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“Earth Democracy, Ecofeminism, the Gift Paradigm and Alternatives to Capitalist Patriarchy”

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Key words: neoliberal patriarchy, deep ecofeminism, life-oriented cultures of sustainability and earth democracy HARD TO LEAVE OUT ANY OF THESE TERMS, if must, then keep neoliberal patriarchy and life-oriented gift economies

As “Terms of Reference” for the Environment Seminar remarked in October 2010“over 99% of human generations survived with a holistic-and-balanced Paradigm of gatherer-hunters, who did *not* radically separate the 1) material **VS SHOULD ACTUALLY BE FROM** vs. spiritual, 2) present vs. future, 3) human vs. non-human, 4) male vs. female, etc. Yet, the last millennia saw the rise of a dualistic Paradigm in which the Material, Present, Human, Male, etc., have been made in opposition to, and placed above, their counterparts.” (REF HERE YUKIO KAMINO?) **Ecofeminisms¹** in their variety as well as tradition-oriented Indigenous scholars would likely not only agree with this, but would also concur that these sum up their core beliefs. Indeed, the current Western mode of dualistic and hierarchical thinking and the concomitant way of ordering reality is far from universal or timeless; societies have existed and thrive even today that are earth democracies, honor life, peace and balanced relations between all living beings rather than naturalizing violence, domination and power-over structures (see in particular www.giftparadigm.org; AkademieHagia).

We must urgently revisit and transform the world’s dominant economic values and political beliefs. This means, among many other solutions, (re)recognizing the archaic and modern gift economies the tenets of which are in many central ways shared and expressed by ecofeminist social movements and their theories. They are most relevant to issues of ecology as their long-term cosmovisions include, most centrally, that we must give back to nature what it gives us, not only because ecological diversity (the many medicinal plants and ecologically important animals) ensures our survival, but because other species have their inherent rights. The hegemonic West benefits greatly if it begins to listen to and learn from non-western cultures and the deep ecofeminist theories that unite some of the best ecologically, economically and socially sustainable practices made visible by the World Social Forum in its various manifestations. It is no longer a matter for feminism of advancing human/woman rights, but a matter of survival for the planet itself. Among ecofeminists and Indigenous people there is a wealth of ecological wisdom and knowledge that will be needed in our struggle for survival. In this text, I wish to clarify and deepen what the International Network of Feminists for a Gift economy (FGE from here on) means by “deep alternatives” in the context of the crises of Western civilization—one that is expanding fast from the South now to the North.

International Network of Feminists for a Gift Economy (FGE)

I consider the above network to which I have belonged for twelve years to be exemplary of the kinds of ecological and social movements that provide a strong counterforce to neoliberal and patriarchal global forces. It is aimed at making visible and available already existing solutions to the planet's crises of ecology, food shortage, financial abuse of power, to name some of the most serious consequences of the geopolitics of domination and non-sustainability. The transformation of the global village towards a more just and eco-friendly way of life requires multidimensional changes in power relations and the neoliberal politics of appropriation affecting the taking over of the Commons in both their material and non-material manifestations (knowledge, immaterial culture, seeds, research etcetera). Diversity, justice and respect do not thrive under ego-oriented politics of patenting or hiding and making one's own another's knowledge. Robbery, greed and privatization are all connected. It is worth remembering the etymology of privatization (Lat. *privare*= to rob, to deprive someone of something) (Mies 2003). Neoliberal patriarchal capitalism can be summed up as including the following features in weaker or stronger forms depending on local application: it ensures continued profits by a) creating false needs to stimulate consumption, b) depriving people of their basic needs for water, food, land and housing to enforce dependency, submission and humility before the "invisible hand of the market".

The points raised at the beginning of this text by Kamino with their far-reaching ramifications have been a central core also of ecofeminist theories since the eighties and the current theories on masculation (Vaughan 1997), theories of the gift and of matriarchal cultures (eg. Göttner-Abendroth 2003, Werlhof 2000, 2004, 2007, 2011, Kuokkanen 2007, Mann 2000, Kailo 2008). Indeed, the FGE network would agree with the "Terms of Reference" of the Environment Seminar that "**Globalization** emerged from the materialistic, tempo-centric and anthropocentric aspects of the modern Western Paradigm, which it is therefore essential to counter." (Kamino) **Kamino. IN SOURCES**

Crises of Western patriarchal capitalism

The gradual dismantling of Nordic welfare states is the latest victory in capitalist patriarchy's strivings to dispossess also Northern women of the tax-funded public services that they need more than men (to be employed in decent waged labour, and to be able to combine family and work). The push towards the paradoxical socialization of private risk-taking and the simultaneous privatization of profits has resulted in an unprecedented redistribution of the world's resources, led by the financial elite of speculators and credit ranking agents. By limiting free access to health services, knowledge and education, by fencing the "Commons" and creating new forms of scarcity, neoliberalism creates demand and markets for elite profiteering. The world's free-flowing and predatory capital is looking endlessly for new investment opportunities and profit-increasing deals.

