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Carol Cohn
Cynthia Enloe

A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War

Cynthia Enloe and I (Carol Cohn) first met in Finland in the frigid January of 1987. We were among women from more than twenty countries who had gathered for a forum on women and the military system—and we turned out to be sharing the government-run Siuntio Health Spa with a group of World War II veterans and their families.¹ Cynthia's pathbreaking 1983 book on the militarization of women's lives titled *Does Khaki Become You?* illuminated the lives of members of both groups and, in many ways, opened the conceptual space for our international forum to take place.² A year later the U.S. edition of Cynthia's *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* came out (Enloe 1990).³ It turned many of the assumptions in the academic study of international politics on their head, revolutionizing our ideas of what should even "count" as "international politics," illuminating the crucial role played by notions of "masculinity" and "femininity" in international relationships, and sparking a vibrant project of feminist critique, research, and theorizing in the study of international relations.⁴

As colleagues in the small world of feminist international relations theorists, we have had many occasions since 1987 to discuss our overlapping interests in militaries, masculinities, international organizations, and gendered conceptions of security. In the spring of 2002, we sat down at my kitchen table to explore the directions feminist analysis of international

We would like to thank Sandra Harding and Kate Norberg for inviting us to have this conversation and for offering such good ideas along the way.

¹ Some of the papers from the forum were collected in Isaksson 1988.

² For Enloe's most recent work on women and the military, see Enloe 2000.

³ See also Enloe 1993, 2001–2.

⁴ There is now a Feminist Theory and Gender Studies section in the International Studies Association. The journal launched by its members, the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, is an excellent location for exploring some of this new scholarship.

politics might take in the changed, and unchanged, post-September 11 world.

Carol Cohn (CC): Cynthia, what do you think we still don't know enough about in the realm of international politics?

Cynthia Enloe (CE): Like you, I, of course, see the "international" as embedded in the national and in the local. And, like you, I also see—or, better, have been taught by other feminists to see—the "political" in many spaces that others imagine are purely economic, or cultural, or private. With those provisos, I think we really don't know enough about how masculinity operates; but to carry on that exploration, we have to be at least women's studies-informed. This is not masculinity studies.

CC: Because understanding the dynamics of masculinity requires being curious about the complex workings of femininity?

CE: Yes, I really believe that. I think more and more about marriages, about particular masculinities—especially of the sort that states think they need—about how they're being confirmed by women in their roles as wives. Those women, of course, are not always willing to fulfill the state's needs! Your own classic article about the American male intellectuals who designed cold war nuclear strategies is so revealing about the ways in which certain forms of masculinity get confirmed by certain highly deflected modes of discourse (Cohn 1987, 1993). You were surrounded by men and operating as a sort of mole in a hypermasculinized subculture. But looking back, do you think it mattered that you were a *feminist* scholar doing this research on cold warrior discourse?

CC: When I was there, I tried very hard to shed my analytic lenses—even though we all know this is never completely possible—and to just pay careful attention to what was happening around me. What was clearly important, however, from day one, was that I was a *female* scholar. For example, I think many men were much more willing to talk with me, to answer my "dumb," naive questions with great openness, both because of a kind of genuinely chivalrous generosity and because it was in a sense "normal" for a female to be asking such basic questions. Also, it was relatively easy for me personally to deal with being in the "nonexpert" position. A male colleague who also did interviews with powerful nuclear decision makers told me somewhat ruefully that he and the men he was interviewing would sometimes get into a kind of competitive "who's-the-bigger-expert-here?" deadlock. It was probably quite productive that my relationships with these men did not provoke that kind of dynamic in either one of us!

CE: Yes, delving into masculinized cultures does turn the usually mad-

dening presumptions about the “naive little lady” into an advantage—it was easier, though, for me to carry this off back in the days when I used to wear sleeveless sundresses!

I also want to know how the genderings of institutional cultures work inside international aid organizations. I want a feminist analysis of Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, the International Red Cross. This is part of my current interest in what it takes to genuinely *demilitarize* a society—and, the intimately connected question, how do postwar societies manage to reestablish masculinized privilege in their political cultures? These peace-building groups become crucial in any demilitarizing processes. For instance, feminists inside Oxfam UK are asking *both* what Oxfam’s postconflict operations’ impacts are on local women *and* what are the politics of femininity and masculinity inside Oxfam itself. Suzanne Williams, a British feminist and a longtime staffer inside Oxfam UK, asked me to come up to Oxford last spring for a noontime conversation with about fifty Oxfam staff people. I remember thinking, “Oh, this is my chance!” So I asked, “Okay, group, I don’t know enough about Oxfam, so tell me what’s the most masculinized of all Oxfam’s departments?” They thought a minute, whispered among themselves, and then came up with their answer: the Emergency Aid Department. Why? Because their staff handles water pipes. If you’re the ones delivering water to refugee camps, you get the Land Rover first; you’re doing the heavy lifting; your daily work is surrounded by the aura of urgency; you’re doing a job that calls for technical expertise. Put it altogether and laying water pipes in the Congo or East Timor becomes a distinctly “manly” enterprise. Now it’s important to remember, the Oxfam water pipes guys are noncombatant, antimilitarist men, providing essential humanitarian aid to people who have been driven out of their homes and into refugee camps in wartime. A bit later, I asked these smart, worldly, dedicated folks, “Okay, so what’s the least masculinized department in Oxfam?” One woman sort of chuckled and ventured, “development education.” Everybody in the room sort of nodded, “yeah, yeah.” “So, that means it’s the most feminized?” “Well, I don’t think about it that way, but yes.”

