

**IV. GIFT GIVING
FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

Indigenous Women and Traditional Knowledge

Reciprocity is the Way of Balance

I. Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a fundamental value of the gift economy. It is also a fundamental cornerstone of Indigenous communities. Reciprocity implies that there is an ebb and flow in relationships, a give and take. Reciprocity infers that there is a mutual sharing, something given for something taken.

In Indigenous societies, reciprocity is the way things work—in society, within the family and extended family frameworks, and in the relationships between human kind and the rest of God’s creation. Reciprocity is not defined or limited by the language of the market economy because it implies that more is owed than financial payment, when goods and services exchange hands. Reciprocity is the way of balance—planting precedes harvesting, sowing precedes reaping. In most Indigenous societies there is a common understanding (sometimes referred to as the “original instructions”), that humankind’s role in the world is to be the guardians of the creation. Indigenous peoples know that if we care for, nurture, and protect the earth, it will feed, clothe, and shelter us.

II. Market Economics and the Gift Economy

The gift economy is diametrically opposed to the market economy. The Gift Economy is collective, the market economy favours individualism. The Gift Economy thrives when there is a bounty to be given. The market economy increases the price and fiscal value of items that are rare commodities. The values, activities, and outcomes of these diametrically opposed economic systems also conflict.

Capitalism/Globalization

Values: consumption/individualism

Activities: production and marketing/allocation based on ability to pay/buy

Results: profit and debt /polarized development of the wealthy versus the poor

Practice: secularization.

Gift Economy/Indigenous Communities

Values: sustainability, preservation/collectivism, social obligation

Activities: gifting, exchange/allocation based on need

Results: community development and advancement

Practice: spiritualism.

III. Indigenous Women and Traditional Knowledge

In all Indigenous cultures, gender roles and responsibilities flow from and are part of a broader socio-cultural environment. That is to say that Indigenous peoples and societies delineate between the roles which women and men assume based on the cultural protocols and survival needs of their collective society (Cohen 1999). The essential feature of a peoples' socio-cultural environment is "meaning." As Walter Rochs Goldschmidt (1990) states:

Each culture provides pathways by which individuals may satisfy their needs for positive affect, prestige and meaning. Small-scale, hunting-gathering societies provide several such pathways: excellence in hunting or story-telling or as a healer. More complex societies offer a greater array of "careers." Whatever its size, complexity or environment, a central task of any culture is to provide its members with a sense of meaning and purpose in the world."

"Gender" is a sociological concept that encompasses economic, social, and cultural distinctions between women and men as manifested in their differing roles, authority, and cultural undertaking.

In recent times there has developed an understanding that gender roles in Indigenous cultures establish who in that society (male or female) is the keeper of traditional knowledge. In traditional societies women are the keepers of certain knowledge systems and make use of different resources than those used by men. Where women might gather healing herbs or edible fruits from trees, men would more likely be employed in the timber industry.

For several years, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has explored the relationship between gender and food security, agro-bio-diversity, and sustainable development. FAO's research and development projects have documented the important role that Indigenous women play in these three critical areas. FAO's (1999) findings are as follows:

1. Through their different activities and management practices, men and women have often developed different expertise and knowledge about the local environment, plant and animal species and their products and uses. These gender-differentiated local knowledge systems play a decisive role in the in situ conservation, management, and improvement of genetic resources for food and agriculture. It is clear that the decision about what to conserve

depends on the knowledge and perception of what is most useful to the household and local community.

2. Women's and men's specialized knowledge of the value and diverse use of domesticated crop species and varieties extends to wild plants that are used as food in times of need or as medicines and sources of income. This local knowledge is highly sophisticated and is traditionally shared and handed down between generations. Through experience, innovation, and experimentation, sustainable practices are developed to protect soil, water, natural vegetation, and biological diversity. This has important implications for the conservation of plant genetic resources.

3. Through their daily work, rural women have accumulated intimate knowledge of their ecosystems, including the management of pests, the conservation of soil, and the development and use of plant and animal genetic resources.

4. It is estimated that up to 90 percent of the planting material used by poor farmers is derived from seeds and germplasm that they have produced, selected, and saved themselves. This means that small farmers play a crucial role in the preservation and management of plant genetic resources and biodiversity.

5. In smallholder agriculture, women farmers are largely responsible for the selection, improvement, and adaptation of plant varieties. In many regions, women are also responsible for the management of small livestock, including their reproduction. Women often have a more highly specialized knowledge of wild plants used for food, fodder and medicine than men.

The critical role which Indigenous women play in maintaining biodiversity, conservation, and promoting sustainable development is acknowledged in two international instruments and the action plan of the FAO. The Convention on Biological Diversity (1993) and FAO's *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (1996a) acknowledge the role played by generations of men and women farmers and by Indigenous communities in conserving and improving plant genetic resources.

Two key objectives of Chapter 24 of *Agenda 21: The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (UNCED 1992) are to promote the traditional methods and the knowledge of Indigenous people and their communities, emphasizing the particular role of women relevant to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources and to ensure the participation of Indigenous women and peoples in the economic and commercial benefits derived from the use of such traditional methods and knowledge.

The Convention on Biological Diversity and the FAO *Global Plan* also affirm

the need for women to participate fully in conservation programs and at all levels of policy making.

Despite these legal pronouncements and the existence of other international instruments that specifically prohibit discrimination against women (such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] and the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), Indigenous women continue to be marginalized and excluded from policy making and program services.

FAO (1999) reports the following:

... [L]ittle has yet been done to clarify the nature of the relationship between agro-biological diversity and the activities, responsibilities, and rights of men and women. Women's key roles, responsibilities, and intimate knowledge of plants and animals sometimes remain "invisible" to technicians working in the agriculture, forestry and environmental sectors, as well as to planners and policy-makers.

The lack of recognition at technical and institutional levels means that women's interests and demands are given inadequate attention. Moreover, women's involvement in formalized efforts to conserve biodiversity is slight because of widespread cultural barriers to women's participation in decision-making arenas at all levels.

Modern research and development and centralized plant breeding have ignored and, in some cases, undermined the capacities of local farming communities to modify and improve plant varieties. With the introduction of modern technologies and agricultural practices, women have lost substantial influence and control over production and access to resources, whereas men often benefit more from extension services and have the ability to buy seeds, fertilizers and the necessary technologies.

FAO's conclusions in this area are verified by the work of the LinKS Project in Africa:

For a long time, despite an increased recognition at the international level, the importance of local knowledge and gender in agriculture has been neglected in policies and development programs related to agriculture and natural resource management. Modern research, science, and national policies undermine even further the capacities of local farming communities to sustain and manage agro-biodiversity and secure food production. In this context, contributions that bring farmers' perspectives, their practice and knowledge of biodiversity into focus are important for a constructive policy dialogue on sustainable management of natural resources.

It is clear that sexism, racism, and poverty operate in the United Nations System and broader civil society to marginalize Indigenous women. These negative

forces need to be acknowledged and addressed as a matter of urgency and as a high priority because of the nexus between women's traditional knowledge and their role in maintaining biodiversity and ensuring food security.

IV. Countering Globalization

The foundation of globalization is and will continue to be the commercialization of knowledge and data and the commodification of knowledge and the life forms relating to that knowledge.

The primary elements of the information society are knowledge, information (data) and communication. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are the transmission instruments used by modern technological states and corporations to further communication in all areas including economic and social development, health, education and security.

Traditional knowledge is the basis of all Indigenous cultures. Indigenous concepts and practices relating to knowledge have evolved for centuries and are defined by the socio-cultural environment of each distinct culture. In Indigenous cultures, gender roles and responsibilities determine who is the keeper of certain knowledge systems and how the knowledge is maintained and transmitted within specific cultural contexts. Most Indigenous cultures follow strict cultural protocols for the sharing and dissemination of knowledge and for communications in general.

In addition, there is a direct relationship between Indigenous knowledge and traditional land rights. The Forum Expert paper prepared by Marcos Alonso (2003) states:

As for Indigenous Peoples, the generation, transmission, and preservation of knowledge is inextricably linked to their continuing relationship and interaction with knowledge from generation to generation in their own way.

Traditional knowledge not only contains the history of a people, but also provides the basis for all customs, traditions, and practices like traditional agriculture or medicine. It is holistic in nature and sets a blueprint for proper relationships between humans as well as between humans and non-humans, such as plants and animals. In summary, it is a core element of the identity of an Indigenous People.

It is only through maintaining and strengthening their distinctive traditional relationship with their lands, waters, coastal seas, and related natural environments that Indigenous Peoples will be able to save their existing knowledge and to secure the flourishing of its development. Only then, Indigenous Peoples will be in a position to share their traditional knowledge on their own terms.

In Indigenous societies knowledge is carefully guarded and often considered "sacred, secret or gender bound." It is customary with Indigenous peoples who follow an oral tradition that the transmission of knowledge may require years of

mentoring, as well as ceremonial undertakings. In Indigenous societies knowledge is the inheritance of the living and the legacy they will leave to further generations.

By contrast, knowledge in the globalized context, is viewed as a valuable economic commodity that should be freely available to anybody wishing to utilize or commercialize it. Western intellectual property law favours the practice of commodification, reserving exclusive use for a short period of 20 years. In the globalized world, the underlying practice is to view knowledge as a commodity in the public domain.

Given the situation, it is no wonder that Indigenous peoples are in conflict with and oppose state and private sector efforts to obtain traditional knowledge. Indigenous peoples often view scientific and economic research and development as the theft of Indigenous intellectual property and bio-piracy.

Indigenous peoples assert that their traditional knowledge systems are their cultural property and that they should have the right to control the use and application of their knowledge whether for commercial or non-commercial purposes. In addition, Indigenous people are undertaking efforts to establish *sui generis* systems for protection of their intellectual property while resisting efforts of transnational corporations-pharmaceuticals to copyright traditional medicinal knowledge and patent life forms. There are increasing examples of the unauthorized and inappropriate use of traditional knowledge and there is significant evidence that corporate and state actors are intent upon appropriating not only Indigenous knowledge but Indigenous sciences and technologies including human and other genetic resources.

IV. Globalization and Poverty

The privatization of life, through the western intellectual property regime has resulted in the earth's bounty being appropriated in the private property of a few individual shareholders and their transnational corporations. The result has been expanding poverty in all regions of the world and an extreme imbalance in the consumptive practices of the developed North. Today, the United States consumes 80 percent of the earth's resources including food, services, commodities, and natural gas and oil. In comparison the developing south, continues to live in extreme poverty and while supplying their natural resources, labor, goods and food to the north, this imbalance is maintained by the multilateral and bilateral trade regimes and international financiers such as the World Bank.

International efforts to address the phenomena of growing global poverty through the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have proven ineffective because the standard of poverty is linked to the U.S. dollar. Under this approach, people live in extreme poverty if they earn less than \$1.20 a day (USD). This standard ignores the fact that real poverty is measured by starvation, hunger, landlessness, ill health, and the inability of people and communities to access land and resources needed for their survival. Despite the fact that the UN Special Rapporteurs on

Extreme Poverty and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues have called for the definition of extreme poverty to be changed, no action has been taken by the UN System and states to change either the rule of globalized trade or the definition of poverty.

The gift economy provides a workable alternative to globalization and a realistic and achievable approach to poverty. Most importantly, the gift economy is people and community based (see Vaughan 1997). For the developed North it means that people can choose to change their consumptive practices, to do with less, and to boycott goods and products that do not meet the standard of fair trade. Our own consumptive practices drive the market economy and the phenomenon of globalization. By returning to gifting and practicing reciprocity between peoples and among nations, we will be able to significantly impact poverty in the South. Indigenous peoples have a role to play in this humanitarian undertaking. By sharing and gifting to others, our traditional knowledge relating to the sustainable use of the earth's resources and the application of culturally appropriate technologies and practices, Indigenous people can demonstrate to others the path of balance and equitable sharing.

IV. Conclusion

If we are to press for a paradigm shift—towards the gift economy and away from market capitalism—we must be involved in and support the efforts of Indigenous women and their communities to protect traditional knowledge and Indigenous intellectual property and oppose the patenting of life forms. The copyrighting of knowledge privatizes the lessons learned and the benefits arising from that knowledge. The patenting of life forms means that a few will own the bounty needed to feed and cloth the world. The gift economy requires that the bounty be part of the commons of all human kind and that human beings, as the guardians of the earth and each other, must ensure the equitable sharing of benefits so that all may share in the gifts of the Creator.

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Supryia and the Reviving of a Dream

Toward a New Political Imaginary

1. Introduction

Let me tell you a story:
a story of women, of their creative survival,
a story of timeless care,
a story of the gift imaginary :

It is a story from Tagore on the *Riches of the Poor*.

Once upon a long ago and of yesterday
it was a *time of darkness*;
it was also a time of famine that was devastating the land of *Shravasti*
people gathered; poor people, hungry people:
Lord Buddha looking at everybody and asked his disciples
who will feed these people? who will care for them?
who will feed these hungry people?
he looked at Ratnaka the banker, waiting for an answer:
Ratnaka, looked down and said
but much more than all the wealth I have would be needed
to feed these hungry people
Buddha than turned to Jaysen, who was the chief of the King's army:
Jaysen said very quickly *of course my Lord I would give you my life*
but there is not enough food in my house.
then, it was the turn of Dharampal who possessed large pastures
sighed and said the *god of the wind has dried out our fields*
and I do not know how I shall even pay the king's taxes.

The people listened, and were so hungry:
Supriya, the beggar's daughter was in the gathering, listening too
as she raised her hand, she stood up and said
I will nourish these people: I will care for the people
everybody turned to look at Supriya:

how would she they thought do this? How will she, a beggar's daughter with no material wealth, how would she accomplish her wish?

but how will you do this, they chorused:

Supriya gentle and strong looked at the gathering and said

It is true that I am the poorest among you, but therein is my strength, my treasure, my affluence, because I will find all this at each of your doors.

Supriya's words and actions come from *another logic*: she refuses the logic of property, profit, patriarchy; inviting us to another *ethic of care*, of concern, of connectedness. She sees the poor as a *community of people* with *dignity* in a relational way, not as individual separate units; and speaks for the many all over the world who are challenging the totalitarianism logic of the master imaginary and trying to re-find and re-build communities, regenerating people's knowledges and cosmovisions, reviving the dream for us all.

2.

We live in violent times: times in which our community and collective memories are dying; times in which the many dreams are turning into never-ending nightmares; and the future increasingly fragmenting; times that are collapsing the many life visions into a *single cosmology* that has created its own *universal truths*—equality, development, peace; truths that are inherently discriminatory, even violent. Times that have created a development model that dispossesses the majority, desacralizes nature, destroys cultures and civilizations, denigrates the women. Times in which the war on terrorism a la Pax Americana brings a time of violent uncertainty—brutal wars for resources—oil, diamonds, minerals: wars of Occupation state terrorism going global, patented by the USA, franchised by the CIA to nation states all over the world, times that are giving us new words: *pre-emptive strike, collateral damage, embedded journalism, enemy combatants, military tribunals, rendition*; new words: *words soaked in blood*. Times in which the dominant political thinking, institutions and instruments of justice are hardly able to redress the *violence* that is escalating, and *intensifying*; times in which *progress* presupposes the *genocide* of the many; times in which human rights have come to mean the rights of the privileged, the rights of the powerful; times in which the *political spaces* for the other is diminishing, even *closing*.

The world, it would seem, is at the end of its imagination.

Only the imagination stands between us and fear: fear makes us behave like sheep when we should be dreaming like poets.

Let me tell you another story, a story of horror and hope, a story of the missing, the disappeared; a story so real, yet magical: a story from Lawrence Thornton in *Imagining Argentina* (1987).

It is a story about Argentina under the dictators. The hero is a gentle person, Carlos Rueda, an intense man who directs a children's theatre and is at home in

the world of children. During the time of the dictators, Carlos discovers that he has an extraordinary gift. He realizes that he is the site, the locus, *the vessel for a dream*. He can narrate the fate of the missing. From all over Argentina, men and women come to his home and sitting in his garden, Carlos tells them stories: tales of torture, courage, death, stories about the missing, about the *disappeared*.

One day the regime arrests his wife Celia, for a courageous act of reporting. The world of Carlos collapses till he realizes that he must keep her alive in his imagination. *Only the imagination, says Carlos, stands between us and fear; fear makes us behave like sheep when we must dream like poets.*

As the regime becomes more violent, it is the women who object. It is the women as wives, as mothers, as daughters who congregate in silence at the *Plaza de Mayo*. Silently, each carries a placard announcing or asking about the *missing*. The women walk quietly, sometimes holding hands.

It is not just an act of protest; it is *a drama of caring*; each listening to the other's story, each assuring the other through touch, weaving a sense of community.

The community grows as the men join them. All the while, through the window, the Generals watch them.

People realize that they cannot be indifferent observers, spectators, bystanders, *even experts*. The indifference of the watchers to the regime is not enough. One must be a witness. A witness is not a mere spectator. S/he *looks* but she also *listens*. S/he *remembers*.

Everything must be remembered. Nothing must be forgotten. We must retrieve history from memory

We must explore the new imaginary not as experts but as witnesses.

The Mothers of the Plaza Mayo, in Argentina express this new imaginary.

3.

Our imaginaries must be different. The new imaginary cannot have its moorings in the dominant discourse but must seek to locate itself in a *discourse of dissent* that comes from a deep critique of the different forms of domination and violence in our times: any new imaginary cannot be tied to the dominant discourse and systems of violence and exclusion.

This new imaginary will move away from the eurocentric and androcentric methodologies which only observe and describe; methodologies which quantify, percentify, classify, completely indifferent to phenomena which cannot be obtained or explained through its frames. We need to deconstruct the dominant mythology, disallowing the invasion of the dominant discourse; refusing the integration of the *South* into the agenda of globalization and the war on terrorism. The new imaginary invites us to create a new spectrum of methods which depart from the linear mode of thought and perception to one that is more *holistic, holographic*. It urges us to search more qualitative methodologies in oral history, experiential analysis, using fluid categories, *listening for the nuances, searching for the shadow*, in poetry, in myth, in metaphor. It invites us to a way of knowing that refuses to

control and exploit Nature, but one that finds our *connectedness to Nature*: to place together these fragments, to discern the essence, to move into another space, another time, recapturing hidden knowledges, regenerating forgotten spaces, refinding other cosmologies, reweaving the future. It is here perhaps, that the notion of the sacred survives; it is here in the cosmologies and rootedness of cultures; here in discarded knowledges of peoples on the peripheries here in the silenced wisdoms of women that we must seek the beginnings of *an alternate discourse*.

It is not difficult to see that we are at the end of an era, when every old category begins to have a hollow sound, and when we are groping in the dark to discover the new. Can we find new words, search new ways, create out of the material of the human spirit *possibilities* to transform the existing exploitative social order, to discern a greater human potential?

What we need in the world today are new universalisms; not universalisms that deny the many and affirm the one, not universalisms born of eurocentricities or patriarchalities; but universalisms *that recognize the universal in the specific civilizational idioms in the world*. Universalisms that will not deny the accumulated experiences and knowledges of past generations and that will not accept the imposition of any monolithic structures under which it is presumed all other peoples must be subsumed. New universalisms that will challenge the universal mode—militarization, nuclearism, war, patriarchy. Universalisms that will respect the plurality of the different societies, of their philosophy, of their ideology, their traditions and cultures; one that will be rooted in the particular, in the *vernacular*, one which will find a resonance in the different civilizations, *birthing new cosmologies*.

We need to imagine alternative perspectives for change: to craft visions that will evolve out of conversations across cultures and other traditions; conversations between cultures that challenge and transcend the totalitarianism of the western logos; conversations that are not mediated by the hegemony of the *universal discourse*.

The new imaginary invites us to another human rights discourse; one that will not be trapped either in the *universalisms* of the dominant thinking tied as it is to a market economy, a monoculturalism, a materialistic ethic and the politics and polity of the nation state; neither must it be caught in the discourse of the *culture specific* but one that will proffer universalisms that have been born out of a *dialogue of civilizations*. And this will mean another *ethic of dialogue*. We need to find new perspectives on the universality of human rights: *in dialogue with other cultural perspectives of reality*, other notions of development, democracy, even dissent, other concepts of power (not power to control, power to hegemonize, but power to facilitate, to enhance) and governance; other notions of equality; equality makes us flat and faceless citizens of the nation state, perhaps the notion of *dignity* which comes from depth, from *roots*, could change the discourse: other concepts of justice—*justice without revenge*, justice with truth and reconciliation, *justice with healing* of individuals, of communities, because *human kind proffers many horizons of discourse* and because our eyes do not as yet behold those horizons, it does not mean that those horizons do not exist.

