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# Queer IR

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An INTERNATIONAL STUDIES QUARTERLY ONLINE symposium

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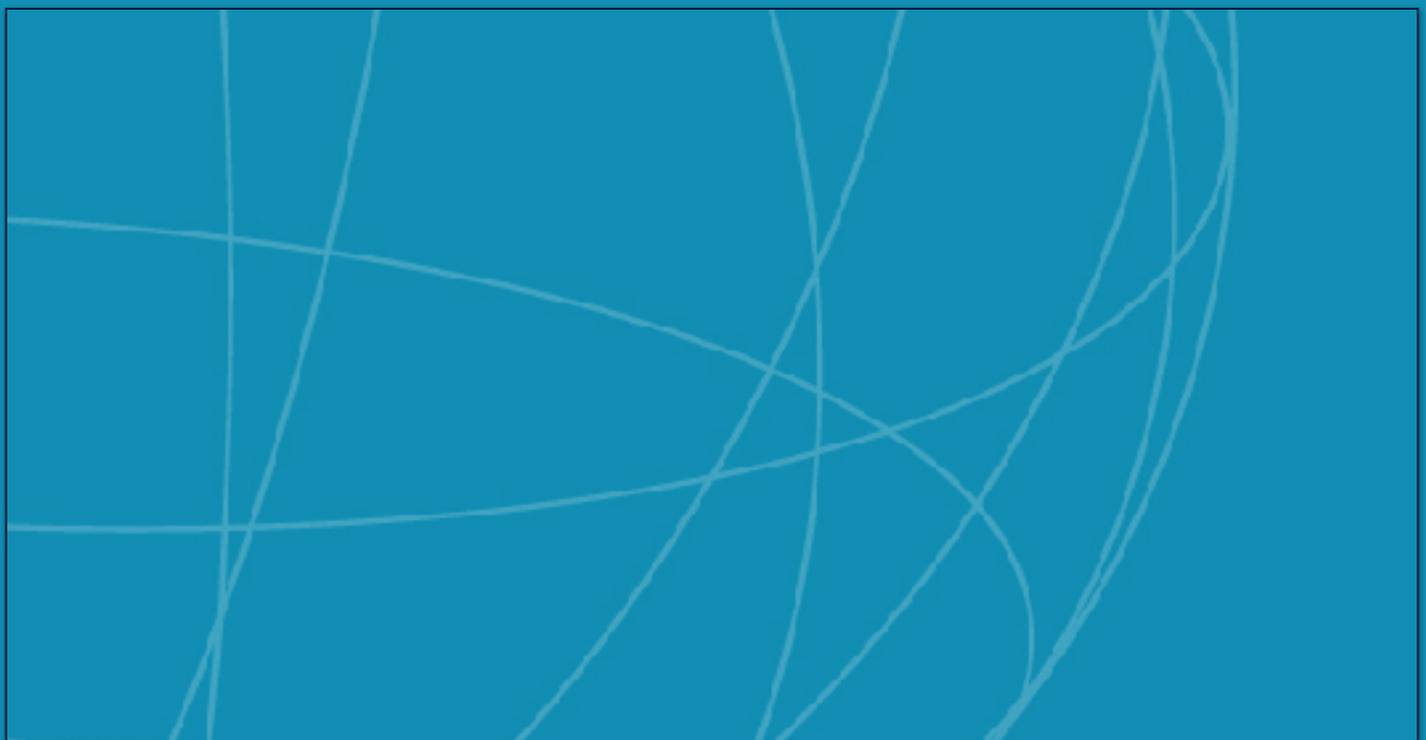
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# INTRODUCTION

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Patrick Thaddeus Jackson  
American University

"Define your terms" is one of those seemingly-innocuous pieces of advice readily dispensed all the time by professors to their students, especially in introductory courses. Be clear and consistent in your use of words. Have a precise way of elaborating what each part of your argument means: when you say "state" or "war" or "woman," for instance, those signifiers ought to have clear and stable signifieds to which they correspond. After all, if we don't all agree on the meanings of our terms, how can we even communicate our claims, let alone assess them in pursuit of a progressive cumulation of knowledge?

Cindy Weber's call for a "[queer intellectual curiosity](#)" (2016a) makes this seemingly innocuous move appear not so innocent. By urging us to examine how the boundaries between the normal and the perverse break down and are incompletely reinscribed at a variety of "international" sites, including in the very writing of "IR scholarship" as an exercise in clearly stating what is and is not going on in the world, Weber raises some challenging questions about both the theories and the methodologies through which we generate knowledge. Normalization and domestication, she suggests, are at work all up and down the "levels of analysis" and at all stages of the research process, and hence -- much as Foucault suggested -- what appears to be liberation might in fact be a renewed and more subtle form of imprisonment.

