

Biography as Philosophy

The Power of Personal Example for Transformative Theory

As I have written this book, my kids have always been present in some way. Sometimes, they are literally present because they are beside me playing, asking questions, wanting my attention. Other times, they are present in the background of my consciousness because I'm thinking about the world they live in and the kind of world I want them to live in. Our life together is probably familiar to many U.S. middle-class women: I work full-time, the kids go to school full time, and our evenings and weekends are filled with a range of activities with which we are each involved. We stay busy with our individual activities, but we also come together for dinner most nights, we go on family outings, and we enjoy our time together. As much time as I do spend with my kids, I constantly feel guilty for not doing enough with them since I also spend significant time preparing for classes, grading, researching, and writing while I'm with them. Along with many other women, I feel the pressure of trying and failing to balance mothering and a career.

Although I feel as though I could be a better mother and a better academic, I also have to concede that I lead a privileged life as a woman and mother. Mothers around the world would love to have the luxury of providing for their children's physical and mental well-being. In the Ivory Coast and Ghana, children are used as slave labor to harvest cocoa beans for chocolate (Bitter Truth; "FLA Highlights"; Hawksley; The Food Empowerment Project). In Uganda, children are kidnapped for military service where they are tortured and forced to commit atrocities ("Lords of Woe"; History; Bangura; Doom; Lane; Vindevogel). In Peru, children's health has been devastated by the mining of heavy metals, which has produced high levels of sulfur dioxide and lead (Fraser).

Mothers in these countries—and mothers who face poverty, violence, and racism in the United States—face daily uncertainties about whether their children will be safe, fed, and healthy.

My heart aches for these children and these mothers, especially when I stop to consider the daily life of my children and me contributes to their suffering. As part of the U.S. middle-class, to say nothing of the wealthy, we go through our daily routines without thinking about the supply chain that produces our goods. We fail to think of the children who produced the soccer balls and the chocolate we enjoy. Far too many of us have no idea that the people who mine the materials used to make our computers, cell phones, and mp3 players are exploited and oppressed. Yet, simply feeling sad for others' plight and guilty for my own role does nothing to stop the exploitation and the violence those mothers and children face every day, so I find myself constantly searching for ways to critique this system of injustice, to raise questions about the lives of people impacted by my acts, and to create a just, peaceful world. Moreover, I want to use my experience as a mother to cultivate the connection between myself and other mothers and their children. In order to foster this connection, I began by looking for other U.S. mothers who recognized systemic injustice, critiqued the injustice, and worked to make the world more just.

Molly Rush, Michele Naar-Obed,
Cindy Sheehan, and Diane Wilson

In my search for what it means to be a mother who cares about the suffering of others and acts to alleviate that suffering, I discovered four mothers whose experiences led them to care about the plight of people around them, both those in their own communities and those across the world. Even more importantly, that care led them to act to change the injustice they discovered. By focusing on individual mothers and the implications of their stories, I found that the critiques of essentialism receded since they each have particular ways of assessing and responding to the injustice that they discover. Their responses share features with other women and mothers and can provide inspiration and insight without imposing a universal standard of what it means to be a mother.

The contributions of particular mothers is important because it addresses a tension that runs through scholarship about organizations built on the idea of a natural connection between mothering and peace.

The tension is between the idea that mothers have a special insight into the destruction that war causes and that such an insight relies on oppressive stereotypes about women and mothers. Michelle Moravec articulates this tension in her article “Another Mother for Peace: Reconsidering Maternalist Peace Rhetoric from a Historical Perspective, 1967–2007” (2010). Moravec argues that “Ultimately, while motherhood provides an emotionally resonate call for motivating peace activists, it undercuts the political efficacy of women working to end war” (10). Her argument is that groups such as Another Mother for Peace and CODEPINK (we can also add GSFSO) use essentialist descriptions of mothers to try to garner support for the peace movement. She does grant that the examples she uses in this article also undermine essentialist categories, but she maintains that overall these groups and individuals are reduced to making essentialist claims. She further argues that this strategy backfires because their message is ultimately ignored by the media or reduced to pity for an individual’s suffering, both of which fail to incite critical conversations about militarism and structural injustice. Moravec suggests that to raise these conversations women must be part of coalitions larger than those defined by maternalism (22–29).

