

# **BECOMING A BUTTERFLY: The Paradigm Shift from Inequality to Solidarity**

Chapter 1 of

**FROM INEQUALITY TO SOLIDARITY:  
CO-CREATING A NEW ECONOMICS  
FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS WELCOME!!

## Chapter 1: Becoming a Butterfly: The Paradigm Shift from Inequality to Solidarity

### **Envisioning A Butterfly**

My friend and colleague in the solidarity economy movement, Jessica Gordon-Nembard,<sup>i</sup> ends all of her emails with the following signature: "*Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, she turned into a butterfly.*" I am beginning this book with this metaphor because it conveys the real, present possibility of qualitative, positive transformation -- of a paradigm shift to a new and higher stage of social evolution. Unfortunately, awareness of this possibility is sorely lacking in contemporary discussions of economics, or of current crises.

The current state of the U.S., and of the world, is terrifying. Indeed, it seems as if the world as we know it may be coming to an end. The future of life on the planet is being threatened by climate change. There is a serious possibility that our trigger-happy president could precipitate a global nuclear war with North Korea. Other serious crises -- from rampant inequality, political corruption, war, pollution, gun violence, health -- not to mention President Donald Trump's efforts to turn back the clock on over a half a century of progress on civil rights and women's rights -- make it difficult to watch the news.

But something ELSE is also going on, something that isn't being reported in the mainstream media, that is going unnoticed... and that something else is the subject of this book. Yes, things are looking bad for the caterpillar -- but something else is emerging, something even more beautiful and wonderful -- an economy and society built on the principles of cooperation, justice, respect, mutuality, sustainability, freedom, and diversity. My goal for this book is to contribute to the ongoing paradigm shift by making it visible to those already involved in it, but unaware of the fact -- and to those who would like to be involved, if they knew about it. In this book, I will help you identify the processes through which this new paradigm is emerging -- a process which I describe as a shift from inequality to solidarity -- so that you can recognize it, participate in it, and come together with others who are part of the shift.

## **Driving the Paradigm Shift: The Four Great Social Movements and the Movement of Movements**

The inequality paradigm has ruled the earth for millennia. It differentiates people into opposing and unequal categories: rich over poor; whites over people of color; men over women; humans over nature; and many more. Domination, injustice, and violence are built into every aspect of economic and social life. However, the reign of the inequality paradigm has not gone uncontested. Throughout time, and around the globe, people have come together in grass-roots, mass movements to fight inequality, domination, and injustice, inspired by radical thinkers and organized and led by a plethora of organizations. In particular, four great social movements – anti-classist, anti-racist, feminist, and ecology -- have been deconstructing four key aspects of the inequality paradigm: class, race, gender, and speciesism. Figure 1 shows the similarities between these movements, each combatting one aspect of the inequality paradigm.

These social movements have involved millions of people in radical transformations of the ways they think about themselves and others, and of knowledge itself; of their relationships; and of economic and social practices and institutions, from schools to workplaces to government. Together, without conscious coordination, each focusing on one inequality perpetrated by the inequality paradigm, they have been doing part of a larger task, the work of a multi-dimensional paradigm shift against inequality in general: against a way of life based on division, inequality, domination, violence, injustice, and inhumanity.

Since the turn of the millennium, these movements have increasingly begun to intersect, come together, and cooperate in a global movement of movements, which opposes all forms of inequality and injustice. We are beginning to recognize one another as part of this large movement, and to learn from one another, and to connect up with one another in networks of support. As Michael Moore advised at the Women's March: don't just pick one group; join all of the progressive groups! We are beginning to realize that we are fighting a common problem: inequality in general, and a culture that divides us against one another.

Figure 1: The Four Great Social Movements

TYPE OF INEQUALITY	POWER CATEGORIES	SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
GENDER	MAN OVER WOMAN	FEMINISM
RACE	WHITE OVER PEOPLE OF COLOR	CIVIL RIGHTS/ ANTI-RACIST/ ANTI-COLONIAL
CLASS	RICH OVER POOR	WORKER/ANTI-CLASSIST
SPECIES	MAN OVER NATURE	ECOLOGY

### **R/evolution<sup>ii</sup>, Not Revolution**

The paradigm shift sounds like a big change – and it is. And precisely because it is such a big change in economic and social life, it cannot happen all at once. As we will see in Chapter 3 and Part II, shifting the paradigm involves multiple distinct and interconnected solidarity processes across multiple movements. It involves quantitative changes in the distribution of income, wealth, and power, but also qualitative changes in our hierarchical and undemocratic economic practices and institutions. It requires the transformation of our values, our ways of parenting, and even of the way we relate to our selves! This change takes time, learning, and organizing. It is an ongoing, incremental process. And it can involve setbacks, a la Donald Trump – reactions against the process of change -- especially if a significant subgroup – like working class white people – is being left behind.

### **R/evolutionary Aspects of the Paradigm Shift**

So that you can start to recognize the paradigm shift happening all around you, I will present some of its key aspects here. While I characterize it by the simple expression, “From Inequality to Solidarity,” it is actually a much more complex and multi-dimensional process. I want to pull out three key aspects of the shift here. Each represents a slightly

different way of looking at the paradigm shift, a direction towards which the movement of movements is advancing. Each aspect develops a dimension of solidarity: equality, unity, and love.

**From Inequality to Equality.** This is the most evident aspect of the paradigm shift, from the point of view of the four great movements. The inequality paradigm involves the social construction of interconnected, interlocking hierarchies of race, class, gender, and human/nature domination, and many others. These hierarchies concentrate wealth, income, and economic and political power in the hands of those who are privileged, and allow them to boss around, abuse, and exploit those beneath them. But they also involve a pattern domination/subordination which governs relationships within oppressed groups, and within families, spilling out into violence against women and children.