The alternative that Weber proposes, and that the contributors to this Forum take up, is challenging indeed for those accustomed to looking for consistency -- if "queer" isn't any one thing, and can't be coded in any reliable manner, how could there even \*be\* theoretical claims about queerness in the international realm? Weber's extended example of Conchita Wurst/Tom Neuwirth, touched on by almost all of the contributors, illustrates one answer: theoretical claims about what Weber calls "non-monolithic genders" can help us to identify those places where the \*cultural politics\* directed against such plurivocality comes into play. Another of Weber's examples, involving how the ambiguous figure of "the homosexual" becomes normalized as "the LGBT" in a particular kind of liberal politics, makes a similar point: if we begin with stable categories and firm definitions, we cannot hope to explain how those categories and definitions come to acquire their apparent stability and solidity.

The contributors to this Forum take up a variety of issues raised in Weber's provocative intervention. [Cynthia Enloe](#) considers the relationship between queer IR and feminist IR, both of which are propelled by a "curiosity" that remains outside of mainstream scholarly structures. [Laura Sjoberg](#) muses on IR's uncomfotability with sex, and looks to a queer sensibility as a way to overcome that. [Paul Amar](#) takes up connections between queer IR and the study of securitization, while [L.H.M. Ling](#) looks at parallels between the "non-dual thinking" of Asian traditions and the rejection of stable gender binaries by a queer sensibility. [Cameron Thies](#) ponders the implications of queer IR for role theory. And [Lauren Wilcox](#) wonders how queer IR might \*itself\* be queered, precisely so that it does not simply become a minor coloration added to the same established way of doing IR scholarship: perhaps we need Queer "and/or" IR, a plurality of pluralisms, rather than yet another reinscription of the distinction between the normal and the perverse. Weber concludes with a brief reply.

This Forum raises important questions for what we as IR scholars do both theoretically and methodologically. How we deal with the undecidable, the ambiguous, and the singular are especially profound challenges in this day and age, when politics is so often the domain of momentarily compelling spectacle rather than sober deliberation. Could a queer intellectual curiosity help us navigate a diverse and plural world in a more authentic way? The question is at least worth asking, and the contributors to this Forum have, by their participation, helped to make that possible.

# THE ROLE OF QUEER STUDIES IN IR

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Cynthia Enloe  
Clark University

In her latest [ISQ article](#), Cynthia Weber has nudged, pushed, and lured us all to think more creatively and more candidly about sexuality as a potentially key dynamic shaping political relationships within and between (alleged) nation-states and their officials. Furthermore, she will not let us stick to what many of us imagine are the principal arenas of sexualized politics.

True, prostitution (as an institution, an industry, and a site for power relations, fantasies and anxieties) still receives stunningly little attention from most students of IR. True, the specific dynamics of sexualized intimidation and rape inside militaries of all sorts and by (chiefly) male members of armed groups in their encounters with civilians are still off the intellectual agendas of most IR specialists. True, efforts to ideologically sexualize the ethnic or racialized Other are so far principally investigated by anthropologists, Women's and Gender Studies specialists, cultural historians, and a handful of non-feminist IR researchers. True. True. True.

So Weber's call to queer IR by following her lead in investigating the typically ignored wieldings of sexualized codes in an even wider range of international arenas at first may seem premature: how can we follow these clues when we've scarcely scratched the surface of seemingly more obvious areas of internationalized sexualized politics?

But, of course, it is not a matter of either/or. It never is. Start some place and then make sure you (we) continue into the realms adjacent, the realms mutually supportive.

A feminist analyst of international politics never loses sight of women – women in all their diversities, in all their complexities, in all their fluidities. Thus when one, for instance, interrogates sovereignty as expressed and performed sexually in any international relationship, one brings up to the surface the long and cross-national presumptions (translated into state laws and policies) about women's sexuality never having a status that is sovereign. Sexual sovereignty is reserved conventionally and solely for the state-recognized masculine person.

The works of [Carol Pateman](#), [Anne Phillips](#) and, of course, [Ann Tickner](#) have taught us to employ a feminist lens when we interrogate all claims of sovereignty – personal, national and statist. The histories of women's campaigns for suffrage, for instance, are histories of collective struggles against precisely this deeply held notion that no woman (or girl) can embody or claim sovereignty. She is – in cultural understanding, in the law – merely an appendage, a dependent, a vessel.

Consequently, as Cynthia Weber's work reveals, Queer IR is not a substitute for Feminist IR. Rather, the queering of IR analysis is an added string to the bow of feminist interrogation of international politics.

# LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX: THINKING ABOUT QUEER IR RESEARCH AGENDAS

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Laura Sjoberg  
University of Florida

Cynthia Weber's [latest ISQ article](#) calls for the use of queer IR methods across IR inquiry in a way that "enriches how we analyze core IR concerns ... [and] broaden[s] our thinking about how to study a wide array of IR mobilizations of normality, perversion, and stigma." The piece is an ambitious, well-argued, and insightful argument *both* for the establishment of a Queer IR research agenda and for the utility of Queer IR methods across the discipline. The call for more work in Queer IR builds on recent scholarship exploring queer theories' contributions ([Weber 2014](#); [Lind 2014](#); [Sjoberg 2014](#); [Wilcox 2014](#)), and extends and makes explicit the queer IR methodology in Weber's earlier work ([Weber 1999](#); [2002](#)).

