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# Book Review

## Feminist Curiosity Unravels Militarism: *Why Method Matters*

**MANEUVERS: THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF MILITARIZING WOMEN'S LIVES** by Cynthia Enloe. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 437 pp. \$45.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

Reviewed by Julie Mertus†

Feminist curiosity. Those are the last two words of Cynthia Enloe's latest tour de force, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. The book is both a call for and an embodiment of feminist curiosity.

Enloe has long been a pioneer on the subject of militarism and gender, having written two of the leading books in the field, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*<sup>1</sup> and *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarisation of Women's Lives*.<sup>2</sup> Her singular contribution, however, reaches far beyond the important subject matter. She suggests a technique that helps our visual acuity as academics, students, journalists, politicians and policy-makers.<sup>3</sup> Never overlooking the obvious and the obscure, she uses wide-ranging interviews and multi-disciplinary secondary research to probe her subject matter, revealing gendered intersections at every turn. Yet she does not stop with this deep description. Enloe is concerned with power, and she continually asks the kind of questions that interrogate power imbalances with emancipatory goals in mind. She is also concerned with women's agency and diversity, and thus her narratives place women as subjects at their center, high-

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1. CYNTHIA ENLOE, *BANANAS, BEACHES AND BASES: MAKING FEMINIST SENSE OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS* (1990).
2. CYNTHIA ENLOE, *DOES KHAKI BECOME YOU?: THE MILITARISATION OF WOMEN'S LIVES* (1983).
3. At the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, February 14-17, 2000, Christine Sylvester used the term "visual acuity" to describe the contribution of Enloe.

lighting women's resistance and embracing the disparateness of women's experiences. This anti-essentialist approach solidly grounds Enloe's work and enhances its value for all who are interested in supporting trans-boundary alliances among women who have suffered militarization.

In typical Enloe fashion, *Maneuvers* deliberately pushes to the back of the book the topics we expect to see in a book on militarism and gender—women soldiers, women nurses, rape and sexual violence in war—and instead, in extremely readable fashion, starts writing about something so obvious that we have overlooked it. She begins with a can of soup. Really. Heinz tomato and noodle soup. (p. 1) Instead of the usual alphabet letters, the pasta was cut into the shape of Star Wars satellites. What were the soup manufacturers thinking? Why would militarized soup appeal to the women consumers who would choose it from all the other options? To the children who would be asked to eat it? Enloe uses this can of soup to introduce three basic lessons of her work.

First, militarization is everywhere. Militarization is not simply about joining the army. "Militarization . . . affects not just the executive and factory workers who make fighter planes, land mines, and intercontinental missiles but also the employees of food companies, toy companies, clothing companies, film studios, stock brokerages, and advertising agencies. Any company's employees are militarized insofar as they take . . . their customers' fascination with militarized products as natural, as unproblematic." (p. 2) Second, militarism is powerful and far reaching. It "can transform the meanings and uses of people, things, and ideas located far from bombs or camouflaged fatigues." (p. 289) Third, militarization is deliberate. "Latex condoms designed to look like army camouflage, films that equate action with war, fashions that celebrate brass buttons and epaulettes—each has been consciously designed by someone." (p. 2)

To further illustrate the pervasiveness of militarization and that it "does not occur simply in the obvious places" Enloe offers a list of things "routinely prone to militarization":

- nationalism
- masculinity
- racism
- motherhood
- heroism
- women's suffrage movements
- prostitution
- government budgets
- women's desire for good industrial jobs
- secrecy
- venereal disease

(p. 290)

All of these things have become militarized. (p. 290) “[T]he full range of things that can be militarized has been uncovered only recently, and we barely comprehend their militarizations today,” Enloe says, adding to the list:

laundry  
 umbrellas  
 girdles  
 domestic violence prevention  
 feminine respectability  
 mascara  
 democracy  
 scientific research  
 marriage  
 fashion  
 security  
 first-class citizenship  
 town pride  
 homophobia  
 anti-homophobia (p. 290)

Everyone who reads *Maneuvers* will come away with an understanding of how all of these things can be militarized. Enloe fosters such a deep understanding of militarization through the technique of suggesting active and personal engagement. She does not begin with her definition of militarization, but instead works toward it, unfolding a series of interesting and provocative examples that encourage readers to think about their own lives. By the time the readers reach the conclusion, they are nodding, Yes, yes, this is so true. I know it from my own lived experiences.

