

Anarchist library  
Anti-Copyright



## The Zapatista's Voice

LIMITING THE LIMITLESS: GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL  
CAPITAL, NEW INTERNATIONALISM AND THE  
ZAPATISTAS' VOICE.

Massimo De Angelis

Massimo De Angelis  
The Zapatista's Voice  
LIMITING THE LIMITLESS: GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL  
CAPITAL, NEW INTERNATIONALISM AND THE  
ZAPATISTAS' VOICE.  
January 1998

<http://libcom.org/library/zapatistas-voice-massimo-de-angelis>

[en.anarchistlibraries.net](http://en.anarchistlibraries.net)

January 1998



# Contents

1. Introduction. . . . .	5
2. Capital's neoliberal strategies and the making of alternative visions . . . . .	7
3. Old and new forms of Internationalism . . . . .	14
4. Roots of the Zapatistas' internationalism . . . . .	21
4.1. Who are the Zapatistas? . . . . .	21
4.2. Globalization and Zapatista's internation- alism . . . . .	25
4.2.1. On Zapatista's "Nationalism". . . . .	25
4.2.2. Zapatistas' rhetoric of liberation. . . . .	27
5. Conclusion: Impact of Zapatista's internationalism.	43
REFERENCES . . . . .	45



[3]These material conditions are not only reflected by the fact that the Zapatistas' practice would not have been possible without internet technology, fact that I give here for obvious and will not investigate further. Suffice here to say that vision and hope cannot be found in dead things, therefore we cannot find vision and hope in computers, phone lines, and terminals spread around the world. Yet, the role of information technology for the building of networks of struggle is increasingly recognised in its importance, and rightly so. Information is quickly distributed around the world thus helping to mobilise campaigns, support, and pressure. This instrumental use of the internet as a vehicle of circulation of propaganda and information is of course important, but must be carefully qualified. Not only we must take into consideration the conditions of availability of such technology (much more limited in the South than in the North). Also, the political and cultural differences, as well the difference in needs and aspirations expressed by different movements around the world may become an obstacle to mutual understanding and mutual support, and can even lead to clashing demands (for example, the demand employment growth may clash with the demand for respect for the environment or indigenous autonomy; the demand for human rights may clash with demands for saving jobs in the industrial sector supplying the military; etc.). Thus it has been argued that "the Net provides new spaces for new political discussions about democracy, revolution and self-determination but it does not provide solutions to the differences that exist; it is merely a means to accelerate the search for such solutions." (Cleaver 1996/97: 5)

LIMITING THE LIMITLESS: GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL CAPITAL, NEW INTERNATIONALISM AND THE ZAPATISTAS' VOICE<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Introduction.

In the last decade or so, many labour, environmental, human and civil right activists belonging to different movements have increasingly turned to different forms of international action. This is understandable, especially considering the level and speed of capital's globalizing processes and its consequence on wages, intensity of labour and work conditions; women's increased unwaged labour to supplant the global heavy cuts in social spending; the continuing human rights abuses often perpetrated in collusion with multinational corporations like Shell in Nigeria and BP in Columbia; the international trade in slaves, the use of child labour drawn in the production cycle of transnational corporations; the continuing destruction of the environmental conditions of our existence, reproduction and nature; and so on.

The growth of this international activism is widely recognised, and does not need here to be further emphasised. However, what seems to me is not sufficiently addressed in most of current debates, is a discussion of what meaning can be given to these international practices beyond their mere instrumentality in relation to the particular aim or purpose of a campaign. In other words, is there a pattern or trend or, better, a common thread that can be envisaged in the various practices of the so many different movements that are turning the entire world into a picket line?<sup>2</sup> What is the meaning of this common thread,

---

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Ana-Esther Cece-a and Monty Neill for their useful comments on various drafts of this paper. Responsibility for errors and imprecisions are of course all mine.

<sup>2</sup> The slogan "the world is our picket line" has been used by the Liverpool dockers' international campaign.

what is, if any, the "future in the present" represented by these developments, what kind of world, what kind of life the concrete practices of these movements point at? These questions are, I believe, of fundamental importance if we want to recuperate and voice a discourse of liberation, an image of hope and a vision of a different world that not only challenges the only possible future envisaged by both neoliberal left and neoliberal right, but also which is rooted in the practice of real movements. In section 3 I suggest that a common thread is developing and a new internationalism is making itself. This new internationalism is not the adaptation to a preconceived idea, but it originates out of practical necessity by different movements in their reciprocal interaction within the context of the global economy.

Finally, in section 4 I speculate about the political visions embedded in these movements once they are taken as a totality. Among the many movements at the international level, perhaps the Zapatistas are the one that most have explicitly and systematically voiced a vision of a different world developed from within the old. This movement gives us important insights about the conditions of struggle in today's world and about the constitutive direction taken by new practices. Therefore I will discuss what I perceive is the Zapatistas' use and understanding in practice as well as in thought of internationalism. The importance of this reference point is in my opinion fundamental for a very obvious traditional reason: Zapatistas' internationalism is rooted in the material conditions of today's class struggle at the international level. In the next section I briefly discuss the general theoretical aspects of globalizing processes shaping these material conditions.[3]

tercontinental por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo. Chiapas, Mexico.

Marx, Karl. 1867. *Capital*. Volume 1. New York: Penguin Books. 1976.

Milner, Susan. 1990. *The dilemmas of internationalism: French syndicalism and the international labour movement*. New York : St. Martin's Press.

Moreno Alejandro 1995. Expropiación revolucionaria de la política. In *La Guillotina*, no. 31, August/September.

Navarro Luis-Hernández. 1996. *Café: la pobreza de la riqueza*. In *La Jornada*, 17 September.

Subcommandante Marcos. 1992. *Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds*. In *Zapatistas!*. Documents of the New Mexican Revolution. New York: Autonomedia. 1995.

Subcommandante Marcos. 1997. *The Seven Loose Pieces of the Global Jigsaw Puzzle*. Originally Published in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 1997. English version available in *Chiapas 95*.

Tronti, Mario. 1968: *Internazionalismo vecchio e nuovo*. In *Contropiano* No. 3.

Wearne Phillip. *Return of the Indian. Conquest and Revival in the Americas*. London: Cassel.

*Zapatistas!*. 1995. Documents of the New Mexican Revolution. New York: Autonomedia.

Other references

DOR1 refers to first Declaration of la Realidad. The English version can be found visiting <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~zapatistas/declaration.html>.

DOR2 refers to the second Declaration of la Realidad. English version can be found visiting <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3849/dec2real.html>.

\*\*\*

BOM refers to the Books of Mirrors. English version can be found visiting <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu:80/~zapatistas/book1.html>.

ing and the Future of Revolution in the Twenty-First Century. Forthcoming.

Dalla Costa, Mariarosa. 1995. Development and Reproduction. In *Common Sense*, No. 17.

De Angelis, Massimo. 1996. La Realidad in Europe: an Account of the first European Meeting against Neoliberalism and for Humanity. In *Common Sense*, No. 20.

De Angelis, Massimo. 1997. The Autonomy of the Economy and Globalisation. In *Common Sense*, No. 21.

Doyal, Len & Ian Gough. 1991. *A Theory of Human Need*. London: Macmillan.

Gates, Marylin. 1996. The Debt Crisis and Economic Restructuring: prospects for Mexican Agriculture. In Gerardo Otero, Neo-liberalism Revisited. *Economic Restructuring an Mexico's Political Future*. Oxford: Westview Press.

Gabel, Ilene. 1997. Coercing Credibility: Neoliberal Policies and Monetary Institutions in Developing and Transitional Economies. Paper presented at the conference on The Political Economy of Central Banking. London: University of East London, 16 May.

Hardt, Michael. 1993. Gilles Deleuze. *An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*. London: UCL Press.

Herrnstein, Richard J. & Charles Murray. 1994. *The bell curve : intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York : Free Press.

Holloway, John. 1996. The Concept of Power of the Zapatistas. In *Common Sense*, No. 19.

Holloway, John. 1997. 'Dignity's Revolt', in J. Holloway, E. Pelaez (eds), *Dignity's*

*Revolt: Reflections on the Zapatista Uprising* London: Pluto Press, forthcoming.

Lee, Eric. 1997. *The Labour Movement and the Internet. The New Internationalism*. London: Pluto.

