

Common Sense

Alfred Mendes

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Mariarosa Dalla Costa

The Native In Us, the Earth We Belong To

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The Gulf Crisis Re-examined

Alfred Mendes

The recent stand-off between Iraq, on the one hand, and the US and Britain on the other, demands a second, closer look at the events that triggered this more recent crisis - namely, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August '90, resulting in the Gulf War some months later.

If there was one undeniable, salient fact in that earlier, 1990 crisis, it was that the US played the leading, principal rôle in the UN-sponsored, anti-Iraq Alliance, acting, ostensibly under the umbrella of the UN (though it should be recalled that Perez de Cuellar in January '91 emphasised that the ongoing military action was not under UN command). The fact that other countries within the Alliance also played a part is incidental here, and only helps to confuse the issue inasmuch as it was the US which had taken the initial, crucial steps on behalf of the Alliance at every stage of the crisis. This is on record. Furthermore, the US having been one of the two main protagonists - the other being Iraq - we are entitled to examine its rôle in the matter carefully if we are to reach a rational understanding of the crisis. Indeed, it is essential that we do so.

Let us, therefore, first examine the motives of the Americans over that earlier period. We were told, repeatedly, that that war on Iraq would be a 'just' war; a 'moral' war; a war to reinstate the legitimate government of Kuwait - under the aegis of 'Democracy'. Putting aside that it is, at the very least, an act of political dubiousness to associate democracy with what was (and still is) a family fiefdom, let us turn to the morality of the matter.

To begin with, did not the US have equally sound, moral reasons for opposing Russia militarily when the latter invaded Afghanistan in December '79? Or Israel, when it invaded Lebanon in June '82? Or, indeed, Iraq itself, when it invaded Iran in September '80? (It is pertinent to note here that the UN responded to that invasion by passing Resolution 479, which neither condemned the Iraqi's invasion, nor demanded a withdrawal of their troops from Iran). That it did not, in any of these instances, intervene openly with military force can only be explained by the fact that its motives in these events were pragmatic - not moralistic. Surely, we are therefore justified in doubting its avowed moralistic motives in '90/'91? Our doubt may even swing towards disbelief

when we recall that not only did the US **not** adopt a moral stance towards Iraq when the latter invaded Iran - it subsequently assisted Iraq in the war that followed, turning one blind eye when the latter killed some 37 American sailors of the USS STARK in May '87, and turning the other blind eye when it, Iraq, gassed thousands of Kurds in Halabja in March '88. This was not morality - this was pragmatism. Pragmatism thus established, why, then, **did** the US intervene militarily, and with such vigour, in the Gulf - and not in other recent, similar events?

At this point, it is incumbent upon us to lay a basis of facts of an historical, political nature concerning the region in particular, and the Arab world in general before continuing with our scrutiny of more recent, contemporary events. It is essential to recall that the political geography of the region had been for centuries an amorphous mix of borderless tribal Sheikdoms interspersed with nomadic Bedu tribes. It was primarily as a result of gerrymandering by the British and French in the immediate post-World War 1 period that the Arab states, as we now know them, were formed - much of it by the British High Commissioner of that period, Sir Percy Cox. Another more critical fact to note is the presence in the region of vast reserves of oil, a product which, because it is the largest dollar-earning, power-wielding industry on this earth, frequently leads to it being the cause of politically motivated events that reflect the potentially explosive physical nature of the product itself - as a brief re-cap of the region's history illustrates.

Two events that were to have far-reaching, de-stabilising effects occurred in WW1: (1) the defeat of the Turkish Ottoman empire; and (2) The Balfour Declaration of December 1917, which pledged the establishment of a homeland for the Jews in British-controlled Palestine - though the latter would not take effect until 1948. In the case of the defeat of the Ottomans: as a result of the leading rôle that Britain had played in that, it was inevitable that it, Britain, would be the dominant power in the post-war period in the region: perhaps most poignantly exemplified by just two military actions taken by the British against recalcitrant groups in what was subsequently to become the State of Iraq: first, the mustard-gassing of Shia rebels by the Army in '20; second, the bombing of the Kurds in the north-east by the RAF (it is relevant to note here that Churchill, then Secretary of State for War, urged the RAF to use mustard gas - but this proved impractical, for technical reasons). Thereafter, British oil interests, mainly in the form of Anglo Iranian, prevailed in the region - particularly in Iran and Iraq. Later, in the forties, British influence declined, due to the encroachment of American oil interests into the region; and, in the post-WW2 period, American hegemony was significantly strengthened by the simultaneous development of the vast Saudi oil reserves, the largest in the region.

