

DOMINANT TENDENCIES OF OUR DAYS. IS OUR TIME RUNNING OUT?¹

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This text proposes to be an anguished reading of the conditions that we face today on the planet Earth, both from the point of view of the survival of life and the possibilities of building democratic, egalitarian, culturally plural and diverse societies, societies that can live in peace and celebrate life rather than war, destruction and death.

Of the multiple tendencies and processes that could be mentioned to characterize the present period of time, only five global processes will be dealt with here, processes that feed one another as the main tendencies that conform the present and future of mankind and life: 1) the tendencies to destroy the conditions that make life possible on the planet Earth; 2) the growing mercantilization of all the dimensions of life, both social and natural; 3) permanent war and the increasing militarization of the planet; 4) the historical decline of liberal democracy; 5) the multiple, varied expressions of resistance, re-existence of peoples, communities, organizations and movements whose broad plurality of historical and cultural experiences all over the planet oppose these destructive processes and reclaim the life, democracy and cultural diversity of peoples.

¹ Partial version of the lecture delivered at the Plenary 4: "Panorama y retos de las ciencias sociales en América Latina y el Caribe" (*Overview and challenges for social sciences in Latin America and the Caribbean*) of the *XXII Asamblea General de CLACSO/IV Conferencia Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Ciencias Sociales*, "Herencias, crisis y alternativas al neoliberalismo" (*Legacies, crises and alternatives to neoliberalism*), Río de Janeiro, 25 August 2006.



1. THE TENDENCIES TOWARDS SHORT- AND MEDIUM-TERM DESTRUCTION OF THE CONDITIONS THAT MAKE LIFE POSSIBLE ON THE PLANET EARTH

The most severe of all the threats that face humanity and life on the planet earth today is precisely the destruction of the conditions that have made life possible. If a brake is not put on the accelerated destructive processes that threaten us today, if there is no life, everything else lacks all meaning. The principal threats to life are today clearly a consequence of human action in its demographic dimensions, modes of territorial occupation, technological models and styles, patterns of consumption, imagination and conceptions of what constitutes wealth and the good life.

For decades now, ever since the first signs of global alarm², the tendencies to destroy life and the non-viability of the current patterns of human relations with the rest of nature have become increasingly familiar. It suffices to look at the media. Endless international conferences and pacts are held. Environmental and ecological studies fill more and more space in the academic sphere. All countries now have public agencies such as Ministries of the Environment and environmental laws and regulations. And yet the processes of destruction of life have not only failed to slow down, but rather have grown even faster.

There are many ways of conceptualizing and evaluating and/or measuring the impact of human activity on the life systems of planet Earth. There are significant levels of uncertainty, and confrontations continue as to the dimensions of such problems. What does seem clear is that beyond the polemics concerning conceptualizations and measures, for a long time now we human beings have together and of course in an extremely unequal manner been using the load capacity of the planet Earth far beyond its regenerative capacity.

One of the most widely known efforts to evaluate these impacts is the approach of the so-called ecological footprint, that is to say, a measure that expresses synthetically the human impact on the planet, both in terms of consumption of resources and energetics and how the natural systems use their capacity to process waste. This is expressed in terms of the biologically productive surface required for human ends. It has been estimated that the impact of human activity surpassed the planet's overall bio-capacity

² Highlights among the first texts that contributed to start these global debates as of the 60s and 70s are: *Silent Springs* by Rachel Carson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1962) and the famous report commissioned by the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*, by Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, (Universe Books, New York, 1972).



in the 80s, and that it has not stopped growing since then. Between 1960 and the year 2001, the global ecological footprint grew 160%. According to these calculations, in the year 2001 the global step exceeded the planet's overall bio-capacity by about 21%.³ The living planet index calculates the state of biodiversity on the planet, measuring the density of the populations of vertebrates that live in terrestrial zones, fresh water and marine systems across the world. It is estimated that the index dropped approximately 40% between 1970 and 2000.⁴

It is not a matter, however, of some abstract responsibility of "humanity". These conditions of over-use of the planet's load capacity are seen in the deep and growing inequalities of access to the goods that make human life possible. Hundreds of millions of people, especially but not exclusively in the South, lack the goods to enable them to lead a life of dignity.

The inhabitants of the countries of the North have an ecological footprint four times bigger than that of the inhabitants of the countries of the South, while the population of the countries that do not belong to the OECD are together living almost on the limit of the biological productive capacity of the territories occupied by their respective countries. The set of OECD countries uses more than double the biological productive capacity of the territories they occupy.⁵ That means that their levels of consumption are more than twice the levels of sustainable consumption. In this way, they use a great deal of the biological productive capacity that would correspond to the inhabitants of the countries that do not belong to the OECD, that is, most of the populations of the South. According to these calculations, 100% of the excess of humanity's current ecological footprint (in relation to the Earth's biological productive capital) is the product of OECD countries. Thus, for example, while the African population uses only 77% of the ecological productive capacity of the territory it occupies, in Western Europe the ecological footprint exceeds the ecological productive capital available in its territory by 53%. This figure is 55% in the United States, in spite of its relatively low demographic density, the immense extension of its territory, and the extraordinary wealth of natural resources that it boasts.⁶

³ WWF, The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Global Footprint Network, *Living Planet Report 2004*, Gland, Switzerland, 2004, p.10. [<http://assets.panda.org/downloads/lpr2004.pdf>].

⁴ Op. cit., p. 2.

⁵ World Wide Fund International, The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Redefining Progress, The Centre for Sustainable Development and the Norwegian School of Management, *Living Planet Report 2000*. Table 2. Ecological Footprint Data: 1996, p. 24.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 27.

