



International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics

Politics

2016, Vol. 36(4) 385–399

© The Author(s) 2016

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1111/1467-9256.12108

pol.sagepub.com**Anthony J. Langlois**

Flinders University

Abstract

Responding to efforts to ‘resurrect’ International Relations theory, this article suggests that the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) – and, more controversially perhaps, queer – global sexuality politics can bring new and transformative insights to the discipline. The study of this global sexuality politics is replete with ideas and approaches that can and should be integrated with IR theory. The article first considers the general absence of global sexuality politics within IR, and why this is significant for theorising the international. It then surveys some recent scholarship which shows how the study of global sexuality politics can speak to and within IR.

Keywords

global sexuality politics, homophobia, Human Rights, International Relations theory, LGBT, queer, security

Introduction

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said that the struggle for the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights is ‘one of the great, neglected challenges of our time’ (United Nations, 2013). In 2011, the UN released its first report on LGBT rights, demanding an end to the neglect by governments and intergovernmental bodies of violence and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (UNHCHR, 2011). Key international leaders have condemned discrimination and violence towards LGBT people. US President Barak Obama has made many clear statements to this end (White House, n.d.) and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton caused a significant impact when she declared in 2011 that ‘gay rights are human rights’ (Clinton, 2011). British Prime Minister David Cameron, less helpfully, has argued that states that do not recognise LGBT rights should have their aid cut (BBC, 2011). Institutionally, for the European Union and other states and intergovernmental agencies, consideration of LGBT rights is factored into decisions about policy cooperation (including aid provision). States that flaunt their rejection of these norms have received much public and diplomatic attention (e.g. Russia and Uganda; Bosia, 2014; Wilkinson, 2014). Clearly, the matter is on the table.

Corresponding author:

Flinders University, UK.

Email: anthony.langlois@flinders.edu.au

While we cannot predict the future course and vicissitudes of global sexuality politics itself, a politics which of course extends beyond same-sex matters, this article will suggest that the study of LGBT – and, more controversially perhaps, queer (Q) global sexuality politics – can bring new insights to IR theory. In line with this special issue's theme, 'Resurrecting International Relations Theory', I argue that the study of global sexuality politics is replete with ideas and approaches which can and should be integrated with IR theory. While LGBTQ global sexuality politics is most commonly referenced within the high-profile and media-attractive domain of human rights abuse and norms violation, there are many additional thematic dimensions of IR theory that are engaged once analysis of these cases proceeds beyond noting such breeches. We could start with the questions of why certain cases of norm violation, in certain states, at certain times are highlighted. We could examine how these claims produce certain subjects and constitute others as threats; and how these practices feed into discourses of order, disorder, security, economy, identity and threat within international politics. Various critical and queer analyses of global sexuality politics have much to say about the international. Their critical interrogation of established discourses of order and anarchy should be welcomed by those seeking to transcend current thought traditions within IR (Sjoberg and Weber, 2014; Thiel, 2014).

In what follows, I first consider in more detail the way in which global sexuality politics is – or is not – theorised within IR, and why this is significant for the overall project of theorising the international. Then I discuss three examples of theoretical work in IR that arise out of global sexuality politics. I end by discussing the complex relationship between LGBTQ rights and human rights.

IR theory and global sexuality politics

In their introductory article to the recent *European Journal of International Relations* (*EJIR*) special issue on 'The End of IR Theory', Dunne et al. suggest that two questions must remain before us as we think about the future of IR theory: 'One is that while "the real world" always comes to us imprinted by the theoretical lens through which we view "it", we also need to keep asking whether there are processes, objects, "things" that are not caught by the lens we are currently using' (Dunne, Hansen and Wight, 2013, p. 419). The second is the question of where 'the international' begins and ends. Both of these questions open up possibilities for understanding global sexuality politics as an intrinsic aspect of the study of IR; in doing so, however, both also set an agenda for the transformation of the discipline.

The 'lens' metaphor very simply helps us to see why this is the case. Attach a wide angle lens to your camera, and you will see a broad reach in front of you. With a telephoto angle your view will be narrower, but you will also see more, in greater detail, within that frame. A powerful zoom lens will enable you to capture (or in the case of video, follow) a particular subject – although the activities of other key actors may well be out of view. But there is also the agent who is the view-finder, the one choosing what to photograph, which lens to use, how to regard and frame the subject. The failure of global sexuality politics to appear in the frame of most IR theorists raises questions about the discipline and the processes and habits of view-finding among its practitioners. This is not a new problem for IR, as anyone who has done work on gender or feminism within the discipline could attest (Peterson and Runyan, 2009; Pettman, 1996; Richter-Montpetit, 2007; Soreanu and Hudson, 2008; Tickner, 2014; see Rao (2014a) on the intersection and mutual disruption of the Woman Question and 'Q questions').

Dunne et al. suggest that IR theorists need to be constantly asking themselves whether there are ‘processes, objects, “things” ’ we miss using our current lens. Scholars of global sexuality politics and global queer studies argue that different sets of lenses are in fact required for understanding the international and, in particular – to address Dunne et al.’s second question – the international’s beginning and end. The two elements of the lens metaphor come into play here. It is not just that certain theoretical lenses will help us to see global sexuality politics – its processes, objects and things – within the field of the international. Rather, and much more fundamentally, it is that global sexuality politics and queer theory are crucial lenses for *looking at* the international, for *doing* IR theory.

