In Germany today even transnational corporations like Hoechst and AEG use the concept of “sustainability” in full-page advertisements in national dailies to try to convince people that they are the ones who guarantee both employment and a healthy planet for “our children”.

This co-optation of the language of protest or resistance by those against whom it is directed is even more pronounced in the case of the term “gender”. Originally coined by feminists to eliminate once and for all the notion that biology, not history and culture, is the root-cause of oppressive man-woman relations, the term is now being used worldwide to make real, live women and their concrete situations invisible again. The “gender discourse” has removed the discussion of women’s problems within a patriarchal and capitalist society onto a totally abstract and hence politically meaningless and irrelevant level. No one interested in preserving the status quo need be afraid of this talk of “gender”.

This is particularly true since “gender” is usually just added on to whatever issue is being discussed or policy planned. Some feminists have characterized this method of filling in the “gender aspect” (or, as I heard it once, the “women’s component”) as “add ‘gender’ and stir”. This approach is typical of a mechanistic, atomistic, linear, reductionist theory of society. It is also typical for the dominant paradigm of science. But feminists have from the beginning emphasized that the “woman question” cannot simply be added on to any other liberal or positivist or Marxist theory of society, but will, if taken to its logical conclusions, revolutionize all existing paradigms and relations, particularly those of capitalist and socialist industrial patriarchy. In the context of this essay, if we take seriously both the concept of ecological, social and economic sustainability and the concept of non-exploitative, non-oppressive relations between women and men, these concepts must be in the centre of our analysis and politics, not simply added on to the analysis of an overall exploitative, unjust destructive global system. To do this we need a different framework, a different view of economy and society. I shall begin with a brief summary of this theoretical framework.
Colonizing: the secret of permanent growth or accumulation

It is usually assumed that "progress" is a linear evolutionary process starting from a "primitive" or "backward" stage and, driven by the development of science and technology (or, in Marxist terms, of "productive forces") to move up and up in unlimited progression. However, since this Promethean project does not respect the limits of this globe, of time, of space, of our human existence, aims like "unlimited growth" can be realized only at the expense of others. There cannot be progress in one part without regression in another; there cannot be development and wealth for some without underdeveloping and impoverishing others. Since "unlimited growth" or capital accumulation are necessarily at the expense of some "others", "progress" or "development" can no longer be conceived as an evolutionary, upward, linear movement but as a polarizing process, following a dualistic worldview.¹

Rose Luxemburg demonstrated that capital accumulation presupposes the exploitation of ever more "non-capitalist" milieus and areas for the appropriation of more labour, more raw materials and more markets. I would call these milieus and areas colonies. They were not only necessary to initiate the process of capital accumulation in what has been called the period of "primitive accumulation" in the beginning of capitalism but also continue to be necessary today to keep the growth mechanism going.²

There is no colonization without violence. Whereas the relationship between the capitalist and the wage-labourer is legally one between owners (the one of capital, the other of labour power) who enter a contract of exchange of equivalents, the relationship between colonizers and colonies is never based on a contract or an exchange of equivalents. It is enforced and stabilized by direct and structural violence. Hence, violence is still necessary to uphold a system of dominance oriented towards capital accumulation.

This violence is not gender-neutral; it is basically directed against women. Contrary to the usual assumption that with modernization, industrialization and urbanization (which is identical with the spreading of the modern capitalist world economy), patriarchy as a system of male dominance would give way to equality between the sexes, it is my thesis that patriarchy not only did not disappear in this process, but that the ever-expanding process of growth or capital accumulation is based on maintaining or even recreating patriarchal or sexist man-woman relations — an asymmetrical sexual division of labour within and outside the family, the definition of all women as dependent "housewives" and of all men as "breadwinners". This sexual division of labour is integrated with an international division of labour in which women are manipulated both as "producer-housewives" and as "consumer-housewives".