This implies that, now that the biological productive capacity of these regions of the world have deteriorated, demands are being made on increasing proportions of the biological productive capacity of the rest of the planet. Given the growing environmental concern of the inhabitants of the Northern countries, and the inclusion of the environment as a criterion of quality of life over the last few decades, and given also the profound inequality of the distribution of power between the North and the South, the growth of the ecological footprint of the Northern countries did not imply a significant deterioration of their eco-systems between 1970 and 1999.⁷ Most of the deterioration in these three decades occurred in the eco-systems of the South. This means that the sustained increase in the levels of consumption of the inhabitants of the North is directly responsible for this deterioration, on account of far higher living standards than what their own natural resources would allow them to sustain. This means that the patterns of consumption in the countries of the North (mostly located in the temperate zones) are mainly responsible for the loss of natural wealth that is taking place in the tropical and temperate zones of the South.⁸

Since the moment that human activity surpassed planet Earth's biological productive capacity, the relations between populations with regard to the use that they make of the planet's biological productive capacity begin to operate in a zero-sum game. In these conditions, while the rich of the planet (regardless of where they live, in the North or the South) go on increasing their levels of consumption (and consequently their ecological footprint), they will be using greater proportions of the biological productive capacity that would correspond to the excluded inhabitants. Based on these zero-sum game conditions, while the inhabitants of the North are richer, the majorities to the South are bound to have less access to the goods of life. Beyond possible technological innovations to transform radically and quickly the efficient use of resources and energetics and drastically reduce the production of waste – technologies that are not in sight – this zero-sum game also leads to consumption of the resources and load capacity projected for future generations (human and non-human). This, of course, is unsustainable.

Perhaps the issue that seizes most attention – and recognition of implied urgency – in the debates on the changes of life-sustaining systems is climate change. Here one has to mention some recent research that illustrates

⁷ Op. cit. p. 1.

⁸ Op. cit. p. 1. The consumption of resources and load capacity of the planet are of course deeply unequal, both in the North and the South. The figures that correspond to these territorial definitions, being averages, present profound inequalities in each territory, and therefore conceal significant dimensions of the inequality that exists in access to natural resources.



dramatically the gravity of the changes underway and stresses the urgency for deep transformations in the patterns and imagination of human life. What seems beyond any doubt is that human action is responsible for most of the Earth's warming during the last half-century, as well as the forecast continuation of these tendencies. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: "There is new and stronger evidence that most of the earth's warming observed over the last 50 years can be attributed to human activities."⁹ Nowadays, only lobbyists and scientists in the pay of some oil transnationals such as Exxon-Mobil, the think-tanks of the United States Right (fundamentalist defenders of a regulation-free market), and the Bush government deny human responsibility for climate change.¹⁰

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased something like 35%. The average global temperature has risen 0.6 degrees Centigrade. According to calculations of the United Nations World Meteorological Organization, from 1990 to 2004, the ten hottest years were recorded since reliable registers started in 1861.¹¹ And the temperatures keep rising. According to NASA, the year 2005 was the hottest on the surface of the earth since such reliable records were made.¹² The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change considers it probable that the continued concentration of greenhouse-effect gases leads to an increase in the average temperature of the surface of the planet of "1,4–5,8 °C in the period from 1990 to 2100. This quantity is 2 to 10 times more than the central figure for warming observed during the 20th century, and it very likely that the projected speed of the warming has no precedents during at least the last 10,000 years."¹³ The tendency is not only for average temperatures to be higher but also for heat waves such as those that have killed thousands in Europe in the last few years to become more and more frequent.¹⁴

⁹ WMO, UNEP, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: Working Group I: The Scientific Basis* [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/007.htm]

¹⁰ For a critical look at these postures, see: ClimateScienceWatch, Promoting integrity in the use of climate science in government. Global Warming Denial Machine, [<http://www.climate-science-watch.org/index.php/csw/C25/>]

¹¹ Kevin Gray, "2004 Among the Hottest Years on Record" *Associated Press*, Buenos Aires, 16 December 2004.

¹² Timothy Gardner, "Undersea gas could speed global warming - study", *Reuters*, 20 July 2006. [http://today.reuters.com/news/newsarticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyid=2006-07-20T192854Z_01_N19270382_RTRUKOC_0_US-ENVIRONMENT-METHANE-SEAS.xml&src=rss]

¹³ United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Grupo Intergubernamental de Expertos sobre el Cambio Climático (IPCC), *Cambio Climático 2001: Informe de síntesis (Summary for policy-makers)*, Wembley, United Kingdom, September 2001. [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/vol4/spanish/009.htm]

¹⁴ Kovats, R Sari and others, "Climate change and human health in Europe", *British Medical Journal*, no. 318, pp.1682-1685, 19 June 1999.

The first systematic study of the changes that occur in the whole Arctic region characterizes global climate tendencies and changes even more accelerated and severe than those witnessed up to now.¹⁵ According to the conclusions of this massive study, the temperature in the Arctic region has risen at a rate almost twice that of the rest of the planet. It is projected that the average temperature of the region will go up between 4 and 7 degrees Centigrade during the next 100 years.¹⁶ In Alaska and the west of Canada, the average temperature has increased between 3 and 4 degrees in the last 50 years.¹⁷ The surfaces covered with snow, glaciers and sea ice have undergone significant reduction over the last few decades as a result these increases in temperature. Over the last 30 years, the area covered by sea ice has diminished about 8%. The decrease in summer has been much more - between 10 and 15%, in some areas reaching as high as 40% between 1960 and 1990.¹⁸ Depending on the presuppositions – especially as regards the levels of future emissions of greenhouse-effect gases – it is forecast that between now and the end of the century, between 50% and 100% of the Arctic polar cap will disappear.¹⁹

The snow cover has diminished 10% in the Arctic region over the last 30 years. The projection is for an additional reduction of between 10 and 20% for the year 2070.²⁰ The surface of glaciers that melt in the summer has increased 16% in Greenland since 1979.²¹ Parallel to this is the thawing of vast tracts of tundra. All this increases the discharges of fresh water, which raise the level of the Arctic and lowers its salinity. It is estimated that the Arctic glaciers, the most important being those that cover Greenland, contain enough water to raise the level of all the oceans about 8 meters,²² to which would have to be added the increased level of the seas on account of the increased volume of water as a result of the rise in temperature.

¹⁵ Susan Joy Hassol, *Impacts of a Warming Arctic*, Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004. This is the first comprehensive study of global evaluation of the impact of climate change on the Arctic and its planetary consequences. Hundreds of scientists from all the countries bordering on the Arctic (Canada, Finland, Russia, United States, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, Island) worked for four years together with the aboriginal communities of the region.

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁹ Op. cit., p. 30.

²⁰ Op. cit., p. 12.

²¹ Op. cit., p. 13.