There is a burgeoning interest in this claim among IR scholars. It is taken up and explored, for example, in a path-breaking volume edited by Manuela Picq and Markus Thiel (Picq and Thiel, 2015). What is crucial to their project is the recognition that LGBTQ claims are not just new processes or ‘things’ that must be recognised and theorised by IR scholars because they are clearly happening and present in a way that is new and unprecedented. Beyond this, LGBTQ claims require a rethinking and transformation of IR theory itself. Rather than, for example, slotting gay rights claims into the now familiar space within IR theory occupied by human rights, a serious investigation of the phenomenon of gay rights claiming may in fact unsettle that familiar human rights conceptual space and indeed go on to have broader implications for the thinking of rights claims of all sorts in the international (Langlois, 2015).

Picq and Thiel bring us a range of critical case studies which re-think IR from peripheral standpoints – theoretical, as well as regional and cultural. These peripheral perspectives challenge generalising accounts and standard normativities. They are a critical aspect of the project to enliven and de-ossify IR theory, which crucially concerns their intention to blur the core-periphery distinction. Doing this in terms of *place* is a relatively established practice within IR; it is well-recognised within the discipline that location matters (Lennox and Waites, 2013). But as Picq and Thiel (2015, p. 9) suggest: ‘Sexualities, in their various meanings and experiences, constitute such a location in the conceptual non-core that permits (us) to unlearn established theoretical fames, using positionality and reflexivity to turn what is familiar into something strange.’ They continue:

To think through an LGBTQ lens... is not simply to say that sexuality (like place) matters. To think from the non-core is an epistemological project. By the non-core we indicate more than those places in the global South defined as failed states that epitomize underdevelopment. The non-core is... what theoretical canons can only make sense of in dystopian ways. Our underlying idea is simple: new places foment new theories. Our aim is more than looking into practices that traditional IR does not consider relevant. We seek a reframing of relevant ontologies to overcome the traditional core as such. To take the non-core seriously is to use it in theory-making, whether we are talking about Amazonia or LGBTQ claims (or both) (Picq and Thiel, 2015, pp. 10–11).

Both of Dunne et al.’s questions come into play here: the question of what we see due to which lens we are using, and the question of where the international begins and ends. Combining the non-core in place and a theoretical lens opens up a wide range of alternative ways of thinking about international theory – with perhaps particular salience to the second of these questions: where the international begins and ends. In a discipline still conventionally figured as ‘an American social science’ (Smith, 2000) – the discipline in which *what matters* is filtered through the national interest of the dominant power within a globally dominant political system – theory-making that emerges out of the periphery,

out of a different international, has a good chance of being able to trouble the parochial tropes that limit the standard theoretical range (Tickner, 2013).

In many disciplines, theorists have sought out the consequences of using lenses other than those provided by conventional sexual and gender frameworks. Queer theory, in particular, is concerned to examine the ways in which the variability of gender and sexuality plays havoc with standardly conceptualised categories of identity and politics (Jagose, 1996). While the expression or performance of sexuality and gender is usually taken to be central to queer theorising, in its preparedness to think about the world from positions of instability, queer theory is a range of approaches that embrace ‘any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations’ (Browne and Nash, 2010, p. 4). Given this, and the obvious range of applications that spring to mind for a discipline like IR, it is somewhat surprising that queer theory has not generally been taken up within IR.

The situation is sufficiently anomalous that 2014 saw the publication in the *EJIR* of a major intervention by Cynthia Weber entitled ‘Why is There No Queer International Theory?’ (Weber, 2015). Weber does not accept that there is no queer IR, rather the burden of her argument is to show the ways in which ‘Disciplinary IR’ functions to suppress any challenge to its standard theoretical range. Queer theory is one of the casualties of this process, as are other approaches that cannot be figured against ‘Disciplinary IR’ and are consequently coded as failures. This in turn has detrimental effects on the discipline and on the scholars who do this kind of work. Critical theory is subdued, the study of international phenomena of various kinds is ceded to other disciplines and the discipline is consequently unable to complete its own work on its own terms (Weber, 2015, p. 30).

Weber’s argument is a call – from within IR itself – to let go of certain regulatory theoretical practices within the discipline: epistemological, ontological, methodological and political norms that cultivate and produce only a certain kind or range of international theory (Weber, 2015, p. 40). Weber makes the point very strongly in her piece that in fact a whole range of scholars *do* develop queer international theory, advancing original ideas, concepts and methodologies not familiar to disciplinary IR in general, but that are operative within and across all the thematic areas which IR usually takes as its disciplinary remit.

Weber has subsequently, with Laura Sjoberg, edited a forum titled ‘Queer International Relations’ (Sjoberg and Weber, 2014). There, Weber provides what might be read as a brief annotated bibliography of research work in IR undertaken by scholars who are in the business of Queering IR. She provides a list of scholars who ‘have generated a range of useful concepts and ideas that enable a rethinking of specific aspects of international theory and practice’ as well as a list of ‘themes and questions generated by Queer IR scholars and scholarship [that] considers what being a Queer IR scholar and doing Queer IR scholarship does specifically in and to the discipline of international relations’ (Weber, 2014, p. 600).

The claim that is being made, then, from these various sources – Picq and Thiel, Weber, Weber and Sjoberg, and of course others – is that international theory that does not take account of global sexuality politics and queer theory is impoverished and incomplete. Put positively, theorists animated by concerns within sexual and gender politics demonstrably contribute to the disciplinary projects of IR through the development of ideas and concepts that advance analysis and understanding not just about their specific research agenda, but for the discipline as a whole. This is the queer claim that when we study IR directly through sexuality and gender politics, the conceptual realignments and

reinterpretations which follow will have *general* significance for the field; that if we do not analyse in this queer way we will misinterpret the putative subject of the discipline (Peterson, 2013, p. 58). The study of international sexuality and gender politics is of consequence for IR in general, and not just for those activists and academics concerned about specific cases of cross-border human rights abuse of sexual minorities, or the like.