As the crisis of the global system deepens, we can observe an increase of violence particularly against women in all parts of the world. As this violence is part and parcel of a political-economic system based on colonization and limitless growth, it cannot be overcome by a strategy aiming only at "gender equality". Within a colonial context "equality" means catching up with the colonial masters, not doing away with colonialism. This is why feminists cannot be satisfied with an "equal opportunities" policy but must strive to overcome all the relationships of exploitation, oppression and colonization which are necessary to maintain global capitalist patriarchy.³
When we began in the late 1970s to seek the root causes of the ongoing oppression, exploitation and violence against women even in the rich, democratic, industrialized societies of the North, we discovered not only that patriarchy continued to exist as a social system but also that it is intrinsically linked to the capitalist system with its aim of ongoing growth of goods, services and capital or, in Marxist terms, of extended accumulation. We realized that the secret of such ongoing economic growth was not, as is usually assumed, the intelligence of scientists and engineers who invent ever more labour-saving machines and thus make labour ever more “productive”, and by the same mechanism ever more redundant. Nor could permanent growth or accumulation be fully explained, as Marx had done, by the fact that the capitalists pay back to the workers only that proportion of the value they have produced by their work which is necessary to reproduce their labour power. We discovered that women’s work to reproduce that labour power did not appear in the calculations of the capitalists or the state or Marx. For all of them the grown-up, usually male worker appears in front of the factory or the office to sell “his” labour power for a wage. But he has not produced this labour power by himself alone without his mother or wife. Yet in all economic theories and models this life-producing and life-preserving work of women appears as a “free good” — like the air or water or sunshine. The “housewifization” of women is therefore the necessary complement to the “proletarianization” of men.

We began to understand that all the dominant theories about the functioning of our economy were concerned only with the tip of the iceberg, namely only capital and wage labour. Its whole base was invisible, namely women’s unpaid housework, caring work, nurturing work or, as we then called it, the production of life or subsistence production. But since many of us had lived in third-world countries for a long time, we saw immediately that this invisible base of the economy included not only women’s unpaid housework and caring but also the work of millions of small peasants and artisans in subsistence economies in the South who produce for local needs. And finally we saw that nature itself was considered a free good, to be appropriated and exploited with no or little costs for the sake of accumulation. All those parts of the submerged economy we termed “colonies of white man” — “white man” standing here for the Western industrial system.

Our thesis is that permanent economic growth or capital accumulation can continue only so long as there are such colonies which can be exploited free of cost or at very low cost. These are areas for “externalization of costs”. Meanwhile more feminists have tried to bring this submerged economy to the surface, especially regarding women’s work. Marilyn Waring in particular has tried to show what it would mean if women’s work counted, if their work were included in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The most interesting part of her analysis is her tracing of the history of the GDP as an indicator of economic growth, which has been considered equivalent to “well-being”. British economists like Keynes, Stone and Gilbert developed this indicator during the second world war to find out whether the war was economically profitable. Subsequently it was universalized by the United Nations to measure the achievements — that is, the growth — of all national economies. Characteristically, it excludes not only women’s work in the household, but also all other non-wage work for subsistence, particularly in the South, and the “work” of nature, taking its regenerative cycles for granted. The destruction of nature is counted only if repairing it involves further wage labour, investment, industry, profits. Only labour that contrib-
utes directly to the generation of profit is called *productive* labour, and only labour that produces commodities is counted in the GDP. Hence, the GDP is an indicator which measures destructive production rather than the well-being of people.

This is quite evident if one looks at the environmental and social costs of what still is called "development". A recent example is the gigantic Sardar Sarovar dam project in India, which plans 3000 dams for irrigation, power generation and drinking water collection. But this "development", meant mainly for urban and rural middle classes, will destroy the livelihood of more than 200,000 mainly tribal people who are being evicted from their traditional habitat in the forests. Besides destroying huge areas of primeval forests with their wildlife and species variety, it will destroy a large number of temples on the river banks, cultural centres since ancient times. The promoters of this project, the World Bank (which meanwhile has stopped its credits) and the Indian government, simply argue that in the process of development some people will always have to suffer. Of course, those who have to suffer are never those who reap the fruits of this development. Medha Patkar, the dedicated woman leader of the anti-dam movement, has calculated that even economically speaking, the project will use up much more money than it will yield.5

But the destructive side of the growth model is also evident in the rich countries of the North, from where the social and ecological costs of industrialization and growth can no longer be exported to colonies. Increasingly it is evident that the more GDP grows, the more the quality of life deteriorates. With the globalization of the economy the old strategy of making growth possible in the centres by an antagonistic division of the world into centres and colonies has reached its limits. Ecological destruction can no longer be kept outside the centres where accumulation takes place.

