

**Being in
Discourse
in IR:**

an Experience Book of
SOVEREIGNTY

Erzsébet Strausz

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

Department of International Politics
Aberystwyth University

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the lived experience of social scientific practice and processes of subject formation in the academic discipline of International Relations. It draws inspiration from Michel Foucault's philosophy and critical ethos of self-transformation with special emphasis on his early writings on aesthetics, knowledge and discourse as well as his late *Collège de France* lectures on ethics. The genre and project of the 'experience book' takes Foucault's self-transformative ethos seriously by translating it into action, into actual practice. As such, it provides a first person narrative of some of the ways in which 'we', professionals of the field, become subjects of particular experiences in the 'disciplinary life' of IR as academic knowers, thinkers, readers and writers. Through a series of accounts of the self, that is, through my own attempts at narrative reconstruction of the constitution of my scholarly subjectivity in the subfields of 'sovereignty' discourses and what we may call 'Foucaultian IR', the thesis develops a subjective, insider's view of the experience of being in discourse and some of its subjectivating effects. As a political project the very process of the writing of this thesis is an effort to negotiate these discursive forces: the thesis sets out to cultivate alternative subjectivities and modes of being in discourse for the self and others. Through the exploration of the desubjectifying potentials of narrative writing the experience books seeks to open up possibilities to remake scientific experience by problematizing some of those unreflected everyday academic practices that reinforce and perpetuate disciplinary identities. Ultimately, it seeks to work towards the transformation of academic practice (and academic experience) into a site of resistance to contemporary forms of government.

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Although this thesis is about the ‘sovereignty’ of the self, what the actual process of writing made me realize is that it would have been utterly impossible to have either a thesis or any sense of self-sovereignty without the continuous support, encouragement and care of a great number of people whom I cannot thank enough for their generosity. This thesis is also about the limitations of discourse and what words can say so to cut a long story short, three months ago (and four years ago and at many other times in-between) I thought this moment would never come. The fact that it did (*as I am writing these acknowledgements now*) is because of what discourse and words cannot say but only express through the person behind them. This is how I would like to express my gratitude, too: in ways and through means that go beyond the content and meaning of words (such as these). I would like to thank *you all* in person when we meet and for now, in the language of symbols (see next page).

While we are here on *this page* though - pushing words to their limits - I would like to thank in particular my supervisors, Alistair Shepherd and Carl Death whose fantastic support in the past year helped me turn the random and somewhat bizarre idea of the ‘experience book’ into one of the most meaningful experiences I have ever had (and something that now also exists as an experience book).

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