



Doing away with “labor”: working and caring in a world of commons

Expeditions into (re)thinking the role of human (re)productive activity

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Pictures created by Yen Sulmowski



Introduction: Caring and Commoning

Similarities of both concepts:

- criticise the prevailing economic rationale (maximising profits, competition);
- emphasize the human dimension, i.e. that wealth must meet the livelihood needs of the people rather than to "serve the markets";
- are based on cooperation and responsibility;
- are relational. They must be constantly created and recreated;
- embody an ethics of care & ethics of reciprocity, that point to many possible ways out of social and ecological crises.

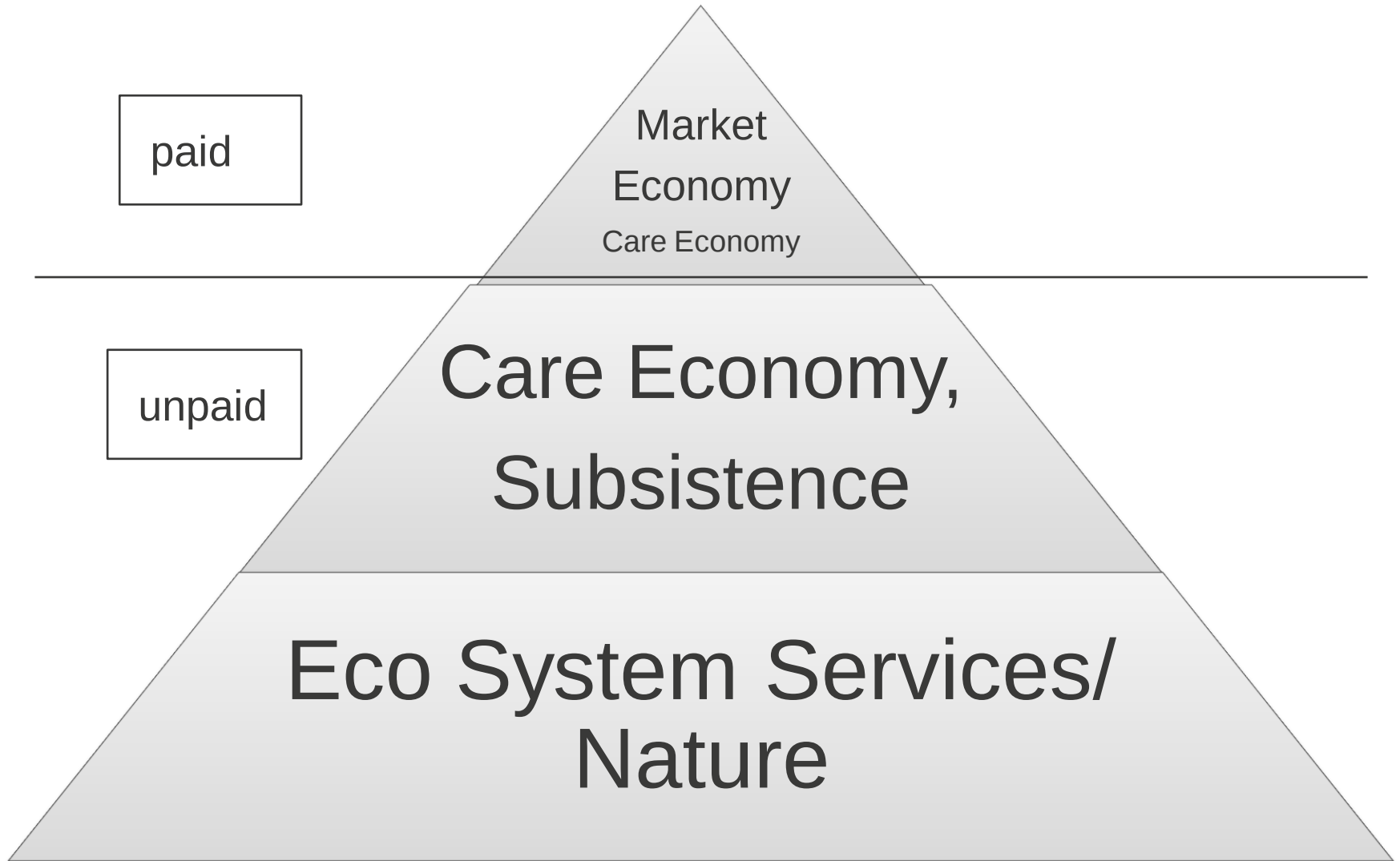


Differences

Commons based peer production	Care work/ „reproductive activities
Self-determined, individual choice	Activities a society cannot do without
Humans are considered to be socially independent	Humans are considered to be dependent and fragile beings, depend on the help of one another for half of their lives (young & old age; ill)
Symmetrical cooperation between people with equal rights and equal status.	Asymmetrical cooperation between care giver and care receiver.
	It is difficult or even impossible to withdraw from caring.



Feminist Economics: Theoretical Basis and Normative Orientation





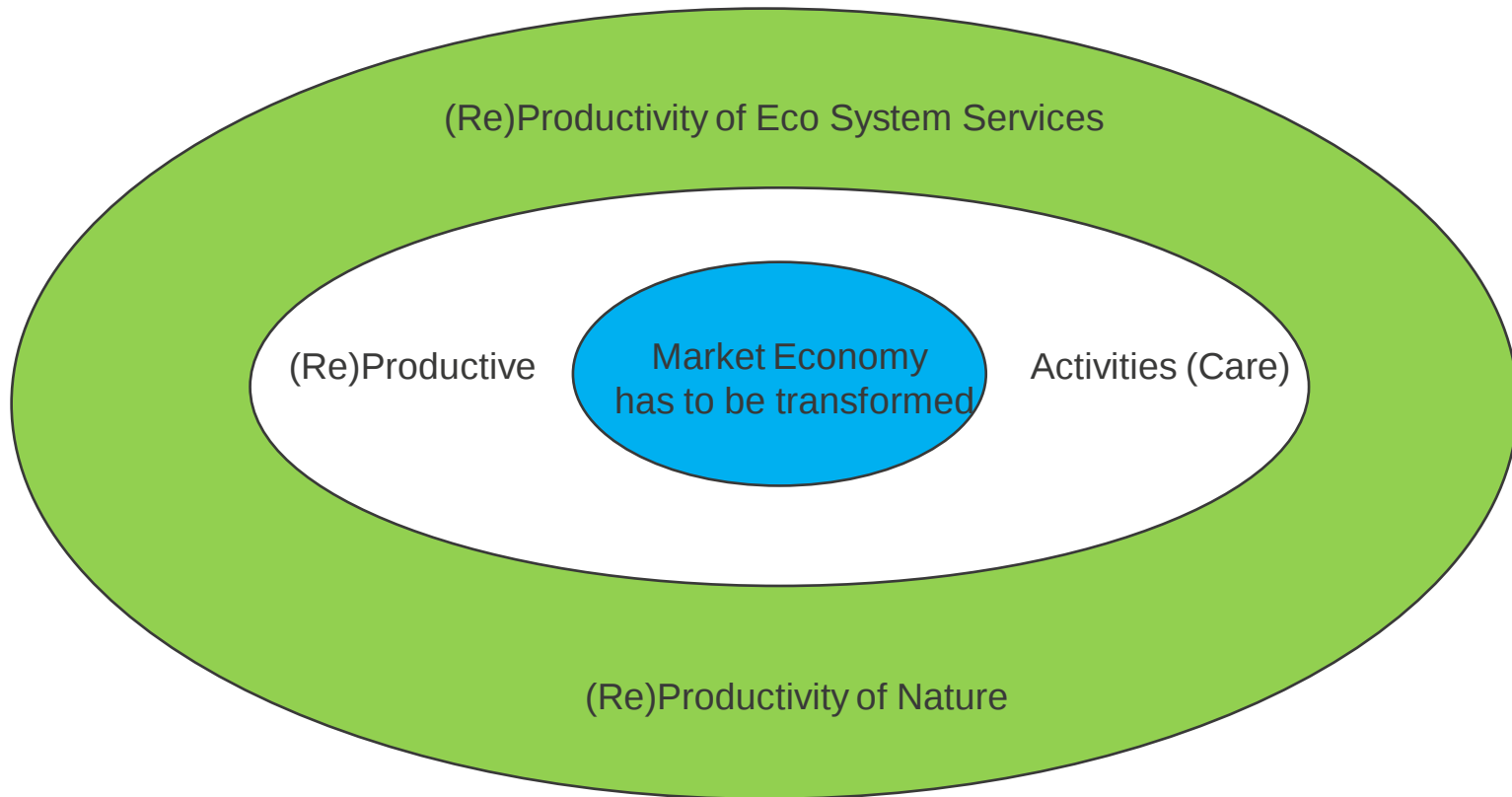
Feminist Economics criticises the prevailing understanding of economics