To properly establish this case, one must examine the work of scholars who work in this field, and the way in which specific research foci in global sexuality politics speak back to the discipline of IR more generally. It is not possible to do this in any great detail in the limited space provided here. As a taster, however, I will briefly review examples of research where this dynamic is clearly in play. In this survey, my purpose is not so much to critically engage and interrogate the specific claims being made by scholars in their research as it is to show *that* certain claims are being made *because of* their focus on sexuality politics, and that these claims speak back to IR: they raise interesting and serious theoretical concerns for the discipline as a whole.

I commence with Paul Amar's work on the security state and sexuality politics in the global South. I then take up two approaches to the study of international homophobia: Rahul Rao's recent work on Uganda, followed by Meredith Weiss and Michael Bosia on global homophobia. I conclude with a brief discussion of LGBT rights as human rights.

Sexuality politics as security politics

Sexuality politics is a central analytical feature of Paul Amar's (2013) path-breaking and innovative work on security politics in the global South. Amar argues that the influence of neoliberal ideologies over regimes in the global South has declined over the last several decades, and that a new form of rule has evolved – a kind of militarised humanitarianism. Focusing on Egypt and Brazil as exemplars, Amar outlines his theory of the human security state in the semi-periphery and the range of associated conceptual innovations for analysing its impact on global politics. Whereas neoliberalism is driven by one logic of subjectivity – that of the rational liberal individual – Amar sees the security state emerging at the intersecting point of four logics of securitisation: evangelical humanitarianism, workerist empowerment, police paramilitarism and juridical personalism (moral, social, territorial and individual security, respectively). These logics of securitisation, Amar (2013, p. 6) says, 'all explicitly aimed to protect, rescue and secure certain idealized forms of humanity identified with a particular family of sexuality, morality and class subjects, and grounded in certain militarized territories and strategic infrastructures'.

In Amar's analysis, the logic of the security state that dominates in the semi-periphery participates in forms of global structural resonance termed 'parastatal formations'. Here, security practices, protection discourses, transnational legal, economic and corporate structures all link together in a privatised space parallel to that of the state in a way which diverges from global North narratives of unfolding international law and economic liberalisation. And as they do so, they 'generate much of their power by targeting controversial sexualities... they govern through moral politics not market policies' (Amar, 2013, p. 16).

The sexuality politics at issue here is not conventionally conceptualised through minority identities, sexual orientations, reproductive health or other personal rights frameworks. Rather, it is 'a contradictory set of humanization dynamics and hypervisibilization processes.... These uses of sexuality render overly visible certain race, class, and gendered bodies as sources of danger and desire, while rendering invisible the political nature of hierarchy and the identity of powerful agents' (Amar, 2013, p. 17). In

processes of governance, sexuality becomes a constant (often hyper-visible through moral panic) thread that can be traced through factors of parahumanisation and securitisation. In the same way that securitisation discourse points to the depoliticisation of justice, distribution or participation issues into matters of technical risk assessment or enforcement, Amar (2013, p. 18) uses the term '*parahumanisation*' to refer to the changed status of people from citizens to 'suspects under the control of privatized rescue industries'. The '*para-*' terms Amar coins are used to articulate the insecurity felt by people – often racialised and sexualised as subordinate – in the face of private and unaccountable transnational power structures that exist in a space parallel to that occupied by traditional states.

In case studies from Cairo and Rio de Janeiro, Amar examines how parastatal formations securitised people and places using sexuality politics. These cases, from the 1980s to the present, illustrate an alternative history to that of the conventional neoliberal narrative: a history of the developing *security archipelago* of the global south in which parastatal security industries 'confronted transnationally identified queer resistance' generating 'new subjects of sexual rescue and emancipation around which this... coercive governmentality coalesced' (Amar, 2013, p. 31). In both Rio and Cairo, authorities staged militarised humanitarian rescue operations which hypervisibilised certain working-class communities, identified them as queer and perverse, and associated them with 'the perversions of globalisation'. In both Rio and Cairo, state economic strategies connected to urban renewal, tourism and cultural heritage required their displacement or removal. Sites of homosexual or queer erotic conviviality in particular were hypervisibilised as contested spaces of a global culture war.

One of Amar's (2013, p. 97) key points is that the securitisation practices and agents that emerge in this context to protect what is pure and local are themselves, paradoxically, transnational parastatals 'consisting of public-private partnerships and development coalitions linked to global investor flows and international tourism markets'. His claim is that these parastatals create new subjects: 'securitised parahumans'. Their subjectivities are shot through with sexuality politics.

In sum, Amar's work exemplifies the kind of challenge that I am arguing the study of global sexuality politics brings to IR. Of particular significance in this case is the generative role of the global South. IR theory in general is derived from the North and applied to the South. It is also a persistent problem that LGBTQ sexuality politics gets framed through a Northern lens of one sort or another, be it 'Stonewall' or EU human rights policy or Western gay identity politics. Amar's focus on securitisation practices in the global South crucially shifts the focus of attention for IR and for sexuality politics. It forces the creation of new analytical categories in order to theorise what comes to the fore. The security archipelago, its sexuality politics-saturated, militarised humanitarianism, and the range of 'parastatal formations' which Amar identifies, challenge standard accounts of IR. Not only does he posit formations not conventionally conceptualised ('processes, objects, things', as per Dunne et al.), but he reconstructs how we think about what the international is, where it starts and ends. Here the global South becomes a crucible of theory-making for the international, and the sexuality politics that is central to the global South's securitisation perforce plays a key role in the conceptual apparatus that emerges.

