

# 'What Is She Thinking?' – Natália Félix in Conversation with Cynthia Enloe

**Natália Maria Félix de Souza\***

Cynthia Enloe's thought has now become a common heritage for all of us who share a sense of importance of the role that Gender Studies more generally, and feminist scholarship in particular, have for broadening our account of international politics, and for making us more critical, sensible and smarter about the international operations of power. In this conversation, I tried to probe her thoughts, looking for ways in which her reflection could help us make sense not only of the long and hard trajectory that feminist studies have faced in the past few decades, but also of the ongoing difficulties and struggles that it continues to face throughout processes sustaining a certain 'modernization of patriarchy' (Enloe 2017).

Our encounter happened in July 2017, during Cynthia's trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she participated in the International Political Sociology (IPS) Winter School<sup>1</sup> and offered a public conference on the theme '*In Times Such as These, In a World Such as This... Why Is a Feminist Curiosity So Crucial?*'<sup>2</sup> The conference resulted from a productive partnership between the Institute of International Relations of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and the MulherRIs group.<sup>3</sup> During the conversation, I tried to pursue three different explorations: the first was concerned with reflecting on the impact of Cynthia's work in the disciplinary field of International Relations, the advancements and setbacks faced by feminist scholarship since her first major intervention with *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Enloe [1990] 2014); secondly, we reflected on the particular theme of this Special Issue, addressing some particularities of gender and feminist studies in the global South; lastly, we addressed a timely topic, namely, the not always easy conversations and cross-fertilization between feminist scholarship and feminist activism. The result of this dialogue was very enticing and thought provoking (Gender in the Global South is actually a triple Special Issue and more articles on the theme will be featured in the two issues coming after this one).

The title of this conversation is inspired by Cynthia's own reflection while watching a female domestic worker do her chores in a high-rise apartment in Ipanema. It reflects her very particular anthropological take on international issues, which is evident throughout

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the conversation. Step by step, she builds very insightful explanations about feminism, gender, international politics; and explores nuances in the ways different people live, survive, get organized, resist. This shows why Cynthia's thought remains a pillar for feminist IR, bringing a fresh account of the power relations traversing our political scenarios.

The conversation has been lightly edited for clarity.

## **Feminism, gender and International Relations: the modernization of patriarchy**

**Natália:** In many opportunities you have mentioned never planning the impact you have had on the discipline, particularly in the way your thought came to be classified as 'international relations theory'. With the benefit of hindsight, what would you say was the greatest appeal of your work for the discipline since the moment *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1990) came out, and became a foundational statement on feminism in IR?

**Cynthia:** Of course, other people can answer this better because I am not the one who back then found it appealing. I just tried to make sense of the world. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* was my third feminist book – it was about my seventh book. This is embarrassing, but I wrote about five books before 1990 that were not feminist – they were not anti-feminist either, but I was just kind of dumb and had not really discovered feminist questions yet. Maybe *Bananas* was my fourth feminist book, but it has had a very particular career. My first two feminist books were done in collaboration with Wendy Chapkis, a sociologist. The first, *Loaded Questions*, was about why women around the world would be recruited into the military (Chapkis 1981); the second feminist book with Wendy was based on a small conference held in Amsterdam and was called *Of Common Cloth: Women in the Global Textile Industry* (Chapkis and Enloe 1983). This was based on a research with activists in the garment industry and tried to look at where women were in the international garment industry. This was the early 1980s, when I was taking small steps towards asking these questions myself.

My third feminist book was a full-fledged book called *Does Khaki Become You?* (Enloe 1983). Khaki is the Urdu word for the colour of the sandy hills of Afghanistan, and the British adopted that colour in order to wage colonial wars in South Asia, thus becoming the colour of sandy, camouflage military uniforms all around the world. *Does Khaki Become You?* was about women's various roles in the militaries – and not just *inside* them, around them too, as wives, mothers, nurses, women in prostitution, and weapons factory workers.

So, by the time (in the mid-1980s) I was asking the *Bananas*' questions, I was thinking about the garment industry and I was thinking about militaries. Then I began to wonder: where else are the women? So the entire motivation for writing *Bananas* was to look at different areas of international relations and ask those simple questions: for instance, where are women in international transnational domestic work? Where are women in diplomacy? The reason I wrote the book is because I did not know the answers. So the book was not: 'Oh, I know everything; now I'm going to tell it.' Instead, it was, rather: 'Oh, I don't

know, I think I'm going to try to find out, and as I find out, I'll share what I uncover.' And that became the original *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.

**Natália:** That is the feminist curiosity you are always talking about, right?

**Cynthia:** Yes. Well, it is so much fun to be curious, you know? Rather than knowing it all. To 'know it all' is boring; curiosity is fun because it allows you to be surprised.

