

Editor's Interview with Cynthia Enloe*

ED: When we applied to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the grant that resulted in the funding of *Journal of Narrative Politics*, we identified the roots of the emerging shift toward narrative methods in international politics in feminist scholarship, much of which was explicitly grounded in storytelling as academic practice. This history, of course, is in large part directly attributable to your interventions in the field and their enduring importance. Would you tell our readers something about what has moved you to use narrative methods?

CE: It took me awhile to find a way – or maybe it was even to find the courage – to use narratives and especially women's and men's own voices in my academic writing. I always tried to describe settings in my own scribbled notes and I always jotted down interviewees' own words. For instance, I can still recall the room in which I interviewed a British military intelligence official in Belfast – as he described how he and his colleagues could tell what the sofa looked like in any given Northern Irish modest home, he served me tea (in a proper teapot) and cookies.

And I was always reading novels during my grad years and my early years of fieldwork, novels set in the countries in which I was doing research, then Malaysia and Guyana. So I could experience the power of narratives. I still do this. Whenever, I'm going to some place to give a talk or to meet with local feminists – in Iceland or New Zealand or Colombia – I still try to take along novels set wherever I'm going.

But, honestly, it was only when I became a feminist – in the late 1970s – that I realized that my own academic works were poorer for their not integrating narratives, depriving my works of stories, graphic descriptions and immediate voices. It was spending time then in feminist bookstores, going to crowded feminist authors' readings, subscribing to new feminist journals, for instance, Britain's *History Workshop Journal*. All together, those experiences taught me how important it was to integrate narratives into my own work.

ED: Could you talk a little bit about the process by which you became a feminist? And was there a relationship there between the development of your feminism and your recognition of the importance of narratives?

* Cynthia Enloe is Research Professor in the Departments of International Development, Community and Engagement; Women's and Gender Studies; and Political Science at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. She is the author of 14 books, including *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (2004), *The Curious Feminist* (2004) and *Globalization and Militarism* (new edition, 2016), as well as *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*, (2011), *The Real State of America: Mapping the Myths and Truths about the United States* (co-authored with Joni Seager) (2012), *Seriously! Investigating Crashes and Crises as if Women Mattered* (2013). Her new, totally updated and revised 2nd edition of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* was published by University of California Press in June, 2014. She can be reached at cenloe@clarku.edu

CE: I became a feminist a bit late. It was after grad school. Even though I was at University of California, Berkeley during the famous ‘Free Speech Movement’ there, and went on strike and picketed with all my fellow students, and even though, as a Southeast Asian politics specialist I marched against the Vietnam war, neither of those movements were informed by feminism. Even when I was in my first teaching job, at Miami University of Ohio, I didn’t include women writers or discuss the politics of women in my courses. I know! It’s embarrassing! This was the late 1960s. It was only when I began to meet feminists in London and Boston that I realized all I had been missing.

Well, maybe that’s not quite true, even when I was still in Ohio, I began subscribing to the then brand new *Women Sports*, Billie Jean King’s new magazine, and to *Ms.*, which was just launched by Gloria Steinem and other feminists in 1972. So I guess I saw the glimmerings of a new way to see the world. But, really, it took feminist friends and then curious undergrad student women to wake me up fully to what I needed to be asking.

After I took a new post at Clark University, in Massachusetts, friends took me to New Words, the thriving feminist bookstore in Cambridge. And when I was in London, other friends introduced me to Britain’s first feminist bookstore, Sisterwrite, and later to another London feminist bookstore, Silver Moon. So I was introduced to feminism both by having friends who were activists (many of them not academics) and by reading feminist books – especially at first novels and histories - and feminist magazines, full of stories by skilled journalists.

I think this must have given me, right from the start, a sense that stories matter. I learned that in stories, narratives, one gleans nuances that one would otherwise miss. Also, in the best narratives, things often remain ambiguous. That’s a good lesson for any investigator or analyst to learn.

ED: Where do you think the shortcomings were in your scholarship before you began the journey toward feminism?

