

Carleton University

The Great Rejection: Modernism, Eurocentrism and Cultural Resistance in Mexico

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts

Institute of Political Economy

by
Morgan Lloyd, B.A. (Hons)

Ottawa, Canada

September 2009

©2009, Morgan Lloyd



Library and Archives
Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-58455-2
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-58455-2

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

**
Canada

Abstract

The resurgence of peasant and indigenous-based activism within Latin America in recent years, has posed a significant challenge not only to the dominant Westernized economic and political institutions imposed upon the region, but also to the foundations of modernist social science itself, which remains overwhelmingly mired in the delusions of eurocentrism and the materialist mode of analysis. My project will examine some of the broader issues and questions posed by this incipient movement, with my specific focus upon the cultural resistance mounted by the Zapatistas in Mexico against the ascendant ideology of late neoliberal capitalism.

Acknowledgements

I would begin by thanking my advisor, Cristina Rojas, for her encouragement and seemingly infinite patience with me over the course of this project. Having provided me with the inspiration for much of my Thesis I can only claim credit now for the mistakes. I would also like to thank Justin Paulson for his critical guidance and feedback, which has enriched my own thinking with respect to many aspects of this topic. In addition, I would offer my heartfelt thanks to my dear friend Rajani Kanth for his support (both intellectual and spiritual) over the course of the past year, as well as to everyone else on the Organizing Committee for the World Peace Congress 08/09. Thanks must also go to the Institute of Political Economy, and, in particular, to Rianne Mahon and Donna Coghill, without whom I would never have accomplished this feat, I am certain. Thanks as well to all of my fellow classmates, and particularly to Elizabeth Record, who I am certain will remain a lifelong friend. Last but certainly not least I would like to express my gratitude to Armagan Teke, whose kindness and gentle love has opened my eyes to a world of *feeling*, which has far surpassed the high analytics of social science in which I am now embroiled. Indeed, if nothing else may be gleaned from my Thesis, I would wish that it be the knowledge that we do not need a social science, but only *social empathy* to sustain us.

Table of Contents	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One.....	11
Neoliberalism: The Great Unravelling.....	14
Political Economy and Neoliberalism.....	22
Political Economy, Materialism and Historicism.....	25
Chapter Two.....	34
Eurocentric History, Political Economy, and the (Un)Making of the Peasantry.....	36
Decolonizing the Peasantry.....	40
Modernity, Resistance and Peasant <i>Otherness</i>	49
Chapter Three.....	55
European Universalism and the Subaltern Countermovement.....	55
The Zapatistas and the Struggle for Indigenous Autonomy.....	61
Imaginary Mexico versus Mexico Profundo.....	66
The EZLN and Cultural Transcendence.....	72
Conclusion.....	75
Bibliography.....	82

Introduction

World War IV, the war in which the whole world is now engaged, is a new kind of war, an ongoing and total war, the war of The Empire of Money against Humanity. The Empire of Money seeks to impose the logic and practice of capital on everything, to turn every living thing, the Earth, our communities and all our human relationships into commodities to be bought and sold on the market. It seeks to destroy everything that human beings have created: cultures, languages, memories, ideas, dreams, love and respect for one another. It even destroys the material basis for the nation-state which western societies created in the 19th century to protect us, if only marginally, from the forces of money.¹

The shield shall descend, the arrow shall descend together with the rulers of the land. The heads of the foreigners to the land were cemented at Chakanputun. There is an end of greed; there is an end to causing vexation in the world. It is the word of God the Father. Much fighting shall be done by the natives of the land.²

At the close of the first decade of the new millennium we find ourselves caught up in a time of great upheaval and poised at the brink of what will undoubtedly be a monumental realignment in the global economy and perhaps beyond. Sparked initially by the collapse in the inflated U.S. housing market and the subsequent reverberations throughout the ironically ‘over securitized’ financial markets,³ the current economic crisis has revealed to many the failings of the deregulatory model that was sanctified by Reagan and has been carried forth under his later epigones. Although the future remains, as always, *uncertain*, it does appear that the era of neoliberal financialization, which began more than three decades ago, is now in the process of unravelling before our eyes, and we are left to ponder what will follow in its wake. If nothing else, recent developments offer

¹ Grace Lee Boggs, “Changing Concepts of War and Revolution” (April 5-11, 2009), <http://www.elkilombo.org/news/041109-boggs-changing-concepts.php>

² Juan Jose Hoil and Ralph Loveland Roys, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1933), 107

³ I say ironic since the prevailing model of ‘self-regulation’ has amounted to a massive increase in systemic risk over and above the failure of prominent financial institutions to manage their own affairs competently. The much vaunted ‘diffusion’ of risk through the engineering of increasingly complex financial derivatives has ultimately amounted to a colossal concentration of risk within major institutions such as AIG.

clear rebuke to the triumphalist fantasies of Fukuyama and others who not long ago proclaimed an *end of history* (although, admittedly, the immensely destructive pathways of modernism force us to consider the *real* potentiality of such a climacteric).

Whereas the sudden demise of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century heralded the end of the Janus faced struggle between capitalism and really existing socialism, the subsequent era has been marked, if anything, by a *gearing up* of historical forces, as a more predatory brand of capitalism has been unleashed upon a large part of the world (in the form of structural adjustment policies in the case of the Third World and the ‘rollback’ of welfare state measures in the advanced industrialized countries), while, at the same time, a widespread social countermovement has emerged (in a manner not unlike that identified by Polanyi in an earlier age⁴) to challenge the stark implications of the neoliberal market utopia as this threatens both the material livelihood as well as the social and cultural integrity of many victimized groups. Although the most visible expression of this movement has been the sporadic protests which have engulfed Seattle, Quebec City, Genoa and other Western metropoles in recent years, its true locus has always resided within the non-Western world, where local cultures remain largely unassimilated within the modernist rubric – having internalized neither the cold and calculating manifest of greed, nor the teleological view of progress or unthinking

⁴ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

veneration of science that have together constituted the core axioms of the historical modernist project.⁵

Within Latin America, the protracted and bitter struggle against neoliberalism has proven to be the catalyst for a much more wide ranging transformation of the political and social landscape of the region, where indigenous and peasant groups (who have historically comprised the most oppressed and marginalized segment of society) have entered the political sphere with increasing assertiveness to press their demands in recent years. Although widespread opposition to the privatized theft of their economic and social infrastructure (which is commensurate with the pro-creditor ideology of reigning financial institutions such as the IMF) has undoubtedly galvanized this movement in many concrete instances (such as in the repeal of the Mexican ejido system of communal land tenure under NAFTA, or in the highly symbolic Cochabamba Water Wars in nearby Bolivia), I will argue that indigenous and peasant-based activism is more far reaching in its aims and aspirations than the overthrow/overhaul of the prevailing economic regime. Rather, this has encompassed a broader legacy of cultural and historic subjugation in which the perennial victims of modernity (i.e. peasants, indigenous people, workers, and women) now seek to assert themselves in what Kanth has termed the incipient *great*

⁵ Throughout my thesis I will rely upon the succinct tripartite definition of modernism provided by Kanth, who identified three major pillars of this historical project as defined by: “(a) a near blind faith in science, (b) an eschatological, if self-serving and triumphalist belief in progress, and (c) a philosophy of rampant materialism.” See, Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 55. Of the three, the philosophical force of materialism has proven to be the most pivotal in my view, since this has demonstrated the power to (re)shape the other two – guiding the forces of technological and scientific innovation within our pseudo-market system, and, at the same time, displacing alternative notions of moral or ethical progress that have commonly been held within premodern and non-modern societies the world over.

*rejection.*⁶ In my coming thesis, I will attempt to explore how some of these forces have converged within the contemporary movement of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, and what this insurrection can reveal about the nature of resistance to neoliberalism⁷ more broadly.

Above all, I will argue that the Zapatistas and their structural allies have embodied a *politics of redemption*, wherein the emphasis has been placed squarely upon the *restoration of the moral or ethical core of society through the rejuvenation of traditional ideas and governing institutions*. It is useful to recall that the neoliberal model, which has foundered in such dramatic fashion of late, is only the most recent incarnation of a centuries long progressivist crusade to uproot the traditional way of life that has existed throughout much of the rest of the world and to implant the dominant mode of Western monoculture in its place. The current economic crisis which is now unfolding on the global stage is only a singular manifestation, in my view, of a much larger *systemic* crisis within modernism itself, which encompasses issues of militarism, environmental degradation, social alienation, political disempowerment, and economic polarization (every one of them a legitimate crisis in its own right!). At the very heart of the modernist crisis, I will argue, has been the imposition of the institution of civil society, whose invention on the part of the late European world was secured at the expense of much older affinities, rights, and obligations which had comprised the historic

⁶ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 113-115.

⁷ For an extensive discussion of the roots of the contemporary neoliberal creed and its current trajectory, see Chapter 2.

moral economy but that had to be sacrificed on the altar of material gain in order to secure the European ascent.

In his path breaking essay on the ‘Moral Economy of the English Crowd,’ the noted historian E.P. Thompson emphasized the role of communal norms and local obligations which had governed the paternalistic relations between rich and poor within the pre-existing Feudal society in Britain (leading, for example, to the popularized notion of a ‘just price’ for bread as part of an overall *subsistence* ethic). As he has observed, the “demoralizing of the theory of trade and consumption”⁸ which attended the spread of the newly consecrated doctrine of political economy and the rise of the self-regulating market would have far reaching consequences, leading to widespread rioting and other forms of popular agitation that mirror, in many ways, the contemporary social countermovement that has emerged to challenge the economic immiseration of neoliberal capitalism in many parts of the world.

The devaluation of the ethical or moral core of human society within Europe was commensurate with the elevation of a principle “only rarely acknowledged as valid in the history of human societies, and certainly never before raised to the level of a justification of action and behaviour in everyday life.”⁹ Unbounded greed became the motor for Euro-capitalist expansion, underpinned by the Enlightenment idea(l) of society as a *balance of interests* (as in the Mandevillian notion of ‘private vices, public benefits’) and by the overarching productivist imperative of transforming human society into a material organ

⁸ E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (1971), 89.

⁹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 31.

of accumulation. The predisposition on the part of modernist theorists (from Smith to Schumpeter), to see greed as a *civilizing force* (the “suture of a fragmented society”¹⁰ that was *assumed* to be fragmented and conflictual in true Hobbesian fashion) must indeed be regarded as an historical deviation of truly monumental proportions, and a serious indictment of the ‘scientific’ foundations of the entire Euro-modernist enterprise. As Kanth has observed, there was never any attempt amongst the liberal philosophers to address human behaviour from a truly naturalistic perspective (i.e. through an honest study of animal behaviour), but rather “Matters were settled, apparently on the secure basis of *inspired introspection* (the elite Englishman probed deeply into his barren soul, and found nothing but embalming capitalist contentment nesting within a now innate sense of superiority to all peoples.”¹¹ Indeed, even the master himself cannot escape criticism on this score, for, as Collier has pointedly observed, “Marx may be right that what distinguishes the human species is productive labour. But why should what distinguishes the human from the animal be more important for the human ideal than what we share with the animals?”¹² Above all, what we share with our mammalian kin, I would argue, is an innate need for social warmth and nurturance such as that exists within the family and larger community, reflected in reciprocal ties of affection and mutual obligation.

The dominant *entropic* view of human society (which is reflected as much in the shallow methodological individualism of mainstream economics as it is in the abstract

¹⁰ Juan Ricardo Aparicio and Mario Blaser, “The ‘Lettered City’ and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America,” *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008), 67.

¹¹ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 63.

¹² Andrew Collier, *Marx* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

organicist model of corporatist collectivity upon which much of our sociology is founded) must be seen as a rather striking departure from the wisdom of premodern and non-modern peoples, who have understood and sought to accommodate the communitarian bonds and affinities that are the essence of a truly *convivial society* (the antithesis of modernist *civil society*). Following the work of Kanth, I would argue that these relations of kinship and fellowship, which have historically suffused life and meaning within tribal and peasant societies, have served a vital function in helping to constrain or defuse the more predatory and violent impulses of men (who, after all, remain the perennial *warmongers* within any polity) as these are pacified through an externalization of the *familial principle* to encompass the larger society and group. In severing this tribal link, I would contend that modernist society has unleashed many of the most rabid and destructive proclivities of our species (and on a scale unimaginable throughout all human history), amounting to nothing less than *masculinity unbound*.

According to De Sousa Santos, we are now “facing modern problems for which there are no modern solutions.”¹³ Beyond the current economic crisis, the Western world is beset by a political crisis of legitimacy, which is reflected in the mounting tide of cynicism and the disaffection of large constituencies with their leadership and governing institutions. Above all, I see this political crisis as a function of the failure of modernist governance (whether nominally democratic or otherwise) to accommodate the self-directing impulses of humanity, which seek autonomy within a social and communitarian framework. The sense of political disempowerment and social alienation (which

¹³ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Towards a New Legal Common Sense* (London: Butterworths, 2004), 13.

incidentally mirrors the phenomenon of economic alienation identified by Marx) that is experienced by so many citizens within the advanced industrialized democracies is, in my view, traceable to the “inhuman size or scale of many contemporary institutions”¹⁴ and the underlying pathos of modernity itself, which represents an unnatural rupture with the nucleus of human life, which resides, above all, within the micro domain of familial and communitarian relations (i.e. amongst the *grassroots*).

The core and central argument of my Thesis is that we should seek in the historic as well as the *living and breathing* testament of non-modern peoples the world over for our collective tutelage in how to address the many crises that now afflict modernist society. I should note from the outset that, while there are obvious ecological implications with respect to this Thesis topic, my attention will be instead upon the *social, political and economic* dimensions of the question as these relate to the concrete experience of the EZLN. Nevertheless, I would venture to suggest that the uniquely premodern/non-modern achievement of having effectively ‘cracked’ their respective environmental codes, of balancing human needs with the wellbeing of the Planet (significantly the two are not seen as apart within many tribal societies where the dominant ethic is *trans-species*¹⁵) must appear as no small feat when considered in light of our own *perpetual* environmental crisis.

It is also important to note that, although my central focus will be upon the Mayan Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, this is only one history (albeit a poignant one)

¹⁴ Gustavo Esteva, *Grassroots Postmodernism* (New York: Zed Books, 1998), 26.

¹⁵ See, for example, Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

amidst a multiplicity of *submerged histories* in Latin America and around the world that have yet to be told. Indeed, the very homogenizing force of Western monoculture which we often associate with Europe as a whole, was, in actuality, a much narrower outgrowth of aspects of *Germanic* civilization (as exemplified in the influence of German Protestantism and Anglo-Saxon mercantilism upon the development of Euro-capitalism¹⁶) and has imposed itself with equal ferocity upon colonized groups within Europe, such as in the case of the proud Celtic peoples (e.g. the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish tribes). The work of uncovering these submerged histories and correcting for the biases and errors of modernist analysis will, in my view, enrich our understanding and appreciation of the “primal genius of the anthropic experience,”¹⁷ and will constitute the first inklings of a true non-modernist history of humanity. What we must ultimately face, according to Cox, is the reality of *multiple realities* shaped by ideological and cultural forces, or, what he has referred to as the condition of *supra-intersubjectivity*.¹⁸ If we can do so, we will have taken our first tentative steps away from the destructive and self-delusional epistemes of Eurocentric modernity and will have entered a much larger *pluriverse*.

In my first chapter I will explore various aspects of the current political and economic crisis, highlighting what I see as some of the shortfalls within Western democratic theory and tracing the evolution (and the more recent implosion) of the neoliberal creed within the United States. Furthermore, I will delve into some of the

¹⁶ Rajani Kanth, *The Challenge of Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁷ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

¹⁸ Robert Cox, “Towards a Posthegemonic Conceptualization of World Order,” *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996).

debates now engulfing the field of political economy, and attempt to articulate my own vision of capitalism as an historic force. My second chapter will address issues pertaining to the peasantry, with a particular emphasis upon the work of the Russian economist Alexander Chayanov, whose sympathetic treatment of the Russian peasant communes contrasted sharply with that of many orthodox Marxists of the day (e.g. Lenin and Kautsky) in their pessimistic view of what was termed the ‘peasant question.’ As I will argue, current events throughout Latin America and many other parts of the world have revealed the insufficiencies of modernist social theory in this regard, which has been hampered in its approach to the study of the historic and contemporary peasantry by the widespread adherence to a materialist mode of analysis (amounting to economic reductionism), no less than the endemic Eurocentrism that has pervaded much of existing scholarship. In my third chapter I will focus more narrowly upon the case of the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, which has been inspired by the overlapping (albeit distinct) customs and traditions of peasant and indigenous society (which remain embedded within the historic *moral economy*). In their quest for local autonomy and self-governance, I will argue that the Zapatistas have provided a model for other groups and social actors seeking to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and of Eurocentric modernity more broadly. In my conclusion I will recapitulate some of my earlier arguments and assess the prospects for decolonizing modernism.

