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The Palindrome as a Disruptive Force:  
An Analysis of Feminist Literature in International Relations (IR)  
Rooted in the Work of Cynthia Enloe

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**Abstract**

Feminists have long been championing the idea that ‘the personal is political’ and that politics occur even in the areas of life which seem to be most apolitical. Popularized in the field of International Relations (IR) by Cynthia Enloe in her 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, this palindrome has come to be used by feminist scholars throughout IR and feminist security studies (FSS). Enloe also introduced the idea that ‘the personal is international’, which is the second palindromic phrase that is explored in this essay. Able to be read both left-to-right and in an inverted manner, the palindrome is disruptive and creates an instability in language and thought, much as feminists aim to do. This essay examines six single-authored monographs which use palindromes in their analysis as a means to unsettle normative political concepts by highlighting connections between the everyday lived experiences of women and the political world, of which women are often portrayed as being outsiders. This thesis will argue that Cynthia Enloe's introduction of the palindromic phrase "the personal is international" in her 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* brings to light the role that individual authors can play in setting the course of academic research in a discipline.

## **Acknowledgements**

The reason I chose to pursue this goal for my research is because I saw the surface level value in reconsidering what I had learned about IR and security up until this point and wanted to dive deeper into the implications of looking at security through the perspective of feminist theory. In a similar vein, I found the break from the strict definitions of political science and IR terms upheld by traditional academia to be refreshing. Additionally, this is shown to not only be possible, but required when one looks at issues through a critical lens.

I would first like to extend the greatest amount of appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Marc Doucet for the extensive amount of guidance and patience which he granted me. It was through his security studies course that I was introduced to the field of Feminist Security Studies (FSS), and it was him who introduced me to the works of Cynthia Enloe, Laura Sjoberg and so many others who I discuss in this essay.

This work also would not have been possible without my little support system of people who sat with me for hours, bouncing ideas around, writing together and correcting the terrible spelling and grammar throughout my drafts. Thank you, Quinn, Pyper, Naza and Devin for keeping me motivated through this process.

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## Introduction

International relations (IR) is a field in which the theories of liberalism, realism and constructivism frequently reign (Weber, 2013). Liberal theories are known to champion among others the ideas of individualism, the rule of law, and market integration; realist scholars focus on an international system which is anarchical in nature and in which the pursuit of power and security by states is considered immutable; while constructivists urge that state identities and interests are constructed relationally by means of iterative practices (Weber, 2013). Those that adopt these theories often look at concepts such as the state, war, and security, as if they are untouched by issues of gender. While these concepts are generally considered to be what make up the field's main areas of analysis and are thus necessary to the understanding of inter-state relations, it is the dominant, commonly accepted patriarchal perspective that can underpin these theories which creates a "[...]problematic sense of homogeneity of all states and markets." (Agathangelou & Turcotte, 2010, p.3). These patriarchal perspectives are often upheld even by women as a result of the hegemonic power of the male dominated political world.

Feminist IR and its subfield of feminist security studies (FSS) aim to problematize both the lack of gender-based analysis in these and other areas of IR as well as the exclusion of women from the academic field, initially posing the question "where are the women?" (Enloe, 1989, 1). Drawing from work that emerged in 1970s, feminist IR scholars deepened their analysis by highlighting the ways in which gender affects both the stereotypically female private sphere of the household as well as the public sphere of international politics, which had long been associated with men. This idea can be exemplified in Carol Hanisch's short article "The Personal is Political"<sup>1</sup> first published in 1970. The article is cited as being one of the first uses of

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<sup>1</sup> Through the sharing of her personal experiences in women's therapy groups, we can see that Hanisch's implementation of the phrase differs from the IR scholars analyzed in this work. Her writing can be understood as

this phrase in academia, in which she argues that “there are things in the consciousness of ‘apolitical’ women[...] that are as valid as any political consciousness we think we have.” (Hanisch, 2000, 116). Rooted in her experiences in therapy groups for women, Hanisch argues that the issues discussed in these groups, whether it be the decision to have children or income disparity between a group participant and their husband, are in fact political issues. From Hanisch’s account, these therapy groups are a form of political action rather than simply a discussion circle to solve women’s quandaries. By mislabeling them as apolitical, the issues of women are made out to be more trivial, and it is deemed weak to admit one is suffering due to an aspect of life which is normalized (Hanisch, 2000, 113). Though she does not make use of the phrase as a palindrome, we can see connections to how other feminist scholars in the years following Hanisch’s publication would come to use the phrase in a palindromic way.

Continuing this query into the hidden issues of women, Cynthia Enloe takes up ‘the personal is political’ in her 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. By using this phrase, Enloe drew attention to the fact that “the kinds of power that were created and wielded and legitimized- in these seemingly ‘private’ sites were causally connected to the forms of power created, wielded and legitimized in the national and inter-state public spheres” (Marks, 2018, 161).

Cynthia Enloe is a professor and author with a career spanning the better part of six decades. Her work explores gendered politics nationally and internationally, with special attention to “[...] how women’s labour is made cheap in globalized factories, and how women’s emotional and physical labour is used by governments to support their war-waging policies.”

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existing in an American context in the 1960s- the time and place in which she was writing- yet it shares many of the conceptualizations of the experiences of women which we can see Enloe and others exemplifying on an international scale.

(Clark University, 2024). The concepts of race, ethnicity, class, and the feminine and masculine identities that accompany them, are core in her work.<sup>2</sup> In her 1989 book, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Enloe expands the traditional feminist slogan “the personal is political,” editing the motto to become “the personal is international” (1989, p.196) in the final chapter of her book. This brings into question traditional conceptions in IR of the relationships between states and the relationships in which wars are waged and allyships are created. The objective of Enloe’s approach is to expand gendered political analysis beyond the national, and to explore how politics is more than just what happens in “[...]legislative debates, voting booths or war rooms[...].” (Enloe, 1989, p.195). The author urges readers to look for gendered dynamics in non-traditional places, such as the banana trade mentioned in the title of her book.

These two phrases – the personal is political and the personal is international – are palindromic in nature, meaning that they can, and should, be read both in the expected direction of left to right, but also in an inverted manner. When read forwards, the ‘personal is political’ captures the manner in which many feminist scholars emphasize how the personal sphere must be understood as political. This personal sphere can refer to the gendered nature of personal relationships, and the environments of the home and workplace. Feminists argue that these spaces and relationships are political in nature because they are informed by and reproduce societal and structural power relations, which can lead to various forms of inequality and discrimination. But when inverted, they emphasize how each of our lives is acutely shaped by the political world that we live in. “The international is personal” forces us to consider how the

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<sup>2</sup> Among Enloe’s other notable book length contributions, see: *Maneuvers: The international politics of militarizing women’s lives* (2000); *The curious feminist searching for women in a new age of empire* (2004); *Globalization and militarism: Feminists make the link* (2007); *The big push: Exposing and challenging the persistence of patriarchy* (2017).

space which is called “the international” is not as separate and far away from our individual realities as we may think it is, and that each individual person plays a role in the international system.