CE: When I look back now at my pre-feminist work (and there was a lot of it!), I think the chief failing is that I did not tally up all the sorts of power that are wielded to create the sorts of societies and the sorts of international relationships that distinguish this world we live in. That is, back when I did not take women’s lives seriously, I now realize that I grossly underestimated how much – and how many varieties of – power had been and currently are used by such an array of actors to police women’s behavior, to keep women in line, to persuade men that this was normal and right, and to discourage women from imagining or trying to create different lives, different relationships of dignity, satisfaction, accomplishment and responsibility.

That’s why today I’m so determined to learn all I can about all the different women’s suffrage movements – those of Canada, the US, Britain, New Zealand, Brazil, Japan, the Philippines, Egypt, Turkey... No one had ever thought it was worth teaching me or other then-young people about all it took to persuade girls and women that they didn’t need or deserve to live as full citizens, and thus all it took for suffrage campaigners to upset those arguments.

ED: Can you talk about the emotions you felt encountering feminism? In my case, the encounters and experiences that fundamentally undermined my scholarly training were quite ‘undoing’ for me – quite traumatic, even. It required me to reckon with my complicity (even my ongoing

complicity) in structures of violence. Could you tell us a little bit about what that experience was like for you – the recognition that your scholarship had been complicit in the things you later worked to resist?

CE: To tell you the truth, it was energizing! I felt so enlivened by all these new possibilities for investigation – and for teaching. Designing new courses, adopting new authors and their books, posing new questions, listening to new voices, telling new (to me!) stories – it was wonderful.

You're right, of course, mixed with the heady excitement was a keen sense that I had missed so much in my research and teaching until the feminist windows were thrown wide open. But the feminists I was meeting in London and Boston in the late 1970s and early 80s were themselves all so full of energy and curiosity. No one seemed to be casting blame at anyone for having taken so long to pose these questions and start telling these stories. What I recall, instead, was the spirit was one of shared curiosity – 'What had kept us from seeing these things and asking these questions for so long?' *That* was definitely worth asking.

And, as you rightly say, delving candidly into that puzzle did mean having to excavate complicity, including one's own. What had I trivialized or dismissed? Who had I imagined not worth interviewing? Which books had I imagined 'not relevant' for my students' learning? Complicity in the perpetuation of patriarchy takes so many forms, most of them quite subtle. So, yes, complicity, especially one's own, is always worth investigating.

ED: It's a long, fascinating process to delve into the blind spots of our thinking as both writers and academics. Can you talk at all about what you had trivialized and missed? Or about whom you did not interview? Are there any specific examples that stand out for you?

CE: Most obviously, in my first 5 books I don't think I interviewed a single woman. I knew women in every one of these field research 'sites'. I had women friends, colleagues and acquaintances – for instance, in London, Berlin, Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown, Guyana – but I don't think you'll find a single one of them mentioned or cited in any of those earlier pre-feminist books. Yes, it's really embarrassing now to realize this.

I just imagined then that it was party leaders and union leaders and senior professors and senior civil servants who mattered. And they were all men. But what's really telling (now I realize, with classic 20/20 hindsight!) is that I didn't think about them – at least in print – as men. I just thought about them, analyzed them as civil servants, or union leaders or party leaders. So I left their masculinities – and their relationships to me, as a 30-something American white woman – totally *unproblematized*. That means that I left whole swathes of power dynamics unexplored.

ED: I wonder what we're all still missing with our scholarship – even our critical and engaged scholarship. Perhaps not as a cause for embarrassment – after all, we can only do what we can where we are, and this changes at different junctures in our lives – but as a cause for change, as you note emerged from your contact with the feminists in Boston and London. Could you give our readers an example of a moment when you recognized what you were missing, or what you realized you had to turn to explore?

CE: So many of my 'aha!' moments – moments when I was both embarrassed at my failings and energized to address them – came while listening. Listening is such a strenuous activity, isn't it?