Chapter One

*The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.*¹⁹

*Some people argue that we're going to sit at a table with these people and they're going to voluntarily give their power away. I think it is a complete fantasy; it will never happen.*²⁰

The recent and historic election of the first African-American President of the United States, Barack Obama, was greeted with much fanfare both at home and abroad, and has been widely hailed as a landmark in the evolution of democracy in the United States (as well as a testament to the civilizing effect of the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the 1960s counterculture more broadly). Notwithstanding the popular enthusiasm surrounding his election, however, we should not fail to notice that President Obama was overwhelmingly positioned as the candidate of Wall Street²¹ and was supported in his bid for office by prominent financial interests and a slew of Washington lobbyists, who together contributed enough money to make his campaign the largest and most expensive in all history (far outstripping the more modestly endowed John McCain/Sarah Palin ticket). It is indeed telling that the Obama campaign, which has been widely touted by the public relations industry as a model of successful marketing, was named ‘Marketer of the

¹⁹ Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 18.

²⁰ John Edwards quoted in Paul Krugman, “Big Table Fantasies,” *New York Times* (December 17, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/17/opinion/17krugman.html>

²¹ Indeed, it should come as little surprise from this perspective that Obama has surrounded himself with the same rogues gallery of influential ‘experts’ (e.g. Summers, Rubin etc.) who have been at the centre of the current economic maelstrom in the U.S., nor that he has presided over the most colossal transfer of wealth into the hands of the financial sector in all of American history.

Year for 2008' by the prominent Advertising Age magazine,²² and it is tragic to think that the election of the first African-American President may owe more to the endemic corruption of a society in which money can seemingly dissolve all biases and inhibitions than to any other single factor.

Having been charged with the Rooseveltian task of saving U.S. capitalism from itself, President Obama is now faced with an open conflict between the interests of his financial and corporate backers, and those of the great mass of Americans who are often invoked under the Middle Class euphemism 'Main Street.' The less publicized backdrop to this curious struggle, which seemingly pits the entire population of the United States against Wall Street and its numerically small band of cronies, is the underlying pathos of U.S. democracy itself, which is only a shade away from outright Plutocracy in many ways.²³ In his *investment theory* of politics (which he has posed in contradistinction to the orthodox neoclassical 'electoral theory,' which he says drastically underestimates the cost to the population of participating in public life) Ferguson²⁴ has emphasized the central role and influence, throughout the history of the United States, of a small clique of wealthy and powerful investors who have effectively ruled over the country by proxy

²² Noam Chomsky, "Black Faces in Limousines: A Conversation with Noam Chomsky," Joe Walker Blog (November 14, 2008), <http://blogs.journalism.cuny.edu/josephwalker/2009/01/26/a-conversation-with-noam-chomsky/>

²³ For more background on the corporate capture of American politics see Simon Johnson, "The Quiet Coup" *The Atlantic* (May 2009), <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200905/imf-advice>

²⁴ Thomas Ferguson, *The Golden Rule* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

through a governing elite that is reliant, above all, upon the largesse of business in order to finance its political ambitions.²⁵

Although it has been taken to the usual unsavoury extremes in the United States, where the overwhelming power of business has rendered this, in essence, a *one party* state (lacking even the vestiges of an organized labourite party) we should not fail to notice that the dominant conception of politics as a venal spoils system has long been enshrined within the Western tradition, where ‘democracy’ has become little more than shorthand for the (un)popular acquiescence of the citizenry in the orderly and bloodless succession of elites (what the famous democratic theorist Robert Dahl famously labelled *polyarchy*²⁶).

Although I will elaborate upon the significance of the Zapatista movement later in my thesis, I will simply observe now and for the purposes of this discussion that the mode of governance that has taken shape in the autonomous municipalities in resistance, and which has been referred to under the heading of ‘radical’ or ‘participatory democracy,’ is predicated to a significant extent upon the *empowerment* of the grassroots and is an outgrowth of the earlier pre-Colombian political heritage that still subsists amongst the indigenous population of Chiapas (as well as the syncretic influence of the medieval religiopolitical institution of the Spanish cargos, which was imposed upon the

²⁵ The electoral spectacle that is presented to the American public is accordingly little more than an afterthought, and has become progressively more denigrated by the influence of that uniquely Anglo-American institution, the Public Relations industry, which employs the same manipulative tactics in its efforts to market political candidates as it does commercial products (e.g. empty sloganeering, branding, delusive advertising etc.).

²⁶ Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

region at the time of the conquista²⁷). As Walter Mignolo has observed, “Democracy for the Zapatistas is not conceptualized in terms of European political philosophy but in terms of Maya social organization based on reciprocity, communal (instead of individual) values, the value of wisdom rather than epistemology, and so forth.”²⁸ Crucially, the Zapatista concept of democracy is a *non-abstraction* and reflects the true character of life within the community (in contrast with the dominant Western mode, wherein idealized notions such as ‘equality’ or ‘freedom’ are bandied about without respect for their stark repudiation in the real world of political *praxis*).

Neoliberalism: The Great Unravelling

The current political crisis in the West is, of course, closely intertwined with the economic crisis, and, in a sense, both can be seen to derive from a fundamental repudiation of core democratic values.²⁹ Furthermore, it is striking to see the casual aplomb with which the United States has shirked off the most bedrock neoliberal principles (principles that it has *imposed* upon much of the rest of the world as part of the ‘Washington consensus’), not only in its domestic stimulus program, but also in the overt regime of financial protectionism (what else, after all, is the ‘too big to fail’ doctrine than a free insurance policy for the financial sector?), and an ever enlarging debt burden which

²⁷ Niels Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

²⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, “The Many Face of Cosmo-Polis,” in Carol A. Breckenridge ed. *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

²⁹ There can be little doubt that the neoliberal policies of privatization and deregulation, which have transferred substantial authority over to unaccountable private power, have substantially undermined the potential for democracy. According to Eichengreen, the liberalization of finance, in particular, has thrown the underlying conflict between democratic and market elements into stark relief (recapitulating the earlier 19th century dynamic identified by Polanyi) as governments have been deprived of their former room of manoeuvre with respect to domestic policy objectives such as full employment that had been an integral part of the postwar ‘compromise.’ See Barry Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

has reached astronomical proportions such that it is hard to envision how the U.S. could ever repay its creditors.³⁰ Of course, this is all in stark contrast with the now familiar neoliberal mantra that has been widely touted by prominent individuals and institutions within the United States for the past thirty years (sometimes couched in elaborate theory or feint appeals to economic development, but more often in the vulgar realities of power). The ideological mainsprings of neoliberalism can be traced most obviously to the influence of the Chicago school of economics and its sordid group of disciples (Friedman, Hayek, Becker etc.), while the real world implementation of this creed has been administered by the IMF (an institution widely acknowledged to be little more than a branch of the U.S. Treasury). Above all, the unrivalled power and influence of Wall Street as the central hub within the global financial nexus has rendered the era of neoliberal financialization a definitively *American* one, and, I will argue, its demise no less so.

It was the unilateral abrogation of the postwar Bretton Woods regime by the U.S. in the early 1970s that provided the initial impetus for the subsequent and meteoric rise of finance capital that has been the defining feature of the neoliberal revolution. Although the repeal of the Bretton Woods system ended the *official* U.S. dollar standard (in which the United States, in its capacity as banker to the world, allowed the free convertibility of dollars for gold as part of the pegged monetary system), this merely led to a new *de-facto* arrangement in which the U.S. dollar has become the unofficial reserve currency of the world – allowing the U.S., in effect, a free ride, due to its ability to trade paper (or, even

³⁰ See, for example, Michael Hudson, “Financial Crisis: Sustaining Unsustainability,” *Global Research* (April 4, 2009), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=13054>

more often, electronically ‘conjured’) money for hard assets. Indeed, the perversities of U.S. dollar hegemony have now led to a situation in which the rest of the world is effectively footing the bill for the entire U.S. military empire which now encircles them (including the more than 750 U.S. bases around the globe) while receiving, in return, what are increasingly regarded as worthless promissory notes (it is, indeed, difficult to envision how the U.S. could ever repay the 4 trillion dollars it already owes to foreign central banks, let alone the vast debts it continues to accrue).

It should come as little surprise that foreign governments are now attempting to extricate themselves from this less than desirable state of affairs, and we can see premonitory signs of this counterhegemonic movement in the recent summit of the BRIC countries (comprising Brazil, Russia, India and China) in Yekaterinburg, to which the U.S. was denied even observer status.³¹ Although the utter nakedness and depravity of American imperialism under the late scofflaw in chief, George Bush II, was undoubtedly a significant factor contributing to the current climate of foreign popular and elite hostility toward the United States, this has likely only accelerated secessionist impulses that were already latent within the international system, and it seems unlikely that the election of President Obama, which was widely perceived as a conciliatory gesture abroad (and most particularly within Europe), can reverse such trends, even if it may render them more inert, owing to the unpredictability of the former neoconservative clique.

³¹ Michael Hudson, “De-Dollarization: Dismantling America’s Financial-Military Empire,” *Global Research* (June 13, 2009). <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=13969>

In many ways, recent developments can be seen as part of an ongoing trend toward increasing regionalization, which is reflected in the emergence of major economic and political blocs outside of the U.S.-dominated global system. In Asia, for example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has come to play an increasingly important role, and in South America, initiatives such as Mercosur still offer the hope that Latin America may overcome its own neocolonial predicament. The decline of U.S. hegemony and the diffusion of power throughout the international system, although this must be greeted with no small amount of foreboding in the West (which has long been accustomed to lording it over the rest of the world), will likely elicit a collective sigh of relief from those outside of Europe and its offshoots, who have suffered under the yoke not only of U.S. militarism, but of European colonialism before it. Accordingly, the transition towards a more *polycentric* world order (which is exemplified in the recent proposal for expanding the G8 to a newfangled G14) might be seen as a fundamentally restorative movement which harkens back to a world not unlike that which had existed before the advent of the European colonial onslaught.

It is worthwhile to recall that Europe was once (and not so very long ago!) a much more marginal presence on the world stage, and particularly when measured against the great civilizations in Africa and Asia, which have historically comprised the centre of the world economy.³² The devastation wrought by the European conquerors,³³ who first overran the far flung reaches of the Non-European world in their vast and terrible

³² Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) or, more recently, Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing* (New York: Verso, 2009).

³³ See, for example, Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (New York: Verso, 2001).

colonial exploits, and later turned their bloodthirsty impulses inward in that paroxysm of mayhem and destruction known as the Second World War, left a world reduced, in many cases (and quite literally), to *rubble*. The preeminent position of the United States in the immediate postwar period was, of course, an artificial circumstance of the war itself (as well as the destruction of the preceding colonial era), and what we have witnessed over the past half century is the steady erosion of that power in the wake of the reconstruction of Europe and Asia³⁴ (leading to a tripolar international economic architecture).

The emergence of neoliberalism as a dominant political and ideological force is often traced to the crisis of business profitability (overwhelmingly a crisis from the perspective of *U.S. business* it bears pointing out) that began in the early 1970s, and the ensuing period of stagflation which swept the United States and other advanced industrialized countries throughout the decade. The ‘Volcker Shock,’ which was the decision by the U.S. Federal Reserve Board under Paul Volcker, to induce an economic recession in the country in order to bring down the overall rate of inflation, is regarded by many observers as a significant landmark in the consolidation of the neoliberal policy ‘consensus’³⁵ in America and around the world. According to Panitch and Gindin, the extreme reaction on the part of Volcker “marked a turning point, after which the

³⁴ For a perspective from within the mainstream foreign policy establishment, see G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Order and Imperial Ambition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

³⁵ In actuality, this era was marked by widespread Labour unrest and popular agitation throughout the society at large (what was referred to in elite quarters as the Crisis of Democracy).

international authority of neo-liberalism was established, emulated and generalised. It was this that resolved, for capital, the crisis of the 1970s.”³⁶

As Kanth has observed, however, capitalist crises should be seen not so much as evidence of “the existence of capitalist problems (which are always inherent), but rather the working out of their solutions.”³⁷ Accordingly, we might view the ‘crisis’ of the 1970s (i.e. stagflation) as little more than a temporary stratagem on the part of business to recuperate nominal profits and to offset the overall slowdown in productivity (buying time, in effect, for their political assault upon the underpinnings of the postwar welfare state). In many respects, the 1970s crisis appears unexceptional (particularly in light of the current predicament we find ourselves in) and might simply rank as another in a long line of greater or lesser capitalist experiments – none of which should be seen as, in any way, structurally preordained but rather as contingent upon the particular circumstances and forces of the day.³⁸

The essentially pragmatic character of such experimentation is revealed in the ease with which even the grandest of such experiments are cast aside. We can now see in retrospect that the depth of elite commitment to the former Keynesian welfare state was never more than razor thin despite the fact that this model was synonymous with, what has often been termed, the ‘golden age’ of postwar state capitalism. Cox is certainly correct to point out that the subsequent reorganization of the neoliberal regime of

³⁶ Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, “‘Imperialism and Global Political economy’ – A Reply to Alex Callinicos,” *International Socialism* (Winter 2006), 195.

³⁷ Rajani Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 27.

³⁸ In his *agenda perspective*, Rajani Kanth has emphasized the role in any era of a “dominant vision of a capitalist solution to capitalist problems,” which is not only corroborated through the bourgeois science of economics but also continually tested within the realm of political praxis.

accumulation in the mid-1970s involved the abdication of important functions of legitimization on the part of government and business³⁹ (for example, the former commitment to full and stable employment). The reality, however, is that legitimate accumulation has never been more than a mirage in the historical experience of capitalism. The failure of social democracy to reconcile the existence of capitalist relations with the creation of a decent society must ultimately register as a decisive, if unsurprising, watershed however. For even if it did not spell the impending demise of the system, the crisis of the 1970s and the rise of political and economic reaction (embodied in the Presidency of Ronald Reagan), dashed the hopes of many and revealed the inherent limits of capitalist ‘consensus.’

The subsequent shift to financialization might now be seen as a failed attempt to shore up the economic underpinnings of American power by shifting the terrain of competition to a field dominated by U.S. and allied British sectors of wealth, and, in effect, putting the world at the mercy of the “*Rentier Class* of coupon clippers [emphasis in original].”⁴⁰ However, predatory finance has proven to be an unpredictable mistress, and its proliferation within the United States and abroad has been marred by a string of major crises – from the U.S. savings and loan debacle in the 1980s, to the Mexican peso crisis in 1994, and leading up to the Asian financial tsunami of 1997 (which would prove to be a watershed event in many ways). Even more ominous than the volatile economic

³⁹ Robert Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 279-285.

⁴⁰ Rajani Kanth, “Neoliberalism, Globalization, and the New World Order: Old Wine in New Bottles,” Paper presented at the PEKEA International Conference, Santiago Chile, 10-14 September 2002, <http://en.pekea-fr.org/Bgkpapers/Kanth.doc>

climate engendered by the growth of unregulated finance (what Baker has termed the asset ‘bubble economy’⁴¹) has been the manner in which financial interests have increasingly insinuated themselves within the productive economy of the U.S. and many other Western industrialized countries, rendering industry little more than a plaything in the hands of the bondholders. The insidious parasitisation of government itself, which has led to the current and quite indefensible strategy of bailouts intended to enrich the very individuals and institutions that provoked the economic crisis, must undoubtedly be regarded as the most baneful aspect of the reigning neoliberal order.

