DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe
Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

Scholar and Practitioner of Nonviolence: The Life and Work of Mary Elizabeth King

di

Dagmar Wernitznig

Abstract: This article chronicles the life and work of Mary Elizabeth King, a scholar and practitioner of nonviolent civil resistance for more than five decades. As a participant in the 1960s U.S. civil rights movement, she handled communications and the national news media for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Atlanta and Mississippi. From within the movement she co-authored *Sex and Caste* with Casey Hayden, which in the United States spurred the launching of the so-called "second" wave of feminism. During the Carter Administration, as a Presidential appointee, she had worldwide responsibility for the Peace Corps, and as Deputy Director of the umbrella agency that housed all national service corps programs was responsible for VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and other such programs. A political scientist, prize-winning author, and acclaimed international expert on nonviolent struggle, she is Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University for Peace, affiliated with the United Nations, main campus in Costa Rica; Scholar in Residence with The American University Center for Peacebuilding and Development in Washington, D.C.; and Distinguished Rothermere American Institute Fellow at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom. "Scholar and Practitioner of Peace" attempts to contextualize Mary's leadership for widening the understanding of nonviolent civil resistance, gender and peacebuilding, and women's rights. She has been honored by both her alma mater and the British university that bestowed upon her a doctorate in international politics, and is the recipient of juried awards from the Jamnalal Bajaj International Award, the El-Hibri Peace Education Prize, and the James M. Lawson Award for Nonviolent Achievement.

There is a critical need to study nonviolent movements as a body of knowledge, because today there is so much faith in violence. People question the concept of nonviolence, but no one talks of violent struggles and how they don't work.

We must strengthen the arguments for fighting with political, nonviolent tools. It is ridiculous to think that one can get rid of terrorism with warfare. I believe that we must spread the knowledge of nonviolent struggle so widely that persons who now choose to become terrorists instead are aware of nonviolent alternatives to a blind faith in violence.

For over five decades, Mary Elizabeth King has been a practitioner and scholar at the intersection of peace and gender. As the eldest child of a nurse educator and

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

a Methodist minister who was the eighth pastor in six generations of clergy from Virginia and North Carolina, she was instilled with a sense of taking responsibility for community and society from a very early age.

She took with her an understanding of practiced Christianity when she left her family home to study at Ohio Wesleyan University. Watching news about the first student sit-in conducted by four students from the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro in 1960 on her dormitory television, she became fascinated with the concept of noncooperation and nonviolence, as displayed by the student activists. Freshly out of college two years later, she was invited by two senior figures who were advising the movement, Ella J. Baker and Howard Zinn, to join them in the southern region of the National Student YWCA based in Atlanta on a project supported by the Field Foundation involving campus travel to promote academic freedom, and she came in contact with the student sit-in campaigns then in full force in a hundred cities across the South. "It sounds pious and dopey, but I took my father's sermons seriously", she later explained[1]. She went on the modest payroll of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") in 1963 as one of a handful of white staff to enlist in this exceptional civil rights organization that grew from the student sit-ins. SNCC concentrated on rural areas to mobilize nonviolent resistance in the South, including some of the most marginalized and remote pockets, mainly conducting voter registration campaigns and organizing direct action such as sit-ins and demonstrations, where possible. Predominantly a grassroots movement of young people, SNCC complemented organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (no relation).

By age 23 she was locked up in Atlanta's city jail, called Big Rock, within sight of the state capital's gold dome, having been arrested as part of an interracial staff group from the SNCC office who met with a Kenyan official, Odinga Oginga. She spent Christmas in prison. Mary later reminisced about what it was like to work for SNCC:

> It was the most pure manifestation of democracy that I have ever encountered. A group of young people who were intense, who cared passionately but who came without ideology and without foreordained conclusions. We believed that determination and working together would produce change. There was a certain amount of naïveté in all this, but my naïveté gave me strength and power because I didn't know how awesome the odds were[2].

Mary's work for SNCC was occurring in a formative time in a sweep of anti-colonial and civil rights mobilizations that girdled the worlds, and her fight against segregation was also a personal and professional rite of passage. Within SNCC ranks, she worked in the communications office with Julian Bond, where they wrote news releases about atrocities or reprisals by vigilante groups of the local movements in which SNCC organizers were instrumental. Getting a reporter from

[1] Mary E. King in Kandy Stroud, "Mary King: A Key Carter 'Brain Truster' from the Beginning", *New York Times*, 8 July 1976.