The r/evolution towards equality identifies, critiques, and deconstructs these hierarchies – including our acceptance of and obedience to authority – gradually replacing them with “horizontalism:” mutually beneficial, democratic, cooperative, egalitarian, and peaceful social structures. Steps towards equality in the economy and polity include anti-discrimination and affirmative action; worker rights; living wages; paid parental leave; income and wealth redistribution; economic human rights (to jobs, education, health care); and Bernie Sanders’ “political revolution” – preventing the wealthy and large corporations from using their financial power to corrupt our democratic institutions and monopolize political power.

**From Division to Unity.** A key aspect of the inequality paradigm is the social construction of mutually-exclusive, opposed groups who do not respect or care about members of the other group, or are even taught to fear and/or hate them. Racism, sexism, religious intolerance, and nationalism define those who are “different” (of color, non-Christian, immigrants) as less human and less worthy, even to the point that their lives are not of value. A classic way that a small minority of the population is able to monopolize wealth and power is by “divide and conquer:” getting working class and poor people to blame people of color, often immigrants, or recently, Muslims, for their social and economic problems. Currently, U.S. drones routinely kills Muslims viewed as terrorists – and often

members of their families – without even the semblance of the due process required to incarcerate a U.S. citizen, much less put them to death. A similar lack of basic respect is shown to non-human forms of life, which are treated as property, experimented upon and killed without any concern for their well-being.

The r/evolution towards unity involves realizing that we are all part of a larger whole, a living system, of which all parts are deserving of respect. We stand in solidarity with people who are being oppressed and exploited whatever their race, religion, nationality, gender, or class. War is not an acceptable way to resolve differences; we must resist being manipulated by our leaders into wars that secure resources or create lucrative weapons sales, while the masses of people pay, and suffer. We stand in solidarity with other forms of life, and seek to steward a balanced planet that nurtures a diversity of healthy life forms in a sustainable way.

One of the important forms of unity that has been emerging within advanced capitalist countries is socially responsible agency. Capitalism set people up in a giant competition for survival, extolling those who beat out others and make it to the top. Narrow competitive materialistic self-interest and the profit motive – caring only about earning money and buying things for oneself or one's family – is viewed as normal (and called “rational” by mainstream economists; we will examine this more in the next chapter). We are pit against each other in the market – like dogs fighting for a bone – and from this standpoint, we want others to fail, to be worse than us, so that we can do better. We begin to believe in zero sum thinking – any gain another achieves is at my expense.

Training in competitive, zero sum awareness runs deep. For example, in spite of my participation in egalitarian social movements since my college days, my childhood programming in the inequality paradigm often rears its ugly head. For example, when I hear that a progressive colleague, especially a left feminist woman, has written something brilliant in my area of research, my first reaction tends to be dismay. Why? Because her achievement makes my work, by comparison, seem lesser. This is the competitive viewpoint. I catch myself having such thoughts, usually with shock, and then remind myself that my goal is progressive social change, and that she is furthering this shared goal!

However, a unity form of consciousness and agency is emerging and proliferating, one which involves looking for ways to act, individually and in groups, which benefit everyone. The movement of movements has come together out of a principled stance -- not just against the particular inequality that oppresses me, but against any forms of oppression that oppress anyone. It has also come together because of a practical and strategic awareness that we cannot overturn the structures of the inequality paradigm unless we mobilize people, en masse, across our differences. On a more individual level, socially responsible agency is beginning to replace narrow materialistic self-interest: essentially, wanting our actions to have a positive impact on others, not just on ourselves and our friends and families. Socially responsible consumers care about the impact of their consuming on the workers who made the product, and upon earth. Social entrepreneurs set up businesses with the goal of helping society at large, in a way that covers costs. These are important aspects of the emerging solidarity economy, as we will see below.

**From Greed to Love:** The third, interconnected aspect of the paradigm shift is a r/evolution in values and emotions -- from greed, heartlessness, and fear, to caring, compassion, and love. The inequality paradigm alienates us from each other, by placing us in an unjust hierarchy of power over, disrespect, and exploitation. The authoritarian parenting upon which it is built teaches us to accept the hierarchy and our place and role in it, which involves short-circuiting our natural instincts to love and defend ourselves (if we are on the bottom) or to care about and share with others (if we are on top).

The capitalist economy cultivates and celebrates greed -- an addictive desire for money -- and uses money as a standard to measure success. It encourages us to put money and things above people, and to view people as a way to make money for ourselves, without caring about them and their welfare. We are taught to dehumanize the service workers we meet, and not to care if the products we consume were produced in ways that harmed workers or the environment. On an even more basic level, our system of private property -- enforced by laws, police, and prisons, and lacking a robust "safety net" of social programs -- is based on an invisible but pervasive violence, because it prevents people with pressing needs from getting what they need, even while others have much more than they could

ever use. Meanwhile this class oppression is inherently racist and sexist, such that people of color – and mothers without husbands – are overrepresented among the “have-nots.”

The “modern” corporation – a legal individual, whose powers are larger than life -- is the ultimate example of heartlessness and institutionalized violence. Focused on maximizing profits, it pays workers as little as possible, even less than a living wage; fires them, throwing them into poverty and insecurity, sometimes after years of service, if it can earn higher profits elsewhere; and has no compunction about destroying the environment, including our health. Since it discovered sea-level rise as part of its ocean platform research, Exxon-Mobil corporation has spent over 30 million dollars trying to convince the public that burning its product was not creating climate change, including paying “scientists,” as Al Gore so eloquently pointed out in the documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth.”<sup>iii</sup>

Movement toward the solidarity paradigm is r/evolution towards the incorporation of love into all aspects of economic and social life. By love here we mean compassion for oneself and for others – sensitivity to our/their needs, respect for our/their rights, and courage to take a stand to protect and defend ourselves and all of life. This is the emotional aspect of unity consciousness. It means loving ourselves enough to know that we deserve to be treated well by all. It means not being caught in divisive thinking which wishes suffering on our “opponents,” even if they are oppressing us – but rather saying no to their negative behavior, and offering a higher path forward. Martin Luther King, the great civil rights leader, envisioned and advocated for a “beloved community” in which all types of people were celebrated and valued. He called for a strong use of love, in standing up nonviolently to injustice:

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love, correcting everything that stands against love.

