Editor's Interview with Laura J. Shepherd[*]

ED: Much of your feminist security studies scholarship has cohered around how our cultures produce us politically through aesthetic forms, such as film, poetry, and fashion. And while studies of popular culture are growing in our field, there is still a sense that this is sociology or anthropology, rather than political science or international relations, per se. Your work challenges that, insofar as you show the profound ways in which conceptions of the international (from international institutions to the practice of war) are inextricable from cultural and aesthetic forms that work to create meaning. And the imperative to 'make meaning', of course, includes a fundamentally gendered conception of culture and of politics. This focus on culture and the politics of the everyday also opens the terrain of method beyond traditional disciplinary confines, which you argue are profoundly unable to capture these aesthetic worlds. Could you talk a little bit about how your own intellectual journey has unfolded, and how you have come to identify the value of specific methods, subject matter, and forms of writing?

LJS: Thank you for that very eloquent summary of my work, Elizabeth, and thank you for inviting me to have this conversation with you. I'm very grateful for this opportunity, and delighted to be working on this with you, from whom I have learned a great deal about writing in particular – but perhaps I can say a bit more about that later on. For now I am happy to share a bit of my intellectual journey to this point; it's something of an odd (perhaps cautionary!) tale.

I think the reason that I struggle with disciplinary constraints, chafe against the confines of conventional Political Science or IR methodologies, is because I am neither Political Scientist nor IR scholar by training. I came to IR in my graduate studies, by way of an undergraduate degree in Social Anthropology. I was somewhat directionless as teenager; I had no idea whatsoever about my desired outcomes from undergraduate study, but I found that I enjoyed my degree program immensely. I had always thought myself a feminist, but discovering academic feminism opened up a whole new dimension of my political awareness.

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I studied feminist anthropology, reading *Towards an Anthropology of Women*[1] and *Women, Culture and Society*[2] reveling in the dusty books (which I still get down from my bookshelf to thumb through periodically) and the confrontational – then radical – ideas. Ideas about gender as a power relation, about the fact that women's experiences and encounters had been systematically written out of history and society: I fell into these ideas and they enveloped me in my journeying around campus, to the pub in the afternoon, to bed at night, with a prickly yet comforting weight.

And simultaneously, I studied power and representation, discovering Stuart Hall and devouring every essay of his that I could find, using Hall as the sugar to offset the bitter taste of Foucault, whom I struggled to understand even as I could see the significance of his works. I found my way to queer theory, falling a little bit into an infatuation with my Women's Literature professor who introduced me to Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam and Leslie Feinberg. This was revelatory to me. *Stone Butch Blues* remains one of the most profoundly influential books that I have ever encountered. I re-read it at least once a year and it makes me cry, and rage, and hope in raw and powerful ways. It was a revelation that the feminism that I had always found safe and ordinary could be formidable, unsafe, even violent, for some. (Please forgive my naivety: I was barely in my twenties and had led a very privileged life.)

No project seemed more important to twenty-year old me than the feminist deconstruction of the subject. No action seemed more potent than the move to define, to classify, to categorise. I read Chandra Mohanty, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Trinh T. Minh-ha and began to understand the racial and colonial politics of definition and categorization. I developed a lasting – career-defining, as it turns out – obsession with representation, with the constitution of cognitive schema and the ways in which we make sense of our worlds. I see representational practice – the rendering of a concept or idea such that it is communicable – as the process through which we attach meaning to subjects. It is the process through which those concepts or ideas become meaning-full, filled with meaning, and this process is subject to endless contestation. Every concept or idea is open to being filled differently, to having different meanings attached with radically different consequences. Which attachments hold, then, and therefore which meanings become stable, is a question of power.

The construction of meaning is a site of politics – to my mind, *the* site of politics, because what could be more fundamental to politics than the conceptual apparatus that structures knowledge in any given society? Understanding what David Campbell describes as 'the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another?'[3] Through examining the construction of meaning, by paying close attention to representational practice, we are in fact examining the production of possibility: once a particular meaning is attached to 'women', for example, such as 'agent of change' or 'helpless victim', certain policy initiatives become 'thinkable', even necessary, while others are excluded.

And, even more than I am fascinated *generally* by the politics of representation, I am fascinated *specifically* by the constitution of gendered subjectivity, by the operation of gendered

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[1] Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, (London and New York: *Monthly Review Press*, 1975).

[2] Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture and Society*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974).