²² Op. cit., p. 40.

Aside from the traumatic regional consequences that these accelerated changes are bringing to the life of the human beings and species of animals and plants that occupy these territories, the expectation is of great impacts of these changes on the global climate. According to the authors of this study, most of the models of climate change are based on the supposition of a progressive increase in temperature. But there exists the possibility that the gradual climate change may – after a certain unknown and therefore unpredictable point of inflection - trigger off a dynamic of climate change in a non-linear pattern.²³

This possibility of abrupt and unpredicted changes is all the greater both because of the evidence that previous climate changes in the region occurred within spaces of very few years²⁴, and because of the potential feedback effects that changes in the Arctic region can produce on global climate systems. Three potent mechanisms that can operate in this sense are described in this report. In the first place, as a result of the thawing of the polar caps, glaciers and snow-covered surfaces, there is a reduction of the terrestrial surface capable of reflecting and returning to the atmosphere an important amount of solar light. Both the seas and the earth not covered with snow or ice absorb more heat, thereby contributing to accelerating the increase in temperature.²⁵ Secondly, changes may come about in sea currents that play a vital part in regulating global climatic systems. Differences in temperature and salinity between the tropical and temperate zones produce the currents that regulate the temperatures of the North Atlantic and carry rain and moderate the winters of Western Europe. This process depends on a delicate balance and could be interrupted if Arctic temperatures rise or salinity decreases.²⁶ Thirdly, as increased temperatures cause millions of square kilometers of the tundra surface to thaw, much of the organic material trapped in the permafrost would be released. The consequent emissions of methane and carbon dioxide could accelerate the higher temperatures caused by greenhouse-effect gases.²⁷

²³ Op. cit., p. 32.

²⁴ Susan Joy Hassol, op. cit., p. 33¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 22.

²⁵ Op. cit. p. 36. See too: "Climate Variability and Change", *Our Changing Planet The U.S. Climate Change Science Program for Fiscal Year 2006*, p. 42. [<http://www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/Library/ocp2006/ocp2006-hi-clivar.pdf>]

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 36

²⁰ Op. cit., p. 12.

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 38; Janet Wilson, "Global Warming Threat Is Seen in Siberian Thaw", *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, 16 June 2006. Likewise, extraordinary volumes of methane, whose greenhouse effect is much greater than that of carbon dioxide, could be released into the atmosphere as a result of the impact of warming on the immense deposits of methane hydrates existing in the ocean beds. See: Timothy Gardner, "Undersea gas could speed global warming - study", Reuters, 20 July 2006. [http://today.reuters.com/news/newsarticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyid=2006-07-20T192854Z_01_N19270382_RTRU-KOC_0_US-ENVIRONMENT-METHANE-SEAS.xml&src=rss]

There are other processes with potential feedback effects that can accelerate the global climate change and lead to sudden breaks in linear changes. The role of forests in regulating climate and hydric cycles and absorbing greenhouse gases has been fully documented. Reducing the forest-covered surface, especially tropical forests, advances in sustained fashion both as a result of voluntary human action – such as the expansion of the agricultural frontier of transgenic soya in the Brazilian Amazon²⁸ – and of forest fires that are all the more frequent due to droughts and temperature increases. So, at the same time that the global emission of greenhouse-effect gases grows, the capacity of the forests to partially deter its effect becomes weaker.

There is growing consensus concerning the probability of abrupt, non-linear changes happening. According to the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:

“Simulations project that the growing atmospheric concentration of greenhouse-effect gases will lead to changes in the frequency, intensity and duration of extreme phenomena ... Many of these projected changes could provoke an increase in the risk of floods and droughts in many regions, and predominantly adverse impacts on ecological systems, socio-economic sectors and human health.”

*“Some of the projected sudden, non-linear changes in the physical systems and natural and waste sources of greenhouse-effect gases could be irreversible, but some of the underlying processes are not fully known.”*²⁹

Various recent studies have drawn the conclusion that the increase in the intensity of hurricanes over the last few years is the result of higher temperatures in the Atlantic caused by human action.³⁰ Spokesmen for the Pentagon have warned that abrupt climate changes represent a serious threat to world security and could lead to wars, nuclear conflicts, droughts, famine and other disasters.³¹

²⁸ Daniel Howden, “Huge soya farms financed by Cargill, the largest privately owned company in the world, are the rainforest’s new worst enemy”, *The Independent*, London, 17 July 2006.

²⁹ UNEP. WMD, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Cambio Climático 2001: Informe de síntesis. Resumen para responsables de políticas. (Summary for policy-makers)* (Question four). [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/vol4/spanish/010.htm]

³⁰ Michael Mann and Kerry Emanuel “Atlantic hurricane trends linked to climate change,” *EOS, Transactions, American Geophysical Union*, 13 June 2006; Kevin Trenberth and Dennis Shea, “Atlantic hurricanes and natural variability in 2005,” *Geophysical Research Letters*, 27 June 2006; John Schwartz, “2 Studies Link Global Warming to Greater Power of Hurricanes”, *The New York Times*, 31 May 2005.

³¹ United Nations Environment Programme, *Geo-Yearbook 2004-2005. An Overview of our Changing Environment*, Nairobi, 2005, p. 3.



The impacts of climate change will be felt disproportionately in the countries of the South and the less favored segments of the population across the world, which would contribute to increase even more the inequalities as regards health and access to proper food, clean water and other goods. The population of the Southern countries is exposed to relatively higher risks of suffering the adverse effects caused by climate change. As shown by the hurricanes that hit central America and the Caribbean in the last few years, including Katrina that destroyed New Orleans in 2005, the poorer and more excluded the population in question, the less political power it has, with less possibility of taking preventive measures and less capacity to recover following extreme climate events. In addition, “In most tropical and subtropical zones, the projection is for harvests to yield less with most of the forecast increases in temperature”.³²

Many more destructive processes today threaten the survival of life on the planet. An accelerated reduction in genetic diversity is taking place, processes that in many areas could lead to ecological systems collapsing. Sea life has been over-exploited, with situations where large oceanic tracts now practically without any organic life. The volumes of many of the main varieties of edible fish have diminished severely. The sources of fresh water are being exploited beyond their capacity to replenish, and are also being contaminated. There is a tendency for agricultural land to become less available as a result of over-exploitation and contamination by agrochemicals.