The problem Moravec identifies of using essentialist claims about mothering to critique injustice is one that is well documented by Harriet Hyman Alonso in *Peace as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights* (1993). She traces, throughout the history of women’s peace groups, the pervasiveness of motherhood as a theme of the movement (11–12, 165, 263). As with Moravec’s analysis, Alonso recognizes the emotional power of making a link between the ideals of motherhood and pacifism, but she repeatedly critiques the essentialism inherent in the rhetoric (14, 263). The essentialism noted by both Moravec and Alonso are problematic for groups who are organized around the common theme of motherhood and nonviolence. Nevertheless, the number of organizations and activists founded by women and informed by mothering indicate that, while women should not be reduced to essentialist stereotypes, many women can find inspiration from mothering to become activists. I will discuss four such women to emphasize the ways in which mothering inspires their actions without reducing them to one-dimensional stereotypes.

First, I discovered Molly Rush, mother of six, who became a convicted felon when she hammered the nosecone of a nuclear warhead in order to draw attention to the danger of nuclear weapons. Her story, which I will discuss in Chapter 2, led me to consider the ethical ambiguity

inherent in mothering. On the one hand, Sara Ruddick's research focuses on the virtues of maternal work and how that work can contribute to living peacefully. On the other hand, mothers who challenge the status quo threaten what society deems acceptable for mothering practices. In order to consider the difficulties of practicing the virtues of mothering in a militaristic society and how these difficulties can be addressed, I focus on the example of Rush and the ethical philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir.

Rush became active in civil rights in 1963 as part of the Catholic Interracial Council in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As part of her commitment to civil rights, she began marching against the Vietnam War the following year (Faulk). By 1980 her awareness of injustice, her dedication to calling attention to that injustice, and her religious commitment to non-violence led Rush to become part of a nonviolent act of civil disobedience in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, at the General Electric plant where nosecones for nuclear weapons were being produced. Rush and seven others (including two priests and a religious sister) who were part of Plowshares—a Catholic community devoted to nonviolent civil disobedience—walked into the facility, spilled their own blood on the nosecone, and used hammers to destroy it. Another Plowshares member, Art Laffin, describes the dual significance of the blood and hammers:

Hammers are used to begin the literal dismantling of weapons that rounds of 'peace' talks have failed to do. They are also used to symbolize the 'building again' process, e.g., a hammer can be used to build homes and hospitals. Blood clearly points to the blood that is spilled so carelessly in war. It is also an essential component of life, which points to our need for one another and our unity as one people. (Brown and Muller)

Laffin's description reveals the power of Rush's act as an inspiration for other mothers who want to create a better world. Both the hammers and the blood symbolize critique and renewal. The hammer destroys that which is meant to destroy in order to clear a space for building things that will nourish life. Blood is used to critique the blood that the weapon will spill, but also reminds us of the force of life in every person whether we are in the United States or the then-USSR (the primary intended target of nuclear weapons in 1980).

The use of hammers and blood to emphasize the misplaced values of militarism is a technique used by many feminists. In *Does Khaki*

Become You?: The Militarization of Women's Lives, Cynthia Enloe describes this approach to critiquing militarization as an economic-technological critique (1983). The economic-technological critique can be effective in drawing attention to the ways in which funding militarism impacts other areas of social life so that people will withdraw support for military funding (Enloe 207). A current example of this approach is evident on the website *Cost of War-Trade-Offs*. On this website, viewers can search for the amount of spending on the Afghanistan war for the current fiscal year and compare that spending to what that money could have bought instead. According to this website, taxpayers in the city of Dayton, Ohio (a mid-size American city) will spend \$14.12 million dollars in fiscal year 2014 on the Iraq and Afghanistan war, money that could have provided 208 elementary school teachers for one year, medical care for 1,752 military veterans for one year, or a year of health care for 7,549 children from low-income families (National Priorities Project). Although Enloe believes this approach frequently does succeed in convincing people that military expenditures are problematic, it fails to produce a critique of the militarization of society and therefore will not ultimately change the emphasis on war and violence in society (208).

Rush's civil disobedience clearly broadens the category of economic-technological critique since her stated purpose is to wake people up to the reality of the dangers of nuclear weapons, as well as to draw people's attention to the ways in which the production of nuclear weapons detracts from spending and programs that nurture life. Rush was successful in raising people's awareness, bringing about conversations on nuclear weapons, and demonstrating that militarism exists because we let it exist. Yet, Rush did have to serve time, leaving her children without her. Her sacrifice of time with her children and their emotional struggles during her imprisonment highlight the tension that mother-activists face: how can we negotiate the tension between taking care of our particular children and trying to act on behalf of other people suffering, many of whom suffer as a direct result of our failure to act?

After presenting a paper on Rush, an audience member told me about Michele Naar-Obed, who has much in common with Rush, but is able to resolve some of the tension of leaving her child. Naar-Obed, like Rush, hammered the nosecone of a nuclear warhead and is a convicted felon for that act. Both women had to leave their children while they served their sentences, but Rush did so without the support of her husband and community, while Naar-Obed had a robust system of support for herself and her daughter. In Chapter 3, I will focus on Naar-Obed's

story of activism and use the theory of Luce Irigaray to explicate the importance of systems of support for activist mothers.

