Interview - Anne Sisson Runyan

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Anne Sisson Runyan, PhD in International Relations (IR), is Professor of Political Science and a faculty affiliate in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Cincinnati (UC). She currently coordinates the Political Science doctoral concentration in Feminist Comparative and International Politics and formerly headed the Department of Women's Studies and directed the Taft Research Center at UC. Among the progenitors of the field of feminist IR, her most recent books include *Global Gender Politics* and the co-edited volumes *Feminist (Im)Mobilities in Fortress(ing) North America* and *Gender and Global Restructuring*. She is currently developing a book tentatively entitled *Contesting Disposability: The Politics of Nuclear Waste and Resistances to Gendered Nuclear Colonialism in Canada*. She has also published in a host of edited volumes and most recently in such journals as *Critical Studies on Security, Critical Studies on Terrorism,* and the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, for which she served as a co-founder, an Associate Editor, and organizer and host for its fifth annual conference resulting in a special issue she guest-edited on *Decolonizing Feminist World Politics.*

She is currently Vice President-Elect of the International Studies Association, having served as among the co-founders and chairs of the Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Section, which awarded her the Eminent Feminist IR Scholar Award in 2007. She has held other leadership positions in the National Women's Studies Association and the American Association of University Professors, recently served as a Fulbright Visiting Research Chair in North American Integration at York University in Toronto, has guest-lectured and taught in many parts of the world, and received the Society for Women in International Political Economy Mentor Award in 2006. She has also participated in several local gender studies, currently co-leading one for the City of Cincinnati arising from the US Cities for CEDAW (UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) campaign.

Where do you see the most exciting research/debates happening in your field?

Since I have long worked at the intersection of International Relations (IR) and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, heading both women's studies and politics departments, my sense of what is most exciting is what cuts across those fields. Just as we have seen the emergence and growing centrality of queer, trans, and decolonial scholarship in feminist studies, so too are inroads being made in IR by these modes of inquiry, bringing with them a wider range of theoretical and methodological approaches, accounting in part for the narrative, affective, visual, and temporal turns in critical IR.

These developments are, on the one hand, blurring binaries and contesting coloniality in thought about gender and sexuality in feminist IR and feminist studies more generally. On the other hand, they are challenging the colonial, settler colonial, heterosexist, heteronormative, and gender normative foundational narratives underpinning IR more generally. These trends have emerged less out of debates (which suggests some measure of legibility between parties and either/or choices), but from an insistence by invisibilized, silenced, and/or marginalized bodies and perspectives to, not so much to be included within reigning orthodoxies, but to transform what constitutes the study of gender and the study of IR.

My earliest and continuing work also cuts across what is now referred to as feminist security studies and feminist international or global political economy (GPE). As those specializations emerged, they appeared to diverge, prompting recent work on how they can (re)inform each other, including my own efforts in this direction in the

introduction to the second edition of *Gender and Global Restructuring* I co-edited with Marianne Marchand that put the war on terror in relation to neoliberal restructuring. This has also meant a better blending of discursive and materialist analysis within and across these subfields.

Again, such shifts are less the result of either/or debates, but rather a recognition that the politics of representation is never separate from the politics of redistribution, even as at times poststructural or materialist analysis has come more to the fore (with the latter gaining more traction again in these times of massive economic inequalities). The question of violence is particularly animating feminist resistances to false divisions between security (as high politics) and GPE studies (as low politics) that the discipline continuously re-imposes. While the heuristic distinction between direct and structural violence, with the former most often associated with security studies and the latter with GPE studies, feminists have been particularly adept at exposing their interrelations, particularly at the level of everyday bodily violence of all sorts, whether in times of "war" or "peace."

