Feminist Perspectives on Intercultural Transformation: Religion, Sexual Violence, and Peacebuilding

Edited by María Pilar Aquino, Mónica A. Maher, and María del Carmen Servitje Montull

Bogotá, Colombia: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2025, 906 pages, USD $68.

Reviewed by Mary E. Hunt, January 31, 2026

Wisdom needed to deal with contemporary geopolitical problems is contained between the hard covers of this welcome, magnificent volume. It is a well-thought-out compendium of articles that address the complexities of religion, the painful ubiquity of sexual violence, and the many efforts women around the world are expending to build a peaceful world. As such, it is timely beyond measure and needed right now.

The editors are all specialists in their own rights. Mexican-born María Pilar Aquino, Professor Emerita of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego, knows the global scene of feminist studies in religion, as well as Catholic academic, especially Latinx, work. Mónica A. Maher, born in the U.S. and living for decades in Latin America, is a social ethicist. She is a practitioner of several religious traditions and a peace activist with a deep commitment to indigenous people. Mexican philanthropist María del Carmen Servitje Montull is immersed in feminist academia. She endowed a chair in feminist studies which has welcomed many distinguished scholars at Iberoamericana University in Mexico City. Her commitment to eradicating sexual violence against children and adolescents is evident in this volume.

These women have performed an enormous service in culling 25 chapters by a veritable Who's Who of Latin American feminist scholar/activists and a few others whose distinguished work, like that of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, has been foundational in the field. The sheer size of this book, over 900 pages, makes clear that the Latin American production of knowledge, all based in concrete efforts to create a better world, is plentiful and powerful.

The Introduction is a very thorough rendering of the whole volume. The Editors lay out their hopes and plans for the book, noting that it is meant to be a contribution to global efforts for women, peace, and security. The essays are summarized in turn, with each author described so the grounding in their concrete experiences is clear. A comprehensive Bibliography adds immense value, and a carefully done Index makes this enormous book more accessible to those who seek particular themes.

The selections are grouped in three parts, each of which could usefully be a separate volume. The first is titled "Contemporary Explorations of Interculturality, Feminism, and Peacebuilding." One distinguishing feature of this section is an emphasis on the structural causes

of war and oppression, and the need to focus on structural solutions. The term "kyriarchy," introduced by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, refers to the interstructured forms of oppression including racism, colonialism, heterosexism, ableism, sexism, and others. It is a very useful construct for describing what is also known as intersectionality or interstructured oppression.

The Greek-rooted neologism "kyriarchy" (lordship) has the value of including religion, especially patriarchal Christianity as such and the Christian churches in particular, as part of unjust social structures. The word 'kyriarchy' brings to mind the common liturgical refrain, "Kyrie eleison," Lord have mercy, adding a certain charm to the concept! Religions play many roles, but several of these essays point toward the need for the "feministization" of religions before they can be truly useful in making peace. This is a nuanced claim, but it is at the heart of the feminist theological project.

The second section, "Feminist Theological Reflections and Approaches to Sexual and Gender-based Violence," fleshes out some of these themes. There are critiques of hierarchical dualism as a way of thinking that leads to conflict. This framing of concepts as God/human, male/female, human/animal, with the first of the pair always better than the second, is seen as a methodological problem that grounds violent structures.

Violence against women, including nuns, teens, and children, is part of the common fabric of patriarchy. Violence is the default, the normative assumption, and not a case-by-case matter. The horrors of sexual violence in war and femicide in places like Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, seem intractable. But feminist scholars in religion do not shy away from these difficult themes. Instead, together, as in this section, they offer resistance and therefore the most realistic hope for change.

The third section, "Peacebuilders: Intercultural Transformation," offers concrete examples of women's international, interreligious peace work. Whether in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, or Thailand, whether Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist women, African or Latin American indigenous women, refugees or immigrants, there are certain common threads. Women use their creativity and express their desperation when they are faced with the vulnerable lives of their children. They stop at nothing to protect and promote a humane future.

An important strategy for women building peace is to form organizations and networks to work against the patriarchal odds. Whether at the level of the United Nations or the barrio, whether professional women or factory workers, the key is that women bond even over profound differences in order to transform the status quo. From hope-inducing reports in these pages, it is hard not to conclude that if women ran the world, it would be a different place.

Having gathered all of this invaluable material, the question is how best to socialize it. With respect to the work in English, I suggest that three separate but related volumes be published in a series. Each could be the core text for a class or book discussion. Their distinct but

overlapping themes allow for helpful repetition of dynamics and practices that demonstrate how groups have survived, made progress, paved a way out of no way.

I suggest adding a few study questions to each volume and invite readers to discuss these themes in their various communities. Otherwise, this important collection will simply be accessible in libraries and not to the very people who, through their current labors on many feminist peace fronts, might be inspired to write the next set of chapters for still a fourth volume yet to come.

Meanwhile, I write for those who are indebted to the Editors and the authors in sounding a loud “Alleluia” for this epic collection.