This idea of the role of the individual is an important concept in the field of feminist literature. The concept of the individual is “[...]saturated with meanings[...].” (Girard, 2016, p.1) in modern politics, such as substituting it for ‘the actor’ in much of IR, or the idea of individualism which is commonly discussed in relation to American politics. For feminists, the analysis of the individual is not just useful, but necessary, as it forces us to deconstruct the systems of global politics by viewing them through the lens of the individual. When reading *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, Enloe’s readers are shown the realities of international trade through the perspective of the women working on banana farms, of global tourism through the gendered dynamics of employment in the airline industries as experienced through the viewpoint of female flight attendants, and workplace safety through the story of women working in clothing factories in Bangladesh. Though it is much easier, and much more common to view the above-mentioned concepts of trade, tourism, and workers’ rights as larger systems which, while made up of individuals, are so large that each individual involved seems irrelevant, Enloe’s phrase “the international is personal” asks us to look at how these systems are much more closely related to the individual than we may have initially thought.

The question that this analysis is aiming to answer is how the palindromic phrases ‘the personal is political’ and ‘the personal is international’ have been employed in the fields of FSS and feminist IR since the work of Cynthia Enloe argued for their use in feminist literature. This will be accomplished through an analysis of Enloe’s 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, as well as an exploration of works which have cited her arguments in the decades since its release.



This thesis will argue that Cynthia Enloe's introduction of the palindromic phrase "the personal is international" in her 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* brings to light the role that individual authors can play in setting the course of academic research in a discipline.

The following contents of this essay are organized in four sections and a conclusion, beginning with an overview of methodology in which I will establish the relevance and breadth of Enloe's work. The second section will provide background information on palindromes, drawing on examples from literary uses of palindromes. Next, there is a literature review comprised of six single-authored monographs from authors with different areas of focus in IR and FSS. The six books in this section were selected because they each interact with the palindromes in a meaningful way. This is followed by the fourth section which analyzes common themes that were found in the literature review.

## **Methodology**

According to Google Scholar, there are over 8,000 books, articles and essays which cite the second edition of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.<sup>3</sup> It is a work that has proliferated in the field of feminist security studies, revolutionizing the way scholars think about issues of conflict and power (Enloe, Lacey & Gregory, 2016). This essay will act as a review of select examples of the literature that has been written since Enloe's original 1989 publication of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* so as to survey the expanse of work which Enloe has influenced through the introduction

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Google Scholar (January 2024). This number shows the vast impact of her work through the field, as these citations are of the second edition of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* which was published only 10 years ago, meaning that there are close to 1,000 citations per year. Though the quality of sources can be brought into question due to the fact that Google Scholar sources come from such a vast number of places- compared to a traditional scholarly journal- the value which this database provides in terms of accessibility cannot be minimized. See also: Harzing & Van Der Wal, (2008) for a more in-depth examination of the merits of Google Scholar as a source.

of the palindrome ‘the personal is international’. Enloe’s work is seen as formative in feminist IR, with *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* published at the end of the 1980s, a decade which saw great advancement in the field (Sylvester, 2002). It is also noteworthy that Enloe’s work is cited in a wide variety of topics, straying from mainstream feminist IR to be cited in work about tourism (Urry, 2002; Yang et al, 2017), the history of the treatment of indigenous peoples (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2023) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Boluk & Cavaliere, 2019). It is easy to conclude that her work has had vast effects on the academic community, far beyond her own field. However, this essay will focus more specifically on the field of IR and the sub-field of FSS, as these are the fields which drew Enloe’s original attention, and the fields in which I believe there have been some of the most insightful interactions with her work.

In this essay, I will explore the way in which different authors have used and interpreted the palindromic phrases “the personal is political” and “the personal is international” in their work in the three decades since Enloe took them up. Though many authors understand the broader argument of Enloe’s work in the same way,<sup>4</sup> it is important to note that there is not just one feminist standpoint (Sjoberg, 2020), thus differences in analysis can arise due to an author’s personal experiences, research foci and educational background<sup>5</sup>. While this may be seen as a form of bias impacting the interpretation in more empirical work, FSS scholars argue that there is no way to produce a truly unbiased interpretation, as each person understands the social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and race in unique ways. Often what is considered biased or

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<sup>4</sup> Though there is general agreement in interpretations of Enloe’s work, there are those who argue that when the lines of what qualifies as “politics” are blurred, politics cease to exist (Elshtain, 1981). Elshtain also warned against essentializing the differences between men and women on the basic ontological level, as she casted one sex as corrupt and violent and the other as innocent and nurturing (summarized in Booth, 2007). By this, Elshtain is arguing that men and women are biologically too different to be treated in the equal way which feminist scholars do.

<sup>5</sup> See also: Lykke (2020). The author critiques the false intersectionality which can arise when one’s own experiences and background too strongly influence the ‘intersectionality’ of their analysis. In this sense, ‘false intersectionality’ means that one may believe their analysis- or understanding- of the world may be more diverse than it actually is, simply due to their worldview.

unbiased in a society is based on the hegemony of a society; what the dominant group believes to be true, or 'unbiased' is what will be most widely accepted. 'Hegemony' here is understood as emphasizing the inherent conflict involved in constructing networks of power through knowledge (Stoddart, 2007). Feminist scholars acknowledge this fact and aim to break these hegemonic expectations of knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will focus on single-authored monographs or book-length works by a single author.<sup>7</sup> This form of work is often perceived as more valuable than journal articles as they are considered as not just a scholarly rite of passage for academics in the fields of the social sciences but as a means for an author to pursue their own intellectual interests in a freer way than what would be possible in an edited edition or journal article (Williams et al, 2009).<sup>8</sup> This will further show the importance of the role of the author in their work, as the writer of a single-authored monograph has, to some extent, greater freedom to present the ideas that they most strongly believe in, and perhaps greater leeway in developing their own opinions and interpretations of what they are discussing.

In my analysis, the use of the single authored monograph is paramount because the authors whose work I will be exploring are each aiming to fill a niche which they deemed present in the field of IR. Though there is no author who is free from the opinion of an editor, the single authored monograph is a medium through which an academic can express the full range of

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<sup>6</sup> It is also important to note that not every author whose work is taken up in this essay may be considered (or even consider themselves to be) a feminist scholar.

<sup>7</sup> The exclusive use of this type of scholarship only occurs in the literature review portion of this essay.