Take the *universal* discourse on *democracy*: the new magical word to *reform* the world, the Greater Middle East: the dominant understanding on democracy is tied to the notion of individual rights, private property, profit, the *market economy*; we are all equal we are told but the market works as the *guarantor of inequality*, of unequal distribution, of how only a few will have and how the many must not have. What shall we do with the rhetoric of political equality on which this democracy is built, while the majority are increasingly dispossessed, living below poverty lines? We must seek new understandings of democracy; that will include a concept of freedom that is different from that which is enshrined in the Enlightenment and its Market. There is an urgent need to reinvent the political; to *infuse the political with the ethical: the new political imaginary speaks to an ethic of care*.

In 1996, Madeleine Albright the then U.S. Secretary of State was asked what she felt about the 500,000 Iraqi children who had died as a result of U.S. economic sanctions (in the name of United Nations Security Council). In the context of the continuing war, was it a high price to pay? Was it worth it? She replied: “*yes, all things considered, we think that the price is worth it.*” Lives of children lost in wars are considered *collateral damage*.

In the world of rights we all are equal; each has the fundamental *right to life*. But what does the right to life mean to the genetically damaged children born all over the world because of depleted uranium? Depleted uranium that was used in wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and in Iraq for this generation, and for the generations to come.

The new political imaginary invites us to write another history: *a counter hegemonic history*, a history of the margins. It is a journey of the margins: a journey rather than an imagined destination. A journey in which the daily-ness of our life proffers possibilities for our imaginary, survival, and sustenance; for connectedness and community. For the idea of imaginary is inextricably linked to the personal, political, and historical dimensions of community and identity. It is the dislocation expressed by particular social groups that makes possible the articulation of new imaginaries. These social groups, the margins, the global South, *the South in the North*, the *South in the South*, are beginning to articulate these *new imaginaries*.

The peasants in Chiapas, Mexico, describing their *new imaginary* explain their core vision in their struggle for their livelihoods and for retaining their life worlds. And in their profound and careful organization, in their political imagining and vision do not offer clear, rigid, universal truths; knowing that the journey is in itself precious, sum up their vision in three little words: *asking, we walk*.

The asking in itself *challenges master imaginaries, master narratives, masters' houses, houses of reason; universal truths, of power, of politics, of patriarchy*. The Zapatistas in offering another logic, draw the contours of this new imaginary.

The new political imaginary invites us to *dismantle the master's house*; and as the poet, Audre Lorde said, the *master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. There is an urgent need to challenge the centralizing logic of the master narrative implicit in the dominant discourses of war, of security, of human rights, of democracy. This dominant logic is a logic of violence and *exclusion*, a logic of

developed and underdeveloped, a logic of superior and inferior, *a logic of civilized and uncivilized*.

This centralizing logic must be decentered, must be interrupted, even disrupted. The new political imaginary speaks to this disruption; to this trespass.

4.

It is a disruption of the dominant discourse and the dominant politics of our times and Public Hearings, Peoples Tribunals, Courts of Women are all expressions of people's resistance: expressions of the new imaginary that is finding different ways of speaking *Truth* to *Power*, recognizing that the concepts and categories enshrined in the dominant thinking and institutions in our times, are unable to grasp the violence.

We must ask where can sovereign people go for redress, for reparation for the crimes committed against them? Where will the *people of Iraq seek the reparation that is owed* to them?

There are no mechanisms in the rights discourse (in its praxis or politics) where *sovereign people* can take sovereign nation states to task, locked as the discourse is into the terrain of the nation state: the states, on signing the International Covenants/Universal Declaration on Human Rights, become the *guarantor* of human rights and freedoms for their citizens; but what often happens is that the *state is the greatest violator*. We know that the International Criminal Court has been ratified by many countries but remains state-centric: the greatest violator, USA, refusing to ratify the Rome statute, continues to make bi-lateral treaties with other states assuring that the USA will not be prosecuted for war crimes that they will continue to commit with impunity.

So, where shall we find justice?

Perhaps, it is in the expressions of *resistance* seeking legitimacy not by the dominant standards, not from a dominant paradigm, not by the *rule of law*, but by claims to the truth offering *new paradigms of knowledge*, of politics: the Truth Commissions, the Public Hearings, the Peoples' Tribunals, the Courts of Women are movements of resistance that are *speaking to power, challenging power*, speaking truth to the powerless, *creating other reference points*; other sources of inspiration, speaking to the *conscience* of the world, returning *ethics to politics*, decolonizing our minds and our imaginations, moving away from the master imaginary, finding worlds that embrace many worlds.

The *South* has, for too long accepted a worldview that has hegemonized its cultures, decided its development model, defined its aesthetic categories, outlined its military face, determined its science and technology, its nuclear options and moulded its modes of governance through the modern nation state. For the modern idiom of politics is the eurocentric world of nation-states, centralized, bureaucratized, militarized, some even nuclearized. The nation state in its homogenization of the polity, has subsumed all cultural diversity, all civilizational differences, into one uniform political entity, which now belongs to the *New World Order*.

A cosmology constructed of what has come to be known as *universal values*; a cosmology whose philosophical, ideological, and political roots were embedded in the specific historical context of the culture of the west. What qualified it then to be termed *universal*? The vision of the world in which the centre of the world was Europe and later North America (West) encapsulated all civilizations into its own western frames: it reduced their cultural diversities into a schema called *civilization*; it made universal the specific historical experiences of the west. It announced that what was relevant to the west had to be a model for the rest of the world: what was good for the centre had to be meaningful for the periphery. *All that was western simply became universal*. Every other civilization, every system of knowledge came to be defined and compared vis-à-vis this paradigm submitting to *its insights as imposition, its blindness as values, its tastes as canons, in a word to its euro-centricities*.

The *Other* in this cosmology were the civilizations of Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, the Arab world. *Scarcely twenty years were enough to make two billion people define themselves as under-developed* (Illlich 1981) vis-à-vis the post war growth model, the market economy and the international economic order conceived of at Bretton Woods. It minisculed all social totalities into one single model, all systems of science to one mega science, all indigenous medicine to one imperial medicine, all knowledge to one established regime of thought, all development to gross national product, to patterns of consumption, to industrialization, to *the western self image of homo-economicus with all needs commodity defined, and homo economicus has never been gender neutral*.

This cosmos of values has determined the thought patterns of the world, as also the world's ecological patterns: indicating its scientific signs, giving it the development symbols, generating the military psyche, defining knowledge, truth: *universal truths which have been blind, to cultures, race, class, gender*. Universal *patriarchal* truths, whatever the cultural ethos, whatever the civilizational idiom.

5.

What is essential is not to develop new doctrines or dogmas, or to define a new, coherent political schema but, to suggest a *new imaginative attitude*, one that can be *radical and subversive* which will be able to change the logic of our development. Perhaps as the poet says *we should now break the routine, do an extravagant action that would change the course of history*. What is essential is to go beyond the politics of violence and exclusion of our times and to find *new political imaginations*.

An imaginary where people of the margins, of the *global South* are subjects of our own history, writing our own cultural narratives, offering new universals, imagining a world in more life enhancing terms, *constructing a new radical imaginary*.

We must seek new imaginaries from the South: the South not only as third world, as the civilizations of Asia, the Arab world, Africa, Latin America; but the South as the voices and *movements of peoples*, wherever these movements exist.

The South as the *visions and wisdoms of women*.

The South as the discovering of new paradigms, which challenge the existing theoretical concepts and categories, *breaking the mind constructs*, seeking a new language to describe what it perceives, refusing the one, objective, rational, scientific world view as the only world view. The South as the discovery of other cosmologies, as the *recovery of other knowledges* that have been hidden, submerged, silenced: the South as a *rebellion of these silenced knowledges*.

The South as history; the *South as memory*.

The South as the finding of new political paradigms, inventing new political patterns, creating alternative political imaginations: the South as the revelation of each civilization in its own idiom: the South as *conversations between civilizations*: The South then as *new universalisms*.

It invites us to challenge the master imaginary, to create a new imaginary, the South as new political imaginary (Kumar 2005).

6.

The Courts of Women are an articulation of the new imaginary. The *Courts of Women* are an unfolding of a space, *an imaginary*: a horizon that invites us to think, to feel, to challenge, to connect, to dare to dream.

It is an attempt to define a new space for women, and to infuse this space with a new vision, a *new politics*. It is a gathering of voices and visions of the *global south*. The Courts of Women reclaim the subjective and objective modes of knowing, creating richer and deeper structures of knowledge in which the observer is not distanced from the observed, the researcher from the research, poverty from the poor. The *Courts of Women* seek to weave together the *objective* reality (analyses) with the *subjective* testimonies of the women; the rational with the intuitive; the personal with the political; *the logical* with the *lyrical* (through video testimonies, artistic images and poetry); *we cannot separate the dancer from the dance*.

It invites us to discern fresh insights, offering us other ways to know, urging us to seek deeper layers of knowledge towards creating new paradigms of knowledge.

The *Courts of Women* are public hearings: the *Court* is used in a symbolic way. The *Courts* are *sacred* spaces where women, speaking in a language of suffering, name the crimes, seeking redress, even reparation.

It is a rejection of the *silencing of the crimes of violence*. Silence subjugates; silence kills: breaking the silence signifies the point of disruption and of *counter-hegemonic truth telling*.

While the *Courts of Women* listen to the voices of the survivors, it also listens to the voices of women who resist, who rebel, who refuse to turn against their dreams. It hears challenges to the dominant human rights discourse, whose frames have *excluded the knowledges of women*. It repeatedly hears of the need to extend the discourse to include the meanings and symbols and perspectives of women.

It speaks of a new generation of women's human rights.

The *Court of Women* is a *tribute to the human spirit*: in which testimonies can not only be heard but also legitimized. The Courts provide witnesses, victims,

survivors and resisters not only the validation of their suffering but also the validation of their hopes and dreams that they have dared to hold. It speaks to the right of the subjugated and the silenced to articulate the crimes against them; it is a taking away of the legitimizing dominant ideologies and returning their *life worlds* into their own hands.

The Courts of Women celebrate the subversive voices, voices that disrupt the master narrative of war and occupation, of security, of justice, of patriarchy...

We need to find new spaces for our imaginations: gathering the subjugated knowledges, seeking ancient wisdoms, with new visions, listening to the many voices speaking but listening too to the many voices, unspoken; remembering our roots knowing our depths of wisdoms written on the barks of trees, written on our skins, as we search for the *river beneath the river*, listening to the different colors of the wind.

Supryia listens to this wind:
 She offers another logic, another lyric,
 lifting the human spirit, creating a new imaginary.
 offering another dream.

Corinne Kumar is a poet, a dreamer leader, a visionary ... a pilgrim of life as she calls herself. With an abiding faith in women's knowledge and all vulnerable wisdoms, she is a woman deeply committed to issues related to women and human rights, peace and justice. She has initiated and sustained groups at the local, regional, and international level, whose core is transformational politics that is rooted in a more caring and compassionate society in immediate, lived realities. These include the Centre for Development Studies (CIEDS), Vimochana, a forum for women's rights, both based in Bangalore, India and the Asian Women Human Rights Council, a regional network of women's and human rights organizations. For the past decade, she has been the Director of El Taller, an international NGO based in Tunis that through its perspectives and programs, including training programs for NGO activists, attempts to create spaces for constructive reflection and action on the important issues of our times and enables a South-South and North-South dialogue. Information on the World Courts of Women is available at: www.eltaller.org.

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Reflecting on Gifting and the Gift Economy in El Salvador

I was born and raised in El Salvador. I have been through many exiles. Because of this I have learned so much, especially to appreciate diversity, the unity in diversity, the many cultures of the world, and the real meaning of solidarity and caring. Now I am back in El Salvador, and my work is with people of various political, ethnic, religious, social, and educational backgrounds. My sister Ana and I take care of our father, who is 96, and our mother, 86. It is both good and challenging and difficult.

I returned to El Salvador just before we signed the peace agreements in 1992. I thought then that the time had come when we could all do the things that we had been dreaming about as a nation. When we signed the accords, I expected us to be loving to each other, to start doing what we needed to do for the betterment of our country. Much of the urgent work needed was about taking care of Mother Earth and our Indigenous roots. Though I look European, I am, as are most of the people in my country, Indigenous and black. Some of us look white and thus some people refer to us as *mestizos*. This is a racist term, created by the colonizers to divide and more effectively conquer us. Our culture is mostly based on our Indigenous roots, in spite of the fact that the language and religion and many ways that we have to live by in the larger society are western.

After the peace agreements there was much conflict in the country, despite the progressive peoples' movement. And even progressive people wanted leadership positions, power. Today we are paying the price of divisiveness within the progressive movement, while a very close-minded government goes about its business, which has resulted in increasing poverty, repression, and hopelessness. Often we can be busy being the Left, but not busy enough in effectively supporting the work people must do in order to transform society to meet their needs and aspirations, and to become a nation of peace and justice for all, in a healthy, natural environment.

It is important to pay attention, and to be clear, that is why I am sharing this experience on how change is generated. My mother would reflect on our situation and say, "Well, things are the way they are, because that's where we [humans] have allowed them to get to." All of us participate in creating the reality/ies we live under. As an example, the peoples' movement lost the last presidential elec-

tion in El Salvador, though there was a good chance that we could have won. But the same situation that happened in the U.S. happened in my country: fear was instilled in the people. Many people voted for the government that is in power right now, which is not the Left (even though the Left was almost ready to win) because of fear. This fear is related to the well-known fact that more than one-fifth of the population of El Salvador is in the USA, a good number without documents, and these Salvadorians are sending remittances to their families at home that amount to one-third of the budget of El Salvador, even more than is exported annually.

Everyone in El Salvador was aware of this. The people in government and the people's movement knew this; there are a few in the middle who also knew this, but they usually vote the status quo anyway. The present government which acknowledges itself as the Right and those in the middle vote together all time, so it was hard for the opposition to win. There was a program of intimidation, of threatening that if the opposition won the election, the country would become like Cuba and in Cuba they are dying of hunger, with no jobs, no social services, and lots of people in jail. In the media, the leaders of the people's movement were shown with gangs burning and destroying properties and businesses, and so there was great fear. This is because when one does not have an education, and is not trained to think critically, then there are no parameters, no points of reference and therefore an inability to discern the truth, thus people only react in fear.

This is the trap of poverty and lack of education. Thus, this is one of the key gifts we must work for: to facilitate people coming of age so that they can carry out their own discernment. Critical thinking is a gift. For it is on this basis, with available resources, that we can figure out and decide the process for what is the best, for ourselves, for others, for future generations, and for the health of the planet.

In spite of all the propaganda, and the fear that was generated, about two weeks before the elections, it still looked as if the Left might win, although the Left is not so Left any more, but much more to the Center. There is very little Left left—just like in the U.S.! But here is the key: we have to be smart and pay attention because we don't want to be back-pedaling—we must know now that the work is not going to be done by any political party, the church, or an NGO. The work for change is going to be done by us. We are the people, we are the community, and whatever we want and whatever we need is up to us. The party is just an instrument, a means to an end, and not an end in itself. This is historically true. If we take a good look, we can see that it is in the leadership of women, the people's movements, affirmed by Indigenous cultures, that change happens and is maintained. That is the way it has been throughout history. The pressure for change comes from below.

About two weeks before the elections the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Latin America arrived in El Salvador and he appeared in all the media, which in most countries, ours not the exception, is owned by the richest people. In interviews he was asked what would happen if the Left were to win and how would the

country's relationship with the USA be affected. The U.S. representative replied that he could see there would be problems; that probably those Salvadorans living in the United States without immigration documents might not have their time extended, thus they would have to return, and even those legally in the U.S. might not be allowed to send the monthly help. Thus, fear was instilled as this situation would be an enormous problem for there are no jobs in El Salvador, and how could the country survive without the support the Salvadorans in the U.S. regularly send back home?

"Did you hear that?" the people were saying. Therefore, everybody voted for whoever they had to in order to maintain the status quo. Whole towns, even those with mayors of the opposition party, voted for the conservative party because of that fear.

Indigenous people in Salvador have a phrase that goes like this: "They have your tail under their foot." If somebody stands on a dog's tail, it cannot go very far, it cannot move. This is what colonialism has done, and today is a modern-day colonial practice.

Yet, it is here that we must remember we are beings that have the power to create. Even in Salvador we are thinking, "We have to take the power for ourselves." In this case, "taking the power" meant having everybody vote for the opposition, so that from the top down we can have the kinds of laws that will give justice and peace and freedom to the people—thinking that political power is the key.

I have come to understand that it doesn't work like that. We concentrate on taking, getting the power, and we maneuver and fight and struggle to do that. Even within the party itself people fight for control, because they see this as the way to have power. This I understand to be the wrong analysis, the wrong way of thinking. For we *are* power. We don't have to take over power because we *are* power. What we have to figure out is: why, if we *are* power, have we come to believe and understand that we don't have power, and that we powerless, and worse, we act that way.

We are the children of the universe. The universe has created all that we have and see, and much that as of yet do not see. Why then do we think that we are so helpless, and so powerless? We can create programs to empower people. If we work to empower someone, there is an important implication: that someone has power, is empowered, and that someone else is not. But if we start from the understanding that everything in the universe is power, and everybody in the universe, all human beings and all of nature *are* power, then we have a different way of working, because then it is about creating the conditions, together, for exercising or manifesting power to bring about those basic things that are our dreams and our aspirations, as persons and as humanity, and for the health of the planet.

When talking about reaching a state of wellness in society, people in El Salvador say, "Oh, but you're crazy, talking about that. It can never happen."

"You don't think it can ever happen?" I ask.

"Well, it might take a bunch of years," they answer.

"Like, how many years?" I respond.

“About 200, and then maybe we’ll have what we have been dreaming about, but by that time I won’t be around, so who knows?” is their response.

Conversations like this suggest we do not, cannot, create the future, and so we continue to allow our country, our nation, to be destroyed.

El Salvador is the second most environmentally destroyed country in the Americas. We continue to experience ever increasing violence that has made our country the most violent in the Americas because we continue to think it is not possible to be different due to the existing conditions. But it is up to us; *we* are the possibility. When we say that another, or many other worlds and better worlds are possible, they are! So we have to discern what world we want and what would make it possible, and start doing exactly that—intentionally and in real time, in community. We cannot wait for someone else to do it. That is a colonial mentality. We are human beings; we have the capability, we are pure potential.

What we are, and what we have to understand we are, is that we are *creators*. *We cannot escape that*. We come from the great Creator Spirit or force, Father-Mother, therefore we are creators. We must own this, and be responsible. We must figure out how to be responsible, intentional creators. That means we must develop a *conscious* culture, because what we have now is unconscious culture, unconscious practices. Culture is everything that we do, everything that we cultivate through our every day practices. But it must be an intentional, conscious culture. That means that every step we take, everything we do, has to be done with the consciousness of this totality, this wholeness, this oneness in diversity, consciousness of who we really want to be, and how we want the world to be.

So people kept saying to me, “Two hundred years for this or that, Marta!” And I respond, “Well, that would be the twenty-third century, right?” And they say, “Yes!” And I say, “Okay. So how about choosing to be the twenty-third century here and now?” What is stopping us from exercising the future now?

Whatever our actions are today create the future even if we are not conscious of it. So we must use the gift of consciously and intentionally being the future in the here and now.

The way this is done is by practicing discernment, which is about figuring out what we want to manifest as an intentional choice, paying attention, and then creating a process together. Discernment is a compound word. The preposition “dis” is a negative, and “cernir” is to spread out, as when one needs to sift flour, when you bring it together you are *discerniendo*, and that is when one can proceed to make the bread. So this is the important thing: we must embrace the gift of taking the time to discern situations, our work, the future, and to develop such skills for ourselves and support others to do the same. We already have the power, because we *are* power itself. Now we must develop the skills to manifest the power that we are in a conscious, intentional way, and in community for the best results.

In what way can we do this, in a country like El Salvador? If we were to take the International Criminal Court (ICC) under the present cultural and political conditions, we could say that it is about 200 years away. Because this institution

is an important deterrent against violations and crimes against humanity, we must be about creating the conditions for the society to support and press the government to adhere to and implement the International Criminal Court in our legal processes. Thus, we have created the Salvadoran Coalition for the ICC, and now we have the regional coalition, the Central American Coalition for the ICC. In this way we are creating a new environment not only for our country and the region but for the world.

We can figure out what the future will be like if we continue to move and be, as we are, and then figure out what best expresses the hopes and aspirations of our nation, a country of peace, justice, freedom, in a healthy environment. It is like visiting the future, then envisioning how to start manifesting it in the present, day in and day out. By doing so, we can change the past, have a different present, and arrive at the future we aspire to.

