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The ethics of autoethnography

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Abstract. This article queries the place of autoethnography in the study of International Relations as it relates to questions of truth, power, and ethics. The traditional denial of the authorial presence of the self in IR scholarship has been increasingly challenged in recent years, and autoethnography is perhaps the most obvious example of this. This article utilises autoethnography to explore some of the pitfalls and dilemmas associated with the approach – particularly the dangers surrounding 'standpoint' epistemologies, and the need to continue to distinguish between scholarship and storytelling. The article does not dismiss these concerns, but seeks to illustrate the ways in which the discipline is already engaged in storytelling as it narrates its own history and development. At the same time, the article seeks to 'guard against a generation of novelists' whose training would inevitably devolve into a question of crafting the 'prettiest sentence.' Mindful of these concerns, the article nevertheless seeks to demonstrate the ethical value of autoethnography in its exploration of the limitations of academic voice and its impact on those we write, the truths we are able to recognise and transcribe, and the ways in which the academic voice silences the self, who is forced to hide or minimise the often very personal motivations for engaging in IR scholarship. It argues that *purposeful* autoethnography should have a place among the diverse approaches to IR.

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I have built my career on the life and loss of a man named Stojan Sokolović. He has pale eyes. He studied engineering. He was mobilised into a war that he did not start and in which he did not want to participate. He would have preferred to go to Canada, he said, but there was no way out. He served me coffee from a copper džezva. It was a bright March day, full of the promise of Spring. In the ancestral mountains to the east, he said, the fighting was very bad. He did not want to discuss the details today. What he would say was that it was bitterly cold on the feast day of St. Nikola and that he did not get his rotational leave as he had anticipated. On that same feast day, his brother was killed in the mountains above Sarajevo. Stojan first believed the Army of the Serb Republic (VRS) when it announced Luka's death as the act of a 'Muslim terrorist'. But when the war was over, Stojan learned from a demobilised soldier that Luka was killed by a Serb artilleryman who had found himself drunk and in the mood to 'shoot something'. One of the witnesses, who had been sworn on the pain of his own death to keep silent, found that he could not. He started telling people. Stojan did not know why.

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But in the small towns and villages of Romanija, word spreads fast. Stojan went to the police in Pale and told them what he had learned. The officer with whom Stojan spoke pointed out the window of the police post at the group of designer-clad *Carabinieri* drinking espresso at a small café across the street. 'They are the ones who decide, *gospodine*, not us.' So Stojan went with his story down to Sarajevo and, after waiting four hours to see someone, he was told that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at The Hague was not hearing 'isolated cases' of intra-ethnic violence. He was advised to try Interpol. So Stojan tried Interpol, and found that his brother's alleged murderer was in Toronto. There was not enough evidence to issue a warrant for his arrest or to mount an extradition request. The coffee cooled in my cup as he told me these things. He wanted me to hear him, he said, because virtually no one else was listening. We were so busy counting the dead and demarcating the territories, we did not stop to hear what else was being said by a people whose language we didn't bother to learn to speak.

Stojan Sokolović did not understand why I had come to Bosnia. He understood why the UN had come, and the NGOs. He understood why NATO had come. He understood that there was money to be made in the great, churning machinery of the international organisations. He understood why Bosnians lined up for the precious jobs that were generated by the foreign aid organisations and military presence. International organisations paid more for translators than universities for an engineering professor. Oftentimes they paid in hard currency. Stojan understood all of this. What was harder for him to understand was why academics came. He sat across from me, his hands folded quietly on the tabletop.

'You write about violence', he said. 'You say that fear is a violence – that the things that cause fear and insecurity are violences. But you do not know how that fear sits like a bear on my heart. You talk about fear, as though you understood what it tasted like – what it smelled like – the scent of smouldering mortar dust and artillery shells. You talk about guilt, but you look in from a place that does not allow you to see it well. Violence must be quantifiable in your world. It must count bodies, burned houses, livestock, and graves – lost libraries, churches and synagogues, mosques. It must count the flood of refugees driven across the border from their own fields into those of others – into fields that do not want to shelter them. You have no scale with which to weigh the contents of heart or soul. And so, you can identify victims – static, immobile entities – but you have not asked yourself about the violence the committer of violence has done to himself, and you have not bothered to theorise that. You have not watched as he sleeps to see if he cries out, or if he weeps, and you have no gauge with which to look behind his eyes. Your scales are a failed chimera.

No one wants to talk to those who hid behind the artillery wearing sneakers because their army did not have proper boots for them. No one wants to ask them if they will ever be alright again, trapped as they are in this life and hemmed in on all sides by the measure of their own responsibility. You do not see it, because you have never been consumed by fear, though you think you have observed it. If you had heard our wailing – killer and killed alike – you would say something other than what you are saying at your seminars and conferences. I don't know what it would be, but I know that it would not be the same.

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We were bankrupt of love, but if all of you there who condemned us here had cared so much about what had happened to our lives, you would not have come to observe us like tourists on some safari. You would not have come to talk to taxi drivers as you drove through the hail of our artillery fire only to go home again and boast about how you survived that, and how exhilarating it was. You would not have snapped so many photographs, looking always for the frame that would "shock the conscience of mankind"[1] – some obscenity – but you would have sold your hefty Nikons on the borders that only you could cross and given us the money to pay the UNPROFOR soldiers[2] who charged five thousand German marks to take our children across the lines.[3] You would have held our heads, because we could not stop trembling, even when we were killing, even when we came to be defined by the killing we had done. You would have come to help us bury the dead and sing prayers over their souls, because we did not have enough clergy from any faith to do it. If you had really cared so much, you would not have written about what primitive beasts we were, or how deranged our leaders were (many of us knew that already), but you would have wept for us. Even the winners in Bosnia lost, and the bottom line is that you got tenure-track positions and scholarly awards and publications and we are the ones who paid for them. They were paid for with the dust from the gypsum in the collapsed heaps of our homes and with our exile and our lives.

You determined guilt and innocence with ink lines on the pages of books and journals in your subfield of an academic subfield, but none of it helped anything to be more bearable. You delineated between categories of ethnicity and language, you passed your pronouncements and decrees – you divining judges and juries – but you did not teach us anything. You had nothing to teach from your mountain of learning, even from the beginning – from the first stroke of your pen – from the first tap of your manicured fingertips across the keyboard of your laptop on your Lufthansa flight out of Zagreb. You pretended to understand what we had done – you organised conferences over it – you developed theories about it – but you never really cared what had happened to us, because it was not you. We were not *you*. And so, what you wrote about us – what you wrote about who we were – was its own sort of destruction.'[4]

[1] Michael Walzer employs this notion as a benchmark for humanitarian military intervention in *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[2] 'The United Nations Protection Force'.

[3] A 1999 Toronto Star article noted that 'Canadian peacekeepers were suspected of being paid cash to smuggle refugees across no-man's land in war-torn Bosnia in 1994, confidential military documents show [...] No charges were ever laid because no witnesses could be found.' Allan Thompson, 'Canadian Troops Smuggled Bosnian Refugees, Memos Say', *Toronto Star* (28 November 1999).

