

# Mothering Peace

by Glenda Cloughley

presented at celebrations of the 93<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 23 April 2008, Canberra

I have been thinking about mothering peace from the point of view of my great-grandmother, Margery Cloughley, while reading in the latest *Quarterly Essay*<sup>1</sup> about a hot social issue that's been dubbed the "mother wars".

What would Margery have made of these mother wars, which the "covert ideology" of "post-maternalism" is spawning alongside a regard for maternal love as "an anti-commodity relationship"? All her life, Margery cared for children — firstly as the oldest of 13 siblings, and then as the mother of eight, including my grandad George and two other sons who sailed from southern New Zealand to the horrific theatres of the First World War.

The essayist, Anne Manne, worries that the mother wars are gaining territory in all Western economies as women are conscripted into the workforce away from their young children for economic reasons associated with the problem of funding the aging population. She turns to the literature of self psychology and psychotherapy to show why it is a short-sighted strategy to promote fulltime non-family care of babies and young children as a social norm.

I approach my subject via the same literature, which identifies uncontained anxiety, aggression and rage — war-mongering emotions all! — as outcomes of poor mothering. But the task I have set myself is to identify some psychological foundations of healthy, which is also to say peace-fostering, cultures.

I'm coming to 'Mothering Peace' this way rather than from a critical perspective because of practical observations, made in psychotherapeutic work. These teach that reinforcing the good and working with the humanity we are all hard-wired to bring into being are better therapeutic strategies than working *against* what's going wrong. I'm pretty sure Margery would have agreed with this line of approach. It seems she learned and passed on a conclusion I have come to through my own experience of being mothered and mothering and my studies in developmental and cultural psychology, archaeomythology and poetics. This is that wherever you look in the world, at whatever

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<sup>1</sup> *Love and Money – The Family and the Free Market* (Issue 29, 2008) by Anne Manne, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne

time in history or prehistory, the cultural health and ethical development of societies reflects the psychological maturity of individuals, and that always begins with mothers' bodies and the family environment people experience as young children.

I see mothering as an urgent issue of public health, upon which the prospects for peace in the world depend. I believe it will become an ever more significant issue as the roll out of climate change brings unprecedented trauma and tensions to relations between people through the displacement of millions of climate refugees and escalating polarisation of wealth, availability of food and poverty. Last month in *The Guardian Weekly*, climate scientist James Lovelock said he expected 80% of the human race to be wiped out by 2100. It's not a good sign that the global consequences of climate change have already been recognised by members of the United States Senate as a "clear and present danger to the security of the US".

So, now to the mothering of peace, and the origins of real security.



This photograph of Margery Cloughley, nee Munro, who lived from 1869 – 1948, was taken the year after George, her oldest child, and Lex, her third son, had returned from war service in France, where her second son Lionel was killed, aged 21.

The following photograph of Margery with her husband Alex Cloughley and their brood was taken less than 10 years earlier, outside their farmhouse in Riverton, the beautiful, strong place where the Aparima River meets the Pacific Ocean on the south coast of the South Island of New Zealand. You might get some sense of the natural splendour of Riverton — the second-oldest European settlement in New Zealand — from my Mum’s remark that it would be the Riviera of the South if the weather were a just a wee bit better.



*These Cloughleys are (back, from left) Irwin, Lex, George, Lionel; (seated) Alex and Margery; (front from left) Violet, Ivy and Myrtle. (The eighth child, Roy, had not been born at the time of this photo.)*

In one of several family histories I consulted, my Auntie Evelyn says Margery spent many of her early years helping with babies and twelve growing brothers and sisters. The far south of New Zealand was settled by Scots, and Margery’s father is said to have been a little against the match to young Alex Cloughley because he didn’t want a “tribe of Irish brats” as grandchildren. Fortunately, Auntie Evelyn was able to report that the “Irish” grandchildren turned out to be “a happy and dignified family”.

