

The Interconnectedness of All Being:

A New Spirituality for a New Civilization

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When I had become an activist against globalization in 1998, a colleague of mine told me that if I was going to try to fight globalization I was only going to make a fool out of myself. I was very surprised. I did not understand. He said: "You cannot fight the multinationals. Trying to do that is absurd. You cannot actually achieve anything struggling against these people".

Shortly after this conversation, however, the MAI treaty – the Multilateral Agreement on Investment of the OECD-WTO – did not get signed because of the emergence of a huge worldwide anti-globalization movement in 1998 which caused the French government to withdraw from the treaty (Mies, Werlhof 2003). In the meantime even the WTO itself has been at the brink of failing, too, because the worldwide movement succeeded twice in blocking its summits (Seattle, Cancún). The next step was the struggle against GATS, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, of the WTO which is still on the table (Barlow 2001).

What seems undeniable is that the paradoxical politics of *profitable destruction* (Chossudovsky 1996) these treaties are an expression of have by now produced its own boomerang, in other words: the consequences of the destruction are coming back to haunt us, as shown, for example, by the various natural disasters we have recently been witnessing. At this point it will not suffice to think about what to do in the future, once everything has collapsed and vanished. We need to think about how to oppose the destruction that is happening here and today. There is no alternative to the search for an alternative. We need a vision what to do now and how to do it.

In this context, Renate Genth (2002) says that we need a new "politics of civilization", since we are experiencing a "civilization crisis". This new politics of civilization has to focus on a new relationship to nature, a new relationship between the sexes, a new relationship between the generations, and a new relationship to "the transcendent". The transcendent generally means religious needs and our relationship to death. I would say that the relationship to the transcendent is the relationship to *earth spirituality*.

The goals of this new politics of civilization, according to Genth, are based on the "five political senses", the sense for community, the sense for justice, the sense for equality (as in: material equality – not spiritual or emotional equality), the sense for freedom, and the sense for responsibility. This implies that diversity is possible – yet there exists a common base.

From this point of view each living being is born free and equal by nature. The first "natural right" is defined as the old mother right that is based on the understanding that everything that has come to life has an innate right to live. Mutual respect is the foundation of all. Society always has to be accountable for what it does.

But, how do we get there? And what all is in our way?

As dreadful as globalization is, it is at least making clear what is actually happening. It seems to have become impossible to ignore what is at stake here. It is now more obvious than ever. Still, next to deep-rooted concepts like Genth's, we hear suggestions about trying to help "shaping" globalization rather than opposing it. Me, however, I am an uncompromising opponent to globalization because what is happening under its banner can never be reconciled with a notion of a world of justice, freedom or equality.

That is why I regard the somewhat pretentious notion of "participation in shaping the course of globalization" (Attac) as inappropriate. This notion will lead and has already led to a split in the anti-globalization movement.

What we need is truly radical opposition, meaning: an opposition that targets the roots of the problem and embarks on a fundamentally different path of thinking and feeling. Which leads me again to my main question: How will this be possible?

As long as we keep on believing that our civilization, and what it has brought to us, is in any way superior to other civilizations, or that our culture is in any way superior to other cultures (past or present), as long as we keep on believing this – and many people generally critical of globalization still do – we can not find common ground. We have to realize that we are indeed facing a crisis of western civilization and that this concerns not only capitalism and modernity, but the entire patriarchal endeavour – in other words: the socio-political order with which the whole problem began (Werlhof 2007).

Since I have been actively involved in the anti-globalization movement for some time now, the search for the "what to do?" equalled a personal crisis that was not bereft of pain. What is, in fact, the key to an effective movement against this global madness?

I have been part of many movements, and already in the 1970s, some feminist friends and I developed the "subsistence perspective" through our own experiences in the periphery, where people had already been reflecting on the unsatisfying state of the world – or the part of the world they live in – for decades (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, Werlhof 1988, Bennholdt-Thomsen, Mies 1999). The subsistence perspective means a notion of community that is based on local involvement and engagement, and a related notion of an economy that is based on the forces (both materially and non-materially) and natural potentials of a specific place without trying to exploit them. Meanwhile, different terms have been coined to describe this perspective: Helena Norberg-Hodge calls it "localization", Vandana Shiva speaks of a "living democracy", and people in Porto Alegre (where the worldwide anti-globalization movement began to gather annually as the "World Social Forum") speak of an "economy of solidarity" (Bennholdt-Thomsen, Faraclas, Werlhof 2001).

There is also the term "sustainability", but this term remains within the logic of the system. It does not fully recognize that we really do need a different form of civilization, not just an economic reform. We need a different culture, because *cultura* means nurturing. The question always is, of course, what are we nurturing? Right now, we nurture machines rather than community. We nurture violence rather than love. This renders our culture useless. It needs to be changed (which, of course, does not exclude saving certain aspects we might recognize as useful).