Mayor Ana Maria. 1996. *Detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes*. In *EZLN, Crónicas intergalácticas*. Primer Encuentro In-

## 2. Capital's neoliberal strategies and the making of alternative visions

In the last two decades, following the demise of the various forms of post-war Keynesian strategies of development, the global economy has been subjected to neoliberal strategies. In both countries in the North and in the South of the world economy this has meant although in different forms the implementation of strategies aimed at the two classical parameters of capitalist accumulation: 1. how much and in what conditions people work; 2. how much and in what conditions people access the social wealth produced.<sup>3</sup> Without entering in a detailed analysis of the interplay of these two different conditions and their definition of capital's accumulation, suffice here to say that these two parameters have been targeted by means of a variety of policies ranging from labour market deregulation, austerity policies, privatizations, cut in social spending, etc. Understood in terms of these two parameters, the neoliberal strategy means 1. a general fragmentation and dispersion of the centers of production at the global level and flexibilization of labour at the national level; 2. a relative and/or absolute reduction in the access of social wealth produced for the satisfaction of needs in all countries within the global economy. These two co-ordinates of the neoliberal strategy are recognisable in numerous concrete policies that have been implemented in the last two decades. "Free trade" (recognisable under the various institutional labels such as NAFTA, EU, ASEAN, WTO, etc. to which corresponds particular level of continental aggregation or supranational co-ordination) implied the increased ex-

---

<sup>3</sup> One can recognise strategies around these two parameters in different areas: labour market, working hours, labour contracts, job security, access to land, etc. all affect parameter 1.; wage, debt, public expenditures, etc. affect parameter 2.; some general institutional conditions such as right to strike, freedom of speech, form of democracy etc. have an effect on both 1. and 2.

posure of "national economies" to global competition, essentially meaning that the vast majority of people within a country has been subjected to global pressure to increase intensity of labour, reduce job security for the employed, etc. (parameter 1), reduction and/or tight control of social spending (health, education, food subsidies), lower wages (or wage growth blow inflation) etc., (parameter 2). Along with the burden of debt in many countries of the South, the trends of liberalisation of financial capital at the global level acts as disciplinary device to impose austerity on the great bulk of the population in all countries, and present it as "objective", "external", faceless discipline of the global market. The financial aspect of global neoliberalism therefore is an important element of the more profound neoliberal strategy to act upon those two fundamental parameters affecting everybody's life.

The result of these strategies is human fragmentation and atomisation that, together with the widespread use of new microelectronics and information technologies, has constituted the condition of a new process of capitalist integration, that of the global network of capitalist production, aiming at the constitution of a global factory. Fragmentation and atomisation on one hand and integration within the global factory on the other are therefore two sides of the same process.<sup>4</sup> Neoliberal strategies shaping the global factory on one hand tend to increase the scale and degree of global interconnection of individuals and population across regions, nations and continents, in the attempt to turn the world in a huge global factory which aim is first and foremost capital accumulation. On the other, each unit within this global factory individuals and productive networks of individuals (communities, regions, nations, continents) present itself as isolated and atomised nodes of imper-

---

<sup>4</sup> Ana Esther Cecena (1997: 38) puts it well: "Production can be built up again only after a sequence which integrates workers, raw materials and territory . . . but while integrating through this network economy separate them from their collectives and subordinate them to individual competition."

a single document. There is plenty of time in front of us to refine, fix, smooth. The point is that these documents are starting points, all together representing one step forward in the collective attempt to make sense of what do we want and how to get it. One step forward is a long way from where we were one month earlier.

However, the fact that so many people belonging to so many different backgrounds produced these Encuentros, the fact that so many different visions were able to come together and relate to each other, indicates that the Zapatistas only acted as catalyst of a process of "encounters", of building bridges that, as I have indicated in section 3 of this paper, is characteristic of the current process of internationalization of struggles. Therefore, in this sense, the strength of the Zapatistas' message resides not so much in what they have "invented", but in the fact that they were able to give voice – in their own particular way – to a process that was already taking place independently of them. This is why, I believe, many around the world got inspired by the Zapatistas' struggle. People across the globe immediately recognised that the Zapatistas' struggle – and the stories, visions, political methodology, human interactions which accompanied their struggles – was also their struggle in the very sense of the word.

## REFERENCES

Brecher, Jeremy & Tim Costello. 1994. *Global village or global pillage: economic reconstruction from the bottom up*. Boston : South End Press.

Cece-a, Ana Esther & Andrés Barreda. 1995. *Chiapas y sus recursos estratégicos*. In *Chiapas*, No. 1, Mexico D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas.

Cleaver, Harry. 1997. *The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle*. In John Holloway (ed.), *The Chiapas Upris-*



ket. Second, hope is posited as the claim of a vision (or visions) counterpoised to the conformity and defeatism of the market. On this ground, the unifying factors of the different participants of the Encuentros was not much the sharing of an alternative vision. What they were sharing was the claim that alternative visions are possible, and are real. Third life in the context of the Encuentros is seen as self-government counterpoised to the rule of power and things (market) on our lives. On this ground, the premises, logistics, and structure of the Encuentros were produced as a result of self-government. Self-government was also seen in the process of definition of the general procedural guidelines of the meeting and in the organisation of its proceedings which was largely in the hands of the people participating in the different tables.<sup>32</sup>

One of the best offspring of both Encuentros has been the weaving of networks, of both global networks which will result precious in times to come but also of circulation of political and organisational know-how across different experiences. For example, direct action environmentalists from Italy and the UK met and exchanged philosophies, tactics and skills. Also, each of the tables has produced a final document. The different documents produced in the various tables of work, represent, regardless of their content, a tremendous effort of synthesis of a large variety of positions expressed in a very short time. It goes without saying therefore that from the theoretical point of view there may be some limitations, or some overlapping or even contradictions among different documents or even within

---

<sup>32</sup> Yes, there were many organisational problems. That moderator tended to be authoritarian. The other was not able to face the authoritarian tendencies of some of the participants pressing for their positions. Some participant was intimidated by the large size of some groups. Some felt put off by the at times endless list of ponenzias that appeared to reduce the interchange, the discussion, the confrontation among people. These and other problems are real, but can only be seen as problems to be solved and not as the overall character defining the Encuentro. The Encuentro did not begin in July 1996 or ended in August 1997. The Encuentro is a process.

sonal networks whose dominant function is to serve the network itself and its boundless drive for profit making.

Atomisation and fragmentation (and the correspondent capitalist integration) are of course fundamental aspects of all capitalist production (Marx 1844), no matter what is its historical phase. When the main purpose of production becomes money making rather than satisfaction of needs, human needs, in their definition and realisation, are subordinated to money (a thing) which therefore is empowered of decisions which should instead belong to human beings themselves. However, we must keep in mind that in each different period of capitalist development, the particular form of boundless profit making activity risks to create the conditions for its demise, that is, conditions for the overcoming of that fragmentation and atomisation. For example, the large factory of the fordist era not only was the result of capitalist strategies to break the collective power (connection) of skilled workers by enforcing a process of production in which individuals had to act only as a brainless extension of the assembly line (fragmentation/atomisation), but it was also the condition for a recomposition (reconnection) among industrial workers, who, on the basis of their conditions of life and work, transcended atomisation and isolation and invented new forms of struggle, lived new dreams, and outlined new demands and aspirations.

Therefore, in this sense, and in general, we can define the attempt to transcend atomisation and fragmentation as the underlying character of what class struggle is. Class here understood not in sociological terms (defined in terms of various criteria such as income, taste, source of income wage or unwaged, sector of work industry, service, agriculture, etc.), but in terms of a network, a collective, which makes itself, and in the act of making itself it also defines what it is making itself for. A network which constitutes itself beyond the network of capitalist production. In the rich histories of different social movements around the world, there are endless examples of this collective-

making activity, this fluid shaping of needs and identities, this continuous re-definition of a social force of radical transformation that has been known (especially in the Marxist tradition) as class.<sup>5</sup>

The characteristics of this class are quite divergent from the impersonal networking of capitalist nature, this for at least two reasons: first, the different nodes of the network (individuals, communities, etc.) relate to each other directly, without the mediation of money; second, the fundamental aim of networking is not money creation but needs, their definition, realisation, and defence. It is clear therefore that the act of making itself is an act of transcendence of capital's imposed atomisation and fragmentation, that is an act of revolt and subversion.

All throughout the history of the capitalist mode of production we have on one hand, capital's attempt to impose fragmentation and isolation through a specific form of networking, that of the global factory (with its extension at local, regional, and continental levels), on the other hand the attempt to constitute alternative networks, that of the constitution of class.<sup>6</sup> These

---

<sup>5</sup> Mainstream Marxist tradition(s) have however rejected the fluidity of this concept and attempted to rigidify it into dead fixed categories. Thus, instead of focusing on the process of making itself (understood as the making of collective subjects not only in opposition to a way of life based on boundless profit making activity but also constitutive new ways of living beyond capital) this tradition has instead used fixed categories (e.g. wage labour, manual work, etc.) to define what "class" is, with disastrous effects in terms of political and organisational work.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the act of constituting a trade union like in the US in the 1930s represents an act of constituting an alternative network. The act of constituting a women collective in UK in 1997 to face government's cut in welfare provisions to single mothers, represents at the same time an act of constituting an alternative network. The act of building a social movement in the 1980s of landless people squatting land in Brazil, is another example. These networks springing from below may end up to be the target of capital's strategies of co-optation. For example, labour unions built by grassroots militancy in the 1930s in the US have been turned into the vertically structured labour bureaucracies in the 1950s and 1960s, that is into fundamental institutions for the management of Keynesian strategy of accumulation.

