

Remaking the Mainstream: The Case for Activist IR Scholarship

Eric Herring*

What should international relations (IR) academics do in relation to activism, both in principle and in relation to Britain foreign policy? In this article I argue that, while British IR academics do a significant amount of valuable theoretical and empirical research, we produce very little primarily empirical work which documents the record of the British state in creating human misery abroad – be it hunger and illness through comprehensive economic sanctions or repression using British taxpayer-subsidised arms sales. I use ‘British’ in this article as shorthand for ‘British-based’, and I use ‘British state’ as shorthand for the highly networked but heterogeneous political and corporate elite which holds concentrations of power and money in Britain and beyond. In addition, British IR academics engage in very little research exposing the deceptions and self-deceptions deployed by the British state to deny its responsibility for that human misery, and directed towards contributing to education and activism which challenges the right of the British political-corporate elite to act in these ways. The important work of exposing and challenging these oppressive aspects of British foreign policy has been carried out very predominantly by non-academics, principally journalist John Pilger, independent author Mark Curtis, and political satirist and campaigner Mark Thomas.¹ Using my own past record of neglect of these issues as an illustration, I argue that most IR academics tend not even to be aware of making a choice in failing to carry out such vitally necessary work. In such cases, we have what physicist Jeff Schmidt called in his brilliant book of the same name ‘disciplined minds’, that is, minds which operate within elite-serving ideological bounds, doing innocuous, weakly challenging or directly elite-serving work.²

This is not to say that one can ever have a completely undisciplined mind in terms of absolute freedom of thought: all minds are shaped to a substantial degree by pre-existing subjectivities. There should be a commitment to reflexivity, individually and collectively, and for discussion of whose values are being served by our research and teaching: in this sense, we can have undisciplined minds. A much more widespread commitment to supporting action against oppression in this way would be a major change in the nature of British IR academia. This article aims to show that there is indeed a choice that needs to be made, to provide an explanation of

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1. The work of all three challenges the view that Britain plays a fundamentally benign role in the world, and only makes well-intentioned mistakes. See Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses* (Vintage: London, 2004) and <<http://www.markcurtis.info/>>; Pilger, *Freedom Next Time* (London: Bantam, 2006) and <<http://pilger.carlton.com/>>; Thomas, *As Used on the Famous Nelson Mandela: Underground Adventures in the Arms and Torture Trade* (London: Ebury Press, 2006) and <<http://www.markthomasinfo.com/>>.

2. Jeff Schmidt, *Disciplined Minds* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) and <<http://disciplined-minds.com/>>.

why there is so little awareness of the existence of that choice, and to argue for scholarship which exposes and challenges the human misery inflicted by policies carried out in our name, with our taxes and supposedly for our benefit. A possible defence of British IR academia is that it is already engaged extensively in encouraging the more positive aspects of British foreign policy, or in supporting activism against oppression elsewhere in the world and by other states, or in developing theoretical ideas about transnational state/imperial practices which may have major payoffs for activism generally. These may indeed be alternative and equally valid contributions to struggles against oppression. However, we must also be alert to the possibility that we are being diverted from a major aspect of what we need to be doing, especially when we consider British IR academia collectively. Our almost complete silence on major acts of oppression abroad carried out or supported by the British state suggests that there is something which is deeply flawed in our collective enterprise in terms of its contribution to opposing oppression but highly functional in terms of the freedom of the British state to act oppressively.

Concepts such as discipline, oppression, progressive, truth, elites, the state and so on do need to be theorised, as their meaning is not self-evident. For example, theory helps us understand the relative value of seeing states as national versus transnational or conceiving of business corporations as separate from or part of states. It also helps us consider whether or not one can pursue an activist agenda through states. However, when Iraqis were dying due to British-backed economic sanctions what did they need most from British IR academia? What did the British state fear most when it was doing this? It is highly implausible that the answer is more theory as opposed to more empirical research made available to campaigners and journalists in forms that they can use to expose and challenge what is being done. If theorisation was the prelude to empirical engagements and the translation of that theoretical and empirical work into activist resources, the demand for theorisation would be more defensible. However, as I show below, few British IR academics have shown an interest in doing so in relation to the British state.

From Wiping the State Clean ...