[4] I did not record Stojan Sokolović's words that night. I have written here my *impression* of what he said to me; the feeling it left with me that I had failed incontrovertibly. Perhaps some scholars would charge my 'methodology' as suspect, but I invite anyone who has ever interviewed another human being to dare say that she herself has not served as the sole interpreter of the significance of words captured on tiny little audiocassettes and manipulated them to fit carefully into the text she has crafted around the interview – or the text which has itself crafted the interview and the interview's content. We craft these statements to serve our own purposes – we tease them out in ways that serve us – to underwrite and legitimise our own intellectual projects and projections. I do not pretend to have spoken for Stojan Sokolović – instead, I have rendered the substance of what I heard in his words, what it meant for my scholarship, and for my ability to be responsible. I have rendered what I heard in the charge – and so the translation is mine (as all translation invariably is and will ever be). I make no apologies for this. It is the state in which all of us who write necessarily find ourselves.

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'What do you know about Bosnia? Why did you come, and what did you think you would find?' I don't think that Stojan Sokolović was angry with me, and I believe even now that he loved me not despite, but *because of* my treachery. He spoke to me thus out of love. He poured my coffee. He gave me a converter for the electrical outlets so I could charge my mobile phone. He helped me change my hard currency for local 'convertible marks' on street corners, where local men whispered '*divize*' – 'exchange' – in such a way that they sounded more like cicadas to me than speaking men. I can say with confidence that I love Stojan Sokolović. I am as sure of that as I have ever been of anything in my scholarly life. And for anthropologist Virginia Dominguez, this love (or lack of it) matters to scholarly undertakings. The reader, she argues, has the right to see the presence or absence of love in a scholar's work, and to evaluate its role in our writing.[5] I have built my career on the Bosnian war. I have built it, in fact, on war more generally. Let's not pretend anymore that we who write International Relations are doing something different. Ours is a discipline built on the deaths and losses of others, and these are deaths and losses that we never personally experience. It is a discipline built on the lives of people that most of us never even meet and, if we do meet them, we certainly never get to know them. We don't invite them to our homes. We don't meet them for coffee. We don't attend their weddings. We don't attend their funerals. We don't love them. If we do, we do it secretly and we never, ever admit it.[6]

On expertise, and its development

What expert am I? This is what Stojan Sokolović demanded of me and to which I had (and have) no good answer. Perhaps I did not understand the question. I believed at the time of his asking that I occupied a more or less secure place in a discipline that provided a sense of coherence even in its divisions (and also precisely *because* of its divisions). I believed that its debates and paradigms were part of the primordial trajectory of its being, and that this could be well-ordered, mapped out, and understood, if subjectively in content and context, then objectively in what we have all tacitly agreed upon as its basic ordering frameworks. The questions that I was prepared to answer were finite questions that were inherently formed and nurtured within the context of the discipline. 'Where do you stand? What position do you take? To what side do you belong? What tradition, perspective or community do your labours faithfully represent? These are questions that we ask one another from the first moment of our entry into the field. These are the questions, we are given to know from the start, to which we must have our already prepared replies.'[7]

[5] Virginia Dominguez, 'Towards a Politics of Love and Rescue', *Cultural Anthropology*, 15:3 (2000).
[6] Some anthropologists explicitly address questions of intimacy or friendship that arise in the course of fieldwork, and specifically query the ethics of relationality in research. For an overview of this literature, see Carolyn Ellis, 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research with Intimate Others', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 3–29.
[7] Richard Ashley, 'The Achievements of Post-Structuralism', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 241, parentheses added.

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What expert am I? This was not an inquiry that could be answered within the parameters of that framework, because it did not ask me to identify the disciplinary ground on which I stood or the theoretical orientation from which I spoke. It did not require me to expound on the history or genesis of my 'expertise' – my travels and research, my interviews and contacts in the southeast of Europe, my theoretical fears or commitments (or my fears of theoretical commitment). It charged me with faithlessness *writ large*, with an inescapable responsibility, to which I could simply make no adequate response. It asked me not with which experts I had spoken, or what they had said. It asked me not what scraps of truth were contained on the tiny little audiocassettes that comprised my burgeoning library of interview archives. It asked, instead, if I had noticed the slant of the setting sun on the terracotta tiles of the rooftops. It asked me if I had stuck my fingers in the honeycomb brickwork of the buildings along the Vrbas River or run the flat palm of my hand along the stuccoed gypsum plaster of the borrowed house in which I slept. It asked me if I had endured the rain at an inopportune moment, or if I had even noticed the rain at all – if I had divined anything in it. It asked me what the future held as read through the dried coffee grounds on the bottom of my cup. It asked me, to put it differently, if I had thought of something other than what I had been trained to look for. And in so doing, it asked me if there was even a possibility of narrative truth – whether anyone could actually apprehend, process, signify, and render it in speech or text or microform.[8] The questions that presupposed the form (if not the content) of acceptable answerability were obliterated in that single sentence – *what expert are you?* – asked rhetorically, perhaps, because there was no possibility of making answer along the lines for which my training had prepared me to make answer and at some level, Stojan Sokolović knew that. This was why he had asked it.

I am not a novelist. It is critically important to clarify this. There are two main reasons why this is so. The first reason is that I don't intend for my scholarship – or for what Stojan Sokolović asked of me – to be dismissed this easily. The second is 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. And this is not the case.[9] I want to guard against a generation of novelists just as I want

[8] This point also raises the question of the role of the author as knower. Recent developments on autoethnography from a methodological perspective have focused on poststructural interpretations of the self-as-author in an attempt to demonstrate the fragmentation and ultimate impossibility of a unitary, knowable/knowing, authorial subject. Who is it, then, who sees, divines, and notices? For an overview of these developments and their impact on writing autoethnography, see Susanne Gannon, 'The (Im)Possibilities of Writing the Self: French Poststructural Theory and Autoethnography', *Critical Methodologies*, 6:4 (2006), pp. 474–95. It is worth stressing here that, in my view, the authorial self recognises her inherent inadequacy through the challenge that is posed to her by others. In other words, this fragmentation is an inherently relational one; hence, the necessity of the charge leveled against me by Stojan Sokolović.

[9] I stress this point despite the fact that some Anthropologists are increasingly willing to understand their own ethnographic writing as similar in form to novels. See Carolyn Ellis, *The Autoethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira) 2004. If I were a novelist, I would write novels, and not International Relations theory. However, we also need to acknowledge the erosion of boundaries that critical approaches have opened up over the last two decades, and to appreciate that the lines we live by may no longer have either salience or meaning for the social worlds we study. We are in a contested space in this regard, and the expansion of critical approaches provides significant evidence of this. I am not sure where or how or if these lines should be redrawn. I invite others to continue this exploration.

