

# Do We Need a New "Moral Economy"?

by Maria Mies

*Selon l'auteure, le système économique actuel, axé sur la croissance et le profit à tout prix, ne peut continuer parce qu'il encourage l'exploitation des citoyens. Il faudra, à son avis, des changements radicaux dans notre style de vie, de nos habitudes*

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*The concept of "sustainable development" is incompatible with the rate of growth in industrialized countries. The stimulation of economic growth cannot be reconciled with a concern for conservation of scarce resources and a sustainable ecology and society.*

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*de consommation et des attentes des consommateurs, si nous voulons éviter les conflits pour la possession de ressources qui se font de plus en plus rares.*

It is well known by now that the biggest problems the world is facing today—ecological destruction, hunger and poverty in the "Third World," and the danger of war—are an outcome of the prevailing development model of unlimited growth of goods and services, of money revenue, of technological progress, and of a concept of well-being, identified as an abundance of industrially produced commodities. It should also be known that this model, which prevails in the affluent countries of the North, cannot be generalized to the rest of the world.

When the Brundtland Commission introduced the concept of "sustainable development" many people thought, that now, at last, the growth mania of the industrial system, its basic philosophy, would be openly criticized and abandoned. But when one reads the report *Our Common Future* more closely, it becomes evident that the authors do not dare to take such a bold step. They do not propose a new economic philosophy as framework for a concept of economic, social, and ecological sustainability. The definition of "sustainable development" as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations" therefore hangs in midair, as Hilikka Pietilä puts it. As a solution to the global problems the Brundtland Commission proposes more global economic growth:

If large parts of the developing world are to avert economic, social, and environmental catastrophes, it is essential that global economic growth be revitalized ... this means more rapid economic growth in both industrial and developing countries, free mar-

ket access for the products of developing countries, lower interest rates, greater technology transfer and significantly larger capital flows, both concessional and commercial. (Brundtland Commission 89)

This insistence on further, more rapid, economic growth, both in the industrial and the poor countries, is evidence of the fact that the authors are obviously not ready to see the connection between growth on one side and impoverishment on the other, between progress and regression, between overdevelopment and underdevelopment. They are still wedded to the linear, evolutionist philosophy of unlimited resources, unlimited progress, and an unlimited earth, to an economic paradigm of "catching up development." This means the rich industrial nations of the North (North America, Europe, Japan) remain the image of the future for the poor countries of the South. "Global economic growth" is seen as the engine that will bring them up to the same standard of living, the same consumption patterns which prevail in the North.

The latest publication of the Club of Rome is even more explicit in describing the global ills of our planet and time. The authors openly admit that the affluent societies of the industrialized North are consuming the bulk of the world's resources, particularly of energy. Whereas before the Industrial Revolution per capita consumption was more or less the same in the North and the South, the per capita consumption of energy and resources in the North is now 40 times that of the South. It is also well known that these societies produce about 80 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions and an increasing amount of waste, including toxic waste. Here, too, growth mania shows its effect.

The Club of Rome (King and Schneider) points out that the concept of "sustainable development," is thus incompatible with the rate of growth in the industrialized countries, suggested by the Brundtland Commission. In other words, the stimulation of permanent economic growth cannot be reconciled with a concern for conservation of scarce resources and a sustainable ecology and society. The authors are also aware of the fact, that the present level of consumption, prevailing in the affluent countries of the North, cannot be generalized. They ask: is the present level of material wealth in the rich industrialized countries compatible with sustainable global development, or, put differently, has a world economy which derives its dynamic from the stimulation of consumers' demands still a future? They even admit that, sooner or later, governments will have to address the question of consumption. "We believe that consumption

cannot survive in the present form, not only with respect to objective reasons, but even more so with respect to human values" (King and Schneider 35).

But does this all amount to a radical critique of the basic philosophy of the market economy and its dogma of growth? One paragraph further we read:

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Here it should be emphasized that we are not in favour of zero-growth. According to our conviction it is indispensable to promote economic growth in the South, while the industrialized North, on its road to the postindustrial society, rather needs qualitative growth. (King and Schneider 35)

This means growth, permanent economic growth, must be quantitative growth of material commodities in the South and of qualitative non-material commodities in the North. As the northern markets for durable consumer goods are largely saturated, new markets have to be created for non-material goods, like services, culture, therapies, religion, tourism, etc. The North wants both, the material cake and the spiritual (cultural) icing on top of it (Sarkar). The South needs the material cake first. Does this not amount to the same philosophy of "catching-up development?" Or can we interpret this document as a first step towards a new "moral economy?" The ambivalence of the Club of Rome with regard to the basic philosophy of the market economy, of capitalism, comes out most clearly in the last chapter about a new strategy. There is, indeed, not much new in it, only a stronger demand of a basic change of values which orient our societies. The authors do admit that egotism, aggressiveness, and competition are the basic values that drive the market system and that these values are responsible for injustice and ecological destruction. They even make a case for a reintroduction of ethical values—like solidarity—into politics and economics and even see the necessity of a reduction of consumerism in the rich countries. But this appeal to more ethics, more responsibility, different values does not mean that they question the basic philosophy of competitive, egotistic, growth-oriented capitalism.

