



Money or Life: What makes us really rich

By Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen

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Women and Life on Earth: women in international cooperation for peace, ecology and social justice (WLOE e.V.) is a German non-profit association based in Bonn. WLOE e.V. offers and supports the work of women especially, in connected areas of ecology, peace and global justice, often through translation and editing of original texts. The website is active in English, German and Spanish at www.wloe.org.

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1. Subsistence, not crisis: we can't eat money!

On the one hand we say 'it can't go on like this!' But on the other hand we have no idea how it *should* go. Against our better judgment – and consciences! -- we accept measures most of us see as harmful in many ways. We remain trapped in the straightjacket of the current capitalist money and commodity system.

That's true, but I am convinced that we can free ourselves if we focus on subsistence. "Subsistence" means having what we really need for our lives. Yet the term "subsistence economy" – an economy focused on life's necessities -- is met with resistance and frequent comments like: "This means going back to the Stone Age."

Does that mean that an economy organized to provide all of the necessities of life is not considered desirable? As a question, this can shed light on the ideological prejudices leading to the rejection of a subsistence-based economy. These stem from a firmly established perception of a modern economy of abundance where all products on earth are available as commodities, where everyone can live in comfortable prosperity, and no one has to worry about the basic necessities.

From the viewpoint of this fantasy, subsistence evokes visions of poverty, insecure and primitive living conditions. But what if all of a sudden it becomes clear that this fantasy of a modern age of abundance for all is just that, a fantasy? Such a moment of clarity seemed possible with the financial crisis

But then something like the subsidy for junking older cars is offered as a countermeasure, and gets an overwhelming response. "Germany addicted to the junking mania," reported the Spiegel magazine. Although everyone knows that cars contribute to global warming and oil reserves are dwindling. Still, we are glad that this way thousands of jobs may be saved. What nonsense!

Or take the so-called bailouts. The banks that caused the crisis receive billions of Euros in subsidies and guarantees from the national treasury. We all know that in this way money belonging to all citizens jointly is handed over to private profit-making interests. We know that in the future these funds will be lacking for community projects and that all of us, especially ordinary people -- and thus the majority of the population -- will have to pay the price. The process that began a long time ago continues: the poor get poorer and their number grows, and the rich get ever richer.

But there are no massive protests. Evidently the majority has the impression that governments have no choice, that without these bailouts the entire economic system would collapse and things would get even worse than during the Great Depression of 1929. And most so-called alternative proposals stay within the narrow frame of the chosen direction: Save these banks and firms – but not those, increase state control here, relax it there. But no one questions that the system has to be subsidized with public money for banks and companies.

Intuitively, however, many people see that for quite some time something has gone fundamentally wrong with our kind of economy. But the longer they have organized their lives and expectations to fit a growth economy, the less they know what an economy organized around providing necessities could look like. For decades we believed that nothing was more important than *making lots of money*. And the experience of the post-war economic 'miracle' and subsequent decades of prosperity seemed to prove us right. Everything, every handshake, was aimed at making money. And for a long time there never appeared to be a problem in transforming that money into tangibles like food, clothing, the roof over our heads – what we need to live.

But what happens if this kind of transformation breaks down? What if we no longer get anything for the handshake? Then we realize that although money can evaporate into thin air, as has happened since the beginning of the financial crisis, it cannot fill us up. In short, we cannot eat money.

We realize that we don't know how to grow food, build a roof or mend old clothes. Because in our highly specialized world with its ever increasing division of labor, only some have these skills. We no longer know, other than through the exchange of money, how to come together and share this knowledge. On a very basic level, namely the level of subsistence, we lack communication and block it from our consciousness.

In order to be able to recognize the specific, material, life-sustaining value of things and services instead of purely their cash value, we need a new term: "Subsistence production – or production of life – includes all work that is expended in the creation, recreation and maintenance of immediate life and which has no other purpose. Subsistence production therefore stands in direct contrast to commodity and surplus value production. For subsistence production the aim is 'life.' For commodity production it is 'money,' which 'produces' ever more money, or the accumulation of capital. For this mode of production life is, so to speak, only a coincidental side-effect." (*Bennholdt-Thomsen / Mies 1999*)

2. The economy – what is it really?

"What is good for the economy, is good for us all." This sentiment seemingly overcomes any misgivings about the purpose of economic stimulus packages and subsidies for bailing out banks and corporations. But it's wrong. Because the economy is more than just bankers, businessmen and trade union bosses, it includes all of us, and is in fact a social process. We all determine its course, and it molds us too, as well as our culture and outlook on life. That is why the present financial and economic crisis is also a crisis of our society and the values that define us. Self-interest and fear of scarcity buttress a worldview based on industrialization and growth.

In this belief system the understanding that every person lives and thus is acting economically, does not exist. Instead, there is only *the* economy, with employees who must be happy if they can sell their labor. Capital, not people, is credited with economic know-how and maybe even the exclusive skill of acting economically. There exists, at

best, a vague notion of an economically acting community where people work together and depend on each other. In the present crisis however, this is changing. Not so long ago, the Deutsche Bank decided to downsize its savings and current account business, indeed, to phase it out by offering poor service to its smaller customers, concentrating instead on large-scale financial operations. Now everyone, also the Deutsche Bank, fears that these customers will withdraw their savings, threatening to result in more bank failures.

A separation between the financial and the real economy is pure fiction

The economy appears to have as little to do with useful goods as it does with people, at least in recent decades. Instead, it seems to be limited to number games with derivatives, futures, certificates and funds. But the financial jugglers, those glamorous heroes, have juggled so poorly that - just as with the Chinese jugglers' porcelain plates in the circus - their offerings have come crashing down. And now they remember that, to continue the metaphor, the plates they juggled are actually real, made from clay and soil. Now we hear that there is "concern that the financial crisis could affect the real economy." This sentence was read and heard everywhere, from the German chancellor Angela Merkel to many commentators.

So let's think this over. Were they actually admitting that the financial economy has disengaged from the real economy? In fact, ordinary citizens have been under this impression for quite some time, as they attempt to make sense of hedge funds, futures and derivatives or to understand why managers receive severance packages worth millions despite (or because of?) the fact that they fail to prevent risky investments or the take-over of their firm. Bonus payments to managers of ailing companies in the middle of the financial crisis follow the same principle. But why, if separating monetary gains from economic performance is considered legal and okay, is the collapse of the financial economy suddenly such a threat to the real economy that all forces must be mobilized to prop it up?

The confusion stems from a classic neoliberal idea. The separation of the financial and the real economy is pure fiction. Yet policies have been pursued as if this fictional separation was real. Economic courses have been set as if the financial sector alone was the actual economy. However, it is easy to see that the financial economy is not separate from the real economy. Capital market gains may be used to purchase real goods at any time. And yet up to now we have been told that the financial economy was *the* supporting pillar of the economy, while the rest was merely a supplier of means, making sure that financial operations could run like clockwork. For instance, German cities sold their sewage systems and streetcars, sewage treatment and waste incineration plants to a so-called investor in the US. Then they leased back their former property and miraculously, and ostensibly without any problems, money poured into city treasuries. This financial game was called cross border leasing (*Rügger 2004*).

Most of the German railroad was privatized and - although the actual date has been postponed due to the financial crisis - its initial public stock offering remains on the

agenda and is expected to raise lots of money. The question is, for whom, and who will benefit? Certainly not those who until now have been the actual owners of the railway (or the postal services or the telephone network or the waterworks, etc.), namely the citizens of the state who funded these common goods or who inherited them from their grandparents.

On the one hand, it is good that the smoke and mirror illusions of the financial market have finally been recognized, in particular by the politicians in charge. On the other hand, it seems as if they and the entire audience are complaining that they were not cheated well enough and that the magic tricks are still recognizable as such. Yet they voted for this hokus-pokus in the first place. And now, they are angry that the magical illusion turns out to be a real illusion after all. But when impresarios like the sacked boss of Deutsche Bahn, who after all had been employed for the staging, are reprimanded for doing everything possible to let the show go on and then ask for their share of white rabbits from the top hat, this bodes ill: Individuals are made into culprits and the theater of illusions is maintained.

However, the real economy is already infected by the illusionary financial sector's greedy profit expectations. City centers are deserted because large department stores shut down branch stores, although business is doing well. They are taken over, merged or closed down because profits no longer meet the expectations of managers and shareholders. These excessive profit expectations, also in the real economy, are especially obvious in the case of so-called jobless growth. Despite good profits, employees are fired en masse to accommodate shareholders' expectations for higher dividends through "lean production" methods.

The most severe consequences for all of us come from the introduction of financial market mechanisms and profit expectations into agriculture. Because the amount of arable land does not grow. And if there is an equally good harvest year after year, why not be content? After all, there will be enough bread for the coming year. However because of the financial economic pressure for profit maximization, new and risky technologies have been developed for agriculture. But the natural limits of agriculture, which is the true real economy, cannot be overcome. The consequences of this mixing of fictitious and real value are the loss of real family farms and the increase in real hunger. And this happens not only in the countries of the southern hemisphere.

Dependent wage labor as a condition for citizenship

Because of confusion about what the economy really is and the mixing-up of money and the true value of life-sustaining resources, it has become the seemingly irrevocable duty of any normal person in industrial society to sell his or her labor as a commodity.

To ensure that this is internalized once and for all by everyone, the German government introduced its Agenda 2010ⁱ and Hartz IVⁱⁱ 'reforms' in particular. It seems that those who do not 'earn' money, have earned the privilege of being treated without dignity. The

employment office appoints a guardian for the wage-less person and if he or she fails to obey the orders of this so-called case manager, the already measly basic social assistance payment may be cut in stages down to zero. The housing allowance may also be reduced, or the person may be forced to move if the size and cost of their rented apartment exceed locally permitted limits. Most striking in the large array of possible sanctions is the obligation of having to work for an expense allowance of only one Euro per hour. This obligation to work for a wage of one Euro demonstrates more than all other disciplinary measures that in this so-called welfare state, the right to eat, live, be clothed and have a sense of belonging is reserved for those who work for a wage, in whatever form.

