

*A Door Into Ocean's* Nonviolent Resistance as Pragmatic Social Vision

In Fall 2014, the United States erupted in protests of police violence against minorities. While sit-ins, peaceful marches, and riots occurred in several states, one particular act of protest made headlines on November 24 for a different reason: on an arch in St. Louis, someone had spray-painted “If we burn, you burn with us.” This phrase is a direct quote from Suzanne Collins’s *Mockingjay*, a dystopian novel whose film adaptation had come to theaters the week before. In context, the novel’s protagonist Katniss Everdeen (nicknamed “The Girl on Fire”) delivers this message to the tyrannical Capitol after they firebomb a hospital full of wounded civilians. In St. Louis, however, it served a more symbolic purpose, inviting comparisons between American police and political power structures and the overlords in the fantastic world of the *Hunger Games* (Bates). This appropriation of Collins’s slogan for an American protest is typical of the role that dystopian or utopian novels often play in society: as symbols and catalysts to action, not as instructions. Speaking specifically of the feminist utopian novel, Catriona Sandilands notes that most contemporary examples have “relied more on the idea of a principled intervention into an uncertain world – utopia as horizon of possibility – than...on the idea of utopia as ideological blueprint” (Eichler 46). In novels that are dystopian in nature instead of utopian, a similar principle applies. Instead of emulating a society, readers may wish to emulate the resistance of characters against society – an impulse often limited by the specificity and otherworldliness of the scenarios found in the dystopian text. For example, while readers may support the message of Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* – that books and knowledge should be valued above shallow entertainment – they are unlikely to find opportunities to promote that message by saving books from being burned by

firefighters. In contrast, Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* (1986) depicts an intricate otherworldly society in which characters employ methods of resistance directly applicable beyond the novel. Drawing on elements of postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and Quaker theology, Slonczewski uses *A Door Into Ocean* to communicate a pragmatic curriculum of nonviolent resistance with proven real-world results.

Before examining specific resistance within *A Door Into Ocean*, however, it is first necessary to determine whether the novel should be classified as dystopian, utopian, or neither. The novel's main setting, the planet Shora, with its all-female, egalitarian, and ecologically harmonious society of Sharers, can certainly be read as a feminist utopia: defined simply by Ellen Peel as "a narrative about a society that is free from the patriarchal subordination of women" (xv). As many contemporary theorists of utopia and dystopia are quick to note, however, the "utopia" – literally "no place," as pioneered by Thomas More's 1516 *Utopia* – has fallen out of fashion as unrealistically perfect. Lyman Tower Sargent suggests another category, eutopia: "a nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as *considerably better than* the society in which that reader lived [emphasis mine]" (Booker 6). As the Sharers freely admit that their society includes crime and discord, Sargent's "eutopia" is perhaps a closer definitional fit, but for the sake of simplicity I will continue to use the traditional "utopia."

On the other hand, if we consider the setting of *A Door Into Ocean* within the larger context of not just the Shoran planet but rather the entire galactic empire, the novel appears to be a distinct feminist dystopia. All featured planets and moons other than Shora – a reported ninety-three of former thousands – are ruled by the "Patriarch" in a system of

power known as the “Patriarchy” (50). Rather than being “free from the patriarchal subordination of women,” a society ruled by a nearly all-powerful entity explicitly known as the Patriarch clearly falls into the realm of a feminist dystopia. That is, it “foreground[s] the oppressive society in which it is set, using that setting as an opportunity to comment in a critical way on some other society, typically that of the author or the audience” (Booker 5). Not only does the “Patriarchy” reflect the patriarchal nature of the reader’s world as identified by the feminist project, but as Tom Moylan notes, as a dystopian narrative it is “largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century...[such as] exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease...and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life” (Booker 4). The Patriarchy features a culture of constant surveillance (216), military escalation (177), corporate power (195), and nuclear genocide (40), all of which reflect contemporary anxieties and reinforce *A Door Into Ocean*’s place as a dystopia.

