

The Feminist Perspective

*Excerpts from a talk delivered by Carol Brouillet of Palo Alto, California
at The Other Economic Summit, Denver, CO*

At the Fetzer Institute, quantum physicists met with Navajo, Hopi and other indigenous people to discover that native languages were able to convey the nature of quantum realities much better than English or French. The foundation of the aboriginal cultures includes a reverence for the sacred dimension of life, our deep interconnection with the Earth, the Cosmos, and all living things and it is reflected in the language itself.

We realize that our planet is under attack, our oceans are dying, the rivers are being poisoned, our forests are being destroyed, millions of people are suffering from hunger and terrible exploitation, species are going extinct every moment. How can we reverse this onslaught, this wave of destruction? How can we fortify the people and lifeforms that remain?

First we must recognize the root causes of the host of maladies that are afflicting humanity and the Earth. The global economy is absolutely blind to the webs of interdependence between all living things and our mother planet. In the past two decades, merger mania has dramatically restructured industry, resulting in the monopolization and vertical integration of large sections of the economy by fewer and fewer transnational corporations. The most socially responsible CEO's lost their positions, or their companies became the targets of hostile takeovers; the corporate raiders loot pension funds, liquidate the company resources for short term gains. Now, the tyranny of the bottom line means that it is almost impossible for CEO's to behave in a socially responsible way. The financial pressure demands that they externalize costs and increase profits or lose their positions or their companies. In David Korten's book, *When Corporations Rule the World*, there are examples of the CEO's of the largest corporations, GM, American Express, IBM, Westinghouse, being axed by an

extractive financial system.

Bernard Lietaer, who is writing a book called *Beyond Greed and Scarcity*, says that our official monetary system has almost nothing to do with the real economy. George Soros, who has made a fortune speculating in currencies says, "Instability is cumulative, so the eventual breakdown of freely floating exchanges is virtually assured." Joel Kurtzman, ex-editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, entitles his latest book *The Death of Money* and forecasts an imminent collapse. Bernard adds, "The only precedent I know of is the Roman Empire collapse, which ended Roman currency."

Aung Sung Suu Kyi wrote: "It is not power that corrupts, but fear—fear of losing power and fear of the scourge of those who wield it." This fear corrupts politicians and immobilizes the vast majority. Academia and the media play a major role in promoting the myths which feed fears and create the image of a dangerous world of scarce resources where overpopulation threatens us with extinction.

Look at the scarce resource myth promoted by Malthus before we were born. "Resources are scarce; we must compete for them in order to survive. They are getting scarcer and scarcer all the time as the population grows and there is less land, less water, less fish in the sea." But if the idea that the Earth has abundant resources, if they are equitably shared had prevailed, I don't think we would have the disparity between the rich and the poor that we have now. Look at the distribution of wealth. There is plenty of money, and yet there is no money for meeting the basic needs of the vast majority.

Overconsumption is surely as threatening, if not more threatening, than overpopulation. It's obscene that some of the world is consuming more than 70% of the world's energy while the remaining three-quarters consume less than 30%. A tiny percentage of

people hold most of the world's land and are the greatest cause of abject poverty. Forced into cities or wage slavery, torn from their cultures, women have had ever larger families. Access to land, equality, education and the availability of family planning would reduce birth rates dramatically.

In the film, "Who's Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies & Global Economics," Marilyn discovers the origins of the U.N. Systems of National Accounts, a system imposed upon every country that joins the U.N. and hopes to get a loan from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. The system was based upon a pamphlet by John Maynard Keynes and Richard Stone entitled "The British System of National Accounts and How to Pay for the War." The system does not recognize the value of peace, an intact ecosystem, or the unpaid labor of women. Monetary transactions are measured and deemed of the greatest importance, no matter how devastating their effects are. It does not see anything of unquantifiable value—life, people, the Earth; it only sees that which it measures—money. The forests, the lungs of our planet, are worthless according to this system, unless they are chopped down and sold as timber.

Agribusiness has meant a loss of 90% of the edible plant species since the turn of the century; it rivals the military as far as the devastation that it has wreaked upon all arable lands. Despite the obvious needs of the vast majority of humanity, money is being siphoned from the poor to the rich. Through the IMF and the World Bank, the money continues to flow to the wealthy countries; in 1994 net payments to the U.S. from "developing" countries reached \$2 billion. The Bretton Woods Institutions force countries to open themselves to foreign in-

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vestment, devalue their currencies, switch from growing food for local consumption to growing export crops.

The old system has relied upon military force and control to maintain the wealth and privilege of the ruling elite. Weapons, misinformation, and money are the tools this system has relied upon. By beating the drum and blaming the world's ills on overpopulation, it subtly encourages the idea that masses of people are expendable. We should respect and honor people for their integrity, character, wisdom and gifts to society, as opposed to the amount of wealth they can extract from society. We should also recognize the gifts we have received from the Earth and recognize our responsibility to future generations to safeguard their living heritage.

GDP (**Gross Domestic Product**) is more indicative of the rape and exploitation of resources in a country than the health and well-being of its people or ecosystems. We need new indicators which measure what really matters— our health, the health of the environment, quality of life, the disparity between the rich and the poor.

Bankers create money out of thin air and loan it to governments and others at interest, but they don't create the interest, so it is never possible to pay off all the debts. Money is a tool of empire; it allows the flow of resources from the poor to the rich.

Suppose we create a different kind of money, with a different dynamic, based upon that which we value .