[2] Mary E. King in Barbara Gamarekian, "One Woman's Chronicle of the Civil Rights Struggle", *The New York Times*, 31 August 1987.

the national news corps to a county jail might be the only way to interrupt the often brutal, obstructive responses by sheriffs and law authorities. The communications office was vital for the movement, because barbarities against black people, or their deaths, were generally not considered newsworthy by the white mainstream southern press. Liaising with the media to help them have the information necessary to report on what was actually happening in the isolated rural hamlets where the civil rights movement was deeply rooted, as well as coordinating with the Friends of SNCC for raising funds in northern cities was a critically important function for the movement. Operating from a tiny SNCC office in the west side of Atlanta's black community, Mary and Julian sought to push into national awareness the eclipsed news of injustices and brutalities against black people. Utilizing a network that they created for telephone calls, news releases, sworn testimonies, affidavits, and feeding radio stations, in Mary's long days she managed to keep the general public informed about and alerted concerning the segregationist terror groups that were instigating fear in the black community. Her diligence and dedication earned her the nickname "meticulous Mary"[3].

Publicly and openly working for a desegregated society in the American South required courage and passion. Associating oneself with SNCC meant becoming a conspicuous target for violent attacks. Being Caucasian bestowed no advantages; to the contrary, whites might be singled out for targeting. Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Turé) would in his autobiography write about his white fellow workers:

> Was I quite serious in saying that there were no 'whites' in SNCC? […] They were friends, allies, comrades, SNCC staffers, and brothers and sisters in the struggle. […] I never said no whites ever *joined* SNCC. […] So how could I say there were no 'whites' in SNCC? Because upon joining us, those comrades stopped being 'white' in most conventional American terms, except in the most superficial physical sense of the word. […] When they experienced the full force of racist hostility from Southern white politicians, police, and public opinion, compounded by the indifference or paralysis of the national political establishment, whatever class and color privileges they might have taken for granted were immediately suspended. At moments of confrontation they were at as great a risk as any of us, and as 'race traitors' were sometimes in even greater jeopardy[4].

Police brutality, arrests, shootings, and other organized segregationist hostilities were constant threats for anyone working in SNCC, whether black or white. For instance, in 1963 in Danville, Virginia, Mary had to seek refuge at a Catholic convent across the river in North Carolina, because she was about to be indicted by a grand jury for "acts of violence and war". The juridical panel had dredged up an archaic Virginia statute, which held that it was "illegal to incite the colored population to acts of violence and war against the white population". This statute was passed after the Nat Turner slave uprising in 1831 in Southampton County in southside Virginia, and was the basis upon which John Brown was hanged following the Harper's Ferry raid. The potential indictment Mary was facing would have

[3] Susan Brownmiller, "Grasping the Nation by the Scruff of Its Neck", *New York Times Book Review* of *Freedom Song*, 30 August 1987.

[4] Stokely Carmichael, with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Turé]*, Scribner, New York 2003, p. 308–9. Kwame Turé was Carmichael's African name.

involved $5,000 bail with no possibility to have an attorney present. When based in Jackson for Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, she worked out ten different routes to drive from the main office to where she lived opposite Tougaloo College in order to avoid being ambushed by vigilantes[5].

By the end of that same 1964 summer project, Mary had tallied the combined retaliations and reprisals aimed at local movement participants, volunteers, and staff to one thousand arrests, thirty beatings, thirty bombed homes, and thirty-five burned churches. These substantiated interruptions and retributions were intended to impede the elimination of Jim Crow in Mississippi. Civil rights volunteers James Earl Chaney, 21, Andrew Goodman, 20, and Michael Schwerner, 24, were murdered in Neshoba County, Mississippi, on June 21. It was her sad task as communications coordinator of SNCC in Jackson to notify the Chaney family and Goodman's parents about their missing sons, who never returned from investigating the bombing of a church where voter registration meetings had been taking place[6]. Years later, in 2016, she would return to Mississippi and was moved to find that the Jackson headquarters of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation had been named for her three fellow workers, who had been murdered by law officers. Mary documented her four-year engagement with SNCC in *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (1987) and dedicated it to twelve civil rights workers who lost their lives in the period from 1961 to 1968.

The choice of title for her first book was emblematic. The singing of freedom songs – one category of songs from a black choral tradition of spirituals recognized across the world as a deeply touching and expressive body of music – served as a tool of mobilization. Forged from a fusion of the African and American experiences in the infernos of southern slavery, freedom songs regularly initiated the mass meetings that took place nightly in churches throughout the South approximately every other week. The songs often pinpointed specific allusions signifying the individuality of each local movement's priorities. Mass meetings served substantive purposes and were also hands-on sessions for training community people about the theories and methods of nonviolent civil resistance.