## 5. Conclusion: Impact of Zapatista's internationalism.

In practice, Zapatistas internationalism has taken a wide range of forms: from reciprocal recognition of movements as part of the same movement for dignity<sup>30</sup>, to important symbolic expression of solidarity; from catalysing the identification with their movement by social subjects struggling in total different circumstances<sup>31</sup> to the inspiration and promotion of two intercontinental meetings for humanity and against neoliberalism (Encuentros) aimed at finding strategies to circulate and build network of different struggles.

Both Encuentros (one held in Chiapas in the summer 1996 and the other in the Spanish state in the summer 1997) were marked, in both conception and organisation, by the three coordinates of the Zapatista's internationalism (dignity, hope and life) and by the essential element of the Zapatista's idea of revolutionary practice: asking we walk.

First a meeting of this kind is possible to the extent the oppressed of the world present themselves as dignified subject. Dignity acts therefore as a bridge among different nucleuses counterpoised to the atomisation we face on a globalized mar-

---

<sup>30</sup> In an interview to the newspaper La Jornada on the day of the uprising (1 January 1994) and published only 18 January, Marcos said: "We have dignity . . . and we are demonstrating it. You should do the same, within your ideology, within your means, within your beliefs, and make your human condition count" (Zapatistas! 1995: 63).

<sup>31</sup> "Zapata's determined gaze and slightly stooped shoulders in the well loved photograph paraded by the 'cobas' of Alfa Romeo workers at Arese in Milan was one of the striking journalistic images of 1994, creating a bridge in real time between the Mexican revolt in January and the struggles of Europe's industrial workers and unemployed. A bridge was thrown through space and historical time to link struggles against continued 'primitive' expropriation of the land to those against the post-Fordist expropriation of labour that brings with it the progressive dismantlement of the public system of social rights and guarantees" (Dalla Costa 1995: 11).

committee. Life cannot be postponed to the "after revolution", and in the process of asking questions we walk forward and deal with the problems as they come ("Asking we walk"). And in the process of asking questions we struggle to go beyond the obstacles we encounter. And in the process of asking questions, we also dance and sing thus stripping politics of its alienated mantle of dedicated and professional seriousness. Politics becomes a human affair, in its totality.

For example, in a communiqué of the EZLN to the EPR (Revolutionary Popular Army) a guerrilla group with basis in Guerrero, the Zapatistas spell out the differences that according to them exist between the two formations. To me, these differences are the differences between the "Zapatistas revolutionary expropriation of politics" (Moreno 1995) and the traditional conception of politics, based in the seizure of state power (whether through revolutionary or reformist means, this does not really matter).

What we look for, what we need, what we want, is that all people without party nor organisation agree on what they want and organise to get it (preferably in peaceful and civil ways) not to seize power, but to exercise it. I know that you will say that this is utopian and not much orthodox, but this is the way of being of the Zapatistas. (Marcos, 29 Aug. 1996)

Their concept of politics is as simple as this: that the people with no party or organisation agree on what they want and how to get it. But such a simplicity is in fact the gateway for many crucial questions with no easy answers, and only people involved in common communication and struggles can raise both questions and hope to find answers.

attempts of course have a material foundation, and this is also given by the particular conditions of existence of the global factory itself.

To gain insights into today's making of class, we must therefore be able to appreciate the strategic meaning for capital of the present form of atomisation and fragmentation imposed by current neoliberal strategies. This strategic meaning seems to be based on two related pillars. First, the promotion, strengthening and consolidation of a global factory (something that always existed in the history of capitalism) as the basic objective of current neoliberal strategies. The nodes of this network constituting the global factory can be identifiable depending on the level of integration: integration of continents, of nations, of regions, cities, neighbourhoods, individuals. Also, the integration of these different levels overlap: the integration of regions cuts across national borders; the integration of individuals cuts across continental borders, etc.

A second complementary pillar of current neoliberal strategies is the promotion, strengthening, and consolidation of an awareness of the whole (the global economy) that regards it as omnipotent. This awareness is generally associated to a corresponding feeling of powerlessness, to the reduction of each productive node within the network of the global factory to the condition of "nobodyness". This conventional wisdom of our age is incessantly reproduced by the media as well as by evident and continuous movements of financial capital that have a disastrous effects on the condition of living of people across the globe. According to this conventional wisdom, individuals, communities, regional, national, and continental networks can only play the game of competition: what appears an immensely powerful, yet impersonal, Leviathan (the global factory) does not allow any other "game".

It seems therefore that, within the material and cultural framework of today's patterns of capital globalization, a syllogism of power is perpetrated: A. the global factory (its needs,

its endless drive to accumulation) is everything. B. Individuals (communities, neighbourhoods, regions, etc.) are for the global factory. C. Individuals (communities, neighbourhoods, regions, etc.) are nobody and their needs and aspirations are nothing.

A. The global factory (its needs, its endless drive to accumulation) is everything. Within the framework of each nation-state, this premise means essentially that the nation state must attract and keep as much as global capital as possible (Holloway 1996). This is the only way a nation state plays the game as a node of the global factory. To play this game is to play the game of "national competitiveness", and this game is defined by the enforcement of the parameters of accumulation 1 and 2 as defined before. The nation state becomes an enforcer of austerity to attract global financial capital, it becomes an enforcer of deregulation in the labour market to attract global industrial capital, it becomes an enforcer of land or social services privatisation to meet the requirements of free trade and attract financial and industrial capital. To the extent each nation state acts as node of the global factory the global factory can survive by pitting

B. Individuals (communities, neighbourhoods, regions, etc.) are for (serving) the global factory. Is there any other role for individuals and their various networks feeding a machine which has no concept of enough (enough profit, enough accumulation, enough misery, enough trade, enough war, enough pollution, etc.)? Of course people have needs and aspirations that are other than those compatible with the requirements of accumulation. They are indeed, human beings. But any strategy informed by premise A., cannot but see this otherness as an obstacle to be co-opted or eliminated. Thus:

C. Individuals (communities, neighbourhoods, regions, etc.) are nobody and their needs and aspirations are nothing. Even if individuals and their various communities have needs and have aspirations and many of their needs and aspirations are extremely well definable (food, health, houses, land, education,

rial things cannot be de-linked from the demand for freedom and justice, as freedom and justice is defined by the indigenous communities themselves, and thus it cannot be de-linked from self-government and self-determination, it cannot be de-linked from new human relations.

Life for the Zapatistas is self-government (the actively participating in the management of life, every single aspect of life: "Every cook can govern!").

Life is the right to govern and to govern ourselves, to think and act with a freedom that is not exercised over the slavery of others, the right to give and receive what is just. (DOR1)

This was true at the local level, it is true at the global level. This conception of life translated at the international level, results in an international of hope that is not "the bureaucracy of hope, not the opposite image and, thus, the same as that annihilates us."

If dignity, hope and life are the elements of this new revolutionary internationalism, then the latter is not instrumental to the fight against capital, but it has as starting point the constitution of humanity. In this context the fight against capital becomes a residual, it is capital which deploys forces against people's constitution of humanity. The old revolutionary practice started from the condition of exploitation, poverty and misery and indicated the answer: revolution. Here, revolution was conceived as realising the hopes of the masses understood in terms of the party plans. Internationalism (and the party) was instrumental to this answer, this idea of realisation. Zapatistas' practice starts from the same poverty, exploitation and misery, and from the fact that despite this poverty, oppression, exploitation, etc. people are dignified human subjects, able to hope and self-govern themselves and ask: what to do in order to deal with our needs? Thus "revolution is redefined as a question rather than an answer" (Holloway 1997), a question of communal self-empowerment rather than a pre-established answer in the hand of few enlightened people belonging to some central

means much more than the preservation of their mere material existence or survival as individuals. For example, the defence of indigenous culture is not defined as museum-like preservation, but it corresponds to the defence of symbolic, material, and spiritual framework within which to live practices of self-government. In this context, culture itself can change, as shown by the aspirations of indigenous women fighting against patriarchy in their communities.

