

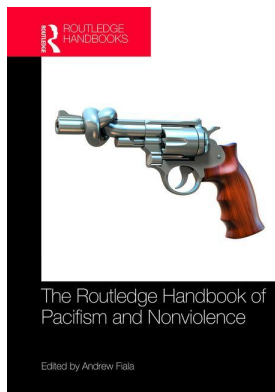
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On: 25 Mar 2019

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence

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Feminism and Nonviolent Activism

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315638751-24>

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Published online on: 21 Feb 2018

How to cite :- Danielle Poe. 21 Feb 2018, *Feminism and Nonviolent Activism from: The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence* Routledge

Accessed on: 25 Mar 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315638751-24>

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FEMINISM AND NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM

Danielle Poe

This chapter will focus on the overlap between two political stances: feminism and nonviolence. While feminism has evolved over the years (an evolution that I will explain in the following paragraph), those who are part of this political position turn their attention to the ways in which women's actions, thoughts, and contributions have been subordinated to those from men. Feminism brings to light the ways in which women's perspectives are different than men's and provides new ways of thinking and new forms of justice that are covered over when men's actions and ideas are held up as the universal standard by which everything else is judged. While not all feminists are committed to nonviolent action, feminism as a movement has example after example of women who responded to violence with nonviolence: Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Dorothy Day, Jane Addams and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Audre Lorde, Wangari Maathi, Shirin Ebadi, Jody Williams, Aung San Suu Kyi, Leymeh Gbowee, and Malala Yousafzai. While this list is long, it is not exhaustive and will hopefully inspire readers to learn about the many different ways that women live out feminist, nonviolent practice.

In order to understand why feminism includes such a variety of women, it is helpful to understand its history. Feminism as a political movement can be understood in terms of "waves"; the first two waves focused on goals that feminists had in common. First wave feminism (mid-1800s and early 1900s) focused on the fight for women's right to vote, which entailed a number of recognizable forms of nonviolent action: marches, petitions, rallies, speeches, hunger strikes, disruptive political action. Second wave feminism (1960s through the early 1990s) focused on equal rights for women and again used nonviolent action to promote its cause. These early forms of feminism focused on common issues, but since the 1990s feminism has expanded to include many issues and has led to disagreement about what is rightly called "feminist" or "feminism."

Unlike the first two waves, third wave feminism (1990s through today) addresses a wide range of injustices that impact all people. This third wave arose as a critique and expansion of second wave feminism. The critique is that feminism was promoting a single image of women; namely, feminism was focusing on the experience of white, middle-class, U.S. women. The critique of feminism's narrowness led to an expansion of feminism, as it embraced women from across the globe, as well as across lines of race, religion, ethnicity, and class. What makes all of the third wave movements feminist is that they are organized, led, and developed by women who are using their experiences as women to craft their critiques, responses, and vision (Coleman 2009; Orr 1997; Bailey 1997; Kinser 2004; Snyder 2008).

This chapter will focus on third wave feminism by drawing on the work of feminist groups and individual women to illustrate the wide variety of influence that feminists and feminism have had on nonviolent activism and also the ways in which they have created more justice in the world. Feminist nonviolent activists—like all other feminists—include a wide variety of philosophical commitments and political affiliations. But what they all share in common is that their identity as women is central to their leadership as they address social and political injustices, especially those injustices that disproportionately impact women.

To begin this chapter, I will focus on two individual women, Leymah Gbowee and Arundhati Roy. Gbowee won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her role in ending the civil war in Liberia and bringing democracy to the country. She continues her activism as part of the Nobel Women's Initiative, which brings together the women who have won the Nobel Peace Prize in order to work collaboratively on projects that improve the lives of women and children around the world. My focus in this article will be on Gbowee's activism that brought down Charles Taylor, a violent dictator responsible for widespread violence and suffering in Africa.¹

Next, I will analyze the work of Arundhati Roy, who rose to prominence when her book *The God of Small Things* was published in 1997. In this work, Roy brings to light the many forms of social injustice that the people of India suffer as a direct result of their colonized history. The success of her book elevated her to international, near-celebrity status. Roy felt compelled to use her prominence to speak out against injustice on behalf of those whose voices otherwise would not be heard. She has since addressed the corruption of governments, big business, and individuals.