To get back to your question, how does any particular book have an impact? The author definitely cannot control and cannot predict the impacts of anything she writes. That was the case with *Bananas*. The book was first published by a small feminist press in England, called Pandora Press. It was a little feminist enterprise within a larger press, with only feminist editors – well, three of them. I think the whole Pandora staff was four women. I was doing a lot of work in Britain at the time, in the early 80s, and hanging out with a lot of feminists there. The editors of Pandora came to me and asked: 'Well, wouldn't you write something for us?' And I thought: 'Well, maybe this is the time to act on that curiosity about garment workers, military bases and now domestic workers and tourism and diplomacy and nationalism – maybe Pandora would like me to try and do that.' This is really important to remember: *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* was written with and written for a small feminist press; it was not written with and for a big prominent academic university press – that came later. So, the first thing to do is to support small feminist presses and independent presses wherever they are, because they oftentimes are the seedbed for really innovative thinking.

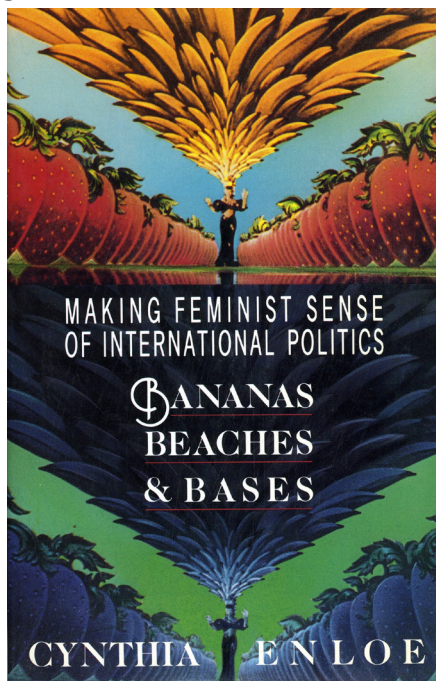
Now, what happened next with *Bananas* was that Pandora got the manuscript – I worked with the editor there, her name was Candida Lacey (I still work with her, she is now the Chief Editor of another independent press, Myriad) and the book manuscript was about to go to press. It is very expensive to print a book, so Candida said to me: 'It will really help our bottom line if I can get an American Press to co-publish and to co-print the book, because then we can split the printing cost.' I said, 'Okay, fine with me,' and she started really trying to sell the manuscript in the US. When she came back to me she said: 'Well, there's this wonderful editor who's a feminist at University of California Press. Her name is Naomi Schneider.' Candida and Naomi were then in a bargaining conversation with each other, but when Candida told me this I said: 'I don't want a university press, I didn't write this for a university press.' I had a narrow idea of what university presses' books were like. Candida tried to reassure me: 'No, no, Naomi will publish it as it is.' I gave in, but I still was sceptical: 'Okay, but here is the deal. The deal is Carmen Miranda has to stay on the cover.' I had discovered this poster of Carmen Miranda in 1942, an ad for her famous Hollywood film, *The Gang's All Here*, and I thought: 'Oh, no serious university press is ever going to accept that as a cover image.' But then Naomi bargained with her own in-house design people; actually, they loved the cover even though it did not look like the usual academic cover. And so, *Bananas* was originally jointly published in 1989/1990 by Pandora Press in the UK and by University of California Press in the USA, with Carmen Miranda featured on the front covers of both editions (Figure 1).

And that is going to explain its impact. If *Bananas* had remained a small feminist press book in England, maybe it would have been read by a lot of British peace activists, a lot of

British feminist activists, but it probably would never have gotten adopted for university courses – because most faculty members do not usually adopt small feminist press books; they do not think they are ‘serious.’ This is a terrible bias held by many university professors still today. But once *Bananas* got published by University of California Press – which is so highly respected – then it began to make the circuit around faculty members. And then faculty members, most of whom I did not know, began thinking, ‘Oh, this is serious, this is a different kind of approach to International Politics.’

The other thing, I think, that widened the impact of *Bananas* was my choice of a subtitle: *making feminist sense of international politics*. Now, there are two things about this subtitle. One is that I put ‘feminist’ in it, not just ‘gender;’ the other is, I put ‘international politics’ not ‘international relations.’ The subtitle, in other words, suggested that this was not a book limited to a single disciplinary field, but was a book investigating a wide area of exploration. As a result, *Bananas* got adopted by professors in Anthropology, in Women Studies, in International Relations, in Global Studies – a whole range of people began to think internationally about making women’s lives visible. So there is a very particular history of why *Bananas* has had the impact it has had. A lot of the impact is due to faculty members who decided to adopt it for their quite diverse courses. There are now two editions of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*. For the most recent one, the 2014 edition, I re-investigated everything, completely rewrote and updated the text – but I insisted that Carmen stayed on the cover.

Figure 1: *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* Book Cover



Source: Enloe ([1990] 2014).

**Natália:** You said you chose ‘feminist sense’ rather than gender as your subtitle. Can you explain why you felt that was important?

