Maternal Thinking

Philosophy, Politics, Practice

Edited by
Andrea O’Reilly
Epilogue and a New Beginning

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It has been more than twenty years since I finished Maternal Thinking, a book at least ten years in the making. Only three years ago, I concluded an interview with Andrea O’Reilly for the book that is now in your hands. Because of the work in this book, for which I am exceedingly grateful, and because of our free-ranging interview, I have in these last years come to see “maternal thinking” as an idea with a history only partly of my own making. For the first time in many years I have been asking myself what this idea, which we have collectively produced, might mean to me now.

For all of the years that the idea of “maternal thinking” has been lurking in my mind, I have been a citizen of a militarist country that makes war; a country that is armed and arming, preparing to fight and fighting. From the start thirty years ago, through the ending that this epilogue represents, I have wanted to oppose concepts of “maternal thinking” to those concepts of militarist thinking that foster and legitimate “war.” Yet I have been wary of drawing the connections between mothering and peace that an opposition between maternal and military thinking seems to imply. Whenever I talk about women and war, or even more about mothers and war, I find myself denying what I have never affirmed. I don’t believe… I never said… it is simply not the case… “that men make wars and women make peace,” that women as a matter of their motherly nature “devote the thinking and practices of motherhood to peace-making, peacekeeping and world repair.”

About a year ago, in the midst of rehearsing these denials, I remembered a time when I spoke about “peace” with the excitement and sense of discovery that I experienced when I first spoke about “maternal thinking.” I regularly taught a seminar on “War and Morality,” using as principal texts Michael Walzer’s Just and Unjust Wars, Hannah Arendt’s On Violence, and various philosophical readings on the moral legitimacy of killing in war. One semester a few students urged me to get more readings on non-violence than the familiar sermons of Martin Luther King. As it turned out, two of these students had been inspired by the literature of non-violence and then by campaigns they had joined. For these students non-violence had become “a way of life” which, given the nature of humans and the state of governments, necessarily included a way of fighting. Soon the experienced students were directing the rest of us as we developed non-violent campaigns.

I was probably the only person in the class who considered maternal relations as an element of such a campaign. In fact concepts of violence and non-violence are richly illuminating of maternal relations. In maternal practices violence is often a temptation and in an ordinary way a permanent possibility. Think of a flash of an eight-year-old’s “hatred” and a household “armed” with a kitchen knife, a set of building blocks, and a box of matches. On the other hand, in a daily way, non-violent aims of preserving lives and fostering development are routinely achieved, often with pleasure and sometimes with joy.

Maternal practices provide one atypical model of non-violence. Warring parties are well known and close, the conditions are relatively safe and contained—in or between neighbourhoods, in a home. Yet maternal non-violence cannot be taken for granted. Mothers may themselves turn violent or they may themselves fail to resist the violence of others. These are liabilities of the practice of mothering in cultures I know not only or primarily the failure of individual mothers. Maternal practices are close enough to the edge of violence to remind us always of the pain that can befall us or that we can unleash. It is also true that in ordinary enough, comfortable enough circumstances, which by definition are circumstances of peace, non-violent mothering is a sufficiently ordinary aspect of experience to remind us of the pleasure that should be ours.

Over time, in two or three semesters, I developed the idea that maternal non-violence was a truth in the making (see Ruddick, chap. 7). But the excitement of the idea of non-violence, its powers and potentialities, was soon dissipated among the challenges of a systematic militarism most confidently, righteously, expressed as “humanitarian intervention,” most suspiciously undertaken as a “war on terror.” However, only recently, in the 2008 U.S. election, I experienced again the excitement of an encounter with new ideals that seemed at least related to non-violence. Yet the most hopeful moment had to survive an entrenched romantic and economic militarist culture that promised disappointment around every corner.

I have taxed the patience of editors and friends by writing several versions of an epilogue that would be appropriate to a grateful good bye to my readers, only to return to the outlines of a new beginning. Finally, when time really ran out, yet choices about war seemed acute, heartbreaking and still just barely open choices, there seemed no place else to be but sitting in front of the computer writing about non-violence.

NON-VIOLENCE

There are many maternal moments that might open a discussion of non-violence. I start with the third aim of maternal practice: training children to behave in ways acceptable to the social groups with which a mother identifies or on which
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she depends. For some of you, training a child to behave acceptably sounds like asking her to conform, knuckle under, obey. When I think of a mother training her child to behave acceptably, I have in mind her imposing a gamut of restraints—don’t pull cans off the supermarket shelf; don’t talk with food in your mouth—and a gamut of positive acts—say hello to your grandmother; learn to type. Beyond making a child pleasant to live with, acceptable behaviour includes the disciplines and skills he needs to get on.