Militarization, as Enloe conceptualizes it, “is the step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria.” (p. 291) A marriage becomes militarized when a woman married to a husband-soldier or veteran-soldier is encouraged to be the support structure and even the cheerleader for military readiness. To take other examples addressed in *Maneuvers*, child-bearing can be militarized to the extent states envision wombs as breeding grounds and recruiting stations for soldiers (p. 248); prostitution is militarized when sex work becomes a form of survival for women in combat zones and militaries view hired sex as an essential component of soldiers’ recreation and preparation for battle. (p. 74)

Militarization is a complex and ever changing process that can be done and undone, molded and unmolded. And women themselves play an active role in this process. Women in Sudan devise their own ways for preventing conception and inducing abortion (p. 248); women at the

Greenham Common Peace Camp in Britain and Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina challenge their state's concept of mother to further militaristic ends (p. 260); Okinawan women fashion their own style of feminist activism to challenge the presence of U.S. military bases (p. 122); and U.S. women married to soldiers develop their own career aspirations and become independent of the military. (p. 179) All of these acts subvert and change in some way the process of militarization.

"One of the reasons that militarization is often so hard to monitor," Enloe observes, "is that it is caused by a combination of decisions of commission and omission." (p. 293) Another reason why militarism is difficult to study is that even as it is deliberate, the decision makers themselves are "not just machines of logic." (p. 289) Afflicted with "confusion and ambivalence," decision makers do not always reach their desired results. (p. 289) At times, *Maneuvers* abundantly demonstrates, the results are downright comical. (For example, men in the U.S. Army or Marine Corps cannot hold umbrellas, but they can walk under the umbrella of a woman soldier. (p. 262))

The difficulty rests not only in identifying instances of militarization, but in understanding "why and how and with what consequences these things become militarized." (p. 289) *Maneuvers* wisely does not attempt to answer all of the complex questions, but instead situates them within diverse strategies and tactics for engagement with militarism.

At the outset Enloe asks, why is militarization possible? The process is complex, but women and notions of femininity are at the center of the process, and the process is a political one in which power struggles take place. "Most conventional commentators discussing the causes of war treat femininity and women as sideshows." (p. 293) No, Enloe shows us, they are essential to the main event. Leaders both of governments and political movements deliberately calculate how to maneuver women and notions of femininity so that they support their militarized political agenda. "Militarizers may want men to make up the majority of soldiers, they may trust only men to craft the doctrines of war waging, they may believe that male party operatives hold the key to ensuring legislative support for military expenditures. Nonetheless . . . these factors do not add up to militarizers not caring about women. They do." (p. 294) Each step of militarization is written on a gendered social and political landscape.

Enloe continues to answer the "why" question by unpacking a related inquiry, how does militarization happen? Enloe's feminist curiosity pushes her to ask, "What maneuverings does it take to position certain women in any society to support their governments in certain ways when those governments rank public priorities so that they bestow superior value on the military as an institution and on soldiering as a public activity?" (p. 294) The key is control. "[M]ilitarizers seem to believe that if

women cannot be controlled effectively, men's participation in the militarizing enterprise cannot be guaranteed." (p. 294) Political leaders thus spend a great deal of time and resources constructing ways, both overt and subtle, to control women and constructions of femininity.

Gendered militarization maneuvers take many forms. Women are drawn in to "smooth" and enable the process of militarization. (p. 293) A properly socialized military wife "can help win civilian support and sympathy for the military by making it seem like a less brutal or insulated institution" and "give male soldiers emotional support and incentives to 'act like men' in battle." (p. 157) Yoking first-class citizenship to military service and restricting the entry of women into the service becomes a way to recruit men and to draw in the few women who are needed to keep the wheels of the military moving. (p. 247) Women as military nurses, for example, add a degree of efficiency and humanness to the suffering of soldiers. (p. 201)

Women's bodies are part of the global battleground. Women rape victims become an essential component of wartime strategies for conquering the enemy and for maintaining national security at home. (Chapter 4) The many different forms of militarized rape share common features:

First, the male militarized rapist in some way imposes his understanding of 'enemy,' 'soldiering,' 'victory,' and 'defeat' on both the woman to be raped and on the act of sexual assault. Second, consequently, the militarized rape is harder to privatize than nonmilitarized rape is, since it draws so much of its rationale from an imagining of societal conflict and/or the functions of a formal institution such as the state's national security or defense apparatus . . . . Third, the woman who has endured militarized rape must devise her responses . . . not only by weighing her relationships to the rapist and to her personal friends and relatives, to the prevailing norms of feminine respectability . . . but, in addition she must weigh her relationships to collective memory, collective notions of national destiny, and the very institutions of organized violence. (pp. 110-111)