**Cynthia:** Well, because I was becoming a feminist in the early 1980s, I began to see that feminist questions were much more likely to lead to discoveries and to answers that could serve positive social change. Tracking gender and the gendered international political economy of insecurity takes exploration and is really important. But a feminist believes that you are exploring something for a purpose. You are exploring so that you can reveal things that will activate people to challenge injustices. So, for me, a feminist investigation is not the opposite of a gender investigation; yet it is beyond gender. A consciously feminist investigator says: ‘I am doing a gender analysis so that I can, along with others, take actions to redress the wrongs that I uncover with my gender analysis.’

**Natália:** When I teach undergrad classes, I oftentimes use Jacqui True’s (2005) feminist typology, where she places you inside empirical feminism, all the while saying, ‘Well, Cynthia does not really fall into either of these categories.’ Now, listening to how you interpret feminism, I can really understand why she is reluctant to place you in just that one particular box.

**Cynthia:** Jacqui is a friend and terrific feminist explorer and, of course, lives in Australia, which really makes a big difference because she sees the world from Australia – which I like.

I think that the field of International Relations today suffers from its apparent constant need to categorize people, approaches and theories – but I just cannot do it. I think it is boring, it does not get me anywhere. What I want to do is actually explain why things happen the way they do, both fair things and most often unfair things. What I start with is, as you know, ‘where are the women?’ Starting from what is empirical leaves me open to surprise. I do not want to set the stage ahead of time, so that I only see certain things – because, then, I will never be surprised. I am not very fond of the ‘capital I, capital R’ ritual – that is a ritual.

**Natália:** That is why you resist sometimes framing your thought as theory?

**Cynthia:** Yes, yes, yes! If people want to use my analyses for theory-building, it is there to be used. But I think if I have to call myself anything, I am an *analyst*, and an analyst is an explorer. An analyst looks at things, tries to disassemble them in order to explain why they work the way they do; and then put it back together with a better sense of both causes and consequences of those particular interactions. To make sense of something is to explain it, but I do not start with the explanation and then impose it like a cookie cutter on a messy reality. I would rather start with the messy reality.

**Natália:** You said that, in the process of revising the 2014 edition of *Bananas*, you felt the need to change it significantly for the purposes of the new reality. Considering this new reality twenty-five years after publishing the first edition, and considering the different state of the discipline now and then, how do you think the intervention of this new edition is different from the first?

**Cynthia:** That is a really good question. Well, first of all, let's go back to why I wrote the first edition and now this new edition: publishing is an industry and within that industry you have feminist editors and feminist design people and feminist marketing people. Not a lot of them, but you have more and more of them because publishing today is filled with women. There are probably more women in positions of authority and expertise in the publishing industry than in most other industries. But they have to stay alive commercially. University presses all around the world have less and less money coming to them from their own universities than they did back in the 1980s. So we shouldn't assume that universities give a lot of money to their respective university presses, even if a particular press seems to us very prestigious. These days university presses have to operate more like profit-seeking commercial presses because they actually have to keep income flowing in. This is true for a major, highly respected press such as the University of California Press. Thus, even though I had published four or five other books with the University of California Press, it was *Bananas* that the press gained the most income from because it was assigned in so many university courses.

This reality is what shaped Naomi's and my conversation over lunch out in Berkeley a few years ago: 'I am being pushed from "upstairs" (that is, her superiors) to ask you to write a new edition of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.' 'Oh, Naomi,' I responded, 'I don't write new editions; I'm always on to the next thing.' She was sympathetic. We're good pals. 'Okay,' she said. 'But I told my senior people that I would ask. Couldn't you, just as a favour, take a look at the original *Bananas* and see if there's any way you could do some minor changes, a bit of tinkering, maybe a new preface so we could publish it as a new edition?' This is what supposedly new editions often are: a little tinkering and a new preface.

Now you have to think about how today's book industry works. If a publisher can re-launch an existing book that is selling pretty well as a 'new edition,' they can cut into the big used book market. Students cannot pay the full new book price, so they, understandably, look for the cheaper used editions. Well, this means that University of California Press gets no money from the sale of used books – the author does not either, by the way. So, by 2012, the first edition of *Bananas* had been out for long enough that anyone who wanted to read it could pick up as a used book. I really tried to see the puzzle from the publisher's point of view. So that day over lunch I said to Naomi: 'Okay, okay, you know, we're friends, and we've worked together so much, I'll take a look at *Bananas*.' I had not looked at it for a long time. 'I'll look at *Bananas* and see if I can do a little tinkering and make "upstairs" happy with minor revisions.'

