

## **Doing away with “labour”: working and caring in a world of commons.**

Expeditions into (re)thinking the role of human (re)productive activity and its inherent nature in a generative commons network

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### **1. Introduction**

It is a great pleasure for me to speak at a conference that is designed to search for an alternative livelihood provisioning system that aims at a good life for everybody. The focus of this thematic stream is to rethink the notion of the economics of “labor” or “work” and, to ask in very practical terms, how to organise and manage the “whole (of) work” for the “whole (of) life”. It is very inspiring for me to see how this ties in with the history of feminist economic thought. Feminist economy is the academic and political environment I come from, and my specific academic focus is on the care economy. This is the perspective from which I approach the commons debate and the commons movement.

While preparing for this keynote presentation in the past few weeks, I realised that the care economy and commons, that “caring” and “commoning” have a lot in common (see also Wichterich 2013).

- Both concepts criticise the prevailing economic rational (such as maximising profits or a culture of competition).
- Both concepts strongly emphasize the human dimension, i.e. wealth is generated to meet the livelihood needs of the people rather than to “serve the markets” or to increase the GDP and accelerate growth.
- Both concepts are based on cooperation and responsibility.
- Both concepts are relational. They must be constantly created and recreated. They can only persist if we constantly renew our efforts.
- Both concepts have ethics (the care economy has ethics of care and commoning has ethics of reciprocity) that point to a variety of alternatives out of the social and ecological crises.

While preparing for this presentation together, Heike Löschmann and Silke Helfrich discussed with me the difference between caring and commoning. These ideas and concepts seem from a structural perspective so similar that they might even be interchangeable. But they are not. There are important differences which deserve a closer look.

One main difference is that the commons based peer production, for example, is a cooperation between people with equal rights and equal status. It is based on voluntary commitment and self-determined choice.

Care work, or using a different terminology “reproductive” activities, are activities that a society cannot exist without. Humans are dependent and fragile beings that depend on the help of one another for half of their lives, first at a very young age and then again at an old age, when they are in need of care (Gottschlich 2012). Caring has a variety of emotional aspects. Similar to commoning, caring is based on attention, mindfulness and cooperation. However, the cooperation between caregiver and care-receiver is asymmetrical (Jochimsen 2003: 85). Caring is therefore based on a different type of reciprocity. Furthermore, it is difficult or even impossible to withdraw from caring, whereas it is much easier to leave a community of peers. It is mainly due to these differences that this conference stream raises the question how to combine caring and commoning in order to ensure the reproduction of society as a whole and thus providing for our social and ecological livelihood support systems.

Let’s now take a step back and look at the links between the organisation of care work and of commons. I would like to start by giving you a short introduction into the thinking of Feminist Economists (e.g. Biesecker 2012; Biesecker & Gottschlich 2013; Biesecker & Hofmeister 2010; Gottschlich 2012; Perkins & Kuiper (2005); Plonz (2011); Schnabl 2005; Tronto 2003; Wichterich 2012, 2013; Winker 2012). Then, I will illustrate some essential ideas by presenting four stories from everyday life.

## **2. Feminist Economics and the Care Economy: Theoretical basis and normative orientation**

- Feminist Economics criticises the fact that there is only one dimension to the prevailing understanding of economics: Based on this understanding, economics is restricted to market processes, following a purely monetary definition. Unpaid care activities as well as the productivity/ the services of nature are considered as “un-economics”, worthless, and “just reproductive”, even though these activities are the foundation and the prerequisite of all economic activities.
- Feminist Economics criticises the fact that there is this differentiation between care and the market economy, the human system and the ecosystem as well as between productive and “reproductive” economic processes including their inherent gender-specific hierarchies.
- This externalisation is inextricably linked with the devaluation of the “reproductive” and causes its excessive and carefree exploitation. The result is the destruction of our livelihood support system and a progressing alienation hereof worldwide. The processes of externalisation, devaluation and exploitation are the underlying common cause for our current social and ecological crises. They are all an expression of one and the same crisis: “the crisis of the reproductive” (Biesecker & Hofmeister 2010).
- Feminist Economics, however, stresses the productivity of “reproductive” activities – commoners might say the inherently generative power of “reproductive” activities – and the unity of production and reproduction, actively calling for the conscious design of

