Interview - Melanie Richter-Montpetit

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Melanie Richter-Montpetit is Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield (UK). Her research interests are in International Relations with a focus on War and Security Studies; Feminist, Queer and Decolonial Theory; and Transnational American Studies. Her work has appeared in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, Security Dialogue, International Feminist Journal of Politics, and the Austrian Journal of Politics. She is currently Chair and Program Chair of the ISA-LGBTQA Caucus. The ISA's Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Section recently presented her with the inaugural Early Career Community Engagement Award for her work promoting equity and diversity inside and outside the academy. She is the recipient of a 2017-2018 Leverhulme Research Fellowship.

Where do you see the most exciting debates happening in International Relations Theory?

International relations (IR) as an academic discipline emerged to provide intellectual support for the imperial and (settler) colonial ambitions of Western states. These ambitions were driven by openly White supremacist politics and anxieties. It is well known now that the first academic IR journal published in the USA was called Journal of Race Development – it was later renamed and then merged with Foreign Affairs. As DuBois' diagnosis of 'the global colour line' as the central problem of the 20th century continues to hold true, a burgeoning body of IR scholarship challenges the ongoing raciality and coloniality of International Relations. A recent edited volume by Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam contains many must-read pieces in this area. But the analytical and political challenge of this literature does not end with unearthing and unpacking White supremacist and colonial premises of IR theory and contemporary global politics. Recent scholarship like Robbie Shilliam's The Black Pacific, the edited volume by Quỳnh N. Phạm and Robbie Shilliam Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions, Anna Agathangelou and Kyle Killian's Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations and Meera Sabaratnam's forthcoming Decolonising Intervention: International Statebuilding in Mozambique provincialize both mainstream and much of critical IR.

Another really exciting area of research is the path-breaking scholarship by Charmaine Chua, Deborah Cowen and Laleh Khalili on the foundational role of logistics and its role in the making of military, capitalist, and imperial relations. Closer to my area of research is fascinating work at the intersection of Critical War Studies, Critical Military Studies, Science and Technology Studies, and Postcolonial theory. I am thinking in particular of the work of Tarak Barkawi, Patricia Owens and Alison Howell. Howell is currently completing a monograph on the military production of scientific racism, from the 19th century to the present. The book challenges the interdisciplinary fields of war and military studies to be more attentive to race and disability, while also offering a rigorous take-down of theories of 'militarization' and 'securitization.'

In Feminist IR there is so much to mention! An absolute must-read is the recently published edited book Scandalous Economics: Gender and the Politics of Financial Crisis. Very recently, vital and exciting debates have emerged about bridging the gap between Feminist Security Studies and Feminist Global Political Economy. As someone who works on gender, sexuality and soldiering, I am really excited about the burgeoning scholarship on military masculinities, including recent work by Catherine Baker, Victoria Basham, Amanda Chisholm, Claire Duncanson, Maya Eichler, Laleh Khalili, Synne Laastad Dyvik, Nivi Manchanda, Keally McBride and Annick Wibben, Saskia Stachowitsch, Joanna Tidy and Julia Welland. Finally, I am really thrilled about the growing interest in Queer IR! I know I will have

opportunity to say more about queer research in the following questions, so suffice it to say that Queer IR has produced theoretically and empirically robust research in core areas of IR – war and security, IPE and development, state- and nation-formation, and human rights. I am thinking in particular of the recent solo books by Paul Amar, Rahul Rao and Cynthia Weber.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

One of the most unexpected and dramatic shifts in my thinking happened during my PhD course work – I came to realize that IR was interesting after all! I did all of my degrees in Political Science – initially because I naively thought that Political Science was the academic discipline to help me better understand and challenge the power relations and systems of violence I was concerned with: war and militarism, chattel slavery and antiblackness, the holocaust, sexism and homophobia – all of which spoke to complex and painful family histories around war, displacement and 'miscegenation.' I quickly realized that analyses of the kind of political I was interested in weren't supported much by the discipline of Political Science. But by far the most alienating class during my undergrad was IR Theory. However, I was very fortunate that before I began my official undergraduate studies in Berlin, I was introduced to works in political theory that deeply resonated with me and that cracked open my political and analytical imaginary.

