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SPECIAL ISSUE: INTERNAL RELATIONS

Introduction: Baring our Internal Relations

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We—as editors and contributors—each variously research and write in the margins of International Relations (IR). These liminal spaces take different form for each of us but all are committed to critical approaches to IR. Some are on the margins due to the increasing reliance on part-time teaching contracts and adjunct positions; some for approaching the discipline qualitatively rather than through the more favored quantitative approaches particularly in the self-nominated ‘home’ of IR, the United States; and one studies IR from another discipline completely. For all, we have contributed to an academic discipline where the objects and approaches of disciplinary study have changed over time (anarchy, norms, institutions, feminism, Marxism, affect, the postcolonial, etc.), but one constant is that the experience—or narrative—of the individual scholar remains invisible.¹ We study distant and sometimes metaphorical structures and foreign agents, and the social relations that count to be studied are those that exist among other humans. Thus, the international relations of a world ‘out there’ is routinely hyper-separated from the worlds we inhabit in highly-individuated ways, within wider collectivities.

In other words, missing from this international gaze is an acknowledgement of the field's *internal* relations. This discipline is itself an institution, a set of practices, and is inhabited and created by people in relation to each other. It is, as Cynthia Weber writes, a site of cultural production based on mythmaking and ideology (Weber 2004). Of course, this must also mean that the conditions in which we live and work shape and define how we teach and write. This is acknowledged in the work of scholars from the Global South, as it is by queer, feminist, and critical race approaches. It matters where we are from and what bodies we inhabit. These experiences and subjectivities shape our research and our connection to the field of IR in both recognized and silent ways.

Further, the anger, fear, anxiety, and dislocation that are increasingly lived within the contemporary neoliberal academy, and the discipline of international relations, are—along with the solidarities, friendships, and loves—the very connective tissue upon which a scholarly field is built. In this way, an academic field is not only an abstraction, or even an episteme, but also a community. As a field, however, we are not yet in the habit of asking each other:

How are we doing?
What are our personal politics and ethics?
How do they relate to our behaviour in the discipline?

Considering these introductory ruminations, we offer this collection as auto-ethnographical or auto-biographical IR, wherein the contributors explore how we, as IR thinkers, understand ourselves within the discipline we each construct through our research, teaching, and service. Not only are we engaged in our object of study—for some, 'the international'—we are also embedded within our discipline, our institutions, our families, our bodies and from these relationships make sense of, and speak of, *our worlds*. Put simply, the authors are constructing and sharing stories about what it is like *inside* IR: not as discipline with footnotes and literature reviews, but rather as the lived experience of the seven authors in this special issue. Of course, the views and experiences canvassed cannot encompass all of IR, nor would we desire to speak for all of those who make their home here. Rather, we hope that through this collection conversations may sprout and flourish about what the internal relations of IR might look and feel like. How could this baring of our internal relations nurture and support other people—now and in the future—who have committed their personal and professional lives and passions to it?

What then are the stories we tell if we aren't just subjects who study IR, but also the living beings who create it as a subject? At this project's inception at the 2016 International Studies Association Annual Convention in New Orleans, we asked simply: 'What are *Internal Relations*?' We argued that:

[...] for most IR scholars, the idea of 'relations' within IR will refer only to the condition of anarchy in international politics, to the dynamic of

states and individual peoples, or the society of states. Another question to ask might be: How does a focus on war and anarchy, on 'high politics', in a plural and complex world affect us as participants? Many IR scholars have pushed the discipline to consider other kinds of orders beyond those accepted by earlier versions of IR, including most notably post-colonial, feminist and queer/LGBTQI+ scholars. These IR imaginaries shifted the center to the periphery. What is more, the field of IR is richer if it 'includes the voices of women from the Global South rather than just white men, of African states rather than the colonizer, and the refugee rather than the citizen'. However, in doing so, these margins, though focused upon, remained external, or international.