“(re)productive” activities. Shaping the whole of economics and the whole of (necessary) work to ensure the “whole of our livelihood provisioning”<sup>1</sup> means much more than just adding up or taking into account notions of economics and ways of working that up to now have been externalised or ignored. This is not only about taking these aspects out of the shadow into the limelight. The “whole of work” concept also contains criticism of paid work/gainful employment that has been subject to very little analysis and is still considered to be a fixed integral part of the labour concept. Criticism of alienated and precarious employment is also something that is shared by Feminist Economics, the Commons debate (Brigitte Kratzwald will take this up in her speaker’s corner) and trade unions’ ideas and calls for decent work.

- It is just as obvious for feminists or proponents of subsistence economies to stress the productivity of what is supposedly purely reproductive as it is apparent for commoners to underline the generative productivity of the commons. The prevailing economic system, however, makes these realities invisible. The wealth generated through commoning and caring as well as the productivity of the ecosystem are immense and yet they cannot be measured. This wealth is for a long time neither been reflected nor appreciated. (To make it clear, the latest attempts to monetize eco system services are no answer to the problem.)
- This means that attempts to restructure work can no longer prioritise the reconciliation of the separated spheres, including the reconciliation of the contradicting rationales of the market logic and the care logic. What we need instead is a system that enables social reproduction without social and ecological destruction. And this is my answer: It will only be possible by switching perspectives, by using the principles of care economics and commons economics to transform the current economic system as a whole. Because it is this kind of work that contributes to maintaining social and ecological qualities. The less of this work is done, the more severe the social and ecological crisis gets. In order to enable a transformation process that promotes sustainability, we need a new social standard practice and that is more caring and more commoning. Caring and commoning help to bring about prevention (rather than aftercare), cooperation (rather than competition), focussing on the necessities of livelihood provisioning (rather than growth rates).
- It is going to be a huge challenge for all of us to see and fully understand human and natural reproductive activity as an integral part of all commoning. But this is the only way to successfully bring about cultural change. This is the only way to slowly overcome the dominance of the prevailing economic rationale and finally fully replace it.
- Changing our ways of life and work does not only require rethinking and re-evaluating but also a new language. We have to part with old terms and invent new ones because otherwise their inherent meanings will never stop reproducing themselves in our minds.

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<sup>1</sup> This notion was inspired by Brigitte Kratzwald

### 3. Stories

The following stories shall illustrate the crisis of the “(re)productive” that needs to be overcome. They also include visions for transformation and the attempt to combine the practices of caring and commoning.

I am going to tell these stories from the perspective of realities here in Germany and as a European. I am very pleased to see so many different life worlds and related practical experiences represented in this international audience, which will surely enrich and broaden my own approach and understanding.

I hope that by telling these stories it becomes clearer, that the (re)productive is the basis for all economic activities so that it is no longer ignored, belittled or exploited. We will wind up by discussing questions that must be raised if we are really serious about “Doing away with labour: working and caring in a world of commons“.

#### **3. 1. First story: Jan, Hung Shung and the duck. Or: How to succeed in autonomous work with and in Commons (e.g. p2p) without social and ecological blind spots**