After I had finished high school in Germany, I spent a year living with my American grandparents in Tacoma, WA. I attended classes at a community college, including by Dr. Boatamo Mosupyoe, a brilliant scholar-activist, who pushed me and made me realize how much un-learning I had to do. It was during this time that I was introduced to reading political theory: The first works I read were by bell hooks, Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins. Beginning my journey into political theory and political science with Black Feminist Theory profoundly shaped my notion of the political and of the kind of analyses necessary to meaningfully study politics and 'world history.' Back in Germany I found supportive contract faculty that agreed to supervise my undergraduate dissertation on the notion of the political in Black Feminist Thought.

It was not until my PhD studies in Tkaranto/Toronto (Mississauga of the New Credit territory) that I was able to combine my interests in critical approaches to war, security and imperial geopolitics, and feminist and queer theory. I was fortunate to be taught by and introduced to the work of IR scholars Anna Agathangelou and Sandra Whitworth. I got to read the scholarship of feminist and postcolonial IR theorists like Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, Lily Ling and Sankaran Krishna, and decided to major in Gender politics – and IR. My PhD project on post-9/11 US security then brought together my longstanding interests in war, the legacies of slavery and feminist and queer politics. Living in Tkaranto/Toronto on stolen land my notion of the political was pushed to account for settler colonialism and my role and responsibilities as a White settler. So much of my learning and un-learning since my graduate studies at York was and continues to be shaped by the political work of brilliant and fierce anti-colonial, anti-racist, migrant justice, sex worker, queer, trade union and other movements and community groups in the city.

How does queer theory destabilise common-sense assumptions about power relations in international relations?

Queer theory is animated by a commitment to the radical contingency of the term 'queer' – which makes Queer theory's scope and approach notoriously difficult to define. IR scholars typically associate Queer IR research with LGBT people and the promotion of LGBT human rights. However, queer inquiry refuses to limit itself to a bound referent object such as 'the LGBT'. Like IR scholarship in general, Queer research on international relations is concerned with formations of international power. As Cynthia Weber and I discuss in a forthcoming article on Queer IR for the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, Queer theory and Transnational Queer studies have produced some of the most innovative scholarship on a range of core concerns in International Relations, including war and peace, geopolitics, sovereignty, colonialism, nationalism, soldiering, globalization, development and norm diffusion.

At a minimum, queer inquiry challenges common-sense understandings of gender and sexuality as singular and stable. Queer theory challenges IR scholars' and practitioners' common assumptions about heterosexuality as the default sexuality and kinship norm ('heteronormativity') and the twin premise of two 'opposite' and complementary

gender positions ('cissexism'). These commonly unexamined beliefs about gender and sexuality are damaging to individuals whose sexuality, familial relations, and/or gender expression do not align with these gender and sexual norms. This critique extends also to the heterosexual/homosexual and male/female dichotomies underwriting traditional LGBT and Gender studies. While there is increasing awareness of certain non-normative sexualities ('homosexuality') and sexual practices ('Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men'), with few exceptions, mainstream and feminist scholarship as well as key international actors and policy frameworks rest on heteronormative and cissexist assumptions.

Queer IR demonstrates that sexuality and gender are important registers in the making of subjects (people; states; organizations) and world orders. While some Queer IR research studies the politics of LGBT human rights and/or explores the differential impact of security practices and economic policies on non-normative sexual and gendered subjects, much of Queer research treats queer as an analytical category. Rather than assume a stable LGBT identity, Queer IR scholarship investigates how certain sexual norms, normativities and subjects are produced. This kind of research is concerned with how sexual subjectivities come to be understood in binary terms and interrogates the political effects of this kind of either/or thinking and 'regimes of the normal' ('normal' vs 'perverse').

As Cynthia Weber and I discuss in the article, a growing body of Queer IR scholarship challenges the facile celebration of sexualized and gendered non-normativities in recent international policy initiatives and certain LGBT research. Under rubrics like 'homonormativity', 'homonationalism' and 'pinkwashing', Queer theorists examine how the increasing inclusion of (certain) LGBT subjects ('the respectable LGBT') in liberal states and markets animates geopolitical struggles and reconfigures transnational political and economic orders. This work challenges common-sense assumptions about non-normative sexual and gender formations as inherently transgressive. It also draws our attention to how non-normative gender and sexual formations are being harnessed in support of regressive geopolitical and economic projects, such as war, occupation and austerity politics. This research investigates how contemporary operations of global power are shaped by heteronormative, homonormative, and cissexist logics and desires beyond simple sexual binaries and dichotomies like homophobic vs. gay-friendly practices, policies, and actors.