As for the Balfour Declaration: what had been formulated in 1917 in line with the classic British colonial ploy of 'divide and

rule', evolved in 1948 into the Great Divide: the State of Israel. The resulting destabilisation that this engendered in the Arab world can be more readily appreciated when it is realised that, until then, Arab and Sephardim Jew had over the centuries achieved a *modus vivendi* in their social relationship (It would, for instance, not be unduly surprising to find a Tunisian-born Jew who, until '48, had served as an officer in the Libyan Police Force). It is a sad fact of history that a similar claim cannot be made by many countries of Christian orientation. Ironically, this overall Arab/Jew division is today mirrored by the Ashkenazi/Sephardim split among Jews in Israel itself. It was against this background that the US, with its newly-acquired influence in the Gulf (as noted above), found itself on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand, it needed to foster a well-armed, technically advanced country like Israel which would serve the dual purpose of being a foil against the Arabs while, at the same time satisfying its powerful domestic Jewish lobby; and, on the other hand, it had to support the Arab hosts of its (US) oil corporations - particularly Saudi Arabia. It resolved this problem by delegating many of its diplomatic functions to oil company executives *in situ*, thus creating a semi-autonomous (and thus non-attributable) arm of its foreign service in the Gulf. This resolution of its problem carried enormous risk, the effects of which reverberate today, as exemplified by the fact that, over the last few years, the US has used its considerable economic and political clout (as well as its veto) in the UN to ensure that Iraq adheres to the resolutions passed against it - while allowing Israel to side-step resolutions passed against it. As any banker would confirm: a customer heavily in debt (as the US is to the UN) carries weight. It must be presumed that this noted risk was outweighed by the high dollar-earning potential within the situation - particularly in the trade of arms.

The emergence of OPEC in the '60's exacerbated these risks. OPEC meant, in effect, an erosion of the oil companies control (though to a lesser degree than is commonly believed, due to strict contractual agreements between the companies and their hosts, which meant effective retention of control of the market by the former - nonetheless, an erosion). This inevitably led to friction, as exemplified by America's bellicose response to the Arab embargo, when, in '74, James Schlesinger, the Defense Secretary, threatened to use force if the embargo was not lifted - a threat used more than once in the following months.

Due to its physical size, and the size of its oil reserves - resulting in the accumulation of vast wealth - Saudi Arabia would emerge as a key player on the stage of Gulf politics; but the nature, the direction of its politics, was inexorably influenced by the oil company that operated on its territory: The Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). Formed in the late '40's by the most prestigious oil companies: Exxon, Texaco, Socal and Mobil, and run by executives of those companies serving under contracts of

secondment, it is no exaggeration to say that ARAMCO was - and is - Saudi Arabia. As the country's sole source of wealth, it could hardly be otherwise. Thus, the basis for a close political relationship was laid. One simplistic manifestation of this was the fact that (from the late '70's to the early '80's, at least) ARAMCO expatriates, most of whom were Americans, were issued with manuals instructing them in the proper, safe method of making their own alcohol stills - and this in the heart of Islam!

More significantly, this relationship led to a number of joint deals of a very dubious, secretive nature. This was both a reflection of the semi-official, non-attributable nature of American foreign policy practised in the area (as noted above), and confirmation of the intimacy of the relationship - exemplified by the following joint secret deals, made without the knowledge of Congress (though subsequently disclosed): (1) As part of the Irangate conspiracy, Saudi Arabia financed the Contras to the tune of 8 million dollars, in exchange for 400 Stinger Missiles. (2) The Saudis financed the failed CIA assassination attempt on Sheikh Fadlallah of the Hizbollah - then paid off the Sheikh. (3) Over a period of years, they jointly financed covert arms supplies to the Afghan Mujahadeen. In such a clonal relationship: between the strongest contemporary nation on earth, and a feudalistic Arab family (conveniently set-up by the British after WW1), it is surely obvious which partner calls the tune! This last point is particularly relevant to an understanding of America's actions vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, when the US claimed that Saudi Arabia had asked for the deployment of American forces in the Gulf. This was a patently specious claim.

Certain events in the short history of the State of Iraq fall within the constraints of an article of this length, and are relevant enough to be noted, starting with the birth of the state in 1921, when the British installed the Bedouin Feisal as monarch - but under British mandate. The High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox (see above), was subsequently to play a crucial rôle in delineating national boundaries that had not, in effect, previously existed. These boundaries - or 'lines in the sand' - ill-defined and contentious as they were, would become a bone of contention between Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in years to come - as evidenced by the Iraqi threat to absorb Kuwait in the crisis of 1961. A very similar crisis was to be repeated in August 1990, but with one significant difference: in 1961, Britain, still a power-broker in the region, made it clear to Iraq that its planned invasion of Kuwait would be countered by a strong British military force, backed by the 'Red Beard' tactical nuclear free-fall bomb - carried by HMS Victorious at that time. The invasion was abandoned.

Two factors that were to have a bearing on America's actions in the post WW2 period in the region were: (1) its increasing involvement in oil development, and (2) the rising influence of the Communist Party of Iraq, from its formation in the mid-30's to its

association with the populist government of General Qasim during his tenure from '58 to '63. The backdrop was set for what was to become another crucial event (though only the latest in a long line of coup and counter-coup that had marked Iraq's early history). In February 1963, Qasim was overthrown - and assassinated - by a Ba'athist Party group, with the direct connivance of the CIA. This resulted in the return to Iraq of young fellow-Ba'athist, Saddam Hussein, who had fled the country after his earlier abortive attempt to assassinate Qasim. Saddam was immediately assigned to the job of Head of the Al-Jihaz al-Khas (more popularly known as Jihaz Haneen), the clandestine Ba'athist Intelligence organisation, and as such, he was soon after involved in the killing of some five thousand communists. Saddam's rise to power had begun on the back of a CIA-engineered coup!

