

Making Babies/Making Kin/Making Community

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“The comedy of man starts like this:

Our brains are way too big for our mothers' hips

And so nature, she devised this alternative:

We emerge half-formed and hope whoever greets us on the other end

Is kind enough to fill us in

And babies, that's pretty much how it's been ever since”

-- Father John Misty, Lyrics to “Pure Comedy”. Genius, 2017.

<https://genius.com/Father-john-misty-pure-comedy-lyrics>

In 2008, the housing market in America crashed. This was the marker of a much larger issue within economics, involving oil, mortgages, invasions, and a million other things I couldn't comprehend as a child. The thing I most understood in this time was how it made the people I cared about feel. My parents owned a business together and lost any savings they had trying to keep it afloat before they had to close, and then file for bankruptcy. They expressed their disappointment in themselves to myself and my younger brother, always apologizing for not being able to purchase the newest toys or get us the nicest technology in the age of new touchscreen smart devices. What they were relaying to my brother and I was shame about their perceived failure within a system that was never created for the average person to succeed in.

The ‘American Dream’ is a set of ideals and morals instilled in every person living in the US which has a strong, and misguided, belief in upward mobility, prosperity, and the idea that anybody

could become wealthy if they worked hard enough. With my parents' commitment to attempt and succeed at the mythological 'American Dream', I spent a lot of time away from my mom and dad. My grandmother stepped in and took care of my brother and I while my parents were at work. In this way, I got to experience an age-old, yet simultaneously rare (especially in the US), experience of kinship. My grandparents became a second set of parents, equally valuable and important in my experience of living.

The economic system of capitalism was built with the intention that many would fail in order for a few to succeed. In areas in America, families are isolated by capitalism in varying degrees. The hours that are required for people to make living wages are so high, parents often are unable to spend time with their children. When so much of life is dedicated to labor, this leaves less time for other things which are vital to a human's wellbeing: laughter, cooking meals and breaking bread together, rearing children, and cultivating community. This impacts people depending heavily on their location, their race, and whatever class they were born in to. In case you haven't realized yet, 'upward mobility' is another myth that supports the fallacy of the American dream. People often stay within the class they were born into, and repeat the behaviors and patterns of their parents.

One of the most sinister intrinsic features of this economic system is its never-ending quest to acquire more: more time, more productivity, more wealth. This has taken its toll on the earth, through systems of extraction, which are promoted by our government for the well-being of the abstract "economy". In reality, practices like fracking, high oil consumption and ongoing military expansion poison resources, often killing many through their impacts, and trap people in lifestyles supported by meager wages. Because Americans have to work so much to simply afford their necessities, there is little time for their humanity to exist outside of the sale of their labor. This also limits the ability for people to have close and meaningful relationships of kin, those which provide mutual aid, solace, and support, within and outside the familial structures of bloodline.

As this economic system is poisoning rivers and streams in pursuit of oil, it poisons the soul of the people obliged to participate. We exist within oppressive standards that place the importance of accruing wealth over everything that makes human life so unique and invaluable -- generating culture, art, and relationships. These practices are regenerative, and instead of whacking away at our soul in the way that selling our bodies for labor does, it builds us up. Capitalism is amazing at facilitating this process at large, punishing and making acts of regeneration difficult, or even illegal at times, in favor of acts of degradation.

Environmental degradation has never been so intense or prevalent, and if business as usual continues, parts of the planet are going to become increasingly uninhabitable. There are going to be unforeseen social impacts, economic impacts, and political impacts. There are going to be events which occur that nobody, not even the top climate theorists could have predicted. To give birth to a human and add another life into this turbulent time can feel daunting, and in respects to some people's moralities, just the plain wrong choice.

Women are intensely pressured to become mothers, so much so that it presented in our cultural rhetoric as an action that is innate to having a certain body. Imagine if the relationships that were non-romantic, non-productive (especially in producing new humans), and instead were focused on their ability to facilitate regeneration, were valued in the same way as it is for women to be supporters to men and their children.

In a seemingly paradoxical way, as women are encouraged to have babies, mostly to produce a new workforce for this economic system, many are beginning to feel that having children is the wrong thing to do. Especially if someone is actively aware of the environmental degradation taking place and the worsening inequalities in an epoch of intense change, there is a popular belief that having children is a contribution to the degradation of the earth. There is merit to this idea, especially given the fact that people who live in America consume more and create more waste than

any other people in the world. However, this idea is in the same vein of thinking that our earth is overpopulated -- an idea that is racist and classist, because the critique of overpopulation is almost always blamed on areas with majority non-white populations. There are plenty of resources to support every person living on this earth and then some, but the way that our economic systems limit access to resources would suggest the very opposite. It's a facade, but its impacts constitute the material conditions of our lives.