This is Jan. He studies Business Information Technology and Politics at the Leuphana University of Lüneberg in Germany. He loves to share music and films. He is currently writing a paper that examines the different debates on the issue of intellectual property rights for seeds, drugs and software. He got more than once into an argument with one of his professors who considers people sharing music or films as criminal software pirates. So Jan works even harder to explain why it is of vital importance for a society to fight for free access to knowledge and against any restrictions or privatisation – that is the Knowledge Commons. He thinks Marcin Jakubowski’s Open Source Ecology is just brilliant. After graduating from university he would like to work as independently as possible. He wants to be a freelancer sharing office facilities with others in a co-working space. Developing free software in self-managed projects would be right up his street. But will he earn enough money to have a good life? If there was a basic income for all, he could give it a try without having to fear for his very existence. Jan likes these new ways of working, independently on the one hand whilst seeking to network with others on the other. No big boss calling the shots. That would save him from the stress he knows from his parents. But he also likes the idea of being able to better overcome the constraints of the market. What Jan finds particularly exciting is that he can use a 3D printer for custom-made parts, even vital ones, instead of buying them at the supermarket. He appreciates very much the awareness of having a self-determined life and job, which means being a **prosumpt**, a producer and consumer at the same time. Jan is getting hungry. He has forgotten to go shopping. His roommates are also out, so there is no one who might have cooked a delicious meal. The fridge is completely empty. Jan decides to order his favourite dish at a Chinese restaurant. This dish is also very cheap: duck sweet and sour.

This is Hung Shung. He will meet Jan for no more than two minutes, collecting the cash: 5.50 EUR. He is paid less than 3 EUR per hour. Usually he does not work as a delivery boy, since he does not speak a word of German. But his colleague is running a fever, so Hung needed to fill in for him. Hung Shung was hired in China as a chef for specialities in a German restaurant. Chefs for specialities are subject to special entry requirements. He has paid 10.000 EUR for employment services and is now in debt. The German Aliens Department approves visa applications only if these contracts provide an appropriate salary. The German employment contract that Hung Shung had signed but which he didn't understand provides for a monthly gross salary of EUR 1,433.00 including decent accommodation and appropriate food. However, Hung Shung signed a second contract in Chinese, differing from the German contract. Hung Shung works seven days a week at the restaurant, more than 10 hours a day. He sleeps on a mattress in the cellar of the restaurant. He cannot permit himself to have an argument with his boss since his boss took away his passport. His visa is only valid for working at the restaurant of his boss. This is not what Hung Shung had in mind when coming to Germany for work. People told him that you can earn a lot of money if you just work hard.

Jan does not know that Hung Shung is a victim of trafficking. He is just one amongst millions of people who are being exploited in the global production chains. What Jan doesn't know either is where the meat in his meal comes from.

It is the meat from a nameless Peking duck. This duck did not lead a happy life on a farm. It has never seen the sun. And although Peking ducks are water birds, it has never swum in a pond. It was raised in a fattening house in Vechta in Emsland, a region in northern Germany, which has become synonymous with industrialised poultry farming. Its life lasted for no more than six weeks. Towards the end of its life it could no longer stand on its feet, since muscle growth was promoted for maximum weight gain.

Neither Jan nor Hung Shung know that animal rights activists call this kind of breeding torture breeding.

This first story is based on the following references: Cyrus, Vogel & de Boer (2010); [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linux#Entwicklung\\_heute](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linux#Entwicklung_heute), <http://opensourceecology.org/>; KTBL (2009); Moldenhauer (2004, 2005); PETA (2012); Statistisches Bundesamt (2012); Wassermann & Winter (2001).

## Analysis

→ Jan's vision of a good life reflects many aspects that are of vital importance to large-scale transformations. And that is: working independently together with others, focusing on the practical value of one's work without any alienation, his commitment to Global Knowledge Commons, his enthusiasm for Open Source Ecology, which is also about establishing a new relation between people/society and nature.