**Women's work in the global economy**

By the beginning of the 1970s, particularly after the oil-shock (1972), it was clear that the independent development of "underdeveloped" countries had not happened. At the same time the leading economies of the world and the transnational corporations (TNCs) were confronted with high wage demands from workers and a flood of petrodollars which they could not profitably invest in their countries. The solution was a restructuring of the international division of labour. Instead of using the colonies as the source of raw materials out of which to manufacture commodities in the metropolis, the TNCs of the USA, Europe and Japan relocated whole factories, beginning with electronics, textiles and garments, toys and plastics, to specially designated production zones in Southeast Asia, in Mexico and later also in Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and other poor countries. The relocated firms were all firms with a very high percentage of female workers. This transfer was made possible by special concessions which the host countries gave to these companies, including relaxation of labour laws, exemption from import-export tariffs, tax holidays, lax environmental laws and prohibition of strikes. The TNCs chose these countries because of vastly lower labour costs. In 1994, for example, a production worker in Germany earned US$25 per hour, in the USA $16, in Poland $1.40, in Mexico $2.40, in India, China and Indonesia $0.50.

Labour costs in these latter countries are low not only because these countries are generally poor and have high unemployment but also because the great majority of workers hired are young unmarried women. One of the main reasons for this is the
skills they have already acquired for housework: they know sewing and knitting and are supposed to have “nimble fingers” and to be “docile”. When they marry and have children, many either leave the job or they are fired. The housewife-ideology sees a woman’s wages only as a supplement to the man’s. Coming from impoverished rural or urban households, most of these women accept appalling conditions, working up to 12 hours a day at an inhuman speed, vulnerable to sexual harassment and safety and health risks which would not be permitted in Northern countries.6

The global restructuring of the capitalist economy has also penetrated agriculture and has created an enormous expansion of what has been called the “informal sector” in rural and urban areas. The exploitation and over-exploitation of women’s labour in this informal sector enable people in rich countries to buy inexpensive garments, handicrafts and year-round flowers, fruit and vegetables from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Green Revolution in agriculture and now biotechnology have driven many peasants from their land and pauperized them, forcing many to migrate to the cities, where the women have had to take up domestic service, work in a sweatshop or work from their home as home workers. The sex industry, including prostitution tourism, is also an outcome of this process. In this “informal” sector, women are not defined as workers but as housewives, so they do not appear in labour statistics, are not protected by labour laws and are atomized and therefore not organized.

In the latest stage of global restructuring, beginning with the recession around 1990, there has been an unprecedented penetration of all regions of the globe and all areas of life by the logic and practice of capital accumulation, epitomized as global free trade. The system of relocating manufacturing industries into low-wage countries has vastly expanded to include not only practically all poor countries of the world but also the whole of the economically bankrupt Eastern European countries and China. The relocation to cheap-labour countries of labour-intensive, environmentally polluting plants in such industrial sectors as the steel industry, coal mining, ship and car production has led to massive layoffs of skilled workers, mainly male, in Europe and the USA. And when wages rise due to workers’ protests in one of the cheap labour countries, the companies move to countries which are even cheaper, for example from South Korea to Bangladesh.7

The restructuring of the global economy in the direction of ever more export-led industrialization, also in the South and East, is driven by the big TNCs, in whose hands more and more capital and power are concentrated, and politically and ideologically upheld by institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), now the World Trade Organization (WTO).

GATT is an agreement by which the trade barriers which countries have set up to protect certain areas of their economy and society must be removed, so that their markets are open to goods from all over the world. This new free-trade policy assumes that all trading partners are equal and that by using the principle of “comparative advantages” all will benefit. In practice, the weaker partners, above all third-world countries, are forced to accept regulations which threaten their national sovereignty. They must make their agricultural sector dependent on the TNCs and abandon policies of food self-sufficiency, allow Northern firms to set up “dirty” industries in their territory, open themselves up to Northern banks and insurance companies. Above all, through the GATT clause on Trade Related Intellectual Property rights (TRIPs), they must allow foreign
companies and scientists as patent-holders to privatize, monopolize and commercialize their biological and cultural heritage and common property. In combination with the development of biotechnology, gene- and reproductive-engineering, TRIPs open the way for biotechnological TNCs to get monopoly control over all life forms — plants, animals, even human genes — particularly in the South. This will especially affect women, who in many countries are responsible for the preservation of seeds.

But genetic manipulation of plants, animals and eventually also of human beings will also have detrimental consequences in the North. As most consumers in the North already depend on the TNCs for their food, they will lose the freedom to choose food which is not manipulated. As biotechnology is seen as the growth industry, ethical considerations are more and more pushed aside. The expansion of reproductive technology all over the globe opens the way for eugenic, racist and sexist manipulations, and treats women's bodies increasingly as strategic reservoirs of biological raw material for scientific experiments and bio-industry.

Globalization has also brought increasing polarization of rich and poor within the South. Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), imposed on indebted third-world countries to bring their economies under the discipline of the "free market", have had especially disastrous consequences for poor women. In the previous phase of globalization the poor could still hope that the state would eventually take care of them. This illusion is no longer possible. The poor — particularly poor women — are virtually left to fend for themselves. They are practically expendable, both as producers and consumers. This is why poor women are the main target of population control.