In the article, we identify the following questions as central to queer inquiry into international relations:

- How are processes of modern state-formation connected to hetero-patriarchal family relations and associated normativities of sexuality and gender?
- How do cultural ideas about gender and sexuality shape foreign policy and military operations?
- How do the security and development needs of LGBTIQ subjects become key terrains in geopolitical struggles around war and security and human rights and norms diffusion?
- How do heteronormative and homonormative frameworks inform the operations of the global political economy? What are the emerging and unexpected ways in which genders and sexualities are being framed and likely to be framed in the future?
- How do normative understandings of gender and sexuality intersect with normative understandings of soldering, militarism and war to make 'normal soldiers', 'normal military policies' and 'normal wars'?
- How do non-normative understandings of gender and sexuality intersect with understandings of racial difference and colonial forms of power to construct internationally dangerous figures – like 'the terrorist' and/or 'the insurgent'?

A growing body of IR scholarship investigates the ways in which sexual norms and formations ('heteronormative', 'homonormative', 'cissexist') are entwined with racialized and colonial forms of power, such as settler colonialism and anti-blackness, including work by Anna Agathangelou and Darcy Leigh. I want to mention that while Queer IR has gained a lot of traction in the last few years, Queer IR as a field is not new. IR scholars like V. Spike Peterson and Cynthia Weber published explicitly Queer work as early as the mid-1990s.

Much of Queer IR shows a sustained engagement with Transnational Queer Studies scholarship, but Transnational Queer Studies does not seem to reciprocate that interest. Where could TQS research benefit from Queer IR? Where do you see Queer IR research pushing TQS?

As I mentioned earlier, one of the most vibrant areas of queer research across disciplines in recent years are debates about the increasing inclusion of (certain) non-normative sexual and gender subjects into liberal states and markets. This literature explores how demands for LGBT equality by state and non-state actors are driven by 'homonormative' and racist politics ('homonationalism'), and have come to constitute important battlefields in contemporary geopolitical struggles and efforts at neoliberal development policy and restructuring. One of the earliest pieces of queer scholarship theorizing how queerness is not simply treated as abject but actively harnessed in support of hegemonic geopolitics was published by IR scholar Cynthia Weber. In a series of essays (1994a, 1994b) in the mid-1990s that were then published as a book in 1999, Weber explores US-Caribbean relations, and the ways in which the USA tried to overcome its crisis of hegemony at the time, and regain its status as a potent and virile global super power. She shows how the U.S. state acted not just according to the usual aggressively masculine and heterosexual 'script', but relied on non-normative codes of gender and sexuality ('queer performativities'). So years before discussions about Pinkwashing, gay imperialism and homonationalism, this IR book tracked how the US state harnessed queerness for hegemonic politics!

Queer Theory today – at least the kind of Queer scholarship informed by Black feminism and Women of Color feminisms ('Queer/Trans of Color Critique') – typically refuses to treat the growing legal equality of (some) LGBT people in isolation from other political struggles and relations of violence. This work is analytically and politically vital. However, as Cynthia Weber and I discuss in the article, overall, Transnational Queer Studies scholarship tends to be quick to dismiss contemporary global LGBT human rights activism as simply animated by racist and colonial rescue fantasies, and as therefore irredeemable. Some Queer IR scholarship offers a more nuanced account of global LGBT politics. For example, Rahul Rao (2010) in his book Third World Protest: Between Home and the World offers a more differentiated analysis of various queer social movements, including in the "West." One of the most prominent indictments of current queer activism is Joseph Massad's Desiring Arabs, in which (among other things) Massad posits the existence of a 'Gay International.' While Rao agrees with Massad that current LGBT human rights politics are all too often entangled with racist and imperial politics, Rao also shows that 'there is no single politics' to the 'Gay International' (Rao 2010: 177).

Also, much of Transnational Queer Studies studying geopolitics and LGBT rights focus on hegemonic actors in the Global North. Queer IR research by Rahul Rao for instance critically examines the ways in which LGBT rights politics are strategically mobilized by elites in the Global South, such as in India. Other Queer IR research shows how geopolitical struggles around LGBT rights also play out among EU states (Western vs. Eastern Europe) and between Europe vs. Russia. Contrary to facile imaginative geographies of gay-friendly vs homophobe states and regions and associated diffusion models, some Queer IR research explores the transnational production of homophobia.