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

I have lived long enough and through enough epistemological shifts that have chipped away at modernist understandings of the world to be wary of progress narratives. That it appears the world is being revisited by the ghosts of overt patriarchy, racism, and fascism and even the ghosts of nuclearism just when it seemed that all kinds of human rights, gender equality, humanitarian, and environmental protection norms were being secured at the international level is, on one level, dizzying, but on another level, not surprising. It is not as if feminist scholars have not been steadily documenting largely unabated levels of violence, impoverishment, and disposability experienced by women and feminized/racialized others throughout the world, but particularly in the Global South, which belies simplistic "success" stories. It is also not as if feminists have not been tracking the feminization of men's labour and the self- and other- destruction associated with this. And it is not as if feminists have not also been repeatedly raising concerns about the enclosures and depoliticizations of feminism as it moves through the halls of power within the (neo)liberal order that can undermine it as an oppositional force and thus vulnerabilize it to assaults, particularly from the religious and nationalist right that have been going on for some time.

Knowing all of this, in recent work I have been doing with Marysia Zalewski we ask why the (re)emergence of what we shorthand as "Trump-time" has been met with such incredulity. We work with the spectral to consider how ghosts of virulent masculinity and constrained and constraining femininity are always with and haunting us, but also how other, more oppositional spirits are always present as well. In earlier work together (e.g. *Taking Feminist Violence Seriously in International Relations*), we raise the spectre of feminist violence, which seems to be an oxymoron given the normalized association between women and peace and the normative association between feminism and nonviolence. This brings to the fore the continued excesses of feminist thought to do epistemic violence to bounded and secured knowledge and attempts to bind and secure feminism and even render it "post" or dead.

What does a gendered lens bring to the study of International Relations?

In my work with V. Spike Peterson over several editions of *Global Gender Issues* between 1993 and 2014 and in my most recent *Global Gender Politics,* I came to make a distinction between a gender lens, which foregrounds masculine and feminine dynamics through which hierarchical dichotomies are naturalized and enforced in world politics, and a gendered lens, which attends to the ways in which race, class, sexual, and national power relations intersect with gender power relations to produce multiple, differing, and shifting femininities and masculinities. A gendered lens is necessary for seeing how gender combines in complex ways with other structural power relations, such as colonialism, imperialism, racism, and economic and environmental exploitation, to normalize a range of social, political, and economic divisions, inequalities, and injustices.

A gendered lens also resists the reduction of gender to "adding women" as is popular and problematic in policymaking circles. And it alerts us to the work that gender does, especially when deployed in this fashion, to cover up and smooth over what Spike and I termed global and systemic crises of representation, insecurity, and sustainability. An exemplar of how this works, which I address in the postscript of the second edition of *Gender and*

Global Restructuring, is in the case of the immediate aftermath of the Great Financial Crisis, when increasing the number of risk-averse women financial managers was briefly trumpeted as a panacea for avoiding such crises in future, relying on biologically determinist constructions of women saviors from testosterone-fueled men. This discursive move (which did not result in any serious material change in the gender make-up of financial services personnel) served to sidestep critical analysis of the systemic nature and costs of gendered financialization.

What is the importance of International Women's Day and what does it represent to you?

What tends to be forgotten is that the idea of a Women's Day and an annual International Women's Day (IWD) emerged from meetings of the American Socialist Party and the International Socialist Women's Conference in the early 1900s. The Triangle Shirtwaist factory disaster that took the lives of women workers occurred just after the first annual International Women's Day was observed and continued to resonate in subsequent observances, which included one devoted to protesting imperialist war on the eve of World War One. Thus, its earliest incarnations were focused on working-class women's rights in the context of anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, and anti-imperial critique.