In order to reconcile these two possibilities and understand how their juxtaposition provides the ideal backdrop for a applicable program of resistance, I turn to Daphne Patai, who argues that ““The protest against injustice implies a vision of justice (Peel 4) – that is, within any critique of an oppressive system, such as that represented by a dystopia, there is the ghost of a preferred utopia. In the case of *A Door Into Ocean*, this internal ‘ghosting’ is literal – Shora exists unregulated within the Patriarchy as an alternative potential society. As it is located within the Patriarch’s realm, however, and later suffers direct attack by his forces, Shora serves not as a classic, stable utopia, but as what Ellen Peel calls a “pragmatic utopia.” “While leery of essences, grand claims, and simplistic teleology,” Peel notes, authors of pragmatic utopias “base their critiques on working principles that help them

define progress” (9). In Slonczewski’s case, the clash of the dystopian Patriarchy and its “ghost” utopia Shora provides an ideal stage for her to demonstrate the working principles that she asserts lead to progress.

As a professor of Biology at Kenyon College as well as a writer, Joan Slonczewski freely admits that she is more pedagogically-inclined than many science fiction writers. She goes so far, in fact, as to include a study guide on her website for *A Door Into Ocean*, where she outlines how the novel fits into the canon of traditional science fiction, provides insight into her biological inspiration and how Shora’s ecosystems might function, and grounds her characters’ ideology in historical political practices. “Quakers, and other people throughout history,” she writes, “have successfully led political revolts and resistance through nonviolent action. *A Door Into Ocean* is a virtual textbook of the methods of nonviolence. All the incidents of this book are based on actual historical events in which nonviolent methods were used” (“Study Guide”). This nonviolence – specifically, nonviolent resistance – to which she refers is defined as “the sustained use of methods of nonviolent action by civilians engaged in asymmetric conflicts with opponents not averse to using violence to defend their interests” (Schock 277). While Slonczewski focuses specifically on the contributions of Gene Sharp, whose work I will address later, her allusion to “Quakers, and other people” is significant. The nonviolent resistance featured in *A Door Into Ocean* is best understood when viewed as a hybrid of three distinct ideologies, all of which are intrinsically linked to the action and setting of the novel.

Though it concerns alien societies instead of the European imperialism of the past millennium, *A Door Into Ocean* frames the Valan invasion of Shora in distinctly colonial terms. Commander Realgar receives orders to “bring Patriarchal Law to Shora,” and speaks

with frustration of the fact that “The Envoy wanted those natives alive” (206-7). As the invasion of Shora progresses, Realgar refers to Shorans as beasts (239), terrorists (216), and insurgents (276), and employs a variety of historic imperialist practices including exhibiting caged captives back home (279) and establishing military outposts on Shoran rafts so as to better control them (271).<sup>1</sup> While the Patriarchy never successfully controls Shora, preventing it from ever truly becoming a colonial space, post-colonial theorist Franz Fanon’s concept of violence as the language of the oppressor provides valuable insight into Shoran action – and inaction – in the face of Realgar’s attacks. One of the first tactics oppressors employ, Fanon explains, is dehumanization of the colonized through language of animalization or monstrosity. “In fact,” he writes, “the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man’s reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations” (33). As colonizers, the Valans refer to Shorans as maggots (382), twisted primates (313), rabbits, (262) and catfish (292), justifying their directive to “squash them like maggots, like we’re supposed to, until the whole planet’s clean of them” (383). The inherent violence and dehumanization of both the colonizers’ actions and words means, Fanon argues, that the colonized cannot communicate with them except by matching their force. “Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon,” he writes. “It is obvious here that the agents of the government speak the language of pure force” (27-29). Realgar openly states that he has internalized this belief, arguing that “Force is all these natives understand” (262). Proponents of this concept of the language of force exist on the side of the Shorans as well; Yinevra, for example, argues in *Gathering* that the Shorans will only

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed explanation of typical colonial practices and discourse, see Ania Loomba’s *Colonialism/Postcolonialism (New Critical Idiom)*

communicate successfully with the invading soldiers through killing. “If we waste time now, it may soon be too late to gather our strength,” she says. “Force is what Valans understand” (222). While Fanon consistently maintains that this language of force is the only option, Merwen denies this belief’s veracity. Gesturing to successful economic boycotts of Valan traders in the past as evidence of non-violence being effective communication, she questions this homogenous narrative proposed by Fanon and other post-colonial theorists and instead offers up a program of non-violent resistance.