I will also examine the activism of two organizations, Code Pink and Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Code Pink formed in the U.S. in 2002 in order to bring women together to publically demonstrate against a U.S. invasion of Iraq. Since that time, the group organizes public protests against war, occupation, and unjust business practices. They are particularly adept at showing the relationship between U.S. business interests and global social injustice. Code Pink uses a combination of social critique, public demonstrations, and satire to draw attention to their causes. Their ability to ground their work in gender and national identity in relationship to global issues illustrates a powerful performance strategy that other feminist groups and individuals use as well.

Finally, I will discuss Madres de Plaza de Mayo. From 1977 through today, this organization has brought Argentinian women together to fight for transparency and human rights. The Madres began informally in 1977, when mothers would walk daily around a public square in order to share information about their children who had been disappeared by the military dictatorship. Over time, they became a formal organization that worked together to challenge the oppression, torture, and injustice of the military regime. Even after the government became democratic in 1983, the women continued their activism (although the original group splintered into two groups) in order to facilitate a peace process and to advocate for other social justice issues.

The four case studies in this chapter will introduce the reader to the range of nonviolent activism initiated and sustained by women around the world. I characterize all of these movements as feminist, even when their activism is on behalf of all people, because the women understand their activism as explicitly connected to their identity as women. This is not to say that there is something about being a woman that makes women nonviolent. Rather, my argument is that women who are committed to feminism and nonviolence use their experiences to inform their political beliefs and actions. Their experiences include an intersection of differences: religious, class, ethnic, national, racial, and sexual to name a few. For each group and each woman, the access to power and experience of vulnerability comes out of the intersection of differences. The emphasis on difference comes out of feminist philosophy and the emphasis on addressing

injustice through nonviolence is a political commitment, and it is this overlap that will be examined. The feminists covered in this chapter are not an exhaustive accounting of feminist nonviolent activism; rather, they are illustrative of the many ways in which feminism is informing nonviolence and bringing about peace and justice. Readers are invited to take this chapter as inspiration to do further research on contemporary feminist nonviolent activists and groups.

Leymah Gbowee

Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee provides an important example of how someone who faced extensive violence joined with other Liberian women to confront that violence with nonviolence. Her story is important because it illustrates the effectiveness of nonviolence against violence, and the power that women have to create the conditions for peace when they explicitly use their identity as women in their activism. Not only does she use her experience as a woman and as mother to inform her activism, but she also uses her education, her political commitment to interreligious dialogue, and her work with humanitarian groups to promote nonviolent change.

In her book *Mighty Be Our Powers* and in the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, Gbowee describes the bloody war in Liberia that began on Christmas Eve 1989 when Charles Taylor began an attack on the Liberian government (Gbowee and Mithers 2011; Reticker 2008). From the moment that Taylor began his campaign to take over Liberia, his leadership was marked by terror and cruelty. For example, Gbowee describes hearing about the death of a friend in the early days of the war:

And I heard about Koffa, my high school friend, the joker with the perfect handkerchief, who dreamed of becoming a US Marine. His father had enemies who were also in the military, and under the guise of war they came for him one day. He hid, so they killed the rest of the family and laid their bodies in the street. Koffa's body . . .

Gbowee and Mithers 2011: 24

Gbowee ends this passage with “Koffa’s body . . .”, an incomplete thought that emphasizes just how traumatic the violence in Liberia is and that no one is safe during this war. Although the soldiers came looking for Koffa’s father, they killed the family when they couldn’t find their target. Not only were Taylor and his forces responsible for indiscriminate killing, rape, and looting, but the Liberian government, led by President Samuel Doe, was also responsible for killing civilians and refugees who were thought to be sympathetic to the rebels (Beck and Hendon 1990; Boateng and Hilton 2011; Graham and Khor 1995; Huband 1990; Huband 1991). While all accounts of war are filled with suffering and violence, the war in Liberia was particularly disturbing in its use of children:

It was “Papay” Taylor who first brought children into the Liberian war with his Small Boy Units, although eventually all the rebels used them. Tens of thousands fought, some of them as young as eight, carrying AK-47s they were barely strong enough to lift. They were a nightmare vision of childhood, these soldiers, desperate to please and too young to understand what they were doing, taken away from their families and kept high on alcohol and drugs until they became the most merciless killers of all.

