

## Interview - Mary Kaldor

Written by E-International Relations

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# Interview - Mary Kaldor

<https://www.e-ir.info/2017/07/21/interview-mary-kaldor/>

E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, JUL 21 2017

Mary Kaldor is Professor of Global Governance, Director of the Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit at the London School of Economics and Political Science and CEO of the Department for International Development (DFID) funded Conflict Research Programme. She pioneered the concept of new wars and global civil society. Her work on the practical implementation of human security has directly influenced European and national politics. Her books include; *The Baroque Arsenal*, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War*. Her most recent book is *International Law and New Wars* co-authored with Christine Chinkin. She was a founder and co-chair of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, a member of the International Independent Commission on Kosovo and convenor of the Human Security Study Group, which reported to Javier Solana and now to Federica Mogherini.

### **Where do you see the most exciting research/debates happening in your field?**

I think there is some very interesting research being done now that brings together some important debates. There are debates about identity politics, ethnicity and war, which have always been very political and not linked to economic issues. There is another set of debates on the nature of rentier economies, dependence on oil revenues and the resource curse. These two areas are now meeting each other and people are beginning to realise that when you have states in which competition for power is increasingly about personal enrichment, you tend to get sectarian ideologies as a means of winning power. This research is being conducted on the Middle East, Africa and Asia, but I think it can also be applied quite well when you are trying to analyse Trump or Brexit.

### **How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?**

First, I was very influenced by thinking about long-waves in economic history – the idea that there are surges of development that are based on different kinds of technologies. We have just come to the end of the Fordist model of development based on the state, on mass production and the intensive use of oil. We are now moving on to something new. These are the kinds of ideas that I came across very early in my career and I was interested in how they applied to the military and war field, as well as the role that war plays in transition periods between one model of development and another. In a curious way I have come back to those issues that I had been thinking about in the 1970s and 1980s because it suddenly seems very relevant today.

Second, another hugely important influence was EP Thompson, who wrote the famous book *The History of the Working Class*, which was about how the working class really made itself. It is about telling history from below and it was definitely an influence on me when I was involved in the peace movement in the 1980s. I started to think about international relations from below and about the role of citizen's movements in international relations. Our bit of the peace movement thought that the most important way to end the Cold War was to make links with human rights groups in Eastern Europe and to bring democracy to the region. This led to my interest in civil society. Somehow Eastern European activists had been sitting around thinking and reading Aristotle, unlike the activists in the West, and had developed a whole language around human rights, civil society, and humanitarianism. That became a very important part of public discourse after the end of the Cold War.

## Interview - Mary Kaldor

Written by E-International Relations

It was my involvement through civil society during the wars in the Balkans that led me to write *New and Old Wars*, but I wouldn't say that it was inspired by one big thinker. Whereas EP Thompson, Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik and George Konrad were a group of influential thinkers in Eastern Europe, I think it was ordinary human rights and peace activists and what they were saying about war that led me to write *New Wars*.

If there is one common thread through my life it has been an interest in war and political economy. I started off as an economist, my father and my sister were economists, so I thought the field was rather crowded. I had always been in the anti-nuclear movement from about the age of 11 and then I got my first job after university at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. That really shaped my intellectual career. My first job was making arms trade statistics which are still used today and, when I look back over my career, they are perhaps the thing that I'm most proud of. I was always interested in the political economy of war but then it was more traditional war. Everything shifted after 1989.

### **How well does the discipline of international relations (IR) consider change and activism from below?**

I think it does it very badly, which is why I am in an international development department and not an IR department. I think the problem is probably inherent in the discipline to some extent. IR was very much born out of the First and Second World Wars, and out of the notion that wars are between states. The classic founders of IR always wanted to find ways to end war and thought that meant discussing diplomacy, as opposed to war, and the focus was on relations between states. This was prominent when the discipline became established in journals and departments and it has been incredibly difficult to escape from it.

The so-called English School has started to talk about world society as opposed to international society because a lot of these scholars began to realise that they couldn't explain norms in international affairs in terms of international society. I tend to think that the language I use around global civil society is more useful, more differentiated and more interesting.

