

# *Teachers as Mothers*

## *Practices of Subversion*

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### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the possibilities for women teachers to use their maternal connotations to their teaching in differently conceptualizing themselves as mothers and teachers. The paper draws on Irigaray's theories of mimesis and Foucaultian notions of power and the care of the self to understand women teachers' use of their maternal teaching positions to go beyond the limiting social expectations of themselves as teachers as mothers. The theoretical explanations of practices of subversion are used in combination with the articulations of three women teachers' understandings of themselves as women and mothers and their ethics of care in particular. Their accounts of their caring selves are considered to be both practices of the care of the self and practices that subvert the usual discourses of the maternal and teaching.

### **Introduction**

*I let her grow slowly  
In the womb of my dreams  
And I was afraid that she dies  
If I try to give birth to her  
But it grew and got full  
And proliferated so much-  
So much-  
I couldn't keep hold of her  
and finally I gave birth to her and laid her slowly  
in the crib of hope*

This is part of a poem entitled *Komunjoni* – (Communion) in *Izda Mhux Biss* – (But Not Only) (Grech Ganado 1999:31) a book of poetry written by Maria Grech Ganado a Maltese woman, teacher, mother and poet. The images provoked by Maria are clearly those of the maternal but coming to know Maria through a series of conversations about herself as a teacher and about her philosophy of education, I

started to read a story of a teacher who makes herself through the making of others. I am using her writing as a symbolization of the maternal dimension in many women teachers' thoughts about themselves and their teaching; an aspect which is rarely taken seriously in thinking about the formation of teachers' selves.

This paper draws on my earlier study of the formation of the teachers as mothers within the Maltese context and the stories of a number of women teachers who make themselves through their social positions as mothers and teachers (Galea 2002). It continues to theoretically explore the links between the maternal, teaching and knowledge and looks into strategies for/ by women that use the maternal dimensions of their work to represent themselves other than the usual. It especially focuses on how women are shaped as acceptable teachers and respectable mothers through social and self-regulatory practices that draw on socio-cultural comparisons between the bad mother and the good mother. Good mothers and good teachers focus on the care of others rather than the care of themselves. Some teachers are able to live these social expectations and use them subversively as spaces for rethinking their usual caring selves; opportunities for taking care of themselves and giving birth to alternative selves.

This paper draws on the work of Luce Irigaray and Michel Foucault to theorise these practices of subversion. Foucault's idea that power and relations of power are "changeable reversible and unstable" (Foucault 1984: 12) and that persons are vehicles of power rather than mere subjects of power is drawn upon to explore how women use their maternal and teaching positions to take care of their selves. Irigaray's thoughts about mimetic strategies for women who have been constrained by discourses of the maternal, share Foucault's convictions that it is possible to use one's positions within networks of power for thinking about themselves differently. The paper's main argument is that the representation of the knowledges of teachers symbolizes women teachers as creators of knowledge especially through a metaphorical use of the maternal dimension in their work.

The paper does not include an analysis of stories of women teachers. However it draws on the narratives of Maria's and those of Sonya and Martina (from conversations I had with these women) to show how women's articulations of their maternal selves can be important sources of theorizing subversions of the conventional ways of thinking of the teacher and mother. Within this framework and through the methodological conviction that conversations are events for women to symbolize their selves in their own ways, the usual descriptions of Sonya and Martina could impose limits on who they are.

Descriptions of Martina as 37, married, a student teacher and a mother of four children and Sonya a 37 year old single woman teacher who has taught in secondary schools and is now teaching in a higher education institution, are fixed portraits that highly contrast with their more fluid, changing and ambiguous maternal and teaching selves.