The next case in my survey, in its common telling, is an example of the opposite: where *locating* homophobia and *placing* certain sexual identities elsewhere does the key political work of shaping analytical accounts as well as the exigencies of conventional

political actors. This shaping is challenged by critical attention; here again, with lessons for IR in general.

Locating homophobia

Uganda has become well known for its anti-LGBT politics in recent years. Legislation introduced in 2009 sought to create a category of offenses named ‘aggravated homosexuality’, which, upon conviction, would lead to the application of the death penalty (or, in the 2014 version of the Act, life imprisonment). Homosexual conduct is identified by Uganda’s government as a Western perversion, culturally inauthentic for Africa. In two important and insightful articles, Rahul Rao has explored Uganda’s sexuality politics and the way in which they thread through international relations. One article specifically explores the international practice of locating homophobia in Uganda (Rao, 2014b); the other examines the practice of native ‘sodomy’ by the last pre-colonial king, the way in which recollection of this practice has entered into annual religious commemorations by Ugandan Catholics (the king executed his Christian pages upon their refusal of his desire for sexual intimacy) and what this might mean for the analysis of homophobia and possibilities of queer sexual dissidence (Rao, 2015). These analyses provide a rich and complicating reading of homophobia and sexual dissidence. They also demonstrate the importance of forms of analysis that are little used in conventional IR for seeking out those processes, objects and things that mainstream methodologies read out.

In ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, Rao (2014b) commences by showing how the mobilisation of international pro-gay activist sentiment participates in a spatial and narrative imaginary that belies its presumed (and often vigorously asserted) emancipatory intent. ‘Neo-Orientalist LGBT activists’ participate in the same ‘imaginative geography’ as their anti-gay opponents: both mapping sexual practices and freedoms in similarly reductive terms. ‘Inherent in this shared geographical imaginary,’ says Rao (2014b, p. 174), ‘is a tight linkage between sexuality, place and legitimacy, in which particular attitudes towards sexuality (and indeed particular sexualities) become markers of belonging to particular places.’ Time is spatialised and space temporised so that non-Western places are imagined as contemporary re-enactments of an undeveloped Western past. Rao’s initial considerations therefore require a critical reappraisal of common ‘progressive’ practices of locating and critiquing homophobia, particularly its placement in the non-West.

Rao insists, then, that we complicate our understandings of *place* to trouble how we locate homophobia. Joining Alfred Whitehead with post-colonial theory, Rao argues that place-formation occurs when a ‘permanence’ (Whitehead’s term) is carved out of flows of processes. Thus, ‘core and periphery are constituted by flows of people, commodities, money and ideas, but importantly, the flows take place in both directions with consequences for both places, allowing for a recognition of the agency of the periphery in constituting the modern world’ (Rao, 2014b, p. 182). Homophobia flows in these processes of place-formation, like anything else. In an innovative and crucial analytical step, Rao addresses the question of how it is that homophobia becomes located here or there. To do this, he mirrors a move made by Jasbir Puar in her analysis of queerness and imperial US nationalism. Queerness, argues Puar, is split: some queers are sanitised and incorporated into the nation – they marry, serve in the military, and are overwhelmingly white and middle class. The remainder are othered as the monster, the terrorist, the fag (Puar and Rai, 2002; cf Puar, 2007). Rao (2014b, p. 184) argues that homophobia is also split. It is plastic and versatile; it can serve in ‘conjunction with both imperial

collaboration and anticolonial nationalism'. Recognising this improves our analytical framework, and our strategic responses. Homophobia is no one thing; it has diverse audiences and serves various political interests. In the same way that it is not linked exclusively to colonial nationalism, it is also not continentally generalisable for Africa. Homophobia appears in Rao's narratives of Ugandan history as both imperial collaboration and as decolonisation; it appears differently in each case – different agents acting with different political purposes in mind. And, as Rao illustrates, when homophobia flares up in Uganda today, via 'moral panics' and linked to precarity (people being drawn in to homophobic behaviour through economic vulnerability and material considerations), it functions just as it does in America. From this, Rao (2014b, p. 195) concludes that there is simply no such thing as 'Ugandan homophobia'.

In summary, it is clear that any close examination of what we do when we locate homophobia in Uganda requires us to re-think what we do when we link certain ways of identifying place with certain kinds of sexual identity and the politics that flow from them. This close examination reveals the flows of processes that constitute the international; it shows the ways in which sexual politics is threaded through the weave of IR. It also shows the poverty of many conventional accounts of IR, with forms of theoretical articulation that commonly abstain from consideration of the history and memory of empire, religion, colonialism and tradition. All of these, Rao shows, are the subject of contemporary deployment and mobilisation; all are threaded through with sexuality politics. Here again, shifting the lens brings into focus unfamiliar terrain; but more to the point, that terrain is itself a power for reshaping our theoretical apparatus.