[3] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 7-8.

power. I have written quite a lot about the ways in which gender – as an identity category, an analytical lens and an organising logic – is foundational to our ontologies, to our sense of being in the world. It would be profoundly difficult to construct an intelligible representation of social life without drawing on widely held and culturally specific understandings of gender. Referring to the Anglophone West, Judith Butler calls the moment of gendering the 'founding interpellation', the solidification of the first identity category into which we are hailed, without which we are denied humanity; 'in this sense', she says, 'the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the human.'[4] As I say to my students, gender is so foundational to our identity that the gender of infants is apocryphally announced at the moment of birthing. No midwife ever called out, 'Congratulations, you have a healthy, middle class, White child'…

        Gender, as Cynthia Enloe notably remarked, makes the world go round: it structures how we think about, and act in, the world, and orders the relationship between bodies and behaviours.[5] As Spike Peterson and Jacqui True comment, 'our sense of self-identity and security may seem disproportionately threatened by societal challenge to gender ordering.'[6] The logical intellectual consequence of this claim is that 'gender ordering' should be opened to critical scrutiny and that is what I try to do in much of my work. From this vantage point, it was perhaps inevitable that I would examine the world in the way that I do.

ED: With respect to this point about how you examine the world, can you talk a little bit about the emotional and personal experiences that caused you to feel that social relations were not quite what was said (or not said) about them? What led you to journey toward the academy as a site of exploration?

LJS: I was fortunate enough to be raised by a mother who was – and remains – critically engaged, who fostered curiosity and a spirit of enquiry and who has a profound and unwavering commitment to social justice. I grew up in south London, under Margaret Thatcher and her slash-and-burn neoliberalism; I have early memories of listening to discussions of privatizing national services, of the dissolution of the Greater London Council in the mid-1980s, of the crushing of the trade unions – in particular the National Union of Mineworkers, the defeat of which at the hands of Thatcher and her ministers is often now held up as a watershed moment for industrial relations in the UK – and of the support for US bombing of Tripoli in 1986, supported by aircraft stationed at British air bases. My father and my step-mother took me to an event protesting those bombings; I played with the other kids, joined in the songs and I felt, then as now, that even if ultimately such protests have no direct effect on policy, somewhat proud that I would not be complicit in the perpetration of violence.

        I think growing up I perceived a kind of generalized injustice in the world, which over time I learned to narrow down and focus on more analytically but which I never learned to live with or accept. I have always struggled with the pain of others. I have lived with depression since

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[4] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.
[5] Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd ed, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 17.
[6] V. Spike Peterson and Jacqui True, '"New Times" and New Conversations', in Marysia Zalewski and Jane Parpart, eds, *The 'Man' Question in International Relations*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

my teenage years at least, and at various times this has had a dramatic impact on my engagement with the world: there have been days when I have been so overwhelmed by the knowledge that such pain and horror exists in the world that I have been unable to get out of bed. I am no longer immobilized by these feelings, but I still find it difficult to read the news, more so now that I have a child. My experience has been that this attachment has rendered me raw in ways that I didn't know were possible, even with my history.

For me, my interior life and my professional life are intrinsically interrelated, with many actions in both 'personal' and 'professional' spaces borne of an unshakeable belief that it must be possible to remake a different world. I think I was drawn to poststructural engagements with discourse, with the attendant theorization of the mutability of meaning and effect, precisely because it allows for change. I cannot believe in a fully determined world because I cannot live in a world in which there is no possibility of things – subjects, objects, and the relationships between them – being constituted differently, even if this reconfiguration is a lengthy, difficult and painful process and is itself only temporary. I think this is captured in my articulation of 'hoping' as a political practice.

I have always been aware of the possibility of reinvention and alert to change as both process and event. Moving from London to a small village outside of Cambridge when I was ten, or thereabouts, offered the opportunity for reinvention and also brought me into contact with people who made all kinds of assumptions about me on the basis of very limited information (as children do). With the extreme narcissism of youth, I spent a lot of time experimenting with different looks, performances, and modes of interaction. I grew – and to an extent I feel like I remain – highly adept at mimicking behaviours and conversational rhythms of others, at the performance of 'fitting in'. In the typically angst-ridden way of teenagers, I didn't see this as a skill but worried instead about what it said about 'me', that I couldn't easily pin down the essence of who 'I' was.

