Interview - Cynthia Enloe

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With her ground-breaking book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe called attention to a neglected field of inquiry in International Relations by asking 'where are the women?' Enloe's contention was that, by looking at the lives of women – from textile workers in Bangladesh to the wives of elite diplomats in the foreign services of Western countries – the discipline could develop a deeper and more complete picture of the international arena. Enloe has served as Chair of the Department of Political Science and Director of Women's Studies at Clark University, where she is currently a Research Professor in the International Development, Community, and Environment Department. She was awarded the International Studies Association's Susan Strange Award in 2007, the Susan B. Northcutt Award in 2008, and the Peace and Justice Studies Association's Howard Zinn Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010. She has also continued to inspire her students, as evidenced by the "Outstanding Teacher" award that she received three times from Clark University.

Where do you see the most exciting research/debates happening in contemporary IR?

To me, what is most interesting is trying to figure out what International Relations *is* or *are*– for the *is* part as a discipline, for the *are* part as what are "relations." And I think that's interesting because it's about scale, and it's about the boundaries of one's curiosity. One of the things that is most stunning about feminist IR is that we – all of us doing feminist IR – basically agree that you have got to have a very broad curiosity. You cannot be just interested in governments, or just policy. You actually have to be interested in political economy and ethnography; you have to be interested in non-elites; you have to be interested in people who look as though they're peripheral to high-level policy discussions. That debate between feminist IR analysts and non-feminist IR analysts is quite a serious debate, because it really means deciding where do you direct your energies, and, since all of us have limited time and resources, deciding where do you pour your intellectual efforts. I think that's a very important debate, but I think a lot of people try to avoid it, and just go ahead and do what they normally do.

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

Well, when I went to undergraduate and graduate school, I had a pretty – not narrow, but quite limited – understanding of international politics. I was very influenced by being at University of California, Berkeley at a time when there was a lot of interest in revolutions, and that prompted me to think about political economy, about alienation, about oppression, across societies, across cultures, and across historical periods. That set the stage for me when I later became interested in feminist questions.

I didn't ask any feminist questions as an undergraduate, and I didn't ask any feminist questions as a graduate. And nobody pushed me to ask them. You know, it was a very good graduate education in some ways, but very limited in others. And, in fact, one of the people whom I recently got back in contact with was Chalmers Johnson. And Chalmers, in the last years of his life, was one of the people to really raise the question of U.S. current imperialism and American foreign policy, particularly as evidenced by far-flung American bases. He was a very young professor when I was at Berkeley, and he taught courses on both Japanese bureaucratic politics and on the Chinese revolution. I think I was very affected by those courses. After my grad years, he and I kind of went off on our separate intellectual paths; but then in the last several years, when he was both ill and prolific, we really came to appreciate each other's

work because both of us came back around to thinking about militarized empire. When Chalmers read my feminist work then, he was very generous about asking questions he'd never asked before about the genderings of militarization and of empire.

So I think one of the big influences on me was the study of revolutions, and particularly the studies of Asian politics. If you're an area specialist, you find yourself reading novels, histories, ethnographies, because you can't really appreciate the complex societies of a regional area unless you take a holistic approach to those societies and the interactions between them. Intellectually, I've found, it's a great advantage to become an area studies analyst, because you do have to have a much more nuanced sense of the historically-dynamic relationships between the local and the national and the international. I was a Southeast Asia specialist when I was at Berkeley and particularly a Malaysia specialist, and for the first years of my teaching life. I continued to teach Japanese and Vietnamese and Philippines politics for the next thirty years. I don't really call myself an Asian Studies specialist now, however, because I don't really think I have the depth of knowledge, but having been trained in history and ethnography, not just politics, stuck with me.

I was *ready* then, I think, when I was nudged, pushed, and led into feminist studies. I didn't become a feminist in the way I asked questions until – let me be honest about this – until the mid-1970s. I was kind of late, you know! It was having feminist friends that was the key. They really pushed me to ask questions about my family history, about relationships, about art, about factory workers, class movements and early feminist movements in Britain and the U.S. I got so interested that when I was doing work in the Philippines, supposedly non-feminist research on the spread of the M-16 rifle, I really made a point of going to the Philippines factory that was producing Levi's jeans. I did it for my friends who were studying factory workers, and I took photographs and made up a little pamphlet with photographs and captions, and that was my very first feminist writing. I was doing it as a favor for someone else, but it really sparked a new curiosity.

