

Developmental Plan

To: Aimee Olsen-Borovitch, Haphazard House

From: [Insert Your Name Here]

Date: November 11, 20____

Re: “The Barter Complex” by Carina Freitas

[WARM OPENING]

Thank you for the opportunity to read this essay. I’m not a denizen of bazaars and flea markets—I’m too shy to haggle—so when I saw the subject was barter, I didn’t expect to be drawn into the author’s project. But as a gay man who lived through the early days of the AIDS crisis, I was deeply moved by the author’s encounter with Rufaro and her family, and even more impressed with her ingenious and courageous response to the family’s suffering.

[CONTENT SUMMARY]

Freitas tells the story of how she learned to barter at an early age from the northern California farming community she grew up in, how she experimented with communal living during the hippie era, and how she eventually parlayed the lessons learned from those experiences—both the good and the bad—into an international business that harnesses the power of barter to enrich the lives of women in Zimbabwe’s informal economy. With humor and grace, the author, herself a single mother, explains how she came to visit the African nation, was welcomed into the home of an abandoned, AIDS-stricken mother and her children, and was inspired by the woman’s stone carvings to establish the House of Stone, allowing individuals and companies to exchange medical supplies and other goods for the world-renowned sculptures of the Ndebele tribe. By outlining the essential steps in establishing a barter system, the author hopes to encourage experiments like hers throughout the developing world.

[PROBLEM SUMMARY]

The author has chosen to argue for the globalization of barter by focusing on her own experiences, and her life story certainly makes a compelling case in its favor. But the essay meanders from narrative to exposition and back again, leaps backward and forward in time, and digresses about topics such as Zimbabwean history and Rufaro’s parents’ backstory that, while fascinating, don’t contribute directly to her argument. This scattershot approach leaves the reader to piece together the benefits of barter. The author has an engaging voice and a great sense of humor, but her colloquial tone can sometimes undermine her authority.

[VISION STATEMENT, READERSHIP PROFILE]

This essay has an important contribution to make to the edited volume for which it was commissioned. If properly revised, it could do much to foster awareness among academics, activists, and international aid workers about the potential for barter to improve the lives of women around the world. The author’s visit to Rufaro’s home makes a compelling entrée into the subject: that experience inspired her to start House of Stone and could easily inspire many more to become involved. But to deliver the information the reader needs, the rest of the essay should focus on the benefits of barter and the process of starting a barter exchange.

Working Thesis. I've identified a handful of main arguments in the current draft:

1. **Women's Value:** When women's skills and labor are valued appropriately, they naturally employ barter, reducing conflict over money and promoting economic advancement across the region.
2. **Globalization:** Barter, working hand in hand with microcredit, can create economic opportunities for women around the world by stabilizing a regional economy's growth and warding off corruption.
3. **Local Community:** In the twenty-first century a barter economy can best achieve the traditional goals of agrarian society—such as fostering trust, sharing access to economic value, and serving as an informal social safety net—by following sound business practices and extending the system to nonessential, or “spiritual,” goods.
4. **Personal Success:** Barter provides an element of surprise and discovered joy in well-off societies.

Although any one of these could serve as the essay's central thesis, because they are so intertwined, I recommend that we go with a broader thesis that embraces all four of these larger points. Here's a version that might serve, written from the author's point of view:

As my experiences demonstrate, the core values of barter can enrich the lives of women in developed nations and provide crucial economic empowerment to women in developing nations.

Working Title. The author's original title is punchy and gets one's attention, but it needs revision because we learn in the text that the phrase “barter complex” refers to elder communes, which are not the focus of the essay. Also, the pun on “martyr complex,” while playful, evokes negative connotations that don't seem appropriate.

In brainstorming for a new title to match the thesis above, I had great fun mining the author's inimitable voice for such choice morsels as “No Easy Way,” “Not a Diva among Them,” “Living the Barter-Centric Life,” and “Bawling Like John Boehner” (just kidding with that last one). In the process, I narrowed it down to three options:

“Starting Local, Going Global: The Barter Lady's Story”

“House of Stone: The Global Sisterhood and the Power of Barter”

“A Wife Is Precious as the Diamonds He Mines: The Power of Barter in the Global Sisterhood”

Of these, I favor the last. It's a bit long but showcases the author's down-to-earth voice at its most striking and relevant.

Revised Contents. The expanded table of contents below roughly alternates between the author's experiences with barter and the ramifications of barter on a national or global scale. But it organizes both of those stories under subheads that advance her argument.

“A Wife Is Precious as the Diamonds He Mines: The Power of Barter in the Global Sisterhood”

[Opens with author’s visits to clinic and Rufaro’s mother]

The Roots of Barter

- [Agrarian barter in Bay Area]
- [Zimbabwe’s collapse spurs barter]

Providing Stability

- [Doling out money doesn’t work]
- [Barter subverts corrupt regimes]
- [Author barter in commune]
- [Author gives birth, survives by barter]

Fostering Community

- [Author fosters local art community]
- [Author fosters global art community]
- [Author identifies need for HIV meds]
- [Author establishes House of Stone]

Enriching Lives

- [Author’s life enriched by co-op]
- [Lives enriched by Shona art, music]

Starting Locally

- [Determining mutual need]
- [Establishing value]
- [Setting rules for deferred payments]
- [Preparing for expansion]

The Global Sisterhood

- [Women’s value as resources]
- [Global scale touches more lives]
- [Synergy with microcredit]
- [Avoiding backlash from men]
- [Global village should have its own co-op]

The Elder Commune

The Role of Creativity

Structural Issues. The unrevised draft contains a number of passages that have no obvious place in the new outline. My intention is to remove them, but if the author feels strongly about retaining them, I’ll be happy to work with her to try to find them a place. These passages include:

- The opening disquisition about barter getting a “bad rap” (pages 1–2)
- A paragraph about “the element of surprise” (page 2)

- Maiba and Zuka’s story (pages 6–7)
- Andrew’s story (pages 13–14)
- A comparison of barter with gifting (pages 16–17)
- The assessment of other relief efforts (page 19)
- Sophie’s existence attributed to barter (pages 22–23)

I’m particularly sorry to slate Andrew’s story for deletion because it is moving, but I can’t see where to put it. Maybe the author will have some ideas.

Stylistic Issues. As mentioned earlier, the author’s voice is engagingly colloquial and funny. However, some of her jokes land better than others. For instance, the joke about assisted-living facilities—“I can’t wait to get my mother into one (joking, Mom!)”—probably reflects a lovingly teasing relationship between the author and her mother, but it will strike some readers as potentially cruel. I’ll be keeping my eye out for issues of this sort for the author’s attention.

Revision Logistics. Because of the tight schedule you proposed, Aimee, I’ll need approval of this plan from both you and the author by November 13—that is, the day after tomorrow. In the meantime, I’m going to start blocking out the essay on the assumption that the table of contents will be approved with minor tweaks.

[UPBEAT SUMMATION]

I’m delighted to help bring this fascinating and important story to light. Please extend my thanks to the author for sharing it with the world.