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to guard against the positivist tradition that entrenched an orthodoxy of knowledge production that works (unsuccessfully, in my view) to deny all traces of the self in scholarly writing and to discipline the others it encounters into rigorous categories that don't work and never did. The researcher is not an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge that is then poured forth through publications and lectures in some charade of authenticity. But neither can the IR scholar engaged in autoethnography rely on the narrow, unassailable ground of standpoint epistemology to secure his or her claims. Standpoint epistemologies may silence those who don't (or more properly, can't) assume a particular identity. This does not extend debate in the field. Instead, it stifles debate. But this is not just a problem with standpoint epistemologies. It is a problem of the contemporary development of social science more generally. Here, the chief problem is that the disciplinary territories that Ashley identified work to silence those who take other positions. There are many ways in which this silencing is accomplished. One of the most obvious tactics takes place in approaches that use standpoint epistemologies as disciplinary weapons. There is nothing more frustrating to me than attending conferences or workshops when that inevitable silencing question is asked: 'Have you *been there*?' This question is not asked in an attempt to further fruitful discussion. It is asked to dismiss and to silence. These kinds of disciplinary questions permeate debate in IR – both orthodox and critical – because the contours of academic debate are erected in specific, adversarial ways.[10] It is not just that our writing is stultifying and limited. It is also that the very structure of the discipline is organised in an adversarial way, which in turn feeds into the limitations associated with our thinking and writing. The late feminist scholar Grace Jantzen expands on the implications of this phenomenon:

> [O]nce the model of a battle is taken as central to philosophical thinking, then the likelihood increases that instead of engaging in creative exploration of the issues, a student who is trying to learn to think philosophically will think not of what gives her insight or how that insight could be extended, but of how her position could be attacked and what she needs to do about it. When such students write essays or present seminars of their own, they will naturally try to make only a small and easily defended case (if indeed they are brave enough to try out their own ideas at all), since in an adversarial paradigm the discussion that follows a paper is not one that tries to take up points to see how they could be developed further, but rather one which tries to demolish questionable bits. If arguments are set up so that they must be 'won' or lost', most people, at whatever academic level, will try to present cases which they feel confident that they can 'win'. Nobody enjoys being a loser. But this means that, in a more important sense, everybody loses, since fewer people will risk trying out adventurous ideas. Innovative thinking may well contain inadequacies. If students expect that these will be pounced upon, rather than that their creativity will be fostered (while being helped to avoid potential pitfalls and dead ends), they will quickly learn to curtail their innovative or exploratory inclinations and reproduce the attacks and defences of traditional philosophical battle.[11]

[10] In my anecdotal experience, critical theories of IR are equally problematic in this respect. 'Critical' students regularly work to demolish one another in seminars and conferences for not being 'critical' enough, or for having blasphemously misunderstood very difficult and dense philosophers, such as Derrida, Foucault, Levinas, Butler, or Spivak.

[11] Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 70.

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Roxanne Doty once remarked in a seminar at York University that you can only say what you really want to say once you have tenure.[12] If you begin by saying what you want to say, no one will listen to you. Maybe no one will listen, anyway. But what Doty expressed in that seminar was her own growing awareness that there is an ethics at work in what we do, in who we are, and in our enormous power to determine who others are, and why. It is an ethics not only with respect to the discipline's own narrative accounts, but also in the strictures of writing that are required for the development and deployment of successful scholarship. Doty's later career has been marked by a radical critique of – and departure from – accepted academic scholarship in IR. She is quite literally wandering in the desert.[13] In those wanderings, she has produced what many must consider to be among the most profound meditations on the securitisation of American space ever published in IR.

The ethics of autoethnography

There are a number of ethical issues surrounding voice that IR scholars have attempted to confront in recent years. I will explore three interrelated ethical concerns here. The first has to do with the limited realities that the academic voice is capable of conveying. There is currently no widely accepted academic voice through which I can convey these encounters with Stojan Sokolović. This is not a problem of the rarity with which we are confronted with such 'informants'. Field researchers reading this article know very well that these encounters are common occurrences. But they are relegated from their first moments into a space reserved for a different kind of knowing, and what we end up doing is privately *remembering*, rather than publicly *writing* them into our publications.[14] This divides our experiences in the field into public and private and, quite predictably, results in a silencing of the private. So the knowledge that emerges explicitly in autoethnographical accounts is already there – it is present because all of us who have arrived in someone else's country with solid research agendas and eager questions have encountered aspects of these communities (or individuals within them) that do not fit with the overall account.[15] These people ask something else of us; something that our profession is not prepared to give. This does more than just limit our scholarship. It does more in its silence than our normative understanding of silence suggests of it. To be silent is still to speak. To be silent

[12] Roxanne Doty, 'Maladies of Our Souls: Identity and Voice in the Writing of Academic International Relations', Distinguished Critical Thinkers Seminar, York Centre for International and Security Studies, York University, Toronto (15 March 2004).

[13] See particularly 'Crossroads of Death', in Elizabeth Dauphinee and Cristina Masters, (eds), *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying, Surviving* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); and '*Fronteras Compasivas* and the Ethics of Unconditional Hospitality', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 35:1 (2006).

[14] Ellen Strain explores this phenomenon in *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

[15] It is worth mentioning here that it is institutionally impossible to conduct field research without ethics approval. Ethics approval requires a substantive research agenda in the form of a proposal, a methodology, and a clear sense of what will be asked of prospective informants, all of whom will have already been identified as members of a specific group, community, or organisation.

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does not divest us of our roles as political subjects. What we must come to ask is 'whose voices are not being heard and why?' At the same time, we need to recognise that finding an academic answer to this question is of no value unless we can implement meaningful change in the ways that knowledge is generated. The point here is to inquire into who gets to decide what counts as proper academic discourse and what needs to be relegated to private memory in order for that academic discourse to move unassailably forward. Given Grace Jantzen's incisive point above, how do we know that the encounters we relegate thus are not actually the things we should be writing about?

Following on from this, the second concern here is that the academic voice perpetrates a considered violence against those whose realities it claims to write. J. Marshall Beier has explored this in significant depth with respect to the appropriations and types of 'knowledges' made possible by European encounters with the Lakota peoples.[16] The academic gaze is an all-encompassing gaze. It seeks to make sense of everything it encounters and, more significantly, to *master* what it encounters. With respect to field research, this is accomplished by a touristic move into a targeted environment that has normally already been made 'known' through the scholarship one reads prior to departure. Unlike tourism, however, fieldwork is justified, legitimated, and funded by institutions whose primary claim is to produce and secure what counts as knowledge. Aside from the vehicle of the interview, which is always crafted by the researcher prior to departure for the target locale, the informant has no mechanism through which to speak back. While autoethnography certainly does not solve that problem, it affords the possibility of conveying something that we would not otherwise have been able to hear. It does not seek to appropriate the voice of the informant – were this the case then we could safely say that two decades or more of critical scholarship have not been heard by proponents of autoethnography at all. Rather, what autoethnography here accomplishes is to focus attention on the relationship of the self to the world that is investigated. In this sense, it is not an appropriation of others (at least not any greater in terms of its violence than the academic voice, which pounds others into manageable interview material), but rather a reflexive awareness of the self as a perpetrator of a certain kind of violence in the course of all writing and all representation – a violence, incidentally, that cannot be avoided.[17]

There are other good reasons to reconsider this question of academic voice. An academic voice that allows for certain elements of autoethnography has the potential to re-center our attention on the individual lives and deaths of people whose names we would otherwise not know – and for good reason, considering the succinct fates and attributes that are ascribed to them through our research: for example, *war criminal, rape victim, refugee, displaced person,* and so on.[18] If we were reading the work of Carol Cohn, we in IR have known since at least 1987

[16] J. Marshall Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places: Indigeneity, Cosmology, and the Limits of International Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

[17] The goal here cannot be to eradicate violence from scholarship entirely. As John Caputo notes, 'there is no pure non-violence, only degrees and economies of violence, some of which are more fruitful than others.' John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 47.

