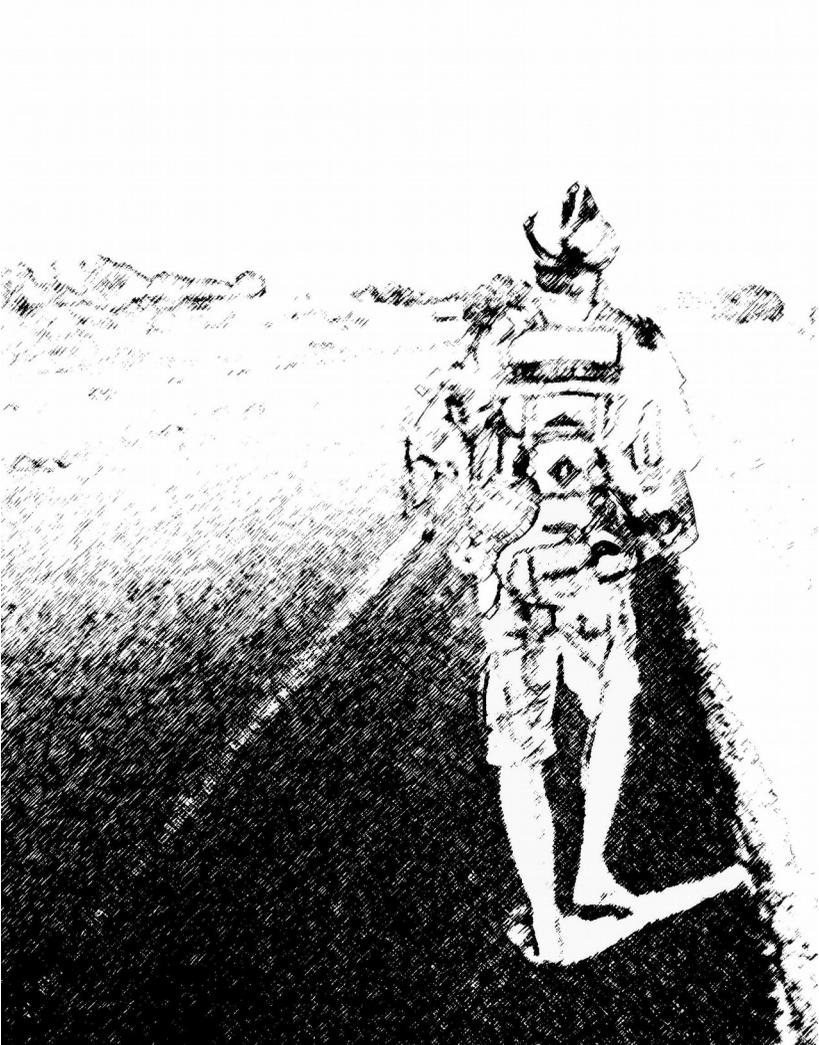


*Benjamin Lesage*

# **Living Without Money**

What if the dream came true?



Special thanks to the great team of [Permondo](#) for the translation. I especially thank Riteba McCallum, Paula Kattan, Laura Streater and Kelsea Riddick for proofreading my book !



“Anything one man can imagine, other men can make real.”

Jules Verne

I have been living without money for five years. This book tells why and how I came to this crazy decision.

This book is free and can't be sold, but must be shared!  
Before printing it, please be aware of the ecological impact of printing. Use recycled paper.

If you want more information about this journey, life without money and our ongoing projects, please visit  
[sansunsou.wordpress.com](http://sansunsou.wordpress.com)

Thank you and have a great read!

## I. Money

Paradoxically, whether we wish to live with or without it, money is omnipresent in our lives. And if this book is about a moneyless experience, this ageless concept which occupies the mind of billions of people today is the main character.

To me, money is before all the pocket money mum used to give me when I was younger. A coin of 10 francs which I would turn in my hand while exploring the window of the candy shop. I would spend a good quarter of an hour calculating the number of sour licorice laces, Coca-Cola sweets or multicolored teddy bears I could offer myself. Money, at that time, was the freedom to choose.

A couple of years later, we used to spend our Saturday afternoons at the mall. I remember the long rows of clothes in the Kiabi store, the excitation when I saw a basketball tee-shirt or a pair of Adidas pants and also my deception when my mum, after having a look at the price, would shake her head

negatively, taking away all my hopes of negotiation. Money was then an obstacle.

I mainly remember the day my mum decided to open a bank account in my name to put in the pension my father transferred each month – about 1500 francs. She wanted to give me a sense of responsibility. Money was therefore mine. I had money and I was free to use it as I wished. The following day, a Thursday afternoon while the history and geography teacher was absent, I went to the city with a friend and I bought a Nintendo 64. The financial freedom I had discovered the day before became suddenly relative when my mum came back in the evening and, furious because of my irresponsibility, seized the play-station for an indefinite time.

Then, there was my first salary. I had just turned 19 years old. After my high school diploma and one year spent between the university of law, a failed political science competition and the university of literature, I had become employed at Quick (kind of Macdonald's). I felt rich, I was going to restaurants from time to time, I was going out three or four times a week

wasting a large part of my income on alcohol, I was buying clothes that pleased me (brand-name clothes of course) and I bought Kinder sweets every week – my mum always forbid me to take them. I could buy whatever I wanted or almost, eat what I wanted, I had choice, I was independent, free.

5 years later, I discovered that those multiples were in fact limited, that in this globalized world where any item is produced somewhere else, such a thing as independence didn't exist, and that this money I owned represented more a restriction than an actual freedom.

## II. Wilson

Recife, 18 de junio 2010, about midnight, not a soul on the streets of *Boa Viagem*, privileged suburb facing the sea. We were walking along the high wall set with barbed wires, reinforced doors and electrified fences. From time to time, in the bend of a street, we met a group of *pepenadores* (trash collectors) who dragged their carts and searched the trash cans of the rich to get some metals, bottles, leftovers. A cool breeze caressed our clammy skins, we had been roaming around for more than an hour, following the fresh smell of the ocean. I felt fine, relaxed, relieved. The 10 kilos I was dragging from The Hague were long gone, in a gutter, a trash can, abandoned on the side of a highway, or still under Wilson's seat. Wilson, an alcoholic truck driver who had seen in my backpack the hope of a better living. Did he really think this backpack would be

worth something? I didn't have time to tell him the computer was broken, the solar panel didn't work anymore, that the only items worth something, to me at least, were my passport, my notebooks and my toothbrush.

For 5 months, I was predicating the “moneyless lifestyle” as a solution, I spent hours debating about money, the system, how the world would go better without it. I sustained wholeheartedly that this journey, this moneyless trip was useful, that all of that had a meaning.

Logic caught me up in the early hours of a sunless morning, at a highway station, in the back of a truck. My bank card hidden in the back pocket of my bag, gone. My passport, gone. No more financial security, no more hypocrisy. From now on, it was for real.

Some weeks before, driven by this idea of a sustainable journey, all those incredible experiences on the road, I had taken the decision, while we were navigating in the middle of the ocean, to turn this temporary experiment into a true lifestyle. I wanted to free myself from money forever.

I just needed a little help and it was Wilson who gave it to me. Washing away the last doubts I hung to like a child to his security blanket. He took it in a moment of inattention, during the night, smoothly. In the morning, a new life started.

Thank you Wilson.

This morning there however, opening my eyes on the empty blank space left by my backpack, I didn't feel that grateful. Anxiety seized me right away, I roamed in all directions, looking for a clue, let some of my tears on the shoulders of Raphaël, raised my eyes to heaven to ask this god I didn't believe in “why?”

I needed several hours and this long walk towards the beach of Boa Viagem to understand that this event was a logical result. I wanted to live without money, I wanted to free myself from all my ties, my possessions, my vices.... I had to start with my backpack and this “in case of” embodied by my bank card.

Now more than ever, I was lighter, ready to resume the adventure to commit to the remaining 7000 kilometers we still had to cover to reach Mexico, our final goal. I had lost all my

stuff but I had gained a purpose, a true goal. From now on, I understood why I had dashed into such a crazy adventure.

### **III. An ecological bet**

This journey had started in The Hague on the 19th of January 2010—The Hague was the city where we had all met. Raphaël, Nicola and myself. We were then three students united by a common wish: to do something useful for the world. This wish become progressively a dream, the dream of going do Mexico hitchhiking and boat-hiking, without money. The main goal of such an idea was to realize the most ecological trip ever. To consume as little as possible, using solar panels to boycott the use of conventional electricity. To use a water filter to ban the plastic bottle of our daily lives. To avoid any type of public transport and do the whole journey hitchhiking....

But what was really motivating us was the perspective of doing something unique, to be like pioneers, to walk on the less traveled paths and film the whole trip to make a documentary that would inspire young people around the world.

We left The Hague on a Tuesday. It was really cold outside, the wind blew from the north freezing our pale faces. We formed an atypical trio, three young Europeans, tall and skinny, one blond, one brown and another one red-haired. The blond, Raphaël, born in Berlin, crazy about journeys, equipped with a genius care-freeness and the certainty that nothing was impossible in this world. The red-head, Nicola, born in a small village around Padua, in the north of Italy, a genuine photographer thirsting for great pictures and stories to tell, and me, the brunet....

### **A normal dude**

Normal doesn't really mean anything but it's the word that comes to my mind when I think about myself, before. I was inside the brackets of normality. A child raised by a single mum in the suburbs of a small town: Besançon. I loved to play soccer, I was shy in front of the girls, I smoked joints and drank

beers because the others did. My mom was a primary school teacher and didn't earn so much money. We couldn't afford Nike air shoes like my other friends but I had all I truly needed. My big brother and sister took me from time to time to the cinema or to the frozen lakes of Switzerland, making up for the absence of my father.

The first brain wave, the first time I opened my eyes to the possibility of doing something special with my life, it was watching *Fight Club*. At that time, I didn't really try to understand why I loved it so much, why I was seeing it over and over. Today, I know it is thanks to this movie I started to dream of another life.

I went through high school without problems, I tried to study law, failed miserably to enter Science Po, a renowned political school—I dreamt of becoming a journalist—and I went to a professional school. This choice was made because of the insistent worries of my mum. Those moral restrictions pushed me this same year to get a job in a kind of Macdonald's. Three months later, I rented a studio. Real life started, I was frenetic,

twenty hours per week doing hamburgers, thirty five hours studying, ten hours in the student organization, two hours for my theater courses and the rest of the time: parties, drugs and alcohol.

It actually felt like everything was just perfect. I was in love with one of the most beautiful girls of the school, had lots of friends, good grades, money, nice perspectives for my future.... However, when I was in my room, on Sunday evening, when there was nothing more to do than wait for the next day, I often felt weak, tired ... all of a sudden, all seemed pointless, tasteless. My video games, my movies, all. I explained those strange moments with the accumulated fatigue of the week but somehow, I also knew there was something else. A suffocating feeling of emptiness was there.

Something was wrong but I was unable to identify it. When our English teacher told us about the Erasmus program, the idea of study abroad, another brain wave hit me. I had to leave. I hesitated some days ... and then, without telling anyone around me, I registered.

The first weeks in the Netherlands were exceptional. No more than 800 kilometers separated The Hague from Besançon but it was a complete change of scenery. I had suddenly tons of friends from Madrid, Lisbon, Los Angeles, Milan.... The parties were the best, we talked all kinds of mixed languages. And then, little by little, I got more comfortable in this new routine which, despite the internationality of my relations and travels, resembled the routine I had settled for myself in Besançon: I washed dishes in a restaurant, I was more or less interested in class, I worked in the student organization and during my free time, same thing, drugs, alcohol and girls. On Sunday evening, when I was alone with myself, this same feeling of emptiness would come back. I could watch movies, play stupid video games or smoke joints the whole night, the black hole was still there, deep in myself, and kept growing.