Gbowee and Mithers 2011: 90

Gbowee was trying to raise her four small children who were between the ages of 6 years and 7 months old during the time period in which she recalls her first work with Taylor’s boys.

Within Gbowee's narrative of the war in Liberia, the immediate suffering from the war takes place between 1989 and 2003. However, it should be clear from the previous descriptions that the impact of this violence continues long after the war stops, long after the arrest of Charles Taylor on March 29, 2006, and long after his conviction for war crimes on May 30, 2012.

One basic idea of nonviolence is that means and ends should be linked; the reason for this belief is that nonviolence is both practically and morally superior when confronting violence and pursuing peace. Practically, Gbowee is the mother of small children, which immediately limits the kinds of actions that will make sense for her. In order to continue to care for her children, she does not have the option of taking up arms and fighting violence with violence, since that is far more likely to result in her death than it is to result in ending the violence. Further, all sides in the conflict are inflicting harm on women, children, and civilians, so adding more violence continues to escalate violence instead of creating the conditions for peace. Morally, as a mother, Gbowee wants her children to grow into adults who value peace and justice. For that to happen, they need to develop those habits and capacities as youth. Because they are surrounded by violence in their society, Gbowee will have to provide another example, an example of acting for peace and justice.

Next, one can consider the objection that nonviolent direct action is too risky and so as a mother Gbowee should not confront the violence surrounding her. But Gbowee is surrounded by risk whether she does something or nothing. Throughout her memoir, Gbowee describes her work with women in internally displaced persons camps where she helps them to tell their stories of suffering during the war. Just one of these stories reveals the horror of the war:

The soldiers came into the displaced persons camp they said, "Give us all the money you have!" I did. I gave them everything. Then they said, "Take off your clothes!" I did what they told me. They all had sex with me. All but one. He was the last one and he said, his penis was too good for me. And so instead, he used his knife.

Gbowee and Mithers 2011: 106

The experience of this woman is representative of the experience of thousands of women during the war; the soldiers systematically stripped women of their possessions, their well-being, and their dignity at every opportunity. The violence, shame, and grief that Gbowee helped women to address in her work with women in displaced person camps stretches across the whole of Liberia. Roughly 200,000 people were killed and another 600,000 people were displaced during the Liberian civil war. The extent of violence at the time meant that standing by and doing nothing was also a threat to Gbowee and her children's safety.

In the 2000s Gbowee would help to inspire other mothers to confront the violence in their country. Gbowee describes the inspiration for her action as coming from a dream that she had after the day that I described in the previous section, when she thought that neither she nor the fifty women gathered together could take any more pain: "*I didn't know where I was. Everything was dark. I couldn't see a face, but I heard a voice, and it was talking to me—commanding me: 'Gather the women to pray for peace!'*" (Gbowee and Mithers 2011: 122; italics in original). In order to act on her vision, Gbowee began to network with other women's networks, trying to cast as wide a net as possible in order to gather women from across all walks of life and across the wide religious divide between Christian and Muslim women. Gbowee describes the women sitting, all in white T-shirts "to signify peace," day after day from "dawn to dusk" under the burning sun where they chanted, prayed, and held signs demanding an end to violence and for peace. Women were there by the hundreds to be visible to the warlords as they supposedly engaged in peace talks. While Charles Taylor and the other rebel leaders paid lip service to the women's demand for peace, the war raged on, heaping more suffering on the people of Liberia.

This impasse and her willingness to risk everything for peace led Gbowee to lead the women to a dramatic protest that changed the course of negotiations. Just in time for the lunch break of those who were supposed to be negotiating for peace, Gbowee led 200 women, wearing their white T-shirts, into the building, and they all sat in front of the door to the hall, effectively blocking the participants from leaving the hall for lunch. To explain their purpose, she gave the men inside a note that read, “*We are holding these delegates, especially the Liberians, hostage. They will feel the pain of what our people are feeling at home*” (Gbowee and Mithers 2011: 161; italics in original). This, of course, outraged the men inside, and they threatened to have Gbowee arrested:

I was so angry, I was out of my mind. “I will make it very easy for you to arrest me. I’m going to strip naked.” I took off my hair tie. Beside me, Sugars rose to her feet and began to do the same. I pulled off my *lappa*, exposing the tights I wore underneath. . . . I was beside myself desperate. Every institution that I’d been taught was there to protect the people had proved evil and corrupt; everything I valued had collapsed. These negotiations had been my last hope, but they were crashing, too. But in threatening to strip, I had summoned up a traditional power. In Africa, it’s a terrible curse to see a married or elderly woman deliberately bare herself. . . . For this group of men to see a woman naked would be almost like a death sentence. Men are born through women’s vaginas, and it’s as if by exposing ourselves, we say, “We now take back the life we gave you.”

