

## *Violent international relations*

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Van Milders, L. and Toros, H. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9139-5292> (2020) Violent international relations. European Journal of International Relations, 26 (1). pp. 116-139. ISSN 1460-3713 doi: 10.1177/1354066120938832 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/113799/>

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Published version at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354066120938832>

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1354066120938832>

Publisher: Sage

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# Violent International Relations

European Journal of  
International Relations  
2020, Vol. 26(S1) 116–139  
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DOI: 10.1177/1354066120938832  
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## Abstract

Can International Relations (IR) be studied without reproducing its violence? This is the central question of this article. To investigate this, the first step is to expose the violence that we argue remains at the heart of our discipline. The article thus begins by exploring the disciplinary practices firmly grounded in relations of coloniality that plague disciplines more broadly and IR in particular. An analysis of IR's epistemic violence is followed by an autoethnographic exploration of IR's violent practices, specifically the violent practices in which one of the article's authors knowingly and unknowingly engaged in as part of an impact-related trip to the international compound of Mogadishu International Airport in Somalia. Here the article lays bare how increasing demands on IR scholars to become 'international experts' having impact on the policy world is pushing them more and more into spaces governed by colonial violence they are unable to escape. The final section of this article puts forward a tentative path toward a less violent IR that advocates almost insignificant acts of subversion in our disciplinary approach and practices aimed at exposing and challenging this epistemic and structural violence. The article concludes that IR does not need to be abandoned, but rather, by taking on a position of discomfort, needs to acknowledge its violence and attempt to mitigate it – one almost insignificant step at a time.

## Keywords

International Relations, violence, autoethnography, epistemic violence, disciplinarity, impact

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## Introduction

In 2008, Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True (2008: 694) asked the question: 'How can we study power and identify ways to mitigate its abuse in the real world when we, as international relations researchers, also participate in the powerful projection of knowledge in this world?' Their answer, part of a feminist path towards responsible International Relations (IR) scholarship, took what had so far remained in the margins of IR – a focus on what was falling through the cracks of disciplinary boundaries, on those who remained unrecognised as agents of IR and as theorists of IR and on the role of the researcher – and brought it to the centre of IR research. More than 10 years later, this article begins its investigation with the same question. Can IR be studied without reproducing its violence? We believe the question needs to be asked again for two reasons. First, we argue that many (though not all) IR scholars, particularly of the critical family, have sought to break down the boundaries of IR through interdisciplinarity. This, we argue, has bore some fruit but has failed to fundamentally challenge the violence of disciplinarity and of the IR discipline in particular. Second, the disciplinary practices of IR have changed in several important ways in the past decade and the question needs to be revisited in an era of growing pressures on academics, in particular to have 'impact' on policymakers. While this tended to be the remit of mainstream scholars, the pervasiveness of the 'impact agenda' in IR has meant that critical scholars have also been called upon and pressed to become 'international experts'. By becoming such experts, an increasing number of critical scholars have begun a direct engagement with the centres of power: political, military, economic and cultural. As such, we believe it is time to ask the question of how we can study and practice IR without reproducing its violence while focusing on and engaging with the centres of power. Investigating this question is the central aim of this article.

We do this by exposing the violence of disciplinarity and of our discipline of IR, through an examination of the construction of expert knowledge – typically steeped in relations of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) – as well as the covert practices that silence, domesticate or gentrify alternatives. We argue in Part 2 that although interdisciplinarity has opened up new theoretical and practice-oriented lines of inquiry that are better equipped to respond to emerging challenges and questions, this search for answers in other disciplines has often become an end in itself that leaves intact the more fundamental assumptions that give rise to disciplinary violence. We understand this violence to involve the politics of knowledge production that informs the theory but also the practices of knowledge workers or academic experts. The focus here therefore is the practices and specifically the racialised, gendered and sexualised colonial dynamics of knowledge cultivation and production in IR. Indeed, although IR is gradually following other disciplines in casting a critical eye on its complicity in institutional practices of colonialism, we argue that the violent separation of a zone of expert knowledge from the zone of lived experience – to be understood through the Fanonian concepts of the zone of being and the zone of nonbeing (1952) – has yet to be challenged. This separation and the practices that ensue from it lead to both an epistemic violence that characterises IR in its disciplinary conceptualisation and a structural violence in its common practices. The future of IR is thus not to be sought in interdisciplinarity but rather in rethinking the discipline of IR through a direct challenge of the violence that marks our disciplinary lives.

Indeed, ever since Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (1975), modern apparatuses of disciplination have been exposed as mechanisms of control that produce the modern subject. The emergence of modern, academic disciplines is indeed not merely an efficient division of intellectual labour but also the imposition of robust limits to human inquiry. More fundamentally, however, disciplinary fetishisation or decadence – which occurs when a proponent of a discipline ontologises their discipline far beyond its scope (Gordon, 2006) – also has an intrinsically colonial and Eurocentric fabric as practices of disciplinarity and categorisation converted colonial societies into 'laboratories of Western sciences' where imperial control could be exercised through a variety of political, governmental, and pedagogical tools (Smith, 2012: 38). We argue that the international expert – a role increasingly performed by IR scholars – can be understood as the contemporary embodiment of this disciplinarity, perpetuating colonial practices of knowledge production today.

In recent years, scholars in a range of disciplines have sought to expose their complicity in the practices of colonial capitalism. This entails, among others, exposing the Eurocentric conception of history (Goody, 2012), articulating the whiteness of anthropology's human subject (Weheliye, 2014), addressing the complicity of philosophy and specifically political theory in facilitating colonial practices (Mbembe, 2017; Losurdu, 2011), and investigating the colonial conception of knowledge production in sociology (Connell, 2007). Especially the latter has been central to a range of decolonial interventions that are taking place in disciplines, curricula, departments and universities worldwide (Bhambra et al., 2018). In IR, this decolonial turn has identified the mainstream conception of the discipline as distributing, to use W. E. B. Du Bois's terms, a global colour line (Anievas et al., 2014; Du Bois, 1903). This is not only related to the colonality of IR's adherence to a white world order (Vitalis, 2015) or to the Eurocentric conception of its theoretical canon (Hobson, 2012) but also to the need to decolonise the discipline altogether (Jones, 2006). Feminist IR scholars meanwhile have challenged IR's disciplinary violence, by highlighting how its practices do not allow for interrogations that 'destabilize the epistemological, ontological, and methodological master-narratives of the discipline' (Zalewski, 2006: 44). In fact, with its focus on conventional social science methodologies, Marysia Zalewski (2006: 45) argues that IR inhibits 'recognition of all the exclusions and sacrifices required in order to tell a singular story'. Christine Sylvester (2011, 2012, 2013) has further exposed how IR has used disciplinary boundaries to delegitimise the human experience as knowledge in IR. Importantly, numerous feminist scholars have put reflexivity at the centre of their methodology placing researchers and researched 'on the same critical plane' (Wibben, 2011: 18; Ackerly et al., 2006: 4).

