

# An Interview with Cynthia Enloe

## *The Gendered Dynamics of Foreign Policy*

**C**ynthia Enloe is a Research Professor of International Development and Women's Studies at Clark University. She received her Political Science PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. Among her ten books are *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*; *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*; *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*; and *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*. Her forthcoming book (from the University of California Press) is *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*.

### **When you spoke at The Fletcher School about the gendered dimensions of the Iraq war, you mentioned your time at Berkeley in the 1960s. How did this period shape your career?**

During most of the 1960s, I was studying for my MA and then my PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. I spent a summer in college interning in the Department of Agriculture in Washington, where I worked very closely with an Indonesian fisheries specialist. I was just a humble gofer, but the fisheries specialist took me under his wing and tried to teach me about the Indonesian revolution against the Dutch. It was all new to me!

When I went to Berkeley, I decided to focus on comparative politics, especially in Southeast Asia. I was engaged in the comparative study of revolutions, particularly the Chinese revolution, as well as the study of political theory, such as the ideas of Hannah Arendt. You could read her stretchy thoughts every week or so in the *New Yorker*. That's where political theorists should be—in the wider public arena.

During 1965 and 1966, I spent a year in Malaysia doing research on the ethnic politics of education (which were intense then, and still are today). There was also an armed conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia in Borneo. At the same time, U.S.

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*PRAXIS* staff editor **Lucija Bajzer** engaged in a series of conversations with Professor Cynthia Enloe after a lecture she gave at The Fletcher School on March 9, 2009. This interview is a compilation of questions and answers from that talk and their conversations.

military involvement was heating up in Vietnam. Southeast Asia suddenly became interesting to many Americans.

**Given all the protests and activism occurring at Berkeley during the 1960s, to what extent were you thinking about the role of gender at this time?**

In 1966 and 1967, the Free Speech Movement erupted at Berkeley. It began as a protest against the computerization of academia and the accompanying alienation. It was also sparked by some administrators' efforts to limit what student activists could campaign for on campus. It soon became a campus-wide strike and a protest against police intervention on campus.

Yes, there was a lot of potential for feminist analysis, but there was none happening! None was happening in any classes, in student activists' movements, or in understanding personal relationships. Zippo! I didn't notice it was missing! I did notice that my colleague and I were the first-ever political science head teaching assistants who were women. I did notice that all my professors were men. I had previously attended Connecticut College when it still was an all women's college, so I was used to having a lot of great women professors. I did notice that when I was in Malaysia there were certain assumptions made about young Euro-American women researchers like me. I did note the sexualized politics in some parts of the Free Speech Movement, but I didn't put it all together. I had never heard of feminism. I never thought gender analysis was necessary for making reliable sense of revolutions, wars, social movements, education and development, ethnic politics, or anti-racism activism.

For me there were two central legacies of my 1960s experiences. First, I try to remember what it was like not to have a feminist curiosity. I try to admit not having it, and I try to keep thinking about why it seemed so 'natural' not to have gendered and feminist questions to pose. This is useful in exploring all the assumptions (and even intellectual excitements) that make asking serious feminist questions seem "beside the point." For example, the assumption that we don't have to ask questions about the politics of masculinity and the politics of femininity in order to make sense of wars and armed conflicts because men and women experience the same conditions in war. These assumptions fuel the perpetuation of patriarchal cultures and structures in societies, organizations, social movements, universities, and NGOs.

I think that for me, a second legacy from the 1960s has been learning to always ask the ethnicity and race questions when digging into women's lives and doing a feminist analysis. I wish now that I had asked serious gender questions about Malaysian politics, about the Vietnam War, and about the Free Speech Movement. I learned from my faculty and especially from my fellow students, to always keep a sharp eye on how ethnicized ideas, processes, and structures work. I think that is one of the reasons that, when I look at how governments use women to staff and sustain their militaries, I've always asked about the government's ethnicized anxieties and manipulations—whether in the U.S., Ghana, South Africa, Peru, or Iraq.

**In the past decade, there has been an increasing trend in military involvement with humanitarian aid. What are some of the implications of the militarization of humanitarian aid from a feminist perspective?**

This has become an increasingly difficult question over the last decade. First, the challenge is to chart the militarization: how can you tell whether any given humanitarian aid program is being masculinized? What are the criteria you should look for? What are the telltale signs?

Militarization, we've all learned (especially those charting it with a feminist curiosity), is not just blatant (e.g. food distribution as an instrument of waging war). Militarization can also be subtle. For example, when we look at what sort of humanitarian aid staffer is "best equipped" to have credibility in the eyes of the military or insurgent armed leader that the aid group has to work with, is it someone who seems to exude a certain kind of manliness?

Even if you do see militarization creeping into humanitarian aid calculations, into aid organizations' ways of conducting their projects, what do you do? Feminists and others concerned about the subtle transformations of aid in war zones have taught me so much. They have been candid about the dilemmas, but they also have become more and more skilled at charting militarization in their own operations, looking at the relationships that get privileged, the language adopted, and the assumptions no longer questioned. They have started to spell out the gendered consequences of militarization: femininity and victimhood being more firmly cemented together; male staffers taking on new external relationships; and masculinized notions of rationality worming their way deeper into the organization's internal culture.