### **Morality—a bad word in economics**

The moral problem of the modern, capitalist market economy consists above all in the fact that ethics, morality, have been excluded and externalized from the so-called economic sphere proper. When the fathers of the new political economy of capitalism developed their theories they were keen to establish that economic laws were functioning like natural laws, like the law of gravity of Newton, for instance. Economics was a science, like other sciences, and as such was set apart from the sphere of moral values. It was supposed to be "value-free" and to follow only universal objective laws of supply and demand.

This externalization of morality from the political economy of capitalism is not only similar to the exclusion of values from modern science, but is also directly linked to the externalization of ecological, social, and other costs, which the capitalists are not ready to pay. These costs have been apparently pushed outside the economic sphere of the core nations of world capitalism and onto colonies. We have identified women, nature, and foreign countries in the South as the main colonies of "white man," i.e. the modern capitalist world system (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Werlhof). Because, if we include those colonies into the analysis of the functioning of the market economy we realize, that the growth of wealth in the core countries in this world-system (Wallerstein) is based on increasing pauperization in the colonies, that the laws of supply and demand, functioning apparently automatically, are based on coercion and violence. Polanyi has convincingly shown that the markets for money, land, and labour had to be created by direct and coercive state intervention in England; they did not grow out of the new economics by themselves. And if we include the external colonies, nature, and women into our analysis of the political economy of the new world market system we see clearly that coercion, robbery, and direct and structural violence are still the main forces behind the apparently, "value-free," "objective" law of supply and demand.

We can conclude, therefore, that the basic philosophy on which the capitalist market system is based, has not been able to solve the ethical dilemma, it has only pushed the moral questions outside the sphere which it has defined as "economy." This system can, therefore, not be called a "moral economy" in the sense this term has been used so far.

### **The limits of growth and the impossibility of "catching-up development"**

It is a well-known fact that the resource base within our

limited globe is limited and that the economic philosophy of unlimited growth will necessarily reach the ecological limits of this planet. And yet, practically all conceptions and strategies of development, both national and international ones, are explicitly or implicitly based on the assumption that the poor nations will eventually reach the standard of living of the U.S. or Europe.

However, if we keep in mind that the six per cent of the world's population who live in the U.S. annually use up 30 per cent of the fossil energy produced, then it should be clear, that the rest of the world's population, of which about 75–80 per cent live in the poor countries of the

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South, cannot also consume as much energy per person (Global 2000 59).

But even if one would assume that the world's resource base was not limited, it would take about 500 years until the poor countries would have reached the standard of living prevailing in the rich countries of the North. And this would be possible only if these rich countries would not continue with this growth model. To catch up with this model of development is practically impossible for the poor countries of the South. It is not only impossible because of the limits of the resource base and the uneven distribution of their consumption. Above all it is impossible because the growth model in the rich industrialized countries is based on a colonial world order in which the gap between the two poles is getting wider and wider, at least as far as economic development is concerned.

The living standard in the rich countries of the North could not be so high if the colonized South had not been exploited and continued to be exploited. If all labour, incorporated in the commodities sold in the rich countries was paid at the rates of a skilled (male) worker of Germany then most of these commodities would be so expensive that only a small minority could buy them. So-called development is not an evolutionary process from a lower to a higher stage but a polarizing process in which some are getting richer and richer because they make others poorer and poorer. Two hundred years ago the western world was only five times as rich as the poor countries of today. In 1960 this relationship was already twenty to one, and in 1983 it was forty-six to one, the rich countries being 46 times richer than the poor countries (Trainer). The wealth in the rich countries grows ever faster, and within a limited world this means it grows at the expense of others, of what I continue to call colonies: nature, women, the so-called Third World.

If one aims at sustainability, then one has to transcend the industrial world market and profit-oriented growth model. This transcendence is, as Vandana Shiva has convincingly shown, for the poor, for women and children in the poor countries and regions, a matter of survival. They fight explicitly against "development" and modernization because they know that this development will destroy their survival base—their access to the commons: land, water, air, forests, their communities, their culture. They are the ones who have to pay the price for urban and male industrial development.