You described the research that you were doing as a grad student as "non-feminist." Can research or a research program be "feminist" without an explicit focus on women and gender?

In my non-feminist years, I think the hallmark of my non-feminist work was that I had no curiosity about women's lives. I had a lot of women friends, and I talked to them about all kinds of things, including what it meant to be "the first woman" in all sorts of settings. But I never thought those questions or the partial answers could be part of my scholarship. And I had no interest in the workings of femininities and masculinities – that is, I had no curiosity about how gender influenced my studies. My dissertation explored ethnic politics, development, and education, a relationship that produces intense politics not only in Malaysia, but in most countries. Yet I didn't ask anything about whether the ethnic politics of boys schools were different than the ethnic politics of girls schools, or whether parents had different ideas about where they sent their sons or daughters to school. My lack of curiosity now seems astounding. I had no curiosity about whether government policy was affecting female students differently than male students. I just didn't give it a thought, and now I look at my dissertation, which I liked – I learned a lot about Malaysia, I learned a lot about Chinese, Malay, and Indian politics in Malaysia, so I don't regret doing that. But I think it's just not as good an analysis as it should have been. It has a big hole right in the middle of it, which means it's not as useful as perhaps it could have been. So to answer your question, no, I think you can't claim to describe your analysis as feminist if you have no interest in women's ideas and experiences and lives, and if you have no interest in the workings of both masculinities and femininities. You have to have curiosity about the workings of both to be feminist. You also have to be interested in the way that power works in gender and in women's lives. You have to add an explicit exploration of *power* if you're not just going to do *gender* analysis, but (a more useful) *feminist* analysis.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of IR?

Read widely. Read fiction, read anthropology, read history. Make sure you have friends who are not academics. Choose your advisors carefully. But never let the ghosts of your dissertation committee haunt your classrooms. Learn from your students. Love teaching.

Mainstream theories of International Relations argue that anarchy is the primary determinate of inter-

state relations. How do feminists look at the state-system? Is gender the new anarchy?

My understanding of anarchy is that it calls for pushing the relationships of power, particularly of authority and of decision-making, further and further down into the micro-level, to the most local level. Anarchy to me is not about chaos – and my guess is the person who asked this question doesn't make that mistake. My understanding of anarchists is that they really desire hyper-local decision-making. Of course, most state elites are very eager to push decision-making away from the local, so that the state's officials be the chief authorized decision-makers. Even if there is international cooperation, statists try to craft it so that it is a system of states, whether via treaties or alliances or trade agreements. So certainly most people who become identified as state elites, even if they began as leaders of local groups or small towns, develop a great stake in pushing authority and decision-making back up the ladder to the nation-state level, and then they have a stake in not giving up too much to any international body, whether it be the EU Commission or the ICC. Alex, you're sitting right there in Britain where the Tory eurosceptics – who are nationalists, not anarchists – are sowing fears of Brussels becoming the next, more distant level of decision-making.

Feminists, I think, have a sophisticated, nuanced understanding of this salient debate about which level of decision-making provides the best guarantee for collective and individual fairness, rights, creativity, and genuine security. Feminists always ask the question who is making which decisions in women's lives, and to what extent those people – fathers, husbands, older brothers, uncles (never overlook the influence of older brothers and uncles in family politics), union leaders, mayors, ethnic community leaders, village elders, school principals, provincial governors, local police chiefs, national legislators, state civil servants, judges, generals, ministers, heads of government – are conscious of women's particular experiences, and their intelligence, of women's knowledge and alternative ideas. Feminists have learned over generations, as well, to keep a sharp eye on the ways policies made at the most intimate to the most distant levels will be affecting women and men, usually in different ways. They have learned that patriarchy can infuse any level of decision-making.

Most feminists do not embrace "national sovereignty" for its own sake. Most feminists push for transparency and for accountability, but they have shed romantic notions of localism. Localism and national sovereignty have time and again each provided deceptively rosy covers for marginalizing and abusing girls and women.