Gbowee and Mithers 2011: 161–162

The result of her actions was that negotiations became serious and the war began to end and processes for peace began. Gbowee describes her action as a spontaneous response to her outrage at the luxury accommodations provided for the representatives of the political factions responsible for inflicting terrible suffering on the people of Liberia, her disgust at being threatened with arrest for interfering with people who had proved evil and corrupt, and her determination to speak out against these injustices. Although her act was spontaneous, she remained true to nonviolent direct action; her actions over many years had created a mindset of nonviolence such that she was able to take advantage of an opportunity using local knowledge and tradition.

Ultimately, Gbowee’s act and the protests by other women successfully brought democracy to Liberia in 2003. Taylor was indicted for war crimes and was eventually convicted in 2012 by special international court in The Hague. Gbowee was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 and now uses her influence to advocate for girls’ education around the world.

Arundhati Roy

As a feminist peace activist, Arundhati Roy confronts the inequity in the world that we all live in today. Roy’s feminism is part of her work in two important ways: a legacy that has paved the way for her activism and a political movement entwined with other movements against injustice, particularly the injustice perpetrated by capitalism. With respect to the legacy of feminism, Roy’s interview with Aishwaraya Subramanyam is instructive because Roy states:

Every freedom we have today, we have because of feminists. Many women have fought and paid a huge price for where we are today. It didn’t all come to us only because of our own inherent talent or brilliance. Even the simple fact that women have the vote, who fought for that? The suffragettes. No freedom has come without a huge battle.

Subramanyam 2016

Roy's point is important for understanding contemporary feminism: women's voices and experiences are part of the conversation because other women have paved the way for contemporary women to express themselves, to vote, to access the media, and to access education. Roy, then, is a feminist because her perspective is formed by the convergence of being a woman, being Indian, being a writer, experiencing poverty, and experiencing affluence.

One place in which Roy's critique of capitalism and her perspective as a feminist is explicit is when she warns against the co-opting of feminism so that it focuses on women's bodies rather than on coercion:

When, as happened recently in France, an attempt is made to coerce women out of the burka rather than creating a situation in which a woman can choose what she wishes to do, it's not about liberating her but about unclothing her. It becomes an act of humiliation and cultural imperialism. Coercing a woman out of her burka is as bad as coercing her into one. It's not about the burka. It's about the coercion. Viewing gender in this way, shorn of social, political, and economic context, makes it an issue of identity, a battle of props and costumes.

Roy 2014: 36

Roy is keenly aware in her work that the harmful effects of capitalism and neoliberalism disproportionately impact women, but an explicit focus on feminism as the primary lens for analysis carries the risk that her audience will get pulled into debates about women's bodies rather than focusing on the source of harm for women. Roy's primary concern is to draw attention to capitalism and coercion and its effects on people. Feminism, then, is the historical legacy by which Roy has a voice and platform to raise her concerns and it permeates her critique of capitalism.

Her activism is both focused on local struggles of the poorest people in India and focused on a global critique of capitalism because "of course India is a microcosm of the world. Of course versions of what happens there happen everywhere" (Roy 2001: 3). Whereas other activists in this chapter use nonviolent direct action, Roy's activism is primarily academic and intellectual. She has brought her message to India and to the world through fiction, journalism, academic articles, and university speeches, and in radio and television interviews. As she explains in *Power Politics*, "It is the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding" (Arundhati 2014: 32). It is also important to remember that when Roy writes about or talks about the poorest people in India and elsewhere, women are disproportionately part of this group (Arundhati 2014: 34).