The work of building the solidarity paradigm is the work of love: the work of nurturing, protecting, and defending life.

These three aspects of the solidarity paradigm – equality, unity, and love – involve a worldview which brings people together peacefully, with mutual respect, cooperating

democratically, and in harmony with nature. While the inequality paradigm sets up zero sum competition between people or groups, the solidarity paradigm looks for solutions which are beneficial to all.

### **Capitalism: Stuck between Paradigms**

Where exactly does capitalism fit in terms of the shift from inequality to solidarity? Defenders of capitalism note its historic role in bring equal rights and democracy, while its critics point out that it is permeated by inequality, hierarchy, and injustice. Both are right. Capitalism is stuck between two paradigms of economic life; a hybrid; a strange combination of inequality and solidarity. While it represents one huge step forward toward solidarity from the millennia-old inequality paradigm, it still shares many aspects of its predecessors.

The proclamation that “all men are created equal” represented a liberatory departure from aristocratic privilege, and a repudiation of colonialism. However, the founding fathers of the U.S. were white men, many of them slave-holders, who treated their wives and daughters as inferiors. The equality they foresaw in the economy was equal opportunity for propertied white men, and this group was the only one allowed to vote. In the nineteenth century, equal opportunity was epitomized by the “self-made (white) man,” who worked his way up “from rags to riches” by beating others at “bread-winning.” In all of these formulations of equality, to focus was on the equal opportunity to achieve upward mobility, as contrasted to the inherited positions from feudal times. The existence of a pyramidal hierarchy of income and wealth – and the owner/boss vs. worker hierarchy in the workplace – were taken as given. “Equality” meant the right to compete for a position within an unequal structure, whose values and rules – including obedience to one’s superior – were taken as a given. Still, freeing most white men from being permanently ascribed to inferior economic and social positions due to birth was a momentous step in the movement from inequality to solidarity.

### **R/evolution within Capitalism**

Not only is capitalism itself a hybrid of inequality and equality, capitalist economies take a range of forms, some much characterized by solidarity than others. Generally, the history of capitalism in most countries has been one of hard-fought but definite progress by

worker, anti-racist, feminist, and ecology movements. Slavery was abolished in the U.S. once and for all in 1865; men of color and women won the vote in 1870 and 1920; the first minimum wage and the 40 hour work week were established in 1938; discrimination against people based on race or sex became illegal in 1964; the effects of toxins on ourselves and our environment were recognized in 1970, with the forming of the Environmental Protection Agency; etc. However, the abolition of slavery and the period of reconstruction was followed by reaction and a half a century of Jim Crow. The progressive sixties – with Johnson’s “great society” and “War on Poverty”, and the advances in Civil Rights were followed by a neoliberal reaction which greatly increased income and wealth inequality, turned back environmental protection, fed the racist prison industrial complex, and attacked African American voter rights with successful voter suppression laws and tactics. There have been too many setbacks for progressives to take any of our victories as permanent.

The movement backwards brought by Donald Trump’s election in 2016 – toward inequality, division, greed, and fear – was unmistakable. Trump won on a platform that promised a return to the “good old days” of white and male supremacy, defeating an opponent, Hillary Clinton, who portrayed herself as the champion of feminism and anti-racism. Meanwhile, Bernie Sanders had come close to winning the democratic nomination with a platform that shared the equal opportunity feminism and anti-racism of Hillary Clinton, but went beyond them to affirm basic economic human rights to jobs, health care, education, and childcare, along with a pro-environment, anti-fossil-fuels stance. These significant differences in position vis a vis inequality all existed in one election cycle of one country, in which none of the candidates called for system change.

Viewed from the “from inequality to solidarity” perspective, the 2016 U.S. election can be represented with Figure 2: Trump was the closest to the inequality end of the spectrum; Clinton was in the middle; and Sanders closest to the solidarity end of the spectrum.



### The Rainbow Solidarity Spectrum

Because the paradigm shift is incremental, it is helpful to represent it as movement along a spectrum, from inequality to solidarity, as we did above, with the 2016 election. We compared Trump, Clinton and Sanders on their general position on inequality vs. solidarity above. Vis a vis the previous president, Barack Obama, Trump represented a movement backward – and Sanders represented a movement forward. One can conceptualize not only political candidates, but also people in general, businesses, cities, state, or countries – as located somewhere on the spectrum, and able to move forward to backward. The task of our times is to do our part in moving the different parts of the world which we come in touch with along the spectrum towards solidarity.

The position on the spectrum can also be differentiated according to the particular type of solidarity being represented, i.e. anti-classist, feminist, anti-racist, ecological, or other. The degree of solidarity can be estimated and compared across many different inequalities, and represented as a rainbow, harking back to Jessie Jackson’s “Rainbow Coalition.” Along which dimension is one more advanced, and where are they falling behind? Which parts of our movement of movement need special attention and help, and

why? Which are thriving, and could be called upon to act in solidarity with those that are not? If we look at positions on the spectrum over time, where are we advancing, and where are we falling back? Why, and what can be done? As our awareness of the paradigm shift and our roles in it deepens, I expect that this kind of thinking will become more commonplace (I suspect it already is, but with the opposite goal, among those focused on defending the inequality paradigm!)