Knowledge about nonviolent struggle was imparted and practiced in a preparatory sense in these concrete training sessions, in which the freedom songs might reinforce lessons. SNCC workers shared with people attending the meetings how to retain nonviolent discipline under physical and verbal attacks. The underlying logic of noncooperation was taught: all systems require the obedience of those involved, and this cooperation can be withdrawn[7]. The mass meetings were also where deci-

[5] Mary E. King, "Waging Peace, Achieving Justice: Understanding Nonviolent Struggle", *Manchester College Bulletin of the Peace Studies Institute* 33 (2006), p. 11.

[6] Cf. Mary E. King, "So that the Sacrifices of 1964 Will not Have Been in Vain", *Los Angeles Times*, 12 July 1984.

[7] *Nonviolent struggle*, *civil resistance*, and *nonviolent resistance* can be used alternatively. The hyphenated spelling *non-violence* enforces a negative connotation, signifying a mere diametrical opposition to the term violence. The term civil disobedience is usually associated with Henry David Thoreau's "Letter on Civil Disobedience", although Thoreau did not use the term himself, so far as anyone knows. Mohandas K. Gandhi read eclectically and had become familiar with Thoreau's thought and was in correspondence with the aging Leo Tolstoy.

sions would be taken on attempting to register to vote, to march, to use civil disobedience, or, equally, strategies were discussed involving community concerns and priorities.

Mary frequently recalls how she and her fellow SNCC workers were educated in nonviolent resistance by experts who had gained their knowledge in India and through the study of Mohandas K. Gandhi's philosophies and tactics. Exactly as had happened with Martin Luther King, Jr., SNCC members were trained in the theory and practice of nonviolence. Two prominent teachers for both the Reverend Dr. King and SNCC were the Reverend Dr. James M. Lawson Jr. and Bayard Rustin[8]. Nonviolent methods were thus acquired and applied consciously, and were by no means arbitrary, capricious, or an extemporization. "Little was improvisation about our movement. A better way to look at it is as a story of the transmittal of knowledge", Mary explains[9].

As the movement expanded and attracted more attention, however, dissent emerged. In the period after Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964, the group's cohesion commenced to disintegrate, as debates over approaches and the structure of SNCC started to erupt. While some, such as Mary, favored SNCC's decentralized outlook and emphasis on local movements, which was more favorable to leadership by women and advantageous for the profoundly democratic decision-making processes that had evolved, others preferred a more hierarchical option. Increasing separatist tendencies among some black leaders tended to radicalize the situation, a development that coincided with a cessation of the ongoing training in collective nonviolent action. Eventually, the strong feeling of a bonded community could no longer encompass the differing backgrounds of the individual activists, whose ranks had swelled with a large number of mostly white volunteers who had been recruited for Freedom Summer:

> We saw ourselves, black and white together, as a 'band of brothers and sisters' and 'a circle of trust.' The spirit that united us – not even the most worldly and cynical of my colleagues would today qualify or disagree – was such that we would have died for one another. What this fierce, all-embracing vital force of loyalty disguised was the real and ultimately unassimilable differences in class, race, gender, and experiential backgrounds in our circle[10].

For a young woman in a movement whose visible spokespersons were predominantly male, concern for building a sustainable movement for civil rights spilled over into addressing whether the concerns of women could be included in its priorities. Despite an exceptionally liberal and egalitarian framework, which offered many opportunities for female citizens to participate and contribute, the general structure of SNCC nevertheless mirrored some traditional gender hierarchies and disparities. Acquainted with Simone de Beauvoir's classic *Le Deuxième Sexe* from

[8] In the 1950s, both Lawson and Rustin traveled to India to familiarize themselves with the nonviolent independence struggles led by Gandhi. Martin Luther King, Jr., having discovered nonviolent thinkers during his adolescent years at Morehouse College, was inspired by Henry David Thoreau's *On Civil Disobedience* and began studying books on Gandhi as a student at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania.

[9] Mary E. King, "Waging Peace", p. 10.

[10] Mary E. King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*, Morrow, New York 1987, p. 231.

her college days, Mary started re-reading this title during her time in the Deep South. Together with Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and works by Albert Camus and Frantz Fanon, it became her literary diet in the evenings after working hours, discussing de Beauvoir and Lessing with her colleague, friend, and roommate Casey Hayden (Sandra Cason)[11]. The universality of de Beauvoir's thoughts and observations about constraints on women and vulnerabilities worldwide struck a chord with both Mary and Casey. Furthermore, SNCC protagonists such as Ella Baker, one of the great voices of twentieth-century U.S. social history, and Fannie Lou Hamer, whose intense authenticity as a spokesperson for the local people with whom Mary was working, had become highly influential for them – deepening their yearning for forums in which such issues could be openly discussed amid democratic equity.