At the same time, the new global restructuring has improved the situation of the elites in the third world, making their life-style more or less similar to that of the middle classes in the North. The fastest-growing economies are today some of the Newly Industrializing Countries in Asia (NICs) like Thailand, Indonesia, China and India, where the eagerness of the middle classes to buy Western-produced consumer goods is helping to pull the rich world out of the recession of the early 1990s. It is estimated that consumers in India, China and Indonesia will make up 700 million people by 2010, but the gap between them and the poor in their countries will further widen.

As the relocation of industries to the third world has led to increased unemployment, wage loss and poverty in the USA and Europe, the same strategies are applied to "solve" this crisis in the third world: deregulation and flexibilization of labour; "housewifization" and informalization of hitherto formal labour relations; an increase of home working. The creation of a cheap labour sector — mostly women — within a country, the gradual dismantling of the welfare state and the elimination of subsidies, particularly for peasants, follow the same pattern as SAPs in the third world. The poverty which has returned to the rich countries of the North is mainly female poverty. Here, too, the polarization between the poor and the rich is increasing.

Global restructuring has not brought more wealth and happiness and development to all; on the contrary, the global capitalist economy can grow only as long as it maintains and re-creates inequality between and within the respective countries.

**Employment or work?**

It is generally assumed that work under capitalist conditions is identical to gainful employment for a salary or a wage, and that without such employment people cannot
survive, since it is this which gives them the money to buy their necessary livelihood. As noted earlier, only the labour spent in such gainful employment is considered "productive" and counted as contributing to the GDP.

Since the late 1970s, however, feminists have shown that such "productive" labour could not even exist apart from the so-called "non-productive" unpaid work of women in the household. Not only has all this work been exploited freely without any labour laws and excluded from the GDP, but it is also not considered when people talk of a "labour market", which in fact was created by state intervention in the 19th century.

We may identify three dynamics of the relationship between work and employment.

1. Feminist theory has shown that there is a clear-cut sexual division between unpaid subsistence work and employment. The latter is typically a male-dominated sphere, while work, particularly housework, is done primarily by women. Even when women are also engaged in gainful employment, the responsibility for the unpaid housework is still theirs.

2. Due to the specific functioning of the capitalist production system, costly employment will increasingly be replaced by machinery, hence creating unemployment. At the same time, unpaid work will increase. What was said earlier about capital going to cheap labour areas is relevant here: the cheapness of such labour is due to the fact that a lot of work done in those areas is some sort of subsistence work.

Seen from a global and feminist perspective, therefore, the dynamics between work and employment is such that while employment shrinks, (unpaid) work increases. Here we can again observe a structural polarization. At the same time, employment is seen as the only source of livelihood and creating new employment is considered the main goal. Even though it is crystal clear that full employment for all is no longer possible even in the affluent countries, policy-makers still continue to talk of employment generation as the only solution to the social crisis.

We often hear that an "ecological restructuring" of industrial society would solve both the environmental and social crises because it would create more employment. In my view this argument ignores the dynamics of the capitalist industrialist system which necessarily has to produce commodities for an anonymous market. If we insist on true social and ecological sustainability and on non-exploitative and non-oppressive gender relations, then not all work necessary for the production of life and for the healing of the environment can become wage labour or employment. A large part of that work will have to be done by men and women as free work.

3. This unpaid or low paid work (mainly that of women) continues to be the base on which employment can be organized. In times of ecological and economic crisis it becomes more and more important. This is the reason why women are often referred to as the saviours of the environment.

The contradiction between ecological and social sustainability on the one hand and unemployment and poverty on the other cannot be resolved without resolving the contradiction between work and employment. To try to resolve the first contradiction without the second would mean mobilizing more (female) unpaid work than ever before, both in the South and the North, to uphold gainful employment for a labour aristocracy earning wages like those of German skilled male workers. Such wages could never be generalizable globally and across the sexes.
Megatechnology, commodification and the end of ethics

The values that make for a humane economy and society — not only basic fairness, equity and the intrinsic value of work, but also respect for nature and for the dignity of all creatures, solidarity and compassion, caring and nurturing, mutuality, love and cooperation — stand in sharp contrast to the philosophy and ethics of the European Enlightenment, which considers man’s dominance over nature by virtue of his rationality the precondition for “freedom”. Feminist scholars have criticized this concept of rationality and ethics not only because of its androcentric bias but also because an ethics that polarizes values like caring, nurturing, responsibility for the maintenance of everyday life (housework for example) as merely private values, can neither save the environment nor do justice to women or any other oppressed group.