The requirements of acceptability may be a burden for a mother who lives in a community alien to her and divided by manners of cash and class. But customs can be a mother’s friend, backing up her judgments, lending her authority. In the worst case, the customs of acceptability clash with a mother’s political morality and therefore with (what I call) the work of conscience. Andrea O’Reilly (see her article in this volume) who writes of such a dilemma, is proud when her children act as feminists, but fears the fate that will befall them in a society that is actively and sometimes violently misogynist. As she notes, her dilemmas are not rare or limited to feminist mothers. They recur in various forms in situations of heterosexual bigotry, anti-immigrant nativism, racialized ethnicity, and various forms of white supremacy.

It is when values of acceptability clash seriously, over time, with a mother’s political morality that non-violent protests and refusals are in order. Principled non-violence has negative and positive aspects. The non-violent renounce their own violence. Skirting subtleties of definition, I count as violent deliberate efforts to compel the will of another (or others) by inflicting or threatening to inflict pain, injury, and death upon her. Principled non-violence also confronts and resists the violence that others undertake, holds those who engage in violence responsible for damages they do, yet forswear a scarring hatred in favour of a peace in which all parties can live safely.

For the violent, bodies become a site and occasion for coercive pain. For the non-violent, a body is protected, held immune from injury and harm. Although violence and non-violence are rooted in bodily life, certain emotions are so painfully destructive of a sense of self that they are strongly associated with the pain and injury of violence. This is especially true of hatred and humiliation as Martin Luther King describes them.² In a positive mode, non-violent activists imagine in detail and often with delight, strategies that will allow them to get others to do what they want, that is to coerce them, without resorting to violence. This aspect of non-violence is creative and often courageous but its presence, let alone its importance, is obscured even by the name of non-violence.

MATERNAL NON-VIOLENCE

Most children at some time, and some children a lot of the time, behave in ways that are frustrating, embarrassing, or annoying. Mothers have power over these provocative small beings, however powerless they may feel. Children are vulnerable to assault not just by bullies and sadists, including among them some mothers, but also by fired angry parents who love them. Very early on they are also vulnerable to humiliation, to being made ashamed.

Recognizing her children’s vulnerability, a mother may (or may not) commit herself to non-violence. If she does, she will see her child as someone not to be violated, not to be made ashamed. She will become unwilling to cling to righteous rage, to continue assault past its moment of anger. She will restore dignity to her child and to herself when she lashes out and then will extend the habit of protection to include protecting her children from her own rage and cruelty.

Most children at some time are, or feel they are, victims of injustice. The most likely perpetrators in the children’s eyes are their mothers or other members of their family. In most societies, on some occasions, and in some society’s routinely, some children suffer injustices that are inflicted upon them because they are “strangers”—lesser because of eccentricity and failure, outsiders because of ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or class.

Children who suffer from injustice, whether individually or as members of a group, long to see justice done. They urge their mothers to speak “truth to the community”² and to listen when others speak truth on their behalf. But mothers are likely to also be outsiders and strangers if their children are. Often they will be intimidated by the same authorities who intimidate their children. Moreover, mothers want their children to be “good” both for their own sake and so that they can mirror their mothers’ goodness. Given these pressures and her own doubts, a mother confronted by her child’s plea for justice may try to change the child rather than the offender. She can call his plea for justice a “complaint,” force him to accept the insult he suffers, or worse, to accept an authority’s interpretation of his experience. What seems to his mother a matter of prudence may seem to a child a cruel betrayal.

Despite these challenges, a mother may try to act on the principles of non-violence as she understands them. Just as she committed herself to respect for her child’s body, she now may commit herself to respect for his moral spirit. She will call cruelty and injustice by their names, help authority and child to understand themselves and each other, and whenever possible work with “elders” and other mothers to insure the conditions of all children’s self-respect and any stranger’s safety in the community they now share.

NON-VIOLENCE IN TIME OF WAR

The ideals of Maternal Non-Violence can inspire and discipline our intimate, domestic, and civic relationships, at home, in “public squares,” and in the institutions that matter to us most—education, justice, and medicine. In Maternal Thinking I set the ideals of non-violence against the practice of war. A state practices war by keeping itself armed, trained, and ready to fight when particular wars require.
The Secretary of Defense of the United States, Robert Gates, expressed this commitment to readiness in a speech in January of this year. The "central question" for the defense of the United States is how the military should be "organized, equipped—and funded—in the years ahead, to win the wars we are in while being prepared for threats on or beyond the horizon."3

Among the requirements for a readiness to fight is a positive ideology that sanctions the injury, pain, damage and death (the "means of war"); Just War Theory is probably the most familiar of such morally serious ideologies, and Michael Walzer, who I quote here, is one of its most respectable public proponents. The book from which I quote is aptly titled *Arguing About War*. Published in 2004, its purpose is to test the theory's capacity to judge contemporary wars and to judge the wars in terms of the theory.

