

After an 18 year gestation, I'm glad to have secured a contract for my book 'Other than Mother: Choosing childlessness with the earth in mind'. It, and its important message, will finally leave the confines of my laptop and make it into wider orbit. In updating my manuscript, bringing it right up to the present-day in terms of my own decision-making, I'm finding myself very often sobered by the attitudes of women towards women and their life choices, as reported in the media as well as found in the content of blog posts and online debates.



Image by Paul Crummay:  
<http://www.paulcrummay.co.uk/>

Of course, I've always known that writing about choosing childlessness, or 'elective childlessness' as it's officially known, was never going to be without controversy. Perhaps that's one reason why it's taken me this long to summon up the courage to put fingers to key board and finish this manuscript. And, way before writing and researching, I realised that there was no question that I was expected to follow the norm of child-rearing. In my late 20s, cautiously letting people know about my decision to remain childless when asked, I attracted attention, comment, criticism, and sometimes, derision.

What's saddening me recently is that there is so little evidence of 'live and let live' particularly between women as reported in the media. A year doesn't seem to go by without the Guardian weekend magazine featuring a woman talking about not having children, followed the next week by a letter from another woman, a mother, asking why the editor gives time to women 'bleating on' about choosing to remain childless. What ever happened to notions of sisterhood and the honouring of our differences? Interestingly, my recent experience in person has been that mothers of grown-up children are as interested in this theme as 20-somethings in the thick of thinking about whether or not to try for children.

So whilst I'm glad to have secured a book contract, I'm sometimes bewildered by the thicket of ever hotting-up views around the subject of conception, child-birth, child-rearing, and what it means to be a childless woman (and man) in a still largely pro-nuclear family, conventional world. In parallel, it also makes me more determined to write a book which is presenting a

particular point of view, hopefully with respect for myself, others and other-than-human life and our home, the world.

In pointing out that until we allow women the freedom that we give to men, we will continue to receive vitriol simply for speaking out, Zoe Williams said in a recent Guardian article:

"The endpoint of liberation will be when we rejoice in the fact that any two women can live their lives as differently as any two men can, and can say so without the necessity of an existential threat to anybody. When

the second-wave feminists said the personal was political, they didn't mean this. They didn't mean the personal instead of the political".

I'm sad to realise that perhaps now more than ever, not having children whilst inhabiting a woman's body remains a severe threat to the status quo. A much more severe threat to the status quo than being a man who doesn't even think about whether or not to reproduce. People have stopped asking me whether I'll have kids, many know about my research in this area, I guess some assume that I'm infertile or a lesbian (and conventional wisdom tells us that lesbian woman obviously can't have kids, because it's 'not natural' etcetera...) I had the privilege of co-ordinating this year's 'Body Politic' conference (as reported in this edition of Transformations), and I regret now that I didn't find a way to bring in the theme of motherhood, non-motherhood and how these relate to the politics of being a body.

Never mind—perhaps there'll be an opportunity in the future. Please do get in contact if you're interested in this theme. Perhaps when I'm less busy writing, editing and launching—when 'Other than Mother' is in her own orbit, and if there's sufficient interest, we can hold a regional PCSR event on these themes.

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