I got home to Boston and I started re-reading the original *Bananas*. Of course, then two things happened: First of all, as I read each chapter, I began to wonder: 'Well, but what has been changing in the banana industry, in domestic work, in tourism, on military bases, in nationalist movements, in diplomatic wives' lives?' Because I knew from reading and continuing teaching about all these things – though I never use my own books when I teach – that, for instance, a lot of women working in Honduras on banana plantations had been doing a lot of new organizing. Knowing this, I realized, 'Well, I can't do a new edition

without finding out more about, thinking about banana worker women and what their organizing was like.' And then I re-read the domestic workers' chapter – which is one of my favourite chapters because I learned so much when I originally was writing it – and I thought: 'Well, I know that domestic workers now have an international domestic workers union, but how hard has that been to create?' You know, it is so hard to get organized locally – not to mention internationally; and Brazilian women are very active in this new international, transnational domestic worker organizing. So I thought: 'Well, of course, I have to think about that too.' So, I got back to Naomi and said: 'Okay, you've done it! You've engaged me. I'll write a new edition, but I've got to start from scratch. Scan me the entire original manuscript, and I will start to rewrite it from start to finish.'

And then the second thing happened: I realized that my own writing style had evolved over the years. I also was more aware that I was writing not just for American and British readers now, but for anyone in any country who was trying to craft a feminist analysis of the world. I knew I was writing for Brazilians, I knew I was writing for South Koreans, I knew I was writing for Japanese and Turkish readers. If you put the original edition page by page next to this new, updated edition, one of the things (I hope!) you will notice is that in this new edition I am trying to be even clearer than I originally was. I am trying not to take anything for granted. If you do not say exactly what you mean, then somebody reading this in Turkey and trying to make sense of the gender politics of Turkish tourism – well, they will miss a bit because I just will not have explained it clearly. So that is one of the big things that seem different in this new edition: sharper clarity. Another difference is that I've tried to make diverse women's organizing – transnational and local organizing – much more visible.

**Natália:** Did you do more fieldwork?

**Cynthia:** Yes. I got in touch with a lot of the organizers. I wanted to make clear not only what has changed (e.g., all the new forms of women's organizing), but also over the recent decades what has *not* changed. You can modernize anything, including sexism. Modernization is a form of social change. Mere social change, though, is not always in the direction of progress. The modernization of patriarchy is one of the main themes running through the new *Bananas*. How have the international garment brands – the big brand companies like Mango, Zara, and the Gap – updated themselves? How have Nike's executives updated their corporate strategies and operations to take account of this new women's organizing, the new consumer social justice consciousness? A lot of the 2014 edition of *Bananas* explores the updating of patriarchy.

I got so into it. You write an article or book or thesis, and you have to bring it to an end, even if you have so much more to say! So what you have to do is think about your *next* project. As soon as you think about your next project, you will be able to wrap up your current one because it won't have to be your final word.

That's how I finished updating the new edition of *Bananas* – so that I could write this new book called *The Big Push* (Enloe 2017). It exposes and challenges the persistence of patriarchy. As I was trying to bring the updating of *Bananas* to a close, I thought, 'No, no, I'm not

going to try and explore here everything that is sustaining patriarchy, I'm just going to raise some flags.' So I raised a few flags, yellow flags of warning about updated patriarchy, modernized patriarchy, but I did not go into my full exploration of it. I stopped the new edition so that the new edition could go to press. Once that manuscript was out of my hands, then I could plunge into the exploration that now has become this newest book, *The Big Push*.

**Natália:** And what do you think are the challenges that the discipline of International Relations still faces when confronted with gender and feminist sensibilities?

**Cynthia:** Well, remember there are a lot of people who came into International Relations – they are now oftentimes senior professors, editors of journals – who were trained by the earlier generation of non-gender conscious professors. They could be any age (Younger does not mean 'more feminist'! Older does not mean 'less feminist'!). And these professors and researchers do not see gender as adding any knowledge, any insight, any 'ah ha' to the study of international relations. And in some ways I sympathize. If you are working with a more senior supervisor who has never taken the opportunity to delve into the rich literature of Gender and IR, you really do have to be able to explain to them – in a clear and respectful manner – what it is you reveal by crafting a gender-explicit analysis, by taking feminist gender questions seriously. You have to take their scepticism or resistance as if it were not merely stubbornly patriarchal, but as if they are genuinely puzzled. I know that a mentor-student relationship is an unequal relationship, but one has to treat one's mentors humanely as well – that is, not just impatiently or arrogantly – and figure out in the best possible way how to show them what is worth exploring, something that they had never thought of.

**Natália:** Do you think younger generations will be more open to gender and feminist analysis?

**Cynthia:** Not necessarily. Do not ever think that the new generation will be enlightened simply because they are the up-and-coming generation. It is true that younger scholars at least may have heard of this new kind of feminist questioning. Still, they might have developed their own careerist, patriarchal stakes in ignoring those fresh questions. In other words, a person (man or woman) can perfectly well be both young *and* patriarchal. Just think of the gendered cultures pervasive in today's high-tech industry.

## **Feminism in the global South**

**Natália:** I will move on to our second general topic, which is feminism in the global South. Do you think there are any specific challenges that the global South more generally – or if you want to entertain some particular narrative of the global South – faces concerning feminist and gender issues? If so, what is the role of feminism in addressing these issues?