The foremost weapon in the arsenal of finance has proven to be the ‘magic of compound interest,’ which has led to the exponential growth of the economy wide debt overhead in the U.S., which now towers over all else and exists out of any proportion to the real ability to pay. The current strategy of financial bailouts intended to ‘make whole the creditors,’ which has been embraced by the Obama administration and other major governments around the world, appears to be contrary not only to economic principles that are widely accepted today,⁴² but to the accumulated economic wisdom of the whole of human civilization, where the practice of debt nullification has long been enshrined (tracing as far back as ancient Sumer and Babylon and the institution of the ‘Blank Slate’⁴³). According to Hudson, the policy now being hatched in Washington is something akin to a financial putsch and will inaugurate a new form of debt peonage that

⁴¹ Dean Baker, *Plunder and Blunder* (Sausalito: Polipoint Press, 2009).

⁴² For a Post-Keynesian critique, see Robert Pollin, “We’re all Minskyites Now” *The Nation* (October 29, 2008), <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081117/pollin>

⁴³ Michael Hudson, “The New Economic Archaeology of Debt,” in Marc Van De Mieroop ed. *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore: CDL Press, 2002).

will not only enslave the population but also stifle the underlying productive economy for years to come.

Political economy and Neoliberalism

One of the foremost debates now engulfing political economy, and, particularly in its heterodox sectors, which seem better poised to respond to the current crisis, concerns the relationship between productive and finance capital, and, specifically, whether the latter can be understood as an autonomous factor (such as in the view expounded by Hudson and others⁴⁴) or whether the growth of finance has simply reflected a deeper malaise within late monopoly capital (as Foster and Magdoff argue, following the earlier eponymous work of Baran and Sweezy⁴⁵). Of course, there is no reason to see this debate as intractable; for, even if we accept that the specific conditions that enabled postwar capitalist accumulation in the U.S. were, in fact, *sui generis*, and acknowledge the reality of ‘vanishing investment opportunities’ (although there is ample confusion surrounding the Marxist concept of the ‘declining rate of profit’), this would, in no way, render the history that has unfolded *inevitable*. Indeed, the ‘hollowing out’⁴⁶ of industry in the United States appears to be much more a result of conscious policy – including the perverse impact of ‘free trade’ and the resultant wave of outsourcing (and this in a country that built itself upon protectionist barriers for two centuries!), as well as the

⁴⁴ Michael Hudson, *Super Imperialism* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Barr Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

spectacular mismanagement of major industries, and the maintenance of an artificially high U.S. dollar in deference to the interests of Wall Street.

Furthermore, although the shift to financialization may have *originated* as a mechanism to compensate for underlying weaknesses within productive capital in the U.S., this phenomenon has almost certainly taken on a life of its own in the qualitative (and not merely quantitative) transformation that has occurred over the past thirty years and the rise of what Susan Strange famously termed the new breed of *casino capitalism*.⁴⁷ Although there is clearly a problem of disentangling cause from effect in this overall narrative, it seems much more likely that that the rise of finance was a *conjunctural* event (much as the Postwar era of accumulation that preceded it) and was, in no way, preordained by the structure or inherent limitations of U.S. capitalism.⁴⁸ Indeed, far too often political economy has embodied a starkly reactionary attitude toward the future, which is understood not as an unknown and independent variable but rather as a prisoner to the imputed ‘laws’ or regularities that govern what is understood as ‘history.’

In addition, the narrow focus upon issues of political economy fails, in my view, to address what are more fundamental questions about the meaning and scope of neoliberal globalization, which, following the work of Latouche⁴⁹ and others, I would contend is merely the most recent and virulent manifestation of the historic quest to westernize the non-European world through the imposition of modernist ideology.

⁴⁷ Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ Indeed, a further significant factor contributing to the financial revolution, quite apart from the economic or political prerequisites I have alluded to, is the spread of computerization, which has enabled the massive growth of speculative electronic or ‘programmed trading’ (a far cry from ‘trade’ in any meaningful sense of the term) on the part of Goldman Sachs and a host of other prominent firms.

⁴⁹ Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

Furthermore, I will argue that this modus of analysis has had the effect, whether intended or not, of reifying the very notion of an abstract and culturally unmediated realm known as the ‘economy’ that has been at the forefront of this historical Westernization project. Following the work of Polanyi and other economic anthropologists, I would argue that, throughout history, the material substrate of existence (i.e. the ‘economy’) has not manifested itself as a force apart from but rather *embedded* within a larger field of social relations (reflected in practices such as mutual reciprocity and redistribution for example), and has served to reinforce the very bonds of sociability and affection that our own economy would cruelly rend asunder.

The widespread repudiation of neoliberalism throughout much of the non-Western world today, has, in my view, reflected the enduring resilience of this preexisting *moral economy*, which still remains a central feature of life amongst many distinctive cultural groups (even as these have been loosely incorporated within the overarching framework of global capitalism). As Sahlins has observed, contrary to the Marxist assertion that the spread of money must inevitably entail the destruction of the archaic community, there is ample evidence to suggest that “where there is no structural opposition between the relationships of economy and sociability, where material transactions are ordered by social relations rather than vice versa, then the immorality that we attribute to money need not obtain.”⁵⁰ The reconciliation between our material needs and moral sentiments (an endeavour which has eluded so many Western minds, beginning with the great scholars of the Enlightenment, such as Adam Smith, and

⁵⁰ Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 519.

proceeding down to our present day) must be regarded as yet another in a long line of noteworthy achievements on the part of Non-Westernized groups for whom the imputed contradiction between these mutually constitutive aspects of our existence has never presented itself.

Political economy, Materialism and Historicism

What has become evident to many observers nowadays is that the entire field of economics is utterly bankrupt – not only for the fact that so many prominent economists failed to foretell the current crisis, but, much more significantly, that the very object of investigation (i.e. the ‘economy’ and its imputed laws or regularities) is nonexistent in itself and merely the result of orchestration by powerful economic actors. Indeed, the preoccupation of much of mainstream economics with seemingly pointless modeling exercises and now with the obsessive study of ‘power games’ (although the latter emphasis within game theory is arguably a better approximation of the real cutthroat world of business), strikes one as quite a sorry state of affairs for the discipline. Nor, frankly, is the Marxist penchant for endless theorization and the quest amongst many theorists to derive generalized and necessary ‘laws’ from the peculiar historical conjuncture that is Euro-capitalism, an entirely healthy corrective in my view.

The root of the problem, arguably, lies in a widespread delusion concerning the practice of ‘science,’ which is more often treated as something akin to a religious precept than as a concept to be investigated and *applied critically*. Following Kanth, I would argue that even where social knowledge could be deemed scientifically valid (which is all too seldom the case) the plain and simple truth is that “scientific knowledge is neither a

necessary nor a sufficient condition for human emancipation.”⁵¹ As he has pointedly observed, “Theorizing oppression, or resistance to it, may be a very diverting parlor room pastime; but it cannot reduce its real, ontic weight even one whit. Emancipation is not a ‘scientific,’ but a moral, spiritual, and ‘political’ process.”⁵² To the extent that we choose to engage in the study of political economy, as opposed to the more meaningful praxis of liberation, we should, says Kanth, place our emphasis upon issues of *policy* over *theory*, particularly now in this age of self-conscious regulation, where central actors coordinate economic activity not so much behind our backs, through the working out of impersonal laws of the market, as *before our very eyes*.

Arguably, the study of political economy has been hampered, from the outset, by its strict adherence to a materialist mode of analysis, which has inhibited any significant investigation into the *ideational* roots of economic life. This conceptual dearth has been most marked within the realm of neoclassical economics, where the reliance upon ‘rational choice’ theory has led to an abundance of flawed assumptions regarding the sources of human motivation, which have been reduced in all their complexity to a simplistic preference ordering in line with the notion of utility maximization. The problem resides not only in the privileging of a narrow ‘reason’ over and above all of the other important attributes of human thought and behaviour, but in the further conflation of reason with greed (simply put, there is nothing remotely ‘rational’ about wanting more). As Kanth has observed, however, economics is often little more than a “science of

⁵¹ Rajani Kanth, “Against Eurocentred Epistemologies,” in Steve Fleetwood ed., *Critical Realism in Economics* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 200.

⁵² Rajani Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 80.

assumptions,” wherein the conclusions are effectively rigged from the outset to produce the desired outcomes (i.e. ‘proving’ the laissez-faire hypothesis). For example, he posits the following thought experiment:

So for the sake of argument, I could legislate a new set of premises, where social groups (not individuals) are the prime economic ‘agents,’ deemed fundamentally altruistic, systematically avoiding self-interest in favour of group interest, thinking that less is better, and so on. Lo and behold, we would then erect a new economic theory with a new set of ‘laws’ (instead of indifference curves, of course, we might now craft sinuously hooped curves of social affection, behaving quite perversely!)⁵³

Even within the Marxist tradition, which has been free from many of the more vulgar delusions that have dominated mainstream economics, the underlying influence of positivism⁵⁴ and the artificial separation between the base and superstructure (as well as the unrealistic agglomeration of so many diverse ideas and cultural formations within a singular entity such as the superstructure) should be seen as ultimately detrimental to an understanding of social causation. After all, “even purely economic activity necessarily has an inalienable ideational component” and we can no more argue for the “purist autonomy”,⁵⁵ of the material sphere of life than we can argue the obverse in the realm of ideas. Rather than as a deterministic factor, we should conceive of material conditions as sustaining a wide array of social practices which are articulated through different

⁵³ Rajani Kanth, “Against Eurocentred Epistemologies,” in Steve Fleetwood ed. *Critical Realism in Economics* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 192.

⁵⁴ Although the relationship between Marxism and Positivism is widely contested, I would refer to Jurgen Habermas’ trenchant critique of Marx’s underlying methodological framework, which, according to him, ultimately “proves itself insufficient to establish an unconditional phenomenological self-reflection of knowledge and thus prevent the positivist atrophy of epistemology. Considered immanently, I see the reason for this in the reduction of the self-generative act of the human species to labor.” See Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 42.

⁵⁵ Rajani Kanth, *Capitalism and Social Theory: The Science of Black Holes* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 134-135.

ideologies and are more or less autonomous in themselves (although certainly not static⁵⁶). After all, material relations have been suffused with cultural meaning, no less in the influence of Protestantism upon northern European capital formation, than in the patterns of reciprocity that have characterized many so-called primitive traditions (e.g. the potlatch).

It is worth pointing out that the dominant strain of materialism that has infused political economy and other branches of modernist social science, has been unaffected by the very profound shift that has occurred within quantum physics, incited by the work of David Bohm in particular,⁵⁷ who has argued that the physical world that we perceive is actually an outgrowth of ‘mind-like’ properties, and that consciousness and matter are inextricably linked as part of an *implicate whole* (rendering the classical modernist distinction between the material world and the realm of ideas essentially moot⁵⁸).

There have been some noteworthy efforts to put historical materialism on a more scientific footing, such as in the nouvelle ambitions of the Critical Realist paradigm and the pioneering work of Roy Bhaskar, who, more recently, has ventured beyond the strict limits of a materialist analysis and has embraced elements of Eastern philosophy (much to the chagrin of formerly sympathetic Marxists such as Callinicos⁵⁹). Critical Realism (henceforth CR) offers a simpliste but largely unassailable critique of economics, advanced by CR theorists such as Tony Lawson and also by members of the Post-Autistic

⁵⁶ Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁵⁷ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁸ See also, Amit Goswami, *The Self-Aware Universe* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1995).

⁵⁹ Roy Bhaskar and Alex Callinicos, “Marxism and Critical Realism: A Debate,” *Journal of Critical Realism* (May 2003).

movement, according to which the entire discipline is utterly oblivious to the reality of society (“structured, stratified, and differentiated” in Lawson’s terminology⁶⁰). This sentiment is echoed as well in Amartya Sen’s now famous observation that one could be ‘rational,’ in a strictly microeconomic sense, and still be a fool with regard to simple social categories, and, indeed, social causation itself.⁶¹ Underlying CR and similarly inclined methodological approaches is the implicit recognition that the ‘economy’ does not exist apart from the larger society, but is shaped profoundly by cultural, political, and other social forces.

An even more serious indictment of much of our Political economy, and, indeed, of modernist knowledge writ large, has been levelled by Chakrabarty, who has criticized the dominant conception of ‘history’ as a linear or progressive stagist movement in which Europe becomes the pivot of world civilization as the “site of the first occurrence of capitalism, modernity, [and] the Enlightenment.”⁶² What this view of history (what Chakrabarty has referred to as European *Historicism*) blithely ignores, of course, is that European civilization was, to a large extent, *plundered* from the non-European world, and even wrested from within Europe itself, such as in the Northern ‘barbarian’ cooptation of the Greek Mediterranean legacy. The Greek legacy itself was, of course, transmitted to Europe by the great Islamic scribes and philosophers, and was, in actuality, an offshoot of the earlier Afro-Egyptian model (how ironic to think of the great Hegel proclaiming the non-existence of African history when Africa was the fount, not only of European ‘high

⁶⁰ Tony Lawson, *Reorienting Economics* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁶¹ Amartya Sen, “Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Summer 1977).

⁶² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7.

culture,’ but the seat of all human life on Earth). The traditional account of the rise of Europe, which either wholly ignores the profound and ongoing contributions of the non-European world to what became known as ‘European’ civilization (whether in the field of mathematics, science, philosophy, religion etc.) or relegates these to the status of a footnote or special ‘Orientalist clause,’⁶³ must be regarded as one of the greatest acts of historic vandalism undertaken, alongside the very real “torching of contra evidence”⁶⁴ such as befell the great Mayan civilization for example.

Undoubtedly the colonial encounter was significant for the material sustenance it provided for the incipient Euro-capitalist system, however, far more significant than the appropriation of resources, in all likelihood, was the diffusion of ideas, institutions and technologies from the older and more venerable civilizations in Asia (the non-European *other*) over the course of, what Hobson has termed, the long phase of oriental globalization from approximately 500 AD onward.⁶⁵ In effect, Europe became little more than the *custodian* for a genus of knowledge that was *non-European* in provenance, and the fact that Europe would carry this knowledge forward with such pitiless abandon should not blind us to its true origins, which are *trans-cultural*.

Although the attempt to derive abstract principles or general ‘laws’ from the European case is undoubtedly complicated by the reality that Europe has never existed apart from the rest of humanity (the continental boundary itself is not a geographic fact

⁶³ John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.

⁶⁴ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

⁶⁵ John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

but rather a reflection of European exclusivist pretensions) the true impossibility lies in the *conjunctural* nature of the history itself. Above all, the materialist account of the Euro-capitalist revolution is flawed for its narrow focus upon aspects of the European case that were neither unique to Europe (e.g. the existence of industry, wage labour, or even the much vaunted parcelization of sovereignty under feudalism, all of which features obtained elsewhere in Asia for example) nor sufficient in their scope or magnitude to account for such monumental forces as were subsequently unleashed upon a hapless world (e.g. in the Neoclassical emphasis upon the cultivation of efficient property rights, which were arguably more a consequence than a cause of the underlying upheaval). Indeed, none of these putative causes can account for what must be regarded as the decisive feature of Euro-capitalist modernity, and that is the “Werewolf lust for accumulation”⁶⁶ which is so conspicuous for its absence in other cultures that, while they may be similarly endowed materially, are ideationally *worlds apart*.

The fact that much of the non-European world still subsists to this day, and despite the centuries long slash and burn mission of deculturation on the part of the Euro-modernisers, within their own simple and perennial *moral economies*, is a testament not only to the resilience and integrity of such *alternative cultures*⁶⁷ but also to the incredible alienness of Euro-capitalist sensibilities, which are no simple matter to inculcate into a

⁶⁶ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 23.