So what contribution can we make here? While recognising the important decolonial, feminist and other critical contributions to IR so far, this article aims to make three contributions. First, we focus on the dynamics of knowledge production through the Fanonian concepts of zones of being and nonbeing, which, we argue, fully reveals the violence of IR and its range of practices. Through this lens, we can expose the production of the Western academic knowledge worker – the international expert – as a privileged subject of knowledge production and dissemination. This is revealed in Part 3, in an intimate description of 21st century international expertise that takes the form of an autoethnographic account of Toros' trip to Mogadishu International Airport (MIA) in Somalia. This highly securitised airport complex houses the United Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), several embassies,

some foreign militaries and an array of private contractors serving these missions, turning it into a village of ‘internationals’ who are in Somalia to help, or to secure, or to feed, or sometimes quite simply and openly, to make money. Toros was there to have ‘impact’ – to demonstrate, as per the British Economic and Social Research Council’s definition that her work is ‘influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour’ (ESRC, 2018). Impact is now a key criterion for judging the quality of universities and selected ‘Impact Case Studies’ represent a source of prestige and income for British universities. Impact, we argue, requires adopting a position as international expert. Revisiting Carol Cohn’s (1987: 687) ‘close encounter with nuclear strategic analysis’, this autoethnography aims to offer a brutal exposure of how a critical scholar can find themselves enmeshed and complicit in IR’s violence.

This highlights the second main contribution of this article. Unlike most past critiques, we choose to expose the violence of IR by adopting an ‘insider’ rather than an ‘outsider’ position. Outsider status, one adopted by most decolonial and feminist approaches that purposely examine IR from its margins (see the rationale for this in Robinson, 2006), has been central to exposing the violence of scholarship and practice, as it has brought ‘to the fore issues of marginalisation and difference within the field’ (Ackerly et al., 2008: 2). Feminist contributions crucially allow for ‘the recognition of people other than those normally afforded intellectual property in IR scholarship as experts – as theorists – in and of their own words’ (Shepherd, 2017: 78). This is done by standing with the marginalised – from the outside looking in. We have chosen and to some degree feel forced to adopt an insider position, both because of who we are and because of the transformation of IR. As middle-class white scholars raised and educated in the Global North (indeed both in Aberystwyth, the ascribed birthplace of the discipline of IR), we believe we cannot but take an insider position. This is further compounded by the increasing recognition of one of us as an ‘international expert’ called upon to have impact on political and military centres of power. We believe such an analysis – examining our violence as international experts embedded in the international policy world – is essential to understand the often hidden violence of contemporary IR practices.

This position of insider complicity leads to the final contribution of this article, examined in Part 4. Here we argue that from a complicit insider’s position there is no path for us towards a truly ethical IR scholarship. Unlike scholars who position themselves as outsiders who feel they can seek a path towards responsible or ethical scholarship (see for a variety of approaches Ackerly and True, 2008; Jackson, 2016), we argue that as insiders we must limit our aspirations to at worst being simply complicit whistle-blowers or at best *less* violent scholars. The former can expose how IR is not only implicated in colonial power relations through its framing of world politics but also increasingly complicit through its practices as agents of an expropriation of economic, social and political capital that characterises contemporary international politics. The latter can hope that by exposing this violence on the inside through *almost* insignificant acts of subversion, there is the possibility of an IR that is more self-reflexive *and* potentially more transformative.

## Violent Disciplinaryity

Our first argument is that any attempt to reform, or indeed redeem, the discipline of IR needs to begin with an exposure of its violence. This requires a critical analysis

of disciplinarity itself as well as of IR in particular. The former refers to Foucault's canonical analysis of modern regimes of discipline but also the role disciplinarity plays at informing our understanding of knowledge production more specifically. Although the modern disciplinary system is itself a product of the 19th century, when scholars sought to both institutionalise their increased specialisation as well as develop a framework of reference to communicate their research with their peers, the idea of a taxonomy of knowledge runs back much further. Typically, the history of categorising knowledge is something that allegedly started with Plato and sees the entire history of Western philosophy and science as a project of ordering knowledge, with disciplines becoming a central instrument for this, as they not only imposed a fragmentation of and order to knowledge but also a sense of hierarchy among them (Weingart, 2010). Central here is the idea that knowledge production necessarily involves a taxonomy, order, fragmentation and hierarchy and, most importantly, the idea that disciplinarity is an intrinsically European/Western concept.

Knowledge production in Western epistemology is indeed considered to be a homogenous and singular enterprise, with modern (i.e. Western) science gradually becoming the arbiter of what constitutes 'proper' knowledge and what does not. The Eurocentric nature of this conception is further clarified when the colonial character of notions such as disciplinarity, method, rationality, science and even logic are unpacked. Following Linda Tuhiwai Smith, these notions – which typically inform the Western understanding of academic research – betray 'a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualisation of such things as time, space, and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialised forms of language, and structures of power' (Smith, 2012: 44). The double meaning of discipline thereby folds onto itself when the regimes of colonisation that disciplined people into submission and oppression resonated within the universalisation of a particular epistemology that disciplined knowledge into a conception that was characterised by rationality, objectivity and universality and regarded everything else as irrational, subjective and particular.

It was indeed precisely through a desire to organise, classify and store knowledge (something that was directly reflected in the colonial project itself) that disciplines served their colonial function as they were required to process the influx of 'knowledge' from the colonies. In short, the colonies acted as the laboratories of Western science (Smith, 2012: 18; but also Deb Roy, 2012; Steinmetz, 2017). Imperial colonialism is therefore at its heart also a project of building an infrastructure of knowledge production that shapes and maintains the hegemonic position of European empires. It is worth quoting Willinsky at length here.