The idea that land, nature, animals and vulnerable populations are there to be taken, appropriated and harnessed for mostly one-sided financial gain results from a utilitarian ethic of domination. Although individuals from any culture or of any gender can and have adopted these and other modes of domination, the culture and worldview socializing an individual has much more to do with the roots of multilevel violence than the focus on single men or women lets us understand. Cultures based on traditional ecological knowledge and women socialized with the rationality of care are on a practical and ideological level a far cry from predominantly male-dominated cultures. The brutal patriarchal core of capitalism and also of many left ideologies is revealed when we consider the honor/shame system of gendering and socialization in Native and non-native cultures, as just one example (Kailo 2004, 2005). Barbara Mann, a member of FGE has done an in-depth brilliant job of exposing the extent to which history, including Marxist appropriation of Iroquoian long-house matriarchies has been written by the winners (2000). It has excluded mile stone events in women's history and has distorted issues such as the birth place even of democracy (the Matriarchal Iroquoian Confederacy rather than the democracy of Greece that was limited to young elite men, Mann 2000).ⁱⁱ By virtue of their socialization to engage primarily in care work and nurturing, women have across cultures created and express a logic of care and gifting that has an interface of affinities with the more far-reaching vision of interconnectedness characterizing numerous Indigenous peoples even today. This is not to idealize motherhood but to recognize that this does predispose women to a less money and conquest-oriented logic than boys and men in particularly colonial nations. Those brought up on this "gift logic" include, based on culture, both men and women who believe that humans and animals are interdependent and that the core of a socio-cosmic contract means seeking to satisfy everyone's needs in the name of collective survival and wellness (including the rights of other species with their inherent rights). They do not grasp the Western notion of an "autonomous man" who, in fact, is dependent on women, mothers and nature. Capitalism creates false needs but is unwilling at the same time to satisfy those needed for survival. This is its core difference from the Gift paradigm. Although FGE has produced diverse perspectives and contributions to the "deep alternative", I focus on Claudia von Werlhof's recent writings, as I feel she well captures both what blocks and what heals the ecosocially sustainable future. Founder of the Planetary Movement for Mother Earth, she has stressed that one must theorize and analyze patriarchy AND capitalism together: failing to perceive the features they share has resulted in the inability of mainstream and even feminist scholars to identify the core of the western crises (2004, 2011). After all, she points out, the two not only share a time of being together on this earth for 500 years now, but are deeply related to each other as modes of masculated competition, ego-centeredness, individuality and a short-sighted emphasis on "progress" and "development" (see also Bennholdt-Thomsen, von Werlhof & Faraclas, 2001).

Patriarchy, like capitalism, is rooted in mastery over nature, over women and life-oriented worldviews, and has through gradual historical mind colonization and the manufacture of consent (Chomsky 1999) also developed a dominant form of consciousness, "the master imaginary" (Kailo

2008). Of course, the advocates of this world view and order conceal their agenda as “progress” or in the case of the Church “rewards in the after-life”. Citizens are manipulated to be flexible and patient and to submit to endless down-sizing projects, cost-saving deals and weaker worker rights in the name of “a better future”, an improved competitiveness or other abstract goals that have not turned out to benefit the middle and lower classes.ⁱⁱⁱ Recent studies of matriarchal societies or “societies of peace” by FGE (eg. Göttner-Abendroth 2003, 2007; Vaughan 2004, 2007) make visible such important findings as the following: patriarchal society as we know it, did not exist “as such” and independently from, or even before, matriarchal society. It began to develop after the armed invasion, violent conquest, and systematic destruction of matriarchal societies by armed hordes that had lost their own originally matriarchal culture after having been exposed to “catastrophic migration” (forced migration due to climatic changes and other catastrophes) (von Werlhof 2011). As Gimbutas (1994) has outlined, this process is reported from the fifth millennium B.C. onwards—concerning the “Kurgan” people and the other Indo-European migrations in general. As Werlhof sums it: “The development of patriarchal society is related to the invention of something that from then on has been called ‘war,’ and since then this world order has been dependent on the ongoing existence of war(s) even in so-called ‘peace times.’” For Werlhof, the logic of patriarchy is that of war and subjugation, which means that all the social institutions from socialism to capitalism invented by patriarchy are principally drawn from and modeled on war experiences (2004). War is nothing less than an economy based on the plunder of other peoples’ property, and on an always more systematic exploitation of those colonized or without real say in their lives.

