



00:00:04 Speaker Bec Horridge
Walawani.

00:00:05 Speaker Bec Horridge
Welcome to Earth Matters Environment, Social Justice Storeys from Australia and around the world.

00:00:10 Speaker Bec Horridge
Produced at the studios of 3Cr on Wurundjeri country in Naarm Melbourne and broadcast across this continent via the Community Radio Network.

00:00:21 Speaker Bec Horridge
I'm your show host, Bec Horridge and I do pay respects to the elders, past, present and emerging.

00:00:30 Speaker Bec Horridge
Today's show was made in Gadigal, Sydney on Wangal, the lands of the people of the EORA nations.

00:00:39 Speaker Bec Horridge
Today on Earth Matters we hear Helena Norberg Hodge on Ancient Futures and the religion of economics.

00:00:46 Speaker Bec Horridge
Helena is a pioneer of the new economy movement, filmmaker, author and founding director of Local Futures, which is committed to the revitalisation of cultural and biological diversity and the strengthening of local communities and economies worldwide.

00:01:03 Helena Norberg-Hodge
I want to talk particularly about the human side today and of course, when we talk about the economy, we need to talk about how the economic system affects both humans and the rest of life.

00:01:18 Helena Norberg-Hodge
And my work started, as some of you know, in this ancient culture called Ladakh.

00:01:24 Helena Norberg-Hodge
Ladakh is a part of Tibet culturally, on the Tibetan Plateau, but belonged politically to India,

was closed off from the outside world.

00:01:34 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So it was one of the few places on this planet when I arrived there in the mid-70s that had not been colonised and that had not yet been colonised mentally by modernity, because modernity, with the use of modern telecommunications, from the radio to the television and now the social media, is a very toxic sort of evil machine that is undermining self reliance and self respect worldwide right here, colonising our children and colonising the children around the world that belong to different cultures that are made to feel that they're stupid and backward if they are based on the land, if they had their hands in the soil.

00:02:31 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And this is something that we really need to understand better, this psychological warfare.

00:02:38 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we need to have clarity about the fact that, that most of that is not coming from a group of evil people with big fat cigars sitting in a dark room somewhere.

00:02:51 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It's actually arising out of literally generations of beliefs that reinforce the idea that we are separate from nature, that nature is like a machine that we can dissect into smaller and smaller bits and we can control nature.

00:03:10 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we haven't really understood how that belief has also translated into the belief that human beings can be remade into something better than human.

00:03:23 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And that is now robots and AI.

00:03:27 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We need to be really aware that we're subjected in every discipline to propaganda that tells us that robots are superior to humans.

00:03:39 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we need to really be aware that that includes kind People, I met this beautiful, kind American female scientist who's in a film about meditation, the benefits of meditation that I hope most of you recognise as ancient truth, that quieting the mind is good for us, it's good for our soul, it's good for our body, good for our spirit.

00:04:13 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And that film, she talks about how human beings are always judgmental but robots aren't.

00:04:23 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And in that film she shows Sophia the robot teaching people how to meditate.

00:04:32 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And so the basic message is that in terms of counsel and wisdom and listening, robots are not judgmental and superior and that we now could have robots teaching us how to meditate.

00:04:46 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Now, the implications of all of this are so much more far reaching than we realise.

00:04:53 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And it can sound a bit overwhelming.

00:04:56 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It can sound like, well, many of you probably believe that this is a sort of march of progress that can't be stopped.

00:05:05 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It's just sort of inevitable.

00:05:07 Helena Norberg-Hodge

How many of you believe that?

00:05:09 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Oh, you're alone.

00:05:11 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Can you believe it?

00:05:12 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Yeah.

00:05:13 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Well, I think, remember, technology is a very broad term for everything from a knife to a nuclear power plant to the system that is necessary to build up a world where algorithms already now are the foot soldiers for a type of extractive global capitalism that we should be very, very sceptical about.

00:05:40 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So we already have a machine like interconnected system.

00:05:47 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And I'm so happy to tell you that Yuval Harari, who wrote the book *sapiens* that sold 25 million copies, and in that book I was very nervous and very sceptical about his voice because he made it seem that this type of technological development that we witnessed was inevitable, was evolutionary and showed a type of Western superiority.

