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Scholar Investigation: V. Spike Peterson

A distinguished scholar in the field of international relations must have a perspective that separates her from the others. In fact, having a background in a variety of different fields allows for a study of international relations allotted to only a few. The ability to think across disciplines therefore allows a scholar to provide valued and thoughtful insight that furthers not only international relations, but also other disciplines congruently. V. Spike Peterson received a “Ph.D. in International Relations from American University in Washington, DC as of 1988. Peterson attained an M.A. in Social Science: Anthropology/African Studies from University of Illinois in Urbana, IL in 1975, and B.S. with Honors in Psychology/Philosophy from University of Illinois, Urbana, IL in 1970.”¹

Spike Peterson became well-known and accomplished a great deal to this point in her career as an academic. Currently, Peterson educates at the “University of Arizona as a Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and Public Policy with courtesy appointments in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies, Institute for LGBT Studies, Center for Latin American Studies, and International Studies.”² Focusing on International Relations Theory, Global Political Economy, Gender and Politics, and Contemporary Social Theory, the vast academic background that Peterson maintains allows for an in depth understanding of the world.

1 V. Spike Peterson, “V. Spike Peterson | School of Government & Public Policy,” accessed May 14, 2013, <http://sgpp.arizona.edu/spikep>.

2 Ibid.

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While contributing to the academic field, Spike Peterson published a variety of papers and books.³ The following books encompass the surface level of the analysis Peterson pursues: “Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium (2010), Global Gender Issues (1999, 1993) with Anne Sisson Runyan, A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy: Integrating Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies (2003), Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory (1992)” – which she contributed to and edited.⁴ Additionally, Peterson published a total more than 75 journal articles and book chapters.⁵

Spike Peterson today exhibits the qualities of an academic willing to contribute to the academic community in a large capacity. Peterson has a role on the “editorial boards of International Feminist Journal of Politics; International Theory; Globalizations; Journal of Women, Politics and Policy; New Political Science; Politics & Gender; and Perspectives: The Review of International Affairs.”⁶ Peterson also received a variety of awards as recognition for valued insight. “She received the Magellan Circle Award for Teaching Excellence (2008) and the Provost’s General Education Teaching Award (2001) at the University of Arizona, as well as the national Mentor Award of the Society for Women in International Political Economy (2000).”⁷

***Global Gender Issues (1999)*⁸**

V. Spike Peterson focused on a variety of topics which are encompassed prominently in the book

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 V. Spike Peterson and Anne S.- Runyan, *Global Gender Issues* (Westview Press, 1999).

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Global Gender Issues. I choose to focus on this book and not one of her earliest works because it provides the best foundation for analyzing the full contribution Peterson has on the academic disciplines, especially with regard to international relations theory. Discussing a variety of topics my aim is to firstly summarize the main ideas of each chapter, and is to secondly discuss the main impact this foundational book had for her career and the International Relations Theory.

First, the book is clearly divided into different themes based on the topic of analysis. Chapter 2 describes “Power of Gender”⁹ which elaborates on the meaning of the gender-sensitive lens via feminist perspectives. In this regard, Spike Peterson assumes the perspectives of the individual and relates the interactions between women and men to the individual in case studies across the world. Chapter 3 elaborates on the ideas of the prior chapter by exposing the “Position of Women”;¹⁰ specifically, gender divisions of power are key to determining the roles of power women have in international and domestic contexts. Moreover, power divisions limit the amount of civic participation women have in social constructs and politics, and the overall messages women are often decoded and obstructed at the detriment of women. Chapter 4 discusses divisions of violence amongst both men and women, and clearly notes the roles of men and women.¹¹ Peterson also focuses on global issues and relates economic, political, and resources based questions to the role of gender. Chapter 5 illustrates resistance as a common theme internationally of oppressed groups.¹² The strategies related to commonly studied

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

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international relations theory subjects is then applied to the special case of women in domestic and international contexts. Chapter 6 formulates a conclusive argument that different lens are vital to understanding the world.¹³ Integrative approaches to examining international relations are vital; Peterson argues through feminist perspective, and alludes to her later work which cautions against hegemonic and dominant ideology oppressing other possible solutions to global issues..