⁶⁷ It is instructive to compare the experience of the former Soviet Union (a quintessentially modernist social entity), which collapsed upon itself much in the manner of a house of cards, with that of contemporary Indigenous societies, which, notwithstanding their brutal oppression at the hands of the Euro-conquerors, continue to fight vigorously for the preservation of their traditional customs and way of life.

warm-blooded polity. As Kanth has observed, the historical specificity of Euro-capitalism was rivalled only by its misanthropy:

It could become a world conquering force only in conjunction with protocols as diverse and implacable as the domestication of women, the expropriation of peasants, the exploitation of workers, the subjugation of “Other” noncapitalist economies and the confiscation of their wealth, resources and labour, the real and metaphysical “conquest” of nature (inclusive of other animate life forms), the reduction of human reason to materialism, the deracination of the very bonding *logos* and *esprit* of anthropic society, the replacement of religion, morality, and ethics by “science,” the perfection of a racist weltanshaaung, the indoctrination into the mores of anthropocentrism and androcentrism, and the warmly embraced inculcation of the “religious” ideology of a god given mission to rule the planet.⁶⁸

To seek after the supposed deeper ‘laws of motion’ and material causation that govern the system amidst this litany of utterly malign though otherwise seemingly discrepant prerequisites of Euro-capitalist conquest seems ultimately futile to me. Rather we should see the material forces that were unleashed by Euro-capitalism as only the more visible manifestation of a deeper epistemic shift (indeed, a *seismic* shift) that occurred in the conceptualization of humanity, society and the natural world as part of the European Enlightenment. There should be little doubt that Euro-capitalism was a terrible deviation (and one of truly *cosmic* proportions when we consider the threat posed to the living Earth itself) from the historical norms of co-respective decency and civility that have governed non-modernist peoples for millennia. I would argue that, although they are not without their varied flaws (widely touted and just as often distorted by Euro-modernist ideologues who would often ignore the far more gaping flaws of their own civilization) these premodern and non-modern societies reflect a quiet sanity that is often lost upon

⁶⁸ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 42.

modernist eyes. It is to the oft derided and misunderstood subject of the historical and contemporary peasantry that I will now turn my attention.

Chapter Two

*The bourgeoisie has subjected the countryside to the domination of the city. It has built enormous cities; it has increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life.*⁶⁹

*Two different ways; two different epistemes; two different motivations; two different approaches to life and living; and anyone who can fail to see which is the sure and sane way to planetary and societal survival, and the possibility of the continued existence of nature and human culture, is but a dupe of the slash-and-burn ideologies of modernism.*⁷⁰

The current effervescence of peasant-based activism throughout much of the non-Western world, and within Latin America in particular⁷¹ (where this has been exemplified in groups such as the Zapatistas in Mexico, the MST in Brazil, and the Cocalero Movement in Bolivia), is a phenomenon that has confounded modernist social theory in many ways. After all, the demise of the peasantry has long been upheld as an ineluctable historical fact by modernist ideologues of all stripes, and has been “inbuilt into a ‘general theory of progress’ taken as given by most contemporary social scientists.”⁷² The complacence and assuredness of modernism in this respect was first shaken by the events of the Vietnam War, and the subsequent wave of peasant rebellions that shook the Third World in the era of decolonization – coinciding with what Shanin has referred to as the “paradoxical rediscovery of peasants” by the academy, which began in the early 1970s. The seeming bewilderment of Western intellectuals at the enduring significance of the peasantry, which has, after all, “existed for millennia as the massive majority of mankind

⁶⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 224.

⁷⁰ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 124.

⁷¹ Adam David Morton, “Peasants as Subaltern Agents in Latin America,” in John Hobson ed.,

⁷² Teodor Shanin, “Chayanov’s treble death and tenuous resurrection,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* (January 2009), 95.

and were still its majority when their recognition so forcefully struck social scientists,”⁷³ must ultimately serve as a rather powerful rebuke to modernist social science, which has failed to elucidate many of the most important features of this historical social form. This failure, I will argue, can be traced to the two preeminent delusions of *Eurocentrism* and the *materialist mode of analysis*.

On the one hand, modernist investigations of the peasantry have been hindered by an overwhelming fixation upon the perceived historical experience of the *European* peasant population, whose local demise is often treated as something akin to a universal ‘law’ of history. On the other hand, the materialist orientation of social science (which has been unreformed by the notable contributions of Heisenberg and others to our understanding of the essential *uncertainty* of the material world) has served, not only to reinforce a deeply reactionary posture toward the ever unknown future, but has also obscured the formative *cultural* essence of peasant life. The intra-modernist debate surrounding the peasantry has suffered from an overemphasis upon abstract theoretical exegesis, which, in some cases, has seemed to border upon the *canonical* (as in the highly contentious debate amongst orthodox Marxists on the existence/non-existence of the purely definitional peasant *mode of production*). All too often, modernist knowledge of existing peasant societies has become an adjunct in service of the overarching development agenda, whether in its capitalist or socialist variant, which would condemn the peasant way of life to oblivion (leastwise within the conventional evolutionist schema). In our quest to more fully comprehend the peasant roots of the Zapatista

⁷³ Teodor Shanin, “Introduction: Peasantry as a Concept,” in Teodor Shanin ed. *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 1.

movement, we should first seek to explore the peasantry as an historical and contemporary social form, and one that remains largely an enigma to modernist eyes.

Eurocentric History, Political economy, and the (Un)Making of the Peasantry

Within the still predominant Eurocentric account of history, the transition from Eurofeudalism to capitalism has been a focal point of modernist introspection, and, I will argue that it has been this parochial orientation, which, more than anything else, has shaped our understanding of the contemporary peasantry. The emphasis on the part of both liberal and Marxist historians alike has been upon the 14th century *crisis of Feudalism*,⁷⁴ which is supposed to have sown the seeds of the later rise of merchant capital throughout the West. According to the conventional evolutionist narrative, it was escalating exactions levied by the nobility upon the medieval peasantry which led to the outbreak of peasant unrest throughout Europe and to the eventual establishment of the punitive Feudal absolutist states, which, in turn, resulted in the growth of the vast national markets that would usher in the coming reign of capital. The instrumental role of the peasantry in facilitating the capitalist revolution (albeit inadvertently and tragically from their own class standpoint) has produced a somewhat ambivalent reaction on the part of modernist scholarship, which has evinced a mixture of contempt and pity for the ‘vanishing peasant.’

However, even if this historical narrative is not strictly *incorrect* (leastwise with respect to the narrow European frame) it is almost certainly *incomplete*. For, in its sole

⁷⁴ See, for example, Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 405-406.

emphasis upon the material forces that are seen to have precipitated the bourgeois revolution in Europe, this view of history omits the even more profound impact of ideational forces, and, in particular, of the spread of the all-consuming manifest of greed, which overtook European society with such a vengeance and is the defining feature of capitalism as we know it today. Of course, it bears pointing out that modernist social theory has also preserved within its corpus the ideas of Weber and other similarly inclined theorists, who would counter the materialist emphasis (which we find in Marxist thought for example) with an equally forceful assertion of the power of ideas. As Kanth has observed, however, the notion that we might treat these apparently separate accounts of the material and ideological dimensions of the Euro-modernist/Euro-capitalist revolution as complementary if “taken together and read *conjuncturally*,”⁷⁵ is a seemingly impossible leap for much of modernist scholarship which seems to thrive upon such false dualisms.

The demise of the Euro-peasantry has often been construed by most modernist scholars as a natural or inevitable consequence of the transition to an Industrial society.⁷⁶ However it is important to recognize that the fate of European peasant society was not sealed solely or even primarily through the working out of supposed economic ‘laws,’ but rather was the culmination of a sustained and centuries long crusade to uproot the traditional peasant subsistence sector and other vestiges of the historic moral economy, with the ultimate goal to “usher these reluctant, lumbering, entities into the seamless web

⁷⁵ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 12.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Press, 1994).

of market relations and to render them simultaneously both a market for finished products and the provenance of a propertyless workforce.”⁷⁷ Here, as elsewhere, Britain supplied the model in a long and sustained campaign that stretched as far back as the early Enclosures Act and culminated in the 19th century repeal of the Poor Laws and Corn Laws, and the abortive experiment in a self-regulating market system. It is interesting to note that many of the prominent classical political economists of the era were intimately involved in the movement to repeal this latter legislation, very much in keeping with the historic and contemporary function of the discipline, which has been to provide a ‘scientific,’ (or, more properly, scientific-sounding) rationale for the temporal policy consensus demanded by the bourgeoisie.⁷⁸ As Karl Polanyi has observed, this campaign was, at its core, an assault upon the preexisting principle of the ‘right to life,’ which had been enshrined within the historic Feudal system but which was wholly incompatible with the bourgeois goal of establishing an unfettered market for labour (as evidenced in the Speenhamland issue for example⁷⁹).

There is something a little unsettling in the seeming ease with which so many European minds could not only contemplate, but actively engineer, the wholesale destruction of an entire culture and way of life, as the peasant mode was sacrificed to fuel the flames of an incipient and expansionist Euro-capitalism. The aided demise of the Euro-peasantry is still widely regarded as a cruel but ultimately necessary gesture to what were, after all, benighted people deprived of the varied graces of modernity (among them

⁷⁷ Rajani Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 100.

⁷⁸ For more background, see Rajani Kanth, *Political economy and Laissez Faire* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1986).

⁷⁹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 81-89.

the adversarial and deeply alienating logos of modernist civil society). However, we must honestly ask ourselves, in light of the subsequent history of Euro-modernism, whether the relative insularity of the much derided dark ages (although this was punctuated significantly and ominously by the medieval crusades) was not a much more desirable state of affairs from the perspective of the great preponderance of humanity, which must have welcomed the solicitudes of a more polycentric world, spared the ravages of two cruel and bloodthirsty empires. Even from the perspective of the Euro-peasantry itself, which was arguably more mixed, modernity presented itself as a terrible sort of ‘devils bargain’ in that it offered up the prospect of certain material improvement, but only at the cost of their way of life itself. In this vein, Polanyi has referred to tragic the plight of the yeoman peasant population in England⁸⁰ which suffered profoundly from the loss of a traditional rural existence, and ultimately would find itself adrift and alienated within the burgeoning industrial slums of England, subsumed within the ranks of Petite Bourgeoisie and the nascent Industrial working class.

What I will argue is that the demise of European peasant society and the supersession of Euro-capitalist modernity was, above all, a cultural phenomenon, and that the dominant class-based approach to understanding the peasantry within political economy has obscured other important dimensions of this societal form, which fall outside the purview of a strictly materialist analysis and are better apprehended from a *culturalist* standpoint.⁸¹ This is in keeping with my overall argument that we cannot treat

⁸⁰ Polanyi, 182.

⁸¹ Although it is important to emphasize that there have been more nuanced approaches to this subject matter from within both the Marxist and Liberal tradition. See, for example, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections*

the material sphere of existence as in any way autonomous from the realm of culture and ideas, which powerfully shape our relationship with our material means and with each other. Of course, this is much more obviously the case within a peasant or tribal (but crucially a non-modernist) social setting where the sentiments that ground the material momenta of life are *warm-blooded*, but it is just as true of modernist Euro-capitalism itself, which is powerfully driven by the motive force of unbounded greed. Indeed, if there is a sense in which Euro-capitalism can be considered distinct from all preexisting economic formations, it is only in the extent to which such indecorous impulses (which have existed in a bounded form within all societies) have been universalized as a wholesale condition of existence.

Decolonizing the Peasantry

In their seminal *Theses on the Peasantry*, Blaut et al argued that the very concept of the peasantry was itself a reductionist one (having been shaped overwhelmingly by the experience of the West European or *yeoman* peasantry) and ill-suited to addressing the widely divergent geographic, economic, political, and cultural realities that have shaped peasant societies outside of Europe. They refer explicitly to the problem of Euro-imperialism and colonialism, which have exerted such a profound impact upon the formation and peculiar genesis of peasant structures in Latin America, Africa and Asia, which are, to a very great extent, a “product of imperialism.”⁸² Some like Bagchi⁸³ have

from the Prison Notebooks (New York: International Publishers, 1971) or Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸² J.M. Blaut et al, “Theses on the Peasantry,” *Antipode* 9:3 (December, 1977).

⁸³ Jairus Banaji, “For a Theory of Colonial Modes of Production,” in Rajani Kanth ed. *Paradigms in Economic Development* (Armonk: M E Sharpe, 1994).

argued in favour of a distinct approach to the ‘colonial mode of production,’ which would correct for some of the distortions of orthodox Marxist theory in its overemphasis upon the development of capitalism *within* Europe, and address the rather different pattern that has obtained *outside* of Europe, which defies comprehension as either Feudal or capitalist, but rather manifests itself as a form of *superexploitation* that is geared toward the accumulation needs, not of the domestic economy, but of the European centres of power.

The more recent work of Hobson⁸⁴ and other notable theorists⁸⁵ has highlighted the constitutive role of European racist ideology in structuring the global economic and political order over the past two centuries (helping, incidentally, to explain the divergent experience of white colonies such as Canada and Australia). As Quijano has observed, this system of racial classification has played a particularly important role with respect to the development of capitalism within Latin America, where the condition of waged labour became institutionalized as a white privilege to be denied the largely indigenous population, who were instead subjected to various forms of colonialist nonwage labour control, ranging from the encomienda system that was imposed in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, to the later regime of Iberian serfdom (which, incidentally, was unlike that we find in Europe, where serfs received the protection of their feudal lord and often the possession of cultivable land⁸⁶). As a result of the deeply ingrained Eurocentric biases of modernist social science, however, the true character of Latin American history

⁸⁴ John Hobson, “One Logic or Two,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (December 2007).

⁸⁵ See, for example, Shahid Alam, *Poverty from the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

⁸⁶ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South 1:3* (2000), 538

and society has been largely overlooked, and, instead, there has been an attempt to artificially impose upon them the peculiar categories and social ‘laws’ that have been derived from the European historical frame, and, with the usual expansionary and conquistadorian zeal, carried far beyond their ‘natural’ boundaries. In the words of Quijano,

Each category used to characterize the Latin American political process has always been a partial and distorted way to look at this reality. That is an inevitable consequence of the Eurocentric perspective, in which a linear and one-directional evolutionism is amalgamated contradictorily with the dualist vision of history, a new and radical dualism that separates nature from society, the body from reason, that does not know what to do with the question of totality (simply denying it like the old empiricism or the new postmodernism) or understands it only in an organic or systemic way, making it, thus, into a distorted perspective, impossible to be used, except in error.”⁸⁷

As Isakson has observed,⁸⁸ the contemporary debate amongst Latin American theorists regarding the viability/non-viability of peasant societies throughout the region has, in many ways, recapitulated the earlier European debate between the orthodox Marxists and the heterodox Russian Narodniks.⁸⁹ On the one side, the Depeasantists (or Proletarianists as they have often been termed) have assumed the mantle of orthodox Marxism in arguing that the pressures of social differentiation introduced by the extension of the market into the rural hinterland will ultimately lead to the dissolution of peasant society, as small scale producers are steadily undercut by more ‘efficient’ industrial methods, leading to the bifurcation of their society into a two tiered one composed of a small and

⁸⁷ Quijano, 573

⁸⁸ S. Ryan Isakson, *Between the Market and the Milpa*, PhD Thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst (2007), 19.

⁸⁹ For opposing sides of this debate, see Roger Bartra, *Agrarian Structure and Political Power in Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Arturo Warman, *We Come to Object* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

wealthy rural bourgeoisie and a large landless proletariat (such as occurred most notably within the Western European context). This orthodox view was originally crystallized within the context of the Bolshevik revolution, where theorist cum practitioners such as Lenin and Kautsky were influential in formulating what became known as the *Agrarian* or *Peasant Question* as an attempt both to clarify the imputed theoretical relationship between the peasantry and capital within Marxism, but also, more significantly, to address the political obstacles posed to the newly empowered Bolsheviks, who were preoccupied, above all, with transforming the predominately peasant society in Russia.