After one year of this Erasmus life, debauchery disguised under the terms of Student Exchange, I decided to stay in Holland. No way to come back to my normal French life. I transferred to

my host university and after another year of parties and some little study, I went for my internship in Mexico.

I had gone to Japan when I was 11 for the wedding of my brother. This trip to Mexico was the second big trip of my life.

I was 24. I fell deeply in love with this country, the charming chaos of its streets, this melting pot of ancient cultures....

Unfortunately, I got quickly into the same routine that stuck to my skin since I was 16. Alcohol, drugs and hangovers. The 6 months spent there went real fast and I suddenly found myself in France again with the feeling of having missed something important. The black hole in my stomach was bigger than ever and I felt that I would get swallowed by it pretty soon.

## **On the road**

It's summer time, Raphaël had arrived from Berlin to visit my home town and convince me to go back to Holland to complete our final study presentation hitchhiking.

We left on a sunny morning, I was quite skeptical, sure the people of this region would never give us a ride. My doubt nailed us at the end of the city for 4 hours and then, a guy stopped. Some hours later, we were stuck in a gas station. The night was early over us, no traffic, few hopes of getting anywhere. We tried to hitchhike on the highway but the cops came quickly and after assuring we were not some kind of bad guys, left us at the same gas station.

We had to spend the night there. It was warm outside, no clouds in the sky. At midnight, while we were discussing in front of the station, two Chechens came and offered us to smoke a joint with them. We could barely talk between each other but the joint was powerful. When they left, we were both smiling and suddenly very happy to be here. We started to dream about such a life. Being free, without money, without plans ... we would go from a gas station to another, exploring the world through the different encounters we would make.

And there I saw, I opened my eyes and saw what my life could be.

## **The idea**

Three months later, we were in the room of Raphaël, the headquarters of the Locomotive, a small foundation we had created some months earlier to organize projects with the university. It was more an excuse to not find a job and prolong this student life we liked so much. We were talking about this famous night and the idea of a free journey. We had two Mexican friends who were getting married. For us, it was a sign, we had to go. Raphaël had already gone to Mexico but Nicola never. “Alright, but if we go there, I don't want to do just a trip, something bigger, making projects, workshops...”

This is what launched the whole project.

He was right, we couldn't just go there and travel freely. I mean, we could, I would be totally OK with that. I just wanted to get this feeling I had at the gas station, to feel free.... But we had to justify such a journey for our families, friends and the whole society.

Since we were already organizing small events about multiculturalism and ecology, we decided to transform this free journey into a sustainable journey. We didn't know so much about environmentalism. We were vegetarians for some months and started to adapt our lifestyle to something greener. It was *Home*, a documentary by Yann Arthus Bertrand, which helped us open our eyes and decide to change our lifestyles. Inspired by this movie, we imagined our own documentary, the story of three young Europeans hitchhiking and boat-hiking on the other side of the ocean, a journey to show we can live and travel while keeping a very low carbon footprint. Basically, we wanted to inspire, to become those people, like Yann Arthus Bertrand, who change the world.

## **Preparation**

We took this idea very seriously. There was something clear: environmentalism was about consuming the least we can, to

ban the products and activities that were polluting the most. The idea of going on the other side of the planet was already in contradiction with it ... but we believed traveling helps open the mind and we needed it! We decided to combine the two.

First point: Transportation, exclusively hitchhiking and boat-hiking. A website talked about a guy who had gone around the world hitchhiking. We knew it was possible and that we had to go to the Canary Islands first to find a boat.

Second point: Food, scavenging, recycling at the end of the markets, in the trash cans behind the supermarkets, put in practice “dumpster diving,” a true phenomenon starting to get famous in the US, a great game consisting in investigating the trash cans to get the unsold items.

Third point: Electricity, it had to be clean so our documentary could be coherent. On Ebay, we bought three solar backpack and two foldable solar panels. We didn't take any plugs to ensure we wouldn't use any dirty electricity for our computer and cameras.

Fourth point: Water, crucial, vital. We knew once outside of Europe, tap water wouldn't be suitable for our delicate European bodies. We found a water filter from the army which cost 300 euros but could filter anything.

Fifth point: Hygiene and health. There we didn't take any precautions. Just a concentrated and environmentally friendly Dr. Bronner's soap. The care-freeness would be our best doctor.

Sixth point: No money, try not to consume anything, reduce to a minimum our consumption of goods and, at the same time, inspired by the Zeitgeist documentaries, question this financial system which increases more and more the gap between rich and poor people.

## IV. Breaking in

We left with a bit more than 10 kilos on our shoulders. It was freezing outside, a gray blanket covered the sky. We took our time to have a last breakfast and it was already two o'clock when we stood at the entrance of the highway. We had already hitchhiked in this spot but this time was special. We were leaving for the big jump. We were dancing on the sideway with our cardboard where we had written our destinations: Belgium, Barcelona and Mexico. The drivers smiled at us but no one stopped. One hour later, I started to doubt about our timing. In January in Holland, night comes at 17h ... it was already 15h15. We had less than two hours of daylight ... what if we postponed our departure to the following day?

A red sports car interrupted my thinking. Our first ride. No coming back.

24 hours later, we were in a gas station, still in the Netherlands, frozen, famished, and Nicola was seriously thinking of stopping this crazy trip. Traveling to him was not about suffering, “sodomasochism, no thank you” he said. This was the first slap of the journey. We wanted to show the world how to travel sustainable without money ... we realized we had first to learn how to survive!

A car came again to stop our doubts. Everything went really fast then, we crossed Belgium in a couple of hours, and three days later, we put foot on the Spanish territory.

## **Scavenging**

Barcelona, European capital of “do it yourself,” refuge for all the alternative people of Europe and the Africans who want to step in. We arrived at night in this swarming of life. Our first contact was an Italian trumpet player who opened the door of his personal *squat*, a flat abandoned by an old lady deceased

some months earlier. Her smell still stagnated in the flat, nothing had been touched as if she had just left for groceries.

The few days spent in Barcelona were like intensive internships to learn how to live without money. Here, they were hundreds, Chileans, Colombians, Italians or Moroccans who were living without a cent or almost, daily, simply, humbly. They all scavenged food at the exit of the local markets or in other stores. They had even a calendar with the different closing times of the shops that were giving the leftovers. They lived in abandoned buildings, waiting for the next expulsion, going from one neighborhood to another, living like nomads in the city.

In Barcelona, putting in practice our theories, we discovered a fundamental truth. If there was more than one person in eight who slept without food in the stomach in the world and about 3.1 million children dying of hunger per year, it was not because of a lack of food. Abundance was a reality, the problem was the distribution of this abundance. As shown clearly by the figures and the number of people suffering from

overweight: more than 1.4 billion in 2013. We could see it for ourselves in this society supposedly in “crisis,” there was not one shop, one grocery store, one bakery or one restaurant which didn't throw away some food. This was automatic and, often, these leftovers were sufficient to feed entire families.

## **The night**

Andalusia, synonym of heat and sun. We were not running anymore, fleeing from the cold. We could start to appreciate the road, take our time. We arrived at night in El Ejido. Nobody knows about this place in Europe but most western consumers have tasted its specialty at least once in their lives: clandestine immigrants getting asphyxiated 10 hours a day under the big tarps which covered the hills of the region. Those fierce workers were not angry about it. They laughed at us, watching us waiting on the road with our thumbs up. Most of them had come from Africa and were very happy about this opportunity to send back money to their families.

We spent the whole day waiting. No one wanted to take us. When the night fell on us, we started our “recycling tour” of the bakeries, restaurants and grocery stores, telling our story in exchange for the leftovers. A vain enterprise until we got to a Bulgarian grocery store. The mum didn't even want to hear our speech and just told us to take whatever we wanted. Just for the pleasure of helping us. Then, we walked during some hours in the city center looking for a quiet spot to spend the night. We finally found a covered corridor that linked two streets. We found some cardboard to make some mattresses. We had already slept in stairwells, gas stations but this was the first time on the bare street. We started to get used to the harshness of the floor but we were not reassured. Anyone could pass by.... We slept curled around our backpacks, just in case. A vagabond came to join us during the night. He also had some cardboard with him and stank of beer. I got certainly a little bit anxious but the fatigue of the day was a good lullaby. I fell asleep quickly, forgetting I was in the street.

## **Hitchhiking**

Despite the fact that we were three men, we had crossed France in two days, staying mostly on the highway. In Spain, hitchhiking is forbidden and it was harder for us to make our way. We waited a lot, walked a lot, and if we could finally get to the other side of the peninsula, it was thanks to two Romanians, one Ukrainian, one Algerian, an Argentine and a French lady. The last ride was a Spanish guy named Raphael and who asked us what we could do in Algeciras.

Algeciras is one of the most southerly points in Europe. 20 kilometers further, lights of the harbors of Africa were shining in the night.

We spent the night on the top of a building, under the stars, and we went early to the harbor. There was one ferry which linked Tangier. Impossible however to speak to the captain or any authority. Hitchhiking was not possible since the tickets were sold for any passengers and not for a vehicle. Remained only one option: the truck drivers. A dozen trucks were parked

outside. One of the drivers told us they had the right to take one passenger for free to cross the strait. This great news gave us more energy and we asked all the truck drivers until we found one Swiss, a German and a Moroccan driver who were willing to help us. They had the right to declare a co-pilot when coming aboard. The transport company paid the ticket, and a meal was offered on board.

Our first obstacle vanished and Africa came before our eyes.

## V. To let go

Once in Morocco, I started do understand what “living without money” really meant. For most of the Africans, Morocco is already like Europe, the waiting room of the dream land. For us, Morocco was Africa, synonymous with adventure, dusty roads ... we found there the values we were looking for in vain in Europe and which here, seemed to spring from every corner: simplicity, generosity, letting go....

From the first night, we were invited and if we slept from time to time in the street, we were often hosted by strangers on those comfy sofas you find in all Moroccan houses. Hitchhiking presented some problems because of the language.... We learned quickly to say “wallou flouz” to explain we had no money at all. Our odd appearance and our greasy hair helped

convince the drivers and we never waited long on the side of the road.

One evening, we had reached the end of a big avenue which cut the city of Fez in two. Ahead of us, an arid steppe extended far away, melting with the night. We had found refuge under the light of lamppost. After a few minutes of waiting, some youngsters sitting on a bench on the other side of a park began to throw oranges at us. Nicola started with the idea, “And what if we walked a little bit. Maybe the people will have pity and stop?”

The idea was not bad but thinking about it afterwards, I have trouble understanding what really pushed us. Rationally, all was against us, it was dark, the cars drove fast and couldn't see us, not a light at the horizon ... we could walk hours before finding anything. If no one stopped, we would have to sleep outside, under a great starry sky ... a romantic idea but also dangerous in this harrowing obscurity. In spite of all that we started walking, without thinking too much about it, as if we felt all three of us that something would happen.

When we arrived at a crossroad, we hesitated. Left or right, what was the road going to the south. A truck appeared suddenly at that moment, pointing his lights at us. We raised our thumbs machinelike and the driver stopped.

“What are you doing here?”

I told him shortly our story and he burst out laughing

“Come up!”

Shaken as never in this old suspension-less lorry, curled up on the back seat, I was exulting. A truth came to shake my conservative and rational mind. Here again, like this famous night spent at the gas station outside of Metz, I felt free, like born again.

We repeated the experience some days later. We were much more in the south, close to the city of Tan Tan, on the edge of the desert. A dusty road sunk in the horizon. Some rare vehicles passed by, old cracked up Mercedes, overflowing trucks going to Mauritania or luxurious camping-cars driven by friendly Europeans who waved at us but didn't stop.

