contributes to this forum evidence and further these research programs, making clear the critical difference queer can make for international theorizing.

“Out” in International Relations: Why Queer Visibility Matters

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Generally speaking, theorists of IR imagine states as heterosexual. To the extent that some feminist scholars have posited essentialist roles for “men” and “women” in the (re)production of nations, they too have imagined states as heterosexual, even if patriarchal. Queer studies scholars have begun to posit something different: Queer states that are not inherently “straight” or heterosexual (Weber 1999, 2014a; Canaday 2011) are “gay-friendly,” and in some significant cases paradoxical, simultaneously promoting and opposing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) liberation. It is this latter category that I find most relevant to and useful for understanding the current global fascination with and concurrent disdain for LGBTI rights; a paradox observed both within and among nations, a paradox notable for how LGBTI rights get mapped onto a myriad of other political struggles involving sovereignty, westernization, modernity, (de)colonization, and globalization. On the one hand, we are witnessing joyous celebrations of “gay pride” and same-sex partner recognition around the world unlike ever before. Yet there are numerous virulent homophobic and transphobic responses to queer visibility, including where states promote the criminalization of queers, as in the case of Uganda’s proposed “Kill the Gays” bill or Russia’s “gay propaganda” bill. Increasingly, states have become vocal and visible actors in constructing homophobic as well as homopositive strategies related to homosexuality and gender identity, and it is this paradoxical queer visibility that I address here.

Specifically, in this essay, I examine how queer visibility, especially LGBTI rights discourse, has been used as a tool of hegemony and empire by states as they struggle for power. On the one hand, states that recognize LGBTI rights bring much-needed visibility to oppressive situations. Yet when states equate LGBTI rights with a particular, typically racialized brand of democracy, development, or progress, they are often pitting their own ideology against that of states or national communities they view as “uncivil,” “backward,” or “terrorist.” As Spike Peterson points out (this forum; also see Weber 1999, 2014a), a key aspect of queer theorizing is the understanding that “codes and practices of ‘normalcy’ simultaneously constitute ‘deviancy,’ exclusions, and ‘otherings’ as sites of social violence.” Queer theory contests the normalizing arrangements of sex/gender as well as the “normalizing mechanisms of state power” (Eng, cited in Peterson, this forum). Yet, as I argue in this essay, “queerness” itself has been normalized through state policy, for example, as nationalist narratives of a “good gay” citizen (for example, gender normative, white, middle class, monogamous) are incorporated into exclusionary nationalist ideologies and mapped onto broader political
agendas such as national security or economic reform (Duggan 2002; Puar 2007; Agathangelou et al. 2008). I thus ask us to be cautious about claiming LGBTI rights victories as always or necessarily emancipatory, especially when they are promoted through neoliberal state logics of securitization and/or through the teleological lens of progress and modernization.

The celebratory global impulse toward same-sex marriage (SSM) is one terrain in which these debates occur. SSM laws have now been passed in at least 16 countries, and legislation is currently being proposed in several more. Some countries also allow SSM in specific provinces or states (for example, Mexico, United States). Seen as a celebration of lesbian and gay rights, heads of state promote their “gay-friendly” legislation as a marker of progress and modernity: Following the July 2013, passage of SSM legislation in the UK, David Cameron stated,

I am proud that we have made same-sex marriage happen...Making marriage available to everyone says so much about the society we are in and the society we want to live in...If a group is told over and over again that they are less valuable, over time they may start to believe it. In addition to the personal damage this can cause, it inhibits the potential of the nation.” (Cameron 2013, emphasis added)

The idea of SSM as reflecting the potential or modernization of a nation is often seen not only as ending discrimination but also as a move toward capitalist prosperity and (neo)liberal modernity. The earlier 2006 passage of SSM in post-apartheid South Africa framed SSM as part of the country’s broader democratic opening and as a move toward liberal democracy; to achieve this, gay and lesbian activists focused on how queers would contribute to South Africa’s progress toward neoliberal modernity as “respectable,” market-based citizens (Oswin 2007).