The first premise of the founding argument of Just War Theory is that war is still sometimes, "necessary" (2004: 14). Therefore, it follows, "fighting itself cannot be morally impermissible." "A just war is meant to be and to have a war that is possible to fight" (2004: 14). Once we assume that war as a practice is morally acceptable, particular wars should be subjected to a double critique, both of their occasion—*jus ad bellum*—and their conduct—*jus in bello*. Presuming the moral acceptability of the practice of war, just war theorists prohibit some but not other military actions, use some but not other weapons, target some but not other populations and individuals.

Because once people kill they kill too easily and too often, critique is always necessary. Indeed, "the ongoing critique of war making is a centrally important democratic activity."4

I do not intend to host an argument between just war theory and non-violence. My aim is to set the principals of maternal non-violence against the practice of war. One way to do this is to refuse to select among causes and weapons, to refuse even to argue about them. Instead, stay fixed on the "scourge of war itself," tolling "the damage done to bodies and souls by shells, bullets and iron fragments." These are the words of a war correspondent, Chris Hedges, who goes on to ask questions that are meant to have no answers: "What do you say to those who advocate war as an instrument to liberate the women of Afghanistan or bring democracy to Iraq?" "How do you tell them what war is like?" "How do you explain that the very proposition of war as an instrument of virtue is absurd?" How do you cope with memories of children bleeding to death with bits of iron fragments peppered throughout their small bodies? How do you speak of war without tears?5

Hedges' questions without answers leave us unprotected by Just War Theory, open to the horrors of war. Could someone in this moment of vulnerability—a photographer, returning soldier, correspondent—reveal war's horrors with a precision and ferocity that would make wars intolerable? Susan Sontag paraphrases the intended message of several examples of war horrors, which she has taken mostly from photography and film, and has gathered in her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*: "This is what war does. And that, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins" (8). "Fill your eyes with this horror. It is the only thing that can stop you" (16). Sontag dwells briefly on a particular terror induced by a photograph of bodies which Virginia Woolf describes in her book, *Three Guineas*. After being bombed by Franco's forces during the Spanish Civil War, bodies are so mutilated that an observer cannot make out what she sees.

[It] might be a man's body, or a woman's, it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a birdcage hanging in what was presumably the sitting-room, but the rest of the house looks like nothing so much as a bunch of spilkins suspended in mid-air. (Woolf 2006: 14; Sontag 4)

Can photographs so terrible, so disorienting, so grotesque, lead us to turn away from the wars that spawned them?

On the whole, Sontag thinks not. She reminds us of the seductive attraction of war's wounded bodies, a source of self-disgust since Plato (96). She alerts us to voyeuristic attitudes and the perpetuation of victimization (92), the exploitation of sentiment, route ways of provoking feeling (80). She is explicitly critical of Virginia Woolf's description of war photographs. "To read in the pictures, as Woolf does, only what confirms a general abhorrence of war is to stand back from an engagement with Spain as a country with a history. It is to dismiss politics" (Sontag 9). Woolf treats war and its victims as generic. She does not argue her case, present or reject the justice of a cause.

But here Sontag seems to miss Woolf's point. Woolf does not doubt the justice of a just war's causes. It is the meaning and reality of "force" that she doubts. In a short memoir of her nephew killed in the Spanish Civil War, she makes this point explicit.

I understand that this [the war against Franco's forces] is a "cause," can be called the cause of liberty and so on, still my natural reaction is to fight intellectually. The moment force is used it becomes meaningless and unreal to me. (Bell 258-259, my emphasis)

Woolf wrote in a similar mode a few days after the Second "World" War began—another good war whose cause she didn't doubt.

It's the unreality of force that muffles everything.... Yes it's an empty meaningless world now.... One merely feels that the killing machine has to be set in action.... It seems entirely meaningless—a perfunctory slaughter ... and for the hundredth time.... Any idea is more real than any amount of war misery. (Diary, September 3, 6, 1939)
It is not that Woolf doesn’t “take sides.” She is increasingly convinced that “it is our duty to catch Hitler in his home haunts and prod him if even with only the end of an old ink pen.” (Letter to Judith Stephen, Dec 2 1939) She does not reject war’s cause but she rejects its weapons and therefore the killing and wounding that defines war. Thinking is her fighting. “This little pitter patter of ideas is my whiff of shot in the cause of freedom” (Diary, September 3, 6, 1939).

Like Woolf, Hedges also rejects weapons, leaving his readers with a specific injunction. By the end of the book he reviews, he tells us, “the image or picture of a weapon is distasteful. Achieve this, he tells us, “make the image or picture of a weapon distasteful, and you will have gone a long way to imparting the truth about warfare.”