- Thus, by mixing open source permacultural and technological cycles, people like Marcin Jakubowski intend to provide for basic human needs while being good stewards of the land, using resources sustainably, and pursuing sustainable livelihoods. Openly shared information is a gift that enables us to manufacture industrial products locally, using open source design and digital fabrication.
- Although Jan is fighting for a better world, caring has been neglected (so far). Caring in the sense of caring for people that depend on him and the responsibility that comes with it, that is to make an individual contribution and to actively look for structures of collective responsibility. Jan is young. He has no children yet and there are no relatives or friends in need of care.
- This begs the question: Do all people with their different biographical backgrounds have the same opportunities to become a Commoner? I will use the third story to elaborate on this aspect.
- The story of Jan, Hung Shung and the duck, however, illustrates that we are still nowhere near this vision of a good life in harmony with nature. Hung Shung and the nameless duck represent the destructive components of the prevailing production processes. The aliveness is subordinated to making and maximising profits.
- The market considers reproductive activities such as preparing a meal as a service of usually little value, involving low costs.
- I have to say that this example is not an exaggeration: The story of Hung Shung was reported to a Berlin human rights' organisation (Cyrus, Vogel & de Boer 2010). This is not an isolated case.
- The aim of this conference is to create a vision of “working and caring in a world of commons”. I believe that creating a vision also means expressing criticism. That is why I think that it is essential to draw attention to the fact how hostile to life the current system is. I am convinced that it is equally important to identify the reasons for this hostility. They can be found in the market logic.
- Based on this criticism we can forge alliances and look for common ground between trade unions and human rights' activists. I can very well imagine that calling for “doing away with labour” may sound strange to trade unionists. We may bridge this gap by calling for decent work, thus paving the way for reflecting on this issue together. We may also want to have a common debate answering the question: What kind of paid activities would we like to promote because they can contribute to a good life? This will shift the focus to the question of quality and purpose, which provide the sense of working.
- Partners teaming up for a world, in which everything that is alive will be respected and appreciated, are a phenomenon that we know from animal or ecological movements or animal studies. In the highly industrialised agricultural sector of the Global North, there is no room left for animals as creatures, as living beings with their own rights. In a world of caring and commoning, we need to create a new relation between people/society and animals/nature.

### **3.2 Second story: Sonja, her mother and a Polish nurse. Or: The economisation and ethnicisation of transnational care chains**

This is Sonja. She is a carer for the elderly working for an outpatient nursing service. She doesn't earn much and working with elderly, sometimes slightly confused and lonely people, can be emotionally challenging. But she has never regretted taking on this job. In the past few years, however, she has grown increasingly concerned whether this is still the right job for her given the changing circumstances. The requirements for nursing care are getting ever stricter. All activities are expressed in time. And time is what they don't have. As if it was possible to feed and wash people or change diapers ever more rapidly. This leaves her hardly any time to talk to elderly people, because if she talks to them, she will not be able to finish work in time. It was only last month that following the advice of a controlling agency the head of the nursing service asked Sonja and her female colleagues (at the moment there is not a single male colleague) to draw up a list with all "hidden" activities. They were categorised and then banned from their daily working routine to save time and money and to be more efficient. These activities also included retrieving the mail from the letter box and giving it to the person in need of care because they themselves were no longer able to do so. Sonja and the other nurses, however, have continued to fetch the mail. But now this is an additional, hidden activity they are not paid for.

Sonja often thinks of her own mother who is suffering from dementia but lives far away with her sister in southern Germany. They couldn't bring themselves to put their mother into a home, precisely because Sonja knows how little time is left for the staff to take loving care of the patients. However, she cannot work full-time and take care of her ill mother. Her mother needs care 24/7. Sonja is therefore very grateful to her sister that she takes care of her mother and also to her brother-in-law who is now the only breadwinner in the household. Sonja often feels bad about it, because of her mother who gave her a carefree childhood, because of her sister who is no longer able to make time for herself and because of her brother-in-law who used to share the financial burden with her sister and is now even forced to be the only breadwinner.