### **Maternal Formations**

Similar limited conceptions of women and/or teachers can take shape when speaking of women teachers as mothers. Defining teachers in maternal terms can be considered a problem for women teachers who would want to be professionally recognised as having the specialized knowledge and techniques for teaching efficiently and effectively. It may also seem problematic to teachers who struggle with/in a profession that has been feminized. One can argue that portraying women through discourses of the maternal can highlight their feminine biological relatedness to the natural and reinforce patriarchal discourses that relegate women to unimportant sides of binary divisions. Discourses of teaching as mothering relocate these problems to women teachers and reinforce the idea of teaching as woman's true profession. Several studies show that women teachers' identification with their motherly role serves as a justification for their inferior status in the teaching profession and also for their exploitation. The maternal connotations represent their teaching as instinctual and natural. They limit and degrade teachers work as well as neutralise their intellectual and political engagements. (Casey 1990, Munro 1998, Dillabough 1999)

These authors argue that the definition and representation of the maternal as natural, normal and effortless has much to do with the maintenance of power and gender relations that pressurize women teachers into maternal caring roles. These representations, as well as discourses that highlight the satisfactions and pleasures of engaging in teaching practices founded on maternal care, form part of processes by which teachers regulate their selves as essentially caring selves. Essentialising tactics work to limit them to fixed ways of caring in teaching and caring for teaching that either leave women little time and space to become and understand themselves as other. Valerie Walkerdine (1990:19) explains that "the liberation of children conceived in progressive terms did not mean the liberation of women. In some ways it actually served to keep women firmly entrenched as carers." As Maria's metaphors imply, maternal nurturance becomes an unrecognized but essential factor in successfully implementing a progressivist idea of education where the child's growth may take over control of the teacher's life.

Genealogical studies in education that trace the formation of the idea of the teacher as we know it today, interpret discourses that depict women teachers as maternal and therefore irrational and emotional as disciplinary mechanisms of the social control of citizens. (Boler 1999, Weiler and Middleton 1999, Jones 1990, Grumet 1988, Galea 2002). Such studies show that maternal discourses in teaching soften the authoritarian and overtly coercive disciplinary practices to help students regulate themselves into acceptable behaviours through a pedagogy of love. This pedagogy of love (Boler 1999) starts out as a teaching methodology that uses gentle but effective ways of disciplining the class. A teacher's compliance with such methodologies is rewarded. She gains a reputation of being a good teacher by taking 'to heart' the love of the children under her care. She is the one that is especially competent in attracting children and getting their love. Through this special bond the link with the family of the child is established. The teacher reaches out to the community and becomes part of the family surveillance group that includes the social worker, the parish priest and the doctor/midwife.

Madeleine Grumet (1988) highlights these regulatory functions of the uses of mothering in schooling that have changed forms from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to this date. However, as she argues, cults of maternal teaching did not really transfer the intimate relations between the mother and child to school settings. It has left teachers, particularly women, struggling with contradictory obligations to take care of the individual particularities of their students' personal, social, emotional and intellectual development and at the same time direct themselves towards a pedagogy that the school considers appropriately transmissive of existing social relations. The formation of the maternal connotations of teaching and their social reproducing functions can also be read between the lines of a Maltese history of education (Galea 2001). But the struggles of teachers with the maternal connotations to their teaching are mostly depicted in the everyday stories of many teachers and student teachers who strive with school limits of spaces and time to actualize their caring through pedagogies that provide children with what they are entitled to. Rigid school timetables, rituals and boundaries, teacher talk within staffroom, the control visits by administration persons and the intensification of time are some factors that tend to normalize teachers into kinds of teaching that enhance their social respectability (Hargreaves 1994, Zembylas 2001, Munro 1998, Galley 1994) and that ensure control of the developing processes of the child towards what is socially denoted as acceptable and normal.

### **Metaphors of reproduction**

The reproducing connotations of the maternal can be taken as metaphors of the reproductive dimensions of those teachers' works that ensure the unquestioned transmission of existing dominant forms of knowledge, values and unequal social relations. They especially point to women's reproducing functions of the patriarchal power networks through their teaching. Critical pedagogies that aim to make teachers conscious of such reproductive forces point to cracks within these systems and suggest how relations of domination can be unblocked (Apple 1993, McLaren 1995, Sultana 1997). Yet, many critical pedagogies are caught up in reproducing their truths and missions (Middleton 1993). This point highlights the ambiguities of theories of change that use the very same reproductive practices that they aim to subvert. One may argue that the commitment towards social transformation is itself grounded within discourses of reproduction that make the teacher/mother responsible for the formation of new social worlds. Lawler (2000) makes a similar point when she refers to feminist theories that see mothers as propagators of change in social gender relations. She explains that these feminist ideas borrow the reproducing tones of Winicott's theories of the love and care of the mother for the creation of stable rational, autonomous selves and social democratic harmony.

