

Feminist Thought (F14)
October 20, 2014

Maternal Peace Politics

Sara Ruddick, "Notes Toward a Feminist Maternal Peace Politics." In *TF*.

I. Questions

- a. What is a mother? (Can men be mothers?) What are the "virtues" of motherhood, i.e., what features enable one to excel in the role of mother?
- b. In what ways, if any, are the virtues of motherhood in conflict with pursuing violent methods of conflict resolution, or violence more generally? Are these virtues in conflict with social resistance, or organizing to oppose state violence?
- c. Are all mothers peacemakers? If not, why are women associated with peacemaking? Should we resist the stereotype of women as peacemakers? Why or why not?
- d. Are there some aspects of mothering that foster a militaristic attitude?
- e. What is a "women's politics"? How, if at all, are men involved in "women's politics"? In what ways are women well situated to be "disloyal to civilization"? (231)
- f. If mothers are identified with their role, why should a maternal peace politics be a form of *women's* politics of resistance?
- g. Is Ruddick a gynocentric feminist? In what ways?

II. Relevant passages from Ruddick?

Mothers are as diverse as any other humans and are equally shaped by the social milieu in which they work. In my terminology they are “mothers” just because and to the degree that they are committed to meeting demands that define maternal work. (225)

I mean by “demands” those requirements that are imposed on anyone doing material work...these three demands—for *preservation*, *growth*, and *social acceptability*—constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance and training. (225)

Maternal peace politics begins in a myth: mothers are peacemakers without power. War is men’s business; mothers are outsiders or victims; their business is life. The myth is shattered by history. Everywhere that men fight, mothers support them. When powerful men have not discouraged them, women, and sometimes mothers, have fought as fiercely as their brothers. (229)

Like revisionary poets, peacemakers set themselves to alter the myth so that it can survive contemporary realism about women and still serve the ends of peace. The contemporary mythmaker can point to the usefulness of mothers and maternal thinking...the practice of mothering taken as a whole gives rise to ways of thinking and acting that are useful to peace politics. Mothers might bring to *any* politics capacities honed in their work—for example, attentiveness, realism and a welcoming attitude toward change...Nonviolent action, like maternal practice at its best, requires resilient cheerfulness, a grasping of truth that is caring, and a tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence. (229)

The mythical peacemaking mother does more than bring distinctive gifts to peace projects. By virtue of her mothering she is meant to be an initiator of peace and a witness against war. She represents a practice whose aims and strategies contradict those of war, which, like mothering, is also an organized human activity with moral pretensions. (229)

It is troubling that the very demands of maternal practice often inspire a militarist politics...The many kinds of parochialism, denial, and inauthenticity to which maternal thinkers are prey often prevent them from seeing, let alone resisting, militarist violence. (230)

Is it possible to create a new, real and symbolic, publicly acknowledged maternal identity? Are there collective enterprises or political movements that transform the practice of those who engage in them? How does participation in these movements undercut specifically militarist elements typical of maternal practices? (230)

A women’s politics of resistance is identified by three characteristics: its participants are women, they explicitly invoke their culture’s symbols of femininity, and their purpose is to resist certain practices or policies of their governors. (230)

Not all women’s politics are politics of resistance. There are politics organized by women that celebrate women’s roles and attitudes but that serve rather than resist the state...A women’s politics of *resistance* is composed of women who take responsibility for the tasks of caring labor and then find themselves confronted with policies or actions that interfere with their right or capacity to do their work. In the name of womanly duties that they have assumed and that their communities expect of them, they resist. (231)

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