Colonial rule gave rise to a new class of knowledge workers in universities, government offices, industry, and professions devoted to colonial conquest by classification and categorisation. They travelled, formed learned societies, created experimental gardens, and established laboratories. They joined in building the military, political, religious, and economic structures of global empires. If imperialism proved to be the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, as Hannah Arendt has suggested, with businessmen assuming the role of international statesmen, it was no less liberating for the attending scholars and educators. The learned helped fashion an imperial design on the world, and they arranged to have the splendid souls of this adventure in learning exhibited in lectures, circuses, museums, zoological and botanical gardens, and written and illustrated accounts, each providing its own lesson on the wonders of empire. Imperialism proved a keen sponsor of an extensive public education on the benefits of global domination.

How could such a sustained sweeping effort help but end up defining the world for the West? (Willinsky, 1998: 26).

Although disciplines are as such medieval concepts, it was through their institutionalised practices of 'show-and-tell' colonialism that they effectively became both a handmaiden and beneficiary of empire. This is particularly clear for disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, which originated out of an attempt to legitimise the hierarchy and, ultimately, supremacy of Western society and white humanity. Yet it is also this new class of knowledge workers that prefigured the role of the international expert as a disciplinary agent that distributes a colonial politics of knowledge production.

The drive towards institutionalisation, fragmentation, and hierarchy then further accelerates the efficacy of disciplines to maintain the colonial order. A key assumption that facilitates this is every discipline's desire to coincide with reality itself. This gives way to, what Lewis R. Gordon refers to as, disciplinary decadence: the process through which a discipline ontologises itself beyond its scope and can criticise or even ignore other disciplines for having a limited point of view. The sciences can ignore the humanities as they are not scientific, history can ignore the other disciplines for not being historical, philosophy can ignore other disciplines for not being philosophical, and so on (Gordon, 2006: 33). It is arguably easy to see how IR is itself a decadent discipline *par excellence*, as it sees its subject of analysis literally corresponding with the world itself. This is reflected by one of the discipline's spectrum of nomenclature that includes global politics, world politics and geopolitics. No other discipline is, for instance, characterised by pictures of the globe that feature on the cover of textbooks, departmental flyers and websites, journals or edited volumes. In a typical decadent fashion, IR can criticise all other disciplines for not being 'international', a term that more often than not simply refers to the world. As it ontologises itself to correspond to the world, it is impossible for IR to accept or even acknowledge the possibility of disciplinary decline or decay: 'Like empires, the presumption is that the discipline must outlive all, including its own purpose' (Gordon, 2014: 86). Or, to paraphrase Fredric Jameson, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of the discipline that claims to study it, that is, IR.

So how then does disciplinarity distribute violence? As argued by Michel Foucault, the 18th century penal system contributed to the formation of the modern subject as a disciplined individual through means of coercion and the infamous panopticon (Foucault, 1975). However, whereas the relation between violence and discipline has commonly been understood through historical regimes of governmentality, what we are talking about here is the violence of disciplinarity itself. This concerns the idea that the very imposition of disciplinarity as simply a reconstitution of thought is facilitated by the capacity of violence to shutdown debate, interrogation, or negotiation and thereby undermine any form of critical and reflective scrutiny into its operation. Indeed, this is what allows for disciplinarity to reconstitute thought into a calculative mode of rationality that obscures the colonial conception of Western epistemology.

It is important to note that this critique also extends to interdisciplinarity, a concept that can be seen as actually strengthening disciplinary rationality by addressing a given *problématique* through a variety of still separate and clearly delineated disciplines. In IR, interdisciplinarity is typically understood to be part of the discipline's historical fabric. Prior to the establishment of the first Chair in International Relations at Aberystwyth University in

1919, the study of international politics was carried out by figures as diverse as diplomats, military strategists, politicians as well as scholars from disciplines with a critical interest in the European balance of power. It concerned intellectuals that were versed in historical, legal, political and economic theory and their scholarship highlighted the emerging field's interdisciplinary identity. After 1919, IR further integrated concepts, theories and methods from other disciplines into its lexicon, thereby continuing to establish itself as the emerging site of knowledge production on international politics (Ashworth, 2009: 17). Leaving the well-known history of IR's disciplination into the prison of political sciences for what it is (Rosenberg, 2016), interdisciplinarity should by no means be regarded as a solution to the colonial nature of disciplinarity as it was discussed above. Interdisciplinarity still presumes a context wherein disciplines operate 'along side each other like ships passing in the night' (Gordon, 2014: 87). Crucially, through the maintenance of walls separating zones of expert knowledge (whether disciplinary or interdisciplinary) and zones of lived experience, what is left intact is the colonial disposition for organising knowledge along white, Western lines. This is why looking for answers in other disciplines will not suffice to confront the violence that IR's disciplinary boundaries distribute. Placing oneself in the 'in-between' of interdisciplinarity carries with it the effect of operating in a nowhere and that deprives one of the ability to 'free up knowledge flows' and thereby halt the colonial distribution of disciplinary violence (Darby, 2003: 148).

We advance here a two-pronged conception of disciplinary violence. On the one hand, as is argued in this section, the epistemic violence of colonial disciplinarity shuts down debate and critique and leaves unhindered violent regimes of governmentality. On the other hand, as it will be argued in the next section, this form of violence is epitomised in the international expert. What moulds this all together is, apart from disciplinary fragmentation and hierarchy, the insulation of rational, objective and universal knowledge (typically associated with Western epistemology) from irrational, subjective and particular knowledge (although it is commonly referred to as experience or a perspective as opposed to knowledge). What this concerns is a colonial matrix of power that is based on a racist classification of the world (Quijano, 2007: 171). This is indeed one, as Kerem Nisancioglu argues in this issue, that still affects IR's racialised account of one of its key elements of analysis: sovereignty (2020). The colonial infrastructure of knowledge production is thus part of a much broader matrix of colonial hierarchies that were imposed through European imperialism since 1492. This involved, among others, a racist hierarchy that privileged European whiteness and a sexist hierarchy that privileged the European masculinity (Grosfoguel, 2009). Indeed, the colonial framework is deeply racist and gendered, and we understand it as such in this article. It also includes a global epistemic hierarchy that privileges the Western mode of knowledge production as the only viable way of producing knowledge that is universal, objective, neutral and scientific. As mentioned above, this concerns ideas about organising, classifying and storing knowledge, yet it is specifically by hiding its locus of enunciation that its claims towards universality are facilitated. Indeed, similar to decadent disciplines, Western epistemology presents itself as coinciding with universality and is therefore capable of generating absolute knowledge by subjugating other modes of knowledge production as particular, subjective, biased and un-scientific. This epistemic subsequently operates through binary conceptions such as the West and the Rest that, on the one hand, consolidate a position of imperial hegemony while, on the other, cement other perspectives, knowledges and experiences into a subjugated position (Hall, 1996).