**Cynthia:** Well, three things come to mind. The first is that so much of the colonial project by Spain, Portugal, Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, France, China, the Ottoman Empire, and czarist Russia, relied on their positioning masculinities and femininities amongst the conquered people in a particular way that becomes very hard to grapple with,



without seeming to buy into or absorb or at least excusing that particular imperial project. For instance, colonizers sought to position colonized or conquered men as somehow more patriarchal. The conquerors argued that they were superior and thus worthy of exercising control over local men because those conquered men were supposedly less enlightened and therefore treated ‘their’ women and girls more unfairly than did men in the allegedly civilized Moscow, Istanbul, Lisbon or New York. By so doing, these colonizers have made it really hard for local feminists to question patriarchy in their own postcolonial societies. I have heard this from feminists who have challenged sexism and patriarchy in their own post-colonial societies or even inside their own local nationalist or anti-globalization movements. The common push-back these feminist activists hear from their own nationalist or anti-capitalist men is ‘You are just putting out the dirty laundry that the imperialist constantly focused on in the past in order to claim that we local men were uncivilized.’

I remember hearing this from Kumari Jayawardena (see [1986] 2016), who is one of the first generation of Sri Lankan feminists: ‘Every time we raised issues of problematic nationalism and tried to show that nationalism, as it then was being practiced, was not only anti-colonial, but it was also patriarchal, we were castigated by our alleged male allies, labelled neo-colonial ourselves. How dare we say that the local colonized culture was itself unjust, was itself racist, was itself neo-colonial in the way its defenders treated indigenous peoples, for instance? How dare we raise issues of domestic violence when we are facing the threats from British colonizers? And how dare we say that we have indigenous, local patriarchies that oppress women? “You feminists,” they claim, “are just giving credence to the external colonizers.”’

This is the challenge facing local feminists in so many societies of today’s global South. You have to do the research and you have to show it. And you do not have to be a researcher in a university: you could be a researcher in an NGO, in a legal aid organization or in an activist campaign – research goes on in a lot of places. You have to show how the colonizers (or neo-colonial bankers or industrial barons) are not the sole patriarchs. Shining a bright light on local forms of patriarchy does not mean that those colonial, neo-colonial or foreign capitalist actors were/are not oppressive: they were! They are! But they are not alone in the condescension toward and the mistreatment of local women. Nationalism and anti-globalization cannot be allowed to serve as a convenient camouflage for on-going patriarchy.

**Natália:** I believe Gayatri Spivak (1988) tries to show precisely that when she claims that subalternity is a position of non-speech, where voice is denied to so many individuals. What do you think?

**Cynthia:** Yes, exactly. Because people in countries of the global South face multiple oppressions, feminists in those countries have to speak with a crystal clear language, a language that can be broadly understood by men and women who think imperialism itself is the sole cause of all oppression. And it is not true. Imperialism is a major cause, but it is not the only cause of injustice. And when you are facing a neo-colonial or currently colonial power – we need to remember that a lot of people in the world are still colonized – it

feels like any argument that diminishes the overwhelming oppressiveness of that imperial or neo-colonial power is somehow traitorous to the nationalist cause. So, one of the things that I have tried to feature in all my writings is the work done by women in the global South, because they are the smartest about how to make visible – boldly visible – the unfairness of this internal patriarchy, without diluting the sources of unfairness, injustice and oppression that are external.

**Natália:** I always felt that your work explores very directly the absence of a capitalized 'Women' – a single, universal category of people that would suffer the same kinds of violence and therefore could benefit from the same kinds of resistance. Your work carefully shows how women live in different positions, experience different forms of violence, hierarchies, which many times means that the achievements of one group of women does not exactly translate into emancipation for all. How do you think these intersectionalities challenge the development of a more coherent and comprehensive feminist politics?

**Cynthia:** Feminists who are active today in transnational research and especially in transnational activism no longer talk about women monolithically. This is a cartoon that anti-feminists paint of transnational feminism in order to alienate local, marginalized women. One has to be very aware that transnational feminists active in peace activism, human rights advocacy, the promotion of political economy rights, labour rights activism, nowadays – none of them portray women as a monolith. So the first thing to do: call out those people who claim that transnational feminists aren't to be trusted because they treat women monolithically. That foolish cartoon is usually popularized by individuals seeking to discredit the very uncomfortable but important activist work of transnational feminists.

In my own journey – it is an always journey – I've found out that amongst the most revealing relationships to keep track of, to explore, to listen to, was the relationship between the woman who hires a domestic worker and the woman who works for that woman as a domestic worker, and to look at how each sees the other, how each relates to the other, how consciousness sometimes changes for one woman or even both, how sometimes activism can grow where at first it seemed starved for air.

The first book I read about that is called *Maids and Madams* by Jacqueline Cock (1989), who is a South African anti-apartheid feminist sociologist. She did her study under apartheid – around 1988, when no one thought apartheid would ever get dismantled, since it was still very powerful (Mandela was then still in prison). Cock is white and she interviewed initially mostly white women, most of whom hired black women to clean their homes. Those white women would express to Jackie their own racist ideas about the maids who worked for them. Because of her anti-apartheid activism, Jackie also was trusted by a lot of South African black women and they would talk to her about their experiences of working for white women in their homes. *Maids and Madams* provides a microcosm of power, racism, patriarchy and inequality among diverse women in very intimate feminized relationships. South Africa's black women working as domestic workers did start organizing. Jackie Cock's book soon started circulating in South Africa. She then endured bomb threats! Bomb threats for a sociological study.