At present, British-based IR academia has a poor record in carrying out research which is of any value in assisting the British public or non-academics activists to have any meaningful chance of holding the British state to account for its actions abroad. To the extent that attention is not paid to producing a body of knowledge about the human costs of the actions of the British state, academics writing about British foreign policy are generating a fundamentally misleading picture of it, and those who concentrate on other things are leaving that misleading picture in place. The result is that the record of the British state gets wiped clean of its oppressive acts. The coverage of the Third World/South in leading British and US IR journals, textbooks and monograph series between 1998 and 2003 was assessed by Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkins.³ They concluded that the coverage of the South was dominated by analyses which framed the South as a problem for, and threat to, the North. As they argue, this reflects the near-monopoly of US and UK based scholars in writing these analyses and the dominance of state-centric realism and liberalism, with imperialism and colonialism treated as subordinate issues if they are mentioned at all.

3. Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkin, 'Still Waiting After All These Years: "The Third World" on the Periphery of International Relations', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol. 6, no. 2 (May 2004), 241-258.

Despite this, there is a substantial amount of progressive IR scholarship in US and British universities. It is progressive in that it considers the problems of the South with a view to remedying them and examines the extent to which the North has played a role in bringing them about and exacerbating them, without losing sight of the possibility that Northern political forces can be (but certainly are not necessarily) more progressive than some of those in the South. As Thomas and Wilkins argue, progressive contributions are being made by US and UK IR scholarship in international political economy, global environmental politics, gender politics, global health politics and development studies. The fact that the most sustained challenges to IR orthodoxy are seen by Thomas and Wilkins as coming from Marxism and post-colonialism reflects the tendency they share with most other progressive IR scholars to value the theoretical over the empirical. Theoretical work in these areas has indeed generated major insights. Marxism provides tools for thinking about how world politics continues to be shaped by the imperialism of capital and the core capitalist states, with extremes of inequality and violence that have dire consequences for much of humankind. Post-colonial studies shows how identity constructions of the North as superior and the South as inferior license the use of force and other coercive means of disciplining and ordering of the South by the North. Human security studies provides a much more empirically-focused exploration of the numerous ways in which people as individuals and members of groups can have their physical or material well-being threatened, and is focused on practical responses to those threats. Thomas and Wilkins see human security studies as under-theorised. However, progressive IR scholarship generally tends to be under-empiricised. This is not an anti-theoretical line of argument: the point is that the progressive force of theory is severely limited if IR academics do not complement it with extensive empirical work focused specifically on the contemporary actions of the state and which provides the raw material with which to assess whether what it is doing is normatively acceptable and whether it has the right to act as it does. A tiny number of activists, some inside but mostly outside, academia have been doing this vital work, when it should be a central task for the majority of progressive academics.

The neglect of empirical research on crucial cases by progressive academics can be seen vividly with regard to British support for the sanctions on Iraq. The British state over many years has hidden behind a veil of deception and self-deception while doing so. British IR academia – along with the British news media – remained almost absolutely silent on these matters. In the discussion below, I explain how I was involved in maintaining that silence for many years in order to emphasise that one can do so quite unwittingly and with only dimly perceived awareness that we face a fundamental choice in how we conduct ourselves as academics.

Silent Sanctions on Iraq

The sanctions on Iraq illustrate the fact that the immiseration of most of a society and causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of its citizens can get hidden right out in the open (the facts are there for anyone who cares to consult them), with barely a peep academics as well as journalists, until relatively recently including me. Comprehensive UN economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq when it invaded Kuwait in 1990 and continued after it was expelled from Kuwait by force: they were only lifted shortly after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. UNICEF calculated that there were 500,000 deaths above the anticipated rate among Iraqi children under five years of age between 1991 and 1998, without attributing proportions of deaths to particular

causes.⁴ Richard Garfield's 'most likely' estimate is that, of the deaths of 227,000 Iraqi children under five between August 1991 and March 1998, one quarter can be attributed to the US-led bombing and three quarters (roughly 170,000) to the sanctions. While Saddam Hussein's prioritisation of himself and his associates exacerbated the situation seriously, the sanctions - soon reinforced in their effects by the US-led bombing in 1991 which was described by the UN immediately afterwards as 'near apocalyptic' - were so comprehensive that they unavoidably had a devastating effect.⁵ This was recognised from the very outset, and not just by the UN. The US Defence Intelligence Agency concluded in January 1991 that:

unless water treatment supplies are exempted from unsanctions [i.e. UN sanctions] for humanitarian reasons, no adequate solution exists ... [to] meet Iraqi needs ... Failing to secure supplies will result in a shortage of pure drinking water for much of the population. ... Epidemics of such diseases as cholera, hepatitis, and typhoid could occur. ... Full degradation of the water treatment system probably will take at least another 6 months.⁶