The result of this is, in the words of Frantz Fanon, a dividing of the world in a zone of being and zone of nonbeing. For if it is only the Western mode of knowledge production that is capable of generating universal knowledge, then this means that the Western experience itself necessarily corresponds to the experience of humanity as such. Everything else is not a different type of knowledge – since this would affect the appeal to universality that marks Western epistemology – but is simply non-existent. What separates the zone of nonbeing from the zone of being is an unsurmountable line that strips the non-Western other of their ontological resistance. In the zone of nonbeing, colonial racialisation inescapably subjects one to disempowerment and objectification. For Fanon, the reasons behind this are plain and simple: ‘The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. He finds himself predestined master of this world. He enslaves it. An acquisitive relation is established between the world and him’ (Fanon, 2008: 97).

Two questions emerge out of this. Firstly, how does the zone of nonbeing determine modes of knowledge production in the 21st century? If the line separating the two zones is, historically, one that separated the European metropolises from their colonies, how then do we need to understand the effects of this in a period where colonial administrations have nominally disappeared but relations of coloniality have remained? Second, what insights can be developed with regards to IR’s epistemic violence? Regarding the first question, it is important to understand that the zone of being and the zone of nonbeing no longer correspond to a geographical delineation, if they ever did. The period of decolonisation after 1945 has effectively multiplied the abyssal line that separates the two zones into a plethora of global lines that have made it more difficult to identify where the zone of being ends and where the zone of nonbeing begins. The time where one could neatly distinguish the two zones is over. What has remained is a messy cartography of intersecting lines that produce the physical coexistence of gated communities that house a global elite surrounded by zones of nonbeing or urban slums that have become sites of exploitation for a global *lumpenproletariat* within zones of being. Typical subjects that emerge in this context are the undocumented migrant worker, the criminalised refugee, the racialised terrorist suspect, etc.; that is, subjects whose identity no longer corresponds to a neat divide between the zone of being and zone of nonbeing. Indeed, in its exacerbated state, the cartography of abyssal lines has made the distinction between the zone of being and nonbeing vague and yet absolute. Vague, as there is no longer a clear divide between the zones. Absolute, as experiences of nonbeing or nonexistence remain as fundamental to those living below the abyssal lines now as they were during the times of Fanon.

This has also left a mark on the dynamics of knowledge production. Our conceptualisation of ‘the other side of the line’ is always determined by Western epistemology’s abyssal thinking, that is, the colonial matrix of knowledge production (Santos, 2007). In other words, this messy cartography is predicated on the assumption that those within the zone of nonbeing cannot speak or think (Spivak, 1994). The hierarchy between rational, objective and universal knowledge and irrational, subjective and particular experience continues to operate through Orientalist conceptions about who knows and who is known or who produces knowledge and who produces experience. In short, the violence of colonial difference constitutes the Western, academic knowledge worker, whether they work strictly within disciplinary boundaries or an interdisciplinary fashion. And this

brings us to the second question: what does this mean for knowledge production in IR? Here we point to the ontological gap between knowledge and experience that has recently been articulated as a critique of the role of the expert as an Orientalist subject (Kynsilehto and Puumala, 2015; Sylvester, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Indeed, the 'international' nature of IR and of its scholars make the discipline a 'front-line' discipline that often resides in practices along the abyssal lines between the zones of being and nonbeing. This is caused by the object of enquiry of the discipline – formally the power relations between states but, as is increasingly recognised, the power relations between people. It is also caused by the practices of the discipline – the need to perform the role and lifestyle of the international expert for research, dissemination and increasingly impact. There are many ways in which this is distributed across the discipline, yet what the iterations of disciplinary violence in IR tend to have in common is a further proliferation of the limits of IR as essentially an abyssal line. This concerns, for instance, the decadent or disciplinary nature of mainstream IR, widely critiqued elsewhere (such as in Ashley and Walker, 1990 and Weber, 2014 to name but two separated by decades). However, critical strands of IR theory might have, despite their efficacy at exposing the violence performed by mainstream IR, implicitly (and presumably undeliberately) contributed to the image of the critical theorist as an expert or intellectual, characterised by the privilege to withdraw politically and theorise both systemically as well as globally (Linklater, 1996). This image subsequently solicits and naturalises a range of theoretical inquiries that not only stem from the zone of being but also, as mentioned above, continue to demarcate an abyssal line around the discipline. This has, in recent years, allowed for the continued support for Western military violence in post-colonial states, even when such instances have had disastrous effects (see debate between Dunne and Gelber, 2014, Hehir, 2015, and again Dunne and Gelber, 2015 as well as the critique of feminist support for war in Afghanistan in Wibben, 2011). The violent nature of IR is also evident from its inclusion of non-Western forms of theory (typically presented as reactionary and anti-Western) on the premise that they do not challenge the discipline's inherently Western epistemology (Buzan, 2018). The violence of IR theory is then characterised by its capacity and often willingness to maintain relations of both material as well as epistemic coloniality.

This article is not about pointing accusatory fingers at specific instances of disciplinary and epistemic violence, which would indeed aid to exceptionalise said violence. Yet the question remains: what marks the violence of IR that cannot be solely attributed to the fact that it is a discipline like any other, and can we study IR without reproducing said violence? To clarify, the type of violence we are talking about is not merely the direct violence of physical and material force or the indirect violence of the aggregate actions of social groups or institutions, such as a refugee crisis or the concentration of wealth. Rather, it is the violence of pacification: a form of domination that (re)structures the political order and ensures that violent resistance against it is infrequent (Baron et al., 2019: 203). The violence of pacification is often inconspicuous, yet it operates through means of coercion that are rendered visible whenever they are resisted. As such, it is similar to Slavoj Žižek's discussion of the maintaining function of objective violence in capitalist ideology that incites the eruption of subjective violence of anti-capitalist struggles and riots (2009). In IR, this pacification is distributed through the so-called liberal world order, often celebrated for bestowing the world with liberal peace and a decline of violence (Ikenberry, 2009;

Pinker, 2012). Yet liberal pacification is still violent, as ‘it coerces a specific type of liberal docility, while also preventing types of resistance that might be understood as violent, including riots, insurrections, civil wars, and inter-state wars. Pacification reveals the ongoing violence at the heart of a political project that imagines itself to be against violence’ (Baron et al., 2019: 207). As it concerns the shaping and maintaining of a political order that seeks to hide its apparatus of violent coercion, the violence of pacification also intersects with the epistemic violence that is distributed through a colonial epistemology. It is indeed the epistemic violence that seeks to silence marginalised groups such as the subaltern nonspecialists, the illiterate peasantry, and the urban subproletariat (Spivak, 1994). Through IR’s violence, the international is reconfigured into a discipline that silences these voices in a seemingly non-violent way by subjugating their experiences as in need of translation or assimilation into expert knowledge that can be evaluated against disciplining/disciplinary criteria, that is, impact. So as opposed to trivialising IR’s violence by exceptionalising it, we rather seek to highlight the deeply embedded nature of this violence across the discipline, although of course distributed to varying degrees.