Apparently, a majority of Germans agree. At least protest against this legal atrocity has failed to materialize. It was silently approved because many people think that social welfare recipients and the so-called long-term unemployed are living at their expense. So, rhetorically speaking, does this imply that the unemployed steal food, take up the living space, and ruin the clothes of others? While it is not without irony that now, five years later, a conservative Christian Democrat-Liberal government grants at least a little bit more money than the previous government of Social Democrats and Greens, the basic lack of solidarity remains.

How did this momentous confusion between money and the real value of life-sustaining resources come about? How can it shape an entire culture to such an extent that many lose their feeling for human dignity and human solidarity? A glance back into the history of modern economic thought helps answer this question.

The invention of the "invisible hand," a theory from the 19th century

Adam Smith is reputed to be the father of modern economics. His famous thesis remains the central principle of economics to date: If everyone pursues their own self interest, they will also be maximizing the economic well-being of society. Accordingly, human activities are directed by some sort of magic economic authority, like an invisible hand. If everyone busily focuses on increasing their own profit, wealth will increase overall and all will do well. In other words, if enough money flows around, all will have enough to eat and a roof over their heads. At the present time, we can see more clearly than ever that this is not true.

The "invisible hand" and David Ricardo's principle of comparative advantage are theories from the 19th century.ⁱⁱⁱ In those days, national economic circulation prevailed and even when this was enormously expanded through colonial trade, we were, at the end of the 18th and in the early 19th century, still at the beginning of international trade and industrialization. The looting of the colonies was just preparing the basis for it, as did the expropriation of peasants' land through enclosures.

Smith and Ricardo had no idea how extensively all necessities of life would change into commodities of global trade during the next two centuries, although they were laying the theoretical foundations for this very process. For most people, food and the supply of

life's necessities still had very little to do with money. Self-supply, use of common land as well as rural and neighborly reciprocity were the foundations of subsistence. While money was used (as at fairgrounds, cattle markets, for pre-industrial paid labor, tithes paid to land owners, etc.), it only played a marginal role in the day-to-day economy and above all was handled and valued according to the rules securing subsistence (moral economy). Smith and Ricardo thought about national economy and international trade against the background of locally and regionally organized subsistence.

In their theoretical work they only considered and paid attention to an abstract exchange or cash value, and not to the value of sustenance or usefulness. One could say that their intention was to 'free' economic policy thinking from its attachment to material, specific use in order to leverage the exchange value economy. They were the preeminent theoretical exponents of the emerging bourgeois class, which was in the process of breaking away from the absolutist state and its mercantile theories. According to mercantilism, the state controls the national economy and improves its own trading position towards other states through war and conquest. The trading volume is seen as naturally limited and trade is handled almost like feudal sinecures. Smith and Ricardo, however, with their concepts of the invisible hand and of comparative advantage, argue for a *bourgeois freedom of trade* claiming that in this allegedly peaceful way, the wealth of nations will increase.

With their arguments they substantially contributed to the fact that dependence on nature and peoples' work and production for subsistence are "forgotten" in modern economics. The substance or physical reality of food, clothing and shelter is ignored and replaced instead with its trade value. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, this omission may be seen as bourgeois-political and liberal-theoretical pragmatism and not necessarily as ignorance. Today it is different.

In the 21st century the majority of the world's population depends on wage labor, peasant and artisanal production are in danger of disappearing, and the basic goods necessary for subsistence have become internationally traded commodities. Thus most of humanity has become directly tied into the globally organized capitalist process of accumulation. This is the case even with those not in formal wage labor, who work in the so-called informal sector or as peasant farmers, and self-employed tradespeople, as hardly any local or regional economic circulation remains which strengthens subsistence. Not only is Coca Cola, the symbol of internationalization of consumer goods, found everywhere, but a limitless number of products for everyday needs are almost exclusively supplied by the international supermarket economy, replacing local goods, produce and marketing.

Via Campesina, the international peasant movement, with good reason demands access to their own local markets. Meanwhile, even the most essential basic foodstuffs are affected. Take Mexico, for example. Until the 1960s Mexicans were self-sufficient in maize (corn) for their daily tortillas. Now maize is mostly imported from the US. The so-called food riots that erupted in 2008 first in Mexico and then in various other countries were the direct result of the uprooting of local staples. Due to speculation with foodstuffs,

such as maize used to make biofuel, this basic food has become much too expensive for many households. Profit maximization for some directly threatens the availability of food for others, because no or only minimal regional and local structures remain to secure subsistence. Conclusion: The “invisible hand” does not give, it takes!

From the "invisible hand" to the invisibility of subsistence

The fact that economic theory is blind to the material basis of our livelihoods is one problem. Another is that this blindness has infected our entire modern culture. Since industrialization began in the 19th century, our awareness of the economic importance of subsistence has faded, although -- or maybe because -- industrialization and commercialization have taken over ever more areas of human needs, culminating in the mass consumption of the 20th century. The things and services we need to survive are at present only taken seriously when associated with industrial commodities and wage labor. Only things that can be measured, bought or sold with money have value. Seeing life through these lenses, the material and life-giving values of self-sufficiency, self-determined, autonomous work and unpaid services go unrecognized.

Five elements in particular impede perception of subsistence today:

1. Disregard for women's work in the modern sexual division of labor

With industrialization, regard for women's work did not increase, but decreased. This was systematized by the model of the male breadwinner and female housewife. Women's crucially important caretaking is not recognized as work and is thus seen as having no economic value. The negative evaluation of women's subsistence work has put its cultural mark on all of women's activities. That is the reason why also for wage work, women are on average paid less than men, and why they seem predestined for temporary and short-term employment. We have called this phenomenon the “housewife-ization” of wage labor (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1979; Mies 1983; Werlhof 1983). It is one of the primary ways that the miserable conditions of wage labor – for both women and men – could proliferate unhampered during this crisis.

2. Disregard for peasant farming

For decades it has been difficult to integrate peasant farming, as opposed to the landed nobility^{iv} and colonial plantations, into the maximization economy. Defense mechanisms against industrialization and profit orientation come from the relative frugality of peasant farmers, their attachment to the land and their communities, as well as their concept of growth in line with nature. In the opinion of the non-peasant majority, this outlook was and is still considered as uneconomic, as peasant farming has reputedly no value for the overall economy. The dominantly negative connotations still associated with the concept of subsistence stem from this discussion. Namely that economic activity for life's necessities -- instead of for profit - - is backward, in fact not an economic activity at all and thus must be overcome. This subsistence destroying viewpoint has shaped both the World Bank's policies and European Union's agricultural policies.

3. Disregard for nature

Since the modern era, Western thought has regarded nature as something to be freely used and exploited, apparently without consequence. Nature has value only when it becomes private property, thus acquiring monetary exchange value. The concept of "the commons," commonly shared access to nature's bounty, is fast disappearing. The modern concept of nature is ultimately the background against which women's work, colonial and neo-colonial regions, and peasant production are considered economically irrelevant, if not completely invisible.

4. Colonialist looting

The colonies were seen as both a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of natural resources and of indigenous labor. Both were appropriated by force, in fact plundered. In the 20th century, the economics of colonial rule were maintained through development policies, now continued with the policies of globalization.

5. Fear of scarcity

The collective and neurotic fear of scarcity prevents us from recognizing the substance or physical reality of subsistence.

3. The invention of scarcity

One of the most important advocates of the ideology of scarcity was Adam Smith. He contributed to its broad acceptance by presenting a consistent theoretical framework showing why the economy must continually grow. Since then, economics has been seen as the science of how unlimited needs can be met with limited resources.

Adam Smith invented the modern fear of scarcity by conceptualizing prosperity in a completely abstract, non-material way. A reminder: for Smith, economic well-being for all is achieved when each person acts according to their own self-interest, seeking the greatest return possible. And the reverse is that someone who does not strive for the greatest possible return bears the blame both for his own and general shortages.

Smith made the fear of scarcity seem virtuous, by presenting other peoples and those from earlier times, who lived well on their given resources, as "savage and barbarous." The threat is obvious: If people in the "civilized" and "thriving nations" fail to make an effort to conquer the inevitable scarcity through economic growth, they could become as "miserably poor" as those who "from mere want, [...] are frequently reduced, or at least think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish with hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts." (*Smith 1776, 2005 p. 8-9*)

With this racially colored horror scenario, the colonization of other countries is not only legitimized, but, as far as economic principles of growth are followed, even considered a 'good deed' for the colonized peoples. The main outlines of international development

policy after WW II were thus already defined. Looking back on early colonization, we see how the Christian message of salvation and missionary work among the 'heathens', which legitimated the colonization of Latin America (Conquista), was replaced by profit maximization and free trade. It remains to be mentioned that a good half-century after Adam Smith's death, conditions much like his horrific example actually took place, namely the great Irish potato famine (under English rule with free trade ideology).

To sum up: Fear of scarcity, as it is in all our minds, spread widely through Smith's definition of prosperity. The real riches -- healthy food, protective homes and social ties - - can no longer be seen through the euro-centric, greedy glasses of the bourgeoisie. For them, only money and commodities are real. The subsistence economy of caring work without money, as in the family, and the appropriation of natural goods without money, as in the peasant commons economy, are de-economized and delegitimated. With all that is life-sustaining defined away, subsistence can now be withheld without moralistic or legal doubts. This creates a modern paradox: scarcity leads to growth and growth leads to scarcity.