Despite knowing the truth from the earliest days, British officials and politicians made the false claims that the sanctions were not hurting Iraqis, that the suffering of Iraqis was solely due to the actions of Saddam Hussein and that their view was supported by UN documentation. For example, Foreign Office Minister Brian Wilson asserted in 2001 that 'There is no evidence that sanctions are hurting the Iraqi people.'⁷

A key figure in promoting these official distortions about the situation in Iraq was Carne Ross, a First Secretary at the British Mission to the UN between 1999 and 2004 and the official in charge of British policy on Iraq at the UN. After resigning over the invasion of Iraq, he admitted that he and his colleagues had engaged in this deception and self-deception:

The speeches I drafted for the Security Council and my telegrams back to London were composed of facts filtered from the stacks of reports and intelligence that daily hit my desk. As I read these reports, facts and judgments that contradicted "our" version of events would almost literally fade into nothingness ... We [were] able to obscure the more complex, deeper and more important truth, perhaps even the truth.... And this was that there was undoubted human suffering in Iraq, of a quite appalling scale⁸

The overall verdict on the sanctions on Iraq offered by Ross is as follows:

4. UNICEF, Government of Iraq, *Child and Maternal Mortality Survey 1999: Preliminary Report* <<http://www.unicef.org/reseval>>.

5. Richard Garfield, 'Morbidity and Mortality Among Iraqi Children from 1990 Through 1998: Assessing the Impact of the Gulf War and Economic Sanctions', Fourth Freedom Foundation, March 1999, <<http://www.casi.org.uk/info/garfield/dr-garfield.html>>.

6. US DIA, *Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities*, 18 January 1991, <http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/declassdocs/dia/19950901/950901_511rept_91.html>.

7. For a review and rebuttal of these official distortions, see my 'Between Iraq and a Hard Place: A Critique of the British Government's Case for UN Economic Sanctions', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2002), 39-56, revised and updated in Richard Falk, Irene Gendzier and Robert Jay Lifton (eds), *Crimes of War: Iraq* (New York: Nation Books, 2006), 222-230.

I think sanctions were wrong and they harmed the wrong people. They did immeasurable damage to the Iraqi civilian population. We were conscious of that damage, but we did too little to address it. ... I'm not proud of my own role in that because I was a vigorous defender of British policy in the security council. We would not have treated a European or American people that way.⁹

For thirteen years from 1990 to 2003, the British state, with the US in the lead and under the imprimatur of the UN itself, conducted a policy which killed Iraqis in huge numbers, with the deaths disproportionately among children, and blighted terribly the lives of most of those who survived.¹⁰

Where were the British news media during this epic disaster for Iraqi society in which the British state played a central role? They failed to educate and inform the British public. In all of the years of the sanctions, aside from Mark Thomas's campaigning political comedy programmes, only one documentary was ever screened on the issue on British television. This programme by John Pilger (for which I was principal academic consultant) exposed how the sanctions were devastating the Iraqi people while noting that Saddam Hussein and his closest cronies lived in luxury.¹¹

Where was British IR academia? Did it do any better? No. Did I do any better? Not much, and not at all until recently. Throughout this entire time there was a total of three articles in British IR journals on the sanctions – mine, one (by US scholars) which I had commissioned as editor of a special issue, and one assessing them in relation to their gendered implications.¹² In combination, the media and academic silence was near total, and made it impossible for meaningful democratic control by the public of Britain's policy on Iraq. How can the people hold the state to account if they have no idea of what it is doing? An explanation of my own role in this provides some insight into how this process works and also how it can be challenged. I was a full yet near-oblivious participant in the silence on human cost of the sanctions. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, I supported sanctions rather than war in order to force an Iraqi withdrawal. However, I saw nothing indicating the comprehensiveness of the sanctions or their extreme effects. Instead, I mistakenly envisaged moderate levels of disruption such as unemployment and underemployment and anticipated that the sanctions would last months rather than years.

