

Interview – Jamie Hagen

Written by E-International Relations

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This interview is part of our LGBTQ+ History Month special feature. The interview speaks to the fundamental aims of LGBTQ+ History Month and discusses current research and projects, as well as advice for young scholars.

Jamie J. Hagen is a Lecturer in international relations at Queen’s University Belfast where she is the founding co-director of the Centre for Gender in Politics. She is the Digital Media Editor for the International Feminist Journal of Politics; Chair-Elect for the ISA LGBTQA Caucus and Visiting Researcher with the Secrecy, Power and Ignorance research Network. In the past, she was also a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School for Economics and Politics. She has written for International Affairs about *Queering Women, Peace and Security*, and is a co-author with Megan Daigle and Henri Myrntinen of the chapter *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression (SOGIE) in Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding* in the *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research* (forthcoming March 2021).

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

I’m excited about the challenge to engage with abolitionist work as part of calls for social and transformative justice in peace and security studies. How can abolitionist thinking be a part of peacebuilding? What does abolitionist thinking tell us about how best to respond to gender-based violence? In what ways does Gender, Peace and Security exacerbate carceral and white feminism and what does it look like to refuse this? I’m excited to learn from groups like the prison abolitionist group Black and Pink in the US who support LGBTQ and HIV positive prisoners, Unis Resist Border Control in the UK and other mutual aid initiatives, including those working to find solidarity and security outside of the state.

Continuing to pay attention to the politics of citation is important as we have learned from Sara Ahmed and Claire Hemmings. I appreciate David Durie’s call for ‘strategic silence’ in citational practice, which also reminds me of Roland Bleiker’s call to ‘Forget IR Theory’.

I’m compelled by the research of those who continue to insist on addressing race and racism in IR, for example this piece in Foreign Policy with insights from Gurminder K. Bhambra, Toni Haastrup, Yolande Bouka, Randolph B. Persaud, Olivia U. Rutazibwa, Vineet Thakur, Duncan Bell, Karen Smith and Seifudein Adem. Linking these calls for anti-racist approaches to security studies with queer theory is also exciting to see, for instance in Heike Schotten’s book *Queer Terror*.

It is especially motivating to see more scholarship connecting ‘queer’ with peace and conflict research. I’m seeing this in the case of recent research related to sexual violence against men, in the transitional justice space, in relation to authoritarianism, and in research about how displacement is experienced by those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Last month, I attended the launch event of a short documentary film by MOSAIC about queer participation in the Lebanese revolution and highly recommend a watch!

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

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Focusing on shifts in my thinking about security in IR, Annick Wibben, Laura Shepherd, and Laura Sjoberg were the scholars who helped me to see conversations I could be a part of in IR through feminist and critical security studies. Cynthia Weber's book *Queering International Relations* presented an important shift for me in understanding how queer theory matters to IR, as did Rahul Rao's call for asking queer questions. Jasbir Puar's work was of course also foundational to my thinking differently about security as informed by queer theory.

My interest in IR is largely informed by curiosities about how transnational organizing can support/transform/shape queer community as a part of peace and security – Ryan Thoreson's work *Transnational LGBT Activism* helped me to see this differently. Paul Amar's *The Security Archipelago* illuminated the relationships between a human security approach and the state, by centering an analysis about the relationship between sexuality and neoliberalism, which now informs how I think about the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Research on decolonizing, especially Meera Sabaratnam's work, has also prompted changes in my thinking, especially in relation to teaching students about conflict intervention and transformation. Queer critiques of development studies have been really informative in helping me think through queer organizing and international interventions.

What is the importance of LGBTQ+ History Month and what does it represent to you?

There is a strong initiative to reclaim queer stories lost in the archive, erased, silenced. Certainly, the LGBTQ+ History Month is a platform to do this. Spending time thinking about queer history also presents an opportunity to break down silos between different movements and to recognize how interlinked LGBTQ+ liberation is with other liberation struggles. For example, historian Emily K. Hobson's book *Lavender and Red* links sexual liberation with other movements against imperialism, war and racism. This is something I seek to do in my own work too, recognizing the role of queer organizers in gender, peace and security work.