Based on this somber but widely known diagnosis, it may be affirmed that today no issue is more urgent to humanity. Beyond generic declarations, this is a problem that deserves priority status on all national and international agendas and should be an express part of all public debates and policies, as well as of the production of knowledge in the academic field. This, of course, is not what happens. The public policies and productive models of almost every country in the world are still moving with irresponsible sloth as if ignoring such matters is enough to make them disappear. Global information has been available for over 30 years on the predictable consequences of climate change. The limits of the planet have been recognized, some measures might be expected to be taken and some indications made that international agreements and conferences on climate have had some impact. The truth is that it is difficult to know whether these efforts have even diminished the rhythm at which the destructive factors are increasing.

. Idem.

Decisions that are presently being taken accentuate rather than deter these tendencies. In this sense, the Chinese model of development is illustrative. Some years ago, when the Chinese government pushed forward its present model of capitalist (neoliberal) development, it found itself in a situation where it was still possible to define a model of alternative transportation to the individual automobile. However, taking the United States model of consumption as the pattern to imitate, the option was made in favor of the automobile culture. With rates of sustained economic growth close to 10% during the last two decades, the Chinese internal market for automobiles went from 220,000 in 1999 to 2 million in 2003, with a 69% increase in sales in 2003. If these trends continue, the country will have 30 million automobiles in 2010 and more cars than the United States in 2030. It is estimated that China accounted for 40% of the increase in the global demand for oil between 2000 and 2004. In order to reach the average of two cars per family, as in the United States, 600 million automobiles would be needed, more than the total that exists today throughout the planet.³³

The continuity of life on the planet will only be possible if a radical redistribution of access to the planet's resources takes place, which would require a deep, fundamental reduction of the patterns of consumption of energy and resources on the part of the rich minorities of the Earth. This involves an equally radical cultural change in the imagination and modes of producing knowledge concerning wealth and "the good life". Otherwise, we shall advance in seemingly inexorable fashion towards deeper and deeper environmental crises, with profoundly unequal consequences. While the segments of the population that have no access to resources or are victims of the major natural disasters will try to move to places where they have better chances of survival, the reaction of the privileged will be to increase racism, anti-migrant walls, and wars.

One of the scenarios (or nightmares) to which the lack of immediate action could lead is that in which, once the real threats to survival are recognized, the more powerful, seeing the demographic growth and "irresponsible" consumption of the population, manage to establish a global State of environmental authoritarianism, a Big Brother to save life on the planet. This authoritarian-technological State would regulate, supervise and control the destructive threats represented by human action in such a way that life in such conditions would cease to be life.

³³ *Newsday* "Editorial: 1.3 Billion Reasons to Worry about Oil", Sunday 15 August 2004.



2. TENDENCIES TOWARDS RADICAL MERCANTILIZATION OF ALL SPHERES OF LIFE.

Part of the logic of the capital regime is the inexorable and expansive tendency to incorporate more and more territories, markets, natural resources, work capacity and knowledge to its accumulation requirements. Since the birth of capitalism there has been conflict over the processes of appropriation and privatization of what in different contexts have been considered part of common goods. Tendencies to mercantilize everything by no means constitute a historical novelty. Nevertheless, after five centuries of global capitalist expansion, significant proportions of human activity and the conditions that make life possible on the planet Earth find themselves fully subjected to the logic of capital. Tendencies towards mercantilization have confronted all sorts of limits and obstacles. Common goods are valued and defended by communities, peoples and movements all over the world.

What today constitutes an extraordinary historical novelty that defines a new moment in the expansion of capital are the ways in which an attempt is being made to overcome these limits and the multiple, simultaneous confrontations that they cause globally. It is possible to distinguish roughly four types of historical obstacles to the appropriation/mercantilization of ways of life, knowledge and resources: geopolitical; democratic; technological; and ideological/cultural/communicational. Faced with these obstacles, the logic of mercantilization that accompanies the expansion of capital tries to knock down barriers against its advance and so generates new spheres of confrontation with those that resist.

Geopolitical limits. This refers to territories, resources and populations that have in some way been at the margin of possible appropriation for



SINCE THE BIRTH OF CAPITALISM THERE HAS BEEN CONFLICT OVER THE PROCESSES OF APPROPRIATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF WHAT IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED PART OF *COMMON GOODS*

geopolitical reasons. Historically, these limits have mainly been represented by territories not colonized or submitted to imperial domination. In the 20th century, the geopolitical limit was the existence of the socialist bloc. With the collapse of Soviet socialism and China's capitalist turnabout, these limits are growing smaller and smaller. Incorporating the majority of the countries in the planet to the WTO is a clear measure of how far this process has advanced.

Democratic limits. These obstacles are the result of the multiple ways in which popular struggles in different parts of the world have managed to conquer rights that placed limits on submitting all the processes of life to the logic of capital. This refers fundamentally to the existence of a public sphere and economic and social rights (education, health, social security, water, etc.) that thanks to the conquests of the democratic struggles have operated with political criteria and were not directly part of the processes of valorization of capital.

Today one of the main areas of the global political struggle involves the defense of the public sphere and the area of rights against the tendencies towards the privatization and mercantilization of these areas promoted by the neoliberal agenda. The changes made in this area over the last few decades have been very radical. There has been a radical limiting of what is public, and rights have been transformed into merchandise. From access to goods and services as a collectively and politically demanded right, one passes to the private contractual relation between a company and a client who has access to the good or service to the extent that he has the capacity to pay. This agenda has been imposed through the political device of foreign debt, policies of structural adjustments and privatizations.

The transformation of the role of the State and the consolidation of these reforms as obligatory norms have been established through the so-called commercial treaties via the World Trade Organization and the TLCs, which have become a new global constitutional order.

Technological and/or cost limits. This refers to the limits met by the process of mercantilization when as a result of the available technology it is not possible to convert a certain good into merchandise, or when this is only possible at too high a cost to be profitable. These limits are characterized by natural resources that are not very accessible poco inaccesibles or have high costs of production or transportation to markets, such as deposits of non-conventional hydrocarbons - bituminous sands, heavy oils, deep-sea deposits, deposits of minerals in not very accessible regions, and so on. Current and progressive technological overcoming of these limits can be seen in deep-sea oil prospection, in the Amazon forest and in the bituminous sands of Canada.