CC: You know, in my research at the UN, I’ve heard the Third Committee of the General Assembly—that’s the committee that works on social, humanitarian, and cultural issues—referred to in-house as the “ladies’ committee.”⁵ On the other hand, the Security Council remains an

⁵ The other five committees of the General Assembly are the First Committee (disarmament and international security), the Second (economic and financial), the Fourth (special

overwhelmingly male and masculinized preserve, although there have been some very important contributions from women ambassadors in the last few years.

CE: The “ladies’ committee” . . . good grief! What you’re now uncovering inside the UN makes me all the more convinced that we need to launch explicitly feminist investigations of institutional political cultures. Let’s have a feminist analysis of the two International War Crimes Tribunals at the Hague and in Arusha—I wonder if the two are identical? We have Carla del Ponte (Swiss) coming right after Louise Arbor (Canadian), two women chief prosecutors. That is pretty amazing! If we really took them seriously, not just as “remarkable women,” what would we reveal about this fledgling new world order—and about what it will take to make the brand new UN International Criminal Court work for women? Could it be that we’re on the verge of creating, through the international war crimes tribunals, institutions that are less masculinized than the UN Secretariat, the WTO, the World Bank, or the IMF? How could we *tell*?

CC: That’s a really provocative and important question. And I think that the feminist questions you’ve proposed for monitoring postwar demilitarization are an extremely useful example of how to approach it.⁶ So, once we get feminist analyses of international institutional political cultures, what do we have?

CE: A lot more realistic notion of how the world operates. That translates into a far more accurate causal explanation for patriarchy’s global malleability.

CC: In my initial conversations with women in NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] around the UN, I’ve found that if I ask questions like, “What gets in the way of DPKO dealing with gender better?” [DPKO

political and decolonization), the Fifth (administrative and budgetary), and the Sixth (legal). The Web site <http://www.peacewomen.org> has a very useful guide to the UN system.

⁶ Cynthia proposed these at a “A Dialogue between Academics, Activists, and UN Officials” on women, peace, and security, held at the UN on April 11, 2002. The April 11 event was part of a larger continuing NGO-academic-UN dialogue project being organized by Sheri Gibbing at the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which Carol has been working on. In addition to Cynthia and Carol, other participants in the April 11 session on Security Council Resolution 1325 included Jennifer Klot (then senior governance adviser at UNIFEM [UN Development Fund for Women], now at the Social Science Research Council [SSRC]), Ann Tickner (director of international studies, University of Southern California), Maha Muna (then at the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, now at UNIFEM), and Iris Marion Young (professor of political science, University of Chicago). For an edited transcript, see <http://www.peacewomen.org>. See also Enloe 2002.

is the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations], the answers first tend to be about individuals—“The guy who headed that operation didn’t want to have to have a gender advisor,” or “These particular people on the budget committee won’t support it,” or “That guy didn’t make a strong and compelling enough argument to the budget committee,” and so on. “Institutional culture” is not usually what they bring up first, although they will, in fact, speak quite pointedly about it when you ask.

CE: Maybe it’s because these women are lobbyists, nudging, pressing UN departments to pay attention to women’s needs and to give women a seat at the proverbial table. I know this year you’ve been paying close attention to the UN-focused activists from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and other NGOs. Well, if you’re a WILPF lobbyist, perhaps you think, “Oh, thankfully X is no longer the deputy head of mission. Now there is somebody who will at least let us in the door.” It is also a more hopeful way of thinking. You can imagine, if this man or that woman gets transferred, we can get access to lobby for women’s concerns. And that does matter. But I always think about the institutional passivity. Who, when he was evaluated for promotion, never even thought to ask WILPF whether they thought he was an effective UN official? Which institution-wide assumptions or priorities or rewards let him ignore DPKO’s gender mandate so cavalierly?

CC: And who made the decision that there needn’t be accountability mechanisms regarding implementation of gender mandates? Cynthia, a minute ago you spoke of “patriarchy’s global malleability.” You are quite purposeful about using the term *patriarchy*. Tell me why?

CE: Well, I can remember the first time I ever heard *patriarchy* used—it terrified me. (*Laughter*) It sounded so ideological, heavy, and—I don’t know—all the things that at that age I wasn’t. It was Jean Grossholz who used it. Jean was mobilizing people behind the scenes at the first Wellesley conference on women and development, which turned into one of the very early special issues of *Signs*. I think it was 1980. I remember Jean going around and saying to people during coffee breaks, “We *have* to talk about patriarchy.” And I thought, “Oh no, not patriarchy—I don’t know what patriarchy is, and furthermore, it’s not the kind of language I use!” Today I can’t imagine trying to think seriously about the constructions of power and the systems by which power is both perpetuated and implemented *without* talking about patriarchy.