In my view, there are a number of key lessons that IR can take from Weber's suggestion that a queer intellectual curiosity inform IR method, including but not limited to the study of plural figurations in global politics and attention to the persistence of the dichotomy between the normal and the perverse. I think that Weber's layout of methods, as well as the example that she provides applying her method to Ashley's contention that statecraft is mancraft, could be and is likely to be used by many who are interested in developing queer research in IR and promoting queer contributions to IR research.

To me, one of the best parts of Weber's essay is the application of the roadmap from Foucault's *History of Sexuality Volume I* to doing the work of (queer) IR. Weber (p.4) suggests that it is important to "1. Analyze how sex is put into discourse; 2. Analyze the functions and effects of productive power; 3. Understand productive power as working through networks of powerknowledge/pleasure, and 4. Analyze how understanding of 'the normal' and 'the perverse' are frozen, without assuming that they are either true or forever fixed." Weber's piece then follows all four of those suggestions to provide insight into figurations of "the homosexual," "homosexuality," and "the LGBT" in global politics, as well as the broader political sphere that those figurations both reflect and produce.

Recently, I have been interested in the first and the fourth of these ideas in studying global politics – where sex is in the discourses of global politics (but often ignored or invisible), and where the taboo of sex and sexuality reifies a dichotomy between the normal and the perverse. I have just begun a project on the role of sex acts in the constitution of territorial borders in global politics, and the role of territorial borders in the constitution of possible sex acts. In my early research, I have found a taboo that sex acts still *are not discussed* explicitly in most references to their existence in global politics. Instead, sanitized language like MSM (men who have sex with men) and partnership or marriage are used not only when referring to people or relationships but also when referring to the performance of sexual acts.

As Weber notes in her piece, the "normal" sexuality in global politics is expanding to include "the homosexual" – at least "the homosexual" who becomes "LGBT" and is seen as if in a heteronormative, monogamous, loving and/or familial relationship. As Weber connotes on p.2, however, this "LGBT" is framed as asexual, a move away from the term "homosexual" which was often used in a way that connoted perversion. Within the "either normal or

perverse” framework that Weber puts forth, I argue that the “normal” is connoted as asexual and the “perverse” is connoted as unmentionable sexuality.

An implication of this that I would like to explore more is that the normal/perverse dichotomy *makes sexuality unmentionable* in important ways – where, even as the LGBT becomes more normal in global politics and in IR discourses, and even as sexuality comes to be referred to in a wide variety of ways (from human rights discourses to health care debates), the normalization of the LGBT comes with the desexualization of “the homosexual” instead of just his/her movement into the realm of normal sexuality. This is because “normal” sexuality is rarely if ever referred to in sexual terms – usually, it is only perceived-deviant sexuality that is talked about as sexuality in IR analyses (and, perhaps, even more generally).

So, reading Weber’s take on Foucault, I want to talk about sex. I want to talk about the way that sex is in discourses of global politics (particularly the use of rape metaphors to talk about territorial invasions or compromises). But I also want to talk about the ways that sex is invisible in, but constitutive of, discourse in global politics. How were the territorial borders of some states constituted by conjugal relationships among leaders or monarchs (e.g., [Nexon 2009](#))? How do state borders constitute or truncate sexual relationships (e.g., [Pariwala and Uberoi 2008](#); [Human Rights Watch 2006](#))? What could be learned by applying the methodology in Weber’s piece *directly* to the relationship between states and sexualities? How are states configured by sexuality, and how is sexuality configured by the institution of the state?

I think that there is much more to Weber’s argument than my extrapolation of attention to sex. But I think attention to sex *as sex* in global politics is one of the many research directions suggested, and made possible, by Weber’s article. I look forward to doing, and seeing, research inspired by it for years to come.

# PLURAL GLOBAL PERVERSIONS AND CURIOUS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Paul Amar  
University of California, Santa Barbara

Cynthia Weber in her important and imminently teachable [ISQ article](#) and [book](#) (, has animated the project of resituating sexuality, particularly homosexuality, as a constitutive force of international and global regimes of regulation, recognition, and figuration. Weber boldly offers a new form of queer IR methodology that maps regimes of sovereignty, rights, and recognition in ways that underline their scripting of plural and contradictory figures of perversion.

Weber’s “queer curiosities” method challenges regimes of sexualized figuration without simply redeeming “perverse” figures as normal “minorities” domesticated within the “man-craft” of governance. Thus the binary between perversion and normal – and between minority and sovereign – is challenged. (Homo) sexuality is moved to the center of IR theory. In this ISQ article, she draws upon Foucault to reanalyze Victorian regimes as they establish binary regimes of normalization through “discursively implanting the ‘perversion’ of ‘homosexuality’ into the bodies of individuals” (1) and draws upon Donna Haraway via Judith Butler to assess how processes of figuration and worlding constitute new meanings and temporalities. These figurations deploy homosexuality to prop up a new international order of normalization, as in Hillary Clinton’s (2011) speech that centers LGBT “love between partners” (not queer sex) as the new priority of Obama administration foreign policy. Or, conversely, they disrupt binary regimes, as in the case of 2014 Eurovision song contest winner Tom Neuwirth’s/Conchita Wurst’s performance, which can be read as articulating the European Union’s “new normal” of embracing gender queer “diversity” and ethnic pluralism *and/or* embodying the EU’s ultimate pervert, refusing identity and ethnic fixity and layering worlds, narratives, and modes of embodiment, pleasure and futurity.

