

## **Making Connections Between Parenting and Peace**

### **Prescript**

Peace the great meaning has not been defined.  
When we say peace as a word, war  
As a flare of fire leaps across our eyes.  
We went to this school. Think war;  
Cancel War we were taught.  
No peace is not left, it is no canceling;  
The fierce and human peace is our deep power  
Born to us of wish and responsibility

—*Peace The Great Meaning* by Muriel Rukeyser

### **September 21**

*I finished these remarks 12 days ago, shortly before “War as a flare of fire [leapt] across our eyes.” The U.S. government now seems to agree on the need, and on the effectiveness, of military retaliation. A majority of citizens share their confidence that military force will make them safer, that “fighting back” with bombs and guns is necessary and desirable. There are also people (and I am one) who are sickened and horrified by the suffering that righteous attackers inflicted but who are also horrified and sickened by the suffering U.S. military policies may inflict.*

*Across the globe people suffer from the violence of people who are certain of the justice of their cause, and from predators with power who may be moved by nothing more than self-interest or greed. Could we name these violations; speak of fear, loss and terrible grief; of poverty, insult, injustice and rage; but not so easily of Us and Them, of God on our side? Could we begin to imagine small steps toward a “fierce and human peace” that start with particular histories, take as given the strength of*

*particular attachments, then try to move into relations that are minimally fair and conditions that are minimally safe?*

*This is a journal issue devoted to mothering and fathering. From late August through mid-September I was visited by mothers and fathers—my children, their spouses, and friends; their children whose ages ranged from four months to ten years. I was able to observe the work and relations I have described here and elsewhere: welcoming respect for vulnerable bodies and spirits, loving attention, patient efforts to protect, nourish, train, and comfort. I saw or heard about anger, perplexity, the fear provoked by illness or accidental injury, discouragement, frustration, and fatigue. I also saw humour, light-hearted delight, and easy pride that I often fail to write about.*

*I heard nothing from these parents that would enable me to predict their opinions about military policies, and those I know best do not now speak in a single voice. I did see what a poet might call a “wish”—what I call in these remarks a deep cherishing of individual lives and a desire to preserve them. I saw responsibility that never lifted and would never be relinquished. If “peace is [a] deep power born to us of wish and responsibility,” then these passions and disciplines of parenting are a resource for imagining peace.*

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Can the work of mothering and fathering, and the thinking that this work fosters, inform and strengthen a culture of peace? I hope so. This is not because I believe that parents are inherently opposed to war and other organized violence. Skilled and devoted parents may be militarist, pacifist, or indifferent to politics; advocates of gun rights or disarmament; for or against capital punishment. They may have little interest in politics. Or they may be actively engaged in anti-violence politics without relating them to their parental work or identity. Nonetheless, or so I hope, people who make the work of caring for children an ongoing and serious part of their working lives, may acquire ways of thinking and acting that help to “create and sustain a culture of peace.”

I know that there are other parents who share this hope. I have heard women and men talk about how caring for children changed not only their lives but their thinking, how they had come to different understandings of the world and their desires and responsibilities for it since becoming parents. Some sought and had found a more public forum for expressing their developing passions and insights.

I was comforted by these remarks. I too believed that the work and passions of mothering had got into my head, that my mind was changed. But during the first 12 or so years of parenting I did not consider the possibility that my relations with my children counted as “work,” let alone that this work had intellectual interest. Then, when my two children were already in school full time, I became passionately absorbed in feminist analysis and politics.

The effects of feminism on my relation to mothering were twofold. It no longer seemed “natural” or inevitable for women to take up mothering; no longer seemed “natural” or fair that women who did become mothers paid a

disproportionate price in non-parental pleasure and power. The sense that becoming a mother was not inevitable but might have been chosen, that mothers, like all women, had “rights” and should be treated fairly, enabled me to take mothering seriously. At the same time many feminists were appreciating women’s lives and work. The idea that there might be something of intellectual interest in mothering was strangely foreign and exciting. I began to watch mothers with their children, listen to them, read about them, remember what I had lived through as a daughter and a mother. Soon I was almost obsessively trying to articulate aspects of the maternal work and thinking that I was just beginning to recognize.