<sup>8</sup> Williams et al. (2009) also voice issues with the inequality and other concerns that can often be found in the publication of these types of works. They are seen as not up-to-date as compared to journal articles as they often take years, rather than months to publish. There is a financial component that may hinder some academics- those who work at small universities who might have a heavier teaching load, those without the financial means to fund the research and time spent writing such a long piece, etc.- but they still voice the merits of the monograph as an important type of academic media.

their argument in longform, meaning that they are more able to express the entirety of their thoughts on their given subject.

All the sources which are used in the review of literature make use of the palindromes I presented above. Though focusing on different niches in the fields of feminist IR and/or feminist security studies, each author at some point in their book directly acknowledges Enloe's use of the palindrome. Through analysis, my aim is to acknowledge not just how authors directly analyze "the personal is political" and "the personal is international" but also how their analysis of these phrases can be seen in other areas of their work. To clarify, my intent is to examine how they analyze gendered power dynamics of the political- and personal- sphere in not just the pages of their book which mention Enloe by name, but how their understanding of Enloe's claims can be seen throughout the entirety of their work.

My aim through this essay is not to give a complete or comprehensive view of the fields of FSS and IR, but to offer a specific glimpse of the impact that Enloe's work has had on the views that authors present about gendered dynamics in the world. The essay will begin with an examination of Sjoberg's work in FSS and then turn to books that are based in the broader field of IR. The intent of this essay is to develop an understanding of the power of Enloe's use of the palindromic phrases "the personal is political" and "the personal is international" and the ways in which these phrases have served to create disruptions in traditional conceptions of who and what are considered to be 'doing politics' in the fields of IR and FSS.

## **Palindromes**

Palindromes are words or phrases which can be read both from left-to-right and in an inverted manner, pivoting around a center (Ranta, 1974). Made up of relatively simple language,

stated in a concise way, the palindrome has the power to make a reader glimpse language in a way that averts the norms of the English language. They “bring into play the figure of reversal and thereby challenge the unidirectional linearity of human discourse.” (Ljungberg, 2007, p.248) As the linear nature of language is distorted, the reader is forced to question not just the way in which we interpret language, but the way in which common interpretations of language are also flexible, breakable even, when typical patterns are disrupted. In literature, this interrogation of norms is powerful as it forces the reader to stop the habitual process of reading, something that may not be disrupted for some readers. A disruption such as this creates a space for experimentation, a space to voice ideas which can conflict with typical cultural and political ideas. Chism (2012) asserts that the palindrome is not unlike a yin and yang symbol, with each half, or rather each direction that it is read in, containing elements of the other half.

As a means of problematizing certain aspects of the homogeneity of IR scholarship in terms of its focus on key concepts and issues as noted in the introduction, feminist scholars use the palindromic phrase ‘the personal is political’ as a disruption and reinterpretation of the dominant perspectives and approaches in the study of international relations. Though an imperfect palindrome- meaning that its letters are not strictly palindromic in nature and cannot be literally read backwards such as the words ‘civic’ or ‘madam’- the phrase ‘the personal is political’ has the same outcome as the literary palindrome, that being that it destabilizes the solid structure of language (Varsamis, 2012), which in turn can lead to questioning societal norms.

A motto of second-wave feminist movements in the 1960s, ‘the personal is political’ became a point of analysis in feminist theories in IR in the decades following. The motto was mobilized to identify and problematize the gendered activities that make up international politics. IR, and its sub-field FSS, has had the goal of “[...]uncover[ing] what has not been seen[...].”

(Booth, 2007, p.72) by making known what has previously been hidden or unquestioned- that being the heavily normalized ways in which gender is embedded in ideas of security as well as other key concepts. When Enloe introduced ‘the personal is international’, she drew attention to the ways in which the international political arena is shaped by the gendered relationships of individual people, a concept which will be discussed in greater detail below.

The palindrome is an interrogation of the relationship between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the concept), a relationship which is frequently considered to be a direct link between two interchangeable things, such as the association between the word ‘tree’ and the physical object that is named a ‘tree’ (Nänny & Fischer, 1999). The same can be said for the words ‘politics’ and ‘international’ in the case of the palindromes, which work to disrupt the relationship between each of those words and the meanings they hold in the IR vernacular. There is an expected signified associated with the signifier ‘politics’ and, much like the word ‘tree’, certain images or concepts come to mind as constituting what ‘politics’ means in IR. Nänny & Fischer argue that the simple fact that each person has a slightly different idea of the relationship between the signifier and the signified implies that this relationship is arbitrary.<sup>9</sup> Some of the associations a word carries in the field of IR were until recent decades rarely questioned. As Marks argues, this is because of the strong “[...]veil of academic language[...].” (2018, p.160) which in IR, means that the associations created by the Realist, Liberal and Constructivist theories, can at times be presented as the be-all and end-all in the discussion and study of the international field.

In the concluding chapter of the second edition of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Enloe gives the example of an international study performed in 2013, which found that no matter the

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<sup>9</sup> See also: Abend, G. (2023).

level of development in a nation, women on average knew much less about politics than men did. Academics speculated that this was perhaps due to the fact that there were fewer female journalists presenting about international politics, or that it was because few women had roles in elite political institutions. A British feminist journalist offered this rebuttal: perhaps the study offered too narrow a definition of politics? Could it be the case that the kind of politics which women pay attention to differs in nature to that which is prioritized by men, based on their life experience? Enloe urged us to consider the fact that, if the “[...]map of what is counted as political were redrawn by feminist informed cartographers, the gap between women’s and men’s political knowledge would shrink dramatically.” (Enloe, 2014, p.161). Until the 1980s, the work which attempted to disrupt these theories of knowledge in a meaningful way, as was done by Enloe through the use of palindromes, tended to be limited.

Returning to the yin yang imagery presented by Chism (2012), we can deploy this same imagery to make sense of the feminist argument; there are aspects of the political realm in the personal realm and vice versa and each cannot be properly understood or viewed without the presence of the other. This is the reason that these palindromes, Enloe argues, are intentionally “[...]disturbing[...].” (Enloe, 1989, p.203), as they force us to reevaluate our seemingly private relationships as instead infused with unequal power. If we are to dissect a relationship, whether it be that of a husband and wife, or between neighboring states, we must first understand this fact: that gender, power and politics cannot and should not be analyzed as separate concepts. When read forward, ‘the personal is international’ can be applied, for example, when demonstrating how women learn to be feminine- a performance which Enloe noted is rooted in the “legacies left by colonial officials who used Victorian ideals of feminine domesticity to sustain their empires,” (Enloe, 2014, p.161). We can see the modern implications of this in the conception that women

should naturally excel at housework and be willing to perform this free labor from a young age. Women in the Victorian era reared children and kept the home, while young girls played with baby dolls (a simulation of child rearing) and assisted their mothers from a young age. Enloe goes on to explain that, when inverted to become ‘the international is personal’, this phrase “[...]implies that governments depend on certain kinds of allegedly private relationships in order to conduct their foreign affairs.” (2014, p.162). This can be exemplified through the willingness of wives to provide their diplomatic husbands with unpaid domestic services so that those men can develop trusting relationships with other diplomatic husbands, with the relationship of the men not being possible without these womens’ labour (Enloe, 2014). Similarly, to operate in the international system, governments depend on “[...]ideas about masculinized dignity and feminized sacrifice[...].” (Enloe, 2014, 162) to sustain their sense of autonomous nationhood. These examples showcase the ways in which the palindromes can be used to break down conventional expectations of what understanding and doing international politics means, an idea which will be expanded in the next section.