Susan Sontag, it seems, keeps the weapons. She asks us to suppose that the world is divided in such a way that war can “become inevitable and even just.” If that should happen, she says, the photographs would “supply no evidence, none at all, for renouncing war—except for those for whom the notions of valour and sacrifice have been emptied of meaning and credibility” (12, my emphasis). But these notions of valiant military death and patriotic sacrifice are nearly already empty of meaning and credibility for Virginia Woolf. She willfully stands outside, “a member of a secret, anonymous Society of Outsiders,” that discourages any rank, glory, or national loyalty which encourages the “desire to impose “our” civilization or “our” dominions upon other people.” She has no country, she wants no country. Her country is the whole world.

KÄTHE KOLLWITZ: FROM VALOUR AND SACRIFICE TO MADNESS

Käthe Kollwitz was a patriotic mother and an ambitious, successful artist who knew Germany’s two “World” wars. Forty-seven years old when the first war started, she was a committed socialist who was married to a doctor who lived in one of the poorer districts of Berlin and devoted his practice to the poor. Whatever the personal character of her marriage, Kollwitz took a social stand beside her husband and beside the “helpless and the weak,” representing them (in both senses of “represent”) in her art and in her work on committees and organizations as a successful woman, artist, and citizen.

When the first “World” war began both of Kollwitz’ sons were of an age to volunteer. Her older son enlisted in the army apparently without his parents’ objection though later he seems to have become a military medic. The parents attempted, unsuccessfully, to dissuade their younger son Peter from volunteering. Ultimately Kollwitz saw him off to war with a copy of Goethe. She then set herself to act as a loyal supporter of her son and the state by finding his fighting meaningful.

Kollwitz was never an unambivalent military mother. When, in early August 1914, she heard young German volunteers singing as they marched in the street she sat on her hotel room bed and “cried and cried and cried” with a foreboding of what would come. At the end of the month she heard “the sweet lamenting murmurs of peace … like a touch of heavenly music” (Diary, August 27, 1914) in reports that French soldiers spared and actually helped wounded Germans and that Germans wrote on the walls of houses in villages notes for arriving French forces. “Be considerate an old woman lives here!” “These people were kind to me,” “Woman in childbed” (Diary, August 27, 1914).

Nonetheless, Kollwitz tried to fulfill the first duty of a military mother, to make death in battle acceptable and appropriately patriotic. Her sons fought for an ideal Germany (Diary, March 19, 1918; see pg. 10). She would, if necessary, “sacrifice” them. In the early weeks of the war Kollwitz did not seem to doubt the value of her “sacrifice” but rather her ability to achieve it. The phrase “joy of sacrificing … struck [her] hard”:

Where do all the women who have watched so carefully over the lives of their beloved ones get the heroism to send them to face the cannon? … The task is to bear it not only during these few weeks, but for a long time—in dreary November as well, and also when spring comes again, in March, the month of young men who wanted to live and are dead. That will be much harder. (Diary, August 27, 1914)

It was at this time that Kollwitz began to question the reality and sanity of war. “There is war … Nothing is real but the frightfulness of this state, which we almost grow used to…. It seems so stupid that the boys must go to war. The whole thing is so ghastly and insane. Occasionally there comes the foolish thought: how can they possibly take part in such madness?” (Diary, September 30, 1914)

Kollwitz’s protest was quieted by sacrifice and duty as Woolf’s would never have been. “At once the cold shower: they must, must! … Only one state of mind makes it at all bearable: to receive the sacrifice into one’s will” (Diary, September 30, 1914).

Kollwitz’s son Peter was killed in Belgium less than a month after she wrote these words, very early in his tour and early in the war. Her diary entries from that time until the end of the war record interlaced efforts to sculpt a memorial for Peter and to create through her mourning for him a visible relationship to him and to the war. Some entries in 1916 are typical:

Now the war has been going on for two years and five million young men are dead and more than that number again are miserable, their lives wrecked … Is there anything at all that can justify that? … It was “insane”…. People who would be friends in other conditions now hurl themselves at one another as enemies … This frightful insanity—the youth of Europe hurling themselves at one another.
By 1918 her position on the war had become “untenably contradictory.” She had believed that Peter sacrificed his life for a war whose value she could not question without also questioning the value of Peter. But this belief in the value of Peter’s sacrifice, so compulsory when Peter died, now seemed to her “insane.” “Is it a break of faith with you Peter that I can now see only madness in the war?” (Diary, October 11, 1916).

Kollwitz never recovered her patriotic loyalty. However during the winter of 1918 she was imagining what could be a quieter more accepting relation to the war. And for this she drew on the patriotic version of Just War Theory.