Water is becoming a merchandise not only on account of its growing scarcity but also because of the technological capacity created to make it possible.

Efforts to overcome these limits relate even more fundamentally to the scientific-technological processes of manipulating/appropriating life and matter (biotechnology, nanotechnology and their combinations with information technology and satellite observation), through which colossal steps have been taken to control the generative capacities of life and change them into merchandise. This is accompanied by biopiracy and other means of appropriating the knowledge of indigenous and peasant peoples across the planet, also in order to change them into merchandise.

Agricultural activity today represents the main frontier of the expansion of mercantile logic all over the world. According to the United Nations FAO, approximate 60% of the planet's agricultural area is farmed by traditional or subsistence peasants, the majority being women (FAO, 1998). This agriculture is assumed as a way of life, not fundamentally as an economic activity designed to produce merchandise. The genetic diversity of the plants present in farms, fields and woods of the South has traditionally been available to all³⁴, being conceived as a common good.

While agricultural activity is undertaken by hundreds of millions of peasants and independent farmers with an extraordinary genetic diversity, in a great variety of ecological contexts, with many farming modalities and techniques, using equally varied experiences and knowledge, and with its production mainly for self-consumption and local and/or regional markets, severe limitations allow this activity to be subordinated as a sphere for large corporations to exploit. Changing peasant and independent agriculture into an activity submitted to the control and valorization of capital would require profound changes both to the gamut of genetic varieties used and to the role of peasant knowledge. Industrialized agriculture calls for genetic uniformity and standardization of productive patterns. It demands reproducing the successful (for capital) historical experience of the so-called *scientific administration of labor*³⁵, and carrying

out a systematic process of appropriation/devalorization of the knowledge of peasants and other independent farmers, and their substitution by a scientific-technological knowledge controlled by agro-industry corporations.

In order to achieve this ambitious objective, agro-industry counts on two parallel instruments: the first of a scientific-technological nature and the second of a juridical nature. The new challenges for biotechnology to make genetic manipulation possible in order to create new standardized varieties of seeds with some specific characteristics considered to be of value, seek to replace the immense genetic diversity (not controllable or marketable) by just a few such characteristics. The juridical instruments for the defense of intellectual property allow these new varieties to be patented and incorporated to the technological packages designed to increase control by agro-industrial companies, with the consequent loss of the farmers' autonomy. In this way, the knowledge of peasants and "direct" farmers is being replaced, a knowledge that accounts for the particularities of the various ecological and cultural contexts (type of soil, rain pattern, productive modalities, etc.) and the genetic diversity of their cultivation, by just a few or a single genetic variety and by the standardized norms established by the companies from which the seeds are bought. This represents a death threat for peasant life on the planet.

³⁴ FAO, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Department (SD) 1998 "Special: Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture", *SD Dimensions*, February. [<http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/SUSTDEV/EPdirect/EPpre0040.htm>]

³⁵ Taylor, Frederick W. 1971 *Principios de la administración científica del trabajo*. (Principles of scientific administration of labor) (México: Herrera y Hermanos, Sucs., S.A.).

Cultural/ideological and communicational limits. These limits refer to a gamut of questions that appear in very different spheres. One, closely linked to technological changes and of extraordinary significance in the last few decades, refers to the sphere of the means of social communication and its growing planetary expansion. The globalization of communications through satellite television has become a powerful instrument for diffusing the expectation of universal access to the pattern of consumption represented by the image of the United States spread by its cinema and television.

A relatively recent and particularly significant sphere of the processes of expansion of mercantile logic into spheres in which up to a few decades ago it was not considered adequate, is the accelerated process of submitting increasingly more direct scientific and technological research to the demands of valorization by capital. A deep cultural change is taking place here that is lending new meaning to previous conceptions of science and the university. This is happening with special vigor in the disciplines associated with biotechnology and biomedicine.³⁶ These cultural shifts are fast leaving behind the ethos of science and the university as it appeared in the idealized model described by Robert Merton. According to this classic formulation of the ethos of science as an institution of modern liberal society, scientific activity is characterized by complying with the following normative prescriptions: universalism (this supposes that scientific knowledge transcends particular cultures); communalism (scientific knowledge is



THE GLOBALIZATION OF COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH SATELLITE TELEVISION HAS BECOME A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT FOR DIFFUSING THE EXPECTATION OF UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO THE PATTERN OF CONSUMPTION

³⁶ See: Edgardo Lander, "La ciencia neoliberal", in Ana Esther Ceceña, *Los desafíos de las emancipaciones en un contexto militarizado*, (*The challenges of emancipations in a militarized context*). CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2006.



the fruit of a joint effort, it cannot be appropriated but rather considered as public knowledge); and a disinterested knowledge (the researcher's quest for scientific knowledge should preclude any personal benefit, he should be guided by the search for the truth and the common good).³⁷ The immediate demands of valorization of capital – principally through control of financing – more and more define research agendas, select specializations for new students, the system of remunerating and awarding the teaching staff, the means of divulging and using the results of

research, and all academic culture in general. If it is true that the universities of the United States is where this submission of science, technology and the university to the direct demands of the valorization of capital is more advanced, it is also true that today the universities of the rest of the world are heading in the same direction.

Each of these tendencies towards mercantilization, as will be seen further ahead, generates spheres of social struggle, resistance and confrontation which can properly be characterized as combats of a war of global civilization.

³⁷ Krimsky, Sheldon 2003 *Science and the Private Interest. Has The Lure Of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?*, Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., Lanham, 2003:, pp., 76-77.

3. THE DECLINE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Liberal democracy as a construction of a society of universal citizenship, recognizing equality of political rights with the conquest of enhanced economic and social rights that have made it possible to reduce the tendencies of the profound social differences that characterize capitalist society, has historically been a very exceptional experience concentrated in just a few key countries of the world system. This has not been the experience of most of the world of the South, the ex-colonial world. Today, at a moment when the centers of power celebrate the universalization of this model of democracy, this finds itself globally in the full process of depletion or reversion, including in the few countries where more significant advances have been made to build historical experiences of liberal democracies: Western Europe and the United States. The global order of mercantilization – increasing priority of the rights of capital over the rights of people – and the militarization that characterize neoliberal globalization is undermining the feasibility of this political regime.