In a similar vein, states utilize SSM and more generally LGBTI rights discourse to advance their notion of political security and democracy, as in the case of the United States’ new branding of foreign policy as “gay-friendly” (for example, through USAID’s LGBT Global Development Partnership) and in Israeli state promotion as the most “gay-friendly” country in the Middle East. Ironically, neither of these states have federal SSM laws. In the case of Israel, the government recognizes the marriages of individuals married abroad, and Tel Aviv’s large Gay Pride festival has led some observers to coin the city as the “gay capital of the Middle East.” The Israeli state’s explicit promotion of itself as “gay-friendly” has led to some of the most vocal critiques of what anti-occupation activists in Israeli-occupied territories have called “pinkwashing,” where state officials seek to create a more positive image of their government, nation, human rights record, economic policy framework, or foreign policy agenda, to name only a few, by promoting or speaking about LGBT rights. These activists have claimed that as Israel promotes gay and lesbian equality as part of its national agenda, it aims to create acceptance for its general human rights record in the region, thus “pinkwashing” the human rights violations occurring in occupied territories (Schulman 2011). This paradox, whereby “gay rights” are linked to Israeli democracy while other forms of rights—such as Palestinian sovereignty—are overlooked, is but one example of the ambivalent ways in which gay rights discourse has been constructed and appropriated in the international arena. Importantly, nonhegemonic national(ist) communities also appropriate LGBTI rights agendas and/or can themselves be heteronormative: Palestinian LGBTI rights activists argue, for example, that dominant notions of Palestinian sovereignty are themselves heteronormative and that change needs to occur from within as well.

These state “celebrations” of SSM have of course been met with opposition. Anti-gay crusaders have long worked against SSM laws, yet more radical queer activists have also opposed SSM on the basis that seeking inclusion in the institu-
tion of marriage is reformist at best, and merely shields the ways in which marriage as an institution is oppressive to individuals who do not conform to its (hetero)normative, Eurocentric, colonialist standards. This critique has been launched by numerous queer activists in both the Global North and South. In South America, whereas Argentina recently passed SSM in 2010, making it the first country in Latin America to do so, activists in other countries have explicitly opted not to push for marriage inclusion, at least initially. In Ecuador, for example, until 2013 activists fought not for access to marriage but for redefining the family (and citizenship) altogether, with the idea of challenging the postcolonial state’s liberal notion of equality. As a result, the 2008 Constitution, passed by national referendum, included language redefining the family as based not solely on kinship or blood relations but also on “alternative logics”; this new definition is seen by its supporters as transforming the postcolonial legal landscape in which “family” is defined, allowing not only for same-sex civil unions but also access to state resources by gay and lesbian, transnational/migrant, and indigeneous households (Lind and Keating 2013).

Like SSM, anti-gay laws can also be seen as global sites of both dispute and (ironically) celebration. How hegemonic states respond to anti-gay laws is fascinating in itself: David Cameron has publicly linked countries’ LGBT human rights record directly to UK foreign aid conditionality. Likewise, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has linked LGBT rights to countries’ “democratic” records, and the US AID Global LGBT Development Partnership is now the largest state-sponsored initiative of its kind. Uganda, in particular, has been threatened with foreign aid suspension due to the passage of the 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act, which broadens the criminalization of same-sex relations, including life in prison for those found guilty and penalties for activists and groups that support LGBT rights. Indeed, while the brutality of the law, which fortunately was dismissed by Uganda’s Supreme Court, merits a response, one has to ask “why Uganda?” and not other countries. Interestingly, when Cameron and Obama were faced with international pressure to boycott the 2014 Sochi Olympics following the passage of Russia’s “gay propaganda” law, both publicly opposed a boycott. Cameron stated, “I believe we can better address prejudice as we attend, not by boycotting...” (Xydias 2013); Obama opted not to attend himself but invited LGBT celebrities to be part of the US delegation. Threats of aid suspension or boycotts are seen as exceptionalist when clearly neither the UK nor the United States have achieved such “modernization” at home.