Economics	Un-economics
Market Economy	Care Activities (education, health, elder- and childcare, domestic work etc.) & Nature/ Eco System Services
Monetary dimension	Social & physical dimension
Productive (considered to be work/labor)	Just „reproductive“ (not considered as work)
High value	Low or no value
	→ Externalisation → Devaluation → Exploitation
	→ The crises of “reproductivity”



Feminist Economists

- stress the inherently generative power of “reproductive” activities,
- call for the conscious design of the “whole of economics” and the “whole of (necessary) work” to ensure the “whole of our livelihood provisioning”





Restructure work ...

What is needed?

- a system that enables social reproduction without social and ecological destruction,
- switch perspectives: use the principles of care economics and commons economics to transform the current economic system as a whole,
- maintaining social and ecological qualities.

The challenge:

- to see and fully understand human and natural (re)productive activity as an integral part of all commoning,
- bring about cultural/civilizational change
- overcome the dominance of the prevailing economic logic

→ Changing our ways of life and work not only requires rethinking and re-evaluating, but also a new language!



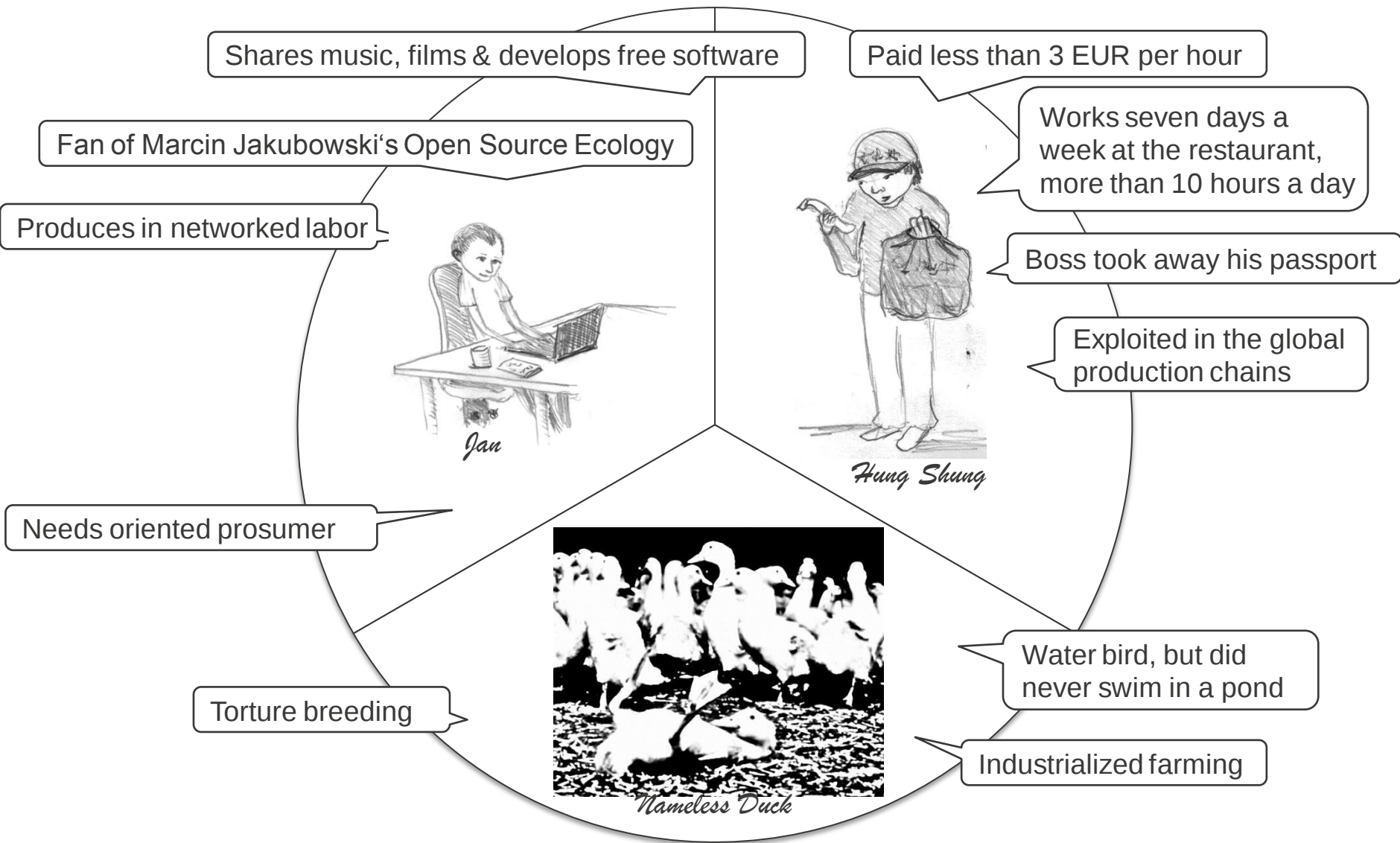
Stories

The following four stories

- illustrate the crisis of “(re)productivity” that needs to be overcome,
- include visions of transformation and attempt to combine caring and commoning,
- raise questions.



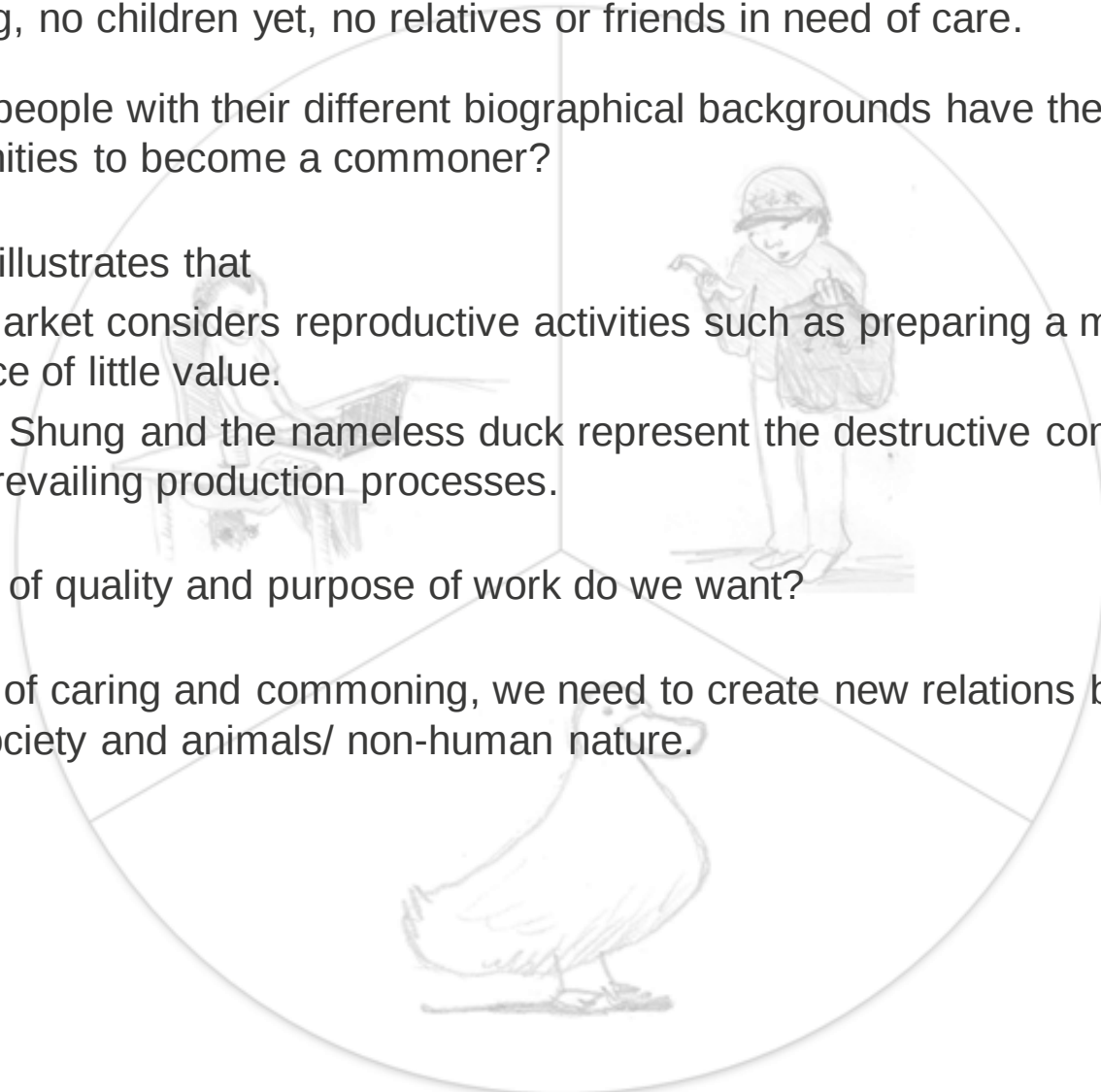
First Story: Jan, Hung Shung and the duck or: How to succeed in autonomous work with and in Commons (e.g. p2p) without any social and ecological blind spots.