Capital's worldwide mission and the colonization of subsistence

With international development policy after the Second World War, development, meaning the spread of the same selfish profit-oriented economic goals, was pursued worldwide. In his inaugural address in 1949, US President Truman called large areas of the world "underdeveloped." Where "economic life is primitive and stagnant," the USA should help with "its scientific advances and its industrial progress," as well as "its capital" to achieve economic growth.

Development policy and development aid were created. The responsible international bodies were the recently founded Bretton Woods institutions: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The newly created United Nations then approved both the gross national product of a country and the average per capita income in US dollars as the internationally binding criteria for defining development and underdevelopment.

Not *how* people really live and work is of interest, but how much money is in circulation. For example, under its president McNamara, the World Bank promoted credits for projects fighting "absolute and relative poverty," which should "draw farmers from subsistence to commercial agriculture." (*World Bank 1975*) Much later, looking at the growing number of poor in the world, McNamara called this policy a failure. But by then his development projects had left a trail of destruction.

The clear failure of the economic model of development policy has not prevented the International Monetary Fund's imposition, since the 1980s, of a neoliberal policy in ever more countries that are now no longer called 'underdeveloped' but 'developing' countries. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) force national markets to align with the world market of powerful corporations, ignoring borders and economic customs. The SAPs, namely the suspension of protectionist measures for national local production, as

well as rigid cutting of suspected protectionist subsidies for staples or for health and educational systems, can be imposed because the affected countries have fallen in the credit debt trap. Which in turn was the result of the former development policy. Money for growth (development credits) creates scarcity. The SAPs have led to the impoverishment of millions, especially in Africa, and the collapse of entire national economies, for example in Argentina. Ultimately, the World Trade Organization founded in 1995 included agriculture -- and thus peoples' basis of existence -- in its maelstrom of limitless corporate dominated international markets.

As a result, today one large, globalized circulation of commodities has developed. The non-consumerized subsistence background of the 19th century food-producing and care-taking work, which still partly existed in Europe until well into the 20th century, and in some regions of the Third World still exists today, has been successively absorbed by the internationalized circulation of commodities. The autonomous or self-determined supply of life's necessities has shrunk so far and become so much part of the international commodities system that it has taken on totalitarian traits. What has developed with the "invisible hand" (Smith), "behind the back" of the producer (Marx), is the absorption of subsistence, the "transformation of all things" (Wallerstein) and services into commodities, the "colonization of the lifeworld" ("Lebenswelt," Habermas), and finally a totalitarian commodity system.

Globalization: Totalitarianism of the money and commodity system

As with every totalitarian system, there are two aspects constituting the totalitarian-ism of the money and commodity system:

- first, *the ideological blindness* of the overwhelming majority;
- secondly, both the structural and direct use of *violence*, from which, in view of the all-encompassing power structure, there is almost no escape.

The real problem of our time and our present civilization is the moral failure of society, which has raised the standards of capital to ethical human values. An example is the violence currently inflicted on refugees at the borders of Europe in the name of these values. Also wars that -- in the name of these values -- are defined as "peace missions." And what about the millions of people forced to go hungry? All of these realities are part of what Jean Ziegler calls the "*Empire of Shame*" (2008).

In a globalized world and giant throw-away culture, the excessive corporate profits, and the even more excessive profits from financial speculation cannot be had without more than a billion people going hungry. In October 2009, the World Food Organization FAO estimated the number of hungry people at 1.02 billion, twelve times as many people as live in Germany. The fact that we have allowed this to happen should be our most terrible problem.

The propaganda machinery of international development policy has been especially effective in Germany (and the US), where many people share the ideology of

'developed' and 'underdeveloped' economies and societies. The judgment of 'underdeveloped' recalls the debates of the 'Conquista' over the worth or worthlessness of indigenous peoples, and whether or not they could actually be considered as human beings. Today, acting in a 'developed' way for maximum profit seems to be a human value set in stone. And yet, the number of people on this planet who are currently suffering from hunger is probably much higher than it ever was in the supposedly underdeveloped subsistence economies. The ideology of development policy perpetuates the colonial claim of the master race's power. This 'master race' abrogates to itself the one true faith and imposes its 'correct' economic strategy everywhere, thus further enriching itself in a colonial way. A concept of the diversity of cultures and respect for other economic values and criteria is completely lacking from this development ideology.

But like every totalitarian system, this one also eats its children. It is an illusion to think that the violence-charged mechanisms such as greed (self-interest), theft (of land and other basics of subsistence) and conquest (colonialism, developmentalism, globalization), which are produced by our economic social system, will stop at specific boundaries.

Rosa Luxemburg thought that at some point this inhuman spiral would have to come to an end. She was the only Marxist theoretician of the period to recognize the fundamental importance of the subsistence economy -- her "natural economy" -- for the functioning of the capitalist production method, namely profit realization. Once the external sinecures are exhausted, with all production sites and all markets integrated into the capitalist system of money and commodities, then, Rosa Luxemburg believed, the limits of continuous profit-making would be reached, and the system would fall apart. (*The Accumulation of Capital*, 1923)

But for all her perceptiveness, Rosa Luxemburg overlooked the inexhaustible aspects of subsistence, both the unpaid caring work done mostly by women, as well as nature's enormous riches which could still be colonized. The colonization affects the wealth of the natural world, and life itself. Who would have believed, one hundred years ago, that on the threshold of the 21st century living organisms could be patented and thus transformed into capital? Or that even water could become a commodity? Or the air, in that CO₂ emissions would be traded as carbon certificates?

Helpful souls in science and politics develop ever new means of profitable commercialization. What is necessary for life is dissected into ever smaller parts, as with DNA from genes, which can then be manipulated, privatized and turned into money. Or by venturing into ever larger dimensions of the atmosphere, as when climate change provides grounds for new areas of financial speculation.

The mechanisms used to commercialize the basics of life are everywhere, affecting everyone, colonizing also people in the so-called developed North. The noose around our necks is continuously tightened, as almost everything we really need is turned into a corporate-capitalist commodity. So we become commodity consumers in ever broader

basic aspects of our lives, from our health and the food we eat, to our leisure time and communication, care for the sick and elderly, and more. This means that ever more independent knowledge is lost, and ever more areas of our human and ethical self-determination are taken from us.

4. Complicity and money

It is a shock to realize that -- and how -- we in our society are ideologically and culturally entangled in this mania of maximization. However it is worthwhile to take a closer look at this truth, as it also holds the comforting notion that if we are the problem, we are also the solution. We can free ourselves from totalitarian constraints. Acting economically, how people live their lives in this world, has turned into a war. We have become accomplices because we believe that participation in this war is inevitable, even natural. Without being aware of it, we use the weapon of this war every day – money. Once we accept money as the basis of subsistence, we are recruited.

But we can make peace if we reclaim sovereignty over life's necessities. This can be achieved in several ways. On the one hand, mentally, ideologically, in relation to awareness, we must free subsistence from its invisibility, as it has been banished to our subconscious by money. On the other hand, we must actively take ever more of what is necessary to live into our own hands.

Supplying ourselves and doing manual labor are much more than the mere production of necessary goods. They are in themselves processes of understanding. We discover that we have skills, we experience ourselves empowered and able to give something of ourselves. We learn once again to make room for feelings of closeness with our natural environment.

As long as money flows, environmental destruction does not seem to be a loss since what has been destroyed is replaced by its supposed equivalent in money. But in reality, essential resources melt like the polar ice caps once they are taken over by money. The diversity of plants and animals disappears, species die out. Soil erosion and desertification advance, while our understanding and compassion for the world and the other beings that share it correspondingly decrease. Eventually we must recognize what avarice and greed mean: that my consumerism harms others. However money conceals the fact that my cheap purchase deprives others of their livelihoods, causing land expulsions, migratory labor, low-paid jobs and temporary employment elsewhere.

In the North as well as the South, money has become the most effective mechanism for destroying subsistence. It replaces the immediate force and direct violence of the former feudal and colonial tributary systems, but remains no less powerful. Indeed, it greatly surpasses them. In particular, the use of force as conveyed through the money system is far more subtle, and the respective power structures are significantly more blurred.

Unlike older, openly violent systems of power, the separation between victim and offender - and thus the responsibility for violence - is now much harder to determine.

The social boundary between those who suffer and those who benefit from the present money and commodity economy has become permeable. While the leap from shoeshine boy to millionaire is still a fairytale, many people continue to believe in it and for some, it indeed does come true. Compared to rigid historical estate structures, the caste system or slave-owning societies, the racial and class barriers of current societies are surprisingly low. The majority believes in the legitimacy of the money system. Therefore, its mechanism of rule is more important than today's racial and class limitations. Heads of states and corporate bosses are right: the central social issue of our time is money. Yet in a completely different way than what they think. The issue is about our freeing ourselves from the constraints of the all-encompassing system of money and commodities.

The fundamental solution required in our time is thus some form of collective *self-liberation*. Such a new vision can also result in a new understanding of politics, one appropriate to the 21st century and its economic and social organization, but one for which we doubtlessly first must develop specific tools. This much is clear: The old concepts of victim versus offender, of rulers versus subordinates, of war versus liberation struggles, these concepts are no longer suitable motives for determining our actions to achieve another economy and society.