Lieselotte Steinbrugge has shown that this contradiction already bothered the Enlightenment philosophers like Rousseau and Diderot, who tried to solve it by making women the “moral gender”, responsible for maintaining humane values within an overall competitive and “rational” economy based on expansionism and self-interest.

Many of the discussions about women and ecology around the 1992 Earth Summit reminded me of this old Enlightenment discourse on women and nature. Women were again discovered both as the ones responsible for environmental degradation (firewood collection) and as saviours of the environment.

But it is clear that many women are no longer willing to play this role of being the “moral gender” within an overall immoral global system. Moreover, the damage done by what Ursula King calls the “military and corporate warriors” is so vast that all women of the world are no longer capable of restoring humanity to this system. An even more compelling reason why new, more humane values will find it extremely difficult to challenge the destructive system is that the material, factual violence of modern megatechnology, in combination with global capital, has structured reality in such a way that ethical considerations are made more or less impotent. Let me illustrate this with regard to biotechnology and TRIPs.

Biotechnology, in combination with the globalization of the free trade philosophy, is used by a few “corporate warriors” (TNCs) to commodify, commercialize and monopolize (through TRIPs) all life-forms on earth. The new “creations” of capital and science are not just products of the ever-inquisitive human (male) mind, but commodities to be sold and consumed. Take the example of genetically or biotechnologically manipulated food. A tomato may be produced in Punjab, combined with some genetically produced enzymes from Mauritius or the Philippines, then made into ketchup by a “daughter” of Unilever in Holland and sold worldwide on pizzas in Pizza Huts or on Big Macs in McDonalds, or in the supermarkets where you and I shop. In such a situation, where practically all consumers have been turned into compulsory accomplices of the TNCs, how can we still speak of ethics? How can the consumer assess what conditions of labour and environmental protection existed at the various points in the global production chains whose end result is now the ketchup on his or her hamburger? We do not know what we eat, who is being exploited in which country in order to produce it, who is reaping how much profit from this worldwide production and trade.

All ethics presupposes some sort of choice, some sort of freedom. But this new megatechnology, in combination with the new globalization of capital, has turned all
life into a commodity which can be monopolized. And this commodity is not just a luxury item. We need it. Therefore we become coerced consumers. This is the end of ethics as understood so far. Not even women can make such a world-system more human.

The need for an alternative perspective

I have carried my analysis of the existing capitalist-patriarchal world system to its logical conclusion not to end on a pessimistic note but to destroy the illusion that we can continue to have our cake and eat it too. If we want to uphold our claim for a humane society and economy for all on a limited earth, we have no alternative but to reject the whole destructive megamachine and search for an alternative.

I think this is possible now. More and more people are rebelling against this commodification and monopolization of life; and even those who have so far profited from this system are coming to realize that in the midst of the global supermarket we live in a state of permanent want, danger, catastrophe and warfare.

In the first part of this paper I tried to show that the aim of sustainability is incompatible with a growth-oriented economic system. But the solutions proposed by those world institutions which have tried to keep the capitalist industrial system going are just more of the same — more economic growth, achieved by cutting down on public spending on social welfare, health, education, child-care. These policies have been criticized by feminists time and again, because women, particularly poor women, are the worst hit by them. But criticizing SAPs, the World Bank, the WTO and the TNCs will not get us out of the dead-end into which this system has brought us, especially since the countries of Eastern and Central Europe have given up socialism as an alternative to capitalism and opted for the market economy. A mere demand to restore the welfare state through Keynesian economic policies and more public spending will not do. We need a much more fundamental change if we really want to establish a sustainable economy and society in which women and children are the centre and in which nature is not destroyed for short-sighted monetary gains.

There are no ready-made blueprints of such a society or economy at present. But looking around one finds a surprisingly large number of individuals, groups, organizations, networks and grassroots movements where people are asking themselves what an economy would look like in which nature mattered, in which women mattered, in which children mattered, in which people mattered, which would not be based on colonizing and exploiting others.

It is perhaps no coincidence that such questions are often asked by women — not always women who have studied economics, but women concerned about the well-being of women, children and the planet. They are scattered all over the globe, both in the North and in the South. Some are more involved in practical survival struggles, others in the women’s and ecology movements, others in more theoretical work. What unites them is a fundamental critique of the dominant economic world disorder and the endeavour to find new ways forward. The following draws on the writings of many such concerned individuals and groups.