00:06:19 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So I tried to warn my friends about these assumptions embedded in a book that looked very radical.

00:06:26 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It looked like it was embracing a lot of what you and I believe in, including meditation, including ecological thinking.

00:06:35 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But now Yuval harari, who sold 25 million copies of that book, has come out with a new book called *Nexus*.

00:06:44 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And he's warning very strongly about allowing AI to continue to be developed, supported, totally deregulated, no control, no regulations, no government, saying, well, where do we want to go here?

00:07:01 Helena Norberg-Hodge

What does it mean for the environment?

00:07:03 Helena Norberg-Hodge

What does it mean for society?

00:07:04 Helena Norberg-Hodge

What does it mean for democracy?

00:07:07 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Yuval is now calling for a moratorium.

00:07:09 Helena Norberg-Hodge

He's calling for regulation.

00:07:12 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Why would we think that we as a society cannot decide to regulate technology?

00:07:20 Helena Norberg-Hodge

What would make us think that this is somehow beyond us?

00:07:26 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I know that many people believe it's beyond us because global corporations that are behind it have no regulations, pay no tax and seem to be totally beyond the law.

00:07:39 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But that is the issue that I think we need to be thinking about very, very strenuously and very actively in the very near future.

00:07:50 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I want to say right away that on the one side, I and my organisation, Local Futures, has been trying to raise awareness about understanding the global system, mainly consisting of global banks and corporations, how this global system is responsible for most of our multiple crises today.

00:08:17 Helena Norberg-Hodge

At the same time, we've been advocating for a shift away from continuing to globalise to support a process of localization as a process.

00:08:30 Helena Norberg-Hodge

This is not about saying that we should only think locally or that we should only act locally, or that only very local is good.

00:08:41 Helena Norberg-Hodge

This is about recognising that the global as it has been created from the outset was always an extractive capitalism that was based on destroying local economies and local cultures, and that we need to have a clear vision, a big picture vision, of what side we want to be on.

00:09:06 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Do we want to support what I see as a cultural turning, a global cultural turning towards nature, towards the human scale, towards a deep spiritual reconnection to life.

00:09:26 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Sitting under that tree, listening to the didgeridoo, hearing about the river, hearing about the mullet, and with you.

00:09:37 Helena Norberg-Hodge

You are a mixed group, coming from different backgrounds, and you're beautiful, many of you very young, and it makes my heart sing to be part of this cultural turning.

00:09:53 Helena Norberg-Hodge

This represents a huge cultural turning.

00:09:55 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Even 10 years ago, people here weren't talking about the indigenous culture in that way.

00:10:01 Helena Norberg-Hodge

They weren't talking about the mullet in that way.

00:10:04 Helena Norberg-Hodge

They weren't recognising that we are an inextricable part of the land of nature.

00:10:11 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It is happening worldwide.

00:10:13 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And for me, I suppose one of the most wonderful things too, is that I'm seeing that in places like China and India, where we have also worked on the ground, that people are coming out of those cities fairly quickly now.

00:10:31 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I'm not saying the majority, I'm not saying it's enough, but it is so heartening when you recognise that we human beings have this light inside us.

00:10:42 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I would basically say as long as we were alive, we have a desire, first of all, to live.

00:10:48 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we know that we need to be connected to life, that we need to be sustained and nurtured by life itself.

00:10:56 Helena Norberg-Hodge

There are so many examples of this, studies that show when there's a window in the hospital room where people can see a tree outside the window, their healing is faster.

00:11:07 Helena Norberg-Hodge

There is so much evidence that when you walk barefoot on the earth for a few minutes the healing will increase again.

00:11:14 Helena Norberg-Hodge

The examples are countless and they're too narrowly focused.

00:11:19 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Usually we do not have enough of a big connected picture that helps us come actively towards life.

00:11:30 Helena Norberg-Hodge

This doesn't mean that we need to go barefoot all the time.

00:11:36 Helena Norberg-Hodge

This doesn't mean that, that we can't spend time in the city, but it does mean that the city needs to be connected to the land around it and inside it, wherever possible.