“Homo oeconomicus“ in question

Economic reason as *the* criterion for all political and personal decisions is one of the pillars of modern complicity. It indiscriminately supports both capitalist and socialist ideological concepts. André Gorz, an eminent advocate of a more just society, especially for wage workers, published his “Critique of Economic Reason” in 1989, with the subtitle: “Search for Meaning.” Here he contradicts the socialist vision that injustice will end once workers own their factory:

“If, from the outset, the development of the means of industrial production had been in the hand of [...] worker’s cooperatives, enterprises might have been managed and controlled by the people working in them, but *industrialization would not have taken place*. [...] only [...] the separation of the worker from the means of producing [...] made it possible to rationalize and economize labour [...]” (Gorz, 1989)

People want to realize their potential through their own activities! Into the 19th century, work was experienced as meaningful activity with immediately obvious usefulness, as opposed to repeating the same action for hours at a time and at a pace set by a machine. But things have developed in exactly this direction, so that today it is almost obscene to ask about the meaning of salaried work, especially in times of crisis and rising unemployment. What matters is that one is doing paid work, and that the economy thus continues to grow. While as late as the beginning of the 20th century, it was noted that “Henry Ford had to employ 900 workers if he needed 200, because 700 could not tolerate the monotonous work under time pressure and soon stopped coming.” (Scherhorn/ Meyer-Abich, 2009, own translation) It should be added that they could

obviously afford to stay away. In other words, alternatives to meaningless wage labor existed, namely the independent generation of subsistence.

But acceptance of the growth economy is in question, not only regarding production, but also exchange. This was underlined by a team of social scientists who in 1981 launched the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* (M.A.U.S.S.), an anti-utilitarian movement opposed to the dictate of economic reason in the social sciences. Their message was that modern men and women and modern society do not function primarily according to cost benefit analyses, as postulated almost across the board in the social sciences. Rather the process of 'give and take' is individually as well as socially very differently motivated, primarily by 'a longing for attachment.' Humans, as expressed through their actions, including their economic actions, want to interact with each other instead of having to compete as opposing interests, or in fact not interacting at all.

The work of the anti-utilitarian movement builds on the academic work of French sociologist and ethnologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), especially his essay "The Gift." Here, based on research studies on indigenous populations, he analyzed the phenomenon of giving and taking and its importance for social cohesion. Mauss concludes that the longing for mutual acceptance is a basic human need, the basis of social bonds expressed in the exchange of gifts as a form of mutual indebtedness. This exchange, the process of giving, receiving and reciprocating, is not solely self-interested, according to Mauss, because then society would no longer exist.

Alain Caillé, who contributed significantly to reintroducing Marcel Mauss' anti-utilitarian version of work to the discussion, stresses that this viewpoint has nothing to do with moral judgments. The non-economic, non-self-interested aspect of the gift exchange is not reduced to donations or charity, but is simply part of the activity of exchange, which ultimately is, and will remain, a process of human socializing. "There is no more urgent task today, on a theoretical as well as an ethical and political level, than to break with the prevailing economic world view, according to which human motivation is exclusively economically determined – whatever this term may mean – and that ultimately the world is ruled by economic considerations and forces alone." (*Caillé 2008, p. 213 our translation*).

But what about the very real force exerted by the mechanisms of the ruling economic system on individuals? Is it really possible to act differently?

The empowerment of the individual

How can the conflict between the decision to act in a different economic way and the ruling system be resolved? In response to ^v scientific advisory board member Ulrich Brand's claim that the proposed economic reform known as the "Green New Deal" would only reinforce the ruling economy, Sven Giegold, European Parliament member from Alliance '90/ The Greens^{vi}, stated: "In such a crisis, we have to take advantage of the situation to achieve at least what's possible – even if it means a pact with the devil.

To reject the ecological and social taming of capitalism because it doesn't fundamentally question the economic system, seems to me cynical, in view of the climate crisis. We don't have that much time any more." (*taz*^{viii} 5/6/10/2009, *our translation*).

How social change can be achieved is an old subject, at least for the left. For a long time there was something like a personified idea of *the* system, one that could be exchanged for another through a revolutionary coup. This idea is no longer considered appropriate, not least because of negative experiences with revolutions. But the question behind it, as to how individuals and society are connected and how individuals as a whole form a society, remains fundamental to social science. What is clear is that this cannot be answered generally, but only for specific historic epochs and cultures. If currently the need for a new social contract is discussed everywhere, then it is in this context, and addresses the changed conditions of our era.

We have been working with the subsistence theory for more than three decades, specifically on the bridge between the individual and the modern society, between close relationships and social structure. We have seen that a focus on daily sustenance, and researching it as an integrated part of the economy as a whole, challenges the monolithic concept of economy that blocks any revision of the outdated social contract. (*Bennholdt-Thomsen / Mies / Werlhof 1992 [1983]*) With a subsistence perspective, empowerment of the individual against the 'diabolic' power of the 'system' becomes tangible. Feelings of powerlessness against the authorities over us are unnecessary. Rather we must stop seeing ourselves as victims. And this is possible because we ourselves are taking charge of our lives. The call to the individual and the civil society (as a term for associated individuals instead of class, people, or nation) to campaign for an ecologically and socially just world, as raised today by a broad spectrum of movements, arises from this view from below.

The isolation of individuals is the historic result of the development of capitalism into a global commodity market system of goods and finance. This is also the historically new power structure specific to our era. The individual is more or less directly subjected to the totalitarianism of the commodity system according to the motto of the wage earning society: that each of us is *individually* responsible for our own survival. The state plays an ever smaller role as an intermediating authority, whether between wage work and capital, or as provider of basic social needs. Instead of mediating, the state has taken over the role of guarantor for the functioning of the economic system of maximization -- in the west and east, north and south -- using outdated institutions of enforcement.

In view of the social power structures of our era, the old quandary of whether "we" should abolish the plundering capitalist system or whether "we" -- since there is no time for systemic issues -- should concentrate on reforms, has become obsolete. What matters now is that we -- all sovereign individuals capable of acting responsibly -- withdraw from the forced maximization economy by refusing to participate. The individualization through the globalized commodity economy, along with the isolation it creates, is probably the biggest problem of our time. But it is also our biggest

opportunity. Because the need for our own subsistence necessities is the source for political, social and economic empowerment of the individual.

One of the most important insights of subsistence theory is the widely researched fact that subsistence production did not disappear in the 20th century and will not disappear in the 21st, even under the conditions of the generalized wage/money/ commodity society. But it changes its appearance. While the appreciation of subsistence production and work declines, direct and self-sufficient caring activity is not disappearing and cannot disappear. For without nurturing and being nurtured, without caring and being cared for, without giving and receiving gifts, we could not exist. Empathy and caring attention cannot be turned into commodities.

For caring is physical and tangible: providing good food, a warm blanket and those vegetables passed over the garden fence. The existential requirements and needs for subsistence remain out of reach for *homo oeconomicus*, mister money. The culture of subsistence, the subsistence knowledge that still exists, do-it-yourself and self-sufficiency, are the basis for a civil society of liberation from the straightjacket of the growth economy. While money separates individuals from each other, the immediacy of subsistence brings us together.

5. From “*Homo oeconomicus*” to “*Homo donans*”

How does money separate people from each other? Isn't money a wonderful invention of civilization, easing the exchange between people? In this complex society is it possible to manage without money?

In her reply to these questions, the Texan-Italian author Genevieve Vaughan picks up from where the anti-utilitarian deliberations of M.A.U.S.S. left off. In her view the anti-utilitarian insight is correct and important, in that economic activity in modern society is not mainly motivated by the so-called economically rational calculation of wanting more, but rather by the desire for social attachment. Yet the authors of M.A.U.S.S. adhere to a basically utilitarian proposition, namely that human interaction is always bound to a cycle of the “triple obligation” of giving, receiving and reciprocating, i.e. returning a gift – with special emphasis on the return. According to Caillé, this is universally valid, and is, in fact, an anthropological constant. (*Caillé, 2008*)

Vaughan rejects this idea of humankind. She criticizes its patriarchal narrow-mindedness, which ignores that the primary human experience develops in the attachment to the mother, which has nothing to do with this triple obligation. The infant is nurtured and cared for because this is essential for the child's survival. The mother or another motherly, caring person gives without expecting a corresponding return. The fact that this is so is due to far simpler reasons than an essential goodness of the mother. If infants are not looked after, they die; there would be no society. Vaughan also emphasizes the anthropological constant that is valid for all epochs of humanity. And also for our modern age. Therefore Vaughan contrasts the dominant idea of humankind,

the "*Homo oeconomicus*," with that of "*Homo donans*," the giving person. (Vaughan 2004; 1997)

"If the fathers of capitalist theory," with Adam Smith leading the way, "had chosen a mother rather than a single bourgeois male as the smallest economic unit for their theoretical constructions, they would not have been able to formulate the axiom of the selfish nature of human beings in the way they did," remark Ronnie Lessem and Alexander Schieffer ironically (Lessem/Schieffer 2010: 124). The decisive criticism of these 19th century theses finally came in the course of the new women's movement and women's studies from the 1970s on. Women's work (care economy), the history of women (Her-Story) and socialization according to motherly principles (matriarchal studies) were freed from invisibility. Women philosophers in the Italian group "Diotima" show how patriarchal language considerably hampers women's ability to think of their own person in female categories. The subject/individual in this language ('homo', 'man', 'mankind' etc.) is not intended to be a woman. 'She' is the other, the one who is notoriously absent in the philosophical discourse (Cavarero). Luisa Muraro shows how the "symbolic order of the mother" was ousted from the dominant symbolic order and how it can be reappropriated.

The term "*Homo donans*" is one such reappropriation. It reflects the motherly giving, nurturing side of humans. The fact that Genevieve Vaughan adheres to the word "homo" sends two signals.

On the one hand, it is that male giving is not excluded from the image of motherly giving. In fact, she considers it a traumatic experience for the small boy that during his socialization into manhood he is basically forced to distance himself from his own gift-giving self because of its motherly-female connotations. And this is a tragedy for all of us. In our patriarchal society, masculinity is connected with an attitude of demanding and taking which as a whole has become the general economic attitude.

On the other hand, the term "*Homo donans*" signifies that not every woman must bear children to be a gift-giving person. Rather, it emphasizes the simple fact that everyone's primary experiences are deeply influenced by gift-giving because we all, men and women, have been nurtured in a motherly way.