Second, the book *Global Gender Issues* provides a clear trajectory for the direction of V. Spike Peterson's career. For example, each of the chapters in the book is clearly and directly related to other articles or books she wrote prior to or after publishing *Global Gender Issues*. Another key example of the book prophetic characteristics – with regard to the career of Peterson – is the ending ideas represented in *Global Gender Issues*. The idea of a relationship between global hegemonic forces and the individual represents the more recent insight of international relations, especially with regard to Peterson's newer 2010 article “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis”.¹⁴ To a greater extent, the book *Global Gender Issues* also becomes more relevant to the works of other scholars that I will discuss in concluding this paper such as, John Ikenberry,¹⁵ Andrew Hurrell,¹⁶ and David Harvey.¹⁷

13 Ibid.

14 V. Spike Peterson, “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis,” *Globalizations* 7, no. 1/2 (March 2010): 187–202, doi:10.1080/14747731003593497.

15 John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

16 Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

17 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 1st ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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“Sexing Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism” (1999)¹⁸

Hegemony is the root cause of oppression according to V. Spike Peterson. Primarily, this is due to the heterosexist environment that the world exerts on individuals.¹⁹ In the scenario where women were to have the same role as men, the oppressed would then become men since the underlying root cause of oppression is still present. And, the overall conditions that lead to oppression would be unsolved due to the lack of addressing the major underlying causes of oppression – hegemony and hierarchy. In the discussion of nationalism as a dominant and prevailing hierarchical force, Peterson highlights on page 44 “[f]ive overlapping and interactive ways in which women and men are differently situated in relation to nationalist processes, as biological reproducers of group members, as social reproducers of group members and cultural forms, as signifiers, as embodied agents in nationalist struggles, and as societal members generally.”²⁰

The fascinating perspective of V. Spike Peterson provides an examination of the international environment which does not discriminate. In fact, even though women are primarily focused on as the unit-of-analysis, gender description provides an outlet for men; in other words, men are not singled out in the article because Peterson focuses on the underlying institutional forces that impact and trap all individuals to the hegemony.²¹ Whereas other aspects of international relations theory present other units-of-analysis, such as states or multi-centric

18 V. Spike Peterson, “Sexing Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, no. 1 (June 1999).

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

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organizations,²² Spike Peterson finds that institutional structures, such as nationalism,²³ are apt entities that are applicable to analysis in so far as finding positive and negative side effects in them. Additionally, Peterson discovers that gender confines individuals to certain roles similarly to ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, etc.²⁴ On page 55, Peterson states the theme of the article best by finding “nationalism reproduces heterosexist privilege and oppression within the group (at the expense of women and feminized males), regardless of the political identity (race/ethnicity, religion, etc.) by which it differs from other groups.”²⁵ These ideas in the middle of Peterson's career developed over the period of the next 10 years and provide a remarkable foundation for one of her more recent pieces.

“A Long View of Globalization and Crisis” (June 2010)²⁶

V. Spike Peterson accumulates the insightful trend of a feminist perspective, including the lens of anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines. The global perspective which Peterson expressed in prior works depicted the nature of a global struggle against hegemony. Furthering this insight, the discussion of a global community of individuals emphasizes the main themes of Peterson's main works. Relating to the main ideas of globalization and the relationship between the individual and an institution, Peterson analyzes the 'Self' and the 'Other'. On page 189, comparison of the relationship between the 'Self' and the 'Other' illuminate the hegemonic and

22 Raymond C. Miller, *International Political Economy: Contrasting World Views* (Routledge, 2008).

23 Peterson, “Sexing Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism.”

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Peterson, “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis.”

