MILLENNIUM
Journal of International Studies

The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations

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Over the past couple of decades a growing number of International Relations (IR) scholars have adapted and adopted ethnographic research and writing modes, hoping that ethnography would introduce an emancipatory research agenda and refurbish the discipline's parochial vestiges. This article discusses the promising and problematic implications of this move. It argues that the 'ethnographic turn' in IR ignores recent anthropological literature on the topic and employs a selective and often instrumental notion of what ethnography is and does. By reviewing some of the most prominent ethnographic contributions made by feminist and social constructivist authors, this article demonstrates that, in international relations, the complexity of ethnography has been reduced to (1) an empiricist data-collection machine, (2) a writing style, or (3) a theoretical sensibility. However, this intervention also hopes to encourage students of global politics to rewrite international relations from an ethnographical stance and take full advantage of ethnography's radical promise.

Keywords: cultural anthropology, ethnography, feminism, international relations theory, social constructivism

Introduction

Judging by the growing number of International Relations (IR) scholars who have adopted and adapted, in one way or another, ethnographic methods and materials since the mid-1980s onwards, we might be inclined to observe a so-called 'ethnographic turn' in the study of global politics. While feminist scholars have been at the forefront of this trend,[1]

1. Carol Cohn, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 867–718; Carol Cohn,

social constructivists[2] and postcolonial students[3] have quickly followed in their footsteps. Although perhaps not a clearly defined or thoroughly theorised 'turn', the main staple of cultural anthropology seems to have gained an unprecedented momentum in IR over the past couple of decades. In 1992, anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff made a similar observation. But their reading of 'the current status of ethnography in the human sciences' noted a paradox:

> On the one hand, [ethnography's] authority has been, and is being, seriously challenged from both within anthropology and outside; on the other hand, it is being widely appropriated as a liberating method in fields other than our own – among them, cultural and legal studies, social history, and political science.[4]

This is the puzzle which this article tries to resolve by looking at both the promising and the problematic ways in which ethnography has been *brought/imported into* the study of global politics.

This article argues that the 'ethnographic turn' in IR could not have been realised without adopting a selective, instrumental and somewhat timid understanding of what ethnography is and does. The apparently paradoxical status of ethnography in the human sciences is in fact the result of a critical lag that exists between the two disciplines, a delay in cross-disciplinary reading practices. The modes of ethnographic research and writing that are presently being pursued in international studies are reminiscent of the productions cultural anthropologists

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'Motives and Methods: Using Multi-Sited Ethnography to Study US National Security Discourses', in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, eds Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91–107; Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Cynthia Enloe, *Beaches, Bananas and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Katherine Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in US-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

2. Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002): 627–51; Iver B. Neumann, 'To Be a Diplomat', *International Studies Perspectives* 6 (2005): 72–93; Vincent Pouliot, 'Sobjectivism: Towards a Constructivist Methodology', *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007): 359–84; Stacia E. Zabusky, *Launching Europe: An Ethnography of European Cooperation in Space Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

3. L. H. M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire between Asia and the West* (London: Palgrave, 2002); Marianne I. Franklin, *Postcolonial Politics, the Internet, and Everyday Life: Pacific Traversals Online* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Marshall J. Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places: Indigeneity, Cosmology, and the Limits of International Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

4. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 7.

started questioning during the 1980s. In a sense, the interest and support ethnography enjoys in IR is misplaced because it is centred on a series of ethnographic knowledge practices, which are currently the source of great disciplinary turbulence in cultural anthropology. Had ethnographically-minded IR scholars paid greater attention to the ways in which ethnography has been written and rewritten from anthropological quarters over the past two decades, it would have been clear to them that ethnography cannot accomplish the goals it was set out to realise. Contemporary cultural anthropology is much more embattled over and hesitant about the ability of ethnographic knowledge to solve the crisis of representation that plagues contemporary social sciences or provide categorical answers to the question of emancipation that lies at the centre of western political philosophy. Only when ethnographic praxis is stripped of its tumultuous and controversial history, only when ethnography is freed from its textual ambiguities and hermeneutic commitments, can it appear as the solution to the *crise de conscience* in human sciences, rather than as its brainchild.

The article begins with a review of selected ethnographic contributions to IR. I draw upon feminist and social constructivist productions to explore the different ways in which the political/poetic complexity of ethnography has been reduced to signify (1) a data-collection machine capable of accessing unmediated reality in all its authenticity and accuracy; (2) a genre of writing that can provoke critical engagement through its personalised style and jargon-free narrative; or (3) a theoretical sensibility, which by paying greater attention to everyday practices and embodied action can offset the stalemate ushered in by IR's over-reliance on discursive interpretations of the political. I label these three tendencies *ethno-empiricism*, *ethnografeel text* and *ethnographilia*, respectively. In the second part of the article, I use these examples to reflect on the origins of the critical lag between anthropology and IR. While in cultural anthropology ethnography was rewritten in a climate of disciplinary uncertainty and hermeneutic ambiguity, in international studies the 'ethnographic turn' was used to facilitate a return to empiricism, albeit a new and improved kind of 'emancipatory empiricism',[5] which promised to refurbish the parochial vestiges of the discipline and restore its much-desired critical voice while keeping its regulatory mechanisms intact. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the article concludes with a more detailed discussion of the promising implications of ethnographic praxis for international studies. In arguing that IR theory is already a culturally and historically bound type of ethnographic knowledge, I hope to encourage students of global politics to cultivate a more audacious and, at the same time, more cautious ethnographical stance that can take full advantage of the radical promises of ethnography.

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5. Pouliot, 'Sobjectivism', 367.