Originating from a home which consciously sought to live and apply Christian morals and values on a daily basis, Mary's decision to join SNCC was not considered rebellious to her family members, but in the wider society it represented the conscious breaking of taboos. Unsurprisingly, she and Casey Hayden represented a mere handful of white women engaged in SNCC organizing until the 1964 Freedom Summer, when larger numbers of Northern women were recruited along with men as volunteers. Ironically, the movement offered Mary and Casey chances for deep engagement in fighting for political and social justice beyond the possible average expectations for young women at that time.

Inspired by their reading, work, and conversations with other women on staff and local women, Mary and Casey drafted a paper entitled "SNCC Position Paper, Nov. 1964". The paper ignited prompt reactions. Although circulated anonymously, they were almost immediately disclosed as among its authors. Ridicule and disbelief about women's concerns prevailed in some quarters, but in other sections of SNCC there was great support. Mary recalls Julian Bond and Charles Cobb as standing out among the SNCC male staff members who appreciated the paper.

Rippling out from a SNCC meeting in Waveland, Mississippi, a comment by Stokely Carmichael about "the position of women in SNCC is prone" made its way through a rumor mill to Robin Morgan in New York, who later reported it in her 1970 book, *Sisterhood Is Powerful*. No circumstantial background was offered, nor did Morgan seek to verify the quotation and its setting from fifteen or more readily available firsthand sources. In *Freedom Song*, Mary contextualizes and explains that Stokely possessed the talents of a stand-up comedian and that this one-liner came at the end of a very long monologue that had begun with his making jokes about Trinidadians (his own roots), about black people in general, moving on to black communities in Mississippi, and finally especially targeting himself with his self-deprecating humor.

Stokely often amused fellow staff members with his comic soliloquies, which are particularly recalled for his mirth at himself. Enthralled by those listening to him, with their long bouts of responding hysterical laughter, he made up one quip

[11] Like Mary King, Casey Hayden decided to work for SNCC after graduating from university. Then called Sandra 'Casey' Cason, she became known as Casey Hayden after her marriage to Tom Hayden in 1962, but is now known by her birth name Sandra Cason.

after another, including eventually this wisecrack about women. Regrettably, Morgan got the date (1966 rather than 1964), circumstance, and contextual meaning of the quotation wrong.

In 1973, Gloria Steinem contacted Mary to find out if the quotation were true – the first inquiry from any reporter, author, or scholar into its truth, so far as Mary knows, and for which she gives her credit. In the years since, Morgan's misrepresented quotation has unfortunately taken on a life of its own and lingered as a misperceived moment in the collective memory of the women's movement, particularly for those who knew little or nothing else about SNCC. Mary later described Stokely to the *Washington Post*:

> If you look at the 20th century as a continuum, on the one hand you have Gandhi and nonviolent resistance and on the other hand Leninist revolutionary violence. He's somewhere in the middle – more on the Lenin side than the Gandhi side. He still believes in using words and persuasion as his primary means of getting things changed. Even though the words are loaded, he still believes in words[12].

In 1965, Mary and Casey wrote "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo" for private circulation and sent it to forty women working in the peace and freedom movements across the United States:

> The reason we want to try to open up dialogue is mostly subjective. Working in the movement often intensifies personal problems, especially if we start trying to apply things we're learning there to our personal lives. Perhaps we can start to talk with each other more openly than in the past and create a community of support for each other so we can deal with ourselves and others with integrity and can therefore keep working[13].

A *Washington Post* article later reported regarding their dispatch that they had "dropped a bomb with the publication of a provocative memo […] considered by some historians to be [a] founding document of the modern feminist movement"[14]. In it, both women translated their experiences in the movement from abstract politics to the personal ramifications of a broadened concept of democracy. The piece addressed the invisible, yet somehow accepted and unquestioned power relations in the movement, and bade a larger understanding of freedom and power. The text was deliberately kept free from the jargon of a typically Beauvoirian style in order to appeal to all those to whom it was sent.

A consciousness for specific women's rights was non-existent among many freedom fighters for universal civil liberties and human rights at the time. Even today, "human rights" are assumed to be gender blind, but apart from the loosest metaphorical sense such entitlements do not have the same meaning for women and men. As Mary later interpreted the meaning of their missive:

---

[12] Mary E. King in Kevin Merida, "Hail to a Chief: Civil Rights Pioneers Gather to Pay Tribute to Kwame Ture", *Washington Post*, 9 April 1998.

[13] Mary E. King and Casey Hayden, "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo", *Liberation*, April 1966, p. 36.