In the many cases where homophobia is being *deployed* as a deliberate political strategy, the deep roots and their connections to the flows that constitute our global environment are often obfuscated. In the Ugandan case, while these flows are material conditions for an anti-gay politics, that politics itself purports a certain independence and 'local' cultural authenticity. Indeed, acknowledging the roots, connections and flows would be inconvenient for the political agenda. Curiously, this same politics is playing out in very similar terms in a range of locations. In the analysis of Meredith Weiss and Michael Bosia (2013) and their collaborators, the deployment of homophobia in contemporary global politics follows what they theorise as a *modular* pattern. Paying rich empirical attention to the flows and processes of global homophobia has led to the development of a new and innovative conceptual framework for understanding the threads of global sexuality politics.

Deploying homophobia

Weiss and Bosia (2013) develop an analysis of homophobia that focuses on it as a modular political strategy engaged by state actors. Their analysis is driven by the observation that homophobia is deployed in remarkably similar ways across a wide range of states; moreover, the politics of homophobia is often employed in states where it was not directly calibrated with substantive local political issues and could not be described as a response to local political demands. Political homophobia is purposeful and deliberate, a key tool in processes of state-building. Drawing a direct comparison with the ways in which states use race and ethnic politics for state formation, Weiss and Bosia (2013) argue that the political deployment of homophobia is used to consolidate identities, enforce heteronormative forms of behaviour and ultimately to consolidate political and economic power for certain elites.

They argue that in the global study of sexuality, political homophobia has been ignored or mischaracterised. An over-emphasis on the role of Western actors in championing LGBT rights has overshadowed the role of Western actors in spreading homophobia, and few have noticed that this Western-style homophobia has often taken political root in states where sexual and gender expression do not align with Western LGBT models as well as where there is minimal Western-style sexual advocacy. Political homophobia 'is invoked where fundamental rights to sexual and gender self-determination remain unclaimed and sexual minorities have not thought in terms of a shared political identity or full legal equality.... Homophobia has, in short, gone modular, being imposed in a consistent way across diverse contexts' (Weiss and Bosia, 2013, p. 6). They observe that the focus of global sexuality politics has been on the spread and transformation of sexual identities, *not* on the political dynamics of local communities suffering homophobia. Weiss and Bosia (2013, p. 6) argue that there 'is no focus on *specifically* state-sponsored or politically charged homophobia' and no 'theoretical framework for understanding homophobia as a named and explicit feature of political contestation over state authority'.

The analytical framework has four dimensions. First, homophobia is adopted by states and social actors as a purposive, deliberate, strategy. These actors may already be in positions of power and influence, or may be adopting this strategy as a way of securing such positions. The parallel here is with the way in which 'public and political manifestations of hate' are analysed by scholars of nationalism. Second, there is a focus on the diffusion of homophobia across borders, and the analysis of the patterns and similarities across jurisdictions where 'homophobic state and social actors create a gay peril against which they seek to organize state efforts' (Weiss and Bosia, 2013, p. 16). Third, Weiss and Bosia (2013) emphasise the way in which state homophobia, derived from borrowed rhetorics and images, often precedes LGBT organising in different jurisdictions, with profound implications for the way in which the identities of emergent sexual minorities develop. Finally, attention is paid to colonial legacies, particularly that of the British Empire and its sodomy laws. Here there are clear synergies with Rao's discussion of homophobia as imperial collaboration and decolonising practice. Beyond this, Weiss and Bosia (2013) invoke a broad range of political dynamics in the relations between the West and other regions over time that explicitly and implicitly feed deliberate political practices.

In agreement with one of the central claims of this article, Weiss and Bosia (2013) argue that researching political homophobia is important not just for insights regarding the repression of LGBTQ communities, but because of general insights into processes of state formation, collective identity-making, tradition reinvention and associated political practices. Moreover, understanding the modularisation of political homophobia, and its deployment in this form, has potential application across a range of areas that may be the subject of similar political strategies. The imbrication of these political strategies and practices with the politics of neoliberal globalisation means research on modular state homophobia will produce valuable insights for general critical research on neoliberalism. There is also immense significance for policy-oriented approaches, with their programmes of intervention in both the domestic and foreign policies of states in various ways in order to manage and change behaviour and policy settings (see, e.g. Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014; Thiel, 2015).

A particularly striking aspect of the modularity conception of political homophobia concerns the mismatch between the state's deployment of homophobia and the status of the 'peril' it is deployed against. Bosia (2013, p. 33) says that

we are unable to understand state homophobia until theory reflects that, in many contexts today, state actors, their allies and proxies, as well as those in direct contestation over state power have no need to embrace repressive policies because no local LGBT movements can make substantive and credible demands that force a response from the state.

The gay peril or LGBT boogeyman that state homophobia posits, in many cases, simply does not exist (Bosia, 2014). Weiss (2013, p. 147) takes this up in her chapter on state homophobia in Southeast Asia by evaluating the impact of ‘anticipatory countermobilisation’ – that is, state and allied agents mobilising against LGBT claims, which, while not yet articulated locally, are considered ‘both teleologically unavoidable and an existential threat’.

To summarise, Weiss and Bosia (2013) posit that established scholarship has missed something significant about global sexuality politics – particularly with its routine focus on the role of the West in spreading norms friendly to LGBT populations. That missed element is modular state homophobia. Deploying this concept and the associated new tools and frameworks has enabled an incisive new analysis of global sexuality politics – one that unravels puzzles about patterns of state policy towards sexuality politics and asks key questions about the set of global relations that give rise to such a systemically modular form of global politics. While the analysis here take a different form to that of Amar or Rao, it is clear that in each case global sexuality politics is generative of conceptual and theoretical tools that have the capacity to re-write IR, re-orienting and transforming its conventional frameworks.