The same can be said about teachers who are aware of the historical and social contexts of their reproductive tendencies. Teachers realize that they border on the reproductive terrain because even the task of questioning the familiar necessitates the reproduction of the attitudes and skills of questioning; the generation of existing frames of thought. Reproductive tendencies of teachers are also evident with their preferences to work with like-minded colleagues or reward students with similar ways of thinking. (Hargreaves 1994)

The parallelism between the association of teaching with mothering and reproductive aspects of teaching highlights the difficulties and even impossibilities of teachers to completely step outside the reproductive and maternal aspects of their work. And one can argue that it is not useful for teachers to do so on the condition that they retain a critical awareness of it and the political commitment to redefine it. In line with this frame of thought it is important to be aware of the debilitating effects of essentialising women's and teachers subjectivities through the discourse of teaching as mothering. However it is not beneficial for teachers to renounce their associations with mothering. The discourses of mothering discussed earlier subjugate and marginalize teachers but they can also be used by teachers to bring about differences in their lives as well as their students.

The maternal connotations of teaching place teachers in a high ambivalent position of power. Women teachers are subject to strong socio-cultural forms of the good teacher and the good mother but they can be subjects of alternative visions of what it is to teach in the light (or shadow) of the maternal. But how is it possible for women teachers to play with the limits of what is acceptable and create their own freedoms to make their own selves through positions conceded to them? What strategies can be taken up to use the maternal connotations of teaching to culturally symbolize women teachers in alternative forms?

### **Mimetic strategies**

In the previous section I argued that teachers find themselves ambiguously exercising reproductive acts for transformative purposes. This argument leads to thinking how systems of reproduction can be challenged when persons have been regulated through such systems and whose selves are formed and nourished through these systems.

Irigaray (Irigaray 1985a, 1985b, 1993) proposes a strategy which she terms mimesis. In her detailed studies of the phallographic formulations of feminine subjectivities in the Western world she points to the difficulties in imagining oneself woman in terms other than conventional ones. The problem lies in speaking oneself woman because in attempting to do so one finds herself caught up within phallographic discourse; not to speak oneself would leave her and other women with no articulations of femininity by their own selves.

Irigaray proposes a mimetic strategy that entails women to take up the positions conceded to them; to act out the roles that they have been assigned but in acting them out they will have the opportunity to redefine them and give them new meanings. This feminist poststructuralist understanding of the use of power frequently draws on Foucault's clear articulation of the possibility of resisting oppressive discourses; of finding within discourses themselves "*a starting point of an opposing strategy.*"(Foucault 1990a :101)

Irigaray's conception of the workings of power is similar. She argues for women's use of phallographic descriptions of the feminine to thwart limiting and oppressive discourses. The creation of new meanings within the usual and taken for granted systems of thought acts as a lever for the displacement of these systems. They open spaces for women to grow and invent themselves in other ways.



Clearly, the liberatory use of the same symbolics that oppress women is problematic and risky. Irigaray, for example, symbolizes women by using the biological, 'natural', bodily denotations of the feminine, which historically have been used to limit women. Irigaray takes this risk in one of her best and widely known symbolizations of the two lips. This image is strategically used to stress sexual difference of women but at the same time is used to broaden and displace the usual meanings of femininity. The two lips initiate an understanding of the identity of woman as multiple, fluid and changeable. (Irigaray 1985b)

Mimesis therefore is not just a matter of opposing discourses. It is an opposing strategy that reformulates existent discourses so that alternative systems of meaning, values and thinking enable women to give birth to themselves.