Developing the vocabulary, derived from Butler, that allowed me to theorise identity as performative probably resonated so strongly with me intellectually because it resonated so strongly with me personally. I have never felt that there is much of a 'doer behind the deed', as she puts it (borrowing, I understand, from Nietzsche), or at least not one that I could comprehend out of context, separate from the deed and its effects. It comforts me to know that there are others who perhaps see the world nearly as I see it, who are similarly confused by the simplest of questions ('Who are you?') and who have come to understand that, in the words of Angel (from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and his own spin-off series fame), 'if nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do'.

To respond more specifically to your question of what drew me to the academy, I have always made the most sense of my world through writing. I have always taken great comfort in writing, found joy, even, and writing has enabled me to work through some of the most difficult times of my life. For me, the great joy of academia is the freedom to write, to continue making sense of my world through writing, albeit in a different – more structured, more constrained – form. I often think that, were I not an academic, I would do something else that allows me to write in some way. (Either that, or I would run a café-cum-library/bookshop – this is my secret – now not so secret – daydream…)

ED: It is striking to me how deeply you and I share the same political memories, with the exception that my mother was a Reaganite through and through and she supported the destruction

of the Air Traffic Controllers' union that was the US version of the attack on the Mineworkers. I also feel like many women (and perhaps men) in our generation of academics have a 'backup plan' – mine was to open a teashop. I wonder how much of that stems from the sense that there is no secure place for us, not just with respect to erosions on things like job security, but in the more pervasive ways that neoliberalism 'displaces' us – how it moves us to other continents, for example, and in the rise and fall of intellectual tides. In this sense, the politics of hope that you talk about feels like a potentially powerful strategy in an academy that is increasingly threatened by the presumed 'inevitability' of corporatization. Our generation grew up as neoliberalism emerged, and we entered university during the deep consolidation of neoliberalism. Could you say a little bit more about the politics of having hope? Is this a disposition? A call to action? Both? Neither?

LJS: So this is another interesting story, one that is actually a pretty decent example of my encounters with the world more generally: I hear or see something that catches my imagination – and I experience this in what feels like a very literal way, a thought or an image snags on my consciousness and embeds itself such that I keep returning to it in moments of quiet to work at it and examine it and attempt either to dislodge it or turn it into something more productive than simply an intellectual irritant – and in the process of identifying what it is about this thing that intrigues me I venture across disciplinary boundaries, into unfamiliar intellectual terrain, and frequently end up somewhere entirely unexpected. (I'm then usually unsure how I got there and whether where I am is an interesting or useful place to be, but that is another story.)

In this case, my configuration of 'practising hope' as a form of intellectual and/or academic politics was borne of at least three things: a casual conversation with my father; living through pregnancy; and watching the televised mini-series *The Corner*, which is a fictionalized account of an urban ethnography undertaken in Baltimore, Maryland.[7] The events or encounters happened out of chronological step with each other but their integration was for me a distinct moment, the moment at which I began to think about hope as a practice.

In my analysis of *The Corner*, which I wrote as part of *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture*, I identified and teased out the politics of hope that to me were latent in the representations of despair, deprivation, and dispossession that formed the text of the series. Very briefly, the series develops over six episodes the inter-related stories of people living on and around one particular street corner, a space that is both a physical site at which narcotics are bought and sold and a metaphor for the limited horizon of possibilities for the young people who grow up in this environment. The corner is juxtaposed as a space with a youth centre, staffed by those whose lives have, albeit only partially, transcended the limits imposed by the corner, and hope is represented as central to this transcendence. In one scene, Ella, the woman who runs the youth centre, is planting a community garden with bulbs that will flower in the following spring. DeAndre, one of the other protagonists, asks her how she knows that the bulbs will flower. To me, this is a question borne of deep hopelessness, a deep lack of faith in even the regularities of nature. The metaphor of flowers blooming in the spring has long signified hope – new life, or rebirth perhaps – and to have lost hope, in the face of so much death, that even this small life will

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[7] *The Corner*, often described as the 'real life' version of the critically acclaimed HBO series *The Wire*, aired in the United States in 2000 and was released to DVD in 2003.

thrive represents the effects of the endemic violence perpetrated against, and in, these communities.