1. Reintegrating what has been fragmented

An alternative concept of economics will no longer isolate economic activity from other activities and spheres of life. The segregation of economics as an academic
discipline and as practice from politics, psychology, pedagogics, sociology and ethics occurred at the time of mercantilist capitalism in the 18th century, when the concept of economy, derived from the Greek *oikonomia*, the theory of the household, was changed to mean only production for the sake of making ever more money.\textsuperscript{10}

A new definition of economics will make it again part and parcel of all other spheres of life and areas of knowledge. The boundaries between the different disciplines will have lost their sense. A women-children-nature-life-centred economy will again be understood as part of a social whole of cultural, ecological and social interactions of people with one another and with nature. The aim of these interactions will not be the maximization of money-income through cost-benefits calculations, but the *production and preservation of life* in a sustainable manner — not only human life but life of all the species. Ethics will again be an integral part of “economic” activity, not as a simple coercive code of norms, but rather as a way of life, a changed lifestyle, designed for permanence and respect for nature and others.\textsuperscript{11} I call this a *new moral economy*.

A second reintegration will be that of nature into economic activities and theories. Hans Binswanger has shown how nature, particularly in the form of land, was gradually eliminated from the factors of production by classical political-economic theory in the 18th and 19th centuries. The theoreticians of modern capitalism, particularly Adam Smith and Ricardo, and with them also Marx, saw labour and capital as the only source of wealth. Nature became a mere resource, a “free good” to be exploited at will.

But the reintegration of nature into economics as a subject with an intrinsic value of its own goes beyond the strategy of “internalizing” the social and ecological costs which were externalized by the economic calculus, which would only mean the further capitalization or monetarization of “nature” or some kind of “green capitalism”.\textsuperscript{12}

Like nature, unpaid work, particularly of women, must also again become part of the visible economy, because it constitutes the necessary foundation for both wage labour and the market. Here again, a strategy aimed at going beyond the existing system cannot just be “wages for housework”. Although imputing a monetary value to women’s unpaid housework and including this in the conventional calculation of GDPs would help to make this work *visible*, as Marilyn Waring suggests, it would neither lead to a kind of wage for this work nor change the existing domestic and public sexual division of labour, any more than making visible the costs of war has ended weapons production or armed conflict. On the contrary, war is considered to enhance productivity and growth, and in Germany today even some Social Democrats suggest arms production as a means to fight unemployment.

To integrate unpaid work within and outside the household into the overall economic, social and cultural sphere requires above all a change in the sexual division of labour. This means men will have to do as much of this unpaid work as women. They will have to share the responsibility for the care of children, the household, the sick and the old; they will have to share the necessary unpaid ecological work, communally and privately. And political work will also be done by both women and men. Caring, nurturing, mothering, taking care of relationships will no longer be seen as “female” qualities, but as human qualities, expected from everyone.

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2. New concepts

Such reintegration of the fragmented parts of our reality — and several more could be added — would necessarily lead to a redefinition of key concepts and the introduction of new concepts.

A new concept of labour. Including unpaid work in economic theory and practice — no longer as an invisible colonized underground but as something shared by men — would transcend the existing concept of labour as synonymous with gainful employment. To be sure, mainstream economics accepts unpaid labour, in a kind of dual economy, but will not give up the priority of wage labour and money-income as the prime source of livelihood. In an alternative vision, however, work for money-income will play a secondary role. Many of the goods and services people need will be produced locally or regionally and can be exchanged directly or for little money.

More important is the emphasis that work is done for another purpose. The alienation and unhappiness intrinsic to wage labour can be removed only when people see work again as both a joy and a burden. And this can only happen when they see again what they produce, for whom they produce and why they produce at all. One aspect of such a new concept of work needs to be emphasized: that work again will be seen as a direct interaction with nature and other people. Only this awareness and the creativity such work generates will make work again a source of joy. Enjoyment is not something that comes only after work; it should be part of the work life.

A new definition of productive labour. One of the most outrageous lies of classical economic theory, not challenged by Marx, is that the concepts of productive labour and productivity are reserved for money- or capital-producing labour, that of the capitalist and of the wage worker, whereas the work of woman who gives birth to a child, feeds her, cares for her, loves her, and the work of all those who only produce for their subsistence, like many tribals and peasants, are considered unproductive, because they do not produce money directly. It is the explicit aim of capitalist international institutions like the World Bank to destroy such subsistence production and to transform the so-called “unproductive” life-preserving subsistence work of self-sufficient tribals, women and small peasants into “productive” wage labour. That means making them dependent on money income and capital both for their work and their livelihood. Capital cannot grow if large masses of people are self-provisioning. We must insist on a different meaning of productivity, one which rejects the semblance of life given to money as the creator of life and recognizes that life comes out of our interaction with nature and with one another.