Naar-Obed began her life as an activist during the build-up to the first Iraq War, pouring blood on the building sign of an Air Force recruiting center, and was acquitted after a jury trial for the act. After this first action, Naar-Obed sought out a community that could more fully support her commitment to social justice and non-violent disobedience. She became a member of Jonah House at which time she met and married Greg Boertje-Obed, a fellow activist. Soon after they were married, Naar-Obed and Boertje-Obed had their daughter, Rachel, who would be actively raised not only by the two of them, but also by the Jonah House community (Prisoners of Conscience; Gross; Naar-Obed).

While pregnant with her daughter, Naar-Obed describes seeing pictures of a woman nursing her infant; the woman and child had been burned and bloodied as a result of the nuclear bombs dropped by the U.S. in Japan. She states, "I see that it's me and that baby is mine. For a very brief moment I feel what that mother must have felt. What I feel is just horrendous pain. And I know this cannot be right and it cannot happen again" (Gross 6). Her commitment to making sure this does not happen again leads Naar-Obed, her husband, and the other members of Jonah House to decide she should take part in another act of nonviolent civil disobedience, leaving her two-year-old daughter in the care of her husband and the Jonah House community.

Naar-Obed's story provides an important contrast to Rush's story since Naar-Obed had already been caring for her daughter with the support of a larger community. Nevertheless, her story highlights the tension between social expectations about mothering and personal convictions about the need to confront injustice on behalf of one's own child and every child. Even in a sympathetic article in the *National Catholic Register* about Naar-Obed's peace activism and her relationship with her daughter, the reporter (Judy Gross) asks, "Why are she and other women activists willing to sacrifice their motherhood on the altar of righteousness?" (Gross 5). To answer this question, Gross continues with interviews of Naar-Obed and Liz McAlister (a Jonah House founder, who has also left her children in the care of the community while she served time in prison for her peace activism), and through these interviews it is clear that both consider their actions and time in prison to be integral to their mothering and not a sacrifice of their motherhood. The gap between Naar-Obed's perspective and Gross's initial question demonstrates the need for a community of support for mother-activists

so that they can expand what it means to be a mother and to link the well-being of their particular children, to the well-being of all children.

For Naar-Obed, her life as an activist began out of religious commitment and the dissonance of the commitment with the first Iraq War, and her activism expanded when she became a mother. For other mother-activists, activism begins after they are personally impacted by injustice. Cindy Sheehan provides a powerful example of a mother who unexpectedly became a witness to the destruction that war causes. In Chapter 4, I focus on Sheehan's story in order to explicate the ways in which social injustice in the form of U.S. militarism impacts people in ways that they never expected. The aftermath of this impact allows us to examine how activism can begin with a reaction against something that is wrong (the death of a child) and become a proactive activism (a quest to reveal the truth and create a peaceful society). Sheehan's story also provides an opportunity to examine the role of the media in activism since it can bring widespread attention to a cause but it can also marginalize the cause and activists for the cause.

Sheehan was first a mother and only became an activist when her son, Casey, was killed in the second Iraq War. In the aftermath of his death, Sheehan made news across the country, as she demands an account from the president as to the purpose of the Iraq War and the purpose of her son's death. Prior to Casey's death, Sheehan describes herself as a woman whose life centered around her family and her local Catholic Church. While she describes herself and her family as politically active in their opposition to George W. Bush for president, she was not active in political protests or antimilitarism. And, when Casey joined the U.S. Army, Sheehan was deeply troubled by his decision, but she was assured by Casey and the military recruiter that he would not be in harm's way. Until Casey's death, her opposition to the Iraq War and to Bush's presidency remained private political beliefs. But, Casey's death awakened Sheehan's awareness that her private grief is shaped by public policies and systematic misrepresentation of the war and the military. Her private grief, then, becomes public and rallies other peace activists to her cause and catalyzes the media to both honor her and vilify her. Sheehan's transformation into a peace activist raises important questions about the ways in which mothers play a role in shaping their children to become soldiers and support military ideology, the way in which media plays a role in shaping U.S. perceptions of the war and peace activists, and how becoming a mother-activist both ostracizes her from some communities and brings her into solidarity with

other communities. From President George W. Bush to members of her extended family, communities with political, economic and emotional stakes in defending the war ostracized Sheehan. CODEPINK, GSFSSO, and her surviving children provided sustenance for Sheehan's activism (Knudson; Managhan; Mollin; O'Neill; Rich; Sheehan 2006a; Sheehan 2006b; Sheehan 2005; Wilson; York).

