Women, Creativity and Nonviolence

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Edited by

Anna Hamling

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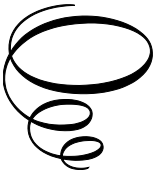

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Edited volumes are the result of a collective effort, and this one is no exception. I would like to acknowledge the excellent endeavours of all the international contributors for putting so much work into this project, and the great help from the proofreader Graham Clarke and the Cambridge Scholars Publishing team. Without their assistance, commitment, and support this project would not have come to fruition.

My sincere gratitude goes to my husband, Richard, “for everything.”

INTRODUCTION

ANNA HAMLING

> If nonviolence is the Law of our being, the future is with Women.
>
> Mahatma Gandhi

> The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.
>
> Eleanor Roosevelt

The current edited volume, *Women, Creativity, and Nonviolence*, the sequel to *Women and Nonviolence* (2021), is the result of the tremendous labour of love of the international scholars who never cease to believe in the power of nonviolent convictions and actions that lead to peace within oneself, communities, and nations. It is remarkable that our interdisciplinary collaborative project came to fruition in the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic when many lost their family members or friends. The determination of all the contributors to complete this needed and worthy volume encourages the reader's active participation and engagement in the area of nonviolence.

This current study offers a common link between the creativity of women who have been either ignored or underrepresented (or both) in the main political, social, or cultural streams. They are from various cultural backgrounds and different countries, but they have been committed to transforming our world into a more just and peaceful place to be.

While contributors to this volume were free to use their own theoretical underpinnings and key concepts in their studies, our overall framing has been in terms of applying creative, nonviolent strategies by women around the globe in their struggle for their, and everybody's, rights, no matter what race, ethnicity, gender, or religion we are. As the Yemeni advocate for nonviolence and Nobel Prize Recipient in 2011 Tawwakol Karman

famously stated in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, “Roses, not guns.”

The original concept was to include only ten chapters in the current volume, dedicating them to the lesser known nonviolent movements led entirely by women or with their active participation. Chapter one sets a background for the theoretical, pragmatic, creative application of nonviolence, while the final chapter considers the challenges and possibilities of the creative use of nonviolence during COVID-19. It offers hope for building resistance in the times of crisis and new ideas of building “beloved communities.”

Chapters two and three explore literary representations of women’s creative techniques applied to create a nonviolent world. Chapters four to eight offer new areas of exploration for both established and junior scholars. While there is no conclusion to the open process of creativity’s uses in the struggle for a more peaceful world, the last chapter presents a case study in the time of COVID that is unsettling but full of hope and new challenges.

This volume can be read either on its own or in conjunction with the preceding volume *Women and Nonviolence*. For new readers, a few words about working terminology used in the study. By creativity I mean new forms of original artistic expression as portrayed, for example, in songs, books, pictures, films, and other emerging media. Since the beginning of time, female and male innovators and creators have transformed our world through the power of their imagination. And today, new innovations and forms of artistic expression are transforming our lives at an unprecedented rate. All the products that we enjoy today are the result of years of research and development, experimentation, and invention. They are all effectively creations of the human mind. Creativity, in this particular volume, serves as an impetus to the further study of a rapidly developing field of nonviolence. It offers possibilities for the further exploration of nonviolence leading to peace and creative nonviolent strategies applied by women all over the globe.

The concepts and experience of nonviolence and peacefulness are as varied as human cultures and perspectives. While there is a growing realization that nonviolence is envisioned as a complex of specific political, economic, and social changes that make the world in some part more just and increase

the areas of agreement among nations and peoples, it is a continuous process contributing to the viability of, and extending those elements of, nonviolence and peace we have attained. The daily work of nonviolence is carried on by the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, peoples' movements, and individual citizens. Millions throughout the world are engaged in the struggle for nonviolence and peace, and women are at the forefront of all these arenas. But still the question remains: What is nonviolence?