IR scholar Paul Amar's recent book The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism is an excellent example for how Queer IR research produces innovative analytical and empirical work on how the governance of stigmatized sexualities and gender expressions plays a key role in shifting figurations of global security regimes. Amar's book focuses on Cairo and Rio de Janeiro, two megacities said to be at the forefront of new and innovative security practices, actors, and governance structures. These new security regimes bring together a set of strange bedfellows, including ultra-conservative and self-identified progressive mass movements around morality, sexuality, and labor.

Securitization may be the most popular IR concept taken up by critical non-IR scholarship, including Transnational Queer Studies. Transnational Queer Studies could benefit from engaging with the work of IR scholar Alison Howell on The Global Politics of Medicine, which offers a fundamental challenge to the conceptual and empirical validity of securitization theory. Working at the intersection of Critical War studies, Critical Disability studies and Queer theory, Howell argues that modern warfare and modern medicine emerged in tandem rather than medicine and psychiatry being 'abused' by military actors. She shows that securitization theory underestimates the extent to which systems of medicine and systems of warfare produce homophobic, transphobic, racist and ableist violence in liberal orders. Howell evidences her understanding of medicine as an instrument of violence by exploring medicine's role in the violent management of "abnormal" populations, such as homosexuals and trans women.

Queer Studies lies at the heart of your own research. Can you draw on examples from your own

research, which underline how a queer perspective on IR themes enhances understanding and theorizing of the international?

I want to start by saying how pleased I am that Queer IR has gained so much traction in the last few years. Having said that, I have been uneasy about how queer is taken up at times. A few years ago, when ISA was held in Tkaranto/Toronto, I remember attending what to me was the first panel explicitly called 'Queer IR' – the room was packed beyond capacity and attendees were – by all IR conference standards – ueber-excited, giggly and flirtatious. Previous conference sessions that day included a series of special panels on Canadian settler colonialism that featured Indigenous activists and scholars – many of the discussions brought up the central role of sexuality as a tool of settler colonial domination. The ways in which matters of sexuality and (racial) queerness were engaged, the kind of audience they attracted and the kind of affective and political responses this provoked, couldn't have been more different. On the one hand, sexuality understood as a fundamental register of colonial governance and death-making, and on the other hand, an audience (not so much the papers) moved by notions of sexuality and queerness as 'sexy' and fashionable in their perceived anti-normativity. The kind of queer scholarship that I find most meaningful and draw on for my work conceptualizes sexuality and gender as part of wider relations of power and violence, specifically racial and colonial formations. That scholarship – Queer/Trans of Color Critique – is rooted in the groundbreaking 1970s scholarship of lesbian feminists, most of whom self-identified as Black feminist and Women of Color feminist theorists. In this literature, sexuality and queerness are not (just) about sexual desire and practices in a narrow sense, but about social reproduction: kinship formations, colonial conquest and plunder; labour and property regimes; dis/ability and racial terror.

Much of my research is concerned with the affective and material economies of contemporary war and associated practices of violence. I explore how racial-sexual norms, practices and identities shape the production of force in 'the international', and in turn, how war and associated racial-sexual security practices are productive of new gendered racial-sexual normativities, subjectivities and (larger) political and economic orders. I am currently completing a book on post-9/11 US security (for more see Question 7) that explores the seemingly paradoxical trajectories of one the one hand, a proliferation of sexual, gender and racial freedoms, and the expansion of regressive racial-sexual security regimes on the other hand. Part of the analysis investigates the increasingly prominent role of women and LGB people in such security practices. The book locates the War on Terror's ambiguous biopolitical promise of liberal freedom and inclusion in the desires and disavowals of a White settler society in 'the afterlife of slavery'. My queer analysis examines how sexuality is a central register – conceptually and materially – in the making of the White settler order and the various subjects that inhabit it.

As I discuss in the book, the struggles over sexual politics and normative domesticity in the post-9/11 U.S. social formation, particularly around the debates on same-sex marriage and the inclusion of queers into the military, are not simply 'culture wars.' The organization of racialized sexuality and gender formations continues to be fundamental to the reproduction of racial capitalism and the White settler order. A few more examples how 'queer' comes up: As I discuss in more depth in Question 6, sexuality plays a critical role in the post-9/11 torture regime. In the book, and building in particular on the work of Laleh Khalili, I investigate how queer sexualities play an important role in the re/making of military masculinities and military femininities as the War on Terror shifts towards counter-insurgency operations. Overall, my work explores how both LGB(T) rights and homophobia/transphobia are strategically deployed as tools of statecraft.