Rush, Naar-Obed, and Sheehan provide inspiration for activism against U.S. militarism and its impact on people around the globe. But as Cynthia Enloe reminds us in *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women's Lives*, the influence of militarization traces back to patriarchy (1983, 210), and both patriarchy and militarization have impacts beyond war. Thus, in Chapter 5, I focus on the activism of Diane Wilson, mother of four and tireless activist against war and environmental destruction. Wilson's story demonstrates the ways in which local forms of injustice are linked to global injustice and, while large corporations would have us believe that jobs and progress depend on environmental destruction, that what is good for the environment is also good for people.

As one of the only women shrimpers in Calhoun Bay, Texas, Wilson had been breaking stereotypes for many years. Yet, she was also well-known as someone who valued silence and time alone on her ship; she would never have expected to become an outspoken advocate against corporate pollution, political corruption, and violence. On the day that a fellow shrimper brought her an article about pollution in the bay, Wilson began to ask questions about the levels of pollution that business development would cause. Her questions led her to discover that the environmental damage in her own community was a widespread practice of the corporation in question, and they had left a path of destruction across the United States and around the globe. Nevertheless, politicians and business leaders in her community begged Wilson to stop asking questions and to stop harassing the corporation since they wanted the company to keep operating and to keep building so that they would supposedly provide jobs and development to the community. Wilson continued to challenge the idea that this company provided for the good of the community while it destroyed the livelihood of those who worked on the bay, poisoned many of its workers, and threatened the well-being of the ground and the water for the entire community.

Rather than agree to silence, Wilson continued to ask questions, listen to people harmed, and to connect the injustices perpetrated by

the military and corporations, all of which led her to raise other people's awareness of military, environmental, and social injustices through public hunger fasts, disruptions of U.S. Senate hearings and political fund-raisers, and chaining herself to a Union Carbide oxide tower (Wilson 2005; Wilson 2011). Her activism has been instrumental in raising awareness about the connections between local concerns and global concerns, as well as between militarism and environmental destruction.

The focus on each of these individual women, their context, and their actions allow us to better understand how particular individuals can respond to widespread injustice and systemic militarization in society. Each of the mothers in this book does draw on rhetorical strategies that Michelle Moravec labels as essentialist: they appeal to mothers' concern for their children and they use emotivism (10). Nevertheless, they are also undermining essentialism at every turn: they break laws nonviolently; they willingly serve time in jail and prison; and they challenge social standards for acceptability. By studying these individual women and the relationships they form to support their activism, it is clear that maternal activism does not necessarily lead to an essentialist understanding of mothers and women. Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson successfully garner media attention, provoke conversations about structural injustice, and incite change as well as challenge preconceived notions of motherhood.

Nonviolent Direct Action

While my first inspiration to write this book came from a desire to help create a just world for my children and other children, I am also deeply committed to nonviolent activism and to teaching people about its effectiveness. A common misunderstanding about nonviolence and peace is a belief that nonviolent actions cannot be effective against conflict and that only violence can be used to stop violence. When I teach students about Jane Addams, Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi, I am continually frustrated when they say they admire these peace activists' actions, but that they could never be effective in today's world where people are violent and there is so much cultural conflict. I have had some success using films and articles depicting the violence used against activists and the people they represent, but most students still insist that nonviolence cannot work today, and without

violence (war, environmental rape, prisons, social injustice) the world will devolve into chaos and many more instances of violence.

When students worry about increased violence, they tend to think about recent violent events in the United States (9/11 and the bombs at the Boston Marathon, for example). They think that without armed intervention these types of violence will increase and that nonviolence is the equivalent to do nothing. In order to get students and others to consider that nonviolence does work against violence and can create a just society, I use examples from students' daily lives, which can then be expanded so they can understand the motivation and the actions of the activists in this book. For example, Sara Ruddick's analysis of conflict and nonviolence in "Making Connections Between Parenting and Peace" is particularly helpful for introducing the ways in which parents use nonviolence in parenting (2004). In this article, she provides an analysis of conflict and the strategies that parents use to resolve conflicts nonviolently. The examples of nonviolence in this article are familiar to most students and give them a framework from which they can build their capacity to imagine a nonviolent culture and to strengthen their capacity to imagine themselves acting non-violently, both in everyday situations and in the face of cultural violence on a large scale.