From this they derive a conception of needs as something which cannot only be defined "objectively" by some elements of the intelligentsia<sup>29</sup>, but it entails a social and subjective process of definition. The material and ideal side of what constitute needs is blurred: land and freedom are not two distinctive demands, they are not two entries in a shopping list, they are part of the same. Thus the famous declaration of war states:

we ask for your participation, your decision to support this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, peace.

and in a very early editorial to the *El Despertador Mexicano* (31 December 1993) we read about the resolution to meet these needs without waiting for others to accomplish them:

Necessity brought us together, and we said "Enough!!" We no longer have the time or the will to wait for others to solve our problems. We have organized ourselves and we have decided to demand what is ours . . .

Land and freedom, food and dignity. You could feed a population by throwing sufficient bread to them. Isn't this a way to meet the need for food? The need expressed by the Zapatistas is not for food and insult. The need is for food and dignity. Not for health care and corruption. But for health care and autonomy. Not for schools and education that legitimised atrocities, imperialism, and the destruction of indigenous culture. But for schools and self-determination. The demand of mate-

---

<sup>29</sup> For an opposite view on needs see Doyal and Gough (1991).

etc.), it follows from A. and B. that individuals and their community exists only in order to feed the global factory. Even as unemployed or as poor one feeds the global factory, because unemployment is supposed to bring pressure to the employed to work more and earn less, extreme poverty is supposed to serve as warning to those who are not in the same condition. People's needs and aspirations can be satisfied only if this satisfaction serves the global factory's purpose. Within the framework of the global factory, people's creation of new needs and aspirations, or the reformulating of old needs in new forms which are not compatible with the two main parameters of accumulation, can either be met with co-optation of these needs into the mechanisms of accumulation through commodification (transformation of the new in old form) or blatant repression of the new. Outside the capitalist process individuals are nobody and their needs are irrelevant.

The important point I want to stress is that within the framework (note the emphasis) of this syllogism there is no hope. If we accept premise A. and B, it follows necessarily C., and thus follows the acceptance of powerlessness and of nothingness, but also that of the invisibility of people as human beings with dreams, needs, aspirations, social practices beyond those compatible with that syllogism. To break the syllogism of power is to make a leap. People's struggles often starts to make a leap from C, from the definition of needs and aspiration outside those currently compatible with the process of accumulation. In so doing they get together and build networks of new kind, they shape patterns of social co-operation and struggle of different nature. People sees each other as human beings, as social individuals, not as dead nodes of a productive machine. In so doing they thus step aside premise B. But the last leap, to move beyond premise A. which continuously reminds us with an endless range of material and ideological weapons that in the end all that matters is the global factory, is the most difficult leap. It implies nothing less than giving birth to a new vision

beyond the one given by power, and it requires that this process of birth-giving be a social process which at the same time constitutes an alternative and this alternative must embrace social relations within the local as within the global space. It seems to me that this vision and this practice of constitution is in the process of making itself, and I will try to delineate some of their essential features.

### 3. Old and new forms of Internationalism

To understand the new, we must have an idea of the old. This is of course not the place to extensively review the nuances of different internationalism that the history of the labour and other movements have created. I thus propose here the comparison between old and new internationalism in terms of two criteria: the relation between national and international dimension of struggle; the relation between labour and other movements. The following table summarises the discussion below.

Relation between national and international struggles	Relation between labour movement and other movements.
Old International dimension	Distinct movements.
Internationalism instrumental to national dimension	Subordination or marginalization of other movements to labour movement
New Internationalism	Building of distinction loses sharpness. The "National" (as well as the "regional", the "local", etc. Is a moment of the global and vice versa)

tional of hope. If neoliberalism marketises and commoditises the world population, the establishment of direct links is the institution of the international hope, and therefore at the same time the construction of a new world.

Life, self-government and Zapatista's concept of power

In the Zapatistas' documents, life is defined by self-government, self-determination, autonomy, freedom. Interestingly, these people one of the poorest communities on earth not only do not loose sight of these political needs, but make them condition and integral part of other material needs. Traditional left discourse has always prioritised the materiality of need satisfaction over the form, the way these needs were defined and/or satisfied. This was true in the many forms of post-Marx Marxism, traditional leftist and trade unionism that prioritised the objectivity of needs, as this objectivity could be defined independently of an ideological apparatus. Thus for example, the real need expressed by European unemployed for access to social wealth, is expressed today by large sections of the left especially in the UK by the need of "full employment", a demand which channels the real need into forms compatible with capital accumulation. In this tradition, which is still dominant in the official circles of the labour movements and other political organisations, need identified exclusively with necessity and therefore social needs identified with social necessity. Generally, this sociality is reduced to the level of productive forces, the development of which leads to the development of needs satisfaction.

For the Zapatistas it is a different matter. NAFTA threatens indigenous communities, to the extent it represents "a dead sentence" for them. Even if individuals within the indigenous community may escape this death sentence by converting themselves into new immigrated labour power, it is the indigenous individual as social being that dies with NAFTA, it is that culture as condition of its own development and growth and freedom that would die. Thus, the preservation of life for them

other. Neoliberalism is accompanied by the belief that the constraints are given by economic conditions, and economic conditions which are things don't leave space for alternatives. The market is the only way forward as the state was the only way forward during the Keynesian era. In the market, supply and demand rule, and we must conform to this rule. Government intervention is effective only to the extent their policies are credible. But in order for policies to be credible they have to be seen as effective.<sup>28</sup> In order to be seen as effective, that is they have to enforce the market. This tautology is the tautology of power. Within this circle there is no escape and no hope. To be hopeful we must break out of the circle.

A new lie is sold to us as history. The lie about the defeat of hope, the lie about the defeat of dignity, the lie about the defeat of humanity. The mirror of power offers us an equilibrium in the balance scale: the lie about the victory of cynicism, the lie about the victory of servitude, the lie about the victory of neoliberalism (DOR1).

Power's sense of reality is nothing else than a lie, to the extent this vision and sense of reality is a constrained vision, depending on the basic assumptions necessary for capitalist accumulation. Once we refuse these, an infinite number of alternatives are possible. Once we detach ourselves from the acceptance of the rules of the market, from the syllogism of power as discussed in section 2, once we envisage our own empowerment as human beings, that is, once we embrace non conformity, hope takes the place of hopelessness. Thus, here is a second meaning of the Zapatista's internationalism, a meaning so much connected to the first one. Against the international of terror representing neoliberalism, we must raise the interna-

---

rather than of the relation possible-real. The movement of "actualization" of what is virtual is always a creative movement, while the movement of "realization" of what is possible is not creative, being this pre-determined by the definition of what is possible.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Ilene Grabel (1997: 5).

In most of the practice of old internationalism, the international dimension of struggle was subordinated to the strategic objectives of the national dimension. Whether we refer to the "political" struggles of socialist movements or the "economic" struggles of trade unions (to use an inappropriate but useful classification, because it reflects a belief rooted in the practice of old internationalism), the immediate objective of the struggle was primarily national and the related internationalism was instrumental to it. For example, socialists aimed at the national seizure of power. Trade unions to win wage increases vis-à-vis their national bosses.

This internationalism reflected the conditions of the time, in which the global character of capital was limited to trade and, for most cases, did not include production. Furthermore, the international movement of financial capital was much slower, thus acting as a disciplinary device over the conditions of valorisation across the globe with a lower and more impact. Working classes relied on this form of internationalism in order to protect themselves on the home front and advance their causes domestically. British workers for example "learned internationalism to resist British employers' practice of importing strikebreakers." (Milner 1990: 18-19) At the time of the First International, cross-country workers' solidarity could serve even as a threat:

Geneva building workers who had been locked out appealed to the International for help. The employers were alarmed enough to concede the strikers' demands for a wage rise plus a reduction in working hours to ten. As employers became worried by the prospect of their plants to substitute foreign labour being thwarted, the prestige of the International among workers soared and its legend grew (Milner 1990: 26).

In this context, Marx and Engels' First International attempted to give a reference point and organisation to a process that was already occurring. The First International did not drive "the workers into strikes; strikes drove the workers into

the International.' Thus, the International was helping to build up national organisation at the same time as it was developing international solidarity, and as part of the same process." (ibid.)

We can dub the internationalism here proposed as instrumental internationalism, in the sense it was primarily aimed at allowing workers in each country to wage war against their own bosses for better wages and working conditions (trade unionist version of this internationalism) or for the acquisition of political power in various countries (socialist version). Without this internationalism the workers in one country would be pitted against the workers in other countries. Solidarity, understood pure and simply as external help as a result of a common sympathy or feeling, is the necessary by-product of this form of internationalism.