This obviously had a lot to do with Margery who – like her mother and grandmother before her – insisted that all the children get as much education as possible. The Cloughley kids were musical, and after they’d left school — the older five at 12 or 14

years, as was common before the war — she sent them to the local convent for private tuition in various musical instruments, singing and other arts, including embroidery and painting. Lionel learned Maori, which must have been unusual for a Pakeha boy in the early twentieth century. The Cloughleys hosted social gatherings where they played their instruments, sang and danced.

## GALLIPOLI

Now, to Gallipoli via another local and family history, *The Riverton Boys*, which my uncle David compiled from First World War diaries, journals and letters.

My grandad was the liveliest writer among the young Riverton soldiers. He took a compassionately observant view of the terrible, wartorn world of Gallipoli and the French battlefields where he lived for three years and three months after landing at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915 — the day he saw a dead body for the first time. Some of his words are obscured by tears, and many more tears have been shed over them by three later generation of Cloughleys.

As you read the following journal entries, imagine what kind of 20-year-old man thinks like this.

**3 May 1915.** I shall not forget the next morning in a hurry. From a certain point of view one could get a clear view of last night's battlefield. Along a ridge we could see a long row of dead. Down the gully dead were lying everywhere where they had died while the stretcher bearers were taking them down to the dressing stations. But for a change there was no sniping, and what was left of Otago<sup>2</sup> trudged their way to the beach. They were haggard, weary and depressed. I searched in vain in the depleted ranks for faces I knew.

Stragglers were coming in for two days after lying hidden behind any sort of cover, not daring to move and crawling back by night.

Some men were always happy, a few Australians went past and one (just a boy) had got a piece of shrapnel inside his water bottle. The bottle of course was useless, but he trudged along whistling a ditty and rattling the shrapnel ball to keep time.

The work of the stretcher bearers was splendid. ... When one considered it, it was touching to see big rough men who had played Old Harry in Cairo<sup>3</sup> and had since done the same with the pride of the Turkish Army, now carrying their wounded comrades down those steep banks so gently, so tenderly.

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<sup>2</sup> the southern New Zealand battalion

<sup>3</sup> on shore leave from the ANZAC troopships on the journey from Australia and New Zealand

That day I was down at the beach just in time for a few shells but found some Riverton Boys and learnt that they had been very lucky. ...

**8 May 1915.** As days went on we began to notice a terrible stench at night. It is surely the most awful factor in trench warfare, it is bad enough to see the dead lying about in all sorts of positions on the terrible No Man's Land, but the smell is worse. It seems to fairly penetrate. But after a time one does not take any notice! A man is a funny creature in wartime and has no connection with civilisation. He takes things as they come. If he is going to "stop one," he will, if not, he won't. After an attack has been made and has not been a success he just sits down on his worldly belongings and prattles his feet to imaginary music, and if he has taken part in a great victory he just does the same.

**12 June 1915.** Hundreds of sick men were going away every day. The food was rough, one had no desire to eat the same kind of "stuff" day after day. There was no hope of getting anything palatable. For an apple, an orange, one would have given a fortune. Worst of all our mails were not reaching us, we were cut off from the outside world. Nothing cheers a man like a letter from Home and nothing disappoints him ---- [tear] ... But it is wonderful how he will ---- [tear] Apart from the heat and flies Anzac ---- [tear] ideal spot for a weekend, the coun--- [tear] pretty about May, there were many wild flowers, birds and insects, especially b---- The sea is smooth and warm, easily one of the best bathing places in the world. On the flat towards Salt Lake were fig trees and orange palms, while towards Anafarta one could see peaceful little farms and old men tilling the soil with the same old wooden plough and two bullocks. We could also see sheep and cattle and little plots of grape vines. The nights were beautifully mild and warm, if we weren't on duty we used to gather in little bunches and sing and yarn by the hour. The Indians used to hold concerts on their own and make a most unearthly noise. The Turks' concerts in their trenches were even worse, like our fellows they had their concerts in bomb-proof shelters. I used to like to sit on top of the hills behind us by myself. In the firing line one would hear occasional shots fired at imaginary targets and the muffled explosions of ---- [tear] hear someone singing, "I wonder if you miss --- [tear] ...

It's tempting with documents like this to focus on what they say. But my job usually involves listening to untold stories. And the untold story I've been listening for in Grandad's journals and letters is the mother's.