One example. The reason for the disrespectful and abusive treatment of elderly women in western societies results from the patriarchal politics of appropriation and reversal—all of the values, beings, people(s) and practices associated with life-oriented cultures^{iv} have been incorporated and systematically turned to their opposite. The manifestations of the matriarchal sacred have been recoded and labeled as agents of “pollution” (Douglas 1966), whence the stereotype of the “evil mother-in-law” or “the old witch”. Clan mothers in matriarchal society had (and in many cultures like the Iroquois still have) control over the means of production, were the producers and distributors, the providers of concrete wealth and healing, life, food, and security. They were responsible for the integration of everyone into the community (Mann 2000). Most importantly, the Iroquoian Plenty Way as worldview expresses a relationship with food production and relations with nature that is the most ecologically sustainable model I have come across. Cultivation lands are not given over as private property but circulated to ensure every tribe’s right to fertile land; furthermore, the surplus created by this agricultural model was intentionally given away to prevent envy and wars. The initiator of our network, Genevieve Vaughan, argues that furthermore, patriarchy invented “masculation” as a mode of psychology and language that naturalized two gendered but not biologically determined logics, that of masculated, competitive, ego-oriented exchange and of the more woman-oriented if not female exclusive gift giving, aimed primarily at fulfilling needs and establishing bonds with the other (Vaughan 1997).

Exchange as both a patriarchal and a capitalistic form of logic and rationality, values masculated realms of action, being, ways of living while looking upon women and nature as the other. It has involved a break with the matriarchal or gift giving social rules, traditions, and ways of living, which had existed from time immemorial. This “mascultation” or assimilation to the master imaginary and its competitive values is more typical of western white boys’ socialization (the norm of the ‘homo economicus’), but has gradually been extended to all humans in most non-western cultures. Still, Indigenous, non-western and female culture offer even today the strongest opposition to this logic and way of carrying on commerce or living. **This form of “rationality” is a central instrument of the assimilatory, mind colonizing practices characterizing corporate, neoliberal patriarchy.**

Today we face the maldevelopment (Shiva in Mies & Shiva 1990) of eco- and other crises which are the direct result of the “new colonization of the world” (Mies 2004, qtd. in Werlhof 2011), one that has been undemocratically pushed by governments since the 1980s adoption of neoliberal restructuring. This policy consists in a “continuing process of primitive accumulation” (Werlhof 2004, 2011) that leads to a forced economic growth through the direct expropriation of the peoples of the globe and the globe itself. For Vaughan: “In order to reject patriarchal thinking we must be able to distinguish between it and something else: an alternative” (1997: 23). **We have, indeed, sought to make visible the many cultures and wo/men who still identify with giving as a means of community creation, collective survival and needs-satisfaction rather than ego-centric exchange and hierarchical structures of domination (Vaughan 1997, 2000, 2007, Göttner-Abendroth 2008; www.giftparadigm.org).**

Motherless creation

We can fortunately find vestiges of former matriarchal or gift circulating societies as a more hidden or unrecognized “second culture” left over or newly re-organized after patriarchal-capitalist appropriation of its worldview. This logic of other-orientation, solidarity, interdependency and communal responsibility can be observed everywhere. It contradicts, complements and gets used by the patriarchal order, but also helps it to exist, because a society without any matriarchal relations could simply not survive. The link between environmental movements and the Gift paradigm is that its philosophical starting point or logic is not that of profit and productivity, but of needs-satisfaction. Thus it also looks upon nature as that with which we are inherently connected through our human bodies, and that it needs to be taken care as much as humans. On the other hand, the logic of care implies ensuring the long-term survival of humans and animals, and hence is not given to short-term abuse of our dwindling planetary resources. However, currently patriarchy is seeking to complete the long process of negating matriarchal or matrilineal societies of peace in order to replace them with itself, a “pure” patriarchy, a pathological, destructive fiction and motherless utopia which is dragging all of us to the brink of extinction. Von Werlhof sees capitalism as the tool for the linear process of history in which women, nature, and life in general will finally be successfully replaced by the artificial products of capitalism and industry: gifts by exchange; subsistence goods by commodities;