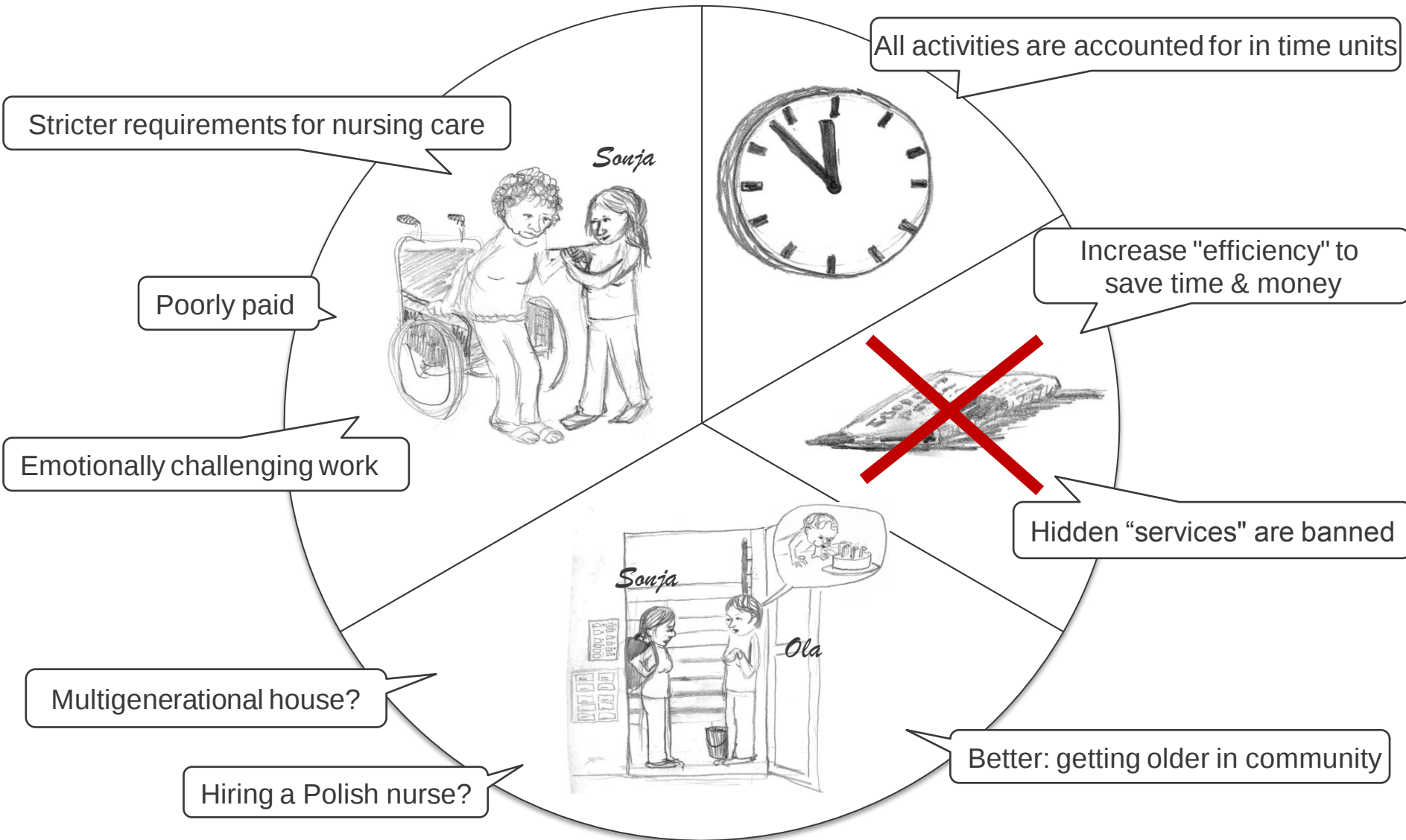
First Story – Analysis:

- Jan: young, no children yet, no relatives or friends in need of care.
 - Do all people with their different biographical backgrounds have the same opportunities to become a commoner?
- The story illustrates that
 - the market considers reproductive activities such as preparing a meal as a service of little value.
 - Hung Shung and the nameless duck represent the destructive components of the prevailing production processes.
- What kind of quality and purpose of work do we want?
- In a world of caring and commoning, we need to create new relations between people, society and animals/ non-human nature.





Second Story: Sonja, her mother and a Polish nurse or: The economisation and ethnicisation of transnational care chains



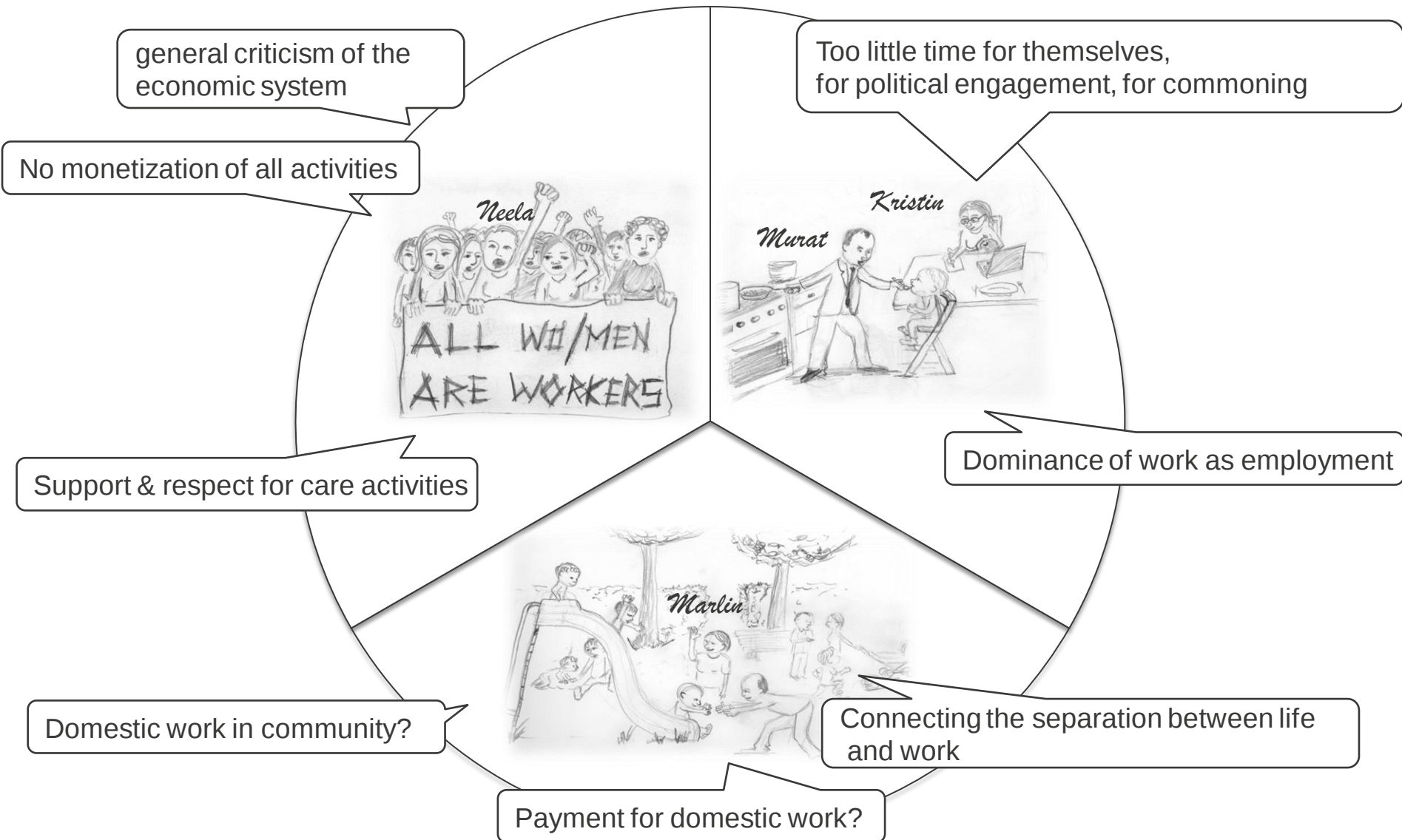


Second Story – Analysis:

- (Elder)Care work provided by the market:
 - poorly paid, working conditions are getting worse, mainly provided by women,
 - not considered as productive,
 - nursing has been transformed into piece work based on listed unit prices.
 - When (elder)care work is provided by families:
 - care givers experience great psychological and physical stress,
 - unpaid,
 - A gendered division of labor (women give care, men earn money).
 - emerging transnational ethnicised care chains
 - gendered division of work (between women and men) + division of work between women according to their ethnic origin.
 - But even if caring is organised as a commons the feminisation of care persists.