Before proceeding, a few preliminary words must be said about the dramatic evolution of anthropological ethnography over the past 30 years or so. Schematically speaking, ethnography refers to the textual transcription/translation of holistic descriptions and experiences gathered through fieldwork. In the heydays of Manilowski, Boas and Mead, when the original mission of cultural anthropology was to construct a 'consultable record' of primitive cultures on a global scale,[6] the business of representing others was a task that implied both the use of scientific research principles and the mastering of realist modes of writing. As later anthropologists would observe, the subject of these first-generation monographs were less the people they were intended to describe, than the 'fieldworker-theorists' who retained an exclusive monopoly over language, experience and culture.[7] It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when symbolic and interpretive anthropology emerged under the influence of philosophy, semiotics and literary criticism, that this narrative authority was dissolved to reveal the intersubjective nature of ethnographic texts. In 1973 Clifford Geertz's seminal essays on 'Thick Description'[8] and 'Notes on a Balinese Cockfight'[9] were the first to highlight that ethnography is a textual negotiation of cultural and political meaning where description and interpretation, experience and theory, are inseparable. However, interpretive anthropology and, with it, critical or new ethnography, did not come of age until 1986 when the simultaneous publication of Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture*, Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, and Turner and Bruner's *The Anthropology of Experience* triggered a full-scale debate around the political implications of ethnographic *representations*.[10]

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6. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 30.

7. James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21–54.

8. Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture', *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 3–33.

9. Clifford Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight', *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 56–86.

10. A series of other interesting and influential texts were published in the 13-year hiatus, including Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). All of these texts were deeply influenced by the work of Geertz demonstrating a thorough engagement with the complexities of reflexive ethnography. On a parallel front Victor Turner, together with his students Edward Bruner and Renato Rosaldo, who would become pivotal figures during the mid-1980s, were interested in the symbolic and phenomenological aspects of cultural anthropology.

Interpretative anthropology did not necessarily originate in 1986. The events of 1986 only forced cultural anthropologists to take critical ethnography seriously. The coincidental publication of three seminal texts signalled that experimental ethnography, which, by then, had been around for over a decade, was a disciplinary change of heart that could no longer be ignored. Like other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, cultural anthropology was making a 'reflexive turn'. Although critical ethnography lacks a coherent set of political commitments and political principles, most proponents understand this to be the textual translation of fieldwork experience, where the perfect correspondence between reality and its representation is obviated through a commitment to radical perspectivism and essential reflexivity.[11] This allows practitioners to openly engage (and sometimes struggle) with textual heteroglossia and cultural criticism even at the cost of sacrificing narrative authority and being accused of fictionalism.[12]

Although new ethnography is generally favoured over earlier realist or impressionist tales from the field, cultural anthropology has not reached a unanimous consensus regarding its achievements and merits. Such disciplinary convergence seems impossible given that, like political science, anthropology is 'a discipline divided', with various schools and sects sitting at separate tables, each with its own conception of ethnography and its own criteria of what constitutes good anthropology.[13] For instance, a major debate continues to exist between 'applied' anthropologists, who argue that ethnography should be used as a political megaphone to recover minority voices and contribute to the preservation and development of subaltern ways of life,[14] and 'critical' anthropologists,[15] who are generally more suspicious of the liberating promises of ethnographic texts and pay greater attention to the political ambiguities that emerge from an ethnography that is 'from beginning to end enmeshed in writing'.[16] Despite the obvious islands of vulnerability attached to the latter – experimental anthropology has been accused of frivolous literariness, political apathy, moral nonchalance and theoretical solipsism – I use this approach to ethnography to review some of the more prominent

11. Graham Watson, 'Make Me Reflexive, but Not Yet: Strategies for Managing Essential Reflexivity in Ethnographic Discourse', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 43, no. 1 (1987): 30.

12. For a more detailed exposé of the coming of age of critical ethnography see John van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

13. Gabriel A. Almond, 'Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 21, no. 4 (1988): 828.

14. Nancy Sheper-Hughes, 'The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology', *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 3 (1995): 409–40.

15. These categories should be read only as heuristic devices.

16. James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', *Representations* 2 (1983): 120.

ethnographic productions in global politics because I believe it resonates with my own ambitions in writing this article.

Different from what ethnographic aficionados in IR would like to believe, ethnography is better equipped to shed critical light on the textual practices and normative ambitions of IR theory than to refurbish the discipline. Bringing ethnography into international relations is not a safe bet that it can resolve the aporias of textual representation, automatically bring about emancipation, or render political scientists reflexive.[17] Viewing ethnography as a 'solution' to various disciplinary problems only obscures the extent to which ethnographic praxis is fraught with textual ambiguities and political uncertainties.

Ethno-empiricism

While cultural anthropology was undergoing its experimental moment, other social sciences, notably sociology and political science, were experiencing a reflexive turn of their own, albeit of a very different kind. Beginning with the 1980s, prominent feminist figures, such as Sandra Harding[18] and Nancy Hartsock,[19] urged us to abandon the sterile and politically ignorant goals of the scientific method and, instead, turn to the study of real-life experiences. The scientific method was discredited not only because it designates man as the main subject of knowledge and agency, hence excluding the experiences of women from the political. More importantly, its dispassionate analytic stance prevents it from offering any alternative visions for our collective future. To realise this ambitious project, feminist scholars of the 1980s voiced a unanimous call for grounded research rooted in situated knowledge, experience and immanent critique. Despite their subjective tendencies, these research tools were deemed useful in their ability to generate first-hand knowledge of authentic forms of living, relations of power, embodied states and social actions.[20] This, in turn, opened the door to ethnographic-like feminist explorations, which promised to fulfil the century-long quest in modern western philosophy for 'innocent' knowledge, that is, socially useful

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17. George E. Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 190.

18. Sandra Harding, 'Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?', in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1–14.

19. Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983). Nancy Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism', in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 157–80.