In colonial times, the colonizers in El Salvador would demand of the Indigenous peoples: “When I am talking to you, you look down. Don’t look at me. And before I finish talking, you start running!” We were forced to learn those ways. Many people still do not look at someone eyes when they are talking, and then, before s/he is finished, they start running, but they are running in the same place. As I observe our society, I see that often we continue running in the same place. Then we feel like we cannot really move ahead, but we can. We must know what we want, though. It means that every day we say to ourselves when we get up in the morning, when we wake up, that we can. It means that everyday we remember to live with a thankful heart, because we know that everything has been given to us—the air that we need to breathe, the water, the earth, everything that we need to be alive has been given to us, as well as the power to create, the power to create and resolve everything in community.

So we must choose, every morning, to do this. There are times I don’t feel like doing it, to tell you the truth, because the work is hard and very tiring at home. So I support myself. I have created a mechanism to give me the spark. When I wake up, and I don’t feel like getting up, I breathe deeply, and since on purpose I leave my window open, I pay attention and listen to the birds sing, and then I say, “Oh, the whole universe is waking up and letting me know that everything is ready for me to go out to work,” and then I start intentionally to give thanks. Then my heart opens up, and I begin giving thanks consciously, and yet naturally.

This is the thing. We must figure out how to live that. In El Salvador we are very ready to be in resistance, and in opposition. It’s been more than 500 years of exploitation, and the oppression in our country is really terrible. Even now my parents become very frightened if I have not returned by 6:30 in the evening. They worry. My father, 96 years old, says, “Tita, you know that your mom is too old to go out of the country. We cannot travel!” He is making an allusion to a life again in exile. And I answer, “Si, papa.” And then my mom says, “Your father is too old to travel, to live outside the country.” And I answer, “Si, mama.” I know that I cannot go into exile again, and besides, the purpose of life doesn’t have to be to live in resistance, in opposition, or to be in exile, or to be fighting all the time.

Life is to be lived and so my work in El Salvador has to be to work with people to create conditions so that we don't live to work. This is what is happening in all of Latin America, in Africa, and all over. People are merely surviving, living to work. We must create conditions so that we live to enjoy life. Whatever we do we have to keep that in mind, because otherwise we end up living to work and that is not living.

When I witnessed all the fighting within the party and didn't want to go into the communities and work with the people, which was what we were supposed to do, I discovered that we all wanted to have peace, we wanted to have justice, we wanted to have freedom, but we wanted the revolution to give it to us. More than 80,000 Salvadorians gave their life for that, and many more were ready to also give their lives for that peace. All of us were living in a culture of giving. Our people have always given, helping and taking care of each other, many women especially as single heads of households, but we have been forced to give and to maintain the society through our giving. But the time has come that we must be choosy and give because we are willing to give, to give from our hearts. If we are willing to die for our aspirations—peace, freedom, and justice—why not live for them instead? This is a conscious way of living and giving. This is the gift we must give! It is easier sometimes to struggle and endure, but it's not about struggling, it is about being efficient so that we can really have what we dream about.

I found out that there is a qualitative difference between being a revolutionary to being the revolution itself. We must manifest it. There is a difference between building and constructing, defending and struggling for peace, and being peace. It's easy, and it's hard. It is being very mindful and intentional. So the work that we have to do is to be in this consciousness, and understanding how the universe works, be responsible and intentional about this knowledge.

For example, in El Salvador everybody says, "Oh, but look at all this violence! We cannot do anything about that, we cannot change that." The UN Economic Commission for Latin America-CEPAL has declared my country the most violent of the Americas. So people ask, "When is the violence going to stop?" Because we have at least a dozen terrible murders every day, and we have gangs and we have corruption, we become more militarized. Currently, the President of El Salvador has given us a "gift"—that is what he calls the "dollarization" of the economy. The President pushed for our national coin to be substituted by the U.S. dollar. His political party in the legislature, and the other political allies, approved it without discussion, but in violation of our constitution. This is legal, but it is illegitimate and immoral. The purpose of the legalization of the dollar for our economy was to support industry, commerce, and international investments in our country. This has made the cost of living go so high in El Salvador that today we are one of the most expensive countries on the continent.

The government of El Salvador has now given us another "gift" for security and against terrorism. El Salvador is the only country that has a contingent in Iraq. These soldiers have recently been honoured since they saved a U.S. contingent. Besides the medals the soldiers were given, we are reminded often of: "How brave

you Salvadorians are and what great things you are doing!” The government declares, “We are fulfilling a commitment that we made to you when we were campaigning,” and now we also have the Super Iron Fist Law.

That is its the real name: Super Iron Fist Law. It is a version of the U.S. *Patriot Act II*. It means repression, especially of the young people, and the poorest people. Many gang members have parents working in the United States, and these young people have been sent back to El Salvador because while the parents were working very hard to maintain the family, these kids were on the streets. These young people, back in El Salvador, are often in very violent gangs. The government now has an arrangement with the national police in each country of Central America to fight terrorism, to fight the gangs. But, in response to this, the gangs joined forces and are now organized throughout the whole region. Today, as per the arrangement of the governments, the police from any Central American country can run across the borders, persecuting the gangs, regardless of sovereignty, and the youth are doing the same. Violence and crime have increased as a result.

The people say, “What can we do?” It is a responsibility to figure out what to do. To do this is to practice governance, and to practice governance is a gift. We have to see what it means in each place. It might mean, for example in the little town where I live, to develop a team of people to meet even with the conservative mayor. I live in an Indigenous town of very impoverished people. I need to pause here to say something about language. Notice that I don’t say “poor people.” I use the word “impoverished” because there is the process of impoverishment and a process of enrichment. We have to pay attention to language. (Also, I never call the people of the United States “Americans.” I call them “United Stateans,” or *estadounidenses*, because all of the people in the Americas are Americans.) In my little town, the gangs and drunken men have taken over the public park so no one can use or enjoy the park. We negotiated with the mayor take the park back for the people. We proposed creating a butterfly garden in the park with his support. We would provide ten people to do the work, we asked him to provide another ten, including council members. We wanted the high school kids to come and work with us in the park, and we wanted him to provide the equipment we would need. We explained to him that this would be a way to save animal and plant species, the diversity. He had to be there and if possible work with us. He agreed.

And there we went: us and a very conservative mayor, working in the park together. The mayor with his team came, and the students, and the government-sponsored House of Culture, and the church came, and they witnessed how everybody was stopping to see what we were doing. Then we explained *Agenda 21*—the 1992 Rio Declaration for a healthy planet and a peaceful planet. We then took time to reflect on how by creating a garden together, we had practiced a level of governance, caring for the Commons, and making them safe for the townspeople, working on plant and animal biodiversity, the filtration of water, the purification of air, and how this is part of what we have to do at the national and international levels for a healthy planet, what *Agenda 21* is all about. And when we finished, everyone saw the beauty that we had been able to create together, in

a collaborative way, in a short time, and even with a conservative mayor. People were pleased, and some people said, “And it was good.”

Now we are creating new projects with the mayor for the benefit of the town and the safety of the people. The butterfly and humming bird garden is beautiful, and people are coming from everywhere just to stand and look at it. There are butterflies, birds, and flowers. We have claimed back the park.

I am giving these examples because this is what I am writing about: understanding globally and acting locally. In order to act locally, we must do it personally, with our families, and then we have to really involve all the stakeholders, including the decision-makers or facilitators, not necessarily the people who are the most powerful. It is important for people to know the power they are.

The best way to mount resistance is to have this intentional culture, this conscious culture, and to create whatever you have been dreaming about. It is not a matter even of believing and having faith; it is a matter of knowing that we are power, knowing and affirming that we are creators, knowing that we are always cause, and never effect. We need to be conscious that whatever we decide to do, at any moment, will have an impact on what happens and on what we do later, on the people around us, even to the seventh generation, and on the health of the planet. Thus, as women, we must choose intentionally what to give, how to give, to whom to give, and what to give, for we are power, creative power, and with our actions we create; we are always cause and never effect.

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From Forced Gifts to Free Gifts

My contribution to this volume should not be considered a “paper” *per se*, but rather an ongoing dialogue with the living-thinking members of the Feminist Gift Economy Network and the ones whom we carry with us. I strongly believe in the power of presence, in its capacity to set in motion a different process of thinking and discovering. I am choosing this incompleteness, this particular kind of thinking that becomes alive when we meet as a group in order to make visible a feminist methodology of thinking and producing knowledge that has been my experience of our various conferences and network meetings to discuss the gift economy. As an incomplete dialogue it thus needs and responds to the others also collected in this volume.

Gifts and Paradigms

I see the gift as an epistemological tool, a paradigm in its most classic meaning: a concept which makes other ideas as acceptable, diverse ways of thinking as legitimate, thus opening a mental space to think differently, creating new imagination. When we say that a new paradigm has emerged, we mean that the basic thinking that allows us to “see” something has changed, providing us with the possibility to ask different questions, and to imagine different answers.

It is no accident that Genevieve Vaughan (1997) developed the gift paradigm within her feminist thinking. Feminism is already a fundamental change paradigm, able to shift our whole thinking. By making visible the lives and thoughts of women, their resistance to dominant paradigms, their knowledge-production processes, feminism makes visible other aspects of the entire social fabric of society, creating different links between phenomena and legitimizing different ideas of how knowledge is created. In this sense, the gift paradigm is one of the best examples of feminist knowledge: it changes our way of seeing the same things, it makes us see differently, and it lies at the junction of different disciplinary fields (economics, politics, psychology, and anthropology, at the least), making it impossible to choose one over the other. I see the gift paradigm as something that is able to “enlarge” the worldview we have developed through feminism, going more deeply and expansively from a theory of subjectivity toward a theory

of economics and social bonds, obliging us to keep together the approaches that have been fragmented by patriarchal knowledge.

The first thing that the gift paradigm makes visible is women's invisible unwaged work. More importantly, it overthrows a basic assumption embedded in economic thinking, namely that of *homo economicus*, looking for a different, non-utilitarian paradigm, based on the anthropological structure of the human being. According to this perspective we do not live in a world of scarcity. Vaughan (1997) challenges the premise of current economic thought, and claims instead that we live in a world of abundance. Moreover, by showing that the market, in reality has a parasitic relationship to the gift economy, the gift paradigm goes further, asking all of us to imagine not only a different economy but also a different idea of what economy is.

I do not think it is by chance that evidence of the gift "being at work" rises to the forefront during extreme social experiences. In revolutionary times, in times of deep crises, when the normal rules of living and of economies are suspended, we can see the gift paradigm, the gift economy, at work, together with other invisible aspects of the human society and of human beings. Normally, this paradigm is not only invisible, but also considered meaningless. However, when the boat is sinking, when the system is collapsing, only a gift economy can keep the social fabric together, emerging behind and inside the barter and the other informal economies that come to light during times of crisis.

There are many examples of this and we might choose to interpret them in different ways. During these times of crisis, *real scarcity* makes visible what can be considered the *real abundance*, which is lost when the market economy "works well." Other possibilities come along, new ways of imagining relationships and the economy. In this sense, the situation of Argentina, where the economic system collapsed in 2001 as a result of an expropriation process which combined forced privatizations, export of capital, and massive corruption, was paradoxical and exemplar at the same time. The crisis was terrible, people were starving, but another economy was being discovered and used, awakening an enormous energy among people, developing what I would call a "healthy crisis" of the social imaginary. Other ways to survive, other social fabrics, became visible and imaginable.

We should ask ourselves what, hidden in the other economies, arises in times of extreme conditions, of catastrophes. What, hidden often within a barter economy, makes barter not a "primitive form" of the market but the anticipation of another scenario, where survival is linked to the capacity to preserve the social bond, as African societies keep telling us. What kind of strength is awakened by the capacity to share beyond promises of restitution? What kind of energy is awakened in the human being when s/he "gives" outside hopes or calculations of restitution? The key word here is: "passion for the social link." Jacques T. Godbout (1993) defines it as follows: "'giving' without any guarantee of restitution with the goal to create, nurture or re-create a social bond among people" (30, *my translation*). This social act works contagiously, putting into motion a whole series of other social acts. According to Jacques Derrida (1995), the gift is the only event that lies at the foundations of real democracy, "a democracy to come" that "opens community

and democracy to a future that cannot be appropriated" (361, *my translation*).

The gift paradigm is not new. Marcel Mauss (1923-24), Jacques T. Godbout (1993), Alain Caille (1998), Georges Bataille (1997), Emmanuel Levinas (1961) and other anthropologists or philosophers have conceptualized the gift as the basis of the social bond and the economy. However, it is not without meaning that today this "other economy" is reawakening in the midst of political thinking. All these theories, from Mauss to Godbout, to, most recently, Derrida (1995), indicate the need to rethink the foundation and the complexity of the social fabric, the need for a vision that will allow us to get out from under an utilitarian anthropology, and away from a fragmented view of the human being. This means, also, rethinking a theory of the human subject.

This theory continues to be, and *cannot be*, nowadays, gender neutral. Yet, the research by male theorists stubbornly continues to be gender neutral. From Derrida (1995), to Godbout (1993), to Lévinas (1961), an idealized feminine is very present, as the "name" by which they try to imagine the absoluteness and purity of the gift: *philia*, the love for the affinity, *agape*, the spirit of absolute pure love. The more the *feminine* appears as a concept, the more *women* disappear. Even the more sociological analyses, like those by Serge Latouche (1991) for example, which provided inspiring visions of the only movement still active in the international scene, the anti-globalization movement, completely overlook the role of women in this respect. Amazingly, women are almost entirely absent from both the theoretical articulations and the descriptions of various exemplary experiences, even in situations where the presence of women is overwhelming. Sometimes there is a nod to the fact that, yes, strangely enough, in all the social struggles of the present times women are the majority, or the main leaders. And "another economy" is at work. This phenomenon, however, is not questioned nor further analyzed.

As a result of this general gender neutrality of male theorists, it is not surprising that their theories of the gift are literally "tortured" by the issue of reciprocity. Is the gift a free gift? How can the gift be a gift if not absolutely pure, or free? Are you waiting to receive something in return, or not? Mauss (1990 [1923-24]) has argued that the gift is in reality the worst compulsive social obligation. In Derrida (1995) the issue of the "purity" of the gift, without expecting anything in return, takes him very close to the Christian concept of pure self-sacrifice.

However, when they look for possible roots of human generosity, trying to solve the issue of reciprocity and pure other-oriented love, the only paradigm that comes to their mind, from Aristotle to Todorov to Freud, is the example of maternal love. Tzvetan Todorov (1992) has long worked on the roots of generosity in extreme situations such as in concentration camps. In his book, *Di fronte all'estremo*, he studied both the Nazi concentration camps and the gulags, interviewing people and trying to understand the root of self-sacrifice. Why is it that some people are able to share their last piece of bread, and some others are only able to hide it? Apart the self-sacrificing-for-the-glory-hero-model, Todorov concludes that the only other model he could refer to is the model of the mother, particularly the

“thinking” of a mother. To provide an example he quotes, interestingly, not a *real* mother but a potential mother, a sixteen-year-old girl, Fania Fenelon. From a barrack in Auschwitz, while she looks at other prisoners during the night, she writes: “I look at them, and a deep tenderness is awakened in me, a protective tenderness which goes back to the depth of centuries. From where can it come to me, to me, the youngest among all of them?” (Todorov 1992: 196, *my translation*).

Recalling the example of maternal love and the importance of women as the subjects of this particular behaviour, which is at the basis of the gift economy, Vaughan (1997) highlights how in symbolic exchange, as in language, the relationship is not only economic or social, not utilitarian and based on exchange and expectation of reciprocity. It is based on the satisfaction of giving. The return is in the experience of giving. The energy awakened is the affirmation of the importance of the bonds with the others. It is impossible in this model to understand the issue of reciprocity as it has traditionally been conceptualized. In this perspective we overcome symmetry and reciprocity, because the obligation becomes desire, recognition of the importance of a relationship. This is the political meaning of the semiotic aspect of the gift. The gift implied in the linguistic exchange is the paradigm of the human relationship, the kind of act that lies at the foundation of the social bond, that bond which gives humans meaning, and pleasure. It also leads to a rethinking of the economic bond. Perhaps we might also have to reconsider that “oceanic sentiment” that Sigmund Freud (1978 [1930]) talks about, as the only emotion able to overcome, together with maternal love, the experience of ambivalence and the drive for pure survival. We need to be more careful in our studies of all those social areas where the connection between human needs and the public worlds, which have been built around these needs, hiding them, are still visible, as the mass experience.

Rethinking Motherhood

The mother as the anthropological basis for gift giving is at the core of Vaughan’s (1997) theory. However, this paradigm of a human relationship should be carefully re-questioned and re-elaborated, because at the present time we are witnessing fundamentalisms and churches attacking women’s advancement using precisely the values accorded to motherhood. It becomes therefore important to trace the difference between a forced and “natural gift” and a free gift. From abortion to assisted procreation, to women’s role in society and family, we are facing what I call a *forced gift* economy to keep women in, or put them back into, their patriarchally-assigned place, socially, economically, culturally. We are at risk of having our values stolen, our rights taken away. It is easy to recognize that that one of the reasons for the recent Republican electoral victory in the U.S. was the capacity of the fundamentalist Right to advocate so-called traditional values, and to convince people to give away their rights in name of those values.

In 2004, the Roman Catholic Church issued a “Letter to Bishops on the Collaboration Between Men and Women,” a very long and important document

which talks directly to feminists, and which seems to take into consideration some feminist claims and finally gives them a death blow. Then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope, wrote this letter. Its significance should not be underestimated. In all religions today, including the Islamic religion, there are specific “schools” whose goal is to get women to conform to their patriarchally-defined roles. Ratzinger talks about this moment, this “difficult moment of history”—and he is not referring to current wars, global violence and poverty, and a certain model of masculinity that thrives on war and threats. He says, in this letter, that the real threat of these times is that women are abandoning their traditional role of being mothers and nurturing human beings, to “live by and for themselves.” He adds: “...She [the woman] is abandoning her intuition, the deep intuition that the best of her life is the fact that all her activities are oriented to the awakening of the other, to the love of the other, to the growth of the other, the perfection of the other.” This letter is a very refined document where women are strongly recognized, however within a fixed role of complementarity to men, prescribed not perhaps “by nature,” or biology, but by God. In this order it is important to avoid competition between the sexes to achieve a “spousal” order made up by the complementarities between the sexes.

The document is so intriguing that even some strong feminists have been “lured” by it. This is because it recognizes and idealizes women’s values and contribution to society to such an extent that it is difficult even for feminists to trace the limits between the feminist re-discovery and re-affirmation of the value of motherhood and the manipulation of the Catholic church. I don’t know if we can all see the difficulty and danger this thinking poses.

We have to be able to articulate the difference of how gift giving, and mothering, which is the basis of the gift economy, is different from the patriarchal image of a mother and a woman, an image used today by all fundamentalists’ attacks against women’s only recently won freedom. It is important today not to be caught in the “forced gift economy,” which has been the life of women, the only base of their importance and recognition, and still is, in the greater parts of the world. We have to be able to show that these gifts should be *free* gifts. In order for this to happen, we have to see that the gift paradigm is embraced by free women who *can* speak and live *also* for themselves. “The world needs the love of a free woman” not that of a *good* woman, says the poet Nan Peacocke.

Motherhood is a very good example of the difficult work done and to be done by feminists. It lies on the very edge of a fine line between the gift paradigm’s power for liberation and orthodox religion’s oppressive glorification of enforced female self-sacrifice (and enforced “mothering”). Men have recognized the gift, the maternal gift from women. What they cannot accept, as Cardinal Ratzinger tells us clearly, is women’s free gift, their freedom to choose to give this gift, which is women’s subjectivity and autonomy, women’s representation as more than just mothers. There is a patriarchal mythology of motherhood where this ideology of maternal giving hides the slavery of women, the control of their bodies, sexuality, and lives. The motherhood that comes from *that* gift carries all sorts of frustrations, hidden returns and dark sides, which are the denial of the idea of the free gift we

are talking about. There is a terrible market of suppression and returns, built on the negation of women's freedom but also on a false image of maternal power. We should also remember that in all religions and in all continents men are still wildly conflicting politically on the control of women's bodies (as is witnessed in abortion and assisted procreation debates), and we should also remember the "internationality" of violence against women, also a form control over women's bodies, from Sweden to Afghanistan.

The distinction between these two opposing and complex positions is difficult to see clearly because so much is involved in each. As emotions, dependency, and social bonds have been attributed historically to women, motherhood is still the place where women find and experience *at the same time* their power(s) and their slavery. Motherhood is still the most complex and unexplored human experience; the experience of the long dependence of one human being on another human being (*neotenia*), and the fact that this dependency is on the female sex, remains substantially unexplored. Only if we explore beyond any idealization of this human experience from both sides, from the mothers and from infants of both sexes, as feminism has started to do, can we constitute a different subjectivity, a real one, "carved in" between patriarchal idealization of motherhood and women's difficult struggle to define themselves liberated from the trap of idealization and devaluation.

