

the success of the Zapatistas and indigenous movements in Peru in navigating neoliberal exploitation and as demonstrative of a potentially alternative approach, such groups have been clear about the significant impact of race relations on their struggles, a discussion of which is curiously absent here.

Would such a focus have addressed more aspects of the process of “greening” within differing levels of the social by allowing for an understanding of the tensions between Costa Rican peasants and their governments, or perhaps shed light on the exploitation of peasant women in contrast to women of other socio-economic status, for example?

The strengths of Isla’s *The “Greening” of Costa Rica* make this a particularly useful text for those interested in policy development, women’s studies, and environmental concerns. As we face serious climate challenges Isla’s book is a timely call for reflection on the impact of seemingly progressive claims such as “sustainable development” and the epistemological groundings with which such discourses are maintained.

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## References

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## THE GIFT IN THE HEART OF LANGUAGE: THE MATERNAL SOURCE OF MEANING

Genevieve Vaughan  
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Genevieve Vaughan has published her third book regarding the reality and transformative potential of the Gift economy, a logic and matrix of practices that imply the liberation of all genders. Two examples, among many, must suffice to illustrate the sort of antitheses Vaughan posits in her work: mother is aneconomic (exchange paradigm) vs. mothering is economic (Gift paradigm); market creates abundance (exchange paradigm) vs. market creates scarcity (Gift paradigm). The new theory provides solutions to the most urgent need in neoliberal capitalist societies: to overturn the civilizational crises that capitalism and patriarchy have caused with the distortion and appropriation of the Gift. *The Gift in the Heart of Language* provides sobering and mind-altering perspectives on the Gift economy in all of its manifestations. The Gift has mostly been discussed in sociology and anthropology, and in relation to Indigenous people. Vaughan’s contribution is to have made its presence visible in many other fields, where it is taken for granted but where it in fact represents the pillar holding societies together. Where French feminism has invented bisexual or feminine writing, Vaughan shows that language itself is at root maternal, not part of the Symbolic, or a symptom of the Law of the Father (Lacan). She shows that The Gift is a more typical matrix of values and

worldview among women, but not exclusively so. References to societies still engaged in ecosocially sustainable Gift practices serve to explode the taken-for-granted views claiming that patriarchy and exchange have been universal and without alternative.

Vaughan argues that the liberation of The Gift as a matrix of economic and communal values requires an end to exchange, the capitalistic market, and patriarchy. This is necessary in order to (re)create an egalitarian society that will function according to the values that have been appropriated and redirected to serve exchange, ego-oriented *homo economicus*, and capitalistic accumulation. Gifting within the model of competition, domination, and patriarchal power-over is a contradiction in terms (it goes against its prevailing logic at least among the “masters”) and it can never bring about a peaceful society. On the other hand, capitalism would not thrive without the free gifts that it appropriates and exploits. The neoliberal market economy is according to Vaughan composed of private property owners or would-be owners and exchangers in the midst of a sea of gifts we do not recognize as such.

Vaughan’s theoretical contribution consists in tackling the blind spots not only of gender studies but all patriarchal scientific fields from linguistics, Marxist theory, child development studies to semiotics and economics at large. Vaughan exposes all the fields which have built their methods and research processes subconsciously or intentionally on the biased model of exchange and masculated perspectives represented as “neutral” and “natural.”

Thanks to feminism, the LGBT movement and the men’s movement, many people are already questioning the prevailing gender stereotypes. This new book deserves

to be required reading in educational circles, foremost in gender studies, as Vaughan's theories move beyond the second and third waves of feminism to create a wave of their own—beyond performative gender, the misnomer called “essentialism,” and the disastrous impact of post-modern and neoliberal feminism. Vaughan is right to stress that we will not solve the crises of this era unless we recognize the important economic aspects of mothering as a *gendered dimension of epistemology* rather than reducing it ideologically to “biological essence” or “nature.” Neither eliminating Capitalism while maintaining Patriarchy, nor eliminating Patriarchy while maintaining Capitalism will change the situation. Indeed, we need to realize that language is based on a Gift schema. One main aim of the book is to help those men and women to be able to respect their own maternal origins and throw off the parasite of the exchange economy. Vaughan reveals the numerous ways in which humans receive gifts from their environmental niche. We are in receivership of endless perceptual gifts. Our eyes are continually exploring our environment even if we don't realize it, finding the gifts, the “affordances.” We breathe in gifts of air and breathe out carbon dioxide which is a Gift for plants. Our hearts pump oxygenated blood out to nurture our cells, and back to be replenished.

The virtual abundance that there is now online is like the virtual abundance in language and is conducive to Gift giving and to the positive human relations carried by the Gift economy. Egalitarian projects like free software, Wikipedia, Peer-to-Peer production, free cycling, Time Banking, the movement against copyrights, the promotion of free information, and even hybrids with the market as in

the shareable economy and crowd sourcing, demonstrate the viability of the Gift economy.

Vaughan claims that through mind-colonization we have distorted our concepts of who we are and what we should do by superimposing an alienated economy of exchange on a human communicative economy of the Gift. Recognizing this is the first step in making the change towards an economy based on free material and linguistic communication and the elaboration of the altercentric mother-child relation.

We will find the way to a positive material economy of abundance and a culture of peace, Vaughan claims, if we conceive altercentric mothering-being-mothered as Gift giving and receiving, if we recognize the positive maternal Gift character of Indigenous matriarchal Gift economies, of the ancient virtual invention of language itself, and of social incarnations of linguistic giving in symbolic Gift exchange. We need to also recognize the maternal and linguistic aspects of the modern internet wiki economy, of volunteering, of social experiments in gifting communities, of ecological initiatives like permaculture.

More specifically, Vaughan theorizes, providing convincing evidence from recent infant psychology (Braten, Meltzoff, Trevarthen and others), that children are born prosocial and they elicit interaction with motherer (whether female or male, mother, father, sibling or aunt). This challenges the widely-spread previous claim regarding infants believed by Freud and Piaget and Skinner to be passive and solipsistic.

Language, by repeating mothering at another level, maintains the altercentric giving/receiving capacity for children who later engage in the many variations on mothering that make up social life. By

re-enacting the maternal model in language, people's unilateral Gift capacity is maintained after childhood, ready to be used in their own practice of mothering. Thus language would have a selective advantage in that more of the children of speaking mothers would survive, grow up, and have children who would survive. Language functions as a kind of refrigerator, storing the altercentric nurturing capacity in the child as *s:he* becomes an adult, keeping it fresh for later use. Thus, contrary to the commonplace ideas of the maternal instinct and the “language instinct” (Pinker 1995), verbal giving as a social transposition of mothering would function to offset the *lack* of maternal instinct, especially after the initial hormonal drives of the birth mother are terminated. Vaughan replaces *he* and *she* by *s:he* to draw attention, on the level of the word-Gift itself, to the nurturing logic of maternal nipples, reflected now in her gender-inclusive pronoun.

The book is important for gender studies which have also thrown the baby out with the bathwater when discussing the social construction of gender. Widely accepted post-modern theories denigrating motherhood (overreacting to the patriarchal idealization/denigration of the Mother) caused a shift towards individualizing the “female problem,” and leaving a systemic view behind. In a “gender neutral” world the collective understanding of women is vanishing, and the political activism against structural injustice and violence is rendered impossible. There is no equivalent development aiming to abolish “men.” By favoring an individualistic and overly neutral view of “humans,” in the name of avoiding the feared concept of “motherhood” or “womanhood,” feminism is losing its transformative power. This approach contrib-