When someone dies because he has been sick—even if he is still young—the event is utterly beyond one’s powers.... But it is different in war. There was only one possibility, one point of view from which it could be justified: the free willing of it. And that in turn was possible only because there was the conviction that Germany was in the right and had the duty to defend herself. That is what changes everything. [Now] the feeling is that we were betrayed then, at the beginning. (Diary, March 19, 1918)

By the end of the war, in 1918, Kollwitz was prepared to become a public pacifist. A well-known poet, Richard Dehmel, urged all capable Germans, even old men and young boys, to sacrifice themselves fighting for the Fatherland. Kollwitz adopted Goethe’s language of generations to refuse, publishing a passionate reply in two newspapers. “There is enough of dying. Let not another man fall. I ask that the words of an even greater poet be remembered: ‘Seeds for the planting should not be ground’” (October 30, 1918).

From the end of the first war on Kollwitz spoke and acted as a socialist and pacifist participating strongly in public life. She worked with concentration on an art exhibit, thought intensely about her artistic “style”—what she had done and would do—reminisced about her boys’ youth and decisions she had made for them, mulled over Goethe’s life as I mulled over hers. But she couldn’t let go of the war except by telling herself she should. “Men without joy seem like corpses. They seem to obstruct life” (Diary, March 19, 1918). Her persistent mood is one of loss and sorrow.

...Where are my children now? What is left to their mother? One boy to the right and one to the left, my right son and my left son, as they called themselves. One dead and one so far away, and I cannot help him, cannot give to him out of myself.... My whole life as a mother is really behind me now. I often have a terrible longing to have it back again—to have children, my boys, one to the right and one to the left: to dance with them as formerly when spring arrived and Peter came with flowers and we danced a springtime dance. (Diary, January 17, 1916)

In 1917, Kollwitz had celebrated her fiftieth birthday. An ambitious, competitive artist, she was multiply honoured with prizes, memberships, and exhibitions. As she reminded herself, sometimes defensively, she was a political, not a “pure” artist, who executed several works which were meant to gather support for peace and socialist groups. She told herself and anyone who criticized her that she was glad her art served others. In 1920, while working on a poster “Vienna is Dying: Save her Children” she wrote:

While I drew, and wept along with the terrified children I was drawing, I really felt the burden I am bearing. I felt that I have no right to withdraw from the responsibility of being an advocate. It is my duty to voice the sufferings of men, the never-ending sufferings heaped mountain-high. This is my task, but it is not an easy one to fulfill. Work is supposed to relieve you. But is it any relief when in spite of my poster people in Vienna die of hunger every day? And when I know that? Did I feel relieved when I made the prints on war and knew that the war would go on raging? Certainly not. (Diary, January 4, 1920)

In 1923 she made a series of woodcuts under the general title “War.” In 1924 she made the lithograph “Nie Wieder Krieg,” whose spiky-haired, draft-age German refusenik has since travelled the world. He is energetic, angry, fully present, often described as androgynous. Many women, myself included, have thought that this figure was a woman, though quite unlike the “mother” we take Kollwitz to be and to represent.

Kollwitz seems to have become an active feminist as well as a pacifist. She got a “warm sense of contentment” (Kearns) from her association with Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and served on several feminist committees, donating posters to their causes, signing manifestos. Among them were a poster to “abolish the abortion law” and a manifesto for a homosexual rights movement, which she had joined.

As she moved to the end of the decade Kollwitz finished her memorial to Peter. After several attempts and experiments it had become “The Mourning Parents”—the Mother and the Father. The figures were first shown in plaster in Berlin. Kollwitz was thrilled with their success. Then carved in granite, they were placed as a war memorial in Belgium where Peter “fell.” For years she had worked on them in utter silence, showed them to no one, scarcely even to Karl and Hans; and now I am opening the doors wide so that as many people as possible may see them” (Diary, April 22, 1931).

Looking back upon the time in Belgium, my loveliest memory is of the last afternoon when van Hauten drove us out there once more.
He left us alone and we went from the figures to Peter’s grave, and everything was alive and wholly felt. I stood before the woman, looked at her—my own face—and I wept and stroked her cheeks. Karl stood close behind me—I did not even realize it. I heard him whisper, “Yes, yes.” How close we were to one another then! (Diary: August 14, 1932)

From the time Peter was killed, Kollwitz’s mourning was intertwined with artistic energy and ambition, particularly her determination to make an emolior for Peter. As she worked on the memorial she was inspired by a developing relation to her son. At times she speaks almost as if she were saying when remembering Peter. She “felt the need to kneel down and let them pour through me, through me ... to feel myself become absolutely one with him” (Diary: July 15, 1915). She still sometimes speaks positively of Peter dying for an ideal and expresses the hope that she would be reunited with his “spiritual part.”