Domestic violence also becomes militarized when soldiers take out their frustration at home. "Something inherent in the process of militarizing a man's sense of his own masculinity makes him not only more capable of shooting at an enemy, but less able to resist resorting to violence when tensions escalate inside his own home." (p. 190)

These gendered maneuvers have fundamentally patriarchal consequences, but different women experience the impact differently. "Women militarized as nurses, for example, are usually from quite different economic, cultural, and even national backgrounds than those militarized as prostitutes, and they develop a stake in being clearly distinguished from those militarized women commonly deemed less respectable." (p. 295) For some women, militarization works to improve their lives. This makes

sense, Enloe suggests. "If militarization were oppressive for all women in all situations, militarization would not be so potent a political process." (pp. 297-298) Militarization is possible not only because it works for governments, but because it works for many individual men and women. Women of color in particular, Enloe found through her research, are likely to see military base living and military careers as good professional opportunities. "[W]hen the military has moved—if, belatedly—ahead of many American institutions (e.g., schools, the press, banking) in dismantling racist structures, these women may find military living less marred by daily encounters with racism than is civilian living." (p. 184) This comparative experience increases their willingness to be soldiers and military wives. (p. 184)

Women's varied lived experiences inform Enloe's last line of inquiry: what is to be done? *Maneuvers* suggests that the strategies and tactics chosen depend on one's own standpoint in relation to militarization and one's theory about patriarchy. Enloe sees two main camps. In the first camp, women who see themselves as benefiting from militarization want to continue but improve the process. "Those women—as weapons factory workers, as military nurses, as girls in school cadet corps, as those girls' proud mothers, as political lobbyists pressing militaries to take seriously sexual harassment in the militaries, as women married to men being promoted up the military ranks, as former insurgent guerrillas wanting their share of places in the new army—may see more, not less, militarization as the solution to their problems." (p. 298) These women see patriarchy not as a product of militarization, but as a barrier to women and girls' full militarization. They view militarism as enhancing women's security and agency. They want to make militarism better for women by exposing sexism and sexual harassment within the military, lobbying political leaders for full integration of women in the armed forces, urging the inclusion and non-discriminatory treatment of gay and lesbian servicemembers, and demanding equitable benefits for former wives of military servicemen.

The other camp is composed of women who see themselves as being harmed by militarization and who want to dismantle militarism. These women—targets of sexualized forms of torture, wartime rape, and sexual violence in the name of national security; women battered by their male soldier-partners; women impoverished by wartime economies and humiliated by military-base attitudes whereby male soldiers feel entitled to use them as (low-paid or un-paid) sex servants; mothers who want to protect their children from military service and war—see less militarization as an essential component of any solution to their problems. These women emphasize the ways in which militarization entrenches and expands patriarchy. They view demilitarization as enhancing women's security and agency. Thus, they protest against the very existence of military bases,

press for nonviolent solutions to conflict, and argue for the diversion of military resources to economic and social problems.

Anyone who has met, read, or heard Enloe knows where she weighs in. But choosing sides is not what *Maneuvers* is all about. *Maneuvers* treats women who fall into both camps with respect and tries to understand them on their own terms. Accordingly, neither camp is deemed automatically marred by false consciousness or by an inability to exercise agency. Each is a site of resistance: "Each group of women was taking political risks by being so forthright in criticizing masculinized behavior. Women in each group defined themselves as feminists. Each group was taking on the state." (p. 298) Nonetheless, the women's different life experiences informed the seemingly unconnected theories and strategies that took them down parallel and seemingly disconnected political roads.

*Maneuvers* is replete with examples of women's differences and of the difficulty and importance of building alliances. One illustration is of:

Those women made into refugees by militaristic armed forces and those women with a secure roof over their heads in part because they are married to the men soldiering in the armed forces appear to have little in common. And yet militarizers need both of those groups to be sexually available as women, whether to male refugee camp guards or to male soldiers home on leave. These two sets of women may never have the chance to sit down and exchange impressions and, even if they were in the same room together, they might even refuse to speak with one another. (pp. 296-297)

If the women did find a way to hear one another, Enloe suggests, they would probably discover that they could build a theory of militarized sexuality.