From these descriptors, as this project has evolved, a series of normative questions emerged for each of our contributors:

What value is it to bare one's internal relations?
What does an IR that is aware of its internal relations look and feel like?
Where does one—and we—go having done so?
What sort of professional and personal ethics follow?
Can we (re)order our discipline (e.g. its conferences, journals, etc.) to account for, or else accommodate, these narrative approaches?ⁱⁱ

For the authors, the answers lie in the ability to tell different stories, or more precisely, for there to be a forum in which we can be understood as complex beings who enter a complex field. As Dauphinee & Inayatullah write in *Narrative Global Politics*, it matters *how* we tell our stories and changing the form of the telling can often allow the reader to 'think, feel, and experience the story' (2016, p. 1). Whereas, Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker had earlier favored an approach that equips the scholar to both appreciate and evaluate autoethnographic insights, rather than indulge in autobiographical narrative, despite apportioning value to how Joseph Kruzel and James N. Rosenau's *Journeys through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty-Four Academic Travelers* 'actively reflected on how their personal journeys have shaped their academic work' (1989). In his *Autobiographical International Relations*, Inayatullah encourages his contributors to effectively write the self, so as to 'place their narratives in the larger context of world politics, culture, and history' (2011, p. i).

Crucially, however, our approach differs. While we are interested in how institutions can make scholars complicit in structural oppression, we are not looking for theory to make itself appear in our stories *from* the field, or for addressing theoretical problems as autobiography. We are not writing the stories of others (Daigle 2016). Rather, we have curated a collection of essays that listen to the personal narratives of the field. Not just as IR scholars, but as mothers, geeks, boy feminists, agitators, conference attendees, and adjuncts. We are writing stories of ourselves. We ask: What happens if we ask the same critical questions that our discipline asks about the international world and ask it of our discipline, the university, and the other institutional homes we inhabit?

How do we peel back our layers of privilege in the academy—as distinct from our identity in global politics—and speak to injustices happening at our conferences, in our departments, our journals, and in our universities? This will include confronting how some forms of domination and exclusion, such as the casualization of labor, are largely unrecognized in the discipline. Can we find those places where racism, sexism, class, ableism, bigotry, and misogyny find purchase? In doing so, we argue that investigating injustice, violence, and domination out-there-in-the-world should not come at the expense of looking at where these very relations make themselves present within the lived relations that constitute our discipline. In examining hierarchy and marginalization, exclusion, violence, and exploitation within the external world ‘out there’ we should not, in other words, neglect a thoroughgoing examination of relations internal to the world of IR.

It can be comforting to insist upon our object of study as being something that takes place far away, on the battlefield, or the boardroom, or the trading floor, or in the streets and houses a continent away. However, diverting our gaze from the international to those around us, and to our own lives, insecurities, struggles, bodies, and contingencies, makes it possible to examine the other stuff of world politics, namely the lived material upon which the discipline is built. We believe there is value in baring our internal relations. We are not allowed ‘the distance-induced catatonia of our academic prose’ (Dauphinee & Inayatullah 2016, p. 2) or, crucially, the distance of these stories happening ‘out there’, to someone else. Everyday language takes on even more importance when we are writing of our ‘everydays’.

These ethnographies of IR scholars each tell powerful stories about those who make the discipline of IR. These essays offer a meta-story about how personal experiences might come to create IR as not just relations between states, but also the relations among and through the bodies of its scholars. For instance, in their contributions to this volume, the editors explore aspects of the mind-body distinction. Taylor’s essay asks whether the worm provides a useful metaphor for the individual in IR, as he comes to terms with the aftermath of a crime committed against him. Whilst Fishel, in her essay, confesses to realizing that her body, and the city she lived in, informed her research as much as her discipline and mind.

