

Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace⁽¹⁾

by Sara Ruddick
Reviewed by Evelyn Accad⁽²⁾

Having just completed a study on **Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East** (New York University Press, forthcoming), I was particularly interested in the topic covered by **Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace**. My study made me aware of the importance of mothers' role in moving toward peace. What I especially appreciate in Sara Ruddick's book is its lucidity and the fact that she does not make excuses for women and mother's responsibility in war. Yet, she defines a feminist maternal peace politics which «can transform maternal practice and the natality in which it begins.» (p.251).

The book starts with an assessment of the philosophy of reason, in terms of women and of what it meant to the author. Becoming a mother led her to write a book on how maternal **thinking** can bring one to peace.

Maternal thinking is defined as strategies of protection, nurturance and training (p.23). It is a disciplined reflection, «a mother who is also a critic may learn something about reading itself from the child» (p.24)

In the second part, Sara Ruddick identifies some of the metaphysical attitudes, capacities and conceptions that arise from mothering. In raising their children, mothers become aware of the contradictions of «maternal power.» (p.109) For example «she may hate wars in general or despise a particular war policy yet urge her son to register because «the law» requires that he do so.» (p.113)

To me, the most interesting aspect of the book was part three which deals with maternal thinking and peace politics. Without ignoring the fact that maternal thinking is often militaristic, Sara Ruddick develops the notion that «antimilitarist maternal perspective is an engaged vision that must be achieved through struggle and change.» (p.136) She reassesses the division be-

tween men's wars and women's peace, showing how through maternal *efforts* to be peaceful a less violent world can be created. She discusses ideals of nonviolence in some maternal practices and ends with a celebration of two transformative social movements: women's politics of resistance and feminism.

There are four ideals which govern nonviolent peacemaking and which coincide with the practices of mothering. They are renunciation, resistance, reconciliation, and peacemaking. Sara Ruddick has some interesting remarks about how little has been written on women's and men's fearful, racist construction of men's bodies: «the 'beastly male'» seems the projective creation of women's and men's fantasies. War, like racism, both excites and focuses on the 'other' fears and desires.» (p.202) If mothers opposed the division of masculine and feminine, insisting it was at odds with children's sexual identities, they would challenge the foundation of the militarist system. To Sara, nonviolent action, like maternal practice, «requires resilient cheerfulness, a grasping of truth that is caring, and a tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence.» (p.220)

This applies to both women and men. A description of peacemaking is a description of mothering. It is «a communal suspicion of violence, a climate in which peace is desired, a way of living in which it is possible to learn and to practice nonviolent resistance and strategies of reconciliation.» (p.244)

If we are to save the planet from destruction and violence, coming from either ecological disaster or through war, Sara Ruddick's fascinating connection between mothering and peace certainly opens to us new avenues and new ways of thinking about the pressing issues confronting us today.

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