Roy's career as an activist started unexpectedly when her book *The God of Small Things* came out in 1996. The book was a work of fiction, but it powerfully captures the struggles of Indian people who were being forgotten in the push for development in India. Through that work, Roy became a well-known global author. And, through the combination of her celebrity and her face-to-face contact with suffering people in India, Roy describes herself as compelled to act:

Sometimes you can't control what you have to do. As in, I can't live with myself every day knowing that I have earned myself space in public. I can make a difference. I can say what I'm thinking. And, when you know that space is there it's very hard to walk past it. I long to walk past it, to tell you the truth. I long to walk past these things. I'm not someone who enjoys controversy.

BBC Interview 2016: 17:30

When Roy refers to “these things,” she is referring to the injustice that she witnesses globally, and especially the injustice in India. In this particular interview, she is referring to the Indian government’s dam projects, which according to her calculations have displaced 33 million people (BBC Interview 2016: 5:55). She had to use her own calculations because the number of people displaced by these projects is not tracked by the government. Roy’s research has also uncovered that these projects are primarily (if not exclusively) benefitting the interests of the sugar industry (BBC Interview 2016: 8:12), while the people who are being displaced are reaping none of the benefits. Because Roy asked questions about the dam projects, discovered real harms to the most vulnerable people in India, and knows that false information is being disseminated by the Indian government, Roy feels an obligation to speak out because she has a public voice and recognition that allows her to be heard in a way that those who are directly harmed are not heard. Even though speaking out causes controversy, name-calling and threats against her, Roy speaks out because she feels she must.

One of Roy’s most powerful books is her analysis of capitalism, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, in which she critiques the irrationality of an economic system that measures the wealth of a nation but fails to measure the cost of that wealth for the poor, and the systematic violence used to protect those who have the wealth. Roy cites the 2010 statistic from *Forbes Asia* which documents the fact that “in a nation of 1.2 billion, India’s one hundred richest people own assets equivalent to one-fourth of the GDP” (Roy 2014: 7). And, in the United States of America, 400 people own half of the wealth (Roy 2014: 94). The point of these statistics is to show that while a country may have a continually growing GDP and may look healthy from the perspective of GDP, the growth may actually be harming more people than it’s benefitting. If most of that wealth is owned by very few people, then we should look more closely in order to determine how the rest of the people are doing and the violence used to consolidate that wealth.

Roy does the work of finding out what is happening to the rest of the population. She traces the ways in which the production of wealth for some is at the expense of others and is deliberately hidden both by businesses and the media. The wealthy are able to protect their interests through favorable media coverage and media that simply does not report on potential scandals and irregularities because the media outlets are owned by big business and also because the media outlets have shares in business (Roy 2014: 14–20). Further, businesses are able to build their public reputation by sponsoring education, the arts, and festivals (Roy 2014: 65–66). While sponsoring things that serve the public interest would seem to indicate that big businesses and the wealthy care about the common good, these investments are actually minimally beneficial and are mostly effective as a smokescreen to hide the environmental and financial harms being committed.

Roy’s critique of the ways in which big business has infiltrated the media, education, and the arts also applies to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are most widely known for their role in the world community as non-state responders to humanitarian crisis. Roy’s analysis, though, reveals that the funding for NGOs tends to come from major capitalist foundations that give money to NGOs who will perpetuate capitalist values (Roy 2014: 34–36, 42, 54). Instead of funding NGOs to respond to humanitarian crises in ways that are compatible with what people on the ground are requesting, the NGOs are coming into countries with preformed ideas about what sorts of economic and political ideals should be instilled in the people. For Roy, this is the newest form of colonialism.

While it may seem that these critiques of capitalism and NGOs fall outside of the concerns of feminism, Roy’s work documents the violence perpetrated against women especially. The most common form that this violence takes is sexual violence and rape (Roy 2014: 12, 64, 73,

90). The documentation of rape is critical to Roy's other critiques because women are not protected from sexual violence, are blamed when they are victims of it, and are victims of this violence because of the institutions that should protect them. Because police and the soldiers are not investigating or punishing rape (and worse, are themselves raping), women are subject to an institutional silencing of their voices and their perspectives. Roy, though, has a voice and international platform to expose this violence and to critique the institutions and structures that create the violence.