For this, we adopt an insider position and choose to make ourselves ‘the target of [our] own words’ (Inayatullah, 2010: 2). In the next section, we therefore seek to explore the violence of IR by engaging in a first-person account of Toros’ research and impact work, highlighting the layered practices of violence that she knowingly and unknowingly participated in. This autoethnographic approach is best understood as an attempt ‘to show rather than tell’ (Inayatullah, 2010: 2), showing through words but also through photographs that aim to further draw the reader into the experience of the IR scholar’s practice and role as an international expert. Such an approach is particularly relevant when engaging in a discussion of violence. Indeed, as argued by Antonius Robben and Carolyn Nordstrom, an anthropologist who believes in writing ‘A Different Kind of War Story’ (Nordstrom, 1997), ‘to be able to discuss violence, one must go where violence occurs, research it as it takes place’ (1995:4). We are the locus of this research into violence.

Considering our complicity in the epistemic violence but also, as we shall see in the next section, in structural violence, the choice to examine ourselves as the locus and agents of violence is the most obvious research design for this article. By exposing ourselves and putting the ‘I’ at the centre of the narrative, we are also rejecting what Naeem Inayatullah calls the ‘fictive distancing’ and its claims ‘to greater precision, accuracy, and insight into the workings of natural and social processes’ (Inayatullah, 2010: 5) to which IR remains wedded despite some impressive tugging by scholars adopting feminist (Enloe, 2014; Sylvester, 2013; Wibben, 2011; Zalewski, 2006) and critical narrative approaches (Inayatullah, 2010; Dauphinee, 2013; and more broadly the *Journal of Narrative Politics*). As they have argued and demonstrated, ethnographic and autoethnographic narratives are not narrations of IR, they are IR, indeed just as IR as quantitative and more traditional qualitative approaches. Thus, the following section should not be understood as an illustration of the theoretical argument made above – a ‘case study’ as such – but rather is to be understood as a central part of our argument on IR’s practices of violence.

## I am the International

Mogadishu International Airport is *also* an airport where, like in many others around the world, people travel in and out every year. The particularity of this airport is that some travel to stay – to make it their ‘home.’ Indeed, Mogadishu International Airport is now primarily a vast compound on the city’s coast sealed off from the rest of the city by kilometres of impregnable walls on the one side and a patrolled and shark-inhabited Red Sea on the other. The compound – known as MIA in the ‘international community’ and ‘Halane’ among Somalis – houses the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), the British Embassy, portions of the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the EU delegation, U.S. military advisors and other military outfits, representatives of dozens of international NGOs, private security and military contractors and international contractors more broadly. In this corner of the global ‘messy cartography,’ these foreign actors have succeeded in establishing a zone of relative safety and comfort in which they produce themselves as the international community here to help Somalis and Somalia – that zone of nonbeing just outside the gates – achieve statehood, security, development, and so on.

Mebrak Tareke, a communications specialist with the UN who lived in MIA, calls it a ‘no man’s land’ (Sahan Journal, 2015). When I visited in February 2018, I did not find a no man’s land: It was a white man’s land. Although officially in Somalia – it is not extra-territorial as an embassy can be – Somalis do not control access to MIA. They are relegated to the zone of nonbeing, behind the wall. Indeed, Somalis recount the humiliation of even members of Somalia’s federal and regional parliaments being turned away from the gates of the compound. ‘Your name has to be on the list’, a district commissioner of Mogadishu tells me. The list of course changes; it is updated. In August 2018, for example, AMISOM, which ensures security for the base, announced that it would ‘begin a comprehensive re-registration exercise of all civilians who have access to the base camp’ (AMISOM, 2018).

Despite the restricted access for Somalis, it is here that the election of the Somali president took place in 2017. This could be seen as ironic – it is in this land to which ordinary Somalis have no access that the most important formal political process of the past few years took place. But in the distinction between zones of being and nonbeing, it is natural that such a political process takes place in the zone of being. This is where democracy starts – it begins with the internationals. It is from this area that modernity emanates with the supposed aim of spreading into the zone of nonbeing. MIA, like ‘Europe’ and ‘the West,’ is indeed both a place and an idea that is produced through an epistemic conjuncture that facilitates abyssal thinking and produces the zone of nonbeing as also a place and an idea. Just as with Europe, MIA is based on the idea of the international community it hosts as ‘benevolent, rational, active, developed and solely capable of protecting humanitarian concerns through intervention’ into the Somalia beyond the walls of MIA, the zone of nonbeing understood as ‘violent, irrational, passive, undeveloped, and in structural need of intervention’. MIA brings out into the open an institutionalisation of a ‘hierarchy of peoples’, indeed racism as a ‘political system, a particular power structure of formal and informal rule’ (Mills, 1997:3).



Cemetery of retired African Union MRAPs (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles) by the beach of MIA.

I was invited to a three-day workshop in MIA by UNSOM (as noted by Cohn (1987) abbreviations are currency in this world) to present a paper I co-authored for them (Toros and Harley, 2018) on the potential prospects and pitfalls of opening dialogue with the non-state armed group al-Shabaab. The interdisciplinary workshop, 'Colloquium on Peace and Reconciliation in Somalia,' gathered two-dozen scholars (IR scholars, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, peace and conflict scholars), practitioners and local civil society organisations to discuss how to achieve peace and reconciliation. I recognised openly that I had no real knowledge of Somalia but I joined forces with a co-author, Stephen Harley, who lived in Mogadishu (not the airport but the city) for years, working in counter-terrorism and strategic communication. I justified my presence (to myself and others) on the basis that I was bringing 'theoretical' knowledge of negotiations and dialogue with non-state armed groups, based on a decade of publications on the topic (Toros, 2008, 2012). What I did not realise at the time was that I was reproducing an epistemic violence in my very proposal to offer such 'theoretical' – read universal – knowledge. Although I recognised that I could not tell Somalis anything about their land and their conflict that they do not already know and know better, I believed that I could bring something else that they did not have access to: theory. This is what Ramon Grosfoguel calls the white man's claim to 'universal truth beyond time and space' (2011).