In this context, Weber’s interrogation, via Roland Barthes, of the pluralization dynamic of the “and/or” (which is not the same as “either/or”) stands as a particularly powerful and useful conceptual tool for interrogating the sexuality politics of today’s EU and US, which are torn by new waves of hypernormative and homophobic right-wing populist “sovereignty” obsessions.

Here, very briefly, I would like to suggest a couple of ways to extend Weber’s contributions and weave innovations in IR methods with conversations coming from studies of coloniality, global south “emergence,” and critical globalization studies. In my work in *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics and the End of Neoliberalism* (2013) and my forthcoming *Thug Love: Authoritarian Populism and Global Counterrevolution* (2017), I focus on the “securitization” of the figurations of the terrorist, trafficker, and rescuer/redeemer. I analyze how each of these three figurations emerges as a transnational regime relatively autonomously, as large-scale international formations of regulation, production and protection. These are shaped in specific ways in the semi-periphery and the global south, although they circulate through and from colonial and northern histories and nexes. Each

of these regimes is co-constitutive of the other, of course, but not simply artifacts or secondary effects or marginal “victims” of capitalism or neoliberalism. And each is driven by imbricated biomedical, penal, police, missionary, and military “implantations” of the perverse and the queer.

Thus, the politics of global rescue and protection regimes, and (anti) trafficking and terror systems are always/already sexuality politics. IR theory cannot assess them adequately without this engagement with the sexuality dynamics of producing, protecting and/or punishing perversion. As I see it, security politics as sexuality politics is akin to sovereignty politics as mancraft or queer statecraft; but in my work I chose the terms security and securitization to underline exactly this plural dynamic of layered, contradictory figuration. These securitizing regimes flow between sites and hot spots, without necessarily being grounded in any one territorial reference or normative “culture” or strategic matrix. For this reason I deploy the term “archipelago” to describe the interaction of parastatals with global security economies, transnational rescue missions, and protection rackets *and/or* as deployed by sovereign states and policy actors.

Returning to Weber’s wonderful essay, I wonder how we can further explore her example of the figuration of Eurovision song winner Neuwirth/Wurst, as Colombian/mestiza/Austrian/German and as both EU ideal and perversion. I wonder what would have occurred, and if the response to this “and/or” performance of queer complexity would have triggered even more violent responses (or been utterly ignored) if Neuwirth/Wurst would have channeled “perversions” not just of Mestisaje, but of an abjected Muslim-as-terrorist and or Colombian-as-cocaine trafficker. Would the debate around Neuwirth/Wurst and his/her/their status as EU representation, and as UN poster-child, have changed radically if such a performance had been staged by a Muslim in this time in which the “othering” of Europe, at least for right-wing populists and sovereigntists, is configured radically around perverse imaginaries of the Muslim as political extremist (terrorism) and as sexual threat (hypervisibility of street assaults)? And it is interesting that the Colombianness of Neuwirth/Wurst was not brought into resonance with the global governance regimes and tabloid media imaginaries of the ‘War on Drugs’ in Colombia, along with Mexico, that continue to be articulated as dominant frameworks for international relations and transnational security politics more vividly than ever in 2015. Was it the fact that Neuwirth/Wurst’s homosexuality could be bracketed off from Muslim-ness and drug-war resonance (and limited to a somewhat old-fashioned figure of rural, Latin American, tropical underdevelopment) that he/she/they were able to “work” this *and/or* dynamic in such a perversely productive way?

Weber’s methodological innovation centers the politics of homosexuality and challenges the production of the normal/perverse binary in the IR field as in global sovereignty regimes. Racial ‘drug war’ criminalization and gendered /militarized Islamophobia, and these processes’ essential co-constitution with other circulating regimes of securitization, protection, war, and development, are essential components of this global story of IR’s designation of perversions. These global security regimes are sexuality politics *and/or* factories for normalization of ‘international communities.’ As Cynthia Weber suggests, pluralization of notions of sexuality politics must be centered in the intellectual curiosities and research agendas of International Relations if the field is to grapple with the power and perversion of these regimes, today and in the future.

# QUEER IR AND ANCIENT ASIA: AN INTELLECTUAL, NORMATIVE, AND POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

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L. H. M. Ling  
The New School

[Cynthia Weber](#) has elegantly and painstakingly articulated a “queer intellectual curiosity” for IR. It refers to a spirit of exploration, especially of received wisdom, from a position that is multiple in-between. This queer curiosity builds on dissident theorizing from contemporary thinkers in the West, ranging from those who question gender as a discourse (Foucault, Haraway, Butler) to language as a site of power (Barthes), and “statecraft” as “mancraft” (Ashley). She draws on Neuwirth/Wurst, winner of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest, to demonstrate the “performative embodiment” of a “plural logoi” (10). It encompasses either/or (e.g., boy or girl) *and* both/and (e.g., girl and boy) *and* more (e.g., combinations of genders, sexes, parentage, states, civilizations). The last conveys “queerness” in its fullest sense: that is, “[an] open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses, and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” ([Sedgwick quoted in Weber, 3](#)). From this basis, Queer IR aims to produce a less hegemonic and therefore less violent regime of global governance, *even when* legal protections – like gay rights – are offered to those with so-called non-mainstream, plural subjectivities. Put differently, Weber argues, homonormativity cannot replace heteronormativity. Each on its own merely reproduces the violence of another binary.