At a literal level, Margery is as absent from these accounts as the family home George was missing. Yet in a very significant, psychological way she is present. You can infer quite a lot about George's good-enough experience of mothering from his softness and

steady, reflective sense of self in the appalling situation of the Gallipoli campaign.<sup>4</sup> He demonstrates obvious capacities to empathise and make meaning as he writes or sits alone, comforting himself with music and thoughts of the people he loves.<sup>5</sup>

## **EMPATHY**

I want to emphasise the significance of empathy because this is the psychological foundation stone upon which compassion and peace are built. Just as lacking the imaginative ability to participate in the emotional experience of another is the first diagnostic criterion for borderline personality disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV* of the American Psychiatric Association, so can it be said that the capacity for empathy is the primary indicator of a healthy sense of self. People rarely grow empathy when they haven't been given it. And people who can't empathise don't know how to play, can't really be creative, and shouldn't be in charge of any human area of public policy because by definition they lack the capacity to think about the effect of policy on the lives of the people who will be affected by their decisions.

This is pause for reflection. In a thesis of 1997, I wrote of many world leaders who have lacked this quality because of traumatic early childhood experiences that they sought defensively to compensate through political omnipotence.<sup>6</sup> These are not only children who suffered cruel, abusive parenting in circumstances of poverty, like Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin and Saddam Hussein. Winston Churchill, like many materially privileged Englishmen of his class, was a lonely, terribly abandoned child. Both the parents of Slobodan Milosevic committed suicide. Osama bin Laden is reportedly one of 52 children of his father. And George W Bush is not looking too good. We can perhaps draw some inferences about the President's experience of mothering from Barbara Bush's uncompassionate view that people at a relocation centre in Houston in September 2005 were faring better than before Hurricane Katrina, which had killed some of their loved ones and dispossessed them of homes, jobs, pets and all their belongings. "So many ... were underprivileged anyway, so this, this is working very well for them", she said. You may also remember the "haves and have mores" speech of her son in the documentary movie, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and the ruthless omnipotence with which he

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<sup>4</sup> Official Australian War Memorial and New Zealand Government figures, quoted 22 April 2008, report that 8709 Australians and 2721 New Zealanders lost their lives at Gallipoli. <http://anzac.homestead.com/casualties.html>

<sup>5</sup> Insecure early environments are reported by many soldiers who suffer from severe combat fatigue and post-traumatic stress.

<sup>6</sup> *The Resounding Silence*, MSc (Hons) thesis in Social Ecology, available at the Australian Digital Theses Program, <http://library.uws.edu.au/adt-NUWS/public/adt-NUWS20030707.091117/index.html>

promulgated war against Iraq to give a target to American anxiety, aggression and rage after the 9/11 attack.

In 1935, the same year that an emotionally deprived child, by then Chancellor Hitler, began rearming Germany through universal military service, Margaret Lowenfeld wrote in her book *Play in Childhood*:

The forces of destruction, aggression, and hostile emotion, which form so powerful an element for good or evil in human character, can display themselves fully in the play of childhood, and become through this expression integrated into the controlled and conscious personality. Forces unrealised in childhood remain as an inner drive for ever seeking outlet, and lead men to express them not any longer in play, since this is regarded as an activity of childhood, but in industrial competition, anarchy, and war.

The logic that underlies ... phantasy (during the child's play) ... is ... at utter variance with the logic of the conscious mind, and man's disharmony with himself is due to the fact that he is unaware of this situation; that once childhood is over, he takes his games for reality, his fantastic conceptions of the world for political sanity, and his momentary myths for considered thought.

At the relatively powerless (albeit psychologically healthier) end of engagement in the First World War, there are some touching letters from France in which my grandfather George tried to comfort his father and mother from his own heartsick grief about Lionel.