Doubting the exchange paradigm of taking, instead of doubting the paradigm of giving

But how can a complex society function according to the principle of unconditional giving? As a matter of fact, society did function this way for thousands of years. Genevieve Vaughan calls this principle "transitive": I give, you give, the next person gives and so on. In this case, giving is not ego-oriented as in: 'I give so that you will give to me' but follows the needs of others: I give because I see, feel, perceive, know your needs. Thus, a chain begins and finally a circle of givers, community and society develops. Giving is the basic pattern of communication, of material and immaterial communication (*munus* = lat. "gift"), neither taking nor with the obligation to reciprocate (Vaughan 1997).

Socialization along the lines of the gift principle is fundamentally different from the market society that follows the exchange principle, emphasizing wanting and taking. The structure of exchange itself already contains the fear of scarcity, which ultimately became the starting point of the modern economy. Exchange is always accompanied by the concern: "Will I get enough in return?" However, societies where material communication follows the gift principle assume and experience abundance. Nature's gifts are equally available to all. Members of the society make use of them according to their diverse and varied needs. No abstract measurement is required; equality must not first be (re)created. It is a premise of the society that all humans are of the same equal human status because all were born from a mother. Whereas the exchange principle reflects the existence of a higher authority, a "justice [...] from above [that] prescribes to each his share, distributing or retaliating" (*Bloch 1961, our translation*). Giving and expecting to receive in return, the exchange paradigm, is tied to a measure defining whether the gift and return gift are actually equal. Because the focus of the exchange is not the other, but the ego and its needs. In order to establish equality, a measure is required.

The myth of equivalence, that a commodity, such as a loaf of bread or a piece of land, is actually represented by a specific sum of money, i.e. that equality has been established, is the bait for our complicity. It is the background for the concepts of fair prices and fair wages. The sum of money, not need or necessity, becomes the measure. But is not the value of bread actually quite different for those who are hungry than for the well-fed? And yet, it costs the same for both, and the hungry can only eat if they raise the money required. The equalizing justice lies supposedly in the fact that the hungry are given money, perhaps as charity, instead of enabling them to have enough to eat in dignity. People who need food and who know how to grow food should have access to the land for themselves and their children. Instead, those with money can buy up the land. They buy it at an allegedly equivalent value, and then sell the food at a high price: this is called development and economic growth.

The equation, which is already a part of the concept of exchange, is a purely mathematical abstraction removed from any sensual experience. Human warmth can quickly chill. That explains statements like that uttered by Hubert Markl, former president of the German Research Foundation and later Max Planck Society, who argued that "the human masses" of soon "ten or even twelve billion people[...] in the future will probably require up to half of the total net biomass of the earth," and thus can only be fed with genetically engineered mass-produced food. (*Der Spiegel 48/ 1995*).

By ignoring the manifold, different subsistence needs of people, human dignity is disregarded, but this is not especially Mr. Markl's problem. Rather, the modern discourse of justice overflows with measurements, numbers, calculations -- and human coldness. Take for example the UN Millennium Goal No. 1, *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*: "Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger." No comment.

Modern humans deprive themselves of their sovereignty and with it their human dignity by daily allowing the laws of the money system to rule their lives. By believing in the equation -- *Money = Existence = Food = Livelihood* -- they subordinate their lives to a superior power. The collective fiction that money really has an essential value for survival is only possible if everyone believes that the value of a sum of money is actually the claimed value. Hence, Hans Christoph Binswanger talks about "Money and Magic." This magic only works as long as everyone accepts the rule of the superior power which guarantees the equation, i.e. the value of money. This fact was more obvious in former times when the pieces of money still carried the ruler's portrait. By virtue of his power he guaranteed that the assumed value of the piece of money was backed by tangible valuables. In other words, power attributed, rule accepted.

Therefore, the most important aim of the governments in the current financial crisis is to stabilize confidence in the value of money. The fact that this not only stabilizes the governments, but also the entire oligarchic power of finance is in line with the power structure of our era, where international corporations and financial institutions are the "new rulers of the world" (*Ramonet*). And it reflects our era's subordination as consumers: the majority pays for the measures taken to stabilize their confidence.

6. Decommmercialization: there is enough for everyone!

We, *our* society, *our* economy must decommercialize our heads, our hearts and relationships. "But it's impossible to live without money," you say. Correct, at least for the time being. But a lot is possible without money! Decommmercialization is first and foremost an attitude of mind. Orienting ourselves not to money but to what we actually need puts all decisions in a new light. Modern insatiability can be replaced by the satisfaction of having a need fulfilled. Decommmercialization is a guideline for individual action aimed at social change.

Decommmercialization of heads and hearts means no longer counting on money and capital as the instruments that allegedly organize life in a global society. The daily politics of decommercialization aim for a new form of horizontal relationships between free, self-responsible individuals who can meet on the basis of their shared essential needs. Instead of a central abstract standard, their communication is determined by their respective specific, diverse and vital necessities of life. There is enough for everyone!

We need a collective self-liberation from the psychotic fear of scarcity. By always asking: "What does it cost?" and "How much money will it make?" this fear is continuously invoked, like a mantra. Decommmercialization is a means of self-defense against the totalitarian mechanisms of the commodity system, and is an act of self-empowerment. Decommmercialization cannot be achieved overnight, but rather through a process of collective learning – and that has already started.

Free communication

Worldwide, more and more mostly young people are getting together to campaign for freely accessible knowledge and freedom from state control of data communication. The movement emerges where the internet is widely used: in Argentina, Chile and Brazil; in the USA and Canada; in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, Europe and in Russia. In seven European countries these groups are officially registered as the so-called Pirate Party. In the 2009 German parliamentary elections, they immediately gained two percent of the votes.

As far as information available via the internet, and the technology required for accessing this information, another morality distinct from the one of exchange has been evident for some time. Free software, free downloads of texts, images and music are considered a form of community property to be shared throughout the internet community. The viewpoint that knowledge and information are common property has found its expression since 2001 in Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia where knowledge is collated and made freely available through voluntary work, free from copyright or similar restrictions.

Helping others, for hours on end and unselfishly, has been a part of dealing with information technology right from the start. Today the internet is teeming with forums where people who don't know each other take the time to answer all kinds of questions, and pass on advice and help. This seems to have resulted in a new culture of helpfulness among young people, which was not at all expected in a society where time equals money. This movement for free software and free knowledge coincides with -- and may even have been initiated by -- the development of a new type of youth culture. Especially in the cities, it is characterized by a lifestyle of frugality and sharing. It appears that immaterial communication has rubbed off on material communication.

In line with Vaughan's concept, communication is a quasi-archaic property of subsistence. Language, the material that knowledge transfer and exchange of life experiences are made of, is a gift, which, among many other things, is given to us in the same way that we are given life. The neoliberal attempt to subject ever more immaterial areas to the exchange logic is met with resistance from a deeply rooted feeling that is not so easily corrupted by the ruling logic of instrumental reason. Consequently, movements for free communication attack an important building block of the World Trade Organization (WTO) structure, that of TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights). With the help of TRIPS, ancient common knowledge is turned into law and can be declared the private property of a company, which, for example, turns a plant extract known for as long as anyone can remember for its healing properties into an international commodity. Local users can now be charged with a license fee.

Decommercialization in the city

When we in the urbanized society of the 21st century, one entirely dictated by consumption and drip-fed by supermarkets, want to strive for an economy where the necessities of life are available for everyone, what are the socially transformative measures available to us here and now?

Some answers are provided in the comprehensive study by Friederike Haberman on networks in Germany and Austria, "A new way of everyday life and economy" (*our translation*). In many cities initiatives have been set up with the declared aim of undermining the money economy. These include free stores where clothing and other goods are brought and taken away without payment. There is rent-free housing, not only in squats but also in city communes and other common property, such as intergenerational housing. Resource and skill centers share tools and know-how. Free food is available in "Volxküchen" (peoples' kitchens), and by collecting discards from supermarket dumpsters. The motivation behind these initiatives is not so much for personal use, or need. Rather it is about a new form of communication not mediated by money.

"You are now leaving the capitalist sector," reads a sign at the entrance of a free store in Berlin. To date (2008/09), some 40 free stores have been set up in Germany. Food from dumpsters is quickly redistributed through informal networks, free food shelves in basements, and one group in Berlin is currently setting up a dumpster-diver co-op. The goal of this and the other give-away campaigns is to build community. (*Habermann 2009*)

What a contrast to the aim and intention of German charity food banks! These are supported by the McKinsey consulting firm with a guideline, based on experiences in the US where low standards of state welfare are much older. McKinsey also formed part of the commission that contributed to the dismantling of the German social assistance system in 2001. Since then, people in need regularly line up at the food banks and are often, as in Bielefeld for example, poorly treated. Meanwhile, the supermarkets that donate food receive tax rebates for their donations, save disposal costs, are seen as charitable sponsors -- and the wheel of the undignified dependency on money and commodities keeps turning.

A society that believes that supply depends on money and that money depends on selling one's labor, is increasingly moving towards polarization and an end to solidarity. At present the income of about one quarter of the total population of Germany is at the level of social welfare or Hartz IV, as mentioned in October 2009 by then German minister for social affairs Olaf Scholz. And poverty will certainly increase, since extensive lay-offs have been announced as a consequence of the financial crisis. What are the prospects for these people?

"*Under the Garbage, the Field*" is the translated title of Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen's German book on community gardens in New York City (2004). This excellent report with many interviews reads like a novel and encourages self-empowerment. During the 1990s, people in US cities transformed wasteland into community gardens for vegetables, salad and fruit. Where once rubbish was dumped, plants now blossom. In 2003, the American Community Garden Association counted more than 6,000 such neighborhood gardens. They bring people together; some get fresh food for the first time in their lives; they take young people off the street, away from gangs and drugs; they build bridges across ethnic boundaries and change ravaged districts into pleasant green living areas.