The first time the nature and costs of the sanctions came to my attention was in a *Guardian* article by Maggie O'Kane in May 1996, at the time when the agreement was being made for small-scale UN-supervised Iraqi oil sales from which Iraq could use most of the proceeds to buy

8. Carne Ross, 'War Stories', *Financial Times*, 28 January 2005.

9. Stephen Moss, 'Diplomat at Large', *The Guardian*, 20 June 2005.

10. On how it could do so while facing minimal scrutiny, see 'Power, Propaganda and Indifference: An Explanation of the Maintenance of Economic Sanctions on Iraq Despite Their Human Cost', in William Haddad and Tareq Ismael (eds.), *Iraq: The Human Cost of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 34-55.

11. 'Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq', ITV, 6 March 2000. See also <<http://www.johnpilger.com>>.

12. Herring, 'Between Iraq and a Hard Place'; John Mueller and Karl Mueller, 'The Methodology of Mass Destruction: Assessing Threats in the New World Order', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2000), 163-187; Lori Buck, Nicole Gallant and Kim Richard Nossal, 'Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft: the Case of Iraq', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1998), 69-84.

an utterly inadequate amount of humanitarian goods under the UN Oil For Food (OFF) programme.¹³ O’Kane’s article reported hundreds of thousands of deaths, and the effective denial of food and medicine due to lack of funds despite them being supposedly exempt from the sanctions. I could not believe it. I thought that if this was really happening, I would have heard about it and that many journalists and academics would have been commenting on it. The article ‘had’ to be an exaggeration or a distortion. However, in 1998 I happened to come across the websites of the UN OFF programme and the Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq (CASI) set up in 1997 by students at Cambridge University. Laid out in detail was all the testimony on the human destruction being caused by the sanctions: this information was the catalyst of my subsequent research and campaigning in this area.

... To Activism Against Oppression

In liberal democracies, journalism tends to be filtered by commercial and ratings pressures (and related assumptions about audiences), the mainly elite sources relied upon, heavily resourced rebuttals from elites and a broad ideological belief in the essentially benign nature of the liberal democratic state. The evidence from the cases examined here shows that filtering not only occurs in academia as well but in important cases is almost totalitarian in its effectiveness. As an institution of the elite, it is hardly surprising that it tends to not to occur to academia to challenge that elite. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)’s control of research funds and interference in teaching by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) present major challenges to activist scholarship which must be identified and dealt with. Most of all, they can create an obsession with process over the substance of what we do and a fear of being seen as having an outsider activist focus as opposed to an insider policy focus (the latter being just as political but of course more acceptable). However, funded research and publication in leading journals which challenges the actions of the British state on grounds of principle can occur if we realise that it needs to be done, if we accept that we have a responsibility to do it (or to contribute to struggles against oppression in other ways) and if we are willing to do it. Approached collectively and with an understanding of the strategic and tactical issues, activist scholars can find ways of coping with the pressures for RAE success, securing ESRC funding and strong QAA ratings without abandoning their principles. The remainder of this article proposes some basic principles underlying what it means to be, and flourish as, an activist scholar.

Always Adhere to the Highest Scholarly Standards in Research and Teaching

Activist scholarship should involve a search for as much truth as can be uncovered, and freedom of thought in trying to uncover it. In research, this means honest and open consideration of arguments and counter-arguments, evidence and counter-evidence. In teaching, it means exposing students to the whole range of debate and sources, making sure in particular this includes full and fair coverage of positions and sources with which one disagrees, and with openness as to what constitutes the whole range. Students should feel able to hold contrary positions to ours and not feel that they will in any way be penalised for doing so if these are well grounded in scholarly terms. Equally, students who hold similar positions should feel that they will not be in any way rewarded for doing so and must earn any rewards in scholarly terms.