Another way that the rainbow solidarity spectrum can be used is to compare people, firms, cities, states, or countries – either overall, or by type of inequality-solidarity. Entities that are further towards the solidarity paradigm can be identified, studied, showcased, and copied. Those which are behind can be pressured, by comparing them to those which are more advanced. It is difficult to argue that the achievement of solidarity is a bad thing; more commonly, the argument is that it is not possible. So actually identifying functioning entities that have achieved it makes a powerful case for following in their footsteps.

For example, a number of U.S. cities stand out for the progress they have made towards the solidarity paradigm – with sanctuary city legislation, \$15/hour minimum wages, worker cooperative programs, police department reforms, and commitments to reduce fossil fuel consumption, for example. They can be held up as models, and copied. The new mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, Chokwe Lumumba, is explicitly committed to the solidarity economy. Just as ALEC, The American Legislative Exchange Council, promotes policies that move us toward the inequality paradigm, our movement of movements can work together – learning from the leaders -- to promote solidarity policies at the local and state levels.

It is also very useful to use the rainbow solidarity spectrum to compare countries. In particular, it is important to educate the U.S. population that, far from being leaders in this shift, as we are often led to believe, the U.S. is behind most of the Western world in terms of its progress towards solidarity. Figure 3 shows that the lack of economic human rights policies in the U.S. compared to European countries – pressure for us to catch up!

Figure 4 shows general comparisons of countries progress along four different dimensions of inequality, calculated by combining a variety of indices of equality for each dimension.<sup>iv</sup> I call this the “Rainbow Solidarity Spectrum.” Again, measures show the U.S.

to be trailing European countries on all dimensions except for race.<sup>v</sup> Bernie Sanders very successfully used this type of comparison in his election campaign, when he called for universal healthcare and free education, pointing out that they existed in many European countries. He noted, for example, that universal health care – decried as unaffordable and inefficient in U.S. political discourse – has been tested and perfected elsewhere, and provides better health outcomes at a lower cost.

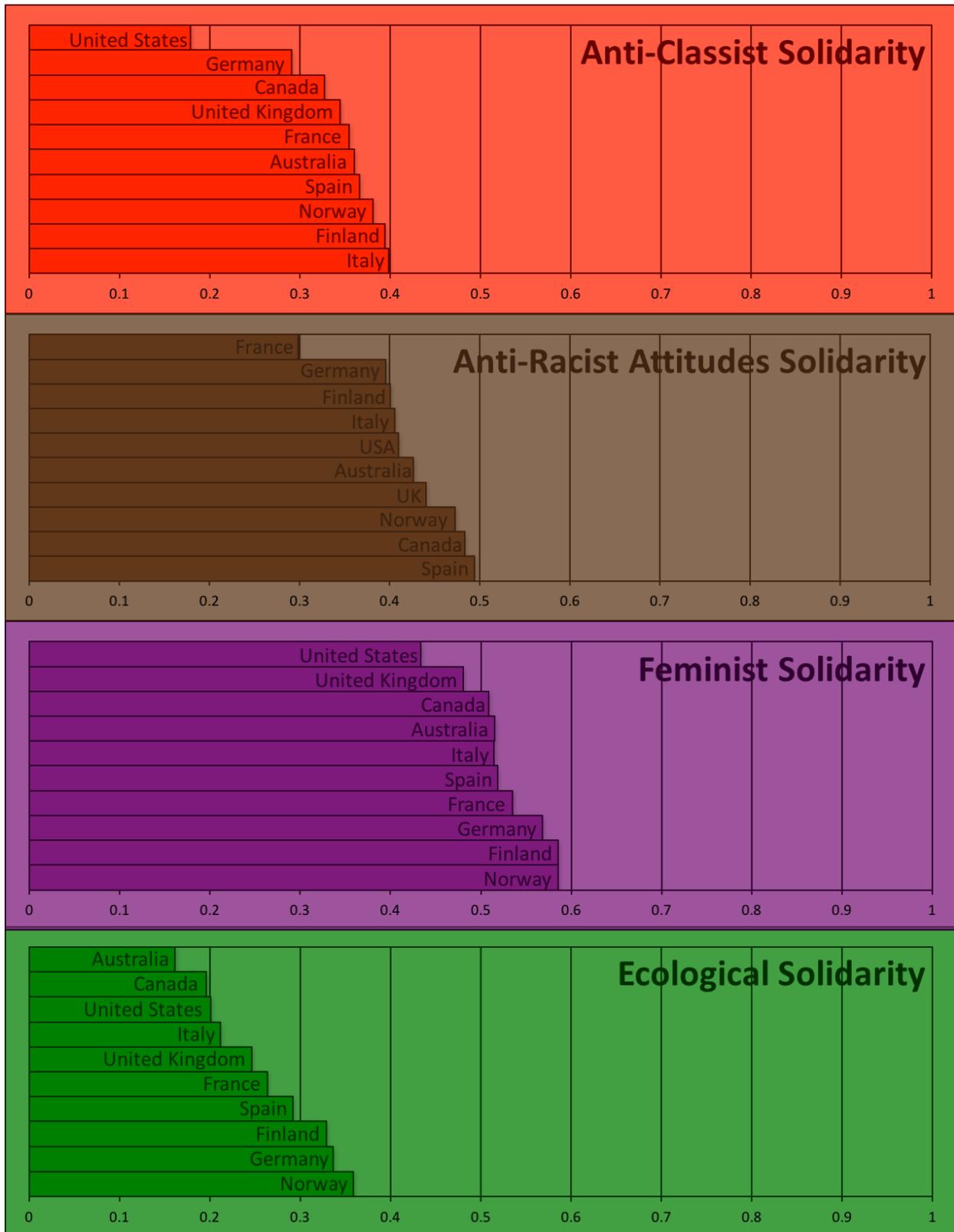
Figure 3. Economic Human Rights in Selected Countries

	Paid Parental Leave	Health Care	Higher Education
Sweden			
Norway			
Finland			
Germany			
France			
Spain			
The Netherlands			
United States			

SOURCES: See bibliography.