When I use *patriarchy* I try to be very clear and to give lots of examples. I try to remember what I was like when I heard Jean use this, and I remember how scary it sounded, right? It certainly sounds scary to many academics and policy makers today who don’t want to be seen as an out-

there feminist. I can understand why they would much rather use *gender hierarchies* (that's if they're really tough), or maybe just *gender divisions of labor*, or simply *discrimination*, or *inequality*.

In my teaching and writing, I try to be as precise and as concrete as I can be, which requires an endless curiosity! *Patriarchy* is not a sledgehammer being swung around a raving feminist head. It is a tool; it sheds light at the same time as it reveals patterns of causality.

CC: But let me pursue that a little. If you say "Is X patriarchal?" for people familiar with the term, normally the response would be, "well, of course—find something that isn't!"

CE: Yeah, right.

CC: But what they might mean is simply that men are on top, men are in power. So saying "It's a patriarchy" wouldn't really shed light on the institution. The term is, for lots of people, a thought-stopper. So why does it seem like such a thought-*opening* question to you?

CE: Because it means you have to ask about the daily operations of both masculinity and femininity in relationship to each other. It is not men-on-top that makes something patriarchal. It's men who are recognized and claim a certain form of masculinity, for the sake of being more valued, more "serious," and "the protectors of/and controllers of those people who are less masculine" that makes any organization, any community, any society patriarchal. It's never automatic; it's rarely self-perpetuating. It takes daily tending. It takes decisions—even if those are masked as "tradition." It relies on many women finding patriarchal relationships comfortable, sometimes rewarding. And you and I in our own work have found women who would much rather not rock the patriarchal boat—often for good reasons. Patriarchal structures and cultures have proved to be so adaptable! That's what's prompted me to watch them over time—the British House of Commons, textile companies, the Israeli military, Chilean political parties, Bosnia's and Afghanistan's new governments.

CC: In the two institutions in which I've most recently done work, the word *patriarchy* is never used, but *gender* is all over the place. In the U.S. military, it is *gender integration*. At the UN, it is *gender balance* and *gender mainstreaming*. Although many people see *gender* as a more neutral, less inflammatory word than *patriarchy*, in these institutional cultures, *gender* is apparently often just as alienating and thought-stopping a term, evoking/representing "political correctness." The other thing that strikes me is that, in these institutions where attention to gender has been mandated, it remains an extremely opaque word. At the UN, for example, everyone is supposed to integrate a "gender perspective" in their programs, but many people simply don't have a real clue what that means.

And the training that might make it clearer has been in short supply. But all of that is really about the practical effects of using specific words rather than the actual conceptual or analytic difference between *patriarchy* and a term such as *gender system*.

CE: And I have kept using *patriarchy* because it reminds us that we're investigating power.

CC: You and I have talked about how highly resistant many people in the fields of international politics and international relations are to feminist analyses and to undertaking feminist-informed research. To some degree that's a reflection of the structure of rewards in academic and political institutions.

CE: Right.

CC: But it is also conceptual. Their models were constructed *without* women, and *without* men-as-men, and "inserting gender" then appears both difficult and unnecessary.

CE: I think one needs to start with the unsettling, candid question, "Do I *really* understand what is going on?" Yes?

CC: Yes. But it is often not easy to see that you don't—especially when you are working within a paradigm dominant in your field. What enabled you to see that *you* didn't really know what was going on? What led to *your* "aha!" moment?

CE: It came in fragments. The first glimmer came when I was doing the index for the book right before *Khaki*—that was *Ethnic Soldiers* (Enloe 1980). I learned so much researching it. It was my last nonfeminist book—of course, I didn't know that at the time! Working for four years on *Ethnic Soldiers* taught me always to ask the ethnic question. But I didn't know then to ask the "where are the women?" question.

I can actually picture this. *Ethnic Soldiers* was going to be published by Penguin, which was great because it was going to be a trade paperback, and I had a very socially conscious editor there. At the indexing stage, I was in Norway, on a fellowship at PRIO, the Peace Research Institute of Oslo. This was in October 1979; it began to get dark by midafternoon. I was sitting in a coffee shop near PRIO, with my pink index cards and my green index cards. I was doing the index—the headings, the sub-headings—realizing that indexes were really very political because they reflect what you want to make visible. Feminist pals had been nudging me to read Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1977) . . . and it had had a big impact on me. All of a sudden I had this fantastical imagining—I was sitting there in Oslo as the twilight was dimming, and I imagined Adrienne Rich, whom I had then never met, and never expected ever to meet, would walk into a bookstore. She would see *Ethnic Soldiers* on a

bookshelf, would pull it off and do what (I was then learning) feminist book buyers always do—turn to the index, and go to the W's. She'd find there were no "women" in my W's—only "Walloons," "World War I," and "World War II." And in my fantasy she'd immediately put the book back on the shelf.