That is, if you do gender analysis really well and you write clearly and you publish your intersectionally-informed feminist findings, it can be very risky. I think that was the first time I really tried to look at women in very intimate relationships with each other: that is, a woman working as a domestic worker and a woman who hires her to work in her private home. What is that relationship like? And that really makes you alert not only to inequalities, but to how these inequalities are lived.

**Natália:** Do you think these experiences of inequality which mark the global South very particularly require a different epistemological approach to gender or to gender analysis? Or do you think gender analysis is itself a transnational tool?

**Cynthia:** Well, we do not talk about globalization as if it were a single process. It has many strands, and people experience it differently. What I think is that there is a lot of similarity between the relationships between, say, ‘maids and madams’ in places like South Korea, Hong Kong, Brazil, Turkey, Jordan, and those fraught relationships inside homes in Los Angeles, Toronto, London or Paris – more similarities than a lot of people want to admit. I also think, though, one has to constantly ask: Does it matter politically whether you are working as a domestic worker in Paris or Mumbai, for example? If so, how exactly? You hear more about Brazilian women domestic workers who migrate to work outside of Brazil than you do about those Brazilian women who are internal migrants and work for more affluent Brazilian women inside their own country. But both are intensely political relationships.

Let me show you a picture I took on my iPhone yesterday. Feminists do research all the time, right? I was looking out the window on the sixteenth floor of my hotel in Ipanema. And across the street, on the balcony of another high-rise building, I saw a domestic worker (Figure 2).

**Natália:** A black domestic worker.

**Cynthia:** Yes. She was wearing a pink uniform vest. She was mopping the floor of her employer’s balcony. I took a picture of her because I thought, ‘I want to know everything about her. How long does she have to commute? Who takes care of her kids during the day? Is she able to be home in time when they come home from school? Are they all in school? How does her employer treat her? Decently, maybe not? How long has she worked? Does she only work for that one employer? Does she live in? – which then makes it really hard to raise her own kids. Or does she commute by bus? How long is the bus ride? Has anyone told her about ILO Convention 189 that establishes her domestic worker rights?’

I look at this picture of this woman and her pink uniform vest, mopping down her employer’s balcony floor of a fancy apartment building in Ipanema – and I want to know everything about her.

Figure 2: Domestic Worker on a Building in Ipanema



Source: Picture taken by Cynthia Enloe.

**Natália:** That is a feminist curiosity.

**Cynthia:** Yes! And the thing is: I do not know what I will learn. I have spent a lot of time trying to understand domestic workers' lives and domestic workers' organizing. And, still, what I know is that I do not know enough. But I've learned from domestic workers' advocates some of the questions I should be asking if I'm going to make sense of the local and international politics of domestic work. For instance, in the new *Bananas* one of the things that I discovered was that Brazilian and Filipina women were among the founders of this transnational organization of domestic workers – International Domestic Workers Union.

**Natália:** Because Brazil has a culture of domestic work, right?

**Cynthia:** Yes, and people have developed a culture of leaving Brazil to go to the US, right, to send money home? I do not know, though, what proportion of Brazil's total GNP comes

from remittances from women working outside of Brazil as domestic workers, but my guess is that it is pretty high. Women earning money abroad and sending remittances home makes their paid work – fair or exploited – part of international politics.

**Natália:** In fact, many young Brazilian women travel to do au pair work. Which means that, at a young age, they have a chance to go to a different country and get a different experience.

**Cynthia:** ... and to learn English or French. And the thing is that working as an au pair makes a woman sound so much more autonomous, because it sounds as though the worker is a working student, right? But at what point does an au pair become a domestic worker?

**Natália:** And why men do not do the same thing?

**Cynthia:** Over the last 15 years, Brazilian men in the Boston area where I live are mainly working as house painters. And oftentimes their partners are Brazilian women working as domestic workers. It is a very particular moment in global history. One of the things for me to keep doing is to continue listening to the complex stories of women in relationships not only to diverse men in their lives, but to other women. There is a big political divide among domestic workers between those women who live in with their employers – because a woman who has to work as a live-in domestic worker loses almost all of her autonomy, perhaps having only one day off a week. By contrast, women working as domestic workers who do not live-in, but have gotten several clients, are not as dependent on any one of them, which means they have a place of their own, and more sense of their own autonomy. Well, how do those two sets of women get along? Do they organize the same way? Do they have the same priorities? It may not be easy for them to create solidarity with each other. So intersectionalities can take some pretty surprising forms.

**Natália:** What I get from what you are saying is that the global South or the global North are not geographical categories; there are much more intricate power relations running transnationally?

