

## The Gift Economy by Genevieve Vaughan

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I believe we can say that Capitalism is Patriarchal, especially Northern or 'Western' Capitalism. We can say Capitalism is actually the economic mode of patriarchy. The reason for this is that the values which underlie the construction of the male gender and the values that motivate capitalism are the same: independence, aggression, competition and domination are thought to be the values of the male gender. Capitalism expresses these values as well, at many different levels, from that of the individual capitalist to the corporation, to the country and the hemisphere. We can say we actually have a gendered economics. Perhaps this identification has not been clear enough because we still tend to look at gender and its values as biologically based, and it appears that Capitalism at least can accommodate women as well. Its values, though similar to male values seem to express an aggressive and competitive 'human nature', in which all participate.

However, if we look at gender as socially constructed, starting with the identity of the nurturing mother as the norm, perhaps we can understand where the patriarchal values come from, if they do not come from biology. A child is identified with its mother as the model for its being whether male or female, however when a boy begins to learn language he finds that he is in a different gender category from the mother, who at that time is the source of all his sustenance. But at that early age all he know is nurturing. He has to learn or invent another identity as did his father before him, and he does this by trying to be the opposite of the mother. Where she includes him, he excludes others, where she holds him near, he tries to be independent, where she feeds, he hits, where she gives, he dominates. Part of my hypothesis is that the early development of the male in opposition to the nurturing mother is the basis of the values of patriarchy and its institutions, including capitalism. Another part of my hypothesis is that the norm of the nurturing mother contains an alternative economic way as well as an interpretative key with which to re interpret many of the aspects of patriarchal thinking. The Western intellectual tradition is actually based on the denial and concealment of the mothering norm and on the destruction and co optation of a world view based on it which I call the 'gift paradigm'. This world view is prior to a second world view which now dominates in our society, the exchange paradigm.

Gift giving involves giving directly to satisfy needs, it is other oriented, paying attention to the other and creating or procuring goods which satisfy the other's specific needs.

Giftgiving transfers value from the giver to the receiver by implication, indeed if the receiver were not important to the giver, she would probably not be satisfying the need. Gift giving creates the bonds of community — in fact the word 'muni' in latin meant 'gifts' and is the root word of both 'community' and 'communication'. By nurturing the bodies and minds of the people in their care women actually create the community whose members would not exist in exactly that way without that sustenance. (I am not saying that this is all that women do, or that they do it all the time, but that gift giving is required and elicited by

children and is necessary for the development of the human community). The opposite logic, exchange gives only in order to receive an equivalent of what has been given. It requires quantification and measurement, and is ego oriented rather than other oriented, since the purpose of the exchange is the satisfaction of one's own need not the need of the other. Exchange creates adversarial relations since each of the exchangers is trying to get the most possible out of the transaction. It does not create the bonds of community but rather separation and independence. Competition to achieve domination of more wealth and more power over others replaces the bonds of community created by gift giving with the bonds of domination in hierarchically structured social groups. The two paradigms are actually in conflict and competition with each other because the gift way threatens the exchange way. In fact if every one were giving to satisfy needs, there would be no need to exchange. The market society based on exchange therefore creates scarcity on purpose so as to not allow gift giving to achieve the status of the mode of production and distribution of the society. The Patriarchal values of Capitalism serve in this creation of scarcity for the many. By possessing and dominating large amounts of wealth Capitalists — along with other powerful men in political and religious institutions, can not only keep the wealth in their own hands and but they can also keep it away from the needs of the many. The poverty of the many is caused by Capitalism and is necessary for the functioning of the market system, not just one of its unintended by-products. Concentrating wealth in the hands of the few is not a safe business however, so hierarchical institutions of armies and police are enlisted to defend it. Enormous amounts of money are spent on armaments. World wide, \$18 billion are spent every week on armaments while that would be enough to feed everyone on earth for a year. This non nurturing expense creates a drain on the nurturing economy, taking away those billions from what I call the Gross Nurturing Product — GNP. The impoverishment of the people by this means also distorts their view making them believe that patriarchy is the only possible reality and the market system is their only possible way to survive.