The complexity of the definition of the work of *caring* is a good example of the difficulty of carving out a new image able to rescue the denial of the value of motherhood and, at the same time, not fall into the trap of a new idealization. The enormous amount of work embedded into caring is linked to the more fragile moments of the human condition, childhood, old age, and death, that have been hidden by men, in the undergrounds of history. Women, as caregivers, are reminders of this part of life. For those who want to externalize this evidence they become, alternatively, persecutors, angels or witches, whether they come out of the shadows as caregivers or as reminders of dangers of that need to be avoided. This immense work, in Italy, my country, today for example, when women are trying to get away from a self-sacrificing model, is being marketed and confined to other and new invisible women, the migrants. Here the market and the gift come together again. Here the market economy profits on the misery and impotence of the human condition, its material, often terrible, needs and on migrant women's poverty. It is obvious, especially today, that women's gift giving has to be cultivated and enforced by patriarchy, in order for patriarchy to continue to pillage, to plunder, for years to come, as it has always done. As long as they are successful in this, men will continue to hold onto their privileges, and continue to be cared for without any recognition of the caregiver. The most miserable parts of the human condition, where human beings are reminded of their fragility, of the futility of the monuments they have erected, must remain invisible in order for people not to truly see who they are. The idealization of women goes together with that. It keeps women where they are and takes them out of the shadow in a non-dangerous way. It is very hard for women to free themselves from this patriarchally defined role. There is a terrible internal conflict, profoundly felt,

which makes it very difficult for a woman to conceive or define herself outside of the maternal framework. These are areas of painful research for women because motherhood is the only relative area of privilege and recognition they are allowed, in exchange for their total service. However, anti-market by definition, it is within this position that women bury the maximum of their feminine “spontaneous” culture of resistance, a culture rooted in their forced position but also prefiguring something new. Inside this position, with its closer relationship to life and death, lies also the possibility of a different notion of personal and social bonds.

We need to be very clear about the distinction between women’s defensive use of motherhood and the possible invention it embeds: we need a feminist gift paradigm. The gift we are talking about is the gift that comes from a real motherhood, “rethought” and reinvented by feminists. It unmasks that “other motherhood” invented by men for their own interests. This motherhood is really “other-oriented” because it is done freely. It comes from a free subjectivity finally identified. It is not internally or externally enforced and requires compensation. This marks the difference between a culture of motherhood, which is just a culture of resistance, and a creative politically active culture of motherhood based on new feminine subjectivities.

This was made possible paradoxically when feminists “re-carved” the imaginary of motherhood, freeing it from the patriarchal dream of an eternal, but powerful, dangerous mother. Since then motherhood has been filled with the real experiences of real women, in all their ambiguity. With feminism, motherhood has perhaps been too quickly reclaimed. But it has also been exposed to the light, re-signified as a subject of autonomous desire rather than a subject of predetermined destiny. Throughout this voyage it has been necessary to travel through ambiguities, and pains. It is always like that when one leaves a condition that is oppressive but well-known, and secure in its aspects. New lives require losing identities, securities, known bonds. Rethinking motherhood means jumping away from the privileges of a bad “sacredness,” made of illusory grandiosity and imaginary power. It implies engaging with history and its limits, with other women, and this is difficult for women too.

Only this painful process allows re-signification, builds other meanings, giving limited reality to dreams. It is important, in this perspective, to de-idealize motherhood as well as the gift, so that its importance in human relationships, its value, can avoid being pillaged again.

Perhaps the difficulties and splendours of the relationships that we have in the women’s movement, so painfully shaped, allude also to new interpersonal and social paradigms. There is a lot of mothering there and here, and there is also very dark mothering at some moments, full of control and bad powers, because mothering in itself is not necessarily “good.” But there is also a lot of caring and love and “good” mothering; many gifts, and many gift economies.

I think we can look at the practices we have developed in these years from this point of view and the different values that have emerged as different paradigms for beginnings of a real history of women, by women, for women.

I would like to finish with a poem by Nan Peacocke, a Caribbean writer and poet, and friend.

The world needs the love of a free woman

The world needs the love of a free woman
 Not the love of a good woman
 There's already too much
 Of that good woman's love
 Waiting in the bantustans
 While her husband's soul is mined
 Deep in South Africa.

Enough of the love of a good woman
 Far in the dark city
 At a high small window
 Lying on a bed
 Crying in her sleep
 So she won't disturb the others.

The world needs the love of a freewoman
 But early in the suburban gleam
 Assisting the suds and cleansers at their chores
 Is one whose dreams are?
 Dried and stacked on immaculate shelves
 Her mask now fixed
 For the trick, the hoax
 The stench of life's betrayal.

Poor bitch
 Gnawing at the bars of your penalty
 Your children know the love that
 Cuts the heart of the holder
 It's wild dishevelled madness.

The world has seen and seen the one
 Who keeps these things in her heart
 She kneels beholding
 The bleeding feet of her boy
 Blessed Art Thou Among Women
 And never a nuisance.

The world needs the love of a free woman
 Who forgives god

But doesn't ask him for an explanation
Of her brother's murder
Her daughter's rape
Her mother's unrepresented life.

She speaks loud
Naming lies
She moves
Clearing the piercing forest
Of guns and crosses held aloft
She works
Planting hopes
And fetching from the horizon
The thoughts of free women
Rising in millions
From this shantytown.
—Nan Peacocke, Barbados, 1986

For more than 25 years, Paola Melchiori has created, nationally and internationally, free spaces of critical thinking, teaching and learning, based on the model of the Free University in Berlin. She is the founder and president of The International Feminist University Network, an international think-tank for women's critical thinking and education. The university is committed to developing and making visible new paradigms of knowledge based on women's ways of knowing and learning and to make them available and meaningful for new generations of women leaders. She has written extensively on feminist theory, knowledge creation, and on interdisciplinary and relational learning and education. She is currently focusing on how to "pass on" experiences, memory, history, to young women and men, through written and visual texts.

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The Gift of Community Radio

Prologue

As Jane Jacobs observes in *Systems of Survival*, different sectors of society have different moral codes. She posits that hybridization of these codes can create moral monsters that have the vices of both systems and virtues of neither. In this paper, I observe the interactions of two moral codes in media, those of the exchange economy, and those of the gift economy. My understanding of the gift economy as a morally distinct economy that is often appropriated by the exchange economy is based on a long intellectual association and friendship with the philanthropist, semiotician, and economic linguist Genevieve Vaughan. Vaughan's work over more than 25 years on the concept of the Gift Economy has sparked an intellectual movement that includes academics, activists, and indigenous thinkers.¹ In the interests of full disclosure, I must say that Vaughan has supported my work and that of many others producing feminist media during more than 20 years.

Introduction

In order to reject patriarchal thinking, we must be able to distinguish between it and something else, an alternative. (Vaughan 1997: 18)

I have been a community radio practitioner for more than 30 years, and during that time have observed several kinds of controversy and struggle erupting within the field. In this paper, I will examine radio and especially community radio in terms of gift economy concepts, and explore the hypothesis that much of the conflict that emerges within community radio can be seen as a conflict between a nurturing gift model and a hierarchical or patriarchal-exchange model.

Definitions and Discussion

First, how is community radio different from other kinds of radio broadcasting? In practice, the definition of community radio is inconsistently applied, and can overlap with other categories such as public radio, state radio, development radio,

and association radio,² and even commercial radio—especially in countries that have no enabling legislation for community radio licenses. However, in December 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society (see Civil Society Initiative on Community Media) divided mass media into three recognized sectors: commercial media, public service media, and community media. Each of these sectors can be described in terms of a gift analysis.

Commercial Radio

Commercial radio is a radio station (or network) set up as a business. Its owners sell advertising to raise revenue, and a money bottom line is usually the prime driver. It is often said of these stations that in business terms the product is the audience, which is sold to the advertiser for a profit, and that the content of the station is simply a means to attract the audience so that the audience's attention can be sold. Station rankings are determined by surveying selected people from the potential audience to find out what percentage of "market share" each station has captured, in terms of gender and age and economic groupings. For example, males 18-34 living in families making more than \$100,000 a year would be a pretty desirable demographic, because it is relatively easy to get them to spend money on advertised goods. It is also fairly certain that you can attract a sizeable amount of them with the right bait. The preference for a male demographic tends to skew broadcasting content towards lowest common denominator fodder for males, such as sports, smart-ass commentary (and on television, sex and violence).

In the United States, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) formerly interpreted the *Communications Act* of 1937 to mitigate the commercial nature of broadcast media and require that it give something of value to the public.

The policy ... that became known as the "Fairness Doctrine" is an attempt to ensure that all coverage of controversial issues by a broadcast station be balanced and fair. The FCC took the view, in 1949, that station licensees were "public trustees," and as such had an obligation to afford reasonable opportunity for discussion of contrasting points of view on controversial issues of public importance. The Commission later held that stations were also obligated to actively seek out issues of importance to their community and air programming that addressed those issues. With the deregulation sweep of the Reagan Administration during the 1980s, the Commission dissolved the fairness doctrine. (Limburg)

Congress passed a law in 1987 to try to restore the Fairness Doctrine by writing into law what had formerly been only administrative regulations of the FCC. However, President Reagan vetoed the bill, and other attempts have failed. Other obligations of commercial broadcasters that have been dissolved since the 1980s in the U.S. include obligations to air news and public service programming, to give a right of reply against attack,³ and "to offer 'equal opportunity' to all

legally qualified political candidates for any office if they had allowed any person running in that office to use the station” (Limburg). This final requirement was suspended for 60 days by the FCC, shortly before the 2000 election, and resulted in, for example, some Belo Corporation TV stations reportedly refusing to air Democratic Presidential Candidate Al Gore’s ads.⁴ The suspension of the equal time rule was supposedly in anticipation of a court ruling striking down the rule on grounds that it violated broadcasters’ right of free speech; however, as of the present writing the courts have not definitively ruled on this matter.⁵

The rhetoric of the broadcast regulation that emerged in the U.S. from the 1937 *Broadcasting Act* turned upon the issue of scarcity. Because broadcasting spectrum was a scarce resource and was interpreted as belonging to the public, this supposedly justified putting requirements on broadcasters to meet community needs. In 1980, broadcasters were required to make an annual survey of nineteen categories of potential community needs and show how they responded to this with programming; by 2000, they were only required to keep a public file of any community issues and programs they aired. Within this time frame, the *Telecommunications Act* of 1996 changed the rules to permit the same owners to have almost unlimited numbers of radio stations. “Family owned” radio stations that might have some human ties to the local community have virtually disappeared, swallowed up and chased out by a very limited number of fiercely competitive conglomerates (Mills and Schardt 2000).

The commonly stated rationale for permitting these ownership changes is that with the availability of more kinds of media outlets (for example, cable TV and radio, satellite radio and netcasting), there is no longer a scarcity of media outlets. However,

Since 1994, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has conducted auctions of licenses for electromagnetic spectrum. These auctions are open to any eligible company or individual that submits an application and upfront payment, and is found to be a qualified bidder by the Commission. (FCC “Auctions”)

In effect, by permitting a few of the largest cash- and credit-rich companies free reign in enclosing the Commons, government is colluding in an artificially-enhanced scarcity of broadcasting spectrum. In the words of former Clinton-appointed FCC Chairman Bill Kennard: “Of course, spectrum has always been in short supply. But never in history have we seen more intense demands on the spectrum resource. We are in danger of suffering a ‘spectrum drought’ in our country.”⁶

In the words of Bebe Facundus, who was forced by economics to sell the commercial women’s radio station she had created in Louisiana, “Only three entities own everything [i.e., all the commercial radio stations] in the city of Baton Rouge, and that’s happening throughout the country” (qtd. in Werden). These conglomerate owners could buy up the most powerful stations with the best reception and greatest audience reach; using economies of scale they could

undersell her in advertising until they drove her out of business, and they (and the casinos) could hog and drive up the price of billboards used for radio promotion. Facundus tried to make her station both attractive and useful to women in her community—an example of how a commercial station that is locally owned can cross over category and be oriented towards meeting needs. She put a large amount of her own money into the station but was unable or unwilling to absorb a big financial loss as the conditions in the community changed. She also says about her experience that she had a problem with male investors, whom she had to buy out because “if men come in with any money they think they own everything” (qtd. in Werden).

The loss of local ownership and local accountability is now recognized by the public in the U.S., and has generated such a backlash against the FCC that in October 2003 the federal regulatory body created a “Localism Task Force”:

... to evaluate how broadcasters are serving their local communities. Broadcasters must serve the public interest, and the Commission has consistently interpreted this to require broadcast licensees to air programming that is responsive to the interests and needs of their communities. (FCC “Powell Statement”)⁷

A North Carolina TV station’s website contained this reporting about the FCC hearing in Charlotte, which was attended by Chairman Michael Powell and other commissioners:

Powell, one of three Republicans on the commission who backed the new rules, has said he believes the issue of how broadcasters serve their local community should be addressed separately from the ownership rules. But he could not stop speakers from bringing up the ownership dispute at the Charlotte hearing. “To try to talk about localism without discussing media ownership is avoiding the issue,” said Tift Merritt, a singer-songwriter from Raleigh who told the FCC members she was unable to get her songs on her local radio station. Her comment drew applause from the packed hearing. (“FCC Localism Hearing Draws Large Vocal Crowd” 2003)

In contrast to 1960, when “Payola” (companies paying to get their records played on radio stations) was a crime, today in the U.S.: “Listeners may not realize it, but radio today is largely bought by the record companies. Most rock and Top 40 stations get paid to play the songs they spin by the companies that manufacture the records” (Boehlert 2001). This affects not only local artists and the local audiences who would like to hear songs on the radio that reflect local culture, but they also shut out smaller and independent record-labels.

Several extreme failures by conglomerate radio stations to meet local needs were widely publicized and became one of the main reasons for the FCC localism hearings. For example:

In January 2002, a train carrying 10,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia derailed in the town of Minot, causing a spill and a toxic cloud. Authorities attempted to warn the residents of Minot to stay indoors and to avoid the spill. But when the authorities called six of the seven radio stations in Minot to issue the warning, no one answered the phones. As it turned out, Clear Channel owned all six of the stations and none of the station's personnel were available at the time. (“#17 Clear Channel Monopoly Draws Criticism” 2004⁸).

And then there was the report, also from the North Carolina, that the *Bob and Madison Morning Show* on WDCG-FM had included a lot of hate talk directed at cyclists, including discussion of how much fun it was to run cyclists off the road. Cycling organizations' protests got the station to promise to run road safety announcements, but these public service announcements were reportedly also parodied and derided by the morning show hosts (“Poor, Poor Broadcasters Might Have to Endure Complaints at FCC Localism Hearings...” 2003).

So-called “shock radio” with hate elements, including sexism, has become standard fare for many commercial radio stations across the U.S., especially in the most widely listened-to time slots. Howard Stern, a shock jock syndicated by a CBS subsidiary, got away with advocating rape, among other things (Pozner 1999). According to the New York-based NGO Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), hate radio is political.⁹ This assessment would seem to be borne out by the fact that Stern's show was cancelled from all the stations of the vast Clear Channel network in February 2004. While CNN reported that this was because Stern violated the FCC's new decency standards (“Howard Stern Suspended for Indecency” 2004),¹⁰ Stern himself was widely quoted as saying that it was because “I dared to speak out against the Bush administration and say that the religious agenda of George W. Bush concerning stem cell research and gay marriage is wrong” (“Stern Feels Bush-Whacked, End is Near” 2004).

Hate radio for political purposes is far more widespread than just in the U.S., of course. According to Radio Netherlands (2004), “Hate radio killed more than 800,000 people in the last decade.” They maintain regularly updated listings of examples of both hate radio and peace radio stations. Among the examples of hate radio they list:

Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) is the most recent and widely reported symbol of “hate radio” throughout the world. Its broadcasts, disseminating hate propaganda and inciting to murder Tutsis and opponents to the regime, began on 8 July 1993, and greatly contributed to the 1994 genocide of hundreds of thousands.

This hate radio station in Rwanda was succeeded in 1994 by two peace radio stations, Radio Agatashya (“the swallow that brings hope” in Kinyarwanda) and Radio Amahoro (“Radio Peace”). However, both these stations were short-lived

as a result of funding shortages.¹¹ Since 1997, women's programming has also been used to promote peace.¹²

The association between women's radio and peace has a flip side in that shock radio, also described as "aggressive reality" radio, finds more of its listenership among males (Dietrich 2003). Not surprisingly, it is also understood to be a tool of a religio-Republican hierarchical ideology that has been struggling hard against feminism and environmentalism in the U.S. Patrick Burkart (1995) analyzed this phenomenon:

Using Clinton's election in 1992 as a basis for a backlash, talk show programs directed momentum-building campaigns of mass fax and phone call petitions to national politicians, especially in response to changing federal policies towards abortion restrictions, discrimination against gays and lesbians, and strengthening national educational standards.

America's most ubiquitous talk radio personality, Rush Limbaugh, undermined the reputation of feminism by popularizing the term "feminazis." Referencing early studies of Nazi radio, Burkart (1995) found that America's sneering right-wing talk-jocks follow the same model—being absolutist and programming to build a false sense of consensus. "Disagreement and dissent are programmed out," he writes, as a targeted marketing tool. Shows are "de facto ... reaching only those audiences with lifestyles that support consumption of this entertainment technology." My own informal survey in 2002 showed Limbaugh was on the air Austin, Texas, 34 hours a week.

Groups ranging from FAIR in New York ("Challenging Hate Radio: A Guide for Activists"),¹³ to the Coalition Against Hate Radio in Portland, Oregon ("Groups Demand End to 'Hate Radio'" 2002), among others, recommend liberals to mount campaigns that include calling in to hate radio programs. However, Burkart explains that the shock radio programs today use technologies such as pre-screening callers and using a delay to allow editing calls even on live radio, in order to build up a picture of monolithic public opinion supporting the host's fascist pronouncements. As Genevieve Vaughan writes in *For-Giving* (1997):

An environment is created in which some ideas fit together and thrive because they are validated as permissible and respectable, while their alternatives are discredited. The so-called 'free market' of ideas, like the economic free market, often promotes the benefit of a (genetically superior?) few while appearing to be good for everyone.... Systems of ideas which have been taught us as the truth back up the political and economic systems of which they are a part. (19)

Burkart's (1995) analysis of right-wing radio is corroborative of that insight: "Shock radio is a technocratic forum, portraying its ideological perspective ... delivering daily, oracular, absolutist insights. Rush Limbaugh reminds his audience regularly that he is the only voice of the truth in 'the media.'"

Commercialism also has a role in less “mainstream” hate radio, whose purveyors simply buy time from commercial operators that exercise no control over the content. This, for example, appears on the website of famous Nazi sympathizer Ernst Zundel:

With only a limited budget, anyone can buy airtime on hundreds of AM or shortwave stations throughout America. Almost everyone listens to the radio! Ernst Zundel urges his listeners to join the “Freedom Evolution” towards Truth and Justice, by participating in this bold new venture in mass communication.

Public Service Radio

Public service radio could mean many things,¹⁴ but you can get an idea of the generally accepted range by looking at the membership of the European Broadcasting Union. Its members are radio and television companies, most of which are government-owned public service broadcasters or privately owned stations with public missions. Support and control relationships between public service broadcasters and governments vary. Stations and networks may be owned by the government like Radio Mozambique (TV Radio World). They may be owned by a foundation partly controlled by the government, like Swedish national radio (Ruhnbro 2004). Or, they may be owned by a state-initiated private company, funded by a dedicated tax and with nominal government control, like the BBC. In the case of National Public Radio in the U.S., you have a non-profit corporation indirectly funded by a line in the government budget, with the money laundered first through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (a bipartisan politically directed body) and then through a network of member stations that are also listener-, donor-, and business-funded. Looking at these structures, you can infer that public service radio is intended to be for the public benefit, but not “by the people.” In many cases, the government makes show of an arms-length relationship, but I think it is fair to say that these entities are expected to promote stability in the present system and cannot afford to be radical. It is a fact, however, that in the current climate of capitalist globalization even maintaining the status quo can become radical by default.

Remember that radio itself is only about 100 years old. In 1894, Marconi “made a bell ring using radio waves.” In 1902 there was a “public demonstration of radio.” Not until 1906 were the first radio set advertised and the first music broadcast on radio. Radio transmitters interfering with each other soon became an obvious problem. The first U.S. law to regulate broadcasters was passed in 1912 (“Radio Broadcasting History”). This was, incidentally, the year the Titanic sank, a ship that had a radio but couldn’t reach anyone with it. The nearest ship did not have a 24-hour radio operator. It was also the period of the First World War, and governments could certainly see the building power of radio for war, not only at home but also in their colonies.