CC: (*Laughter*)

CE: I was at the post-page-proof stage, so I couldn't go back and rewrite anything in *Ethnic Soldiers*. I just prayed "Please, dear God, maybe I mentioned women *someplace* in this 500-page typescript?" And I found, by luck, I had used it—twice. Once when thinking (briefly!) about Nepali women married to Gurkhas, and again when thinking about the Rhodesian white-dominated regime starting—in desperation—to enlist white women into their military, rather than recruiting more black men.

CC: Two things immediately strike me about this story. First, *there's* the question you've asked ever since—"Where are the women?"! Second, you started by saying that one needs to ask, "Do I really understand what is going on?" But, of course, in the story you just told, asking that question wouldn't have helped, would it? You didn't think that you didn't know what was going on when you wrote that book, right?

CE: You're right.

CC: It was actually a very different process that got you there—a social one, just as grad students' questions are socially shaped by their relations to professors, their departments, job markets. In this case, you imagined someone whom you admired and what her reaction to your book might be.

CE: My fantasizing about Adrienne Rich in a bookstore didn't immediately change my writing or my research. But soon after that I was being pushed by the wonderful students at Clark to start teaching a comparative politics of women course. I think that the embarrassment I felt as I imagined Adrienne Rich's curiosity and *her* dismay at my lack of awareness made me a little more open to students' suggestions. Soon I began to let my teaching—and I love to teach—really begin to affect my research more. So sometimes embarrassment is really fruitful! Then there are also friends. It was feminist friends' encouragement that led me to start reading things I hadn't been reading, far from political science though deeply political.

CC: I love the idea of "*fruitful* embarrassment." What do you think are the social contexts that make that possible?

CE: I've thought about this a lot, and I know you have, too. It's about this thing called a "career." How to not position oneself holding a Plexiglass shield in front of you. How to gain confidence from expressing

surprise, how to gain confidence from admitting, “I should have thought of that, and I didn’t!” From very early on in this thing called a career, I’ve tried very hard not to act out of defensiveness. It’s so demobilizing, draining of energy, and privatizing; it doesn’t let one listen well enough, or reach out, or be part of a community. Defensiveness plays right into the narrowest, least fruitful form of careerism. Careers are okay, in the sense that one wants to grow, to have the sense that you are moving forward in your own thinking—even having a bit more influence along the way, if it’s a good kind of influence—in one’s own little pool. But *careerism*—that is about, “Oh, I better not let anybody see what I don’t know.” Or, “I better pretend that I know more than I do”—and we all have those feelings. But I really try not to let that be what I express. Once I try to express the curiosity, and the, “Gee, I never thought of that, tell me more, I need to rethink that”; once I express it, even if it is not what is going up and down my spinal cord, it’s easier to actually do it.

I remember once doing a noontime thing at Harvard, for the Department of Political Science. A senior male faculty member was there; everyone was very aware that he was there and that he didn’t usually come to anything that had women or “feminism” in it. He asked a question, a little skeptical, a little amused. You could almost feel a collective shiver go down the spines of everyone in the room as they together silently thought: “Oh my God, what if she doesn’t measure up?” Everyone was thinking, “We’re having a feminist talk at Harvard. We need its credibility, its senior male faculty’s credibility to insure our own careers.” I felt really responsible. So I just turned to everybody before I answered and said, “Breathe. It’s okay. We’re just having a discussion. This is an interesting question, not a test. We’re not in a gladiator arena.” We might have been, mind you! But I decided that we would pretend we weren’t.

CC: Cynthia, one thing that everyone who knows you comments on is that you are amazingly generous to your feminist colleagues and graduate students. Why are you?

CE: Oh, a lot of people are.

CC: But you are to a remarkable degree. Why?

CE: Because I think we’re all in this together. Because I know that 95 percent of everything I know, I know because somebody else has done the work. I’m totally dependent on other people feeling confident enough, empowered enough, energized enough, and funded enough that they can do the work that will help make me smarter. Also, I actually want to have a lively set of experiences with people. It makes academic life more fun; it makes it more interesting; it’s worth doing it. I’m not the sort who wants to go to a log cabin in the woods and think my own shallow thoughts by

myself. This means it really matters to me to change institutions, to change the cultures in our departments, in ways that give people who are coming along, just like other people did for me, a sense that, together, you can change cultures; you don't have to buy into it. I think about institutional cultures a lot. I think they're changeable, though it's surprising what one has to figure out in order to make those transformations stick. This is why the host of women's caucuses we've all created in so many professional associations, and all the new feminist journals we've launched with their formats and processes self-consciously crafted and nurtured, are so significant. Each and every one of them, I think, are feminist experiments in creating healthier professional institutions—in the process, we're trying to transform the very meanings of “professionalism” and “career.”

CC: I've noticed that in your books you draw a lot on works by historians and anthropologists.