Over the years, I have learned that one cannot make enough sense of how and why militarizing processes operate the way they do unless one deliberately acquires feminist analytical skills. That is especially valuable today if one is going to do emergency aid work anywhere that armed groups wield any influence.

**You seem to suggest that militarization and masculinity are closely linked. What do you believe is the relationship between them?**

Militarization is commonly explained without any attention to its reliance on particular ideas about gender. These are conventional, but inadequate, analyses of the militarizing processes. Instead, just watch defense budgets, the roles of military personnel, the discourses on weaponry, or the practices of inculcating patriotism and demonizing enemies. None of these concepts can be reliably explained or mapped in sufficient detail if each is imagined to be totally independent of how masculinities and femininities are wielded in the lives of elites and ordinary citizens. For instance, it is not sufficient to suggest that women and men equally depend on defense industry jobs in the U.S., Russia, Brazil, and South Africa. Similarly, it is not sufficient to suggest that masculinized patriotism and feminized patriotism are mobilized by a government or by war supporters in identical ways.

Masculinity is often woven tightly into militarism. For example, soldiering and “proving manhood” are deliberately glued together in most societies; but they are analytically distinct. That means we need to have the skills and the research strategies to chart both. Then watch when, why, and how masculinity (of a certain variety) reinforces militarization; and when, why, and how masculinity may challenge or stall a given local process of militarization. It has been feminists who have looked at both distinctly, but simultaneously. It is a tough intellectual task, but it is the best way to get a firm grip on the causes and the consequences of each.

**At The Fletcher School, you spoke about how the framing of gender influences the policy decisions that leaders make. How do you think George W. Bush’s understanding of masculinity influenced U.S. policy during his term?**

One of the insights we’ve gained over recent years is that both femininities and masculinities come in various forms. For instance, the standards crafted by societies or by particular communities for ‘respectable’ masculinity in, say, early 20th century Ghana, will perhaps change by 2009 in Ghana. Likewise, standards for ‘respectable’ femininity in, say, 2009 Sweden may be slightly different than the standards crafted by South Koreans in 2009.

Of course, in any society, at any period, there will be varieties of masculinity and varieties of femininity affecting each other, and often imagined to be in an unequal hierarchy with each other. The ‘imagers’ who reaffirm those unequal hierarchies will include foreign development specialists, local economists, local party leaders, foreign bankers, and foreign military alliance officers. This means that we need to have the skills to investigate and find the implications of the dynamics of crafting femininities and masculinities. We should never assume that only elite men’s presumptions of the most admired form of masculinity matter. However, we should also not imagine that elite men like World Bank economists, American presidents, Peruvian ministers of the treasury, and Indian software company entrepreneurs don’t have particular hierarchical notions of masculinity. They do. How they imagine which sorts of manliness is deemed ‘trustworthy’ or ‘loose-cannon,’ ‘backward’ or ‘modern,’ ‘courageous’ or ‘hard-nosed,’ will shape two dynamics: first, influential relationships with other local and foreign men, and second, which women they consider ‘proper,’ ‘respectable,’ ‘attractive,’ ‘honorable,’ ‘dangerous,’ or ‘fair game.’

Thinking through these dynamics might help us to think more usefully about George W. Bush as U.S. president. It might also help us think about Liberia’s Charles Taylor or Afghanistan’s President Karzai. It will also help us to make clearer sense of the internal dynamics of Oxfam, CARE, UNEP, and of any government’s aid agency.

The main thing, though, is never to presume that we can make reliable sense of the workings of masculinities in the lives of men without simultaneously taking women’s lives seriously. We must consider how the pressures they experience to express certain forms of femininity help to shape the hierarchies of manliness, and how women are

affected by those politics of manliness. It takes a conscious feminist curiosity to avoid slipping into the trap of treating masculinity as having to do only with men.

**How do you think using gendered analysis can help us better understand the situation in Iraq?**

One of the things I've been trying to figure out is what I would learn that would increase our powers of explanation if I investigated the lives of particular women. One of the women I've been trying to think a lot about, and have followed for several years, is a woman named Nimo. Nimo is a hairdresser in Baghdad. The reason we know anything about Nimo is because Sabrina Tavernise, a New York Times reporter and a wonderful journalist, decided to go to a beauty parlor in Baghdad in May 2003—that's in the third month after the U.S.-led invasion. Sabrina Tavernise went in and spent time in the beauty parlor owned by Nimo.

The first thing that Sabrina Tavernise is interested in is what the women are talking about. What they want to talk about is security. They want to trade information with each other about where it is safe. They are really trying to calculate the conditions of security. If that were happening in the National Security Council, you would think that you should be there as a political analyst; but because it is happening in a beauty parlor, it is not defined as a political space. Of course it is a political space. It is a space in which women in wartime are trying to make the finest calculations they can about security and insecurity.

The first lesson one learns is that the discussions, calculations, and assessments of a foreign occupation's impact on security are happening in a lot of places that most political analysts never think of as sites of research.