LGBTQ+ History Month represents a time for me to make myself even more visible to students as someone doing queer research. To this end, I've participated in events organized by the Queen's Students' Union about conducting and supporting queer research these past two years during LGBTQ+ History Month.

Your work draws on and combines insights from security studies, queer theory and a gender perspective. What does this approach bring to the study of international relations and particularly security?

My work is built on the unifying understanding that everyone has a sexual orientation and gender identity and this matters to politics on the personal as well as international level. For me, the most exciting thing queer theory brings to security studies is seeing IR differently by prioritizing sexuality as a lens of understanding power and politics. Bringing a gender perspective informed by feminism to queer security studies also means going beyond work that sees queer people as merely a violently oppressed group, and instead understands queers as having our own communities, people with a future, and people with different visions for this future beyond progress towards heteronormativity. Bringing such an approach to studying security requires a reframing of what we actually see as IR, as Cynthia Enloe prompts us to do.

Queer theory also pushes a gender perspective beyond binary thinking about sex and gender by pointing out that cisgender people have a gender identity too. The framing of 'white heterosexuality as norm' is actively upheld in the everyday through the politics of racism, sexism and patriarchy which everyone is a part of, even members of LGBTQ+ communities. There are all sorts of vibrant theoretical contributions from queer theory in the discipline of IR. I view having queer lives, queer community and queer work for social justice taken seriously as the most valuable contribution to the discipline and to rethinking security more broadly.

A significant part of your research focuses on how to better include LGBTQ+ perspectives in the Women, Peace and Security agenda and broader peace and security initiatives. How can we queer the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and why is this important?

Attention to LGBTQ+ individuals in conflict is long overdue in peace and security scholarship. Even the robust

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scholarship that studies how gender matters to peace and security often neglects to consider how this is experienced differently by women who are bisexual, lesbian and transgender. This neglect amounts to an overlooked area of research regarding transphobic and homophobic violence as gendered violence, but also fails to take up the ways queer women have always shaped and often led this feminist peacebuilding work.

At a time when anti-gender backlash has led to increasing attacks on abortion access and LGBT rights, spaces like Women, Peace and Security programming and gender mainstreaming must continue to insist that gender is not another word for women and that lesbian, bisexual and trans women are women too. These are not separate projects, but deeply related. There are those who have been making these connections in peacebuilding work, feminist organizing and gender analysis in Nepal, in Northern Ireland, and in Colombia for some time, but it's important that this analysis becomes central to thinking about Women, Peace and Security if the agenda is to be transformative.

Relatedly, queer thinking challenges what security looks like, especially if committed to decolonial, anti-militaristic practices. This moves us beyond the dangerous narratives of rescuing queers by sticking with the more structural dilemmas in global politics that must be addressed for gender justice.

In a recently published chapter in *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security* you and Toni Hastrup contend that the Women, Peace and Security agenda “is steeped in racialized hierarchies manifested in whiteness” because National Action Plans from the Global North tend to reinforce racialised narratives and practices. Can you briefly explain your argument?

National Action Plans continue to garner extensive resourcing as a tool to promote and ensure implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. As we explain in our blog post about the chapter, we identify three sites where racial hierarchies are reinforced by the National Action Plans of Global North countries: who gets funded; who is the subject of foreign policy; and what imageries define country priorities and perception of ‘the Other’.

There is a need for much more attention to what it means to bring a ‘local’ perspective to Women, Peace and Security efforts that continue to be funded by, directed towards and are sometimes outright written by Global North actors. An intersectional anti-racist approach to gender justice work requires accounting for slavery, racism, and occupation, including confronting how people in the Global South face violent policing, within the international system of which this agenda is a part.

You are currently researching feminist and LGBTIQ+ activism in the context of political crises such as Brexit and Covid-19 (with Maria-Adriana Deiana and Danielle Roberts). Which specific challenges do LGBTIQ+ folks and women currently face in Northern Ireland, and how are they responding to them?

The research has been cathartic for a number of participants. As folks who are involved in social justice movement work know, it is often challenging to find any time to reflect on the work, especially in times of crisis like we are living in now. Recognizing how exhausted so many of the feminist organizers we were speaking with would be, we opted to host the interviews as small conversations. With this approach, two or three activists were able to reflect together about the work they've been doing and make connections in important ways. This served as an effective way to learn across organizations and connect about the most pressing issues for those we interviewed.