[18] For an in-depth analysis of the silencing abjection associated with such categories of being, see Liisa Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 377–404.

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that language, and the use of language, is extremely significant in terms of how we come to know both the violence and the 'who' that will bear (or has borne) the brunt of the violence.[19] Rethinking how we write others may raise a range of epistemological problems in terms of the privileged (or even romanticising) self, but it also forces us to consider the names and lives of those who are mobilised into our publications for the purposes of tenure and promotion, research grant applications, and other forms of career-development.

This leads to the third ethical dimension of academic voice, and that is the autodisciplinarity enacted by the writer of IR. We operate in a field that has a very specific narrative past, and a set of conventions around which we must orient our scholarship if we want it to be published and taken seriously by our colleagues. Had I not already known this, it would certainly have become apparent to me at the International Studies Association Annual Convention in New York this year, when I was lucky enough to be riding in an elevator with an academic who was loudly explaining to her rapt (or captive) protégé how the panel they had just attended did not 'fit' either the conference theme or, indeed, the discipline of IR. The protégé was properly disgusted. Witnessing this encounter illustrated to me that there is already autoethnography operating all throughout IR, in both the terms I'm arguing for, and also as the 'orthodox' work to proclaim the superiority of their orthodoxies over others. We already belong to a discipline that tells stories about its past, and these stories comprise a narrative that develops along a relatively clear plotline – the development of realism in response to the failures that culminated in the First World War; the rise of behaviouralism in response to connections developed between natural sciences and psychology; the terroristic explosion of critical interventions following the end of the Cold War. All along this trajectory, we can trace the closures that intellectual purism and orthodoxy require for the maintenance and reproduction of certain positions and approaches. Critical theorists are equally culpable in this respect.

It is perhaps objectionable to some that I am here conflating 'story' with 'narrative'. In so doing, I follow Tony Adams, who argues that both stories and narratives proceed along 'storying conventions such as the use of common storylines, linear or chaotic temporal sequences, and writing within/against genres.'[20] If we understand stories and narratives as 'tools for managing life,' it becomes possible to recognise the similarities in content, if not in form, between different forms of text.[21] What is at stake here is not the objective veracity of any particular claim, but rather the question of how that veracity is generated, and by whom. In other words, some of us enjoy a narrative privilege that others do not.[22] The plain fact that professional academics possess (a certain kind of limited) narrative privilege when it comes to storying the world they encounter means that those stories – and their generation – need to be carefully queried. If all were empowered to speak and write equally, there would be less need for an ethic of scholarly writing, because scholarly writing would be just one more form of textual expression. But this is not the case. Scholarly writing is understood as 'truth

[19] Carol Cohn's 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', *Signs* (1987), was a major breakthrough in the way we understand the role of language in IR.
[20] Tony E. Adams, 'A Review of Narrative Ethics', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14 (2008), p. 176.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p. 182.

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writing,' and the stories associated with this writing often – though not always – operate under the pretence that there is no self behind the choice to write something in a particular way. This is the sleight that allows us to call them intellectual 'histories' or 'narratives', and not 'stories'. As Roxanne Doty reminds us with respect to IR, '[e]ach of these narratives is a creative story presenting itself as truth, but ultimately grounded only in the imaginations of individual and collective writers and readers.'[23] Additionally, she observes that there is a self lurking in this sleight. In our sanitised, self-evacuated, academic landscape, we become the 'hideous beings swallowed up by our scholarly clothes, the dancing fools under the fluorescent lights of our paradigms and theories that voraciously consume our thoughts, hammer the soul from our words, and drain our voices of any traces of humanity.'[24] I believe that Doty is right, and it is this that in no small measure motivates my own attempt to write IR in ways that I believe contain the potential for a greater measure of ethical accountability on the part of the researcher.

The ethics of responsible scholarship are significant here in terms of how we question, how we adjudicate between answers, and how we situate ourselves as writers, witnesses and participants. In this sense, Virginia Dominguez is perfectly correct: if we don't show our motives, they cannot be evaluated by our readers. I write out of love. I also sometimes write out of guilt.[25] In all cases, I write because I become aware that something is not the way I thought it was. Something has hurt me. Something has made me angry or sleepless or aggrieved in some way. I don't think the fact that I have personal motivations that orient me toward the political world I study is particularly unique. However, my account of my relationship with Stojan Sokolović cannot be considered to uniquely authorise me as a speaking, knowing agent because of the depth of my emotional experience. My encounters with Stojan Sokolović should not be understood to place me in a privileged position of knowledge acquisition. That is most certainly not the intent of this article. Instead, I am trying to impart the awareness visited upon me that *I don't know what I think I know*, or that *what I think I know is not so*. In other words, my encounters with Stojan Sokolović had implications for my scholarship that I had not considered. There are limitations to my scholarship that I have not sufficiently acknowledged. This awareness, it seems to me, evokes some of the very first critical attacks against orthodox IR in the 1980s and, in those ways at least, is in line with the 'stories' of IR itself.[26] R. B. J. Walker, for example, famously queried the discipline's stance that its approaches did not take an ethical position. Ethics was, instead, something to be 'added' only *after* the theory had been developed and only *if* the theorist wished to consider it. Today, virtually all critical scholars understand that each approach to IR has an ethics associated with it, for better or worse. Richard Ashley, as already noted, explored the ways in which the discipline *disciplined* its practitioners. V. Spike Peterson queried the distinctions

[23] 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), p. 380.
[24] Ibid., p. 378.
[25] See particularly, 'Living, Dying, Surviving', in Elizabeth Dauphinee and Cristina Masters (eds), *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror*.
[26] Even if mainstream scholars don't want to acknowledge them, they cannot deny that the critical interventions of the 1980s formed a new trajectory in IR – one that was taken seriously by a great many scholars and that changed the face of the discipline in profound and unexpected ways.

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between public and private that produced and relegated gendered forms of labour – and of gendered being itself – into discrete complementarities that either were or were not proper arenas of scholarly investigation. Steve Smith explored theory as emancipatory practice. And, of course, Robert Cox framed the terms for generations of subsequent scholars with his single well-placed observation that 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose'. These were some of the first public critical resistance moves against IR as a scientific discipline. There are countless others, whose omission here is not intended as a dismissal. What is at stake for the place of autoethnography in the discipline is the question of how open critical scholars remain now that they have acquired their own privileged status. How orthodox have critical approaches become? Are they still willing and able to welcome further, justified movement? I believe that they are. I have faith in them.