During these years of maternal fascination and feminist liberation (the cliché seems appropriate) I was also preoccupied by war. Long before I had children the possibility of nuclear disaster was present in my daily consciousness to a degree I can now barely credit. (Not that I don’t recognize in a cool way current nuclear dangers. But then I didn’t expect my children, barring illness or accident, to grow into adults.) I took part in my first protest against U.S. “military involvement” (as it was then labelled) in Vietnam the fall of ’63 a few weeks before my first child was born. U.S. “defence” policies in Asia, Central America, and across the globe became more enraging the more I learned about them. Yet it was only during the years I became excited by feminism and obsessed with mothering, that I also developed intellectual interests in war that went beyond assimilating information and analysis from teach-ins.

My “resistance” to nuclear armament and military action continued to consist almost entirely of attending demonstrations other people organized. But issues of war began to dominate my intellectual life—the morality and consequences of conscription, just war theory and the justification of nuclear “deterrence,” theories of non-violence and histories of non-violent action, war’s “masculinity” and the gendering of war. While folk singers urged us to “study war no more” I read, argued, joined a woman’s peace study group, devised new seminars, taught and began to write “war.”

Retrospectively, it seems inevitable that my account of “maternal thinking” would emphasize the conflict, even battle, which pervades parental life. It was also inevitable that I found mothering relations a resource for resisting war and making “peace.” I would have asked that of any work I taught and studied intensively at that time. Some mothers, including my own, found my account of mothering too war-like; others found it naively hopeful. I see the dire and hopeful intertwined. I continue to believe that many parents, much of the time, create with their children protective, respectful, welcoming relationships. But assault and neglect are permanent possibilities. It is these possibilities that make disciplines of non-violence necessary and thus enable mothers and fathers to contribute to a “culture of peace.”

I have taken this “call” for papers as an opportunity to review a connection between mothering and peace that I made at a time when nuclear danger, U.S. militarism, feminist fervour, and my preoccupation with mothering were at

their most intense. I begin by construing war as a culture that can shift incrementally to a culture of peace. I then reflect on “fighting” in parental life. I end with a controversial question of vocabulary: whether to speak of mothers, mothering as a male inclusive activity, mothers and fathers as in this call for papers, or parents. In the course of my remarks I will speak mostly of “parents.” I refer to anyone who assumes serious responsibility for children’s welfare and makes the work of child care an important part of their lives. I mean to include people who are not mothers or fathers in the ordinary sense but, say, teachers or paid caregivers, a distant relative, or a neighbour, anyone who finds herself or himself parenting a child—keeping her safe, nourishing her spirit, training her in the ways of the world. At the end I will reconsider this vocabulary in terms of its implications for undermining war and creating peace.

### **A culture of war**

To say that war is an expression of the culture from which it emerges is to say that it is more than an event, a spatially bounded phenomenon with a fairly clear beginning and end. Many wars are in some sense events. They start with attacks, mobilization, and often, across the globe, with mothers’ attempts to “rescue” their sons from a military machine. Some wars seem to end when treaties are signed and bombing and other terrorizing attacks are brought to a halt. But war is not “just an event”; it is an organizing “presence” in the cultures and societies of which it is an expression.<sup>1</sup>

Before the first attack there must be enemies who are killable; at least one adversary must stake claims to the other’s territory and goods; at least one must be seen as dangerous. Before the beginning, armies are raised, sometimes large, standing armies are maintained. Weapons are developed, manufactured, purchased, or traded—somehow acquired. Violence becomes popular and war-serving masculinities and femininities make it manly to fight and womanly to applaud, make ammunition, work in men’s jobs, nurse the wounded, and also sometimes to fight. Citizens prepare for armed violence, expect it, and justify it; then “the war” can “begin.”

When the organized violence of war is over, and the treaties are signed, wars live on in their legacy: the devastation of the physical and social infrastructure through which people provide for themselves and their families; the lives and psyches of combatants and non-combatants, of the children who have grown up in war, all irrevocably changed; the surfeit of arms on the streets, and of ex-soldiers trained to kill; citizens who have been schooled and practiced in the methods of violence, but not in non-violent methods of dealing with conflict; “nature” that has been poisoned, burned, made ugly and useless. The treaty of Versailles was notorious for the continuation of war in peace. More recently the Iraq war which the U.S. “won,” and the Cuban battles which we either “lost” or avoided show that “peace” can include official ongoing “punishment”—retribution, reparations, domination, and deprivation. Even the best treaty is only the beginning of making peace.