### **WOMEN AND PEACE**

I do not know how my great-grandmother responded to Lionel's death. Although she had campaigned within the family to keep him at home, believing he was too young and not strong enough for soldiering, her political attitude to war was less publicly stated than mine. Nevertheless, I like to think that the 1300 women who gathered in The Hague at the same time as her oldest son landed at Gallipoli spoke as fully for her as did the Lament I helped 150 of us sing in the Australian Parliament on 18 March 2003 for all the mothers and fathers and children whose lives were about to be shattered in Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> LAMENT  
Open the doors of the chambers of your heart  
Open your minds to our song  
We sing for peace through the power of love  
Hear the wisdom of women, hear our song  
  
Weep for our sisters in danger  
Weep for our brothers and children  
Sound the cries of grief and despair  
Sound the lament for the dead

words Glenda Cloughley, music Judith Clingan, 14 March 2003 (see [www.chorusofwomen.org.au](http://www.chorusofwomen.org.au))

The unanimous resolutions reached at the April 1915 congress, where the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was founded, begin with these words:

We women, in International Congress assembled, protest against the madness and the horror of war, involving as it does a reckless sacrifice of human life and the destruction of so much that humanity has laboured through centuries to build up.

Just as the effective mothering of Margery Cloughley can be inferred from George's wartime journal, so is a politically unclaimed, collective maternal potency implicit in this statement and the principles of a permanent peace articulated at that congress.

The harmonising, life-protecting powers of women have since been recognised in Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council, which addresses the impact of war on women and also specifies women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. These powers are not represented in the sculptures of Anzac Parade, Canberra — the avenue leading to the Australian War Memorial. To me, their most exquisite representation lives in the National Gallery of Australia.



*Madonna of Humility, c.1470. Ferrara, Italy. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra*

Since my first pregnancy 22 years ago, I have made many visits to feel the wondrous potency between the eyes of this mother and her ecstatic, smiling baby. Whenever I look at them I know that although there is much blind and cruel omnipotence in the world, the vast, as yet untapped political as well as personal possibilities for love and the constellation of kindly divinities are renewed in every child who knows itself in a mothering gaze like this.

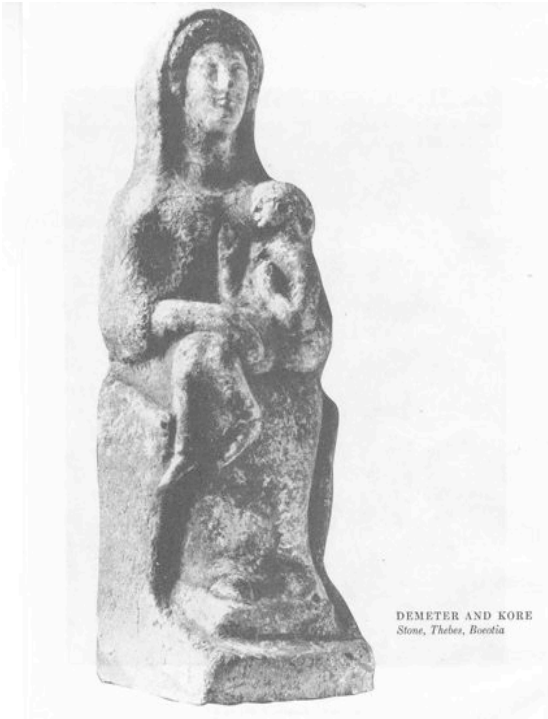
That an impulse to make evocative images of the life-giving bodies of mothers is felt by people all over the world is suggested in the following selection — from friends in Alice Springs, a West Arnhem Land bark painting, and images from many cultures in Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother*:



Geography of Skin. *Anonymous photographer, Alice Springs*



Maralaitj by Yirawala 1894-1976, Gunwinggu tribal group, Croker island.  
West Arnhem Land bark painting of Maralaitj, the creator ancestress giving birth to the northern tribes.  
Ochre on eucalyptus bark. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