*To play with mimesis is thus for woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself - inasmuch as she is on the side of the 'perceptible', of matter - to ideas, In particular about herself that are elaborated by masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible', by an effect of playful repetition, what is supposed to remain invisible. The cover up of a possible operation of the feminine language. It also means 'to unveil' the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they simply are not simply reabsorbed by this function. (Irigaray 1985b:76)*

Irigaray's strategies of displacements of the maternal connotations to their lives and particularly her reading of Plato's parable of the cave, as I shall explain later on, give a good idea of how women teachers can go beyond their usual placements and become creators rather than reproducers of knowledge.

In spite of her deconstructive aims, Irigaray's playing with traits that have historically and socially been used to conceive women in essential ways, has been considered as dangerously essentialist. One of the main critiques of mimesis is that her alternative representations of femininity borrow the same universal language which feminists consider a source of oppression of women. Butler (1993) critiques Irigaray for partaking in the construction of grand narratives that oppressively constitutes women as the same. She notes this tension in Irigaray's critique of patriarchy as universal systems of thought and her inability to look at specific contexts of women's oppression and their engagement with their specific power positions related to culture, class, race, age and sexual preferences.

This issue opens up an important debate on how narratives that assume universal grounds are to be challenged. Before engaging in this debate however it is important to note that making universal claims about oppression levels out the contextual differences in the way power works. Butler is right in saying that women's oppression cannot be considered as if it were one. Irigaray's works, especially her work *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985b) Irigaray is indicative of the way Western systems of thought construct women as the same and in particular how limiting symbolisations of their feminine selves as mothers prevent them from differentiating themselves from each other. Irigaray's socio- psychological readings describe how women compete for the only place allowed to them i.e. the maternal and explain that this hinders women from establishing meaningful relations with each other. Nevertheless, even though

Irigaray's intentions are to show how women are trapped within singular and universal representations of their subjectivities, her works do not explore women's differences in reacting to them.

This debate raises some crucial questions in thinking about power, resistance and subversion. Do resistance and subversive acts only make sense within specific contexts of domination? If subversive acts function to challenge the foundational and universalizing narratives of who we are or supposed to be, what is the relation between subversive micro strategies of subversion and global formations of domination?

### **Global and Local Stories**

Other questions arise from these, namely whether it is more politically effective to take note and make use of grand or local narratives in thinking about social positions of women and what importance women teachers ideas about themselves and teaching should have in their personal and professional development. The questions touch upon a widespread concern about the usefulness, correctness and even possibility of speaking as a woman. The critique that Irigaray's theories generally speak and think of women as if they were the same, is frequently eschewed by recognising that such theories have valid suggestions applicable to particular situations.

Nancy Fraser's (1995) distinction between grand narrative and large-scale narrative is helpful in thinking about the relation between global and local narratives. Fraser explains that grand narratives that tend to give general explanations of what constitutes a subject's claim to truth. Large scale narrative or what we can call big stories give account of how male dominance works on large scale. Large scale narratives are conscious of their fallibility and seek to draw on similarities as well as differences in gendered relations according to the time, place and contexts. This highlights the relation between global workings of social systems and localized operations of power strategies. As Fraser explains, it is useful to trace out broad patterns of male dominance but such stories need to be open to the particular local narratives of oppression and subversion. These local narratives in turn cannot simply be valued as examples of difference. One needs to find the matching threads that are visible over long periods of time and/or wider contexts and understand how such threads infiltrate our own particular ways of living.

The relation between global workings of social systems on a large scale and localized networks of power can be understood by referring again to Foucault's understanding of power. According to Foucault power is everywhere. He explains that one must not think of power networks at macro- and micro spheres as if they were discontinuous and being on different levels. These work in relation to one another so that micro-practices serve to support an overall strategy. (Foucault 1990a:99-100)

Irigaray's analysis of the grand narratives that have defined women as maternal beings pays attention to the macro oppressive forces of these limited representations of the feminine. Her mimetic strategic proposals suggest general large scale pathways by which these narratives can be defamiliarised and deconstructed. However her

writings do not bring in the small tales of different women of how they live localized power relations.