The second thing is that women who might otherwise be thought of as shoved out of the political sphere are, in fact, highly political. No matter what site you choose to do political analysis, one should start with the questions: have I chosen a site that is gendered? Have I chosen a site that is disproportionately masculinized—not just because it is mainly men who meet there, but because the culture presumes that manliness is privileged?

If you have chosen that site, and then didn't try to weigh the extent to which it affects your analysis of what you are seeing, then you will end up with an unreliable analysis. That doesn't mean that you can just hang out in beauty parlors—although that would be kind of refreshing—but it does mean that if you have a gender analysis, you multiply the spaces that you visit to do political analysis of security. Particular spaces in society are made comfortable or uncomfortable for women, and that will determine where women feel comfortable and empowered to talk.

**In the context of Iraq, have the gendered consequences of war changed over time?**

In May 2003, Nimo still had an income. Whenever any armed conflict starts anywhere, it starts at a particular point—not always the same point—but a particular point in

women's employment. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Ba'hist party, which was highly patriarchal and nationalized, came into power in Iraq. It was secular in the name of Iraqi nationalism, and out of their nationalist priorities, they encouraged women to come into the paid labor force in Iraq because it would be good for strengthening the Iraqi nation and the Iraqi state. Therefore, by the first Gulf War, there were thousands of Iraqi women—especially urban women like Nimo—in the paid labor force. Women being in the paid labor force and having a university education was promoted not for the sake of women's liberation, but for national strength. By the 1990s, it was thought to be normal for women in urban areas to have paid jobs. The Iraq war happened at a time in the gendered political-economy history of Iraq when paid labor for women was considered normal; higher education for women was considered normal; and women entering professions such as engineering, medicine, and teaching was considered normal.

In the 1980s, during the war between Iran and Iraq, a lot of women were urged to take the place of men in the paid economy. At the same time, Saddam Hussein was in power, but he began to really lose legitimacy. Increasingly, he not only had to rely on coercion, but he also began to reach out to Iraqi allies that he used to disdain—that is, tribal male leaders and conservative clerics. Despite Ba'hist programs, the political calculations he made because of his failings in his military enterprises made him begin to compromise around those policies that had promoted women's education and paid work.

After 1991, the UN implemented economic sanctions to punish the regime. Because of the Ba'hist policies, women had paid work. The Ba'hist model for economic modernization was expanding the state, and a much higher proportion of Iraqi women than Iraqi men worked in the state sector. Which sector of the economy will international economic sanctions hurt first? The state sector.

In Iraqi gender-political culture, a woman working in the state sector was considered protected in her feminine respectability—even if she saw male clients and had male co-workers. There was an understanding that a woman's marriageability and her own respectability as a wife would not be jeopardized if she was working for a state industry. While a woman working in the private sector would, in fact, jeopardize her standing as a respectable woman.

What did this mean? It meant that when the state sector began to shrink as a result of the economic sanctions, both men and women lost jobs. However, women lost jobs disproportionately because they were more reliant on state sector jobs. Also, men who lost their jobs had a better chance of maintaining their status as respectable men with a new job in the private sector than a woman would. Thus, women were under pressure from their brothers, father, uncle, and husband not to pursue a private sector job even if it partly impoverished the family.

**Are there other ways in which you think Nimo's story can help us more fully understand the gendered dynamics of the war?**

The politics of not only respectability, which are highly gendered, but also the politics of beauty in wartime are very important. I would have never really thought about this if I hadn't decided that Nimo was somebody I wanted to have as a window into wartime. In about 2005 and into 2007 and 2008, the newly-formed, highly-masculinized, armed militias began to target beauty parlors for firebombing. This was in the second or third year of the war. Why then and why not before? Why then and why not later? Why then at all?

As more and more men mobilized in sectarian militias, they began to be motivated by their anxieties about the dissolution of the social fabric and of the social order. Those types of anxieties are very prominent during many wars. Look at World War II: living in a war zone makes you feel as if the social fabric is really disintegrating. If you have a masculinized anxiety about that, and if you have a certain kind of framing of it, in terms of presumptions about good womanhood as a key to any social fabric—which is very, very common in most societies, including the United States (watch the pressures on Michelle Obama) —then in the middle of wartime there are likely to be efforts made to try to put womanhood back where it belongs. That seems to be the point at which those Iraqi men who joined armed militias picked out women's beauty parlors as targets for attack, as if women's public indulgence in their own appearance was part of the cause of the disintegration of the entire social fabric. Many of those women who worked in beauty parlors or who owned them, and then lost their livelihoods, still had family responsibilities: sometimes for a disabled husband; sometimes for older parents; sometimes they had become widowed or were divorced and had children they were raising on their own.

Just thinking about Nimo, I realize several things about war. One is that wars happen in the ongoing gender-history of politics. Second, within wartime there are gender-political changes. Third, calculations of security are made in many different sites, by many different actors in a war zone, and they use those criteria in order to determine whether security's gotten better or worse. Fourth, women themselves are thinkers and actors in the middle of war and will affect the course of war. That's all from just taking Nimo seriously.