Another characteristic of old internationalism was the relative separation between different issues and movements, separation that was reflected in the centrality of the labour movement and the subordination of other movements to it (this was true nationally and internationally). For example, Lorwin (cit. in Milner 1990: 15) points out five different kinds of internationalism (humanitarian, pacifist, commercial, social-reformist, and social-revolutionary). This is of course a quite old and inadequate classification. How to classify environmental internationalism, among others, for example? The point however for us is that, according to the author, the first three kinds of internationalism "gave rise to campaigns involving a variety of social classes and intellectual currents", while the former are "associated primarily with the labour and socialist movements". In this classification there is implicitly a hierarchy of importance.

Solidarity seems therefore to be the main characteristic of old internationalism. Solidarity here understood as cross-border, cross-issue unity. Unity has generally been formulated as instrumental to a goal. The nature of the goal however, was generally defined outside the process of unification (recomposition). The goal may have been defined by a section of a national

man relations non mediated by things, often implies struggle. It is here that the atomised subjects get together, and recognise each other as "somebody". The moment of struggle therefore is first of all a moment of human recognition and positive identification. Secondly, the global character of the rule of capital necessarily extends this process of human recognition and identification to the global level, across the global wage hierarchy.<sup>26</sup>

Hope.

Hopelessness is that attitude that goes along with thing-like dignity, that accepts the status quo as the only viable way of life, and cannot envisage an alternative. Hopelessness therefore is that status that allows to enforce total invisibility to those social subjects who are left at the margin of the circle defining thing-like dignity. Utter hopelessness always walks with lack of alternative. What can the circles of power say to the million of men, women and children in the global economy, not only deprived of human dignity, but also of the simple material conditions for human dignity? Only one thing: keep neoliberalize yourself! That is, keep subordinate your needs and aspirations to the requirements of the market, access the means to satisfy your needs through competition with anonymous fellow human beings on the other side of the world, be prepared to give up entitlements and rights gained in years of struggles, gained in generations of revolts. Today the rule of capital shows its might in its purest form, with no mystification, with no apologetic attachment. What we see is what we get. To accept the rampant commoditization of every aspect of life means to negate any alternative vision, any sense of the virtual<sup>27</sup>, any alternative way for human beings to relate to each

---

<sup>27</sup> In his excellent study on Gilles Deleuze, Michael Hardt (1993) deals with Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson in relation to the contrast between what is virtual and what is possible. The essential point is that what is virtual is real, while what is possible is not real. Deleuze's point is therefore that the movement of being must be understood in terms of a relation virtual-actual,



ucts, and not as human rulers. Thus, one is somebody simply to the extent he or she is involved in the human endeavour, in actively claiming ones place within the human community, in reclaiming the direct links with other human beings, link that have been cut loose by the rule of money. Thus, human dignity is to bypass the mediation of money, capital, market and competition and assert direct reciprocity among human beings. If this is dignity, and if globalization has necessarily lead to link human beings in competition with each other in the four corners of the world, then the fight for dignity cannot be restricted to national frontiers. In the words of Marcos (1st declaration of La Realidad):

‘dignity . . . is that homeland without nationality, that rainbow that is also a bridge, that murmur of the heart no matter what blood lives in it, that rebel irreverence that mocks frontiers, customs officials and wars.’ (DOR1)

Dignity is a bridge, is to be for humanity.

In a society such as ours, in which one continuously faces the rule of capital, human dignity, the establishment of direct hu-

---

<sup>26</sup> "Marcos is a gay in San Francisco, a black person in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Isidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, an Indigenous person in the streets of San Cristobal, a gang-member in Neza, a rocker on [University] campus, a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in Department of Defence (Secretaria de Defensa, Sedena), a feminist in a political party, a communist in the post-Cold War period, a prisoner in Cintalapa, a pacifist in Bosnia, a Mapuche in the Andes, a teacher in National Confederation of Educational Workers (Confederacion Nacional de Trabajadores de Educacio'n, CNTE), an artist without a gallery or a portfolio, a housewife in any neighbourhood in any city in any part of Mexico on a Saturday night, a guerrilla in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century, a striker in the CTM, a sexist in the feminist movement, a woman alone in a Metro station at 10 p.m., a retired person standing around in the Zocalo, a campesino without land, an underground editor, an unemployed worker, a doctor with no office, a non-conformist student, a dissident against neoliberalism, a writer without books or readers, and a Zapatista in the Mexican Southeast. In other words, Marcos is a human being in this world. Marcos is every untolerated, oppressed, exploited minority that is resisting and saying, "Enough!" (Zapatistas! 1995: 310-311). See also Mayor Ana Maria (1996: 25 - 26.)

movement and whoever relate to that section will have had their voice silenced: their support, help, funding, can only be accompanied by "self-sacrifice" for a cause, and restraint criticism in order to pursue that goal. This is of course a mystical practice, because its goal has a reality which is not self-evident to the senses, since it is defined by an intelligentsia which posits itself outside the real movement. This mystical practice that subordinates the process of constituting a unity of what is different to an external "goal", is still widespread today, and it is identifiable any time an activist attempts to challenge the mystical armour of a campaign group by challenging their strategic demands. For example, a UK based anti-Maastricht campaign group may regard the demand for "full employment" a demand broad enough to bring unity of different constituencies, a demand furthermore, in "line" with a traditional idea of "socialism" based on a strong work ethic. Anybody challenging this demand not only on the general ground that it is a demand compatible with capitalist accumulation, but on the more specific/strategic ground that it is a demand which cannot and will not bring unity among the many disillusioned by capitalist work, capitalist market etc., will be silenced and accused of wasting precious organising time which instead must be used to reach unity.

Fortunately, the tide is changing, and we are all forced to think about the process of unification, its forms, its objectives, its mechanisms, rather than only its results measured against the yardstick of an idea. Ideas themselves are born and nurtured in real processes. The recent globalizing processes have led to the breakdown of the traditional labour strategies, while at the same time many more voices have started to appear on the scenes of international movements, most of these using international connections. A new internationalism seems is in the process of making itself. But although many see this internationalism again as instrumental to the proposal of national strategies, I believe the character of this international-

ism is moving to another much more radical direction. First, although in many cases it holds on to old ideas and conceptions, it is clearly evident that on the terrain of organisation this new internationalism is definitively loosing the "national" dimension as referent, and on the terrain of the definition of an alternative the local, regional or national struggle acquires an immediate global character. As capital's strategy of globalization is increasing the inter-dependence of different peoples around the world and therefore their vulnerability vis-à-vis capital is increasingly expressed at international level, so these same people are transforming through their practice the distinction between national and international, making this distinction less definite, less important.<sup>7</sup> Also, as more and more state functions are transferred to supranational state bodies, so too the struggle against these bodies (IMF/ WB/ WTO etc.) is blurring the distinction between national and international.

The other characteristics of the new internationalism is the large diffusion of acceleration/promotion of a dialogue between grassroots labour activists and militants environmentalists, human-rights groups, women, etc. Just as the Liverpool

---

<sup>7</sup> Example of this blurring distinction is provided by the wave of anti-NAFTA struggles in the few years before 1994; the emerging coalitions against social exclusion and unemployment in Europe; the mushrooming of committees organising (and in so doing learning and practising direct democracy) the first and second Intercontinental Meetings for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, etc. On the labour front, Brecher and Costello (1994: 160 ) report that the organising of the new labour activism is based on practices such as a) worker-to-worker exchange; b) Cross-border organising; c) labour-rights; d) international strike support; e) global labour communication (Internet etc.). "LaborNet also ties into other 'nets' dedicated to social movements like the environmental movement, peace movement, and human rights movement. Labor communication expert Peter Waterman has suggested that the increasing use of computers by labor and social movements constitutes a 'communications internationalism,' which he dubs a 'Fifth international'". Also in this case, the blurring of the distinction between the national and the international is evident in the practice of the movement itself. See also note 14.

Interestingly enough, the Mexican government position regarding the meaning of dignity is very similar to the one adopted by the authors of the scientific rationalisation of racism, the Bell Curve:

In economic terms and barring a profound change in direction for our society, many people will be unable to perform that function so basic to human dignity: putting more into the world than they take out (Murray & Herrnstein 1994).

Left to this unqualified definition, not only wage labour, but even slavery, child labour, prison labour, and all situations in which people are forced into "putting more into the world than they take out", would be an expression of human dignity. Marx's *Das Kapital* would become an exercise of how workers become dignified in being exploited!

Power's definition of dignity therefore, is a definition which accepts as dignified a condition of exploitation and oppression. In its eagerness to turn any social relation into a measurable and quantifiable relation, power defines dignity in abstraction from self-determination. In a society based on exchange-values, dignity (self-worthiness, recognition of ones own value) can be acquired only through access to value (access to illusionary wealth).