IR analysts could learn a lot from paying close attention to current transnational women activists as they push for an effective ICC (International Criminal Court), while they smartly critique the IMF (International Monetary Fund), as they strategically lobby the UNPKO (United Nations Peacekeeping Operations) and UN member states for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, while they also critique capitalist globalization.

What do you think is feminism's greatest contribution to the discipline?

I think feminist analysts are more realistic. I mean talking about small-"r" realistic, not as in Realism of the capital-"R" variety: I mean realistic as we understand it in ordinary language. I think that feminists are much more realistic about the workings of power, because they see how power operates in areas where most non-feminists deny there's any power at work. That's why non-feminists were so slow, and maybe now, even still, they deny the political import of domestic violence – they don't want to see the workings of power inside this thing called the family home, or the family. Similarly, non-feminist IR specialists have been slow to admit that gendered power dynamics have shaped their own academic "homes," their university departments, their professional associations and journal boards.

So I think that one of the really stunning advantages that any scholar or teacher can gain by taking feminist analysis seriously in their own work is that it gives you an incentive to pay attention to many more operations of power. Non-feminists, I'm afraid, remain a bit naïve about power.

What are the main triumphs of feminist scholarship in the last 20 years, i.e., the time period after your genre-defining book, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, was published?

Well, we won't define an era by a mere book! That would be a little parochial. I think most feminists would never use the word "triumph," it sounds very patriarchal! But I understand the reader's question – that is, what kind of progress

have feminist IR scholars noted. I think one of the terrific signs of progress in our field is that there are so many more women *and* men now than two decades ago, in undergraduate and graduate school now, throughout the world – I mean, in Korea, in Brazil, in Turkey, in Japan, in France, in Iceland – who are seriously considering feminist questions in their own explorations and in their own teaching. That is a huge achievement! To get three new generations of academics asking serious feminist questions, and going off and doing the research, and writing theses and dissertations and books and articles, and teaching new courses, I mean, that's big stuff. To change peoples' curiosity – including our own – is a *major* achievement. And it didn't take a single tank!

You wrote in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* that women play an essential, if often subordinate, role in international diplomacy. Now that the U.S. has had several women secretaries of state, and women are playing an increasingly visible role in diplomacy, how would you update that chapter of the book?

It's interesting, because I'm just about to write a new edition of *Bananas*, so that's a great question. I've started a big "Revised BBB" file. I want to ask: what has changed and what has not changed? Has anything truly changed in the gendered international politics of tourism, of domestic workers, of blue jeans, and of diplomatic wives? Thinking about the gendered politics of international diplomacy, a lot of women who have been able to move into the foreign services of their countries – and I'm talking about professional foreign service, not just political appointees, which is why it's really important not just to look at Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton, or at the foreign secretaries and ministers of other countries who are women, but to look deeper down into the professional foreign services of every country. That's the place that a feminist looks. It can be very important if a woman becomes a chief minister for foreign affairs, *if* that woman actually herself has some gender consciousness and some feminist understanding and *if* she is not so constrained that she cannot act on that consciousness. But I think what drove me to write that earlier chapter in *Bananas*, and what I'll now be rethinking in the new edition, is to look at the institutionalized foreign services and how profoundly they have been shaped by implicit and explicit ideas about patriarchal marriage.

I was at a conference in Texas just last week, where we were talking about the politics of being a "wife." From the audience a wonderful African-American woman said that, in the year 2000, she was both married to a foreign service officer – a man – and she was herself a foreign service professional in the U.S. foreign service. When she was stationed in Europe, she told us, the first question that the head of mission asked her, knowing that she had both of those roles, and this is a quote – "How do you feel about folding napkins?" That was not in 1800, that was in the year 2000. So my sense is, in most foreign services around the world, the politics of marriage have not moved a great deal. It is true that in a lot of foreign services now, the rule that says a woman who is married cannot be a professional diplomat has been eliminated. But, as far as the ordinary daily practice, marriage politics still infiltrates assumptions about what women can do, where they can be posted, what kind of careers they're going to have. The patriarchal politics of marriage are very stubborn, and I think the place to look for them is not just at the pinnacle of foreign service elites in any country, but inside the career service, asking women how they're experiencing this thing of being a wife and a foreign service professional.