local markets by a world market; foreign cultures by western culture; concrete wealth—gifts by money, machinery, and capital—the new abstract wealth; living labour by machines; the brain/rational thinking by “artificial intelligence”; women by sex-machines and “cyber-sex”; real mothers and/or their wombs by “mother-machines”; life energy by nuclear energy, chemistry, and bio-industry; and life in general by “artificial life” like genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The only problem that remains today consists in how to “replace” the elements and the globe itself and von Werlhof calls this race to the bottom “west end”, the end point of a long process of patriarchal “alchemy” to usurp nature and reproductive labor and turn it into technological innovation (2004).

The telling symptoms of motherless creation from destruction are cloning, the very idea of reproductive technology, Franken-science with the short-sighted, commercially motivated gene manipulations and the unthinkable invention of such “male babies” as the atom bomb and terminator seeds (Corea 1980). The overwriting and appropriation of gift economies as forced gift provisioning to serve the wealthy is one of the main reasons for the depth of the crisis of in contemporary civilization. Since the norm of the human being as motherlike (Sumatra’s *minangkabau*), as caring, maternal humanity is replaced by the harsh, me-first values and ways those positioned as subaltern must assume more and more of the care and gift labor that capitalist patriarchy both idealizes and abuses to its ends. While the gift logic’s value is being eroded as “second class activity”, the morality of the species is being destroyed in the name of unsustainable self-interest. Asian, Indian, African and other non-western cultures are under attack for their traces or full-blown gift economy values. Thus the matriarchal Mosuo of China are targets of predatory tourist colonialism; when the gift logic is turned into exchange, capitalist patriarchy can step in and destroy the vestiges of woman and nature-friendly ways of life (for peaceful societies see www.giftparadigm.com).

The deep ecofeminist alternative

In contrast, the deep ecofeminist alternative with its core of advancing earth democracy emerges from the ashes of the kind of capitalistic patriarchy that hails “creative destruction” as the motor of the creed of eternal growth, a clear fallacy in a world of limited resources. This masculated fantasy now shared by increasing numbers of western and non-western men and women needs to be replaced by indigenous cosmovisions and “rematriation.” The latter Indigenous concept opposes the Western repatriation with “rematriation” as the “reclaiming of ancestral remains, spirituality, culture, knowledge and resources, mother Earth” (Muthien 2011). **Indeed, we need to return our collective consciousness to the values and worldview of radically ecosocially sustainable interconnectedness, the good circle and mode of life that appreciates traditional ecological knowledge, oral stories, herbal medicine and grassroots healing, the natural rhythms of nature, local food production, ceremonial life, the arts, and rituals aimed at consolidating mutuality and eco-friendly living.**

Language is not just a vehicle for communication but partakes itself of the ways in which we perceive each other and nature. The deep alternative we need is thus linguistic, discursive, political, and

psychological and we can chart the path towards the gift-based affinities across gender, species and culture only by combining all these strategies of transformation.

What is needed in the view of our network is nothing less than a “re-version of a perverted parasitic society and (wo)mankind” (Werlhof 2004) and a radical re-valorization of the sustainable gift economy as a logic and mode of living. Ecofeminists have been critical of the very notion of “cyborgs” (Haraway 1991), whereby the human-animal connection has been replaced by the human-machine representation, as if it really could liberate women from the nature that liberal feminists shy away from (Kailo 2005, 2007). The patriarchal “mother-father” as a “cyborg,” which is the alchemical materialization of a metaphysical fiction has to be replaced by human norms that bring us back to the body, the spiritual, the earthly. Werlhof outlines the following preconditions for the deep alternative: “de-constructing patriarchal institutions, policies, economies, technologies, and ideologies; making visible matriarchy as the second culture and the gift paradigm, and recognizing their importance in everyday life; giving up the metaphysical Gnostic worldview, including the belief in patriarchal religions and the patriarchal philosophy of idealism-materialism; re-gaining a matriarchal spirituality that leads again to a recognition of the interconnectedness of all life; not defining technology/progress any longer as having to produce a substitute for life, women, and nature in general; not defining economy any longer as having to produce a “value” and a profit; recognizing that the paradise which is supposed to be invented, is already here” (2004). Werlhof sums up what most ecofeminists concur on: “It is the earth as the only planet in the known universe that is full of life and the only one on which human beings can survive ... liberating ourselves from the idea that “material” [physical] life on earth is unimportant, sinful, humble, and something that has to be overcome; liberating ourselves from the delusion and the hubris that there can ever be a substitute for life and nature on earth...learning instead to live in commonality and organizing around egalitarian principles; taking seriously what we are doing in and to the world, and accepting our responsibility for the maintenance of life on the planet; learning to rehabilitate and love life, including our own, and the life of the earth; seeking creative ways for the maintenance and culture of life on the earth; acting in favour of and not in contradiction to them...learning that women can teach us a lot; giving up belief in patriarchy and joining with others in order to stop it; listening instead to the joyful song of mother earth” (Werlhof 2004).