Two thirds of the community gardeners are women. It is noticeable that subsistence oriented supply is apparently mainly of concern to women, and especially to feminists, practically and theoretically. And no wonder, since the prevailing disrespect for subsistence as a whole coincides with the disrespect for the non-monetary supply activities of women. It was the proud and self-confident action of the women's movement, claiming that these unpaid contributions are in fact socially necessary, that brought about a civil society movement for freedom from the constraints of the growth economy. The studies by Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen and Friederike Habermann were supported and published by the (German) Women's Initiative Foundation (www.stiftung-fraueninitiative.de) under the auspices of Carola Möller.

Christa Müller set up the foundation "Stiftung Interkultur," which is mainly dedicated to intercultural gardens, as a project of the foundation "anStiftung & ertomis" in Munich. These special neighborhood gardens enable migrants in Germany to 'gain new ground' and, similar to a plant, to 'sink new roots.' In their gardens, refugees and migrants from different countries grow fruits and vegetables, often varieties from their far away homelands. They feel more at home, have a supply of fresh food, make new contacts and, last but not least, have something to give their German neighbors over the fence. The first intercultural garden was created as an initiative of Bosnian women refugees in 1996 in Göttingen, Germany. Today there are more than 100 intercultural gardens across Germany, and another 50 are being developed. (www.stiftung-interkultur.de/program; Müller 2002)

There is more than wage labor! The decommercialization of work

The spirit and feeling of refusal to be completely taken over by the industrial exploitation of labor lives on. In our society, labor has long been separated from self-realization through work, and people have adapted to dependent, mostly meaning-less jobs. However, there are indications that independence, creativity and community spirit are alive and well. In Germany, evidence for this can be seen in the diverse ways that craftspeople, health experts, artists, teachers and writers have developed to generate income at a time of dwindling long-term contractual employment.

The 1980s and 1990s were increasingly shaped by information technology and the globalization of markets with accompanying "jobless growth" and privatization of public

services. During this period, many workers in Germany found ways to organize their own incomes following the guiding principle of meaningful work. Combining paid and unpaid labor, they developed a 'patchwork' of income-creating activities. With the help of short-term job creation programs, state subsidies for non-profit institutions, unemployment benefits earned through previous formal employment, and all types of self-employed work, many were still able to more or less do their work of choice.

Apparently, it was exactly this independence from wage labor that proved to be a thorn in the flesh of the commission that devised Hartz IV and of the members of parliament who passed the bill. Along with Peter Hartz (at the time, board member of Volkswagen AG and now a convicted lawbreaker), the commission included a manager from Deutsche Bank, a member of the Roland Berger management consulting firm, a director from McKinsey's and other business heads. What really incited this aggression towards the 'patchworkers' that such drastic disciplinary measures had to be drawn up to force them back into the coercive system? After all, they did not amass any wealth and at times had to fear for their livelihoods due to lack of security. Yet they were able to defy the situation and to mobilize primeval energies. It was possible to focus on goals such as being creative or serving the common good instead of having to do wage work in a job only endured for the pay check. Day care centers and women's shelters, fair-trade and whole-food shops were set up, academics lived from one lectureship to another, did free-lance writing, others organized free theatres and artist collectives, developed woodworking and sewing workshops or managed to complete a university degree thanks to social welfare support for young mothers. People got by, some better, others not so well, but the necessities of life could be generated: food, clothing, accommodation, education for the children, social life, travel. Above all, one was at peace with oneself.

Adrienne Goehler^{viii} identifies this large group of people -- in line with a US study -- as the German equivalent to the "cultural creatives" who are said to account for a quarter of the population. (*Ray/Anderson 2000*) Goehler defines her concept of culture similar to the US authors. "To be culturally active is a concept that not only refers to the manageable group of those making a living from culture, but also those who understand culture as matrix for creativity and thus a fundamental human ability." (*Goehler 2006*) In Germany, a trend can be noted towards a cultural change, away from the identification with economic growth and increasing profits and consumption. Goehler makes the case for a policy paving the way for fragmented livelihoods, one that is open for new types of occupations (*Kurskontakte Dez. 08/ Jan. 09*).

The deccommercialization of money

It sounds like a paradox, but it isn't. Money has two fundamental functions: as a medium of exchange and as a commodity. As a neutral exchange medium it can facilitate exchange by simplifying, for a large number of individuals, transactions with a wide variety of goods. As a commodity, money itself has a price, namely the interest, which carries the increased risk that money takes on a life of its own as opposed to its function as a medium. Money may be held back if the expected interest to be earned appears too

low, as was the case in 2010. Banks are accused of hesitating to extend credit to the real economy, despite the fact that they are receiving government funds for exactly that purpose. Indeed, the entire crisis results from the detachment of money. The trading of money has spiraled without any relation to the goods for which it was meant to act as a medium.

The decommercialization of money first of all involves reducing the function of money as a commodity. This can happen on many levels and is most urgently required at present. The money involved in speculative transactions – the commodity that has taken on a life of its own – must be separated from money used as an exchange medium for necessary goods. The current so-called rescue packages continue to suffer from the construction faults of the monetary system, namely that the real economy and the financial economy operate with the same money. What some need to live on can be 'play money' for others. Therefore, separate currencies are necessary. Anyone wanting to go to the casino must first change money from the real economy into play money. A proposal of the governor of the Bank of England and the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve and later presidential advisor deals with at least part of the problem. They argue that "normal banking, i.e. current and savings accounts as well as corporate and private loans, should be separated from the considerably more risky investment banking." (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* 22/10/2009)

However, there are probably only a few people authorized to make decisions on financial policies. But many others are by no means unable to act in financial matters. It is important to make ourselves aware of this possibility for action. Especially when it comes to matters of money and currencies, people tend to believe that only a higher authority can make the rules. This belief leads us to project ourselves into the director's chair, instead of addressing our own situation in the here and now. However, we can in fact take action on the monetary system. For decades, various initiatives have made possible the decommercialization of money for every man and every woman in their daily lives. Local and regional alternative currencies and local exchange trading systems are a first step towards the decommercialization of money.

Two basic motives can be distinguished among the diverse approaches to alternative money. The older school of thought focuses on the question of interest or no interest. This goes back to Silvio Gesell (1862-1930) and his theory of 'free money'. The range to which the 'free economics' apply is relatively broad, including the complete national economic system. (www.inwo.de) The new school of thought around local exchange trading systems starts, however, with an explicit view from below, from everyday life. Members join forces locally, form face-to-face relationships and find quite different practical solutions to existing problems. Both schools of thought come together in the local currency movement, as documented by the German social economy journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialökonomie* (edited since 1963 by Werner Onken). This journal also documents the close relationship between the search for alternative money and the social movements for economic and ecological justice since 1968.

In England, exchange systems flourished in reaction to Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal gutting of social welfare. These Local Exchange Trading Systems, LETS, contained the central idea of current alternative exchange systems: 'I may not have a job or many possessions, but I am skilled and can offer something that others need. In return I can find enough for my own needs in the exchange circle.' Generally, the alternative exchange systems create their own currencies; some call them "gems," or "bees." The unit of exchange can be based on time, such as 15 minutes of work. Or it can be based on an exchange rate, such as one Euro = one "Waldviertler" as used in this region of Austria. According to Friederike Habermann, there are currently 271 exchange systems in Germany. She also reports on the "Gib & Nimm" (Give & Take) initiative in Wuppertal, where some 40 members exchange services like ironing, computer servicing, childcare etc. with no central exchange unit or book keeping involved.

Right from the beginning, members of "Give & Take" consciously opted against any form of measuring and counting and they are now experiencing how difficult it is to let go of the exchange concept. "You first have to break down barriers in your mind," says Marie during the interview and concludes why this is so: "Normal alternative exchange systems basically mirror our society." Regardless of the currency unit and even when money is reduced to its function as simple mediator, it is hard not to remain stuck in the prevailing discourse of self-interest. The emancipation of individuals, and finally society, from the super-ego of "*Homo oeconomicus*" is a process in which values have to be reconsidered and changed. A process that takes time. Meanwhile, stories of the courageous actions of individual initiatives will eventually make history. Friederike Habermann's book presents many of these stories.

The microcredit bluff and lessons to be learned from it

With microcredits, commercialization invades the last corners of minds, hearts and communities. In 2006, the Bangladeshi banker Muhammad Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for this. With the granting of credits to the "destitutes," these were able to purchase "a calf or a sewing machine. Millions of poor people have become entrepreneurs in this way." The journalist quoted here however also allows her doubts on the peaceful intentions of this profiteering to shine through. "The Grameen Bank charges 20 percent interest and yet, Muhammad Yunus received the Nobel Peace Prize for establishing this." (*Spiegel online 13/10/06*)

Farida Akhter, who has for decades denounced the violence against women caused by development aid, for example through forced sterilization, clarifies: "Money circulated through the poor communities expanded often to 130 percent, appropriating the remaining resources of the poor in the form of interest. Indebting the poor has become the new game of development and swept the development discourse and the former practice away." (2007: 112) Farida Akhter also sees a parallel between the programs to control population growth and the microcredit programs. Ninety-one percent of those sterilized were women and 82 percent of microcredit borrowers are women, because they are more easily pressured: by the fieldworkers of the cooperating NGOs, who earn their own income this way, and from their own husbands, who want to use the money for

their own purposes. "Violence has not diminished, but has rather increased with the microcredits. [...] She even has to sell her chicken or get another personal loan." The repayment rate of microcredits granted to women is 95-100 percent. In the past, development aid workers were involved in setting up support for economic activities. Today, what matters is the granting of credits and securing repayment. (*Akhter 2007*)

The biggest problem is the fact that the credits undermine local mutual solidarity, also concerning the way credits were commonly originated. The rural organization of credit ('grameen' means 'village') used to be similar to our historic credit and savings co-operatives. Today the local economic solidarity is being usurped by distant banks and transformed into the opposite, namely instruments of mutual control and liability. In this way village women are directly connected to the national and international financial system. Farida Akhter reported how BRAC, an NGO involved in the granting of credits, joined forces with Monsanto in order to foster the distribution of genetically engineered seeds with the help of microcredits. This example shows what effects microcredits can have, namely further curtailment of subsistence sovereignty.