"How do you feel about folding napkins"! When that woman told us of her own recent experience, every eyebrow in the Texas audience went towards the ceiling.

What can we learn from the feminist slogan "the personal is political" to understand better how "the world economy is political"?

Well, let's start with garment factories. 'The personal is political' works out in the international profit-seeking politics of garments through garment makers and their sub-contracted owners, and the governments who ally with both. There's a very elaborate system of manufacturing sub-contracting today, so you have to watch patriarchal ideas working through the sub-contractors, as well as looking at the Gap or any other global brand corporation – how does the idea that a woman is not the head of household play out in the international political economy of textiles? A woman who is married is assumed by many profit-seeking garment sub-contractors, contractors, and brand name corporations not to need decent pay and the chance for promotions. That's the personal – that is, that's the managers and executives making assumptions about a garment worker's personal life in order to maximize profits in a

globalized industry. 'The personal is political' is a theoretical statement – it is as high theory as you can get. I think we all misunderstand where theory is crafted and where theoretical insights are expressed. We should look more closely at bumper stickers!

Taking seriously the theoretical insight that the 'the personal is political' also can make us all a lot smarter about the ongoing, complex, intra-and inter-societal politics of the Arab Spring. We will take seriously the politics of both sexual harassment and women's campaigning against it. We will take seriously the gendered politics of constitution-drafting. We will take seriously the updated gendered politics of electoral political party competition.

How can feminism engage with the gun wars – that is, debates between people who are for and against gun control, both on the domestic and international level? And how are feminism and femininity negotiated by women gun users and those opposed to gun use?

My guess is that the person who posed this good question is thinking particularly about the recently increased intensity of gun politics in the center of American public discourse. But, really, the people who are smartest about the gendered politics of guns are those women who've worked in post-war settings, and ongoing armed conflict settings, strategizing about how to make effective gun collection at the end of wars. Women in Mali have been, from what I understand, amongst the most innovative in thinking about how to analyze and then how to put into practice more gender-smart gun collection policies. One of the things that they have said – this is in the international politics of what's called small arms and light weapons – is that if you don't think about the politics of masculinity – amongst teenage boys, amongst the men who run militias, what gives any man or any boy a sense of their own status, a sense of their own self-esteem, a sense of their own power in social relations – you'll never effectively be able to get men to give up guns, or boys to give up guns.

It's really incumbent on Americans, who now are talking fervently about what has gone so terribly wrong in the culture of gun owning and gun using in the United States, to listen to those activists in other countries, especially countries coming to the ends of war, when they strategize about how to more effectively persuade men and boys to not be so attached to guns as integral to their sense of manhood. But that doesn't happen in the United States very much – that is, Americans just don't look often enough to other countries – they certainly don't look to the women of Mali to give them solutions, but they probably should! Feminists who work in Geneva Call (that's an NGO based in Geneva, but there's a whole group within it that works there on gun collection and reducing small arms and light weapons in the world) have been working with women in other countries on gun collection, and they all say you not only have to do close analysis of masculinities, but also you've got to involve women because they know where the guns are hidden, and they know more about how guns work in their husbands', sons', fathers' and uncles' senses of themselves.

Again, multi-level feminist analysis is crucial. So watch individual men's and boys' senses of manhood, but also watch corporate gendered strategies. American gun manufacturers have crafted two gendered marketing campaigns: one, they're trying to persuade more and more women to own and get a license for a gun – usually a pistol, often in pink – as if it were a source of women's security. The second, complementary, corporate gender strategy is to try to masculinize and militarize the ownership of guns. American companies who sell the big assault rifles are thus campaigning to persuade men of all ages that, if they own an assault rifle, their "inner soldier" will be affirmed. That is, militarization is being harnessed to gun selling corporate campaigns aimed at men. So you have a masculinizing, militarizing campaign going on to sell assault weapons to civilian men, at the same time that you have, if you will, a "pink" campaign by the same gun makers to persuade women that their security will be enhanced by owning a pistol. These U.S. gun manufacturers are all international players.