Indeed, by believing that I could bring theoretical knowledge from the zone of being that can be latched onto the empirical knowledge I found in Somalia, I was – I understand in retrospect – reproducing the zone of being as a zone of expert knowledge

and the zone of nonbeing as a zone of lived experience. I was turning Somalis into nonbeings incapable of thinking or talking for themselves and in need of international experts to do it for them. This was sustained by the belief that *their* level of development in the academy or in the practitioner world *had not yet reached mine*. Possibly even worse, I incorporated in my paper the need to examine ‘the ongoing role of elders and how they may offer a particularly effective pathway toward engagement with Al-Shabaab’ (Toros and Harley, 2018: 442). Through such an inclusion of ‘indigenous’ approaches to dialogue and conflict resolution, I was appropriating local knowledge *into* my ‘universal truth beyond time and space’ and thus successfully hiding the violent imposition of my Western claims to universality through theory.

My claim to universality also erased my womanhood and my years of research and teaching on the central role of lived experience in understanding war and conflict (Toros et al., 2018). To *some* degree unknowingly, I took on the role of the colonial white man, a role I accepted and was recognised as legitimate in despite being a white woman. My belief in the contribution I was making by bringing theory to the event – one of the many mostly white scholars from the Global North doing so – and others’ recognition of me as a legitimate theorist, placed me in this position of epistemic violence, while at the same time erasing it. Indeed, arguably my attributed and self-attributed gender identity as woman appeared to be less a factor in the recognition of my capital in MIA than my positionality as scholar from the zone of being capable of bringing objective universal knowledge (theory) to those (others and often women) only capable of subjective individual experience in the zone of nonbeing.

If the violence of my epistemic practices was not clear to me at the time, my participation in structural violence, in this case in the forms of violent economic and social practices, was acutely so. Indeed, my participation in the economy of MIA and of the system of international expertise more broadly was extremely clear to me. From the fact that a bottle of Vermentino Sardinian White Wine cost less in the UN bar in MIA than in Rome (Is the company that caters to all the UN Staff in MIA paying *any* tax *anywhere*?) to the fact that I was sleeping in a custom-made container built in Croatia in a fortified camp called Chelsea Village for \$175 per night, the violence of MIA was jarring and impossible to ignore. Indeed, everything in MIA is aimed at reassuring me that my life is worthy of protection and care. The contrast with the dangers and discomfort of life on the other side of the wall is repeatedly and explicitly pointed out to me. These are words of reassurance that in fact hide a colonial structural violence: the beings within are worthy, the nonbeings outside are not.

Chelsea Village, ‘your home in the heart of the Mogadishu International Airport zone,’ best exemplified the violence. The camp, right off the airport’s runway, is controlled (via a variety of companies) by Richard Bethell, now Lord Westbury MBE, a veteran of the British Army and a key private military and security contractor since the 1990s with operations across the world from Colombia to Iraq. His company offers services from maritime security to ‘client extraction’ (Hart International, 2019). The camp offers security – the ex-South African military now Chelsea’s security officer was very reassuring, as was the dark bunker in which 200 people can hole up if the MIA perimeter is breached – but also comfort: A highly equipped gym, drinkable running water, Wi-Fi and the option of a lobster and white wine dinner on a wooden terrace dubbed ‘the pirate ship.’ Perhaps most tellingly, the paths between the rows of welded steel containers are

named after iconic (and elite) London addresses: ‘While we’re not sure which “road” you’ll be staying on at Chelsea Village – Oxford Street perhaps or possibly Covent Garden – one thing is certain: your room will be of an exceptional standard’ (Chelsea Village, 2019). Chelsea is more than an accommodation (a place), it is an idea. It is an idea of exclusiveness – of ‘exceptional standard’ – amidst what is viewed outside its gates as a war zone, a zone of nonbeing. In the messy cartography discussed above, Chelsea Village *is* Europe/the West. As such, my presence in MIA, my staying in Chelsea Village becomes a cog in the economic machine that sees the transfer of public European money to private European enterprises using non-European lands as simply a locus and excuse for such transactions. In this case, money donated by the Norwegian government to the UN Mission in Somalia ‘to generate a body of research that will enhance efforts at conflict prevention and reconciliation’ (UNSOM, 2018) was finding its way into the accounts of Lord Westbury, major private security and military actor in London.



The 'Pirate Ship' terrace in Chelsea Village.

Added to the knowledge of the economic violence that my presence in MIA was contributing to was knowledge of the social violence I was contributing to. I was aware of the offensive nature of MIA for many Somalis. I was part of an international system or a system of internationals who want to see war, but from the safety of behind a wall; who want to help those suffering in conflict but without taking the risks or experiencing the deprivation that comes with conflict; who want to bring knowledge *to* Somalis, without receiving knowledge *from* them. Most Somalis – although not all – are in fact ‘removed from the dialogic situation’ (Fabian, 2006: 86), their names are not ‘on the list’. Some Somalis indeed are on the list – ministers, senior government officials, civil society leaders, Somali academics (some flown in from London) – but most Somalis are not, and the invitations and the vetting is done by the internationals.

It is thus not in ignorance of my violence that I entered this system and the space/idea of MIA. I may not have been aware of my epistemic violence, but I was very aware of my complicity in economic and social violence. And I was not exceptional in this. Julian Brady, the head of the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Somalia, recognised recently that ‘sceptical Somalis call [MIA] “the occupied territories”’ and that ‘ordinary Somalis will find it difficult to access areas of Halane other than the civilian airport terminal’ (OCHA, 2016). At a 2018 meeting, the former head of the UN mission said Somalia was better off with decisions being made by Somalis than by ‘a UN guy sitting in a bunkerized environment in Mogadishu’. This feeling can emanate all the way down to short-term UN contractors, such as Mebrak Tareke, who, when interviewed by Al Jazeera, said she did not ‘like the idea of setting myself apart personally from the local community and traveling in visibly armed vehicles [ . . . ] it creates a gap between me and the locals. And I think that it breaks trust’ (Sahan Journal, 2015).

