[Video: 30_Jarosz-Lucy.mp4]

Feminist Oral Histories of the University of Washington

Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, University of Washington
Seattle, WA

Lucy Jarosz

Interviewed by
Natalie Vaughan-Wynn

April 26th, 2021
Via Zoom

Narrator

Lucy Jarosz is Professor Emerita in the Department of Geography and Adjunct Professor Emerita in the Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies. Her research interests include the political ecology of food and hunger, women and agriculture, and agrarian development and change.

Interviewer

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn, at the time of this interview, is a first-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Geography. Her interests lay in the intersection of food, power, politics, and feminist methodologies. She became involved in the Feminist Oral Histories of the University of Washington through the GWSS 490: Oral History Research Methodology class taught by Professor Priti Ramamurthy of the GWSS Department. Students of the class were asked to conduct an interview with a faculty member of the GWSS department as part of the fulfillment of the course requirements.

Interview recorded by Natalie Vaughan-Wynn over Zoom. One 45-minute recording.

Files
Video: 30_Jarosz-Lucy.mp4

Transcript – 20 pages
Transcribed by Natalie Vaughan-Wynn.

NOTE: Transcript of video file. Timecodes in transcript relate to video player, not timestamp in display.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Hi Lucy, we're recording now.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Hi Natalie.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Thank you so much for doing this interview. The first question that I have for you…I actually don't know where you are.

Lucy A. Jarosz: I'm at home here in Seattle.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Okay that's great.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: The second question I have I'm wondering. If you could just share a little bit about your family and your childhood and any other factors that influenced who you became today, thank you.

Lucy A. Jarosz: My parents and I arrived in the United States as refugees after World War Two in the early 1950s. And both of my parents worked very hard in physically demanding jobs starting out as farm workers and as dishwashers at a restaurant. They encouraged me and my siblings to attend college and graduate school and they nurtured intellectual curiosity and a love of learning in all of us, and I think that was probably the most foundational and influential experience that I had in terms of shaping who I am…was just you know my family background and my parents.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: That value for education and the intellectual curiosity, that's wonderful. I'd imagine that that type of intellectual curiosity makes for a really successful academic career. Can you talk a little bit more about your career trajectory?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Sure. As an undergraduate I was a French major and then in graduate school I pursued French African studies and I was particularly interested in francophone studies, with an emphasis on oral narrative and literature and also I developed an interest in human geography. I was hired at the University of Washington just right out of graduate school and my research and teaching interests in gender and gender relations, hunger and poverty, and agriculture started out with field research in Madagascar and South Africa and ultimately moved to a focus on the Pacific Northwest largely because I was so influenced by where I was living. And my teaching has centered around the themes of political economy of hunger and agriculture, qualitative methods, and rural development.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: You were hired at university of Washington directly out of graduate school?

Lucy A. Jarosz: I filed my dissertation, um, in July and moved to Seattle, in August.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Is that typical?

Lucy A. Jarosz: It was, you know, at the time. I think it was at the time, and I mean it was great for me, because it was an incredible prod to get the dissertation done. At the time, in terms of other people that I knew in graduate school, it was common. Yeah and whereas now, as you know, especially since 2008

generally people wait a year or two before they get their first position you know, and they're usually postdoctoral fellows or perhaps visiting instructors.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Did it feel like a roller coaster?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Oh from graduate school to…uh yeah yeah! All of a sudden being called Professor so and so was quite the shock and being considered an expert made me giggle a little bit because I didn't consider myself an expert in really anything so the transition, I think, from graduate student to faculty member took some time.

(4:44) Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: That is related to the next question I have for you. Being at a university, a large research university, how did you balance all of the positions that you've had over the years, just in terms of your identity, your values, responsibilities and obligations. What were some of the different maybe competing priorities and how did you deal with that tension if there was tension?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Just as a junior faculty member, one of the most wonderful things about the Geography department was the sort of mentoring relationships that senior faculty had with junior faculty, and so I had help from colleagues in negotiating and negotiating commitments and actually, I think the most important help as a junior faculty member came in learning—although it was a lifelong, career-long process—in learning when to say no to things so that you didn't feel like totally over extended over or overworked. I mean there's nothing worse than feeling over extended, so much so that much of the stuff you do feels half-baked because you're just rushing from one project to another, so I think that that sort of collegial mentoring in the Geography Department was really important to me as a

junior faculty member. When I first came into the department, there was only one other woman in the department and so as the number of women on the faculty grew, most of them were very interested in feminist theory and feminist scholarship and men too, and so then over time our liaisons with GWSS began to grow and grow, and I think that those sorts of relationships also helped me navigate competing interests and competing commitments.