In the European Union, whose experience of the welfare State in the decades following the 2nd World War represented the highest degree of democratization of society under the liberal regime, this State model finds itself in full decline. The political debate within the European Union today is not about basic social options (alternative models of the desired society), or about new democratic conquests. Debates are about the speed with which the social and political conquests of the golden era of the welfare State will erode in order to adapt better - and compete – in the conditions created by neoliberal globalization. The Constitution of the European Union seeks to consolidate, constitutionalize and consequently make the neoliberal conquests of the last few decades irreversible. This explains why this text was rejected in the referenda held in France and the Netherlands.

To study the health conditions of liberal democracy, there is no better case than the country that today assigns to itself the divine mission of carrying democracy and freedom to all the countries of the world, if necessary by force: the United States. A country at present going through a deep constitutional crisis, the current situation of the United States political system is a far cry from Lincoln's Utopia of government of the people, for the people, by the people. As never before, the power of the large financiers of political campaigns and the corporative control of the means of communication determine who can be candidate and who can end up elected. The electoral frauds in Florida in 2000 and in Ohio in 2004 which made both the first election and the re-election of George Bush possible, have been widely and convincingly documented.³⁸

³⁸ On the elections of 2000, see: David Margolick, Evangelina Peretz and Michael Shnayerson, "The Path to Florida", *Vanity Fair*, October 2004; and Greg Palast, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, Plume, New York, 2003; on the elections of 2004, see: U.S. House of Representatives, *Status Report of the*

The simultaneous control of the Executive, the Supreme Court and the two branches of Congress by a Republican Party that is increasingly more controlled by corporate interests, the radical Right and Christian fundamentalism have produced deep changes in the political system over the last few years. The so-called “war against terrorism” and the systematic promotion of fear in the population have become effective instruments to justify step by step a significant restriction of the political rights that are supposedly guaranteed in the Bill of Rights³⁹ that is part of the Constitution, as well as a severe weakening of the separation of powers, concentrating more and more decisions in the Executive. Wars are started and justified against “sovereign” States on the basis of systemically distorted manipulation of intelligence information. The government expands the scope of the fields in which it operates in secret to impede public evaluation of its administration. The approval of new laws that seriously restrict the rights of citizens, as in the case of Patriotic Acts I and II, and the reinterpretation of legal norms by the courts to authorize policies that had hitherto been considered clearly unconstitutional, reveal deep shifts in the political system. All this accompanied by communications media that are more and more under the control of large corporations and less and less willing to question and/or denounce the government’s actions. This occurs in part as a result of threats to and persecutions of those who spread information that is damaging to the government,⁴⁰ but it is mainly a reflection of the interests of the head corporations of the large communications conglomerates. Could it be expected of the NBC – the television network owned by General Electric, one of the major military contractors in the United States – to present a critical view of the invasion of Iraq?

One of the most alarming expressions of the increasing concentration of power in an increasingly imperial presidency is the recurrent use of the so-called signing statements, by means of which Bush, when he disagrees with some aspects of a law approved by Congress, instead of vetoing it, signs it (thereby converting it into a mandatory law for all, including the President) and reserves the right to break that law whenever he feels that it contradicts

House Judiciary Committee Democratic Staff, *Preserving Democracy: What Went Wrong in Ohio*, 5 January 2005. [http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/ohiostatusrept1505.pdf]; Bob Fittrakis, Harvey Wasserman and Steve Rosenfeld, *Did George W. Bush Steal America's 2004 Election? Ohio's Essential Documents*, The Free Press, The Columbus Institute for Contemporary Journalism; Robert F. Kennedy Jr., “Was the 2004 Election Stolen?”, *Rolling Stone*. 1 June 2006.

³⁹ Ann Fagan Ginger, *Editora, Challenging U.S. Human Rights Violations Since 9/11* (Report by Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute), Prometheus Books, 2005.

⁴⁰ The Associated Press, “Fearing Legal Battle, Ohio Newspaper Holds Stories”, 9 July 2005.

his interpretation of the Constitution. In this way he bestows upon himself the power to formulate and interpret both laws and the Constitution itself, attributions that the Constitution grants to Congress and the courts.⁴¹ This has been considered a serious threat to the constitutional system of separate powers.⁴² The American Bar Association set up a working group comprised of renowned constitutionalists to assess the implications of such practices. In its report, the working group unanimously concludes that the signing statements constitute a violation of the state of law and the separation of powers established in the Constitution.⁴³

One of the many conclusions reached by the final report of a thorough study on the current crisis of constitutional order in the United States prepared under the responsibility of Representative John Conyers, Jr. (Democrat for Michigan)⁴⁴, is that the Bush government violated the Constitution and laws on the following matters: 1) deciding on the war against Iraq prior to obtaining authorization from Congress; 2) manipulating intelligence information on arms possessed by the Iraq government to justify so-called “preventive war”; 3) persecuting and punishing critics of the war and government policies, many of them being civil servants; 4) lying and deceiving in respect to the development of the war, its cost and its impact; 5) illegally spying on innocent citizens without authorization from the courts; 6) concealing illegal acts for which the government was responsible; 7) refusing to provide Congress and the population with information; and 8) deteriorating civil liberties generally. Among the more controversial aspects of the Patriotic Act, this report mentions authorization given to the FBI to supervise without court order and without prior notice telephone calls and Internet communications and access by intelligence agencies to medical records, registers of purchases in bookshops and consultations in libraries, as well as records of past consumption.⁴⁵

In flagrant violation of the Constitution, the government defends its right to detain United States citizens without any formal charge.⁴⁶ Calling war prisoners “illegal combatants”⁴⁷, the government of the United States

⁴¹ Charlie Savage, “Bush Challenges Hundreds of Laws”, *The Boston Globe*, 30 April 2006.

⁴² Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Judiciary Committee, Hearing on Presidential Signing Statements, June 27 2006. [http://judiciary.senate.gov/member_statement.cfm?id=1969&wit_id=2629]

⁴³ American Bar Association, *Task Force on Presidential Signing Statements and the Separation of Powers Doctrine*, 2006. [<http://www.abanet.org/op/signingstatements/>]

⁴⁴ *The Constitution in Crisis, Final Investigative Report Prepared at the Direction of Rep. John Conyers, Jr.*, August 2006. [http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/iraqrept2.html].