**Cynthia:** Absolutely. One of the things that you study here in Brazil is the way the gendered class system works. You know, not everybody in Brazil is oppressed. A lot of Brazilians are themselves oppressors. Just ask any Indigenous woman or man living in the rain-forest who their oppressor is, and they are not necessarily going to say ‘the Portuguese.’ They are likely to say ‘the loggers.’ And loggers – or cattle ranchers – are not ungendered! And those gendered (usually masculinized) Brazilian loggers and cattle ranchers are part of international political and economic relations!

## **Feminism between the academy and the streets**

**Natália:** I feel we have arrived at the last part of our conversation today, in which I planned to ask you to provide us some reflection on the relationship between, on the one hand, the major advances in academic intellectual feminism and gender analysis and, on the

other, the struggles, the twists and turns that feminist activism still faces. Since there is no single, all-encompassing feminism, different women and different feminists do not always get along. In light of that, what do you think about these complex relationships between feminists in academia and grassroots activists?

**Cynthia:** I am a political scientist by training, and I came into feminism and women's studies academically when the second wave of women's activism informed 'Women's Studies,' 'Women and Gender Studies,' or 'Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies' (at every university they are called something else). I always worry that some political science or international relations department leaders imagine that it won't matter if their department does not hire women as fulltime faculty because the university's Women and Gender Programs will fill the gaps. Relying on that lazy assumption is an academic strategy for modernizing and thus sustaining patriarchy. The most radical word in 'Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies' is 'women,' because women should be both treated as professionals and treated as a serious academic topic in all disciplines.

As we discussed earlier, this does not mean that you think 'women' is a monolithic category; but it does mean that, as academics, we need to take women's diverse lives seriously. Getting our colleagues (and our senior administrators) to do that is one of the hardest things to achieve today in academia.

I was already a tenured political science professor when I became engaged with Women's Studies during the late 1970s, during the American Second Wave of feminist activism, an activism which shaped this new discipline. Each of us enters academic life at a particular point in our own country's gendered history, and that will affect how we engage with our teaching, our students, our colleagues, our superiors, our topics for research. Here in Brazil you all now in 2017 – and that is very exciting – you all that are developing the agenda on gender in IR, creating MulheRIs and trying to start a Caucus within the Brazilian International Relations Association: you are entering at a very particular point when there is something called Gender and IR. Today, for instance, thanks to so many feminist academics' efforts since the early 1990s, there exists in Gender and IR a recognized publishing field, a teaching field, a research field. But that means you have to be on your guard because you are creating a new academic field here in Brazil at the time when it already looks – deceptively! – like an 'established' academic field internationally. That will be risky, first because the field is not so 'established;' its very legitimacy is being questioned constantly by journal editors, department chairs and even Ministers of Education. Second, you are doing this innovative work inside universities and academic associations at a time when there are pressures on you to narrowly define 'academic,' to repeatedly separate yourselves and your teaching and your research from local and international women's movements.

Yet, from its start, Women's and Gender Studies – and thus the field of Gender in IR too – has drawn questions and concepts from politically engaged feminist advocates, at the same time as it has enriched women's movements around the world with its research and analyses. Women's and Gender Studies – and Gender in IR – is a serious intellectual field that exposes and explains gendered inequalities at every level of socio-economic-political

life in order to challenge myriad forms of injustice. This does not make the field ‘biased.’ It makes the field – and those of you developing this field – clear-eyed, rigorous, energetic and accountable. *All four.*

Sometimes I make a list, I put it on a black board and I get students to add to the list. The list is of all the concepts that have come from feminist activists, concepts that we now use (in English) as if it were an established, unquestioned intellectual concept. So for instance, ‘domestic violence.’ No academic created that concept. That concept came straight out of the work done by British feminist activists in the 1960s who were alarmed at male partners’ violence against their women partners. So ‘domestic violence,’ which we now think is just a kind of unquestioned sociological concept, was initially not academic, but an activist concept to make certain social patterns visible that otherwise would remain invisible or imagined to be not patterns, but merely random behaviours.

Or think about an even newer concept, ‘sexual harassment.’ Now we talk about it as if it were an established legal and socio-political concept to make visible a very particular form of gendered violation of employees’ rights in the workplace. To not be curious about who coined the concept and when and under what circumstances and with what consequences is to erase the crucial intellectual history of ‘sexual harassment.’ Every concept, though, has a history.

Or take the concept of the ‘double day.’ It too was developed to make what had been invisible (and thus not worthy of examination or critique) visible. The ‘double day’ is a concept to capture the entrenched pattern of women who have paid work yet also expected to do the majority of unpaid reproductive (household) work, a taken-for-granted pattern that has made so many women’s workdays longer and more exhausting, even than those of disadvantaged men of the same economic class. I first heard ‘double day’ in English, in a translation of a Peruvian feminist’s writings questioning, ‘why are women’s lives so difficult in Lima?’ She explained that Peruvian women not only have to do paid work, oftentimes as domestic workers and street vendors; on top of that, they had to come home in the evenings and provide childcare, do most of the cooking, go to bed late after housework, get up at 5:00 the next morning to make early breakfasts, get the kids off to school, make their partners’ lunch and go on their long bus routes to their daily paid jobs. She called this the ‘double day.’ So, to me, ‘double day,’ which is so important to our thinking now – about the World Bank, about economic development and foreign aid, about the IMF, about economic inequalities – is not merely an academic concept; it derives from feminist activists trying to make sense of complex realities in order to effectively reform or dismantle them.