To conclude we may say that the prevailing world market system, oriented towards unending growth and profit, cannot be maintained unless it can exploit external and internal colonies: nature, women, and other countries. The only alternative is a deliberate and drastic change of lifestyle, a change of consumption quantities, and consumer patterns in the affluent societies of the North. Such a change of lifestyle would, however, imply something like a "new moral economy."

#### **Historical roots of the "old moral economy"**

The concept "moral economy" has been used by economic historians like E. P. Thompson to describe the undivided complex of social, economic, cultural, religious, and ethical norms which were the base of the pre-capitalist society and which was broken up by the new capitalist political economy.

The protest movements of the European peasants, craftsmen, and petty traders in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the corn and bread riots, the Jacobin revolts, drew their legitimacy from the values of the "old moral economy." And this economy was based on what Scott calls "subsistence ethics," which means that each person, living in a community has a right to subsistence. And all economic transactions, for example the price of bread, are not based on the laws of supply and demand because they can be manipulated by force—but on the right to subsistence, even of the poor. In the "old moral economy" the bread price was always a moral, or political price. The poor had a right to subsistence and a right to prevent food from leaving the country and to set up prices which they could afford to pay (Thompson 1979; Scott).

#### **The "moral economy" of peasants and women**

The "old moral economy," based on a subsistence ethics, was thus rooted in the reality of peasants. In this reality the economic, social, cultural, political, and moral spheres and activities were not segregated, but formed one whole. Otto Brunner called this whole the "whole house." The well-being of this "whole house" depended not on money income and external markets but on the work of all who lived in this unit. This work was not motivated by the objective of profit maximization but by the need for subsistence security and self-provisioning. In this unit the

relationship between the human being and the soil necessarily had to be a caring and ecological one. The peasant who exploited his land and his animals too much in one year would possibly have starved the next year. The three-field-system rotation which the German peasants invented in the Middle Ages is an example of this ecological relation to the land.

The relationship between people also had to be such that everyone had a guarantee of subsistence security. These relationships were, no doubt, patriarchal and unequal, but the head of this household, the householder, was quite different from a modern manager. He had to be

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a teacher, a caretaker, a doctor, an economist, an agriculturist etc., all in one person (Brunner). "Economy" as commerce and profit-seeking was not his main concern but the well-being and the security of all. Brunner shows that the word "economy," which stems from the Greek word *oikos*, originally meant exactly this type of subsistence relationships to the land and the people which ensured that the survival of everyone, including the land, was not jeopardized. The central value in this "moral economy" of the peasants was not wealth but subsistence security. This involves a long-term perspective (Scott).

To guarantee this subsistence security on a given plot of land and within a given village community and a given region, with a given geography and climate it was necessary to maintain certain norms and institutions, in short a subsistence ethics. As Scott puts it:

Although the desire for subsistence security grew out of the needs of cultivators—out of peasant economics—it was socially experienced as a pattern of moral rights and obligations. (6)

This system of rights and obligations made sure that nobody within the community was threatened by individual starvation (Polanyi). Everybody had a right to subsistence. This subsistence ethics was based on mutual help, village reciprocity, generosity (even sometimes forced generosity), patron-client relations and, above all on the village commons, on which the poor had a claim and a right.

#### **The "moral economy" is not moralistic**

It is important to stress that these norms, obligations, and institutions do not fit into a moralistic, or ethical

framework which only differentiates between "good" or "bad." These norms, obligations, and institutions were neither good nor bad. They were necessary, they oriented human behaviour in such a way that survival of all was possible, even in times of scarcity. The "morality" of the "moral economy," therefore, is based on a realistic recognition of the ecological, social, and economic limits of a given area and the people living there. According to Scott the subsistence peasant does not ask "how much is taken"—by the landlord or the state—but rather "how much is left" and whether his basic subsistence needs are respected.

Everybody had a right to subsistence. When this right was violated by landlords and the state the peasants and the poor in general had a right to rebellion and their seizure of land, grain, flour, etc. was considered legitimate:

At the core of popular protest movements of urban and rural poor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe was not so much a belief in equality of wealth and landholding but of the more modest claim of a right to subsistence. (Scott 33)

If we look closer at the popular protest movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth century we see that the bread and corn riots in England and France were to a large extent led by women. E. P. Thompson writes that such bread or food riots could be found in England "in almost every town and country until the 1840s" (1979, 67), and that not wages "but the cost of bread was the most sensitive indicator of popular discontent" (1979, 68). The poor women were the ones who marched to the market and who saw to it that the food prices were such that poor families would not starve. When, for example, all the corn had been bought up by one of the new merchant capitalists in Ireland who wanted to bring it out of the country, a mob entered the Dutch ship, brought the corn to the market, and sold it for the owners at the common price.