Ruddick's insight into the role of nonviolence in the family is an insight that inspires this book as well: we have experiences in our lives that provide the inspiration for creating a just society, the critique of injustice, and the means for moving from injustice toward justice. This book describes the actions of four women (Molly Rush, Michele Naar-Obed, Cindy Sheehan, and Diane Wilson) whose experiences as mothers inspire them to transform society and mothering. While stereotypes of mothering rely on a model of self-sacrifice, nurturing, and caring for their own children within a nuclear family, each of these women expands the institution of mothering beyond these stereotypes by highlighting the connections between all children and all people. Each of these women is nurturing and caring and sacrifices tremendously to create a just peace, but they resist any essential definition of what caring and nurturing entail. While they are willing to take a stand for what is right even when their communities and loved ones urge them to stop, they find and help create supportive communities to share the work of transformation and mothering.

Once students begin to think about the ways in which nonviolence functions in a daily context, the challenge is to get them to think about the role of protests and activism in nonviolence. For the most part stu-

dents agree with the analysis that Jules Boykoff offers in *Beyond Bullets: The Suppression of Dissent in the United States*:

Contained, sanctioned actions are not likely to garner mass-media attention, but disruptive, novel events improve the chances of mass-media interest. This relationship with the media creates a dialectic of escalation whereby activists feel perpetually compelled to foment protest activities that are novel and attention-grabbing enough to be newsworthy. Yet, this creates a dilemma in that such actions can be easily dismissible as gimmicky, violent, or weird. (28)

Boykoff assumes that much of activism is aimed at garnering media attention so activists can raise awareness of an issue and generate public debate or discussion about that particular issue. The difficulty with garnering media attention is that the media thrives on spectacular events such that only the most creative, large, or outrageous displays by activists get media attention. Events that are outrageous and creative, however, are typically dismissed as weird and far from the lives of average citizens; and, even if they are covered in the media, they are not successful in convincing people to become part of that cause. This is a concern that applies to all four of the mothers in this book; any action that risks prison time, especially if it carries the risk of a felony conviction, will seem easily dismissible because few mothers will risk leaving their children in order to serve a prison sentence. Yet, what Boykoff fails to recognize is that the actions of Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson can be understood in another way. These mothers are not suggesting that their actions ought to be performed by all mothers, rather they act because they believe their actions are the right thing to do, whether or not the media notices, and they act so other mothers will be inspired to work for justice in their own way.

While popular media is structured in a way that prevents deep analysis of what these mothers are doing, academics can provide analysis of those acts that the media does not examine sufficiently. One of the most important contributions of academics is to provide critical analysis of the world; this analysis explains problems and injustices as well as the systems that cause and sustain the injustice. However, when academics focus on exclusively critical analysis of the world and its moral problems, that description can make it seem as though the world is inevitably unjust, and leaves no room to imagine what a just world could be. When

academics focus on ideals and what a good society could be, then we have inspiration for what we could have if only we could resolve the injustice that we have today. Yet, critical analysis and articulations of what a just society would be still leaves us feeling helpless if we do not have a path from injustice to justice. The stories of Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson allow them and others to recognize injustice and to create justice in a concrete way.

The Role of Critique in Social Transformation

To say critiquing unjust institutions is one of the primary tasks of creating social change may seem to be an obvious point at first. Yet, the way in which a critique functions may be far less obvious than it initially seems. In its first instance, a critique can be as simple as an emotional response to a situation. Children critique their surroundings on a regular basis declaring, "That's not fair!" This statement can be used when children think a friend or sibling has more privileges than they do, whether they get to stay up later, or take a trip that the child wishes he could take. This statement can also be uttered by children when they are told that a favorite teacher has a serious illness such as cancer. Finally, I have heard my children say, "That's not fair!" in response to learning that because of the Iraq war, Iraqi children are suffering from more poverty, more sickness, and receiving less education than they suffered from before the Iraq War (Ismael 151–163). Each of these responses tells us something about the kinds of critique in which people can engage.

The first critique in which someone has something that a particular child wants for herself focuses the critique on the child as the center of attention. As far as instilling a sense of social justice or concern for others, this perception of "unfairness" leaves much to be desired, but does show some promise for instilling social justice if nurtured. The statement comes out of frustration with a circumstance in which the child can compare her situation to someone else's situation. In some cases, the charge that her situation is unfair may be completely incorrect when considered in a larger context. My six-year-old son might think it is unfair that his eleven-year-old sister gets to stay up until nine p.m. when he has to go to bed at eight p.m., but he does not have the perspective I have as a mother: younger children need more sleep, and he will be up earlier than his sister regardless of what time he goes to bed. In other cases, the awareness of unfairness is indicative of a larger

social problem, as in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" describing why he will no longer wait for justice:

. . . when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people. . . . (292–293)

As with the first example, a six-year-old child wants something another child has, but the larger context of the second example reveals a larger social problem. While in both examples an adult's perspective reveals whether there is an injustice happening, the child's ability to compare herself to another is an important part of ethical development that can be encouraged when she begins to feel empathy for people other than herself.