This dignity, this sense of self-worthiness and recognition of ones worth by others which depends on the acceptance of ones role imposed by the requirements of capitalist accumulation, I call thing-like dignity, that is, dignity acquired through ones subordination to the work and market machine. I believe this is far from being human dignity. Thing-like dignity requires an individual to demonstrate to be somebody by means of external evidences such as money, status, a job, or power. Lacking external evidence of this kind, one is invisible, and therefore cannot be a dignified subject. On the contrary, human dignity is not acquired through the access to external evidence, it does not require dead things to rule life for human beings. Human dignity is based on the treatments of things as human prod-

the right to govern and to govern ourselves, to think and act with a freedom that is not exercised over the slavery of others, the right to give and receive what is just. (DOR1)

What is striking of these three fundamental characters of what is common among the different opposition nuclei in the act of building bridges with each other is not a mere "interest" in the traditional sense of the world, it is not something to be pursued because it has a prospected payoff. What is common is not something to be lived in the future. What is common is here and now to be lived: dignity, hope, life. These three dimensions are, I believe, essential dimensions of the Zapatista's internationalism. Let us review them in details.

Dignity.

What is dignity in contemporary society? How is it expressed in a society built around the capitalist principle of subordination of every sensuous aspect of life (love, hate, pleasure, pain . . .) into a thing, into a means to an end?<sup>25</sup> Comandante Tacho recounts what was dignity for the government negotiators who told the Zapatistas delegation:

. . . that they are studying what dignity means, that they are consulting and making studies on dignity. That what they understood was that dignity is service to others. And they asked us to tell them what we understand by dignity. We told them to continue with their research. It makes us laugh and we laughed in front of them. They asked us why and we told them that they have big research centres and big studies in schools of a high standard and that it would be a shame if they do not accept that. We told them that if we sign the peace, then we will tell them at the end what dignity means for us. (La Jornada 10/6/1995)

---

see John Holloway (1997).

<sup>25</sup> Within the constraints of capitalist accumulation, a citizen can express her self-value to the extent she negates herself, she accepts abuses without screaming on the job or while talking to the dole officers, she does her job professionally or accepts her role as job-searcher.

dockers received the support of the Reclaim the Street activists (a direct action British environmentalist group)<sup>8</sup> the cuts in welfare state can be resisted on grounds such as human rights, thus enabling a wider coalition.<sup>9</sup> The Anti-NAFTA campaign represented the coming together of these different souls, forcing the official US labour bureaucracies to distant themselves from supporting U.S. foreign policy for the first time in history. The traditional AFL-CIO failure to back progressive movements and unions in Latin America and other third world countries, traditionally served US bosses to pit the workers of these countries against the US ones.<sup>10</sup>

On other fronts, many other struggles have started to have an international resonance. Struggles of militants on the environment front, gender, indigenous issues, anti-multinationals,

---

<sup>8</sup> See the Liverpool Dockers' site for documented information of their dispute: <http://www.gn.apc.org/labournet/docks/>.

<sup>9</sup> See for example the project of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and the Poor People's Embassy in the US In their Call for Testimony and Documentation they write: "WELFARE CUTS = HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS .The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948, guarantees every man, woman and child the right to housing, food, education, health care and living wage jobs. Recent federal and state welfare reforms in the United States violate these rights. People who have been receiving public relief are told to "get a job" while millions of unemployed and under-employed people can't find jobs. With the new welfare laws, those who cannot find a job are no longer guaranteed the right to food, housing, clothing and health care. As a result of this, more and more people are unable to feed, house and clothe their families." They also take a stand on what they believe it is a human rights ground and poor families from the Kensington Welfare Rights Union in Philadelphia marched at the end of June 1997 from the Liberty Bell to the UN "With this historic march, we will expose the inhumane conditions in which we are forced to live, and we will insist on our right to live." Union <http://www.libertynet.org/~kwru.kwru@libertynet.org>

<sup>10</sup> Brecher and Costello (1994:150) note: "Curiously enough, the architects of American labor's foreign policy during the Cold War regarded themselves as internationalists anti-communist internationalists. They cooperated closely with the CIA to break left-led strikes (for example in France in 1949) and overthrow leftist governments (for example in Guatemala in 1954). Business Week described the AFL-CIO's global operations, such as its Inter-

anti-Third World debt/IMF/World Bank, etc. The rise of so many voices at the local and world level should enable us to more than compensate for the difficulty that the globalization processes of production, finance and trade seems to have put in establishing "national alternatives".

The practice of this new internationalism, which I repeat it is in the process of making itself and by all means it is not an established result, seems to indicate that the notion of unity and solidarity has been significantly transformed. The old call for unity, a call often demanded at the expense of autonomy, is being replaced by a continuous practice that is defining the characteristics and parameters of united action in respects to all autonomies. Also, internationalism becomes less and less an ideal for which to fight, and increasingly a strategic and organisational need springing from the grassroots<sup>11</sup>. Thus rather than the old solidarity paradigm, a better description of the way different groups and movements tend to enter in relation with one another is the one provided by what an Aboriginal women said to those coming to her people to offer solidarity:

---

national Affairs Department in Washington and its American Institute for Free Labor Development in Latin America, as 'labor's own version of the Central Intelligence Agency a trade union network existing in all parts of the world.'" (150) In 1988, still most of AFL-CIO budget in overseas activity comes from US government (1988 data). The collusion of AFL-CIO with US foreign policy was mocked by American grassroots militants by calling the union organisation AFL-CIA.

<sup>11</sup> It is remarkable that almost thirty years ago, the Italian Marxist Mario Tronti could anticipate so clearly this process and write: "... the new international ... will no longer be the international of the parties, but of the class, first of all international of workers' struggles. It is therefore no longer an ideal for which to fight for, nor an organism of the leadership that attempts to convince workers to fight for the ideal, but a simple political fact, an organisational need that comes from below, as struggles comes from below, and that meet a international strategy of these struggles that comes from above. We must understand that the international dimension of the class struggle is a fact that is imposed on us by capital's world development." (Tronti 1968: 525-526)

perience. The siege is broken by establishing communication among the different opposition nuclei. Here communication is not regarded instrumentally, as a mere means for activists in different parts of the world to bring their solidarity to the insurgents (although this solidarity is part of the story). Not even as only an exchange of information (although also this is part of the story). The main point of this communication is that it is also a moment of the "commune", that is a moment of expression and practice of what is common among them. What is common is not defined negatively. This is important, because usually a definition of what is common, which is a definition of political identity, occurs primarily in "opposition to". Instead, here the it acquires primarily a positive character, and has three names: dignity, hope, and life. As globalization isolates and fragments people (while it paradoxically increase their interdependency) dignity is the reclaim of ones position in the world as social being. Dignity is the bridge that breaks the siege<sup>24</sup>:

Dignity is that nation without nationality, that rainbow that is also a bridge, that murmur of the heart no matter what blood lives it, that rebel irreverence that mocks borders, custom and wars (DOR1).

Hope is the slap in the face of power's vision, is the refusal of "pensé unique", of the lack of alternatives, of options, of crass realism of the market, of the false boundaries encircling aspirations, in short:

Hope is that rejection of conformity and defeat. (DOR1)

Finally, life is nothing else than the life of individuals who consider themselves as members of society, as dependent on each other, as social individuals. Life is the satisfaction of needs, but also their definition, it is self-government, autonomy, freedom. Life is justice where justice implies a relation among people. In short, life is

---

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed analysis of the role played by Dignity in the Zaptistas

them different (their political proposals) and not what makes them similar (the enemy which they confront: the system of the party-state). (BOM3, pg. 5)

There is of course nothing wrong with difference. On the contrary, it is difference the basic condition for human communication. Also, in a society which attempts the cultural homogenisation and tries to impose the hegemony of the market over other possible ways of socialisation, "difference" constitutes a crucial terrain of political recomposition of subjects whose identity is threatened. The point here is that the unique and exclusive emphasis on "difference," without a correspondent effort to and reflection on ways to tune to "other worlds", build connections, etc., reproduces isolation, atomisation, ghettoization, fragmentation, and these play in the hand of those in power. From the perspectives of these different "opposition nuclei" taken in isolation the experience of exploitation and repression present itself as unique experience, having specific and particular form (racism, sexism, money, etc.). As in a board game (whoever has plaid Risk will know), when each "opposition nucleus" is thus surrounded, reinforcement cannot be obtained, and "resistance becomes futile", to say it with Captain Picard's arch-enemies, the Borg. Thus power appears as the plurality of powers, and as many different oppressions as there are "opposition nuclei". The wage hierarchy on which capital has always relied for the perpetuation of its goal (endless growth of itself) is thus reproduced through the many oppressions. But the many oppressions leads to the same result: undignified conditions, power accumulates power, misery accumulates misery.