Even today we find that women everywhere in the world protest first when the prices of basic food are rising too high. In 1973–75, the women of Bombay started a massive agitation, called the Anti-Price-Rise Movement against inflation of food prices.

But the resistance of women against the introduction of the money and market economy and its "rational logic" is not only restricted to the past and to the sphere of consumption. Women, particularly rural women, are also found in the forefront of movements which try to defend the ecological base of their survival or subsistence. Women are in the forefront of the Chipko Movement in India (Shiva; Hegde), they are the initiators of the Green Belt Movement. Women like Medha Pathak are also leaders of movements against big dams, like the Narmada Dam project in India, sponsored by the World Bank.

And, as the women of the Chipko movement make explicit, these women do not want to sacrifice their subsistence security, their subsistence base for all the

promised wealth which modernization, development, and the capitalist market are supposed to bring them. They, too, like their sisters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, know pretty well that this wealth is not meant for them but for the urban elites. And even if it was, they do not want it. They have a different concept of freedom, equality, and good life than the one which the capitalist market economy promises. Their ethics is still a subsistence ethics, based on the recognition that their survival is better guaranteed when they cooperate in the same careful manner with "mother nature" as they did before than when they gave up this "moral economy" for short-term monetary income.

The "moral" or subsistence economy of the women of the forest-agriculture has never destroyed the forest, has never exploited nature to an extent that she could not regenerate herself. This "moral economy" is not only based on a respectful and careful relationship to nature, but also on a system of social relations which makes sure that all can survive in dignity and without the threat of individual starvation. When in one of the women's agitations against a chalk mine in the Himalayas the mine owners tried to bribe the young men of the community by offering them money and jobs, one of these men, the son of one of the women leaders, said: "Money I can get anywhere, but my mother's dignity comes from the village community, and we can never sacrifice that" (Mies and Shiva 243). It is this sense of honour, of dignity, which goes much deeper than the short-term egotistic interest in money and material gains which gives the "moral economy" the strength to resist the fascination and the glamour of the capitalist supermarket. But, as was already said earlier, this "stubborn" insistence on a subsistence ethics, on values like honour, dignity, self-reliance, reciprocity towards humans and nature, freedom based on one's own food production, community-based solidarity, and mutual respect, are not moralistic in the sense that they are better or worse than other values. They are not part of an ethics that is segregated from everyday life. They are based on a realistic assessment of the ecological and social conditions which are necessary to guarantee survival. They are based on a world view, a cosmology which does not consider these necessary conditions of survival, the limits of nature and of human life as a handicap to our freedom and well-being but rather as preconditions for these goals.

These values stand in sharp contrast to the philosophy and ethics of the European Enlightenment which considers man's dominance over nature by virtue of his rationality the precondition for his freedom. Feminist scholars have criticized this concept of rationality and ethics not only because of its androcentric bias (Merchant; Harding; Fox-Keller) but also, because it is an ethics that considers values like caring nurturing, responsibility for the maintenance of everyday life, and humaneness as only private values, for which women have been made responsible. Such an ethics cannot help women or nature. Lieselotte Steinbrügge has

shown that the Enlightenment philosophers tried to solve the contradiction between the market values (egotism and competition) and the claim to build a more humane society by making women the "moral gender," that is by making them responsible for maintaining human values like mercy, solidarity, love, caring within an aggressive, competitive economy based on individual self-interest. Because of this heritage mere demands for social justice will not do for women writes Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen. Instead women should demand more reciprocity and mutuality, the values of a "moral economy."

### **The need for a "new moral economy"**

A solution for the fundamental questions of our time: the problem of poverty in the South, the women's question, or the problem of patriarchy and, above all, the ecological question, cannot be found within the paradigm of the existing growth-oriented, industrialist market system. What is needed is a "new vision" based on new values, on a new ethics, which respects the limits of nature, of human beings, the diversity and dignity of all life forms and is not based primarily on Hobbes' anthropology of individual self-interest, egotism, and competition but on solidarity, mutuality, love, cooperation, caring, and responsibility as basic human characteristics.

Many analysts of the present crises agree to this need of a new vision, of new ethics. But they would hesitate to go all the way from their analysis to spelling out the basic premises and principles of a "new moral economy." But this is exactly what is needed today. We will not be able to solve the global crises we are experiencing today unless we have the courage to think at least about this "new moral economy."