But – and in the book I play around a little further with the idea of (re)birth and hope – the narrative arc of the series leads the viewer not to the conclusion that life must continue, bleakly, without hope but rather that hope is essential to a meaningful life. DeAndre gets his sometime-girlfriend Tyreeka pregnant; the miniseries draws to a close on the revelation of the child's birth and its impact on the lives and priorities of the others represented in the series. The attachment that Tyreeka, DeAndre's mother Fran, and even DeAndre himself, feel towards this particular new life can be interpreted as hope: I read it as a moment of radical humanization.

I feel like my analysis of *The Corner* is probably the most present I have felt in my intellectual work, because it was all conditioned in and through my own feelings about birth and new life. I empathized powerfully with DeAndre and Fran and the fears that they had about the responsibility of bringing a new life into the world because I had lived those fears myself. When I found out I was pregnant I was both amused – it felt like such a terribly 'grown up' thing to happen and I still felt distinctly un-grown-up (this feeling abides, to be honest) – and afraid. I could not think how I would teach a child to live in a world that I could not fathom, that sometimes I could not bear. I was terrified that I would unknowingly, inadvertently, create for my child the same porous barrier between him and the world that makes it so difficult for me to shut out the horrors that the world is capable of, the violences that we visit upon each other. I felt that I had – just, barely – learned to look after myself, and that I had no idea where to begin understanding how to look after a whole other human being, for the rest of his life.

I was scared of all these things. And then my child was born and I realized I had never really known fear, responsibility, or vulnerability. My reaction to reading news of abuse or violation was amplified through the lens of this new attachment to create a new dimension of hurt. I was haunted by the generalized pain of knowing of an injury or loss and then the specific pain of imagining: how would I survive if that were my child? How could I live in a world without them in it? I used to go into his room at night and stand with my hand on his back to witness him breathe, and feel the weight of the promise I felt I had made to him, bringing him into this world.

There was never a conscious decision-making moment as far as I recall, but I did somehow come to the realization that I needed to find a way to cope with these fears, if they were not to overwhelm me (and therefore my child). In each moment, I chose (where I could) to *commit* hope, as a counterpoint to the commission of violence. This was not a vague resolution to 'look on the bright side' or find the silver lining in every cloud but really a decision to practice hope in the face of extreme provocation, an insistence on thinking that we – as humans – are neither defined by the best nor the worst of our encounters, and hoping that each of us is able to use our time here well, at least sometimes. I had to practice this feeling, hence my formulation of 'practicing hope' (though I quite like the idea of 'committing hope', as I came to above). In a discipline defined by fear (per Neta Crawford's theorization), practicing hope feels somewhat radical, but in a private life undone by the pain of others it was – is – transformative.

The third element of this tripartite narrative is the chance conversation I had with my father. My dad is a psychologist; he held a Chair at King's College, London, for a time, and, although he used to be a clinical practitioner, in his later career he worked with service providers on the provision of long term mental health care. He has always been very interested in, and supportive of, my work, but his was always the language of randomized controlled trials, of

variables and replication, and he had little to say on the subject of Foucault, still less on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. We have always enjoyed talking about our various investigations, though, despite our lack of shared common ground, and one day we got to talking about a project he was working on at the time, which was premised on a fundamental shift in the conceptualisation of mental health care.

As I understand it (and I am probably getting this at least half-wrong, so my apologies to any and all psychologists or health service providers and to my dear father in particular, who is not responsible for my mangling of his words and work), this shift was borne of a desire to move away from a 'medical model' of mental health care towards a form of provision that is led by, and centres on, the individual living with mental health problems. In the former (and again, I am explaining from a lay perspective), it is assumed that expertise about mental health care resides with the mental health care professionals. The person living with mental health issues is a patient, with an illness to be treated, the end goal being stabilization: enabling the patient to live in the world without constituting a risk to themselves or others. Under the 'recovery model', however, the process of recovery is centralized (with the understanding that recovery *is* a process, rather than a goal). Contrary to the medical approach, the individual living with mental health problems is recognized as the expert in their own life. The question that guides treatment is, What do you need to live the life you want to lead?

Obviously, much is invested in the medical model. In Foucauldian terms, the subject positions produced through this discourse are rewarding, seductive even, for the mental health care professionals, social workers, doctors and others who perform their expertise in the treatment of a particular 'case' and achieve positive results (stabilization, as I mentioned). As a society, we perpetuate these hierarchies, deferring to the medical experts even in the face of lived experiences that contradicts their advice. The medical model strips the individual living with mental health issues of their agency, of their autonomy, of the ability to speak from lived experience and be recognized as experts in their own lives.