'*What expert are you?*' Stojan Sokolović's question is not a question to end questions. It is a question to expand them. It does not ask me to stay silent. It does not ask me to find a way to write that will close all the gaping holes in anything I might say. It does not insulate me against critique, but in fact *opens* me to it. It makes me vulnerable not just to the colleagues who peer-review my work, but to those whose lives I write, without whom I could not have a career, or a nice office with a big picture window that looks out onto the commons of my university. Stojan Sokolović, like so many of our 'informants', asks me to think and to question differently. By his own admission, he doesn't know what this would mean, however. After several years of thinking about it, I still don't know, either. But this 'not knowing' does not require silence. It requires the articulation of that unknowing, and the reasons for that unknowing, so that discussion and debate in IR can continue to move in fruitful directions. Autoethnography allows me to hear the question that was asked of me. And, in hearing it, it asks me to make answer in some way. It shatters the illusion of expertise – the divide – between the 'researcher' and the 'researched'. It makes me answerable to him. It makes me understand that my attempts to know him and, in turn, to make him known to others is already a failure under the terms of my discipline's expectations. It is also a violence, because it requires him to be intelligible and, if he can't be intelligible, to be eradicated from my article, book, essay, lecture, or conference talk.

Alphonso Lingis argues that it is the speaking with another that allows us to increasingly categorise, but it is also simultaneously the case that the more we speak the *less* I understand, the less I can organise the space, the place, and the charge of Stojan Sokolović with my own systematised categories because he must necessarily defy the bounds in which I seek to contain him. He has destroyed my myth of order. Lingis explains: 'I present to the other the representation of him that I form. But in facing me, contesting or confirming that identity I have assigned to him, the other rises apart, beyond the representation [. . .]'.[27] This instability, however, is here an imperative. It is an advantage. It gives us room to move away from the strictures of identity and being that academic writing so pointedly demands. It gives us room to write what we could not get away with writing – not for writing's sake, but for the sake of illuminating those things that we normally ignore. And this is the ground on which the adjudication of autoethnography can begin (which would be another systematisation of scholarly conventions, but I

[27] Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 175.

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don't consider all of these systematisations to be equal crimes). Autoethnography opens up the possibility of questioning representation, of questioning systematisation and contributing to an insistent mobility. It opens up the possibility of making an ethical response to a charge that would normally never be heard. But it also runs the danger of being an unassailable form of writing – how can we adjudicate? This is, to be sure, a critical question, and a ground for future debate. Whatever these debates-to-come might decide about autoethnography, I want to argue that, rather than some self-indulgent attempt to insulate oneself from critique, autoethnography must instead open the self to that critique. If it is to remain ethical in any sense, our representations cannot be understood as unassailable. In this way, autoethnography can contribute to ongoing identification of lesser violences, rather than insulating itself against critique by falling back on that frustrating and useless mantra 'but have you *been there*?'

These observations lead to another question of ethics that arises here, and that is the question of veracity. IR assumes a certain element of veracity in its stories – whether it is the story of the discipline's documented history (in which case we need to ask what documents and oral forms have been left out of that narrative), or whether it is the material we gather in fieldwork or other research settings. Several years ago, my institution received an application from a prospective graduate student whose submitted writing sample was an entirely fictitious account of a period in Latin American history. The applicant manufactured the names of leaders seemingly out of thin air, and documented rebellions and conflicts that never took place. The Latin American specialist who reviewed the essay was mystified by the complete fabrication of people, places, and events. It is fair to say that no serious scholar intentionally fabricates information.[28] But it is also prudent to remember that we rely on the veracity of the articles and books we read, and on the accounts of those we encounter in fieldwork interviews. This requires us to rely on elements of human interaction that IR (among other social sciences) has no mechanism to judge. The most basic of these elements is trust. We trust, as researchers, that our informants are telling us the truth when we interview them. But informants may lie. Stojan Sokolović says that he lied all the time to the Western academics. Why did he do this? He shrugged his shoulders. To punish them a bit for their arrogance, he said. They descend upon our cities and villages, and everyone in these places wants to be a victim – no one wants to be a perpetrator, because the shame of a perpetrator is very great. Or maybe it's that no one wants to be a victim – because the shame of victimhood is also a heavy load to bear. Maybe no one wants to talk about the war, so they make things up, maybe to protect themselves from their own memories, maybe to remake themselves anew. Maybe they want to put their best face forward, so to speak; to

[28] The Sokal Affair is a rather amusing and telling example to the contrary, however. In Sokal's own words, the hoax perpetrated on the editorial board of *Social Text* was intended to determine whether a reputable social science journal would 'publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions.' Despite the deception, Sokal insists that he did not 'lie'. All of his quotations were verifiable – it was just that he strung them together into a nonsensical series of arguments in an effort to reveal what he considered to be a politically and scientifically dangerous trend in cultural studies away from any form of intersubjective or verifiable reality. In the context of his insistence that he did not 'lie,' however, Sokal did acknowledge the extent to which 'professional communities operate largely on trust.' See Alan D. Sokal, 'A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies', *Lingua Franca* (May/June 1996).

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say 'we did not do that killing'. 'Go to Omarska!' a Bosnian Serb woman once urged me. 'You will see there was no concentration camp there.' I didn't go. I had already heard directly from the mouth of an American forensics expert how the walls at Omarska had lit up like morning when they were doused with Luminol in the summer of 1996. All the layers of gypsum plaster in the world could not hide the blood on the walls. 'You will see there was no concentration camp there.' How would I know what a concentration camp should look like, anyway? What features would it have? How would I recognise them as the features of a concentration camp – or not?[29]

These are questions of veracity, and questions of veracity necessarily lead to questions of trust. The Serbian woman and the American forensics expert both believed themselves to be telling the truth. We know that the Serbian woman was 'wrong'. Being 'wrong' is different, though, than 'lying'. Maybe the Serbian woman did not want to believe that Omarska was what the international community and its accompanying forensics teams had said it was. Maybe she did not want to belong to a people who were increasingly seen as capable only of murder and outrage. The American woman is a forensics expert. That is probably enough to silence the Serbian woman, even in the absence of the testimony of Omarska's Muslim prisoners and the infamous photograph of the emaciated Fikret Alić behind the wire that caused such controversy in Britain and around the world.[30] The veracity of the Serbian woman was easily dismissed. There was incontrovertible evidence. But that should not silence her. It should alert us not to the malice of Serbian informants, but possibly to their desire not to be responsible for such outrages. It could alert us to the fact that Serbs, too, seek those elements of a good life that animate our own approaches to the political, but that the path that was followed was not just any ordinary failure; instead it was a spectacular outrage. Trust is an elusive element of what we do, because we need to rely on our informants as trustworthy witnesses. We need to be able to determine not only that they are right or wrong, but that they are not actively lying – perhaps to punish us for our arrogance, as Stojan Sokolović indicated, but for a multitude of other possible reasons, too: fear, mistrust, a desire to please the researcher, a desire to portray oneself or one's community in a positive light. I am confident that I encountered plenty of untruths in Bosnia. I was ill-equipped – as most of us are – to adjudicate between them.[31] 'Trust, but verify'

[29] There are a number of factors that make these questions very murky. It is, of course, not only the case that I have never seen a concentration camp in my life. It is also the case that concentration camps do not have to share the same characteristics in order to be acclaimed as concentration camps. I don't mean to make an unproblematic distinction, but there are valid principles through which distinctions can and should be made. It is also the case that some concentration camps, for example, the camp at Dachau, have been entirely reconstructed in order both to memorialise the events that took place there, and to attract visitors to the memorial. Dachau was almost completely levelled by invading Americans in 1945. David O'Donoghue writes that 'Even the watchtowers had to be rebuilt, and the iron gate [at the entrance] is a reconstruction.' 'Holocaust Tourism', *Sunday Business Post* (13 January 2002).