A new definition of the aim of economics. With such new concepts of work and of productive work, the aim of economic activity will automatically change. First of all, this will lead to discarding the aim of permanent economic growth. This is one of the main requirements for a truly sustainable economy and society. The aim of a new perspective has to be the direct satisfaction of human needs, not the permanent accumulation of money or profit and their concentration in ever fewer hands. This satisfaction of human needs, however, has to take place within a given, limited globe, within a limited human life, in consideration of the entropy layer, and with a view that all people on earth must be able to achieve the same quality of life. A truly sustainable economy and society which has discarded the growth mania will necessarily aim at some kind of permanence or “steady-state” situation. This does not mean that there will be no life, no change, no interaction, no trade; but the moving force behind these
will not be the selfish, narrow and destructive drive for accumulation but the search for better relations — between humans, between humans and nature and between man and woman — and more happiness.

A new definition of "good life". The mere appeal to more ecologically sound production and consumption patterns, though necessary, will not suffice to make people move in the direction of a truly sustainable or subsistence perspective. What is needed is a fundamental change in the perception and definition of what constitutes a good life.

The mainstream economy defines the "good life" or "happiness" in terms of an ever-growing amount of goods and services, bought in the global supermarket. It is clear, however, that this superabundance of goods and services and amenities has not produced a "good life" even in affluent societies. People’s real needs are not satisfied. The consumption of ever more commodities still leaves people empty, though at the same time addicted to these goods. The goods produced for the sake of profit-making are no longer meant to satisfy legitimate human needs but to stimulate new desires, new addictions, new preferences. The concept of choice has replaced the concept of freedom. One of the greatest perversions of this war against people via consumerism is the selling of violence, horror and brutality to children in the form of videos and war toys. We need another definition of happiness and good life which is not dependent on the purchase of commodities, but which will mean different relations to ourselves, others and nature.

A new concept of satisfaction of needs. A different definition of "good life" and an improvement of the quality of life imply different forms of satisfying fundamental human needs. Manfred Max-Neef and his colleagues, who developed the concept of fundamental human needs, stress that although these are universal, their "satisfiers" — the means and ways by which these needs are met — vary according to culture, region and historical conditions. In capitalist industrial societies, commodities have become the determinant satisfiers.

Max-Neef and his colleagues identified nine fundamental human needs: subsistence (health, food, shelter, clothing), protection (care, solidarity, work), affection (self-esteem, love), understanding (study, learning, analysis), participation (responsibilities, sharing of rights and duties), idleness (curiosity, imagination, games, relaxation, fun), creation (intuition, imagination, work, curiosity), identity (sense of belonging, differentiation, self-esteem), freedom (autonomy, self-determination, equality). These fundamental human needs are the same in rich and poor, in "over-developed" and "under-developed" countries. In "over-developed" industrial societies these needs are met almost exclusively by satisfiers which must be produced industrially and bought in the market. This mental framework created by industrial society has been exported to all poor countries. Very often these are pseudo-satisfiers, because they do not in the end respond to the need (for example, cars bought for status purposes, cosmetics bought to satisfy the need for love). Sometimes they are simply destructive. The arms race, for example, is legitimized by the need for protection, subsistence and freedom.

But there are many different ways not dependent on the market to satisfy those fundamental needs. Take the need for affection. Many women in affluent societies try to satisfy this by going on a shopping spree. They hope that by buying clothes they can win the affection of their partners and others. Their self-esteem has come to be closely
linked to their outward appearance. Yet we know that the need for affection and self-esteem is never satisfied this way. Within a consumer liberation movement one would have to find or invent new ways, particularly non-commoditized ways, to satisfy this need for affection and respect. For example, this might mean spending more time with children or playing with them rather than buying them more toys.

Many non-commoditized satisfiers have the advantage of being synergetic; that is, they satisfy several needs at once. If one takes the time to play with children, one satisfies the needs for affection, protection, understanding, idleness, freedom and identity. And this applies both to the children and to the adults in the interaction. If fundamental human needs are satisfied in non-commercial ways, the processes of satisfaction are often reciprocal: the one who gives something also receives something.

Were such a change of life-style to happen in the rich countries on a large scale, it would not only halt the destruction of the environment and stop the exploitation of the third world, but also change the model of imitative and compensatory consumption provided by middle-class people in the North for the lower classes in their own country and people of the South and leading to more dependency, indebtedness, internal imbalances and loss of cultural identity.