CE: I continue to be especially influenced by feminist-informed, historically minded ethnography—no matter what is the writer's formal disciplinary home. At my favorite Cambridge café, I read every publisher's new catalog! I've been influenced by so many feminists using an ethnographic approach: Seung-Kyung Kim's (1997) work on South Korean women factory workers during the prodemocracy campaign; Diane Singerman's (1996) study of women, men, and the state in one Cairo neighborhood; Anne Allison's (1994) terrific participant observation of corporate businessmen's interactions with hostesses in a Tokyo drinking club; Purnima Mankekar's (1999) subtle insights into lower-middle-class Indian men's and women's viewings of nationalist prime-time TV sagas. Oh, and then I love Cathy Lutz's (2001) new study of town life around Fort Bragg—that's the huge army base in North Carolina, Jennifer Pierce's (1995) eye-opening insider's account of how masculinity continues to get privileged in two large San Francisco law firms, and Hugh Gusterson's (1996) ethnography of life in a California nuclear weapons lab. And more! Then I take these and almost literally put them side by side with Joni Seager's (1997) astounding feminist world atlas. Doing this makes me think in thickly local and broadly comparative ways simultaneously. Over the years I also have been deeply affected by Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1951, 1963, 1968, 1972). She was the first to make me rethink just what is “politics.” I heard her in person—twice!

CC: You did?

CE: Yes! Talk about formative times! I was an undergraduate at Connecticut College; it was maybe 1958 or 1959? And I had a professor, Louise Holborn, wonderful woman, who was a German emigrée and who was my comparative politics teacher. And she said we all *had* to come, we

who had never heard of Hannah Arendt! Here was Arendt, by this time, an older woman, kind of jowly, with still a very German-accented form of English. I remember this clearly—I *did not* understand what Arendt was talking about, *and* I was absolutely mesmerized. Both! I took notes like crazy. She probably was talking about totalitarianism, at that point in the late '50s. I remember going to the little campus coffee shop afterwards; I just sat and I thought and thought. . . . It was so exciting! Arendt was so serious. I was surrounded by women faculty members who were serious, but I had never seen seriousness like that. . . . I thought it was wonderful! I thought it was just wonderful.

A few years later, out at Berkeley, I took political theory from Sheldon Wolin, a wonderful teacher. He was a great admirer of Hannah Arendt, who in the 1960s—when I was at Berkeley—was writing provocatively rich essays for the *New Yorker* and in the *New York Review of Books*. I tore out each essay and still have every one of them! When I've taught seminars on Hannah Arendt, I've brought those now-yellowing articles into class and said, "You all know what political thought looks like? It has ads down the side. It has cartoons in the middle. It appears on the newsstand. Political theory isn't something that just comes out in a University of Chicago book, that you buy in a serious bookstore. Political theorizing is—well, should be—part of the hubbub of the public arena. See, I get excited even thinking about it! So, the second time I heard Arendt was thanks to Sheldon Wolin. I was a graduate student at Berkeley, and Sheldon Wolin had organized an APSA [American Political Science Association] panel on revolution. Remember, this has got to be in 1963 when we were all talking about theories of revolution. The panelists gave their written papers, then Sheldon Wolin looked out in the audience to start the discussion. There were about fifty people there—it wasn't a featured panel. Wolin spotted Hannah Arendt and called on her. She just stood up in the audience and said, "I've been taking some notes." (*Laughter*) It was great! And out came, of course, the most thought-provoking ideas. I mean, they weren't arrogant; they didn't sort of wash over all the panelists; they were engaged. What I loved was that she was a member of the audience, an audience participant. And that is exactly where political thinkers should be, right? Not just up on the panel, but rising out of the audience. I wish Arendt were still alive, writing in the *New Yorker*!

CC: I wonder what she would have written about September 11? Did the events of September 11 change what you want to be thinking about?

CE: I don't think I'm knowledgeable enough yet to think very clearly about the actual men who took part. I would have to think about where masculinity comes into it, and the way in which masculinity gets mobilized.

“Frontline” on PBS has had some very slow, thoughtful, jigsaw-puzzle kinds of biographies of two or three of the men, and I found them very helpful. To be honest, I—this doesn’t mean other people shouldn’t be interested—but I myself am not *very* enlivened in my own curiosity about men or women, but especially men, who engage in what is now defined as terrorism. I think I’m quite determined not to be seduced into thinking that those men are more interesting than men who look much more conventional, much more institutionalized, more rational, and *seemingly* nonviolent. There is a temptation—and this is simply the strength of narration—to find Timothy McVeigh or Mohammed Atta much more intellectually engaging than a person who usually goes nameless, for example, who flies—or designs—a B-52 bomber. Curiosity about the rank-and-file terrorist so often distracts us from asking where power really lies. I don’t mean that people who engage in murder, singly or multiply, shouldn’t be thought about a lot. I am more interested, though, in the Koranic boys’ schools. I’ve been trying to read a lot more about why parents are pleased to have their young sons receive shelter, food, and learning that is valued at these schools. I’m very wary of demonization. I am interested in alienation; I am interested in socialization; I am interested in the larger processes at work without treating individuals as abstractions, as lacking in consciousness.