[30] David Campbell, 'Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imagine the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – the Case of ITN versus Living Marxism, part 2', *Journal of Human Rights*, 1:2 (2002), pp. 143–72.

[31] The case that Campbell explores is not the only well-known controversy that emerged from the Bosnian War. It is well-documented, and well-known that each 'side' claimed certain civilian deaths as their own, when in fact the dead in question belonged to a different national group. Add to this the murky question of perception – for example, the various articulations of Srebrenica as a 'massacre' and a 'battle'. See David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1998).

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is not always a viable option. Sometimes that verification is impossible. In the case of Fikret Alić and the Omarska camp, it was possible to verify. But other claims are admittedly murkier. 'Here is the house that I slept in; this is how my brother died; his murderer will not be prosecuted.' The point here is not to say that all claims (whether verifiable or not) are now of equal weight. Whether the house that Stojan Sokolović slept in is more or less important than the captivity and torture of Fikret Alić is not the question I am interested in exploring. Of course we adjudicate the importance of the stakes in and between certain claims. We do this all the time, and sometimes without even really thinking carefully about it. What I wish to point out here is the possibility that we may find ourselves more invested in what we can verify, rather than in what we can't, not because the issues are always more important politically or ethically, but simply because we can verify. I cannot verify what the Pale police said to Stojan Sokolović on the day he came to seek his brother's murderer. I can't, in fact, verify that his brother was murdered as Stojan Sokolović claimed. This lack of verification, however, should not – though it does – make Luka Sokolović's murder less important in the context of our research.

In his discussion of the place of trust in the human encounter, Alphonso Lingis writes that:

> to *trust you* is to go beyond what I know and to hold on to the real individual that is you [. . .] When we leave our home and community to dwell awhile in some remote place, it happens every day that we trust a stranger, someone with whom we have no kinship bonds, no common loyalty to a community or creed, no contractual obligations. We have no idea what he said, what are his family, clan, and village coordinates, the categories with which he represents for himself society, nature, and the cosmos. We attach to someone whose words or whose movements we do not understand, whose reasons or motives we do not see. Our trust short-circuits across the space where we represent socially defined behaviors and makes contact with the real individual agent there – with *you*.[32]

There is a space for radical possibility here in terms of how we understand ourselves and others in the course of our interactions with, and participation in, politics, history, and scholarship. Not only is the separation of subject and object problematic (if not impossible), and not only is the self reliant on others for its sense of sameness, but also the ability to trust in our representations of others – or in the representations they reveal to us – is at stake. And this is often irresolvable. We rely on others all throughout the development of our careers; we rely on our supervisors, our doctoral committees, our hiring committees, the referees of our journals, our informants and students, our philosophies and data sets. In turn, we rely on one another as producers of knowledge and bearers of truths extracted like harvests from the texts and pockets of the world we either read about or visit. We do not often ask ourselves whether *we* can be trusted – not because we actively lie, but because we trust in certain elements of our craft that are inherently untrustworthy. The point here is that the data gathered and reported by the field researcher within the rubrics of accepted academic methodologies is just as suspect as any autoethnography, and perhaps more so, because the autoethnography does not purport to be more than it is – the refiguring of the self that compiles the information and does the knowing – the re-centering of a self that has long since been absent in mainstream IR in a decades-long conspiracy of

[32] Alphonso Lingis, *Trust* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. ix.

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silence. Autoethnography opens space for the reader to see the intentions – and not just the theories and methodologies – of the researcher. It opens us to a deeper form of judgment. That is the core of its ethics.

The place of the self in our writing is starting, in some institutions, to take root in rocky soil. When I came back from Bosnia after my first foray into the 'field', I was furious. The 'Bosnia' I knew before I left my office was not the Bosnia that Stojan Sokolović revealed to me. I did not come back feeling lost or unsure. I came back feeling angry at what I perceived to be a profound betrayal in the texts and accepted logics of my discipline. I was not prepared to be silenced in the way that Stojan Sokolović had silenced me. This was not a problem of inexperience. It was a problem of my discipline. I wrote a long, careful letter to my dissertation supervisor. He was very young at the time – perhaps 35 or so – and untenured. In my letter, I tried to explain my frustration with what I perceived to be IR's fundamental inability to respond to the charges laid against me by Stojan Sokolović. I could not find an academic language to say the things I wanted to say. I wrote that I did not want to do this anymore – that I could not do it. I was not terribly surprised when my supervisor called me into his office several days later. But I was shocked when he casually dropped the bulk of my carefully-crafted letter on the desk before him and said, 'This is the first chapter of your dissertation.' I had not considered that possibility. Today, I understand that his was an act of faith.[33] Faith is a dangerous but necessary phenomenon, because it asks us to open ourselves, yet at the same time carries the risk of betrayal and failure.[34] It carries the risk of being 'wrong'. I benefited in ways I cannot calculate from my supervisor's act of faith. A different academic – a different man – might have shaken my hand as I walked out the door of that research unit forever. In this profession, most of us do not have faith. We do not trust. We verify. It is this fact that makes all theory violent. But it also makes all theory a form of faith, because verification – and particularly verification of value – is often impossible.[35]

[33] He would most certainly prefer me to use the word 'trust' here. But we make what I consider to be a false distinction in contemporary language between faith and trust. I am proceeding here as though they have the same meaning – relying on the Greek *pistis* – which is normally translated in religious texts as 'faith' but is translated in our field as 'trust'. If the religious texts translated *pistis* as 'trust', and the academic texts as 'faith', we might find ourselves in a different philosophical position altogether.

[34] Thomas Keenan writes that the emergence of what is other – unknown – always carries with it a certain risk in the conceptual space before identification takes place. The identification, incidentally, also contains a risk. We open ourselves to the possibility of otherness, even as that otherness may destroy us. See Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford University Press, 1997). See also Elizabeth Dauphinee, *The Ethics of Researching War: Looking for Bosnia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 102.

[35] Resistance to this notion of faith in scholarship is significant and often compelling. But insofar as we attempt in IR to write about the apprehensible world in some meaningful way, it is interesting to me that this activity (in its current manifestation) is perceived as so fundamentally distinct from all the other aspects of our lives in which faith features prominently – we have faith in our spouses and partners, faith in our pensions (although perhaps a little less now), faith in the law and order that governs our functioning societies. We have faith in colleagues and students – that they will attend those meetings or complete those essays, and so on. We may have punitive mechanisms in place to address shortfalls in some of these areas, but an examination of the ways in which we rely on faith in our everyday lives (and the ways in which this sometimes fails us) should reveal to us the extent to which we are always at others' mercy.