Global Studies might be better at explaining activism from below. I was at the International Studies Association (ISA) conference in Baltimore earlier this year and I talked about how, in this new phase of history that we are in, we really need to be able to think beyond IR and to be doing Global Studies. There seemed to be a lot of agreement on that.

### ***New and Old Wars* was first published in 1999. Do you think international actors have adjusted to the realities of 'new wars'?**

Yes, but I have only really noticed it in the last two or three years. What astonishes me is that 18 years after I wrote the book, there is more interest in it than at the time I wrote it. After I wrote it there was a lot of criticism and everyone said 'new wars aren't new,' which irritated me because I felt that that wasn't the point of the book. The point was to explore the logic of new wars and the way in which identity politics and the war economy all worked together. I suspect that there was something gendered about the response – I may be wrong but I had this feeling that it annoyed men to have a women writing about war. Perhaps I should have called them 'hybrid wars' which is more fashionable now, or 'postmodern wars' because they were literally the wars that come after modernity, but I felt that would have taken me down a path of cultural relativism that I didn't really want to get into. The good thing about the term 'new' is that it produced a debate that kept it in the public arena.

If you look at the EU's global strategy, and a couple of recent reports from the UN on peace-keeping and peace-building, the kind of thinking that informed my ideas about 'new wars' is being taken seriously, at least at international levels. National departments of development are also taking note and at LSE, we now have a research programme within DFID on conflict dynamics. I realised when I went to a meeting with DFID conflict advisors that they do really get the logic of new wars now, in a way they didn't before. Despite this, it hasn't filtered through to the political class. I think we are in a very dangerous situation and that the political class all still think that military or top down diplomatic responses are the only way to deal with these situations. While I am not against using the military, I think in most cases it makes the situation worse and it is very destructive. The other go-to way to deal with conflict is through top-down negotiations, but these tend to entrench a new war logic. So you really need different approaches. While the EU

## Interview - Mary Kaldor

Written by E-International Relations

and the UN now get that you need different approaches, it is really hard to convince states and states ultimately determine what these organisations do.

I've just finished a new book that is due to be published soon, called *Global Security Cultures*, with the idea that there are different ways of doing security. I say security rather than war, as some security cultures aren't necessarily war based, they might be police or diplomacy based. One of the reasons I wanted to write the book on security cultures is because of the knee jerk way certain approaches are adopted whatever the actual consequences. For example, airstrikes look as though something is being done and this is good in terms of domestic politics. If the government say they have killed 10,000 jihadis then that looks good too, even if 20,000 jihadis are mobilised as a result.

### **What do you think of the approach taken by international actors to resolve the conflict in Syria, so far?**

I think the EU, the US and the West made a big mistake in calling for Assad's removal instead of calling for him to stop killing his citizen's. Instead of using the leverage they had at the time, especially the EU, they gave it up over night. Many of the mistakes that have been made stem from a very old fashioned view of war. The conflict in Syria is seen, by the West, as a war between Assad and rebels. The rebels tend to be armed groups funded by external donors who are making money out of the war. Something similar has happened on the government side. It is a kind of mutual enterprise where they are all incentivised to keep fighting. There is a conflict between the regime and civil society but that is not the same as the violence. In that sort of situation top-down talks are not really very effective because there are too many armed groups, they are not really serious about ending the violence, and because you do not want a political future determined by armed groups.

I have been arguing that Syria is an incredible mixture of a new war, old fashioned geopolitics from the outside, and the war on terror, which makes it so intractable. I am struck, again and again, by the similarities with Bosnia, which was my initial case study for *New and Old Wars*. In the same way democracy has been subverted by sectarianism and the people who were doing the fighting are not necessarily the same people who were campaigning for democracy. Most of the protestors, even more strongly in Syria than in Bosnia, were very skeptical about the use of violence, which they did not believe could defeat Assad. The people who did take to violence were often poor unemployed young men who were paid for by rich Gulf donors. This is again very similar to Bosnia, where the Bosniaks were paid for by the criminal class and the opposition became peace and human rights groups.