Furthermore, Irigaray's texts are highly theoretical and academic and may not be familiar with those women who are looking for strategies of subversions or who would want to understand the larger political implications of their small scale subversions. Irigaray's playing with words is detached from the everyday lives of many women. Her theories would be more politically effective if they were to be read in relation to women's everyday lives, their stories and their perspectives on women, mothering, teaching and caring. As Foucault would have it, their subjugated knowledges (Foucault 1980b) can challenge dominant views of what it is to be woman, mother and teacher.

One should make clear, however, that women's representations of their own selves do not make them automatically subversive. It is the mimetic reading of their stories and particularly ways of linking the maternal to their teaching that makes them and their philosophies an enriching source of subversion.

### **Mothers of knowledge**

Irigaray's works may be esoteric but they are extremely important to coming to understand the relations between the maternal, the creation and reproduction of knowledge to draw implications for understanding of the teacher as mother. In one of her most inspiring deconstructive texts (Irigaray 1985a), she manages to "unveil" the maternal functions in one of the most influential stories of education and construction of knowledge in the West; Plato's parable of the Cave. The parable of the cave represents man's search for knowledge as a journey towards light. It is a quest for enlightenment; a process everyone should want to engage in. However this movement towards light becomes possible through the presentation of the dark cave which according to Irigaray is a symbolization of the maternal. The maternal is represented through the images of the dark walls of the underground and by states of passiveness and confusion. This symbolization represents the maternal as central to the process of acquiring knowledge. However, the maternal is symbolized as a state of captivity, a matrix for knowledge production; never itself an active agent of knowledge creation. The maternal metaphorisation of the cave renders women invisible/ visible both at the same time; They are the unacknowledged foundations of epistemological, political and educational projects.

Through this deconstructive reading of Plato's parable women's maternal teaching can be read as silently partaking in the formation of social order and the efficient running of educational systems but is never recognized in its making. The connections of the maternal with teaching are appropriated for the functional ends of the system just as Plato's representation of the maternal becomes a resource for constructing universal epistemologies. In similar ways educational systems use women's maternal functions but leave no space for articulations of their maternal productions of knowledge.



### **Maternal Knowledges**

The formation of maternal knowledges or the creation of new knowledges through maternal connotations can be an important source of subversion of the passive maternal functions in systems of knowledge and education. The association of the maternal with knowledge creation can also be a site for subverting the reproductive understandings of teaching as well as the stereotypical formulations of women as maternal carers. It is important that women do not renounce what they have become, namely mothers and teachers. They can mimetically use their situated maternal positions for imagining themselves differently and for articulating their philosophies of education.

Sometimes these teachers' thoughts about education and teaching are considered as non-knowledge especially because they are thought to be not academic enough. These knowledges have been subjugated, as Foucault would describe them. Subjugated knowledges according to Foucault are "knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task and insufficiently elaborated; naïve knowledge, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition and scientificity (Foucault 1980b: 82). However Foucault believes that they can challenge centralizing discourses and disrupt our usual ways of thinking.

The knowledges of women teachers and particularly those described in this paper are not formed outside mainstreamed cultures of teaching and mothering. Yet women's ambiguous placing within these systems; their being accepted/ not accepted at the same time helps them keep a certain distance and take up different ways of conceiving themselves as caring maternal subjects. Women in this sense can be described as being elsewhere and their dreaming of elsewhere (Tamboukou 1999) nourishes their different imaginations of teaching.

### **Dichotomies of Caring**

The pedagogies of love explained earlier focus on the use of maternal love for social and individual control. These stories show how teachers become maternal subjects to sustain and nourish others; sometimes also forgetting themselves for the sake of their students. Teachers' identities are formed through a process of annihilation of their own selves – through making oneself inconspicuous in spite of their essential positions in spheres of education. I have used Irigaray's deconstructive reading of the parable of the cave to symbolize teachers' maternal positions. However, Foucault's genealogical study of the care of the self in Western civilization is another good source for understanding women's "loss of self" through their maternal connotations. Foucault explains how the Christian renunciation of the self replaced the Greek and Roman ideas of the care of the self "*denounced as being a kind of self love, a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others or to the necessary sacrifice of the self.*" (Foucault 1984:4-5) The renunciation of the self of women teachers is reinforced by its maternalisation and especially through the influences of the Maltese ideal of femininity (Anzinger 1994) based on the socio-cultural images of the Catholic Madonna who devotes her whole self for the care of the other.