DEMETER AND KORE  
*Stone, Thebes, Boeotia*



MOTHER AND CHILD  
*Egg-shaped vessel, Peru, pre-Columbian*



ISIS WITH HORUS  
*Copper, Egypt, c. 2040-1700 B.C.*



THE GODDESS RATI  
*Wood, Bali, XIX century*

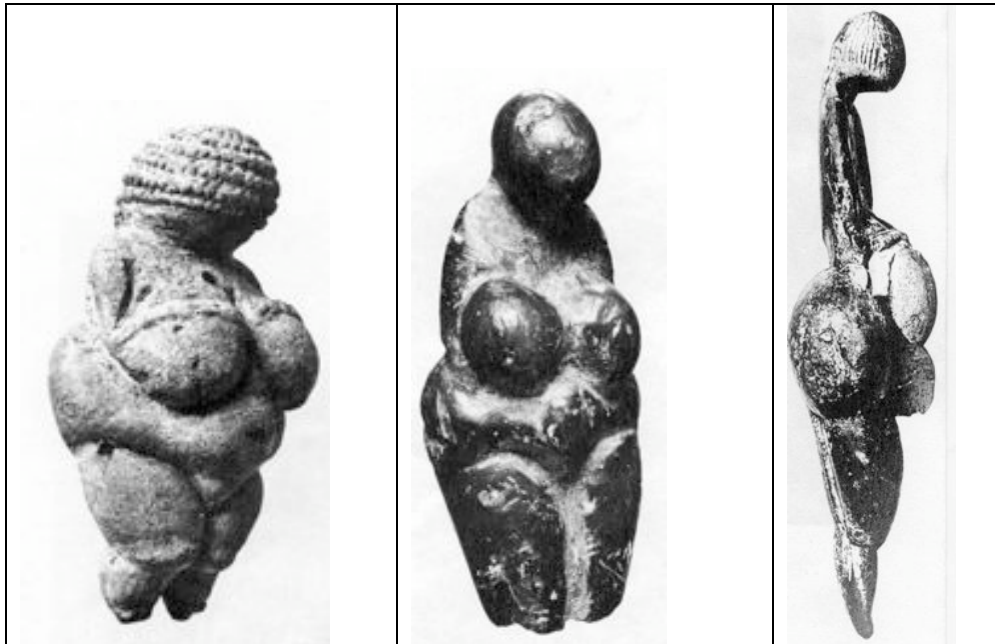


MOTHER AND CHILD  
Wood, Yoruba, Nigeria



CELTIC MOTHER GODDESS  
Stone, 11 century A.D.

There is no evidence of war between humans in the Palaeolithic period of European prehistory. The most obvious feature of the 20,000 – 30,000-year-old images from that period is that they portray the bodies of mothers (or grandmothers).



Upper Palaeolithic figurines: (from left) Willendorf, Austria (limestone); Menton, Austria (soapstone); Lespugne, France (mammoth ivory).

Many scholars claim these figurines also represent the sacred Earth. In the Neolithic period, from about 10,000BC, agriculture, settlement and trade flourished without war in south-eastern Europe for some four – five millennia until hostile, climate-traumatised warriors from the desertified Russian Steppes moved west in successive invasions. Mother Earth, symbolised most often as a human mother, dominated European imagery through the long peace, then gradually gave way to images of heroes as warrior-colonisers of nature and people.

As climate begins again to pressure populations of people and other species, it is worth contemplating anew the common wisdom about our kinship with the earth known by all indigenous people, which is certainly held in the maternal images of the European heritage. Aspects of this wisdom, and an attitude to action that springs from it, were written some 2500 years ago by an unknown Greek poet in the Homeric Hymn to Gaia, the Greek name of the Earth.

### **Hymn to Gaia<sup>8</sup>**

Gaia, I will sing to the mother of all  
Gaia, I will praise the source of all  
Whoever is of the land and sea  
The many who fly in the sky  
Gaia, all are nourished from your wealth

Gaia, out of your treasures come children and fruit  
You grant birth and death — the law of life  
Food-giving land, thriving herds  
Houses filled with good things  
Gaia, your kindly blessings bring happiness

Gaia, order and beauty spring from you  
The city you honour enjoys good laws  
The children play merry with fresh-budding joy  
The maidens dance in the flowering fields  
Greetings, mother of gods and wife of the starry sky  
Gaia, I will remember you in another song

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<sup>8</sup> My lyric and choral music of the Hymn to Gaia were composed for Canberra's A Chorus of Women from Jill Hayman's translation of the ancient Greek text.