### **Enloe’s Work and the Thread of Palindromes in IR and FSS**

This section of the essay will be a presentation and analysis of six works which make use of the palindromic phrases ‘the personal is political’ and ‘the personal is international’, as well as an examination of the way in which the palindromes are utilized in each author’s analysis. The six works in this section were chosen because each not only used the palindromes in a meaningful way, but also presented examples from different areas of IR and FSS, displaying the wide-ranging applications of Enloe’s work. As will be demonstrated below, concepts from *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* are used by scholars discussing conceptualizations of war in FSS



(Sjoberg, 2013), conceptualizations of world security in the broader field of IR (Booth, 2007), as well as in theoretical IR scholarship in which an overview of the use of metaphors in the field is presented (Marks, 2018). Each of these works fits the guideline of single-authored monograph. In addition, the works were selected from a range of years and with a range of topics to more fully present the body of work which Enloe has influenced in IR.

A first foray into an analysis of the palindromes noted above might begin with Laura Sjoberg's 2013 book *Gendering Global Conflict*. Sjoberg asserts that along with all other aspects of the political world, war must be viewed through a gendered lens. Highlighting the "war puzzle" that many scholars are still trying to solve (e.g., what are wars? Why do they happen?). Sjoberg approaches this issue by arguing that most scholars are missing a key part of the puzzle in their analyses: the issue of gender. She cautions that the omission of gender is a "[...]grave error, because the meanings, causes, and consequences of war cannot be understood without reference to gender[...]" and that gender is an important causal and constitutive factor in theories of war (Sjoberg, 2013, p.3). Sjoberg highlights that feminist IR scholarship has not yet rooted itself in the mainstream of war theory,<sup>10</sup> with critics arguing that there has yet to be a feminist theory of war which is on par with those proposed by realist and liberal IR scholars (Sjoberg, 2013). This misconception is the result of a twofold issue; partly a misinterpretation of the literature on the behalf of some non-feminist scholars, and partly due to the valid fact that many feminist scholars are reluctant to engage theoretically with the concept of war. It is through *Gendering Global Conflict* that Sjoberg aims to fill this gap in the literature.

In the sixth chapter of her work, titled "People, Choices, and War(s)," Sjoberg directly addresses both of the palindromes presented by Enloe. She examines the palindromes "the

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<sup>10</sup> See: Tickner (1997).

personal is political” and “the personal is international” as they relate to the militarization of the international arena. For Sjoberg’s specific interest in war, the palindrome disrupts the ways in which war, and especially the motivations and decisions which occur “behind the scenes” of combat, are viewed. Arguing that war is not simply defined by what occurs between soldiers on the battlefield, Sjoberg underlines the role that Korean prostitutes played in military negotiations between the American and Korean governments in the 1970s. It cannot be minimized how much the military policies which arose from these negotiations were shaped by these women and their bodies,<sup>11</sup> Sjoberg argues, yet “[...]both their bodies and their lives were omitted from the [...] narratives of the very policies they were indispensable in shaping.” (Sjoberg, 2013, p.165). Those “[...]who make war(s) do not do their decision-making (or living or working)[...]” in a vacuum from everyone else- they “[...]exist in their relationships with others[...].” (Sjoberg, 2013, p.164). Sjoberg argues that we must search for influential actors in places where we are not expecting to find them, and further, we must reconsider who is considered to be an actor in war if we hope to solve the war puzzle in a way which actually addresses all theoretical aspects of the puzzle. Creating a sort of palindrome of her own, Sjoberg asserts that “all people do not exert equal influence on war, and war does not impact all people equally” (Sjoberg, 2013, p.169). When analyzed through the use of this phrase, one can see how gender is intertwined in Sjoberg’s analysis of war. While the impact of war is often explored<sup>12</sup> in fields other than IR such as sociology and the broader discipline of political science, the analysis is often of the

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<sup>11</sup> Moon (1999) argues that Korean prostitutes acted as unofficial ambassadors between the United States and their home country of South Korea. An agreement was struck between the two nations to clean up the “camptowns” inhabited by the prostitutes, including enhanced infrastructure and bi-weekly venereal disease testing. These actions were meant to incentivise the American military to slow the withdrawal of its troops.

<sup>12</sup> See: Modell & Haggerty, 1991; Santa Barbara, 2006; Stein & Russett, 1980; Thompson, 2008.

impact on the “victims” of war, those who the international actors deem worthy of being saved from the “perpetrators”.<sup>13</sup>

Though she does not directly address the palindromes until relatively late in her work, when one reads between the lines it is easy to see the influences of “the personal is political” and “the personal is international” in Sjoberg’s analyses. The aim of her work, to see the gendered effects of power in conceptions of war where they are so often ignored, is in itself a disruption to the accepted reality of war. Like Enloe’s conclusion to *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, this is a “disturbing feminist insight,” (Enloe, 1989, p.195) because Sjoberg is guiding her readers to see “how wars are *lived* and *felt* through gender lenses,” (Sjoberg, 2013, p.271, emphasis in original), an undertaking that opens the possibility to disrupt how war is conceived. She asserts that even those who conceptualize war as being made up of acts of horrific structural violence still conceive of a neatness, an inaccurate progression of events- a beginning, middle and end- that begins to crumble when examined through a gendered lens. The gendered perception of war found in *Gendering Global Conflict* considers the experiences of women not just during organized combat between recognized combatants, but examines “women’s experiences before, during and after war,” considering “what is required to wage war” (Sjoberg, 2013, 274).