To cite an example, poor rural and urban women at a workshop on sustainability in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 suggested closer links between rural producers and urban consumers, a direct exchange between different producers outside the money-economy, a direct exchange of different types of knowledge between different groups of women and men, a direct link also between third-world and first-world women.16

3. New values and new structures

These women also spelled out clearly a whole new set of values and principles necessary for true social and ecological sustainability, including deliberate simplicity, not as an ascetic value but as a better life in harmony with nature and in peace with our fellow-beings on earth; self-reliance and self-provisioning instead of dependence on imports and exports; cooperation instead of competition; respect for all people, all creatures and the earth and its diversity. Implied in this list is the rejection of self-interest as the only driving force in economics. The women insisted on unitedness, togetherness, sharing as important new values for survival.

These values are not only ethical postulates but are already practised in many grassroots movements. They are necessary for their survival. The poor women in Rio said that their vision of a positive alternative to the destructive global supermarket-model in their local situation would also work at the global level. In order to realize these values, however, a restructuring of the economy as a whole has to take place at all levels.

Here are some of the priorities emerging from their insights:

— Agriculture before industry. Sustainable agriculture cannot be based on the industrial model and on global agro-business. Small peasants must be strengthened. Many more people than now can work in agriculture.
— Land reform is urgently necessary, but it should be combined with ecological considerations.
— Producer-consumer cooperatives can not only guarantee a regular income to small producers but will reduce ecologically dangerous agricultural inputs such as pesticides.
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— *Rural-urban links* will teach the urban consumers again the importance and the value of the work on the land and with nature. They will also make sure that unnecessary and dangerous things will not be produced.17

— New rural-urban links and the principle of self-reliance and food security will require much smaller, decentralized economic regions. Such *bio- or eco-regions* will be able to produce what is necessary for basic survival in that region. The mainstream principle of comparative cost-benefit advantages and the globalization of the world market will be abolished. The role played by trade will be secondary and supplementary. People will export what they produce over and above the satisfaction of their basic needs, rather than starve while producing luxury items for the affluent.

— New *global links* will follow the same principle. This will lead to a shrinking of world trade, of transport costs, packaging and waste, dangerous and exploitative production relations and monocultures. More or less self-reliant societies in the South will demand diversification of the economies of industrial societies. An economy like the German one, in which every third job is dependent on export, is simply not sustainable.

— *World trade*, whatever will be left of it, will be based on the principle of fairness. This means work everywhere must have the same value. The phenomenon of “cheap labour” countries will no longer exist.

— All of this will also restructure the *relationships between the private and public spheres and between production and consumption*. As house work, communal work and ecological work will have the same status as wage-labour, much more work will be available nearby.

— *Reclaiming the commons*. People driven away from their habitat are resisting the privatization of traditional cultural and economic commons.18 Both ecological resources — water, air, land, forests, deserts, oceans and life itself — and the collective knowledge of a people are not to be commodified.

— *Money will be used as a means of circulation*, an instrument of exchange only, not as a means of accumulation. For that to happen interest must be reduced or abolished.19

All these new values, principles and structures require an altogether different anthropology, cosmology and epistemology from the current “mainstream” theories. But as the processes of restructuring the world towards what I call a subsistence perspective — others call it a sustainable perspective — are already underway, particularly at the grassroots level in many parts of the South, this new worldview will definitely also emerge. In these processes people are already practising a different approach, a different understanding of politics — a participatory politics instead of centralized representative politics. This is a sign of hope.

**NOTES**


3 Plumwood, *op. cit.*
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9 Cf., e.g., Utsa Patnaik, “The Impact of Economic Liberalization and Adjustment on Food Security in India” (unpublished paper presented at an International Labour Office workshop on employment, equality and the impact of economic reform for women), New Delhi, Jan. 1993.
17 To these suggestions I would add the proposals of Göring, Norbert-Hodge and Page regarding true agricultural sustainability: moving away from capital- and energy-intensive development towards decentralization, removing subsidies that encourage agro-business at the expense of small farmers producing for local markets; helping farmers to make the transition to organic methods of cultivation; supporting farm research and regional information exchange; and restoring respect for agriculture as a profession; Peter Göring, Helena Norberg-Hodge and John Page, *From the Ground Up: Rethinking Industrial Agriculture*, London, Zed Books, 1993.
18 The resistance of Indian peasants against TRIPs is a case in point; cf. Mies & Shiva, *op. cit.*