Crucial to Merwen’s proposal for Shoran action is the idea that non-violent resistance is not only an effective course of action, but also one that honors the complexity and harmony of life on Shora. During debates in Gathering, Yinevra argues that violent defense of the planet is the only way that they can successfully honor Shora:

Not only Sharer children and survival are threatened, but all the other creatures of Shora, the lesser sisters, seaswallowers, fanwings, rafts – from snail to swallower, not one is untouched by the Valan pestilence!... We are protection-sharers; as Shora protects us, so we must protect. Her heritage. When the balance tips, when the web stretches – who remains to balance life and death, if not us?” (309)

While Merwen shares Yinevra’s belief that Shorans are protectors of all life on Shora, she fundamentally disagrees with the assertion that they must fight the Valans in order to do so. When Yinevra claims in another argument that they must fight to “save” Shora, she counters “To save what? What is worse, to die having lived or to live having died?” (327). Because Shorans believe that to kill someone is to “share death” with them, by killing Valans in their effort to preserve life they will actually be destroying what makes them enlightened protectors of their world. By protecting Shora through violence, Merwen asserts, they will themselves unbalance the web of life and achieve an empty victory.

Though Shorans have no need of differentiating themselves as such, this commitment to the environment and belief that morality, society, and nature are intertwined recalls core tenets of ecofeminist thought. Petra Karin Kelly explains, “Nonviolence, ecology, social justice, and feminism are the key principles of Green politics, and they are inseparably linked” (39). The ecological aspect of this philosophy asserts that people have a responsibility to all living organisms, and their fates are intertwined. Violence enacted towards one group is violence enacted towards all, and consequences spread throughout entire systems. Merwen espouses this belief when she explains the interconnected “web” of Shora to Spinel. “A lesser creature sees its rival on the water and jumps in to fight it,” she says. “A human sees herself and knows that the sea names her. But a *self-namer* sees every human that ever was or will be, and every form of life there is. By naming herself, she becomes a ‘protector’ of Shora” (61). For Shorans, enlightenment entails moving beyond selfish short-sightedness and instead considering how, like poison through water, their actions will affect every part, past and present, of their world-sea.

The feminist aspect of ecofeminism claims violence is inherently antithetical to the feminist project, and is instead an aspect of patriarchal control. “As women assert ourselves,” Kelly argues, “we face the question of whether we should seek access to every male arena of power, even at the price of giving up feminist principles...As one woman working for peace said, ‘To establish more equal relations between the sexes, rather than training women to kill, let men learn to nurture life’” (19). Many Shorans share this essentialist concept of women as proponents of peace and progress who must move beyond male aggression. “‘Could it be that the persistence of malefreaks has kept the Valan race in a primitive state?’ one asks upon learning that Valans kill each other to settle

disputes. “Only lesser races produce males” (80). Once again, Merwen counteracts this generalization, this time by integrating “malefreak” Spinel into Shoran society. She cannot deny, however, the explicit contrast the novel creates between the violent conquest of the male-dominated “Patriarchy” and the ecological responsibility of the peaceful, all-female Shoran people. In *A Door Into Ocean*, to be part of a female society is to automatically be committed to the interdependency of all life and instinctively opposed to violence and warfare.

As Slonczewski articulates, however, the most prominent influence on the Shoran philosophy of nonviolence is Quaker theology and political thought. “Quakers believe that God exists infinitely within every human being,” she writes. “This means that within a Quaker community, all decisions must be made by ‘spiritual consensus,’ in concurrence with the spirit of all individuals” (“Study Guide”). These beliefs have a two-fold impact on Shoran society. First of all, they manifest in Shoran Gatherings, where Merwen is able to single-handedly prevent her society from committing violent acts against the Valans because they cannot reach a consensus (310). Secondly, Merwen’s continual insistence that the Valans are human does not only provide a counterpoint to their dehumanizing language regarding her people. Rather, by claiming that Valans are humans, and can self-name and become Protectors (61), she asserts that Valans contain the essence of God – or in this case, Shora – and are therefore sacred. “If they are not human, if they have no door to the self, then they are surely the most deadly creatures Shora has ever known,” she testifies. “But suppose they are our sisters, as Usha says, and suppose they die at our hand. Who will share their destruction?” (81). To destroy the Valans is to destroy themselves – to disregard their respect for the sanctity of life.

