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BOOK REVIEW

***Revolutionary mothering: Love on the front lines*, edited by A.P Gumbs, C. Martens, & M. Williams. (2016). Oakland, CA: PM Press**

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Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines traces the form, content and aspirations of mothering from the margins. Inspired by and drawing on a rich legacy of intersectional Black feminist thought, the editors and contributors work to foreground radical practices of mothering as they are revealed through the labour of Black women and women of colour more broadly in the U.S., the geographic focus of this text. “Revolutionary mothering” is presented as a mothering that unsettles the status quo, which women of colour and Black women have, in particular, been uniquely positioned to do because of our coerced positioning at the margins of normative structures of power. The collection as a whole aims to resist and provide radical counter-narratives to the Eurocentric, heterosexist, and neoliberal institution of motherhood, which centrally shapes social expectations and policies involving motherhood and mothering in the U.S. From this vantage point, the editors frame the practice of mothering as a necessary political act. Mothering from the margins, in the tradition of Black feminist theory and politics, is presented as a queer practice, one that exercises a politicized love, and is directed at dismantling the logic of privatized, consumptive, heteronormative, and Eurocentric motherhood. As such, the concept of revolutionary mothering presented in this collection is not isolated to the issue of motherhood and mothering per se, but has the broader aim of examining the central role of mothering—specifically, mothering from the margins—as a practice through which to “end war, to end capitalism, to end homophobia and to end patriarchy,” as editor Alexis Pauline Gumbs states.

What does revolutionary mothering consist of, according to editors Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, as well as their contributors? It is a mothering that persists in spite of institutionalized efforts to delegitimize and thwart its capacity and potential to humanize, to nurture children into their own freedom, to socialize children into the practice of a radical love that ends cycles of violence, to engage in loving communal parenting, and to mother unhinged from capitalist and nationalist imperatives. Revolutionary mothering is a set of mothering

practices that invest in children by working against the oppressive forces and social injustices that pervade the world in which they live. The book's six sections are thematically organized to highlight various forms of revolutionary mothering according to a diverse set of voices, practices and experiences. The first section features an overview of the particular influences from the 1970s and '80s that have shaped the editors' vision for this collection. The second section reflects on mothering as a place of strength from which to confront the many challenges and hardships presented by a system of social inequality. The socio-economic reality of poverty is examined in section three, while section four considers the mothering done by Black and other women of colour as already queer by virtue of systematic efforts to attack and sabotage Black mothers and Black children on an ongoing basis. Section four also holds the voices of self-identified Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) mothers, reflecting on their mothering from this particular vantage point. Section five reflects on the process of becoming a mother, via birth, adoption, or socio-spiritual practices. Finally, section six provides visions of revolutionary mothering produced by contemporary collectives, organizations and individuals involved in thoughtful contemplation of the conditions most likely to nurture a radically equitable and inclusive future.

The collection is geared toward a broad audience of people who mother, in all the forms that this takes: biological, social, political, and spiritual. Gumbs et al. designed the book to have broad accessibility, and they do not utilize traditional academic structure for the book's organization. That is, the majority of pieces in the collection are experientially-centred, first-person reflections. The poetic form also appears throughout, alongside blog compositions that have previously appeared online. In addition, features presenting liberatory visions of revolutionary mothering link the aspirations of feminist foremothers (e.g., contributor June Jordan's "the opportunity or/and the obligation to nurture a child into his or her own freedom" through love as a life-force) to contemporary propositions for radicalized mothering (e.g., contributor Cynthia Dewi Oka's vision of a "mobile, multiple, and underground" home/state of mothering; one that is not bound to capitalism or nationalism). Because the book centres on the thinking and practices of Black women and women of colour specifically, it also speaks directly to women and folks who mother at the intersection of multiple sites of oppression. In this sense, the collection is a celebration of often ignored and devalued mothering practices, such as queer mothers and mothering, anti-capitalist/anti-racist/anti-sexist parenting, and other forms of mothering that are in a continuous struggle to even exist. As Gumbs and a number of contributors indicate, people who mother in this context are mothering against a historical legacy and a present day reality in which Black maternity (uniquely, but not exclusively) is criminalized.

Revolutionary Mothering sketches the *fight*—as described by contributors Tara Villalba and Lola Mondragón—that is mothering from the margins, both in terms of struggles and hardships faced, as well as the modes of resistance, the refusals to obey, and the insistence on joy, as contributor Mai’a Williams argues. A greater amount of space for earlier works that present radical discussions of Black mothering would have served this collection well and set a stronger foundation for the collection, given its explicit inspiration from this earlier period. The specific aims of the collection as a whole could also be more clearly articulated, particularly given the politicized nature of the content. Notwithstanding, the collection makes an important contribution to an existing body of literature on motherhood and mothering. This collection highlights the ways in which mothers engaged in mothering from the margins often struggle to access capitalist resources and are, therefore, perceived to not be mothering successfully in the neoliberal sense, in terms of time (e.g., not doing enough intensive mothering, or helicopter parenting), money (e.g., not providing enough extra-curricular activities, name brand clothing, trips), and a host of other expectations premised on racist, heterosexist, and capitalist norms. This is not revelatory in and of itself, but here is the insight: The radicalism of these mothers emanates from the unquantifiable resource that is love in the form of nurture and, importantly, such nurturance brings with it the gift of a radicalized consciousness (so says contributor Esteli Juarez) that breathes life into children. It is through this type of nurture—communal, autonomous, politicized toward freedom, dignity, equity and inclusion—that mothers, going against the grain of violence and scarcity, secure for children, and all of us, what is perhaps the most important asset of all: a better future, and a better world than the one in which we presently live.