The second example I used in which children might state that something is unfair is the case in which a favorite teacher is suffering from cancer. Like the first example, the statement of unfairness is a direct result of the child's perspective on the situation. My daughter feels that this is unfair because she knows the teacher, the teacher is kind and generous, and she does not want her to suffer. This time the belief that the situation is unfair is on behalf of someone else since the child is not suffering, but someone else is. Yet, her statement of unfairness still needs to develop more fully for it to lead to a social critique since the teacher's sickness cannot be remedied by improved social conditions.

The third example I used of a child stating that it's unfair for Iraqi children to suffer as a direct result of war is a social critique, and it is precisely this kind of social critique that I will focus on in this book. Anyone who can make the statement, "That's not fair!" when confronted with the suffering of Iraqi children can then understand each of the previous examples in their larger social context as well. First, the child whose bedtime seemed unfair to him can step outside of himself to consider instead the plight of a child who cannot go to an amusement park because of the color of her skin. He can be told that the policy of the park is an arbitrary rule that should not be in place. Second, in the

case of the sick teacher, we can teach the child that while her teacher's illness is unfortunate, we can only offer sympathy and comfort, and that no action can change the teacher's illness. Finally, in the third case we can begin to teach the child about the relationship between decisions in one country, the United States, and the effects elsewhere, Iraq.

Certainly, I am not suggesting a six-year-old will understand the complexities of social injustice; instead, I am suggesting that from an early age children have insight into injustice that can be reinforced and developed. I have drawn on three very different kinds of examples of injustice to demonstrate that recognition of social injustice can come from a variety of sources whether it is a personal comparison, empathy for people they know, or empathy for people like us but far away. The different examples also draw attention to the difference between situations we do not like and would change if we could, but are not an example of a social injustice. The distinction between an unfortunate event and social injustice will be important to maintain so we do not treat instances of injustice as though they are unfortunate events that cannot be helped. The intuition that something is not right must be unpacked in order to understand what precisely could be otherwise, if it could be changed, and how it could be changed.

The Role of the Ideal in Social Transformation

Once we discover and critique social injustice, one of the keys to social transformation for justice is to have some vision of what a just world would be. The history of philosophy is filled with descriptions of ideal societies; as far back as Plato, these descriptions depict a world in which people have all of the basic necessities met and can flourish because they also have access to goods beyond their basic needs. These visions give us a way to be *for* something positive and not just *against* something, and they help us to build our imaginative capacity so that the world as it is can be transformed into one in which everyone can flourish.

When feminists think about a just world for mothers and children, they have been instrumental in describing societies that value women and girls. Clearly, two of the features most important for protecting women and children are ridding the world of militarism and overcoming environmental destruction. In addition to being against militarism and environmental destruction, we need to envision a world that values mothers and daughters as much as fathers and sons. One of the leading

theorists for these ideals is Luce Irigaray whose work began in the 1970s by critiquing patriarchal structures, and now focuses on describing how society can respect sexual difference and provide for the flourishing of females, which would in turn create a world in which both females and males can flourish.

In *Democracy Begins Between Two*, Irigaray lays out a political agenda that would guarantee natural and civil rights based on sexual difference (2001). The codes that she proposes would guarantee recognition of sexual difference within the law and within the family. For example, she proposes, “A relative destructuring of family unity, which requires that each man and woman should enjoy a specific civil identity which cannot be alienated in the family institution, a requirement which confirms the need for a new civil relationship between woman and man, women and men” (70). Certainly, her critique of family institutions as isolating for women has been accurate for many women as well as documented by many women including Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, and Irigaray. But Irigaray’s recommendation for destructuring family is unclear, especially in terms of how the relationships between woman and man, women and men, would change.

While Irigaray’s suggestions for what precisely would change between men and women is not spelled out in detail, her suggestions for changing relationships between mothers and daughters provides an outline of how things might change to better support their relationships. These suggestions include changing the way mothers speak to their daughters by displaying images of mothers and daughters in homes and in public, using gendered pronouns and examples, and exchanging meaningful objects between each other (1993, 47–50). Her suggestions for flourishing relationships between mothers and daughters are part of her vision for a society that would not be hierarchical and demeaning for women and girls. Though she does not provide guidelines as to how this change could occur, she provides a description that can inspire the creative imagination. Even if we imagine a different kind of society than the one that Irigaray envisions, we can realize that society as it is, is not the only possibility. We can imagine living in a just world.