New Zealand passed the first law to require government licensing of radio, in 1903 (“A Brief History of Regulation of Radiocommunications in New Zealand, 1903-2003”), while it was still a British colony (“Timeline: New Zealand”). Private broadcasting was introduced in New Zealand in 1923, but in 1936 the 22 private broadcasters were nationalized to create a state broadcasting monopoly. In 1947, New Zealand became one of many colonies that gained full independence from Britain. Like other former British colonies (and most of the rest of the world) it retained monopoly broadcasting and looked to the BBC for ideas. However, the BBC’s programming was supported by government-levied licensing fees for radio receivers, and New Zealand was too small a country to make much money that way; hence, they took advertising, with its attendant pressure to make programs attractive to wealthy businesses. They also bought the majority of their programs from BBC.

In the mid-1980s, a New Zealand Royal Commission “advocated a strong public service system with limits on advertising levels and a local program quota.” But instead, national broadcasting was made into a state-owned enterprise that was supposed to return a profit to the government. Bids for programs the government wanted produced were let out for bidding to private companies. One big project the government funded was the medical soap opera *Shortland Street*, “NZOA’s major prime-time vehicle for representing a changing national culture.” *Shortland Street* is a wonderful example of how government-funded programs can be politically shifted. Watched by 700,000 people every weeknight, the show has been top-ranked drama in the country ever since its debut. But as its website describes, the program has changed:

When *Shortland Street* began in 1992, “privatization” and “business practice” were the buzzwords of a health system reinventing itself. The direction of healthcare seemed to lie in the private accident and emergency clinics springing up around the country. The forward-looking clinic *Shortland Street A&E Medical* was the way of the future.

Ten years later, faced with a decline in the demand for specialist private clinic services, *Shortland Street* has become a public hospital, funded by a district health board, and managed by a DHB-appointed CEO. Reflecting the health services most in demand in the fictional suburb of Ferndale, it provides a 24-hour accident and emergency service, community services (including GPs and preventative health care programs), and elective surgery facilities.

The program had been initiated by the right-wing National Party during the Labour Party interregnum of 1990-1999, with the obvious political aim of normalizing privatized healthcare. Perhaps unfortunately for the Labour Party when it returned, it wasn’t as simple to turn around broadcasting policy as it was to change content. In 1991, New Zealand under the National Party had dropped all restrictions on transnational ownership of broadcasting, and the results were disappointing to some:

Although the introduction of competition has significantly increased the number of television services available within New Zealand, there is heated debate as to whether it has extended the range of programming on offer. Critics of the reforms point to the cultural costs of the minimal restrictions on commercial operators, the intensified competition for ratings points ... the absence of any quota to protect local programming, to NZOA's inability to compel stations to show the programs it has funded in favourable slots; and to the marked increase in advertising time which gives more space to commercial speech and less to other voices. (Murdock)

The National Party had not only deregulated New Zealand's broadcasting sector, it had made a gift of it to the corporations and corporate-controlled states through the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), an internationally negotiated trade pact.

New Zealand deregulated its broadcasting sector and listed it as a covered service under the GATS. It is thus constrained from reintroducing content quotas, despite a change in government and a clear public will to re-regulate the sector. ("Advancing Cultural Diversity Globally" 2003)

Most other countries have similar points of struggle to New Zealand's. There are governments that still maintain broadcasting monopolies, but far fewer now, even in Africa and Asia. Zimbabwe remains one of the few governments that maintain total monopoly over broadcasting. Recently a high-ranking minister in Zimbabwe cancelled the popular national anti-AIDS TV soap opera *Mopane Junction*, because funding had come from the Centers for Disease Control in the United States (Khumalo 2004).

Canada is a country that still has a major government-funded public service broadcaster. Through a combination of budget cuts and exponential growth of its competition, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has lost ground in the ratings, but is still the major opinion-testing ground of the nation, and clearly courts more diversity of opinions than the U.S. commercial talk radio referenced in the beginning of this article. Canada also has stiff requirements for Canadian Content (CanCon) in the music played on its radio outlets; and the province of Quebec has additional quotas for playing songs that include at least some French.

With so much shared border and so much shared language between Canada and the economically and culturally aggressive U.S., the results of dropping Canadian cultural quotas and subsidies would be instantly noticeable and highly unpopular. Canada was one of the countries that brought the 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) to a halt in the fall of 2003, largely over the issue of protection of cultural diversity. Other countries share Canada's concerns. The UNESCO Executive Committee recommended in 2003 that a Convention on Cultural Diversity be developed as a legally-binding international instrument, citing:

- There is a growing awareness that aspects of globalization are leading to cultural homogenization and increasing the difficulties for local and diverse cultural production.
- Bilateral and multilateral trade agreements make the situation worse by limiting the ability of nations to support their own artists, cultural producers and institutions. Trade in “products and services” of the “entertainment industry” is big business, accounting for an increasing share of the trade balance of several countries.
- “Exempting” culture from trade rules has been ineffective in preserving cultural sovereignty. WTO rules have been applied to cultural activities by trade panels. Cultural policies are increasingly made to conform to trade commitments. Developing nations cannot promote their own indigenous artists and cultural producers even when they have the capacity to implement appropriate policies.

UNESCO’s General Conference Approved the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions on 20 October 2005.¹⁵

Sweden provides a tidy example of public service radio at the service of national policy (see Ministry of Culture). The current guidelines for Sweden’s public service broadcasting were vetted by a committee appointed by the government that included members of all the parties in the Riksdag (Parliament). What they accepted includes this definition:

In general terms the task of public service radio and TV can be described as giving everyone access to a balanced and independent selection of high quality programs with no commercial advertising. Among other things this means that the broadcasts shall reach people throughout the country and that the broadcasts shall be so composed that it ranges from programs of general interest to the more specialized, at the same time as the citizens are given new and unexpected choices of programs and genres. The broadcasts shall be characterized by the fundamental democratic principles by which the state is governed and shall meet the requirements of impartiality, objectivity and independence of both state and private interests, and of political, economic and other spheres of authority. All programs shall be of high quality. Another important aspect is that the broadcasts shall reflect the country as a whole and that programs therefore shall be produced in different parts of Sweden.

One may note within the description above a number of phrases that are typically used for keeping station and programming decision-making within establishment boundaries, such as “of high quality,” and “objectivity.”¹⁶ “Diversity,” explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the guidelines, is largely described in terms of geography and alternative languages. But we also see, later in the same document, indicators that Sweden intends public service broadcasting should be something of a

counterweight to private media consolidation:

Public service radio and television enjoy high status and will become increasingly important when there is greater competition. The Government proposes that the fundamental principles for public service broadcasting shall continue to apply and considers that there is broad agreement on having well-established public service radio and television companies in Sweden in the future. Vigorous public service radio and television can provide a strong balancing force in a media landscape that otherwise risks being dominated by a few actors. (Ministry of Culture)

In early 2004, there was a conflict in the UK around the independence of the BBC from government control. I had imagined when I began researching this that BBC was a government entity that had been granted independence by sufferance, but when I looked into its history, I found that it was actually a private-public partnership from its inception in 1922:

Though it was the Post Office that had initiated the meeting, it was the six main manufacturers of radio equipment (the Marconi Company, Metropolitan-Vickers, the Western Electric Company, the Radio Communication Company, the General Electric Company, and the British Thompson-Houston Company) who were asked to form a committee to prepare the plan for broadcasting in Britain.

The formation of the BBC involved companies making a capital investment for setting up transmitting stations that would reach all of Britain, thus creating a demand for radio receivers. The “new BBC was to undertake to sell only British-made sets, to pay to the Company ten per cent of the net wholesale selling price of all broadcast receiving apparatus.” BBC was also forbidden to accept money for carrying any message or music, except with written permission from the Postmaster. In 1927, Parliament joined the troika with the Postmaster-General and the corporate governors, and was nominally given “ultimate control” of the BBC; but basically “broadcasting had become a monopoly, financed by licensing fees on radio receivers, and administered by an independent public corporation” (“The Unofficial Guide to the BBC”).

One of the stumbling blocks BBC had to get around when it began was opposition by the British newspaper industry. Initially the industry won a ruling saying that the BBC would have to buy and pay for its news from existing print news services. Before long, of course, it outstripped these other sources—it still pays rather well, but has its own relationship with correspondents. Recently the conflict between BBC and newspapers has heated up again, though, and the crux of the matter is related to gift giving.

In August 2003, a headline appeared reading, “Dyke to Open Up BBC Archive.” Greg Dyke, Director General of the BBC, had announced that:

...everyone would in future be able to download BBC radio and TV programs from the internet. The service, the BBC Creative Archive, would be free and available to everyone, as long as they were not intending to use the material for commercial purposes....

“The BBC probably has the best television library in the world,” said Mr Dyke, who was speaking at the Edinburgh TV Festival.... “I believe that we are about to move into a second phase of the digital revolution, a phase which will be more about public than private value; about free, not pay services; about inclusivity, not exclusion.... It will be about how public money can be combined with new digital technologies to transform everyone’s lives.”

Dyke’s announcement of free content fell in the middle of a spate of decisions by other UK news agencies that they were going to start charging for content on the Internet. An analysis appeared on the University of Southern California’s *Online Journalism Review*:

The BBC has the most popular British news website by far, with 16 to 20 million unique users per month. But it has pockets £2 billion (\$3.32 billion) deep, filled with taxpayers’ money. While it does not run advertising, most commercial newspapers believe that the BBC makes it harder to compete and survive because it poaches potential readers and subscribers.

The BBC response is to claim the public service defense. “We believe that the news we provide is a valuable service for the UK’s license fee payers,” said Pete Clifton, the newly appointed editor for BBC News Online. “It delivers to them, on an increasingly important platform, a rich source of BBC News content which they may have missed elsewhere. This content, paid for by them, covers news from local to international, and we feel it is right to make this available on the Web.”

Newspapers are eagerly awaiting the British government’s online review, which will report on the market impact of BBC’s Web business next year. Many in the industry want curbs placed on the BBC Online; they hope the online review will make recommendations to that effect.

All of the United Kingdom’s bigger online news operations are focused now on growing profits—and doing that is naturally more difficult in a marketplace where one of your competitors is deeply subsidized and giving away top product for free. (Ó hAnluain, 2004)

This controversy reflects a very deep conflict in societies around the world between models of socially-provided goods and services that are collectively supported for all, and individual payment on the barrelhead for everything (even essentials of life like water). In the case of public service radio in the UK, “free” access to information and entertainment was made possible by over-the-air broadcasting to all who have the receivers, and those who bought the receivers paid for this information through dedicated taxes. Now public access, to what

is essentially collective wealth, is being vastly extended by the BBC's opening its archives to all who have sufficient Internet tool access, and this is considered an attack by those who need a condition of scarcity to help them make money on selling information.

It is important to note that the resemblance between the issue of information access and water access is not merely coincidental. Both are the subject of extremely heated trade negotiations, legislative activity, regulatory interpretations, and court fights all over the world, brought by a corporate sector that seeks to privatize valuable resources in both the material and the information commons. New laws formed in these arenas are extending copyrights, so that the products of creativity are not coming out into the public domain. They are newly criminalizing the copying of "intellectual property" even for individual use, research, or critical analysis. They are giving broadcasters and distributors new ownership rights over material that they did not create. And they are extending enforcement jurisdiction not only to those who actually copy or share protected intellectual property, but to those whose services or equipment designs are used in these newly illegal activities. That means Internet service providers (ISPs) and engineers being held liable for what might be done by others. ISPs in some places are being subpoenaed to provide the names of their users who might potentially be sharing music files, for example, and coerced to provide this information under penalty of law.¹⁷ As pointed out by attorney Robin Gross (2003) of the organization IP Justice, these new laws and trade regimes contravene an international human right, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

This brings us then to the final section of this article, and a discussion of community radio.

Community Radio

Community radio is the form most clearly concerned not only with people's ability to seek and receive information through media, but also with our ability to "impart information and ideas" to one another. As Genevieve Vaughan (1997) has pointed out, "'Co-muni-cation' is giving gifts (from the Latin *munus*—gift) together. It is how we form 'co-muni-ty'" (25-26).

Since the first community station started broadcasting to Bolivian miners in 1947, the movement's development has been uneven in both geography and time, but now it is growing fast. As of 2005, Jordan licensed what is probably the first community station broadcasting in Arabic. In 2006, both the UK and India finally opened to more than a few experimental licenses; and Nepal, where the monarch tried to suppress community news, had a revolution with community broadcasters as heroes. In 2006, Mexico, which had legalized community radio, illegalized it again by privatizing broadcast regulation; Indigenous communities

have literally fought battles to remain on the air. In 2003, the World Bank announced it intended to put 100 community radio stations on the air in Africa, raising debates about what constitutes community radio, and whether it is distinct from “development” radio and other potentially donor-controlled models. There is no single exemplar by which community radio can be defined.

**Some stations are owned by not-for-profit groups or by cooperatives whose members are the listeners themselves. Others are owned by students, universities, municipalities, churches or trade unions. There are stations financed by donations from listeners, by international development agencies, by advertising and by governments. *“Waves for Freedom.” Report on the Sixth World Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters, Dakar, Senegal.* (“What is Community Radio?”)

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires [AMARC]), based in Montreal, promotes mutual support among community radios around the world. They organized the Dakar conference of community broadcasters referenced above, as well as eight others since 1983. AMARC has members that are licensed and members that broadcast illegally; members that are free-standing stations, members that do community radio in the permitted niches of state broadcasters, and members that share frequencies with stations that may have incompatible aims to their own. If you go to the AMARC website <www.amarc.org> and click on “What is Community Radio?” you’ll find instead of one definition a series of quotes submitted by members in different regions. For example, from Latin America, where community radio stations are numerous and are often strongly linked to anti-oligarchical struggles:

Radio stations that bear this name do not fit the logic of money or advertising. Their purpose is different, their best efforts are put at the disposal of civil society. Of course this service is highly political: it is a question of influencing public opinion, denying conformity, creating consensus, broadening democracy. The purpose—whence the name—is to *build community life*. *“Manual urgente para Radialistas Apasionados.”*

In Latin America, there are approximately one thousand radio stations that can be considered community, educational, grassroots or civic radio stations. They are characterized by their political objectives of social change, their search for a fair system that takes into account human rights, and makes power accessible to the masses and open to their participation. *“Gestión de la radio comunitaria y ciudadana.”*

From Canada, where community radio is obligated by government to promote diversity and Canadian culture:

The tone of each community radio station is well modulated in the image of its listeners. The important thing is to seek out differences. Community radio is an element of closeness, a bridge, a step toward the other, not to make the other like us, but to have him become what he is. It is not a question of having more, but of being, that is the real mission of community radio stations in Canada. Isn't the most meaningful definition of culture the act of making people aware of the greatness they possess? *Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada (ARC) Canada.*

From France:

Free, independent, lay radio stations that are linked to human rights and concerned about the environment. They are many and pluralistic. They refuse mercantile communication. They scrupulously respect the code of ethics of journalists and work to disseminate culture by giving artists broader expression within their listening audiences. They have association status, democratic operation and financing consistent with the fact that they are non-profit organizations. They are solidary toward each other and constitute work communities that make it possible for each member to fulfill its mission to the utmost. *Charte de la Confédération Nationale des Radios Libres (CNRL), France.*

From the Philippines, where radio was very powerful in mobilizing People Power that overthrew the Marcos dictatorship:

Stations collectively operated by the community people. Stations dedicated to development, education and people empowerment. Stations which adhere to the principles of democracy and participation. *TAMBULLI, Communication Project, Philippines*

From Africa:

The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of oppressed people (be it on racial, gender, or class grounds) and generally as a tool for development. *AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa.*

A far-reaching example of community radio organizing, started by women, originated in Africa during the period when government-controlled radio was the rule across the continent. In 1988, the Zimbabwe chapter of the Federation of African Media Women (FAMW) resolved to get more rural women's participation into broadcasting, and came up with the idea for radio listening clubs (Matewa 2002¹⁸). These professional women communicators contacted women in rural villages, asked them to listen to the radio as a group, and then recorded the rural women's comments and questions. Next the journalists took the rural women's

questions to public officials and asked them to respond. Programs combining these elements were aired on Zimbabwe Radio 4. The rural women listened to the programs, again responded, and the series went on in this vein. Eventually, having observed how little it took to make the recordings, the rural women asked to be given their own recording equipment, and told the professional journalists they were no longer needed during the discussions (Karonga 1999).

Radio listening clubs spread first to other countries in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region, and then to other parts of the world. It became a model for other feminist and community media projects in film, video, and still photography. And it's been copied by governmental and non-governmental development agencies seeking to accelerate social change. In *Media and the Empowerment of Communities for Social Change*, Chido Matewa (2002) writes of radio listening clubs: "Grassroots participation is what sets this project design apart and distinguishes it from other rural radio which is in line with the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw, i.e., that the media agenda (MA) leads to the people's agenda (PA)."¹⁹

According to Matewa, radio listening club membership declines when radio sets become more available in villages, so expansion has been in ever more remote areas. Another problem may be that the association of radio listening clubs with state radio, and the adaptation of the radio listening club model to the aims of development agencies change the experience from participatory to didactic, and reduces its value as a gift. One gets a hint of local contempt for such coercion in a speech delivered by Kate Azuka Omunegha (2003) at the World Forum on Communication Rights:

One thing that seems to be glaring in Nigerian media is the near absence of women as newsmakers. One possible reason for this is the new news value, which privileges prominence, who is involved. Closely related to this again is the idea that Nigerian media seem to work with what we call the ideology of developmental communication. The media are seen as the mouthpiece of the government.

As more governments have opened up space for independent broadcasters, though, some community radio stations have been created that incorporate values from radio listening clubs and also consciously draw on the values taught by Brazilian popular educationist Paolo Freire, values such as starting with people's own lived experience, *concientizacion* (a word that is very popular in Latin America, but whose closest common North American equivalent is "consciousness raising"), and emphasis on dialogue that involves respect and working together.

There are community radios in Africa consciously promoting those values. The one I visited, Radio Ada, was first set up to serve the coastal fishing community of Ada, but because they could uniquely fill a need for local, participatory radio programming in the Dangme language, they ended up serving the entire region of about 500,000 Dangme-speaking people, half of whom are not literate. The

station's mission as reported on the website of their funder, UNESCO, is "to support the development aspirations and objectives of the Dangme people, give a voice to the voiceless, sustain the growth of Dangme culture, and encourage, promote and contribute to informed dialogue and reflective action" ("Ghana: Radio Goes Up in the Air").

I visited Radio Ada in 2003, in the company of the coordinator of the Ghana Community Radio Network, and was fascinated by a description of how they work on reflective action in the public sphere. First, I was told, they ask the people what their problems are, then whose responsibility it is to deal with the problems. Then they go to those responsible, often public officials, and ask what they have done to meet their commitments around the problem. Then they give everybody time to think and work on the problem. This groundwork is done before beginning any recording, so no one is shamed on air before they've had a chance to improve their practice. I was told that this was normal procedure for all four stations in the Ghana Community Radio Network.²⁰

Another African station that grew directly out of the radio listening club movement was Radio Mama, the women's station in Kampala, Uganda, regrettably shut down by the Ugandan government on January 8, 2004 (reportedly for not having paid its license fees) ("Mama FM Closes"). According to an interview I conducted in 2002, Radio Mama had been assigned a broadcasting frequency that could not be picked up on car radios, a staggering handicap for developing an audience. (Note: Radio Mama has re-opened!)

The issue of who is the audience, in other words, who is the recipient of the gift of radio, is a crucial one for community stations. To be community stations in the sense of "giving gifts together," the audience and the operators of the station should be interrelated categories.

Radio Ada co-founder and Deputy Director Wilna Quarmyne (2001) clearly subscribes to this view. She is originally from the Philippines, where she was also involved in the community radio and popular education movements. She writes that the approach to training in the station's activities was

...originally developed in 1997 for and at Radio Ada, the first full-fledged community radio station in Ghana. The approach is continually being enriched and has succeeded in enabling a group of volunteers with no previous training or experience in broadcasting to operate a full-scale, 17-hour-a-day service entirely on their own. Some of the volunteers have grown into trainers. The approach has also been extended with positive outcomes to other member stations of the Ghana Community Radio Network, as well as to a prospective community radio station in Ethiopia.

In some stations, the radio audience may be virtually coterminous with the presenters. The legendary Margaretta D'Arcy is an AMARC member who runs Radio Pirate Women in Galway, Ireland, a pirate (unlicensed) station that operates during periodic Women's Radio Festivals, using a transmitter small enough

to fit in a purse. When asked how many listeners the station had, D'Arcy stated that listeners were completely unimportant—that what is important is that the women talk on the radio, they listen to each other, get all fired up, and then they go out in the street and they demonstrate!