[14] Anna Holmes, "Spotlighting the Work of Women in the Civil Rights Movement's Freedom Rides", orig. "The female side of freedom", *Washington Post*, 3 June 2011.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/spotlighting-the-work-of-women-in-the-civil-rights-movements-freedom-rides/2011/06/01/AGPH1aHH_story.html

> [W]e were asking whether we would be able to act out our beliefs and make decisions based on our convictions, beliefs grounded in our definition of freedom and self-determination as women, stemming from what we had learned in the movement. The questions Casey and I raised ran parallel to the larger debate about SNCC's future course. The organizational structure for SNCC that we supported, one of democratization and decentralization, would have allowed this. Autonomous local movements as opposed to a centralized hierarchy would have supported diversity and variation […] and [this view] was broadly compatible with a concept about which there was consensus: the increasing conviction that SNCC organizers should dig in and help local people develop institutions they controlled. […]
>
> [Our document] was in part a call for a return to the fundamental values of the sit-ins and the early vision of SNCC, according to which any community should be free to define its own political agenda, spark its own local movement, and raise up its own leaders. Ten years later, when I […] [was quoted as saying] that I had felt "relatively powerless" as a member of the SNCC staff, I was referring to a general feeling that I was losing ground within the movement with regard to the principles and beliefs of the early SNCC years that I valued[15].

This document did not simply stimulate discussion about gender roles in SNCC and its wider community, but – in April 1966 published as "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo" by the War Resisters League in its magazine *Liberation* – has affected contemporary and future generations of women (and men). As Mary notes in *Freedom Song*, the forty women to whom the document has been sent began meeting in small gatherings, later known as consciousness-raising groups. Conversations in these groups during the 1970s shared the realization that women – simply because they were female – were treated inequitably within societies organized around men's interests and concerns. Women, therefore, were said to be what men were not. If men were strong, women were weak; if men were rational, women were irrational; if men were active, women were passive; if men were intelligent, women were emotional.

The awakening that occurred in these circles derived from personal struggles and eventually developed into a trend in the United States among women, who found that in such small settings they could share their experiences without scorn or ridicule. Grappling with significant questions in protected surroundings, a critique began to emerge, a major tenet of which was that sexual roles were largely socially constructed, yet profoundly internalized. By articulating a politics of self-determination, Mary and Casey, in fact, opened the forum for feminism in post-war America. Today "Sex and Caste" is generally considered as having facilitated the so-called second wave of feminism, a term that derives from the posthumous credit given to those who fought for women's enfranchisement and rights in the nineteenth century, on whom the category first-wave feminism was bestowed. In *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* Ruth Rosen, for instance, credits the two women and their memo with galvanizing a feminist awakening in the United States of the 1960s[16].

[15] Mary E. King, *Freedom Song*, p. 460.

[16] See Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, Penguin, New York 2000, ch. 4.

Scholar and Practitioner of Nonviolence – a Synopsis

Mary's published oeuvre is prolific, increasingly focused on the history of collective nonviolent action, including a number of works intended as teaching material that focus on the "hows" of civil resistance. Her major books range from her widely-acclaimed *Freedom Song*, for which she was given a 1988 Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book Award, to an analysis of nine contemporary accounts of nonviolent resistance, entitled *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr: The Power of Nonviolent Action* (1999; 2nd edn. 2002). This book traces the influence of Gandhian thought on the young Martin Luther King, Jr., and examines several key twentieth-century nonviolent struggles. Gandhi's and King's paths to nonviolent resistance are sensibly characterized as comprising a pragmatic and individualistic learning curve:

> Both believed in nonviolence as a universal principle and a transcendent value, yet they understood that not everyone could make their commitment. […] Although they are often described as visionary, far more consequential is how intensely practical they were. In their respective struggles, they wanted to minimize anything negative and maximize the chances of success. Nonviolent behavior was, for both of them, a means of transforming relationships and creating peaceful transitions of power. […] Neither sought sainthood or martyrdom[17].

Mary's *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance* (2007) sheds new light on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its prospects for peace. Her discourse about the first Palestinian intifada, from late 1987 to early 1990, brought to light the uprising as a predominantly nonviolent phenomenon. Based on 150 interviews of Israelis and Palestinians, she gives details on how a decades-long spread of knowledge about nonviolent strategies throughout Palestinian society had shaped the uprising. The Palestinians' success coincided with the two and a half years of their most disciplined use of nonviolent action in the 1987 intifada, achieving the 1991 Madrid conference and the opening of political space for the 1993 Oslo Accords, notwithstanding the latter's subsequent invalidation by all parties to the conflict.

In a collaboration with the *New York Times*, her succeeding title, is a detailed study of the movements of nonviolent resistance and democratic formations against communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, and the Ukraine. *The New York Times and Emerging Democracies in Eastern Europe* (2009) is unequaled as a reference work on the national nonviolent revolutions that brought about democratic transitions in the Eastern bloc.

Mary's latest book, *Gandhian Nonviolent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: The 1924–25 Vykom Satyagraha and the Mechanisms of Change* (2015), reveals what actually happened in the 604-day nonviolent struggle (satyagraha) against untouchability at the Brahmin temple in the village of Vykom in today's Kerala, India, where she conducted hundreds of hours of painstaking research in archives and newspaper morgues.