Figure 4: Countries on the Rainbow Solidarity Spectrum

Sources: See Appendix



### **The Equal Opportunity Trap**

A key weakness of the four great social movements in the U.S. is that they have tended to fall into the equal opportunity trap. This trap is the equating of increased mobility up a hierarchy by members of a subordinated group with the ending of inequality. Working people are convinced that, if they just tried hard enough, they could make it. Women and people of color are told that sexism and racism cannot exist if women are now CEOs of large corporations and blacks hold high political office. Unfortunately, the view that equality is achieved when members of a subordinated group “break through the glass ceiling” into positions previously occupied exclusively by the dominant group – be they aristocrats, whites, or men – is prevalent in the US.

As I noted above, while equal opportunity forms of organizing represent important advances towards solidarity, they leave hierarchies of income, wealth, and power intact. The latter are all key aspects of the inequality paradigm, as it has existed for millennia. For this reason, equal opportunity forms of organizing are tolerated, even favored, by the billionaire class and large corporations, because they do not challenge their domination of the economic and political system, Trump being an obvious exception. Meanwhile, these class hierarchies play a major role in reproducing race, gender, and the domination of nature.

It is important to note that equal opportunity forms of solidarity organizing alienate men and whites from feminist and anti-racist movement. By focusing on the definition of feminism and anti-racism as getting positions previously monopolized by white men, within our competitive pyramidal economic hierarchy, it portrays the movements in zero sum, inequality paradigm terms, as taking away money from men and whites. In fact, feminism and anti-racism have much to offer to men and whites, especially as part of a multi-dimensional solidarity platform like Bernie’s which not only opposes all forms of discrimination, but also promises to increase the security and well-being of those at the bottom of the economic hierarchy.

Indeed, the last three presidential elections are a perfect example of the equal opportunity trap. The election of our first black president -- Barack Obama -- represented to

many the ultimate achievement of anti-racist activism. Yet his election did not eliminate black poverty rates that were more than twice those of whites, or reduce the enormous racial wealth gap, nor did it challenge the corruption of politics by the wealthy and by large corporations, whom he received substantial campaign contributions from. Similarly, Hillary Clinton portrayed her campaign as representing women's ultimate achievement, but offered little inspiration, as a highly educated professional, for working class white women, whose families had been losing economic ground under Democratic as well as Republican presidencies. The presence of a black or woman at the top of the job hierarchy does not change the hierarchy itself, a hierarchy which, in the US, doesn't even guarantee a basic living to all our citizens. Arguably, the economic human rights policies advocated by Bernie Sanders would have done more to help women and people of color – who are overrepresented at the bottom of the income hierarchy – than the elections of a black or a woman to the presidency. Polls indeed showed Sanders doing much better in a run off against Trump than Clinton. However, once Clinton won the nomination, the equal opportunity focus of Hillary's campaign created an opening for self-proclaimed "outsider," Donald Trump. Once he defeated Ted Cruz, Trump was able to win the backing of hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer, and, with the help of the Republican voter suppression machine, steal the presidency by appealing to the anti-establishment sentiment of a population plagued by rising inequality, stagnant wages, and rising debt. This include winning over a majority of white women voters, showing the lack of appeal of equal opportunity feminism to middle and working class women.

As I will show in Chapter 4, there are six other solidarity processes needed to transform inequality into solidarity, along each dimension. Not to mention that all types of inequality need to be addressed by our movement of movements – including and especially class – for it to be successful. All of these solidarity processes have been present in the four great social movements – they have, however, been actively underreported and suppressed. The Black Panther Party comes to mind, with their dedication to breakfast programs for low income youth, their affirmation of the right to self- defense, and their critique of capitalism. Another example is the violent suppression of the nonviolent Occupy Wall Street

Movement, which challenged the concentration of incomes in the hand of the “1%.” A third is the suppression of Marxist and leftist economics in the U.S. academy, including an appalling absence of alternative, heterodox views of economics, which reject the claim that capitalism is the last and best possible economic system, in economics departments across the country.

A key lesson of this book – which I will expand upon in Chapters 4-8 -- is the imperative of expanding our view of organizing beyond equal opportunity. Simply put, we must realize that the extreme inequality of wealth, income, and power in our country is an enormous problem. It is the proverbial elephant in the living room, ignored in mainstream economic discourse, yet hugely and adversely impacting every aspect of economic, political, and social life. This problem will not be solved by the ascent of a few blacks or women to high level positions. When we fall into the equal opportunity trap, we sell ourselves and our movements short.

My message here is simple: we need to realize that we are struggling for nothing less than a paradigm shift in economic and social life; a qualitative change in the ways we relate to each other. A r/evolution. We will not be able to win our individual struggles – to end climate change, or racism, or sexism, or classism – unless and until we realize that we do the hard work of transforming inequality into solidarity, on every level and in every sector of our economy and society. To this we need to replace a focus on equal opportunity reforms within capitalism with a broader, solidarity perspective. Thinking in terms of a paradigm shift from inequality to solidarity provides a fulsome, multi-dimensional, and qualitatively transformative view of the road from inequality to liberation which can appeal to and engage the vast majority of Americans.