Martina and Sonya's talk about themselves draws a lot on this prevalent view of the good mother who is mainly preoccupied with the other. Yet in their own different ways they play with notions of care and love as well as with the understandings of relations with others to highlight the importance of their selves; to announce rather than renounce themselves.

In this respect, the very acts of talking about herself which are presented below; of giving time to concentrate on herself, of speaking herself, subverts maternal obligations to forget herself. Ironically, even the very act of woman speaking her loss of self entails a recognition of herself.

Martina

*"I do understand that people look at me as a mother first and foremost but how do I see myself?"*

*I want to do what is right. And I want to give all the love to my children; to the children in my class as my own. I am not happy unless I'm sure all others are happy. Now I feel I shouldn't feel guilty when I don't have time for cooking for example. I go out in the morning and my husband does the work in the house I used to do before. Still I sometimes feel guilty and I ask myself 'why?'*

*I can't lose the place I have in the home. There is the problem that when I want to do something I think "Would my children suffer or miss something?" You know having these mixed feelings.*

Sonya

*I rebelled, I looked at my mother and I rebelled. I didn't want to be like her. There are many things which I liked and I wanted to be like her and I tried to incorporate these in my life... that oscillating factor of wanting to be my mother but at the same time not wanting to.*

*"Having my own students makes me think of myself as their mother-wanting to take care of them as my children maybe because I do not have children of my own."*

*Today a woman can orchestrate her cycles in the way she likes. She can use contraceptives and control. These possibilities help a woman. But no, not kill the maternal but achieve fulfillment when and how she desires. These are such important factors in every woman's life.*

Sonya and Martina's different representations of their caring selves struggle with the gendered maxims an ethic of care and an ethic of teaching that respond to the demands of the other in maternal ways. Martina's guilt feelings of not sacrificing herself enough contrast with Sonya's imaginations of herself as a free woman.

*There was this young woman driving the car- very feminine – I was 11 years old may be older. And this young woman answers a call in her car and she says Dinner? Right now? But can I come as I am? I was so impressed by this image of this different woman!*

The powerful guilt feelings of Martina and Sonya's descriptions of the strong images of the TV advert, both share these women's desire to be other than solely mothers and carers. The question "*But can I come as I am?*" can be taken as a representation of an inquiry of a self that wants to accommodate oneself in relation to others; an attempt

that incorporates the care of the self within discourses of caring of others or even to envisage the care of others which necessitates the care of the self.

**Sonya:** *It is so important to take care of your self. Otherwise how can you take care of others who need you?*

**Martina:** *Taking care of oneself?! You need to make time. Because if you don't take care of your self you end up not being able to take care of others.*

These thoughts are good examples of mimetic practices as they play with the socially accepted notions of caring. These women's interpretations of their locations within these love/power relationships exceed the reproductive limitations of their love pedagogies. They are aware that their maternal love knows self sacrifice but it also knows of self love and a desire to cultivate one's own self which is not separate from taking care of others. These women oscillate between what is socially expected of them and the desire to love their selves which is socially considered as a taboo. Martina's and Luce Irigaray's pedagogies of love represent an ethics of care that goes beyond the binary divisions between the care of others and the care of oneself.

**Martina:** *I know I need to take care of myself more... get rid of these guilt feelings of not loving others as much as I should have. I feel I love myself when I listen, read, learn, do what I like. On the other hand I do not want to leave the mothering and the teaching to others. No, no ... I want to take care of that. I wouldn't be myself.*

**Irigaray:** *How can I love myself? Who is who in this love? I relate to myself, I affect myself, I am affected by myself. That which affects me is an attribute of mine... But who are what separates the one who loves from the one who is loved? And if both of these are separated, who or what allows them to come close again? (Irigaray 1993:60)*

## Knowledge of love

Similar oscillations between loving oneself and loving others are present in teacher's representations of their love of knowledge and their love of children. The ethics of teaching articulated by Martina and Sonya adheres to the conventional view of an ethic of care, that teaching is essentially an act of giving. At the same time they see teaching as an ethical practice of self formation.