Perhaps one of the most inspiring aspects of Irigaray’s philosophy is that she includes the natural world in her descriptions of an ethical society:

Such an objective [salvation of the earth] seems to me, today, to be the first one that we should pursue to ensure for each

man and woman at least the right to life: to air, to water, to light, to the heat of the sun, to the nourishment of the earth. Rescuing the planet earth means, too, being concerned about happiness, as much for ourselves as for others. . . . What brings greater happiness than the return of spring? What is more marvelous than the lengthening of the days, than the earth once more covering itself in leaves and flowers and fruits? What is more joyful than the birds beginning to sing again? This happiness that we receive for nothing should be given priority protection by a politics which is concerned with the well-being of each and every one of us. (2004, 231)

This passage from Irigaray draws on the features of human life we want most for ourselves and for those we love. Rather than using the kind of narrow definition of “right to life” that only considers the life of a fetus, Irigaray looks instead at the very condition of possibility for all life. Whether it is human life, animal life, or vegetable life, all life needs air, water, light, the sun, and the earth. Yet, the basic needs that the environment fulfills do not go far enough in describing the happiness that is possible for humans, a happiness directly related to the earth itself. Certainly, those of us who have lived in places where winter can be harsh know how those first signs of spring—such as crocuses coming up through the snow—can renew the spirit, inspire hope, and bring happiness.

Irigaray’s descriptions about protecting mothers and children, laws that respect sexual difference, and having a thriving environment are all inspiring and provide ample fodder for the creative imagination. Her work inspires her readers to participate in imagining a future based on happiness, love, and sexual difference. Her work describes a world in which people and the environment are regulated by love and sharing rather than economic exchange, which leads to militarism and environmental destruction (2008). Even so, her work provides few concrete details as to how we can transform the patriarchal societies she describes in her early work to societies that respect sexual difference described in her newest work.

The Role of Activists’ Stories in Social Transformation

Social transformation is impossible without recognition that something is wrong with current institutions and relationships, and it is also impos-

sible without some vision of a society with just institutions and relationships. The gap between a society that is clearly unjust, especially for mothers and children, and one that is peaceful and honors mothers and children can seem so wide that people become overwhelmed by all the personal and social changes that would have to take place. In the face of this chasm, many people choose to simply continue with the status quo in the hope that they can protect themselves and their families from the worst injustice by staying silent even though they wish society were different. Others continue with the status quo because they believe one person cannot make a difference when injustice pervades every aspect of society. The challenge, then, is to find a way to inspire people to act on their ideals. This is why examples of activists with whom we can identify can be a powerful source of social change.

In her work on activist mothering, Nancy A. Naples uses interviews and case studies of activist-mothers to research:

the ways in which women from different low-income communities in the United States come to identify and then challenge the relations of power that circumscribe their lives. What contributes to the process of politicization and what strategies are effective for fighting social and economic oppression at the local community level? Why do women of different racial, ethnic, class, cultural, and geographic backgrounds engage in these struggles, and what keeps certain women fighting despite minimal gains or even further devastation of their neighborhoods or towns? (1998a, 329)

The answer to this question seems to be that these mother-activists develop their passion for justice and their perseverance not only by virtue of how they are raised as individuals but also through the relationships that they develop with their communities (1998a, 329–333). Through years of research about mothers from diverse backgrounds across the United States, Naples uncovers the ways in which women take issues and concerns about poverty, education, and discrimination out of the private sphere and into the public sphere in order to achieve political change. When oppression is effectively confined to the private sphere, mothers remain isolated and struggle to support their families, but not to change institutional structures. The significance of activist mothers is that they bring their personal concerns into their community work and their personal experiences become the impetus for political change (1998b, 149–150). While Naples uses sociology to examine the

motivation for the activism of mothers engaged in the War on Poverty, this book focuses on the examples of four individual mothers working against U.S. militarism in order to dispel the myth that individuals cannot effect change against deeply ingrained institutional injustice; the myth that mothers' actions ought to be limited to the private sphere; and the myth that people should only act if they can guarantee their actions will have the desired results.

In order to further understand the purpose of examining the stories of how Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson became activists, I will turn to the work of Stanley Cavell. In *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*, he focuses on the role of autobiography in philosophy, but his comments are helpful in thinking about the effectiveness of philosophy in analyzing activist stories as well (1994). Cavell provides insight into how individual experience points beyond itself. In particular, he states that, “[a philosophical education] is an education that prepares the recognition that we live lives simultaneously of absolute separateness and endless commonness of banality and sublimity” (vii). When we study moments from the particular story of an individual, those moments reveal both the separateness and commonness of every human life. The stories of Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson and their activism are stories that could not happen to any other person; even so, each mother's acts have significance for other women, mothers, and activists.

Cavell uses this same observation to make another point when he writes, “The philosophical dimension of autobiography is that the human is representative, say, imitative that each life is exemplary of all, a parable of each; that is humanity's commonness, which is internal to its endless denials of commonness” (11). While philosophy frequently has the reputation of being difficult and beyond the understanding of the average person, Cavell makes an argument for philosophy's role in revealing common experiences. The stories of Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson all provide examples of an individual person's capacity to challenge injustice and to provide examples of how the world could be a better place for all people.