When I am dead we may find ourselves in a new form, come back to one another, run together like two streams ... May your short life on earth some day reach perfection in another shape—perhaps in another place entirely. I want to flow together, untied, deeper, stronger, swifter. Dearest, dearest one, together with you united with the spiritual part. (Diary: October 13, 1916)

At times however Kollwitz speaks as if the thought of Peter’s immortality was her no consolation. In a diary entry in December 1915 she writes:

The spirit in Peter goes on living. True enough—but what does this spirit mean to him? ... What was important was this particular form which grew. This unique person, this human being who could live only once.... Peter’s spirit was inseparable from his body.... That is why for me there is no consolation at all in the thought of immortality....

When one says so simply that someone has “lost his life”—what a meaning there is in that—to lose one’s life. (Diary: December 1915)

In this incarnation, Peter is particular, unique, and inseparable from his body. His death represents the irredeemable losses of war—both the losing—what meaning there is in that—“to lose one’s life”—and the being lost ... no consolation at all in the thought of immortality.

When she returned from Belgium to Berlin Kollwitz had a birthday letter to a prisoner who had refused military service. In her reply to him—but where else that I know—Kollwitz spoke of seeing a tower near the battlefields which had written on it Nie Wider Krieg in four languages. German, Flemish, French, and English. “You bolster this creed by going to prison,” Kollwitz wrote. “I greet you joyfully for what you have done” (Klein and Klein 109).

When she was already nearly fifty Kollwitz had learned to see “the scourgé that is war itself” even as she loved Germany and would have thought it right to die fighting for the Fatherland. Now one war later, and another coming, her political, joyous, public yet hidden greeting sounds out over the military halls and cemeteries, including the military cemetery where Peter “fell,” is buried and is mourned: “I greet you joyfully for what you have done.” This is the non-violent mother in public whose joy can yet pose a welcome danger to the practice of war.

KÄTHE KOLLWITZ: THE END

The year after the placing of the statues—1933—Kollwitz signed an urgent appeal to and from “the left” to unite against fascism. This was the beginning of her remaining years of exclusion, ostracism, and at least once, interrogation after which she and her husband carried a vial of poison. Although it seems as if we have come to an ending for Kollwitz, the life—a combatant’s mother and then a combatant’s grandmother—can be very long. In her last years Kollwitz’s work was excluded, scorned, declared degenerate. She found living as an artist a continuous struggle to be loyal to friends who had been persecuted. Even as she relished an occasional opportunity to exhibit a work she felt it dishonourable to do so.

Kollwitz was gifted at making burial reliefs for gravestones and this trade gave her sorely needed money. One relief, which later became famous, was made for a Cologne business man Franz Levy. Kollwitz’s letter to Franz Levy’s widow, who had, with her children, emigrated to England after her husband’s death, represents Kollwitz’s feelings these years. “I have been thinking continually about you dear Frau Levy. Not only do my thoughts turn to the grave relief but also to you. Believe me we are all suffering the same and deeply: We feel pain and shame. And anger” (December 1938).

Years of pain, and shame, anger and grief. Yet also sometimes of pleasure and trust in her work. Once again Kollwitz used Goethe’s phrase: seeds for the sowing are not meant to be ground. Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden. This time she used the phrase in her own lithograph which showed an old woman, who can be identified as Kollwitz herself, forcefully encircling small children in her arms. The old woman is combatively protective, her gaze defiant, as she uses Goethe’s line, not “to express a longing—for wish but a demand, a command” (Kollwitz, Letter to childhood friend, January 1942). It took me sometime to realize that Kollwitz is making the demand on the children whom she describes in the letter to her friend as “real Berlin youngsters ... who are like horses, eagerly scenting the outdoors,” “prey for war makers.” “This time the seed for the planting—sixteen-year-old boys—are all around the mother,
looking out from under her coat and wanting to break loose. But the old mother who is holding them together says, "No! You stay here! For the time being you may play rough-and-tumble with one another. But when you are grown up you must get ready for life, not for war again" (Letter, January 1942).

Yet, by 1940, Kollwitz's grandson Peter had joined the German army. In the last page of the exhibition catalogue I consulted, there is a photograph of Hitler handing out medals to boys from the Hitler Youth. The last photo in the catalogue is a small picture of Peter dressed in his German army uniform smiling with a self-satisfaction that made me gasp.

In 1941, Kollwitz wrote a New Year's Eve letter to her grandson. She jokes about his having jaundice. "You are living and for the time being safe. Keep your jaundice as long as you care to." She reminisces about the family's past holidays, and then responds to a letter from him which we don't have. She writes to Peter: "Every word you write I thoroughly understand, and it proves to me that there is some factor beyond physical presence that goes on affecting people and developing them. Even during the times when alienation, and illiterate to understand, seems to have set in" (Letter to Peter, January 1941).