One specific challenge our participants in Northern Ireland are facing is that there is more than one crisis – the crises are cascading. There is the crisis of finally making abortion accessible now that it is legal. There is the crisis of dealing with a lack of access to childcare further exacerbated by COVID-19. There is the crisis of Brexit, especially as experienced by those who are racialized and face threats of deportation. There is the crisis of the near total lack of access to transgender healthcare in the region. There is the crisis of how the green/orange divide in post-conflict Northern Ireland continues to be used as an excuse for postponing meaningful work to address race, class and gender inequalities. An important way that activists are addressing this is by working to address those crises together, intersectionally, across organizations. A powerful example of this is the Feminist Recovery Plan developed by the Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.

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Together with José Fernando Serrano Amaya and Samuel Ritholz, you are working on a chapter on teaching LGBTIQ+ issues in the classroom. How are LGBTIQ+ issues taught globally, and what could be done better?

Though we are in the early stages of this chapter, our conversations to date have allowed us to reflect on the experiences of being in the classroom as queer scholars teaching about LGBTIQ+ issues. A central component of this is thinking about how teaching about LGBTQ lives and bringing queer questions to global politics is inherently political whether this is happening in Belfast where I'm situated, in Bogota where Fernando is teaching or in Oxford where Sam is located. To this end, the classroom is also very much a place of conflict when taking on feminist and queer pedagogies.

There are also implications for how we approach 'LGBTQA issues in the classroom'. It is problematic to look primarily at violence and marginalization faced by LGBTQA populations as stigmatized under patriarchy, rather than centering the transformative feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial dimensions of LGBTQA studies. Something we are all very much interested in thinking through with this chapter is also what/where is considered international in international studies. Queer communities exist everywhere, yet the idea that the West has formalized LGBTQ identities and is the location of knowledge about LGBTQ organizing, rights, and futures persists.

Matt Brim's book *Poor Queer Studies*, confronting the elitism of the university, also informs how I think about queer pedagogy. We're all very much committed to queer theory and LGBTQ studies as something that is relevant and should be accessible to all students. There is more work to be done to refuse queer as something that so many view as being out of touch for people who are poor, not relevant outside of the academy and detached from activism. No! Queering opens up exciting new ways of thinking about what knowledge matters in IR, what knowledge is centered in IR, how sexuality informs everyday life and what future we believe we deserve.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of International Relations, particularly LGBTIQ+ folks?

Find and prioritize queer and feminist community. I'm Chair-Elect for the ISA LGBTQA Caucus. This year the caucus launched a mentoring program, largely led by the work of Member-at-Large Alex Edney-Browne. The Caucus will be hosting a panel discussion on the job market this month recognizing the difficulties of the job market with particular attention to LGBTIQ+ experiences. Previous to being active in the ISA LGBTQA caucus I was active in the ISA Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Section (FTGS) and am really grateful for the mentoring and networking received in this space as well.

But when I say find queer and feminist community, I do not necessarily mean in the discipline. Something I really love doing is co-hosting Feminist & Queer Happy Hours. Hosting and attending these events was especially important for me while I was finishing up my PhD, which can be an isolating experience even in the best of circumstances. These monthly events allowed me to connect with community while learning about the various projects' folks were up to in the community, like organizing drag shows, advocating for LGBTQ health care, fundraising for queer asylum seekers and facilitating free bicycle repair workshops. I got to know so many queer and feminist members of the Providence and Boston communities which reminded me why I'm motivated to do the work and see this work in practice. People really showed up! More than one queer couple met at our events too, by the way. We even had a visit from Ayanna Presley to one of our events which we co-organized with the fantastic annual Boston Film Festival Wicked Queer. I have also hosted these events alongside conferences because I know that big academic conferences are overwhelming and not the easiest spaces to connect. For example, during the 2019 ISA in Toronto I hosted a Feminist and Queer Happy Hour at the Glad Day Bookshop, the oldest queer bookstore worldwide. That was really fun! I look forward to co-hosting these events in Belfast post-pandemic. Oh, and two quick things: 1) As Sarah Jaffe's book reminds us, *Work Won't Love You Back*; 2) Join a union.