We need far-reaching, global, perhaps even further extending notions and terms that are tied into a way of thinking, acting and feeling that is able to confront globalization with the possibility of success. Yet, success ought not to be *expected*, since this would instantly lead us back into a modern, rationalizing, calculating way of thought. When it comes to calculation, we are infe-

rior to “them”. In the same vein, we can not “participate” in anything. The gender movement is wrong in the assumption that women’s future is determined by the logics of becoming sex-less, male or patriarchal. Under conditions of globalization such theories have all become irrelevant and lead nowhere. Christina von Braun (2000), for example, says that there is no possibility for transformation at all anymore because she assumes that we have already been so alienated from ourselves by patriarchal conditioning that it has become impossible to return (or progress) to non-patriarchal forms of community. This kind of pessimism is also prevalent in the gender movement, and translates into the quasi-optimistic notion that we can at least still go somewhere *within* the system of capitalist patriarchy. It is always this *failure to leave* the confines of the system that divides all social movements. In other words, making compromises with the system by taking it for granted will always lead us back into it.

In patriarchy, everything is separated: the material from the spiritual, men from women, the lower from the higher, etc. This becomes expressed, on the one hand, in the form of a materialism that regards matter as spiritless, and, on the other hand, in the form of an idealism, that regards matter as not important. When comparing to this the notion of *subsistence* I realized that the reason why so many people still do not understand subsistence must also lie in the fact that we, who propose subsistence as an alternative, have forgotten something or have not thought it all the way through. That is exactly the point.

What needs to happen is that our notion of subsistence which is materialistic in the sense of focusing on what materially shapes our existence, has to be explicitly complemented – not by idealism, but by an explanation of how the material relates to the non-material, to mind and soul, to the spiritual. In other words: we also have to explain mind and soul, the spiritual, through our notion of subsistence. The connections exist anyway – the separation is always but a fictitious and imagined one. All things are connected. This has to be made explicit. This is why I speak of “earth spirituality”.

As a next step, I concluded that it is not enough to call for a relationship to nature that is simply not antagonistic anymore but caring, or that is also spiritual and not only material, etc. It is also not enough to say that we want to “co-operate” with nature or that we want to “be part of a network”. These are all “cold” terms. They are rationalistic terms that always miss something. When we speak of co-operation we have a guideline for action – since co-operating means acting with – but we do not address any emotional or spiritual dimension. The biggest problem with rationalism is that it tries to extinguish our feelings, or tries to turn them into their opposites: for example, love into hate. I believe this is the main problem of our rationalistic society. The problem is amplified by the history of National Socialism that has abused our feelings violently and still leaves the question: how can we rehabilitate our emotions without arousing suspicion of becoming susceptible to a new form of Nazism or fascism?

But we cannot shun the problem because as humans we are sentient beings. If we do not feel, we can not think. Thinking and acting and feeling are intrinsically linked. In our society, we have separated the three. We think differently to how we feel and act. Native Americans know the term K’OP – a term that expresses the understanding that acting, thinking and feeling belong together and correspond. We have lost this understanding through the permanent processes of separation.

I then reflected on “wilderness”. What is wilderness? I have always been looking for a term to substitute “nature” with. The term “nature” has been abused and become abstract. I realized, while reflecting on wilderness as the original and first expression of nature, that we need a notion of a “spirituality” that is linked to the wild!

Basically, spirituality is a notion that is always related to wild na-

ture, and that does not see nature as exclusively material, but also as mind and soul – we could also say: as *alive*. Spirituality is embedded in the vitality of nature. This is my notion of spirituality, hence “earth spirituality”.

But how can we express this without championing just another “cold” term on the one hand, or, on the other, without reproducing a notion of spirituality that is purely idealistic and knows of no relationship to matter, leave alone of political reflection and activism?

Eventually, I did find the answer.

We need a term that is not just cold, but that expresses the *affection* that is inherent in life. The term is: “*interconnectedness of all being*”! This has become my central term in the search for what it actually is that we need to be based on in order to confront the madness of globalization and to get a sense for where to actually go.

When I speak of the interconnectedness of all being, I am not only talking about connectedness as an opposition to separation, but about intrinsic links between everything there is. Everything is tied together, everything is connected with each other. We are not in the world as human beings alone.

Systems of ethics do not suffice to explain what that means, however. They mostly negate the relationship to nature (Jonas 1979). Religion does not work as a term either, because it does not want to reconnect us with the wild and is based on the separation that has occurred.

My point is: There is no separation - it is purely fictitious. That is how I came to the notion of interconnectedness as the truth about our reality, if we want it or not.

The notion of interconnectedness of all being is a notion that is very comprehensive – a notion that guides us back to the unity that truly exists underneath all. The notion of interconnectedness is a notion in which *love and knowledge belong together*. Contrary to rationalism which distances itself from nature – particularly evident in the machine-logics of a computerized rationality that systematically eradicates all feelings of love and belonging – the notion of interconnectedness embraces everything.

Interconnectedness means that we are connected and feel mutually bound in solidarity in a decisively caring environment to which we belong. In English we have the terms “solidarity”, “bonds” and “ties”, in Spanish “*apego*”, a term expressing closeness: the child who discovers the world still attached to its mother, or “*lazo*”, which translates as connection and bond. In German I call it “*die Verbundenheit allen Seins*”. These terms are rather poetic than analytical. I find them very useful to provide some kind of an orientation within the diversity of being, including the diversity of social movements. Because when one feels connected to all being – and I mean really from the leaves of grass to the universe – there is no end to this feeling. And it is precisely then when one will actually find solid ground under one’s feet.