One of the problems one faces is the recurring argument that the "old moral economy" was nothing to be nostalgic about, that, on the contrary poverty, disease, exploitation, and feudal and patriarchal dominance could only be overcome by the new market economy of the modern era, by the combination of modern science, progress, and the development of a "rational" economic system, called market economy. Without this modernization process we would all still live in abject poverty and misery. A "moral economy," therefore, will not be easily accepted as something that could help overcome our crises. But I think we have no other choice today but to look for radical alternatives to the present economic and social system. And I am not afraid to call this search a search for a "new moral economy."

Of course, it should be obvious, that the "new moral economy" cannot just be a replica of the "old moral economy," described above. It certainly cannot have the same feudal and patriarchal structures and institutions. But certain characteristics and principles of the "old moral economy" will have to be preserved or reactivated if we want to develop a truly sustainable, non-exploitative, non-destructive relationship between human and non-human

nature, between women and men, between different people and countries. Most of the characteristics of such a moral economy are identical with those which I have spelled out for an eco-feminist perspective of a new society (Mies).

The first insight is the recognition that our planet earth, that nature, is limited and that we as human beings are limited. Within a limited universe there cannot be unlimited economic growth lest people and nature are being progressively exploited and destroyed. This means, a “new moral economy” will have to be developed from a new cosmology and anthropology in which the *de facto* limits of our universe will be respected. It will therefore be a kind of global *oikos* or household, an *oikos* embracing the whole world.

The second principle to be reactivated from the “old moral economy” would be the reinclusion of subsistence ethics into economic activity. The externalization of morality from the economic sphere—and the division of labour between economics and science on one side and ethics and politics on the other—has led to the present irresponsible behaviour both of consumers and producers. Only if ethical considerations are again present in all everyday economic, social, and cultural activities can we hope to overcome the vicious circles of destructive growth mania.

But, as was said before, such everyday survival ethics would not be moralistic. It would not be based on a Protestant work ethic, on asceticism, and this-worldly or other-worldly deferred gratification. It would be based on the realistic recognition of the necessary conditions of survival for all and on the right to subsistence for all because it is this right which is violated everywhere by modern development. A glaring example are the big dams or the destruction of the survival base of people and of nature for the sake of luxury production for 20 per cent of the worlds’ population. This destruction has been made invisible by the world market and its global division of labour.

This, of course, implies, that the concept of what constitutes “a good life” changes, both in the affluent countries and in the hitherto poor countries. Only when the notion that “good life” is identical with the production, possession, and consumption of ever more material and non-material commodities is given up—first in the rich countries and the rich classes of the North but also in the poor countries of the South can we hope that people will be able to overcome the suicidal myth of “catching-up development.”

The concept of “good life” within the framework of a “moral economy” will not mean that people are not able to satisfy their fundamental human needs, on the contrary, it will mean that these needs will rather be satisfied by direct human interaction and mutuality instead of only by the purchase of goods in a supermarket. This non-commoditized satisfaction of human needs will be a greater source of happiness.

### Some features of a “new moral economy”

A “new moral economy” will be based on a different concept of labour. This concept of labour will again combine work as a burden and work as enjoyment. This will necessarily also lead to a different concept of time, a concept of time which does not split up a human lifetime in periods of burdensome and alienated work only and of pleasure and alienated leisure time. Further consequences of a different concept of labour in the framework of a “new moral economy” would be the restoration of meaningfulness, of a sense of purpose to human work, of a direct interaction with non-human nature as a precondition for our happiness, and a closer link between production and consumption (Mies).

It is obvious that such a concept of work transcends the framework of an economy based on ever-expanding growth of monetary revenue and of ever-expanding forces of production in terms of high technology development. As this paradigm has led to “overdevelopment” of some nations at the expense of “underdevelopment” of women, nature, and colonies, a concept of work oriented towards the production of life requires a reversal and a transcendence of this framework.

The first basic requirement of an alternative economy is a change, both in the overdeveloped and in the underdeveloped societies, from dependency for basic subsistence needs—food, clothing, shelter—from economies outside their national boundaries and a movement towards greater self-sufficiency. Only societies which are to a large extent self-provisioning in the production of these basic necessities can maintain themselves free from political blackmail and hunger. In this, self-sufficiency in food is the first requirement.