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Autoethnography and representation

In July of 1999, Stojan Sokolović and I were driving from the recently revised south of Serbia back into Bosnia, where the NATO armoured vehicles are too large for the narrow mountain roads. The weather turned bad and there was nowhere to sleep because the guesthouses were all filled up with Serbian refugees from Kosovo and the landlords were bitter because those refugees had to be kept and fed free of charge. ('What shall I do?' demanded the owner of a hostel who had no room to let. 'Shall I turn them away?' He shrugged and waved us onward through a sheet of rain. 'Find another place!')

All along the road, there were terrible scars in the earth. At the border at Karakaj, between two republics which not long ago were undefended and inseparable, the soldiers stared interestedly at my strange blue passport. They seemed very young in the rain as they begged me for patience while they took my passport into the shelter of their guard post. One of them had sneakers on his feet. He asked from where I had come. I told him in my grammarless way that I had paused last in Belgrade, where I had a discussion with an old colleague and friend over two brown bottles of beer in Republic Square. One of the soldiers asked if the buildings along Kneza Miloša had really been so badly destroyed by the bombs. I told him they had, and that it was the same in Niš, Čačak, Kragujevac, and Pančevo. I told him that, although Belgrade was a showcase of targeted warfare at its technological pinnacle (or at least somewhere in that general vicinity), the same could not be said for other cities and villages, in which cluster bombs had been dropped on marketplaces (Niš) and cruise missiles on homes huddled together against nights marked by war (Aleksinac)[36]. I probably didn't say this as well as I wanted to. My Serbian is not as good as Stojan Sokolović's English, which says something very significant about my comings and goings in his country when he can't even consider the reverse. He couldn't get a visa to interview me in my 'authentic' surroundings if his life depended on it. There is something very painful about that to me when I think about it for too long. At the Karakaj crossing, it began to rain harder. The soldier with the sneakers on his feet told me quietly that he had heard the bombers coming every night as they passed over Karakaj for Serbia. I fished out two unbearably harsh local cigarettes from a crumpled package and offered one to him through the window of the car. He cradled it carefully in his hand while he rummaged through his numerous pockets in search of a match.

All around us, the fields stretched out into an unseen distance, marked in my memory with pyramid stacks of hay and distant, clustered collections of houses across the flatlands of Serbia. The things that had been destroyed were destroyed, and nothing could be done then to take it back. The road was more poorly lit than usual because the switching stations and refineries had all been bombed, and there remained a state of energy emergency as a result of that war, which my friend in Belgrade reported had from the beginning smelled thickly of death and defeat. It was more terrible to drive in the darkness, I thought, if only because the image

[36] After cruise missiles were dropped on the small mining town of Aleksinac, CNN correspondent Brent Sadler reported seeing 'quite clearly that these were civilian homes [. . .] I saw body parts inside these buildings.' See 'More Explosions in Yugoslavia; Civilian Casualties Reported', 5 April 1999 available at: {http://cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/05/nato.attack.04/} accessed on 5 April 1999.

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produced by my imagination is sometimes more difficult to grasp than the reality of things – and this was the case even when I had already seen what was done. When the sun was yet low in the sky and the earth was scorched in places by deep black craters that had collected blackish water in their centres, the sight was somehow bearable. It was bearable because I could talk about it (I could write about it). I could murmur at it, and then hear the story of the night that it (whatever it had been) was struck by missiles that were satellite-guided and fired from the safety of a thousand miles away. You could hear them coming, my 'informants' said. They made terrible whistling noises in the seconds before the earth trembled and the concussions rippled through the surrounding houses, imploding all the glass windows for half a mile and wrenching the nearest buildings from their very foundations. My security studies mind rattled on stupidly about air-to-surface, wing-mounted, laser guided missiles, defended against poorly by outdated anti-aircraft artillery, which was essentially useless, because those bombers hid up beyond the clouds at a full 15,000 feet. It was because of this that NATO made so many mistakes in their target identification and the reason why the Serbian gunners could not find them up there.

It was better for me to see it in the day because I could order and catalogue the damage. The rational parts of me could engage in assessment – in *verification*. I could grasp the blast radius and the corresponding damage done to structures 20 metres, 40 metres, 100 metres from the point of impact. It was a neat trick, how the intellect was able to master the heart in daylight. But at night, along that road, passing unseen gnarled transformer towers, charred roof tiles, smashed windows, structures bent at crazy angles, bridges broken in half, my intellect could not function as it had been trained to function. At night, there was no rational order for me, because without seeing, I cannot order, but I can imagine. And imagining is sometimes worse than seeing, because seeing allows me to find the parameters of something – allows me to delineate things – whereas imagining has no parameters, and because it goes on and on long after the seeing is finished.[37] It keeps me awake at night. I suspect that I am not the only one who is kept awake by these things – these unacademic answers to the question of why I write what I write. So, I waited in the rain at the Karakaj crossing, and I thought these things – things which I was sure that my discipline would never provide a place for me to say, and to which I still cannot do justice, because darkness is something other in a world apprehended and mediated by vision. We huddle against it, whether in the shelters of our little circles of lamplight, or in the shelters of the orthodoxies and accepted knowledges of our disciplines.

The soldier with the sneakers on his feet smoked my cigarette under the cover of his waterproof overcoat. He gathered himself beneath that coat, squinting his eyes against the rain as he waited for his superiors to return with my passport. I thought that it was unfair for me to think about him – to wonder why he didn't have proper boots or to contemplate what else he might have in the many pockets of his coat or to wonder how he felt when he had heard the NATO warplanes

[37] Derrida asks, '[w]hat happens when one writes without seeing? A hand of the blind ventures forth alone or disconnected, in a poorly delimited space; it feels its way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes, trusting in the memory of signs and supplementing sight.' See Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3.

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crossing on their way to Serbia. I thought it was unfair for me to wish that I had the time and the opportunity to talk with him further when that desire was only so that I could represent him better in some narrative or other, as I am representing him now. I thought it was unfair to want to write about him, to want to capture him like some strange animal in his authentic surroundings, a hastily-constructed border post in a seemingly random spot. I felt that I was on a safari of some sort, scouting Serbs like lions. I felt that then, and I feel it still – the narrow line between fieldwork and tourism, between scholarship and voyeurism.[38] Ours is a strange pornography. Speaking of war, but readily applicable to the fruits of our everyday research, Levinas writes that 'violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves, making them betray not only their own commitments but their own substance [. . .]'.[39] When it was finished, the soldier that I wanted to interview and never did tossed the cigarette out into the side of the road and said that he would go inside to see why 'in Christ's name' it was taking so long. He came back promptly with my passport and regretfully announced that his superiors had forgotten about me. He wished me a safe and pleasant journey and I gave him another cigarette before I thanked him and drove on. The stamp in my passport was thick-lined and still wet. The ink had bled into the fibers on the opposite page as well. The rain had let up a bit, and I was pleased about that, because those roads going up through the mountains were dangerous enough without that they should also be wet.