Human rights and global LGBT sexuality politics

The engagement between human rights and global sexuality politics is perhaps one of the most visible of the threads for IR. Hillary Clinton’s ‘Gay rights are human rights’ speech to the UN is often taken as a defining moment: a crucial point of international recognition and visibility. When viewed through the lens of dominant liberal progress narratives, this form of international publicity and policy engagement is a crucial achievement. But the speech *also* flags a certain *use* of global sexuality politics, for the purposes of certain agents, which when engaged critically sits uncomfortably against ‘simple’ notions of rights and justice headlined through the speech’s key sound bite: that gay rights are human rights (Lind, 2014, p. 602; Thoreson, 2014)

As Anna M. Agathangelou (2013, p. 459) argues:

[D]rawing on human rights to open space for the rights of queers and for expressions of queerness is crucial, but the intended universality of the human rights framework is haunted by an incapacity to agree internationally on basic terms (i.e., who deserves human rights and under what conditions). In fact, the discourse with which states support/do not support the rights of queers legitimates imperial preemptive strikes in the very composition of intimacies, global order and understandings of life, terror and death. Clinton proposes gay rights as human rights and links them with humanitarian aid. Yet, this move bolsters neoconservative projects and violences: it ‘often increases the vulnerability of those in the Global South’ (wa Mutua, 1996, p. 590), people of colour and those in the margins of the North.

The recognition of gay rights is usually – and problematically – put forward in speeches such as Clinton’s as a test of civilisational maturity, modernity, partnership within the international system, shared norms and values (for critical discussions, see Rahman,

2014a; 2014b) Due to its attractive ethical appeal, the face value narrative of human rights can function as cover for a range of power relationships that frequently sustain rather than ameliorate colonial, imperial, capitalist and other exploitative dynamics within the international system (Waites, 2015) Here the salience of critical theoretical perspectives is paramount (Douzinas and Gearty, 2014). For those interested in the freedom, equality and well-being of LGBTQ people, we cannot *not want* gay rights to be human rights (Spivak, 2009). Like any political tool, however, human rights must be used advisedly, and their use, history, conceptualisation and spread must be critically engaged (Kollman and Waites (2009) and the special issue this piece introduces; on 'Pink-washing' human rights, see Franke (2012)).

These critical concerns are crucial, given that gay rights as human rights has decisively moved from being an ambit claim to being an active policy agenda, debated globally, and systemically institutionalised in some regions. It is no longer 'the norm that dare not speak its name' (Thoreson, 2009). But what *kind* of an international human rights norm is it – particularly given its still fundamentally contested nature?

While critical and queer scholars have engaged the rights discourse by questioning its use of power, hierarchy, identity and normativity, others have begun to examine the emergence and spread of this new norm around LGBT sexuality using approaches more familiar to mainstream IR. The identification of gay rights with human rights provides a ready-made if not unproblematic set of frameworks for LGBT sexuality politics to register within IR (noting, as an aside, that IR has only recently started to come to terms with human rights themselves). Here again, sexuality politics has required the expansion of conceptual frameworks around norm development, diffusion and contestation.

Much of this work is based around developments in the EU, and is concerned to unravel why and how different European states have enacted legislative reforms – a particular concern being the differences between old and newer EU states (Ayoub, 2014; 2015). The extraordinary institutionalisation of LGBT supportive norms in Europe should not distract from the fact that other states and regions are implacably opposed to formalising or even establishing such freedoms and protections. This opposition and its increasing presence and entrenchment in international institutions generates what Symons and Altman identify as *international norm polarisation*. Arguing as I have here that IR has rarely addressed the issue of sexual orientation, they use the case to further develop and elaborate norm life-cycle theory (e.g. Symons and Altman, 2015; Wilkinson and Langlois (2014) introduces a special issue dealing with the issue of resistance to LGBT rights norms).

Similarly, and to this point most extensively, Kollman (2013) uses a study of the changes in Europe and other Western democracies to push the boundaries of constructivist socialisation theory. She argues that while constructivism is a useful framework for this study, it is 'not without its lacunae'. It does not, for example, fully account for 'how international norms cause domestic policy change or why a norm's influence varies across countries' (Kollman, 2013, p. 61). Kollman adopts and applies concepts from other areas of social research, and by utilising them in her examination of same-sex union laws is able to innovate within constructivism to extend its theoretical sophistication and explanatory reach. Kollman's work usefully (and self-consciously) highlights the tension between human rights as a radical tool to break down barriers and the assimilationist pressures rights generate as institutionalised norms. Her specific focus – rights to same-sex unions – is a case in point: such rights protect LGBTQ

people as they live together, but this freedom is formally articulated in only the most conventional of heteronormative ways. Kollman concedes that it makes the radicalism of earlier sexuality liberation movements all but invisible (disenfranchising today's radicals, too, we must add); she also expects that the LGBT 'marriage equality' movement will not be able to 'reform the gendered nature of modern marriage beyond what feminist movements have already accomplished' (Kollman, 2013, p. 43; Zivi, 2014).