Part of your research focuses on torture as a technology of security. You argue that torture, while proven ineffective, is embedded in Orientalist, racial-sexualised and imperialist grammars. Can you explain your argument and unveil what kind of social relations are reproduced by torture practices?

Confessions made under the influence of torture produce notoriously unreliable data. That's because most people are willing to say anything to stop the pain, or to avoid getting killed and/or are simply unable to remember accurate information owing to exhaustion and injury. All of this has been extensively studied and modern interrogation manuals commonly stress not to use torture as a means of intelligence gathering.

In my work, I have focused on the transnational torture regime the USA set up after 9/11. As I discuss in a blog piece

entitled 'Why Torture When Torture Does Not Work? Orientalism, Anti-Blackness and the Persistence of White Terror', the Senate Torture Report published in late 2014 came to the conclusion that up until then, the US post-9/11 detention and interrogation program failed to produce even one case of 'actionable intelligence.' Why then torture when it is known not to work? Why torture prisoners known not to be involved in or not to have any information on criminal or terrorist activity against the U.S. and its allies? In a journal article, I explore this puzzle by addressing two key questions: What is the value of these carceral practices when they do not produce actionable intelligence? And, what are the social relations and structures of feelings that make these carceral practices possible and desirable as technologies of security under the hegemonic post-9/11 U.S. security imaginary?

I cut into these questions from two angles: In a first move, I analyze the productive or constitutive effects of torture and show how these carceral security practices are not just shaped by Orientalist ideas about Muslim/ified sex-gender regimes but are also practices of gendered and sexualized race-making in this so-called post-racial era. I argue that torture and associated carceral security practices restore and eroticize the display of state authority and racist subjugation in the wake of the emasculating national security crisis termed '9/11.' In a second move, I explore the central role of law in making possible the post-9/11 torture regime, and specifically how the lawfare around torture is deeply shaped by the legacies of chattel slavery and slave laws. In conversation with Black studies scholarship on 'the afterlife of slavery' and the work of abolitionist critical race/critical legal studies scholars Angela Davis, Colin Dayan and Dylan Rodriguez, I discuss how the CIA Detention and Interrogation program didn't just suspend or disregard the law, but went to great pains to legally codify the torture regime. The torture memos draw on the legal gymnastics of slave law, which produced the enslaved as civilly dead, a subject that became recognized as a person only when committing a crime.

Locating the torture regime and other seemingly valueless carceral security practices within genealogies of antiblack and settler colonial violence opens up our analyses beyond explanatory and moral frameworks such as "failed intelligence-gathering", "state of exception" or "human rights abuses." As I explore in more detail in a book manuscript I am working on, this genealogy indicates the fundamental role and value of force and White racial terror in securing the sovereign authority of the U.S. settler imperial formation 'at home' and abroad.

My initial interest in torture and Orientalism was sparked by problematic feminist debates about the role of women torturers in Abu Ghraib prison in the early years of the US occupation of Iraq. At the time I was concerned in particular by feminist theorist Barbara Ehrenreich's (2004) widely circulated commentary in the LA Times in which she argued that the acts of torture were horrible 'but a sign of gender equality.' It was my first year of graduate school and I had just finished reading two brilliant books (Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004) on the gruesome torture and murder of Shidane Abukar Arone. The Somali teenager was brutally tortured to death by Canadian soldiers deployed on a peacekeeping mission to Somalia in 1993. Whilst all of the soldiers responsible for Arone's torture and murder were cast as cis men, Sherene Razack's and Sandra Whitworth's work provided me with important analytical tools to craft a more meaningful understanding of the Abu Ghraib torture 'scandal,' and which gave rise to my 2007 article entitled 'Empire, Desire and Violence: A Queer Transnational Feminist Reading of the Prisoner "Abuse" in Abu Ghraib and the Question of "Gender Equality".' Animated by an anti-racist, anti-imperial queer-feminist analytic and politics, it was important to me to account for the role of racial-sexual colonial desires in shaping the participation of White women soldiers in acts of torture that followed a clear misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic and racist script. This analysis sought to challenge liberal feminist demands at the time for the full and equal inclusion of women into Western militaries. In later work ('Militarized masculinities, women torturers and the limits of gender analysis at Abu Ghraib'), I recognized and revised a serious shortcoming of my analysis: while I accounted for the imperial politics of the torture regime and larger war, I failed to consider the settler colonial character of the US state, and the ways in which torture and the participation of settler women secured settler sovereignty 'at home.'