### **The Emerging Solidarity Economy**

The solidarity r/evolution is already happening within market economies, alongside traditional, capitalist institutions. The Community Economies Collective uses the metaphor of an iceberg to portray this. The narrowly self-interested materialistic and competitive behavior of consumers, workers, and profit-only motivated capitalist firms are only the tip of the iceberg of the economy. As we discussed earlier, forms of economic agency that are

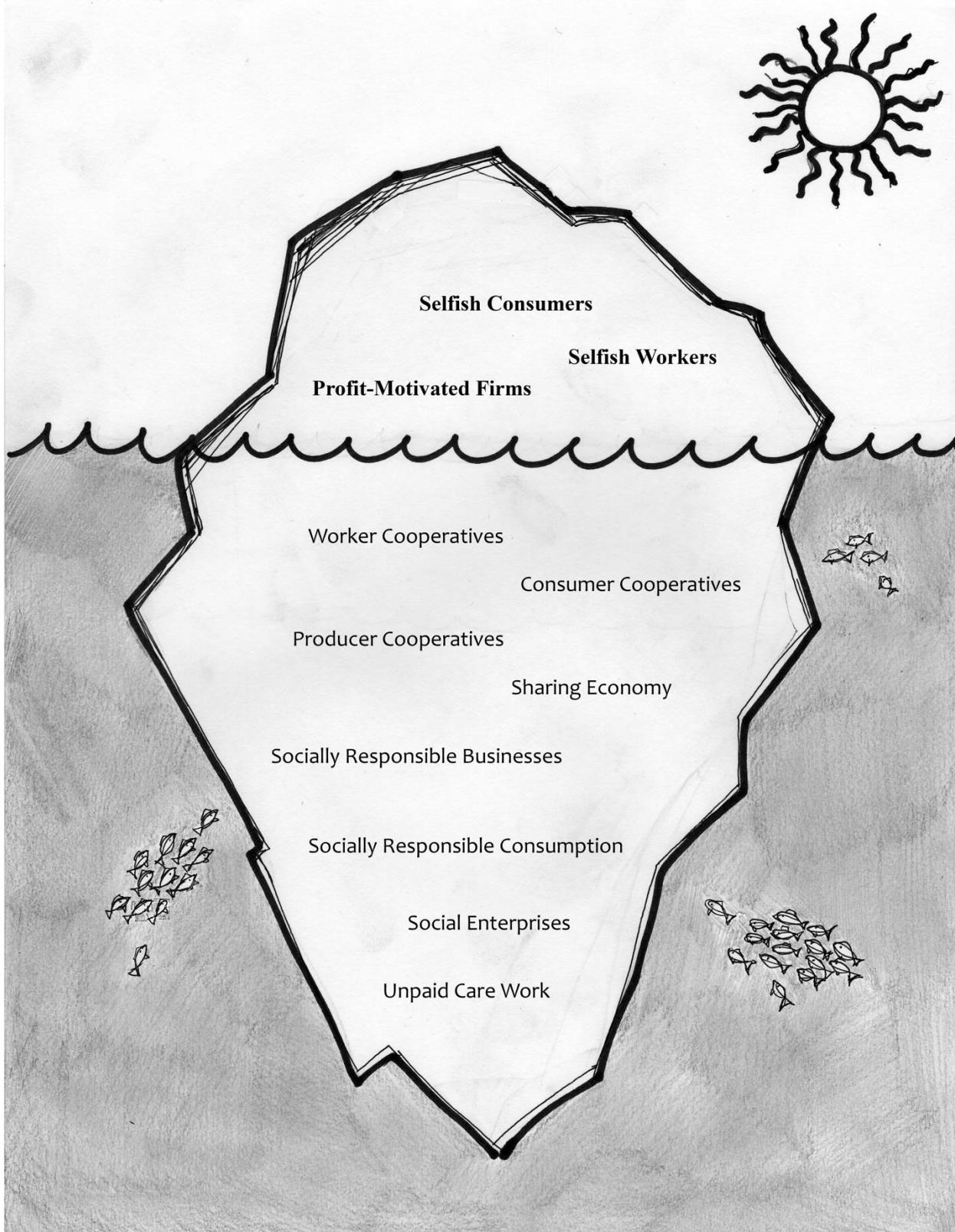
infused with solidarity– i.e., that are based in caring, cooperative, and socially responsible agency – also exist within market economies, but are hidden from the consensus view of reality propagated by mainstream economists and the media. Figure 5 depicts the economic iceberg, with its solidarity economy forms below the water line.

The concept of the solidarity economy was coined in the 1980s, and is now used worldwide to describe these new forms of economics which exist all over the planet, and are proliferating and developing. Other terms that are used include the new economy, the community economy, the caring economy, and *sumak kawsay*.<sup>vi</sup> In 2007, at the first U.S. Social Forum, Jessica, I, and others helped found the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (SEN, [www.usсен.org](http://www.usсен.org)), as a national branch of RIPESS, the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy ([www.RIPESS.org](http://www.RIPESS.org)).

Where is the solidarity economy coming from? Solidarity economy practices and institutions were not thought up in the head of a progressive economist. Rather, they emerged organically within market based economies as a reaction to the failures of capitalist institutions, as well as an expression of the solidarity values of the movement of movements. Ethan Miller depicts the solidarity economy as a tree rooted in the soil of social movements, and these movements, indeed, are the consciousness and conscience of the solidarity economy. It is also important to note that another root of solidarity economy is pre- or non-equality paradigm cultures, viewed as backwards and uncivilized by Europeans who colonized them. For example, Eucadorians use the indigenous, Quechua concept, *sumak kawsay*, to describe their version of the solidarity economy, which was incorporated into their constitution in 2008; a similar indigenous concept, *Suma Qamana*, is used in Bolivia.

Figure 5. The Economic Iceberg

Drawing by Hans Han



What exactly IS the solidarity economy? Emerging as it does from grass-roots movements of people against oppression, and embodying their increasingly interconnected values, it takes different forms in different places. Generally, solidarity economy analysts and activists identify, as part of the solidarity economy, practices and institutions that strive to embody the following values: equity in all dimensions, solidarity and cooperation; economic and political democracy; sustainability and harmony with Mother Earth; and diversity. Institutions which are cooperative and democratic in their structure, rather than hierarchical, are also lifted up. And policies and practices which focus on provisioning the needs of all are also seen as a key part of solidarity economics.