The best you can do for Syria, which is to some extent happening through the Astana process, is to get the key outside actors, which are not the west, but Russia, Iran and Turkey, to put pressure on all sides for a ceasefire. At the same time, you need to think about politics in an inclusive way. It really does need a bottom-up approach which I argued for in *New and Old Wars*. There are many areas of Syria where people have negotiated their own ceasefires and kept armed groups out. It is these local administrative councils and civil society groups that provide a plausible alternative and the potential for a legitimate authority to be established. To some extent this is recognised by Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy to Syria, who has introduced a civil society room and women's advisory board, which are steps in the right direction but they are not far enough.

### **You have talked about the existence of a new understanding between civil society and international actors (UN and EU) in Syria. What do you mean by this?**

There is a new understanding between civil society and some international actors. This understanding is that civil society is the key to establishing legitimate political authority and that this is essential to end new wars. You can't end them through violence, or through talks among illegitimate participants. You can see this if you read the various UN reports and the EU global strategy. Unfortunately at the moment, when it comes to Syria, both the UN and the EU have been very much sidelined and the key actors, like Russia, Turkey, Iran and the Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia are still thinking in very old war terms.

The civil society I am talking about in Syria are real local activists. There are so many wonderful examples like a group called The People of Aleppo. It is a group of engineers, who are dedicated to keeping the infrastructure going

## Interview - Mary Kaldor

Written by E-International Relations

by ensuring that the power lines work, the water pipes function, and that gas flows. They do this by negotiating with all parties to the conflict. For example, at least until Aleppo was taken back into Government control, ISIS controlled the oil supply, the government controlled the electricity grid and, *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham* controlled the water installations. So the People of Aleppo went around negotiating with all three in order to be able to do the repairs necessary to keep the water, electricity and oil flowing to Aleppo.

These civil society groups are really maintaining some element of social cohesion inside Syria but they are also the first to be targeted. More and more of them have been forced to leave. Those working in government controlled areas very often get arrested and so others in their group find it necessary to flee. Some of these groups do get money from the outside world and this has been really problematic. In opposition controlled areas they are often targeted by armed groups, especially if they are being funded from abroad. The search for funds often diverts them from what they ought to be doing and, when they do receive money, donors think they know best and often direct civil society groups to activities they wouldn't otherwise be doing, such as having a meeting on gender equality (although women's issues are very important for them).

What often happens to civil society, in these types of conflicts, is that it is very active during the conflict, it disappears afterwards, and western funded civil society steps in. This happens, in part, because the war is actually directed at civil society, so although there is an active civil society it gets weaker and weaker through the war and more and more of those working within it have to flee or are killed. This is already happening in Syria. A few weeks ago I was in Gaziantep, a Turkish city on the border with Syria. It is full of civil society groups who have kept themselves going by believing that what they are doing is helping Syria. They believed that they will eventually return to Syria and re-build it but now there is a huge sense of disappointment and disillusionment. There is a feeling that actually what they were doing was useless and that they are never going to return to Syria. Now there is donor fatigue so donors don't want to fund them any longer, and these people have now got to start thinking about establishing their lives in Turkey or Europe, which is quite depressing.

### **Are there signs that international actors (UN, EU, as well as states) are becoming more attentive to civil society more broadly, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations?**

I think there is an increasing understanding that civil society is important in solving conflict. I was struck when I went to a meeting of DFID Conflict advisors that they do realise that armed groups have a vested interest in the war economy and that the problem of corruption is not just bad morals but it is systematic in societies where new wars take place. I think it is becoming understood that we are not really talking about old-fashioned political contests but more about a social condition. That is something that is beginning to be grasped in EU, UN, and development circles, even if it is not understood in foreign and defence ministries. Maybe among the military it is understood a bit and I am not sure how far it is grasped in academia, perhaps best within development studies, but much less in IR.

One of the points I keep making to the UN and the EU is that the issue is less about money, but communication. They have always been funding civil society but they regard it as a nice add-on – something that does good things or a means of sub-contracting others to do good things, but not as a political partner. That is what I think needs to be changed – international actors need to start thinking of civil society as a political partner.