- Paradigm shift is needed: new evaluation criteria: appreciation as well as providing a livelihood, basic income
- Who is responsible for ensuring the generative (re)productivity of our society?



Third Story: Marlin, Neela and livelihood provisioning work or: the gap between life and work





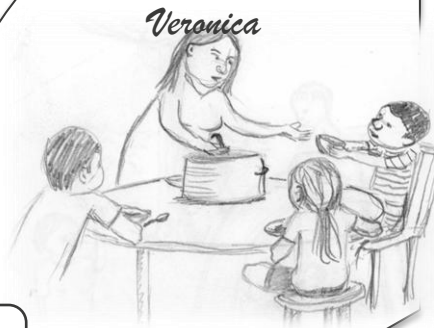
Third Story - Analysis

- Childcare and domestic work
 - are underestimated,
 - offering no or too little socioeconomic security,
 - almost everywhere linked to gender injustice.
- Is monetising of reproductive activities (of care and of nature services) an option?
 - Most Feminist Economists say: no!
- **Pricing trap:** How do we overcome the externalization of care work and nature services without falling into the pricing trap that – if left unattended – can lead straight into the economization of life?
- **Livelihood protection trap:** Who cares for us in a world in which we care for others but still need money to survive?
- **Time trap:** How to solve the problem of being involved in the existing structure of the market and the care economy and having no/ little time left to think of and put alternatives in place?



Fourth Story: Veronica, the maize and the destruction of subsistence farming or: the relation between financial markets and empty pots

Subsistence farmers
vs.
international agribusiness



Price for maize depends on
the finance sector news

Fundamental change is needed

Increasing maize price



Speculation on food stuffs

Green economy
vs.
subsistence production?