While post-9/11 US security practices are defined by the 'global war on terror', you shed light on the broader social structures, which reproduce and enable this discourse. What are these structures and why is it important to get beyond discursive constructions of the 'war on terror'?

I am currently completing a book manuscript that examines how both the Bush and Obama administrations have conducted the War on Terror as a liberal war. At the heart of liberal war is the promise that the 19th century 'colour

line' and associated ideas about gender and sexuality have been transcended. The book explores the vexed relationship between an explosion of sexual, gender and racial freedoms on the one hand, and the expansion of regressive racial-sexual security regimes on the other hand. Part of this analysis explores the increasingly prominent role played in such practices by subjects that until recently were themselves cast as threats to the nation and national security. Much of the scholarship on the ongoing hold of racial and colonial forms of power in the War on Terror is confined to exploring how US security policy is structured by the racial-sexual logics of Orientalism. Tentatively entitled Beyond the Erotics of Orientalism: Queer and Feminist Investments in Liberal War, the book locates the War on Terror's ambiguous promise of liberal freedom and equal inclusion, including equal sexual citizenship, in longer and neglected genealogies of colonial settlement and chattel slavery. The book explores how US security is produced around the figure of the Savage and the figure of the Slave since the making of the early U.S. settler empire, and the ways these knowledges facilitate the targeting of the Muslim/ified populations and spaces in the War on Terror. However, as I discuss in the book, these are not simply discursive constructions. The Savage and the Slave have come to constitute both the conceptual and material raw materials for securing the sovereign authority of the US settler imperial state – and the liberal way of life more broadly. Essentially, by tracing these longstanding security discourses, the book makes a larger argument about liberalism and specifically what Toni Morrison calls 'the parasitical nature of White freedom.'

The research for the book emerged from initial PhD course work on women torturers and the role of Orientalist logics in shaping torture practices in the War on Terror. Following on from that work, I wanted to write my thesis on the ways in which post-9/11 US security and public understandings of the ethical and necessary use of force continued to be inflected by the sexed 'colour line.' As I began to work on my PhD proposal, I kept coming across references in official military reports and media representations to two other racial-sexual discourses and enemies of the state: what Frank Wilderson refers to as the figure of the Native Savage and the figure of the Slave. From the 2004 war on Iraq all the way back to the US occupation of the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century, official and popular representations compared the pacification of populations abroad to past and ongoing pacification of 'domestic' Indigenous and Black populations. In tracing the legal, political, military and affective legacies of Indigenous dispossession and chattel slavery on contemporary security practices, I discuss how in turn these security practices shore up the settler colonial and antiblack order in the 'homeland.' Importantly, I show how 'kinetic' security practices, such as torture and drone strikes, are not simply inflected by gendered racial-sexual logics but constitute key technologies of gendered and sexualized race-making in this so-called post-racial/gender/sexual era.

Your commitment to Queer Studies, intersectional analysis and embodied knowledge is mirrored in your teaching methods. Can you describe your teaching philosophy?

My teaching philosophy is deeply shaped by Black feminist, Decolonial and Transnational feminist and Crip knowledge production. It's based on two main premises: 1) We all have different learning styles and different ways of expressing what we know. 2) The power relations and forms of violence we study in (Global) Politics classes shape learning in the classroom – both in terms of stimulating and hindering learning and meaningful exchange. Therefore, both my course materials and pedagogical practices engage head-on the diversity of lived experiences and power differentials in the class community.

I have studied and taught in Politics and International Relations departments in the Germany, Turtle Island/Canada and the UK, and it has always been my experience that courses that are not specifically designated to explore questions of gender, sexuality, race and or colonialism typically segregate these subjectivities and power structures to specific learning units or individual texts. My classes, including in War and Security Studies, are designed to offer students a more sustained engagement with the intersectionality of social power. The syllabus is conceptualized in a way that students get to track connections between a wide array of actors, processes and structures throughout the term.