Perhaps part of the problem is the term 'civil society' which sounds very unpolitical when we are actually talking about groups that are anti-sectarian, that are really trying to find inclusive political solutions. In many places civil society has become a discredited term because it is associated with contract work. Yet, in war zones, whether you're talking about Afghanistan, Bosnia or Syria, somehow the term civil society has a lot of resonance, because I guess it means acting with civilians and being anti-militaristic. Often civil society groups will define themselves as acting in the public interest and opposing those with sectarian or private interests. They are often suspicious of professional NGOs. For example, the Civic Platform in Afghanistan, in which I was involved, were determined not to receive international funding.

### **Can you briefly explain your idea of human security and how you came to it?**

## Interview - Mary Kaldor

Written by E-International Relations

After the EU established the European Security and Defence Policy, I was asked by Javier Solana, the then High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy for the EU, to form a study group that would look into the sort of capabilities that Europe needed. It was a really interesting exercise because Javier also helped to choose some of the members of the group, so we had a combination of former defence ministers, generals, lawyers, as well as academics. Our first report talked about an approach that was very close to what I called cosmopolitan law enforcement in *New and Old Wars*. We argued that this approach would require a mixture of military and civilian elements that would operate in completely different ways, according to different principles. We agreed to call this human security. This was actually before I was really familiar with all the discussions about human security.

Once we had decided to call it human security we started studying the concept in more depth. I wasn't even aware at that time that there was a debate over the broad and narrow versions of human security. We realised that our version was a little bit different from either the UNDP version or the Canadian version. The UNDP version was very much about development and argued that the resources going to the military ought to be put towards development, which would result in fewer wars and more security. The Canadian version, which later became Responsibility to Protect, was all about the physical security of the individual and the need to uphold human rights through military means. I think ours was a very European version.

The European version of human security is about extending the kind of security we enjoy in rights-based law governed societies like the UK. In such societies, we expect to be kept secure and when there is a crisis like the Manchester terrorist attack – we expect there to be emergency forces that will come to our aid. Our idea of human security was about extending that model internationally and providing security from extreme events whether it is war, flooding, terrorism, drought or famine. So it is in some sense broad but it is at the sharp end of human rights and human development. We argued that human security is the extension of law-based security but we had one lawyer in the study group, my colleague and co-author Christine Chinkin and she kept saying 'what law?' The result of that discussion was a big book that we have just published, called *International Law and New Wars*, which actually explores what law we are talking about.

My team did another report as input for the EU's Global Strategy report, which was based on a big research grant I had from the European Research Council. We brought together everybody who had been involved in the earlier programme and wrote individual papers. We called it Second Generation Human Security as the emphasis this time was on implementation. If you look at the section on conflict in the Global Strategy you can see that it was more or less based on our proposals and it emphasises human security. The only thing that wasn't included, which is actually a big gap, is the emphasis we placed on justice; we proposed that the EU should establish a special justice instrument. I think that without justice mechanisms it is incredibly difficult to deal with armed groups who have, not only committed war crimes, but also many day to day economic crimes. I think that an emphasis on justice, documentation, and establishing justice mechanisms at an early stage, would really make a difference.

What is interesting about the EU, is that although the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is small, they do seem to have assimilated many of these arguments and ideas. The problem is the extent to which there is enough political consensus to conduct EU operations in the future. Under Solana, there were many EU operations but very few since. The EU proposed a different approach to the NATO operation in Libya, which mainly involved air strikes. The EU's approach was ground-based and would have included supporting areas that had declared themselves liberated. This could have been closer to the kind of human security approach that I'm talking about.

**You've stated that there is a frustration with formal politics in Europe and you have noted that subterranean politics has been bubbling to the surface in recent years. Why is this happening now?**

This is what I am really interested in at the moment and would like to be working on more. The argument in our research project, *Subterranean Politics*, is that there are lots of political tendencies beneath the surface and there are moments when these bubble up. That is when you suddenly get movements. I think my argument in general, which I put forward in *Global Civil Society*, is that these are moments when a fundamental shift in the dominant discourse takes place and it is this discourse that affects how institutions, governments or the EU behave. These moments could be described as major turning points and the mechanism through which it happens is social movements.