Where Sjoberg identifies the issue of gender not being considered in discussions around war, Christine Sylvester does something similar with her discussion of the development of the field of feminist IR. Situating Cynthia Enloe’s work among her contemporaries in the introduction to *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (2002), Sylvester begins her book by introducing readers to three academics which she deems to be key authors in

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Sjoberg has multiple works which tackle the concept of the female perpetrator of violent acts. See: *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (2007); *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (2011); *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (2016).

the field of feminist IR: Cynthia Enloe, Jean Elshtain and J. Ann Tickner.<sup>14</sup> Sylvester's book is a rather unique style of monograph, in which the author presents her career and works leading up to the point of publication. Offering her inspirations and insights to what guided her work, Sylvester shows the evolution of not just her own work, but the feminist field in the years she was writing, which spanned from 1985 to 2001. The presentation of Elshtain's work in the second chapter in Sylvester's book is in clear opposition to the work of Enloe and Tickner, as the former strongly opposes the blurring of lines between the personal and political spheres, championing the idea that women are most powerful in political positions because of their traditional roles as wives and as mothers and as those who men are said to fight for in war. Sylvester claims that, while none of the three authors have created works that are above criticism, they are the academics from whose publications methods of "[...]locating gender and the international around feminism." (Sylvester, 2002, p.18) have been developed. Sylvester seeks to highlight that all three scholars drew attention to everyday people, not just the heroic or scholarly men to whom attention has typically been granted in the field of IR.

Connecting to Enloe's work throughout *Feminist International Relations*, Sylvester begins by highlighting how Enloe's work was contradictory to much of that created by her contemporaries in the 1980s, asking her readers to give up the conception that IR "[...]consisted of peopleless states, abstract societies, [and] static ordering principles." (Sylvester, 2002). Introducing Tickner as the scholar who carried into the 1990s the torch lit by Enloe and Elshtain in the 1980s, Sylvester argues that these three women were more influential to the field of feminist IR than anyone else at the time that her book was written and published.

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<sup>14</sup> J. Ann Tickner is referred to as Ann Tickner in Sylvester's work, but in her own published work and when cited by others, her name typically has the 'J' initial.

Citing Enloe's analysis of "the personal is political," Sylvester writes that Enloe calls for a pro-woman spirit in the global arena, and that her analysis "[...]is more concerned to find and engage women inside/outside their allocated ontological spaces than she is to fit women into a field that has historically studied international relations without them." (Sylvester, 2013, p.38). This point, the fact that Enloe does not want to simply fit women into where they have not historically been accepted, reflects the core of what the palindrome intends to do: poke holes in common discourses such as that of security by highlighting that what is accepted as a norm can be profoundly gendered. While the literary palindrome makes the reader question the linear nature of the English language, Enloe's reversal of the "personal is political" into the "political is personal" forces us to acknowledge that, while women may be missing from traditional IR spaces, they are as connected to the political world as men. Sylvester delves into this idea further with her chapter "Picturing the Cold War: an eye graft/art graft." The essay that this section is centered on uses mostly sources from outside the field of IR, taking inspiration from an abstract painting by artist Jackson Pollock,<sup>15</sup> which has been taken up as an image of "[...]US efforts to influence the world in the 1950s." (Sylvester, 2002, p.123). The international route of the Pollock painting, traveling from gallery to gallery, makes Sylvester think of the trade and currency deals that must be in place for the painting to travel, of the sprawling power of the United Nations, and, most interestingly, it makes her think of Pollock's wife, Lee Krasner. Lee was a fellow artist, who was tasked with "holding together the frantic, the splendid, and the falling apart artist" (Sylvester, 2002, p.123) whom she married, in something that Sylvester relates to an act of performative art. This invisible role played by Pollock's wife, unknown while being entirely necessary to keep the image and success of her husband afloat, is much like the

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<sup>15</sup> Cited painting is entitled *Blue Poles*, 1952.

role played by women in many aspects of political (and personal) life. Placed in this context, Krasner's role resembles the role played by base wives and diplomatic wives whom Enloe discusses. A similar line of argument is taken up by Booth (2007), who argues that the use of critical theories is necessary to uncover the political experiences of these women.

Ken Booth aims to reconceptualize world security, placing the growing global security threats at the forefront in *Theory of World Security* (2007). He cites that humans have never been more capable of inflicting harm to ourselves, others, and the environment in our entire history. For Booth, this trend explains the reason why the 20th century conception of security is no longer suitable. Though not a feminist work specifically, Booth connects with the work of feminist scholars<sup>16</sup> at multiple points throughout his book, using feminist IR and security studies theories to widen his analysis. To further contextualize his conceptualization and use of feminist approaches, he introduces his readers to patriarchy, proselytizing religion, capitalism, statism, race, and consumer democracy. These are the six structural ideas which shape our lives, and the reasons which Booth believes have led the human species to this destructive point.

Problematizing the inescapable way in which these structures are viewed and treated by many academics and politicians, Booth urges his readers to fight terms which are already perceived as having a firm meaning by altering the way which they think about seemingly simple ideas, such as 'peace' or 'violence'. An analytical approach which can be deployed to challenge one's own normative conceptualizations are the critical theories introduced by the author. These theories include the Gramscian tradition,<sup>17</sup> Marxism, critical IR, and feminism. With these theories, peace

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<sup>16</sup> Aside from Cynthia Enloe, Booth cites feminist scholars Maggie Humm (p.70), Catharine A. Mackinnon (p.70), Simone de Beauvoir (p. 71), J. Ann Tickner (p.71) and Susan Brownmiller (p. 73).

<sup>17</sup> The Gramscian tradition arose from the ideas of the Italian Marxist and the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci who was imprisoned by Mussolini's regime in 1928. Central to his ideas are conceptualizations of the theorist- someone who Gramsci says does not stand on neutral ground separated from the world that they study, as they are part of the social processes making up that world (Booth, 2007).

can be viewed as a positive as well as a negative, and violence as a structural phenomenon and not simply as the use of brute force (Booth, 2007).

When a critical perspective is employed, it creates the possibility of questioning the status quo, a status quo which the author says is permeated by those who most benefit from it. This is where Enloe's work comes in, and Booth highlights how he and his wife were following the feminist author's thoughts of 'where are the women?' while watching news coverage of the 2003 Iraq war. While traditionally gendered views of war and security show women as victims in need of protection from the male perpetrators of war, or in the case of 1940s Europe, as those who are liberated, rushing towards tanks with flowers and kisses for their saviors, Booth notes that Iraqi women were largely invisible, as was the issue of security related to their lived experiences during the war. They were not seen in news coverage of celebrations and looting in the days following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, nor the protests against the American presence in their country or as insurgents fighting back against Western forces. When they were visible, women were seen crying after disaster, clutching babies, or fanning injured children in makeshift hospitals, but only in a post-war context, showing the aftermath of what the American media claimed to be the effects of the poorly run Iraqi state. This highlights not just the changing way in which war was being viewed- as something less glamorous- but also the way in which the experiences of women outside of the Western world were portrayed.