What elates me in this line of inquiry is its resonance with ancient Asian thought – and it’s about time we recognize this intellectual, normative, and political solidarity. Some of these philosophies come from what our Westphalian world order categorizes as “India” and “China.” But monks and nuns, merchants and soldiers, cooks and scribes and others from all over ([Gordon 2009](#)) have forged over “twenty centuries of civilizational interactions and vibrations” ([Tan and Geng 2005](#)), along the Silk Roads and across the Himalayas, to transmit what Westphalia considers a “religion” – Buddhism – but which more fully constitutes an alternative ontology and epistemology. And it is this culmination of *advaita* ([Shahi and Ascione 2015](#)) and *daoism* ([Ling 2014](#)), both expressed in Buddhism, that has the potential to de-center IR from its hegemonic perch of Hypermasculine-Eurocentric Whiteness ([Ling 2015](#)), rendering it as one of many rather than the only One ([Ling 2016a](#)). Solidarity with “epistemologies of the South” ([Ling and Pinheiro forthcoming](#)) offers one way. Another comes from Queer IR.

Indeed, both Queer IR and ancient Asian thought seek to overcome binaries. Buddhism provides specific teachings on how to do so. I refer, specifically, to the five-rank protocol in Zen Buddhism ([Loori 2009](#)). Here, I supplement the five ranks with Neuwirth/Wurst as example. The first two ranks – (1) “the relative within the absolute” and (2) “the absolute

within the relative” – caution, in effect, that appearances can be deceiving; Things may seem different on the surface but they share a common essence underneath (e.g., Neuwirth and Wurst share the same body). Even so, the common essence in different things does not negate each entity’s unique qualities (e.g., Neuwirth is an urban man from Germany; Wurst is a rural woman from Colombia). From these two ranks, the third one – (3) “coming from within the absolute” – becomes possible. Here, we begin to see and treat the two parts, relative (Wurst) and absolute (Neuwirth), as one (Neuwirth/Wurst). From this basis, compassion arises and enlightenment begins. A fourth rank – (4) “arriving at mutual integration” – urges action based on this insight (e.g., Neuwirth/Wurst enters the Eurovision Song Contest and wins). “At this stage, the absolute and relative are integrated, but they’re still two things” (Loori 2009: xxvii). For this reason, we need a fifth rank – (5) “unity attained” – to affirm “[t]here is no more duality. [Neuwirth/Wurst] is one thing – neither absolute [Neuwirth] nor relative [Wurst], up [North] nor down [South], profane [homosexual] nor holy [heterosexual], good [normal] nor bad [perverse], male [Tom] nor female [Conchita]” (Loori 2009: xxvii).

Affirmation of “unity attained,” however, does not freeze the entity. On the contrary, the five-rank protocol proceeds from a profound insight: that is, non-duality cannot remain so without consideration of duality; otherwise, non-duality becomes another duality. It is this tension and the creative possibilities that arise from it that sustains Buddhist enlightenment as “awakened wisdom and selfless compassion” (Hori 2003: 6).

Such integration aims not only to stay on the right path or avoid making the same mistakes over and over again, as underscored by Weber. That is, simply including LGBTQ rights as human rights does not eliminate the binary between the “normal” (e.g., “advanced” Western states with liberal, gay rights) and the “perverse” (e.g., “rogue” or “backward” states with anti-gay policies). On the contrary, unthinking inclusiveness tends to reinforce these binaries. Rather, finding the multiple in-between benefits a variety of crises resolution in world politics. Where the very Westphalian notion of “sovereignty” can be loosened from its individualistic, territorial, and white-patriarchal moorings to something more multiple and culturally dynamic, we may find transformational emancipation in more ways than one (Ling 2016b).

# FIGURATIONS, ROLES AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF WEBER'S QUEER METHOD

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Cameron G. Thies  
Arizona State University

There are several ironies embedded in my reaction to Weber's [ISQ article](#). One is that I was undoubtedly chosen to represent the mainstream reader of this work—a disciplinary figuration of the normal scholar, and apropos to this particular project, a homosexual. Yet, my inclusion in this discussion may also betray my struggle with normality to those whose disciplinary orientation I am asked to represent. Thus, I am not *either/or*, but *and/or*: normal *and/or* perverse in Weber's reformulation of a *plural logoi*. I find comfort in this queer sensibility to my placement in our disciplinary networks of power/knowledge/pleasure, even as others may be troubled by it.

The second irony is that I wish to explore Weber's queer method, derived in part from Richard Ashley's work, as it disrupts my own work on role theory developed to a great extent by my mentor, [Stephen Walker](#). As a graduate student at Arizona State University in the late 1990s, both men had tremendous influence on my thinking. It is a good thing that I was not clever enough at the time to realize that post-structuralism and mainstream “positivism” were not supposed to be compatible. I am not claiming a privileged position as an interlocutor between the two philosophical positions, but I am able to appreciate both for what they offer to the study of international relations.