As there is no single, universal definition of nonviolence and peace I will insert Dr Michael Nagler's eloquent and elegant quote from my recent book *Women and Nonviolence* (2021), because his words mirror my own ideas on nonviolence:

> For some, nonviolence is a roster of techniques. No one would disagree that there *are* techniques or tactics that implement nonviolence; but they are only the surface, and if you approach the topic with only that in mind you can make mistakes. A case in point (in my view) is the classic and influential list of 198 techniques assembled by the late Gene Sharp. Some of these, particularly those that humiliate the opponent, would not be considered nonviolent in the deeper sense but only non-violent, i.e. they do not inflict physical harm. Gandhi would make the British ashamed of what they were *doing*, but never ashamed of what they *were* – a subtle but critical distinction. When one's commitment to nonviolence is *only* to a set of techniques he called it "the non-violence of the weak." Any day more effective than violence (the technique of the *very* weak) but nowhere near the potential of a nonviolence arising from the awareness that the opponent, so-called, is fully human and has arrived at her or his position, however much it may seem unjust or hurtful, for reasons that seemed legitimate to her or him. This is essentially a vision, an awareness, of the innate unity among people (indeed, in the end, with all that lives).

The goal of a nonviolent action coming from this deeper place will of course involve a redress of grievances but include, perhaps primarily, repair and restoration of the *relationships* involved. This is how we get to one of the principles of nonviolence I like to call work vs. "work," where "work" in quotes means achieving one's immediate aim – reform of an unfair law, removal of a dictator – while work without quotes means to do good work on the social field – work that will often show up further down the road as

a far more important result than originally intended. The classic example is the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, which actually achieved very little in terms of alleviating the hated salt tax, but demonstrated, in the "nonviolent moment" at the Dharsana salt pans, that, as historian Arnold Toynbee put it, "[Gandhi] made it impossible for us to go on ruling India," but "made it possible for us to leave without rancour and without humiliation."

This work vs. "work" distinction yields a powerful formula which sums up what we need to know about the effectiveness of nonviolence in a nutshell:

> Violence sometimes "works" but never works; while
> Nonviolence sometimes "works" but always works.

Nonviolence, to the extent that it's engaged in any of the infinite ways possible, will *always* do good work on the social field, often, as we've seen, leading to unforeseen positive results that may far outweigh the immediate result whether or not the latter was gained. Counter-intuitively, but perfectly in line with this principle, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan found that nonviolent insurrections led to more democracy some years down the road than violent ones did, even if they "failed."[1]

What one brings to any situation of conflict, the techniques one selects to deal with one's partners (aka opponents) determine their ultimate results, and are determined in turn by what one "sees" – in particular to what degree one is aware of the humanity of the other. Critically, it also depends on what nonviolent options one is aware of. Awareness of nonviolence is not available in our educational system, not to mention that powerful (dis)educational force, the mass media. That is changing, and informal avenues are becoming available now, though not nearly quickly enough to meet the urgent needs of the time.

We can define principled nonviolence, Gandhi's nonviolence of the brave, as follows:

---

[1] Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict (Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

> Nonviolence is a method of persuasion that draws on the best within a person to elicit the best from others.

This definition goes a long way to explaining the surprising effectiveness of nonviolence, how it elevates human dignity (which is in short supply these days), and why it is rewarding to doer and recipient alike – why it is such a fulfilling practice in sharp contrast to the devastating effects of practicing violence. But the definition does even more: it brings out the most profound secret of nonviolence – that it is the defining characteristic of what it means to be human. This is the deepest meaning. Gandhi, who was not given to exaggeration, said, quietly and often: "nonviolence is the law of the human."

The question then is: why has it taken so long – is still taking so long – for nonviolence to be recognized and used, and what shall we do about it?

The problem with nonviolence is not that it requires courage – people throw themselves enthusiastically into many reckless adventures that require courage of a kind – but that the relentless materialism of modern culture makes it all but incomprehensible how nonviolence fits into the scheme of things and why it's effective. Before it comes to the surface as a form of behaviour, as we've seen, nonviolence is essentially an immaterial, spiritual force. Scientists are only now, here and there, coming to accept the existence of some kind of "subtle energy" in the universe, which opens the door for a metaphysics that would include what Gandhi called "soul-force" (Satyagraha, or nonviolence). In a universe of separate, competitive fragments, a universe of matter, what is the "adaptive advantage" of self-sacrifice? How can we explain its effect on others, or train for and develop it?

These considerations point the way in which each of us can make a contribution to hastening the general understanding and adoption of nonviolence – and thereby actually make our contribution to the advance of human evolution. At the Metta Center we have formulated five eminently doable ways each of us can do this. Briefly:[2]

[2] For a fuller version, see www.mettacenter.org/roadmap.

