

the vulnerability Laike first admired in him: “a boy of two/breaks easily on concrete/the weight of suffering/crushes/a man of forty”. Ruth Panofsky doesn’t polarize husband and wife here; rather, she wisely reveals how the two respond in different shades and with varying nuance to trauma, even as that trauma all but breaks them.

Part III moves the reader to spawned suburban angst with the abusive marriage of the couple’s daughter, Hannah. In this last segment, Laike finds some healing when she finally acknowledges her daughter’s pain and her own past inability as a mother to breach the silence between them. Laike and Nahum quietly yield to their hard-won knowledge of the inevitability of loss, and in doing so, become open to renewal in a future that lies waiting. Panofsky closes the book with Nahum’s voice as he reclaims his deep love for Laike. In the following brief lines, Nahum fervently wishes his family will again be bonded. His words are a prayer and plea, supported by resolve and underlying faith: “I will/the pardoning of souls.” His words can not help but resonate with readers.

I enter the world of this delicate book and discover its humanity, uncovering new meanings with a ripple effect, which is all or more than I can hope a book of poetry will do.

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NOBODY’S MOTHER: LIFE WITHOUT KIDS

Lynne Van Luven, Ed.
Vancouver: Touch Wood Editions,
2006

REVIEWED BY BETH PENTNEY

On my long flight from Vancouver to Northern Ontario during the holiday break, I devoured the new collection of essays *Nobody’s Mother: Life Without Kids*, edited by Lynne Van Luven. First and foremost, this book wants sharing. Second, it would do well on a Women’s Studies syllabus. That it can accommodate both a popular and an academic audience is significant, since feminist literature about mothering (and non-mothering) rarely extends beyond narrow academic circles. The twenty-one authors who contribute to the collection provide a diverse terrain of voices on the subject of (biological) childlessness within a mostly-Canadian context. They earnestly explore the emotions, experiences, and ideological baggage associated with not bearing children, and they challenge well-worn gender norms in the process.

Recognizing the need for literature by women who do not have children, rather than literature about women who do not have children, Lynne Van Luven has compiled a range of essays that are poignant, direct, and witty. What emerges most clearly from the collection is the unified insistence that one need not birth a child in order to be motherly, and one need not be a mother in order to be a woman fulfilled. While this is hardly earth-shattering for many, as a PhD student in Women’s Studies struggling with the choices available to me as a female academic (children or career, rarely positioned within a “both/and” structure of thought), I see this collection as a welcome ally. In a pro-natalist culture that rewards women’s allegiance to the domestic and maternal as it simultaneously

brands the childless narcissistic or neurotic, *Nobody’s Mother* offers women and men an intelligent and insightful discussion about life without kids.

Several of the authors are successful creative writers and teachers; this makes for a smooth read and touching moments of insight that are often missing from more clinical studies of childless women. As well, the essays reflect a variety of political and personal subject positions, including contributions from Aboriginal women, lesbian women, immigrant women, women of colour, academic women, rural women, working class women, young women, and old women. The collection is heavily inflected by a West Coast authorship, which I perceive to be a strength. It would be exciting to compare a similar anthology by women from the East Coast, Northern or Central Canada. Since most of the authors call British Columbia home, *Nobody’s Mother* can be read for its regional nuances in interesting ways. Notably, the landscape factors into the essays more than one might think upon consideration of the topic at hand.

Highlights of the collection include contributions from writer Katherine Gordon, journalist Mary Jane Copps, professor Jennifer Wise, Canada Research Chair Smaro Kamboureli, writer and carpenter Kate Braid, and writer Sarah Leavitt. Katherine Gordon’s “No Child of Mine” is composed as a dialogue between herself and the voice of the typical nosy stranger, who asks all-too-familiar questions like: “Who’s going to look after you in your old age?” and “Don’t you realize how much children make you part of a community?” While some of the essays move towards sentimentalism, Gordon is direct in this mock conversation: she has never wanted kids and doesn’t think there is anything wrong with her. She is happy. She thinks that people who call non-parents “selfish” do so as a way to displace their own frustration with the “negative consequences of having children.” Her essay will

have you alternately laughing and cheering.