My classes are usually designed in a way that students learn through both traditional lecture and the 'flipped classroom.' Overall students are provided with options in regards to learning, creating and displaying their knowledge and skills. For instance, students produce visual analyses of the shifting sexual politics of contemporary counter-insurgency operations. Students are divided up in small groups and supplied with crayons and paper. Some of the

groups have to produce advice about political and military strategy to the insurgents, and the others groups produce such advice from the perspective of the counter-insurgents. Rather than produce a written brief, students have to visually convey what to them is the central 'battlefield' in counter/insurgency. This typically ends up the most genuinely collaborative learning and knowledge creation activity. Often students who do not participate much in conventional seminar discussion take the lead and excel in producing their group's visual analysis. Because the students get to hold on physically to the paper as they describe to the class what they produced and why, they tend to feel more confident and assured to speak in front of the larger group.

In the first session of the term I typically have students explore questions of power, subjectivity and knowledge production with the help of a few exercises. These learning activities bring the students to a deep first engagement with the politics of knowledge production, and its implications for the study of global security. At the heart of our discussion is a poem ('Rich woman, poor woman') that juxtaposes the voices of two very different women who narrate their views and experiences prior and during the Pinochet dictatorship. In all of the maybe a dozen classes that I have shared the poem, each and every student was analytically and affectively moved and without fail, every group of students collectively developed nuanced accounts of the intersectionality of systems of power, the situatedness of knowledge – and how that shapes contending notions of security and insecurity. Developing these insights in collaboration with one another rather than being introduced to these concepts and ideas through lecture registers on a much deeper level in students' learning.

In another exercise in the first session, students analyze in small groups an excerpt from Fanon's 'Concerning Violence.' Students are given a list of guiding questions to develop Fanon's distinction between power and violence – concepts fundamental to the study of Global Security – and to develop an understanding of Fanon's notion of the generative character of violence. This powerful exercise allows students to view the question of 'security' and 'irregular warfare' from the perspectives of both insurgents (militarily weak actor from the Global South) and counter-insurgents (militarily powerful actor from the Global North). Furthermore, Fanon's take on the fundamental role of violence and the production of racialized subjectivities for both the projection of colonial rule and decolonial struggle allows students to explore in a very tangible fashion the otherwise quite abstract concept of the generative or productive character of security practices. Throughout the term, we come back to the insights gained from these exercises – getting students to deeply engage with and probe the politics of knowledge production makes for a much more aware and intentional learning space. Students tend to be much more open for engaging with critical social and political theory outside their own lived experiences.

What is the most important advice you could give to young IR scholars?

The university as a site of learning, knowledge creation and employment rests on such profound social hierarchies along lines of racialization, gender, ability, class, citizenship, sexuality etc. – that makes it very difficult to give generic 'advice.' The dramatic increase in precarious employment and the intensification of the neoliberal audit culture (like the British REF and the use of metrics for promotions) in recent years have in many ways exacerbated existing hierarchies. For multiple-oppressed scholars, in particular Black, Indigenous and women/trans of colour colleagues, this intensified structural precarity is rendering them even more vulnerable to sexual, racist, ableist, homo- and transphobic harassment and exploitation. Overall, there is no way around organizing collectively – join a union if you can! And yes, all too often that means having to challenge existing union structures over prioritizing the working conditions of its most privileged members… The maybe most promising challenges to the exclusionary relations at the heart of the academy are leveled by student-led struggles over the curriculum, epistemic authority and hirings, such as 'Why Is My Curriculum White?', 'Rhodes Must Fall' and 'Why Is My Professor Still Not Black?.' These powerful struggles deserve our full support.

A few thoughts on coping strategies: Mentor colleagues that can benefit from what you already know about the profession, even if you're a grad student and or consider yourself 'junior'. Most importantly, junior scholars most removed from White masculine epistemic authority and professional networks, do feel entitled to reach out for support! Ask people senior to you for mentoring and guidance – even if you haven't met them yet. Send an email, ask them for a chat over coffee at the next conference etc. Not everyone will respond or have the capacity at that particular moment, but there are people out there that understand how much they owe, and will be happy to do so.

There are currently plans to create an online collective of queer and feminist IR mentors that take turns throughout the year to offer guidance and support for under-represented junior scholars, in particular queer and trans Black, Indigenous and women of colour/from the Global South. Once it is set up, we will announce it via the ISA-LGBTQA Caucus. Volunteers, please get in touch.

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This interview was conducted by Alvina Hoffmann. Alvina is an Associate Features Editor for E-IR.