Along with the question of 'where are the women?' Booth interacts with Enloe's work through her use of palindromes, and the disruption that they cause to naturalized ways of thinking, noting that "Many of us (including many women) have had the same experience: we have discovered that what we thought was natural as we were growing up was cultural, expressing the traditional power of patriarchy." (Booth, 2007, p.72). The palindromes employed

by Enloe have this same effect, as they create an opportunity for readers to understand security as something that is not just affected by gender, but inseparable from gender in a way that may not be immediately clear. Booth furthers this idea by asserting that it is a trademark sign of a non-feminist analysis when the amounts and forms of power operating in the world are underestimated. Through his interaction with 'the personal is political' and 'the personal is international' Booth supports Enloe's contention that in orthodox academia, IR is more concerned with efficiency of explanation- that is with using already established definitions for terms- over engaging with the true complexities behind the ideas which they are aiming to define. To further this argument, Booth turns his discussion of Enloe's work, to the examples shared by Enloe in relation to the rigidity of political terminology. This argument is prominently displayed in the fact that there is an obvious group of people who are typically deemed to be involved in issues of security, such as soldiers and executives of weapons manufacturing companies. There are also those that, while they are intimately involved in the economic and political systems of the military, are invisible in most common conceptions of the international system. Though not exclusively, these invisible people are often women, including sex workers who work around military bases and the wives of diplomats. Booth notes that when these women are not invisible, they are often dehumanized, treated as though they are objects in the machine that is the global security arena. Throughout this book, the author attempts to disturb the basic assertions of the security community, in a way which reflects the ideas put forth by Enloe. Through his adoption of critical theories, Booth's work attempts to highlight the 'business as usual' reality of IR and the critical theories have a similar effect as the palindromes- they create a space for one to look differently at something that, while typically accepted as fact, is actually an idea held in dominant discourses, not something that is inadvertently true as a fact of nature. This



argument, that it is when one approaches a topic through an unconventional lens, can be seen in Michael Marks' (2018) use of metaphors to analyze the field of IR.

In *Revisiting Metaphors in International Relations Theory* (2018), Marks aims to outline the role which metaphors play in the field of IR. Exploring how in IR theory, metaphors have a “[...]wider impact for depicting world affairs[...]” (Marks, 2018, p.2), the author begins with multiple examples of when those who are influential in the field and those on the fringes of IR have used metaphors to express concepts of international affairs. He cites a *New York Times* reporter who referred to North Korea as a “failed state with nuclear weapons” while writing about the death of the country's leader Kim Jong-Il. This example highlights the ways in which the metaphor, while commonly used in this type of broadly read political discourse, creates a statement which goes directly against what would be said in scholarly literature. Marks explains that, while the term “failed state” had a good ring to it in the eyes of this journalist, and North Korea may be considered a political failure by some as a result of its lack of participation in the Western liberal democratic world, the term “failed state” refers, in academia, to a state which lacks institutional political authority, something which is clearly not the case in North Korea. An issue that arises from the use of metaphors in this sense is that they can be too vague- calling North Korea a failed state as was done in the *New York Times* article highlights the way in which this type of metaphor can lead to “[...]non-falsifiable or tautological claims because any evidence can be used to verify them.” (Marks, 2018, p.3) as the metaphor strays from the true meaning of the phrase. Marks goes on to explore metaphors in the sub fields of international political economy and the literature on democratization, as well as the ways in which they are used in the different theoretical camps<sup>18</sup> of IR, concluding his book with his analysis of the role

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<sup>18</sup> Along with Feminist theory, these include Realist theory (p.136), Liberal theory (p.147), Constructivist theory (p.152), and general theories of “the international” in IR (p.169).

of metaphors in IR theory. While stressing the role played by metaphors in the field, Marks urges scholars to not rely on them too heavily, but instead reach for approaches which contain a balance between description and explanation, as a means to avoid claims which are too broad or too specific, something which occurs when metaphors are relied upon.<sup>19</sup> In the case of Feminist IR theory, Marks states that there is a surprising lack of metaphors, something which points to the marginalization of Feminist theories in IR. This is credited to feminist scholars' refusal to stick to the ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies which are deemed credible to the conventional social scientists of IR, as these conventional academic spaces become “[...]complicated machineries of recirculating old content under the protective veil of academic language.” (Marks, 2018, p.159-60). Starting from a standpoint that seeks to determine what the “problems” are in the IR field and how they can be solved, feminist scholars question even the most basic concepts, which have long since been accepted as academic fact.

This is the lens through which Marks analyzes Enloe’s use of the palindromes. Stressing the fact that starting from the very title of the book, Enloe does not beat around the (metaphorical) bush, as the “bananas,” “beaches,” and “bases” for which her work is named, are actual locations in which politics and IR occur. While authors often employ the use of metaphors in their titles to draw readers in, suggesting “[...]creative ways of thinking about IR[.]” (Marks, 2018, p.161), Enloe’s title simply includes the means and location through which IR can be witnessed, in the everyday lives of real people. He champions Enloe’s methodology, as it is one

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<sup>19</sup> Marks provides the example of Barack Obama using the metaphor of a “red line” when discussing the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, with the former US president warning that a “red line would be crossed.” This metaphor was picked up by both media outlets and other American politicians, who echoed the president's warning that the use of chemical weapons would be seen as the crossing of a “red line” in the eyes of the American government. Despite the fact that Obama did not say what would happen if the “red line” were to be crossed by Syria, he put his policy makers in a difficult position when, the next year, Syria deployed their chemical weapons, showing that the use of the metaphor, rather than the use of an actual meaningful claim, had no real world effects other than potentially undermining the perception of the strength of the US in global affairs.

which, at its core, is at odds with the use of metaphors, deconstructing the broad ideas such as power, politics, the international, and the personal, down to their most basic parts, to show that they are much more complex ideas than they are typically taken to be, undoing the metaphorical nature which they have been given in IR. To feminist scholars, metaphors largely act the same as widely accepted IR conceptions, and thus must be broken down in the same way. Because of this, Enloe's use of 'the personal is political' and 'the personal is international' works similarly, aiming to question concepts that have remained firmly unquestioned in much of IR. We can see this when the term "woman" is used as a metaphor for "victim" in mainstream discussions of security in IR. Through the lens of Enloe's work, we are brought to look deeper and question not just why this became a metaphor, but the ways in which political systems continue to enforce this idea.