Nobody's Mother is not an anthology by women who hate kids. It is not an anthology by women who regret not having had children. It is a complex and varied collection that explores multiple ways to parent, and relationships between women and their mothers, women and their partners, and women and themselves. It addresses abortion, adoption, step-parenting, caretaking, travel, abuse, work, love, and writing. *Nobody's Mother* would be an excellent text for use in university courses on mothering, women and popular culture, intro to women's studies, Canadian literature, and creative non-fiction. It is also a book to pass on to women and men we know and work with outside the university, since it creates an opening for respectful discourse where little exists that is not sensationalized or condescending.

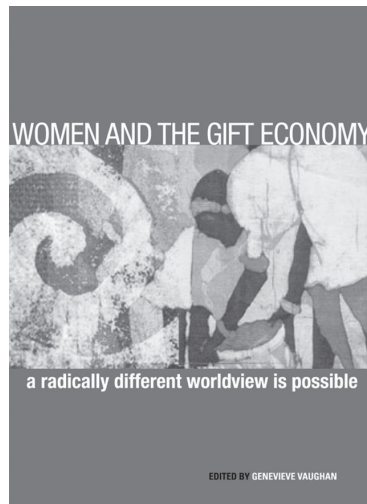
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WOMEN AND THE GIFT ECONOMY: A RADICALLY DIFFERENT WORLDVIEW IS POSSIBLE

Genevieve Vaughan, Ed.
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, Inc., 2007

REVIEWED BY JOANNA SWANGER

The World Social Forum (WSF) has performed a vital function for people dedicated to economic restructuring toward social justice and sustainable peace: it has empowered them col-



lectively by introducing them to one another. Still, much of the discourse at the WSF also demonstrates that when people convene on the basis of a shared frustration with the global economy, they might use the opportunity primarily to create a space of comfort, which is accomplished in the WSF through the ritual refrain of such grievances as corporate irresponsibility, environmental devastation, and the long-known complicity of economic structures in exacerbating racism, classism, and sexism. To go no further than this, however, means an opportunity is lost, for the question of what is to be done must be answered through dialogue and collaboration grounded in critical analysis. The 33 contributors to this creative and analytically rich volume have answered the call to continue WSF-inspired discussions and collaborate in the necessary work of peace-building through cultural change toward economic transformation.

This collection resulted from a post-WSF conference in 2004 on the theme of transforming Patriarchal Capitalism via the gift economy. The authors argue the need for a paradigm shift to make solutions visible by recasting the nature of the problem. It is not a lack of individual morals or integrity on the part of certain actors—e.g., the agents of transnational lending institutions, corporations, and the investor class—that causes the aforementioned grievances. It is

the cultural logic of exchange, the systemic imperative of near-sole reliance upon the profit motive to mobilize resources. The logic of exchange attempts to harness self-interest in the service of the greater good, but it has failed to meet needs, in large measure because this is not what it is designed to do. The cultural logic of gift giving, however, takes as its fundamental objective meeting the needs of others. Genevieve Vaughan writes: “The gift interaction is transitive and ... [creates] a relation of inclusion between the giver and the receiver... Gift giving implies the value of the other while the exchange transaction ... is reflexive and implies the value only of oneself. Gift giving is qualitative rather than quantitative, other-oriented rather than ego-oriented, inclusive rather than exclusive.”

The emancipatory potential to be unleashed by and through the gift economy begins with quelling cynicism by making manifest the extant gift economy in operation, and this collection presents wonderful examples in this vein, such as Jeannette Armstrong's description of gifting among the Sylix people of Okanagan (British Columbia); Rabia Adelarim-Chikh's discussion of solidarity economics within women's banking networks in Senegal; and Yvette Abrahams' discussion of gifting among the Khoekhoe prior to European colonialism in South Africa and vestiges of gifting that remain. This volume also contributes to liberation by excelling at highlighting the efforts of two vast groups of people who have historically been underrepresented—or ignored altogether—by prominent leftist critiques: Indigenous peoples and women. Both Jeannette Armstrong and Mililani Trask argue that what most unites Indigenous cultures in contradistinction to the culture of patriarchal capitalism is precisely reciprocity, both sociocultural and ecological. Thus, Indigenous cultures are the vanguard of workable economic structures, which, the authors