7:23-7:33: Poor internet connection

Lucy A. Jarosz: For me, I think the point that I was trying to make there was just that there was a professional network, a mentoring network within the department that was so valuable to me, and then, more broadly, you know, and I use GWSS as an example, but there were other networks that I became involved in and through those networks met colleagues and having those relationships was really instrumental in helping me try—you know because it's always a work in progress right—where you're trying to balance things and sometimes you feel like, "Oh it's just right," and then the next month, you feel like, "Oh no, this is too much," but yeah it was it was through those relationships.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Well, you segued perfectly to the next question and partially answered it. I'd love to hear more about those specific relationships that you had with faculty, with colleagues. What sorts of activities you did or friendships that developed or just like how you talked about how they gave you support. Were there moments that stand out specifically that stemmed from those relationships?

(9:30) Lucy A. Jarosz: Yes. I think initially just as I moved to Seattle to take my first job as a Ph.D. I had the pleasure of meeting Vicky Lawson in the interview process and what was so fantastic about meeting her was we shared an interest in feminist theory, we were interested in the political economy of international development. I was interested in Africa, she was interested in Latin America, and so that you know sort of caused us to have a lot of really great conversations. She had already built up an enduring relationship with the Jackson School of International Studies and introduced me to people there, and also with GWSS so I got to meet colleagues from GWSS so I felt like just because we shared all those interests and development geography at that time, I felt very welcomed and very grounded, so we became close colleagues and eventually did research and writing together, which was, you know, really, really wonderful and she's one of my oldest friends now and I've known her for nearly 30 years, you know, the whole time I've been here.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Wow.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah, it's pretty nice.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I appreciate you using Vicky as an example since she's my Committee Chair (both laugh).

Lucy A. Jarosz: And she's a really important figure, both in Geography and in GWSS, because she's done so much service to GWSS in terms of program review. She's really a key figure, I think.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I am so happy to hear about that orientation toward relationships within the department and across departments between Geography and GWSS. As someone coming in this year, not 30 years ago, I feel…my suspicion is that that's still there, so I'm really excited to hear that.

I really want to hear about more about your collaboration and writing projects, but since this is a video for GWSSs anniversary maybe we will segue into your scholarship as a feminist, if that's okay.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Okay.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: First, is there a moment, so what was there like a light bulb moment or did you slowly build your identity as a feminist scholar or did that happen when you were an undergraduate? Did it happen slowly over time?

Lucy A. Jarosz: hmm. It happened slowly over time and I was aware of it in different ways at different points in my life. The first time… I mean if I could point to I guess the initial moments…I was in high school, I think it was my senior year in high school and I read *The Second Sex* and I read part of a biographical work by Simone de Beauvoir as well called *Prime of Life* in translation and I became very, very interested in the position of women as my guidance counselor was counseling me to go to secretarial school. (laughing) So! You know, there was a lot going on just even in high school and then in college, the Environmental Studies program—so this is all to me like ancient history in some ways—but while I was in college environmental studies and women's studies programs were just taking root and getting started and as an undergrad, I was taking courses in both of those

and really sort of reading the foundational works of the early socialist and radical feminists of the 70s and 80s and then it began to change in graduate school, as I started doing more reading about, particularly about women in agriculture and women's varying roles in food production and processing and distribution, and I was especially at that time really interested in their roles in Africa and trying to understand those roles in relation to the climbing hunger numbers in sub Saharan Africa, so you know it was sort of different at various points of my life, but when I think about it, it started kind of really pretty early and then just sort of developed and changed depending on what I was doing and where I was trying to go.