20. Joan W. Scott, 'Experience', in *Feminists Theorise the Political*, eds Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22–40.

knowledge that can ground political action in a moral terrain beyond power or desire.[21]

Carol Cohn's piece, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals',[22] is a product of this quest. Armed with a feminist sense/ibility on conflict and violence, and a political commitment to grounded research, Cohn spent some time during the mid-1980s among American nuclear strategists to gain a more intimate understanding of Cold War militarism. The outcome was stunning. Compared to the sterile and pedantic rhetoric dominating IR literature around that time, Cohn's piece startled its readers with a captivating combination of experience-near insight and candid autobiographical reflection. 'Sex and Death' was quickly devoured by undergraduate and graduate students across the continent, becoming the flagship ethnography of the discipline. Although Cohn seems glad to assume this title,[23] what is being left out from and conflated in her ethnographic project needs to be scrutinised more closely in light of the past two decades of experimental anthropology.

In a recent article, Cohn remembers her fieldwork experience as follows: with her political assumptions left behind, she ventures into the field, curious and open-minded, to capture the existential universe of nuclear strategists.[24] After recording their linguistic utterances from a distance through participant observation and interviewing methods, she brings the data back to her office where, using feminist discourse analysis, she concludes that 'nukespeak' plays a vital role in legitimising the American nuclear strategic project as something that is both self-evidently rational and morally commendable.[25] In this account, ethnography is reduced to a series of methodological choices – participant observation and interviews – designed to gather empirical data according to a linear spatio–temporal logic of home–field–home or theory–method–theory. Methodologically speaking, the advantage of ethnography is thought to be its ability to maintain a clear separation between events 'out there' and theorising 'in here', between the data-collection that occurs in the field and the interpretation that takes place in the confines of our homes and offices.[26] From an epistemological point of view, the merit of ethnography is the opposite, namely, its ability to fashion a perfect congruence between the pre-discursive realm

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21. Jane Flax, 'The End of Innocence', in *Feminists Theorise the Political*, eds Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 447.

22. In *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987), 687–718.

23. Cohn, 'Motives and Methods: Using Multi-Sited Ethnography to Study US National Security Discourses'.

24. Ibid., 95–6.

25. Cohn, 'Sex and Death', 717.

26. Judith Okely, 'Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge', in *Anthropology and Autobiography*, eds Judith Okely and Helen Callaway (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

of fieldwork and the cognitive realm of theoretical interpretation. In preventing the contamination of 'the field' and 'the armchair', at the same time that it is ensuring their synchronicity, ethnography is deemed as the most grounded of social science methods. Not only does it deliver a glimpse of unmediated reality, it also allows us to recognise the possibilities for changing that reality.

Anyone who reads anthropological literature beyond the work of Clifford Geertz[27] will quickly realise that this is a partial definition of ethnography, which reduces its political complexity to a positivist data-gathering machine. While, logistically speaking, participant observation and in-depth interviews may constitute the basis of fieldwork, these research methods are not the birthright of ethnography. There is nothing intrinsically ethnographic in gathering evidence by listening and taking notes or in writing in narrative and autobiographical form unless these practices are reflexive about how the representations they generate are shot through with power and pregnant with political meaning. What is more, in the case of critical ethnography, the possibility of making an ontological distinction or establishing a perfect correspondence between experience 'out there' and text 'in here' is precluded by the fact that both domains are 'from beginning to end, enmeshed in writing' (e.g. writing field notes, writing monographs).[28] Although receptive and respectful of ethnographic modes of research and writing, in trying to close the semiotic gap between social reality and its textual representation and avoid all ethico-political aporias that come with such distancing, Cohn's project remains firmly confined within the epistemological boundaries of mainstream social science. Hence, her work is an example of what I call *ethno-empiricism* – the notion that ethnography is a mimetic tool of representation, which can impose empirical order upon our home-made theoretical puzzles.

But this limited reading of ethnography does not remain without problems. Eventually, Cohn has to admit that fieldwork is a much more unruly experience than she had imagined. The more time she spends among defence intellectuals, the more versed she becomes in technostrategic language. This thrills and frightens her at the same time. On the one hand, she is now able to enter 'a secret kingdom, being someone in the know';[29] on the other hand, she begins to realise that, although 'nukespeak' mitigates her fears of nuclear war, it also makes her complicit in the 'cold-blooded decision to ignore the effects of nuclear weapons on real live human beings'.[30] While some argue that such ambiguities are inevitable because participant observation is an inherently oxymoronic concept that asks the fieldworker to strike

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27. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
28. Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', 120.
29. Cohn, 'Sex and Death', 704.
30. Ibid., 707.

a perfect(ly impossible) balance between the 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective,[31] Cohn cannot help but be surprised by her sudden loss of innocence. Having imagined ethnography to be a reliable data-collection machine, she is shocked to see the hyphen between 'participant' and 'observation' dissolve. How could she, an innocent bystander, have been lured into the linguistic universe of defence intellectuals? How could a pacifist feminist researcher become complicit with its cognitive effects?[32] When this happens, Cohn has difficulty coming to terms with the fact that the social world is not a laboratory one can report on without becoming a part of it.

To keep the moral innocence and narrative authority of her ethnographic voice intact, Cohn has to fix her objects into a neatly integrated linguistic tableau which tells it how it is. Instead of allowing difference to transpire in a way that is both reflexive and reflective of the co-constitution of self and other, the voice and presence of defence intellectuals is never felt beyond the caricatural portrayal of their speech utterances. Here Cohn becomes guilty of what Johannes Fabian recognised as the classic ensnarement of ethnography – the need to deny the historical contemporaneousness of our others to produce ethnographic knowledge.[33] To put forward a politically convincing critique of defence intellectuals, Cohn builds her analysis around a series of linguistic statements extrapolated from the discursive processes that make them possible and understandable in the first place. Unfortunately, this strategy works against Cohn's intentions: without the co-presence of defence intellectuals, 'Sex and Death' draws more attention to the tantalising aspects of 'nukespeak' than to the author's ambiguous/ambitious struggle with language.[34]

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31. Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority'; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays 1971–1991* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991).