For instance, during the 1980s there were intense conversations here in Boston between white feminists (though 'white' camouflages ethnic, generational and class differences) and Black feminists (who were themselves diverse). Black feminists, among them Barbara and Beverly Smith, had been crucial to local feminist organizing. Nonetheless, there was an acute sense that we often talked past each other. Particularly, small groups of white women would organize a new group and only as an afterthought invite a (usually just 'a') woman of color to join. White women activists also too often expected women of color (which was scarcely a term used until the late 1980s) to tutor the rest of us in 'Racism 101.' I wasn't immune from either of these failings. What is so embarrassing is to realize I had my eyes opened to them by others. It was profoundly discomfiting. Coming to recognize my own class privileges was also unsettling. On the one hand, I knew I had come from a segregated northern suburb, Manhasset, Long Island. There were no African American students in my classes until I reached junior high. And I never had an African American or Asian American teacher throughout my public school years. I also had in my head the picture of my mother, along with other Manhasset white mothers, driving down to the Long Island Rail Road station each morning to drop off my father on his way into Manhattan to work and then to pick up Betty Scudders who, with other African American women, stepped off the train to come to work as domestic workers in ours and our neighbors' homes.

But what it took me a lot longer to admit and absorb was the multiple privileges this sort of upbringing bestowed on me, privileges that, painfully, I slowly was made to see created barriers to being in any sort of genuine solidarity with women who grew up without such privileges. Not assuming solidarity among women until it could be actually created – that has been a hard lesson to learn - a hard and necessary lesson to learn.

ED: Do you think there is redemption?

CE: Redemption. What a potent concept. I honestly think that all of us who have become even partially conscious are working on redemption all the time. There are very few of us with 'clean hands.' Even if we've been lucky enough to have been shown a feminist path – paths, really – we each are more than likely to have been complicit in interlocking forms of arrogance, parochialism, ethno-centricism, militarism or exploitation. After all, we all live in a world that lures us into all of them almost daily.

If, as feminists, we have grown up with the undeserved privileges of being economically comfortable, and/or being treated as 'white,' and/or speaking English and/or carrying an acceptable passport, we have a hefty share of complicity to examine and compensate for.

For a wide range of us, as feminists, complicity can come in many subtle forms, I think. For instance, being of a privileged class in any country where domestic workers have cleaned our homes or taken care of our children, or purchasing clothes, food or electronic devices without giving serious thought to the women whose underpaid labor enabled us to have these goods, or presuming to give advice to impoverished women simply because we've had access to higher education or feel comfortable dealing with bureaucracies - each of these is likely to have made us complicit in local and globalized systems of discrimination and exploitation.

There are plenty of actions for which we need to seek redemption. But that is the great gift of a thoughtful, searching, reflective, generous kind of feminism – it offers that possibility, gives us the chance to listen intently, to reflect critically and to be accountable. Recognizing our

multiple forms of complicity in perpetuating injustices should never paralyze us. It should energize us to weave genuine webs of solidarity, out of which the most effective actions will flow.

ED: Looking back over the years of your career, what would you say has been your biggest joy?

CE: Teaching. Always teaching. I think that it has been teaching that has brought me the most joy because it's in teaching that I have learned the most. And learning is so joyful.

Here's an example from teaching a course for mid-career gender specialists at the University of Iceland just last month. The course is a creative project developed by three Icelandic feminist faculty members and is taken each year by a dozen gender specialists from Uganda, Mozambique, Malawi, Palestine, Ghana and South Africa. I learn so much from being one of its teaching crew.

Last month I was exploring with this engaged group the step by step processes by which anything can become feminized and anything can become masculinized. One of the Ugandan women, an official in her country's agriculture ministry, offered an eye-opening example: Traditionally, growing cow peas has been considered by most Ugandan farmers to be naturally 'women's work.' But in the last few years, men in these rural women's households have started to claim that it 'really' is 'men's work.'

Her revelation really set us off. Soon we were all joining in, offering clues to explain the gendered dynamics causing this switch from feminized cow pea farming to masculinized cow pea farming: 'Oh, that's because cow peas have become profitable to sell in the market.' 'Cow peas seemed a women's crop when it only fed the family, but now it can be sold away from home.' 'Yes, and, of course, only men can travel from home to the market several miles away.' 'We all know who then decides how to spend the money made from selling the cow peas!'

It was such a lively collective exploration of the genderings of cow peas! Combined sleuthing. Surprising discoveries. It felt downright joyful.

Teaching, we all know, is never easy. It always takes energetic listening, a lot of reflection and, of course, perpetual curiosity. But it can bring joy.