Night came down on our hopes and there again, we decided to walk, just like this, to see and because we thought there was nothing better to do. After a ten minute walk, a car stopped five hundred meters away from us. A unique chance. We accelerated our pace. It was one of those old Mercedes and a man, apparently alone, drove it. He was under the hood when we asked him. He refused immediately, fearing we were some kind of bad guys ... but seeing our desperate, burnt faces and our passports we were holding in front of him, he finally agreed. He was going to Laayoune, three hundred kilometers in the south. Exactly where we wanted to go to find a boat. When we arrived, like the truck driver some days before, he invited us to his house to eat and sleep.

This time, I didn't doubt anymore. I understood the power of this trip, of this moneyless experience, resides in learning to let go, learning to not control one's destiny but let oneself go with the flow, trust in the goodness of the people, in the universal law: *if you smile at the world, the world will smile back at you.* It worked, we experienced it every day.

## **Common sense**

We wanted to reach Laayoune to find a boat. The city was located just in front of Fuerteventura, the nearest island in the Canaries. Unfortunately, the ferry no longer worked and the transportation of sand had stopped. Since the 2008 crisis, Spain had stopped building and no longer needed that much sand. This was explained to us by the boss of the company. The sand was now used for the beaches.

So, we had two options. Go south to cross Mauritania and reach Dakar and hope to find a boat there or come back to Agadir to find a sailing boat. Since we need a Visa to go to Mauritania, we had to go back north anyway.

Agadir is known for its beaches, big hotels and luxurious Marina. The anti-tourist atmosphere made it difficult for us to find a roof for the night. Here, Moroccans had a specific opinion about Europeans, and it wasn't always positive... But tourism also meant loads of left-overs. We roamed the streets

for a couple of hours before finding a corridor, half covered behind a building which we could access from the hill. We could protect ourselves from rain without having to trespass on private land. We still wrote an explanatory note and stuck it to our feet in case someone found us in the morning. We had been chased before by a guy with a golf club in his hand...

Raphael woke up first and alerted us with a scream. When I opened my eyes, I saw, at my feet, a tray with a succulent breakfast on it: bread, tea, olives, marmalade, cheese and fruit... Without investigating where this miracle had come from, famished despite the food collected the previous day – remains of pizzas, salad and old bread – we devoured this gift of God in ten minutes.

When our helper appeared – a forty year-old woman, without a veil and with delicate features – we tried to stammer some thanks, and insisted on doing the dishes. In silence, she asked us to stay where we were. She brought us a bucket with warm water and soap and wished us a good day.

We washed ourselves quickly, quite astonished by all that and went back to the Marina. One of the policeman we had established contact with told us “there’s a sailor looking for you, he saw your note”. We then saw a two-meter tall blond guy coming towards us. “Are you the ones who were looking for a boat? I’m going to Fuerteventura in a week and I can take you with me.”

Incredible. Raphael jumped with joy. Nicola and I were stunned at the news.

We had been looking for this opportunity for about a month, and this sudden encounter came too quickly. It was hard to believe.

The day before our departure, we went back to the corridor where we had spent the night before. In the morning, again, a tray with breakfast waited for us. After we’d started eating, the woman from the last time came out with another tray. Seeing how hungry we looked, she gave us her own breakfast, smiling. The first tray had been given by another resident, a woman who talked a bit more with us. For her, it was just natural to

give food to the people who needed it, and we looked like we needed it. “it’s written in the Koran and more than this, it’s just common sense.”

Since our arrival in Morocco, we’d experienced the kindness that its people showed to what they called “passers-by.” This is who we were, people passing by, and they gave us food and shelter. Moussa, the truck driver from Fez, had pushed this kindness to the limit. Following the message of the Koran to the letter, he “forced” us to stay three days in his house, giving us the best food ever and after that, coming to an agreement with his boss to take us 600 kilometers further on our journey up to Agadir. Each time we wanted to thank him, he just answered “*Machi Mouchkil mes frères, Machi Mouchkil*”, a kind of Moroccan *Hakuna Matata*, “no worries, it’s normal”.

These situations were not so easy to deal with for a French guy like me who was raised in a country where individualism and independence were virtues. My ego suffered quite a lot. To receive can be perceived as being belittled in front of the one who gives.

I realized that I had received for years without even noticing it. All that I had consumed had been made by someone else, an illegal immigrant in El Ejido, a Chinese child in a tax-free sweatshop, a Moroccan woman in the king's strawberry fields... An army had been at my services so I could live comfortably. Without the barrier of money, without this idea that by buying I had all the rights, I could open my eyes to this reality, I understood I was not alone in this world and that everything I consumed had a human and ecological impact.

## VI. Waiting

The crossing was fast but epic. Robin, the captain, didn't expect the sea to be so wild for our first time. It was the first time we had been on a sailing boat. At first, we were very keen on helping out: Nicola held the helm firmly, and I helped Robin to take the sail out with Raphael. But as soon as we got out of the harbor and the waves started to overturn our stomach, our faces suddenly became pale, our vision became blurred and, twenty minutes later, we were nothing but useless weight moored in the hold, waiting for better days. The slightest attempt to move would make us throw up. Pathetic landlubbers but happy to have this experience. On the following day, the waters were calm again and we could see the volcano of Fuerteventura.

In the Canaries, we discovered what waiting really meant, the true frustration of waiting that drowns the biggest hopes. We

spent three weeks on the island of Fuerteventura, a mix of European tourists who wanted the African climate and European security... Three slow weeks in which we could take a step back from the first three months of our journey. That was the deadline we had given ourselves to get to Mexico. Our Mexican friends were getting married next week and we had a lot more distance to travel.

A seaman was stopped in the small Marina of Corralejo. It turned out to be Wim, a friendly Belgian guy who had been living on the island for ten years, and he decided to help us. He went to Las Palmas with us just for the pleasure of helping us out and doing some sailing. Las Palmas, on the main island, where hundreds of sailing boats make a stop every year to resupply and make some repairs before the big crossing. This time, we were only sick once and it was my turn to feel the power of the elements unleashed against the shell of this 10 meter-long ship. I felt the most perfect illustration of “let it go” that I had felt on the road. I was holding the helm in the palm of my hand. I had the sensation of directing the boat but

actually, it was the wind, the waves and the currents which drove us. This was what all this trip was about: Without money, we didn't decide anything, like the elements which were pushing this ship, the encounters we made were taking us to our final goal: Mexico.

## **Las Palmas**

There are more than 400,000 habitants in this rather imposing city, with its heavy and noisy traffic, its high concrete towers and the crisis which has hit everywhere, leaving entire blocks abandoned. These old houses were inhabited by anarchists from the continent and African immigrants waiting to be deported to Spain. We stayed there by obligation, the main harbor was surrounded by the smelly and sticky mass of the city.

Every day, we would go to the harbor, talk to the barmen, exchange with the sailors who had mostly come here years ago and lost their hope of going any further. They had abandoned

their dream facing their own fear or the rising cost of having a ship nowadays. We were in April, most sailors cross between November and February... But we didn't lose hope, some captains told us this period was just a trend, people go to spend the winter in the Caribbean sea and the summer in the Mediterranean. Until July, when the storm season would start, we could still find something.

Las Palmas also meant coming back to civilization with its containers full of groceries and, if we ate like princes, we couldn't help feeling sad about all this waste. Every two or three days, we would go behind a supermarket close to the place where we slept. At 4:30pm, a member of staff took the bins out and we had until 5pm to take all we could, before the garbage truck came past. In this half hour, we always scavenged about 50 kilos of fruit, vegetables and dairy products, not to mention the meat and fishes we let rot in the containers. There were about 10 supermarkets like this one in the city, each of them with equal waste. You don't need to be a good mathematician to understand the scale of waste and we

could see with our own eyes the figures of the FAO: In the world, more than a third of the food produced is thrown away. Every second, 41,200 kilos of edible stuff are thrown away. We lived in abundance, force-feeding ourselves with out-of-date products or ugly fruit and vegetables.

On the other side of the island, fields of plastic tents housed hundreds of immigrants who earned some euros in exchange for their health. Seeing these people confirmed our choices to us. Living without money was a Utopia, but what else could we do to boycott money, the base of this perverse economical system?

Buildings in ruin, food waste, beaches covered with plastic in the morning before the clean up truck came, young people exhausted in bars, this gray color sweating from the city and contaminating the countryside. It was there, in the middle of this mess, this scenery of apocalypse we had around us since our childhood, that I understood why our quest had a true meaning. We were looking for a certain coherence. We found the meat industry repulsive, so we stopped eating meat. This

system based on money horrified us, so we tried to use it as little as possible, living off what was already there. This was our goal, a desperate but relentless attempt to make things right. Each morning, when opening my eyes, I reinforced myself in my convictions and I felt like trying even more.

**“OK”**

7 weeks passed by before a light of hope came to us. We found it at the bottom of a container, of course. A Mexican flag some sailor had decided to throw away. A coincidence? Impossible. For Raphael, this was a sign. I recall seeing him jumping with joy with the flag in his hand.

The following day, we went around transport agencies to find a way to embark on a cargo ship. Hopeless, we needed papers, certificates... In the end, we went back to the harbor, dismayed. A friend saw us and immediately informed us: “Chicos! A boat came in this morning. Two Italians, they’re looking for a crew!”

We ran to check out the boat on the arrival deck. It was there, a beautiful brand new sailing boat. We called for the crew. No answer. The neighbor told us to check at the bar. He had seen them going there. We followed their lead and found them. Nicola took a breath and made the speech we had told so many times:

“We are three Europeans traveling without money to show we can live and travel in an ecological manner. We have solar panels, we only hitchhike and boat-hike, we scavenge for food, we filter our water... We want to go to Mexico and would like to know whether you need a crew...?”

The taller one looked at the other and just said:

“OK”.

A simple OK. This was the fateful moment of the whole trip.

Yes, they agreed, they were leaving in ten days and needed help to clean, make the crossing, take turns. They admitted that they had actually been looking for two blond girls but couldn't find any.

Over the next 10 days, we cleaned the boat, polished the guardrail and the other metal parts of the ship. This was the first part of the deal. During the crossing, we would take our turn, cook and give Spanish and English courses. All that in exchange of three seats and food.

We enjoyed our last days in Gran Canaria. Our biggest obstacle was getting smaller. From now on, we knew nothing was really impossible, it all came down to knowing how to wait. We had arrived on the island of Fuerteventura at the beginning of March, On 12<sup>th</sup> May, we left for America.

## VII. The crossing

### **At sea**

Marco and Francesco were an atypical couple. Two characters diametrically opposed. On one side, a rich man from Milan: tall, shaved head, tattooed all over, a fan of extreme sports and easy women. On the other side, a Sicilian: a small and thickset seaman with thick eyebrows, who had put all his savings into this boat. His financial shares were divided with two other partners in Italy and Marco. 50,000 euros each. This boat was a business. They were going to Brazil to welcome rich Italians who wanted to learn sailing. This was the reason why we couldn't bring any salvaged food on board. "No way", Marco told us, "this boat is a work tool, it must remain impeccable". Life on board was like a dream. This boat, which was heavier, resisted the assault of the waves better. Less rolling and

therefore less seasickness. We cooked, took our turns, taught Spanish and English and spent most of our time sleeping and reading. The ocean makes you feel tired, we ate 6 times a day trying to follow the advices of Marco: “at sea, there are three enemies: hunger, cold and fatigue. You have to remain operational at any moment.”

After 6 days, we arrived in Cape Verde, a small archipelago situated off the coast of Senegal. The air was sweet, the atmosphere relaxed, Capeverdians sung a kind of Portuguese. Like us, most of them were dreaming of America but they were more attracted by the US. Televisions showed American TV shows, alcohol flowed easily down their throats, traditions were getting lost. Some were still fishing in a sea where they had to go further each time to find something. At night, far off, the lights of the European trawler furrowed the horizon, their nets scraping the bottom of the sea.