International Women's Day was mostly celebrated for a time and as an actual holiday from work in socialist or communist countries, and has even been abandoned or reduced to a celebration of motherhood by some former ones as a way to break with a communist past (including a reassertion of "traditional" gender roles). It only became widely accepted and more fully internationally observed when it was taken up by the UN in 1975 at the start of the UN Decade for Women. It is still not very visible in the US, perhaps because of its socialist roots and/or American exceptionalism that prefers national over international observances; even then, the US has no actual holiday (day off from work) in recognition of women's rights. One could argue that perhaps the now annual January Women's March (and its global sister marches) in Trump-time is partially eclipsing March as the US Women's History Month as well as the month set for annual meetings of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

To the degree that IWD has become an instrument of global governance under the auspices of the UN (complete with corporate sponsorship and items for consumption), it has been made more widely acceptable and representative of the uptake of gender agendas (e.g., gender quotas and mainstreaming, gender as a poverty reduction and counter-terrorism tool, prohibitions of sexual violence in war, feminist foreign policy, and so on) across IGOs and some national governments. But this has also been at the cost of forgetting its more radical roots.

This year's campaign theme #BalanceforBetter calls for a gender-balanced world. What do you think is the biggest barrier to achieving gender-balance in academia?

Of course, gender parity across all institutions is necessary as a matter of fair representation and non-asymmetrical access to power and resources that could potentially lead to reassessments of how power and resources are used. However, the appeal for gender balance does not take into account hierarchical differences among those who identify as women and those who identify as men (or neither) and it appears to summon a notion of gender complementarity as opposed to equality, which also appears to rest on essentialist notions of women and men. Moreover, it seems to occlude questions of gender balance for what and under what conditions.

Thus, when we consider gender balance in academia, we need to consider how it is being restructured as a site of more flexibilized and casualized labor (long referred to as the "feminization" of labor) and from which public resources are continually withdrawn. This is happening just as women are outpacing men as undergraduates and achieving parity with them in graduate and professional programs, with the exception of most of the STEM fields, in much of the global North and about half of the global South where women still outpace men as illiterates (see, for example, UN Women's Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016 Report).

In the US, trends observed almost a decade ago and that have continued and continue to worsen include the rise of contingent faculty labour in academe, with three-quarters of instructional faculty not in tenure track positions and half working part-time, the majority of whom in both categories are women. Women are also least represented in the upper echelons of the professoriate, in university administration, and in professional organizations and over-represented in teaching positions and service work (vs. research-oriented jobs), the humanities (which have become

increasingly devalued), and the least prestigious institutions and lowest level institutions, while pay gaps increase between women and men the higher the level of the position. Thus, where some level of parity is occurring it is at the lowest and most contingent levels and under deteriorating labour conditions for women and men in academe.

For gender parity in representation and pay in academe to have any meaning, there is a need to resist the feminization of labour in academe, which is deeply connected to the withdrawal of public resources for it and undermines career paths for the women who are now swelling the ranks of undergraduate and graduate students and taking on the greatest student debt in the process. This is also occurring as gender studies in the academy is under major attack in the context of the rise of illiberal democracies, with Hungary recently banning it outright.

You recently wrote an article explaining the importance of intersectionality and the costs of its misappropriation within the discipline. What can intersectional organising and analysis contribute to real life issues faced by women, such as those embodied by the #MeToo movement?

This article was written not for the discipline *per se*, but for a special issue of *Academe*, a publication of the over a century-old American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which defends academic freedom and tenure and represents faculty unions and associations across the US and for which I served as the Chair of its Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (known as Committee W) for several years. Rehearsing the genesis of the term intersectionality and the insights applying this methodology has brought the study of structural inequalities from the local to global. I contrast it with both divisive identity politics and institutional co-optations of the idea that result in simplistic box-ticking of “diverse” bodies on campus (and elsewhere). This enables claims about “inclusion” and “tolerance” without actually producing multidimensional equity or the conditions for it.

Sexual violence appears to be among the top gender issues on US campuses and among national women’s movements around the world as it tends to gain greater traction than economic issues, as these require greater resources and resource redistributions vs. passing prohibitive laws. Noting this, I use it as an example of what intersectional analysis reveals about how gender in relation to race, class, citizenship status, sexuality, disability, and so on determines who is most at risk, how they are treated, what support they have, and what remedies are available to them.