September 11 engaged my emotions, a sense of horror, and a sense of worry about people I knew in New York. But the terrorists who hijacked those three planes? They aren’t the main objects of my curiosity, because I think they are more the symptom than the cause. And I think ultimately they are nowhere near as capable of affecting our ideas, our lives, the structures and cultures in which we live, as a lot of other people who look not very narratively interesting. I’m pretty interested in bland people, people whose blandness is part of what’s interesting about them—the rank-and-file men in conventional armies, the women who work as secretaries in aerospace corporations. Or Kenneth Lay, the CEO of Enron; nobody till last winter thought he was as interesting as Timothy McVeigh. I’m interested in Kenneth Lay and the culture he and his colleagues helped create that destroyed everybody’s pensions. So, yes, I put up a bit of an intellectual firewall between my curiosity and certain popular—and state-crafted—diversionary narratives. When reporters phone to talk about, for instance, women terrorists, I try to lead them to consider other, more politically fruitful puzzles.

CC: Interest in the Koranic schools, the *madrassas*, fits right in with your interest in institutions—both in how different kinds of masculinity are constructed within institutions and in how masculinity is mobilized

to meet the institutions' ends. But the question of what is the difference between somebody who goes through those *madrassas* and engages in these violent acts versus someone who goes through the same school and doesn't—that is not especially interesting to you?

CE: For me, no. But I'm not saying my interests are what everybody should be interested in. Some of the best pieces of reporting in recent months coming out of Afghanistan in the midst of the bombing were by a *New York Times* journalist named Amy Waldman. I'm going to have to write her a fan letter! She wrote such smart analyses of how the warlord system works (Waldman 2001). I'm very interested in warlords, in warlordism. A lot of men are oppressed by warlords, yet other men really get a sense of pride and satisfaction, as well as rifles and daily food, by attaching themselves to the coattails of men who thereby become warlords. Warlords have much in common with American party machine bosses. Well, Amy Waldman paid serious attention to women in these processes that have nurtured warlordism—and also the Taliban regime—and Al Qaeda. She asked, whom did these men *marry*? The foreigners, particularly the Arab men who had come to Afghanistan as Al Qaeda fighters, and the Afghan, mainly Pashtun, men who became part of the Taliban—whom did they *marry*? How did these men construct their own notions of themselves as masculine? A certain kind of warrior ethic and identity requires a man to be deliberately celibate, while other warrior cultures put a premium on the warrior-as-husband. Amy Waldman started going around the neighborhoods, talking with women and men, about the process by which young women were pressured into marriages with Taliban and Arab men. She found that some mothers and fathers had been given money in order to give up their daughters to be wives of Afghan and Arab fighters, though oftentimes the parents didn't feel like they had a choice.

So I thought, all right, let's talk about warlordism and marriage as if that connection actually mattered, as if marriage also were a transaction of power that created a social system that allowed the Al Qaeda Arab male fighters, the Afghan Taliban fighters, and the anti-Taliban Afghan warlords (the U.S. allies)—each to confirm their masculinities in wartime. And let's ask who were these women and how did they cope with it? And how did their fathers and uncles and brothers think about it? This was one of those articles that turned on a lot of lights. It reminded me that to make sense of any militarized social system, you *always* have to ask about women. They're not a minor sidebar interest.

CC: What other questions did your feminist curiosity turn to as being really important questions to ask—not just in relation to the events of September 11, but everything that has come after?

CE: Looking at U.S. society, I became intrigued with the gendered sprouting of American flags. Thinking about them pushed me to think about, on the one side, private emotions, particularly grief, grief for people whom you don't know, and, on the other side, constructions, reconstructions, and perpetuations of a militarized nation. The connection can only be fathomed if one asks feminist questions. Back in that October I happened to be talking to a woman at a campus social gathering. A staff woman came up to say "hi." She had on her lapel one of those jeweled American flags. I didn't look at it and grimace—it would be terrible if I had. Still, she immediately said, "Oh, you know I'm wearing this not to say anything political, but I had to find some way to express my sadness, and my feelings of solidarity with the people who've lost so much." I was very embarrassed that she felt she had to explain her wearing the flag pin to me. Did I come across as judgmental?

Later I thought that maybe especially people who don't have much power—certainly many women who are in staff support positions in universities don't have much power to shape the expression of ideas and meanings—maybe they have to search for a way to make a public expression of grief that won't be misinterpreted—that somebody else won't co-opt, expropriate, exploit. Women are in that position so often, and so are a lot of men without power, but women are in that position so often because—and this comes back to patriarchal cultures—because their *ideas* about grief are not taken very seriously. Their *expressions* of grief are treated as important symbolically, but not their ideas about grief, and certainly not their ideas about the relationship of grieving to public policy. So in that circumstance, how does a woman reduce her complex ideas to a pin she wants to wear on her lapel?

CC: How have your reflections on the relations between grief and patriotism shaped your approach in your public talks since September 11?

CE: I try to talk about grieving, about the multiple forms of security, what feminists have taught us about "national" and "security." I try to describe other countries where people see as strange what Americans take to be normal.