⁴⁵ Op. cit., p. 132. Ver: Barton Gellman, “The FBI’s Secret Scrutiny”, *The Washington Post*, 6 November 2005.

⁴⁶ Tom Jackman, “US a Battlefield, Solicitor General Tells Judges” *The Washington Post*, 20 July 2005.

⁴⁷ Patrice de Beer, “Illegal Combatants, a False Debate”, *Le Monde*, Paris, 29 June 2004.

declares that the norms of the Geneva Convention do not apply to them. The generalized practice of torture has been widely documented, both in Guantánamo⁴⁸ and Abu Ghraib⁴⁹. The Bush government claims that it has the right to use torture as part of its “war against terrorism”⁵⁰. Nothing is known of what goes on in the broad network of secret detention centers sponsored by the United States in various parts of the world and to which not even the Red Cross has access.⁵¹

One consequence of the use of this modality of government of capital, by capital, for capital is lower taxes for the rich, accelerated increase of social inequalities, deterioration of public education, millions of people without medical insurance, walls, guards and armed militias to prevent the entry of immigrants.

In most Southern countries, and certainly in Latin America, no democratic or sovereign national States have ever been constituted. With significant differences between countries, with advances and setbacks, after the political independence of the early 19th century, most of the population in this continent continued to live in societies with a colonial pattern of power, racially hierarchized, with highly excluding patterns of citizenship.⁵² The profound, and even growing, social inequalities that characterize Latin America at present are an affirmation of the persistence and historical continuity of these mechanisms of exclusion. In these neoliberal times, countries that were never properly sovereign have faced tendencies to reduce their autonomy. They operate in a global context dominated by transnational capital, a small group of North countries,

⁴⁸ AFP and The Independent “Constata la Cruz Roja Internacional torturas a presos en Guantánamo”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 1 December 2004; Neil A. Lewis, “Fresh Details Emerge on Harsh Methods at Guantanamo”, *The New York Times*, 1 January 2005; Carol D. Leonnig, “Further Detainee Abuse Alleged”, *The Washington Post*, 26 December 2004; Andrew Buncombe, *The Independent*, London, “Green light for Iraqi prison abuse came right from the top”, 3 April 2005; Rosa Miriam Lizalde, “La tortura, estimulada por Bush, acusa vocero de grupo de juristas estadounidenses”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 26 November 2005.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, “Abuse ‘continued after Abu Ghraib’”, *The Guardian*, London, 9 December 2004.

⁵⁰ Edward Alden, “Dismay at Attempt to Find Legal Justification for Torture”, *Financial Times*. London, 10 June 2004.

⁵¹ Andrew Buncombe “Bush ‘operating secret gulag in eastern Europe’”, *The Independent*, London, 3 November 2005; AFP Y DPA “Cerrar centros de detención secretos, exigen ONU y OEA a Washington”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 29 July 2006; John Hendren, “CIA May Have Held 100 ‘Ghost’ Prisoners”, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 September 2004; AFP Y Notimex, “Detectan más de mil vuelos secretos de la CIA por naciones de la UE”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 27 April 2006; DPA, Reuters and AFP, “Estuvo en Polonia el mayor centro de detención secreto de la CIA: HRW”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 10 December 2005; Afp, The Independent y DPA, “EU ha creado un archipiélago de centros de detención, denuncia AI”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 6 June 2005.

⁵² Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina”, in Edgardo Lander, *La colonialidad del saber. Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. (The colonialness of knowledge. Eurocentrism and social sciences. Latin-American perspectives)*. CLACSO, UNESCO, Buenos Aires, 2000.

and the financial, commercial and military instruments that defend their interests. The territorial base of liberal democracy, the national State, has ceased to be the pertinent sphere for taking the principal decisions that affect the populations of these territories. Democratic international law, which with setbacks and advances has managed to broaden the definitions of the rights of persons and peoples in the period since the 2nd World War, now finds itself in a state of regression. In an imperial global order, the norms of international law and its institutions are observed only insofar as they correspond to the interests of the hegemonic potency. Current Latin-American projects for development, industrialization, subregional or continental integration are based on imagination and betting on patterns of production and levels of consumption and material abundance that are no longer sustainable. Everything seems to indicate that it is already too late for all that. In the present global context, the aspiration of the peoples of the South to achieve “developed” national States, even with liberal democracy, capable of ensuring equality and effective universal rights for all, constitutes a path heading towards the past. It is too late. Other options are necessary.

4. THE AGE OF PERMANENT WAR

Another key characteristic of our age is the state of permanent war, just as Orwell predicted in 1984. The so-called global war against terrorism is by definition a war that has no limits in space or time. It is infinite war, a war with no end. Inasmuch as the tensions - so characteristic in times of liberal democracy - between accumulation and legitimacy have been resolved in favor of accumulation, a regime of growing domination without hegemony is being established. More and more, the search for consensus and legitimacy is being replaced by the promotion of fear and the use of force. This frank exercise of power necessarily generates multiple forms of resistance. According to the neoliberal system, the military dimension is essential and constitutive. The industrial-military complex has more and more economic, political and communicational power, and has even found a

new sphere of valorization by operating as subcontractor in the new dynamics of corporative privatization of war.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, the Lebanon, so-called “intelligent” bombs kill the civilian population systematically and with impunity, massacres that are cynically called “collateral damage”. The indiscriminate murder of civilians – preferably at a distance so that it is not actually witnessed – is trivialized as an inevitable fact of contemporary life, with the televised images on Fox News and the CNN differ little, in aesthetics and zero moral impact, from the films turned out by Hollywood.

The inevitable consequence of imperial policy is increasing militarization of the planet. Iraq was not invaded because it had arms of mass destruction, but precisely because the intelligence agencies of the United States and the



United Kingdom knew that the Saddam Hussein government did not have the military capacity to resist invasion.