32. Cohn, 'Sex and Death', 707.

33. Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

34. I am often disappointed with the ways in which Cohn's piece is treated in graduate seminars and beyond. Most readers prefer to focus on the sensationalist findings of her fieldwork, the sexual innuendos of 'nukespeak', rather than engage with Cohn's highly provocative altercations with this language. The difficult questions she asks about her ambiguous location between participation and observation, nukespeak reporter and nukespeaker, are sidelined by outraged and/or bemused reactions to expressions like 'patting the missile', 'bombs losing their virginity' and 'nuclear penetration'. Although frustrated with these reading practices, I suspect that Cohn's epistemological and methodological choices, some of which I have discussed in this article, are partly at fault for making her work vulnerable to such vulgar interpretations.

Ethnografeel

If in the case of Carol Cohn I was dissatisfied with the ways in which ethnography was reduced to a set of mechanical and theoretically unproblematic data-gathering techniques, in the case of Cynthia Enloe it is the opposite that disturbs me: the tendency to sacrifice fieldwork experience on the altar of literary stylisation, something I call ethnogra*feel.*

Cynthia Enloe's work plays a pivotal role in disturbing canonical IR literature. Perhaps because of the ease with which she incorporates anecdotal detail and everyday trivia in her political research or perhaps because of the audacity with which she abandons all disciplinary criteria for 'good research', Enloe is usually credited with legitimating experience-near research and writing modes (e.g. biography, autobiography, ethnography) in international studies. Although she never openly acknowledged making an ethnographic contribution or writing ethnography, like Cohn did, Enloe's work is read as a typically feminist research formula that combines political analysis with anecdotal, biographical and historical detail to ultimately deliver a gripping narrative, the purpose of which is to generate theoretical engagement as well as political action. During the 1990s, this research recipe had a powerful resonance among feminist IR scholars like Katherine Moon, Marysia Zalewski, Christine Sylvester and Roxanne Lynn Doty, who took her writing challenge seriously and started producing one ethnografeel text after another.

Without a doubt, Enloe's ground-breaking work – both thematically and stylistically – must be acknowledged in terms of the many ethnographically-minded roads she paved before the time of this writing. As she explains in *The Curious Feminist*, this was not necessarily a 'natural' process. Turning her pedantic academic prose into the joyful and energetic narrative she dazzled us with in *Beaches, Bananas and Bases* and *Maneuvers* involved a series of painful, politically negotiated transitions.[35] Creative writing is not simply about letting one's creative juices flow or about writing from the heart. It is by far not the undisciplined and uncontrolled activity that surfaces naturally in the late hours of the night as popular representations of genius suggest. Rather, it is about constantly juggling theorisation and experimentation without miscalculating the mixture between intellectual astuteness and captivating narrative. And it involves a great deal more political engagement, disciplined commitment and editing work than we would like to imagine. Here, I am less interested in presenting a critique of Enloe's substantive work than in re-evaluating the common idea that in fusing theory and practice or analysis and history, creative writing represents a milestone in the discipline's 'ethnographic turn'. This idea rests on a specific reading of ethnography, which demands further explication.

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35. Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 86–7.

Without doubt, Enloe is highly versed in the narrative intricacies of non-fiction writing. Her politics of 'getting personal', which masterfully alternates between candid biographical detail and outspoken political insight, hits two birds with one stone: it implodes the positivist data-collection machine that was lingering in Cohn's work and it rebels against the theoretical abstractions of academic writing. Rather than being strictly dependent upon recording and reproducing first-hand empirical information, Enloe assumes a certain literary licence that allows her to reconstruct the experiences of militarised women in her own voice. But the very same textual strategy that works to her advantage, making her books so translatable across various disciplines, genres, professions and feminist identities, is also what serves to cast doubt upon her politics of writing.

Bananas and *Maneuvers* are littered with stories of women from all walks of life, from sex trade workers to diplomatic wives, from female soldiers to historic icons. But these stories are little more than docile examples of larger circulations of power and the women behind these stories remain stick figures with no voice. Despite the wealth of contextual and colourful information we have about these women's lives, I still find it hard to imagine them *alive*. Often, they remain token representations of female oppression, whose silent presence allows Enloe to preserve an innocent authority throughout the text. Enloe's monological writing style, although engaging and provocative, is a direct consequence of the absence of fieldwork.[36] Enloe is not directly engaged in a conversation with her subjects, nor do she and her subjects take part in a shared world of experience. As a result, all potentially disturbing aspects of fieldwork, such as political differences, unexpected gender constructions, closed doors and broken hearts, are absent. What is left is Enloe's confident narrative voice, which in order to maintain its political persuasiveness is at liberty to assume the existence of a sovereign identity category called 'women'. The result is a text held together by an uninterrupted faith in the content of feminist activism and the value of identity-based resistance – a text which looks like an ethnography but feels like a manifesto.

Ironically enough, in order for Enloe to use militarised women's lives strategically, as examples for her larger arguments on gendered power, she needs to objectify their voices and hollow out their subjectivities, which is the same violent strategy used by the masculine–military complex. The unquestioned belief in the 'authentic' experiences of women and the ensuing refusal to denaturalise or, at least, complicate the secure ontological identity of 'women' is what enables both the militarisation of women's lives and the formation of a credible resistance strategy against it. The fact that Enloe never considers the problems attached to the latter, the problems inherent in the humanist promise of collective emancipation, might be attributed to her deep attachment

36. Personal communication with Cynthia Enloe via email, 25 January 2008.

to second-wave feminism and her ensuing disdain for post-identity politics. But it can also be attributed to her refusal to engage the politics of ethnography, that is, to open up her textual stylisation to a multiplicity of voices, modes of life and political strategies.

