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From: Cynthia Enloe

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**Re: Responses to Questions posed to Cynthia Enloe from the Zoom Chat Room, during the WGS lecture “Racial Justice, Policing, Masculinity and Militarization,” October 8, 2020**

First, I want to say how much I enjoyed reading every comment made during the Women’s and Gender Studies event on October 8th. Each comment and every question sent to the Chat Room made me happy to be a Clarkie among Clarkies.

In addition to the questions we were able to discuss on-line, there’s space here, alas, to reply to only three more questions. It’s been tough to choose.

But, hopefully, these will touch on puzzles raised by many participants.

1. Solange, Clark Women’s Studies PhD alum who works on security sector reform in developing countries, asked:

*“What are the links that we can make between policing and Covid-19?”*

Women’s advocates and other human rights defenders in many countries have raised warnings about abuses of police powers during this present pandemic. Autocratic civilian officials in Poland and Belarus, each of whom now are facing outpourings of civil protest against their repressive actions, have issued police-enforced bans on public assembling, allegedly in the name of protecting public health – even though in prior weeks, these same autocratic politicians willfully neglected the public’s wellbeing. Similarly, human rights and women’s activists in India have reported that India’s current Hindu-nationalist ruling party has wielded disproportionate police violence against non-Hindus for pandemic curfew violations.

Each of these actions has subverted popular trust not just in the police, but also in civil authority, at the very moment when collective trust is crucial to protecting public health. It’s imperative, I think, for government officials everywhere to recruit gender-equitable and racially diverse police forces and to train them in non-violent de-escalation skills, while holding them accountable in all ways that build the broadest possible public trust long *before* any crisis occurs. Only in this way, when a crisis does emerge, can police be deployed in a fashion that inspires trust and promotes promoting collective care. Wielding police power in ways that turn police into instruments of either regime or communal self-interest, on the contrary, insures that policing will exacerbate, not alleviate, the crisis.

2. Colleen, a current Clark WGS major, asked:

*“Is there a relationship between* *a militarized police mindset, on the one hand, and, on the other, rates of sexual assaults by male police officers either on people in custody or on their own domestic partners?*

Serious researchers have revealed, first, that any person or any institution that becomes militarized – for instance, someone who starts to take pride in being a national security expert, somebody who joins a state military, a person who joins an illegal armed militia, someone who becomes assertively patriotic, a person who pursues a career in weapons development, someone who aspires to be a member of a police force’s SWAT team – also becomes more intolerant of a lack of control and more likely to see violence as a justified means to re-assert control. Here’s a second thread that runs though any militarized person’s outlook: an assumption that the world is divided between “us” and “them,” with the “them” imagined to be somehow less human (less “civilized”) than those counted among the so-called “us.” Now twist in a third militarizing strand together with these first two: the belief that only “manly” men are “rational” and that only “rational manly men” can assert control in a way that allows them to act as the “protectors” of everyone else.

Then add to these three militarizing twisted strands the equipment that enables and justifies the perpetration of physical violence – a badge and uniform of authority, bars on a cell, weak civil oversight, plus batons, guns, tear gas or battering rams. Voila! You have the makings of likely physical abuse. If the target of that abuse is a girl, a woman or a supposedly unmanly man, that militarized, masculinized physical abuse is likely to be sexualized.

Men who work as police officers certainly are *not* the only men who can become frustrated when their female domestic partners step outside of their masculinized circle of presumed control. Likewise, *not* all men who don a police uniform use physical violence to assert control over people in their custody. Instead, what we’ve learned from feminist researchers around the world is that we need to be on the alert for the development of, and the intertwining of, all three militarizing strands in any policing organization. They are not inevitable. They develop and twist into a tight knot only when we fail to pay attention and do not call out their misogynist, racist and anti-democratic implications.

Colleen, your good question prompts us to listen to women and men who’ve been abused while in police custody *at the same time* as we listen carefully to women who’ve endured domestic violence while living with a police officer. That is, we need to listen to both sets of survivors if we are going to successfully re-make policing into a peace-enhancing, justice-promoting democratic civic service.

3. Adam, a Clark student currently taking Professor Scoggins’ research methods course, asked:

*“Are their issues of transparency and identity one has to weigh when studying any aspect of U.S. policing?”*

It’s great to be thinking about how best – most productively, most carefully, most fairly – to conduct research on any police department, police officers and policing as an arm of any government. The only way we together can hold police accountable to the citizens they serve and sustain a democratic society is to keep honing our investigatory skills. Two aspects of many police forces make this sort of effective investigation of police particularly difficult. The first is that in many of our countries, police institutions (local, regional, national) – like the military and national security arms of a government – are wrapped in secrecy and confidentiality. These legal wrappings make the police harder to extract vital information from than say, departments of education, environment, transportation, or public health.

The second barrier to effective investigation of police is more cultural: people inside police agencies often create bonds of “brotherhood” (even women or racial minority men, usually minorities of all police personnel, can be individually pressured to think and act like a “brother” in order to fit in). The most potent bond holding that fictional brotherhood together is loyalty – loyalty to each other. The measure of one’s loyalty – and thus one’s acceptance as a brother – is silence, not speaking out when another officer has violated rules or laws. This misplaced bonding creates the wall of silence that so often confronts outside independent investigators.

In order to do meaningful research on police (or military or national security) institutions, investigators somehow have to build enough trust that the members of the police will speak candidly with them. That may seem to require that the investigator also bonds around masculinized activities, activities the researcher otherwise might even find offensive. For a woman researching a highly masculinized profession – policing, soldiering, construction, fire fighting, mining, deep ocean fishing, national security strategizing – the challenge is even more acute. I have colleagues in many countries who have conducted research on such inward-bonding masculinized organizations. They all talk about how tempting it can be – in the name of deep research – to ingratiate themselves by staying quiet about the anti-democratic, misogynist or racist expressions and practices they witness.

Nevertheless, it is often precisely those people who have no personal stake in the perpetuation or the valorization of the current policing institution’s internal culture who can most clearly map the distinctive characteristics of that culture. As outsiders, they still face their own challenge: they must not conduct their research into the police – or the military, or the intelligence agency – from atop a condescending, holier-than-thou intellectual pedestal. If they do, they are certain to miss the humanity, the complexities and the ambivalences that also shape the institution and the people living their lives inside it.

Talking openly and honestly about these challenges and the dilemmas they pose for all sorts of investigators – academics, civilian oversight officials, professional journalists – is exactly what it takes to generate trustworthy, valuable research.