This belief in the sacredness of all human life has contributed to the development of nonviolent resistance politics in several Christian denominations, including but not limited to Quakerism. As Walter Wink, a Methodist theologian argues in his landmark work *Engaging the Powers*, the ministry of Jesus not only proclaims the value and equality of all people, but also outlines a program of resistance against authorities who deny that inherent value. Thinking that nonviolent resistance equates passivity is erroneous. Rather, “Non-violence is highly aggressive,” he writes, “and Jesus is the best example of it. He attacks his accusers with truth. He forces them either to accept the truth or to silence him.” Similarly, the Shorans repeatedly “witness” to the Valan invaders: “The Gathering decided to swamp the Valan headquarters with as large a witness as could be mustered. Clickflies were released by the thousand, saying: This soldier-place at Per-elion is where death was hastened; send your witnesses here” (237). By sitting silently in front of the Valan headquarters where their sisters have been murdered, the Shorans force them to confront the reality of an entire civilization of individuals whose peaceful lives they have violated.

Wink also pinpoints the key to successful nonviolent resistance, a trait that the Shorans share and the Valans fail to understand. “One does not become free from the Powers by defeating them in a frontal attack,” he advises. “Rather, one dies to their control...‘You don’t need courage to speak out against a regime. You just need not to care anymore – not to care about being punished or beaten” (157). This crucial detachment makes coercion through fear impossible. In Wink’s Biblical context, this detachment comes via a belief in salvation and the Christian heaven. On Shora, remaining free of Valan control stems from a combination of escape from suffering via “whitetrance,” and confidence in eventual reincarnation on Shora (289). In her analysis of a prisoner, Commander Jade

expresses how perplexed she is by Shoran's attitudes despite their dangerous world. "One feature stood out," she reports. "An extreme, almost pathological depletion of fear...their lives are full of dangers...Catfish look straight ahead and follow *it*, whatever 'it' is. So far, they consider us just a distraction" (239). Both the Valans and the Shorans identify this fear as the crucial difference between them. Because the Valans are afraid of suffering and mortality, they seek out control as a way to compensate for their inevitable fate (333). The Shorans, however, care more about their ideals than individual survival, and so they are able to make risky, often self-sacrificing acts of protest without fear of retaliation and death.

With these interwoven backgrounds of postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and Quaker theology in mind, Slonczewski turns to Gene Sharp's exhaustive *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* for the specific Shoran actions that elevate *A Door Into Ocean* from a philosophical treatise to a "virtual textbook of the methods of nonviolence."<sup>2</sup> Sharp is a retired professor of political science, four-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee and founder of the Albert Einstein Institution, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the study of nonviolent action (Arrow). In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, his most influential work, he references revolutionary nonviolent philosophers including Mahatma Gandhi and Henry David Thoreau as well as specific nonviolent movements around the world to create a purportedly complete list of the ways in which people can practice nonviolent resistance. He also outlines possible outcomes for nonviolent resistance movements, and attempts to create a definition of successful resistance. Sharp delineates 198 distinct acts of nonviolent

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<sup>2</sup> Though both Slonczewski and Sharp also spend an extensive amount of time explaining why and how these methods of nonresistance actually *work*, I do not have the room to explore them at length in this paper. Rather, my aim is to understand how the philosophies and actions of the Shorans reflect and relate to real-world practices.

resistance, which he divides into the categories of “Nonviolent Protest and Persuasion,” “Social Noncooperation,” “Economic Noncooperation [Boycotts],” “Economic Noncooperation [The Strike],” “Political Noncooperation,” and “Nonviolent Intervention” (xii-xvi). Of these, the Shorans employ at least 15 different categories of acts, with varying success.