The lesson to be drawn from this example is not that women are ultimately the same and they should all get along. On the contrary, Enloe is very clear: "To avoid seeing all women as natural allies simply because they are women . . . is crucial for building reliable causal analyses and for crafting effective strategies." (p. 297) Nonetheless, there is often common ground for alliance building. The political category of "women" and notions of "femininity" are used continually in militarization, and help explain the causes and consequences of militarization.

Accordingly, space for alliance building exists. All women live in a world where gendered militarization "virtually always privileges masculinity," even when some women gain benefits from being included." (p. 299) The process of militarization counts on women not seeing that dynamic. Women who do see that dynamic have a responsibility, Enloe urges, to do something with their knowledge and to keep probing the intersections between militarization and patriarchy. "It would amount to an intellectual loss to step away from understanding militarizing decision makers' complete panoply of gendered maneuvers simply because some of the women



thus militarized may shrink from forming political alliances with some of the other women militarized.” (p. 299)

*Maneuvers* thus concludes with a call for a certain kind of political action, one drawing from cross-boundary alliances but, more important for Enloe, one continually interrogating itself about the risk of producing consequences that might reinvigorate patriarchy. All women who organize to address militarization confront the following five puzzles:

First: How can feminists lobbying against sexist practices inside militarized institutions (armed forces, defense factories, national security agencies, foreign affairs legislative committees, the UN’s peacekeeping forces) reach their objectives

*without*

assigning to those institutions a superior worth in the political culture?

Second: How can feminists who draw upon maternal consciousness to politically activate women (who usually feel as though they have no place to voice their opinions in public affairs) do so

*without*

reducing women to mothers and

*without*

making motherhood the sole legitimate space in which women can take political action?

Third: How can feminists make visible the uses of rape in warfare and mobilize support for women raped by soldiers

*without*

allowing women who have endured rape to be turned into symbols of “national humiliation” or allowing news of rapes to inflame masculinized revenge?

Fourth: How can feminists peel back a military’s protective covering to show the institution’s cultural reliance on sexism and homophobia

*without*

permitting women’s entrance into and promotion within that military to be interpreted as steps toward women’s “first class citizenship”?

Fifth: How can feminists ensure that more women with feminist consciousness are appointed to policy posts within the state and international agencies

*without*

the sacrifice of a gender-smart critical approach to militarization becoming the price of admission? (pp. 299-300)

The tight framing of these puzzles, so well articulated by Enloe, are a perfect ending to *Maneuvers*. Characteristic of her earlier work, Enloe ends not with resolution, but with complication. She wants cross-border feminist alliances to continue to challenge militarism, but she knows it will not be easy. I would suggest that she add to her superb list of concluding questions one additional line of inquiry, an interrogation of the very cross-boundary feminist alliances Enloe espouses. Defining "boundary" broadly, I would suggest considering linkages between women in the same country, such as those between women soldiers and anti-sexism activists, as well as alliances between women in different countries, such as those between war affected populations and human rights activists. These kinds of interactions are usually conceptualized as being uni-directional, with one "side" being the benefactor and the other being the beneficiary. I would suggest that future researchers challenge this assumption by asking for each linkage four sets of questions: 1) Who really benefits? Just one "side" of the alliance, both "sides," some other actor or institution? 2) How is the alliance possible? Must either "side" give up, modify or discount their view of militarization and patriarchy? 3) How do these alliances influence the identity and behavior of local and international institutions, individual actors and norms? 4) How do they affect patterns and opportunities for transformative social change?

There has been a proliferation of local and international conferences on women and war, women and conflict, women and the military. Many of these conferences are organized by women from a "here" (read: politically powerful and affluent country, i.e., the United States) to help women from a "there" (read: less affluent and less powerful, i.e., women from conflict zones). The largest and most well publicized of these meetings are sponsored by the interests of powerful governmental and non-governmental donors. Little critical work exists on these meetings because often the women who are most knowledgeable are also those on the payroll of the powerful agencies sponsoring the meetings.<sup>4</sup> While these women may be critical, they cannot bite the hand that feeds them. How marvelous would it be if Enloe were to include in her next project an analysis of these meetings and of cross-border alliances generally. I am

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4. Simona Sharoni made this point at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, February 14-17, 2000.

sure that she would unravel gendered intersections, pointing both to the obvious and the obscure. I am sure she would interrogate power imbalances and recognize the diversity of women's experiences. I am sure that she would complicate the picture and leave us with more questions.

No matter what path Enloe's next project takes, it will be driven by feminist curiosity.