(15:51) Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: That makes a lot of sense that it would emerge as a really important identity to embrace at different points in your journey. Yeah. I also have a question about how your understanding of feminist theory has evolved over time, which you, you did talk a little bit about. Um, I guess maybe we could think, if we think of this other question, which is how because you're a geographer also, so just thinking about your identity as a feminist geographer, what contributions do you to think geographers can make to feminist theory? Or have made?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Well, I would say that for me, in watching the way in which concepts like relationality and intersectionality have influenced and shaped academic inquiry as well as activism, I think what I see is that feminist theory has moved beyond you know, a sole focus—a focus which I still consider very important—but a sole focus on women and gender identities and gender relationships to examine multiple sites of oppression, non binary gender identities, sexualities and the relationships of humans to space, place, and the non-human world, so I really like the way that feminist theory—and I would say it's sort of to

me like the discipline of geography in many ways—has become wider and more interdisciplinary I think that's really, really, healthy and liberating.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Yeah I think so too. Although I don't have the benefit of that trajectory or that that perspective, yet, I have been happy to walk into what I feel like is a big open wide world with a lot of connection.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah, exactly, and that being said, at the same time, those timeworn concepts of patriarchy and sexism are not obsolete. They still exist and, in many ways, despite this wonderful expansion of the theoretical field and the programs, I still am really, really interested in questions
of justice and oppression and liberation and development that concern women. I still am after all of that. And so, I was thinking too then about your second question, which is the contributions that feminists geographers make to broader feminist theory thinking and I see examples of that in our department. I think of the work done with Black Geographies bringing writing about the world and geography in relationship to racial formations and racializations, I think is very, very exciting. I think that feminist work in political ecology is key to understanding how small-scale sustainable agriculture around the world is key in fighting climate change. That's really important. I think that looking at productive and reproductive work and gender relations of power as they concern food is really, really important, and I think people are making contributions there in terms of care work, care ethics, and definitely I would say around sort of issues of food sovereignty and food justice. So those are for me, like the four major areas.

(21:23) Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Even though these fields are new to me I can clearly see the connection between care geographies, geographies of care and the work of feminists and feminist scholarship.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah and exactly you know and productive and reproductive labor and wage non-wage work and, well, I was thinking of Caitlin Alcorn's dissertation research as I was talking to you about it but yeah, I feel that feminist geographers in terms of looking at these things in relation to space and place, region and nation, are just making incredible contributions across those fields and I really have deeply appreciated Vicky's work on care ethics and Sarah's work on care ethics, too. I mean I think that's been really important. Kim England also has done, is doing some work in that area so all of those contributions I feel are very important.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Would you say more about Caitlin's work. You mentioned Caitlin. Is she one of the students who has taken coursework in both GWSS and geography?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Boy, you know, that's a good question I don't know. I know Caitlin because, as a grad student she taught my lower-level food course and we talked about that, and then I was very, very interested in the kinds of work that she was doing related to migration and women's work with Kim. And she was on my mind, but you know when I think about feminist geography within the department I think about people working on Black Geographies and Latinx Geographies and feminist political ecology and feminist digital geography and just the broad swath of graduate students. Just the sheer number of people doing work in feminist studies, both men and women.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Yeah I've been looking through examples of preliminary and general statements and that's definitely the case.

Lucy A. Jarosz: It's striking, isn't it?

Lucy A. Jarosz: When I was Chair, what I realized—and it was like it was like a dream come true for me!—when I was Chair, we reached parity in our faculty between women and men, we didn't of course have parity in terms of ethnicity and race, but reaching parity in terms of gender identities was huge, especially when decades earlier I'd come to a department that had one woman in it and I had graduated from a department that had no women in it.

(24:54) Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: So when was that parity point reached?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Decades later.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Decades later.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I don't know what it looks like these days, but I think it's tipped a little bit.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Tipped over to women more?

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I think so.

Lucy A. Jarosz: yeah I mean the one thing that I'm seeing is I feel like it's tipping toward women more which I think is really great because I remember as a junior scholar, I was just stunned to see that, in terms of senior faculty, tenured faculty, women were still in the we're in the minority.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Was that the norm, with all the departments?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah around the country, so I that part I think is good, and you know I'm also really, really heartened to see, and you can see it in Geography to, because this has really been a vital thing and now it's happening, is we're seeing more people of color coming into tenure track positions, and I think that that is vital, for the health of the university and programs and disciplines in general, to have that kind of diversity on the on the faculty is really, really important both for teaching, but also for mentoring. Teaching, researching and mentoring students.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Absolutely.