Malcolm Caldwell has shown that such self-sufficiency in food, as well as in energy, would be quite possible in Britain, with the available cultivable land and its present population. It would equally be possible in any other of the overdeveloped countries of Europe or North America. But what is more, if the governments of these overdeveloped countries had not bribed their working people by importing cheap food, cheap clothes, cheap raw materials, etc. from so-called “cheap labour” countries, these countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America could all be self-sufficient in food, clothing, shelter, etc. If the protein food imported to Europe from Third World countries in the form of animal feed to produce milk seas, butter mountains etc. was used to feed the local people there, there would be no hunger in any of these regions (Collins and Moore-Lappé). A largely self-provisioning economy would necessarily lead towards a change of the existing exploitative and non-reciprocal international world order, a contraction of world trade and of export-oriented production both in the industrialized countries, whose economy is dependent on export of industrial products and of underdeveloped countries who have to pay back their credits by exports of mainly primary goods, cheap labour, or raw material.

A further consequence of a more or less self-provisioning economy would be a drastic reduction of all non-productive work, in the sense I use the term, particularly in the tertiary sector, a change in the composition of the workforce with a movement away from employment in industries towards employment in agriculture. If people of a given region want to live mainly by the natural and labour resources available in that region then it follows that many more people will have to do necessary manual labour in food production. Within such a finite region people would also be careful not to destroy the very ecology on whose balance the survival of all depend on. It would lead to the narrowing down of the gap between production and consumption and to more autonomy of producers-consumers over what they produce and consume. As Caldwell points out, this radical restructuring of the economy is not only a beautiful dream or a case of exhortatory politics, but will increasingly become a necessity particularly for workers who have been made redundant for good by the rapid development of high technology and automation. He reminds us that already in 1976 massive unemployment in Italy has led to a big movement of workers back to the land. About 100,000 workers returned to farming. A similar movement back to the land happened in India during the strike of the textile workers in Bombay in 1982-83 which lasted for almost a year. These workers started a movement for alternative agriculture and water management, inspired by a subsistence perspective (Patankar; Mies and Shiva).

The brief description of an alternative economy, spelled out by Caldwell, however, is silent about the non-reciprocal, exploitative division of labour between the genders. The perspective of a self-provisioning "moral economy" based on non-exploitative relations to the ecology, other peoples, people within a region, and on small, de-centralized units of production and consumption, is for feminists not broad enough if it does not start with a radical change of the sexual division of labour. In most ecological writings, however, the "woman question" is either not mentioned at all, or is simply added on to a long list of other more urgent, more "general" issues. This "adding on" will no longer do if we want to change the existing inhuman men-women relation. The concept of a "moral economy" is therefore not only incomplete without the goal of transcending the patriarchal sexual division of labour, it will rather be based on the illusion of change and therefore not be able to truly transcend the status quo.

A feminist conception of a "new moral economy" will include all that was said before about self-provisioning and decentralization. But it will place the transformation of the existing sexual division of labour (based on the breadwinner-housewife model) at the centre of the whole restructuring process. This is not mere narcissic self-indulgence of women but the result of our historical research as well as our analysis of the functioning of international capitalist patriarchy. Feminists do not start with the external ecology, economy, and politics, but with the social ecology, the centre of which is the relation

between men and women. Autonomy over our bodies and lives has been the first and most fundamental demand of the international feminist movement. Any search for a "new moral economy" must start with the respect of the autonomy of women's bodies, their productive capacity to maintain life through work, their sexuality, and procreation. A change in the existing sexual division of labour would imply first and foremost that the violence that characterizes capitalist patriarchal man-woman relations worldwide will be abolished not by women but by men. Men have to refuse to define themselves any longer as Man-the-Hunter or Warrior. Men have to start movements against violence against women if they want to preserve the essence of their own humanity.

This demand of autonomy over women's bodies also implies that any state control over women's fertility has to be rejected. Women have to be freed of their status of being a natural resource for individual men as well as for the state as the Total Patriarch. True women's liberation will be also the cheapest and most efficient method to restore the balance between population growth and food production.

Secondly, in a "new moral economy" men have to share, as far as possible, the responsibility for the immediate production of life, for child care, housework, the care of the sick and the old, the relationship work, all the work so far subsumed under the term "housework." This means men would have to share in the ethics of care. In a community keen to preserve its autonomy and keen to follow a non-exploitative ecological path of human development this "housework" could not be paid. It would have to be free work for the community. But each man, each woman, and also children would have to share this most important work. This would then immediately have the effect that men would have less time for their destructive production in industry, less time for their destructive research, less time for their destructive leisure activities, less time for their wars. Positively put, they would regain the wholeness of their own bodies and minds, they would re-experience work as both a burden and enjoyment, and finally also develop a different scale of values altogether with regard to work. It would also mean the end of the breadwinner-housewife-model.

