

Regretting Motherhood

Orna Donath

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Orna Donath's *Regretting Motherhood* is a revealing study of women who dare to speak the “unspeakable”—that their experiences of motherhood are less than charmed. This is work full of remarkable disclosures and significant questions.

Centered in Israel—of the developed nations, a place where women have more children, on average, than anywhere else—Donath's study gives a voice to women whose experiences are often silenced and ignored. They are regretful mothers.

They may have begun families because of social pressure, or out of a sense that time demanded it; they may have once believed they longed for motherhood themselves. But the diverse group that Donath speaks to—women who range from mothers of toddlers to those whose children already have grown children—reveals that all did not turn out as promised. Sometimes motherhood does not fulfill you; sometimes it leads to lifelong regret.

Forthrightly feminist, the work speaks of women's bodies as colonized, and reveals how illusory choice is, even for women who opt out of being parents. It explores whether there might be more to some cases of postpartum depression than just chemical imbalances, saying that expressions of regret, if heard, “add ... a missing location on the emotional roadmap of motherhood.”

Many of the mothers' confessions will be shocking—indeed, culture trains us to react to such expressions with shock, rather than compassion, as the study shows. If they could do it again: they wouldn't. Love does not come naturally. The bind is unending. The pressure is enormous. They wish they could leave, but “don't think [they] could handle the social repercussions.” There is no “out” that these women realistically see—but their honesty and bravery may provide an out for those still deciding about motherhood themselves, and that possibility fills many pages with hope.

Donath's study fills a gap in discussions of women's lives and choices. While it will undoubtedly be a hard pill for many to swallow, it is also a necessary one.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July/August 2017)

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