This brief outline of the visions of one ecological and social movement cannot do justice to the individual richness of vision and the practical ways in which many of us already practice the gift. Still, I hope to have captured the essence of our shared beliefs across the divides of culture, continent, class, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Unassimilated women of the South –those with the most expertise of survival under patriarchal capitalism and colonial conditions – are in my view the best spokespersons for the Gift Paradigm as a deep alternative. It is something we cannot afford not to heed—if we do not wish to have patriarchy have its cake and eat it too—complete the centuries of

matricide and self-destruction that can only lead to another realm patriarchy loves—death, annihilation, the planetary-end.

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ⁱEcofeminism is an umbrella term covering many different feminist schools and movements ranging from liberal, cultural, postmodern, ecospiritual, Marxist, socialist, cyberecofeminist and radical to deep ecofeminist “schools.”. The Bielefeld School that includes Claudia von Werlhof, Maria Mies and Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen is closest in terms of membership to the FGE, and I personally identify strongly with the ecospiritual and deep ecofeminist school. Categories are always just that, rough efforts to group similar trends, and as such they fail to do justice to the overlap and commonalities across all the ecofeminist schools. What they do share is the view that the master identity or the patriarchal, mostly Western domination of both nature and women must both end as part of the same paradigm shift. The shared view is that the intersectional connections between all forms of subjugation and oppression reveal the ways in which a dominator and conquest- model of ecological and social relations creates unhealthy dualistic and hierarchical structures harmful to the most vulnerable groups, to animals and the entire ecosystem. On recent ecofeminist studies, see

ⁱⁱBy “appropriation” is meant that someone, or even an entire culture adopts values, ideas, rituals or other phenomena not typical to them, as their own, without crediting the source. Adopting sacred rituals of Native people and re-selling or offering them as distorted New Age products is one example, but particularly Native Canadians have written about the multiple more subtle modes of appropriation affecting customs, clothing, ideas, symbols and other cultural items. Instead of listing these important works for lack of space I refer to the good analysis of cultural appropriation by Helmut Lutz (1990). Much has been written about the ways in which Christianity has demonized nature-peoples’ and in particular their women’s spirituality, taking their symbols and even clothing, but giving them a new, at worst, defamating meaning. Goddesses of Healing and Motherhood, for example, have been turned to the opposite as sources of disease or evil with Pandora’s box as the prime Kailo, 2007, 50-71. Von Werlhof elaborates on these manifestations of appropriation in a most profound and scientific way (2010) and the field of Goddess Studies does so likewise. I recommend the publications especially by scholars at the California Institute of Integral Studies in the US.

ⁱⁱⁱThe bank and loan crises of Greece, Ireland, Portugal and soon the US epitomize the contradictions of securing the banking sectors’ “competitiveness” by sucking European taxpayers. These sacrifices merely serve to make the rich richer and more competitive, at the expense of those gullible enough (or forced) to tighten their belts for the global elite. The plan for a permanent mechanism of financial stability at the EU following the debt crises is nothing less than a massive private project of seizing tax-payer money by the European banks and the IMF.

^{iv}“Life-oriented cultures” is my term for the matrilineal, matriarchal gift economies and their locally variable manifestations across time and space. Their main difference from the capitalistic order, as I see it from matriarchal studies and the research produced by FGE, is that they value the social dimension of reproduction, environmental protection and even more far-reaching values of a felt interdependency with animals and other species over money, materialistic progress and the dominator-model of humanity which by definition expresses militaristic and violent values, even glorifying conquest and competition.