Although Marx himself had vacillated somewhat on the question of the peasantry (from his famous denunciation of ‘village idiocy’ to his less publicized forays into the study of primitive communism in Russia and elsewhere⁹⁰) it would be fair to say that many of his later disciples were less nuanced in their wholesale embrace of the progressivist teleological framework that would become the core of orthodox Marxism.⁹¹ Within this perspective, the peasantry were seen as little more than an archaic remnant to be duly modernized and rendered ‘efficient’ (as, indeed, occurred in such tragic and misguided fashion within the former Soviet Union). The pessimistic attitude evinced by many orthodox Marxists toward the peasantry can be traced, in no small part, to the productivist inclinations of Marx himself, and, more broadly, to the dominant fixation upon material progress and expansion which is so much a feature of modernist thought (what Kanth has termed our *syndrome of accumulation*⁹²). In their overriding emphasis

⁹⁰ Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

⁹¹ See, for example, Esther Kingston-Mann, *Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁹² Rajani Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997).

upon the perceived *material* shortcomings of peasant small-scale production, many modernist scholars have neglected not only those features which may be more advantageous from a narrowly economic point of view,⁹³ but also the deeper *non-material* forces that have actuated peasant society. The widespread view of peasant production as somehow ‘backward’ or ‘inefficient’ is not so much incorrect as it is *facile*, in my view, since peasant society is not constituted solely or even primarily on the basis of material production, but rather as an outgrowth of the underlying familial moral economy, and must be judged, if at all, from the perspective of the communitarian bonds and social affinities that are engendered within.

The original opponents of the Lenin-Kautsky view of the peasantry were the Russian Narodniks, who were less willing to consign their peasant society to the already overflowing modernist ‘dustbin of history’ (in a noble deviation from the overall progressivist fervour of the age), and argued, contrary to the orthodox Marxist line, that this was a more integral social form that could sustain itself even within the bosom of capitalist modernity. The inheritors of this view in the Latin American context have been the Peasantists (or Campesinistas) who have maintained that the peasantry will remain a viable force throughout the region for any number of reasons. Isakson has identified two main lines of argument amongst the Peasantists, which, although not incompatible with one another, are nonetheless distinct. In the first camp are those who, following the work of Gunder Frank,⁹⁴ Amin⁹⁵ and others, have argued that the peasantry fulfills a vital

⁹³ See, for example, Robert Netting, *Smallholders, Householders: Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive, Sustainable Agriculture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁹⁴ Andre Gunder Frank, “The Development of Underdevelopment,” *Monthly Review* (September 1966).

functional role within capitalist accumulation, providing a source of cheap food and labour for example. The second camp is occupied by those who see the peasant-based family economy as a more resilient mode of production, which is predicated not upon the profit motive but rather upon subsistence and egalitarian impulses that tend to counter the forces of social differentiation introduced by capitalism (this latter view is exemplified in the work of Arturo Warman,⁹⁶ Gustavo Esteva⁹⁷ and others).

Many of these Peasantist scholars draw upon the work of the early 20th century Russian Economist Alexander Chayanov, whose studies dealt with the organizational aspects of the peasant family farm in his native Russia, which, he argued, should be treated as a distinct economic system in itself, and not in the manner of many Marxists as a form of incipient capitalism based upon petty commodity production. The Problem with this perspective, as Shanin has observed, is that it “uses the unrealistic logic of total exclusion, i.e. either peasants or capitalism, either market or family farming, etc. The fact that contradictory characteristics persist side by side should not lead to their intellectual reduction but to more realistic models and to more sophisticated analysis which treats them for what they are, i.e. a social reality, rich in complexity and historical connotations.”⁹⁸ According to Chayanov, there is a natural balance that is struck within peasant economies between the satisfaction of the material needs of the family and the subjective distaste of manual labour. He maintained that neoclassical concepts such as the

⁹⁵ For a recent contribution, see Samir Amin, “World Poverty, Pauperization and Capital Accumulation,” *Monthly Review* (October 2003), <http://www.monthlyreview.org/1003amin.htm>

⁹⁶ Arturo Warman, *We Come to Object* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

⁹⁷ Gustavo Esteva, *Grassroots Postmodernism* (New York: Zed Books, 1998).

⁹⁸ Teodor Shanin, “Short Historical Outline of Peasant Studies,” in Teodor Shanin ed. *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 473.

law of diminishing marginal returns for labour were inapplicable in the case of the peasantry, where production would persist regardless of decreasing value, so long as the “needs of the family are not satisfied.”⁹⁹ Similarly, he rejected the effort on the part of many economists¹⁰⁰ to circumvent “the absence of wages by imputing values to unpaid family labour”¹⁰¹ and thereby to assimilate the peasantry within the logos of capitalism, since this failed to account for the natural ceiling that is placed upon peasant production (and hence also expansion) by the ‘drudgery averse’ character of peasant labour.

In many ways, Marx’s condemnation of peasant idiocy would seem to pale in comparison to the “ubiquitous spread of ‘advanced’ industrial cretinism that is so marked a feature of contemporary western capitalism,”¹⁰² and which has attended the intensified division of labour within modernist societies. Here, the natural human aversion to excessive and monotonous toil has been overcome through the imposition of an ideology of scarce means and limitless wants, which is a rather striking departure from the typical pattern within tribal and peasant societies, where material wants have been more carefully balanced and circumscribed.¹⁰³ Although it assumes its starker form within the discipline of mainstream economics, the doctrine of ‘more is better’ (what is sometimes derided as the vulgar ‘pig principle’) must be seen as a much more pervasive feature of our society and culture, which is conceptualized, in many ways, as a *material organ of accumulation*. The fallacy inherent in the productivist weltanschauung lies in the

⁹⁹ Basile Kerblay, “Chayanov and the Theory of Peasant Economies,” in Teodor Shanin ed., *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 177.

¹⁰⁰ For a contemporary example, see Gary Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁰¹ Kerblay, 177.

¹⁰² Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 138.

¹⁰³ John Gowdy ed., *Limited Wants Unlimited Means* (Washington: Island Press, 1997).

valorization of *material* abundance above all else, and the resultant failure to apprehend the truer and far simpler route to *psychic* abundance which might be found in the greater peace and repose of a world not bent upon endless toil and strife (what the economic anthropologist Marshall Sahlins famously termed the ‘Zen route’ to contentment¹⁰⁴). But alas, the trade-off is never presented as such within modernist societies, where the notion that *more* material enrichment might actually lead to *less* collective contentment would be regarded as an absurd non-sequitur.

Indeed, even as astute an observer as Chayanov failed to recognize that the characteristic of peasant *self-exploitation*¹⁰⁵ which he identified, was little more than a reflection of the normal ethic of hospitality and mutuality that we find manifest within the familial *social economy of affections*. Ultimately I would argue that the subsistence orientation of the peasant family economy is rooted in what Shiva and other Ecofeminists have referred to as the *feminine principle*¹⁰⁶ (i.e. in the ordinary civilities and benignities of women). One might ponder, for example, the difference between a gift that is freely given (as within the familial domain of care¹⁰⁷) and one that is forcibly coerced, or more subtly expropriated (as in the capitalist pursuit of surplus wealth) to better appreciate the contextual and, above all, *affective* quality of our shared hominid existence.¹⁰⁸ In many ways, modernism might be seen as a form of anthropic denial, which robs humans of their innate affinity with the natural world and with each other (what Marshall Sahlins

¹⁰⁴ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1972).

¹⁰⁵ A.V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

¹⁰⁶ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1989).

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Genevieve Vaughn, *Women and the Gift Economy* (Toronto: Inanna, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Frans De Waal, “How Animals Do Business,” *Scientific American* (April, 2005).

has referred to as the *transpersonal* fabric of existence¹⁰⁹) and submerges them within a cold and sterile contractualism that is the foundation of our civil society (Weber's 'iron cage').

Needless to say, mainstream economics has fared no better in this regard, as the discipline has remained mired in its own egoistic cage of assumptions, which have utterly blinded Economists to the simple realities of the peasant family economy. Within the arena of formal development economics, views of the peasantry have shifted only more recently from the formerly paternalistic attitude evinced under Modernization theory, which conceived of surviving peasant societies as somehow irrational or backward (as reflected in the debate surrounding the backward-sloping labour supply curve) to the 'optimizing peasant' paradigm, developed by Lipton et al beginning in the 1970s, which has reflected a somewhat more nuanced and sympathetic posture on the part of mainstream economists. Nevertheless, as Mehmet has observed, the overall context within which this academic shift has occurred has been marked by the consolidation of a systematic "anti-rural bias" amongst many theorists and technocrats, who, by and large, have been willing to condemn peasant communities to a "low-equilibrium trap, while Western donors [have] supplied cheap food aid and concentrated on building urban industries and infrastructure."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the universalization of economic theory and analysis has itself reflected a deep-seated cultural imperialism on the part of the West, which has not only functioned as a tool of Western national interests in many cases but has also "denied the cultural diversity that exists in non-Western branches of

¹⁰⁹ Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2008).

¹¹⁰ Ozay Mehmet, *Westernizing the Third World* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 64.

humanity, where group and community rights are often held in higher esteem than individualism, and cooperation rather than competition is prized.”¹¹¹

Modernity, Resistance and Peasant *Otherness*

Although this has invariably incorporated issues of class and economic exploitation, I will argue that the phenomenon of peasant resistance to neoliberalism has ultimately rested upon a more fundamental struggle between the ideological and cultural encroachments of modernity and the preexisting non-modernist culture. Indeed, this conflict is manifest not only in the contemporary stirrings of the non-Westernized world, but also in the premodern history of Europe itself, where the fiery peasant-based millenarian or chiliast movements of the late medieval period were primarily oriented around “recreating the primal egalitarian state of nature and were explicitly opposed to historical [or unilinear] time.”¹¹² A particularly interesting feature of the Zapatista movement has been the manner in which this has tracked the ritualized *calendrical schedule* that has guided Mayan political action throughout history, tracing as far back as the Spanish conquest of the Peten Itza town of Tayasal in 1697 (which was in accordance with Mayan prophesy). Gossen has pointed to several recent events, such as the signing of the San Andreas peace accords in February of 1996, which occurred shortly before the commencement of the ritual of solar renewal known as *Carnival*, and the brutal massacre of Acteal in which forty three Zapatista supporters (predominately women were children)

¹¹¹ Mehmet, 8.

¹¹² John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002), 25-26.

were murdered by a government allied Tzotzil militia in December of 1997, in the midst of the winter solstice.¹¹³

The significance of this ritualized action lies in the recurring cycles of death and rebirth which are seen to govern not only the behaviour of the cosmos, but of human life on Earth as well. According to Batalla, this prophetic strain of thought is ultimately rooted in a different conception of time evinced by many indigenous groups throughout Mexico:

As opposed to the Western conception, time in Mesoamerican civilization is circular, not linear. The universe proceeds through a succession of cycles that, although not identical, pass through the same stages in an unending spiral. When one cycle ends, a similar one begins. Humans fulfill their own cycle, which is in harmony with the other cycles of the universe.¹¹⁴

As Batalla has observed, the perseverance of ideas and customs such as these is actually much more widespread throughout Mexican society, and is manifest not only in rural areas, where the cultivation of the traditional *milpa* plot is still commonplace amongst indigenous and mestizo peasant communities alike, but even in the urban ladino culture, where life is everywhere “structured in terms of contrast with that of the Indian, by the necessity of permanently marking everything with an indelible ‘not Indian.’”¹¹⁵ The history of Mexico, according to him, has embodied the ongoing struggle between the

¹¹³ Gary Gossen, “Everything has begun to Change,” in John Watanabe and Edward Fischer ed., *Pluralizing Ethnography* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004).

¹¹⁴ Guillermo Batalla, *Mexico Profundo* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 38.

¹¹⁵ Batalla, 51.

authentic Mesoamerican civilizational legacy of the country, and the artificial Westernization project that has been imposed from the outside, and whose latest manifestation has been the ideology of neoliberal developmentalism that has provoked such widespread disaffection on the part of many indigenous and peasant communities. The root of the problem with Western-led development is stated succinctly by Todorov: “No one asked the Indians if they wanted the wheel, or looms, or forges; they were obliged to accept them. Here is where the violence resides, and it does not depend upon the possible utility of these objects.”¹¹⁶

From the perspective of the peasantry, the unilateral imposition of the neoliberal policy programme must be seen in the context of a broader history of subordination and exploitation in which peasants have been rendered over and again as the “object of schemes and plans designed elsewhere and of profits drawn mostly by others.”¹¹⁷ Although the adverse impact upon Mexican peasant agricultural producers (who have suffered acutely from the importation of heavily subsidized U.S. crops) has undoubtedly fuelled much of the contemporary opposition to neoliberalism, we should not fail to notice that this movement has been actuated, to a large extent, by the imperative of cultural self-preservation. Indeed, this is in keeping with my overall argument that we cannot treat issues of economy and culture as, in any sense, distinct, but must ultimately view these as *mutually interdependent* aspects of our existence. In the case of the Zapatista movement, it was the repeal of the ejido system of communal land ownership under NAFTA which provided the initial impetus for their 1994 uprising. However, this

¹¹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York: Harper, 1984), 179.

¹¹⁷ Teodor Shanin, *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 8.

move on the part of former President Salinas amounted to more than an assault upon the material basis of peasant subsistence agriculture, since, as Wolf has observed, the ejidos have fulfilled a vital cultural function within indigenous communities, where they have lent “support to their accustomed way of life and reinforced their attachment to their traditional heritage.”¹¹⁸

It is not only peasants, but also workers, women and indigenous peoples, who have been amongst the perennial victims of the Euro-modernist onslaught; and, indeed, these subaltern groups (who together comprise the vast preponderance of humanity) still live on in varying degrees of subjugation within the bosom of modernist society itself. What I would venture to suggest is that there is an important and often overlooked relationship between the ‘internal’ *other* and that which is seen as ‘external,’ supplementing the findings of Fanon¹¹⁹ and Said,¹²⁰ and affirmed in the work of many contemporary Postcolonial scholars.¹²¹ What Joseph Conrad once referred to as the ‘not so pretty business’ of colonial conquest and plunder was prefigured, in many ways, by a local history of European intolerance, which would only later “spread its shadow from nearby hearts of darkness to those far over the sea.”¹²² Particularly momentous was the British Anglo-Saxon encounter with its own internal ‘Celtic periphery,’ which would become the model of how to contend with peasant, tribal and other non-modernist elements within. Likewise, the Spanish reconquest in the 15th century, which resulted in

¹¹⁸ Eric Wolf, “Group Relations in a Complex Society: Rural Mexico,” in Teodor Shanin ed. *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 52.

¹¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

¹²⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹²¹ See, for example, Nitasha Kaul, *Imagining Economics Otherwise* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹²² Thomas A. Brady Quoted in Noam Chomsky, Year 501 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993), 7.

the destruction of the “more tolerant and cultured”¹²³ civilization that had flourished under Moorish rule (along with the expulsion of the Jewish and Muslim population within) would ultimately stoke the most bloodthirsty impulses of the conquistadors as they ravaged the great civilizations of Central and South America. Above all, a sense of innate superiority, which was more savage than ironic, pervaded the entire Euro-colonial endeavour, and, although there were noble deviations from this Imperial mentality, such as a Las Casas in Spain or the German Marx in England, these were few and far between (and remain so today).

Although the formal European dominion over Latin America ended more than two centuries ago in some cases, the baleful legacy of Eurocentric ideas, institutions and values still weighs particularly heavily in this part of the world, where the process of decolonizing social relations and attitudes remains unfinished business. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this chapter, the impact of Western social science, which has remained in thrall to the tenets of Eurocentrism and the dominant materialist mode of analysis, has ultimately hindered our understanding of peasant society as it exists in Latin America and many other parts of the world today. Although the contemporary peasantry does not exist apart from the broader society in which it is embedded, there is no cause, in my view, to see the *subsumption* of peasants within the capitalist market system as necessarily leading to their *supersession*. As I have attempted to highlight throughout, the endurance of the peasant-based family economy is ultimately rooted in its consonance with our more fundamental human nature, and, for this reason, we should be cautious in imputing its imminent demise (indeed, the experience of the European

¹²³ Ibid, 5.

peasantry might be seen as more the *anomaly* than the *standard* in this regard).

Ultimately, Latin Americans, much as Asians, Africans and others, must look beyond the narrow horizons of Europe in order to more fully appreciate the cultural depth and difference of the world in which they live. In the words of Quijano, “it is time to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror where our image is always, necessarily, distorted. It is time, finally, to cease being what we are not.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Quijano, 574.