The key question however is whether such knowledge – theirs or mine – necessarily changes behaviours? I am not trying here to find excuses for my participation in the colonial violence of MIA but rather want to argue that knowledge does not necessarily alter the material circumstances – financial, security and other – that govern the space/idea of MIA. If knowledge is key to violence and power, so is materiality. If knowledge matters to our self-understandings, so do our embodied practices, as argued by Catriona Standfield in her analysis of gendered practices of diplomacy in this issue. Violence is not something internationals do or a space they/we enter, it is a defining element of who internationals are. We not only *act* as internationals, we *are* internationals.

Indeed, if Somalis feel excluded, shut out of a centre of power in MIA, many internationals feel shut into MIA. Life insurance, kidnapping insurance, and medical repatriation insurance – indeed any ‘risk assessment’ – makes leaving MIA logistically difficult and extremely costly. I would not have known how to leave the airport – I never even saw Medina gate. Planning a previous trip to Mogadishu for research, I looked into carrying out interviews with Somalis not authorised to enter MIA. Such interviews would happen at the Peace Hotel or the Jazeera Palace. I was told the trip would cost \$800 to do the 600 metres from Chelsea Village to the Peace Hotel and one kilometre to the Jazeera Palace. The cost is due to the need for two armoured vehicles and six security guards (‘one international, five Somalis’) to ensure security on this trip. Some Somalis I have spoken to since have scoffed at this: ‘You could walk it!’ they insist. But I *cannot* walk it. I cannot because it invalidates my life insurance – potentially leaves my children poor as well as



Warnings against swimming in the shark-inhabited waters off MIA.

orphans. It invalidates my medical repatriation insurance and goes against the risk assessment I promised to follow back at my university.

Breaking the written and unwritten rules of how an international should behave has costs beyond the immediate. Indeed, there are reputational costs and ensuing career costs to breaking the rules. The Orient is a ‘career’, as noted by Benjamin Disraeli (Said, 1978). It has long been a career for the political and economic elites of the West in diplomatic missions, international NGOs and foreign investment. Perhaps most importantly here, the ‘Impact Agenda’ of Britain’s universities has made the Orient part of my career. Indeed, I am in MIA to have ‘impact’, as I have been selected as an Impact Case Study by my university. Impact case studies have become a key element in the cyclical Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise that determines how much money a university receives for research from the British state as well as its ranking in league tables consulted by future students (and their often fee-paying parents). Crucially, achieving a 4\* on an impact case study – the highest grade – is the monetary equivalent I am told of seven 4\* publications for the REF.

Leaving MIA, refusing to follow the rules and refusing opportunities to ‘impact’ the ‘relevant stakeholders’ would have very real implications in terms of my chances for promotion, the amount of teaching and administration I am asked to do and the worth I am ascribed by others and indeed myself. My knowledge – first of the economic and social violence, then of the added epistemic violence that I am complicit in – does not change this. It is thus not simply ignorance or knowledge that brings me into MIA but,

worse still, co-optation and complicity in a system of which I am personally a beneficiary. The Orient, embodied at the moment by Somalia, is my career. But it is also far more than this: I *am* the international. Thus, I cannot leave MIA because I have internalised the fear associated with entering the zone of war, the zone of nonbeing. I want to remain in the zone of being, as that is where as an international I belong. I feel I cannot escape the role I have been assigned and have taken on. The Orient is thus not just a career but also a rationale for my very existence. It *is* my skin – the only skin I have. If I shed it, I fear I am left with just raw flesh and bones exposed. Such a shedding requires accepting a vulnerability – no doubt a vulnerability that those in the zone of nonbeing live with every day – that I am incapable of accepting. Thus, I not only see the violence in me, I live it. I see the racism as a political system *and* embody it.

A career as an IR scholar today often means engaging in more than the epistemic violence of the discipline and requires that one participates in indirect violence exemplified here by a simple trip to present at a UN colloquium on peace and reconciliation in Somalia. Disciplinary success increasingly requires this, and there are indeed growing pressures on academics to take part in the international system, a system that has been clearly exposed for its grounding in direct, colonial violence. Crucially, however, what has been put forward here is not only a narrative of structures that drag the IR discipline into violence but also one of co-optation and complicity in which IR's knowledge producers actively take part.

### **Small acts of recognition and a position of discomfort**

The last two sections have outlined how IR – in the discipline and in the scholar-as-expert – is intrinsically violent. We understand this violence to involve a politics of knowledge production that informs the theory but also the practices of knowledge workers or academic experts. It is specifically through the role of the international expert, which resonates within a colonial class of knowledge workers, that the distribution of disciplinary violence is reproduced. The question thus becomes what we – as critical scholars – can do. One answer could be withdrawal from colonial spaces in favour of participation in alternative forms of knowledge production. Although in themselves commendable and sometimes necessary interventions, we argue, however, that if withdrawal or participation in alternative sites may be possible in the academic world of conferences and workshops, the increasingly central position of the impact agenda further complicates attempts to lead a non-violent scholarly existence in IR. Other critical scholars, particularly feminist scholars, argue in favour of focusing on the marginalised – not only women – to bring their lived experience but crucially also their theorising into IR (Ackerly and True, 2008: 698; Sylvester, 2011, 2012, 2013). This, we would agree, may be a better route towards responsible or ethical scholarship. The question remains, however, whether and how critical scholars should remain in IR as a discipline and as a practice, and whether and how they should engage in impact activities with powerful and often violent actors. Indeed, the question is whether or not to remain on the inside.

For some, it is imperative to withdraw. Richard Jackson, for example, has compared those working with state actors to 'medical professionals who collaborate with torturers

in an effort to improve prisoner welfare' (2016: 121). He argues that critical actors should refrain from any engagement with state actors other than to carry out research *on* them and their practices, aimed at 'highlighting the state's crimes and plainly stating that state actors need to end their violence' (Jackson, 2016: 125). Scholars should instead focus on supporting resistance and counter-hegemonic forces: 'social movements, human rights groups, protestors, oppressed groups, and humanity at large' (Jackson, 2016: 125). In the framework presented here, this means choosing to cross over into the zone of nonbeing. This approach – which offers the comfort of disengagement – is certainly appealing and has an internal coherence that is enviable. However, it withdraws critical voices from policy conferences and workshops, calls for evidence and other instances that have the potential to directly affect state policy. To use Toros as a small but telling illustration of this, her withdrawal could deny an open discussion of negotiations with al-Shabaab in Somalia in a public setting in the presence of federal government ministers and advisers. It would, in short, mean leaving the zone of being intact and unchallenged from within on this specific question. It assumes that the zone of being can only be challenged from the outside, from the zone of nonbeing. It also assumes that we *can* enter the zone of nonbeing, that we (those born into the zones of being and thus recognised as subjects/actors) can simply slip across the abyssal lines and their boundaries separating these spaces/ideas. But as exemplified by the narrative in part two, such a crossing is difficult if not impossible. It is also potentially another form of incursion of a being into the zone of nonbeing to 'help,' 'save' or 'educate'.