I want to use that appreciation for Weber's queer method to explore briefly its implications for one of my own recent projects that examines rising powers through the lens of role theory. I wrote a dissertation using role theory that was eventually published as a book ([Thies 2013](#)). My own work on role theory has sometimes been viewed as too structural, considering roles as somewhat pre-defined positions within the international social system. Yet, role theory also has roots in symbolic interactionism that considers roles as “the kinds of actors it is possible to be,” lending more agency to actors to co-create roles with others.

Many of the figurations described by Weber are akin to roles, such as Thai ladyboys, the terrorist, the torturer, the slave, the human rights holder, etc. According to Weber “policymakers...employ these figurations to construct and legitimate how they order international politics and tame anarchy...” (2015: 2). Thus, these figurations may be used to justify imperialism, neo-imperialism and other forms of ordering world politics. Similarly, role theory uses roles as ways of understanding how states (or typically elites acting on behalf of states) see themselves in relation to significant others. Knowing who Ego is in relation to Other then helps us to understand the social order and its behavioral manifestations. What Weber's queer method brings to role theory is a greater sense of contingency. I fear that foreign policy roles as often portrayed in the current literature recall

her worry about reification of figurations that could lead to “flat, unproductive, stifling...” worlds ([Weber 2015:5](#), citing [Grau 2004:12](#)).

In a recent paper exploring the socialization of rising powers through the use of a role theoretic model, I focused on the roles conceived by China during the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1995-96. China was observed to offer roles such as victim, anti-imperialist agent, opponent of hegemonism, rising power, great power, bastion of world revolution and socialism, sovereign state, and unifier of the Sinic world. My original reaction while conducting this research was: how can China think of itself as a victim, and why would it need to reinforce its role as a sovereign state? These roles portray China as weak as opposed to the other more active and aggressive roles that emphasize strength. What Weber’s queer method tells us is that roles that might initially seem incompatible may in fact be incompatible, yet simultaneously performed—victim *and/or* anti-imperialist agent, rather than *either/or*. China can be observed conceiving and enacting these kinds of *and/or* roles relatively frequently. For example, China often claims to be a developing state *and/or* rising/great power, especially during discussions about controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Perhaps rising powers are likely candidates for *and/or* roles as they change internally and in their external orientation to the world.

Role theory may benefit from a queer sense of contingency and instability through *and/or* performances of roles. The symbolic interactionist approach to role theory is already much closer to this than structural forms of role theory. Recent work on domestic role contestation also helps shed light on the internal debates about what roles states should be enacting in the international system ([Cantir and Kaarbo 2012](#)). Much of this work still assumes that in the end a single role is selected to represent the state in a given relationship. Even work on intra- and inter-role conflict is premised on mechanisms designed to resolve the conflict ([Brummer and Thies 2015](#)). While figurations may not exactly match what we mean by roles, it seems like they are analogous enough for us to consider that *and/or* is possible and not to ignore it in favor of *either/or* because that fits better with existing theory and empirical work.

This short exploration of Weber’s queer method as applied to my own work on role theory demonstrates the potential fruitfulness of her work. It should not be seen just as a contribution to queer theory or to work that grounds international order in gender, but as a method that can inform a variety of theoretical and empirical research traditions. I look forward to seeing how Cynthia Weber’s “Queer Intellectual Curiosity” spreads across the discipline.

# IR'S QUEER PRESENCE AND QUEER POTENTIALS

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Lauren Wilcox  
University of Cambridge

My main reaction to the publication of [Cynthia Weber's piece](#) is that this has been long overdue. For years, as Weber noted in her earlier work ([Weber 2014](#)), queer studies has become 'Global Queer Studies,' in which queer theories and queer theorists engaged with central concepts to IR theory such as political violence, sovereignty, identity, race, terrorism, migration, and emotion (as in well regarded works such as Jasbir Puar's [Terrorist Assemblages](#) and Sara Ahmed's [Cultural Politics of Emotion](#), among many others). On the other hand, one could only point to a few works that are unambiguously regarded as 'queer' within the disciplinary spaces of IR (*inter alia* [Weber 1999](#), [Peterson 2014a](#), [Rao 2014](#) and [a recent forum in ISR](#))

Weber's piece does more than 'bring queer work' into the field of International Relations; in my view it makes the case that IR has always already been 'queer' in the sense of its dependence on unstable logics of gender and sexuality. Weber's piece complements work such as V. Spike Peterson, who points out how IR's founding assumptions are not only *gendered* but institute a heteronormative international order ([Peterson 1999](#), [2014a](#), [2014b](#)). For example, Peterson has argued that the development of states has instituted and normalized the heteronormative basis of families and intimate life and contributes to global inequalities, while contemporary social and economic trends disrupt normalized assumptions about intimate family life. She writes, "Queering the family/kinship rules that constitute birthright citizenship ultimately queers both the inherited basis of national in/exclusions and the bounding of states/nations themselves" ([Peterson 2014b](#)). Peterson has investigated gendered and heterosexual norms at the roots of international society, revealing IR's past and enabling conditions to be deeply implicated in gendered and heteronormative politics. Weber's framing of a methodological framework for queer IR in terms of Foucault's *History of Sexuality Part 1* ([one of the most frequently cited works in the social sciences and in the humanities](#)), as well as the insistence on framing 'queer IR' in terms of an open-ended methodological framework, suggests not only a kind of Foucauldian 'history of the present' in terms of queering IR's past, but its present and future as well. It suggests, in one sense, a deep familiarity in terms of 'the queer' in such a foundational work, and a deep sense of possibility and the unexpected—not the least of which is the figure(s) of Conchita Wurst/Tom Neuwirth.