13. Maggie O’Kane, ‘The Wake of War’, *Guardian*, 18 May 1996.

Even though activist scholars will think themselves correct (though not unquestioningly so) in the accuracy and moral value of their own position, teaching must not be conducted with that as the assumption. Indeed, there needs to be a positive commitment to self-questioning. Such points are universal to good scholarship, not merely to activist scholarship, but it needs to be stated to make it explicit and clear that there is no trade-off between any activism worth having and scholarly standards. Truth and freedom of thought are things we are meant to be championing. Activist academics are not necessarily more vulnerable to sacrificing scholarly standards to politics than mainstream academics, despite the tendency of mainstream academics to assume that to be the case. Indeed, making one's activist values and their political implications explicit is an important means of upholding scholarly standards. In contrast, when mainstream academics assume or assert their political neutrality they are making a political move without having to account for how it might undermine their scholarly standards.

Organise, with Non-academic Activists

It is vital that activist scholars organise to provide mutual support, help themselves to understand better what they are doing, debate goals and strategies, provide a platform from which to persuade and convert, and interact with non-academic activists. The American Political Science Association (APSA) Caucus for a New Political Science (CNPS) states that its purpose 'is to help make the study of politics relevant to the struggle for a better world'.¹⁴ Founded in 1967, it has its own journal *New Political Science*, organises many panels at the APSA annual conference and seeks to provide career support for young activist scholars. It has annual awards for the community activist group, lifetime achievement, best book and best conference paper. It rejects the notion that the study of politics can be objective in the sense of being politically neutral, and argues that the claim of neutrality is actually the partisan defence of the status quo against democratic challenge. The CNPS has campaigned for unionisation of academics and students, for a ban on CIA recruitment and military-funded research on campuses and for debate within the APSA on major political issues. There have been and will be disagreements on strategy and tactics (for example, whether military-funded research should actually be kept on campus the better to monitor it and assess its legitimacy). However, the CNPS has been effective at protecting and promoting a vigorous community of US-based activist scholars.

In order to provide a similar platform in Britain, in December 2002 I co-founded the Network of Activist Scholars of Politics and International Relations (NASPIR) which has as its stated purpose the promotion of politics and IR scholarship which supports non-violent action against oppression.¹⁵ It has over 400 members, most of them British-based and including many non-academics, with younger scholars, including PhD candidates, particularly strongly represented. One of its main achievements has been to provide a sense of community for activist scholars who did not previously feel at home within British IR academia. It has a website and web-archived email list with traffic of over 2,000 messages in total. It has a British International Studies Association (BISA) NASPIR Working Group which has run numerous panels at BISA annual conferences since December 2003. In contrast, it has yet to be very active within the UK Political Studies Association (PSA).

14. <<http://www.apsanet.org/about/sections/section27.cfm>>.

15. <<http://www.naspir.org.uk>> and <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/naspir/>>.

The other main achievement of NASPIR has been to encourage progressive theoretical and empirical research which is embedded in social movements. For example, Emma Mayhew's research on the intimate connections between the British state and the arms industry which underlie New Labour's subsidies for the arms trade features prominently in her work in the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, and Anna Stavrianakis's research informs her campaigning against the involvement of British universities with arms companies.¹⁶ Other NASPIR members have concentrated on scholarship aimed at combating oppression elsewhere. For example, Doug Stokes's research on the US war of (not on) terror in Colombia is connected with his work as a member of Justice for Colombia.¹⁷ Ruth Blakeley's work on torture as a tool of US foreign policy also provides an assessment of the achievements and limitations of the campaigning of School of the Americas Watch.¹⁸ The research of NASPIR members is often theoretically informed, and some focuses primarily on theory: the key point is that it is situated within debates about and actions aimed at ending oppression.

NASPIR could expand its activities in many directions, such as creating its own awards for high-quality activist scholarship, expressing a collective view on issues within the profession such as the ESRC's review of PhD research training, developing teaching resources, and securing research funding. It might also look to peace studies for advice and lessons: not surprisingly, considering the similarities of outlook, some NASPIR members are peace studies scholars. It could connect more with activist scholars in other disciplines, as an activist IR scholar is likely to have more of significance in common with an activist scholar of, say, physics (as in the case of Schmidt) than a mainstream IR scholar. By organising, activist scholars are more likely to come through their professional training with their commitment to activist values and actions intact. They can be (principled) winners, not martyrs, and in particular can provide encouragement to research students who will inevitably be worried about the employment implications of their values. While passion and commitment can have pitfalls, believing in what you do and feeling that it is geared to something of social value as opposed to career value alone can result in much better work and therefore career success. And interactions with non-academic activists helps develop an understanding of what research is needed, and those activist connections, which are often local, are another means of sustaining a scholar's activist values.

