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Rosa Manus (1881-1942): The international life and legacy of a Jewish Dutch feminist

EDITED BY MYRIAM EVERARD AND FRANCISA DE HAAN, 2017

Leiden: Brill, xxi + 473 pp., \$147. ISBN 978-90-04-33317-8

This book does several things: for those unfamiliar with Rosa Manus, it introduces her as a central figure during the heyday of the pre-Second World War international women's movement; for those familiar with her story, it fills it in and revises what we know in important ways; and for those eager to know more about transnational feminism, it uses both a collective biography of Manus and an archive of annotated photographs and documents to give a flavour of that world and the sources that help us to understand it. What makes the volume so poignant is that Rosa Manus's archive, carted off to Berlin by the Nazis and after the war ending up in the Soviet Union, was returned to *Atria: Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History* in Amsterdam only in 2003 (Atria was previously the *Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging* [IAVV, International Archives for the Women's Movement] and the original home of the Manus archive). That archive serves as the basis for much of this book and for the new angle of vision on Manus presented here.

For those in the first category, Rosa Manus was a wealthy secular Dutch Jewish feminist who got her start in international feminism at the International Woman Suffrage Alliance conference in Amsterdam in 1908. From there she became a central figure in that organization, a cofounder of the group that became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a world traveler in the interests of feminism, a tireless worker for peace in the period between the two world wars, and ultimately a victim of Nazi genocide. For those well versed in her story, the essays in this volume flesh out important details and shed new light on two

elements. First, Manus presented herself, and has come down in history, as a behind-the-scenes worker, not an out-front leader but an organizer and facilitator who, in part because of her Jewish heritage, shied away from the limelight. Myriam Everard in particular explodes that notion by showing how much of a leader and central figure Manus was, how confident and proud she was of her accomplishments, and how, while she was profoundly secular, in the end she bravely pursued her work knowing the danger she was in. Second, Everard, through impressive detective work, shows that it was Manus's leadership role in the Communist-dominated *Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix* (International Peace Campaign) in the 1930s that first caught the attention of the nationalist right in the Netherlands and then the Nazis. So, although Manus ended up in the Jewish block at Ravensbrück concentration camp, it was her political activities as a feminist peace activist that prompted the Gestapo to call her in for an interrogation. Everard also untangles the conflicting versions of the location and date of her death.

As all this suggests, this is a unique volume, with separate sections featuring essays, pictures, and reproductions of original documents. Francisca de Haan introduces Manus and the essays, photographs, and documents and beautifully sets these in the larger historical context. The essays, by leading scholars of international feminism, are framed by Everard's painstaking reconstructions of Manus's life. The other chapters consist of analyses of Manus's involvement in different organizations and events, including Annika Wilmers on WILPF, Karen Garner on the Women's Disarmament Committee, and Dagmar Wernitznig on the IAVV; a consideration of Manus's peace work in the 1930s and its significance for a crucial shift in women's activism against war by Ellen DuBois; an exploration of Manus's transformed encounters with Egyptian feminists in the 1930s, illustrating the impact of anti-imperialist activism on the international women's movement, by Margot Badran; and Mineke Bosch's delving into Manus's previously

unknown relationship with a German woman, Katharine von Kardorff-Oheimb, which sheds light on both friendship and the various roles of wealthy donors in the women's movement. As de Haan says in her introduction, this book is a 'project of recovery, documentation, and historical analysis' (p. 1).

It is the historical analysis I want to emphasize in this review, because I fear this is a book that, because of its focus on Rosa Manus, could be overlooked by those interested in the larger history (and present) of the international women's movement. The volume touches on all of the important themes of that history - the centrality of peace activism, the impact of the world wars and the rise of fascism, the tensions over imperialism and nationalist resistance in colonized countries, the importance of resources to the persistence of the movement, the vital glue of intimate relationships - and brings to the fore additional ones, including the role of Jewish women, the centrality of Dutch feminists in transnational feminism, and the struggle over preserving the history of the movement. This is, in addition, a beautiful (hence expensive) book with 53 photographs and reproduced documents. While the photograph and documents sections do more for understanding Manus than the movement as a whole, the book is deserving of a wide readership for all it has to say about an important and largely overlooked international feminist and the movement she helped to make.

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