How can feminism engage with female ex-combatants for whom guns meant visibility, gender power, and autonomy?

Well, I'm not sure that's true actually of all ex-combatants. What we know from work by Diane Mazurana and Megan MacKenzie is that a lot of females – meaning both girls and women – who've been in armed insurgencies and armed state militias, have not necessarily been issued guns. When we think of an ex-combatant, we shouldn't always think of someone whose assigned role, or forced role, was as a wielder of guns. In fact, Diane Mazurana has made it really

clear that if we imagine that an ex-combatant is somebody who wielded a gun, then we will make those girls and young women invisible when we try to reach them after the peace accord has been signed. So, warning number one: do not imagine that an "ex-combatant" is always someone who wielded a gun or got their sense of importance from wielding a gun. Oftentimes the ex-combatant did laundry or sexually serviced men in the militia. If they were in a more equitable kind of militia rather than a misogynist militia that abused them, they oftentimes are persuaded to give up their guns by encouraging them to go back to their "normal" roles as wives and mothers. That's a common patriarchal way to demobilize women in armies and militias, even though what a lot of girls and women who are demobilized most want is health care, child care, secondary schooling, and a way to make an autonomous living – and not just by becoming domestic workers and garment workers. One of the classic things to teach women in demobilization programs is the sewing machine. But a lot of women would like to be school teachers or doctors. Demobilization, then, is as gendered – and as potentially patriarchal – as any other political process, and will continue to be so if not assessed with feminist analytical skills.

Is the U.S. Department of Defense's recent decision to allow women to serve in combat positions in the U.S. military a victory for feminism? And what might it mean for the construction of masculinity and gender in militarization and in the military?

Well, one of the reasons its headline character is so – I guess "humorous" is too light a word, but it is kind of funny – is that the United States' military is so far behind other militaries. We didn't ask this question when the Dutch lifted their ban on women in combat roles, we didn't ask it when the Canadians ended their ban, or recently when the Australians ended their ban. We assumed those militaries would go on being effective, or rather flawed, peacekeeping or national security institutions. When the Dutch lifted their ban, nobody said, "Oh my god, the Dutch state is about to fall apart." But there is something about the militarized, patriarchal culture of American contemporary politics that raises the stakes, as if to (allegedly!) fundamentally change the role of soldiers and the meaning of what it means to soldier could fracture the whole society. But that level of public panic or debate intensity just reflects how militarized contemporary American society has become.

Whether the Pentagon's ending of the ban is a big step forward for American women calls for two answers. One, it's not a big deal because American women soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan say they've all been doing combat roles all along, it's just that the Pentagon, which is afraid of the American civilian reaction, has refused to recognize that those women are already carrying on combat roles. These American women in the military say, "Well, we're already in combat roles, we are in the same platoons, we take the same risks, we're carrying the same weapons, we're wearing the same heavy armor, we're in combat. What's new is that finally we'll be officially recognized for having been in combat." And in the American military, if you're not recognized by officialdom as having been in this thing called "combat," it's hard to get the most senior promotions, not to mention you don't get the same ribbons and you don't get the same "combat" pay. So the mere recognition of what the reality already is does matter to women in the military, because it means that what they call the "brass ceiling" – their chance for promotion if they are senior officers – has now been cracked.

For women generally, I think the ending of the U.S. ban is not a great leap forward. Opening up more roles in the U.S. military should not be a measure of whether all American women are making progress in pushing back patriarchy: to make that a measure of liberation, I think, would be to militarize feminism. So long as the military continues to play such a huge role in American society, it will be very hard for women ever to gain genuine equality in American society. As someone who is a feminist critic of militarism, but also a critic of patriarchy, I think it's a good thing that the Pentagon was pushed – and that they didn't just come to it themselves, they were pushed – to end this artificial ban. I do think that's a good thing. Sexism should not be allowed to stand in any institution. At the same time, nobody should imagine that making a military a more legitimate institution rolls back patriarchy.

Cynthia Enloe talks about the books that inspired her on LSE's Review of Books blog here.

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This interview was conducted by Alex Stark. Alex is a Director of E-IR's editorial board.