Lucy A. Jarosz: I see these changes as being incredibly positive. But what's fascinating to me at the same time Natalie is, well, I guess it's all relative, but it's happened but it takes a long time. It doesn't happen instantly but it does happen.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Yeah. Of course, especially your point about the diversity of faculty being important for student to mentorship, for students to have role models that they're working with.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Well, it was amazing to me, and I remember it really clearly because Vicky and I were talking about it when this happened—I don't when it was…it was a while ago now, definitely over 10 years ago, maybe 15 years ago, and now it's commonplace and nobody even thinks about it, but at the time it was a big deal—that it was possible for a student to constitute a committee in the department or maybe even you know, bringing say someone from GWSS outside as a committee member, but now it is possible for a student to compose a committee made up of top colleagues, all of whom are women which was something I could have only dreamed about, as a graduate student.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I have dreamed about that!

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah, I mean it's pretty amazing to me to see that happening in other departments too. GWSS, certainly, but Sociology, just committees I've served on in Sociology that were all made up of women. That for me became really important, and it goes it speaks to the point that you made: depending on who you are and your identity, it is just so important for me to see women in that position, because then you can imagine yourself doing it too, and you know this holds true, then also for Latinx, African American, and Asian American students too, to see graduate students and faculty members in these positions so that you can actually imagine yourself following them and doing that too.

(29:25) Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Well, that brings up another question that I have, which is did you have role models, either when you were in graduate school or even once you were at the university employed, did you have people that you looked up to? I mean you mentioned having mentors who were colleagues…

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah I guess I had never thought about it as role models, but I'm going to call it "people I admire." There's a whole list of people that I admire who were really important and inspirational to me, and I would say that in graduate in graduate school. Harold Scheub who was in African languages and literature was amazing. His love of oral narrative was so inspiring to me in the kind of field work that he did in South Africa, and he actually introduced me, was one of the people who introduced me, to Geography, because he knew Michael Watts and he thought I would be interested in the kind of research that Michael Watts did. So I ended up, thanks to Harold, I ended up in Berkeley's Ph.D. program working with Michael Watts, whom I admired greatly, both as a scholar and a person and learned a great deal from and then after I came to the UW, and this, it was kind of a slow process because two scholars in feminist political ecology, I followed their work and I admired their work one was Louise Fortmann who I believe is Emeritus now and Dianne Rocheleau too who co-edited one of the first books on feminist political ecology.

Louise worked in Africa and Dianne worked in Central America, but I loved the kind of research that they did. I was so excited about the field of feminist political ecology, because I'd been looking at women in agriculture in Madagascar, so their work was really influential for me and then I think in terms of, oh gosh, there's just so many people at the UW…Vicky Lawson, just an important colleague and research collaborator. I was, very, very inspired by Priti Ramamurthy's work broadly on the political economy of development and under development in India and her work in rural development was inspiring to me, and she was just a great, great colleague and kind of a kindred spirit in that sense. Judy Howard, former Chair of GWSS, just her intellectual breadth and her administrative skill, both as a (GWSS) Chair and then ultimately as an Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences was really inspirational to me as well, and she was just really, really amazing. So there were,

and continue to be a number of people around campus—those are just a few, I mean there were many, many more

—And Maria Elena Garcia, I was just thinking about her work, which I find very, very interesting and really good. I'm inspired by her mentoring as well, but yeah, there are many people that I'm leaving out, but at the same time, what was great was just how I never really felt isolated.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: That's so good to hear. Yeah, just so good to hear. I also really appreciate Maria Elena Garcia's work so…and some of the others that you mentioned, I will seek them out. You well, you just mentioned mentorship. Could you talk more about your students and the mentorship that you provided to students. I would even like to hear about how you saw yourself as kind of caring for your students?