00:11:49 Helena Norberg-Hodge

You have to look at some of these new cities and you'll see there is no land inside those cities because they are high rise cement and they are deadly.

00:11:59 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I first had my eyes open to just how deadly they are when I had been out in Ladakh, this part of Tibet that hadn't been colonised and I had learned to speak the language fluently.

00:12:12 Helena Norberg-Hodge

There's too little time to go back into all the history, but if you're interested, please read my book, *Ancient Futures*.

00:12:20 Helena Norberg-Hodge

That's the name of the book that I wrote about the experiences there and the changes I saw.

00:12:26 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But when I had been living out there for two years, speaking this ancient dialect fluently and discovered that I had never ever encountered people who were so happy, who were so deeply self assured, that they were the most tolerant, the most vital, the most joyful people I had ever met, I discovered that a word like depression, they couldn't understand.

00:12:52 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And when I explained that in the west we even had doctors who dealt with this emotional mental problems, not the physical health they could not understand.

00:13:03 Helena Norberg-Hodge

When I went back to Sweden, I saw wide scale depression, alcoholism, suicide.

00:13:11 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It was suddenly so clear why at that time, already in Stockholm, more than half the dwellings, there was one person living alone.

00:13:21 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And in the extreme circumstances that some people lived, they might literally have nothing alive.

00:13:29 Helena Norberg-Hodge

In that apartment on the 10th floor, where windows couldn't open, maybe a plastic plant.

00:13:37 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Nothing alive.

00:13:38 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And already then there were therapists that knew having a fish tank with one little fish that you needed to feed could help restore a sense of meaning.

00:13:51 Speaker Bec Horridge

Helena Norberg Hodge, you're listening to Earth Matters, broadcast nationally across this continent via the Community Radio Network.

00:14:07 Speaker Bec Horridge

Back to Helena Norberg Hodge, who argues for a radical shift from destructive global capitalism and unchecked technological advancement, including AI and urbanisation, towards a model of localisation emphasising reconnecting humans with nature and community, which fosters happiness, self reliance and ecological healing.

00:14:29 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Very early on I got this very black and white sense and of course I was very alone, because in the west at that time, Sweden was being held up as a model, as a nice blend of communism and American capitalism.

00:14:46 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And in many ways Sweden was doing very well, except for that suicide rate and alcoholism and depression.

00:14:53 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But no one was really looking at that because outside Sweden people didn't really get to hear about that.

00:15:00 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And they weren't destroying the environment in the same way.

00:15:04 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Obviously didn't have the poverty that we had in America already at that time.

00:15:10 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I started already back in the 70s, talking about the economics of happiness and trying to get people to look at what is it that actually makes us happier and healthier.

00:15:24 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And let's start bringing in that indicator later on.

00:15:28 Helena Norberg-Hodge

I worked with a friend who started a project in Bhutan where by that time I and my organisation had also worked in Bhutan in the 80s for five years.

00:15:39 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And in Bhutan, again, very similar to Ladakh, the happiness indicator was virtually 100%.

00:15:48 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we started a project called Gross National Happiness.

00:15:51 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But one of the reasons I was feeling a bit down the other day with the closing down of Schumacher College was also the knowledge that in Bhutan this project has gone backwards.

00:16:04 Helena Norberg-Hodge

The King at the time in the 90s when this first took off, was much more on board.

00:16:09 Helena Norberg-Hodge

The Prime Minister was much more on board.

00:16:12 Helena Norberg-Hodge

The current Prime Minister and King are now on a very different tack.

00:16:20 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And they just had something called an Innovation Forum in Bhutan.

00:16:24 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And that Innovation Forum is about their plan to build a city in Bhutan that will hopefully answer people's needs to leave the country.

00:16:36 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Many of them coming to Australia, by the way, young people who feel that life in the west is so much better.

00:16:43 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And this Innovation Forum, it tragically spells out the essence of what I'm trying to say today between these two paths, on the one hand are quite a lot of entrepreneurs, a lot of them from Silicon Valley investors, supported by Joseph Stiglitz, whom I have met personally and who is a sort of good guy economist.