In November 2009, the third "Vision Summit" took place in Berlin with the theme "Social Business – Another Wall to Fall." Muhammad Yunus, who created the concept of social business, was the main speaker. The intention of 'social business' was revealed at the award ceremony of the Vision Summit. The award was given to the Grameen Danone Community for the first Global Social Joint Venture: Grameen Danone Foods. "Grameen Danone Foods Ltd. will produce a special yogurt from pure full cream milk which contains protein, vitamins, iron, calcium, zinc and other micronutrients to fulfill the nutritional requirements of children [and] adults. The price of each [...] yogurt will be [...] cheaper than other available yoghurts in the market and in line with what low-income people can afford. Grameen Danone Foods will reduce poverty by creating business and employment opportunities for local people since raw materials including milk needed for production will be sourced locally. The companies that make up Grameen Danone Foods Ltd. have agreed not to take out any of the profits of the company."

<http://www.grameen-info.org/dialogue/dialogue64/specialfeature3.html>

What is the reality beyond these dazzling slogans? Bangladesh is a country of peasant farmers. Almost 60 percent of the population work in agriculture. Owning a cow for self-sufficiency and the sale of dairy products is an important goal for the peasant women. It is here, in this context, that local production happens. Here is the local market and the jobs that prevent malnutrition. The Danone-Grameen project in fact threatens this local subsistence economy, as it takes over and destroys local and regional markets.

What do these examples in Bangladesh tell us about the situation in the metropolitan north? How long will it take for German banks to discover social welfare recipients as a target group for microcredits? Already, they are publicly referred to as "customers." The next step seems to be mapped out. As is well known, the model of wage labor as a means of profit maximization is reaching its limits and some have already – wrongly and mistakenly -- predicted the "end of the working society." Where thus far the employment contract served as a purchase agreement for the worker who sold his or her work as a

commodity, money or a credit agreement will take its place. The ties that bind the worker may now be more impersonal, more mechanical so to speak – obeying the mechanism of money – but no less compulsory.

The way out is when we stop supporting the money mechanisms, and instead focus on subsistence. Communities should create a body of regulations beyond the exchange logic of money.

Food comes from the earth! The deccommercialization of agriculture

What about our food? Don't we need money as mediator between city and rural areas? Is a deccommercialized agriculture possible?

Experience shows us that focusing on subsistence leads to a deccommercialization of agriculture and vice versa. In agriculture, focusing on subsistence means that crops are cultivated and animals are kept for the purpose of food creation and not for profit. This is exactly what rural logic and economy are about. Farmers feed themselves with their harvest, milk and meat, and sell the surplus. In industrialized agriculture, however, self-supply is the exception, as for example when hog breeders raise a pig for their personal consumption on straw instead of concrete crevices, with feed free of standard pharmaceutical additives. Apparently many breeders prefer to avoid the meat of animals from their own factory farms, which are fattening 1,000 to 10,000 animals at a time. (*Baier/ Bennholdt-Thomsen/ Holzer 2005*)

Deccommercialization means that agriculture is no longer ruled by money. Seed can be selected and reproduced by the farmers. The soil recovers when turbo fertilizers, growth regulators, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides are no longer used to increase yields. Animals are bred naturally without artificial insemination or hormonal treatment; a cow will live for 25 years and not just five. Deccommercialization of agriculture ends the paradox that in rural areas many people are starving; that the farmer is skinny and the tractor is fat; that in India, thousands of peasant farmers are committing suicide because they cannot repay the money they borrowed to purchase seed from Monsanto. Deccommercialization means a reversal of the World Bank's 1975 motto: "To draw farmers from subsistence to commercial agriculture." (*World Bank 1975:20*).

In the cities of the North, a subsistence orientation means that people must stop plundering the forests, the earth, and its inhabitants in other parts of the world with 'their' money by consuming cheap agricultural produce that destroys the subsistence agriculture in those parts of the world. Even here, low food prices are causing farmers to lose their livelihood: ever more farmers are giving up because they can no longer compete with increases in livestock numbers and tons of grain per hectare and want to avoid ruinous debts. This is the same process that is happening in India. Deccommercialization brings an end to the paradox that rich harvests or bountiful milk production are considered a disaster called "overproduction." Deccommercialization and a subsistence orientation mean careful handling of humans, animals, plants and the landscape.

Subsistence agriculture does not imply that peasants are producing only for their own consumption, eating alone in self-sufficiency, as is often insinuated. That has never been the case. This myth was in fact created in line with colonial development policy, which established the market for international looting and destruction of local and regional economies as well as of independent national economic cycles. In Europe, peasant women's markets (almost everywhere women ran the market stalls) existed up to the 20th century. These markets, of which only a few have survived, offered the surplus from self-sufficiency as well as goods and items produced especially for sale. For centuries, the rural economy in Europe was a market economy; in parts of Central America, Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia, this has been the case for thousands of years. Market economy is simply not the same market economy everywhere and forever.

The network of peasant markets that covered all continents for thousands of years with supply lines – obviously with great cultural diversity – was plainly ignored by economists from Adam Smith to Robert McNamara and was as a consequence destroyed. When today a Swiss organic farmer from Möschberg – one of the cradles of organic farming – almost desperately declares at the Möschberg meeting of organic growers in 2009: “I want to remain a nurturer,” it becomes clear what rural markets are about, and how much the dimension of real provisioning has been destroyed even in organic farming by the commercialization of the supermarket era.

The human measure of manageable size has been pushed aside by the megalomania of economic growth. This was the analysis of the working group “A different way of acting economically” at the above mentioned 15th Möschberg talk organized by Bioforum Switzerland. This working group developed the vision that economic activity can recover, provided the measures of value of the peasant economy, especially the principle of manageable size, are applied in all economic sectors. “Profit for the peasant farmer is not to be confused with the profit an entrepreneur must aim for under the thumb of capitalism.” (*Heindl 2009; Bioforum Schweiz, Kultur und Politik 2/2009*).

7. Re-ruralization: for a new urban-rural relationship

An economic system that is not conceived of as a war for growth, and that follows a social contract based on the equality of all, would see many more people working on the land. Because if we want an economy that is not at other peoples' expense, in a peaceful world, we must try to live from the resources in that part of the earth we call home.

In the 21st century, re-ruralization obviously means something different than it did at the end of the Roman Empire. It includes people in the city and the development of the city itself. The social division of labor, in which the countryside provides food for the population centers, and the extreme separation between the rural and urban we know today, first came to a head with industrialization. This undesirable development can be changed. United Nations data show that for the first time in human history more people

live in cities than in the countryside and this seems to indicate that urbanization and further development of megacities with mega-slums is unavoidable. However, this development, as the continuation of the growth economy, is not inevitable. In fact, for some time there have been indications that megacities are shrinking, as the economic patterns creating them are in crisis, and that counter-movements exist.

Re-ruralization in the 21st century includes three aspects:

- re-ruralization of the city
- re-ruralization of the urban-rural relationship
- re-ruralization of agriculture.

Re-ruralization of the city

"Agriculture is moving back into the city," stated organizers of the "Urban Agriculture" conference in 2009 (www.anstiftung-ertomis.de/opencms/opencms/urbane_landw/).

This meeting focused especially on examples of "neighborhood gardens; intercultural gardens; small, herbal and school gardens; farms for children; and community gardens" in German-speaking regions.

In the U.S., Detroit, Michigan has become famous for its urban agriculture movement in a deindustrializing city. There, members of the civil rights movement sought new forms of organization in reaction to the city's disintegration. In her autobiography, Grace Lee Boggs describes their challenge, to create local, more self-sufficient and sustainable economies, ones that would redefine our relationship with the Earth, and that could rebuild communities destroyed by consumer oriented monocultures and the transformation of relationships into commodities. The new goal was to bring the countryside to the city and create a new culture there. Thus began the "Detroit Summer" initiative, which for twenty years has tried to create a new economy and lifestyle in a city that is shrinking and falling apart. (*Lee Boggs 1998*)

A similar kind of re-ruralization of the city is being promoted through the relatively new Transition Town Initiative (TT). Starting in England and Ireland, hundreds of TT groups have also formed in continental Europe. A main theme is that the era of big oil is coming to an end ('peak oil'), and a move into the post-oil era must be found. *Transition Town* and not *City* reflects the goal of finding a middle way between cities and villages, the places where most people in Europe live. One important initiator is Rob Hopkins, an Irish expert on permaculture, an alternative integration of fields, gardens and housing.

The transition to the new era should happen through local or regional integration of supplies of energy and food (with self-sufficiency through neighborhood gardens and an urban-rural connection through farmers' markets) and of other basic resources needed. Materials will be recycled and free stores will be supported by independent artistic production, a local currency and much more, all of which strengthen public spirit. Above all, the TT philosophy reveals a great openness towards the diversity of possible paths to a different, ecologically adapted city. Since 2006 the town of Totnes in southeastern England has been especially successful with this initiative.