Sonja gets very worried when thinking of what it would be like when she is old and needs to be taken care of. She hasn't met anyone yet she can imagine to share a flat with when being old. Maybe a multigenerational house would be a better idea. Because if all flatmates were old and probably ill, who would be helping whom? But is it really possible to provide care in a multigenerational house? What is most definitely out of the question is hiring a Polish nurse to care for her at home like her elderly neighbour did. Sonja has a vivid memory of meeting Ola in the hallway. She was very sad because it was her little daughter's birthday and she could not be with her and her family in Poland. Sonja has only very recently learned of a more promising approach on TV. The report was entitled "Getting older in community". It was about the community Bürgergemeinschaft in Eichstetten that has agreed by contract with the people living in the community that the village „puts the intergenerational contract into practice in everyday life“. This means that those who so wish are guaranteed to be able to grow old at home. Sonja is thrilled at this new idea of care which

is based on a combination of voluntary and social work. The community arranges for social and basic public services. However, she has quickly realised that similar to her nursing service this type of care model involves again mainly female carers.

This second story is based on the following references: Biesecker & Gottschlich (2005); Brensell (2012); Çağlar, Gottschlich & Habermann (2012); Gottschlich (2012); Lang & Wintergerst (2013); Wichterich (2013).

## Analysis

- ➔ This is an example from Germany, where care for the elderly is a big issue due to demographic change. This is another example illustrating very well the following: It is the underlying principle of the existing economic system to externalise reproductive activities/ care services. This leads to depreciation and underestimation of care work provided by the market (in our story: paid care for the elderly): It is poorly paid, working conditions are getting worse and it is mainly provided by women.
- ➔ In market terms, the reason for low pay is: low productivity. In fact, the productivity and efficiency of these activities cannot be increased. As long as market criteria are used to evaluate care work, it will always remain undervalued since there are no or only restricted possibilities to make these activities more profitable (Wichterich 2013).
- ➔ Caring for other people's lives thus goes against the logic of profit maximisation and efficiency dominating the market economy. There is less and less time for care and nursing of people. Nursing has been transformed into accounted piece work based on listed unit prices. This short-term rationale of maximising (financial) benefits has nothing to do with human dignity or quality of life. Since paid care work (in the form of personal services) has also the aim to support old and ill people or those who are in need of assistance in coping with everyday life. These are time-consuming activities. Care givers are required to be alive and human. Transferring capitalist economic principle to care work has a destructive impact on care receivers as well as on care givers who take their care work very seriously (Gottschlich 2012).
- ➔ When care work is provided privately, other aspects of the crisis of reproductive activities are prevalent. Care givers are under great psychological and physical stress, they cannot provide for themselves financially because they give unpaid care to others. This problem is often solved privately by falling back to traditional, gendered division of labour (women give care, men earn money).
- ➔ That's why it is of vital importance to recognise care work as a challenge to be addressed by the whole of society: This, however, means that a paradigm shift is required, i.e. we need different evaluation criteria in society for activities that make a contribution to reproductive activities benefiting the whole of society, in intangible terms (appreciation) as well as tangible terms (providing a livelihood).

- We have to critically reflect on the emerging transnational ethnicised care chains (Polish female carer). For the individual this may mean that there is empowerment of foreign women who work as household workers or domestic carers (strengthening their independence and freeing them somehow from the economic, social, cultural and religious constraints of their home country.) Just as often, though, this comes at a high price for individuals because they are separated from their families and friends. This means in structural terms that gendered division of work (between women and men) will continue to exist in the area of reproductive activities, compounded by a division of work between women according to their ethnic origin. The problem of lacking caregivers in Germany is “solved” by hiring women from Poland. And the lack of caregivers in Poland is “compensated” by carers from Ukraine. Christa Wichterich (2013) called this the “imperial reproduction process”.
- In the example of the citizen’s community in the South German City of Eichstetten caring is commoning. This may seem as the most normal thing in the world to people with a different cultural background, similar to the saying: “It takes a village to bring up a child.” However, this is a small (institutional) revolution by German standards. But even in this case of commoning, the feminisation of care work continues to exist, as this model almost exclusively relies on women as well (Lang & Wintergerst 2013; Wichterich 2013). But aren’t we all responsible for maintaining and ensuring the generative productivity of our society?