Although many of Cavell's observations about autobiography apply to personal stories as well, the two differ in some important ways. Cavell begins his comments on autobiography in philosophy by reflecting on the arrogance for which philosophy is known, and he proceeds to list as examples Augustine, Kant, Nietzsche, Hume, Emerson, Thoreau, and Austin (3). Since all of his examples are men, it seems appropriate that a feminist analysis introduces women to the conversation and shifts the

ground so we gain insight about humanity from others, not just from oneself. Another advantage of analyzing others' stories rather than using autobiography is that we are not caught in the difficulty of using "we" instead of "I" that Cavell describes: "Their basis is autobiographical, but they evidently take what they do and say to be representative or exemplary of the human condition as such" (8). When we study biography, the answer to why a philosopher would use "we" instead of "I" becomes clear since I (the philosopher) am studying someone else in order to gain insight into how the other person's actions inspire others and are aimed at others. The mothers in this book also create a "we" because their activism is not a solitary endeavor for their own benefit; their activism is inspired by relationship and aimed at relationship. Even when their actions are solitary and even when they face resistance from their communities and families, these women always have an awareness of the connections between all people and are part of a "we." Cavell overlooks the ways in which relationships can inform philosophy because he has only focused on purely abstract philosophy and the arrogance of autobiography, both of which are overcome by philosophical biography.

While Cavell analyzes autobiography for its philosophical significance, Keith Lehrer analyzes individual stories from a person's life for their significance to understanding the person. From Lehrer and Cavell, I want to emphasize that particular stories have significance beyond themselves. In "Stories, Exemplars, and Freedom," Lehrer offers other important insights into how life stories can provide examples that are useful for understanding beyond that particular story. He examines the purpose of using particular exemplars from a person's life in order to consider how those exemplars tell the story of one's life (Lehrer). Lehrer uses the theory of John Martin Fischer from *Our Stories* to argue that the story of one's life is made up of the actions of that person's life (Fischer), and while the story and the actual life may not always coincide, the exemplars are still significant for understanding how a person wants to represent herself or himself (Lehrer 1–17). His point is significant for this book since each of the women is described in numerous ways by numerous sources. Some people have described these women as "bad mothers," as "nutcases," and "dangerous." I will highlight the stories that reveal them as brave, visionary, and caring. The discrepancy between these descriptions comes from perspective. Those with negative perceptions have a stake in maintaining the status quo, while the perspective that I am advocating exposes the inequity of the status quo.

The concern for objectivity is also a focus for Genevieve Lloyd when she considers the purpose of autobiography in philosophy. She focuses on the autobiographies of St. Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Jean-Paul Sartre, she studies each of these biographies for their perspective on “relations between truth, time, and selfhood” (170), and she concludes that all of these fail to provide an objective account of a true self (184). Lloyd’s concern that autobiography be objectively true neglects the reality that all stories about ourselves and others are shaped in their telling by the purpose of the telling and who tells the story. Nevertheless, Lloyd introduces an important consideration that I apply to my analysis of the narratives of the four mother-activists in this book. According to Lloyd, “An autobiography is as much the expression of a present self as it is the representation of a past one” (170). In the case of philosophical autobiography, the point of studying oneself as an object is to come to some sort of insight about an objective truth that is made visible by one’s particular case. In the case of philosophical biography, the point of studying other people’s narratives is to provide examples that can be applied to other situations and in other lives.

Chuanfei Chin provides another perspective that can help clarify why the stories of individual women can provide insight into larger cultural phenomenon. In her article, “Margins and Monsters: How Some Micro Cases Lead to Macro Claims,” Chin draws several conclusions about how micro observations can apply to macro claims that will be helpful for understanding why case studies of women activists can tell us something about larger cultural issues for women and mothers, particularly issues related to building a culture of peace and nonviolence (341–357). Chin’s study focuses on historical accounts of people at the margins of society and what those cases reveal about the majority of society. While she applies her analysis to historical studies, this analysis is applicable for other theoretical accounts of biography and memoir used to make larger claims about a society. In this book, I am using the examples of four mothers who engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience in order to reveal the ways in which U.S. policies and practices jeopardize children’s well-being. Their examples also reveal the variety of peaceful means that mothers can use to oppose that violence.

One important way in which historians use micro cases, according to Chin, is to consider how the majority views those who are marginalized (341–357). The question of how Rush, Naar-Obed, Sheehan, and Wilson are viewed by the majority of society is an especially relevant question in my analysis since they are all marginalized by society as