The Zapatistas' concept and practice of internationalism arises out of their concept of themselves (indigenous communities of Chiapas) as one oppression among many, as one voice among many, as one struggle among many, as one assertion of dignity, among many. And it arises out of their perceived need to break the siege that they (as one of the many minorities) ex-

If you have come here to help me  
You are wasting your time . . .  
But if you have come because  
Your liberation is bound up with mine  
Then let us work together

In this assertion there is at the same time the rejection of instrumental support, the assertion of autonomy, and the openness to relate to others. At the same time, it implies that subjects apparently so distant such as an Aboriginal woman and a Western activist meet and find their way to constitute new social relations. To date, perhaps the more elaborate voice expressing this new internationalism is the one of the indigenous communities in Chiapas, voice that we have heard through the stories, tales, speeches and communiqués of the EZLN, the Zapatistas.

## 4. Roots of the Zapatistas' internationalism

### 4.1. Who are the Zapatistas?

The first of January 1994, 502 years after the beginning of the invasion of illegal immigrants from Europe into the American continent, was the day in which it was declared that US commodities and capital could freely and legally enter with no restriction into Mexico. It was the day of implementation of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The same day, an army of indigenous people entered in San Cristobal and other cities of Chiapas, wearing ski masks, carrying guns, and proclaiming revolutionary laws from the balcony of the city council. The world woke up in the new year and sleepy eyes and hangovered brains knew of an indigenous army called EZLN, Zapatista's Army of National Liberation, shortly Zapatistas. Their aim was not a socialist state, nor a planned economy, nor to bring consciousness to alleged unconscious people, as it was the case in old socialist tradition. Their aim was living

with dignity, and nothing less than the simple task of building a new world. Yet, they could not say how this new world would look like, they did not have a plan for you and me. In fact they wanted you and me to talk to them, and together bring about a new world, meeting our needs and aspirations.

The indigenous people who took arm came from the poorest region of Mexico, and one of the poorer in Latin America. But it exports coffee to the world and energy to the entire Mexico (10% of electricity and 90% of hydroelectric energy). It is one of the one of the most important region of strategic reservoir of biodiversity - the knowledge bank of the developing industry of biotechnology - where the Lacandona Jungle offers the greatest number of vegetable and animal species per square mile in North America and one offering the greatest variety in the world. It has huge reservoir of petroleum, making it one of the greatest potential strategic areas in the world. And it is a region in which 80% of the population suffers of malnutrition, 50% have no potable water and 66% has no sewage system. A region in which the daily livelihood of the greatest majority of the people depends on a diet of coffee, tortillas, corn and beans, acquired through petty trade such as selling crafts to tourists (one bracelet = 20 pence; it take one day of work for a woman to produce four of them) or selling crafts to the local shops (owned by the coletos) in conditions similar or worse to the old putting out system; and day works at meagre pay for the rich Rancheros. Alternative - or complementary - way to get by has been, historically - access to collective property of land<sup>12</sup>.

The land held in collective property is not only important because it is the basis of the economic survival of communities (an economic survival though which is increasingly threat-

---

<sup>12</sup> For a background analysis of the economic and social conditions of life in Chiapas, see for example Subcomandante Marcos (1992); Cece-a & Barreda (1995).

ment, uses again the military analogy to elaborate on this point, although in that context he refers to the national reality of Mexico. I will under-emphasise the context in which the following remarks were made and referred to (the Mexican Party-State), and instead I will stress their general character and applicability to all countries in the world economy. Here we are looking for the meaning of minority and fragmentation.

The fragmentation of the opposition forces allows the system of the Party-State to, not only resist the attacks, but co-opts and weakens the opposition. The system of the Party-State does not worry about the radicalism of the forces which opposes it, it only worries about their eventual unity. By parcelling out the political forces against the regime, this allows the Party-State system to negotiate or "fight" to conquer the political "islands" which form in the opposition.(BOM)

Fragmentation is what defines a minority. A minority is what has been cut out of the rest. The totality appears therefore as a simple set of minorities, as isolated groups/individuals. Interestingly, in modern mainstream economics and sociology, the totality of society is defined as the set of minorities, of isolated individuals engaged in the market. Society is therefore the mirror of the market and the market the mirror of society.<sup>23</sup> Economics and sociology (by reflecting against each other as to parallel mirrors in a barber shop) presuppose this understanding of human social organisation based on fragmentation and isolation. These are enforced by the people in power who apply a law of war, the "economy of forces": to a diffuse enemy in tiny nuclei which are beaten by concentrating forces against each nucleus, isolating one from the other. These opposition nuclei do not see that they confront ONE enemy but MANY enemies, in other words they emphasise what makes

---

<sup>23</sup> This reflection of society into the market and vice versa is most evident in the original discourse of classical Political Economy. In his Wealth of Nations Adam Smith talks about civil society as "commercial society", that is the set of isolated, atomised individuals pursuing their self-interest.

A New world war is waged, but now against the entire humanity. As in all world wars, what is being sought is a new distribution of the world (DOR1)

The character of this distribution is something which we all know quite well, and Marcos refers to as "concentrating power in power and misery in misery". In Zapatistas' hand however, this reflection on the dynamic of globalizing economy very similar to what Marx called the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation (Marx 1867: chapter 25) opens the way to a reflection on who the subjects of misery are, rather than an analysis of what are the rules of globalizing (accumulating) capital. It is thus an opportunity to define the directions of political activity, rather than the strategies deployed by capital.<sup>22</sup> This "new distribution of the world" has the power of exclusion of what at first appear as isolated minorities, and then, with a magic twist within the argumentative line, show themselves for what they are, the greatest majority of the world population:

The new distribution of the world excludes 'minorities'. The indigenous, youth, women, homosexuals, lesbians, people of colour, immigrants, workers, peasants; the majority who make up the world basements are presented, for power, as disposable. The new distribution of the world excludes the majorities (DOR1).

What is this majority, how to call it, how to define it? The majority is made of minorities, but minorities are minorities to the extent they are isolated, atomised nodes of the global factory. Marcos, (or better his alter ego Don Durito), in another docu-

---

<sup>22</sup> The two approaches of course do not exclude each other. The first tale of Don Durito, the beetle used by Marcos as subject of his more analytical narratives, met Marcos while sitting in front of "a small typewriter, reading some papers and smoking a diminutive pipe". Marcos asked him what was he studying, and Don Durito replied : "I'm studying neoliberalism and its strategy of domination for Latin America" (Zapatistas: 274. My emphasis). An example of this strategic reading of Capital's strategy is in Marcos' recent theses on globalization which I cannot here critically review (Marcos 1997).

ened). Also, to a certain extent it gives people autonomy and it constitutes the material basis for indigenous traditional forms of collective democracy in which a community, a village, a region, takes decision affecting everybody's life collectively. Decisions may range from the sending of a child in need to a hospital, to the decision to refuse the last government offer at the negotiating table. Decisions are taken in ways so different from western democracies, based on the forced separation between the people of a community<sup>13</sup>, separation that is only mystically overcome at the moment of the vote (once every 5 years<sup>14</sup>). Consensus seeking, rather than voting, is their way to democracy. Consensus seeking requires time and ability to listen. But it does not produce majorities or minorities, it does not promote victory and defeats, vanity and resentment. Take away their common land, further worsen their condition of living, and you have also destroyed the conditions upon which indigenous democracy can flourish, the opportunity to practice a different life.

This comes about through three weapons associated to the implementation of NAFTA.

First, the institutional weapon. The logic of the market and competitiveness accompanying the NAFTA agreements meant that Mexico - among other things - had to prepare for the invasion of cheap corn produced by highly mechanised farm of the US. This of course can be done by concentrating land property in the hand of big farms, mechanise, increase productivity to face US competitiveness. It is the old story. But corn is not only the staple food for the greatest majority of people in Mexico. It is also the major source of income for large sections of

---

<sup>13</sup> However, when people are separated, a community is only illusionary: such as the state, the city, the neighbourhood.

<sup>14</sup> In the occasion of Britain's last general election, the Independent opened with this quotation from J.J. Rousseau: "The English people believes itself to be free: it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of MPs; as soon as the Members are elected the people are enslaved".

the campesinos and indigenous population in Chiapas, Guerrero, Tabasco, and other Mexican states. Large part of this corn is produced by campesinos in lands held in common, the result of the Mexican revolution at the beginning of the century, and with its roots down to Maya traditions. The "modernisation" of the Mexican agriculture passes by the expropriation of common land, its fragmentation and sale on the market. This is what the abrogation of article 27 of the Mexican constitution proclaims, in line with NAFTA and the global competitive race.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the economic weapon. The general conditions of subsistence have been worsening for the majority of the Mexican population, while the indigenous population has been the most hit. Much of the income of the indigenous population of Chiapas comes from coffee production which price is linked to the international market dominated by agri-business multinationals. Mexico is the fourth exporter of coffee, with 280,000 producers, 60 per cent of which are indigenous. More than 70 per cent of the coffee producers (200,000) work on small plots less than two hectares (Navarro 1996). Faced by intense global competition and pressures by the agri-business multinationals that keep price low, the income received by small producers is increasingly insufficient to meet basic needs. In addition, the cuts and restraint in all areas of social spending following neoliberal dogmas, implies that the large majority of coffee producers have only the market to rely on for the acquisition of the means for the satisfaction of basic needs.