### **3.3 Third story: Marlin, Neela and care work for children. Or: Livelihood provisioning work and the difficulty to bridge the gap between life and work**

Marlin went to the playground to meet other parents. The weather is fine and they want to continue the debate that was raised at last night's parents meeting. Should you pay for domestic work? And if so, how much money should you earn? Marlin feels like travelling back in time. She remembers her mother having a similar debate in Germany in the late 1970s. The aim, however, was not to monetise all activities. The idea was rather to raise awareness for domestic work. Domestic work has been excluded from the economic system so far and it has been mainly women carrying out his work, which can be identified as being the other half of capitalist exploitation. Only very recently, her Indian friend Neela told her on the phone that the women’s movement in India initiated a campaign with the slogan “all wo/men are workers”, no matter whether people work in the productive sector or in care services. This campaign too has expressed a general criticism of the economic system. It is about joining forces to provide a counterbalance to the increasingly corporate-driven growth paradigm that tends to overexploit common pool resources, and denies recognition and valuation of all livelihood provisioning work. Neela made it very clear: The issue is not to pay for housework and be done with it, but to enable societies to evolve forms of mutual and collective forms of support and respect for care work.

Marlin can very well understand why. She has made the same experience. Since their children were born, she and her husband have taken on the traditional roles performed by man and women. Before

that they shared all reproductive activities, be it cleaning, washing or cooking. She loves spending time with her children but she also misses her work as a journalist. She used to love writing articles for Wikipedia. But now after putting her children to bed, she is much too tired to do so. But all parents she knows have too little time. Too little time for themselves, too little time for political engagement. It's the same for all parents, even for those who are trying hard to equally share all reproductive activities like her friends Kristin and Murat. They would like to spend as much time with their children as possible but they also love to being (gainfully) employed. Not to mention the fact that both of them have to earn money given their lifestyle. Living on one income would not be possible. At the same time, however, she feels stuck between a rock and a hard place. Her life is dictated by the requirements relating to gainful employment. Reproductive activities must be adjusted to meet these requirements. It is always a problem when institutions such as kindergartens or schools are closed for holidays and neither she nor her husband have sufficient leave days. But it is also a problem when her children fall ill or are dawdling in the morning and Murat misses his train for work.

Marlin couldn't think of anyone she knows who has been able to bridge the gap between life and work, who works in different areas forming a harmonious whole, who does not have to fear for their very existence and actively participates in shaping a world providing a good life for everyone. Tomorrow she will attend a lecture. She has already asked a childminder to look after her children. The Housework Commons: Choosing to do Domestic Work in Community. That sounds interesting. The speaker will talk about his experience of organising time-based economics that is being practiced in intentional communities in the US. This might be inspiring. Change may be possible...

This third story is based on the following references: Biesecker & Gottschlich (2013); Dalla Costa & Jones (1973); König & Jäger (2011); Winker (2012; Allen Butcher, 2013).

## Analysis

- ➔ As different as realities may be on this planet, domestic work and childcare are underestimated almost everywhere, offering no or too little socioeconomic security to those who perform care work or domestic work. And almost everywhere in the world, this issue is closely linked to gender injustice.
- ➔ From a feminist perspective, monetising these activities that combine living and working is not an option. How to measure it? Playing with children and cleaning up afterwards, washing their clothes, comforting them when they get injured, putting them to bed and reading bedtime stories? This will be obvious to people familiar with the Commons discourse. Commons cannot be measured either, but they are of immeasurable value. They are common wealth.
- ➔ But the critical question remains: Who cares for us in a world in which we care for others but still need money to survive? We need a transition strategy. For example, we need to dis-

cuss whether a basic income might be worth considering to provide a temporary solution to the problem.