00:17:08 Helena Norberg-Hodge

He was the chief economist at the World Bank, Nobel Prize winning.

00:17:13 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And he did see that global corporations were getting too much power through the process of deregulating global trade, that is globalisation, the deregulation of global trade through free trade treaties.

00:17:32 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And he saw that these global corporations were getting too much power.

00:17:35 Helena Norberg-Hodge

He's even been on Australian television talking about that.

00:17:39 Helena Norberg-Hodge

That's a problem.

00:17:40 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But he's an economist, Nobel Prize winning economist, and he's now sitting there in Bhutan buying into mainstream dogma around the economy, which is to do we need education to train up a workforce?

00:17:57 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We don't have a workforce here.

00:17:59 Helena Norberg-Hodge

What that means is we've got to pull people away from more rural ways of living, where they learn how to grow food, how to build a house, how to weave clothes, how to make music, how to act in theatre, how to collaborate at the local level, how to respect the elders, how to look after children.

00:18:17 Helena Norberg-Hodge

They have a medical system too, that is not worthless.

00:18:20 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It's a mixture of Chinese and Indian.

00:18:23 Helena Norberg-Hodge

All of that is zero.

00:18:25 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And he describes that all as zero and talks about that hard life.

00:18:31 Helena Norberg-Hodge
And that's what the modern economy has done from the outset.

00:18:34 Helena Norberg-Hodge
It's called subsistence.

00:18:36 Helena Norberg-Hodge
We know no one wants to be there.

00:18:39 Helena Norberg-Hodge
It's hard, it's difficult.

00:18:41 Helena Norberg-Hodge
We do not have studies of what that life was like, what it consists of.

00:18:46 Helena Norberg-Hodge
And it's not perfect.

00:18:49 Helena Norberg-Hodge
It's definitely not perfect.

00:18:51 Helena Norberg-Hodge
And you and I would not want to stay living exactly that way if we had tasted this.

00:18:58 Helena Norberg-Hodge
But I can tell you that my choice in rebirth would definitely be to be reborn a traditional
Ladakhi.

00:19:07 Helena Norberg-Hodge
I would actually prefer Ladakh to Bhutan, because in Ladakh women had even higher status,
much higher status than in Sweden.

00:19:15 Helena Norberg-Hodge
And the whole structure of society made it so easy to be a mother and to have a voice in
political and economic decisions, because things were at a local scale, at a human scale, at a
pace of what we need to care for children, for the elderly, for ourselves.

00:19:36 Helena Norberg-Hodge
What we're dealing with then is this big picture of right now.

00:19:42 Helena Norberg-Hodge
We're at a crossroads.

00:19:44 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But please keep in mind the world is constantly changing.

00:19:49 Helena Norberg-Hodge

On the one hand, we have a world pushed by very, very few, the numbers pushing this world of AI, which is also competition between the US, China and Russia, to be on Mars first to go to the deep sea bed, to do everything, to grab more minerals from this living earth, to compete with each other.

00:20:16 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It's a war machine, fundamentally a war machine now that's being pushed, actively pushed by vastly less than 1% of the global population.

00:20:27 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We estimate having started a forum on globalisation where I, with Vandana Shiva and other people that I invited to this forum for about 12 years, we studied the impact of these trade treaties that have been central in giving freedom to now, to Amazon, to Blackrock, to run the world.

00:20:49 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Basically, that freedom was very dangerous and it was very destructive of any form of democracy.

00:20:57 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And it meant that money for a particular type of science, it meant that money for media that would reach us was coming from fewer and fewer global corporations with vested interests.

00:21:11 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So that path pushed by vastly less than 1%, I mean, we estimate it's probably a few hundred thousand people who are actively pushing this.

00:21:21 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Many more are going along with it, but not actively pushing it.

00:21:26 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we estimate that more than half of the global population don't want to go there.

00:21:32 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And part of why we know that is that the epidemic of depression among young people from Korea and Japan to right here to Sweden is escalating like this.

00:21:45 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Our young people are now being told, don't think you're going to own your own home, don't

think you're going to have any kind of meaningful work that you enjoy and that pays enough to pay for a house.

00:21:57 Helena Norberg-Hodge
It's like extinction they're told they're facing.