- Avoid violent media (just about all of it).
- Learn everything you can about nonviolence and the "new" model of reality in which it is embedded.
- Take up a spiritual practice if you have not already done so.
- Be personal in your daily interactions with everyone.
- Tackle a critical problem that calls for your particular capacities *and* be prepared to explain the new model to whomever is prepared to listen.

Oh, and one last thing: when you get to work, be strategic. Rushing out to a protest and then going home – the *technique du jour*, at least for beginners – is ineffective. Nonviolent change requires sustained, strategic action.[3]

The challenge of converting the world to a nonviolent vision is not beyond us. It's the critical challenge of our time. To get engaged in it is actually a journey of self-discovery on which, as Gandhi said, we are all invited at this critical juncture of human history.

Dr Nagler also states:

> Nonviolence is also known as "love in action." As a constructive power, it's unleashed when potentially destructive drives like fear or anger are converted into creative equivalents like love and compassion.
>
> Nonviolence, when harnessed systematically and in an experimental, scientific spirit, can be used as a force for realizing greater security, justice, and social unity.
>
> Nonviolence is more than putting another person in power. It's about awakening a different kind of power in people.

The case studies collected here represent a valuable assortment of new material for the study of connections between women and nonviolent action, as well as nonviolent movements in general. The women studied here take action, without weapons, based on experiences with, and visions of,

[3] There are several good books, websites, and organizations offering guidance on strategic action, most recently George Lakey, *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning* (Brooklyn, London: Melville House, 2018).

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.

It is my hope that this volume will help readers to understand the richness and variety of community or larger nonviolent movements created by women and the necessity of establishing nonviolence studies at universities all over the world, where the research and communication between actors in various cultural contexts will create new research and new strategies and symbols in future endeavours.

In chapter one, Linda Land-Closson explores Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), a feminist model of human development which arose out of the recognition that traditional models tend to function prescriptively (i.e. top-down and hegemonically) instead of descriptively (i.e. bottom-up and situated). The founders of RCT critiqued traditional models for normalizing and standardizing a focus on deficits, independence, and individualism. They worked collaboratively with material from therapeutic encounters to offer a descriptive view of human development. Accordingly, RCT centres culturally contextualized relationships while decentring the individual, normalizing mutual vulnerability and growth, and promoting power-with (in contrast to power- over) relationships. In short, RCT invites us into ongoing, creative human engagement that supports ways of being and leadership that are less likely to cause harm to the self, others, and relationships. Land-Closson's study specifically investigates the roles creativity and intersectionality play in the leadership styles and techniques of women informed by RCT. More specifically, this study explores RCT-informed leadership as a tool for decreasing intra and interpersonal psychological and relational violence.

In chapter two, Mayy ElHayawi explores the questions: Why are Arab women writers usually perceived through the narrow angle of gender antagonism? Why are they usually celebrated as rebels against patriarchal, masculinist, hostile, and oppressive orders testifying to the fabrication of Arab identity as a signifier of terrorism and religious backwardness? Can we all move away from stereotyping Arab women as helpless and perceive

women and men as equal human beings, living in a contact zone charged with complex sets of values, norms, histories, ideologies, and challenges? Transferring Mary Louis Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" into the study of Arab women's writings is an attempt to resist the colonial strategy of feminizing indigenous men and hyper-feminizing indigenous women, a Derridean deconstruction of the social spaces wherein different genders construct unbalanced relations of power. It is a means for bringing the powerful and the powerless under the same spotlight and diminishing the gap between the centralized and the marginalized.

ElHayawi dismantles gender relationships and reconstructing agency in three short stories written by Iraqi, Egyptian and Syrian authors that not only defy the fabricated binaries which guarantee constant submission or everlasting domination, but also debunk the stereotypes that have always locked Arab women behind the bars of defaming hypersexuality or dehumanizing marginalization. Deconstructing the contact zones in Aliya Mamdouh's short story "The Dream," Alifa Rifaat's "My Wedding Night," and Ulfat al-Idilbi's "The Breeze of Youth" is neither an underestimation of Arab women's struggle for liberty and equality nor a defence of patriarchal hegemony. It is rather an attempt to comprehend the amalgamated networks of relations both genders have to spin, fortify, or destroy while negotiating their agency and identifying their position in the world.