With the concept sketched above, we will have a point of reference which will tell us what it is that we do, what it is that we shall and can do, and what it is that we can not do. And it is by way of this that we will find a holistic way of thought that does not omit anything: not the animals, not the elements, not the planet. We will find a holistic way of thought that will not allow for gaps, since true interconnectedness knows no gaps either. *Nature has no gaps*.

Furthermore, the concept requires a call for action, namely to take a stand for the defence of all being and its interconnectedness, and I mean on all levels. Only through this will we be able to feel and take on responsibility. With the return of the emotional, the passion to defend that which is alive will return as well. Our feelings will regain their place. They will be able to flourish again without being abused. Because, on the basis of the notion of the interconnectedness of all being, it is impossible to be cor-

rupted or seduced or confused.
At any rate this is my thesis.

Because if nature is alive and not just machine or resource, or whatever these patriarchal terms replacing nature are, then she is neither merely object nor no object at all, but subject, meaning: she is telling us something, she speaks to us, she communicates with us, she is sending us messages, and we can turn to her, *we can ask her what we shall do*. We can ask where it was that we have erred and where to go from here.

We not only have to regain our senses and our sensitivity, but we have to expand them, also in the terms of Günther Anders (1987) who always demanded that. In order to expand our senses, to let them grow above us, we have to “deploy” antennas of perception and realization of the interconnectedness, but not in any super-sensual terms (*übersinnlich*: that which goes beyond the senses), but in *trans-sensual or cross-sensual* terms (*transsinnlich* and *quersinnlich*), which will allow us to also perceive the senses of others, not only our own. My energies are not only isolated and ego-logical ones, exclusively focused on me, but they are connected to other energies and forces that support me, just as I support them.

I know that this is the way it is. I have experienced it. If we open ourselves to the interconnectedness of all being, then all energies are with and behind us, and they will guide us, and we will be their advocates and voices.

We have a calling in this world, namely to prevent the destruction from continuing. This also leads us close to Gandhi’s notion of *ahimsa*, which is always translated as non-violence, but which also means *innocence*. Ahimsa is a way of action that does not follow self-centred goals and the interest to *be personally successful*, but that follows the bonds of life and that thereby offers new possibilities of acting and resisting and creating alternative ways of living. This way we can finally leave ego-centrism behind us and become channels of and for mother earth.

Only such a way of feeling, thinking and behaving makes it possible to act without rational calculation and unnecessary compromises. *Compromises will be made, but not with society*. We will gain a truthfulness of action, and even though the web in which we act will be large, it will always be possible to have an orientation and to act very concretely in each specific case. This is an outstanding experience since so far we have not had many possibilities (and were prohibited from having them) to unite theory and practice in such a way.

Acting, thinking and feeling along the lines of the interconnectedness of all being also creates a “*mimetic sphere*”, meaning: a mimesis which allows for the extended and conscious exchange of energies with other living beings, since we will establish always more contacts with them and will thereby also create common ground and orientation.

For me all this means the possibility to escape the one-step-at-a-time character of the alleged alternatives offered - from above, from the west, from the left - so far, their temporality and weakness, their incompleteness, and their lack of vision and orientation. But this happens without needing a “political program” or “technological project”, not to speak of new forms of domination.

What we have instead is a way of perceiving and thinking that follows the interconnectedness of all being and that knows as its base the depth of this interconnectedness – I call it “*deep feminism*”.

There will also be no more separations in action and thought. There will be no *nihilism* that denies life, any more. The interconnectedness of all being teaches us that there are no ruptures and gaps, but that there is always a connecting *rope* that guides us and that we can hold onto.

The main challenge that remains probably is: how can we turn this awareness into appropriate action *in each specific case*? How can we exchange the experiences we are making on this path? How can we know that we do the right things in order to defend mother earth? And how do we know that we are really on the way to another civilization?

I consider the development of a spiritual understanding in the way outlined above for absolutely necessary and, in the end, I consider it to be the only possible way to find an adequate response to globalization and to develop alternatives to it that will not lead us astray once again.

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Radiant Sentence

“We have a calling in this world, namely to prevent the destruction from continuing”

Biography

Claudia von Werlhof, born 1943 in Berlin, Germany, mother of a son, Prof. for Political Sciences and Women’s Studies, University of Innsbruck, Austria. Master in Economics, PhD in Sociology, Univ. Cologne; Habilitation in Political Sciences, Univ. Frankfurt, Germany. Empirical research in Central America and Venezuela. Co-founder of the international Women’s (Studies) movement. Activist against globalization and neo-liberalism. Theoretical work on a feminist theory of society, patriarchy, matriarchy, and alternatives to western civilization. Last book together with V. Bennholdt-Thomsen and N. Faraclas: *There is an Alternative. Subsistence and Worldwide Resistance to Corporate Globalization*, London 2001