We didn't spend much time in these paradisaical islands. Marco and Francesco went for a night out and the following day we went to the market to get fruits and vegetables. Marco

calculated more or less 15 days to get to Brazil. He reproached us for eating too much. “It’s because you are vegetarians!” he said. We tried in vain to convince him to scavenge for some food. We went back on the boat with just a little fresh food with the perspective of eating mainly crepes on board.

A few days later, we passed the equator line, the dead zone where winds became rare. Marco took the spinnaker out, a huge sail of 90 square meters. We could then keep an average speed of 6 knots, being helped sometimes with the motor. This trip in a sailing boat was in fact less ecological as what we first thought. Maintaining a boat is expensive and Marco was in such a hurry that he used the motor every time the wind slowed down. Added to this were the liters of anti-corrosive paint that washed little by little into the sea; we could expect a high ecological footprint... But still a lot smaller than the footprint of a flight.

## **Revelation**

On board, a revelation hit me like a wave in my face. We had been sailing out in the unknown for five months, we had learned how to live without money. At first, it was just an idea, a trip, a challenge... But now, while sailing towards America, this idea represented much more to me. We had already seen and felt so much. We had received so much, the generosity of the world, of the Moroccans in particular had turned my world upside down. The faith that drove them and chased their fears and doubts away... That faith was now in me. Without money, I was learning to trust, but not an artificial trust in a piece of paper or an institution, a real personal trust. I believe in myself, and therefore in others. I was understanding that the world is not made of borders and that if I opened myself to it, If I let life guide me, the world would open.

Marco repeated it daily. We were not traveling without money. We traveled with the money of others. It was a valid argument, I couldn't deny it, but this journey brought us beyond that interpretation. Living without money, more than boycotting money or the financial institutions, consisted in giving up on

monetary exchanges. We were creating a new type of personal economy where all we needed was obtained with a human exchange, friendly and trustful. It was this type of exchange we want to favor, to consider all beings on this planets as brothers and sisters, not to sell anymore, not to buy, to share, to give and to receive.

It was on this ship that I made the decision to transform this temporary experience into a true lifestyle. I wanted to live without money to burry these monetary barriers held between my needs and the world. Raphael felt the same way, he didn't want to buy or sell anything in the future either; he wanted to give away, like the apple tree gives away, freely, without expecting anything in return. Gift was natural and in our search for harmony, it came to us as the only viable economic system.

## VIII. Recife

We disembarked in Brazil in the city of Recife, a huge metropolis of inequalities. It was hard to return to the streets and our daily globetrotters' life, especially during the first nights spent in the colonial city center, the Casco Viejo. Hundreds of homeless people were strewn over sidewalks, doorsteps and all kinds of shelter. We walked several hours before we could find a quiet place, in front of the police station. The following day, we strolled around this contrasted city. On one side, huge commercial centers, high luxurious towers protected by voltage barriers, big hotels facing the sea, empty private flats belonging to the rich and, at their feet, shanty towns spread in the dust, waste lands where thousands of poor people lived. Some billboards praised the efforts of Lula for his "social reconciliation". Behind the propaganda, images were eloquent, aimed at those not used to injustice.

One extra night in this misery and a nocturnal confrontation with two teenagers, high on glue, brought our three-man band to an end. Nicola was tired, fed up. He started to disagree with our new ideas, this philosophy of gift economy. For him, money was a necessary tool to transform the world, a means that could help accelerate the change. He wasn't wrong, but Raphael and I were determined. We didn't want to touch it anymore. The separation was hard, but we still had 7000 kilometers to cover, and we were half way there, so there was no giving up now.

A few days later, we went as a new duo on the road. That's where we got stuck at a gas station, where me met Wilson, a friendly and strange truck driver who was going to steal my backpack and, at the same time, help me achieve that long-searched freedom. How strange that, when the police came to take us to the tourist police station at the airport, we bumped into Nicola, who was just about to board his plane to go back to Italy.

## **Brazil!**

The robbery initiated a new kind of journey. Our official cameraman gone, no more computer or voice recorder, our documentary project came to a sad end and with it the idea of the most sustainable journey ever. More than just ecological traveling, energy and water savings, we realized it was in the most complete destitution that we would be able to become one with nature. We stayed a week in the house of two friends we'd met some weeks ago. It was time to reorganize ourselves with a new project. We were now on a revolutionary quest, we wanted to share this moneyless experience to share our findings along the road. I found a small school backpack, a toothbrush, some clothes and a knife, and we started again.

The streets of Recife were full of party-goers, the first rounds of the World Cup had been played and the Brazilians were celebrating their national team. Impossible to avoid, there wasn't a single shop or restaurant without a TV showing the matches. When Brazil were playing, the whole country would stop. No schools, no traffic, political debates were suspended,

everyone, women and men, children and elders, were watching the screen holding their breath for 90 minutes. When Brazil won, regardless of how they achieved it, parties burst into life throughout the city, the beer flowed, and bars and clubs became packed. All was perfect in a perfect world. No more poverty, no more inequalities, no more problems; Kaka had scored and it seemed it was the only thing that mattered.

We became trapped at another gas station, this time for five long days, desperately wanting a truck driver to lend us a hand. The car drivers coming to the gas station just ignored us. We spent all day in the restaurant where the truck drivers were having lunch. We were eating the scraps from their plates before they returned them to the tills. Thankfully, the truckers would just eat the meat and leave the salad, rice and boiled manioc most of the time – a complete dish for two happy vegetarians!

Finally, one guy took pity on us and, on a sunny afternoon, just after receiving his load, invited us to come in. This was the longest wait ever as hitchhikers. Darli drove us over 1000

kilometers. In the countryside, far away from the city, hitchhiking was working again, people were friendly and curious to meet us. After some happy days, we arrived in Belem, another chaotic city perched on the edges of the Amazon river.

Like Recife, Belem presented a two-speed society. Shanty towns, squalid and unhealthy, mounds of trash ran along the river. The well-off neighborhood was fenced and surveyed by police cars. There were huge commercial centers that we could enter thanks to our shallow white faces. Those places were a great place for recycled food left by customers. Fries, leftover pizza bases; we always found plenty food.

The owner of the boat company to cross the Amazon was called Ruth and had the physical appearance of a German. Maybe she was the grand-daughter of a German couple who fled during the war. She listened to our story and before we finished, just handed us two tickets « *boa viagem* » she just said. The following day, we left on a big barge where more than fifty hammocks were swinging in the breeze.

It would have been a dream to go up the Amazon and reach Bolivia. But without passport, I knew it would be impossible. We were happy to spend 24 hours on an aquatic labyrinth and admire its beauty. We thought the Amazon looked like a brown ocean winding amongst jungle islands where we could occasionally make out small villages resting above the water. We met a family of evangelists from the *Assembleia de Deus*. When we got to the other side, in Macapa, they invited us to stay with them and meet their parishioners. About 50% of Brazilians were affiliated to this new church that didn't exist 30 years ago. Even in the middle of the Amazon, we could see small churches with the « *Assembleia de Deus* » written on the front. The pastor was proud to say that he'd built 16 churches on his own. He tried to convince us to spread their faith. They weren't too fond of our beliefs and adoration of universal forces and mother earth, and we weren't really on the same wave length.

## IX. Borders

I had never really felt as free as these last few weeks. Without a passport, I felt like everyone else here. It was just my skin that made me stand out. Unfortunately, although the Brazilian authorities weren't really concerned about this, entering other countries without a passport was almost impossible.

Being surrounded by the Amazonian jungle and entering France was quite a shock. Roundabouts, neat lawns, clean roads and precise signposting. Most of the inhabitants of Cayenne were black and the houses built in wood but for the rest, it was as if we were back in the West.

The weather was hot, humid and asphyxiating. We had to spend two weeks getting together all the paperwork necessary before being able to register my passport. Then, we still had to wait two weeks.

This was a second waiting period after the Canaries where we could think over the new turn our adventure had taken.

However, each day was one less day spent on the road and we were waiting impatiently for the passport.

We'd bought a lot of stuff beforehand to ensure we would leave a minimal carbon footprint. A solar panel, for instance, to avoid "dirty" electricity. Three solar backpacks, two foldable solar panels and one battery pack. This gear had suffered on the way and we knew these items would not survive the trip. We had only used the solar electricity to charge our cameras and laptop during 6 months but at what price? With some investigations on the Internet, we found a website which explained the impact of the production of a machine compared to its life expectancy. This impact was called the "embodied energy", the energy consumed for the conception, fabrication, production, transport, commercialization and recycling of a product. This embodied energy was, in most cases, higher than the energy consumed during the life of a product. We discovered for instance that the energy used by a computer during three years accounted for just 17% of the total of the energy spent. The 83% remaining were the embodied energies. Another example

was the aluminum can. Each can needs about 10 000 watts to be produced, which corresponds to the amount of energy a family would spend in an entire day in the north of Europe. We then understood that our solar panels had needed more energy to be produced than all the energy we could get from them, even if we exposed them for 10 hours over 10 years. With all our purchases at the beginning, we had seriously compromised our efforts to live in a sustainable way. This information confirmed us that to be ecologically coherent, we should never buy anything new.

## **Visas**

Living without money is possible. I was convinced of it and had spent a good deal of time in Guiana writing articles for our blog and writing a bit about this great idea. However, to do something it is not always enough just to want it. We were invited on local television. The mayor of Cayenne received us and granted us an interview, coming on television himself to try

to convince the consul of Surinam. Nothing could be done. We had to pay for a visa. “The Surinamese needed a visa to enter France so why could two French people come to our country for free?”, said the consul using logic. We had to pay 10 euros each. It was not a large sum but it was symbolic. We added them to the 40 euros we spent for each passport. From the beginning we had anticipated a few exceptions at borders but ever since the robbery I was on cloud nine and was convinced that I could live without money forever. The relentlessness of reality brought me back down to earth.

## X. The road less traveled

This inevitable route through French Guiana led us to take one of the least traveled roads of South America, a continent that is well known to all the globetrotters of the world. The Guiana's and Venezuela were not on the typical to-do list of backpackers back then. This was a true godsend for us. The locals were more enthusiastic to welcome us.

We did not hang around on the roads of Suriname, the former Dutch colony, which was characterized by its maze of small canals and multicolored dolls houses. Three days later, we entered Guiana. No visa was required and our welcome was one of the warmest. In the capital Nieves, the girlfriend of Raphaël, joined us. We were again three travelers and everything became easier, the hitchhiking as well as scrounging. 'Strangely', the presence of a beautiful Spanish lady in the team ensured that from now on we would at least

get a balanced meal everyday and a roof over our heads under which to rest.

Since we were more comfortable, our adventure had now become a study trip. Each stage of the trip taught us to observe a characteristic of a people or a culture which resembles with a character trait of all humanity. In this sick globalized society which spread to the most remote corners of the world, we contemplated our own reflections, vices, laziness, egotism. In Guiana the take-away trend shocked us with its tons of light and innocent plastic packaging waste flying around and ending up in fields, sides of roads or canals and then sooner or later ending up in the ocean. The beaches, a sort of dump where inhabitants came to burn their rubbish, received a tired ocean whose backwash tirelessly vomited new waste.

A horrible and repugnant spectacle... But still, we knew that the Guianians were not the biggest plastic consumers in the world, far from it. These beaches, flooded with oil residue, were identical to all the beaches in the world before cleaners arrived. Pristine beaches did not exist anymore. Man marked his

territory with his bottles, deodorants, sandals that had been half eroded by the sea... This was the heritage we were passing on to future generations.