## Interview - Mary Kaldor

Written by E-International Relations

Social movements rise and fall, and when they reach their peak they are either accepted; their ideas and proposals become adopted as part of an official agenda and they become institutionalised and bureaucratised, or they decline, and sometimes turn to violence. I think you can see how Labour movements reached this moment in 1945 and there was a transformation of social movements into trade unions and labour parties. This was a slow process, taking most of the 20th century, but these groups became real partners of government after 1945. After 1968 there was a whole new wave of movements, which felt that the old labour movements hadn't been concerned with issues of gender, human rights, peace or the environment (which I was a part of). A big moment for those movements was 1989 when a lot of their agenda was adopted by government, though unfortunately neoliberalism developed at the same time. Many of these movements were institutionalised as international NGOs, which I think explains the rise of INGOs.

Since about 2000, there have been new mobilisations around things like Occupy and climate change. *Subterranean Politics* was very much about describing that phenomenon and how these movements have suddenly become more important in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. 2011 was a sort of starting point for all of this. A very interesting thing that happened in Europe is the rise of movement parties, such as Syriza, Podemos, and Momentum in Britain. I think the problem with movement parties is that they tend to get dominated by, the old left but the debate that is generated is often what influences the dominant discourse.

When I was an activist in the 1980s, we spent a lot of time fighting the old guard who were fellow travellers who argued that the end of the Cold War would come about by making friends with the Communists. I think the same thing happens with every movement. It is quite fascinating that we have Corbyn and Sanders who are the big leaders, who are very much of the traditional left, whereas those in the movements are a new generation and have very different sets of ideas. The debates that they generate is what produces the new. I also saw this in the 1980s – we got engaged in debates with the old left and we started making the links with Eastern Europe and in the end it changed a whole way of thinking, including our own.

I think this is a moment when such movements are beginning to break out of a preoccupation with local, national and statist solutions, and realise that they need to be much more global and European. At the moment what you see is national populism (of the right and left) versus global neoliberalism, whereas I think we need a new kind of global progressive discourse. I believe this is just beginning to happen, and it is for both environmental and social justice and is linked to the revolution in information technologies.

When we did the original research on *Subterranean Politics*, many of the activists we spoke to during the research didn't really mention the EU and were totally preoccupied with democracy at a national level. When we did prod them to talk about the EU they had very different views. But since Brexit this does seem to be changing. Last autumn I convened a meeting of European activists from across Europe in Athens. It was absolutely fascinating because everyone was preoccupied with their national situations – we had Turks, Ukrainians, Bosnians, Brits, and Germans, who only wanted to talk about their national problems but who all saw the solution as European.

There are also an increasing number of groups who are embracing the positives of globalisation. I recently got involved in a group called Another Europe is Possible which was formed during the referendum to mobilise progressive pro-Europeans and people who wanted a different kind of Europe. Now I think there are a number of pan-European groups, such as European Alternatives and Yanis Varoufakis' DiEM25 or #PulseofEurope. There is a struggle going on between the Europeanists and what are known as the Lexiters (the left exiters), and I think that it is going to be a very productive debate that could produce a more positive, pan-European, progressive view.

The issue that really needs to be addressed is one of substantive democracy rather than formal democracy. DiEM25, which is about getting a democratic Europe by 2025, sometimes seem to argue in quite old-fashioned formal terms, in relation to how one would have elections. I'm not against this but if you work with the EU institutions, as I have done, you realise that they are actually more responsive to ideas and proposals than national governments are. This is much harder in the economic sphere but the Commission, for example, is thinking about how to tax multinationals and how to constrain financial speculation perhaps by introducing a Tobin Tax. Another initiative is the idea of associate citizenship, which I am really keen on and could represent a move to create a Europe based on individual citizenship as opposed to citizenship based on nationality.

## **Interview - Mary Kaldor**

Written by E-International Relations

### **What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars?**

Be interested in ideas and not the REF. Do things because they are interesting and not because they are important for your career. Although I appreciate that this is much more difficult for young scholars now.

I think that this is the most dangerous period that I have lived through so being critical and honest is really important, especially at the moment.

—

*This interview was conducted by Jane Kirkpatrick. Jane Kirkpatrick is Features Editor and Director of the Editorial Board at E-International Relations.*