The recovery model focuses directly on the agency of the individual. The hierarchy is flattened, such that medical and other professionals become but one source of information for the formulation of a care plan that is guided by three concepts: agency, opportunity, and hope (I am getting to the point, finally). The early proponents of the recovery model determined, from talking to many hundreds of people living with mental illness, that these three things are essential to the process of recovery. The agency of the individual is paramount, while the expertise of those with whom they share their lives is also recognized and valued in the decision-making processes. Opportunity, to lead a life that each individual finds fulfilling, is the second pillar. And third, produced by agency and opportunity yet also productive of these, is hope. Without the hope that they will be fully respected as an expert in their own life, an individual's agency is curtailed. Without the hope that each decision will have a positive, or at least net positive, outcome, opportunities are likely to be ignored. The recognition by others of our agency, and the pursuit of opportunity, produces hope that as individuals, we won't be defined by our pathologies. Hope is foundational to participation in the process of recovery. I suspected, as I thought through the conversation I had had with my father, that this is true of pathologies other than those defined as 'mental illness', even pathologies of disciplines and worlds.

So these encounters, the integration of these happenstances which at first seemed unconnected to me, prompted my thinking around a politics founded on practicing hope. It's a quiet sort of politics, as you say more of a disposition perhaps, but I find affinity with others in

this practice: with Saara Sarma's theorization of humour as a form of disciplinary resistance, and with Elina Penttinen's exploration of joy as methodology. Practising hope at home helps keep me integrated, at least; I am not sure I ever feel 'whole', exactly. Hope, aligned with a theoretical commitment to the immanence of change, affects my work practices in ways that make work feel like doing good. Not always, but mostly.

And you are right. Practising hope feels radical in the neoliberal university. We have hopelessness drummed into us in higher education: funding cuts, fewer jobs, increasing precarity at every level (with the corollary hyperemployment of those with a modicum of security), the erosion of traditional protections within the academy. We are told, *pace* Thatcher again, that 'There is no alternative': do more, with less, with a smile. And the smile is important. It must make us happy, this service, it must fulfil us as individuals: research as vocation. Perhaps if the work is constructed as reward in itself, we will not notice that we are working more and more hours for less pay (in real terms). Perhaps if we are made fearful enough for our own employment, we will not stand in solidarity with those who struggle to secure fair terms for fixed-term contracts or who are expected to maintain their research in their own time to have job mobility even as they are paid only by the hour for teaching. Perhaps we will be sufficiently grateful for the consideration shown by institutions that offer free 'professional development' courses in stress management and relaxation that we won't question why we need such measures.

I am deeply skeptical of the co-optation of self-care discourses, 'mindfulness', and even love in service of capital in late modernity. When I am told by smug headlines of op-eds and think pieces as I scroll though my Facebook feed that I should 'Do what I love and love what I do', but 'Practice self-care', it enrages me. I will not accept these words from corporations, from bureaucracies; this is the lexicon of attachment, of the social, of relationality. It feels important to me to reclaim love, joy, laughter, our constitution as human in and through our connections to others. These are micro-practices of resistance, perhaps, but it is resistance nonetheless.

ED: It is fascinating to consider the relationship between agency and things like joy and love. Or to consider that joy and love are themselves ways of being political. It is also fascinating to reflect on the ways in which change and transformation – both joyful and uncertain – impact our lives and our work. You mention the birth of your child as a watershed factor that led you to reexamine your own relationship to the world. This is certainly an experience that resonates deeply. Can you talk a little bit about the personal joys and transformations that also find their way into your scholarship?

LJS: Yes, I was really inspired by Elina Penttinen's work I suppose because it resonated so closely with my own feeling that hope is both political and practice. I feel this in my professional activities in really quite prosaic ways: when I teach, for example, I don't like to start off the semester talking of the state, security, and so on; I prefer to begin by asking students what they identify with in the world and what they would maybe hope to change or at least like to see configured differently. I like to discuss hope with my classes early on (partly because I find the subject matter of much IR scholarship relentlessly depressing, particularly in the intersection of gender and violence, where much of my research is located). I think it is important to foster a vocabulary to express hope, and human connection, rather than hide behind the bloodless articulations that our discipline seems to favour.