Chapter Three

In the competition between the moral logic of Indigenous people and rational logic of free market globalization, Indigenous people are the protagonists for change who offer the greatest challenge to the New World Order defined by superpowers. In the process of the struggle, those who are least integrated into the communication and exchange networks of the emerging global market are gaining skills that enable them to pose an alternative to global hierarchies.¹²⁵

We don't need the government's permission to build our own autonomy.¹²⁶

European Universalism and the Subaltern Countermovement

The Zapatista uprising of 1994 caught many observers by surprise, and particularly within the West, where the spurious tenets of neoliberal globalization remained almost entirely unchallenged within polite commentary. The image of poor indigenous peasants rising up in rebellion (and at a time when rebellion itself was widely regarded as *passé*) against the ineluctable forces of 'free trade' and the capitalist market utopia seemed to collide so fundamentally with the supremacist assumptions of the Westernized world, that it was scarcely recognizable at the time. Of course, subsequent developments have vindicated the radical critique of the EZLN, and the organization now appears as part of a much larger global social countermovement against neoliberalism, which is embodied, for example, in the growth of the World Social Forum and in the current indigenous resurgence throughout Latin America. As Almeyra has observed, the Zapatista uprising "did not remain isolated and confined to Chiapas: it stimulated the extension of other

¹²⁵ June Nash, *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 25.

¹²⁶ Quoted in John Ross, "Celebrating the Caracoles: Step by Step the Zapatistas Advance on the Horizon," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005), 46.

forms of autonomy in other indigenous communities that were not run by the EZLN, a massive peasant mobilization, and serious worker and popular conflicts.”¹²⁷

In many ways, the Zapatistas have epitomized the *nouvelle esprit* of contemporary resistance to neoliberal globalization, which has been animated, above all, by the interaction between local and transnational scales of praxis. On the one hand, the EZLN has been firmly rooted in the local struggle for autonomy on the part of the Mayan communities of Chiapas, which, from the inauguration of European colonization up until the present day, have comprised the most oppressed and downtrodden segment of the population. On the other hand, the movement has been seized upon by solidarity activists from around the world, who have appealed to the symbolic and inspirational power of the Zapatista uprising (what Gibler has referred to as “one of the most beautiful stories ever told”¹²⁸) in their own efforts to counter neoliberalism. As Olesen has observed, activists have appropriated the legacy of the Zapatistas “with the blessing of the movement itself. In fact, they have encouraged it from the earliest days of the uprising. They have done so because the transnational spotlight gives them some protection vis-à-vis the Mexican state and military. The main reason, however, is that in their analysis, the root of many of the problems that Mexicans face must be found outside the borders of the country.”¹²⁹

What I will argue is that, in their unique conception of autonomy, the Zapatistas have managed to effectively bridge the divide between two divergent views of human

¹²⁷ Guillermo Almeyra, “Mexico is Becoming Latinamericanized,” in Francois Polet ed. *The State of Resistance* (New York: Zed Books, 2006), 53.

¹²⁸ John Gibler, *Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt* (San Francisco: City Light Books), 189.

¹²⁹ Thomas Olesen, “Mixing Scales: Neoliberalism and the Transnational Zapatista Solidarity Network,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005), 84.

society, balancing and, in many ways redefining, the traditional *communitarian* view and the somewhat more novel *cosmopolitan* perspective. The difficulty in reconciling these distinct approaches has derived from the apparent disjunction between the more ‘inward looking’ social bonds that characterize the many different cultural, religious and ethnic communities on Earth, and the broader universalistic structures that are imputed to govern the human community as a whole. The foremost obstacle posed in this regard has been the ideology of modernism itself, which, as I have emphasized throughout, fails to adequately encompass our true human (i.e. hominid) nature, which is rooted, above all, in the emotive ties of kinship that are formed within the family and the larger community. In the words of Kanth, “We flourish most naturally in packs and herds, i.e. in Families and Tribes [our natural state], and inevitably, and transparently, rot and decay in ‘Civil society,’ succumbing to Anomie and/or Angst, or worse.”¹³⁰ Rather than as an impediment to the realization of a truly universalistic vision of human society, communitarian bonds and affinities must be understood as the unifying thread that serves to bind our diverse experience as a species and the only true basis for the construction of a genuine cosmopolitanism.

In some ways, the Zapatista movement might be seen as emblematic of a new “subaltern cosmopolitanism”¹³¹ from below, which is exemplified not only in the widespread opposition to the contemporary spread of neoliberal globalization throughout much of the non-Western world, but also in the repudiation of the false universalist

¹³⁰ Rajani Kanth, “Challenging Eurocentrism: 45 Theses,” in Rajani Kanth ed. *The Challenge of Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5.

¹³¹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abysmal Thinking” *Eurozine* (June 2007).

premises of Eurocentric modernity that have been reflected in the historical conquest of Western social science more broadly. Indeed, the implicit bias amongst many cosmopolitan theorists has been their uncritical acceptance of so much of the European cultural patrimony, and, in particular, their wholesale embrace of the core tenets of liberal philosophy (as reflected in the influence of Kant and other Enlightenment luminaries within their intellectual corpus). As Singh Mehta has observed, the theoretical claims of Western liberalism, which have been closely implicated with the European colonial project throughout its history, “typically tend to be transhistorical, transcultural, and more certainly transracial. The declared and ostensible referent of liberal principles is quite literally a constituency with no delimiting boundary: that of all humankind.”¹³²

By way of contrast, the Zapatista ideal of a “world where many worlds fit”¹³³ presents a rather striking rebuke to the dominant cultural imperialism of the West, and the movement has adopted what might be termed a position of “radical pluralism,”¹³⁴ seeking not to impose their own model or designs upon the rest of the world, but rather to build bridges between themselves and other victimized and subaltern groups. Indeed, we can see this Zapatista ideal reflected in their poetic metaphor of an “archipelago of islands,”¹³⁵ which conveys their own unique placement within the larger constellation of forces of which they are a part (what is often referred to as a global ‘movement of movements’). According to Esteva, their position “challenges the assumption that there is

¹³² Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 51.

¹³³ Quoted in R.J. Maccani, “Enter the Intergalactic: The Zapatistas’ Sixth Declaration in the US and the World,” *Upping the Anti* 3 (April 2007).

¹³⁴ Gideon Baker, *Civil society and Democratic Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 135.

¹³⁵ El Kilombo Intergalactico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything. An Interview with Sucomandante Insurgente Marcos* (Durham: PaperBoat Press, 2007).

a fundamental sameness in all human beings. There are *human invariants*—what distinguishes us from other species—but not *cultural universals*.¹³⁶ In his words,

The Zapatistas resisted the secular, liberal temptation, of “liberating” themselves from their own culture in order to adopt some “universal” ideologies or values. Well affirmed in their own cultures and communities, they opened themselves to wide coalitions of the discontented. Their *localization* is thus radically different to both globalization and localism. It invites those still searching for a change in the frame of *One World* to create a whole new world, in which many worlds can be embraced. It is an invitation to go *más allá* (beyond) mere cultural resistance or economic or political claims (in a struggle for a bigger piece of the existing cake), towards an epic of transformation open to many cultures. It is an invitation, not preaching or instructing. It is not a sermon or a lesson, but a gesture.¹³⁷

Rather than in the familiar and inveterately modernist mould of a revolutionary vanguard intent upon seizing power over society (what Quijano has referred to as the “Eurocentric mirage”¹³⁸ of socialist revolution) the Zapatistas appear more humble in their aims and aspirations, which are oriented instead around the concrete needs of their own communities than in the abstract utopian visions of modernism for which so many revolutionaries have fought and killed. The local orientation of the movement, which has been interpreted by some Western academics as a retreat from the larger platform of national liberation, might be seen instead as a noble involution into the communitarian bastion of the moral economy, and characteristic of much of the resistance that has been engendered by neoliberal globalization, which has been actuated, above all, by the

¹³⁶ Gustavo Esteva, “Celebration of Zapatismo,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005), 153.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America,” *Nepantla* (2000), 220-221.

imperative of *cultural survival* and has led to the creation of a “plurality of shelters against such depredations.”¹³⁹

The central principle upon which the EZLN have built their movement has been the notion of *encounter*, through which diverse communities are encouraged to come together, not with the aim of eradicating mutual difference, but in order that they might enrich themselves and each other through dialogue and interchange (a sentiment that is captured beautifully in the motto of ‘what is missing, is yet to come’). The earliest instantiation of this policy of encounter actually occurred within the Zapatista organization itself, between the guerrilla fighters of the National Liberation Front and members of the indigenous communities of Chiapas, which would ultimately result in the subsumption of the guerrillas within the very communities which they had come to radicalize. As Holloway has observed, this novel approach on the part of the Zapatistas has turned the notion of revolution on its head in many ways, as this has become “a question rather than an answer. ‘Preguntando caminamos: asking we walk’ becomes a central principle of the revolutionary movement ... The revolution advances by asking, not by telling; or perhaps even, revolution is asking instead of telling, the dissolution of power relations.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Rajani Kanth, “Neoliberalism, Globalization, and the New World Order: Old Wine in New Bottles,” Paper presented at the *PEKEA International Conference*, Santiago Chile, 10-14 September 2002, <http://en.pekea-fr.org/Bgkpapers/Kanth.doc>

¹⁴⁰ John Holloway, “Dignity’s Revolt” in John Holloway and Eloina Pelaez eds., *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling: Pluto Press, 1998).

The Zapatistas and the Struggle for Indigenous Autonomy

Within the Zapatista worldview, power is understood not as a force of domination or conquest (as in the ubiquitous Western frame) but rather as an ineffable aspect of life *within* the community itself, leading to the central focus of the movement upon issues of self-government and autonomy. The Zapatista conception of autonomy is, in many ways, broader than other competing visions in that this calls for a ‘pluralism of autonomies,’ and the movement has managed to successfully steer away from a number of the pitfalls and “potential dead ends”¹⁴¹ in the autonomous struggle, including those versions of autonomy in which collective rights over resources are denied or the largely token acknowledgement of multiple ethnicities in what Stahler-Sholk has termed the ‘neoliberal multiculturalism trap.’ In many ways, the experiment in local autonomy on the part of the EZLN should be seen less as an end in itself than as a means to attaining their larger social and political objectives. As Aparicio and Blaser have observed, the Zapatista struggle for autonomy, much as other popular mobilizations throughout Latin America, has entailed a fundamental challenge to the dominant project of Westernization posed by the insurrection of formerly subjugated knowledges, which have elicited the “possibility and plausibility of a politics other than the one conceived within the narrow, yet until recently insurmountable, limits of modernity.”¹⁴² The far-reaching scope of the Zapatista struggle for autonomy has been summarized by Cleaver in the following terms:

¹⁴¹ Richard Stahler-Sholk, “Resisting Neoliberal Homogenization,” *Latin American Perspectives* (2007), 128.

¹⁴² Juan Ricardo Aparicio and Mario Blaser, “The ‘Lettered City’ and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America,” *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008), 66.

The affirmation of national identity, of cultural uniqueness, and of linguistic and political autonomy is rooted not only in an extensive critique of the various forms of Western culture and capitalist organization that were imposed on them through conquest, colonialism and genocide, but also in the affirmation of a wide variety of renewed and reinvented practices that include both social relations and the relationship between human communities and the rest of nature.¹⁴³

The overriding emphasis of the Zapatistas upon issues of self-government and local autonomy has, of course, reflected the concrete aspirations of the indigenous communities themselves, for whom autonomy has been widely regarded as fundamental for the fulfillment of other claims “such as cultural recognition, bilingual education, or a guaranteed representation in elected office.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, although they have played a significant role within this movement, it is important to recognize that the indigenous struggle for autonomy within Mexico is larger than the EZLN, and encompasses a wide range of social actors and organizations. The contemporary historical genesis of the autonomist movement can be traced, in particular, to the formation of the Independent Front of Indigenous Peoples (FIPI), which was created as a branch of the Independent Union of Agricultural Workers (CIOAC) in order to mobilize the indigenous peasantry in the late 1980s. A particularly important watershed was the experiment in indigenous self-government within the municipality of Las Margaritas in the early 1990s, which was spearheaded by FIPI alongside of the Union of Tojolabal Ejidos and Villages, and which would lay the groundwork for the later development of the Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (RAPs). As Barmeyer has observed, the creation of the RAPs alongside of the Zapatista autonomous municipalities in the mid-1990s, “resulted from a dialectical

¹⁴³ Harry Cleaver, “The Chiapas Uprising,” *Studies in Political economy* (1994), 147.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Niels Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 55.

relationship between two autonomist currents, which was fertile at first but later became increasingly competitive.”¹⁴⁵

The foremost distinction between the Zapatista conception of autonomy and that held by many other indigenous groups within Mexico and throughout Latin America has been the strict insistence of the movement upon maintaining a *wall of separation* between their own organization and the official state. Indeed, this political programme has even led the EZLN to distance itself from the sympathetic example of Evo Morales and the MAS, cautioning Mexicans ‘not to look towards Bolivia’¹⁴⁶ in a controversial statement made during the recent Other Campaign that was launched in 2006 as a counterpoint to the official Mexican elections. The concrete embodiment of this ideology of separation has been the *Resistencia* policies, which were implemented in 1996 as part of a concerted effort both to undermine the stranglehold of the Mexican government upon the Mayan communities of Chiapas, as well as to uphold a dignified self-image on the part of the EZLN (barring the acceptance of government aid among other features of life in resistance). According Barmeyer, however, the rejection of state resources on the part of the movement has proven to be a rather bitter pill for many communities, whose provisional acceptance of the policies of la Resistencia must be seen in retrospect more as a matter of faith than of real material or moral commitment on the part of the membership.

¹⁴⁵ Barmeyer, 57.

¹⁴⁶ Almeyra, 55.

Although it was intended as a gesture to uphold the dignity and self-respect of the Zapatista communities, the rejection of state resources would also increase the hardships of life in resistance and exacerbate existing communal tensions that would culminate in the defection of a number of communities (San Emiliano and La Gardenia most notably). Of course, it should come as little surprise that these tensions and divisions have been actively nurtured, and, in many cases, fomented by the state itself; however we should not dismiss the very real impact of the Zapatista policy in this regard, which may have reflected a violation of the popular will of the base communities themselves. According to Barmeyer, the self-perception of poverty and austerity which had been an integral component of the Zapatista discourse in its formative years and had once served to unify the diverse lowland settlements of the Lacondón and Las Canadas regions, should have ultimately been “replaced or at least balanced by another self-perception along the lines of ‘we are enjoying the fruits of our struggle and our hard-earned autonomy.’”¹⁴⁷

Although the adherence of the EZLN to the Resistencia policies has undoubtedly carried a political cost for the movement, it is important to recognize that this has also crucially prevented the subsumption of Zapatista communities within the administrative apparatus of the state (such as has befallen many North American indigenous groups sadly). Indeed, we might better see the gulf that separates the realm of official politics within Mexico from the experience of the rural population of Chiapas as a protective hedge, which has functioned to preserve the vitality and integrity of indigenous communities which would have had little hope of maintaining themselves as a distinctive

¹⁴⁷ Barmeyer, 134.

cultural force within a ‘competitive’ political environment (rigged in typical modernist fashion to produce the desired outcomes). As Esteva has observed, even the sympathetic incorporation of indigenous peoples within the dominant project of nation-building in Mexico would, given the imbalance of power, inevitably entail “complete subsumption by the state order.” The most that could be hoped for from such a strategy would be the dubious ‘success’ of indigenous peoples within the venal spoils system that is the essence of organized politics in the West (what else, after all, is our much vaunted ‘balance of interests’ than a balance of greed?) As Esteva rightly concludes, such an arrangement “would be a Pyrrhic victory; it would be exchanging one’s birthright for a bowl of beans.”¹⁴⁸

Even within Chiapas we can witness the contrast between the older and more conservative indigenous highland communities, which have been incorporated to a greater extent within the framework of official governance, and the more recently settled areas of the Lacondan jungle, which have constituted the local base of support for the Zapatistas. According to Nash, the “neglect of the [lowland] colonizers by the federal government, which had never even delivered voting urns to the settlements before the uprising, meant that none of the co-optive strategies dividing highland communities operated in this context.”¹⁴⁹ Above all, I would argue that it has been their historic alienation from the realm of modernist politics that has contributed, more than anything else, to the vibrant spirit of independence and resilience which has characterized the

¹⁴⁸ Gustavo Esteva and Carlos Perez, “The Meaning and Scope of the Struggle for Autonomy,” *Latin American Perspectives* (March 2001), 128-129.