Make Activist Arguments on the Home Ground of Mainstream Scholars

While as activist scholars we need our organisations, publications and forums, we also need to make activist arguments on the academic and policy home ground of mainstream scholars. In April 2006, Noam Chomsky addressed around 500 cadets at the US Military Academy at West

16. Emma Mayhew, 'A Dead Giveaway: A Critical Analysis of New Labour's Rationale for Supporting Military Exports', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 26, no. 1 (April 2005), pp. 62-83 and Campaign Against The Arms Trade, *Who Calls The Shots? How Corporate-Government Collusion Drives Arms Exports*, February 2005. Anna Stavrianakis, '(Big) Business As Usual. Sustainable Development, NGOs and UK arms export policy', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 5, no. 1 (2005): 45-67 and 'Call to Arms', elsewhere in this special section.

17. Doug Stokes, *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (London: Zed Books, 2004) and <<http://www.justiceforcolombia.org>> . Justice for Colombia's activities include uncovering information about British military aid to the Colombian state.

18. Ruth Blakeley, 'Still Training to Torture? US Training of Latin American Military Forces', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 8, forthcoming December 2006.

Point on the theory and practice of Just War, and in June 2006 Mark Thomas spoke on arms export law reform at the annual conference of arms industry lobbyists.¹⁹ That such efforts need to be made is illustrated by the PSA's naming of Tony Blair as 'Politician of the Year' for 2005. In support of this, the PSA judges cited Blair's winning of three general elections and his transformation of the Labour Party into 'the natural party of government'.²⁰ Blair's policies, such as his backing for the sanctions on Iraq or authorisation of arms sales to dictators such as Indonesia's Suharto counted for nothing against that narrowest imaginable measure of success – winning elections, it being an irrelevance what you do with power when you get it other than manoeuvring to retain it. The fact that this award was not greeted with a campaign to force its retraction is a measure of the impunity with which mainstream academics can act at present. Activist scholars need to reframe what counts as the academic discipline and what counts as politics within it.

Insider activism (that is, intellectual and policy work within mainstream institutions) risks co-option and deradicalisation. For some, being an activist scholar necessarily involves being an anti-military, anti-state, anti-capitalist outsider opposing British-backed US foreign policy, but there is no consensus on this.²¹ The risks of co-option and deradicalisation needs to be considered in relation to context, strategy and tactics as well as a theorised understandings of the underlying characteristics of those mainstream institutions. To insist on or assume pacifism, anarchism, socialism and opposition to all aspects of British and US foreign policy misses what may turn out to be the ambiguous, contingent, factionalised and therefore potentially progressive aspects of the military, the state, capitalism and the foreign policies of Britain and the United States.

Assess Your Scholarship in Relation to its Contribution to Collective Struggles Against Oppression

Being an activist scholar involves measuring your research primarily in terms of its contribution to collective struggles against oppression rather than its contribution to one's RAE profile or to creating or advancing scholarly debates. We need to protect ourselves by working out how to deal with RAE pressure and move scholarly debates on to issues that reflect our activist values. However, RAE success and the advancement of scholarly debates should not be ends in themselves. While our intentions matter, we are also responsible for the consequences of our actions and inactions, and one way forward is to direct our efforts at challenging oppression where we are most likely to achieve some success. This is likely (but not necessarily) to be in relation to the actions of our own state and those state and non-state oppressors it supports, rather than its official enemies.²² As IR scholars, we have significant time and resources at our disposal and therefore an additional responsibility to investigate, expose and oppose those oppressive acts. As academics, we all develop areas of expertise and specialisation, but that does not necessarily excuse us from committing ourselves to spending a significant amount of time in developing expertise on oppressive actions and making that expertise publicly available. When the state acts in oppressive ways in areas that are outside our expertise, we have to be willing to

19. Respectively Book TV C-Span2 <<http://www.booktv.org/feature/index.asp?segid=7022&schedID=428>> and *New Statesman*, June 2006, p. 20.

20. <<http://www.psa.ac.uk/awards2005/notice.htm>>.