Re-ruralization of the urban-rural relationship

For some time, city dwellers have sought closer connections to the land without having to move there. "Community Supported Agriculture" (CSA) has been spreading increasingly in North America and Europe since the 1980s. Farm owners plan the next planting season together with a group of city dwellers, deciding what and how much will be planted, and how to organize distribution in the city. The people from the city finance the crop and thus their own harvest. Usually they can also participate in basic work, where many hands are needed, like weeding or harvesting, for example potatoes. Vandana Shiva (2006) reported that in the US some 3,000 CSA groups had formed in the past 17 years. In western Switzerland alone, there are more than 20 groupings of this kind. In Germany, there are fewer than ten projects. However, among them is the well-known Buschberghof, which has successfully functioned this way for 20 years.

In Germany, the system of regular delivery from farms is widespread. Households that receive their weekly "green box," find an assortment of vegetables, fruit and salad that varies according to the season and weather. The customers thus adapt to real natural conditions, far different than shopping in the globalized world supermarket.

A very successful and common city-country relationship is the formation of communal groups of city people in the country. Since the 1970s, rural communes have been founded in Germany, some now with up to 70 adult members. Members work in agriculture or in workshops, organize kindergartens and seminars, pooling their income. In the same spirit and following the growing environmental awareness, eco-villages were formed somewhat later. Still developing, such a village is seen as home for up to 300 people. The most important principles are self-sufficiency and self-organization. In addition, there are rural communities founded in a Christian spirit of community, some dating from the late 1950s. From the 1980s, communities with a Buddhist spirituality formed. Then there are groups that are mainly focused on organic agriculture, organized as cooperatives, which produce on 100 hectares (250 acres) of land or more. The diverse projects established in eastern Germany after 1989 are also relatively well-endowed with land. A look in the book "*Gemeinschaften & Ökodörfer in Europa*" ("Communities and Eco-villages in Europe" 2009) shows that Europe is covered with rural communes, especially Germany, which has more than 100 such projects.

The communities outlined above remain part of an urban culture. Although they have moved to the countryside, they remain closely connected with similarly oriented groups in the city. The contrast to the traditional rural culture around them is clear, and can sometimes lead to friction. But the new communities' members generally make a real effort to establish bridges between the cultures of city and countryside. This approach is successful, especially when people know each other longer and because the outlines of rural culture are also increasingly blurred. One could say it is becoming citified.

Re-ruralization of agriculture

In the second half of the 20th century, agriculture became industrialized. The degree of industrialization differs according to the world region and is also different within these regions. But the international development organizations and the WTO are actively working to remove the last, also cultural and psychological, barriers to the commercial take-over of rural areas. Agriculture should be treated in international agreements like every other economic activity. A result of this development is the massive buying out of peasant farmland and corresponding expropriation of the resident population ("land grabs").

The buyers of these lands include: "Countries that since the food supply crisis fear for their own food security – especially Arab states with huge oilfields but little productive agricultural land. [...] In addition, there are the financial investors such as Morgan Stanley or BlackRock." (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 February 2009) The US investor Philippe Heilberg bought 400,000 hectares (1 million acres) of the best land in southern Sudan (!) from war lords there. George Soros acquired land in Argentina for production of liquid fuels. The Italian clothing company Benetton controls more than 900,000 hectares (2.25 million acres) in Argentina for wool production, while the Russian hedge fund "Renaissance Capital" controls 300,000 hectares (750,000 acres) in Ukraine. The South Korean 'Chaebol' Daewoo Logistics has a 99 year lease for 1.3 million hectares (3.25 million acres) in Madagascar, half of the island's fertile land. Meanwhile, German investors buy land in Romania through the investment firm Agrarius Ackerland, which went on the German stock exchange in November 2008. (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 31 March 2009)

A re-ruralization of the countryside means bringing local peasant farmers back into agriculture. This is part of a process through which the "Earth Democracy" or "Democracy of all Life," as Vandana Shiva puts it, can be achieved (*Shiva 2006*). Everywhere worldwide, the displacement of small farmers, men and women, through the industrial, monocultural, capital-intensive plantation economy must be stopped, and the farming methods of small farmers, as well as regional marketing structures and opportunities must be strengthened. This is not just necessary for social justice, but, as the 2008 World Agricultural Report^{ix} makes clear, is also required for the ecological recovery of the earth. The protection of biodiversity, the reduction of greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide emissions, the production of healthy food within the regions and the protection of the earth's water supplies can only be achieved through the diverse economy of small-scale farming.

Food sovereignty is unfailingly bound to the small-scale farm perspective. The term and idea came from a 1996 meeting of the "Via Campesina" international movement of farm workers and peasant farmers in Tlaxcala, Mexico. The term 'food sovereignty' includes both food production -- access of the local population to land, seeds, forests and water -- as well as the consumption of food: its qualities of freshness, taste, nutrition, and special ways of preparation. These can satisfy the eater and are filling, as opposed to "mal bouffe" or junk food -- the unnatural industrial supermarket offerings condemned by

French farmer-activist José Bové and others. Diverse, local and regional autonomous food supplies must replace the monopolized, corporate-led monocultures of the globalized food industry which has seized control of the entire food chain from seeds to meal. Food sovereignty is at the heart of the movement to reclaim the independence of the individual and civil society as opposed to the totalitarian system of money and commodities.

8. For a politics of daily life

Not everyone wants to work the land, live communally, get around by bike or wear other peoples' clothes. And we can't forget about money or self-interest overnight. Just as we cannot replace wage work with self-determined community work, even if many would like to do that right away. Even so, there is a lot we can change in our daily lives. The politics of daily life is the decisive means of self-empowerment for individuals and civil society, against the disabling moloch of the money and commodity system. Another world is possible, and we can do something to achieve it.

Starting points for another economy exist. All the studies about the practice of subsistence, the work done every day without paying or being paid for, the things that are necessary for life and are done "so that life goes on," come to the same conclusion. People actually do much more for immediate subsistence than they realize, *and* they are filled with pride and satisfaction when they realize the extent of their contributions. Mainly, these involve activities they are happy to do anyway, without admitting that this is so. Because the dominant discourse that disciplines us and directs the socialization process sends a completely different message: that only work for wages or, in other words what brings in money – the more the better – belongs to a socially accepted lifestyle.

We should consciously distance ourselves from this money ethic. Only in this way can a new social contract emerge, beyond the culture of multiplying money. Because the goal is not to get through the next crises, but to stop the mechanisms of impoverishment and destruction. It is about achieving another relationship with our fellow humans, our fellow creatures and the world as a whole. To achieve this Earth Democracy, another mindset and behavior is demanded from us all. By now it should be clear enough that it is ethically-morally impossible to delegate our own human responsibility given the framework of current global structures of power and governance. The new US president received the Nobel Peace Prize and continued the politics of war, sending more battalions of soldiers to Afghanistan. At the world climate summit in Copenhagen (December 2009), national leaders from 192 countries haggled over ways to prevent pollution of the atmosphere, without meaningful results.

In our era, the dominating power is solely legitimated by economic growth. This legitimation has to be denied, and by all of us. The responsibility for policies of an Earth Democracy lies with each individual, and can be realized in our daily actions. Will money drive our decision-making, or will it be replaced by an orientation on subsistence, on what is really necessary for a good life for all?

As we seek a guiding policy for our daily lives, it makes sense to ask:

- What do I do without money?
- Which of my relationships have nothing to do with money?
- Which communication, be it material (goods) or immaterial (social relations) has no calculated, hence no exchange bias?
- and finally: What makes us really rich?

Money leads to misanthropic separation and the atomization of society. The abstraction of money and the anonymity of exchanges through money lead to our estrangement from each other and weaken feelings of community. That is why money is also the central building block in the "Empire of Shame." Daily actions against this imperialism can only happen if we reduce anonymity and abstraction as much as possible. Also when money is involved we can think about another attitude towards money. Fair trade, environmental certification and organic certification appease our consciences, but are by no means sufficient. They may prevent the worst excesses of combined, plundering self-interest. But they do not change the basic fatal attitude, that similar to a supposed colonial master's right everybody can lay claim to all the goods of this earth just because they have money.

We have to ask ourselves how Christian or humanitarian it is at all, when fertile land in East Africa is used to produce roses for Europeans, even if certified as fair trade. Or when ever scarcer water supplies in Africa, Latin America and Asia are used for sugar cane, cotton, soya and wine for export, instead of food crops for the local population. We should provide for ourselves with what our land, climate and the farmers of our region can produce, instead of easing our consciences by paying a few cents more for certificates. They don't help anyone, because you can't eat money!

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ A series of laws aimed at reforming the [German](#) social system and labor market. The declared aim of Agenda 2010 was to improve economic growth and thus reduce unemployment.

ⁱⁱ The Hartz IV reform merged the previous unemployment insurance payments and social welfare benefits, leaving both at approximately the lower level of the former welfare benefits and ending insurance benefits for the unemployed after only one year. For Germany it is a clear break-up of the century old insurance standards and social welfare net.

ⁱⁱⁱ "David Ricardo ... was an English political economist, often credited with systematising economics, and was one of the most influential of the classical economists, along with Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill. ... Perhaps his most important contribution was the law of comparative

advantage, a fundamental argument in favour of free trade among countries and of specialisation among individuals.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Ricardo

- iv Landed aristocrats, or “Junkers” of the 19th century owned most of the arable land in the Prussian and eastern German states, giving them virtual monopoly on all agriculture in the German states east of the Elbe river.
- v Attac is an international movement working towards social, environmental and democratic alternatives in the globalisation process.
- vi [Green political party](#) in [Germany](#), formed in 1993 from the merger of existing West German Green Party (founded 1980) and the eastern Germany [Alliance '90](#).
- vii The abbreviation for *die tageszeitung*, Germany's seventh largest national daily newspaper, [cooperatively](#)-owned and administrated through [workers' self-management](#).
- viii Former active Green Party politician.
- ix See comments on this report at: <http://www.currentconcerns.ch/index.php?id=959>