[17] Mary E. King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action*, 2nd edn., ICCR/Mehta Publishers, New Delhi 2002, p. 4.

A more lyrical work, *Photographing Freedom*, is forthcoming, based on Mary's personal photographic portraits that she took of local people that she met during the civil rights encounter in Mississippi in the 1960s. With additional trips to the state for interviews and more photo-portraiture taken decades later, she is exploring the accomplishments of the movement as personally disclosed by individuals today.

In her teachings and lectures, Mary is critical of a lopsided tendency in historiography and historical analysis, which results in an almost exclusive conceptualization of belligerent conflicts, whereas successful nonviolent struggles for independence, rights, or reform are generally eclipsed. Awareness and documentation of peaceful revolutions in the past, according to Mary, would increase the chances for nonviolent resolution of intransigent global problems:

> A technique for sociopolitical change that offers a realistic alternative to violent struggle and armed conflict, nonviolent resistance as a chosen means of engagement can lead to outcomes in which all the parties profit, disconnect cycles of intergenerational violence, enhance negotiations, heighten prospects for reconciliation, and favour outcomes with a democratic ethos—without bloodshed or physical and economic destruction. Yet nonviolent struggles in pursuit of social equity, justice, reconciliation, and human rights remain largely undocumented and often misunderstood[18].

So long as history is perceived or equated with militarism, the likelihood of nonviolent conflict and arbitration being chosen for areas in crises remains below its potential, she argues. Knowledge about nonviolent methodologies should particularly be offered to professionals preparing for all of the fields and professional circles that are involved in confronting with such predicaments. Journalists, politicians, parliamentarians, academicians, and diplomats alike need to be erudite about the historic contributions of nonviolent movements in order to help prevent the incursion of violent retaliation into disputes and to break the vicious cycle that results from introducing violent action. Equally important is the offering of competent training in how to prepare nonviolent strategies for justice struggles. Both need long-term perspectives. Mary describes how nonviolent civil resistance is not simply a means to overthrow dictatorships and armed oppression; rather, this method, process, and technique has a strong record of generating democratization processes. The individual choice to participate in nonviolent action, she points out, neutralizes coercive structures of resistance and prefigures democratic forms of leadership emerging from successful nonviolent campaigns. Mary sums up the theory and practice of nonviolent action as follows:

> Nonviolent struggle is an active response in which the taking of action is not violent. It is not the same as the absence of violence, which can be accounted for by numerous causes and explanations. It does not infer passivity—which alters nothing and may even constitute acceptance of hostile violence—nor does it refer to the values of tolerance and virtues of nonviolent interaction that in modern political thought constitute civil society. Rather, it stands as a technique for achieving social and political justice, in contrast to conventional warfare, armed struggle, and guerrilla warfare, which seek to achieve their goals through producing fear or capitulation (because injury to life and limb demoralizes an opponent) or through expressly violent subjugation. The technique employs strategies for applying nonviolent sanctions to

[18] Mary E. King, "Nonviolent Struggle in Africa: Essentials of Knowledge and Teaching", *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal* 1:1 (December 2008), p. 43.

> bring about results; put simply, it does not seek to accomplish its goals through physical harm, injury, or killing[19].

She emphasizes that the choice for nonviolent struggle over violent struggle is neither intuitive nor instinctive, and that the practice of nonviolent action is far from heroic romanticism or idealism. At the core of any successful nonviolent campaign in the contemporary era lies effective teaching and the lateral sharing of lessons by experienced organizers about the basic properties, capacities, and limits of nonviolent resistance:

> The concepts and methods of nonviolent struggle must be coherently explained as a system of principles and applications that otherwise appear to be inscrutable, cryptic, mysterious or weak. One must practice to accept the consequences of unarmed action methods that can lead to reprisals of pain, injury or even death – and here we come to the core specificity of militant nonviolence – *without violent retaliation*. It is at this moment that one has the ability to pierce psychologically the defenses of the opponent and undermine the political pillars of its support[20].

Mary stresses that – despite Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., for instance, both deeply influenced by their religious faiths – nonviolent action is not necessarily linked with spirituality: "What makes a movement nonviolent are not the beliefs of the participants, but their behavior. Movements are composed of persons of all persuasions"[21]. Such mobilizations apply social power, the full sum of the weights and forces that can be exerted by a people or meted out to affect and apply pressure on the targeted group or adversary. The technique of nonviolent action, she states, is based "not on turning the other cheek, but on realistic premises of power", and she explains "that the capacity to reveal the opponent's brutal repression is one of the properties of nonviolent resistance and part of how it can be used to achieve success"[22].