¹⁴⁹ June Nash, “Beyond Resistance and Protest,” in John Watanabe ed. *Pluralizing Ethnographies* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004), 178.

contemporary activism of the Maya, who still remain largely unassimilated within the dominant Westernized political and social discourse. As Higgins has observed, the fact that the Maya have “fought continually to maintain an ongoing allegiance to a culture of their own making [is] an historical trend only understandable with reference to the scant opportunity they had to participate in and benefit from the legitimized practices of the modern state.”¹⁵⁰ Although this fact had been tempered somewhat under the aegis of the older corporatist Mexican state, where “marginalized peoples had been promised that redistributive services would reach them someday,”¹⁵¹ the predatory forces of neoliberalism that were unleashed in the 1970s and 80s spelt the demise of this historic compromise (culminating in the repudiation by President Carlos Salinas of the radical content of the Mexican revolution, which was embodied in the ejido system of collective land ownership).

Imaginary Mexico versus Mexico Profundo

Interestingly, some scholars have suggested that the roots of the contemporary indigenous autonomist movement within Mexico may actually lie in the very culturalist policies of Indigenismo which were promoted actively by the Mexican state throughout the twentieth century as part of the overall project of nation building.¹⁵² According to Mattiace, the ideology of Indigenismo, which originated as an assimilationist project intended to incorporate the indigenous inhabitants of the country within the dominant political and social structure, ultimately led to the emergence of a more participatory

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 181.

¹⁵¹ George A. Collier and Jane F. Collier, “The Zapatista Rebellion in the Context of Globalization,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* (July 2005), 452.

¹⁵² Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 231-232.

framework in the 1960s and 1970s (inspired by the critical contributions of Guillermo Batalla and others) through which indigenous groups were able to “appropriate these [official] spaces to create their own cultural and political projects.”¹⁵³ Nevertheless, the central role of the state in the formation of these policies could not help but to render them subordinate to the overarching colonialist mandate of intervention and surveillance which has governed the historical relations between indigenous groups and the central authority; in this vein it is important to note that the National Indigenist Institute (which was the concrete embodiment of the ideology of Indigenismo) often constituted the full extent of state penetration within indigenous communities.¹⁵⁴ According to Higgins, the real impact of Indigenismo and the institutional apparatus of the INI was, in fact, to turn indigenous populations against the leadership of their own communities, which had been most heavily implicated in these programs and were now seen as having been co-opted by the official government. Following the work of the noted anthropologist Jan Rus, he contends that the enforcement of native rule through Indigenismo ultimately led to a “crisis in native community organization,” whereby indigenous populations were increasingly forced to “look beyond their traditional communities [in] a sincere search for alternative ways to be ‘Indian.’”¹⁵⁵

The enduring conflict between indigenous groups within Mexico and the modern independent nation state can be located in the ideological construction of Mexican national identity itself, which has relied crucially upon the invocation of the doctrine of

¹⁵³ Shannan L. Mattiace, *To See with Two Eyes: Peasant Activism and Indian Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 71.

¹⁵⁴ Mattiace, 81.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 133.

mestizaje, which upholds the imputed racial or cultural unity of the population through an historical legacy of miscegenation.¹⁵⁶ As Batalla has observed, the fallacy inherent in this ideology has been the fundamental conflation between the processes of biological or racial mixture which have undoubtedly occurred throughout large parts of the country (and, indeed, have been publicly celebrated in some instances such as in the iconic Virgin of Guadalupe), and the pressures of cultural contact, which have failed to lead to any significant fusion between the two cultures within the context of European colonial domination.¹⁵⁷ Rather than seeking to accommodate the authentic *Mesoamerican* civilizational roots of the country, whose reality is still manifest in a wide swath of life (and not only amongst self-identified indigenous groups but also in the overlapping customs and traditions of the mestizo peasantry) what we have witnessed in Mexico has been the unilateral imposition of Western designs upon a resistant body politic, and what has amounted to a systematic campaign of *de-indianization* waged at the highest levels. In the absence of a truly pluralistic social model, which might better accommodate the genuine pluriethnic character of Mexico itself, elites have opted (quite *suicidally* in the view of Batalla and others) to suppress and deny the cultural patrimony of indigenous groups, consigning their innumerable capacities and contributions to the moribund status of “dead weight.”¹⁵⁸

According to Batalla, the history of the country from the time of the European conquest onward has been shaped by this deep-seated confrontation between two distinct

¹⁵⁶ Mattiace, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 17.

¹⁵⁸ Batalla, 67.

sociocultural visions that are embodied in the starkly different pathways of *Imaginary* and *Deep Mexico* and the power imbalance that exists between them: “groups embodying the two civilizations have permanently confronted each other, sometimes violently. They constantly confront each other in the activities of daily life, which put into practice the deeper principles of their respective cultural matrices.”¹⁵⁹ There is, indeed, a profound dissonance between the image of Mexico as this is propounded by elites and institutions affiliated with the dominant Western nationalist project, and the reality of Mexico, which is ultimately grounded in a different conception of cyclical time, and a resistance to the sort of futuristic or utopian impulse that is at the heart of the dominant project.¹⁶⁰ It is important to recognize that the current neoliberal market utopia, which has foundered in such dramatic fashion of late, is only the latest incarnation of a centuries long progressivist crusade to uproot the traditional way of life that has existed throughout the country and to implant the dominant mode of Western monoculture. As David Noble has observed, the Zapatista uprising of 1994, which was timed to coincide with the commencement of the NAFTA agreements, was, above all, a repudiation of this form of abstract and futuristic utopianism and attests to the reawakening of another more ancient understanding of the human condition. This understanding is, according to him, of the imminence and precariousness of existence and is reflected in a popular slogan of the movement: *Ya Basta*, meaning *enough is enough*.

¹⁵⁹ Batalla, xvi.

¹⁶⁰ Gustavo Esteva and Carlos Perez, “The Meaning and Scope of the Struggle for Autonomy,” *Latin American Perspectives* (March 2001).

In their radical critique of the dominant political and economic institutions of the country, the Zapatistas have reflected, above all, the historical experience of indigenous groups as a subjugated and oppressed population *within* the modernist nation state. Following the work of Higgins and others, I would contend that their “lack of a clearly discernible large-scale governmental strategy or policy was not a failure of political vision on their part but rather the result of an alternative historical and political perspective that clashes with the modernist governmentalities of the orthodox political elite.”¹⁶¹ To a large extent, this alternative perspective has been shaped by the same forces of Euro-exclusivism and chauvinism that have guided the ruling modernist political elite in its historic relations with the indigenous/mestizo majority (in what can be seen as something akin to a self-fulfilling prophesy). As Rabbas has observed, it has been their historical experience of exclusion within the dominant framework of Eurocentric modernity (the ‘Europe and its others syndrome’) which has engendered the resistance of those groups who both “exist *without* (outside) history and the state, and consequently who define themselves against the state and history.”¹⁶²

Rather than as a negative dynamic, however, we should see this as a liberatory convergence, which has allowed the Mayans of Chiapas to escape the mechanical dependencies of state and market, freeing their own creative energies and leading to a flourishing of genuine participatory democratic forms, such as in the consultative assemblies that have preserved and extended traditional indigenous ideas of governance

¹⁶¹ Higgins, 185-186.

¹⁶² Jose Rabbas, “On the History of the People Without History,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005), 210.

(e.g. *to govern by obeying*). Whereas democracy in the West has been reduced, by and large, to a mere procedural shell in line with democratic elitist criteria, it remains a living and breathing force for the Mayan peasants of Chiapas for whom governmental functions are seen as “a prerogative of society”¹⁶³ rather than of a separate stratum comprised by political parties and an ‘official’ government. Perhaps the most significant difference between this horizontal structure and our own vertical arrangement of politics may lie in the social composition of the assembly, whose members are not professional politicians or elites but rather ordinary people who spend one week a month as political practitioners and the rest of their time occupied with ordinary demands and concerns. This is, of course, in marked contrast with our own elite-driven system in which ordinary people cannot get elected, and, even if they could, would have a nearly impossible time sustaining their organic connections to the community from which they have emerged.

The Zapatista experiment in participatory democracy reveals the enduring relevance of communal bonds as an alternative vector through which to organize social and political life throughout much of the non-Western world. As Aparicio and Blaser have observed, this communal mode, which contrasts sharply with the abstract universalistic structure of modernist ‘representational’ knowledge (which is exemplified in the technocratic governance of the modernist nation state), embodies nothing less than a “ceaseless co-adjusting of multiple experiences in co-existence. Knowledge in this context is relational, emergent and contextual. Its truth-value goes hand in hand with its

¹⁶³ Gustavo Esteva, “Celebration of Zapatismo,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005), 139.

conduciveness to such co-adjusting of multiplicity.”¹⁶⁴ I would argue further that the *social economy of affections* which underpins our communal livelihood actually reflects a much higher order of complexity in many ways, and is far more conducive to the flourishing of our human well-being and autonomy than the cold and sterile contractualism of modernist civil society (in fact, unwritten ‘contracts’ enacted through our natural bonds of kinship and mutuality are all the more binding for their being based upon mutual affective ties). As Kanth has rightly observed however, it has been the routine stock and trade of modernist theorists to disregard or superficially disparage as ‘primitive’ what is ne’er understood: “contra the hallucinations of a Durkheim, the so-called ‘organic solidarity’ of modern society is only a shell compared to the ontic depth of what he despised as ‘mechanical’ solidarity.”¹⁶⁵

The EZLN and Cultural Transcendence

In its attempt to wrest the Mayan communities of Chiapas from the historic grip of internal colonialism, the Zapatista movement has embodied a politics of redemption, which has sought to reaffirm the value of traditional ideas and practices that have long been suppressed within the exclusivist paradigm of the modernist nation state. In their passionate defence of local culture against the hostile encroachments of neoliberalism and of Western monoculture more broadly, the movement has represented a fundamental challenge not only to the ruling political and economic establishment within Mexico, but also to many of the core tenets of Western civilization itself (and, in particular, to the

¹⁶⁴ Aparicio and Blaser, 86.

¹⁶⁵ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 61.

materialist foundations of our collective *weltanschauung*). In many ways, the EZLN has epitomized what Sahlins once referred to as the “resistance of culture,”¹⁶⁶ and I would argue that their radical pluralist ethic, which is rooted in the sharply divergent experience and understanding of the varied indigenous groups of Chiapas (Tzeltal, Tojobal, Cho’l and Tzotzil), may ultimately prove to be a far more potent force for change than the high analytics of scientific socialism (which fails to depart from many of the core conventions of modernism after all). It has been the false universalist premises of Eurocentric modernity, which have been imposed with such arrogant certitude upon the rest of the world, that have constituted the foremost *obstacle*, in my view, to the construction of a more genuine and inclusive universalism such that could encompass the whole of humanity (perhaps the alternative model of a “multiplicity of universalisms”¹⁶⁷ suggested by Wallerstein might offer a viable alternative in this respect).

Of course, the historical modernist project never has been and never could be fully ‘universalized’ within Mexico or anywhere else, as this would mean the ultimate banishment of morality from our social existence and the utter annihilation of the affective ties that still exist between humans, and which endure even within modernist societies in the underlying structure of the family (which offers perhaps the best example of how we can delink ourselves from the grim logic of commodification). In seeking to stem the advancing tide of Western commodification and social alienation, which is carried out today under the rubric of neoliberal globalization, the Zapatistas and their structural allies have harboured an alternative vision of social and political life that is

¹⁶⁶ Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 519.

¹⁶⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism* (New York: New Press, 2006), 84.

rooted in the communitarian horizons of the historic and contemporary *moral economy*.

Inspired by religious sentiments, such as those expounded by the influential Catholic Liberation theologian Bishop Samuel Ruiz, the movement has also reflected the enduring power of spirituality or religiosity throughout much of the Non-Western world, which, contra the impressions of Marx, “is not always the opiate [but], more often than not, is the amphetamine of the ‘masses’”¹⁶⁸ Following Kanth, I would argue that this mounting tide of cultural resistance, which is embedded not only within ancient forms of wisdom but also in the concrete experience of a multitude of non-modernist groups who have preserved their own cultural independence, “cannot fail, because [it] does not understand, or accept, the rationalist materialist notion of failure.”¹⁶⁹ In a single word, it is *transcendent*.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 151.

¹⁶⁹ Rajani Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 53.

¹⁷⁰ I should caution the reader that my own, much as any other scholarly perspective on the Zapatista movement, should not be confused with the self-perception of the membership of the EZLN (which is, after all, both varied and diverse)

Conclusion

Throughout my Thesis, I have attempted to trace the historic and ongoing struggle between the forces of Eurocentric modernity, which are today embodied in the prevailing hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, and the resistance of surviving non-modernist groups, which I see as the inspiration behind the local insurgence of the Mayan Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. One of the criticisms that might here be levelled against my foregoing analysis would be that, in upholding this innate distinction between modern and non-modern elements, I have merely perpetuated the conventional binary division between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ which has been such an enduring staple of the dominant Euro-modernist discourse over the past two hundred years. A more fruitful line of inquiry, according to some, would involve an analysis of the complex interaction between modern and non-modern forces (including the widespread *invention of tradition*) and the manner in which Modern features of life have been assimilated within the context of local culture (as exemplified in the successful use of cyberpolitics by the Zapatistas for example) leading to the pluralisation or *Indigenization* of modernity, which is now treated as a culturally ubiquitous phenomenon.

However, as Aparicio and Blaser have observed, this denial of modernist *specificity* is not without its drawbacks, foremost among which is the “tacit acceptance of modernity’s terms to conceive difference. This problem is evident in the quick equation of any claim of non-modernity with an argument about traditionalism, which is in turn equated with an invitation to ignore the real world of interactions and a thoroughly enmeshed present. With the parameters of the discussion set in such a way that the

alternatives are either true modernity or unreal traditions, few can conceive of something real existing outside modernity.”¹⁷¹ This hegemonic view of modernism has not only subverted our understanding of the possibility of “radical difference,”¹⁷² but has also overstated both the adaptability and transformative power of modernity, which remains overwhelmingly seeded with the cultural and religious patrimony of northern Europe, leading to the inherent tension within the processes of modernization and development whereby “non-Europeans could only be rational and capitalist by dint of *denying* their received culture, heritage, and religion(s).”¹⁷³

Furthermore, I would argue that, even if modernism could be shed of its deep-seated cultural intolerance and effectively *decolonized* (opening the door to the possibility of *multiple modernisms*), that this would, in no way, obviate the more fundamental problematic I have identified in my Thesis, which concerns the widespread denial of our species existence within modern society, as this imprisons the warm-blooded impulses of humanity within the cold and sterile contractualism of our dominant mode of civil society. Indeed, it has been the wholesale denigration of the moral or ethical core of our social existence (a promise which remains as of yet unfulfilled within non-Western societies), that has provoked such furor on the part of a multitude of offended cultures, leading to the incipient *great rejection* of which the Zapatistas are an integral part in my view.

¹⁷¹ Juan Ricardo Aparicio and Mario Blaser, “The ‘Lettered City’ and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America,” *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008), 62-63.

¹⁷² Ibid, 63.

¹⁷³ Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 55.

What should be obvious to all at this historical juncture is that the material blandishments of modernist civilization (which were impressive enough to have swayed Marx in his own productivist inclinations) have been purchased at far too high a cost, and it is now widely accepted that the path of boundless accumulation has wreaked untold ecological destruction (from species extinction, to environmental despoliation, to the corruption of delicate climactic balances and so on). Less often appreciated but no less significant in my view has been the toll of modernist monoculture upon the social and cultural diversity of human life on Earth, as entire groups have been forcibly wrenched from their own self-sufficing moral economies, forced to trade away their precious autonomies, leisure, and simple affinities (i.e. the true path to contentment and abundance) in exchange for the mechanical dependencies of state and market.