Another type of pirate radio is represented by the movement of small, unlicensed radio stations that sprang up across the United States, mainly during the 1980s and 1990s. Often organized by young people under the philosophical banner of anarchism, some of these stations followed a model of open access, allowing all comers to express themselves without any restriction, with DJ's cursing frequently, while others, such as KIND in San Marcos, Texas, had the open blessing and participation of the local establishment (Pyle 2001; Markoff).²¹ However, unlicensed radio stations are still proliferating in many parts of the world, such as Mexico (Calleja 2006) and Haiti, where community radio licensing is unavailable to local or indigenous communities. These stations' equipment is often seized or destroyed by authorities, as by virtue of its signal it is impossible for a broadcast station to be truly clandestine.

Larger and more permanent community stations around the world usually have doors open for volunteers but also have some kind of long term paid staff for facilities management, and may also have staff setting programming policies. To maximize the gift-giving potential of community radio, leadership should ideally be nurturing and give way (Vaughan 1997: 96) to the needs of the organization, promote horizontal giving, and promote "abundance through the cessation of waste" (Vaughan 1997: 98). However, most stations also exist in a context of patriarchal hierarchicalism that can be insidious. In the United States, for instance, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting gives money to noncommercial radio stations that meet certain criteria, which in recent years have included having not less than five full-time paid staff members. This can provide an opening for stratification, and be in conflict with the kinds of values that often emerge from collective activity, where paid positions are often part-time or rotating jobs that help subsidize people of small financial means who are also volunteers. Professional aspirations of staff to earn higher salaries without moving on can lead to cutting in other areas (Gerry 1998), and staff desires to minimize conflicts and hassles and streamline decision-making for themselves can lead to imposition of rules and loss of flexibility. Allowing breaking of rules so as to be flexible for some people and not others is then a likely source of cronyism and dissatisfaction.

Another entrée for hierarchicalism is provided by the "ownership structures" of most noncommercial stations. In order to qualify for noncommercial frequencies, receive public funds, and offer tax-deductible status to donors, stations generally have to have boards of directors. In the U.S., only one state, Wisconsin, even permits nonprofit organizations to have a cooperative structure, and even those have to have boards of directors (Stockwell 2000). Directors have the legal liability for the station, the rights to change its bylaws and approve its budget, and are in effect treated by the law as the owners of the station. (And as volunteers

have sometimes found when they tried to go to court against boards of directors, “ownership is nine-tenths of the law.”) A famous recent struggle within the five-station Pacifica network turned in part on directors’ decisions to change the board from elected to self-selected, and a suggestion that they would change the bylaws to allow board members to make a profit from activities performed for the station. In both staff and board hierarchies, you can see a potential for imposition of one/many structures, where the one or ones who are staff or board substitute and take over from the many who are volunteers or listeners (or both). This pattern can be found not only in community radio, but in many kinds of nonprofit organizations. A corollary of such a development is that volunteer contributions are devalued and raising and spending money takes over as the dominant activity of the organization. In the case of U.S. community radio, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting promoted such substitution by changing the way it awarded public funds. Where formerly stations’ “match” for public funds they received could include volunteer hours assigned value in monetary terms, this was changed so that stations had to raise actual dollars to match the federal dollars they might be given (Anonymous 1995). This discounting of volunteers’ gifts of their labour and denial of economic means to support that work seems related to the following statement in Vaughan’s book, *For-Giving*: “Free gift giving to needs—what in mothering we would call nurturing or caring work—is often not counted and may remain invisible in our society or seem uninformative because it is qualitatively rather than quantitatively based” (1997: 24).

Many community stations run on very little funding, but even they have financial needs for equipment, for electricity, for materials, and usually for at least some paid staff that can spend the concentrated time to coordinate volunteers and keep things running smoothly. Whether the funds come from NGOs, foundations, the government, or business advertiser/underwriters, they often come with some kind of mandate, pressure or temptation to modify or abandon a social change agenda. Even listener donations can tempt community radios to play to the richer elements of society. One of the most frequently heard debates within listener-supported radio is whether the value of the program should be measured by how much money is donated to the station when that program is on the air, and whether shows that don’t raise enough money should be dropped, even if they serve a disadvantaged audience.

A related conflict is whether the value of a station can be measured by the number of its listeners. Commercial radio stations use commercial measuring services to come up with audience “ratings.” The sample of people asked to give data on their listening habits is supposedly randomly selected from fixed demographic categories (e.g., males 18-34). Standings in the Arbitron ratings are used to rank stations in terms of “market share” both geographically and demographically, and these figures in turn are used by stations to set advertising rates. That is the process by which the invisible product of human attention to radio is made visible and sold.²² Similar methods of audience measurement have been adopted by National Public Radio (NPR) in the U.S. Their audience surveys include asking

whether their listeners use or buy long lists of products, but have little (usually nothing) about the listeners' social change activities. Starting in the 1980s, a well-publicized goal of their audience research department was to "double the NPR audience," and the announced plan for doubling the audience was to have stations program so that the same people would keep listening longer. This led to a conscious effort to program more for the well-off white male, the same demographic that commercial radio found most desirable. While some editions of *The NPR Audience* noted that older women are actually more generous and consistent listener-donors, they were considered a shrinking part of the audience, and of course they were less attractive to underwriters. (Underwriting is a form of quasi-advertising that NPR, PBS, and most U.S. public radio and television stations now pursue heavily.)

Within U.S. community radio, two divergent streams of thought emerged around the question of audience. One faction believed and promoted the concept that pursuing similar strategies to NPR's would be good for community radio and give it more listeners, more money, and greater stability. Their approach was to change stations so that there would be more paid programmers and hosts, a more consistent sound, and more mainstream kinds of music and information. This was similar to the usual public radio formula, and often included airing offerings from the major public radio syndicators, NPR and Public Radio International. Programs most likely to be cut included women's programs and other kinds of programs run by collectives or groups, the reason given usually being that shared responsibilities and changing hosts led to inconsistent air-sound. The other community radio faction, however, developed a very different self-identity, rejecting some of the advice that was being promoted to them through the collaborative efforts of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasters. In 1996, breakaway stations from NFCB created a new annual conference, the Grassroots Radio Conference (GRC), "as a reaction against the homogenization of commercialization of public radio." The founders of the GRC, Marty Durlin of KGNU in Boulder, Colorado, and Cathy Melio of WERU in Maine, wrote an article explaining their movement. I excerpt here from a version found on the web:

You can recognize a grassroots community station anywhere in the country. There is a freshness you'll not hear elsewhere due largely to the variety of voices and connections the station has with its community.... Local programming is the backbone of community radio, [but] another element that connects grassroots stations are the independently-produced national programs many of us broadcast, including Alternative Radio ... WINGS (Women's International News Gathering Service), National Native News, and Making Contact.

These national programs connect the grassroots stations, while our local programs ground us in our own communities.... Sometimes the performances of inexperienced programmers are rough...[but] those new voices

become competent and creative broadcasters before our very ears.... It is insulting the intelligence of people to think that they can not accept or appreciate variety of programming.... We believe in expanding the audience for the variety, not reducing the variety to expand the audience.... Important principles to maintaining a community involved grassroots station are: participatory governance, with active committees involved in decision-making, community and volunteer involvement in all major decisions, openness on the air (no gag orders!), elected volunteer representatives serving on the board of directors, open access to the airwaves, active recruitment and ongoing training of volunteers, commitment to diversity, consideration of those under-served by other broadcast media, and diverse programming. (Durlin and Melio)

The GRC has done much to strengthen the self-identity and resolve of community radio in the U.S., and its model has had a strong impact. Throughout the eight years of GRC conferences, it has also provided a national venue for the struggles of volunteers and listeners to reclaim the five-station Pacifica network from its runaway board. Many of the GRC stations were affiliates of the syndicated programming distributed by the Pacifica network, and organized among themselves to support striking Pacifica news reporters and withhold affiliation fees in support of the struggle. After the volunteer-listener victory and re-organization of Pacifica, GRC co-founder Marty Durlin was overwhelmingly elected to chair the reclaimed board of the Pacifica Foundation, in March 2004.

In 2002, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Brazilian popular education activist Moema Viezzer took me to visit a special community radio station. It had been set up with city government support for the use of the youth at the conference. They were broadcasting primarily via loudspeaker to the youth camping area, and to a landless-persons' camping area nearby. The studio was a large log building with a packed earth floor, and inside were rows of computers, and a complete broadcasting studio. Over the microphone was a sign, which Moema Viezzer translated for me: "A microphone is not a piss pot."

What did this mean? I wondered. Finally, this occurred to me: radio is gift giving, and gift giving is transitive (Vaughan, 1997: 36).²³ When you speak into a microphone, you don't do it to relieve yourself. You do it to reach people with something that will meet their needs.

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Notes

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- ¹ For examples of gift economy proponents, see the speakers listed on the website of the 2004 International Conference on the Gift Economy at <<http://www.gifteconomyconference.com/>>.
 - ² An example of an association radio station serving the community is, Meridien FM in Tema, Ghana, owned by an association of women journalists. An example of a station formally owned as a commercial licensee functioning as a community station is Radio Ammanet in Amman, Jordan, founded by Daoud Kuttab. Radio Ammanet is hosting the 2006 conference of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters
 - ³ “Corollaries to the fairness doctrine—the ‘personal attack’ and ‘political editorializing’ rules—were thrown out in October 2000 by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia” (Lee).
 - ⁴ See WINGS #4-01: “Revenge on Big Media: Dallas’s Cat-Killers.” Radio program produced by Mary O’ Grady for Women’s International News Gathering Service and released in 2001.
 - ⁵ “Section 315 of the *Communications Act*—the section that imposes an equal time requirement for all broadcasts featuring candidates—may itself be unconstitutional” (Dorf 2003).
 - ⁶ I am using the U.S. as my primary example because I am most familiar with the process there, and because the process of enclosing the commons there is very stark. However, as will be discussed in the section on government radio, there is more than one way to ensure control through scarcity. Genevieve Vaughan’s (2002) theory of the gift economy posits that the creation of scarcity is one function of the exchange economy: “The exchange paradigm requires scarcity in order to maintain its leverage. In capitalism, when abundance begins to accrue, scarcity is artificially created to save the exchange-based system. Agricultural products are plowed under in order to keep prices high. Money is spent on armaments and other waste and luxury items, or cornered in the hands of a few individuals or corporations in order to create and maintain an appropriate climate of scarcity for business as usual to continue. These mechanisms have other advantages which also reward successful exchangers with social status and power and penalize gift givers by making their gift giving (in scarcity) self sacrificial. A context of abundance would allow gift giving to flower while a context of scarcity discredits gift giving by making it painfully difficult.” (94).
 For information on the technical feasibility of alleviating scarcity of broadcasting spectrum through new methods of spectrum-sharing see, for example, the New America Foundation’s Wireless Future Program <http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=sec_home&secID=3>.
 - ⁷ Chairman Michael Powell is the son of the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. To see what is the “community” of media owners in the U.S. (and transnationally) today, see the web page “Who Controls the Media?” maintained by the National Organization for Women, as part of their campaign against lifting media ownership restrictions (see <<http://www.nowfoundation.org/issues/communications/tv/mediacontrol.html>>).
 - ⁸ Summarizes coverage by Jeff Perlstein from September 2002.
 - ⁹ See collection of back articles from FAIR on <http://www.fair.org/media-outlets/talk-radio.html>. In 2005, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) opened the door to shocked broadcasters by licensing U.S.-based Sirius Satellite Radio. While

- Canada's content standards are different from those imposed by the FCC, *The Howard Stern Show* likely offends both. For the broadcast industry interpretation of CRTC standards regarding ethics, violence and sex portrayal, visit www.cbcs.ca and click on "codes."
- ¹⁰ These new "decency standards" are also quite political, a reversal of the entire trend toward deregulation of media content pleasing to the fundamentalist sector of the U.S. political right.
- ¹¹ Radio Netherlands describes the funding crisis of Radio Agatashya: "In June 1994 it was pledged a U.S.\$20,000 grant by UNESCO, which it never received, and turned down a French government gift of 250,000 French francs owing to the French military involvement in Rwanda. It was funded by the UNHCR, European Union and the Swiss government.... The radio has been off the air since 27 October 1996, mainly due to a funding shortage."
- ¹² See Case Study 9: Rwanda – Urunana (Hand in Hand). Online: <<http://www.comminit.com/pdsradiodrama/sld-9388.html>>
- ¹³ "Call in to the show. Call the on-air line during the show and try to challenge the racism, sexism or homophobia calmly and directly. It often doesn't take much to demonstrate the absurdity of bigoted arguments. If several people call in, it can change the entire show" ("Challenging Hate Radio: A Guide for Activists").
- ¹⁴ In the U.S., the term "public service radio" is sometimes applied to emergency radio communications used by police and fire departments, and "public radio" is used for the noncommercial broadcast stations.
- ¹⁵ The press release with a link to the full text of this UNESCO convention can be found on the web. See <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=11281&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html> accessed March 28, 2006
- ¹⁶ See, for an example of such discussion, Noam Chomsky's book *Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship* (1967), which discusses objectivity as an ideological mask for championing mainstream self-interest against mass movements for change.
- ¹⁷ Robin Gross, speaking at the World Summit on the Information Society 2003, can be heard in radio program WINGS #52-03 Copyright and Human Rights, streamable from web page http://www.cas.usf.edu/womens_studies/wings.html.
- ¹⁸ See Chapter 5: "Participatory and Development Communication in Zimbabwe."
- ¹⁹ I can't resist commenting that the "MA leads to PA" formula might be phrased in a more feminist manner: "MA leads PA."
- ²⁰ N.B.: "We are not using the violent methods of the system but are looking for other ways to change it from within" (Vaughan 1997: 23).
- ²¹ The pirate radio movement in the U.S. was greatly diminished by the availability of low-power FM licensing for under-served communities, starting in the year 2000 (Sakolsky 2001). For more on low-power FM licensing today, see the Prometheus Radio Project's website, www.prometheus.org.
- ²² I should mention here that community broadcasters, including both FIRE (Feminist International Radio Endeavour/Radio Internacional Feminista, based in Costa Rica) and the great community station Bush Radio in Cape Town, South Africa, are coming up with new and appropriate ways of not only measuring but valuing their audiences.
- ²³ Also: "[G]iving to needs creates bonds between givers and receivers. Recognizing someone's need and acting to satisfy it, convinces the giver of the existence of the other, while receiving something from someone else that satisfies a need proves the existence of the other to the receiver" (Vaughan 1997: 24).

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Gifting at the Burning Man Festival

The Burning Man Festival is an annual event that takes place in the week leading up to and over the Labour Day Holiday in September, in Nevada's Black Rock Desert. The festival creates an experimental community that encourages participants to express themselves and as a result of its remote location also challenges participants to a degree that is not normally encountered in one's day-to-day life" (see www.burningman.com to learn more). The festival's humble origins date back to 1986 when Larry Harvey set out to burn a wooden stick sculpture in the figure of a man at Baker Beach in San Francisco. At the instant the eight-foot figure was ignited, others who were also on the beach that evening drew close to witness the burning. Strangers in a circle with fire-lit faces, they began to introduce themselves to one another and shared gifts of songs and stories. As they stood there in this circle with newfound friends, they were inspired to repeat the event the following year. That first year there were about 20 people present. Four years later, in 1990, the crowd attending the burn had grown so much that the organizers, Larry Harvey and Jerry James, decided to move the gathering out to the Nevada desert. As the number of people participating in the desert festival grew, so did the art installations, costumes, community services, theme camps and even villages organized by the participants for the participants. This festival, with its radical self-expression and radical self-reliance in a forbidding environment has grown to over 40,000 participants in 2006.

What I would like to share with you in this paper is what I consider to be the heart of the festival. While participants pay an entrance fee which offsets administrative expenses and the fees charged by the Federal Bureau of Land Management (the largest fee charged to anyone in the U.S.), organizers prohibit vending and any form of advertising and have rejected all offers of sponsorship. With no emphasis at all on buying or selling anything, the participants in the festival must rely on themselves and each other to fulfill needs whether for food or water, protection from the sun, or for help of any kind.

I first heard about the Burning Man Festival in a *Wired Magazine* article when I was finishing graduate school in Atlanta in 1998. I had completed a degree in community psychology and was interested in exploring the idea of alternative communities and the article had made an impression upon me. It wasn't until

two years later though that two friends and I drove for 20 hours straight to spend two days and two nights at the Burning Man Festival. I was overwhelmed by everything: the art, the people, the conversations (the best gift!), the organization, the beauty, the laughter, the tears, and the striking contradiction to our consumerized world. I carried a camera with me but I never took a single picture that year and because my time there was so short, I wasn't able to make a lot of deep connections. But I saw enough to know that something different, something very positive, was going on. I just didn't know what it was. Where did that magic and peacefulness with radical self-expression arise from? It was only in hindsight that I realized that the fruits of a gift giving culture, and the community these gifts sustain, were the very core of this event.

I had attended other alternative events, like the Rainbow Gathering, but none had the level of expression, freedom, creativity, and community that I glimpsed at Burning Man. I watched other documentaries after having gone that first year and felt none of them addressed the aspect that peaked my interest. Most coverage was sensational in nature. I wanted to produce something authentic to this community.

So I sent a proposal to Burning Man, explaining my desire to make a film that focused on the community aspects of the event, looking for patterns of contributions, and to explore what I considered then to be their barter system. My proposal was very well-received by the organizers who wrote back, "sounds like you're interested in the gift economy." That was the first time I had ever heard those words.

I was off to the desert with my camera, a one-woman film crew, to make my first film. I knew I would ask the people there about community, expression, and gifting, but I didn't know what I would find or what patterns would emerge.

From the moment I arrived, I was witness to unending acts of gifting. Some I caught on camera, most I did not. Everywhere I turned some sort of gifting was taking place and it wasn't just in the fabulous and engaging art that surrounds you at every turn. Neighbours greeted us our first morning with fresh brewed coffee. An artist explained his struggle to figure out how to fix a key aspect of his sculpture, which had just broken, when a stranger walking heard part of the story and happened to have the knowledge and the tools to help out. A shade structure was given to a camp that wasn't prepared for effect of 118 degree weather by another camp two blocks away, and it goes on and on. One year a participant came deliberately with nothing and called himself "the nothing camp." No tent, no sleeping bag, no clothes, no food, no water. As the days passed, he was given all the articles he needed to survive along with the non-material gifts that really make the heart of the festival.

It wasn't until that second year that I was truly able to see all the gifts that were unfolding every moment, and the enormity of the event I had witnessed became clearer as I began filming and later reviewing the footage.

Oddly, on my way out to the desert I worried about using the term gift economy, wondering if anyone would understand what I was referring to. But not once did

I have to explain these words at Burning Man.

After I got back and began editing the film, people would ask me what I was working on and over and over again I had to explain the concept of gift economy and work through people's preconceived notions and confusion with the barter system, as well as explain just how magical gifting can be. Spending day after day and month after month with the footage, a strong pattern emerged in the film confirming that a vital foundation of the power of the festival was the absence of commercialism and the ethics of a gift giving culture.

In 2002, I finished my documentary on the Burning Man Festival, which I called *Gifting It: A Burning Embrace of Gift Economy*.¹ It is a meditative piece that explores how a host of social elements are affected in an experimental community that embraces a gift giving culture. Burning Man allows a unique opportunity to experience the fruits of a gift giving culture as they happen within a particular time and space. And the documentary suggests that this altered reality may extend far beyond the festival's boundaries, and, in fact, it may be the hope arising out of its ashes that our world desperately needs.

Renea Roberts believes in an intimate approach when creating Feature length documentaries and shorts. She's also passionate about alternative energies, permaculture, and learning to garden organically in the high deserts of New Mexico. See www.giftingit.com for more information.

Notes

¹ A two-minute trailer that will give you a feel for the documentary can be found at www.r3productions.net.

Activism

A Creative Gift for a Better World

Activism is derived from the word “action,” and an activist is one who literally takes a creative and direct action to bring attention to an issue. Activism’s gift for the world is to expose an issue or wrongdoing that will hopefully garner enough public support to then, in turn, bring about a social and political change for the betterment of all. The way I’ve personally been able to have hope in a world full of such fear, injustice, and despair is through activism. Of course there are as many kinds of activism as there are worthy and righteous causes. I ascribe to a form that I like to call creative activism. By using artistic expressions in the forms of street theatre, visual arts, dance, songs, and puppet shows and pageantry, the protest message can be translated to a larger audience. This type of activism is based in finding innovative ways to break down the gap between us (the protestors) and them (all other people). Creative activism can be seen in terms of the gift economy as an inspiring gift to both the movement itself by means of support and morale and to the general public as education and entertainment.