According to her research, paradigms of power can be significantly changed by nonviolent action. Complex undermining of unjust political systems by individual citizens and, consequently, withdrawal of their support and exercise of noncooperation can, if applied with ascending forms of disruption, reconfigure standard patterns of power and subjugation[23]. Properly prepared and strategized, and often interacting with other forces, this process may be able to bring about social change and solidify political consensus behind the resulting alterations. Conversely, military regimes and authoritarian forms of power – when confronted with disciplined

---

[19] *Ivi*, p. 23.

[20] Mary E. King, "Waging Peace", p. 11.

[21] Ibid., p. 13.

[22] Mary E. King, book review of *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) by Timothy B. Tyson, *Journal of American History* 87: 3 (December 2000), p. 1128.

[23] Scholar Gene Sharp defined a taxonomy of nonviolent methods, or so-called action steps, which can be applied by adherents of nonviolent struggle in mounting exertion of disruption: *protest or persuasion*, for example, includes marches, petitions, or vigils; *noncooperation* may entail strikes and boycotts; and *nonviolent intervention* is inclusive of hunger strikes, sit-ins, and alternative institutions. See Gene Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 3 vols., Porter Sargent Publishers, Boston 1973.

nonviolent resistance – face a quandary, in which if they respond violently they may paradoxically heighten the power of the nonviolent challengers.

An important dimension of nonviolent action as a technique lies in its ability to benefit from an asymmetrical and unbalanced power. When the parties to a conflict are uneven and lopsided, in some instances and with study and planning, it may be possible for the putatively weaker side to undercut the power of the adversary presumed to have superior power. Writing of a phenomenon that has been called *jiu-jitsu* – an idiom borrowed from the ancient Japanese martial art, a system of wrestling based on knowledge of balance and how to such an understanding may be used to overcome an adversary's sense of equilibrium – she says:

> Briefly stated, by deliberately refusing to meet violence with violence, and by sustaining nonviolent behavior despite repression, a protagonist throws an opponent off balance by causing the adversary's repressive measures to be seen in the harshest light. As the participants in a nonviolent campaign refuse to reciprocate their adversary's violence, the attacker becomes affected by shifts in opinion and potentially by internal power relationships within the ranks. The adversary becomes unsure of how to respond. In a minority of cases, the sympathies of the police or troops may begin to flow toward the nonviolent protagonists[24].

Hence when physical force and reprisal by dictatorships is not retaliated with violence, it may be possible to undermine the apparently stronger power: Unique about nonviolent action, according to Mary, "is that it preserves the dignity of your opponent; it doesn't seek to humiliate him. The use of violence does exactly the opposite. […] Violence is not a long-term solution to social problems"[25]. Mary warns against a mixing or combining of nonviolent and violent techniques, which, she says, are neither interchangeable nor compatible because their underlying concepts of power are different. Even if employed sporadically, violent action punctuates, mitigates, and contaminates the discipline and efficiency of nonviolent resistance. The empowering momentum of social power gained by nonviolent action as an alternative to physical force is therefore diminished. Violence tends to induce more violence, or as Hannah Arendt observed, "the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world"[26]. The logic of nonviolent civil resistance relies on a persistent erosion of the bulwarks of power that uphold totalitarianism in conjunction with stirring public opinion to turn away from cooperating with the source of the grievance.

Mary considers globalization as a vital component for the dynamics of nonviolent struggle:

> The major nonviolent struggles during the last decade (or more) against military regimes, oppressive bureaucracies, military occupations, and dictatorships – which have changed world maps – were strengthened by globalizing technologies. […] As access to the Internet and electronic mail continues to widen, knowledge can more accurately spread on how to use nonviolent sanctions to press for rights, justice, reform, the lifting of military occupations, or citizenship. […] Globalizing information technologies transit the world swiftly without regard to

[24] Mary E. King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. xvi.

[25] Mary E. King in Seema Kamdar, "Mary's Mahatma", *Times of India*, 17 November 2003.

[26] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1970, p. 80.

> borders, and can make lucid the principles of nonviolent strategic action, with its profound understanding of power[27].

Mary is persuaded that stable and durable peace can only be achieved by integrating and accepting women in leadership in any socio-economic, political matrix. In her view, it is essential to engage women as leaders, mediators, and negotiators in conflict zones. She frequently cites examples around the globe where women are agents of nonviolent strategies. For instance, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) in South Asia, Women in Black in Israel, and Women of Zimbabwe Arise demonstrate nonviolent alternatives to militarism[28].