I am increasingly of the view that the most valuable professional practices are those that centre the relationships that we have with others. You, Elizabeth, have written very beautifully about our obligations to others; I think my engagement is at a more basic level. Perhaps the most significant transformation in my own self as I have grown older has been a lessening of the tendency towards introspection, a reorientation of my positioning vis-à-vis the world such that I focus as much outwards as inwards, on the moments I share with others and the nature of my relationships with them.

I think I was more arrogant when I was younger, and certainly more narcissistic. This didn't always lead me to make the best decisions, or be as kind or sympathetic in my engagements with others as I could have been. These days, the process of professional engagement is far more important to me than the outcome (at least most of the time). It matters to me that I am available to colleagues who want to talk through an idea or discuss a new seminar activity or set reading. It matters to me that I take the time to be positive and constructive in reviews and that I offer support when I can to those newer than I am to publication, promotion, or other professional activity. It matters to me that I am explicit in my appreciation of the time invested by others in supporting me, in all the small and significant ways that make our professional lives more bearable. Recognizing that these things matter to me, and that it is within my power to live and work by these principles, was an important and transformative process for me.

It takes practice, though, and such is the nature of the profession that it is tempting, always, to lapse back in to the ego-centric pattern of encountering the world that sees You (in all your guises) as secondary to Me (or rather, Professional Me). Hope takes practice, as we discussed, but so does humility. And I suppose I try to embrace uncertainty, to try to de-centre my (professional) self, in the hope that this is a way to build a kind of academic community that is resistant to the relentless individualization and will to competition that characterizes the neoliberal academy. This is certainly a social politics, or a politics of the social, and one built on relationality and our connections to each other (as professionals, as teachers, as students, as researchers) as these connections are, I think, what render us human.

There are two elements of this mode of encountering the academy that I need to elaborate upon, though – not quite caveats, but close… First, I recognize that I have no small amount of institutional and social privilege, which has an impact on my ability to choose which activities I make time for and which I can refuse. I'm a White, English-speaking, mid-career academic; I'm not on probation and I have (through both luck and judgement) developed a portfolio of publications and a history of grant awards which mean that I am at a stage where I can turn down opportunities that don't appeal (and even those that do) because I want to focus on mentoring junior colleagues, or developing a new teaching idea, or settling my son into a new school routine. The penalties for these professional transgressions no longer weigh heavy on me, and this is a privilege of my academic – and personal – position.

Second, even as I write about making time for mentoring, discussion with colleagues, providing feedback on draft work, I am conscious both that this kind of invisible academic care work too often falls on women – so by prioritizing this I am perpetuating this particular operation of gendered power in ways that are not necessarily helpful for others – and that the neoliberal academy relies on the hyperemployment towards which such care work contributes. Because it is largely invisible, because it is neither measured by performance metrics nor captured in the kinds of professional narratives we write when such things are called for (grant applications,

promotions/tenure and so on), because it cannot easily be quantified it is dis-counted, seen as something that we do as part of our professional obligations. As is the nature of obligations, however, some feel them more keenly than others, and there is little professional reward for such activity, meaning that while I – with my job security and relative privilege – can decide to spend a day at a PhD symposium and not feel that I have to scramble late into the night to make up the 'real' work that I should have been doing that day, I know that for others this is not the case. I hope that by drawing these discussions out into public discourse, we can create new institutional contexts that recognise this academic care work, the enormous volume of invisible labour involved in making the academy a bearable place to be, as real work (without falling into the trap of trying to force this kind of work into the straitjackets of metrics and indicators, for ease of 'measurement', as if value is only visible where it can be counted).

ED: Well, maybe I'll take some heat for saying it, but in my experience, egomania is often a problem that thwarts opportunities for solidarity among academics. I'm probably still quite arrogant, but one of the things that humbled me is my encounter with undergraduate students – specifically undergrads – because their pressures and needs are unique. In terms of 'centering relationships', as you put it, where do you think your most satisfying moments as a scholar emerge?

LJS: Writing is a joy, as I have mentioned, and a way of connecting with my intellectual community. I have been on sabbatical for this first half of 2016, and I have been both amazed and humbled at the scope and quality of engagement I have received with my work at the various seminars I have delivered. I have presented the bare bones of my new book (the completion of which is the main aim of the sabbatical period) and had audiences ask such interesting, thoughtful, provocative questions that in each location I have come away from the encounter feeling indebted to those people who gave up their time (and all time is precious in the neoliberal academy) to help me refine my ideas.