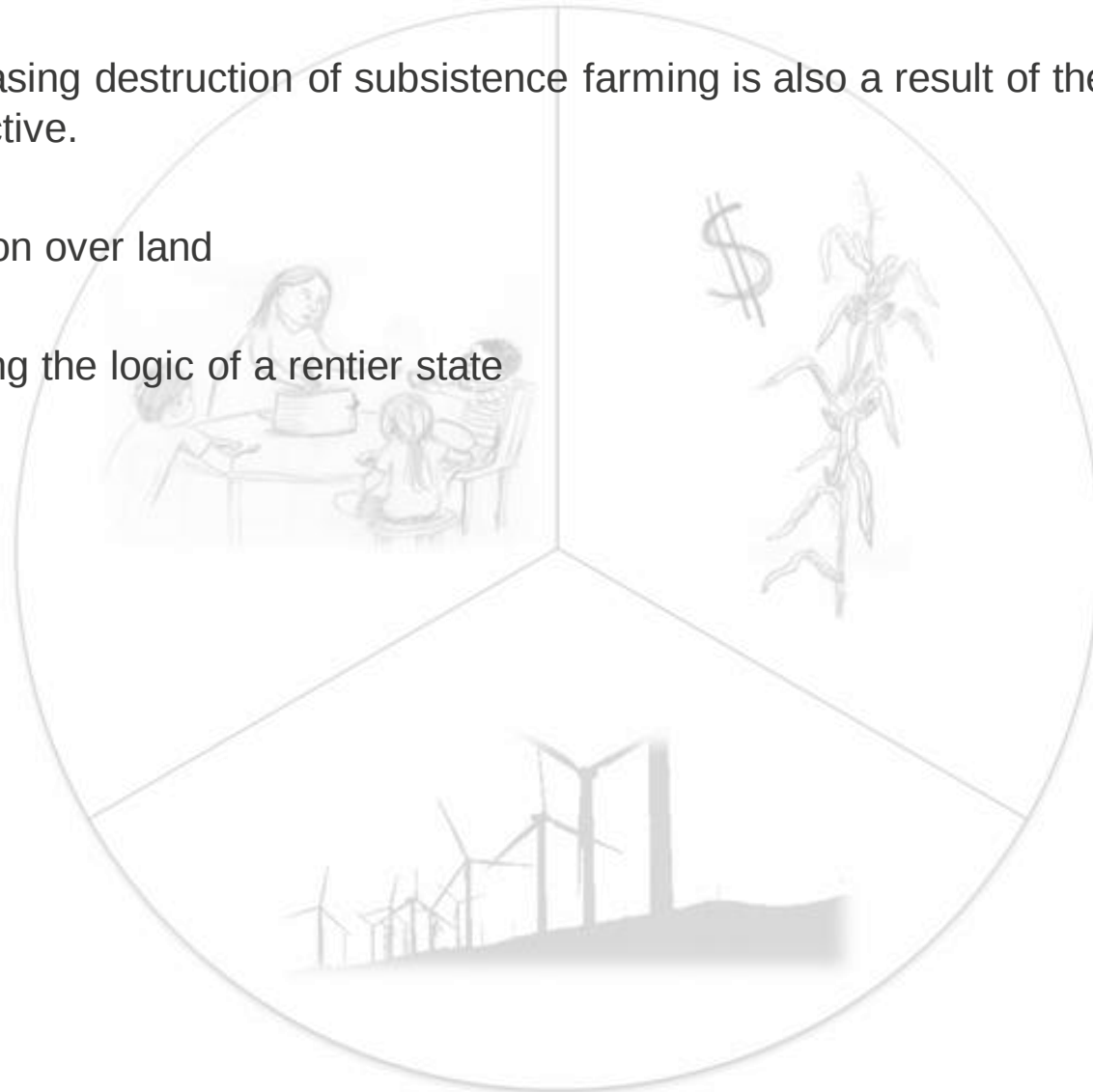


Privatization of the commons (→ NAFTA/ TTIP)



Fourth Story – Analysis:

- The increasing destruction of subsistence farming is also a result of the crisis of the (re)productive.
- Competition over land
- Challenging the logic of a rentier state





Conclusion

- The market economy insulates us from the consequences of our own actions.
- Caring and commoning require proximity and responsibility, thus strengthening moral values and social norms.
- The new way of living and working requires:
 - Expressing radical criticism of the destructive market logic
 - New goals:
 - balance of responsibility
 - (re)productivity and prosumption = (re)prosumption
 - re-organising work not just for a good life, but that work is good life itself.
- For this vision to be realised we need:
 - new alliances,
 - a variety of strategies to match the complexity of the various transformation requirements since there is no blueprint for transformation.
 - room for collective thinking and experimenting.



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Thank you!