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*Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social
Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*
(review)

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Feminist Teacher, Volume 19, Number 1, 2008, pp. 76-78 (Review)

Published by University of Illinois Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ftr.0.0026>



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between education and women's participation in civil society. Those interested in dominant discourses of gender and the history of education will find this book both interesting and informative. Kelley excels at offering a variety of illustrations and life stories as evidence of her findings, and her chapters on pedagogy (Chapter Three) and "the privilege of reading" (Chapter Five) are especially engaging because of her skilled interweaving of examples. Ultimately, Kelley's book offers a significant examination of how women

situated in a particular historical time period gained entrance to civil society and thus paved the way for further movement toward gaining citizenship rights for women. This book would be best utilized in a course examining the historic relationship between women's education and women's participation in public life, but should also be paired with texts that explore the diverse identities of women from the same time period.

KATHRYN E. LINDER

Fernandes, Leela. *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2003. 146 pp.

I recently took a class on feminist activism in which we examined the dichotomy between theory and practice. During the semester it became quite evident that students were overwhelmed by the social justice issues we were examining. Many students defined activism or practice as something that had to create immediate change and that could not take place within the academy. These understandings of practice resulted in feelings of hopelessness because many students did not have the time between work, school, and family obligations to participate in the activist projects we had studied. Shortly after this course ended, I read Leela Fernandes's *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*. Fernandes's book examines a form of spiritual feminism that deconstructs the false dichotomies between theory/practice, spirituality/religion, and self/other. In five

compact chapters, she advocates for a synthesis of spirituality and feminism that allows one to generate alternative visions to social problems in the world.

Spirituality, for Fernandes, is a "lived spirituality" (10). Her concept of spirituality departs from the conventional forms inscribed by patriarchy, colonization, and violence. One of her primary goals is to reclaim a form of spirituality that necessitates "an understanding of self as encompassing body and mind, as well as spirit" (10). Fernandes's theory of a spiritualized feminist activism begins with a transformation of the self, which eventually leads to enduring social transformation. Her approach to spiritual activism is not a "quick fix" solution, but rather a necessary process for lasting social change. Fernandes elucidates her approach to feminist activism by examining recent and historical world events, building on feminist writings, and reflecting on her experiences teaching women's studies.

Fernandes's classroom experiences provide an important foundation for her book. These experiences have provided her a lens through which to see how the cycle of cynicism influences students' abilities to

imagine a different, more just world. As a result, she begins her book with a discussion of how identity politics have hindered social movements from creating lasting social change. Fernandes's objective is not to discredit identity-based approaches, but to examine how they are oppositional in nature. Consequently, identity-based strategies end up perpetuating the very hierarchies and divisions they oppose (26). As she discusses the inherent contradictions with identity-based practices, she builds on a process of disidentification that has been proposed by AnaLouise Keating, Rosemary Hennessy, and other theorists. Disidentification, for Fernandes, is a process of "letting go of all forms and elements of what we perceive as constituting our identity while being fully engaged in confronting the very real inequalities and exclusions which existing constructions of identity do produce" (31). This practice of disidentification must be a spiritual journey that encourages individuals to question the boundaries of identities and the divisions between mind, body, and spirit (37).

The oppositional framework intrinsic in identity-based strategies that Fernandes highlights is a springboard for her discussion of the dichotomy between theory and practice. She argues that the current split between theory and practice has divided the academy from social justice movements. Fernandes contends that we need to move beyond the postmodern rut and initiate alternative understandings of practice. Even though she believes that postmodern theorists have failed to provide alternative visions to societal problems, she credits them for providing necessary theories of deconstruction (50). Revealing current rifts between theory and practice, she proposes a process of ethi-

cal practice infused with a philosophy of nonviolence. Ethical action, for Fernandes, is a form of activism that avoids "acts of harm and injury against others" (53). In order for feminist practice or activism to be ethical, "it must begin by linking the dailiness of an individual's behavior with her or his more public, formal activity that is engaged in service of others" (55). Dailiness is a vital component for transforming ethical action into a spiritualized practice because it focuses on the actions of one's self before trying to transform the actions of the entire world. This persistent effort to emphasize daily action makes Fernandes's book an essential element for classes emphasizing activism. Her spiritualized practice is not an avoidance approach. Instead, her approach requires that individuals represent the possibility of lasting social change by living their daily life in accordance with their goals for social change.

As Fernandes expands the boundaries of practice, she reconnects the academy with social justice organizations by claiming that knowledge production is also a form of ethical practice. Postmodern theorists have contributed greatly to our understanding of knowledge as a tool of domination void of ethics. However, Fernandes suggests that knowledge production can be a form of ethical practice if individuals "recognize and accept the power-laden relationships that permeate it without being ultimately trapped" by them (83). The transformative approach to knowledge production that she suggests is a process of "active witnessing" (79). Witnessing, for Fernandes, is a sacred venture that exposes one to the suffering of others and requires one to make an effort to understand it. As a result, the act of witnessing initiates a process of self-learning that is

the antithesis of current knowledge practices. The practice of self-learning inherent in active witnessing suggests “that those of us who claim to be knowers are in fact the ones being taught” (93). This process of active witnessing requires individuals to move beyond pointing out the mistakes of others and towards a spiritualized knowledge that welcomes mystery.

Mystery, in Western society, is not a concept readily embraced. Intangible ideas, like spirituality, that accept partial understandings are often rejected by academic and social justice institutions. For that reason, Fernandes’s book is a crucial component for academic classrooms because it expands the definition of knowledge, discusses ethical practices

for knowledge production, and accentuates how knowledge can be transformative. In many ways, the process of spiritual transformation that Fernandes proposes in *Transforming Feminist Practice* represents a missing link in social justice movements by beginning with a journey of self-transformation. In this case, beginning with ourselves is not a selfish start, but a starting point that ensures the sustainability of the changes we wish to see in the world. It is only by changing ourselves that we infuse the changes we desire to see in the world into everything and everyone we come into contact with.

SALLY SAYLES-HANNON

Humm, Maggie. *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 226 pp.

Critical interest in the personal lives of Virginia Woolf and her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, has increased exponentially in the last twenty years, as scholars apply newly articulated theoretical tools to map the dynamics of their position in British modernism. As daughters of historian Sir Leslie Stephen, they were raised in a stimulating, literary middle-class environment and grew into maturity and financial independence just before the Great War when their prospects for personal and creative freedom seemed limitless. They would go on to contribute significantly to modernist aesthetics while also brilliantly defining and undermining the role gender played in family, education, politics, and art. Yet Virginia would infamously claim in “A Room of One’s Own” that between

the vote and five hundred pounds a year, the latter was far more important, and the freethinking Vanessa would retreat for half her lifetime to the domestic sanctuary she created for herself and her blended family at Charleston Farmhouse in rural Sussex. Their modernity was decidedly of their own fashioning. Maggie Humm’s book asks what their use of amateur and domestic photography reveals about how they shaped their identities and aesthetic visions. By approaching Woolf’s and Bell’s photo albums as vehicles and means of identity construction, she dismantles the conception of albums as insignificant domestic (feminine) productions and shows how the albums “reveal two visually creative women articulating aesthetic, familial and fraternal experiences in a range of media” (4) as they illustrate, construct, and assess their own history.

The book is organized in three parts: an expository and critical history exploring Bloomsbury’s relation to photography