A stigmatized and monolithic dichotomy of men labeled as warriors and women marked out and ostracized as victims of war has to be overcome, she assures, to create forums for political dialogue in which women are able to bring their breadth of experience as equal and respected negotiators of peace. She sees an international consensus forming today around the increasing evidence that the building of peace is impossible without the cogent involvement of women and women's groups. In Mary's opinion, peace itself has already been reconceptualized and is no longer something hammered out between belligerents or warlords.

Nor is it merely a settlement scratched on paper. Women and women's groups are more and more viewed as being among the most potent and enduring forces available for the prevention and amelioration of acute conflicts, warfare, and violence: "One major obstacle to discussions of women and building peace is a reflexive argument that there are intrinsic natures of men and women. I propose instead that we look at the *experiences* of women, which may give them a view of peace and security that produces different tools"[29]. At the same time, she explicitly discards gender stereotypes and simplifications as futile. The evidence is now indisputable that effective peacebuilding can only be sustained with the forceful involvement of women, yet the clichéd notion of women as "natural" peacemakers should be avoided[30].

---

[27] Mary E. King, "Globalization: A Powerful Opportunity for Nonviolent Struggle", *Fellowship of Reconciliation* 65: 9–10 (September/October 1999), p. 4.

[28] See Mary E. King, "Women and the Building of Peace: Muslim-Hindu Women's Resistance to Militarization in Kashmir, and Israeli Women Seeking an End to Military Occupation of Palestinians", *The Women's Policy Journal of Harvard* 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 11-27.

[29] Mary E. King, "Peace, Human Rights, and Women's Empowerment", *Gender, Peace, and Security Seminar Lecture*, 29 October 2001, p. 36.

[30] Terminologically, *peacebuilding* defines post-war efforts to secure and maintain peace and stability as well as to minimize the trauma of bloodshed, support democratization, and establish a system of justice. UN operations in Namibia in 1978 are often cited as the start of the current concept of peacebuilding, a conception that was expressed in the 1992 and 1995 editions of former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace* and continues to expand. Then speaking in relation to post-conflict situations, Boutros-Ghali identified a range of peacebuilding programs, including "co-operative projects [. . .] that not only contribute to economic and social development but also enhance the confidence that is so fundamental to peace." See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, 2nd edn., United Nations Department of Public Information, New York 1995, p. 15. He mentions activities of agriculture, transportation, resource management, cultural exchanges, educational projects, and simplification of visa requirements. The connection between security and development has become an accepted tenet in peacebuilding.

> Gendered socialisation processes are fundamental to war and peace, which is not to say that women exude maternal attributes or have a reflexive interest in peace making. Notions that women possess a 'natural' bent toward conciliation and peace delegitimise women's voices in policy and international relations[31].

Conclusion

In sum, Mary calls for a trilateral recognition of three handles for building more peaceable societies. First is the recognition of the indispensability of woman, who have from time immemorial borne the brunt of rebuilding war-torn societies. Women's tangible experiences transculturally as agents of social change – especially at the local, community, and regional levels – commends them as bringing essential knowledge to the building of lasting peace. Although until recently excluded from the dominions in which societies decide to administer political violence, because they were deemed inadequate for military service and generally untrained in the use of weaponry, it can be empirically observed that as a consequence women's adoption of action choices has historically emphasized means other than armed confrontation. Women have thus in history learned by compulsion and choice to become proficient in exploring the enormity of the human experience with regard to utilizing nonviolent action, having done so for centuries before historical analysis had begun or coinage of terminology had formalized its study. The second lever is the scale of the body of knowledge of theory and praxis of nonviolent civil resistance, which has been rapidly growing. Recent research suggests that this method dates back to the ancient period and has vastly more potential for successful outcomes that guerrilla warfare and armed struggle. As a quantum benefit, scholarship is now growing and discloses the influences of women throughout the ages to the development of nonviolent processes for waging conflicts. The results are revealing an appreciation of history in which women's involvement has encouraged the use and expansion of civil resistance and nonviolent struggle. The third and interlocking handle is peacebuilding, one of the genuinely new and fresh concepts of the past four decades, in which it is increasingly understood that post-conflict societies will return to civil war within a short period – often an estimated five years – if knowledge of how societies can correct deficiencies in their standard institutions of politics is not widespread. In other words, the baskets of peacebuilding measures and initiatives must include the broad understanding of how to fight for correctives, should the established institutions of political power become corrupted or ineffective. With enlarging roles for women, increasing knowledge of the potency of civil resistance, and widening appreciation that peacebuilding must forthrightly include both women and nonviolent action, it is possible to perceive realistic means for constructively facing the future.

[31] Mary E. King, "What Difference Does It Make?: Gender as a Tool in Building Peace", in Dina Rodríguez and Edith Natukunda-Togboa, eds., *Gender and Peace Building in Africa*, University for Peace, Ciudad Colon, Costa Rica 2005, p. 30.