How, then, can scholars and activists best navigate these political landscapes and understand the ambivalent nature of globalized queer visibility? Here I offer three preliminary thoughts: First, recognizing how queer visibility becomes a tool of hegemony and empire is key: As I’ve outlined above, queer visibility in global arenas has brought with it a series of paradoxes that involve the legitimization of a “new gay normal” (read: Western, middle class, white, masculine, gender normative) over all else, and which often serves as fodder for broader struggles for/against colonialism, westernization, and empire. Rao (2012) has described this tension as involving those who claim to be on the “right side of history” (the normative move toward global gay rights, launched primarily by Western states and global institutions) vs. those who are simply “on the wrong side of empire,” including queers in countries deemed “uncivil,” “dangerous,” or “backward” according to hegemonic standards. Being “on the right side of history” implies, then, serving empire as well. Currently, this “new gay normal” is being played out in foreign policy, security, and development arenas and is embedded in state as well as market ideologies linking gays to growth and neoliberal modernity.

Second, because states and global institutions are now finally “paying attention to us” (Scott Long, quoted in Rao 2012), bringing heightened visibility to LGBTI rights, it is imperative that “we” pay attention to states and global institutions as...
they continue to legislate, advocate, and/or construct discourses concerning LGBTI rights in a global context—this being only one, albeit important aspect of thinking “queerly” and critically in our queries of IR. Major groundwork has been done to understand how hetero- and homonormativities are embedded in state practices of securitization (for example, Weber, Duggan, or Puar) and law- and policymaking (for example, Weiss and Bosia), yet much needs to be carried out to better understand how and why states craft both homophobic and homo-positive strategies as they relate to their national political economies as well as their positions vis-à-vis other states and regions, and to address the very real consequences of pro- and anti-LGBTI rights discourse in people’s lives. This certainly applies to nonstate communities as well (for example, Palestine), and to nonhegemonic states that invoke a heteronormative notion of nationalism (for example, Ecuador, Cuba).

Finally, although here I have focused on queer visibility in relation to state practices, it is crucial, of course, that we pay attention to how other hegemonic institutions such as institutions of global finance and development convey heteronormative and/or homonormative logics in their supposedly neutral (and/or modernization) discourse, with very real effects for citizens and policy recipients (Cornwall, Correa, and Jolly 2008; Bedford 2009; Lind 2010). The World Bank’s suspension of US $90 million in aid to Uganda in March 2014 is a case in point, alongside the Bank’s “Economic Cost of Homophobia” project, which aims to monetize the cost of discrimination and link it to aid distribution, economic growth, and modernization. While advances in LGBTI rights are important steps, the political messiness of queer visibility offers IR scholars an opportunity to think more critically about how state practices contribute to and indeed powerfully shape the (hetero)normative landscape in which we conceptualize our work.

**Family Matters: How Queering the Intimate Queers the International**

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A key insight of queer analytics is that codes and practices of “normalcy” simultaneously constitute “deviancy,” exclusions, and “otherings” as sites of social violence. To reveal how power operates in normative codes and normalizing practices, queer theory aims to “make strange”—disrupt, destabilize, deconstruct, effectively *to queer*—what is considered normal, commonplace, taken-for-granted, or the “natural order of things.” The point is to contest normativities and orthodoxies (Browne 2006:886), in part by exposing “regimes of the normal” (Eng et al. 2005:3) as historically contingent and power-laden social constructions and by disclosing inconsistencies, instabilities, and fluidities of social meanings and boundaries. In particular, queer work contests “power-ridden normativities of sex” (Berlant and Warner 1995:345) exemplified in heteronormative sex/affective arrangements, and the “normalizing mechanisms of state power” (Eng et al. 2005:1) exemplified in heteropatriarchal marriage/kinship arrangements.