**Natália:** In fact, a paradox within feminism seems to be precisely that the more we advance in our feminist agenda, the more hours women are putting on working than before. It is never a winning game.

**Cynthia:** Yes. Well, it is not a winning game in so far as, once you become visible in your university as a friendly feminist faculty member, more and more students want your ad-

vice. And that is a good thing. I mean, that is what we are there for. But it also compels us to ask: 'How come those students don't think other faculty members are supportive?' This is patriarchy at work. Patriarchal people say to each other: 'Well, we resisted feminists as our colleagues for years, but now we'll hire one. Oh, but thank goodness all the women students (and some of the smart male students too) will make her their advisor.' So they, the persistently patriarchal faculty members, can continue to have reasonable, maybe even low, numbers of student advisees. This is not the attitude of all male professors, of course, but it is the self-serving attitude, alas, of too many of them today.

I also know that not every feminist faculty member is a wonderful student adviser – let's not imagine ourselves to be angels, right?

**Natália:** I will come to our last question now. One of the big challenges that feminist politics these days has been facing is a certain critique from a more traditional left – by which I mean people who are more concerned with class politics than with what has been called 'identity politics.' And I see a growing number of criticisms, both academically and more generally, of movements which privilege a more identitarian agenda, as for instance, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity. What do you think about these kinds of critique of identity politics?

**Cynthia:** Well, first of all class is also an identity. I mean, how do you mobilize people on class terms? You encourage them not to see themselves as either Catholic or Evangelical, for instance, but as 'working class.' The class galvaniser's message is: 'We may go to different churches or we do not go to any church, but we share an identity bond based on the sort of work we do, the relations we have to production, and the rung of the economic ladder on which we reside.'

So, class, when it becomes a basis for mobilizing otherwise diverse women and men, is also fostering an identity politics. But here's the other thing: identity is not the opposite of material reality. A lot of us get our identity as women, for instance, from our shared denial of access to birth control, coupled with our shared lack of access to medically safe abortions. Well, that is very material. That is not merely cultural. We have identities based in large part on our own political economies. I really do not think it is very useful – either analytically or politically – to create a hierarchy of political significance claiming that class identity should rank higher and gender lower because one is allegedly material and the other is supposedly cultural. Furthermore, cultural and material realities are in a constant interaction with each other *and* economic class never operates in a socio-political vacuum. One cannot, I am convinced, make reliable sense of economic class relations without being explicitly curious about the local, national and international workings of gendered, ethnicized, sexualized, and racialized relationships.

Think back again to our conversation about Jackie Cock's study, *Maids and Madams* (1989) or about women as banana plantation workers and women as garment workers. Class analysis in grand isolation from feminist analysis won't get us very far in explaining anything.



And we need to do our feminist gender analyses up and down the economic class ladder. For instance, given how globalized the high tech industry is, we need to take analytically seriously the experiences of women who are sexually harassed as middle-class professionals technology workers, engineers and executives. How much does the international high tech industry depend on the persistence of a masculinized licence given to male workers in their relationships to women in their workplaces? If you are tracking the international political economy of patriarchy you cannot assume: 'Once a woman reaches a certain class status, don't worry (and don't be curious), she will never be oppressed, never be harassed, never be treated unfairly, never be silenced, never be abused, never be beaten'. Making that naïve assumption will deprive you or me of the ability to make reliable sense of international political economies.

**Natália:** This has been brilliant. I thank you so much for this opportunity. I have learned so much and I bet our readers will too.

**Cynthia:** Natália, this has been so much fun. Thank you.

## Notes

1. The IPS Winter School is an initiative of scholars engaged with IPS since 2015, and is organized by the International Relations Institute at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (IRI/PUC-Rio). For more information, see <https://ipswinterschool.com/?s=winter>.
2. For a video of the conference, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_kj2NBV2CE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_kj2NBV2CE).
3. MulheRIs is a recent initiative by a group of young female scholars in Brazil which has been trying to bring awareness to the issues of gender inequality and representativeness in the international relations field in Brazil. Since 2016, the group has been advancing an agenda on gender issues within the Brazilian International Relations Association (ABRI, in Portuguese), mobilizing national and international audiences in the search for greater recognition and institutionalization. The initiative has sparked productive results so far, including this partnership with IRI/PUC-Rio in 2017, during Cynthia Enloe's visit to Brazil. For more information, see <https://www.facebook.com/grupomulheRIs/>.

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