(34:45) Lucy A. Jarosz: Hmmm. I've been blessed and privileged to work with, I think, just some really smart and creative people and I never really liked the idea that someone came to be like me that just sounded dull and boring, and so my idea of mentoring people was not… I didn't feel like, you know, that I wanted them to follow in my footsteps at all, but what I had hoped for them was that they would grow in self-confidence and develop their own voices and move forward, you know, in ways that they thought were important, so I really tried hard to guide people, but not tell them what to do, and you know that didn't of course fit everyone's needs, but that was sort of my idea, my philosophy of mentorship was, I wanted to encourage and support, but not necessarily direct people and tell them what to do or not to do because I felt like one needs—and it's really difficult I think in graduate

school—but you know one needs to just sort of develop a sense of oneself and feel confident in terms of one's own voice in order to go forward.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I wanted to go a little bit back to what you've mentioned a couple times now, you talked about your transition from your work in African Geographies where do you were mentioning role models, quite a few people you mentioned work outside of the US context. So I wanted to hear a little bit about your characterization of feminism outside of our US context, or maybe that's the wrong way to put it, but what feminist action or like what feminist participation or what feminism looks like outside of our context. What could it look like?

Lucy A. Jarosz: Ah, for me, I think that it can be embodied in somebody like Wangari Maathai of Kenya. In sort of the actions that she did the kind of influence and following that she had and the inspiration that that she was, I mean she's certainly I think one of the more high profile kinds of activists.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: So you've talked a lot about work that you've seen that's been really inspiring, what work do you hope others pick up in the future, related to the fields in which you have expertise?

Lucy A. Jarosz: I am really interested to know more about the ways that Indigenous agricultural knowledges is in particular places--and that's usually women's knowledge, particularly say in Africa or South Asia--and then, sometimes in Indigenous communities in the Americas, too, but the ways that Indigenous knowledge can be combined with agro-ecological principles to build sustainable local food systems that are democratically

controlled that will fight climate change and eliminate hunger, you know, for me, that's kind of, those are like the larger themes, but research that's connected to those themes for me is really important right now.

(39:45) Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Yeah I, I agree, I know. In statistics, they call it finding the positive outlier, but you know with storytellers you would just tell the stories of solutions that work, and I think I think they are out there.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Yeah, yeah I think so, too, I mean you some of its participatory action research, you know ethno botanist knowledge of medicinal plants seeds, you know seed saving, ways of producing food that are in harmony with ecological systems. You're right, I think it's definitely out there and continuing but that for me is just the most important work, you know it's my interest but it's the most important work. (laughing)

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Well, I love that your interests are the most important work. I agree. (laughing)

Lucy A. Jarosz: I don't know… what could be more important than food? Hardly anything! I mean maybe water and air, but you know it's right up there.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: It's right there. That's actually, if I mean if you'd like to share anything else, or is there anything that we missed that you would like to share? Or that's a perfect…thinking about the future and future research is a good note to go out on…

Lucy A. Jarosz: Well, the one thing that I would like to share that I'm finding really inspiring is…I'm not so much, I don't know so much about graduate school because that's a whole different endeavor but, at the undergraduate level, I have been really inspired by undergraduates who are doing, who are really curious about the world and committed to making a difference and applying their skills and knowledge that they've learned to problems that are important to them. I'm really inspired by the kinds of double majors that I see people doing: doing Computer Science and Political Science, Geography and Biological Sciences or Fisheries Sciences. I love, I LOVE you know, maybe it's because I didn't do it and it just seems great to me, but sort of combining maybe the humanities, or the social sciences, with the natural sciences in a in a double major, or with computer sciences or information technology. I've been most inspired by students who are doing that because I think that they will have an important kind of way of approaching the complex problems that we're facing that people before them didn't have who just majored in one area.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: I'm definitely passing your comment on to a classmate in this oral history course who is a Computer Science major and a GWSS minor.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Perfect! That's the perfect person! (laughing) And doing oral history! Fantastic, love it.

Lucy A. Jarosz: You know I sort of saw it, too, an undergraduate I remember this one undergraduate who was really interested in Indigenous plants and knowledges and so she was an Anthropology/GWSS major who wanted to work in museum collections. I just you know, it was wonderful, and she was really interested in food sovereignty…yeah it's good. So, yeah, I thought yeah, I feel hopeful for the future, when I see that.

Natalie Vaughan-Wynn: Great. Thank you.

Lucy A. Jarosz: Thank you Natalie for taking all the time and energy in a really busy time of the quarter to write up the questions and inviting me to do the interview. It's been great meeting you and I really wish you great success in your program and I really hope there'll be some useful bits that you can use for your project and GWSS can use for their celebration. If not, if you need anything more, let me know because I'm happy to help in any way I can.

(45:07) END