In chapter three, RoseAnna Mueller analyses the work of the Bolivia activist Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1937–2012), who recounted her years of struggle as the wife of a Bolivian tin miner and the social and economic factors that led to her leadership in organizing a worker's movement, "The Housewives' Committee of Siglo XX," the largest and most militant mining centre in Bolivia, reflected in *Let Me Speak: The Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines*. Hers is a moving oral history that documents the harsh living conditions of the miners. Her demonstrations and hunger strike led to her imprisonment and torture, where she lost the child she was carrying. After finding her voice as a representative of the Housewives' Committee at the International Women's Forum in Mexico City in 1975, Domitila published her story, stating that, "What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country." *Let Me Speak!* describes her role in the organized worker's movement. There was little written

documentation about the Bolivian working class, and that spoke to how the system exploited the miners and their families. Domitila's is a straightforward account of how a working-class woman acquired a political consciousness, and she acknowledges that, "Everything I know and am I owe to the people. And also the courage they've inspired in me."

In chapter four, Breanna J. Nickel focuses on interreligious collaboration that plays an essential role in nonviolent initiatives around the world. While the idea of "interreligious collaboration" can be described in different ways, in nonviolent movements it often entails, (1) networking between multiple religious groups to reach a wider audience and achieve the same goals, (2) capitalizing on the principles within scriptural and ritual traditions that support relational peace and solidarity, and (3) employing interreligious dialogue as an impetus for greater societal unity. Nickel examines diverse and creative strategies of interreligious collaboration (primarily Christian-Muslim collaboration) utilized by women's nonviolent movements in recent history. It includes well-known examples such as the work of Leymah Gbowee in the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign and Dekha Ibrahim Abdi through the Wajir Peace and Development Committee and other initiatives. Both figures strongly promoted Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue, and Gbowee in particular was instrumental in introducing prayer as an activist tool and reconciling religious conflict among the participants of the Liberia Mass Action movement. The chapter also examines the inter-religiously inclusive strategies of other prominent activists such as Palestinian Quaker Jean Zaru in the West Bank, Sufi Muslim Rabia Terri Harris in the US, and interfaith group Gerakan Perempuan Peduli (Concerned Women's Movement) in the Maluku Islands. All of these individuals and groups reflect the need for interreligious collaboration in effecting peace, but each also demonstrates the efficacy of different collaborative and nonviolent methods.

In chapter five, Masha Kardashevskaya examines the cases of nonviolent resistance by the Indigenous peoples in Indonesia, stating that there have been calls for Indigenous and gendered approaches to the study of nonviolent resistance. Kardashevskaya conducts a comparative analysis of Kendeng women who resisted cement mining in Rembang, Central Java, Molo women who resisted marble mining in West Nusa Tenggara, and the

Panduman-Sipituhuta who resisted the pulp and paper plantation in North Sumatra.

Based on the analysis of these three cases, the author argues that the indigenous philosophy is often the driving force behind these nonviolent resistances for environmental sustainability.

In chapter six, Burcu Gümüş analyses the issue of violence against women in Turkey that has become a complex state of affairs entailing a number of problems, including the lack of reporting such violence to authorities, the failure of the authorities to protect women even when it is reported, government-imposed restrictions on the efforts of civil-society organizations, forced early marriages, and victim-blaming. Turkish women are struggling to survive under a political regime that has demonstrated that it does not value women, which, despite having taken steps to deal with violence against women that at first glance seem positive, has repeatedly and openly stated that men and women cannot be equal. It is a regime that strives, through its policies – which include calling for women to have more children, confining them to the home – to strengthen the institution of the family, seeing it as more important than improving mechanisms to prevent violence against divorced women. Moreover, the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention – the full name of which is "The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" – by presidential decree on March 20, 2021 has increased the risk of violence against women. Women in Turkey, where democracy is impaired and freedom of expression and civil disobedience rights are restricted, have continued to show how creative they can be in protesting and engaging in civil disobedience.