In France, every inhabitant consumes on average 20 kilos of plastic per year. From this 20 kilos, less than 30% will be recycled, and about 40% incinerated... What about the rest? They are in the countryside, the rivers, flying around and sooner or later ending their journey ending up in the sea.

In the middle of the jungle, the same thing happens. An indigenous man, convinced we were ecological experts, asked us, "What can we do with our trash? Burn it or bury it?".

We did not know what to say, and for good reason there were no correct answers to this puzzle. They were invaded by by-products, beer cans, plastic packaging and frozen products...They were not given a note to explain how to get rid of these things. Maria hosted us in her desperate native village. Modernity made her people feel lost. Powerless, she could only see the decline of her people. It all started with the advent of electricity, followed closely by the advent of the fridge, a

symbol of modernity which changed the eating habits of everyone in the space of a few weeks. To sustain the very enjoyable consumption of beer, chocolate, sweets and frozen food men left their jobs as farmers and hunters and went to work in the mines. Straw houses were abandoned for concrete blocks, and people began watching TV in the evenings instead of gathering around the fire. This was the end of a world.

### ***Patria socialista o muerte***

We were really excited about the idea of discovering the country of Chavez and his *Revolución Bolivariana*. Did he succeed in defeating capitalism and in perpetuating the idea of communism? The first few months after our arrival in these cities confirmed to us that the situation was totally different. Behind propaganda billboards showing a gleaming Chavez with his finger pointing upwards McDonald's and Coca-Cola signs towered above. The citizens were caught between a rock and a hard place. They were caught between two ideologies,

the dreams of Chavez and the opposing view of relentless capitalism as relayed by Hollywood and multinational food companies.

We met a lot of people who painted a Venezuela that was at times revolutionary and at times corrupt. Each person went by their own version, either loving or hating the current president. Some only spoke of the unfair expropriations and the political scandals, and others restricted themselves to speaking about the free hospitals, the minimum wage for all. Each person turned a blind eye to a part of reality. This resulted in a divided society undermined by inequalities, violence and insecurity.

The situation was summarized for us in a few words by an adorable grandmother of twenty children. She lived peacefully at the seaside, in a *posada* that welcomes a few tourists from time to time.

“The people are not ready. The ideas are good but the people are not ready.”

Everything has been said now. No change was to be expected from the top; the biggest social advances remain in vain if the people do not adhere to them.

Thanks to Nieves being there, we rarely waited, gliding with ease from one end of the country to the other. We ate our fill since Venezuelans, rich or poor, were so kind to us. We slept outdoors many nights, in shopping center halls, hospital parking lots, or on the beach, but we were also often invited to people's homes.

Colombia, the sister nation of Venezuela, had chosen the opposing side: excessive capitalism. The Drug War was all the rage. Drivers never stopped, hiding their fears behind the tinted windows of their beautiful cars. We moved forward bit by bit following the waves of police and the military who blocked the road at each village exit. Each time they made a point of honor to convince a driver or bus driver to take us with them. They also asked us to not travel too far from the main road. There were regular bursts of gunfire but if we did not witness them we could still feel them.

After a few rainy days, we arrived in Cartagena, a seaside colonial city where we hoped to find a sailboat to reach Panama.

## XI. To change

There were no roads between the North and South America, supposedly to prevent diseases from spreading all over the continent, or maybe just to limit immigration in North America. We had chosen to stop in Cartagena because we knew that sailboats regularly crossed to the city. After 10 days, we met an Austrian anarchist who was also the captain of a 40-meter-long old Dutch trawler. Seduced by our story and our “struggle”, he agreed to take us on board in exchange for a few favors: to find clients for the crossing (he organizes trips between Cartagena and Panama for the modest sum of 400 dollars!), clean his boat, cook for the passengers and participate in housekeeping tasks.

After three days in the open the sea, we arrived in paradise, the archipelago of islands belonging to the Kuna, an autonomous indigenous tribe which carefully protects itself from the outside world. They ferociously resist foreign invasions and alcohol is

forbidden, as are mixed marriages. They watched us from afar, only coming to us to sell us some fruit and vegetables. Some rich people from Panama City also came to us in a helicopter to party on their yachts in the middle of these idyllic islands. Their lively evening contrasted with the tranquility of the Kuna, two parallel worlds that stood alongside each other but did not mix.

### **The price of comfort**

Like their Latin American neighbors, Panama City accommodated the injustices and inequalities of the world: tall glass towers like those in Miami encircled insalubrious neighborhoods encircled them. We had seen enough of those urban monsters where people mix with the most complete indifference, and which we pass by without wasting time. We entered Costa Rica a few days later and discovered a small country which was markedly distinct to its neighbors. It had a more egalitarian society. Historically, the Spaniards, having

been unable to find any gold on these lands, sold them at a low price to the peasants of the Northern Spain. Therefore, this kind of bourgeois feudalism which determined this two-tier growth in most countries of Latin America did not exist there. On entering, we were surprised to discover that the roads were in a good state, and that there was no trash on the roads. We were also surprised to discover ecological propaganda which incited the people to save water and take care of nature.

Costa Rica is also the kingdom of the pineapple. Wide fields spread across the hills as far as the eye can see. Costa Rica, the world's primary producer, gives priority to the production of the king of fruit above anything else. A farmer clearly explained to us the ecological disaster that he was obliged to create to satisfy European whims: "You want beautiful fruits without marks, forcing us to use tons of pesticides to repel insects, impoverishing the soil. It's a disaster but we have no choice!".

This was even more obvious in Nicaragua, the small sister country of Costa Rica, which did not benefit from the same

starting conditions. Rich farmers had plundered a country which henceforth collapsed because of poverty. Nevertheless, we met a people who were generous and open. It was impossible for us to scavenge and everyone insisted on offering us food.

On our way, a couple picked us up from the side of the road and invited us to their home. The woman worked in a tax exempted zone, in the offices of what they call there a *maquiladora*, which is a textile industry that outsources for big brands. A company which subcontracted for big brands. She told us about the continuous exploitation of employees in these firms which evade tax and violate the international rights of employees to produce jeans that cost two dollars fifty each on average. She admitted to us that two employees passed away the previous month from a cancer and that the firm denies all responsibility.

Whether pineapples, jeans or any other product, the reality came to light for us in the cruelest way. The life of a European

was enjoyable because it was based on an unjust exploitation of human and natural resources of other countries in the world.

## **Vegan**

This observation led us to make a new decision. We had started our journey as vegetarians, mainly for ecological reasons and to avoid, for instance, those ten thousand litres of water and ten kilos of grain needed to produce one kilo of beef. However, being vegetarian was not a complete solution as this diet had to go hand in hand with local consumption without processed or dairy products which were often just as polluting as the meat. We had met a veterinarian who worked in one of those enormous chicken factories. He helped us open our eyes to sixty thousand chickens locked up in a shed which laid forty-five thousand eggs per day in coops that measured 35 square centimeters. We knew it was the same story for the industrial production of milk, which is incidentally not very digestible for humans.

At first, we thought that a vegan diet would be difficult to stick to on the road but once we arrived in Central America, with this abundance of fruits and vegetables, we took the firm decision to turning our thoughts and feelings into decisive action. No more dairy products, no more meat, and one more step towards consistency and harmony with nature. We did not have the jaw of a carnivore nor the stomach, so why continue being stubborn and eat meat?

For the taste or for the enjoyment? How enjoyable is it to kill or exploit animals?

To respect our culture? This same culture which enslaved three quarters of the inhabitants of this planet?

In our quest for freedom it became clear that we had pass by there, free ourselves from our eating behavior, and put an end to keeping human and animal enslavement alive and well.

## **The King Dollar**

Unfortunately, our actions cannot always match our thoughts. We had a tourist tax dilemma. The customs officials were not very lenient and to be able to continue our trip we had to pay. I refused knowing that our quest was well and truly utopian. To live without money was a dream, a vision for the future that we tried to keep alive but could not make a reality on that very day. This was a fact. Nieves still had a few dollars and marked a key point on this journey. I understood that I should not be stubborn in not spending one cent. The reality of this trip was not to be found in this effort but rather in the idea of eliminating the use of money, limiting our ecological footprint and maintaining this simple way of living which leads to harmony.

We found simplicity daily with the Nicaraguans, Hondurans, Guatemalans and Belizeans. It appears everywhere on the Pan-American highway that crosses through Central America. We discovered the generosity of these poor but happy peoples. In Honduras, the White Revolution, the rising up of the elites against the socialist government (discretely supported by the

US Army), had plunged the country into a hopeless crisis. However, the inhabitants received us with a big smile and shared their meals with us without batting an eyelid. Incidentally, many of them understood us, having made a similar trip without money, and hitchhiking. The main difference was that they went to the United States to make money...and then come back having been forcefully repatriated. Our European passports ensured an easy route. We were received well everywhere and the firemen hosted us at every stop we made. We crossed Guatemala and Belize without a hitch. The last leg of our journey before Mexico and our last obstacle was: a tourist tax of 35 dollars. In a small country such as Belize with its 300,000 inhabitants, it was easy to get a meeting with the secretary of the Minister of the Interior. She listened to our story, glanced at the article that appeared on the first page of the Honduras newspaper and gave us a tax exemption. Two days later, we crossed the Mexican border!

## XII. To give

In concrete terms, we did not travel without money, having been in constant indirect contact with money. People paid for petrol, electricity and food... We knew this as it was clear, and yet, we were determined to continue. By receiving so much, we learnt to accept the reality of this world just as it was, without having the financial means to bend or alter it as we pleased. We had discovered that it was possible to live on earth as a big family, donating and sharing.

Inevitably, after having been the guests of the world, we only had one desire: to donate when it was our turn.

The first stop was the *Klimaforum*, an alternative forum at the climate summit, the COP 16. In exchange for food and housing, we agreed to spend more than 10 hours per day cooking, cleaning, receiving people, translating, organizing... We were looking, in vain, for ways to repay our hosts for all that they gave us.

Nieves became pregnant at this time. She decided, together with Raphaël, to go back to Europe to give birth to the baby there. I could not imagine going back so soon. I had not had enough and had an enormous thirst that needed quenching. I dreamt of traveling the world with no money, crossing the Pacific Ocean and still having more crazy adventures... At the end of the *Klimaforum*, a Danish guy gave me a bike that he could not take on the plane and I found myself with a new vehicle to continue the journey with. I continued alone this time, nourished by the same convictions, with a saying that would become my own little by little: “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. Gandhi came with me. I wanted a world without money, without injustice, and without human and animal exploitation. I therefore tried to apply these values to my life while waiting to be able to do more.

### **On the bike...**

This new chapter of our journey without money began with painful effort. The first few days were exhausting. Somehow I cycled in torrid heat and had long breaks from 11am to 4pm to prevent myself from getting heatstroke. Alone, I found it difficult to motivate myself to scrounge and so I ate a lot less, mainly relying on some fruit and the flapjack that I took from the kitchens of the *Klimaforum*. With my accomplices I was able to allow myself to be get tired or to not want to ask. If my morale was affected, Nieves or Raphael made up for this by smiling. Everything was easier. When I was alone I faced new challenges: explaining the trip to people on my own, responding to all the critics, boosting my mood and permanently smiling. Luckily, the bike was of a very good quality and transported me more than 600 kilometers to a small village on the edge of the gulf of Mexico. It was the evening of the 31st December. I managed to get myself offered a succulent meal in a *cevicheria*, a salad with *frijoles* and some tortillas. I then wandered about in the town on the lookout for a smile or an invitation. I felt terribly lonely and I could not find a

charitable soul to offer me somewhere to stay and spend the new year with. I ended up on the lawn of a petrol station, in tears, asking myself what I was doing there, far away from everyone and with my bike as my only company. It was the first time on this trip that I sunk into depression and I realized that until now the journey seemed enjoyable because we formed a good team with Raphael and the others. When I was alone everything changed. The next day, I continued the journey driven by a certain desire. I become open to others, creating projects where the community would dominate over the individual, and I decided to thumb a lift while cycling. Thanks to the abundance of pickup trucks in Mexico it worked and five days later I arrived in Mexico City.