State imperialist conquest and interstate combat, the most individuated of wars, are only one form of military violence; high technology conventional and nuclear weapons are only one form of arms. There are civil wars, ethnic wars, “guerrilla” wars, and urban violence in response to social assault; house guns, light arms which trade and travel easily, home made explosives and land mines. The division between combatants and non-combatants no longer holds if it ever did; civilians—children, people with disabilities, old people, and most women—are the primary casualties of war. Factories, power plants, bridges,—the instruments of civil life—are the targets of war. Women’s bodies are a battleground, rape is a weapon, female sexuality is conscripted for soldiers’ “comfort.” These conditions of contemporary and perhaps earlier wars were revealed once the veil of the cold war was lifted.

Feminists have been especially apt to recognize that military violence is not a distinct species isolated from other social practices. A continuum of harm, indifference, and wilful injury connects bedroom, boardroom, death row, and battlefield; school room, university, welfare reductions, and precision-guided bombs; racial profiling, racist employment practices, and nuclear “waste” in the lands of the poor. The soldier who left a “good boy” returns home an abuser; corporate entrepreneurs consider as their own whatever resources and labour they can command; government officials coolly kill the killers who have been rendered harmless. Children are taught not to hate force but to applaud it; they learn an elementary indifference to others’ pain whether it is inflicted by “advanced” weapons or by illness, bad luck, social injustice, or domestic abuse. The engine of war, making kinds of people killable and dispensable, feeds the racism on which it depends. Our towns and villages, our bodies and identities are shaped by the violence we suffer and inflict. As Virginia Woolf saw in the fascist ’30s:

The public and the private worlds are inseparably connected. The tyrannies and the servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other.” (1996:142)

This portrait of a war culture is a nightmare, though it also manages to appear on the evening news. Even in the midst of battle soldiers care for each other and often enough for an “enemy.” In homes, schools, hospitals, and government offices, people protect lives, foster spirits, extend their own and others’ imaginative comprehension of needs and abilities to meet them. Cultures of war and cultures of peace intermingle. The world’s balance seems tipped toward the culture of war. In some times and places the safety and ordinary freedoms of “peace” may disappear. But the task of peacemaking is not to create a way of living wholly new but rather to strengthen and institutionalize elements of restraint, respect, sympathy, and care that almost always survive in even the most war-like cultures.

Parenting is a part of culture, not separate and apart. Particular parenting

practices seem to imitate war. Children are treated as “objects of property”; in the worst case their bodies are subject to deliberate pain and abuse. Elements of war are occasional aspects of most parents lives, temptations to dominate, episodes of more or less willing assault. But cultures of parenting, so far as I have known them have been tipped toward peace. A shift in parenting toward still more conscious and reliable practices of peace is also a shift in the culture of which it is a part—away from neglect and assault, toward protection and response to need.

To the extent that wars are events they can be protested by events—boycotts, demonstrations, demands to “bring our troops home,” “stop the bombing.” When war is a “presence,” a cultural expression, then resistance becomes more diffuse; to shift a cultural balance from war to peace requires incremental changes in social relations and values. In her book *Feminist Morality*, Virginia Held (1993) speaks of a feminist “revolution” as a “cultural revolution” in important ways. She does not separate culture from its material or political conditions, nor minimize the importance of economics and structures of power. She recognizes that “no lines between the symbolic and the material in human affairs are likely to be firm, or precise or lasting.” But she sees feminists as trying to create “new cultural realities.”<sup>2</sup>

Although I would be slow to speak of “revolution,” either cultural or feminist, the kinds of changes that Virginia Held (1993) envisions, the words she gives us to describe them, seem helpful. Constructing new cultural realities, for example shifting the cultural balance toward peace, means changing “...the ways in which we see the world and think and feel about ourselves in it,” changing “the interpretations given to, the values placed on, and especially the intended uses of configurations of power,” constructing the kinds of “cultural reality that encourage human connection yet discourage domination.” One aim of parenting is to create, in a situation of inherently unequal power, relations that are nearly free from domination, self-affirming “human connections” that will replicate themselves throughout life, even as they develop and change.