Enloe's texts are masterpieces of *style*, style as critique, style as political mobilisation and style as embellishment of facts.[37] But the style of getting personal and (auto)biographical has never been a sufficient condition for a text to pass the test of ethnography because ethnography is a political choice, not just a matter of style, technical skill, or aesthetic choice. Contrary to general opinion, ethnography is not the property of those who can write well, nor is it only for those comfortable with disclosing (auto)biographical detail. If the personal is to be taken seriously as part and parcel of theory's material and not merely as a sign of self-indulgence, as orthodox disciplinarians claim,[38] then we need more persons. In other words, we need to ask, not only 'Where are the women?', but also 'What are women?' or 'Who are the women?'. All these stories and no voices cannot protect feminist ethnography from accusations of self-absorbed narcissism.

Ethnographilia

I use the term ethnogra*philia* to refer to a variety of social constructivist contributions that employ a certain ethnographic sensibility to study everyday practices and embodied action. In the context of social constructivism, ethnography promises to lend methodological rigour to a theoretical approach that has always struggled to find a balance between agential and structural, subjective and objective, mid-level and grand-level theorising. In other words, ethnography can act as the missing methodological link that would make constructivism whole.[39] However, ethnographilia – the professed sympathy for the ethnographic works of Pierre Bourdieu,[40] Michel de Certeau[41] and James Scott[42] – only works if

37. James Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 13.

38. Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 21; for a more detailed discussion see Okely, 'Anthropology and Autobiography'.

39. Pouliot, 'Sobjectivism'.

40. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

41. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

42. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

social constructivism adopts a selective understanding of ethnography, which reduces ethnography to its constitutive method, participant observation, and purposively ignores the by now common idea that ethnographic texts always interpret, distort and betray the social reality they seek to capture.[43] Good intentions notwithstanding, ethnographilia is ultimately about helping social constructivism secure a stable middle ground between rationalist (realist or liberal) and reflexivist (critical and poststructuralist) approaches.[44] A more thorough engagement with ethnographic praxis could only threaten this ambition.

As Vincent Pouliot explains, there is no such thing as a specifically constructivist methodology.[45] Unlike realism or liberalism, constructivism is not a political theory per se, but rather a platform for social theory that presents 'the first real opportunity to generate a synthetic theory of International Relations since E.H. Carr'.[46] As such, constructivism is loosely guided by a set of ontological and epistemological commitments, but lacks a coherent methodological toolkit for examining these principles. While some regard this looseness as a source of strength – after all, this is the way in which constructivism can claim the *via media* between rationalism and reflexivism – others view it as a potential weak spot. Pouliot belongs to the latter category. He finds it necessary to outline a specifically constructivist method of inquiry, because this is 'the major missing link in constructivist theory and research',[47] which would allow constructivist researchers to speak to one another 'on fundamental issues of validity, falsifiability, and generalisability'.[48]

Pouliot considers 'subjectivism-with-an-O' – a complex algorithm which constantly alternates between thick description and historical contextualisation to ensure methodological rigour – to be the compromise best suited for this purpose. In combining 'experience-distant' and 'experience-near' knowledge, sobjectivism captures the unique 'constructivist style of reasoning' and, as a result, is perfectly capable of resolving the many tensions that beleaguer it (e.g. the agency–structure debate, the materialism–idealism dichotomy, and the rationalism–reflexivism gulf).[49]

Without doubt, Pouliot's efforts are ingenious and laudatory. But they forego their own advantage. Instead of using 'the constructivist style of reasoning' to question the scientific standards for methodological

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43. George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, 'Ethnographies as Texts', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 29.

44. Emanuel Adler, 'Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics', *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997): 319.

45. Pouliot, 'Sobjectivism'.

46. Adler, 'Seizing the Middle Ground', 323.

47. Adler cited in Pouliot, 'Sobjectivism', 359.

48. Ibid., 360.

49. Pouliot, 'Sobjectivism', 364–7.

rigour, Pouliot tries to live up to them[50] and, in doing so, compromises his ethnographilia on the altar of orthodox social science. In the end, 'subjectivism-with-an-O' becomes a mildly interpretivist stance constantly kept *en guarde* by an endemic fear not to corrupt or compromise the scientific project. As usual, if social constructivism wants to keep its distance from the frivolous excesses of solipsistic theorising, practised in other disciplines (hint: cultural anthropology!), it cannot afford to grant too much attention to subjectivity, language or reflexivity because these represent the risk of advancing a purely discursive understanding of social reality.[51] In this context, ethnography serves both as a solution to the contradictions of 'thin contructivism'[52] *and* as a cautionary tale that can prevent constructivism's fall from disciplinary grace.

Another relevant, albeit slightly more focused, example of ethnographilia comes from Iver Neumann's work on national identity formation, popular culture and the everyday practices of epistemic communities.[53] Like Pouliot, Neumann is frustrated with the 'linguistic turn' in critical IR, which has generated a wealth of 'text-based analyses of global politics that are not complemented by different kinds of contextual data from the field'.[54] To better illustrate how global politics is experienced in everyday action, Neumann recommends what Schatzki et al. call a 'practice turn'.[55]

In a nutshell, the 'practice turn' invites us to replace the discourse theories of Wittgenstein and Foucault with the social action theories of Bourdieu and de Certeau. Despite their shared affinities, the latter two offer a slightly distinct model for understanding social reality. In their ethnographic studies, Bourdieu and de Certeau draw upon minute and idiosyncratic aspects of everyday life to demonstrate how dominant cultural and political regimes are either activated or resisted at various nodes and in various modes. Whereas Foucault's theory of discourse has conflated linguistic and embodied practices to the point where the former has come to dominate the latter,[56]

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50. Ibid., 361.

51. Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz, 'From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004): 268.

52. Steve Smith, 'Wendt's World', *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 151–63.

53. Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the 'Other': The East in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Iver B. Neumann, 'To Be a Diplomat'; Iver B. Neumann and Daniel H. Nexon, *Harry Potter and International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

54. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', 628.

55. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike von Savigny, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001).

56. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', 629.