Roy's critiques of capitalism clear a space for "demands" that will make way for a more just future:

One: An end to cross-ownership in businesses. For example: weapons manufacturers cannot own TV stations, mining corporations cannot run newspapers, business houses cannot fund universities, drug companies cannot control public health funds./ Two: Natural resources and essential infrastructure—water supply, electricity, health, and education—cannot be privatized./ Three: Everybody must have the right to shelter, education, and health care./ Four: The children of the rich cannot inherit their parents' wealth.

Roy 2014: 93

Roy's demands are an important mixture of limits and support. She limits the ways in which corporations and the wealthy can accumulate power and wealth by calling for an end to cross-ownership and an end to inheritance of wealth. Her second demand is both a limit and a support. By stating that natural resources and infrastructure cannot be privatized, corporations' right to own these is limited, but the access to both are extended to everyone, which in turn lays the groundwork for people to realize their rights.

Roy's championing of rights for all people, particularly the poor, means that she not only critiques the consolidation of power by the rich and by big businesses, but she is also a fierce critic of governments and those who claim to promote peace but fail to address structural inequality. Her critiques that may be most surprising to her readers are those that target Nobel Peace Prize recipients. She critiques Nobel recipients Barack Obama and Mohammed Yunus because they ultimately fail to bring about peace because they are only using the structures that are currently available, and in both cases that reinforces injustice rather than moving closer to peace. While Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his potential to bring about peace, Roy uses Kashmir as an example of Obama's failure. Before he became president, Obama pledged to support Kashmir's fight for independence, but as president he privileged his Afghanistan war efforts and the U.S.'s relationship with Pakistan and turned his back on Kashmir (Roy 2014: 69–75). Obama's failure to support Kashmir's independence paved the way for greater violence there.

In the case of Yunus, many peace activists know the story of the Grameen Bank, which created micro-lending opportunities for the poorest of the poor in India. But Roy traces the full impact of people's participation in capitalism: "Microfinance companies in India are responsible for hundreds of suicides—two hundred people in Andhra Pradesh in 2010 alone" (Roy 2014: 27). While the micro-loans allowed some people to escape poverty, those who struggled to make payments were subject to pressure and ostracism within their communities. For many, the social isolation and inability to make payments is so inescapable that people commit suicide.

Roy uses her status, her research, and her writing to tell the complete stories instead of focusing on the façade that is presented. Roy's work to expose injustice and to tell the complete story is work that carries a great deal of risk since many of the journalists who have critiqued the

Indian government have been subject to harassment, imprisonment, and even mysterious deaths (Roy 2014: 57–66). She is aware of these risks, but continues to speak out on behalf of the dead:

One day in Dantewanda [an Indian district which has been subject to much violence between local people who are opposed to the destruction of their land and the government] too the dead will begin to speak. And it will not just be dead humans, it will be dead land, dead rivers, dead mountains, and dead creatures in dead forests that will insist on a hearing.

Roy 2014: 65

Because of Roy's activism, the dead are already speaking of the injustice that has destroyed them, and the living can begin to create a more just future.

Madres de Plaza de Mayo

Just like the other narratives of feminist nonviolent activism, the story of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo begins with a story of violence and oppression against which the mothers organized and responded. From the 1970s through 1983, Argentina's military engaged in systematic kidnapping, torture, and murder of people who disagreed with the military dictatorship or who in some way were viewed as a threat to the dictatorship. While the military officially came to power on March 24, 1976, they had begun their campaign of terror in 1974. Once they had officially gained control of the government, the level of repression and violence in the country escalated dramatically (Benedetti 2013; Bustos et al. 2009; Carlson 2000; Schmidli 2012).

At this time it was not only dangerous to question the government, it was also dangerous to meet in groups and give the appearance of organizing against the government. Thus, the strategy of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to meet in a public square and to walk together each day was effective for building solidarity, for raising public awareness about their plight, and for helping to bring an end to the military dictatorship.

For some writers, the activism of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is impressive human rights work, but not accurately characterized as feminism. For example, in her entry "Feminist Activism in Latin America," Julie Shayne states:

The women who organized their committees did so as mothers, wives, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, etc. of the "disappeared" men in their lives; they were in no way making a feminist statement. Rather, their efforts lay firmly in a human rights agenda which called for the end of dictatorships and their tactics of summary torture, kidnapping, and incarceration.