One of the important activities of solidarity economy activists has been to discover, describe, and “map” different solidarity economy practices and institutions, making them visible to each other and to the wider public so that the people involved in them can cooperate, learn from, and buy from each other, forming a literal alternative economic space within and outside of markets. Solidarityeconomy.us is an interactive map and directory for the U.S.<sup>vii</sup>

The solidarity economy is, literally, a work in progress, and an economy in the making. We have yet to achieve any economic practices and institutions that express solidarity in all aspects, and every dimension – race, class, gender, and man/nature. Thus SE activists include in the solidarity economy practices and institutions which embody some solidarity values, and strive to move all our economic practices and institutions along a spectrum from inequality to solidarity, along every dimension (race, class, gender, man/nature). The act of teaching about and mapping the solidarity economy is crucial in helping people and groups understand their key role in helping transform our economy, and linking them up cooperatively with other sectors of the solidarity economy, and with a larger movement for change.

## Figure 6. Solidarity Economy Practices and Institutions

### Creating Solidarity Economy by Working and Producing:

- doing unpaid work raising children or doing community or political work, with solidarity values
- as part of worker-owned cooperative ([usworker.coop](http://usworker.coop))
- as part of a producer cooperative (e.g. a farmer's cooperative)
- as a worker for a socially responsible and/or green business ([greenamerica.org](http://greenamerica.org))
- as a social entrepreneur (start a business with a social goal; [se-alliance.org](http://se-alliance.org), [ashoka.org](http://ashoka.org))
- as a worker for a nonprofit with solidarity values (day care, social movement group)
- as a whistle-blower or transformer in a nonsolidarity business or nonprofit
- as an unpaid, volunteer worker in a solidarity organization or movement like Occupy
- as a member of a time trade circle, for another member of the circle ([timebanks.org](http://timebanks.org))
- as part of a progressive labor union (e.g. [seiu.org](http://seiu.org))
- DIY (do it yourself) and DIY (do it ourselves)
- working in a community garden ([communitygarden.org](http://communitygarden.org))
- participating in open source production (p2p, open source ecology)

### Creating Solidarity Economy by Consuming:

- socially responsible or green consumption ([greenamerica.org](http://greenamerica.org)); fair trade ([wfto.com](http://wfto.com))
- sharing ([shareable.net](http://shareable.net), [collaborativeconsumption.com](http://collaborativeconsumption.com), [zipcar.com](http://zipcar.com), p2p)
- collective consumption of public goods: funded by taxes, free to users (schools, roads, parks, etc.)
- recycling, buying used goods ([craigslist](http://craigslist)), simple living ([newdream.org](http://newdream.org)), and cutting your consumption so you can downshift to more fulfilling, lower paid and unpaid work
- freeganism: (living off the waste stream; [freegans.info](http://freegans.info))
- buying clubs and consumer cooperatives (food or day care coops)
- coop housing, cohousing ([cohousing.org](http://cohousing.org)) and ecovillages ([ecovillage.org](http://ecovillage.org))
- collectively, by guaranteeing economic human rights to health care, education, jobs with living wages, housing, etc.

### Creating Solidarity Economy in Exchange and Distribution:

- giving/getting for free: open source, really free markets, freecycling ([freecycle.org](http://freecycle.org)), charity, volunteer work and unpaid work; skillshares, freeganism ([freegans.info](http://freegans.info))
- swapping and bartering: informal swaps, swapfests, barter clubs
- time trade circles ([timebanks.org](http://timebanks.org)) – one hour exchanges for one hour
- taking or using that which isn't being used: squatting, recuperated factories, occupying public spaces
- refusing to give up your home after an unjust eviction, supporting others doing so
- sharing: in family economy, with friends and neighbors; with other citizens via government and taxes
- sliding scale pricing – pay according to your income
- community currencies – keep purchasing power in local economy, prime the pump of spending during recessions
- consumer supported agriculture ([localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org)/CSA) and fisheries; farmers markets

### Creating Solidarity Economy by Saving and Investing:

- checking or savings account in socially responsible bank, credit union, or mutual
- participating in socially responsible investment, impact investing, seed banks, conservation land trusts
- rotating credit associations
- crowd sourcing
- public investment in creation of socially responsible jobs, including social enterprise development and cooperative development and training; public investment in day care and education, public goods, public parks

## **Key Features and Examples of the Emerging Solidarity Economy**

An impressive set of solidarity economy practices and institutions already exist in the U.S. Here, I will briefly discuss basic aspects of solidarity economics as it emerging in the different sectors of the economy. I will also provide some common examples, shown in Figure 6. When my students read this list, they are always surprised at the fact that they are already involved in the solidarity economy!

**Solidarity Work:** Solidarity economy work and production means striving to do work that uses ones special talents and skills to contribute to society as a whole, in ways that are affirming and empowering oneself and ones co-workers. SE forms of working include the crucial work of raising children with solidarity values and awareness; being part of worker- or producer-owned cooperative; starting up or working for a business which embodies socially responsible, solidarity values, rather than being solely motivated by profit; and acting as a whistle-blower on unjust, destructive, and/or illegal practices occurring in ones workplace.

**Solidarity Consumption:** Socially responsible consumption -- i.e. caring about how the products you purchase were produced, and about the effects of your consumption of them on others and the environment -- is a key part of SE consumption. This involves minimizing your consumption -- rather than maximizing it, as taught in mainstream economics -- by reusing, repairing, recycling, and sharing with others. Sharing on a larger scale, another important part of the solidarity economy, is accomplished through what economists call public goods, funded by our taxes, and usually free to consumers, as well as through the guarantee of the right of all to health care, education, housing, and jobs. Another important part of SE consumption is cooperative consumption -- buying clubs, consumer coops, and housing cooperatives and cohousing.