I write this now in an attempt to answer to the charge levelled against me: 'What expert are you?' I cannot enter a plea of 'not guilty', because Stojan Sokolović will never sit on the jury that is empowered to decide my fate. Stojan Sokolović is not my peer in the empire of knowledge, and no court comprised of my colleagues would convict me for having wronged him. I was only following the rubrics of acceptable scholarship. Who can be convicted for having followed the letter of the law? And yet, I have to answer to the charge, because the charge was made against the discipline itself, and I am claiming in this forum to speak both from and to that discipline. This cannot be accomplished in a novel. It has to be accomplished (if it can be accomplished at all) from within the discipline. We cannot elide this kind of responsibility by saying that it does not 'fit' into the proper structures of writing IR, because these structures are not appropriate to answer the legitimate questions that are asked of us. If this were so, I would upload a novel on my university webpage and leave it at that. But it is not the novelists who are answerable to the Stojan Sokolovićes. It is the IR theorists and scholars who descended, unchallenged, into his world and returned with their truths on how we should best understand it. All he is asking for is the chance to respond and to have that response be heard – to have it be meaningful. He doesn't

[38] For a pertinent discussion of the relationships here, see Kenneth Little, 'On Safari: The Visual Politics of a Tourist Representation', in David Howes (ed.), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Debbie Lisle, 'Consuming Danger: Reimagining the War/Tourism Divide', *Alternatives*, 25:1 (2000); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford University Press: 1988); and John Hutnyk, *The Rumour of Calcutta: Tourism, Charity, and the Poverty of Representation* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996).

[39] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 21.

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want the relationship to end once he has answered our questions. He wants us to answer his.

There is an ethics here, and it is an ethics that does not, at the moment, have a well-formed place in our discipline. It is not a standpoint ethics, and it may not be a poststructuralist ethics (although it may find voice through forms of poststructuralism). It is not a cosmopolitan ethics, because Stojan Sokolović and I do not live in worlds that can be understood in any sense of the word as commensurable, and because we may not be working toward the same future. This is a very important point. Only some of us are vested with the 'expertise' to forge our way through other people's countries gathering 'data' in an effort to produce the 'truths' of the world. This is not only because our institutions vest us with this power (which is absurd, since it would mean we derive our power from ourselves), but because those institutions exist in a matrix of political relations that also vest some with the capacity to move freely, while others cannot. Perhaps we should understand the political as a craft; a form of *techne* as the ancients understood it: a form of building and creating relationships, rather than an epistemic commitment to dispassionate understanding or knowledge or philosophy. This politics requires both craft and philosophy, with necessary overlaps and interplays. Perhaps for us it involves, or should involve, a certain alchemy and a commitment to understanding our worlds as spaces of opportunity for creation and fruitful debate that seek not to destroy the ideas and risks we might be willing to take, but instead foster them. In a certain sense, autoethnographies in IR can begin to build a community of interested participants rather than dispassionate observers. This does not mean that autoethnography can make our disciplinary literatures whole, or create a knowledge form that is free of pitfalls and dilemmas. It does not mean that autoethnography does not require some method by which to judge its contributions. As I stated earlier, we cannot raise a generation of novelists and call them social scientists, even if the only reason we do not understand novelists to be social scientists is because their evidence is anecdotal and they lack formal training. We cannot assess doctoral qualifying or comprehensive examinations on the basis of who writes the prettiest sentence about a war zone. We cannot reduce our adjudication to a matter of aesthetics. But this does not mean that autoethnography does not have a place in IR, or that this is not a debate that needs to be undertaken.

The erasure of the self is a violence in that it purports to provide the ground for objective knowledge that is *always* and *necessarily* about others. As Clifford Geertz so aptly notes, 'explicit representations of authorial presence tend to be relegated, like other embarrassments, to prefaces, notes, or appendices.'[40] What I have been trying to suggest here all along is that we should also be embarrassed by our depictions of the political 'realities' of others.[41] Why are we not ashamed to return to our institutions from 'the field' and impart only the things that happened to fit into our pre-designed research agendas? Why are we not ashamed of ourselves for speaking and writing as though the only people who have the right to question us are other academics? As Raul Hilberg reminds us, it is when we

[40] Geertz, *Works and Lives*, p. 16.
[41] See Elizabeth Dauphinee, 'The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery', *Security Dialogue*, 38:2 (June 2007).

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succeed at our scholarly task that we are in the most danger of having usurped that which we wrote about. It is precisely our success that indicts us.[42]

Conclusion

Responsibility, ethics, and love are not the same. But they often enable one another. Of equal significance is the fact that love is not always something that emanates from the expectations we grow to have of one another (of our spouses, siblings, children, parents, and so on). Sometimes, love is a surprise that animates our research. Sometimes, to love is to be answerable for our actions – for our words about others, who cannot respond from within the confines of our disciplines. Virginia Dominguez's argument that the researcher is obligated to plainly explore the presence or absence of love in her scholarship is therefore significant for the question of responsibility. It is one of the enabling factors that can assist us in assessing the motives that lead to academic (and many other kinds of) writing. Autoethnography in IR is one way in which scholarship can respond to Dominguez's call. It is not the only way, and it is not without its pitfalls. Autoethnography in contemporary IR is a very young form of research. It asks us to explore the manner in which we evacuate ourselves from our writing, and to consider the implications of this. It has the potential to open us to a certain kind of scholarly exchange that does not seek unproblematic truth, but which propels fruitful exploration of a range of concerns in IR: the place of the self in writing, and the ethical risks of ignoring this; our relationship to those whose lives we research; the ways in which scholarly writing forces us to dismiss elements of our research findings into footnotes or acknowledgements (or to dismiss them entirely); to accept clear and present responsibility for what we write by stripping us of the armour of unproblematic 'data' and 'theories' that we use to protect ourselves; and to rethink the structured and silencing model of 'debate' that stultifies our scholarship and frightens our students and ourselves into making only the most minute, defensible claims. It attenuates us to the reality that our worlds are not the same, but that they are nevertheless related by what Anthony Burke aptly calls 'long, glowing filament[s]' of connectivity.[43]

The rules of scholarly writing in IR are ingrained in us. We write in the way we know we have to without having to think about it. It is an integral part of our craft and it comes as second nature after a long, disciplining journey.[44] Auto-ethnography is one way through which we are reminded that the form and content of contemporary writing in IR are not automatically or necessarily the only valuable ways to conduct a scholarly, research-oriented life. These interpretations and ways of writing are choices, and this means that we can choose differently to some extent. There are important reasons why we might want to consider this. The risk of autoethnography opens us to the possibility of seeing more of what we ignore in both ourselves and others, asking why it is ignored, and what we might need to do about it.

[42] Raul Hilberg, 'I Was Not There', in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), p. 25.
[43] Anthony Burke, *Beyond Security, Ethics, and Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.
[44] Adams, 'A Review of Narrative Ethics', p. 180.

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