These processes of liberation are interrelated. It is not possible for women in our societies to break out of the cages of patriarchal relations unless the men begin a movement in the same direction. A men's movement against patriarchy would not be motivated by benevolent paternalism but by the desire to restore to themselves a sense of human dignity and respect.

### **Voluntary simplicity and consumer liberation**

The transcendence of the capitalist, patriarchal growth economy model should start in the rich countries. As the path of "catching-up development" is neither possible for all, nor is it desirable, the only solution of this dilemma can be a voluntary reduction of the living standard and a

change of consumer patterns in the rich countries and classes. If sustainability is a good thing for people living in the poor countries then it must also be a good thing for people living in the rich countries. A double standard is ethically not acceptable. We cannot preach to the people in Brazil not to destroy their rain forest while we in the rich countries continue to destroy the world's climate by an ever-growing car industry and private transport systems.

Such a change of consumption patterns and of lifestyles will only occur when people begin to realize that less is more, when they begin to define what constitutes a good life differently from what the managers of the corporations think. This new definition of "good life" will emphasize different values which in our consumer societies are underdeveloped or even destroyed: for example, self-sufficiency, cooperation, respect for all creatures on earth and their diversity, belief in the subjectivity not only of human beings but also of non-human beings, communality instead of "catching up with the Joneses," joy of life that springs from cooperation with others, and an understanding of the meaningfulness of what one does. All these values can be brought to life if consumer liberation is correctly understood as a liberation and not only as a loss or an ascetic exercise.

A different definition of the "good life" and an improvement of the quality of life implies different forms of satisfaction of fundamental human needs. Max-Neef and his colleagues, who developed this concept of fundamental human needs, stress that fundamental human needs are universal, but the means and ways these needs are satisfied may vary according to culture, region, and historical conditions. In capitalist industrial societies, commodities have become the determinant satisfiers. In industrial capitalism the production of economic goods along with the system of allocating them has conditioned the type of satisfiers that predominate (Max-Neef). I find the distinction between needs and satisfiers useful for our discussion on consumer liberation, because it allows us to see that there are different ways to satisfy the same fundamental human needs. Max-Neef and his colleagues have identified nine of these fundamental human needs, namely: subsistence (health, food, shelter, clothing etc.); protection (care, solidarity, work etc.); affection (self-esteem, love, care, solidarity etc.); understanding (study, learning, analysis etc.); participation (responsibilities, sharing of rights and duties); idleness (curiosity, imagination, games, relaxation, fun); creation (intuition, imagination, work, curiosity etc.); identity (sense of belonging, differentiation, self-esteem); and freedom (autonomy, self-esteem, self-determination, equality).

As these fundamental human needs are universal they are the same in rich and poor, "overdeveloped" and "underdeveloped" countries. In overdeveloped industrial societies these needs are satisfied almost exclusively by satisfiers which have to be bought in the market, which are produced industrially, and which not only very often are pseudo-satisfiers, because they do not in the end satisfy the

need—like cars which are bought for status purposes—or cosmetics, which are bought to satisfy the need for love—they are sometimes simply destructive. The arms race, for example, is legitimized by the need for protection, the need for subsistence, the need for freedom.

If we try to break out of the mental framework which industrial society has created and which it has exported to all poor countries we discover that there would be many different ways, many of them not dependent on the market, to satisfy those fundamental needs. This could mean for children, for example, that one would spend more time with them or play with them instead of buying them ever more toys. Many of the non-commoditized satisfiers have the advantage of being synergetic. This means they satisfy not only one need but several at a time. If one takes time to play with children a number of needs are satisfied: the need for affection, for protection, for understanding, for idleness, freedom, identity. And this applies both to the children and to the adults. If fundamental human needs are satisfied in non-commercial ways—I call them subsistence ways—then these processes of satisfaction are often reciprocal ones. The one who gives something also receives something.

If such a change of lifestyle would happen in the rich countries on a big scale this would not only halt the destruction of the ecology and stop the exploitation of the "Third World," it would also change the model for imitative and compensatory consumption which middle-class people in the North provide both for the lower classes in their own country and for people of the South. Because patterns of consumption of the North are imported into countries of the South and are imitated there by political and economic power groups, these consumption patterns then lead to more dependency, indebtedness, internal imbalances, and a loss of cultural identity (Max-Neef 47).

Max-Neef and his colleagues stress the need to break away from these imitative consumption patterns in the "Third Worlds" in order to free these countries from economic and cultural dependence and to make a more efficient use of their own resources for their own well-being. It would be a necessary step for "Third World" countries towards self-reliance. In my view, however, a breaking away from the imposed consumption patterns would also be a necessary step towards self-reliance of hitherto overdeveloped, affluent societies. Most of these depend, as we saw, to a very large extent on the exploitation of the "Third World" countries and their resources. If sustainability and self-reliance are considered the correct path for countries of the South, then they must necessarily also be the correct path for the countries of the North.