Michel de Certeau[57] has refused to reify language in order to validate social action as an intrinsic and indispensable part of discourse. IR scholars, Neumann argues, must follow de Certeau's example. We must refrain from splitting the social world into its sensory components and creating a division of labour between language and action, hearing and seeing, discourse analysis and ethnological studies.[58]

While I tend to agree with Neumann's call for a renewed interest in embodied action and visual knowledge practices, I find it unfortunate that, in making these arguments, he deems it necessary to distance himself from Foucault's theory of discourse. Foucault's theory of discourse can accommodate both discursive and non-discursive elements. It can examine the axio-epistemological statements formulated through programmes and rationalities of government as well as pay attention to the mundane and humble details found in the everyday operations of power. Discourse and practice are not only inseparable in this context, but also identical. Although my reading of Foucault is perhaps more generous than Neumann's, he is correct in pointing out that, when applied to IR, Foucault's theory of discourse has tended to generate mostly one-dimensional, that is, exclusively linguistic, interpretations of social reality. I attribute the blame for this not to Foucault, but to critically-inclined scholars who, possessing only a superficial grasp of his work, have mistaken genealogy for yet another social science method of inquiry to be used for recording, encoding and, then, decoding the concealed political meaning of various linguistic utterances. As Neumann, via de Certeau, rightfully points out, this has been a fatal error, the most common result of which has been to split the social world into its sensory components, each subject to a separate type of empirical analysis.

I dwell on Neumann's sceptical treatment of Foucauldian theory of discourse because I take it to be an apt illustration of social constructivism's aversion to language. The broad church of social constructivism has permanently been embattled over how much constitutive leeway can be attributed to ideas, identities, language, narratives and representations. Perhaps, rejecting Foucault for having overemphasised the prevalence of linguistic constructions can be read as yet another 'thin' constructivist attempt to maintain a clear distinction between the ideational and material elements of political analysis. The failure to fully accept or make complete use of Foucault's writings suggests that the 'practice turn' continues to have difficulty acknowledging language as an indispensable part of knowledge production. Unlike critical anthropology, constructivist IR has not yet come to the realisation that language is not only an intrinsic part of social reality, but also the medium used to communicate our interpretations of it. The idea that writing is an ever-present part of knowledge production, which bears difficult political/poetic implications for the

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57. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
58. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', 633.

representation of experience that cannot be reduced to method,[59] is not an insight social constructivism seems prepared to embrace despite its ethnographilic inclinations.

Although important, the contributions of the 'practice turn' are bound to remain modest. Its ethnographic ambitions are limited to a methodological critique of the overemphasis on linguistic evidence in social science research. Crudely put, the aim of the 'practice turn' is to encourage students of global politics to triangulate research methods by using the wealth of 'contextual data from the field'.[60] While this could teach us a thing or two about how to combat 'armchair analysis', it cannot show us how to fully take advantage of the promises and potentialities of ethnographic praxis. In doing ethnography, it is not sufficient to pay careful attention to everyday practices, one must also assume the political responsibilities that come with 'the specification of discourses', with asking questions like 'who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?'.[61]

The Puzzle of the Comaroffs Resolved

After a lengthy incursion into the ethnographic hesitations of disciplinary IR, it is time to return to the initial question posed by the Comaroffs. How do we explain that, just when ethnography was being challenged within cultural anthropology for its structuralist, Orientalist and masculinist foundations, other disciplines, IR included, turned to ethnography as a potential source of political emancipation?[62] In reviewing ethnoempiricist, ethnografeel and ethnographilic productions in IR, I have been less interested in the conclusions reached by these authors than in the methodological and epistemological choices and sacrifices they had to make to engage in ethnographic research and writing in the first place. What puzzles me – like the Comaroffs – is why ethnography has enjoyed such interest and support in IR, when it was under such vehement attack in its discipline of origin. The conclusion I reach here is that much of the enthusiasm surrounding ethnography in international studies is the effect of a selective and often instrumental understanding of what ethnography is and does. A closer look at the common professional and political ambitions of the 'ethnographic turn' suggests that this 'turn' could not have taken place without adopting an impoverished and somewhat antiquated definition of ethnography. Disregarding the historical controversies and political aporias of ethnographic knowledge has been a *necessary* condition for such a 'turn' to occur in the first place.

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59. Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', 2.
60. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', 628.
61. Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', 13.
62. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, 7.

Despite their differences, two common ambitions mobilise all ethnographic contributions to IR. First, ethnography was expected to launch an emancipatory empiricist research agenda that could rescue IR from moral relativism and (re)invest it with a much-desired policy voice. Second, it was hoped that ethnography would refurbish the discipline's parochial vestiges through an inter- and multi-disciplinary effort. Contrary to expectations, the ethnographic turn in IR realised neither of these ambitions. In this section I discuss the former objective, leaving the second ambition for the concluding pages.

Whether by grounding global politics in the conditions of everyday life or by paying greater attention to embodied action, reformers of the discipline – feminists and social constructivists alike – had a shared goal in mind. They hoped to distance themselves both from the politically sterile commitments of the scientific method *and* the solipsistic tendencies of what have been pejoratively called 'postmodern' theories of the political. Ethnographic modes of research and writing were deemed useful in this double pursuit because they seemed to promise a type of knowledge that was more politically engaged than that achieved through scientific deduction and more empirically accurate than that provided by discursive theories of the political.

However, I argue that, had ethnographically minded IR scholars paid greater attention to the ways in which ethnography has been written and rewritten from anthropological quarters over the past two decades, it would have been clear to them that these hopes were misplaced. Inspired by literary criticism, history and the philosophy of science, cultural anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s was consumed with challenging its constituent categories. Anthropology's pretension to study native peoples in their authentic settings was dismissed as a semiotic paradox designed to perpetuate colonial styles of rule;[63] the primary research method in anthropology, participant-observation, was critiqued for its oxymoronic logics used to shield the fieldworker from cultural contamination;[64] and anthropology's main export product, ethnography, was exposed as a textual representation that could never be safe from interpretation and dissimulation.[65] All in all, the original objective of structural-functionalist anthropology to represent reality as faithfully and completely as possible was dismissed as a skilful narrative device meant to keep the narrative authority of ethnographers intact.[66] This so-called *crise de conscience* brought anthropology's age of

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63. Arjun Appadurai, 'Putting Hierarchy in Its Place', *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988): 36–49.

64. Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority'.

65. Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths'.

66. James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 100.

innocence to an end, throwing the discipline into a decade-long quest of soul-searching, textual improvisation and disciplinary self-doubt. It is here, in this climate of uncertainty and vulnerability, that the new ethnography was born.

The new ethnography was going to be a transparent and collaborative textual practice open to subaltern voices, receptive to subjectivity, language and reflexivity, and even tolerant of fantasy and fiction. Since there was little guidance and no solid guarantees as to what an ethical representation of alterity might look like, trial-and-error experimentation was called for. By the early 1990s, ethnographic texts were dialogic or polyphonic, interpretative or experimental, personal or fictional. But beyond the enthusiasm of this generation lingered a modernist naiveté about the emancipatory potentials of ethnographic representations. Dialogical texts, with their strategy of quoting informants at length, offered only a superficial compromise to a much more complex problem.[67] Polyphonic texts, although arguably more democratic in their inclusion of characters, plot, drama and sentiment, were also suspect in so far as the ethnographer, now relegated to an editorial role, continued to hold veto power.[68] Biographical and autobiographical texts were often little more than lyrical pieces of prose self-indulgent in their analysis and superficial in their political commitment.[69] Overall, critical ethnography had not managed to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of alterity. No matter how much the voice or the subjectivity of the subaltern was being in/evoked, the other was still not the agent of ethnographic texts. Seen in this light, anthropology's recent story of becoming may seem daunting – a disciplinary dead end, yet another moment of theoretical navel-gazing. Surprisingly, however, the impossibility of recent cultural anthropology to resolve the aporias of representation was not received as a sign of defeat, but as proof that the days of innocent writing were gone forever. Over two decades of ethnographic experimentation have demonstrated that reality does not have 'an idiom in which it prefers to be described'.[70] Neither functionalism and realism, nor allegory and polyphony, can absolve ethnographic texts from their inherent violences and vulnerabilities. Unlike in IR, where ethnography has been viewed as a solution to the crisis of representation, as a way out of radical reflexivity and moral incertitude and a way into policy-relevant knowledge, cultural anthropology has come to accept critical ethnography as

67. Dennis Tedlock, 'The Analogical Tradition and the Emergence of a Dialogical Anthropology', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 35, no. 4 (1979): 397.

68. Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', 139–40.

69. See Ruth Behar, 'Ethnography and the Book that Was Lost', *Ethnography* 4, no. 1 (2003): 15–39; Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

70. Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 140.

the brainchild of its disciplinary uncertainties, as something that is here to stay for anthropologists to work with, not as a momentary obstacle to be overcome.

The regulatory mechanisms of disciplinary IR are such that extra-disciplinary efforts are granted a 'workers' visa' only if they conform to already-existing criteria for good research and unless they do anything to perturb the ontological imagination of the discipline. When stripped of its political baggage and reduced to a method, an aesthetic convention or a theoretical sensibility, the main export product of cultural anthropology fulfils these conditions.[71] A poor familiarity with anthropological debates and literatures post-Geertz, an endemic fear of pushing the boundaries too far in the direction of theoretical solipsism, a belief in the empirical muscle and the emancipatory potential of experience-near methods of research, and a continued refusal to engage in the political responsibilities opened up by an ethnography enmeshed in language, allowed a certain type of ethnography to gain a temporary 'workers' visa' in international studies. Had ethnography not been viewed in these reductionist and instrumental terms, I doubt that IR scholars would have demonstrated such generosity in making it their source of disciplinary reform.

What the Comaroffs have identified as the seemingly contradictory 'status of ethnography in the human sciences',[72] can be attributed to a critical lag between the two disciplines. Having missed the effect of the 1986 moment, which has radically reshaped the self-image of cultural anthropology and, implicitly, ethnographic praxis, the 'ethnographic turn' in IR lacks a thorough grasp of anthropology's canons and debates. Consequently, ethnographically minded IR scholars borrow uncritically from anthropology to fashion politically hesitant ethnographic simulations. The kind of ethnography that has been emulated in IR is a particularly parochial one. In fact, it is the same kind of ethnography that has come under vehement attack in cultural anthropology for its realist-positivist inheritances. Ethnography, as it is being practised in the most audacious corners of anthropology, has yet to be discovered by students of global politics. Although such ethnographic practice could never amass enough appeal and confidence to generate an epistemological turn, it could pose a veritable threat to the self-image of disciplinary IR and, in doing so, entail a much greater promise to international studies.

Towards an Ethnographic Reading/Writing of International Relations

A second objective of the 'ethnographic turn' was to refurbish the parochial vestiges of international relations. Often accused of being

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71. Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places*, 62.
72. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, 7.

one of the most insular and hermetic disciplines, with little or belated attention to other fields of study, bodies of literature and sources of knowledge,[73] post-Cold War IR scholars found it useful to branch out in a series of multi- and inter-disciplinary turns: the linguistic turn, the aesthetic turn, the practice turn and, finally, the ethnographic turn. In the case of the latter, importing the main staple of cultural anthropology was deemed enough to achieve a disciplinary breakthrough. Although the 'ethnographic turn' fitted in well with the larger critique of IR being a state-centric discipline, unable to grasp the minute and complex details of political life in an age of globalisation, ethnographic modes of research and writing had little transformatory effect upon the constitutive categories of the discipline. The limited version of ethnography employed in feminist and social constructivist productions cannot bear the entire blame for this. A more important reason is that most IR scholars work with an onto-spatial understanding of disciplinarity to legitimate their multi- and inter-disciplinary efforts. The very idea of *bringing* ethnography *inside* IR requires 'the ontologisation of the discipline'[74] into a sovereign corporeal presence that exists both independently of other disciplines and separately of the world it intends to analyse. Viewed as such, it seems possible to resuscitate IR's age of glory simply by stretching the discipline's territorial boundaries through extra-disciplinary imports. However, the successive deconstructive efforts of R. B. J. Walker,[75] Marshall Beier,[76] and Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney[77] illustrate that such hopes are in vain.