When we are able to establish meaningful relationships that exist outside of reproduction and romance, especially for women who are socialized to believe that is where their worth lies, it opens the door for a plethora of fulfilling relationships in other areas. Just because someone makes the choice to not reproduce (or sometimes, is unable to birth children), does not mean they cannot be a parent, a guide, or a mentor. Community parenting is beautiful and immensely beneficial to both the adults and children. Someone may want little involvement with children and agency around our choices to become parents should be respected and highly valued.

In 2016, feminist scholar Donna Haraway published a book titled "Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene". The Chthulucene is a word employed by Haraway to represent the state of the world with tentacles of interconnected problems, those of ecological destruction and social injustices, and their pervasive way of appearing in our everyday lives. She explores topics of kinship through a process of speculative fabulation, essentially imaginative fantastical futuristic fiction, which Haraway describes as a "mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding", where she uses the real conditions of current situations, with respect to histories and legacies, to be wildly imaginative in her conception of the future.

In this book, Haraway writes of "Children of the Compost", people who exist through and of the rubble of this broken world in the Anthropocene, and their future generations, but especially, the way they have learned to structure society and families. In the Communities of the Compost,

Haraway speculates that children are no longer born simply out of accident or societal pressures, but everyone's reproductive decisions are highly respected. Because of this, birth is much more rare and consequently, each child's life is highly valued by their community. Families choose to structure themselves differently, the gestation parent often being joined by one or two other people to be the primary caregivers for the child, or the child is raised by groups that had no part in their conception.

Because of these new structures, making kin through relationships that we have agency to choose, especially those outside of familial relationships, will gain a new importance. Haraway's work is fixed on understanding the flaw in structures pushed upon cisgender women, especially those that assume their biology predisposes them to be nurturing, caring, and therefore, every woman should have goals to reproduce. By understanding these flaws, as well as the intrinsically exploitative nature of capitalism, feminists should be advocating for systems that address justice across gender, species, and borders. Learning to create relationships that are mutually supportive and regenerative that exist outside of blood relationships is key in this process.

Haraway believes that making kin is making persons, not necessarily populations. This occurs through the respect and veneration for all life and a move towards social relationships that prioritize agency and mutual aid. In our close friendships, we often feel with the people we love that they are so close to us, they are like family. It is important to not limit our support and our outreaching hand to provide the resources we already have to people we care about, even if they are not related to us by blood or marriage.

Children are going to continue to be born and they are going to be born into a broken world. This is a fact. I would like to propose that having children is not a selfish or narcissistic action, but rather one that instills active hope into our world. In spite of understanding the deep hurt our planet and its people are suffering under, people will continue to reproduce. In the same way that people still find time to dance, to laugh and sing, to create art, to love one another although

everything in our rigid systems denounces these actions: they are acts of resistance. These are acts of radical hope. Although we may be conscious of the intense degradation facing our people and planet, in spite of this, we continue to provide regeneration for ourselves and the ones we love.

It is important for us to protect the core aspects of our humanity in systems that attempt to dehumanize us. Systems of compelled labor in order to survive, systems that dictate certain bodies to act in accordance to their assigned gender, systems of environmental degradation all point us to believe, in varying ways, we are less than human. Capitalism withers people from multifaceted, nuanced beings, into compartmentalized, organized, cogs in a greater machine. In the face of this, our acts of resistance which restore our humanity are more important than ever. This includes acts of creating family and creating kin. I experienced this when these systems tried to destroy and degrade my family, and because we were able to find mutual aid through our structures of kin, not only did we survive, but we were able to thrive. It taught me an important truth: underneath what we are told we are by our culture, we are beings that need to be supported meaningfully and deeply. I would have been the shell of the person I am today if it weren't for the community that arose to care for me.

Our children will outlive us, and our values will inspire them to be creators of the new world we desperately need. Like planting a tree, the legacy we instill in our future generations will blossom and spread beyond our reach, providing shade and fruit for years to come. They will be beacons of hope and light, carrying on the work that we are dedicating our lifetimes to. Their existence will be known to be important, and will be respected and welcomed with open arms into communities that are eagerly awaiting to nurture them. Communities who will build with, and for them.

Sources

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