21. Martin Shaw, 'The Unfinished Global Revolution: Intellectuals and the New Politics of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4 (October 2001), p. 638.

22. See Noam Chomsky, 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', *New York Review of Books*, 23 February 1967.

consider developing new areas of expertise in order to make our contribution to democratic accountability.

Acceptance of this as a serious consideration would represent a significant change from the current pattern of assuming that if a policy or issue is not in our personal area of specialisation we need not pay attention to it. We might decide in the end that our individual contribution to activism is better made in other ways, and there may be good reasons for that choice. For example, we may feel the need to write about a case of oppression in the past, or to document one in which there is no hope of success so that at least the story of those who are lost is told. Or we might conclude that we need to forgo working for some probable short-term smaller gains in order to do the groundwork in the hope of longer-term and less probable larger gains. It will also be difficult to work out what kind of individual contribution is more likely to have most effect, not least because the weight of our individual contribution will be small (but certainly not therefore insignificant). However, in considering and discussing together how we might best contribute to opposing oppression, and seeing ourselves in a collective, social movement context rather than solely as individual scholars, we would at least be asking the right question from the right perspective.

Measure the Worth of Your Work by the Extent to Which it Serves Your Own Values, not Those of the Institutions Which Employ and Monitor You

What is best for your department is not necessarily best for humankind.²³ For example, if you are in a department which is silent about the human costs of the actions of the British state and it achieves a high ranking in the RAE and consequent funding, this may be a cause for personal relief in terms of job security but should be a cause for grief in terms of social worth. It is all too easy to feel grateful for the pat on the back and/or money in the bank from the state and its quango instruments: I could not stop myself feeling that when the department I am in was awarded 23 out of 24 by the QAA. I have also found it difficult to restrain myself from deploying that score in defence of my teaching and that of 'my' department. As institutions, the department, the university, the ESRC and all the rest are, for many purposes, 'them', not 'us'. This does not mean that activist scholars should not work within established institutions: indeed, by being in universities and colleges, we are already in such institutions. There can be significant areas of common cause with those in established institutions: such areas should be developed and built upon – for example, mainstream academically-oriented and policy-oriented scholars can be seriously committed to hearing, publishing and funding work from an activist perspective, or to opening up deliberation and decision-making in a much less hierarchical fashion. One possible criterion for deciding whether or not to take on a particular task or position within an established institution is whether you will still be able to do things as an activist scholar that an insider scholar would not. In policy work, it should involve putting on the agenda principled critiques of our own state and not just its official enemies. Within academia, it might involve speaking at public meetings, providing information for campaigners and journalists or becoming involved in campaigning. It should involve seeking to promote much more openness and democracy (including in one's own department) and exposing anti-democratic aspects of supposedly neutral academic and policy processes and organisations. It should also involve exploring the value of unconventional teaching techniques which are consciously aimed at empowering students and

23. This paragraph is strongly influenced by Schmidt, *Disciplined Minds*, especially ch. 16.

reducing hierarchy in the classroom.²⁴ Our activist values should provide both impetus and insight into how to exercise what power we do have in a much more democratic way.

Conclusion: Making Activist IR Scholarship Mainstream

To a great extent British IR academics have effectively and unwittingly abandoned control of the political content of their work as researchers, administrators and teachers: they have been channelled away from challenging the British state, its human rights abuses and the lies and deceptions it uses to cover them up. Our overall goal should be to remake the mainstream, whether academically oriented or policy oriented, so that activist IR scholarship is the norm rather than the exception. While some of us are engaged in important aspects of activist scholarship, collectively we have failed thus far to provide that necessary challenge to the British state. Imagine if a high proportion of the IR funding applications to the ESRC was focused on principled assessments of role of the British state in the world. Imagine if all this scholarly work was connected to campaigns to educate the public about what the state is doing, and to have truly informed democratic debate. The fact that this special section has been published in a mainstream journal is a small but still meaningful demonstration of progress which may embolden others to become activist scholars or increase their activism. Social justice often advances not in one fell swoop but in myriad small acts, usually imperceptibly influential in themselves, which can merge to become a major force for change.

Eric Herring in Senior Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Bristol, UK.

24. See for example Ira Shor, *When Students Have Power. Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Another resource is *Radical Teacher*. See <<http://www.radicalteacher.org>>.