For a wide range of critical and queer scholars, such concessions point strongly to the limitations of rights and their use as a framework for an emancipatory sexual politics. We cannot *not* want rights, and the study of LGBT norms in global politics and their theorisation within IR is an enormously important and valuable development. At the same time, any specific rights norm instantiates a particular politics, as does any given way of analysing it. Gay rights as human rights is no exception; the assimilative trajectory of once radical, dissenting, ambit claims into established political systems is to many LGBTQ voices a matter of profound regret, even as it moderates fear and enables certain freedoms. Observing this, we see that the empirics of LGBTQ human rights realisation link directly to the politics of IR scholarship, the positionality of the researcher, and deep ongoing questions about the purpose and nature of the IR discipline (Sjoberg, 2015, pp. 167–169).

Conclusion

My purpose in this article has been to suggest that the study of the international is incomplete without attention to global sexuality politics. I have argued that the lived experiences of LGBTQ people, and reflection on that experience, can speak to IR not only about LGBTQ-specific issues, but in ways that address the general theoretical concerns of the academic discipline. To return to Dunne et al.'s two questions about the future of IR theory, the foregoing survey clearly substantiates the claim that a view of IR through the lens of global sexuality politics produces different pictures than the ones we conventionally display to our students and peers, in turn provoking theoretical and conceptual innovation of general applicability. Different 'process, objects, things' are more readily observable; different connections, subjectivities, questions are apparent. Crucial among these differences are observations we might make about what exactly the international is, where it begins and ends, and the significance that such observations have for theoretical reflection, development and transformation within the discipline.

Beyond this, I have suggested that IR is something of a laggard on these matters. In the stuff of day-to-day international politics, LGBTQ global sexuality politics has become highly visible. In IR theory itself, there has to date been little response to this. In many other disciplines, particularly those that engage with queer theory, scholars have been pursuing lines of inquiry that draw them inexorably into the domains IR conventionally considers its own, domains infused with sexuality politics: war, peace, global order, nation-building, political economy, the allocation of rights within states and through international institutions, identity formation and so on. A great opportunity beckons, then, for IR scholars to take advantage of this interest, to engage in conversation, to change lenses, shift focus, and in so doing, rejuvenate the discipline.

Acknowledgements

Work on this article commenced while I was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Advanced International Theory (CAIT) at the University of Sussex in 2014. I particularly thank Beate Jahn, Louiza Odysseos and David Karp

for their hospitality, and Cynthia Weber for allowing me the use of her office in her absence. I would like to thank special issue editor Robert Oprisko, the editors of *Politics*, and my reviewers for their input, generous support and enthusiasm. I also thank my partner Allan for his continual forbearance and encouragement!

References

- Agathangelou AM (2013) 'Neoliberal Geopolitical Order and Value: Queerness as a Speculative Economy and Anti-Blackness as Terror', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15(4), pp. 453–476.
- Amar P (2013) *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics and the End of Neoliberalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Ayoub P and Paternotte D (eds.) (2014) *LGBT Activism and the Making of Europe: A Rainbow Europe?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ayoub PM (2014) 'With Arms Wide Shut: Threat Perception, Norm Reception and Mobilized Resistance to LGBT Rights', *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), pp. 337–362.
- Ayoub PM (2015) 'Contested Norms in New-Adopter States: International Determinants of LGBT Rights Legislation', *European Journal of International Relations* 21(2), pp. 293–322.
- BBC (2011) 'Uganda Fury at UK Gay Aid Threat', BBC Africa [Online], 31 October. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15524013> (Accessed 6 January 2015).
- Bosia MJ (2013) 'Why States Act: Homophobia and Crisis' in Weiss ML and Bosia MJ (eds.), *Global Homophobia: States, Movements and the Politics of Oppression*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, pp. 30–54.
- Bosia MJ (2014) 'Strange Fruit: Homophobia, the State and the Politics of LGBT Rights and Capabilities', *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), pp. 256–273.
- Browne K and Nash CJ (2010) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Clinton H (2011) *Hillary Clinton on Gay Rights Abroad: Secretary of State Delivers Historic LGBT Speech in Geneva (video, full text)*. Huffington Post [Online]. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/06/hillary-clinton-gay-rights-speech-geneva_n_1132392.html?ref=mostpopular (Accessed 6 January 2015).
- Douzinas C and Gearty C (eds.) (2014) *The Meanings of Rights: The Philosophy and Social Theory of Human Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dunne T, Hansen L and Wight C (2013) 'The End of International Relations Theory?', *European Journal of International Relations* 19(3), pp. 405–425.
- Franke K. (2012) 'Dating the State: The Moral Hazards of Winning Gay Rights', *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 44(1), pp. 1–46.
- Jagose A (1996) *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press.
- Kollman K (2013) *The Same-Sex Unions Revolution in Western Democracies: International Norms and Domestic Policy Change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kollman K and Waites M (2009) 'The Global Politics of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights: An Introduction', *Contemporary Politics* 15(1), pp. 1–17.
- Langlois AJ (2015) 'Human Rights, LGBT Rights and International Theory' in Picq M and Thiel M (eds.), *Sexualities in World Politics: How LGBTQ Claims Shape International Relations*. New York: Routledge, pp. 23–37.
- Lennox C and Waites M (2013) *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Commonwealth: Struggles for Decriminalisation and Change*. London: Human Rights Consortium, Institute of Commonwealth Studies.
- Lind A (2014) '"Out" in International Relations: Why Queer Visibility Matters', *International Studies Review* 16(4), pp. 601–604.
- Peterson VS (2013) 'The Intended and Unintended Queering of States/Nations', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 13(1), pp. 57–68.
- Peterson VS and Runyan AS (2009) *Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium* (3rd edn). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Pettman JJ (1996) *Worlding Women: A Feminist International Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Picq M and Thiel M (eds.) (2015) *Sexual Politics in International Relations*. New York: Routledge.
- Puar JK (2007) *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Puar JK and Rai AS (2002) 'Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots', *Social Text* 20(372), pp. 117–148.