I will consider one aspect of parenting, conflict and combat. Parental ways of fighting partake of war and peace; many are already governed albeit imperfectly, by more or (usually) less conscious principles of non-violence. Making explicit the disciplines that parental fighting requires should, in itself, strengthen the connection of parenting with peace. Construing these disciplines in the terms of ideals of non-violence might, I hope, also contribute to the construction of “kinds of cultural reality” which take efforts to fight non-violently as an aspect of one ordinary familiar practice, namely parenting.

### **Conflict and combat**

Conflict is a pervasive part of parents’ lives and often includes combat. Parents fight with their children and on their behalf. Children fight with each other and their parents interpret these fights, sometimes trying to settle them but sometimes passionately intervening in them. Parents talk about these fights

with children and other adults, telling stories that often reflect or contribute to war-like or peace-like elements of their culture.

Two stories illustrate these points. A nameless wife and mother tells the first in praise of her husband who fought on their daughter's behalf. David Blankenhorn then retold it in a book about fatherhood.

My daughter was about seven. We had just bought her a brand-new bike. The bike was outside on the front lawn. My daughter ... went outside and the bike was gone. Meanwhile a little boy down the street ... [also] said his bike was stolen. My husband gets in his van.... You know what he did? He took the van right to where the kids were and knocked them off both the bikes and they ran. Now, not only had he saved my daughter's bike, but the little kid's down the street. I mean everybody, the whole neighbourhood, knew what he had done. My daughter was so proud of her daddy saving their bikes. (cited in Blankenhorn, 1996: 214)

Audre Lorde tells the second story about herself, a feminist African-American and lesbian mother. Lorde had been urging her son to fight back when he was bullied, reinforcing his shame of running away. As a result of a suggestion from a "wise friend" she changes her tactics:

And no, Jonathon didn't have to fight if he didn't want to, but somehow he did have to feel better about not fighting....

I sat down on the hallway steps and took Jonathon on my lap and wiped his tears. "Did I ever tell you how I used to be afraid when I was your age?"

I will never forget the look on that little boy's face as I told him the tale of my glasses and my after-school fights. It was a look of relief and total disbelief, all rolled into one. (1984: 76)

These parents are defining for their children what it means to be strong in battle, to fight, to be "so proud" of fighters, or somehow at least "to feel better about not fighting." Both of the public narrators praise the parents they speak of. David Blankenhorn celebrates a father's traditional protectiveness and the pleasure wives and children take in manly protection. Audre Lorde, both self-critical and proud, explicitly sees herself as challenging an aspect of war culture.

This is the way we allow the destruction of our sons to begin, in the name of protection and to ease our own pain. *My son get beaten up? I was about to demand that he buy that first lesson in the corruption of power, that might makes right.* (1984: 76)

In my view, the wife's story that Blankenhorn (1996) retells sustains war

culture. A father who knocks thieving kids off their bikes although he is surely stronger and more authoritative than they, suggests that physical force is his best or only recourse. His wife in praising him seems almost to thrill to “might” that made things right. Lorde (1984) who in other contexts often spoke of herself as a warrior, seems to shift the balance of the war culture toward peace. Boys are expected to “fight back.” To be beaten when you fight hard does not challenge the culture though it may decrease your popularity. To walk away from a fight without shame would, in Virginia Held’s (1993) words, begin to change “peoples’ aspirations for the kinds of lives to be led, and ... the way persons experience a sense of self and of a life as satisfactory.”

In addition to fighting with children and for children, parents fight for themselves. Parents suffer indignities and insults; I doubt that any parent, any person, escapes them or any child fails to notice some of them. Many parents also suffer from repeated forms of social aggression that directly or indirectly implicate their children: injuries of class, racist bigotry, ethnic misunderstanding and arrogance, sexist or heterosexist contempt and insult. Parents often also have to defend their children against abuse or cruelty from other adults with whom they are intimate—for example from a lover, co-parent, or friend.

Children learn and mislearn meanings of injustice, abuse and resistance from the stories their parents tell about themselves, the actions they undertake—and from their silences. Some parents convey the advantages of indifference or appeasement. The “insulters” may wield power over the parent—a landlord, social worker, teacher, or doctor. Fighting back is risky; small humiliations do not require retaliation. Later children or the parents themselves may speak of confusion, anger and self-doubt when parents failed to protest real or perceived insults. In strong contrast some parents do “fight back,” not by knocking people off their perch but by sustained battle that involves confrontation with insulting adults, meetings with teachers and principles who refuse to act, conversations with indifferent acquaintances, and whatever other practical action will prevent further insult.