As we have seen with the #MeToo movement, although now transnational in scope and bringing down more than a few powerful men across several sectors, its face has largely been more elite and mediagenic (cis) women, (and a few cismen) despite being founded by a working-class woman of colour. As a result there is very little discussion of how multiple and intersecting vectors of power determine who gets to speak, who is heard, and whether or not sexual violence is abstracted from other forms of violence in which it is embedded which make it harder to escape, and whether or not responses to it target individuals (and which ones and how) or structures (and which ones and how).

Related to this discussion is the attempt by the Women’s March, through grassroots consultations, to create an intersectional agenda to hold US lawmakers accountable for enacting legislation that seeks to avoid the advancement of some women at the expense of others, and resists a hierarchy of oppressions in favour of seeing them as interconnected. As inevitably with such documents it has lacunae, but it is suggestive how the term and method have gained traction and are being deployed politically at national and international levels.

You have explored how feminist knowledge production and activism reproduces and/or challenges colonial and settler colonial logics. What are the costs of neglecting the coloniality of power and settler colonialism in feminist scholarship, and what can a feminist decolonial perspective offer?

My work on settler colonialism in particular has arisen from my research focus, which began under a Fulbright in Canada, on nuclear colonialism as it is playing out with respect to site selections for nuclear waste burial on indigenous lands in North America, with particular attention to a case in Ontario. Nuclear colonialism occurs throughout the nuclear fuel cycle, from mining to production to disposal; I argue it is also a gendered process, based on the undermining of indigenous women’s authority and status within their nations and beyond by hetero-patriarchal settler colonialism (or the coloniality of gender enabling the coloniality of power) and the techno-masculinist logics of

the nuclear power and weapons industries gaining renewed traction in the face of climate change and the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

I began my career with a feminist critique of nuclear weapons in the midst of the Cold War and especially the deployment of cruise missiles. The subject of nuclearism has been relatively neglected in feminist IR in the post-Cold War period, so my return to the subject necessarily centers settler colonialism thanks to work of such feminist indigenous scholar-activists as Winona LaDuke. These scholar-activists have coined the term radioactive or nuclear colonialism and first tracked its implications for indigenous women.

When nuclearization is understood as taking place primarily on indigenous land and, thus, resting on the dispossession and destruction of indigenous peoples, their lands and their gender relations, we begin to understand how deeply settler colonialism is implicated in the contemporary world order and how central decolonial thought is for challenging it. We also begin to see how feminist approaches that neglect settler and other forms of colonialism fail to see the interconnectedness between militarized, economic, and environmental violence (the latter also less studied in feminist IR). Moreover, indigenous epistemologies enable ways to think about the world quite differently, reimagining geopolitics, temporality, and human relations with the non-human world.

What is the most important advice you would give to young scholars, particularly women?

My worry is that way too many of them may find themselves in the contingent workforce, not because they lack merit (as graduate students and young scholars, I would argue, are producing at rates far above those of earlier generations), but because of the restructuring of the academy. Just as those of us who constituted the “first woman” in a range of positions in the academy and/or produced the “first” feminist organizations within professional associations or women’s studies programs on campus just a few decades ago had to do a lot of organizing while relying on the long-term organizing that preceded us for us to reach that point, young scholars need to expect to have to organize as well, and likely throughout the life of their careers in the face of growing assaults on terms of work and academic freedom. This is something that those traditionally marginalized in the academy—women, people of colour, queers, the disabled, etc.—know well, but often have the least time and resources to do so. Nevertheless, deteriorating conditions of work are starting to cut across institutions, disciplines, ranks, and identities, increasing the need for mutual support and solidarity of a sort that goes way beyond traditional networking, mentoring, and collaboration. One response to this is to join or organize a faculty and/or graduate student union with collective bargaining rights, where possible, to make demands for liveable and gender and race equitable wages, fair and reasonable workloads, sufficient research funding, and supports for social reproduction that enable the life of the mind (which is always embodied) and its ability to think outside the box without penalty.