One such form of creative activism is called “radical cheerleading.” In radical cheerleading there are no such things as “try-outs,” and no one person can be a squad. In the spirit of teamwork, you must join in. To get into character, start by imagining yourself in your cheerleading suit of choice (it doesn’t have to be a short skirt-unless of course you want it to be!) and then picture yourself with your squad unified against one common enemy.

Squad set, you bet!

Who let the bombs drop?
Bush bush bush
And who do we gotta stop?
Bush bush bush
And who funds Bin Laden?
Bush bush bush
Just like his daddy taught him
Bush bush bush
Who steals food from children?

Bush bush bush
In Iraq and Afganistan.
Bush bush bush
And who is a facist?
Bush bush bush
The worlds worst terrorist
Bush bush bush
Break it on down
Cops on the street yo
Threatening to beat you. Don't let them hurt you
Get rid of W. but don't just fight the symptoms tear down the system
Actualize solutions, global revolution!
(Cheer written by Valera Giarratano, Austin, Texas)

Of course, it's impossible to capture the spirit of a cheer when written on paper, however, the word "revolution" can sometimes arouse fear and bad connotations whether read to oneself or screamed aloud. In the context of the cheer, we are not advocating for a global revolution which takes up arms and instigates a world war. Revolution in this cheer means getting to the root of the issue (hence the word radical), acknowledging the problem, and then proposing proactive solutions for global radical change. For example, Bush merely personifies the problem at hand but really he is just a symptom of a much greater problem—the system itself—which is based on patriarchal capitalism, exploitation, oppression and greed. It is equally important to not only speak out against Bush and the system, but also to come together to devise a united revolutionary plan of action. The result of such strategies is a solution that can be actualized by providing an alternative model of what a different system could and does look like. Conferences such as the International Gift Economy Conference (Las Vegas, Nov 2004) allow us to be inspired to action by the fact that we can gather together, learn from each other and be consoled and unified in realizing that alternative systems to the patriarchal market economy do, indeed, exist. This creating and sharing of our visions of a what a radically different world looks like, is at its very essence creative activism.

What Connects Us?

We may all have different definitions of activism, but I think it is safe to assume that what most often connects us is the tremendous energy, hope, passion, and commitment that we share to create a more nurturing and just world. We may not even describe ourselves as activists, that may be to some an isolating term. We may feel more comfortable identifying as organizers, networkers, rebel rousers, lecturers, academics, teachers, professors, healers, bodyworkers, therapists, scientists, caregivers, builders, technicians, journalists, maids, maidens, mothers, and/or crones. Whatever our title, what connects us is that we are all gift givers. There is no way to either qualify or quantify our dedication, spirit, and love that

we put into our, more often than not, unpaid work of promoting radical positive change. Our time and commitment to the cause, whether it be social, political, environmental, and/or even spiritual, is not valued in the capitalist market economy. That is why the work we do is a gift.

The Gift/Il Dono

Genevieve Vaughan (2004) sees activism as the defining of a problem and seeking solutions to it, not just for ourselves but the universe at large. In her preface to the article about the activist work of women in Argentina, she states:

The problem solving of activism can be understood as the satisfaction of a social need, addressed with creativity and determination, individually and in community with others. The actual solving of the problem is a unilateral gift given by those who have dedicated themselves to doing it in spite of great difficulties. It is a gift to society as a whole.... I would even say a gift to the powers that be, because it has kept them from perpetrating yet another evil upon the people. Social activism can be thought of in this way, as gift giving to society. That is, the gift of social change is the most necessary gift in our times. It can have huge multiplier effects, by changing the system that is causing the needs, and by spreading the example and the hope that this can happen. (313)

I deeply connected with another article in the collected volume, *Il Dono/The Gift*, called "The Gift Economy in My Life." The author, Jutta Reid (Vaughan 2004: 301), narrates her whole entire life in relation to the gift economy. Until I read this article, I did not have a truly good understanding of the gift economy. For me, it took seeing someone else's life through the perspective of the gift economy to relate. Hopefully you will be able to do the same. I offer to you my life as I equate it to the gift economy.

Radical Cheerleading

Radical cheerleading is what gifted me my voice and shaped my path of activism over the last ten years. I happened upon radical cheerleading in January of 2007 in South Florida, when the initial bright idea was just being ignited. We started by reclaiming the American icon of the "cheerleader" and radicalizing it to fit our needs. We declared no try-outs and encouraged anyone that wanted to shake it for the revolution to participate. We also welcomed everyone to write cheers for whatever cause, action, or campaign that needed support and energy. Since then literally hundreds of cheers have been written regarding everything from pro-bike, pro-choice, anti-war and anti-globalization (to name only a few). It is easy to look back and see the gifts that were given and received through the process. Radical cheerleading gave the opportunity to be creative, dress up, coordinate

routines, work cooperatively and form a nurturing community, while at the same time fostering an innovative way to speak truth to power. Radical cheerleading continued to serve its traditional purpose of providing morale, enthusiasm, and support but it took that role and elevated it to center stage instead of just the sidelines. Radical cheerleading gave fun and animation to the protest and captured the eye of the media allowing the protest message to be heard by the larger public. Even with very limited access to resources, we were able to give strength and excitement to many causes. I'm speaking in the past tense; when in reality, I should be speaking in the present or future for that matter. Since its inception, radical cheerleading has spread across the country, and now the world. Its unpredictable course has created its own movement. This movement was facilitated by the fact that radical cheerleading is based on the anarchist principle of autonomy. There is no one that owns the idea of radical cheerleading. As radical cheerleading spread and new squads were being formed, each new group of radical cheerleaders were independent in defining how they would be both individually and as a team and what issues stood out for them to cheer for and against. Today there are countless squads all over the world that have either existed and or are still in existence. There are also radical cheerleaders, like myself, that no longer practice cheerleading on a regular basis but put on the non-uniform and gather together a squad when the need for a cheer arises (which could be any moment!)

In terms of the gift economy, I've looked at radical cheerleading's gifts to both the movement and the greater public but it is also important to note the gifts I've received personally over the years. The gifts are many but what stands out for me the most is the radical community that I met through my extensive and adventuresome travels as a radical cheerleader.

The Rhizome Collective

While traveling to conferences and gatherings, I met many likeminded people who were also manifesting through art, puppetry, dance, and street theatre. Creativity abounded and many of us started thinking about using our creativity to not only protest what we were against but to demonstrate what we were for. We learned from the Zapatistas that as important as it was to travel and be a part of the global protests and mobilizations that it was equally important to foster something at home. Needing a base of operation led to the fall 2000 planting of the Rhizome Collective in Austin, Texas. Over time and through many trial and errors, we developed our dreams into a collective mission that unconsciously resembles the gift economy. This mission agreed upon by the collective and articulated by Stacy Pettigrew, a co-founder of the Rhizome, is as follows: "In our worldview, the dominant values of competition, greed, and exploitation would be replaced with cooperation, autonomy, and egalitarianism. We believe that all struggles against oppression and for self-determination are connected, and that it is important to construct viable alternatives while simultaneously fighting for social justice." The Rhizome, in name, refers to both a consensus run member based organization

as well as a 9400 sq. foot warehouse with an outside courtyard and gardens. The space itself was gifted to the Rhizome Collective as not only a low income space to live (a need for the people involved) but also as a place for various grassroots activists and organizations to work out of (a need of the community). In addition, the Rhizome is an educational resource center which provides for the needs of the public. Classes are free or sliding scale and focus on creative arts and activism as well as ongoing permaculture and environmentally sustainable projects. The Rhizome Collective also receives endless gifts from outside the market economy including but not limited to materials to build, seeds to plant, financial help, land, and hundreds of thousands of volunteer labor hours. This vast network of people who are involved in the Rhizome give meaning to the definition of the word—rhizome: *An expanding underground root system, sending up above ground shoots to form a vast network which makes it very difficult to uproot.*

Bikes Across Borders

Bikes Across Borders (BAB) is one of the organizations that took root in the early days of the Rhizome Collective. I mention BAB in particular because it serves as a prime example of the gift economy. A small group of us created Bikes Across Borders as a way to recycle the excess of capitalism. We started a bike shop inside the Rhizome where all the bikes had been either been found in the trash or gifted to us. We wound up with such a large number of bicycles that we realized that we needed to develop a program to fix them up and give them away. There was already a grassroots organization in Austin that was providing for the bike needs of the city so we looked elsewhere, this time south of the border. BAB became acquainted with a women led organization on the Mexico side of the border called the Committee for Border Workers (the CFO). They worked tirelessly to educate workers of their rights and fight for better conditions in the U.S. owned assembly plants (las maquiladoras.) The CFO had put the word out that one of their needs was bicycles so they could have more autonomy in their daily transportation, thus an alliance between BAB and the CFO was forged. On our first organized trip to the border a group of BAB radical clowns rode their bikes from Austin to the border where we met up with them with over 80 bicycles. On this day, even after all our our experiences of protesting global trade organizations, we truly began to understand the consequences of “free trade.” To bring the trailer full of bikes across the border we were told by government officials that we would have to pay a heavy tax that none of us on either side of the border could afford. In response and as advised by Julia, the director of the CFO, we spent all day riding each bike across the border one by one. It became apparent that NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) was created for big corporate businesses not for small grassroots organizations and everyday working people like ourselves. For the next two years we made a number of trips to the border not only providing bicycles and bike tools but also creative activism in the form of circus acts, puppet shows, visual arts and radical cheerleading. What we found is that through providing

conscious entertainment we were breaking down both cultural and communication barriers. For-give me if I sound like we were doing all the giving. The CFO also used creative activism to share their message with us. They demonstrated how to use Theatre of the Oppressed as a fun and innovational organizing tool. But most importantly the Committee of Border Workers gave to us the gift of trust, which allowed us access to their homes and most personal experiences.

We were moved by their tireless passion for justice and inspired upon our return to take action. We brought their stories to life by translating them into various forms of creative activism. These puppet shows, comic strips, radical cheers and slide shows were used to educate people in the states about the struggles endured by the CFO and how to be in solidarity with them. Through this process, our project evolved to not be charity, but instead an organization based on solidarity and mutual aid. Mutual aid is *not* an exchange of a tit for a tat. Mutual aid is an example of gift giving. None of us on either side of the border were consciously counting gifts. It's only now through reflection that I understand that what we were sharing was much deeper than the exchange of money and material possessions. What we experienced was giving for the simple sake of giving, not for the sake of getting something in return. That in itself is radical.

Burn-out and How to Cope

As activists we often times give so much of ourselves that our vital flame inside us begins to be snuffed out. Burn-out is quite common in activism but very rarely discussed. We sometimes have very high expectations and become easily disappointed in ourselves and in others. There is always so much to do! How can we as one individual person be everywhere all at once? How can we keep up the same energy and passion we once had? How can we balance the amounts of gifts we give with the gifts we need to sustain ourselves? I, honestly, ask these questions for myself but feel that others can probably relate. We must remind ourselves and friends that “gift giving is not self-sacrificing” (Vaughan 1977).

In our creative endeavors to establish more radical models to live by, we must at the ground level establish better ways to communicate and support each other. We should also allow each other to take time to nurture ourselves without passing judgment for not living up to prior expectations. Taking a reflective break allows us time to self critique and redirect our activist work down new and innovative paths. By giving to ourselves, we can better be able to serve and give to others.

To avoid a complete burn-out, I have slowed my pace to a more sustainable speed. In this reflective phase, I'm trying to learn to say “no” when appropriate and take time for myself without guilt. For many years I lived off adrenaline. Now I'm taking the time to learn to be healthy by studying herbal medicine and bodywork. This healing time is balanced by working from home on two separate projects that document, archive and preserve inspiration stories. I'm co-directing the WINGS, Women's International News Gathering Service, archival project and also co-editing a book on radical cheerleading. The sharing of these herstories is

a true gift for both present and future generations.

Organizations can also experience a burn-out. For the sake of sustaining the group it's imperative to have periodic assessments of what has worked and what hasn't over the long term. In Bikes Across Borders we realized that we did not have the same resources and time to do what we had done before. So after many years of intermittent travel and taking bikes and puppet shows to many parts of the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Cuba, the members of Bikes Across Borders redirected their focus to be more locally based teaching bike maintenance, puppetry and arts in the public schools. BAB continues to send bikes to Cuba and Mexico through the more established connections of the Pastors for Peace biannual caravans. In our group's check in, what we recognized as a consistently positive aspect of our organization was our adherence to the principles of solidarity and mutual aid. Through cross cultural networking, we are presently able to provide housing at the Rhizome Collective for creative activists from four different countries.

By looking back over the last ten years of my life through the lens of the gift economy, I am able to honor the many gifts that I have been blessed. I am also able to recognize the gifts and experiences I shared, not as wasted time, but as time that was and still is validated in the gift economy. I say "wasted time" because that is what much of my family and old friends, indoctrinated by the capitalist system, thought I was doing. The question was always, "When are you going to get a job and stop all that protesting?" My answer now is that creative activism is my life's work and everything else is *lagnappe*.* I think it's important to recognize my first world white privilege in this equation. I was never forced to have to get a job and financially take care of anyone else but myself. I was able to commit myself wholeheartedly to my activism, because I was being supported by my community and the Rhizome Collective. Not having to pay high rents was a true gift. I did work an occasional freelance job, but it is true that I don't have much, monetarily speaking, to show from most of my adult life. However the gifts I do have are the skills and community that I acquired from my years of volunteer work. I now am lucky enough to work a job in the market economy that I like and even have enough time left over for my activist projects and sometimes for myself.

Conclusion

Once I was able to see the gift economy in my own life, I began to see it everywhere. For some, maybe we just knew and called it by some other name. It's more than likely something we have been practicing in some form or fashion all of our lives, especially if we have been socialized as women. By beginning to see activism as a gift, we are more able to equate value with the work we do for either low or no pay. Society at large doesn't honor our work so we have to take it upon ourselves to acknowledge each other. When we feel validated we live more meaningful and inspired lives. However, it's easy to get overwhelmed and let the system get us down. To counteract this feeling we should start by recognizing our many gifts within and then gather strength by reaching out to those friends that live by a

respectful, nurturing, and compassionate worldview. Really the gift economy is simple: our work is to establish a radically different world that puts at its center the needs of the people and the planet before money. It seems easy; however, we must overcome thousands of years of indoctrination. It is our job as creative activists to break the curse of this outdated patriarchal consciousness and to generate creative ideas of how to “actualize solutions for a global revolution!”

To come full circle, I would like to end with an adapted version of one of the first radical cheers ever written. Since radical cheerleading was designed to speak to whatever issue is at hand, I thought it would be an appropriate gift to present a radical cheer to lend support, morale, and validation to the gift economy.

Squad set... you bet!

I don't want to work no more.
 What did you say? I said
 The capitalist system doesn't work no more.
 That's what I said, now say,
 The gift economy is what came before
 What did I say? I said
 The gift economy is what came before.
 Yes that's what we say, now
 Stomp dissolve the state, let's liberate
 Patriarchy go to hell
 Another woman to rebel!
 Organize and raise some hell
 Create something radical—REBEL!
 (original cheer by Aimee and Cara Jennings, Florida, December 2006,
 adapted by Firecracker)

**Creole dialect for extra or unexpected gift or benefit.*

Brackin “Firecracker” Camp grew up in a small town in Mississippi and came of age in New Orleans, Louisiana. She has an extensive background in protesting, networking, traveling, interviewing, researching, radical cheerleading, circus performing, parading, bike riding, and organizing events/conferences throughout the U.S. and in various other countries. To support herself in the market economy, Brackin presently works as a personal care attendant/body worker as well as a puppeteer in the Austin public schools. In addition, Brackin is a board member of the Rhizome Collective and a member of the committee to free the Angola 3.

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Women's Giving

Feminist Transformation and Human Welfare

Genevieve Vaughan's (1997) theorizing of the gift paradigm provides essential support for feminists who know intuitively that the political, spiritual, economic, and environmental are connected and who are struggling to bring these together in our practice and in the world we want to build. The recognition that *giving* is an alternative paradigm to *exchange* and not just a different type of behaviour, is incredibly important.¹

Understanding that *giving* relations (with each other and nature) are *both* the fullest expression of our humanity/spirituality *and* our greatest wealth reveals the self evident but currently hidden truth that economic relationships are human and social relationships. It allows us to know deeply and confidently that our world is a whole and that holistic politics, visions, and practices are both crucial and possible. So it invites, encourages, even requires, that each of us open ourselves to elements that have not hitherto been a feature of our work. This provides important ground for transformative feminists working in different communities around different issues to identify and build connections among our struggles in a way that deepens and broadens all our politics.

My sense is that the rich array of feminists all over the world who are drawn to the gift paradigm are attracted by just this promise of dialogue and solidarity across what have tended to be the spiritual, political, and economic solitudes of our movement. Here, we find longed for space to articulate the spiritual elements in our political and economic struggles and the political and economic elements of our spiritual struggles. In this way the International Feminist Network for a Gift Economy offers the vital opportunity for diverse transformative feminists to strategize and work together while retaining the autonomy and diversity of our practice.

The Network at this stage is essentially an e-list of individual Indigenous and non-Indigenous feminists from all regions with enormously varied priorities and histories, engaged with a broad range of issues at local, national, regional, and/or global levels. Many, though not all participants in the Gift Economy Network have met and dialogued with each other at conferences dedicated to exploring the gift paradigm and related matriarchal paradigms² and many have presented together and individually in other contexts.³ For instance, the "Position Statement for a Peace-

ful World” which follows this article was presented at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2002. The diversity of participants and the rich variety of their work and relationships to the gift paradigm are evident in *Il Dono/The Gift: A Feminist Analysis*, a collection edited by Genevieve Vaughan (2004).

The articles gathered in this new book are based on presentations at the second international conference on the gift economy held in Las Vegas in 2004. Indigenous and non-Indigenous feminists from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and North America shared information about important, hugely diverse struggles that illuminate and are illuminated by the gift paradigm. A powerful implicit theme was the common conviction expressed eloquently by Marta Benavides, that the *way* we move forward must be a central part of our Network’s discussion and reflection:

We must ... consciously and intentionally be the future in the here and now.... There is a qualitative difference between being a revolutionary to being the revolution itself. We must manifest it. There is a difference between building and constructing, defending and struggling for peace, and being peace. (page 315 in this volume)

The extensive testimony at this gathering to the practical relevance of the gift paradigm and our evident consensus on the importance of means as well as ends is exciting to me. It shows that when Linda Christiansen-Ruffman and others at the gathering speak of strengthening the feminist movement, they/we are looking for far more than mere alliances, or mere mutual agreement to collectively prioritize one issue at a time. We are not looking for a common political line or proposing a political orthodoxy. Rather we are seeking relationships, networks, and strategizing that connect us in the fullest most integrative sense.⁴ Such relationships are only possible among those who share a critical and visionary perspective that is broad and deep enough to speak to all our struggles and move them all forward. The gift paradigm provides that perspective. It is clear from the articles gathered here that no one is going to drop what they are doing to work with the gift paradigm. Instead, this paradigm will allow each of us to more completely realize the potential of our specific and varied ongoing work.

In the rest of this article I will briefly outline a few of the most immediate ways I believe theorizing *the gift* contributes to my own understanding and, I think, to transformative feminism generally in Canada and globally.

Gender and the Gift

In patriarchal misogynist societies around the world transformative feminists do not base women’s claims to equality, autonomy, and humanity simply on our similarity to men. We challenge not only women’s exclusion from humanity, but the dominance of male-associated values and the androcentric definition of

humanity itself. The Third World feminist network, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), expressed this eloquently in an influential (later published) document they issued in preparation for one of the United Nations World Congresses on Women:⁵

The women's movement ... at its deepest is not an effort to play "catch up" with the competitive, aggressive, "dog-eat-dog" spirit of the dominant system. It is, rather, an attempt to convert men and the system to the sense of responsibility and nurturance, openness, and rejection of hierarchy that are part of our vision. (Sen and Grown 1987: 72-73)

This spirit is evident, also, in the following feminist response to the Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women in Canada (1970):

Our goal must be to obtain full human status for women in every area of human activity. And this is not to accept the present "human activity" realm of the male. Values in the male realm today are firmly rooted in the evils of power, dominance and oppression. We must look for a broader and deeper definition of human life. (Dorothy 1971: 3)

These transformative feminist challenges involve affirming women and women-associated work and values while resisting gender as a structure of hierarchy. The vision of a less fragmented and less "male" world in which characteristics, concerns, and values associated with women are the defining human values has been at the heart of transformative feminist practice in all regions for many decades. The following quotations from U.S. feminists Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1979) and Indian feminist Vandana Shiva (1989) are just two eloquent articulations of this common feminist project:

We refuse to remain on the margins of society, and we refuse to enter that society on its own terms.... The human values that women were assigned to preserve [must] become the organizing principles of society. The vision that is implicit in feminism [is] a society organized around human needs.... There are no human alternatives. The Market, with its financial abstractions, deformed science, and obsession with dead things must be pushed back to the margins. And the "womanly" values of community and caring must rise to the center as the only *human* principles. (Ehrenreich and English 1979: 342)

The recovery of the feminine principle allows a transcendence and transformation of patriarchal foundations of maldevelopment. It allows a redefinition of growth and productivity as categories linked to the production, not the destruction of life. It is thus simultaneously an ecological and a feminist political project which legitimizes the way of knowing and being

that creates wealth by enhancing life and diversity, and which delegitimises the knowledge and practice of the culture of death as the basis for capital accumulation. (Shiva 1989: 13)

Affirming (female) gender *against* gender is a “contradiction” that many of us have necessarily been prepared to live with. I have written elsewhere that this is not a static linear contradiction, but a dialectical contradiction from which creative new possibilities emerge (Miles 1996). Still, we have not found words to adequately capture the substance of the human process we are engaged in. The project of “feminizing the world” can be misread as retaining the very gender definition of qualities and priorities we wish to generalize/humanize. The gift paradigm helps us in this quandary by theoretically clarifying how and why the feminist affirmation of women-associated characteristics, concerns, work, and values is a human struggle to move beyond a gendered world.