In describing battle and attitudes toward it my first aim is simply to underline the importance and complexity of fighting in parents’ lives, and the decisions and disciplines fighting may require. But I also aim to find in practices of parenting elements of a “culture of peace.” At the time I first thought about fighting in parents’ lives I was transfixed by the writings of Gandhi, King, and other non-violent theorists.<sup>3</sup> I deliberately focused on parenting with their concepts as a guide. This is surely an eccentric standpoint from which to look at parenting. It may also seem disrespectful of the weight of the imperialism and racism these men fought and suffered. Nonetheless, I continue to see in parenting what I then saw. No other concepts have served me as well.

I identified four principles of non-violence that imperfectly govern many parental practices. The first, and the one for which non-violence is notorious, is the *renunciation* of weapons and strategies that damage a person, cause serious long term psychological or physical harm and injury. Violence includes any



weapons that damage including words of hate and fists or other weapons of the body. The renunciation of violence is not equivalent to pacifism, the principled rejection of war-making as a practice. Most parents aren't pacifist (nor was King on my reading and even Gandhi is occasionally ambiguous). It does include renouncing violence against children and against anyone vulnerable and unarmed. And it fosters a sturdy suspicion of violence in even the best of causes.

The second principle, and just as important to Gandhi and King, is *resistance* to injustices. In practices of parenting resistance is often limited to injustices suffered by children, parents themselves, or "neighbours." Even within these limits, the commitment to resist injustices seems to be the weakest element of parental non-violence. Moreover those parents who are committed to resisting injustice while also rejecting violence may not extend their commitment to include injustice to people outside their family or beyond what they take to be "neighbourhood." The reliable extension of its attitudes and values beyond the neighbourhood is the greatest challenge parental non-violence faces.

Third, non-violence requires *reconciliation* or, if not that, at least a reliably safe mutual existence and the absence of the hatred and bitterness which, to paraphrase King, distort judgment and scar the soul.<sup>4</sup> Reconciliation is not the same as forgetting. Indeed, it may require remembering and holding accountable. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission signals these requirements in its name. Reconciliation does allow for personal change, 'rehabilitation', renewed trust, and moving on.

Finally non-violence requires a commitment to *peacekeeping*. Keeping the peace often involves compromises and appeasements whose aim is to avoid the wounds and misunderstanding that are part of even non-violent battle. In public and in domestic non-violence peacekeepers may be tempted to sacrifice truth with its accompanying anger for the sake of quiet, safety, and being "nice." But there are also real conflicts between peacekeeping and justice. Moreover the peacekeeping efforts for which parents, especially mothers, are blamed may often protect and preserve well enough the relationships on which children depend.

I believe that enough practices of parenting are sufficiently governed by the four principles of non-violence to provide one model of non-violent practice from which anyone can learn. Closer to home, by articulating the demands of non-violence, it is possible to reflect more precisely on the confusion and feelings of failure many parents suffer when they fight or fail to fight. These are rewards of what I might call a "method" for research on parenting. It consists in focussing on parents through lenses of concepts and values derived from "outside"—for example from anti-racist critical theory and practice or from the many recent studies of democracy. In my use of this method you look at parenting through the lenses of non-violence in the hope of finding what you want to be there. But inevitably the method also reveals failures and differences. It is also possible to assess in the light of parenting the principles that are meant

to guide. For example, a fifth principle important to both Gandhi and King, is *self-suffering*, taking on oneself and expressing the sufferings of battle. This principle I came to see as a temptation for mothers rather than an ideal. I then took a more critical look at the function of the principle as it governed public practices of non-violence.

There are intrinsic rewards of the method of being guided by concepts and values independently adopted. They lie in the details of unfamiliar, fresh observations and in the pleasure of finding in the most familiar and domestic relations analogues to affairs of state. For me there was also the 'discovery' of what I set out to find, a distinctive, imperfect, but developing project of peace. My less guided, less biased reflections on mothering were then recast in the light of their potential to become part of a practice of peace. I was not an independent objective observer, nor could I have been. But in finding what I looked for, I found a source of hope that has proved sturdy and realistic.