### **In sedentary fashion**

Traveling without money is one thing, living without money in one place, many weeks later, is another.

As soon as I arrived in this impressive megalopolis, I needed to solve my housing problem. I had a friend living there who was

willing to host me for as long as I wanted. Nevertheless, I felt it was out of the question for me to squat at his place without making myself useful. I felt too much like I was taking advantage of the people the last few months. I therefore suggested to him that I would take care of the housework and transform his apartment into an eco-flat. The goal was to save water by putting buckets everywhere in order to collect this precious liquid and use it for flushing, create a vegetable roof garden, to get food so that he and his fellow flatmates could have a meal – vegan it goes without saying – every evening and organize events on the subject of ecology. My friend and his flatmates were immediately thrilled by this idea. The project was developed in a few weeks and was an immediate success. Unfortunately, the price of success meant that we attracted too many people too quickly and by the end of three months, the neighbors and the landlord put a stop to this project.

While I was at it, I threw myself into organizing free vegan camps around Mexico City. Thanks to the network I had

established with our eco-flat, I succeeded in gathering about fifty people on a site where each person could suggest an activity or a workshop that was related to ecology in a wider sense: spirituality, health, respecting animals, ecotechnics and sustainable development.

I endeavored to increase the activities and give more than I could. I had learnt to receive but not yet to give, and often I lost myself in these projects that were too short-lived and which were born and then died out immediately afterwards. I got angry and complained to my friends who did not want to follow me or my ideas and choices.

Confusion reigned in my soul and, after a year, I decided to continue my trip but this time towards the United States. I had still a lot to learn and I knew that the road was a good teacher.

### **XIII. On the trail of the spider**

On 1<sup>st</sup> November, we were sitting on the wall of the cemetery of Mixquic, a small village where we watched lights dance to the wind and where hundreds of candles adorned the graves. The village families moved slowly like caterpillars in between the tombstones, which were decorated with flowers and seeds. These slow processions headed towards close relatives, to dedicate some of their time and lives to them. I myself was in the middle of mourning a chapter of my existence and was ready to go on the road again.

On the other side of the wall, the fair was in full swing. A man was shouting into his microphone to sell come carpets, spoiling the silence of the candles on the graves without meaning to. Thousands of people were crammed into this small village on this festive Day of the Dead to consume and perpetuate the semblance of tradition by stuffing themselves with sweets, hot dogs and getting drunk with beer and Mezcal.

The following day, three of us left for the United States. Yazmin, an adorable Mexican lady with whom I had fallen in love and who taught architecture at the University of Puebla. She had taken four months off to come with us. Mike completed the trio. He was a young British man who I had met in Cancun and who dreamt of attempting to make the journey without money.

A few months earlier, we had registered to attend a meditation course which would last 10 days and would start in exactly one a month's time in the Mojave desert, a two hour journey from Los Angeles. A friend had told me about it. He said it would be ten days of silence to meditate for more than 10 hours per day. The food would essentially be vegan and the course was completely free, which was a piece of information that made me jump at the chance. I needed help to distance myself from the last two years, the trip, and life without money. I could not imagine anything better than silence.

We needed four weeks to get to Los Angeles. I was happy to get back on the road again and I was particularly happy to

share this experience with new traveling companions. I savored the long waiting times such as waiting for 6 hours in the grueling sun, at the foot of the *espinazo del diablo* mountain range. When the sun disappeared behind the pine trees of the valley, a pickup truck finally stopped, picked us up and then began its crazy race in the mountains. We rode for 3 hours on a winding road, under a starry sky so that we could finally sleep on the oceanfront of the Pacific Ocean.

Getting food was easy in the markets. We were often offered tortillas or entire meals. This time we had each taken a tent. It was more convenient for us to be able to lose ourselves in nature or on wide beaches of the Pacific. We work up to Monarch butterflies, wonderful beings with orange wings which traveled more than 6000 kilometers to come to die in the Michoacan mountain summit. In this particular spot, butterflies gather in thousands on the conifers of the region to wait for a ray of sun so that they could be brought back to life again.

We arrived at the border after spending thirty-six hours in the cabin of a heavy goods vehicle, a journey that was necessary to

cross the sand dunes of the desert that separated the Tarahumara mountains from Tijuana. We spent our first night in an abandoned house in the Tijuana suburb, feeling not very safe and starving. In the night, some careless kids threw some firecrackers at us, waking us up startled. This was the only incident that happened that night, and the next day we went across the city to get to *the other side*. Entering the United States without any money would have been a dream. The customs official listened carefully to our story but assured us that exceptions were not possible, and that we would incidentally encounter problems “in this country where even the air is not free”. he told us. Yazmin had kept on her a few dollars just in case and she paid the twelve dollars that were necessary.

## **Vipassana**

Vipassana was a real shock. After the ten days of meditation, we stayed for another two weeks at the center to help out voluntarily and to perfect our understanding of the technique. Vipassana is the technique that came from the teachings of the Buddha. Vipassana means to observe reality as it is, to learn the art of living, the art of keeping calm in all situations, and of never reacting out of fear or pleasure, but to be happy to act calmly and keep smiling.

In fact, the course consisted of getting up at four in the morning and meditating following instructions until nine in the evening. There were short breaks every hour and two hours dedicated to meals, one at six thirty and the other at eleven, and then fasting until the next morning. They were ideal conditions to cleanse the mind of all confusing thoughts. After the first three days, meditators start to empty their minds, observe the sensations which constantly come and go in their bodies. The goal of this observation is to let the unconscious understand that everything is transitory and that it is useless to get attached to short-lived pleasurable or uncomfortable

feelings. Through detachment, the meditator is cured of his or her flaws bit by bit.

At the end of the stay I felt liberated of an enormous burden, happy, a big smile across my face. We returned to civilization on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, arriving in the middle of Los Angeles.

This month of intense happiness and peace was followed by several days of depression. I realized I was not someone that was as good or as generous as I had claimed I was. Throughout my journey, my stubbornness to live without money was perverted by my ego, my thirst for recognition, the desire to show that I was superior to others. By meditating, I could clearly see my mistakes, this aggressiveness which I put in my actions, the lack of acceptance when faced with the desires and wishes of the people I lived with. I understood, finally, that what was more important than living without money, was to live in peace with the world.

I did not call into question my ascetic life either. Vipassana advocated simple living, without possessions, and the path of the Buddha, carefully explained to us in evening speeches was

enough to confirm my choices. Living in complete poverty is a noble thing, I just had to learn to do it with peace of mind and without trying to be against society but with it, while feeling compassion for other beings.

## **Waste land**

Coming back to American consumer society was brutal. Through couchsurfing, a wonderful website which allows travelers to stay over for free with a host, we met a young American guy who was a house sitter in an uptown neighborhood of Los Angeles, North Hollywood. On the first night, we explored the area to check the containers of Trader Joe's, an organic supermarket in California that was quite popular. When opening a container, the sheer size was surprising. There were kilos of food inside including vegan cheese, eleven jars of almond butter, which were thrown away because the labels were too sticky, and all types of fruit and

vegetables. On the way back, we explained our journey to the manager of an uptown bakery run by Belgians. The manager listened attentively and told us to come back at closing time. A bag of organic wholemeal bread which weighed five kilos was waiting for us. We discovered the crazy abundance which irrigated California. Surely enough food to feed all of Africa is thrown away. All kind of products ended up in the containers because of wet labels, dates that were not easily legible or simply because there was no more space on the shelves. We happily profited, organizing big feasts and shared our finds with the abundance of nomads in the city.

After Los Angeles we went to San Francisco, a more conscious city and less food waste but enough to feed ourselves with. Then we left to go to Oakland, a home for anarchists who were squatters and protested night and day against this system. We found ourselves right in the middle of the Occupy movement revolution. The streets seethed with bitterness. Protesters occupied public spaces, even camping on concrete to

denounce the injustice of the American system and the 1% of rich people who exploit the people of this world.

In Las Vegas we camped with the demonstrators of Occupy Las Vegas, a submovement of Occupy. About fifty tents were erected in a parking lot in front of luxury hotels. A rudimentary kitchen was placed on planks and crates and there were some get-togethers with beer. In the end, there was not much conviction in the hearts of those who searched for the hope of a better and more comfortable life. Crushed by the burden of protesting, constantly *against* instead of *for*, some of them got tired and quit the struggle to find work as cashiers or security guards.

We needed two days to get out of Las Vegas, a sticky city where hitchhiking is forbidden. We ran into other nomads who were traveling along the motorway trying to avoid the police. We also had to be cunning to hide from the police and position ourselves at the entrance of the freeway. After a freezing night, since it was January, in a commercial zone, three of us in a tent, we finally found a mother who was a former hobo. She did not

hesitate for a second and took us in her car to a small village twenty kilometers away. On the same day when night was falling quickly over the bare mountains of Nevada, one last vehicle took us for a long ride in the desert to Grand Junction. We slept there under a tent on an icy floor, shivering until daybreak.

The following day, after the police tried in vain to forbid us to hitchhike, we reached Moab, a small city of 20,000 inhabitants deep in the middle of the canyons of Utah. This was the location where Daniel Suelo lived. He was a hero of modern times, an inspiration for our trip with no money. He himself lived without a cent for more than 12 years and spends a peaceful ascetic life in a cave, lost at the deep end of the canyon.

### **Follow the spider**

Daniel was laying on a rock in a cave he had chosen as refuge for the last few weeks. The cave was located in a canyon that

was deep in the middle of a nature reserve, a 45-minute walk from the city of Moab, at the end of a long craggy path. It was far away from the noise and lights of society. He looked at the ceiling of the cave, blackened by the years and by camp fires and let his thoughts wander. Suddenly, he saw a large spider climbing up a slope, slowly but surely. Suelo got up and got it into his head to follow it. He climbed onto the side of the rock to then let the spider move quickly at the top of the canyon. He was struck by a revelation. This is what he had been looking for: to be like the spider, to move without stress or fear while searching for a spot to weave its web.

We were around the fire when Suelo told us his story. His eyes were shining, the dancing flames of the fire were reflected in his childlike eyes. Daniel could talk about politics, economics, the perversion of the banking system, capitalism, social injustice in the world, the obesity of Americans in contrast to hungry Africans. However, when it came to explaining why he was living without money, he was happy to tell the simplest of stories, like the day he found he had 30 dollars in his pocket,

lost in the middle of nowhere, in a petrol station on the side of the road. He suddenly realized that this handful of 30 dollars was completely useless because if something serious were to happen to him these three dollar notes would not be of any use for anything. What's worse still is that they would prevent him from being completely liberated. He left them in a phone booth and started walking. Since that day and for the next twelve years, Suelo did not touch one cent. He scavenges, scrounges, walks, hitchhikes, hangs off freight trains and sleeps in a cave. Suelo decided to live ethically. He breathes the easiest in the world and does not demand recognition, nor does he try to impress people or make an impact. He is content with being true to himself and his thoughts and feelings match his actions.

This encounter marked a decisive moment in my way of looking at myself. With him, I understood I was not anymore this arrogant French adventurer who wanted to show the world another lifestyle was possible. Little by little, I was becoming a human being looking for his own truth, his own happiness.