- At the moment, it is an interdependent and hierarchical relation between paid and unpaid work. As I said in my opening remarks, unpaid care work is the basis for paid work. At the same time, it is paid work with its tight schedule, its efficiency requirements, its logics based on competition and maximisation of financial benefits that makes it so hard to perform unpaid work and care.
- There is another problem that is striking and needs to be discussed. The problem of being involved in the existing structure of the market and the structure of care economy, i.e. the necessity to earn money while providing care to others. So there is little time and space left to think of and put alternatives in place. There is no time for self-development and leisure. There is no time for political involvement. There is no time for commoning. Biographically speaking, people start to feel the effect of these interdependent crises of gainful employment and reproductive activities when having children and/or caring for ill, elderly relatives. The gendered division of work often starts or intensifies with the birth of the first child. However, there are some exceptions indicating new coping strategies. People often seek more gainful employment to pay for support in the reproductive area, especially for cleaning (and this is where the ethnicizing processes of global reproduction chains kicks in. In Germany, many people who are poorly paid to do the cleaning in other people's homes have a migrant background).
- We need a vision of how to establish a framework for a good life. We need to answer the question of how to reduce all those activities that do not promote a good life while increasing the quantity and quality of those activities that will help us to turn our vision of a good life into reality. No matter whether we will get paid for those activities or not.

### **3.4 Fourth story: Veronica, the maize and the destruction of subsistence farming. Or: the relation between financial markets and empty pots**

It is not the news from the finance markets that makes Veronica Díaz worry about how to provide for enough food to feed her three children tonight. But in the end, it is the stock exchange news that is at the root of it. After all, the price for maize also depends on these reports and tortillas, which are key basic foodstuff in Mexico, are made from maize. Like millions of other Mexicans, so called Campesinos, who are mostly but not only subsistence farmers, Campesinos, Veronica had lost out in the competition with international agribusinesses and was thus forced to leave her village and live in the slums of a big city in the North: Tijuana. Veronica Díaz still has a job at a world market factory, a Maquiladora. She knows, however, that at the age of almost 30 she risks losing her job because the factory prefers hiring very young workers who are not so quick in fighting bad working conditions. But today she is facing another problem: So far her wage has been hardly enough to pay for transport and food, but what to do in the face of rapidly increasing maize prices?

Yesterday she talked to her neighbour about how destructive this world is: a world, in which investing in the real economy seems much less profitable than investing in financial businesses, a world, in which it is allowed to bet on prices for maize, wheat and other food. As if the world was just one big casino. Many people living in the Global North are involved in the speculation in agricultural commodities without even being aware of it. When investing into pension funds or life insurances to provide for old age, there money is sometimes invested in the speculation on foodstuffs. After, it are these prices that decide whether Veronica's children will get tortillas tonight or not.

Investing in the real economy, however, is not per se desirable either. Veronica has only worked with this contact lenses production company for a few years but the destruction of her skin caused by her dealing with toxic substances on a daily basis is already visible. The exploitation of workers – most of them are women due to lower wages and the inhumane working conditions offered by many multinational firms – is real but not ethical.

Veronica believes that we need fundamental change in the way business is done today. But even new ideas, such as the Green Economy concept, don't touch upon existing inequalities, sometimes they even make them worse.

Subsistence farming in the Global South, for example, is constantly being destroyed because so much land is needed for renewable energies. In terms of the Green Economy, this is just a conversion measure. Her friend Bettina Cruz Velázquez was touring Europe in spring 2012 to tell people that they had to give the agricultural land in her village to an electricity company for the erection of wind turbines. People in Mexico, however, fought very hard for this land during the Mexican Revolution in 1910, which was then granted to them as inalienable common land. But since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force, these areas have been privatised again. At the same time, the forest where edible fruits are growing (such as Pitayas) has also been cleared for this purpose. And also the sea with the fish they eat to survive, is full of offshore installations. Deprived of all natural resources to ensure their livelihood, people here and elsewhere are often only left with one option: moving to the slums, where they need money and are much worse off than before.

This fourth story is based on the following references: Çağlar, Gottschlich & Habermann (2012); Foodwatch (2011); Oxfam Deutschland (2012).