CC: Such as?

CE: The presumption that the military as an institution is the bulwark of "national security"—it's not just a U.S. idea, but it's such a distinctively American late-twentieth-, early twenty-first-century presumption. It certainly is not, however, a Canadian presumption, not an Italian presumption, not a German or Japanese presumption. And then I try to suggest how asking *feminist* questions helps me make sense of things that otherwise are very puzzling. I want to present feminist questions as a tool.

And usually I'll try to get them to talk about the images they've seen of Afghan women, and did they know that there are Afghan feminists, and why does it seem so hard to take on board the idea of an Afghan feminist organizing, strategizing, analyzing.

CC: What did you think of the "women's week" in presidential politics, when Laura Bush was out talking about Afghan women?

CE: You know, in some ways, I found it very embarrassing, absolutely insulting. It was not Laura Bush's or even George Bush's message. It was White House strategist Karen Hughes's message, her effort to close the gender gap between Democrats and Republicans.

CC: Yet in some ways, it seemed to work for them. I was struck by all the women who supported U.S. military action, *because* of the condition of Afghan women—something that was news to many of them.

CE: You know, when researching *Bananas*, I became fascinated with the World's Fairs in the 1870s, '80s, and '90s. One of the things that promoted the value of Americans' colonization of the Philippines was expressed in the tableaux that were put up on the midway in the World's Fairs. The "benighted woman," usually carrying a heavy burden, was put there to make the Americans in Chicago going through the midway think, "Oh, that's terrible." The oppression of women, for at least the last 150 years, has been used as a measure of how enlightened a society is, without much deeper commitment to deprivileging masculinity. That's why you have to have a feminist understanding of orientalism.

CC: No one could ever accuse me of being an optimist, but let me push this. Now that the position of women has been publicly inserted in national security discourse, now that it has been rhetorically marked as a supposed concern of male national political elites (no matter what their motivation), do you think there is even the slightest chance that that new discursive legitimacy of talking about "women" and "national security" in the same breath can be used as a wedge for political good?

CE: Here's my sense—but we're all going to have to keep watching this. If Afghan women, like Kosovar women, Bosnian women, and East Timorese women, manage to make serious gains in demasculinizing the reconstructed Afghan society, it will not be because of tokenist, exploitative discourse maneuvers by Bush and Blair and others. It will be because, first, Afghan women themselves are organized. Second, because there has been so much serious, feminist-savvy, detailed work going on inside international groups such as Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty, as well as inside UN agencies—UNDPKO, UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund], and the UNHCR [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees]. Most of us in our research and teaching

barely know all the things that you, Cynthia Cockburn and Dubraka Zarkov (2002); Dyan Mazurana and Angela Raven-Roberts (2002a, 2002b; Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 2002); Sandy Whitworth (2003); Julie Mertus (2000); Suzanne Williams (2002); Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyman (2003); and others are trying to teach us about how feminists have made dents in the masculinist operations of international and local institutions operating in Afghanistan and other “postconflict zones.”

CC: My wondering if there could be any positive impact comes from my conversations with NGO activists about Resolution 1325, the UN Security Council’s landmark resolution on women, peace, and security, passed in 2000. While the Security Council may have anticipated simply another thematic debate, women’s NGOs ran with it; they publicized it, printed and distributed copies of it, and got the word out to women’s activist groups in many different countries. So now, 1325 has an active constituency who monitor and push for its implementation. Women’s groups are really using it as a tool. For example, in the resolution, the council committed to consult with women’s organizations when on field missions. So on the council mission to Kosovo, the women got to meet with the council members and present them a letter critiquing the UN mission’s Gender Unit and pass on information they wanted the council to have—although the meeting *did* end up occurring at 11 P.M. in a diplomat’s hotel room! Another example—before Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN’s special representative to Afghanistan, left New York to start talks about an interim Afghan government, women’s NGOs provided him with a list of Afghan women’s NGOs they felt he should consult with—and he did. And 1325 isn’t just having an impact on UN activities; women are also using it to put pressure on their own governments. I spoke with a woman from the Russian Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers, for example, who told me that when they first got the resolution in the mail, they looked, thought, “Oh, just another Security Council resolution,” and didn’t bother to read it. But later, someone looked—and they’ve found it to be a gold mine. “Now,” she says, “when we go to talk to political or military leaders, we take it with us. And because the Russian leadership is now very concerned about their international legitimacy, they feel that they have to listen to us, because that’s what the resolution says.”

CE: But that’s not a high-tech aerial bombing campaign that’s improving women’s lives.

CC: Right. But is there the least possibility now of a parallel move? Despite the motivations of the Bush government, could this opening of rhetorical space for talking about women’s lives and “national security”

in the same breath be seized upon by women activists for ends that go far beyond the intentions of Bush's policy advisors and speechwriters?