## XIV. Living together

### **Crossroads**

It took me several months to digest all those new feelings that had shaken me during this trip to the United States. In the meantime, I worked as a volunteer for a couple of ecological projects in return for accommodation and food. I understood that even if Daniel Suelo was a great source of inspiration with his simplicity, his natural way of being, his lifestyle didn't attract me. He was alone for many years, with the exception of the few visitors that he received from time to time. Some nature lovers tried to follow him but, despite himself, he remained mostly alone. I was more in love than ever with Yazmin and I was in-between two ideals: living without money, an ascetic life, in nature - maybe I would join Suelo; or choosing to live with others, creating collective

projects to help promote global change, finding alternative new ways to live in a more ecological and human manner – to be happier.

Yazmin had spent four months with me living without money, or almost without money. There were two exceptions: once to pay the tax for the three of us to enter the US - 12 dollars in total; and another to buy a jar of peanut butter in Colorado – a necessary dalliance after three months of ascetic life!

Back in Mexico, she resumed her teaching job and confirmed that even if she did indeed like the idea of living without money, she nevertheless wanted to keep some savings as a nest egg, just in case. Of course, she didn't mind spending less, but she didn't want to deprive herself too much either.

On my side, I remained convinced that I didn't want to use money again. I felt so great, so free. However, as I was living with people who used money everyday, it was hard to stay moneyless. It didn't matter that I was struggling to find food, or working in exchange for accommodation, it remained

clear that there was nevertheless a minimum spend involved in my lifestyle, whether this be electricity, internet or gas.

I hesitated but I finally chose in favour of Yazmin, sacrificing this coherence that I held in my heart to be with others, to develop a sense of togetherness, putting my ideals to the side to serve a common purpose, trying to contribute to this unstable society.

This resolution was the start of a new chapter in my life, a new stage. We started organizing other free and vegan camps with some friends. This time, we were more open to others and therefore received more responses, with 200 and 400 hundred participants respectively, and dozens of workshops and conferences spread over three days. We realized this was the key, creating self-managed and free activities open to everyone. Everyone, without exception, left transformed from this three-day conscious escapade where they learnt to compost, build dry toilets, create a permaculture garden, think about the importance of conserving grains, and eat delicious vegan and local food. We also found our way. We wanted to continue

creating spaces where people could forget about this world of financial oppression for a few days, spaces where people could be themselves, sharing and finding harmony with others, the world and all living beings. This was the dream that unified us, Yazmin and I.

These camps were nonetheless fleeting, and if they showed us anything, it was that we dreamed of something based on the same concept, yet bigger and longer lasting.

We shared our feelings with Raphael and Nieves over a skype call. They were now parents of an adorable little girl and they were also very interested in the idea of creating a vegan and moneyless eco-village. After the journey without money a new dream united us, and made me think of returning to Europe. I had left three years ago.

Mexico was a true paradise and the ideal place for creating this kind of community, but I felt society still was not ready for it. The political situation was getting worse with Peña Nieto coming to power - he was a corrupted man, and he was old school. He had bought his way into power by using a

Mexican supermarket chain to offer vouchers to anyone who would put a cross opposite his name. The voting office could not justify more than 25% of the fraud, and the election stood firm despite the protests of the people. Even though Mexico was not as dangerous as the media made out, it was still clear to me that it was not so peaceful either. Unfortunately, Mexico had other priorities, such as rights for the indigenous populations, gender equality, and the fight against corruption, which were more important than ecological concerns.

I was also European and couldn't find a way to relate to the Mexicans. Yazmin hesitated but finally accepted to go back with me. The perspective of spending the winter in Europe didn't please her all that much. We got married and went on the road again heading for America. This time we wanted to find a sailboat on the East Coast.

## **Coming back**

The trip from the Netherlands to Mexico was born out of the idea of avoiding travelling by plane to be more eco-friendly. As many know by now, a ten-hour flight amounts to an ecological footprint of 4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger. As a comparison, a French citizen emits, on average, about 8 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. For a French person, two return flights from Europe to America would double their carbon emissions for the year.

Taking a plane then, for the innocent ecologist I was, was like signing a deal with the devil. However, after a month and a half of wandering the roads of America in the cold month of March, along with some setbacks and the inability to get in touch with skippers in Florida, we decided with Yazmin to make the one big exception of the journey: fly back to Europe.

It was hard for me to accept and still today I feel like a coward. If even I had given up, then how could I hope the world would change? However, it was a difficult situation. Yazmin, whom I loved deeply, had had enough. She was

exhausted by these setbacks, from the lack of sympathy, and from the difficulties that surrounded us.

We hitchhiked up the coast to New York. My mum paid for my ticket - Yazmin had some savings. It would take 7 hours to get to Germany. 7 ridiculous little hours compared to the 11 months it took to get here. The comparison illustrated perfectly the ecological consensus - longer, more tiresome, and harder to keep up could not compete with comfort that was served on a plate. My mum spent 300 euros, a very small amount for the 2600 kilos of CO<sub>2</sub> I emitted.

Getting onto the plane I told myself that this time would be the last time. My ego suffered from this choice. I was no longer an exceptional traveller – I was going back to Europe through the back door. But this experience was also part of the process. I was learning to let go of this need to be someone extraordinary, I was learning to just *be*. I put my foot on the ground in Germany with the certainty that I wanted to keep living without money, but that I would try to do it with humility, without criticizing others – since I had used money

myself! – without putting distance between myself and others. I went back to Europe to build something, to participate in the global effort to create a better world, to promote the idea of a life of giving and sharing. I had to merge with the crowd to do it.

## **Eotopia**

Our first stop was in Berlin to visit Raphael, Nieves and Alma Lucia, their daughter. Since our separation in 2011, Raphael had also kept his moneyless lifestyle. He also faced some hard choices. Nieves received some help from the government and dipped into her savings. However, she never spent more than 50 euros a month, using the money from the government to pay medical insurance.

This story of a moneyless family propelled Raphael into the limelight – he was on talk shows and prime-time TV, his picture was on the front page of magazines. It was a notoriety that enabled him to broadcast our ideas on a large scale. He

also participated in the creation of *Foodsharing*, an official network dedicated to scavenging and sharing expired food. This project attracted even more attention and became a recognized organization in Germany, with several thousands of people joining this online platform to share leftovers from supermarkets.

Raphael was therefore always busy and was also writing a book. We only stayed one week but it was enough to define the principles of our new dream: Eotopia. We were aware that our moneyless lives were becoming a lie. Electricity, internet and other amenities implied the definitive spending of money. It was this observation, which we were constantly reminded of by our critics, that led us to think about this idea of community. This initiative was our chance to experiment with a truly moneyless lifestyle, not alone but together with many others. It was our chance to create a sustainable place to live in harmony with nature and all beings - a kind of laboratory to find solutions and alternatives. We only needed those few days to get to work on turning our dream into a reality.

Eotopia, the cradle of our utopia, started gleaming on the horizon - a sustainable vegan eco-village based on gift economy. We wanted to try to build everything without money, to get everything for free, starting with land. More than using money or not, the idea was to create an economic system based on Gift.

## XV. Gift economy

*“The Human is a communicative animal. It listens, speaks, answers. Most of his activities are activities of reciprocity and free exchanges. Friendship, love, seduction are not driven, generally speaking, by monetary grounds...”* Bernard Maris

### **What is money?**

Various theoreticians, authors, and philosophers have mentioned the possibility of a gift economy in our societies. Most agree that our actual economic system is not viable anymore – was it ever? – and that *gift* could cement the bases of a new society that would be fairer, more balanced and more functional: a society where all beings would get an equal chance to access resources.

There is first one question we must consider before looking deeper into this quite paradoxical idea of a gift economy: what is money? Or better, what does it mean for us? It is hard to find the origin of money since all civilizations have been trading it for thousands of years. It seems that the majority of populations that have inhabited this planet have, at some point, using units of measure – currencies – set up a system for the exchange of goods. For example, currencies we have seen in the past have included salt in the Mediterranean basin, shells in America or precious stones in the Mayan Age. These currencies were made to facilitate a global exchange system, allowing people to get what they needed directly, without having to provide the giver with whatever they needed. Today however, money plays another role. Firstly, it doesn't correspond to a ground and concrete value anymore. According to Marie-Louise Duboin, about 97% of the money which circulates around the globe is fictitious, created from nothing by the banks. The author of “But Where Does the Money Go?” clearly explains the process of money making which starts with

the right given to the private banks to create 9 euros from 1 real euro. This makes the possibilities infinite for the banking system. A documentary called “The Debt” was made in 2013 and unveils the secrets of monetary creation in France and brings us to reflect on the money we believe we own in our bank account.

Concretely, money is a tool that allows us to get things. A simple tool. However, money today represents much more than a simple exchange tool. Charles Eisenstein, an American economist and author of *Sacred Economics* sees money as the symbol of security: the security of getting what we need, of realizing our projects, of securing our children’s future.

### **Money is trust**

By experiencing life without money, I have confronted this idea. On a daily basis, I was asking myself these questions: *How could I eat? Where would I sleep? How could I heal myself?* I had to replace this security that was normally offered

by money. The substitute became evident in Morocco with this unconditional faith that animated the people there.

This was a small revelation concerning what gives its value to money: the trust we give to it. I used to trust money to get what I needed... a trust put into the banks and the monetary system. The economic crisis of 2008, whose shadows still remained, was suddenly explained. The investors had doubted, they had lost their trust, contributing to the bankruptcy of the whole system.

The Moroccans seemed more prepared for this kind of crisis. If money went missing, everyone would just count on God, trusting in His guidance towards the light. Their faith guaranteed their future. Following this discovery, I didn't start to believe in God nor turn to religion, but I got passionate about the idea of an universal faith, a general trust towards life itself, the natural forces, the basic law of the universe: We are what we give.

Charles Eisenstein imagines this hypothesis: If we could put our trust directly into the hands of the providers instead of the bank system or money, what would happen?

This is the idea of a gift based economy. An economic system based on direct and mutual between all the people.

Jean-Michel Cornu explains in his book *tirer bénéfice du don* until what extent a gift economy would be preferable in many ways. He says that if the exchange, monetary or non-monetary, allows a desire or a need to be fulfilled almost instantly, it always requires a counterpart and exclude automatically the ones who have nothing to exchange. Therefore, it doesn't facilitate an egalitarian repartition of the resources.

Giving, on the contrary, allows this repartition, basing itself mainly on the needs of the people more than the possible counterparts.

### **Local economy**

Obviously, such a hypothesis can only work on a local scheme. Which is fine since it comes to agree with the theories of the

deep ecology movement which talks about the fragmentation of the economy into thousand of smaller and self-sufficient economic systems as the only remedial to the diminution of greenhouse gazes.

The question is recurrent : how can we trust 7 billions people, 60 millions French, or even a thousand of individuals ? We just can't. This kind of trust is called faith and it seems human being are not ready to share this faith towards their own humanity.

A study lead by the British anthropologist Robin Dunbar precise that a human being can only recognize about 150 faces. Trust requires at least this: recognition of a face, a smile to develop a certain feeling of familiarity, to be considered as a friend or neighbor. Therefore, a gift economy could only function in a configuration where we would have the creation of local economic systems composed of a hundred individuals at most. Each group would be as self-sufficient as possible on the area of lodging, food and energy supplies. . For the rest, each local system could specialized in a certain area and share

this production with the others systems with the trust that the other groups would do the same. The products that are futile and less interesting – often the more polluting too - to design will be abandoned since nobody would want to take care of it.

Can you imagine it ? Why not. This doesn't need a drastic come back to the middle age but, obviously, it requires certain changes and sacrifices. Anyways, this change is becoming crucial with the last news given by the last report from the GIEC (Groupe Intergouvernemental d'Experts sur l'Evolution du Climat). It shows clearly that an “economical revolution is vital” and “drastic changes” in our ways to *consume the earth* are necessary. We can't ignore no more the urgency if we wish to take part in the well-being of the future generations and the natural ecosystem.