Christopher Pierson's analysis in *The Modern State* (2004) also highlights the way in which language can play a major role in IR definitions, as the author aims to define the state in a time which, the author claims, people are beginning to lose faith in its competence, while wrestling with the notion that the state, as a free-standing entity, should not be considered as independent from society. He highlights the reasons why the simpler the terms one uses to define the state, the less air-tight the definition will seem, as the state itself is a man-made conception whose key characteristics differ from person to person, society to society, and place to place. The state, he argues, is one of those concepts which is difficult to define. Referring back to an American Supreme Court judge who used this sentiment when asked to define pornography,<sup>20</sup> Pierson declares that the state is something which people know when they see it. There are countless definitions of the state, and they vary based on where one is from and the functions

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<sup>20</sup> In the direct quote being cited by Pierson, the judge admitted that he could not define 'pornography' but that he "know[s] it when [he] see[s] it." (2004, p.5)

which they prescribe to the state. Pierson then presents the idea that states must be understood historically, as they did not just appear one day, but were- and still are- fought over and prone to changes. Not aiming to lay out the history of any particular state, the author provides a historical analysis of the “[...]conditionality, contingency and temporality of states[.]” (Pierson, 2004, p.35) which established the groundwork for the remaining chapters in his book.

The book’s introductory chapters analyze how the state is situated in the societies within them, as well as in the global political order. This leads into his next body chapters which discuss the relationship between the state and society, between the state and the economy, between the state and its members, and between the state and the international order in which it is situated. Pierson’s analysis effectively situates the state in the field of IR and highlights the fact that it is impossible to create one single definition of ‘the state’. This aligns with the idea presented earlier in this essay that, in feminist theories, it is necessary to pay attention to the individual. The state would be conceptualized in completely different ways by a wealthy person living in Europe and a poor person living in the global South. Their relationships with the state, their jobs, and their levels of education, along with their personal worldviews, among other possible factors, would shape how the state appears to them. Gender is something that also comes into play in this scenario, as the modern state, as we see it today, has been shaped by men who, to this day, hold many of the elite positions in most state institutions around the world. Pierson argues that, through the lens of feminist literature, we begin to challenge the idea that concepts such as citizenship and state policy are as equal and universal as they are made to seem in the liberal-democratic political world. The dominance of the male perspective, he argues, is the reason that the laws and policies of many nations treat women as unequal to men, as men see women as being unequal to them (Pierson, 2004, p.148).

This idea, of the man at the center of the state, is how Pierson connects to Enloe's work, asserting that the division of public and private is constructed by, and at the heart of, liberal democratic political thinking, much the same way as commonly accepted definitions of the state—both of which highlight the patriarchal world view which is dominant in much of political discourse. As stated by Enloe, if we attempt to map the international world in an 'ungendered' way, the end result is to map a landscape populated mostly by elite men. This idea can also be seen in Pierson's defining and mapping of states in the international system; if he does not do so in a way that is intentionally gendered, he will display states in the way that they appear to men, and more specifically elite men. When discussing the relationship of the state and the economy, Pierson's analysis connects Enloe's argument that the international economy is maintained on the cheap or unpaid labor of women, including those that perform domestic labor and those who work in poor factory conditions, labor without which the international economy would not be able to run at its current capacity. The author is able to create a disruption to the concept of the state, as Enloe does with the use of the palindromes. The concept of the modern state typically goes unquestioned, it is something that is accepted as fact, but even the process of the author asking the reader to stop and consider how they would define the term creates a moment of disruption in a way which strengthens the role of the palindromes in his analysis. Similar to Pierson's disruption to the definition of the state, the next author does so with the concept of violence.

Laura Shepherd highlights the way in which gender plays a role in acts of violence in her 2008 book *Gender, Violence and Security: Discourse as Practice*. One of the main objectives of her book is the attempt she makes to show the way in which different types of bodies are "[...]marked and made through violence[...]" (Shepherd, 2008, p.2) This means that, while

providing an overview of the way that violence generally plays a role in security studies, she is attempting to highlight that violence is a gendered and embodied act, one which is often aimed at maintaining binary orders<sup>21</sup> in the international system. She does so by employing a non-state centric approach to security, something that is made possible by her gendered view, which she argues is lacking even amongst scholars who take a similar stance away from the state as the core of the security dynamic in international relations. There is also a strong assertion through Shepherd's work that there is no single definition of what gender is; she uses it as a verb, a noun, and a "[...]logic that is product/productive of the performances of violence and security I investigate here." (Shepherd, 2008, p.3). Shepherd thus seeks to problematize the conventional constructions of gendered subjectivity. This is an idea that the author understands could draw some criticism, which she gets ahead of by presenting Judith Butler's argument that through the deconstruction of identity, the terms through which identity is expressed are seen as political. Put simply, what it means to identify as a 'woman' comes with certain social and political expectations, and these are not properly analyzed without a gendered lens. Through an analysis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), Shepherd aims to interrogate the Resolution as a space in which the concepts of security and violence are in contact. And, as a space with predominantly liberal political theories of what international security is meant to do, she highlights the Security Council's conceptualization of security as meaning international security and violence as meaning gendered violence. This conceptualization of international security and violence is something that is not made clear enough in the Resolution despite the fact that it is lauded as providing governments with a

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<sup>21</sup> 'Binary orders' in Shepherd's work refer to the gendered expectations for men and women in the international system. These expectations are often treated as if they are in some way related to nature or necessity, and Shepherd discusses them in relation to both violence and security.

gendered lens through which they can view women, peace and security issues. Through her analysis, Shepherd also acknowledges that her views, and even the fact that she is able to voice them and publish them in a book, reflect the privileged position granted to her simply because of where she lives.

Concluding her work by stating that the “[...]performance of gender is immanent in the performance of security and vice versa.” (Shepherd, 2008, p.172) Shepherd establishes a clear connection to Enloe’s work. She urges readers to understand that everything that we are able to see or conceive of is a product of power relations, linking her work to the palindromes ‘the personal is political’ and ‘the personal is international’ and rooting these palindromes in the subfield of security studies. The conceptualization of security is also closely linked to *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, with Shepherd outlining Enloe’s conceptualization of ‘womenandchildren’ (Shepherd, 2008, 41) as a term which represents not individuals who are affected by violence in times of war, but as a term which instead refers to those who need care and protection because they are vulnerable and easily exploited in times of conflict. The heavy prevalence of this type of language in international politics and the field of IR is not often questioned. The idea of women and children needing protection is taken as a fact, negating any role that women may play as either the perpetrators of violence,<sup>22</sup> or as not being affected by violence as is automatically assumed, and instead painting them as a group which are seen as victims, while men are linked to power and dominance in times of conflict. Through the use of Enloe’s work, Shepherd is able to expose how these associations permeate not just the international spaces, but those of the private world as well.

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<sup>22</sup> See also: Sjoberg & Gentry (2007). Though the content of this work, which analyzes wartime violence perpetrated by women, would make it a meaningful addition to this essay, given that it was co-authored, it fell outside of the methodological approach adopted here.

