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Review of Women and Nonviolence

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***Women and Nonviolence*. Anna Hamling, Ed. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021, hardback, \$99.95, ISBN 9781527566767.**

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Worldwide cultural norms have typically defined women as “the peaceful sex,” nonviolent where men are violent; peace activists and peace researchers have long exploited and explored this stereotype. From women’s peace movement organizations such as Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and Code Pink, Women for Peace to Betty Reardon’s *Sexism and the War System* and the “Women : Peace = Men : Violence?” chapter in Johan Galtung’s textbook, *Peace by Peaceful Means*, the theme has persisted through the end of the 20th Century and into the 21st. In 2021, as many scholars are busily deconstructing the gender binary, Anna Hamling, Professor of Culture and Media Studies at the University of New Brunswick, has curated a compelling collection of readings on the topic of *Women and Nonviolence*, demonstrating the continuing power of the association. From artistic demonstrations by the likes of Yoko Ono and Pussy Riot through the anti-wife-beating movements in Africa and protest disrobings by indigenous Toba Batak women in Northern Sumatra, readers of this volume get a guided tour of women using nonviolent tactics effectively and taking successful action around the world.

This 222-page anthology is divided into three major sections covering arts and literature, exemplary individuals, and women’s nonviolent movements across the globe, with a helpful listing of contributors’ biographies in the back of the book. Authors from Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia bring to life the editor’s goal to “explore the issues of nonviolence and women from different perspectives and within a broad cultural context” (p. 2). While the breadth of the topic precludes the possibility of completing an exhaustive survey in just one volume, Hamling has collected a fairly representative sample of case studies with enough variety to engage the reader, without overwhelming them.

The editor’s introductory chapter offers readers a brief discussion of the meaning of nonviolence as used in this text via a lengthy quote from Michael Nagler, who explains the method as not just a list of tactics, but rather an attempt to restore, repair, and rebuild broken relationships. Hamling’s ensuing summary of chapters in the book traces this idea about relationships through the very different topics, time periods, and movements covered in each author’s contribution. Given the wide-ranging subject matter, I would have liked to see a similar concluding chapter, recapitulating key lessons from the book as a whole. Still, leaving that task to readers may have been a wise choice, as the chapters together point in many directions for continuing research and practice.

The first section of the book offers four chapters under the heading “Women Exploring Nonviolence in Visual Arts and Literature.” The authors examine different women using different media—performance art, punk rock, memoir, and poetry—to examine women’s relationships and resistance to violence in the world. Yoko Ono invites observers to cut away her clothing, exploring vulnerability, objectification, victimization, othering, and power in the relationship between artist and audience. Pussy Riot occupy the altar at a Russian Orthodox cathedral, screaming criticisms of Vladimir Putin and his regime over the blare of electric guitars to wake Russians from their passivity. Anne Moody writes from the heart, describing her experience of the intersection of race

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with gender in the Civil Rights Movement. And Arab-American women use poetic verse to challenge stereotypes that present them as both victim and threat. Different women in different places at different times take very different approaches to delve into relationships violent, nonviolent, and compelling.

In Part 2, three chapters tell the stories of four lesser-known heroines of nonviolent resistance. Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakkol Karman epitomizes the active work of Arab women, too often stereotyped as passive and confined to domestic roles, as actors in the nonviolent civil resistance actions collectively known as the Arab spring. The organizing work of Mary Elizabeth King, a young white college student leader in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, embodies the complexities of working for peace and justice without weapons at the intersection of race and class. And a reconstructed history of the Russian Revolution brings forward the significant contributions of two important women, Nadezhda Krupskaya and Aleksandra Kollontai, to the creation of a workers' state. In each case, attention to the relationships between oppressed people and their oppressors led women activists to use unarmed approaches to address civil and political conflicts.

The last section of the book takes readers through five chapters on "Women in Global Nonviolent Movements." In the opening chapter, Selina Gallo-Cruz theorizes the roles women play as both threats and sources of change when they exercise nonviolent power in Chile, El Salvador, and Palestine. Part 3 continues with stories of collective opposition to wife-beating in Africa, women's tax resistance in Nigeria, nonviolent action against a pulp mill in Northern Sumatra, and women's movements in India. Each of these case studies explores longstanding tactics used by nonviolent women resisters, including victim-led actions, disrobing, and invocation of "motherhood" as a powerful force for peace.

The case studies collected here represent a valuable assortment of new material for the study of connections between gender and nonviolent action, as well as nonviolent movements in general. While the title of the volume may initially appear anachronistic, recognition of gender as a spectrum has not stopped women from identifying and organizing as such around the world, and the successes of the different movements described illustrate the continuing power of the cultural association of women with nonviolence. The women studied here take action, without weapons, based on experiences with and visions of peaceful relations between and among human beings. The authors cannot tell us everything there is to know about women and nonviolence, but together they paint a vivid picture illustrating the continuing power of the theme.