In these ways, this collection of experiences hopes to bring attention to bear on the ways in which we come to embody and understand our academic discipline through our experiences and lives both inside and outside the walls of the university, and inside and outside the borders of our disciplinary knowledge. Thus, while we may tell the story of IR as one of anarchy and regimes, it does not follow that our professional lives conform to the same organization. We contend that the ability (and desire) to see our lives as strictly our professional, disciplinary-producing lives makes seeing the hierarchies of our associations and the university especially difficult. We must, therefore, not only bare our internal relations, but have others study and comment upon them

without shame or embarrassment. Even with its privileges, academic life can be brutally hard and isolating for many of its practitioners. Finding friends, comrades-in-arms, or a sympathetic ear is often of paramount importance for healthy bodies and disciplines.

Encapsulated in our title's play on words, attention to *Internal Relations* therefore questions how the discipline of IR both shapes the way we study 'the world' and shapes the way we understand *our worlds*—through an exploration of our own internal relations. We wanted to hear about relations as they exist internal to the field, as well as speculate as to how they might be otherwise. Importantly, these articles discuss the myriad ways we are constantly ordering and reordering our lives and bodies, our work selves and family lives, and our confident, professional personas with the lived experiences of anxiety, doubt, and frustration. This led us to reflect on the question of how we, as IR scholars, support and care for others while dealing with our own personal and professional relations. We wanted to ask: How might we acknowledge the vulnerabilities, hardships, and resiliencies experienced by IR scholars as important to understanding our research and work?

To further these introspective disciplinary questions, we have taken a novel approach to integrate the various authors' reactions to the process of writing and editing the articles you are soon to read; therefore, the format for this introduction differs from other collected works. Throughout the process, we created 'internal relations' amongst the authors by asking, recording, and sharing reactions and responses to the various steps in preparing these essays for publication. We exchanged our writing and shared with others to deepen an informal peer review process. The writing and editing processes also became a way to connect the authors across experiences and distance. We found that living through the other authors' stories, we were all reminded that it just feels plain good to remember we are connected to others in our discipline. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson reflects that:

We often spend too much time imagining that we are not connected intimately to our intellectual and academic lives. We are not free floating agents in an external world, but rather bound to our mundane and quotidian lives in special ways that connect us to others, for good or bad.

It was Delacey Tedesco, while finalizing her own contribution to this collection, who put it most eloquently:

My work so far has been closely tied to the particular place where I live, and made possible by the people who support me (financially, emotionally, institutionally, intellectually). And yet I have an underlying unease when thinking about relations, because my experience through this work has also shown the breaks, the weaknesses, the fractures of relations. I was drawn to the opportunity to investigate my own ambivalence around relations and to trace the interactions between the cracks in family ties, the

precariousness of institutional ties, the instabilities in my own relation to my research, and the disciplinary and geographic boundaries that allow only a tenuous relation between my work and International Relations as a discipline.

For Rowland, these relations surfaced as 'aggressive curiosity' across disciplinary boundaries while trying to navigate his first experience at an IR conference. He felt very much the outsider invited to extract his specialized knowledge leaving him with a feeling of predatory acquisition rather than scholarly exchange. His final note to himself during the conference read: 'We may have been invited, but I think we were also on the menu'.

Additionally, in the process of compiling this project, it became evident that the relation to academic writing—and the abstraction of the self that occurs in adopting the voice of objective authority—does considerable work in the making of disciplinary knowledge; not just epistemic work but also in the making of ourselves as academic subjects. Indeed, reflecting on his own internal relations, Isaac Kamola reasons:

