

My First Encounter with the Feminist Gift Economy

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Dans cet article la chercheuse et activiste Angela Dolmetsch rapporte son expérience vécue dans un atelier des Wise-Women en Norvège en 2001. Elle a été immédiatement inspirée par les exercices du don avec le résultat qu'elle a décidé spontanément de se débarrasser de ses possessions matérielles. Elle décrit ses efforts subséquents pour établir un cadre pour l'économie du don, en particulier dans le village écologique Nashira, en Colombie.

Just two months before the 9/11 bombings, Berit Ås from Norway invited twenty women from all over the world to the Women's University in Loten Norway for the Wise Women's Workshop ([www](http://www.wisewomenworkshop.org)).

On July 13, 2001, we arrived in Loten at night but nevertheless in the full daylight of the midnight sun. We had received a letter, not an email, on perfumed paper inviting us to the event with all our expenses paid. Even though we had been contacted and asked to send our biographical information, we were not given any specific information and we did not know what to expect at all.

I met Genevieve Vaughan at the Wise Women's Workshop, and I was intrigued by her theory of the Feminist Gift Economy even though I did not fully understand what it meant at the time. I had not yet read her books, nor had I considered what the philosophical and practical implications of her idea of a Gift Economy might be. My first reaction was to wonder if I would be willing to give away those things that most mattered to me. I came up with a simple exercise: I decided that if somebody complimented my necklace, blouse, or poncho, I might perhaps take them off and give them to that person. At the end of our stay, I had indeed given away a reproduc-

tion pre-Colombian necklace that had been gifted to me by my husband, a poncho made by a well-known artist, several blouses, and other items. I was happy that I did not seem to be sorry to have given away some of my worldly possessions. Of course, that was by no means what Gen meant by the Gift Economy.

In the following years, I gained a better understanding of the criteria for an exchange economy and its profound negative implications for present-day society. Being a practical person, I started developing the idea of creating an eco-village for very low-income women. The houses would belong to them free of charge, and the resources of the community would be available to all. As Miki Kashtan has said, the resources "should flow where they [are] needed" (see her article in this issue).

Eighty-eight low-income Colombian women, victims of the Colombian conflict, now live with their children in the Nashira eco-village. I was able to acquire three hectares (seven and a half acres) of land in the Cauca Valley, some of the most fertile land in the world, and donated it to the Association of Women Heads of Families to use as the site to build their houses. They did not have to pay mortgages or down payments, and they could access the government subsidies available to people below the poverty line. In this way, resources held in banks and earning interest made their way to the places they were most needed. The women built their houses with their own hands, and soon they had created an eco-village where they could live with their children, grow their own vegetables, raise their own poultry, and provide each other with support as needed. Gifts came as we were awarded funds for projects presented to UN Habitat, Mama Cash, The Hildur Jackson Award,



Nashira under construction.



Nashira — House First Stage.

and regional and municipal government entities. People from various professions started contributing via a “Time Bank”: Lawyers, architects, agronomists, psychologists, teachers of English, and many more started donating several hours of their time a week as gifts to help consolidate the Nashira project and ensure its sustainability.

In March 2019, the mother of the Gift Economy and the inspiration for Nashira, Genevieve Vaughan, visited the eco-village to launch the Spanish version of her book *For-Giving*. A three-day event was held in which more than a hundred women took part. There were several lectures and discussion panels on a variety of subjects. Food and souvenirs made by the women of Nashira were given to the participants, and copies of Gen’s children’s book *Por Amor, por Dinero* were also distributed to one hundred children of the eco-village. Her book *Para Donar (For-Giving)* was distributed free to those who came to the event; hopefully this will help to modify the prevailing paradigm of the exchange economy. We also held a “Gratifieria,” in which everybody contributed an item and also took another item that they needed, regardless of the price. On the last day, the women of Nashira requested perhaps the most wonderful gift of all from the visiting speakers. They wanted to hear from each one the story of their lives, their experiences, their joys and sorrows. It was the ultimate gift.

After the event, it was back to reality for Nashira. The women and children returned to their daily tasks, but they also continue, even now, to eat fruit from the trees that grow in Nashira, bathe in the fountain of the Pacha Mama when it rains, and enjoy a better quality of life. As part of the gifts from Mother Nature, they can hear the singing of the birds, and they may even have their toes tweaked by curious iguanas!

Angela Dolmetsch received her doctorate from the University of London. Her doctorate thesis is on Women in Colombian Politics: Three Case Studies. She is the founder of the Eco-village Nashira; International Honourary Life President of the International Federation of Women Lawyers; and hostess of the weekly television program, El Agora. Her publications include: La otra cara del Dólar (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1985); Of Governments and Guerrillas (London: Biddles, 1988); and El Hombrecillo que se tragó a Dios y otros relatos (Cali: ASOMUCAF, 1999). Forthcoming is: La Mujer en la Política en Colombia Contemporánea, tres experiencias reveladoras.

DIANE DRIEDGER

Banana Insight

at 10 I covet
the Chiquita banana
sticker oval
blue and yellow
every Saturday
after groceries are unpacked
from brown bags
I put it
on my forehead
the third eye

perhaps my knowledge
that blue stickers
are too precious to
throw away
indigo too strong to ignore

now at 50
a red patch on my face
the third eye
is an age spot
when a baby it was
a birthmark
that faded as I grew older

now bright red
turning indigo
a return
to Chiquita stickers
to the beginning

Diane Driedger is a poet, visual artist, and educator. Her latest poetry book is Red with Living: Poems and Art (Inanna, 2016).