Meanwhile, the price of the corn (the other source of income for many campesinos, although less so in the Chiapas area) have started to fall on the wholesale market. Currently a ton of corn is paid on the market about 100 pounds, 10 pence a kilo. For the poorest section of the population, it takes many hours

---

<sup>15</sup> For a background analysis of the relation between neoliberal forces and Mexican agriculture see Gates (1996).

dichotomy. First, the process of globalization accelerated in the last 20 years by neoliberal policies. The paradoxical result of this process is the creation of increased inter-dependency among people around the world, and at the same time the acceleration of their isolation, alienation from each-other and indifference. There is nothing new in this typical process of capitalist accumulation, only its dimension now extended to the global scale.<sup>20</sup> Second, the politically humble but yet incredibly important recognition that in these conditions emancipation can only occur by challenging capital's own meaning of integration by connecting in new way what has been fragmented and integrated within the global factory, by turning inter-dependency from being the product of the external market and alien power of the market, into an act of freedom. Yet this connection cannot occur on the ground of abstract unity grounds which subordinates everybody to a cause (the "unite and fight" which leaves the "what for?" to be decided after the "revolution", and in practice it implies it is decided now by an elite). On the contrary, difference, and not homogeneity, is the basis of unity. The Zapatista's appeal is for a world that contains many worlds, for a world in which "all are equals because they are different" (Major Ana Maria 1996: 28), in which allows to maintain differences and autonomy vis-À-vis the homogenising power of capital, power which subordinates every aspect of life to the same logic of accumulation. Let us see more in details these two aspects of Zapatistas' internationalism.

According to the Zapatistas, globalization is a world war, it is a war waged against humanity, and its aim is the distribution of the world.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> This means essentially that inter-dependency express itself as an external power to the individuals, instead of these individuals expressing their human powers through their inter-dependency.

<sup>21</sup> Similar to this conception is the concept of globalization as capital's strategy (De Angelis 1997).



sequent condition of invisibility<sup>19</sup> (condition posed by the syllogism of power). However, their struggle at the same time poses the question of visions alternative to that of power and that of the constitution of alternatives starting from the framework of fragmentation of today's global factory.

The strength of the message coming from Chiapas resides in the fact that this invisibility, this complete atomisation and fragmentation of an entire population within the huge global productive machine is not only a characteristic of the Maya people in Southeast of Mexico. It is increasingly a condition of existence of all kinds of people and individuals (although in different forms and contexts), once they are understood in terms of their relation to the global factory. Neoliberalism is the forced commoditization and marketisation of every aspect of life on a planetary scale, and this commoditisation essentially implies atomisation and invisibility. Starting from their experience of invisibility and fragmentation, the indigenous population of Chiapas responds with an internationalist practice and theoretical vision of extreme novelty. Yet, it is a response which, as we have seen, finds a parallel in the practice and visions of social movements across the globe. However, since the Zapatista's movement was able to combine a struggle against neoliberalism with the continuous production, elaboration, and diffusion of a body of theoretical work reflecting on the condition of struggles and the essential elements of an alternative vision, it is of extreme importance to read their message in the attempt to help to shed light on other current practices of emancipation.

I think there are two main roots of Zapatista's internationalism, one objective and the other subjective, to use an old

---

<sup>19</sup> "We don't have words. We don't have face. We don't have name. We don't have tomorrow. We do not exist". . . . "For power, what today is known in the world with the name of 'neoliberalism', we do not count, we do not produce, we do not buy, we do not sell. We were a useless number for the accounting of big capital." Mayor Ana Maria (1996: 23).

to harvest a ton of corn, with no machinery. A reduction in the price of corn through unrestricted entrance in the market by US agri-business corporations, points in the same direction of the abrogation of article 27 of the constitution, implying the abolition of common land, the abandonment of common land, and of indigenous identity and culture.

Third, the military weapon. People have another alternative besides giving in to the dictate of the new constitutions and the market. It is to say "ya Basta!", enough!, as the indigenous population of Chiapas, and groups and movements all around Mexico have said. When this happens, neoliberal strategies (as any other strategy of accumulation in the history of capitalism) rely on force to back up the market markets were never a spontaneous process, they always had to be imposed. The force of military actions, murders, rapes, policing, imprisonment and torture, are all well documented.

## 4.2. Globalization and Zapatista's internationalism

To these three weapons embedded within the logic of global capital, the Zapatista's struggle responded with internationalism, although of a totally new kind.<sup>16</sup> This assertion is surely controversial, and may seem paradoxical when many from the left have critically pointed at their "nationalism" transpiring from their frequent use of the terms "nation" or Mexican nation. It is not here the place to enter in this debate and defend the Zapatistas from these attacks. However, few points require here to be noted.

### 4.2.1. On Zapatista's "Nationalism".

The Zapatistas' continuous reference to the "Nation" can be understood in at least three directions. First, in term of the ref-

---

<sup>16</sup> As a prime facie evidence of this assertion, suffice to say that the first communiqué addressed also to the "people and government of the world"

erence to the "ideal", to the "whole" that the indigenous communities ought to be part of. They can be part of the whole, only to the extent they are in condition to self-determine themselves, a condition that is negated in the very moment the "whole" is kept together by means of an external things (money, the police force, etc.). Thus, the invisibility of the indigenous community (and for that matter, the invisibility of any single minority constituting the majority of us) is the result of their being separated from the whole, or from being connected to the whole in an inorganic way, as a "cog in the machine". Their claim to visibility, is a claim for the establishment of an organic link (nothing for us, everything for everybody). The Zapatistas refer to this organic unity as "nation", Marx calls it Res Publica, or True Democracy, or Communism, but they all means the same thing; people recognizing each other as human beings and therefore governing themselves.

Second, what they call "nation" often is not defined by national borders or racial characteristics, but more in terms of subversive affinity. An imagery that is continuously repeated is the one that regards everybody in the world sharing their struggles and visions, as carrying a bit of Mexico in their heart.

The use of the discourse around the nation acquires also a third meaning. The government can claim legitimacy to the extent it is able to present an image of itself as the institution protecting the general interest vis particular interests. The Zapatista's use of the nation's rhetoric challenges this fundamental means of legitimisation. But for them, the general interest is that of humanity, not of capital.

It must also be pointed out that if my argument developed in the following section on the inherent internationalism of the Zapatista's movement is correct, than the accusations of nationalism (as a rhetoric of reaction) loose ground from the

---

dates 6 of January 1996, that is only six days into the revolution. Thereafter, all communiqué carry the same address.

start and the meaning we must give to the term "nation" in their discourse is much richer than commonly understood. This meaning appears to be much closer to the rhetoric of liberation, autonomy and identity pursued in the last two hundred years by the indigenous "nations" whose claims of sovereignty has always been in direct opposition to that of the "nation-states."<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Zapatistas' rhetoric of liberation.

In section 2 I have indicated that the current neoliberal strategy for the formation of a global factory is based on two pillars: a. the formation of atomised nodes (individuals, communities, regions, countries, continents, etc.) and their functional integration for the pursuit of capitalist accumulation; b. the correspondent promotion and imposition of an awareness of the whole (global economy) which is overwhelming and in relation to which individuals and networks of individuals are "nobody", and "invisible". In other words, beyond the realm dictated by the requirements of accumulation, what is promoted is an ideology of human powerlessness.

The writings of the Zapatistas contain both the awareness of the condition of fragmentation within the division of labour constituting the global factory<sup>18</sup> and the realisation of the con-

---

<sup>17</sup> See for example Wearne (1996: 108-111).

<sup>18</sup> "Chiapas loses blood through many veins: Through oil and gas ducts, electric lines, railways, through bunk accounts, trucks, vans, boats and planes, through clandestine paths, gaps, and forest rails. This land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, banana, honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melon, sorghum, mamey, mango, tamarind, avocado, and Chiapaneco blood flows as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast. These raw materials, thousands of millions of tons of them, flow to Mexican ports and railroads, air and truck transportation centers. From there they are sent to different parts of the world: The United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan, but with the same fate to feed imperialism." (Subcommandante Marcos 1992: 26).