Gümüş's study looks at the form of nonviolent protests of violence against women held in various provinces of Turkey and the actual cases of such violence to which they were a response over the past twenty years. It evaluates these cases within the theoretical framework of intersectionality, which has been used in feminist literature since the 1990s. The nonviolent protests studied also shed light on the shrinking/constricted sphere in which women in Turkey are forced to live. The data used for this study was collected from newspaper archives and Internet sources spanning the past

twenty years. Because there is no other study of nonviolent protests over violence against women in Turkey covering such a long period of time in either Turkish or English, this study is a major contribution to the scholarship.

In chapter seven, Christelle Barakat explores the issue of the civil resistance efforts of Lebanese women's NGOs and Lebanese women who have continuously claimed a primary role within peaceful resistance on the Lebanese scene. These entities and individuals have been defying patriarchal structures through the elaboration of creative art instalments and the adoption of varied nonviolent techniques. Their endeavours are a work in progress towards repealing discriminative and antiquated Lebanese laws to create a more equal and just society. To this end, their initiatives have ranged from hanging wedding dresses on the Beirut waterfront aimed at repealing rape laws, to a social experiment featuring a young (pretend) child bride with an older man, media and social-media campaigns, and banner visuals of violence against women, among others. More recently, throughout the October 2019 protests, Lebanese women stood out as emblems of the "revolution." They symbolized resistance against the state throughout the protests and infused a message of unity among Lebanese citizens after the 2020 Beirut explosion. Working with explosion debris, female Lebanese artists created phoenix-like sculptures sending out a message of peace, hope, and reconstruction. Within this piece, theories of bifurcation of consciousness and civil disobedience coupled with ideas of nonviolence and relative deprivation combine to instigate and fuel women's civil resistance in Lebanon. Nonetheless, based on Aberle's four types of social movements model, Barakat argues that while Lebanese NGO and women's endeavours have been revolutionary in scope, they were able to trigger reformative social movements and changes only.

In chapter eight, Nandini Gupta explores the feminist models of partnership represented by Kashmiri women by focusing on the work of the selected artists. She also explicates how Rollie Mukherjee's art is an example of nonviolent activism, and an engaging way of communicating the cultural history of Kashmir and its women which has been strategically erased by the rhetoric of nationalism and militancy. Mukherjee's work has acted as a strong witness to Kashmiri women's struggle against the arbitrary abuses of power which have escalated violence, militarization, and hegemony in the

valley. Through analysing it against the backdrop of theory, an understanding regarding the multifarious ways through which Kashmiri women have mobilized their resistance develops.

In chapter nine, Olga Patricia Velásquez Ocampo introduces a discussion on women's mobilization in Latin America identified as feminist with a feminist agenda. In this way, the focus is on the case of collectives that fight for the eradication of violence against women – such as the *colectivo* "Las Tesis," "Ni una menos" (Not one less), and the "Green scarf" – to support the guarantee of abortion rights in Latin America. Less attention, however, has been paid to current movements that use motherhood as a pivotal part of their discourse, that is the case of the mother's groups that seek for their sons and daughters who were lost during dictatorships or internal armed conflicts. The mobilization strategy of a group of women in Medellin, Colombia known as "Mothers of La Candelaria" is also explored. "The Mothers," established twenty years ago as a way of defending the memory of the victims of forced disappearance during the armed conflict in Colombia, is also explored. Despite the predominance of Catholicism in Latin America, the powerful religious symbols of the Virgin Mary as holy mother, and the Marian cult in the region, mothers' movements have not drawn on these cultural religious tropes. These are symbolic resources available to mothers' movements, but remain largely unused or underutilized.

In chapter ten, Brett S. Goldberg explores community as an active verb – not a noun fixed in time and space – that is practised to challenge the violence of rape culture and white supremacy in Minneapolis, Minnesota through interviews with women survivors of campus-based sexual violence, advocates, mental-health practitioners, and social-justice activists. The year 2020 centred Minneapolis as an embodiment of the power of collective empathy, care, and solidarity. Black women in Minneapolis sparked a mainstream conversation on defunding police and investing in communities. Rape survivor and advocate Sarah Super and her organization, Break the Silence, lobbied the state legislature to fund and build the nation's first memorial for survivors of sexual violence. In these and additional examples, community is an embodied practice of care wherein the community believes in its responsibility to care for the wellbeing of individuals, and individuals recognize their responsibility for building community capacity. Women

who experience systemic oppression due to their race, economic class, sex or gender identity, and who have experienced sexual, domestic, or relationship violence, internalize a responsibility to their communities, families, and loved ones to end cycles of violence and practice the empathy and care they themselves have not always received. Goldberg's interviews and focus groups with self-identified survivors throughout 2021 have echoed themes of the need for mutual aid in times of crisis, caring for oneself to better care for others, and justice as the active pursuit of righting wrongs and addressing root causes, not merely punishing, caging, or cancelling those who have caused harm.

