Some may ask how the concepts of ‘housewifisation’, ‘globalisation’ and ‘subsistence’ relate to another and whether they are still topical after 35 years. How is reflection on the meaning of these theoretical concepts relevant to answering the questions women – and men – are struggling with in central Europe today? These are legitimate questions. In what follows, I will attempt to answer them. I will begin by formulating some hypotheses:

(1) Not only were the concepts of housewifisation, globalisation and subsistence the right key concepts for feminists seeking to criticise a worldwide, capitalist-patriarchal economic system, but they prove to be more apposite than ever when used to explain the consequences of this economic system, which also affect women and men in the industrialised nations.

(2) Established left-wing theories have proven insufficient both for adequately explaining a globally active capitalism and for opening up a perspective that safeguards the future of nature and of everyone on this planet, a future based on ecological and cultural diversity, self-organisation, democracy and a ‘good life’, meaning the satisfaction of needs and a pacified

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1. This article is the revised version of a previously unpublished manuscript written around the turn of the millennium (editors’ note).
conviviality within the limits of what our planet can provide. This is part of what the concept of the subsistence-perspective means.

(3) Those who demonstrated in Seattle have understood that the WTO is the institution that symbolises a global economic system that is hostile to nature, human beings and women. They have also understood that the WTO is the institution where political rules are established that give large transnational corporations (TNCs), globally operating patriarchal capital, full power not just over nations, provinces and municipalities, but over all aspects of life: food, health, education, culture and life itself are subjugated to commodity-production and the insatiable profit-motive.

(4) People from every country and culture are resisting this new totalitarianism: consumers and peasants, environmentalists and workers, young and elderly people, women and men. In doing so, they are not merely pursuing their own narrow interests; they are demanding an economy that sacrifices neither human beings nor nature to the logic of accumulation. ‘People and the planet before profit’ was one of the slogans I read in Seattle.²

(5) Seattle marks a turning point, a watershed,³ demonstrating that thousands of people from every country in the world have lost their faith in the principles of neoliberal capitalism – which are destructive of nature, women and human beings – and have already begun replacing them with principles we hold to be fundamental to a subsistence-perspective. Vandana Shiva summarised these principles as follows:

The centralized, undemocratic rules and structures of the WTO that are establishing global corporate rule based on monopolies and monocultures need to give way to an earth democracy supported by decentralisation and diversity. The rights of all species and the rights of all people must come before the rights of corporations to make limitless profits through limitless destruction.⁴

I want to elaborate on these hypotheses by recounting the genesis of the subsistence-approach as it was developed by Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Claudia von Werlhof and myself in the late 1970s. Forgetful times like ours render such retrospection necessary. I will engage in it even at the risk of reiterating familiar notions (or rather notions that have not yet been forgotten).

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² Mies 2000.
³ Shiva (no date).
⁴ Shiva (no date).