The gift paradigm shows us that giving is the defining quality/activity of *all* human beings, male and female; exchange behaviours and ways of being and seeing are departures from the human. “Masculation” is the term coined by Genevieve Vaughan (2004) for the process by which males in patriarchy were originally, and are still socialized away from giving into exchange behaviours and learn to base their claim of masculinity on their distance from their mothers and from giving. The female gender is, then, the residual human. Patriarchal dominance is at its root the dominance of exchange over giving. Even in modern urban contexts where women move also in the public world of exchange and market and have learned to see the world largely through the dominant exchange lens, they/we remain associated with and are necessarily still more grounded in giving. So we can see that when women affirm our experience, values, and responsibilities as formative of our struggle, we are affirming the human. In the non-patriarchal world we aspire to men will not be masculated; their maleness will be lived through and not against their giving human qualities.

“New Socialist Man” and the Gift

Understanding human beings as essentially giving creatures helps us see that we need not concern ourselves with the classic Left project of creating “new socialist man,” that is, new human beings capable of living in a world without individualism, competition, or profit. Even today and even in the heart of hyper-capitalist globally dominant neo-liberalism we all feel best—most human, vibrant and alive—when we are giving and receiving in a human way. We don’t need to be made human, we just need to be allowed to be human. So our challenge is to create a world in which we can be fully ourselves, not a world where we can be something else. The awareness that in our struggle we are working *with* our humanity and not against it is a significant shift of awareness for me. I find it a far more hopeful scenario.

Women's Leadership and the Gift

The gift paradigm also provides critical theoretical support for the feminist knowledge, gained from decades of political observation and experience, that women are playing a leading role in the struggle for change in all areas. Feminists have noted that women make up the majority of grassroots activists in the economic South and North—in their communities and in local and global campaigns and movements against poverty and mining, for the environment, for the Commons, for land, for human and community rights, health, peace, education, democracy, food security, and water among many others (Seager 1993; Marcos 1997; Mies 1998; Maathai 2004; Ackerley 2005). Women are disproportionately committed to the thankless long-term tasks of building relationships, knowledge and organizations with the capacity to confront power. And women have proven less likely to be sidetracked from long-term aims by offers of jobs or profit sharing or deals with colonizers (Brownhill 2006).

The central, even leading role of women remains largely unacknowledged except by feminists who have explained it in various social and structural terms. These include, for instance, women's more immediate responsibility for sustaining individual and communal life; their greater vulnerability to the harms of "development" and neo-liberal globalization; their necessarily less complete separation from nature and the body, their ultimate outsider status and consequent lack of access to the benefits of deals and power sharing (O'Brien 1981; Hartsock 1983; Aptheker 1990; Smith 1990; Agarwal 1992; Mies 1998; Collins 2000; Burack 2001; Higgs 2004). All these are obviously important factors that help explain women's leading activism. The gift paradigm takes us further by more fully revealing the deeper meaning and significance of this activism.

When we theorize giving as a different paradigm from exchange, giving becomes visible and we can see that at the deepest level, our movement is not simply about fairer exchange, less—or even no—exploitation, or more equality of condition, respect, and status; it is about creating a giving society and economy. The organic connections among all our many and varied issues and campaigns become clear and the underlying logic of the most progressive expressions of the feminist movement in all these areas is illuminated. We have new ways of thinking about and articulating our long-term dream of a world where women, women's work, and nature are valued. We have a new grasp of these as quintessential gifts and giving relationships; a more adequate understanding of women's reluctance to pursue or accept market measures of value for these things; and a deeper theoretical understanding of their human and political significance as central fields of struggle in our movement toward a giving society, economy, and world.

Women's Consciousness, Women's Liberation, and the Gift

Feminists worldwide are questioning everything, especially the models that are presented to us as the most advanced and the best for women. In the two thirds/

majority world feminists have for decades now been documenting and resisting the negative impacts of “development” on whole communities, especially the poor and the Indigenous, particularly women and children (Anand 1983⁶; Dakar 1982; Sen and Grown 1987; Tauli-Corpuz 1993; Tauli-Corpuz 2000). In the “developed” world feminist radicals have, since the 1970s, been drawing on their own experience to de-mystify false promises of “modernization” and “development” (Boston Women’s Health Collective 1973). Indigenous feminists in their resistance in all regions are re-discovering, defending, and sharing the non-patriarchal traditional knowledge surviving (to greater or lesser degree) in their communities and among their peoples (Trask 1984; Allen 1986).

The gift paradigm strengthens us in all these stands inside and outside our communities. For instance, it exposes the continuity in the historical and current colonization of women, nature, land, and labour (Miles 2001). It also clearly shows that the modern urban educated “equal” woman isn’t so advanced. Far from providing a model for women’s progress, she is at risk of becoming purely a creature of exchange and forgetting she is a woman. This leaves her vulnerable to the domesticating mystification that her conditional privileges are the pinnacle of freedom for women everywhere (Rich 1986; Standing 2006-07).

Theorizing the gift helps feminists resist this false and divisive model of “liberation” which masks women’s shared oppression and common strengths and undermines women’s potential for mutual identification and solidarity across our hugely diverse circumstances. Seeing “giving” counters the male-identified ethnocentric, even racist, belief in the backwardness of “other” women that traps many well-meaning “liberated” women in the economic North in patronizing attitudes that render them incapable of respectful participation, and therefore acceptance, in the global feminist movement. The clear theoretical articulation of an alternative gift-based vision of women’s liberation and future human society also strengthens in important ways the recognition, acceptance, and practice of “third world,” marginal and Indigenous women’s leadership. For traditional women-identification that persists more among these groups, and the holistic knowledge surviving in Indigenous communities are important and defining strengths. In a feminist movement that is seeking giving alternatives to exchange rather than escape from giving, remaining women’s sub-cultures and matriarchal Indigenous cultures are honoured as essential precursors of a more human future, not dismissed as vestiges of the past.

Anti-Globalization and the Gift

Feminists have long known that using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of well-being is a lie. For GDP measures only the value of market transactions and fails to take account of environmental and social destruction (Waring 1988; Shiva 1989; Isla 2007). Growth in GDP today comes mainly from enclosure and appropriation, that is, drawing non-market goods, services, land, resources, and labour into the market as new profit opportunities for the few—making these,

at the same time and with devastating consequences, less available to the many. Neo-liberal globalization is the triumph of minority forces that benefit from this economic growth at the expense of the majority of the world's people and the environment (Miles 2001). Feminists have resisted this process of theft and destruction by insisting that the market cannot be the only measure of value, and by naming the harm and protecting the wealth that GDP discounts. This refusal of capitalist market measures is the ground on which we and other anti-globalization actors have attempted to exempt some areas (water, education, health, etc.) from pervasive and intensifying commodification, win more equal terms of trade, place limits on the environmental and social damage caused by essentially destructive forms of production, and protect people from the worst effects of enclosure and appropriation of common wealth.

The gift paradigm provides support for much more radical challenge and alternatives. Theorizing the gift goes beyond insisting that there is value outside the market, to showing that this is the only true wealth. For it demonstrates how exchange, the market, and trade (even fair trade) are parasitical on the gift, require and enforce scarcity, in their very essence interrupt our human relationships, reduce the wealth we can give each other and the abundance which could be ours. With this perspective, our aim is no longer merely to limit the damage of the market but to refuse the market itself and *all* commodification as we work toward our vision of a fully human future. This feminism resonates with and draws deeply on Indigenous relational and holistic worldviews and Indigenous and third world feminist leadership against colonization and neo-liberal globalization.

Women's Welfare and the Gift in Canada

Still, feminists need to deal in market and exchange contexts in our crucial struggle for money for women and children's immediate survival. I'd like to close by sharing one case where we in Canada are drawing on gift theorizing to deepen our demands and articulate them in terms of an alternative paradigm. We have overwhelming testimony from other articles in this book (Ana Isla, Claudia von Werlhof, Maria Jiminez, Linda Christiansen-Ruffman) that in this period, triumphant neo-liberalism is spreading poverty, violence, desperation, and destitution everywhere. Certainly this is true in Canada where social support and social services are being undermined at a great rate (Armstrong *et al.* 2004). It seems to many of us here that, at this time, the women's movement to be worthy of its name, has to make the fate of the most economically vulnerable women a central and pressing issue.

As part of this commitment about twenty women gathered in September 2004 in Pictou, Nova Scotia, representing national groups from across Canada and grassroots groups from the Atlantic region. We began by sharing our many and varied experiences campaigning against women's poverty and for economic support, social services, and labour rights for women. The notion of a basic income or annual general income (or as we preferred to call it, "guaranteed livable income")

Feminist Statement on Guaranteed Living Income⁷
Pictou, Nova Scotia, Sept 18-20, 2004

For millennia women's work, along with the free gifts of nature, has provided most of the true wealth of our communities. Women's work has been central to individual and collective survival. In all our diverse communities women can be seen to work on the principle that everybody is entitled to economic and physical security and autonomy and a fair share of the common wealth.

Women in every community, context and racial group are still denied our rightful political power over the economics governing these communities and our world. To paraphrase "A Women's Creed," for thousands of years men have had power without responsibility while women have responsibility without power. This situation must change.

Feminists insist that all activities of government and business in our nation(s) and our diverse communities should be assessed in the light of the prime value of sustaining life and the social priorities of universal entitlement, human security, autonomy, and common wealth. These must become the central priorities in social life and in public policy.

We refuse to accept market measures of wealth. They make invisible the important caring work in every society. They ignore the well-being of people and the planet, deny the value of women's work, and define the collective wealth of our social programs and public institutions as "costs" which cannot be borne. They undermine social connections and capacities and currency.

We reject policies that sacrifice collective wealth and individual security in the interests of profit for transnational corporations.

Women in Canada expect full and generous provision for all people's basic needs from the common wealth. Social and collective provision for sustaining life must be generous and secure in Canada and must be delivered through national mechanisms appropriately influenced and controlled by the women of our many specific communities.

We expect all people's full and dignified participation in society including full individual and social sharing of the work and responsibility of sustaining life that has so far been gendered. Men must share equally in this work within and beyond monetary measures.

We expect our rightful share of the wealth we have created. Women's work must be recognized and valued both within and beyond monetary measures. We expect sustained and expanding collective provision for people's needs.

Women demand an indexed guaranteed living income for all individual residents set at a level to enable comfortable living.

for all emerged as an important and positive way to respond to criminal decreases in welfare and the government's sharply diminishing resource commitments to women. We liked what we felt was the potential of this demand to shift the idea of poverty alleviation out of a charity frame and make women's demands general social demands. In this period of harsh government cutbacks we also welcomed the fact that this demand achieves this reframing without in any way absolving government of responsibility for individual and community well-being. Yet we were concerned that basic income has never been articulated in feminist terms. As it is generally conceptualized, it leaves women's disproportionate unpaid work invisible and does not contribute to a shift in this burden (Standing 2006-07). From these discussions we drafted a "Feminist Statement on Guaranteed Living Income," known as the "Pictou Statement," in which we (1) challenge poverty through an affirmation of the wealth women create and distribute, not in exchange terms but according to people's needs; and (2) demand that the whole of society adopt these gift principles. This Statement [see box] is just one specific example of the ways a gift perspective can deepen even struggles for money and more participation in the market in crucial transformative and feminist ways. Participants in the International Feminist Network for a Gift Economy share a myriad of such instances in their gatherings, their e-list, and their publications. Readers are invited to join the Network and share your reflections and experience.

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Notes

- 1 For sources, publications and information on the gift paradigm see <http://www.gift-economy.com/>.
- 2 These conferences include "A Radically Different World is Possible: The Gift Economy Inside and Outside of Patriarchal Capitalism" November 13-14, 2004, Las Vegas, Nevada; "Societies of Peace, Past, Present, Future," Second World Congress of Patriarchal Studies, September 29-October 2, 2005, San Marcos, Texas.
- 3 For instance, at World and Regional Social Forums in Porto Alegre (2002, 2003, 2004), Mumbai 2005, Mali 2006, Nairobi 2007; the International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women in Upsala 1999, Kampala 2002, Seoul 2005; European ATTAK Graz, Austria 2003; Semiotics Conferences in Finland, France, Italy and the U.S.A.; The Other Economic Summit (TOES); the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE); the National Women's Studies Association in the USA.; the

- Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association and the Canadian Woman Studies Association, 2003; the UK and Ireland Women's Studies Association, Dublin 2004; "Spirit Matters: Wisdom Traditions and the "Great Work," Toronto 2004; American Association of Anthropology 2006; International Peace Research Association Calgary, Canada 2006; International Women's Peace Conference Dallas, U.S.A. 2006.
- 4 I use the term "integrative" feminisms and feminists to refer to feminisms seeking deep transformation with integrative/holistic practice that addresses the whole world and understands the integration of race, class, colonial, and patriarchal structures of power (Miles 1996).
- 5 A version of this statement was later published by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) as *Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (Sen and Grown 1987).
- 6 While published by *ISIS* in 1983, this document was first written and circulated in 1980.
- 7 First published with an explanatory introduction and list of those present in *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme's* special issue on "Benefiting Women? Women's Labour Rights?" 23 (3,4) (Spring/Summer 2004).

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Position Statement for a Peaceful World Feminists for a Gift Economy

Presented at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, January 2002

From the dawn of time women's gifts have been creating and sustaining community, and we have struggled to make the world a better place. In recent years women have been articulating new forms of protest, refusing war and all forms of violence, protecting the environment and all life, creating new multi-centred and diverse political spaces and defining new politics of care, community, compassion, and connectedness.

Women, from both North and South especially from the margins of privilege and power, are creating alternative visions. Over the last decades the growing feminist movement has developed analyses, changed paradigms, built solidarity through listening to each other. We are rethinking democracy, creating new imaginaries, even reconceptualizing the foundations of political society.

The anti-globalization movement is grounded in the new political space women have created. The global dialogue and networking among men, so celebrated today as a new achievement, post-dates the growing global women's movement by many years. Yet this is rarely acknowledged and feminist leadership is seldom invited. Feminist perspectives remain largely invisible in the struggle against globalization, impoverishing not only women but the struggle as a whole.

We, women of many countries, believe that the death dealing elements of patriarchal capitalist colonial globalisation are rooted, not in unequal exchange alone but in the mechanism of exchange itself. The creation of scarcity, the globalisation of spiritual and material poverty, and the destruction of cultures and species are not failures of a wealth creating system. They are essential expressions of a parasitical centralizing system which denies the gift giving logic of mothering.

Traditional gift-giving societies integrated the logic of mothering into the wider community in many ways. Now socio-economic systems based on the logic of exchange degrade and deny gift giving while co-opting the gifts of most women and many men, dominating the gift givers and destroying the remnants of traditional gift giving societies.

Nevertheless, mothering is a necessity for all societies. Because children are born vulnerable, adults must practice unilateral gift giving towards them. Women are socialized toward this practice which has a transitive logic of its own. Men are socialized away from mothering behavior and towards a self-reflecting logic of competition and domination. The gift logic, functional and complete in itself is altered and distorted by the practice of exchange which requires quantification

and measurement, is adversarial, and instills the values of self interest and competition for domination. Exchange, especially monetized exchange, the market, and the capitalist and colonial economies that derive from them are formed in the image of masculinist values and rewards. For this reason we can characterise capitalism as patriarchal.

In the present stage of patriarchal capitalism, corporations have developed as disembodied non-human entities made according to values of dominance, accumulation and control and without the mitigating rationality and emotional capacity a real human being would presumeably have.

Corporations have an internal mandate to grow or die. However, even simple market exchange superimposes itself on gift giving at all levels, cancelling and concealing its value and appropriating its gifts, renaming them as its deserved profits.

Women's free labour is gift labor and it has been estimated as adding some 40 percent or more to the GNP in even the most industrialized economies. The goods and services provided by women to their families are qualitative gifts that create the material and psychological basis of community. These gifts pass through the family to the market, which could not survive without them.

Profit is a disguised and forced gift given by the worker to the capitalist. Indeed the market itself functions as a parasite upon the gifts of the many. As capitalism "evolves" and spreads, its market becomes needy for new gifts, commodifying free goods which were previously held in common by the community or by humanity as a whole. The destructive methods of appropriation which feed the market also create the scarcity necessary for the exchange-based parasite to maintain its control. Since gift giving requires abundance, the parasite can only keep the gift giving host from gaining power by creating artificial scarcity through the monopolization of wealth.

Northern patriarchal capitalism has grown exponentially by invading the economies of the South and extracting their gifts. In the past whole continents have been appropriated, their territories and peoples divided into private property of the colonizers, their gifts commodified. Today, in a new form of colonization, traditional indigenous knowledge and plant species, as well as human, animal, and plant genes are being patented and privatized so that the gifts of the planet and humanity are passing again, at a new level into the hands and profits of the few.

The mechanisms of exploitation are often validated by the very institutions that are established to protect the people. Laws are made in the service of the patriarchal parasite and justice itself is formed in the image of exchange, the payment for crime. Apologists for patriarchal capitalism exist at every level of society from academia to advertising. The very language they use has been stolen, the common

ground of its meanings distorted and co-opted in the service of the perpetrators of economic violence. Thus “free trade” apes the language of the gift and liberation while it is only short hand for more exploitation and dominance.

While fair trade seems to be better than unfair trade, it is not the liberating alternative we seek. Exchange itself and not just unequal exchange must give way to the gift. The answer to the injustice of the appropriation of the abundant gifts of the many is not a fair return in cash for the theft but the creation of gift based economies and cultures where life is not commodified.

While such a radical change may appear extremely difficult, it is more “realistic” than simply continuing in our attempts to survive and care for one another in the frighteningly destructive and increasingly toxic world we know today, for these attempts are doomed to failure in the long term.

Women have worked to transform political spaces and have made important, though fragile and highly contested gains in the last decades in affirming women’s legal, sexual and reproductive rights, challenging fundamentalisms, opposing violence, and war, improving women’s education, health and economic conditions. These struggles have broken new ground while remaining within the exchange paradigm. Our successes and failures challenge and inspire us to seek new terrain, recognizing that “the masters tools can never be used to dismantle the masters house” (Audre Lorde).

WE WANT A MARKET-FREE SOCIETY, NOT A FREE-MARKET SOCIETY

WE WANT:

A world of abundance where bodies, hearts and minds are not dependent on the market.

A world where gift-giving values of care are accepted as the most important, the leading values of society at all levels.

A world where women and men enjoy taking care of children and each other.

A world where everyone is able to express their sexuality in life-loving ways, where their spirituality is treasured and their materiality is honored.

A world where trust and love are the amniotic fluid in which all our children learn to live.

A world where boys and girls are socialized without gender limits as gift-giving humans from the very beginning.

A world where mother nature can be seen as the great gift giver, her ways understood and her infinitely diverse gifts celebrated by all.

A world where humans and all species can reach their highest potential in relationship rather than their lowest potential in parasitism and competition.

WE WANT:

A world where money does not define value nor legislate survival.

A world where all the categories and processes of parasitism and hate - racism, classism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia are regarded as belonging to a shameful past.

A world where war is recognized as expressing unnecessary patriarchal syndromes of dominance and submission in a ridiculously sexualized death ritual using phallic technological instruments, guns and missiles of ever greater proportions.

A world where the psychosis of patriarchy is recognized, healed, and no longer validated as the norm.

We will create the world we want while keeping intact our full humanity, humor and hope.

November 15, 2001

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