- Rahman M (2014a) *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rahman M (2014b) 'Queer Rights and the Triangulation of Western Exceptionalism', *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), pp. 274–289.
- Rao R (2014a) 'Queer Questions', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16(2), pp. 199–217.
- Rao R (2014b) 'The Locations of Homophobia', *London Review of International Law* 2(2), pp. 169–199.
- Rao R (2015) 'Re-Membering Mwanga: Same-Sex Intimacy, Memory and Belonging in Postcolonial Uganda', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9(1), pp. 1–19.
- Richter-Montpetit M (2007) 'Empire, Desire and Violence: A Queer Transnational Feminist Reading of the Prisoner "Abuse" in Abu Ghraib and the Question of "Gender Equality"', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9(1), pp. 38–59.
- Sjoberg L (2015) 'Conclusion: LGBTQ Politics/Global Politics/International Relations' in Picq M and Thiel M (eds.), *Sexualities in World Politics: How LGBTQ Claims Shape International Relations*, New York: Routledge, pp. 155–171.
- Sjoberg L and Weber C (eds.) (2014) 'Forum on Queer International Relations', *International Studies Review* 16(4), pp. 596–622.
- Smith S (2000) 'The Discipline of International Relations: Still an American Social Science?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2(3), pp. 374–402.
- Soreanu R and Hudson D (2008) 'Feminist Scholarship in International Relations and the Politics of Disciplinary Emotion', *Millennium* 37(1), pp. 123–151.
- Spivak GC (2009) *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York: Routledge.
- Symons J and Altman D (2015) 'International Norm Polarization: Sexuality as a Subject of Human Rights Protection', *International Theory* 7(1), pp. 61–95.
- Thiel M (2014) 'LGBTQ Politics and International Relations: Here? Queer? Used to It?', *International Politics Reviews* 2(2), pp. 51–60.
- Thiel M (2015) 'Exploring Transversal and Particularistic Politics in the European Union's Anti-Discrimination Policy: The Role of LGBT Politics' in Picq M and Thiel M (eds.), *Sexual Politics in International Relations*, New York: Routledge, pp. 75–91.
- Thoreson RR (2009) 'Queering Human Rights: The Yogyakarta Principles and the Norm That Dare Not Speak Its Name', *Journal of Human Rights* 8(4), pp. 323–339.
- Thoreson RR (2014) *Transnational LGBT Activism: Working for Sexual Rights Worldwide*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tickner AB (2013) 'Core, Periphery and (Neo)Imperialist International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 19(3), pp. 627–646.
- Tickner JA (2014) *A Feminist Voyage through International Relations* (1st edn). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- United Nations (2013) 'Ban Ki-Moon: Struggle for LGBT Right One of the Great, Neglected Human Rights Challenges of Our Time', International Conference on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Oslo, 15–16 April.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) (2011) *Discriminatory Laws and Practices and Acts of Violence against Individuals based on Their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, New York: United Nations.
- wa Mutua M (1996) 'The Ideology of Human Rights', *Virginia Journal of International Law* 36(3), pp. 589–657.
- Waites M (2015) *Claiming LGBTI Human Rights in the Commonwealth after Empire*. Discover Society. [Online] Available from: <http://www.discoverysociety.org/2015/01/03/claiming-lgbti-human-rights-in-the-commonwealth-after-empire/> (Accessed 7 January 2015).
- Weber C (2014) 'From Queer to Queer IR', *International Studies Review* 16(4), pp. 596–601.
- Weber C (2015) 'Why is There No Queer International Theory?', *European Journal of International Relations* 21(1), pp. 27–51.
- Weiss ML (2013) 'Prejudice before Pride: Rise of an Anticipatory Countermovement' in Weiss ML and Bosia MJ (eds.), *Global Homophobia: States, Movements and the Politics of Oppression*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, pp. 149–173.
- Weiss ML and Bosia MJ (eds.) (2013) *Global Homophobia: States, Movements and the Politics of Oppression*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- White House (n.d.) *President Obama and the LGBT Community*. <http://www.whitehouse.gov>. [Online] Available from: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/embeds/footer> (Accessed 6 January 2015).

- Wilkinson C (2014) 'Putting "Traditional Values" into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia', *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), pp. 363–379.
- Wilkinson C and Langlois AJ (2014) 'Special Issue: Not Such an International Human Rights Norm? Local Resistance to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights – Preliminary Comments', *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), pp. 249–255.
- Zivi K (2014) 'Performing the Nation: Contesting Same-Sex Marriage Rights in the United States', *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), pp. 290–306.

Author biography

Anthony J. Langlois is an Associate Professor at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. He has just completed a term as head of the discipline of International Relations in the School of International Studies. He was educated at the University of Tasmania and the Australian National University. Langlois is the author of *The Politics of Justice and Human Rights: Southeast Asia and Universalist Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) and co-editor of *Global Democracy and Its Difficulties* (Routledge 2009) and *Australian Foreign Policy: Controversies and Debates* (Oxford University Press, 2014). His areas of academic endeavour include International Relations, Human Rights, International Political Theory, Global Sexuality Politics and Ethics. Anthony J. Langlois, School of International Studies, Flinders University, GPO 2100, Adelaide 5001, Australia. Email: anthony.langlois@flinders.edu.au; Twitter: @AnthonyLanglois