There is at least one defect of my particular focus, or use of the method. By directing attention to the passions and conflicts of battle, then by borrowing concepts from non-violent struggle, it is easy to lose sight of the lightness and pleasure of relations with children, of the joy, ordinary boredom and frequent fascination that lies in the work. It would be a serious distortion of parenting to look always at battle. During the years of my obsessive interest in mothering and peace I would look up from my computer or from my reading, see children and their parents apparently happy together, and feel as if I have been living a grim fantasy. During the weeks I was writing this paper I watched with fascination, as my children and their friends engaged with their children. With the passionate distance of a grandmother I delighted in their delight in each other and in the burgeoning highly individual personalities, whose spirits they treasured. But I did see moments of well managed fighting and hours of patience and hard work. I had occasions to remember the confusion and sadness that are part of parenting for both children and parents. Fighting is a reality of parenting as is sadness, disappointment, frustration, and rage. To deny these realities makes a parent feel that her children are distinctly unhappy, that only she, among parents, fails to insure their happiness. It is from the intertwining of sadness and delight, conflict and cooperation, rage and love that we might learn valuable lessons of peace.

### **Parents and mothers and fathers**

I want to end with a postscript, to raise again the question of the language one should use in speaking of people who do the work of caring for children. When speaking of the work of child care do you call the workers mothers, mothers and fathers (as in the call for papers) or parents as I have been doing?

In earlier days I spoke of mothering as inclusive of men. I still believe, know, and have lived the fact, that men are as able as women to undertake the tasks of mothering. I have more recently argued that women are as able as men to undertake responsibilities explicitly designated to fathers: namely providing

protection and discipline. When I wrote about fathers doing mothers work I emphasised their abilities to preserve, protect, comfort, and discipline. When I spoke of mothers doing fathers' work, I emphasized that no individuals can provide for or protect children, that these are social tasks. But the message is the same: the work of caring for children is men's work and women's work. I called that work mothering and the men who did it "mother" in order to recognize that historically, and still today in most cultures, parenting was largely the life-shaping responsibility of women. I said often enough that many mothers were men, that men should not be excused or excluded from any aspect of maternal work. But this inclusive use of the term "mothering" couldn't be heard in a world where everyone still distinguishes mothers and fathers. .

I then began to find it useful to speak of parents. I could include as parents many child care workers who were neither mothers nor fathers. Some are employees, for example teachers or nannies. Others are distant relatives. Some became attached to a child by chance because they were there when a child was lonely. Anyone is a parent who takes on serious responsibility for a child and makes the work of caring for her a significant part of their life. This usage reveals parenting that is sometimes invisible. It also enables me to look in all parenting for hints of ways to see, develop, and insist on ideals of non-violence.

In these remarks, for the first time, I required myself to speak, for the most part, of parenting. It was a strain and the experiment an emotional failure. Repeatedly I wrote sentences that seemed to be really about mothers. Some I switched to 'parent', some I probably missed correcting. I wrote with a sense of self-censorship. Enchanted as I was with the inclusiveness of the language of parenting I found it not only unwieldy but suspect.

I am suspicious of my desire to deny sexual difference between parents, of refusing to distinguish between mothers and fathers. In a gender neutral language whether of parenting or mothering it is difficult to credit the value of women's birth-giving and to recognize its very different meanings for men who are also procreative. Gender-inclusive language also averts its eyes from sexuality, specifically from the heterosexual intercourse which is still at the origin of most births as well as from the sexuality that is retained in varieties of other procreative practices. And, as I knew from the outset gender neutral language masks the deeply gendered character of parents' lives, the distinctive weight and meaning that parenting still has for women in most families and cultures, the challenges that men must deal with in taking on work that is still thought to belong to women.

While I fear denying sexual differences I also fear affirming them. There is still some danger of excluding or, even more, excusing men from parental work. Then too any affirmation of difference is likely to lead to unsubstantiated and often harmful generalizations about what women do, what men do. Most important, speaking of mothers and fathers risks reconstituting parenting as inherently heterosexual at a time when the rights of gay and lesbian parents are, where they exist, still fragile.