00:22:01 Helena Norberg-Hodge
The climate narrative is being run by global interests, so we don't hear about emissions from global trade.

00:22:09 Helena Norberg-Hodge
Every day food is being imported and exported across this world in vast quantities.

00:22:15 Helena Norberg-Hodge
Those emissions are nowhere mentioned in the climate negotiation.

00:22:20 Helena Norberg-Hodge
So please don't join some of the people who think that climate is not an issue, but please join us in getting a clear narrative out about what is causing climate change, where are most of the emissions coming from and what are sensible solutions?

00:22:38 Helena Norberg-Hodge
We do not need masses of more energy if we are talking about what people need to heat their houses, cool their houses, cook, do what they need to live, whether in Ladakh and Bhutan, where they might want a bit more comfort and what we would need here to stay just as comfortable as we are.

00:22:58 Helena Norberg-Hodge
But we need to be looking at trains that make sense.

00:23:01 Helena Norberg-Hodge
We need to be looking at not continuing to destroy farmers worldwide and shoving people into bigger and bigger cities.

00:23:10 Helena Norberg-Hodge
So the link between the destruction of food and farming and the massive issues that we have, both in terms of conflict and climate, are linked to this pressure from very, very few people, pushing us into 100% urbanisation, mega cities.

00:23:31 Helena Norberg-Hodge
So there's a link between mega cities, climate change, globalisation, corporatization, epidemics of depression, loss of democracy, a mad swing back and forth between left and right, which has become meaningless now because both left and right have been pushing to

support that global, highly wasteful, highly inefficient system.

00:23:58 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Their food production is a fraction of what we can produce on small, diversified farms.

00:24:06 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We can actually, by supporting the life of farming, more localised interaction, which is being embodied in a cultural turning.

00:24:16 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It's what people want.

00:24:18 Helena Norberg-Hodge

That's why they're talking more and more about indigenous, more and more about community, more and more about what they really care about.

00:24:27 Helena Norberg-Hodge

That cultural turning needs to have a structural part, needs to look also at the economy, needs to look at the media.

00:24:36 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And the media we want you to join into is what we call big picture activism, sharing the big picture, looking for those sources of information which confirm that we can and must move towards life.

00:24:51 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We are seeing the most amazing examples of how ecosystems can be healed, but I mean dramatically healed in a few years when you support diversity above ground.

00:25:05 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Not just regenerative, it's localised, diversified systems that are truly regenerating.

00:25:12 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Soil cleaning, the water, magic stuff.

00:25:16 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And it's accompanied by people who are being healed.

00:25:20 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Prisoners, torture victims, depressed people helped to return to the land to be part of the healing and do something really productive.

00:25:32 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So one of the most enriching and healing for all of us is to support, join or create what is a worldwide local food movement.

00:25:45 Helena Norberg-Hodge

It is regenerative.

00:25:46 Helena Norberg-Hodge

But the word just regenerative also is being pushed by Kellogg's and Nestle for big monocultures.

00:25:55 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So support highly diversified, highly localised, smaller scale systems that can happen right in the city or on the edge of the city.

00:26:06 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And they are happening.

00:26:07 Helena Norberg-Hodge

They're happening in China as well, and in India, all across the world, Even in the Middle east, where people sometimes say, we can't grow any food here and we have a lot of humans.

00:26:19 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We've got an overabundant, renewable resource of human beings.

00:26:24 Helena Norberg-Hodge

We need a human liberation front to allow us to engage in the work of caring and restoring and healing both humans and ecosystems.

00:26:36 Helena Norberg-Hodge

So this is the path of what we're broadly calling localization.

00:26:40 Helena Norberg-Hodge

And we need a global movement as soon as possible.

00:26:44 Helena Norberg-Hodge

Thank you.

00:26:46 Speaker Bec Horridge

Thank you to Helena Norberg Hodge.

00:26:49 Speaker Bec Horridge

Find her website buildingeconomicsofhappiness@www.helenanorberghodge.com

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00:27:30 Speaker Bec Horridge

Earth Matters is produced in the studios of 3CR on Wurundjeri Country.

00:27:34 Speaker Bec Horridge

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