PART I

LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN, CREATIVITY, AND NONVIOLENCE

CHAPTER ONE

REFLECTIONS ON RELATIONSHIP AS NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: RELATIONAL-CULTURAL THEORY AS RELATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY

LINDA LAND-CLOSSON

We are in a world of hurt. In some ways, and for some people more than others, the world has always been this way, and yet this current time feels poignant. This era seems defined by division.[1] We are divided as individuals in ways that fuel (both internal and external) feelings of isolation, and we are divided into groups in ways that fuel derision, violent rhetoric, and sometimes physical violence. Not many of us claim to enjoy this, and yet we seem unable to find our way through this era. We remain politically, economically, racially, and ideologically divided. While these divisions are real, and more real for some than others, they are also our own doing. These divisions are a truth of our experiences, but they are not a Truth, and definitely not *the* Truth. Differences and conflicts are Truths, but violence and division do not have to be.[2] We can choose differently. We can live differently.

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[1] Fiona Hill, a former National Security Council official, asserts that current divisions in the United States are at the level of a cold civil war, https://www.npr.org/2021/10/06/1043401926.

[2] While many thinkers discuss the inevitability of conflict, I am drawing upon a published conversation between bell hooks and George Brosi centered on the Beloved Community, George Brosi and bell hooks, "The Beloved Community: A Conversation Between bell hooks and George Brosi," *Appalachian Heritage* 40, no. 4 (2012): 76–86, http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/aph.2012.0109); Similarly, James Baldwin asserts that struggle is an unavoidable experience for humans, despite efforts among the White community to deny this reality. James Baldwin, "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind," in *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage

We have been discussing, reflecting on, and analysing our divisions, seemingly without impact, and yet we persist with our deconstructions and deep-dive analyses – understandably, because the divisions remain, as does our discomfort.[3] We want to feel engaged and responsive. We want the discomfort to dissipate. Many of us continue to hope for *the* analysis that will provide an adequately complex understanding or, conversely, a root cause so foundational it will prove to be the Achilles Heel of our divisions. Part of what I offer here is not much different in this regard, and yet my overall intent is not analysis but a call to action as a way of life. More specifically, my overall intent is to ask that we live our way into new ways of perceiving and thinking,[4] that we take the risk of living with a presumption of relationship as a way to move through our divisions. I am not calling for a denial of differences or for silence in the face of oppression. I am asking that we recognize and live our interdependence. I am thereby advocating that we live relationally and communally so that relationships become means for nonviolent resistance to division and tools for disrupting the anthropology and systems feeding our divisions. I humbly suggest this is our way forward.

Who Is this "We"?

My primary audience is the Minority World[5] – not "minorities," but a group of us that makes up significantly less than fifty percent of the world's population: typically White people with easy access to education, financial stability, a presumption of safety in public, and a presumption that our ways of thinking and being will not draw unintentional or unwanted attention. We are my primary audience because we (often violently) put ourselves in positions of power with a specific form of power, which I discuss later, and impose a narrow and hegemonic way of thinking and being on the Majority World. Therefore, we carry greater responsibility to move us through our

Books, 1993).

[3] I define and explore "we" in the next section.

[4] The notion of living our ways into new ways of thinking has been credited to many over the years. I have Richard Rohr, OFM, to thank for this.

[5] Baldwin, "Down at the Cross," 70; https://speakingofmedicine.plos.org/2021 /07/29/its-time-to-decolonize-the-decolonization- movement.

divisions, for with greater power comes greater accountability and responsibility. Perhaps more importantly, the Minority World carries greater responsibility for undoing our divides because we benefit from these divides at the expense of the Majority World.