CE: It's really risky for anyone who's trying to understand cause and effect to imagine that the military campaign strategists who were desperate for international legitimacy and thus grasped on to whatever they could—and girls being denied schooling happened to work very nicely, thank you—had that as their strategic objective. Maybe sometimes it's a risk that it's worth feminists taking. After all, we aren't served up many chances to get our foot in the patriarchal door. Still, so many feminist studies of imperialism, colonization, World's Fairs, warfare, the global spreadings of Christian missionary work, and capitalist markets are here to provide us with a blinking yellow cautionary light: that is, when on occasion women's liberation is wielded instrumentally by any masculinized elite as a rationale-of-convenience for their actions, we should be on high alert; they'll put it back on the shelf just as soon as it no longer serves their longer-range purpose.

CC: So, in those weeks after September 11 and before the bombing started, what did you say when you were asked for a feminist response to the question "What should 'we' do now?"

CE: I didn't have it all worked out—I found myself saying, well, first of all, let's really think about what is the *appropriate* response, and what, in the long term, is the most useful response. And especially if we're Americans, let's really think comparatively. Can we learn some lessons from the women of Srebrenica, the Bosnian town where five thousand men were massacred by Serbian militias? Or, what if the September attack had happened in Brussels, seat of the European Union? Would we all assume that the Belgian air force should take to the skies, heading for Southwest Asia? Feminists have taught us to be very, very careful before we adopt a response to grief, loss, and anger that is a *state* response, especially a militarized state response.

What did you say during those weeks?

CC: My starting place was that we needed to analyze *why* military violence seemed like a good response—or why it seemed so impossible not to strike back. We can't take it as self-evident.

I've been very influenced by working with Sara Ruddick on a "feminist ethical perspective on weapons of mass destruction" (Cohn and Ruddick 2002). She has written that the efficacy of violence is overrated, while its costs are consistently underestimated—although I actually believe that more than she does at this point! Anyway, I think that response to September 11 is really a prime example. The seemingly "self-evident" (to a lot of people) need to strike back is partly based on the assumption that

it will “work,” that it will be the most effective form of response. People assume that military violence will, in general, work a lot better than a negotiated political solution or a response based on the enforcement of national or international law or on economic actions.

I think that assumption needs to be examined, challenged. Even if you see the question of whether to use military force as a strategic, pragmatic question, apart from moral consideration, I am not at all sure that it *is* an effective response to terrorists or the causes of terrorism—even from a purely U.S. perspective. What I am sure of is that the human costs will be enormous, including the spread of further violence, and that in the long run the political consequences both for the United States and for many Arab women will be quite damaging.

I think one reason it’s so hard politically to even examine the assumption that “striking back” is the best option is that ideas about masculinity are so intricately and invisibly interwoven with ideas about national security. So-called realist strategic dictums for state behavior sound a lot like dictums for hegemonic masculinity.

CE: You mean, “We have to do something.”

CC: And, “The risks of inaction [read ‘passivity’] are far greater than the risks of action,” and “We have to show we are strong,” and “We have to show them they can’t push us around,” and “We aren’t going to take this lying down,” and “We can’t let them think we are wimps.”

CE: “It’s our honor.” Americans in the early twenty-first century have created what seems to me to be a deadly combination for themselves (ourselves!)—possessing such disproportionate power combined with a cultural sense of being vulnerable. It gives me the shivers.

CC: But I think the problem is more than the sense of being vulnerable. It is the refusal to acknowledge the *inevitability* of our vulnerability. After all, vulnerability is a fact of human and political life. The attempt to deny its inevitability is what has led to the development of weapons of mass destruction “as deterrents,” to massive investments in “national missile defense” and other baroque weapons technology, while we refuse to make serious investments in dealing with the worldwide HIV epidemic, or starvation, or poverty around the world. It has led to U.S. partnerships with oppressive regimes and multiple military attacks on other nations—and another being talked about by the Bush administration even as we speak! And all of these, of course, are part of what creates the desperation and anger that are the seeds of terrorism.

My fantasy is that if we acknowledged the impossibility of making ourselves invulnerable, of constructing Reagan’s Plexiglass shield, we would have to have policies that fostered and strengthened good will and

interdependence, that invested in making the planet a livable place for people in all countries, that aimed at disarmament instead of weapons “advancement” and proliferation. And my fear is that we won’t acknowledge it, because these assumptions about strength and weakness, and vulnerability, are simultaneously engaged at the very personal, identity level but also built right into beliefs about national security and into national security doctrine—as though they reflected “objective reality” and in no way stemmed from deeply felt and held identities.

So stopping to try to disentangle emotions and assumptions about violence and its efficacy was the starting place for me. Ultimately, I want to ask what it will take to change the discourse, to alter the meanings of strength and justice in the international political arena?

CE: You know, having conversations like the one we’ve been having makes me more convinced than ever of the necessity of crafting, and teaching others to craft, a feminist curiosity. And I guess that my conviction comes from our being at a very particular moment in world politics and feminist politics; we’re living in a world where American militarized policy carries more clout—disproportionate clout—than ever in world history, while we’re also living at a time when feminists in the United States are more conscious than ever that we’ll only be able to understand the world if we take seriously the insights of women from Finland to Fiji!

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