

# Book Reviews

## THE WOMEN AND WAR READER

Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin, eds. New York and London: New York University Press, 1998.

BY ANNE McGRATH

Characterizations of women and their approaches to war and peace often fall into the realm of stereotypes. In a world of hawks and doves, women are portrayed as the doves. *The Women and War Reader* challenges simplistic notions of women's relationship to armed conflict and describes the various roles played by women as well as the various political positions taken by women with respect to particular conflicts and war in general. This does not mean that the impact of war on women and their preparation for it is downplayed. The shift in this century to civilian populations as the main victims of war has horrific implications for women. The specific roles that women play in war and the consequences of war on women are detailed. The implications of war for women are varied and include the current discussions about the particular targeting of women as victims of rape and forced impregnation. The editors have assembled 37 dense chapters by leading feminist scholars and activists that cover many of the theoretical, geopolitical, and practical aspects of war, the war industry, and their relationship to women's lives. The book is broadly organized into six thematic sections dealing with different aspects of the issues. It

is packed with information and sweeping in its approach. It is essentially anti-essentialist and author after author argues for theoretical and practical approaches that reflect the complexity of women's experiences, race and class differences, and political perspectives. In a world where armed conflicts are being waged in several dozen parts of the globe this detailed look at women and war provides an important contribution to feminist theorizing and political action.

Theoretical debates about women and war are explored in the first section. The impact of war on women is described in detail—as direct casualties, as war refugees, as victims of wartime sexual violence, as victims of wartime domestic violence, loss of family, loss of work, loss of community, loss of social structure, environmental destruction, and the impact of military spending on women. Jennifer Turpin also describes the variety of responses women have to war—as soldiers, as military production workers, sending men, supporting men, and reproducing men for the war effort, mourning, and resisting. These chapters explicitly reject the notion that women are innately more peaceful but argue that there are concrete reasons based in actual experience that make it important for women to resist and reject war. Jodi York says, "Although it sounds like a cliché, peace remains a 'women's issue,' not for reasons of motherhood or biological difference, but for reasons of justice." It's not exclusively their domain, but since they pay the primary price when peace is absent, women have a particular interest in pursuing peace. The de-

politicizing effect of essentialist arguments are rejected in favour of women working in a politically conscious way to oppose war in defense of our interests as participants in democracy.

A comprehensive section on nationalism, victimization, and war culture looks at women's roles as guardians of culture and the reproducers of ideology in nationalist struggles. Rhonda Copelon's chapter takes a chilling look at the issue of genocidal rape and describes the historical and contemporary prevalence of rape as a weapon of war. She draws clear links between the crime of rape in war and the everyday violence against women in general. She states, "Emphasis on the gender dimension of rape in war is critical not only to surfacing women as full subjects of sexual violence in war, but also to recognizing the atrocity of rape in the time called peace." Militarist ideology and the processes of militarization in South Asia offer clear examples of the operation of patriarchy.

The various ways that women have participated in war as supporters is explored in a section on women in the military and war complex. The women munitions makers working in England during the First World War provide an example of support for the war effort stemming partly from the expansion of women's ability to operate in the public sphere and partly from a genuine desire to support the war effort and be fighters for the cause. Ilene Rose Feinman looks at the rhetorical ground shared by feminist antimilitarists and right wing opponents of women's participation in the armed forces. She believes that, "the language of social

conservatives and the language of feminist antimilitarists can, and has, dangerously converged over assigning the martial to the male." A look at the ways that women have participated as peacekeepers in the United Nations and women's roles in the Israeli Armed Forces provide examples of the complexity of women's participation in militaries.

A section on resistance movements and literature explores women's aspirations for equality and the difficulty in carrying through the dreams of revolutionary armed struggle. Women's active participation in resistance movements in Central America and Palestine and the hopes for new societies that include women as full actors are explored through official discourse, revolutionary symbols and images, testimonial literature, autobiography, and poetry.

Articles dealing with motherhood, parenting and war run head on into the usual discussions about women's roles as mothers and what this means for feminists theorizing about women and war. Sara Ruddick's article describing women of peace is careful to make the point, "In outlining the 'figure' of a *woman* of peace I make no quantitative, much less competitive comparisons between women's and men's peacefulness." She goes on to state, "Women can no longer understand themselves as peaceful by 'nature.' They are responsible for their attitude toward war and non-violence." The discourse around women's mothering roles and how this is constructed in support of war and in opposition to war makes it clear that our capacity to bear children cannot be the defining aspect of women's relationship to war and peace.

In the final section on peace culture and peace action specific women's organizations working for peace are discussed. A description of internal difficulties in the U.S. women's peace groups highlights divisions that arose regarding race and class. The discussions about women's organizing in Israel and Palestine describes

the work, the difficulties, and the tensions of women coming together across the division created by armed conflict to work for peace. The case of the Women in Black in Israel and their effective, persistent, moving, and ubiquitous presence in silent protest for peace presents a strong argument for the strength and value of women's actions for peace. The final chapter, written by Susan McKay, emphasizes women's roles as actors in the period of post-conflict reconstruction. She points out that reconstruction is highly gendered and women must be vigilant in the rebuilding period. In particular, she asserts the importance of defining peace in ways that promote equality and development. She notes that post-conflict peace accords rarely take gender into account even when women have played important roles in the conflict. The idea of a society returning to a sense of normalcy means a return to gender roles that are not in women's interests. She reminds readers of Cynthia Enloe's argument for "reading peace agreements with a feminist lens to interpret whether the intent of the agreement is to demasculinize or remasculinize public life, to ask what has changed postwar."

The gendered dimension of war is forcefully presented in each section of this book. It is a challenging look at the politics of women acting in a variety of ways to support and oppose war. It is both theoretical and practical with examples taken from a large number of the 35 or so currently active armed conflicts engaging women around the world. While Cynthia Enloe notes that, "in the torrents of media images that accompany an international crisis, women are typically made visible only as symbols, victims, or dependents," the writers featured here make women's participation as politically conscious actors visible and explicit. In addition the violence and attacks experienced by women in periods of armed conflict is situated concretely in women's everyday ex-

perience during times of so-called peace. This reader is not light or easy. It is a demanding, challenging, comprehensive look at the complexities of women's experiences in the realm of war and peace.

## **WOMEN DIVIDED: GENDER, RELIGION AND POLITICS IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Rosemary Sales. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

BY ANNE MCGRATH

The 1998 Belfast Agreement, sometimes known as the Good Friday Agreement, sparked a flurry of conferences, workshops, cross community, and cross border gatherings which, in turn, sparked an outpouring of literature. *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*, by Rosemary Sales, is one of the results. The book developed from Sales's doctoral dissertation and explores, in detail, the divided society of Northern Ireland and the impact of these divisions on women. The invisibility of women in the "peace process" and the intersection of gender oppression and sectarianism are central themes. The usual process, in writing about Northern Ireland, of separating sectarian practice from the underlay of gender inequality is challenged throughout the book.

The book describes the transition from a Northern Irish Parliament to the dissolution of that Parliament and the establishment of Direct Rule from Britain. Sales confidently titles one of her chapters "Explaining the Conflict" and, indeed, presents a very clear, cogent description of the background to the conflict, the historical underpinnings, the institutional mechanisms and practices, the key actors, and the main groupings. She is very aware of the audacity required