I am part of this we, and therefore I share this responsibility. As a White, highly educated, financially secure, able-bodied, and cis-gendered woman born and raised in the United States, I am trying to figure out how to live what I know to be my part of the needed change in our world. From my studies and teaching, my close relationships and values, I know my presumptions about what it means to be human are not ontologically factual and much less universal, and yet my position as a member of the Minority World means I am insulated from the inaccuracies of, limits to, and ways in which I benefit from my presumed anthropology. Therefore, if I want change I need to take on the responsibility of educating myself in honest and self-reflective ways regarding this anthropology. This essay represents part of this effort, and I invite you to join me in this reflection.

The anthropology into which I was born and which is representative of the dominant anthropology of the Minority World, presumes – in fact, prescribes – the attainable goal of a self- sufficient individual for whom any suffering ought to be minimal and meaningful, particularly if one lives a moral life characterized by a strong work ethic.[6] I was taught that hard work *always* pays off equitably, that treating others with respect *always* results in feeling and being safe, and that I can avoid unwarranted conflict and discomfort if I follow rules and laws. A comfortable life of independence and freedom is not only the expected result of living this way, it is the deserved and just result; the comfortable, unrestricted, self-sufficient individual is the pinnacle (and right) of humanity.

Accompanying and augmenting this individualistic anthropology are presumptive beliefs characteristic of the Minority World that also tend to pass unchallenged and remain unconsciously operative due to the Minority World's insulation from the Majority World. I include from among these

[6] In this chapter, I use suffering, discomfort, and struggle interchangeably, while acknowledging that important differences exist between the meanings of these words.

beliefs those most relevant to this reflection, namely beliefs and implications about the function of power, the workings of collective individualism, and the singularity of identity.

In the Minority World, power tends to function in a power-over fashion, so much so that our default understanding of power presumes authority and dominance.[7] Alternate understandings of power, however, emphasize more collaborative approaches to creating change that do not necessarily require top-down systems, domination, or violence. In the field of social change, for example, we teach students how to create change through mechanisms such as accompaniment, solidarity, and Community-Based Participatory Action Research. Without question these approaches incorporate power – after all, they are used to create change – but they are not top-down approaches, nor do they impose upon others. Within these ways of creating change, power functions in a manner we refer to as power-with, which tends to run afoul of an individualistic anthropology because it operates through a diminishment of individuals and in support of a collaborative process and will. Despite perceptions from within a power-over system, power-with does not erase the individual as an agent for change, but it decentres individuals, especially individuals more inclined to power-over functioning. Such an approach to change therefore also tends to violate the expectation of comfort that is part of the individualistic anthropology because diminishing oneself in support of the collective is often uncomfortable.

One possible critique of my assertion that the Minority World lives according to an individualistic anthropology that functions through power-over systems arises through pointing out that all individuals live within societies and communities; clearly, we are not simply a collection of eight billion individuals attempting to gain power over each other. While I grant that we do operate, to varying degrees and in various forms, at the collective level, I suggest the Minority World approach, which is gaining in prominence due to neocolonialism, does so through an individualistic anthropology; meaning, our inclusion of others is increasingly limited to people who will allow us to continue living the lives we desire without (what

[7] I am not claiming the power-over function of power is limited to the Minority World, for we see power-over operating throughout human history.

we perceive to be) unwarranted conflict or discomfort. To put it in personal terms, if I can live as I see fit with you in my world, I will include you; if, however, your presence infringes on my ability to live as an individual *as I see fit*, I have no room for you. Our relationships with each other can function, ultimately and reductively, to support our own way of being in the world and little else, especially if we are part of the Minority World. It does not take too many of us believing and living this way before our social and political systems, our efforts to work together collectively with our differences, experience strain, possibly to the point of rupture. This, I suggest, is our current situation. We are reaching capacity for individualists living amidst self-serving relationships – a state I refer to as collective individualism.