*This article has been excerpted from Challenges: Science and Peace in a Rapidly Changing Environment, proceedings from the International Congress of Scientists and Engineers, Berlin, November 29-December 1, 1991. Reprinted with permission by BdWi-Verlag, Marburg, Germany.*

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## **Leipzig Appeal for Women's Food Security**

### ***Food Security in Women's Hands, Food Sovereignty for All, No to Novel Food, and No to Patents on Life***

For thousands of years women have produced their own food and guaranteed food security for their children and communities. Even today 80 per cent of the work in local food production in Africa is done by women. In Asia it is 50 to 60 per cent and in Latin America 30 to 40 per cent. And everywhere in the world women are responsible for food security at the household level. In patriarchal society, however, this work has been devalued.

All societies have survived historically because they provided food security for their people. This policy, however, has been subverted by the globalization, trade liberalization, industrialization, and commercialization of all agricultural products under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank/IMF.

In November 1996 the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization held a World Food Summit in Rome. Its goal was to achieve "universal food security" by the year 2010, eradicating hunger and malnutrition. However, this objective is to be met through a continuation and extension of industrialization and the worldwide trade of food. Food will be produced where labour is cheapest and environmental protections weakest. Poor communities will be forced to produce luxury products for export to rich countries and classes. These trends are already in effect, with devastating results: large-scale disappearance of small farmers; the end of food self-sufficiency; reliance on monoculture; genetic manipulation of food; loss of biodiversity and ecological sustainability. The impoverished rural people who are displaced through this world agriculture policy end up as marginal members of society in overcrowded mega-cities without work, hope—or food. Although it is known that this policy is the cause of poverty and malnutrition, it is still proposed as a remedy for these very ills. The most vulnerable groups affected by these policies are poor rural women and children.

This policy also threatens food security and safety in the North, where the family farm has been rapidly replaced by chemical-intensive agribusiness. Consumers have become virtual hostages to the handful of transnational food processing and trading corporations. At the consumption end of the globalized food chain, women as housewives can no longer guarantee that they can give their families wholesome and healthy food.

In Peru, Chile, and other countries of the South, women are fighting against this monopolistic policy, building their own communal food and health systems. Women in indigenous societies fight against land alienation; women in export-oriented agriculture oppose hazardous chemicals. They are supported by women in the North who call for boycotts of these export products: flowers, vegetables, shrimps.

Many groups in the North and South reject genetic manipulation of food. We are told that this bio-technology is necessary to feed a growing world population. However, 60 per cent of cereals are fed to animals in industrial farming systems. And more and more land in the South is not used for nourishing local people, but for the production of luxury items for export.

The commercial interests connected with this technology are particularly apparent in the promotion of patenting of life-forms—plants, animals, and humans—under the protection of Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). In the South, the patenting of life-forms is opposed because it is in many cases based on simple piracy: theft of indigenous biodiversity and local knowledge. In the North, many people oppose patents on life-forms for ethical reasons.

On the consumer side, a majority of Europeans oppose genetically manipulated foods. Yet the European Union promotes such "novel food," even refusing to label it, thus denying consumers their human and civil right to determine what they eat. Consumption in this so-called "free market" becomes a matter of coercion.

Worldwide, women are resisting the policies which destroy the basis of their livelihood and food sovereignty. And they also create alternatives to guarantee food security for their communities based on different principles and methods than those governing the dominant, profit-oriented global economy. They are: localization and regionalization instead of globalization; non-violence instead of aggressive domination; equity and reciprocity instead of competition; respect for the integrity of nature and her species; understanding humans as part of nature instead of as masters over nature; protection of biodiversity in production and consumption.

Food security can be achieved if people within their local and regional economies feel responsible, both as producers and consumers, for the sustainability of land and other resources, for the social and ecological conditions of food production, distribution, and consumption, for the preservation of cultural and biological diversity where self-sufficiency is the main economic goal.

Our food security is too vital an issue to be left in the hands of a few transnational corporations with their profit motives, or up to national governments that increasingly lose control over food security decisions, or to a few—mostly male—national delegates at UN conferences who make decisions affecting all our lives.

If you wish to join us in this appeal, please write to: Maria Mies, ITPSS e.V. Am Zwinger 16, 33602 Bielefeld, Germany or, Vandana Shiva, Third World Network, India, A 60 Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110016, India.