Then she continues to speak of love and loss:

How your grandfather loved you.... If fate permitting, we see one another and embrace another again, you must think then that through me your grandfather embraces you— you, our beloved eldest grandchild.... my wish is that we see one another again. (emphasis in original) (Letter to Peter, January 1941)

Several times I have been tempted to make up the letter from Peter to which Kollwitz responds. I want the alienation to which she refers to separate Peter from his state and its army. But there are no such words, only Kollwitz's wish to see her grandson again and the words and the art she left for us: Kollwitz sent the stone for the lithograph to the printer in January; Peter was killed fighting in Russia in September.

WHEN WE PLANT TREES
WE PLANT THE SEEDS OF PEACE AND OF HOPE

I find myself left with a fantasy. The seeds Kathe Kollwitz said must not be lost have survived although one son and one grandson died. They are now in the hands of Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement of Kenya. Wangari Maathai was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2004. According to her, the committee was honouring the interconnection of ecology and peace, and more extensively, the mutual interdependence of both peace and human rights.

The founding action of the Green Belt Movement was simple—plant the seedlings of trees (see Maathai 2004). Simple but brilliant: practical, visible, educational, economic, ecological and, spiritual; designed to serve the needs and draw upon and develop the skills of rural women. Although planting seedlings is simple enough for rural women to learn quickly, they also quickly edged into a political space. They gather together to get tools and learn their use—and therefore need freedom of assembly. They teach each other and learn to talk together, therefore demanding freedom of speech. In a project directed especially toward impoverished women who have little self-esteem, they can find among each other women who are leaders and who mirror for them their potential capacity to act. A small fir tree—a spiritual symbol in Kenya—can be taken to meetings where conflicts and disputes are being negotiated, bringing to life the idea of reconciliation and non-violent negotiation.

Wangari Maathai is consciously a very public mother who has led the women of Kenya in political and practical action. She herself has been jailed and beaten; elected and defeated; honored and shamed. She has feminist stories to tell about marital injustice; humiliation by women and men when she was divorced; a hard story of wise mother love when she took her three young children to live with their father. You can read these stories in Unbowed, Maathai's memoir. They are honest, painful, and sometimes witty stories told, it seems, to women who can use them.

There are many facets of Maathai's thought and work that I will write about sometime. Among them is her idea of the micro-nation. A micro-nation is what we, the former colonizers and we, the citizens of Kenya, and we, who grew up in Ohio and played cowboys and Indians, would likely call a "tribe." Maathai develops the concept of embracing one's micro-nationality, envisioning each micro-nationality bringing their distinctive cultures and histories into the macro-nation, the state, and, in Maathai's discourse to the continent of Africa.

In the winter of 2008 Kenya was caught in a civil war whose brutality Maathai found astonishing and personally devastating. Since that time I have been wary of imputing to Maathai and her projects an inappropriately simple and premature achievement. Creating democratic spaces, cultures of peace, and sustainable equitable uses of resources in Kenya—this seems very hard work.

To tell only one story: After the 2008 war ended and a power sharing arrangement had been worked out, Maathai and her colleagues held a demonstration in Freedom Corner in Uhuru Park, the real and symbolic place of democratic free speech in Kenya. Their aim was to deliver to the new leaders an open letter asking that they put the needs of Kenyans first by, for example, forming a small efficient cabinet to do the government's work. However, when the citizens of Kenya started to walk toward the government buildings where the leaders, the president, and prime minister designate, were allegedly meeting, the police reacted with tear gas to disperse the crowd. The panic of people running, chased by police with batons ready; the eye-stinging, lung-burning tear gas remind Maathai of many similar assaults which she graphically describes (2009: 209-210). As I wrote these sentences several weeks ago, Nairobi waited for a visit from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Fears and security were intense. This
morning, several weeks later, I came to the computer having read the headlines from Kenya. A devastating drought is destroying the land. Desperate struggle for scarce resources is leading to “ethnic strife.”

As I have been writing this essay, Maathai’s book, The Challenge for Africa (2009), was published. It is a valuable analytic, political treatise on, among many other subjects, the structure and scandal of “Third World” indebtedness and the importance generally and for Africa of recognizing, preserving, and developing culture. I have suggested some of the book’s themes and will return to it. But I introduced Wangari Maathai because another death of another combatant-child had left only with a fantasy of a maternal custodian for the seeds” which Käthe Kollwitz said should not be ground.

Wangari Maathai herself adopts a nostalgic fantasy in order to tell a story of abundance, loss, repair, and recuperation. Both its form and its principal episodes are recognizable in her formal speeches as well as in children’s stories. Here I borrow from her Nobel acceptance speech and Wangari’s Trees of Peace by Jeannette Winter, putting words from the Nobel speech in italics. I close with her story, in need of fantasy, and even more of children’s voices.

As a girl, “Wangari lives under an umbrella of green trees in the shadow of Mount Kenya in Africa,” so Wangari’s Trees of Peace begins. “I reflect on my childhood experience,” Maathai begins to close her Nobel speech. “I would visit a stream next to our home to fetch water for my mother.”