'Theories of international relations', Walker writes, 'are interesting less for the substantive explanations they offer about political conditions in the modern world than as expressions of the limits of the contemporary imagination'.[78] Indeed, the analytic frameworks IR offers are far less interesting than the ontological boundaries and the axiological warning signs it imposes. In teaching us the limits of rational and responsible political action and in making those limits coincide with the spatio-temporal dimensions of the sovereign state, IR has not just validated the state as the only legitimate actor on the international stage, it has invested its knowledge practices with physical permanence and moral legitimacy. Not without the complicity of its most loyal practitioners,

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73. Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places*, 54.

74. Marshall J. Beier and Samantha L. Arnold, 'Becoming Undisciplined: Toward the Supradisciplinary Study of Security', *International Studies Review* 7 (2005): 53–4.

75. R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

76. Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places*.

77. Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

78. Walker, *Inside/Outside*, 5.

IR has become a space with a firm territoriality, fixed boundaries and a strict code of conventions, an island to which foreign ideas can migrate and from which disturbing elements can be banned, a land where all spatio-temporal tensions of modernity (e.g. community, democracy, security) can be resolved.

Taking Walker's critique one step further, Beier demonstrates that the boundary disciplinary IR imposed between a sovereign 'inside', where peace, community and progress reside, and an anarchic 'outside', where chaos and barbarism pervade, is in fact a historico-cultural division between 'modern' and 'pre-modern' forms of political existence. In order for IR to maintain its epistemic security, the non-statist political alternatives of indigenous people, women and racialised subjects must be banished as primitive aberrations always prone to conflict and insecurity.[79] Ethnographic representations of 'primitive' peoples play a crucial role in this because the writings of colonial explorers, missionaries and travellers – all of which belong to ethnography's family tree – reinforce IR's constitutive fantasy, namely, the idea that the 'state of nature' is an anarchic and barbaric realm. Although ethnographic praxis has been dismissed from the disciplinary toolkit as a method suitable only for studying the pre-political past, IR continues to use the rhetorical and representational mechanisms of colonial monographs – e.g. the objectification, reification and temporal fixation of the other[80] – to carve out a disciplinary place for itself. And, in doing so, it inadvertently becomes an ethnographic account of modern political 'man'.[81]

Similar to Walker and Beier, Inayatullah and Blaney read IR as a profoundly western discourse that must either banish or assimilate difference in order to appear as a seamlessly integrated and self-evidently rational realm of knowledge.[82] Incapable to confront the problem of cultural difference or to account for matters of race, identity and history, all of which are of prime interest in an era of spatio-temporal acceleration, disciplinary IR remains caught in a realm of stasis and repetition where the economy of violence, manifested in the colonial encounter, is bound to reproduce itself over and over again.

Unlike Beier, whose thorough familiarity with the colonial history of anthropology made him suspicious of ethnography's political promise, for Inayatullah and Blaney, ethnography is the prime textual tool for reading, interpreting and rewriting disciplinary IR. They encourage students of global politics to practise what Todorov described as an 'ethnological stance', that is, a textual strategy that allows 'the coexistence of mixed and overlapping modes of social life and points to a

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79. Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places*, 34–5.
80. Ibid., 54.
81. Ibid., 70.
82. Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 11.

possible dialogue among them' without reducing radical difference to a benign and romantic version of cultural diversity.[83] In its readiness to use radical difference as a resource for cultural self-examination, the ethnological stance has a unique ability to destabilise the essentially colour- and culture-blind discourse of IR.[84] This, in turn, can help 'provincialise' the European-inspired intellectual history of the discipline, which, although indispensable, has proven inadequate for theorising the present postcolonial condition.[85]

The challenge facing the study of global politics today is not some disciplinary impasse (i.e. postmodern solipsism), but the growing awareness that IR is less a discipline than a series of disciplining acts meant to police the sensible boundaries of politics, identity, community or democracy. To rearticulate the categories of political existence it is not enough to 'borrow from', 'bring in' or 'turn to' neighbouring disciplines, which are often fraught with the burden of their own historicity. Inter- or multi-disciplinary solutions are not enough to disturb disciplinary power because although, occasionally, 'extra-disciplinary insights and ideas' may be granted a 'workers' visa', only rarely do they come to enjoy 'the rights of full disciplinary "citizenship"'.[86] Contrary to expectations, disciplinary turns, and the hyphenated efforts that support them, help reinvest disciplinary IR with a corporeal presence wrapped in an aura of permanence, hence sheltering it from temporal contingency and cultural difference.[87] What is needed is a radical critique of the onto-spatial imagination of IR, a critique that can make disciplinarity part of our research, not as an explanatory framework, but as an independent variable.[88] Only a critical ethnographic study of IR, that is, an ethnography that takes IR's own theories, histories and actors as its main objects of research, can accomplish such a task and open up the sovereign foundation of the discipline to cross-cultural or culture-to-culture engagements.[89]

The stakes involved in practising critical ethnography may be higher today, but so are its promises. Critical ethnography may not be able to provide us with a glimpse of authentic ways of life, let the subaltern speak, produce knowledge uncorrupted by power and desire, or make any guarantees of emancipation, but it can help us read and write global politics differently. The radical promise of ethnography lies in its ability

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83. Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 169.

84. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12.

85. Ibid., 16–17.

86. Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places*, 62.

87. Ibid., 59.

88. Beier and Arnold, 'Becoming Undisciplined', 59.

89. Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 3.

to expose IR as a culturally and historically specific ethnographic account of modern man and his political place in the world. According to this reading, ethnography does not have to be brought into or compared to IR because it is already here and we need to write it.

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