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Bold Act of Bravery: Narratives of Women Peacemakers

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Writers Festival

Sometimes, the boldest, bravest act one can perform is simply to listen. CBC presenter Lucy van Oldenbarneveld gave Writers Festival attendees the chance to listen to a phenomenal exchange of ideas between the women writers and activists who contributed to *When We Are Bold: Women Who Turn Our Upsidedown World Right*. The new anthology, edited by Rachel M. Vincent of the Nobel Women's Initiative, contains roughly two dozen stories of inspirational women activists, each in turned profiled by a woman writer who has thought carefully about the role of the individual in brokering peace and justice.

Oldenbarneveld skillfully mediated a conversation between Native rights activist Casey Camp-Horinek, poet Aja Monet, writer Madeleine Thien and Nobel Laureate Jody Williams. Monet, Thien and Camp-Horinek each read a selection from their contribution to the anthology. After the readings, Williams joined the panel on stage for a discussion of what might constitute peace-making in 2016. On the night after the Trump-Clinton debate, these Canadian and American women mapped out an understanding of power and social change far more sophisticated than the mainstream media ever allows their audience to take home.

Seated in the pews of Christ Church Cathedral, listeners heard stories of how each author and activist came to understand her place in the world. Horinek spoke of carrying out the will of her mother, also a Native rights activist, whose followers continued to stream to the family homestead long after her death. Madeleine Thien spoke of the intricate relationship between her grief at losing her mother and the public grieving of Ding Zilin, who founded Tiananmen Mothers after she lost her son in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Aja Monet spoke of the power with which June Jordan's poetry affected her; she emphasized the idea that the importance of poetry lies in its emanating from the personal interior, the "last frontier of colonization." All the panelists, including Jody Williams, spoke of importance of taking the first brave step towards empowering oneself and others; and of the necessity of having a space – either figurative or literal – where one can hear oneself think clearly. Oldenbarneveld and the panel then fielded questions from the audience, including a young girl who asked the crucial question of why so many women have been overlooked for their contributions to the peace process around the world. A highlight of the conversation with the audience was when Williams drew a very useful distinction between simple anger and the more important "righteous indignation" which leads some many women and men to take part in initiatives for peace and justice.

Published by the Ottawa-based Arts and Literature Mapalé Press, *When We Are Bold: Women Who Turn Our Upside Down* includes profiles of such figures as the Chechan journalist Natalya Estemirova, conflict negotiator Betty Oyella Bigombe,

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Irish peace activist Mairead Maguire and Canadian politician Flora Macdonald. The trajectory of each of the narrative varies, demonstrating not only how different leaders came to their positions in a diversity of ways, but also how their moments of influence varied according to the receptiveness of their audiences.