The question of sexual differences takes on new weight in the context of trying to shift the balance in a culture from war to peace. Sharp gender division is a characteristic of most armies and militarized states. Norms of masculinity and misogynist and heterosexist charges of being a “woman” or a “fag” are regularly used to recruit, conscript, train, and discipline male soldiers. It is crucial then to insist that the emotionally laden, culturally central work of parenting is as open to men as to women.

Attitudes toward bodies are among the most important marks distinguishing cultures of war and from cultures of peace. War-making includes as a defining characteristic the willingness to injure, damage, and destroy bodies. Peace, minimally, protects bodies from war’s attack. Parenting includes as a defining characteristic, a commitment to preserve children’s bodily lives and to protect them from bodily harm. Mothering and fathering and occasionally parenting by “neighbours” also often includes a bone deep cherishing of individual physical bodily beings, an attitude totally opposed by war.

Fear and contempt for “different” bodies makes it easier to create them as enemies who are killable. Racist division, fear of different or strange bodies, is intrinsic to war. Denying sexual difference seems to work against that fear and contempt. But it does so by avoiding rather than confronting them .

There is nothing in parenting or mothering that precludes racism or tribalism. It sometimes happens, however, that passionate bodily cherishing of children makes it impossible to kill the enemies’ children. For some mothers or parents all children in themselves become a kind of being that is “precious.” Or mothers identify with enemy mothers, fathers with enemy fathers. It is a struggle within maternal and paternal thinking to extend protectiveness to “enemy” children, to identify with “enemy” mothers’ and fathers’ cherishing of their children’s bodies. The denial of bodily difference or fear of bodily sexuality seems to work against that struggle. Children’s precious bodies are sexed and sexual, as are the bodies of mothers and fathers. They cannot be sturdily cherished if their sexed identities and sexuality are washed away.

So while I do not want to affirm I also do not want to deny sexual difference. While I want to recognize all parenting persons, and also to subject them to ideals of non-violence, I do not, and in honesty cannot deny the gendered specificity of mothers’ lives, and therefore of maternal work and thinking. The language of mothering and fathering, chosen by these editors, has many virtues. But that is a language I will have to learn.

### **Postscript: September 23**

*It seems that terror spread quickly after the attack. People were evacuated hundreds of miles away. Yet some people believed that the second plane was bringing help. One of the children. who visited us this September was in day care at the World Trade Centre when the planes hit. The e-mail message of his safety brought exquisite relief and with it a sharp awareness of the pain of others’ loss. On a listserve someone pleads that it is not unpatriotic to learn about the policies your government pursues.*

*In grand gatherings people celebrate America and prepare for a “long fight.” There are teach-ins, petitions, familiar efforts to break into the cycle of violence. But violence, overt and covert, has come to seem the normal condition. I wrote these remarks in what now seems a time of “peace” yet spoke of a culture of war.*

*This is an odd moment to write, a moment of waiting for events that will occur—or not occur—before this journal is published. I stand by the hope I expressed some weeks ago in the first words of this article. I end with a poem, a dream, in praise of keeping still.*

Now we will count to twelve  
and we will all keep still.

For once on the face of the earth,  
let’s not speak in any language;  
let’s stop for one second,  
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment  
without rush, without engines;  
we would all be together  
in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea  
would not harm whales  
and the man gathering salt  
would look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,  
wars with gas, wars with fire,  
victories with no survivors,  
would put on clean clothes  
and walk with their brothers  
in the shade, doing nothing.

...

Now I’ll count up to twelve  
and you keep quiet and I will go.

—“Keeping Quiet” by Pablo Neruda

*I want to thank Luciana Ricciutelli for her patience, reassurance, and editorial skill*

Sara Ruddick

*amidst computer failures, miscommunications, fears of war.*

<sup>1</sup>The idea that war is an expression of a culture is common among feminists. I have written about this in “Notes Toward A Feminist Peace Politics” (1994). Two recent versions are Schott (1995) Cuomo (1996).

<sup>2</sup>All phrases are taken from Chapter 1 of Held’s (1993) book.

<sup>3</sup>I have written more extensively about non-violence in my book, *Maternal Thinking* (1995), especially Chapter 7. There I also include bibliographical references to particular theorists.

<sup>4</sup>From a sermon, “Loving Your Enemies,” delivered by Martin Luther King during Christmas 1957 in Montgomery Alabama. This sermon can be found in almost any collection of King’s writings.

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