By making the move to theorize "homosexuality" and "the homosexual" as a figuration rather than an essential characteristic of certain subjects, Weber is attentive to a key theme in queer theory, which is the instability of locating certain bodies as 'queer' as well as an attentiveness to how such categories travel and the uses to which such designations are put: in this piece alone (and further elaborated in [Weber 2016](#)), Weber traces figurations 'homosexual' and the ways in which it becomes attached or detached to material bodies: from the linkages of 'the homosexual' to discourses of the underdeveloped, the colonized and the savage, to the unwanted migrant and to the terrorist, as well as to a 'normal' subject in need of the protection of human rights. The figuration of 'the homosexual' through a queer methodological framework is read, as in Sedgwick's influential formulation of queer, as when the constituent elements of gender and sexuality "aren't made (or *can't be made*) to

signify monolithically” (1993). It can therefore be read through a lens of ‘and/or’: plural rather than fixed meanings. Importantly, this formulation of ‘and/or’ avoids the reifying of a ‘queer’ subject as necessarily excluded or ‘other’: as Weber points out, the figuration of ‘the homosexual’ also includes ‘the normal (rather than perverse) homosexual’ whose rights are not recognized and who serves as the impetus for neocolonial and violent policies toward some states who refuse to recognize these rights as part of IR’s ‘modern man’, and instead need to violently oppose its others. In addition, this formulation may be a means to avoid the ‘gentrification’ of queer—the replacement with a ‘queer variable’ in the way that feminist approaches are replaced by ‘gender as variable’. Weber has argued against this for decades.

By positing ‘queer’ not as an object to be studied as in a ‘queer’ or ‘sexuality’ variable but a practice of thinking and doing IR, Weber simultaneously posits queer as IR’s structural impossibility, as something IR always already is, and, as methodology, something IR could be and do in the future. Queer IR is itself plural and undecided. In other words, Weber’s ‘and/or’ formulation of plural logics could be said to hold for the relationship between ‘queer’ and ‘IR’ as well. IR is both queer and not queer, and it is either queer or not queer. The development of ‘international relations’ in terms of its foundational political logics can be ‘queered’ in terms of revealing how gender and sexuality were regulated in the past. Queerness can also/or be a future-oriented imperative, as a methodological framework aimed at opening up space for future investigations of plural figurations of sexuality and gender. Queer work can be a constitutive failure in IR as Weber (2014) has argued, and/or appear on the pages of some of its most prominent journals.

Such a formulation of what a queer ‘orientation’ to the field of IR recalls Jose Estaban Muñoz’s statement that begins his *Cruising Utopia*:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.

In his invocation of queerness as a horizon, as a utopia to imagine other lives, other ways of being, Muñoz posits ‘queer’ not as unstable signifier of sexual difference, as a past to be recovered, but as a way of giving life to projects yet unimagined or unimaginable. This can be a dangerous proposition, as this kind of curiosity—Weber’s ‘queer intellectual curiosity’—has always been dangerous for ‘women’ and others who might upset certain hierarchies by seeking knowledge. But queer intellectual curiosities inspire us to read such pronouncements of the dangers of queer approaches to IR in terms of a desire to enforce singular logics in the paradigm of ‘sovereign man’ at the expense of considering the possibilities of plural logics. And in so doing, Weber points out, we remain open to the unknown future: “Unlike heteronormativities and homonormativities... we cannot name in advance what these institutions structures of understanding and practice (dis)/(re)orientations will be” (2015:11).

# QUEER AND/OR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS...OR NOT?

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It is exciting to be in conversation about queer IR theories and methods with such outstanding Mainstream IR, Critical IR, Feminist IR, Queer IR and Queer Studies scholars. It is gratifying to see how they take up [queer intellectual curiosity as IR method](#), not only to further work in what is being called Queer IR but also to make connections with mainstream IR role theory, ancient Asian thought, feminism, and Queer Security Studies.

Reading their contributions to this forum, I am intrigued by their arguments and by the claims they make regarding what a queer intellectual curiosity makes possible.