I try to view my academic writing as storytelling. I'm not convinced that social scientists tell 'truth' and fiction-writers write 'fiction'. I believe that insisting upon a blurrier line recognizes that the knowledges we produce are always speculative, incomplete, located within a time and place, and grounded in subjective experiences. In an undergraduate class I took with her, Tess Gallagher told the story of how her late husband Raymond Carver—the great American short story writer—once wrote about an event that took place among a group of friends. When these friends read the story they all exclaimed, "that's not what happened at all!" He told them that to tell the truth about what actually happened he had to change the story. Tim O'Brian makes a similar point in 'How to Tell a True War Story' (2009, pp. 64-81). Because the experience of war cannot be generalized or abstracted, capturing the actual experience of spending a night scared for your life in a Vietnamese jungle requires explaining the noises he heard all night long: the cocktail party, the opera, the glee club, the talking rocks. Being willing to acknowledge the possibility that the social sciences might be a form of fiction writing not only makes it possible to tell certain truths, but also grounds academic writing beyond the narrow limits of the provable banality of the world. This makes it possible to write in a more ambitious, poetic, and speculative manner, allowing ourselves to get swept up in language and to imagine the world differently—as it already exists, just not yet. In this way, I approached this piece of writing as an opportunity to explore the line between fact and fiction more intentionally, making my friends and myself the characters in this particular story. This was the best part, thinking of my own life and biography as meaningful, and that how I spend time with others as itself the stuff of the world.

All told, we found that many are not comfortable sharing personal experiences. The distance between the scholar and the person is very important for their care of the self. This felt too much like shouldering

the emotional labor of the discipline, and for women especially, of taking on the gendered role as caretaker and confidante yet again. For Tedesco, this pressure to shift between the narrative scholar and the mother came to a head during the *Internal Relations* project:

The push to let go of clinical, distant accounts and say more about how certain events made me feel made me aware of how much I rely on the strategy of containment to get by. I was willing to accept the challenge to crack these open, at least a little, but doing so meant being willing to sit with heartaches, fears, and mortifications that normally are tucked safely away. I am somewhat ambivalent about the results. There are hopefully aspects of this narrative that readers respond to; I know, from talking to other academic parents, and particularly other mothers, that my experience might take a particular form, but that the risks and complications embodied in having children are all too common. Yet I continually wonder about my decisions on what to share and how to write, particularly in my family relations: the relations between honesty, manipulation, and exploitation seem too close for comfort.

For the editors and authors alike, we both loved and were challenged deeply by writing narratively about the overlap between the personal and professional, the private and the public. Overall, the authors felt that writing together opened up a conversation like atmosphere around the process, rather than opening themselves up to anonymous missives being inflicted upon them or the writing as a means to an end—a publication for their career alone. It pushed each author to place themselves in their story; this was, in fact, the largest challenge. Jackson found that paradoxically his academic voice is so much part of himself that leaving it behind for the narrative voice felt more distant. He felt adrift and surprised by his commitment to this academic self. Tedesco echoes this sentiment and adds that drawing back from the academic voice felt like a loss, that her academic prose was just as important as the narrative writing. Kamola felt caught between the optimism of narrating instances of resilience in the face of academic contingency and the nagging concern that something as small-scale as making an academic conference more just and equitable nonetheless seems so hopelessly impossible. Crane-Seeber has always been pushed to write from his wounds by mentors and found the space in his essay to work through his frustrations and struggles with the limits of actually-existing feminism and its intersections with scholarship. Not being allowed to slip into the academic voice to escape dealing with the issues at hand left his essay that much stronger. Indeed, many of the contributors feel that writing in the narrative voice is difficult in unexpected ways, simply because the matter being narrated is personal, and so the writing, editing and publication processes are too.

Indeed, it is this very grappling with writing from experiences that binds all the contributors to this special issue on *Internal Relations* together. These confusions, aches, and wounds occur out-there-in-the-world that IR scholars claim as their subject of study, but also the academic world that besets and frames the discipline of IR. In other words, this issue

brings our internal relations into a dialogue with the so-called international ones.

Notes

ⁱ This may be part of the 'author function' as theorized by Michel Foucault. The text often does not need an author, or the function of discourse is to make the author disappear.

ⁱⁱ For example, Saara Särämä has fought hard on this front with her work on shaming the 'all male panel'. It is our belief that a feminist IR conference would certainly have more participation from women, women of color, and those who identify as women. Elsewhere, counter movements such as the *Journal of Narrative Politics* are reshaping the ecology of scholarly outlets.

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