### **Common Threads of Analysis: The Disruptive Power of the Palindromes in IR and FSS**

As shown in the examples above, Enloe's work has influenced the field of IR and FSS by enhancing the use of palindromes, something which has yet to permeate this field through modes other than the two palindromes presented in her work. The presentation of this literary device into the world of feminist IR and FSS has the effect of disrupting what might appear as solid nature of the political world described by traditional perspectives in the study of international relations, a disruption through which critical scholars are able to interrogate the norms which have long been accepted as more or less unproblematic. Some of the concepts accepted as unproblematic that I have presented in this work are the concepts of war (Sjoberg, 2013), violence (Shepherd, 2008), and the modern state (Pierson, 2004). These concepts are able to be redefined through the use of 'the personal is political' and 'the personal is international' (as well as their reversals) because the palindrome highlights the way in which each is inseparably related to both the domain of our private and individual day-to-day relationships, as well as the sphere of international politics. When we reevaluate war through a feminist lens, rather than just discussing the way in which war alters the life of the stereotypical male soldier, Sjoberg and Enloe both insist that we analyze deeper, to look at "[...]the perspective of those most socially subjugated in it." (Sjoberg, 2013, p.248), which has the effect of altering the conception of war to be something not just fought in, but something that is felt, lived and experienced. In this way, war becomes something that is not just a political concept, but something that is also personal. In this sense, the palindromes create an analytical setting in which concepts such as war can be questioned. Similarly, in Booth's (2007) work, this shift in perspective occurs in the case of the conception of state security. In the traditional sense, state security is thought of through the lens



of a centralized state government that is tasked with protecting its borders from external and internal threats. This traditional conception of security is one that is steeped in ideas of the military and of what it means to be a “good” secure country. When we consider how “the international is personal” works with this conception of security, it becomes difficult to avoid questioning what the state is, who benefits from protection in the name of the state, and how central the needs of women can really be if they are so infrequently involved in visible aspects of politics on the level of the international arena. We are forced to view “the state” as not just an indistinct entity, but instead one that is made up of many gendered individuals, each with their own complex relationship to the state in which they live.

Perhaps the most insightful takeaway from the review of how the palindromes appear in the feminist IR and FSS literature is that many of the authors borrow Enloe’s sentiment that these palindromic phrases are some of the most disruptive feminist insights (Booth, 2007; Shepherd, 2008; Sjoberg, 2013).<sup>23</sup> This is one of the most powerful assertions in Enloe’s work; that the questioning of the commonly accepted political norms in IR is an uncomfortable burden, but one that is necessary. The fact that multiple authors whose work I highlighted above included these palindromes asserts how while confronting what is the everyday lived experience of women may be a troublesome task, it is essential. This is something that Enloe makes her readers aware of—confronting our own experiences within political systems and our personal relationships are necessary tasks to see how all of these relationships are infused with power. In Sjoberg’s (2013) work, this is seen through her attempt to reconceptualize who is considered an active participant in war, and who is most greatly affected by war. This type of reconceptualization is not examined in mainstream approaches to IR, but through the use of a critical theory—in this case

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<sup>23</sup> As noted previously, Enloe herself calls it a “disturbing insight,” (Enloe, 1989, p.196)

feminist theory- as is done in Shepherd's book. By using critical theories, academics are able to "[...]explore the barriers to and possibilities for human emancipation[...]" (Wyn Jones, 2001, p.7). We can see this further in Shepherd's (2018) book, and her critical reconceptualization of violence- perhaps one of the most commonly used concepts which the authors of the monographs examine in this essay aim to work through. To varying degrees, violence is something which many people come across in their everyday lives. However, like other concepts in IR, violence remains something that is difficult to define for the average person. Violence is not something which should be viewed as a senseless act or simply a form of 'politics by other means' as the famous saying from von Clausewitz asserts,<sup>24</sup> but instead as something that is experienced and felt by individuals (as war is in Sjoberg's view). Despite the fact that it may feel troublesome to begin to question such seemingly basic ideas, as the ones presented in the review of literature in this essay, it should be even more unsettling that these conceptions have gone unquestioned for so long. It has only been in the past few decades that these concepts have been questioned in a meaningful way, and there is still much work that needs to be done, especially in terms of type of comprehensive analyses that single authored monographs can offer.

## **Conclusion**

This essay sought to examine the impact that Cynthia Enloe's work, and specifically the use of palindromes, has had on the field of feminist IR and FSS. Arguing that, through the use of palindromes, feminist literature is able to disrupt mainstream political theories in IR by highlighting the unusual places in which politics occur, I introduced six single-authored monographs. Each of the monographs sought to explain the ways in which the- often invisible-

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<sup>24</sup> See Clausewitz (2010) p. 70.

political world of women can be explored. This essay examined the ways in which each author drew from Enloe's work, highlighting the fact that the disruptive nature through which this type of feminist analysis occurs, is something which is (according to Enloe) intentionally unsettling because we are forced to question even the most minute details of our private and day-to-day lives. My review of the literature which works directly with the palindromes "the personal is political" and "the personal is international" attempted to show the wide-reaching body of work which has come in the years following Enloe's publication. The goal of the analysis of these works is to show the widening of one's understanding that can come from the use of alternative forms of analysis such as these.

Over the past three decades, Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* has helped open the eyes of researchers in the field of international relations and security studies. It helped to force attention outside of what mainstream IR considered to be political issues by taking into account gender and presenting firsthand accounts of the experiences of 'invisible' women. This is one of the most powerful aspects of Enloe's work: that it is able to make seen what was previously hidden. Booth (2007) recalls a senior male figure in the IR field, who remarked that *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* had "[...]hit him between the eyes on first reading it[...]," and that it had "[...]changed fundamentally how he thought about studying the world." (Booth, 2007, p.72) Enloe's use of unconventional examples and unorthodox methodologies, especially the use of palindromes, are what allowed her analysis to open up these new points of view. Palindromes are such an effective analytical device through which to do this because, as argued by Chism (2012), they highlight the flexible nature of language, and thus allow us to see the instability of the meaning behind language. Seeing language as something that does not simply have to be read in a left-to-

right manner, and can instead be read in an inverted manner, means that perhaps the word or phrase that makes up the palindrome also can be understood outside the linear style which they have classically been understood.

As examined in this essay, the general themes in IR of war, security, and the state have offered a solid launching pad for the initial feminist contributions in IR theory and FSS. However, in order to show the true implications of the patriarchal norms that are revealed by the two palindromes at the center of this essay, one needs to consider a broader analysis of how “[...]gender makes the world go round.” (Enloe, 1989). The work of Enloe and those who used the palindromes in the years since her original publication have created a disruption in IR, by highlighting the ways in which both the political and the international are deeply intertwined with the personal relationships and experiences of individuals.

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