For Cameron Thies, queer intellectual curiosity offers not only “a contribution to queer theory or to work that grounds international order in gender, but...a method that can inform a variety of theoretical and empirical research traditions.” For Laura Sjoberg, it not only provides “the roadmap from Foucault’s *History of Sexuality Volume 1* to doing the work of (queer) IR,” but it also makes it possible to think “sex *as sex* in global politics.” For Cynthia Enloe, it demonstrates how “[s]exual sovereignty is reserved conventionally and solely for the state-recognized masculine person.” For Lauren Wilcox, it “makes the case that IR has always already been ‘queer’ in the sense of its dependence on unstable logics of gender and sexuality.” For Paul Amar, it “animate[s] the project of resituating sexuality, particularly homosexuality, as a constitutive force in international and global regimes of regulation, recognition, and figuration.” And for LHM Ling, it both “seeks to overcome binaries” and “has the potential to de-center IR from its hegemonic perch of Hypermasculine-Eurocentric Whiteness.” These are very generous claims.

I also appreciate how the contributors challenge me to take my thinking on these issues further. Amar, for example, challenges me to think more about how logics of international security interact with logics of sovereignties and sexualities. Ling challenges me to think more widely beyond the Western canon. And Enloe challenges me to make more connections to the feminist canon. They are all right to do so.

Just as the contributors to this forum push me to think further, I would like to push them to think further as well.

On the one hand, I like Wilcox’s construction of Queer *and/or* IR. But as what is being called [Queer IR](#) work gets taken up by some of those in this forum and in IR more generally, I wonder whether or not ‘queer’ will be made to fit into something called ‘IR’ or ‘Feminism’ or ‘Role Theory’, for example, without being allowed to challenge or to change what these IRs understand ‘IR’ to be and do.

This concern stems from my understanding of queer and its relationship to IR theories and practices. [Following Eve Sedgwick \(1993\), I understand queer as](#) “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.” My suggestion is that if IRs entangle themselves in

this open mesh of possibilities, IRs will no longer (only) mean what they formerly meant or (only) conduct inquiry as they formerly did. This is because encounters with non-monolithic sexes, genders and sexualities (what I call in [this ISQ article](#) pluralized *and/or* sexes, genders and sexualities and what I have previously also written about as *neither/nor* sexes, genders and sexualities [Weber 1994a](#), [Weber 1994b](#), [Weber 1999](#), and [Weber 2002](#)) do not only transform *what* we know; they also transform *how* we know. At the heart of that transformation are IRs that *necessarily* think about how non-monolithic sexes, genders and sexualities (read intersectionally through races, classes, abilities, religions, colonialities, etc.) function in and through international theories and global politics.

This leads me to pose a range of questions to variously positioned IR scholars.

To mainstream IR scholars, I wonder:

- Is there anything ‘queer’ about multiply-contingent roles ([Figurations, Roles and the Possibilities of Weber’s Queer Method](#)) if a rethinking of role theory is informed only by [plural logics of sovereignty](#) and not also by the plural logics of sexes, genders and/or sexualities (what I call [queer logics of statecraft](#)) that are produced by and are productive of these sovereignties?

To feminist IR scholars, I wonder:

- While a queer intellectual curiosity can never be – nor should it be – a substitute for a feminist curiosity, does a queer intellectual curiosity merely ‘add’ a ‘string to the bow of feminist interrogation[s] of international politics’ ([The Role of Queer Studies in IR](#))? Or does a queer intellectual curiosity (also) radically contest where some feminisms draw their ontological limits (at women and later men), their epistemological limits (at knowledge about only some kinds of sexes, genders, and sexualities), and their methodological limits (at techniques that inquire only about *either/or* logics and subjectivities while generally excluding *and/or* and *neither/nor* logics and subjectivities)?

And to critical IR scholars more generally, I wonder:

- Might critical IR scholars merely practice “unthinking inclusiveness [of queer IRs that tend] to reinforce...binaries” ([QUEER IR AND ANCIENT ASIA: An Intellectual, Normative, and Political Alignment](#)) between some critical IRs and some critically queer IRs? Or will critical IR engagements with queer IRs also take seriously, for example, how non-monolithic sexes, genders and sexualities (read intersectionally through races, abilities, classes and their sovereignties and colonialities, for example) multiply and contest things [like Westphalian notions of sovereignty](#) as well as [conventional modalities for practicing some critical IRs](#)?

From my perspective, if well-meaning IR embraces of ‘queer’ do not insist upon putting non-monolithic sexes, genders and sexualities and their transformative potentials for *how* we know as well as *what* we know at their core, then they are more likely to maintain IRs as usual than they are to produce what Wilcox calls Queer *and/or* IRs.

What the discussions in this forum suggest is that getting to these Queer *and/or* IRs theoretically and methodologically requires IR scholars to do more than eschew the discredited claim that [there is no queer international theory](#) (as all of the contributors to this forum have done). It also requires all of us (myself included) to be attentive to how – even against our intentions – we may constrain IRs in the name of expanding theoretical and methodological investigations of international politics. This is as true for how we engage

with so-called Queer IRs as it is for how we engage with IRs being generated from and in relation to [Black](#) and [Anti-Blackness Studies](#), [Indigenous Studies](#), [\(Dis\)Ability Studies](#), [Postcolonial Studies](#), [Decolonial Studies](#), and other [intersectional Orientalisms](#), for example.

Figuring out how to embrace these *and/or* IRs without squeezing out their transformative potential for IRs will be no easy task. This forum is a bold step in that direction.

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