The question is not anymore : Do you want to change ? but rather : would you prefer to change by yourself or wait for someone to enforce this change ?

## **Auto-gestion**

A local economy has to come with a local type of governance. This economy can only work in self-management with the participation of all the members of a community in the process of decision, a true democracy which would take some time to get installed but would allow, later, a true social justice.

Self-management is the belief that anyone can be his own master, decide for himself what is best, it is the trust that anyone can behave for the better of all. Gift economy brings an automatic responsibility.

Concretely, this means that each autonomous community will have its own decision-making process to cover its basic needs. A sort of council of the communities could be also installed with representative of each group to ensure all are going towards a similar direction : preserve the earth and create an equal justice for all beings.

There has been many experiences of self-management all around the world with the Zapata movement in Mexico or the takeover by citizens of certain enterprises in Wales or France. Today, many communities experiment this form of management.... And it works ! The only inconvenient is that we are obliged to trust “blindly” the other groups and community. Here again, the gift economy is based mainly on trust.

## **Gift**

Giving is a kind of moral contract. Marcel Mauss wrote a very good essay where he explains what represented the idea of giving in primitive society. He said himself that the gift economy was the only natural system that could be visioned for humanity. « Le don a toujours été présent et représente l'économie naturelle assignée à l'homme comme “animal économique” ». He opposed it to the market economy which

has for only goal the accumulation of wealth instead of the circulation of wealth.

He didn't talk about altruism but morality. Giving gives status, reputation which guarantees the participation of all the people. Marcel Mauss preferred to see the gift as an obligation that creates social links and reinforce trust and security.

Waiting for the human being to become altruist is a far-fetched utopia. But establishing a system which creates giving and sharing dynamics could help to increase consciousness.

Some say that the gift economy is unfair, that a large number of people would not give anything and would be excluded. This affirmation doesn't acknowledge what Marcel Mauss concludes: "we receive when we give". We all have a lot to give and sometimes, the simple fact of receiving with gratitude can help make a better society.

## **XVI. Eotopia**

Eotopia is born out of this utopia, a dream a bit crazy which want to pioneer gift economy in a community.

Why not ? Personally, we don't have anything to loose, on the contrary, whether this experience function or not, it can help us to reflect on new models of society, truly local and fair, with a low ecological impact. The question about its doability doesn't have to be asked. What we know is that the time where humanity had the choice is ending. During the last decades, humans have taken freely the resources of the planet for its own comfort. Today, those resources that feed the actual system have overcome their production peaks (Petrol, Natural gaz, Uranium) and will be sufficient to perpetuate our way of life for another twenty or thirty year at most. The people of this world are not any happier than before, worst, the inequalities are stronger than ever between the one who have too much and

the ones not enough to live. The huge amount of waste as well as the billion people who suffer from overweight illustrate perfectly the unbalance in our system.

To change our way of life has become an evidence for us and Eotopia is an attempt to make this evidence concrete.

This dream is based on four pillars which summarize well the philosophy that was born during this moneyless experience.

## **Ecology**

The first and the most important. This was the original drive of the journey without money, a drive that evolves then but which remained strongly axed on the idea of a deep ecology. We are not talking here just about energy savings or water consumption; it is more about finding a symbiosis with our environment

Humans perturbate the biotopes at a fast pace. This is not sustainable; we can see the effects clearly today. And I am not

talking about climate change. Who can continue to affirm that the earth is our garden, that it is our playground?

Find a new harmony is a necessary step, not for the planet which can easily override us but for our own specie.

As we see it, ecology means question oneself, understand our belonging to the world and diminish our impact. This goes through a radical change of diet. We are what we eat and we eat three to four times day !The products which take care of our health are often the one who pollute less : vegetables, fruits, non-transformed products, cereals... We therefore have chosen a vegan diet.

Being vegan is understanding the necessary personal sacrifice to recover a certain balance, accept privation of certain things to re-learn to eat correctly, without killing or harming nature and its animals, and in accordance with our teeth and digest system. We got the same stomach as the chimpanzee who eat only rarely some meat, some insects at most. All those animals fat we eat are not sane for us... is it an evidence on a biological point of view.

Being vegan, it's understanding that humans can be happy while consuming only natural treats and, by the same means, reduce its own ecological footprint.

Ecology is also about living and inhabiting the planet. Therefore, living in small and home made houses which are harmonious with the natural surroundings.

It is the creation of a life style centered around global well-being.

It is autonomous energy and reduction of sound and visual pollution that impede us to be with ourselves.

### **Gift Economy**

Second pillar, the gift economy.

We can't boycott money. It is there, here, everywhere, we should let it flow. However, we wish to reduce monetary exchanges and build the village out of the gifts. When something is given, the vibration that comes with it is always

positive. These positives vibrations are the cement of our dream.

Of course, the inhabitants will use money from time to time but the idea is that everyone learn to give and receive freely, without looking for compensation, to learn to trust, to share without counting, to harmonize oneself with the universal law of nature, mother of all which gives unconditionally to all !

We wish to experiment a new economic system, to confront this idea of gift economy to corroborate the theories we spoke earlier and, maybe, find solutions to make our society evolve towards a fairer and happier one.

### **Free education**

The moneyless journey was like a des-education, we learn to unlearn, to question everything we had learned, or, better put, recorded since we were little.

Eotopia will also be a place where we will install different educational dynamics to transmit our knowledge and

knowhow, a place where adults and children will be all pupils. No sectarianism, total openness to exterior people, ensuring that all can freely learn what they need or want to learn.

No school in itself, no particular places, but a plural education, multiple education in the whole area.

The main idea is to learn to accompany each other in the process of education as Paulo Freire explained : « No one teach anyone, no one teach himself, we teach ourselves together, through the world. »

### **Personal growth**

The more decisive and complicated pillar. Whatever life choices we take, we know the hardest is to live together. I have experiment it sufficiently to know that I am not even ready. The people of Eotopia and the visitors will have to learn to accept the other the way they are, their differences, to love accept themselves as well, to deal with their ego and succeed in putting their own priorities after the priorities of the group.

This will be a continuous learning process to find the way towards harmony, to create a big united family, strong of its own differences and conscious of its interdependencies. This pillar will be our spirituality. Whatever techniques we will use, non-violent communication, meditation, Yoga and other, our spiritual goal will be to learn to grow together.

## **XVII. The utopia is on the horizon...**

Today, I don't live without money anymore. I am still convinced that money is just a tool we don't need to be happy. But with the birth of our child and the starting of Eotopia, I also understand that this tool can be very useful to advance a bit further.

We bought land for Eotopia and starting June 2016, we will start making the dream come true. Yes, we are and will use money but we keep in mind the utopia that shines on the horizon. We'll keep on giving until we don't need money anymore. And hopefully, you'll join us too !

After several days in Berlin, we returned to France. Living without money in this country is a totally different issue. If waste is not as substantial here as it is in the United States, putting together a daily, balanced meal is rather easy. We wait for the end of the markets to salvage what's left over while be-

ing asked every now and then to help pack up the stalls. I don't miss going through trash cans but they are becoming less and less accessible, and several of the stall owners require the employees to pour bleach on the food that has been thrown away. The discussion that we present for the first time in more than 15 countries and in 5 different languages, takes a completely different dimension in my home country. I am no longer a sympathetic traveler with a charming accent, but simply a French citizen. This process is a practice that has become common in our country and I am only another "parasite" as some do not fail to point out. I see the contempt in the look of many stall owners, a feeling that I have nearly never encountered this during my trip. In particular, I think about all those Moroccan people who offered us shelter and food without prying and I can only regret that the French are not more open to other cultures. They have so much to learn.

As far as housing goes, we have to resort to the exchange of services. It is a practice accepted quite well in French society and we find, without difficulty, many places and solutions

for housing; in the city and in the country in exchange for babysitting, doing odd jobs or helping with truck farming. However, it is rare to find people who will, on a whim, invite us to stay with them. Elsewhere outside of France, when dusk is approaching, to be invited to stay has become almost automatic. Here, one drops us at midnight at the edge of a highway or at a gas station. Individualism has overridden generosity.

I have succeeded, nevertheless, to persuade a dentist to examine several of my teeth for free. In exchange, I help her and her 84-year-old mother for one month in the summer. I attest to the fact that living off of donations is much more agreeable than a monetary exchange, even if sometimes the concept of the compensation remains (here, the time). Each time, a more intimate contact is created; we become friends.

In general, my family welcomes me with open arms accepting of my preference to live without money and they do not talk about it too much either. In fact, they encourage me. My sister stands by it completely and only asks me one thing: “If only you could at the least insure yourself, just in case!” My

fully comprehensive insurance wouldn't suffice.

My mum houses me while holding back tears. Arte had had the great idea to release the movie *Into the Wild* just after I'd left. My mother seriously thought she would never see me again. Over the years and after many family reunions, she now worries about Yazmin, this little Mexican girl who has to endure my narrow-minded convictions.

Seeing the state of my shoes, my mum tries to buy me some new ones at Decathlon, two pairs of tennis shoes *Made in China*. I then beg her to never again buy me anything brand new and definitely nothing made with plastic and so on. Thereafter, she settles for cooking us two delicious, organic and vegan meals. She adapts wonderfully to our mode of living and I am forever grateful for it and her. My stepfather is, lastly, the one in whom I find the most support. He has always remained in contemplation and observation; he admires to some degree my acting out.

Today, I no longer live without money. My daughter was born, add that to other priorities which have arrived merely due

to my existence. In any case, I know that for our community project, we must utilize a little bit of money from time to time, whether it be to pay the taxes or take care of unexpected emergencies.

My style of living is not as consistent as I would like it to be, but I continue to favor “donation economy,” the scavenging of food and the searching for alternatives in regards to living without monetary exchanges.

The use of money has become very insignificant in our society and it is difficult to measure the impact of it. It was only once I decided to deliberately give it up that I was able to understand the impact of it on my life and on my relationships with the world that surrounds me. To eat, to sleep, to get from place to place, to take care of myself, I create human exchange. The trust that many put into money, I put into the other.

It is for this reason that today I still persist in not having money on me, in buying only the bare minimum and in selling nothing; in order to preserve the exchanges, bonds of the overall human family and, on my scale, to make an economic

change that seems quite necessary. If the banks go bankrupt tomorrow, if the system just falls apart, what will we do? I would like to, therefore, be able to give and share freely. I am convinced that the gift of giving brings happiness. This is maybe utopian, and many will say that man is inherently too evil for this, but I believe in it.

## XVIII. Here and Now

Living without money is a path, an experience that can bring certain lessons, help us find certain personal truths. *My* path allowed me to find happiness and gives my life a deeper meaning. This is not to say that this is the only way, for there are many paths that lead a person.

However, there is a suggestion that I think I can pass on. No matter what path is taken, inner harmony is necessary in order to find happiness and peace. One cannot be well with himself while living in inconsistency. If I want to continue to live without money, if I try every day to diminish my ecological impact as much as possible and if I force myself to live off of donation and love, it is because I know and because I feel that these are the things that I must do. If I listen to my heart, if I pay attention to my thoughts, then I know which decisions and actions are beneficial, and if they are to me deeply beneficial,

they are so for the rest of the world. This I think is the only rule, the paths are numerous but the one that works must find inner harmony, it must agree with his or her thoughts, feelings, and actions. When these three centers are aligned, happiness is no longer sought for, it is there, here, and now.

To you the reader, I hope that you find your way, and above all, dare to take the first step.

With love,  
Benjamin

The website for Eotopia: [www.eotopia.org](http://www.eotopia.org)  
We finally started the project ! Get in touch !

The author's blog: [sansunsou.wordpress.com](http://sansunsou.wordpress.com)