**Solidarity Exchange and Distribution:** Solidarity forms of exchange include a number of forms of gifting and/or getting for free, from open source, freecycling, charity, volunteer and unpaid work, and skillshares to freeganism (living off of the waste stream). Informal ways of organized sharing like swapping and bartering help people fill their needs when their income is limited, and allow them to do so without taxing the environment. Not obeying the laws of private property when they are unfair -- by refusing to leave ones home

upon eviction, squatting on unused land or in abandoned homes, or continuing to work in factories after their owners have shut them down – is another example. Time trade circles facilitate filling one's needs for services through participation in an egalitarian, internet-facilitated, exchange community where one hour of anyone's time has the same value. Time trades can specifically help communities plagued by under- or unemployment – or just your basic shortage of cash – as can community currencies.

**Solidarity Saving and Investing:** There are a number of ways that one can participate in and build the solidarity paradigm in this sector. Banking with a socially responsible bank, that uses your funds to do good is one. Finding ways to invest that also help others and the planet is another, through vehicles like socially responsible investment or pension funds or impact investing. Cooperative saving – through a credit union, mutual, or rotating credit association – is a solidarity economy form, as is crowd sourcing. Another area is public investments in growing the solidarity economy, including quality childcare and education, worker cooperative development, and public goods.

These many examples show that people in the U.S. are already in the process of building a new, solidarity paradigm of economic and social life. Similar examples are present around the world. A next and better economy is already emerging. Our movements are not only resisting the different inequalities – they are also building a better world, brick by brick. The real “news” in the world today is not the ongoing crises, which, unfortunately, are the “olds”<sup>viii</sup> – but rather the truly liberatory potential of all our movements against inequality, when taken together, and when committed to an emerging set of shared values. The fact is that, together, the social movements are establishing new forms of economic and social life which, together, represent movement towards a qualitatively different and superior paradigm. Together we have already begun to show that the economy does not have to be a locus of strife, scarcity, greed, and insecurity, as portrayed by consensus reality – but rather an arena of sharing, cooperation, fulfillment, and compassion.

I end this chapter where it began, with the butterfly metaphor. Another friend and colleague of mine in the solidarity economy movement, Emily Kawano, who directs the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network, has described these emergent solidarity economy practices and institutions as equivalent to the imaginal cells which the caterpillar begins to produce once it has spun its chrysalis.<sup>ix</sup> These special cells hold a different program as to what the caterpillar should be, and at first are attacked by its immune system. However, they multiply and begin to form clusters, which become the beginnings of the organs of the emergent butterfly, then grow and begin interacting with each other, eventually taking over the caterpillars identity and turning it into a butterfly.

Like these imaginal cells, those of us involved in solidarity economy practices and institutions are acting out a different program, or value system, than is currently dominant. We have begun to express these values by forming solidarity “organs” in the different sectors of the economy, which are beginning to take over a portion of our economy. Already today, some people are able to live their lives largely in the solidarity economy, by participating in the practices listed in Figure 6. Eventually, the growing solidarity economy can replace the inequality-based forms that currently dominate economics. As part of this metamorphosis, we need to replace mainstream economics, which takes narrow self-interest and competition as a given, with solidarity economics. This is the topic of our next chapter.

My final and summary message here to you as I end this chapter is, do not despair! Do not lose hope!! There is a way forward out of the crises that currently grip humankind, a collective way forward that is has been under construction for decades, if not longer. In the rest of this book, I will show you ways to connect your life up to this larger process of paradigm shift, so that you can start becoming part of the solution. I invite you to join our movement of movements – or, more likely, to take in the fact that you are already part of it, and part of a larger process of paradigm shift, and the process of co-creating a new economics. In our crisis-wracked world, knowingly participating in the paradigm shift – and connecting to others on the same path -- can offer your life meaning, fulfillment, hope, and deep and meaningful, co-creative connections to other human beings and to all of life.

You can make a positive difference in your life, and in the world! As the great nonviolent activist, Mahatma Gandhi, advised, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” As I will show you in the following chapters, anything and everything we do in our lives – from the way we treat ourselves, to our relationships with our family and neighbors, to our work and activism – can contribute to our collective metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly, from inequality to solidarity!

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Jessica is an expert on cooperative economic forms in the African American community, past and present; see her wonderful book, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. State College, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2014.

<sup>ii</sup> I first encountered this concept as a logo on a T-shirt made by the Boggs Center in Detroit.

<sup>iii</sup> This estimate of ExxonMobil's climate denial funding from 1998 through 2014 -- \$30,925,235 -- was compiled by Greenpeace. See <http://www.exxonsecrets.org/html/index.php>; accessed 10 17 17.

<sup>iv</sup> My research assistant Madeleine Stern and I compiled these indices from a variety of other indices; for details, see the Appendix.

<sup>v</sup> Our race indices were difficult to compile and hence cannot be relied upon, since the EU does not release statistics for race, due to the belief that the act of collecting statistics by race itself contributes to racism.

<sup>vi</sup> See <https://NewEconomy.net/>; [www.CommunityEconomies.org](http://www.CommunityEconomies.org); and [CaringEconomy.org](http://CaringEconomy.org)

<sup>vii</sup> Brazil developed the first and most extensive maps, via the FBES, the Brazilian Forum on the Solidarity Economy ([www.fbes.org.br](http://www.fbes.org.br)).

<sup>viii</sup> I first heard of this distinction between the “news” and the “olds” from Barbara Marx Hubbard, at a Science and Consciousness Conference in the 1990s; see also her book *Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential*. Novato, Ca.: New World Library, 1998.

<sup>ix</sup> Emily Kawano, “Crisis and Opportunity: The Emerging Solidarity Economy Movement,” in Emily Kawano, Thomas Neal Masterson, and Jonathan Teller-Elsberg, eds., *Solidarity Economy I: Building Alternatives for People and Planet*. Amherst, MA: Center for Popular Economics, pp. 15-16.