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hierarchical forces that condemn actions of the 'Self' when conflicting the desire of the 'Other'.²⁷

Furthermore, on page 188, Spike Peterson takes on a historical approach admitting to a general overview – cautioning the reader to understand that a detailed analysis would be a lengthy endeavor.²⁸ Understandably, Peterson already addressed major historical trends in other books and articles (and I infer, not reading all of Peterson's work, much of the detail Peterson refers to is in earlier work).

“Throughout this history, accumulation has involved both economic and non-economic processes and a mixture of coercion and consent. While the process has been uneven, its globalizing dynamic has gradually incorporated most people and most places into economic systems premised on profit-seeking priorities that require ‘growth’ (further accumulation) for their realization. I argue that a history of these transformations illuminates issues shaping current crises: in particular, the givenness’ (normalization) of inequalities within and between groups; belief systems that cultivate stratifications and antagonistic relations; erasure of social reproduction as the indispensable foundation of sustainability; and the idealization of ‘growth’ that underpins accumulation processes but is in tension with fairness and sustainability.”²⁹

(Page 189)

The major theme of accumulation essentially punctuates the main argument that Spike Peterson makes in this article. The relevant argument to a world even more interconnected is one where people require access to open, decentralized, and equitable resources.³⁰ In fact, the ideas of preventing individuals from gaining access is described on page 198 where “conceptual boundaries and institutionalized patterns obstruct movement toward more just and equitable social relations, but without such movement we remain subject to recurring crises—of inequality injustice, unsustainability and the fraught conditions of insecurity these entail.”³¹ The value of

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

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this stance depicts a relationship between the human species and the institutionalized forces that it creates. Moreover, the overall ability to function efficiently on the planet is called into question if an institution – the 'Other' – is created to not adequately maintain a lifestyle that supports the individual – the 'Self.' Spike Peterson finds that individuals are only able to prosper, or live fulfilling lives, when the individual acts in accordance with institutions.³² In fact, the ability to thrive hinges on changing failing institutions; the recognition of institutionalized forces is a common theme between the literature of V. Spike Peterson and other scholars such as John Ikenberry, Andrew Hurrell, and David Harvey.

Comparisons

The following three sections will describe the relationship between three different authors and V. Spike Peterson and the works which they contributed to the academic community. In each case, Spike Peterson has similar ideas on the notions of changing global order and on the notions of international organization. Due to the academic background of Peterson, the cross-disciplinary focus relates ideas historical change to the arrangement of actors that participate in the global community. Additionally, without a clear dedication to a certain school of thought, other than that of a critical, poststructural, postcolonial, feminist theory, Peterson allows the ideas presented to relate in a flexible manner to the works of other scholars.

John Ikenberry compared to V. Spike Peterson

Both John Ikenberry and V. Spike Peterson have an historical perspective on changing

32 Ibid.

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order. Ikenberry notes that different settlements create new or adapted orders for the world.³³

In fact on page 56, “leading postwar states have an incentive to take advantage of this path-dependent opportunity to lock in a favorable order”.³⁴ According to Peterson, the order would best serve the most people if that order were not hierarchical in its creation, and if it were to liberate individuals from hegemonic institutionalized constructs.³⁵

Additionally, both John Ikenberry and V. Spike Peterson adapt to a constructivist appeal where institutional systems are under the control of dominant actors in a society. Described on page 71, institutional agreements are possible after leading states triumph in war; large-scale constitutional institutions are an opportunity that can provide every state positive returns on participation in a more efficiently organized set of institutionalized agreements – guaranteeing the safety and security of every actor involved.³⁶ Whereas Ikenberry focuses on the state as the unit-of-analysis with regard to power disparities, Peterson focuses on individuals and gender differences.³⁷ The appealing note in both arguments is the similarities of the theories provided by both Ikenberry and Peterson, and the ability for each theory to maintain its validity and reliability when changing the units-of-analysis and the conditions that pertain to those units.