Several Shoran actions during the Valan invasion can be read as unequivocally successful: that is, they result in increased Shoran freedom or agency without any loss of life. The first among these, the “Producers’ boycott (#79),” occurs prior to the Valan invasion. Sharp notes that this boycott has been used to boost prices of goods, support fellow producers, or participate in a wider noncooperation movement against a hostile occupying regime (231). In the case of the Shorans, they boycott selling medicines and raw materials to Valan traders to protest elevated prices and prevent them from selling stones to the stonesick (74) – an action that leads to the intergalactic Trade Council ordering merchants not to sell stones to stonesick Shorans (126). During Valan occupation, the most successful Shoran strategies emphasize their unthreatening hospitality or make them extremely difficult to work with. After the Valans take the Shoran children hostage, they manage to negotiate their own release without their parents’ help using a combination of “Symbolic sounds (#28)” and “The fast (#159).” Apparently taking after her mothersister Merwen, Wellen attempts to coordinate the children in harassing the soldiers: ““We’ve all had enough,” she declares. We’ll all scream. We’ll *all scream*, until they let us go home” (294). Though it does not procure their release, the Valan soldiers do let the children go swimming to appease them, a concession that allows Spinel to escape. Spinel’s escape allows him to provide the adult Shorans with valuable information, as well as inspiring the

children to undertake an almost two-week hunger strike eventually leading to their release (298). The adults, for their part, obstruct Valan goals either by hiding or destroying their lifeshaping places and by disappearing entirely from their own rafts, making prisoners and technology impossible to seize. These actions, labeled “Destruction of own property (#23)” and “Collective disappearance (#69) by Sharp, make it nearly impossible for Valan troops to carry out orders. In a quiet way, the Shorans also carry out “Protest disrobing (#22) through their normalized cultural nudity, a state which leaves Realgar and his soldiers in a state of perpetual discomfort (231, 242).

Conversely, when Shorans are in positions of power, they do everything they can to humanize themselves to the soldiers, actions that eventually persuade the troops to disregard Realgar’s orders. Through “Fraternization (#33),” they befriend officers living on their rafts, encouraging them to care about their children and learn about their peaceful way of life (271). They also force an officer nicknamed “Jasper” to learnshare with them in exchange for medicine during their “Teach-ins (#50),” simultaneously accomplishing goals of modeling peaceful exchange and providing background information on a controversial topic (in this case, stone) (365). Most significantly, the Shorans heal wounded Valan soldiers and return them to their military bases instead of leaving them to die or taking them as permanent prisoners (356). These actions go beyond fraternization to the point of serving as blatant statements of benevolence, and do not go unnoticed by the soldiers; shortly after, a soldier refuses to shoot a Shoran mother who is nursing her infant, representing a tipping point in troop sentiment. Arguably the Shorans’ healing actions, combined with their rescue of Valan troops from seaswallower devastation, is what leads to their successful expulsion of Realgar’s forces (389). “By now too many soldiers had

proved themselves human by ‘not-killing,’” Lystra reflects. “After all, who ever heard of a fleshborer that learned not to hasten death?” (385). Not only do the Shorans’ actions save their own lives – they also increase empathy and self-actualization in the Valan troops.

The Shorans’ more troubling actions – and those that cause more controversy within the text – result in serious injury and death, often with little measurable reward. These begin with a combination of “Vigils (#34)” and “The sit-in (#162)” when Merwen and four others refuse to leave Realgar’s headquarters until he lets them see their imprisoned sisters (231). When he refuses, they escalate these actions into a coordinated schedule of hundreds of Shorans sitting silent in front of headquarters. These actions prompt gas attacks against the Shorans that leave them gasping and fainting (238); though Usha soon creates an antidote, allowing them to bring their children with them to protests without risking their lives, the Shorans are left weakened, with lingering respiratory distress (242-3). While some Valans allude to the psychological strain of the Shorans’ constant presence (245), for the most part the sit-ins are ineffective. “They really think they’re staring us to death?” Realgar asks incredulously, refusing to release his prisoners unless the Shorans submit to his authority (245). The Shorans’ next tactic, Unspeaking, applies their cultural practice of “Silence (#52)” as discipline to enact a “Social boycott (#55)” against Valans. Fascinatingly, Merwen opposes unspeaking the soldiers, arguing that it is a form of inaction that “ties our hands” in dialoguing with the soldiers (258). Indeed, while the Unspeaking does make life more difficult for the Valan troops, it also prompts them to torture and mind-probe Shorans to gain crucial information, violating both their bodies and their minds (313, 317).