Shayne 2007: 1687

For Shayne, groups such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo are not feminist organizations because their goals are not targeted toward equal rights or some other social good for women. A wider understanding of feminism would include those groups who work to challenge injustice and to establish peace through their identity as women, which is precisely how these women effectively agitated for political change that was ultimately successful. This section will analyze the ways in which the Madres' identity as women influences their nonviolent activism.

In the article "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism: Embeddedness, Emotions, and Social Movements," Fernando J. Bosco examines how this group has been able to maintain their group identity and activism since 1977. For Bosco, the

Madres have continued to have a strong political presence and identity in spite of internal conflict because of a shared “embeddedness,” which he defines “as a process that develops and intensifies over time, and its assessment should give attention to the shared emotional attachments that bind people together in social networks, rather than simply to the frequency of interactions” (Bosco 2006: 347). Bosco’s analysis of embeddedness and effectiveness emphasizes the kinds of interactions that the women have had, and the ways in which their emotional investment in their cause, in their shared past, and in their commitment to each other all create a network of activism that continues today.

Bosco’s analysis of the emotional ties between the women as a source of cohesion is important when we consider their origins. These are mothers whose sons and daughters have disappeared; they felt isolated and scared. By coming together weekly to exchange information and to offer support, these women—most of whom had never met before becoming Madres de Plaza de Mayo—found women who understood their suffering and became sources of care for each other. Bosco writes:

For the Madres, the emotional is not and was never just a strategic façade (though the Madres do recognize that they took advantage of this in the past) but rather it runs deep into the core of the interpersonal relations among the Madres themselves and defines the nature of their activism.

Bosco 2006: 354

Bosco is describing the way in which the Madres’ emotions have always characterized their interactions with each other as well as their activism. Their early activism was characterized by a very public show of their tears and their grief, a way to draw international attention to the repression and violence of a state that kidnaps and disappears citizens who oppose them. But this passage also expresses the way in which the Madres actively cultivate their relationships to each other through their hugs, laughter, and support.

Another perspective on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo’s activism is detailed by Julio Etchart in “‘Not One Step Backwards!’” She chronicles the continued work of the Madres in the thirty years since they began their protests. The first victory came in 1983 when democracy was restored in Argentina. Unfortunately, Presidents Raúl Alfonsín and Carlos Menem granted amnesty to the police, dictators, clergy, and civilians who had disappeared, tortured, and murdered Argentinians. It was not until 2003 that President Néstor Kircher began the process of overturning amnesty. Now:

as of March of this year [2013], a total of 250 people have been found guilty; 22 have been absolved, 790 cases are proceeding and 35 suspects have gone into hiding. So far, many of those tried have been armed forces and police personnel. But the net has been cast wider and civilians too are being investigated and brought to justice.

Etchart 2013: 24

Because the reach of oppression ran so deeply through Argentina, the Madres continue to protest and agitate for justice and accountability. They are seeking to bring charges and convictions against the companies and clergy who provided spiritual and financial support to the government. They are seeking a change in the actions of the police and unions because they continue to be populated by those who were formed during the dictatorships and those who were formed in this way continue to respond violently and oppressively. And they are seeking new laws and protections for women, children, and other vulnerable Argentinian people.

For the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, solidarity comes from their shared experience as women who have devoted time, energy, and love to the care and well-being of their children, and through that experience they have a respect for the dignity of all human life. Their respect for all human life leads them to continue to advocate for extensions of justice to all people who are oppressed. In “The Mothers of La Plaza de Mayo: A Peace Movement,” Viviana M. Aberu Hernandez quotes Hebe de Bonafini, one of the mothers who continues to be involved in the protests today:

The child of one of us is the child of all of us, not only those who are missing, but the ones who are fighting for their rights today. We learned this from our guts, not from philosophic concepts. We are aware that before everything comes the defense of life.

Aberu Hernandez 2002: 401

For these mothers, the Roman Catholic imperative to defend life was much more than a political directive against abortion; rather, it was a call to speak out for those who had been disappeared and to demand an accounting for all of their lives. And, even when Argentina’s government became a democracy and stopped the systematic disappearances, kidnapping, torture, and murder, the mothers continued to defend life by agitating for human rights.