Andrew Hurrell compared to V. Spike Peterson

More to the point, Andrew Hurrell and V. Spike Peterson discuss perspectives on global

33 Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

34 Ibid.

35 Peterson, “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis.”

36 Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

37 Peterson and Runyan, *Global Gender Issues*.

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order. Hurrell forms his argument from a vastly different 'nib of truth' – or starting point – discussing the overall observation of states interacting within a global environment.³⁸ The international society of states impacts the global order, as described on page 235.³⁹ While Hurrell – like Ikenberry⁴⁰ – focuses on the state as a unit-of-analysis, Peterson would likely agree with the sentiment on page 235 which invites the reader “to imagine and think through innovative ways in which the environmentally destructive potential potential of the state can be tamed and the emancipatory potential enhanced.”⁴¹ In fact, Peterson argues that nationalism may have flaws for the state and its individuals and calls for the consideration of other institutionalized structures which could better serve global society.⁴² Additionally, Peterson may find that Hurrell's ideas of complex governance⁴³ could be a required to alter cycles many observe throughout history.⁴⁴ An appealing factor in the insight of both Hurrell and Peterson is their optimistic, and squarely grounded, view that global order does change over time and that individuals – whether states or individual people – are able to steer the trajectory of the change.

David Harvey compared to V. Spike Peterson

David Harvey and V. Spike Peterson find that imperialism equates to hegemony in most cases. Harvey discusses in the final pages of the afterword of *The New Imperialism* ideas of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism and how both notions are present with the modern

38 Hurrell, *On Global Order*.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Peterson, “Sexing Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism.”

43 Hurrell, *On Global Order*.

44 Peterson, “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis.”

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American form of imperialism.⁴⁵ Spike Peterson addresses the notion of global hegemony and hierarchy, and considers imperialism in a more general sense.⁴⁶ In addition, while both scholars appreciate the coercive nature of hegemony, their insights are drawn from two separate historical contexts. Harvey finds that the American hegemony is blatantly present in the 21st century,⁴⁷ while Peterson looks at hegemony over the scope of entire human history.⁴⁸ Harvey and Peterson approach a global study of hegemony and hierarchy from two distinct perspectives, yet their conclusions are quite similar.

The most fascinating aspect of the similar conclusions that David Harvey and Spike Peterson present are their notions of accumulation. On page 226, Harvey describes the unsustainability of accumulative practices by finding that “[t]he spiraling deficits in the US cannot be sustained without default or falling into a chronic state of dependency on foreign largesse.”⁴⁹ Likewise Peterson, on page 198, describes a long history of the same type of accumulation processes which Harvey refers to “and their stratifications and normalizing ideologies reveals how gender coding has become both pervasively consequential and relatively invisible.” What is more is the essential similarity between Peterson and Harvey depict in their arguments. The main difference, like Ikenberry⁵⁰ and Hurrell⁵¹, is that Harvey uses a unit-of-analysis of the state and discusses state concerns – only then relating those concerns to

45 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

46 Peterson, “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis.”

47 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

48 Peterson, “A Long View of Globalization and Crisis.”

49 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

50 Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

51 Hurrell, *On Global Order*.

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individuals. Instead, Peterson discusses the individual first and then relates states as one of the most prominent and dominant forces of those institutionalized mechanisms of social control.

Implications

V. Spike Peterson enriches the academic disciplines. Peterson and the specific contributions made in international relations theory provide a creative and extremely insightful perspective. Possibly due to the cross-disciplinary background Spike Peterson achieved throughout the foundation of her education, Peterson embodies the merit of a scholar that questions – critically – the merit of institutions that may be out-of-date. Does Peterson effectively convince skeptics of the fallacies pertaining to older institutionalized social formations? Peterson creates a perspective which is unique and it may be one of the hidden gems of international relations theory. Finally, because Spike Peterson is fairly young for a distinguished academic, it will be exciting to discover what the next ambition Peterson pursues. The world is in the midst of a global crisis, and the analysis V. Spike Peterson provides may be invaluable to the survival of successful and the removal of poor institutions – whatever those institutions might be.