The nurturing mother often gives more to the male child who is trying to create a masculine identity in opposition to her gift giving identity. This creates a basic paradox whereby the mother values more and gives more to the one who is unlike herself. Not only do patriarchal men and their institutions devalue women and the gift economy. Women do it also, stepping down from the position of the main model for behavior in a culture, putting men before them, and creating a sort of social veil behind which the gift paradigm is hidden.

Women need to take back the power of definition. Women's free labor in the home and elsewhere is gift labor, which is given to the family but also sustains patriarchy itself both in the form of individual men and in the form of the patriarchal institutions. It has been estimated that if housework were counted in monetary terms it would add some %40 to the GNP in the US, more in some other countries. We can also look at surplus value as gift value that is given to the Capitalist by the worker. Surplus value is the part of value of the work that is not covered by the salary of the worker. That is the free gift which forms the profit of the capitalist and motivates the whole market system. Using gift giving as an interpretative key in this way lets us see how much the market system actually depends on gift giving, nurturing, need satisfying labor. The value of the women's labor passes through the labor of the men who have been nurtured by them, and into the surplus value or profit of the capitalist. That free part of the labor is done by men and women, forced into it by

poverty and the functioning of the system. Even if it is forced from the worker for the capitalist it is free.

Globalization is one more development of Patriarchal Capitalism by which more gift labor and cheap resources (resources of which a large part is free to the buyer) can be transferred from the South to the North. The market economy makes it appear that the gifts are going the other direction, that the Capitalists are giving jobs to the people of the South. Having caused enough scarcity through exploitation and debt creation, the North has diminished the level of life in the South so that the price of labor is cheap for the Northern investors – that is it brings a large percentage of gift value. By privileging a few workers by monetizing their labor, Northern corporations create a funnel or bridge by which gifts from the South can be brought to the North, with the appearance that the Corporation is providing the only source of a decent livelihood. A structure of laws is made to uphold the flow of gifts from the South to the North, from the poor to the rich, from women to men. These laws are based on the values of the exchange system, on defending property over the satisfaction of needs, on ‘paying’ for crime, and maintaining the hierarchical structures of dominance. What is needed is not justice, which is based on the system of exchange, but a commitment to finding the problems which cause crime and solving them. That solution may include the protection of the gift givers rather than of the Patriarchal Capitalists, a re visioning of society, putting the gift paradigm first and showing the actual dependency of the market upon gift giving. In fact the market, the whole exchange economy is actually a parasite on the gift economy – and the gift economy allows this. It nurtures the parasite. Recently it has become quite clear how the law is being used to uphold the transformation of gifts into commodities. Not only the gifts of women and communities but the gifts of Mother Earth have become the hosts of the patriarchal parasite. Scarcity is being created where previously there was abundance in many new areas. The patenting of life forms, the commodification of traditional knowledge, the privatization of water are only some of the ways in which what was formerly a free gift is being seized by the parasite and the flow of gifts channeled into its financial institutions, protected by international law.

In order to combat this state of affairs it is important to unite the women’s movement with the movement against Globalization and Patriarchal Capitalism, not to look at feminist issues as those having to do with the self interest of women – according to the logic of exchange – but to look at feminist issues as having to do with a logic of gift giving as opposed to the logic of the market. The other oriented logical gesture which we must practise in order to be mothers needs to become the respected not the disrespected human way. That is what needs to be institutionalized instead of the false and artificial logic of exchange and the values of patriarchy. By re naming the aspects of patriarchy in a way that makes gift giving visible, we can see that we already have an alternative economic form in our hands, if we can only take back our gifts from the parasite. We can do this at all levels from the individual to the institutional, from the South to the North. Women need to become conscious of the gifts that are being given, by others as well as by themselves. Women and men of good will in the North need to ally against Patriarchal Capitalism with the people of the South, and become conscious of the gifts that are being given to the North. We can do this by recognizing the gendered basis of economics as we know it, and by proposing a more human way. This recognition can be aided by a re vision of all of patriarchal thought, restoring the gift paradigm in the innumerable places where it has been taken away. On

this basis of new/old values we can create a gift economy, make peace, and accumulate the abundance for all that is necessary to make it work.