Teachers' articulations of their knowledge of teaching and/or the desire to refine their specialized knowledge of subject content and methods of teaching resist the typical maternal attitudes of losing oneself for the sake of others. They do not see development of their professional selves as completely separate from their maternal interests and their social obligations of caring.

The dichotomies between love of self/love of others and love of knowledge/ love of children are bridged through the very broadening of the concepts of mothering and teaching that are not confined to the either/or.

Martina cares for herself when she pursues personal interests and seeks to develop herself professionally. Nevertheless she sees the development her self as a

knowledgeable person as benefiting her students as well as her own children. Her justification is a subtle subversion of the teachers' maternal obligations towards developing their students rather than their knowledgeable selves.

**Martina:** *Sometimes I know I sound convinced that what I am doing is the right thing but I do get my doubts. I know for example that I am studying and making my life better I know that my children my family will also get so much from the new things I come across; teaching methods, educational theory, teaching practice. Study time is my time but not really – others will get lots of things out of it, I hope.*

Sonya subverts obligations of self renunciation more openly. She explains that she uses her caring relationship with others to care for herself. Students expect her to give them what they need. They see her as a mother and caregiver. However she states that she cares for her students for her own satisfaction; for the gratification she gets from parents as well as for social recognition. She aims to better the lives of others but in doing so she continuously reassesses herself and makes herself an important woman within the community.

What is particular to Sonya's explanations of her practices of caring is that they do not use the altruistic language of care. They resist the social conditioning of a professional ethical conscience that obliges her to devote all their time and energy to others. She chooses to care, to establish close relations with others to make herself different. As Sonya explains

*I live through people. I live through my relationship with them. It is like having an umbilical cord; you metamorphosise your self and draw on other persons to take that which you consider important for your own being. People attract us. We feel the need to discover them, to get to know them a bit deeper. There are people that you care for whom you take as model- sometimes taking the risk to become their photocopy. There are others whom you would like to be a bit like you. These are two way processes by which we make ourselves.*

The articulations of these women reflect their philosophy of teaching as a way of life related to the maternal. This philosophy of teaching reflects their bonds with the maternal but the understandings and meanings they give to their relation with others reinterpret the maternal mainly as a process of their own growth. Teaching becomes a care of the self; a process of self creation. Their teaching philosophy mimes the cultural and social expectations of their maternal selves to search for new ways of making themselves as Irigaray explains

*If my woman's nature was considered as living matter at the service of the other's desire and of reproduction, I could not experience it as "for me" and assume its becoming spiritual through a dialectic of "me" ...*

*But I belong to a cultural tradition. My relation to the world to others and to myself is shaped by it. I had to, I still have to effect a gesture that is at least double: deconstruct the basic elements of the culture which alienate me and discover the symbolic norm which can at the same time preserve the singularity of my nature and allow me to elaborate its culture (Irigaray 2000a :148)*

### Creating her own self

*I let her grow slowly  
 In the womb of my dreams  
 And I was afraid that it dies  
 If I try to give birth to her  
 But it grew and got full I let her grow slowly  
 In the womb of my dreams  
 But it grew and got full  
 And proliferated so much-  
 So much-  
 I couldn't keep hold of her  
 and finally I gave birth to her and laid her slowly  
 in the crib of hope*

In rereading this poem one can understand Maria's philosophy of education as a symbolization of her maternal and teaching self; a practice of the care of the self through an articulation of an ethic of care for others. The growing child is what gives her the opportunity to be defined as mother and teacher. Her philosophy of life as that of her teaching remains that of growth. It is a risky philosophy of education because the growth of others may engulf her. But she strategically uses birth to give herself hope to go beyond essentialising maternal bonds; an opportunity to take care of the growth of her own self and that of others both at the same time. The thoughts of Martina and Sonya can be interpreted along the same lines. They play with self renunciation and self fulfilling practices of care that give themselves space to become other than maternal and redefine the maternal as other.

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