The two most extreme Shoran tactics involve complete removal (either temporary or permanent) from Valan reality. One of the major features of Shoran culture is “whitetrance,” in which a Shoran enters a state of meditation beyond the reach of pain or interference, exiting it only through death or their own desire to emerge. Combining both mystical elements and the immobilization of the subject, whitetrance evokes “Total noncooperation (#66)” and “Prayer and worship (#20).” For Merwen, whitetrance is the key ability that separates Shorans from other beings: “Without whitetrance,” she reflects, “no Valans could properly control their own pain...Conscious beings were meant to control pain, to say yes or no to their physical selves, else how could their souls be freed?” (289). This freeing of the soul from pain is what allows the Shorans to, as Wink articulates, “die to [the powers’] control.” It also means, however, that Shoran bodies are left vulnerable, and several are tortured or die at the Valans’ hands. The most prolific deaths, however – and the most shocking form of nonviolent resistance in the novel – are those of the Shorans who essentially commit suicide in a last desperate attempt to show the Valan soldiers that killing is not the answer to fear and force them to recognize their humanity. We have “nothing left but ourselves,” Ama suggests. “That is all, in the end: to keep on sharing of ourselves, until the day comes when Valans see our eyes in the ocean of their own” (343). The Shorans’ intentional martyrdom is so extreme that Sharp does not include it in his list of 198 nonviolent practices, presumably because it could be considered violence against the self. The martyrs’ goal, however, aligns with that of many acts of nonviolent resistance: to force the enemy to confront the humanity of the oppressed. While these deaths do contribute to this goal, along with more obviously productive methods listed earlier, they come at the cost of more than forty thousand Shoran lives (366). Faced with such a

devastating loss of life, the reader and characters are faced with the same question: how can this kind of nonviolent resistance be considered successful?

The answer to this question, both Slonczewski and Sharp would no doubt claim, lies in the definition of “success.” According to Sharp, there are three major forms of achieving success: conversion (the enemy changes their mindset to match that of the protestor); accommodation (the two entities learn to coexist); and nonviolent coercion (the enemy agrees to evacuate the premises or emancipate the oppressed) (705). This third variety of success is closest to *A Door Into Ocean*’s ending: Realgar and the Valan troops pull out of Shora completely, and the borders are sealed (398). For Merwen, however, success always depended less on political outcome and more on moral principles remaining uncompromised. I return to Merwen’s rhetorical question when confronted with the possibility of using violence to protect life on Shora: “To save what? What is worse, to die having lived or to live having died” (327). For Merwen, committing acts of violence against other human beings violates the sanctity of life and brings about a sharing of death before one’s actual death. The very fact that the Shorans never use violence against their oppressors means that, regardless of whether they are exterminated or successfully convince the invaders to leave, they succeed. Their bodies may be conquered, but their ideology – their souls – remains untouchable.

Before I conclude, I would like to turn my attention to two specific moments in *A Door Into Ocean* that reinforce Slonczewski’s vision of the novel as a “textbook of the methods of nonviolence.” First, Slonczewski demonstrates in no uncertain terms that, while seductive, opting for violent resistance inevitably results in swift retribution and further devastation. When Nisi the Deceiver/Berenice attempts to blow up the Valan command

center, Realgar responds by fire-bombing Shoran rafts and publically executing major Shoran elders. Nisi's actions give him the justification he needs for untrammelled violence against the Shorans. Slonczewski's point is clear: by committing even a single act of violence, resisters lose their moral high ground, which is one of their key bargaining chips. Conversely, Slonczewski uses Spinel to portray that the Shorans' philosophy and practices are immediately applicable to other situations, both within the text and outside of it. Even before he sees Shoran methods practically demonstrated, Spinel organizes a peaceful sit-in of the townsfolk in his military-occupied hometown to protest curfew, and succeeds in getting it lifted (184-7). By portraying Shoran methods of nonviolent resistance working in a dramatically different environment, Slonczewski implies that the Shorans' principles are pragmatic both within their fantastic world and in contemporary society.

Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* remains a rarity among dystopian and utopian novels: a work of pragmatic feminist speculative fiction that not only expresses an ideology, but also outlines practical methods of advancing that ideology in the real world. This kind of idealistic yet applicable literature, Kum-Kum Bhavnani argues, is essential to the global feminist project. Unless we can imagine a better reality, we cannot achieve it (322). "My aim in writing *A Door Into Ocean*," Slonczewski explains, "was to give [readers] a window into a hopeful future" ("Study Guide"). By providing readers with a practical curriculum of nonviolent resistance, Slonczewski goes beyond giving them a window: she gives them a door.

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