Like you, though, I tend to return to teaching, or engagement with students of all kinds, as a source of inspiration and nourishment. There is no more critical community than the next generation of scholars. The willingness of students to learn, to discuss, to engage and to critique the wisdom of those that have gone before is what sustains a discipline; it is what keeps knowledge alive. And knowledge is a living thing, we know this from our classrooms: I have never met a teacher who has not experienced an instance of new knowledge being born, when new connections are made and new ideas emerge into the light of a seminar discussion to be examined and defended and tussled over and critiqued.

I am fortunate enough to have wonderful academic colleagues, both in my immediate institution and in my broader intellectual community across the world; I learn a lot from these colleagues every time we converse. But I learn far more from my students. Every student I've ever taught has taught me something; I learn a lot about the discipline by viewing it through their eyes and I learn about the things I thought I already knew when I debate those things with a new group of students each year. I see the role that students play as essential to the discipline, essential to the field of IR: without the opportunity to engage with new people, mostly unfettered by the disciplinary training that teaches us to encounter the world in a certain way or to ask certain questions and those questions only, my scholarship would stagnate and wither. The curiosity of students, the desire to understand differently or better and the will to push for

different or better answers and different or better ways of encountering the world: there is nothing more valuable in the academy than this.

In my academic career, I have been nourished by those who share this belief. I had to work so hard in the first few weeks of my graduate program to catch up with my classmates, many of whom had undergraduate degrees in IR or Political Science. I read constantly, working my way diligently through the reading lists we were given, but it made little sense to me. I can remember sitting in classes on IR theory listening to people talking about 'the state as a unitary actor' and 'sovereign equality' and being utterly bemused. I couldn't understand at all how these eminent scholars we were reading really believed that 'the state' was anything other than a locus of power, a complex abstraction obscuring multiple forms of power and domination. I couldn't understand how the manifest inequalities in the international system – which, to paraphrase George Orwell, creates all states as equal but some states decidedly more equal than others – were not as glaringly obvious to everyone else as they were to me (or, more accurately, how these did not confound every attempt to adhere to this fiction of 'systemic anarchy', as all I could see was hierarchies…).

I went to the director of the program, Jutta Weldes, and told her that I was dropping out. I told her that I had made a terrible mistake (and wasted an awful lot of money), as this 'IR' stuff clearly was not for me. I didn't understand it, and I couldn't make sense of it, and it made me feel stupid and alone when I couldn't even catch at the edges of the discussions in class, when I couldn't speak the language of 'alliances' and 'positive preferences' and 'collateral damage': mine was a language of friendship, and joy, and the horror of dead children. I could not learn their language, nor did I want to; I felt I could not belong in a discipline whose basic vocabulary, whose very words, were so alien to me. She listened, and nodded, and let me rail and cry, and then asked me to give it another couple of weeks. She asked me to wait until I had at least submitted some work for assessment, to wait until we were at least a little further in to the course. I sighed, and deliberated, and agreed that I would give the program a chance, until the end of the term at least.

And then we moved on, from democratic peace theory and neo-realism to Robert Cox, and Christine Sylvester, and Cynthia Enloe, and I rejoiced. Theirs was a language I could understand, finally, and theirs was a vision of the world that made sense to me. So I didn't drop out. I submitted work for assessment, and while I think my essays were a touch unconventional (I have, and retain, a propensity for interweaving song lyrics, snippets of stories, personal narrative in my writing that I suspect was not common among postgraduate essays at that time), I did well – well enough for the director of the program to call me in to her office and ask whether I had ever considered undertaking a Ph.D. I told her honestly that I never had considered it, not even for a minute, and she said that maybe I should.

So I did, and Jutta, who believed in me, and understood my confusion and my anger and my thirst to see a different world, became my PhD supervisor; I owe her a tremendous amount and I am still grateful that she saw something in me worth nurturing, an intellectual orientation or way of encountering the world that I didn't see as valuable (or even really understand) in myself. I remain humbled by the effort she put in to helping me stay the course, and I remain inspired by her early faith in me to take the time with every student to really understand how they know the world, and what is at stake for them in their intellectual journey. I never thought that I would end up as 'an academic', to be honest, and even now sometimes when I talk to people about my job, it takes me by surprise. I ended up where I am now, because people believed in me, took time with

me, and I gradually learned to believe in myself, to live in a world I still often find baffling, and to practice hope, even to play a small part in nurturing hope in others, as others have made the effort to nurture the same in me.