Collective individualism functions in large part on an us-versus-them mentality that draws clear lines between those who are in and those who are out. This corrupt version of community also functions to minimize discomfort, thereby reducing the ability to incorporate difference. Of course, all humans seek out "our people," those with whom we feel known, accepted, and, yes, comfortable. We all need these relationships of relaxation and solace. *And* we also need to recognize "our people" making up a miniscule sliver of humanity that is unable to lay credible claim to a universalizable way of being. If we feel entitled to avoid difference and discomfort, we will be unable to interact meaningfully and sustainably outside of our in-group, which, of course, means we will have to find ways to insulate, isolate, and possibly defend ourselves against those who are different or make us feel uncomfortable.[8]

In addition to building on an expectation of comfort, collective individualism relies on and perpetuates binary thinking. The same may be said, more generally speaking, for an individualistic anthropology. Whether at the scale of the individual or the collective, binary thinking promotes clear and distinct – yet false – demarcations between, for example, us and them, good and bad, and right and wrong. And when binary thinking operates

[8] Before presuming these statements do not pertain to you, please keep in mind we all operate to varying degrees with an us-versus-them mentality; the excluding and self-protective behaviors of collective individualism are displayed not only by others, but by each of our own in-groups as well.

foundationally in the formation of one's identity – whether at the individual or collective level – people are set up to establish and defend a singularity of identity and truth reliant on much of what life is not: stable, known, predictable, and orderly. One's inability, or one's group's inability, to interact with and respond (not react) to life's unpredictability and messiness perpetuates defensiveness, fear, and the closing off to true relationality and community, to the growth and vibrancy of life that comes

only through conflict and discomfort, for, as James Baldwin writes, "People who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are."[9]

The Non-neutrality of Our Anthropology[10]

In "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind," Baldwin asserts that racism will not end in America until White people find the courage and tools to accept that struggle, suffering, and mortality are unavoidable realities of human existence. The connection between racism and these denials was not immediately apparent to me: possibly a symptom of my being part of the Minority World. While I intuited a connection, I could not articulate such until I taught Baldwin's essay in a course critically exploring our individualistic anthropology.

Baldwin, of course, uses much more eloquent prose, but this is my version of his argument, paraphrased to fit the context of this chapter: Because an individualistic anthropology supports the belief that comfort, freedom, and self-sufficiency are rights and markers of success, and because these characteristics come about through power-over functions and binary thinking, crafting a life within this anthropology requires always having at least one Other, a group of people with whom we interact only transactionally (not relationally) and over whom we have power. Baldwin places his focus for this othering on racism, while I argue it also operates along other avenues of division reliant upon oppression.

In order to create the connections between Baldwin's assertions and this current work, I will look at our denial of struggles and mortality in greater

[9] Baldwin, "Down at the Cross," 98.
[10] I owe gratitude to Julia Brumbaugh for both this language and her support.

depth, one at a time. Our denial that meaningless struggle is part of all human lives leads us to reduce others to mere means for our deserved comfort. For example, we expect to pay as little as possible to have our houses and offices cleaned, and we demand affordable, year-round access to fresh food from across the globe. We spend hours shopping online to find what we want at the lowest cost and from a place that will deliver to our door within a day or two. Waiting more than a few days or later finding the same item for less causes us discomfort or anger. But how often do we pause to consider the human lives wrapped up in our expectations and demands for comfort and convenience? Our expectation for inexpensive services and goods means someone else is paying the price we are not.

Fortunately, more of us are becoming aware of the hidden costs to our consumerism and demands for physical comfort. For Baldwin, however, our denied struggles are related less to physical comfort and more to emotional, psychological, and spiritual comfort. Put differently, we hold expectations that any struggle we encounter will offer clear and immediate value, for we do not deserve meaningless suffering. While our increasing awareness about the hidden costs of consumerism and the people who carry these costs might result in our choosing ethically-sourced products, the only "discomfort" we feel comes through spending more time shopping and waiting for an item, as well as through the additional money we spend. We find value in these discomforts, though, because we feel we are doing good in the world. The true discomforts – or struggles – from which we remain sheltered are the daily realities and struggles of the people exploited by our demands for comfort and convenience, regardless of how enlightened our thinking and habits may be. For example, our demands for twenty-four-hour access to services such as grocery stores and gas stations result in hourly-paid workers needing to find affordable, night-time child care or public transportation options that are safe in the middle of the night, regardless of one's identity. Our belief in convenient independence requires the exploitation and erasure of members of the Majority World.

We distance ourselves from this exploitation and meaningless struggle by holding firmly to the narrative that hard work, respect, and self-restraint result equitably and invariably in lives of independence and comfort. Moreover, we are reticent to acknowledge the lack of meaning in some