art: Problems of Self-Positioning and the Absence of Freedom', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43:4 (December 2008), pp. 363–72, at pp. 364, 370.

[79] See: Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), pp. 90–111.

[80] On the construction of social science in the nineteenth century as non-polemic and objectivist project see: Regina Hewitt, 'Expanding the Literary Horizon: Romantic Poets and Postmodern Sociologists', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 35:2 (May 1994), pp. 195–213.

[81] I pay homage to Stephen Krasner for the term. See his: *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

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your education and career you are not quite aware of it, but as you gain perspective you gradually understand that almost any IR theory is socially constructed or, to be more lenient, is founded upon certain worldviews, beliefs, and values.[82] The 'theoretical bridges' that so many conferences and written works try to construct are very difficult to build precisely because people know – or, better still, *sense* – this. The attempt to cast subjectively based and value-laden theories with the cloak of 'objectivity' raises more antagonism, at least on my part, than would the theorist telling you beforehand where s/he comes from, including emotionally and personally. I could have been more open and attentive to people's arguments had they been less objectivist in this manner. After all, as recent research on rationality shows, emotions and rationality are mutually constitutive.[83] Even if I'd become antagonistic to an argument because of the author's personal voice, history, emotions, and experience, I would still *respect* such a theory much more than a theory from which the author is supposedly missing. Most likely, I would remember the argument better, could contrast it more clearly with 'competing explanations', and better teach such an argument to my students.

Boredom also means that our knowledge of the social and human world becomes narrower. Vico wrote that the human sciences are ontologically superior to the natural sciences. This is because we, as human beings, have the capacity to understand, in the deep sense of the word (*verstehen*), the human and social world as its *creators*. Boring IR theory reduces this ability to understand the world as it neutralises the emotional and subjective aspects of the text, treats the author's 'I' as a contaminant in the text, and thus enshrines – even in constructivist and post-modern writing – the illusion or myth that the 'author is dead', not a part of the construction of reality.

White storks turning into jet planes and a blizzard of breath

I do not want readers to conclude that this article calls to abandon social science methods and theories as we know them today. I think that we could do good IR theory with some of the methodological and theoretical tools already available. But we should stop treating the author's 'I' as an unwelcome intrusion in the text. Throughout this article, I grappled with my internal conflict on how to study war. One of the things I wanted to show here was that the way you write about the international also constructs your subjectivity in a certain manner. This became very clear to me when in the midst of revising the current article, the Gaza War of 2008/9 between Israel and Hamas broke out. I was paralysed for almost three weeks, full of anger, shame, and sadness in front of the pointless and raging violence, the loss of so many innocents' and children's lives, and the process in which brutality became ever more banal and taken for granted in Israeli society. Yet this time I decided not to remain aloof and study this war from the 'security

[82] See: Hedley Bull, 'Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations', in Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), pp. ix–xxiii, at p. xxi.

[83] See: McDermott, 'The Feeling of Rationality'; Mercer, 'Rationality and Psychology'; Löwenheim and Heimann, 'Revenge in International Politics'.

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studies' expert's objective and detached perspective. Instead of thinking about 'deterrence', 'strategy', 'civil-military relations', 'the state', and 'terrorism', I decided to share with my 'Intro to IR' class my own fears and emotional turmoil. The discussion was difficult and tense. Some students accused me of demoralisation in time of war. Others argued that I should empathise just with 'our' side, not the 'enemy's'. I replied that my heart is big enough to see the humanity of both. Several students left the class showily. A great many of the others became antagonistic. Yet still many others listened attentively in a manner I had never seen before (even in those lectures that contained mandatory material for the final exam...). Afterwards, several students sent me emails in which they said that my talk helped them to acknowledge the evil of war and the human tragedy – not only on the Israeli side but also in Gaza – and to see the interconnectedness of human sufferings on both sides. The important point in the context of this article is that I do not believe I would have had the courage to have this discussion with my students had I not written this work. By writing this autoethnographic account, I became highly sensitive to and aware of the importance of personal voice, style, and selfhood in academic texts, as well as of the personal and societal implications of suppressing these dimensions. I also realised the importance of claiming the place of the individual and ordinary man, woman, and child in the discipline of IR. This awareness enabled me to speak with my students in a straightforward manner, not hiding my inner thoughts and feelings behind the expert's image. I know that in this way I made a difference.

Now that the water presses hard
On the walls of the dam,
Now that the returning white storks
In the middle of the firmament
Turn into flocks of jet planes,
We will feel again how strong are the ribs,
How bold the warm air in the lungs,
How urgent the daring to love in the open plain,
When great dangers arch overhead,
And how much love is needed
To fill all the empty vessels
And the watches that stopped telling time,
And how much breath,
A blizzard of breath,
To sing the little Song of Spring.[84]

[84] Yehuda Amichai, 'Now that the water presses hard', in *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry,* p. 21.

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