

Feminists for a Gift Economy

Position Statement for a Peaceful World

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 and acting on 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% or more to the GNP of even the most industrialized national 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 Lord).

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, ablism, 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.

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