Code Pink

The final group that illustrates the variety of feminist activists and feminist organizations who are active in nonviolent activism is a U.S. group, Code Pink. This group walks many different activist lines; they walk between the reactive and creative, the humorous and serious, and national and international concerns. Code Pink’s origin comes from the line between being reactive and creative. The three founders of the organization—Medea Benjamin, Jodie Evans, and Gael Murphy—were all involved in peace and justice work that promoted environmental, social, and political rights. In 2002 they joined together to protest against the possibility of a second Iraq War, which in fact began on March 19, 2003.

Code Pink’s linking of the humorous and the serious directly relates to their origins as both proactive and reactive. Code Pink may be best known for their humorous public protests, which have included the use of lingerie (a giant “pink slip” for George W. Bush to protest the Iraq War), pig snouts (an elegant party to raise awareness and critique Haliburton’s contracts in Iraq: “Halibacon” profiting off the war and suffering in Iraq), sparkly vagina costumes (a protest in front of a Republican National Convention to emphasize the number of platform policies that undermined U.S. women’s rights), and pussyhats (endorsed by Code Pink as part of the 2017 women’s march to protest Donald Trump’s inauguration and a reminder of his statements encouraging violence and subordination of women). These protests have gained national and international attention and raised awareness about violations of human rights, militarism, and environmental destruction. Alongside of these highly visible protests are the proactive acts of Code Pink that allow viewers to imagine what a just and peaceful world would entail. One example of this work is detailed by Linda Milazzo in her article “Code Pink: The 21st Century Mothers of Invention”:

Code Pink coordinated the historic “Families for Peace Delegation.” On this trip the three Code Pink founders, and a member of UPJ [United for Peace and Justice], accompanied Fernando [a father whose son, an American soldier, was killed in Iraq by an American cluster bomb], his wife Rosa, several relatives of fallen American soldiers, and families of “9/11” victims to Amman, Jordan. In an inspiring act of humanity and

generosity, they brought with them \$650,000 in medical supplies and other aid for the Fallujah refugees who were forced from their homes when the Americans destroyed their city.

Milazzo 2005: 103

The blend of critique with peace-building is part of the success of Code Pink. When something is identified as unjust, such as the destruction of a city by American forces, Code Pink acts to support those who are harmed and to provide survivors the support that they have available. This act recognizes a certain unavoidable complicity that U.S. citizens have in the acts carried out by our military and our government. But their act also points to a deeper relationship that is possible between U.S. citizens and people around the world: a relationship of compassion and mutual support.

Many of the commenters on Code Pink's work note the line that this organization walks between embracing femininity and challenging the norms of femininity. For instance, Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, in her article "Code Pink, Raging Grannies, and the Missile Dick Chicks: Feminist Performance Activism in the Contemporary Anti-War Movement," quotes the Code Pink founding document: "Women have been the guardians of life—not because we are better or purer or more innately nurturing than men, but because the men have busied themselves making war" (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2007: 93). In their mission statement, the founders draw on a common social experience rather than making a claim that it is an essential feature of all women to be nurturers and guardians of life. In "Pink Thongs and Patriarchy," Liza Featherstone makes a similar distinction when she writes, "Code Pink and projects like it resist essentialism by making a joke of femininity, even while honoring it. It is a delicate balance, which somehow mostly works" (Featherstone 2009: 12). For the women of Code Pink, that which binds them together is a belief that war and militarism are harmful, and their socialization as women provides powerful means to speak out against militarism's destruction. Ultimately, their blend of humor and serious critique, which characterizes both their protests and constructive action, work to create a space that draws people into comforting norms that they recognize (such as women as "guardians of life") even while challenging other social norms (such as the conflation of security and militarism).

Code Pink, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Arundhati Roy, and Leymah Gbowee come from different experiences and backgrounds, but they all are attentive to the needs of their social context and address those needs out of an awareness of their own social formation as women. In the twenty-first century, feminism embraces its global context and makes connections between women's experiences and social injustice that harms others. Feminism no longer focuses only on issues that harm women since it is by forming alliances between people and recognizing patterns of oppression that structural violence can be addressed and undone. This chapter has introduced just four examples of nonviolent feminism and hopefully has inspired the reader to continue to look for more examples in their local contexts and around the world.

Note

- 1 This section is adapted from my article "Responding to Violence and Injustice Using Nonviolence: Martin Luther King, Jr., Leymah Gbowee, and Dorothy Stang." *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 26 (2), 177–193, 2014.

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