## Analysis

- The story focuses on subsistence farming, which cannot be found in official economic data but helps provide a livelihood. The increasing destruction of subsistence farming is also a result of the crisis of the (re)productive. Free trade agreements and policies of liberalisation have reduced maize diversity and increased prices as we heard yesterday in the keynote speech delivered by Silke Helfrich and David Bollier.

- ➔ Another big issue is the fact that subsistence farming is threatened by the competition over land. The land is not needed for growing subsistence crops but for renewable energies, that is energy crops, but also for wind parks, as it was mentioned in the beginning.
- ➔ Under the current economic system, the “issue of land” refers to the fact that what we call common goods (and now I am really referring to goods) is subjected to the logic of a rentier state. Just owning something or having property rights leads to monetary profit. And this does not only apply to oil and sometimes to knowledge but also to land (including the land used for wind parks). The rentier benefits from his monopoly and the blockade.
- ➔ Nature is privatised and overexploited, which leads to the destruction of its productivity. The Commons, however, would lose out on this productivity of nature that otherwise could be used for a good life.
- ➔ What we need is the separation of these resources - that do not belong to one person alone - from the logic of the rentier state.

#### 4. Conclusion

An article written by Armin Falk, a German professor of economics, was published in the latest edition of the journal “Science”. This article has turned the world of many economists upside down: He made an experiment to see whether the market tempts people to commit immoral deeds. And indeed it does. Many people tend to ignore their own moral values if the anonymity of the market enables them to either save or earn money. The market creates a distance between us and the consequences of our own actions. We see neither the working conditions under which people like Hung Shung or Veronica Diaz have to suffer in the global production chain nor do we see the factory farming in Northern Germany when buying cheap food. “Others do it too, so the individual seems to have only little influence. It seems to be an “infringement” that is socially accepted.” (Heuser 2013: 21).

While the market seems to take away responsibility due to the distance it creates, Caring and Commoning require proximity and responsibility (care is relational work), thus strengthening moral values and social norms.

Hence, we can conclude that the aim of developing a new way of living and working is twofold:

1. Expressing radical criticism of the destructive market logic and making efforts to push it back.
2. Working on a vision and (re)thinking the role of human (re)productive activity and its inherent nature in a generative commons network beg the question of how to ensure a fair balance of responsibility: between individual and collective responsibility, between men and women, between people of different “ethnic origin”, between the Global North and the Global South etc.

Yet, we have to differentiate between the different levels of discussion: criticism or vision, transition strategy or options that have already been implemented or those that are still evolving in our imagination.

Creating new working environments as I have described in the first story of Jan as a networker helps us to blur the distinction between producer and consumer leading us to the notion of the prosumer. But prosumption does nevertheless not yet mean that we have fully overcome the separation of these two spheres of production and reproduction. Yet, they remain two sides of one and the same coin, namely “(re)productivity” (Biesecker & Hofmeister 2010).

The aim is to shape the whole of all those activities that are required for a resilient livelihood provisioning system. This leads us, amongst others, to the vision of (re)prosumption. We will have to use this combined vision to reorganise work (see working page to frame the "working and caring stream" by Heike Löschmann).

Reduction in working hours, minimum wages, decent working conditions, social and ecological standards are all essential on the way to bringing about change.

But: All of these actions refer to the remodelling of gainful employment/paid labour. This is undoubtedly very important. But there will only be room for gainful employment in this vision of new working environments if it promotes the means for a good life for each individual, for the society and for nature. Gainful employment will no longer be at the heart of work since it also includes alienated work, which is part of the problem. And last but not least it is up to trade unions to face up to the challenge of redefining their activities to embrace this new trend: re-organising work not just for, but as a good life.

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.

On the road to changing thoughts, perceptions, values and judgements, there are still more questions than answers. We will have to explore them, one by one and find answers and solutions.

I finally like to invite you to our expeditions into (re)thinking the role of human (re)productive activity and its inherent nature in a generative commons network in the coming days.

Thank you!

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