“She watches the birds in the forest where she and her mother go to gather firewood for cooking,” the story tells us. “I would drink water straight from the stream. Playing among the arrowroot leaves I tried to row to pick up the strands of frogs’ eggs, believing they were beads. But every time I put my little fingers under them they would break. Later, I saw thousands of tadpoles: black, energetic and wriggling through the clear water against the background of the brown earth. This was the world I inherited from my parents.”

This abundance is followed by Maathai’s travel and learning. But, as the children’s story tells it, while Wangari is away, “thousands of trees are cut down to make way for buildings” and none are replaced. In the Nobel Speech, fifty years later, “the stream has dried up, women walk long distances for water, which is not always clean, they have no food, they are hungry, they do not have water for their animals, they cannot take their children to school…” If not for nostalgic memories, “children will never know what they have lost.” But out of remembered loss Wangari Maathai takes the first step of repair by planting “nine seedling trees in her own back yard.” She then gets the village women to plant seedlings, paying them “a small amount for each seedling still living after three months—their first earnings ever” (from Wangari’s Trees of Peace).

The story then consists of struggles between “government men” afraid of dissent, developers who continue to hack down trees, and Maathai’s army of women who continue to plant seedlings—now in the millions all across Ke-

nya—their only “force” (sometimes) shaking their naked breasts in the face of violent police whose behavior insults their mothers.1

“The challenge,” Wangari Maathai tells the Nobel audience, “is to restore the home of the tadpoles and give back to our children a world of beauty and wonder.” And then, in the words of Wangari’s Trees of Peace, “The umbrella of Green in Kenya returns”, “The whole world hears of Wangari’s trees and the Army of Women who Planted Them.”

When we plant trees we plant the seeds of hope and peace
Is the image or picture of a weapon distasteful?
Can you talk about war without tears?
What a meaning there is in that—to lose one’s life.

For help with this essay I am grateful to Jane Lazarre who read it and to Luciana Rizziutelli who edited it skillfully and whose patience is astounding. Whatever I know about war I owe to Marilyn Young who is, of course, in no way responsible for my ignorance and errors. I am again grateful to Sara Friedman, whose essay, “Seeds for the Sowing: The Diary of Käthe Kollwitz,” first directed me to the work of Käthe Kollwitz. Friedman’s essay was first published in Arms and the Woman, edited by Helen Cooper, Adrien Munich, and Susan Squier.

1 In order to deny what I never said I lift phrases from Patrice DiQuinzio’s essay in this volume. DiQuinzio is citing an essay by Nancy Scherper-Hughes in the Woman and War Reader, “Maternal Thinking and the Politics of War.”

2 See, especially, “Loving Your Enemies.”

3 There are many kinds of non-violent campaigns. In our class we discussed the efforts of a small French village to rescue Jewish children from the Nazis; the non-violent protests of the Madres of Argentina against the disappearance of their children; Albert Camus’ The Plague which we read as a fictional representation of a non-violent concerted response to evil. We took key sermons of Martin Luther King to be foundational texts and studied several of Gandhi’s campaigns. In this respect Joan Bondurant’s analyses were especially useful.

However, I was struck when I realized that I am still able to recognize and analyze publicize many sustained non-violent campaigns.

4 I am drawing on Grace Paly’s well-known short story, “Midrash on Happiness,” in Long Walks and Intimate Talks.


6 A simple, brief account of Just War Theory. Only wars that are fought justly
for a just cause are acceptable. There are causes that are just—no one should deny this. Among them defense against aggression, rescue of people suffering terrible aggression. There are requirements for fighting justly, most notably the prohibition against targeting civilians or "non-combatants" as they are known. There are subsidiary requirements of a just war—victory must be likely; the stated cause must be, or at least include, the real cause; the war must be declared by a proper authority (by the head of a state or by a suitable but as yet untheorized analog of a non-state entity). There is an overarching grand requirement: the injuries sustained must be proportionate to the good achieved. And there is a contested requirement that war be a last resort after non-violent strategies have failed. All of the quoted phrases in this section are from Walzer's (2004) book, *Arguing About War.*

I am adapting a quote from *Three Guineas* (129). Notoriously, Woolf says that it is *as a woman* she has, no country, *as a woman* she wants no country, *as a woman* her country is the whole world. This is the kind of sexual difference I would assert only to deny but which I believe braver souls should explore. In her final writings and ambitious reading, Woolf was adding a global and even planetary dimension to her insistent pacifist internationalism. Nonetheless her words ring oddly in these U.S. ears. We have been hearing that whether we like it or not, we do have a country whose actions have consequences, but which is not, as we seem to believe, the whole world.

"I have heard this story from a participant and from Temma Kaplan an historian. However it is neither in Maathai's Nobel speech nor in the children's book (Winter) I am using.

**WORKS CITED**