The nightmare of nuclear war, which seemed to have been ended together with the Cold War, was once again on the carpet. The leading nuclear powers fail to comply with the obligations assumed by signing the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Arms to reduce their nuclear arsenals. Countries “friendly” to the United States, such as Israel, Pakistan and India face absolutely no obstacles in the so-called “international community”, in the International Atomic Energy Agency or the United Nations to develop their nuclear arms programs. The same does not hold true, of

course, for Iran and North Korea. What will happen when more and more countries decide that only possessing missiles and nuclear arms can offer some degree of protection against a military attack from the United States when it decides that some country is sheltering or sponsoring “terrorists”, that it belongs to the “axis of evil”, or simply that it does not like its policies? For smaller States or sub-State groups that lack these military possibilities, there will always be other options. So-called terrorism and religious and ethnic-identifying fundamentalism is apparently becoming the answer of the weak, the desperate, the trapped, people whose very existence is being threatened.

None of this augurs a peaceful future.

5. RESISTANCE AND RE-EXISTENCE: THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

These civilization processes that point towards death are today confronted by an extraordinary gamut of forms of existence and resistance, mobilization and struggles of peoples, communities, organizations, movements and local, regional and global networks that use their vast gamut of experiences on behalf of life. It is not just a matter of confronting the capital system, its forms of property and exploitation and its forms of exercising power. It is also rejecting a model of civilization historically characterized by the idea of controlling and submitting nature – including human beings, a model that, if not deterred, will lead inexorably to the destruction of the conditions that make life possible on the planet Earth. Accordingly, the anti-capitalist struggle and the resistance to this model of civilization are not principally an expression of internal contradictions of the capital system, contradictions that function in a bet shared by industrial society (such as that imagined by Marxism in betting on the protagonist role of the industrial proletariat), but rather a struggle based on experience, memory, the community, history, a struggle based on the life that is being threatened. It is this truly civilization characteristic that allows the convergence of the most extraordinary diversity of subjects across the planet. This convergence is not based on agreements on a model of an alternative society but rather on principles to preserve cultures, knowledge, nature, life, re-existence.

ARE WE RUNNING OUT OF TIME?

As pointed out above, today the capital regime counts on new geopolitical, technological, communicational, military and juridical-political resources to enable it to overcome the many obstacles that have historically prevented full mercantilization of all the dimensions of life and realization of the Utopia of total market⁵³.

Returning to and integrating questions touched on earlier, it is possible to identify two new conditions that define precisely a new historical era. The first is the capacity for human beings to destroy in a short space of time the conditions that make life possible, both because of the impact of their productive activities and a global nuclear holocaust. The second refers to the confrontations – which for the first time are truly global, in that they appear in a very different but spontaneous way in all the corners of the world – concerning the processes of mercantilization of all dimensions of culture and life, to submit them directly to the demands of valorization of capital. In turn, this dynamic of mercantilization of life can only accelerate the processes of its destruction.

These two conditions oblige us to rethink the ways that time has been conceived. In the principal forms of imagining the future of society associated with modern experience and capitalism, whether they are celebratory or critical, time was conceived as a good infinitely available in the future. The welfare society, abundance, freedom

and equality would all be possible in the future. What cannot be achieved in the present or in a short space of time would surely be achieved in the long term. Nonetheless, what happens if we realize that these suppositions are no longer sustainable? What are the implications of our assuming that we find ourselves in a decisive historical moment, at a point of inflection such that if the present generations of humanity fail to stop the advance of these devices of systematic destruction of cultures and life, there will be no guarantee for the future?

This consideration about the conception of time and its availability is based on the two conditions of our age pointed out above. The calculations and projections of the various models of the future of the planet may vary and be subject to polemics, but there is no doubt that the current civilization patterns are not sustainable and that they are undermining the conditions that make life possible. How much time do we have left before these destructive processes become irreversible? Evidently, not much.

Also from the point of view of the struggles concerning the productivist-depredatory logic of industrial society – radicalized in its present neoliberal expressions – this is a critical historical era. Most of the capacities of resistance against the mercantilization of all the expressions of culture and life are not based on imagination or projects of alternative future societies, but

⁵³ Edgardo Lander, “La utopía del mercado total y poder imperial” (*The Utopia of total market and imperial power*), *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 8, no. 2, May-August 2002.

rather – as already pointed out – on experiences, traditions, stories, identities, community life, and memories that things have been and may be otherwise. It happens based on the socio-cultural fabric of the very historical existence of peoples, on the subjectivity of what human experience has been. If today there is such vigorous resistance against transforming water into merchandise, this is not only because water is a condition of life. It is equally because in the experience of peoples and communities, water has historically been a common good, because access to water as a human right was a conquest of democratic struggles in different parts of the world. If this historical memory and this defense of democratic conquests are defeated, and global capital manages to impose full privatization and mercantilization of water, the next generations will assume water as just another piece of merchandise. It will be taken for granted that those who cannot afford it will not have access to it. The struggles will shift to problems of quality and price in the relation between clients and the companies that sell the service. Likewise, after one or two generations for whom access to education and health and social security services are only available through the market, the political-cultural patterns that today define access to these goods as rights may disappear from collective memory.

This is exactly the same pattern that defines, for example, the current global confrontations between the peasant way of life and the productive

model of agro-industry. This is not just another confrontation in the historical progressive expansion of the frontier of capitalist agriculture, a battle that continues the dynamics of past decades and centuries. Today, as pointed out above, capital counts on new technological possibilities (especially biotechnology) and juridical-political possibilities (WTO, the TLC and the corresponding norms of intellectual property). We may be in the presence of a great final confrontation, a global assault in which what is at stake is the very existence of the cultural complexes that make up peasant life, not in some distant corners of the world but all over the planet. The devastating impact that TLCAN has had in just one decade on millions of indigenous and peasant maize farmers in Mexico illustrates the extraordinary speed with which these processes move. The material and territorial conditions that enable the extraordinary diversity of cultures and ways of life in this planet are under threat.

All this defines the present – and here it would be necessary to discuss what we understand as “the present” – as the moment in which a possible solution has to be found for the continuity of life and the diversity of cultures on the planet Earth. We are running out of time. In the multiple available forms of resistance, creation and re-creation of other forms of living that struggle to put a brake on this expansive logic of mercantilization, submission and destruction, that is, the civilization pattern of progress, the future of life is at stake.