

# 10th Anniversary Interview - Melanie Richter-Montpetit

Written by E-International Relations

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**E-International Relations (E-IR) was founded 10 years ago this week. During that time we have interviewed over 150 academics, policy-makers and journalists. To celebrate E-IR's 10th anniversary we asked some of our existing interviewees two further questions reflecting on the last decade in International Relations.**

Dr Melanie Richter-Montpetit is an Assistant Professor in Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. 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. Dr Richter-Montpetit was interviewed on feminist IR, torture as security technology, the social structures of the war on terror, and about her teaching philosophy in 2017.

### **What changes have you seen in International Relations or your field over the last 10 years?**

Critical IR scholarship has not only flourished intellectually, but overall has made some serious gains institutionally. In particular postcolonial, decolonial, feminist and queer research has grown tremendously. Among the most exciting developments in the past decade in my areas of research are the rise of vibrant, well-organised transnational scholarly networks, including *Feminist Security Studies*, *Critical War Studies*, *Queer IR*, BISA's *Colonial/Postcolonial/Decolonial Working Group* and *Feminist Global Political Economy*. While metrics cannot measure research quality, and are shaped by various structural inequities, it is interesting to note that *Security Dialogue* and *IPS* have recently achieved higher impact factors than *ISQ*. Over the past ten years, many of the university and major trade presses adopted very successful book series on gender, sexuality, the coloniality of global power and 'non-Western' IR.

And yet, despite greater theoretical diversity and greater acceptance of that diversity, there has been very little actual engagement between different theoretical positions. Together with Alison Howell I am currently working on a discipline-facing book project on security studies. It is frustrating to see how little both orthodox and some of the most prominent critical approaches have engaged with the rich bodies of postcolonial, feminist and queer scholarship. In critical security studies, little seems to have changed since the debate around the manifesto of the *c.a.s.e. collective* ten years ago. Looking at the syllabi of many of the high-ranking US IR departments, the range of scholarship that is being taught seems to have become ever narrower and parochial: less historical, less theoretically informed.

The 'gender gap' continues to unfairly advantage cis men in hirings, tenuring, promotions, citation practices and teaching evaluations. While White women have been able to make important inroads in the discipline in the institutions of the Global North, and despite growing talk about 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism', these same institutions and the profession generally continue to be overwhelmingly/underwhelmingly White. The all-White Sapphire Series at the Annual ISA 2015 conference sparked much discussion about whether or not the discipline is experiencing a backlash. The dramatic increase in precarious employment, the intensification of the neoliberal audit culture (like the British REF and the use of metrics for promotions) and growing pressure to secure external research

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funds in the past decade have in many ways exacerbated existing hierarchies along lines of racialization, gender, dis/ability, class, citizenship, sexuality etc. While deteriorating working conditions are experienced by all academic workers regardless of job security and status, they are compounded for multiple-oppressed scholars, in particular Black, Indigenous and women/femmes/trans of colour colleagues. No doubt these inequities have fuelled existing relationships of dependence and possibility for abuse, have produced structural incentives not to rock (too much) the boat of existing orthodoxies in both mainstream and critical IR, and led brilliant and engaged IR scholars to quit academia.

### **What books, or other media, published in the last 10 years has made an impact on you and/or the discipline?**

The books that most influenced my thinking and work over the last ten years have their disciplinary 'homes' in Queer/Trans of Color Critique, Black studies and Critical Indigenous studies. To name just a few: Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*, Adi Kuntzman's *Figurations of Violence and Belonging*, Chandan Reddy's *Freedom with Violence*, David Eng's *The Feeling of Kinship*; Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, Frank Wilderson's *Red, White & Black*, Christina Sharpe's *Monstrous Intimacies*; Jodi Byrd's *The Transit of Empire* and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's *Hawaiian Blood*. These works conceptualize sexuality and gender as part of wider relations of power and violence, specifically racial and (settler) colonial formations. 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.

A burgeoning body of postcolonial IR scholarship has challenged the ongoing raciality and coloniality of International Relations. The edited volume *Race and Racism in International Relations* 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 *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 19<sup>th</sup> 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, Jesse Crane-Seeber, Claire Duncanson, Maya Eichler, Marsha Henry, 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 impact of Queer IR. 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 solo books by Paul Amar, Rahul Rao and Cynthia Weber, which I review in a recent article in *Millennium* titled *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex (in IR) But were Afraid to Ask: The 'Queer Turn' in International Relations*.

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