The profound dissonance between the modernist and non-modernist gestalt is captured in the traditional Marxist distinction between the society founded upon use-value (what Rosa Luxemburg referred to as the *natural economy*) and that founded upon exchange. The transition from a needs-based to a greed-based economy was, of course, one of the defining features of the Euro-capitalist revolution, and would ultimately herald the demise of the European peasantry, which would become subsumed within the ranks of the petit bourgeoisie and the nascent industrial proletariat. What is interesting to note is the extent to which Marx's own vision of a future Socialist utopia was influenced by his anthropological research into the past, and his understanding of *primitive communism* as this had existed amongst the Russian peasantry most notably.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, there is even a

¹⁷⁴ Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

sense in which the failed experiment in really existing Soviet socialism can be seen as a terribly flawed attempt to restore the essence of a *needs-based* economy within the modernist/productivist wasteland.

What I would argue is that *primitive communism*, rather than residing in some archaic past or an anachronistic present (what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian has referred to as the *denial of coevalness*¹⁷⁵) is, in fact, the enduring mode of life amongst a multiplicity of non-modernist groups, and even within modernist society itself, where the paradigm of familial care and affection has yet to be displaced by the cold nexus of cash and formal contractual relations (which incidentally pale in comparison to the informal and unwritten codes that have obligated humans throughout the ages). Contrary to the arid progressivist visions of modernism, the *subsistence form* of economy is in no sense undeveloped and actually reflects a much more intricate balance of subtle reciprocities and communitarian affinities when compared against the adversarial capitalist pursuit of profit and the command over resources.

As Marshall Sahlins has observed in his reflections on the *familial mode of production* that is predominant amongst tribal and peasant societies alike, the resistance on the part of the constituent domestic units to amassing surplus wealth is not only an outgrowth of the ‘natural ceiling’ that is placed upon usufructuary production in which needs can often be readily met and leisure is favoured to toil, but also of the crucial imperative of preserving the social bonds of community and kinship that flourish most obviously within an egalitarian framework of *relative* (as crucially opposed to *absolute*)

¹⁷⁵ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

poverty. Sahlins famously remarked of this economic type, which is exemplified in the conduct of hunter-gatherers but which can be extended to encompass the whole range of subsistence activities, that it might be regarded as the ‘original affluent society’:

There are after all two roads to satisfaction, to reducing the gap between means and ends: producing much and desiring little. Oriented toward providing a modest supply of consumables, the household economy takes the latter, Zen course. Their needs, we say, are limited. Economic activity does not break therefore into a galloping compulsion, goaded by an interminable sense of inadequacy (i.e. a “scarcity of means”). Work is instead intermittent, sporadic, discontinuous, ceasing for the moment when not required for the moment.¹⁷⁶

There is indeed a clear reminiscence between the picture that has emerged from within anthropology of the typical pattern of labour within tribal societies,¹⁷⁷ and Marx’s own musings upon life within a socialist society, where we all might “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.”¹⁷⁸ Regardless of what Marx’s own position was with respect to primitive communism as he understood it (which, in any case, was certainly more nuanced than what is presented within much of Marx scholarship nowadays) I think it is clear that the study of *actually existing* classless societies and the institutions that have mediated resource use and conflict within these societies can offer us invaluable insight into the *general principles* and *limitations* of our anthropic existence.

At the core of the historical modernist project has been the deeply held Judeo-Christian belief in *human perfectibility*, which is reflected not only in ideas of unbridled

¹⁷⁶ Marshall Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 79. See also, Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972).

¹⁷⁷ John Gowdy ed., *Limited Wants Unlimited Means* (Washington: Island Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁸ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).

economic growth and development but also in the ambitions of many amongst the opposition (whether Socialist, Feminist, or even Anarchist) who accept the premise of Civil society but seek to capture and transform it in line with their own political programme. It has been the uncritical acceptance of this institution, as well as the underlying *entropic* view of human sociality upon which it has been founded, which has constituted the foremost impediment, in my view, to the realization of a more pacific and convivial existence.

Indeed, there is no reason to expect that a saner or more hospitable world could ever emerge from within the sordid den of predations that is Western civil society. Following the work of Kanth, I would conclude that formal political and economic life is simply an extension of the endemic masculine *lust for power*, which is manifest as much in the craven capitalist pursuit of ‘surplus’ and the command over resources as in the immensely destructive imperialist rivalry within the interstate system. Building upon the work of Carol Gilligan¹⁷⁹ and other cultural difference theorists, Kanth has postulated an innate distinction or *bifurcation*¹⁸⁰ between men and women, which is, to a significant extent, an outgrowth of our own species proclivities. As he observes pointedly, “the many misanthropic urges of patriarchal masculinity are too rabid and obvious to be delicately subsumed under the decorous veils of social science that apologetically shift the burden of causation on to ‘economic’ and ‘political’ forces, thereby effectively disguising it as much as its gentler obverse, femininity.”¹⁸¹ Accordingly, it is not to the Hobbesian realm of men ‘red in tooth and claw’ that we should look for the seeds of our collective

¹⁷⁹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁸⁰ Nick Hostettler, “Reclaiming the Past and Outside,” *Journal of Critical Realism* 5:2 (2006).

¹⁸¹ Rajani Kanth, *Breaking with the Enlightenment* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 121-122.

salvation but instead to the domestic economy of care and affection that has been the perennial domain of women and children.

The quiet rise of women and their structural allies (actuated collectively by what Vandana Shiva has referred to as the *feminine principle*¹⁸²) offers us the last best hope, in my view, that this world can yet be spared from the ravages of modernism. Indeed, one of the particularly striking features of the contemporary Zapatista movement has been the formative role of *women* within the organization,¹⁸³ a fact which must be seen as all the more poignant in light of their terrible subjugation within many rural indigenous communities, where practices such as arranged marriage, abduction and even rape still occur with alarming frequency. As Barmeyer has observed, the enshrinement of equal gender rights within the revolutionary laws and the prevailing ban upon alcohol might explain why Zapatista “membership may just have a special appeal for women.”¹⁸⁴ However, I would also contend that the support of many women for the Zapatista insurrection may reside in a deeper affinity with their aims and aspirations, which seek, above all, the restoration of the historic *moral economy*, and the underlying *feminine* attributes of hospitality and nurturance upon which the future of our fragile world must ultimately depend for its survival.

¹⁸² Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1989).

¹⁸³ Guiomar Rovira, *Women of the Maize* (London: Latin America Bureau, 2000).

¹⁸⁴ Niels Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 117.

Bibliography

Alam, Shahid. *Poverty from the Wealth of Nations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Amin, Samir. *Eurocentrism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989.

Amin, Samir. "World Poverty, Pauperization and Capital Accumulation." *Monthly Review* (October 2003). <http://www.monthlyreview.org/1003amin.htm>

Aparicio, Juan Ricardo and Mario Blaser. "The 'Lettered City' and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008).

Arrighi, Giovanni. *Adam Smith in Beijing*. New York: Verso, 2009.

Baker, Dean. *Plunder and Blunder*. Sausalito: Polipoint Press, 2009.

Baker, Gideon. *Civil society and Democratic Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Barmeyer, Niels. *Developing Zapatista Autonomy*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009.

Bartra, Roger. *Agrarian Structure and Political Power in Mexico*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Batalla, Guillermo. *Mexico Profundo*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

Becker, Gary. *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Bellamy Foster, John and Fred Magdoff. *The Great Financial Crisis*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009.

Bhaskar, Roy. A Realist Theory of Science. New York: Verso, 2008.

Bhaskar, Roy. *The Possibility of Naturalism*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Bhaskar, Roy and Alex Callinicos, "Marxism and Critical Realism: A Debate." *Journal of Critical Realism* (May 2003).

Blaut, J.M. et al. "Theses on the Peasantry." *Antipode* 9:3 (December, 1977).

Bluestone, Barr and Bennett Harrison. *The Deindustrialization of America*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.

Boggs, Grace Lee. "Changing Concepts of War and Revolution" (April 5-11, 2009).
<http://www.elkilombo.org/news/041109-boggs-changing-concepts.php>

Bohm, David. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Breckenridge, Carol A. ed. *Cosmopolitanism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

Carey, Alex. *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Chayanov, A.V. *The Theory of Peasant Economy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986.

Chomsky, Noam. "Black Faces in Limousines: A Conversation with Noam Chomsky." *Joe Walker Blog* (November 14, 2008).
<http://blogs.journalism.cuny.edu/josephwalker/2009/01/26/a-conversation-with-noam-chomsky/>

Chomsky, Noam. *Failed States*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006.

Chomsky, Noam. *Year 501*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993.

Cleaver, Harry. "The Chiapas Uprising." *Studies in Political economy* (1994).

Collier, Andrew. *Marx*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004.

Collier, George A. and Jane F. Collier. "The Zapatista Rebellion in the Context of Globalization." *Journal of Peasant Studies* (July 2005).

Cox, Robert. *Approaches to World Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996.

Cox, Robert. *Production, Power, and World Order*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Dahl, Robert. *Democracy and its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Davis, Mike. *Late Victorian Holocausts*. New York: Verso, 2001.

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. "Beyond Abysmal Thinking." *Eurozine* (June 2007).

- De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Towards a New Legal Common Sense*. London: Butterworths, 2004.
- De Waal, Frans. "How Animals Do Business." *Scientific American* (April, 2005).
- Diamond, Stanley. *In Search of the Primitive*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007.
- Eichengreen, Barry. *Globalizing Capital*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Ekins, Paul. *A New World Order*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- El Kilombo Intergalactico, Beyond Resistance: Everything. An Interview with Sucomandante Insurgente Marcos (Durham: PaperBoat Press, 2007).
- Escobar, Arturo. *Cultures of Politics Politics of Culture: Reenvisioning Latin American Social Movements*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.
- Esteva, Gustavo. "Celebration of Zapatismo." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005).
- Esteva, Gustavo. *Grassroots Postmodernism*. New York: Zed Books, 1998.
- Esteva, Gustavo and Carlos Perez. "The Meaning and Scope of the Struggle for Autonomy." *Latin American Perspectives* (March 2001).
- Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2005.
- Ferguson, Thomas. *The Golden Rule*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*. New York: Verso, 2008.
- Fleetwood, Steve ed. *Critical Realism in Economics*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Gibler, John. *Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt*. San Francisco: City Light Books.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Goswami, Amit. *The Self-Aware Universe*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1995.
- Gowdy, John ed. *Limited Wants Unlimited Means*. Washington: Island Press, 1997.

- Graeber, David. *Possibilities*. Oakland: AK Press, 2007.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- Gunder Frank, Andre. "The Development of Underdevelopment." *Monthly Review* (September 1966).
- Gunder Frank, Andre. *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.
- Hauser, Mark. *Moral Minds: The Nature of Right and Wrong*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.
- Higgins, Nicholas. *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914-1991*. New York: Vintage Press, 1994.
- Hobson, John ed. *Everyday Politics of the World Economy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Hobson, John. *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Hobson, John. "One Logic or Two." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (December 2007).
- Hoil, Juan Jose and Ralph Loveland Roys. *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1933.
- Holloway, John and Eloina Pelaez eds., *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*. Sterling: Pluto Press, 1998.
- Hostettler, Nick. "Reclaiming the Past and Outside." *Journal of Critical Realism* 5:2 (2006).
- Hudson, Michael. "De-Dollarization: Dismantling America's Financial-Military Empire." *Global Research* (June 13, 2009).
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=13969>

- Hudson, Michael. "Financial Crisis: Sustaining Unsustainability." *Global Research* (April 4, 2009). <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=13054>
- Hudson, Michael. *Super Imperialism*. London: Pluto Press, 2003.
- Ikenberry, G. John. *Liberal Order and Imperial Ambition*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
- Illich, Ivan. *Toward a History of Needs*. New York: Bantam, 1980.
- Isakson, S. Ryan. *Between the Market and the Milpa*, PhD Thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst (2007).
- Johnson, Simon. "The Quiet Coup." *The Atlantic* (May 2009).
<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200905/imf-advice>
- Kanth, Rajani. *Against Eurocentrism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Kanth, Rajani. *Breaking with the Enlightenment*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997.
- Kanth, Rajani. *Capitalism and Social Theory: The Science of Black Holes*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992.
- Kanth, Rajani. *The Challenge of Eurocentrism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Kanth, Rajani. "Neoliberalism, Globalization, and the New World Order: Old Wine in New Bottles." *PEKEA International Conference* (Santiago Chile, 10-14 September 2002).
<http://en.pekea-fr.org/Bgkpapers/Kanth.doc>
- Kanth, Rajani ed. *Paradigms in Economic Development*. Armonk: M E Sharpe, 1994.
- Kaul, Nitasha. *Imagining Economics Otherwise*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Krugman, Paul. "Big Table Fantasies." *New York Times* (December 17, 2007).
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/17/opinion/17krugman.html>
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Odysseys*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Latouche, Serge. *The Westernization of the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.
- Lawson, Tony. *Reorienting Economics*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992.

Lomnitz-Adler, Claudio. *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Maccani, R.J. "Enter the Intergalactic: The Zapatistas' Sixth Declaration in the US and the World." *Upping the Anti* 3 (April 2007).

Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2002.

Marx, Karl and Fredrick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1998.

Marx, Karl. *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*. New York: International Publishers, 2007.

Mattiace, Shannan L. *To See with Two Eyes: Peasant Activism and Indian Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003.

Mehmet, Ozay. *Westernizing the Third World*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Mehta, Uday Singh. *Liberalism and Empire*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Liveable World*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Mies, Maria and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen. *The Subsistence Perspective*. New Jersey: Zed Books, 2000.

Molesky-Poz, Jean. *Contemporary Maya Spirituality*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

Nash, June. *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Netting, Robert. *Smallholders, Householders: Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive, Sustainable Agriculture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

Olesen, Thomas. "Mixing Scales: Neoliberalism and the Transnational Zapatista Solidarity Network." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005).

- Panitch, Leo and Sam Gindin. “‘Imperialism and Global Political economy’ – A Reply to Alex Callinicos.” *International Socialism* (Winter 2006).
- Polanco, Hector Diaz trans. Lucia Rayas. *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-Determination*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997.
- Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.
- Polet, Francois ed. *The State of Resistance*. New York: Zed Books, 2006.
- Pollin, Robert. *Contours of Descent*. New York: Verso, 2003.
- Pollin, Robert. “We’re all Minskyites Now.” *The Nation* (October 29, 2008). <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081117/pollin>
- Quijano, Anabol. “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1:3 (2000).
- Rabbas, Jose. “On the History of the People Without History.” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005).
- Ross, John. “Celebrating the Caracoles: Step by Step the Zapatistas Advance on the Horizon.” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005).
- Rovira, Guiomar. *Women of the Maize*. London: Latin America Bureau, 2000.
- Sahlins, Marshall. *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays*. New York: Zone Books, 2005.
- Sahlins, Marshall. *Stone Age Economics*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1972.
- Sahlins, Marshall. *Tribesmen*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968.
- Sahlins, Marshall. *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Saunders, Kriemild. *Feminist Post-Development Thought: Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism, and Representation*. New Jersey: Zed Books, 2002.
- Sen, Amartya. “Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Summer 1977).
- Shanin, Teodor. “Chayanov's treble death and tenuous resurrection.” *Journal of Peasant Studies* (January 2009).

- Shanin, Teodor. *Late Marx and the Russian Road*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.
- Shanin, Teodor ed. *Peasants and Peasant Societies*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive*. New Jersey: Zed Books, 1989.
- Stahler-Sholk, Richard. "Resisting Neoliberal Homogenization." *Latin American Perspectives* (2007).
- Strange, Susan. *Casino Capitalism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Thompson, E.P. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century." *Past and Present* 50 (1971).
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America*. New York: Harper, 1984.
- Van De Mieroop, Marc ed. *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East*. Baltimore: CDL Press, 2002.
- Vaughn, Genevieve. *Women and the Gift Economy*. Toronto: Inianna, 2007.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. *European Universalism*. New York: New Press, 2006.
- Warman, Arturo. *We Come to Object*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Watanabe, John and Edward Fischer ed., *Pluralizing Ethnography*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004.
- Wolf, Eric R. *Europe and the People without History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.
- Wright, Ronald. *Time Among the Maya*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1989.
- Zerzan, John. *Future Primitive*. New York: Autonomedia, 1994.
- Zerzan, John. *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002.