What we are more interested in here is how we can challenge the violence of the zone of being, *our* violence. Thus, what we aim to explore is how to remain 'in' – in Mogadishu, in rooms with Western military and defence officials – while refraining (as far as possible) from participating in structural and epistemic violence, and indeed challenging it. Such a staying 'in' would allow critical IR scholars to uncover the fissures (Horkheimer, 1982) that exist in all structures of violence, and attempt to expose them and enlarge them. Before elaborating on this, it is important to point out that such an attempt is not rooted in the belief that we can find a path towards a completely ethical future in IR scholarship. Just as we argue that there is no ethical past to ground ourselves in – on the contrary, there is only a violent past – we are not contemplating the possibility of an ethical future free of tensions and violence. Such a stance is not of the purview of critical scholars, as it is inevitably based in the misrecognition of violences that always mark – to some degree – human social relations. Our aim is far more modest and thus hopefully more honest in that it seeks a path of discomfort that is ethical *enough* to allow for an engagement with today's power structures, which we continue to insist are in need of critique and countering, also from within.

Drawing some foundations from research on the everyday and the banal, we want to argue in favour of *almost insignificant acts of subversion* in the zones of being. These are acts that are so small that, for example, they cannot be used as a reason to exclude scholars from a gathering or even indeed to refrain from re-inviting them. They are *almost* insignificant. It is in the almost however that we seek ethical moments that have the potential to highlight and enlarge the fissures of violent power structures. Just as banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) can be 'significant and political' and instances of 'everyday peace' and

'everyday resistance' can be generative (Mac Ginty, 2014: 552; Vinthagen, 2015), almost insignificant acts of subversion can, we argue, be disruptive and generative. Such acts can take a variety of forms and, just as everyday peace, they 'probably cannot be modelled, taught or replicated' (Mac Ginty, 2014: 554). They are available in the immediate and only exist contextually. They differ from the concept of the 'everyday' insofar as the term has been used in IR to mean practices that are of the 'realm of the routine and humdrum which we take for granted' (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001: 33). Our acts of subversion are just the opposite: They are precisely those conscious acts of agency that may be disguised within the routine and humdrum but that in fact aim to challenge and subvert it. They recognise our position as agents, our being internationals and use this position to authorise these minute acts that challenge our exclusive right to be. Methodologically, they operate like a crack – 'the perfect ordinary creation of a space or moment in which we assert a different type of doing' (Holloway, 2010: 21).

What this means in terms of practices is not obvious and all we can put forward here is a discussion that is aimed at clarifying our argument rather than offer an exhaustive list of what they may entail. As such, we identify three forms of almost insignificant acts of subversion that acknowledge the position from which the enunciation takes place: (a) moments in which one implicitly recognises and, if appropriate, highlights the other as different *but equal*; (b) moments in which one implicitly recognises and, if appropriate, explicitly speaks out the power disparity and violence of a relationship; and (c) moments in which one implicitly recognises and, if appropriate, explicitly highlights the violence of power structures generally made invisible through habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). As with everyday peace, such subversion 'is not something that people always and necessarily engage in. It relies on opportunities and context, as well as the ability of individuals and groups to exploit these' (Mac Ginty, 2014: 550). Context – the power structures surrounding the individual and the latter's capital within those structures – will be central to an actor's ability to engage in such acts and to what degree.

We recognise that these may be meagre pickings and that this approach lacks the clarity of disengagement and of direct challenges from the zone of nonbeing such as struggles for restorative relations, as discussed by Martin Weber and Heloise Weber in this issue (2020). We also recognise that our position may be the result of co-optation – our lives may have become so enmeshed in the systems of power that we are unable to understand ourselves as external to them. But we understand such a position as unavoidable in the messy cartography of intersecting zones of being and nonbeing. We believe that choosing to remain 'in' while pursuing as far as possible almost insignificant acts of subversion is taking on a position of discomfort. It is a position of discomfort as it forces us to enter spaces in which we are confronted directly with our violence as well as take up positions that leave us open to critique from all sides. It is by seeking out discomfort while recognising our complicity that we may find a path to challenge the structures of IR that have allowed and continue to allow so many scholars – even those of the critical ilk – to remain blind to its violence. This, crucially, also means countering narratives of disciplinary decadence that continue to distribute epistemic violence. Such a position does not necessarily entail the abandonment of IR as a discrete field of thought. Just as we have argued in favour of 'remaining in' spaces of power in

the practice of international expertise, we argue that it is by interrogating and challenging IR's violent structures of knowledge production from the inside that we can open fissures or exploit cracks. Thus, we are not contemplating a complete transcendence of disciplinarity. Our lives remain enmeshed within the institutions and apparatuses that constitute the discipline, such as the dissemination of our 'research' in a peer-reviewed journal. And it is by accepting our position within the IR zone of expertise that we can identify and take advantage of cracks and fissures allowing for small acts of subversion. In each crack that momentarily shatters the monolithic discipline, the possibility exists to achieve minute ethical moments – however uncomfortable – that pull on the fissures present in all power structures, however impregnable they may appear.

This is thus an intervention onto us, onto the discipline of IR, that aims to go far beyond the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries and finding solutions in interdisciplinarity. We aim to challenge the violence that is at the heart of IR. The impact that we hope to leave behind has little to do with the British Higher Education Council's understanding of impact. We are deeply aware that the impact agenda is making us more and more complicit in a system of colonial and epistemic violence, most of which we are or feel incapable of challenging directly. The impact we hope to leave behind is in much smaller alterations of our behaviour, and potentially that of others, inside spaces/ideas such as Mogadishu International Airport. It is in the practices of recognising the other as different but equal. It is in the discussion within zones of being and along abyssal lines about how such a recognition is difficult behind the walls separating zones of being and nonbeing. It is in taking advantage of the fissures and cracks that exist within these spaces/ideas that allow us to prevent another body – that of an international with no understanding of their violence – from taking up the container on 11 Oxford Street, Mogadishu International Airport.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the EJIR editors, anonymous reviewers, as well as Martin Weber, Naeem Inayatullah and Ben Turner for their close reading and valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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- but not cited in the text. Please supply citation details or delete the reference from the reference list.]
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