The build-up of the Iraqi military machine - including its biochemical weaponry - would not, of course, have been possible without considerable assistance from the more technically-advanced countries, such as Germany, France, Britain, America herself - and others. Much of this is now in the public domain, such as the Scott Report in Britain. It is also common knowledge that the US supplied Iraq with strategic information gleaned from their satellites during the Iran/Iraq War of '80 to '88. Less well publicised was the substantial American aid brokered by such as (1) the US-Iraq Business forum, set up in May '85 with many of the top corporations as members; (2) the Kissinger Associates consulting firm, boasting such former members as Brent Scowcroft (National Security Advisor), Lawrence Eagleburger (State Department No.2), and Lord Carrington - and (3) the Bechtel Group, boasting such alumni as George Shultz (Sec. of State) and Caspar Weinberger (Sec. of Defense). Bechtel won the contract to build the PC-2 complex near Al-Musaiyib for the production of gas precursors and ethylene oxide.

This close relationship would account for the turning-of-the-blind-eye incidents noted above, and was perhaps most clearly spelt out by Geoffrey Kemp, Head of the Mid-East Section of the National Security Council under Reagan, when he stated that: "It wasn't that we wanted Iraq to win the war, we didn't want Iraq to lose. We really weren't that naive. We knew that he (Saddam Hussein) was a son-of-a-bitch - but he was **our** son-of-a-bitch."

Such, then, was the situation as we entered 1990. On the larger canvas of world events, détente leads, inevitably, to planned defence cuts. The US is no exception: a proposal to cut defence spending will be put to Congress in September, and almost certain to be passed by its Democrat majority, mindful of its country's enormous deficit. After eight years of war, Iraq is heavily in debt, but acutely aware that an increase in oil price could restore its credit. To determine this requisite price rise, it commissions a study from The Washington Center for Strategic and International Studies. As a result of this study, and with the tacit understanding

of the US government, a figure of 25 dollars per barrel is advised. With that figure in mind, Iraq tries, by means of cajolery and military threats, to persuade its OPEC partners to accede to this figure: without success. Its principal opponent in this matter is its neighbour, Kuwait. In view of the fact that Iraq has by now massed its troops on their common border, and is once more laying claim to its 'province' of Kuwait, it would seem that Kuwait's defiant rejection of the proposed price rise is both impolitic and illogical, and, as such, very puzzling. But - so it is. Iraq decides to kill two birds with one stone: it will invade Kuwait under the banner of 'righteous reclamation', and thus be in a position to impose its oil price rise. However, it must first obtain clearance for its planned action from the area's power-broker, America, and in view of its recent friendly relations with that country (perhaps best exemplified by Assistant Secretary John Kelly's report to Congress in Feb.'90, when, on his return from talks in Baghdad, he described Saddam Hussein as 'a force for moderation' in the region) - it foresees no obstacle from that quarter - and so it transpires. In the last week of July, Iraq is, in effect, given the green light by the US Ambassador, April Glaspie, in Baghdad. On the 2nd of August, Iraq invades Kuwait. In view of the American's well-known proclivity to the use of military force in a situation such as this (Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada and Panama), and in view of the effectiveness of Britain's earlier threat of military force in precisely similar circumstances to those that faced the US in 1990, it is surely logical to deduce from America's apparently aberrant reaction in this instance that it **wanted** Iraq to invade?

This poses the question: why should the US have wanted this? This, in turn, begs an answer, the key to which surely lies in CENTCOM (Central Command), a military strike force that had evolved in the mid-'80's from the earlier Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force formed by Carter in '79 to cope with the situation in Iran. This new force, CENTCOM, was to implement the Pentagon's new-found strategy of striking rapidly with air, sea and land forces at a targeted area, such as, in this instance, the crucial Gulf region. This called for bases where the logistic needs for such a force would be readily accessible - ideally in the targeted area itself. However, the volatile situation in the Gulf determined that the inadequate number - and efficacy - of such bases as were already there (Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain) could not be strengthened. They would therefore be augmented by (1) bases where they were already ensconced - such as in Turkey and Diego Garcia (in the Indian Ocean) - and (2) further supplemented by 'Over the Horizon' bases for 'contingency access', staffed by 'caretaker personnel' - in Kenya, Somalia and Egypt. However, the Pentagon was acutely aware of the fact that these latter were no valid substitute for bases closer to the targeted area, for obvious logistic reasons.

The invasion of Kuwait supplied the US with an excuse for concentrating their forces in the targeted area - the Gulf - and

together with its allies in the Gulf Alliance, deployed a substantial military force there in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. The planned defense cuts were, naturally, set aside by Congress (much to the joy of the arms industry) - and war broke out some months later. Under the command of CENTCOM General Schwartzkopf (who, incidentally, had led the invasion of Grenada in '83), the Allies drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait - but no further. To have invaded Iraq with the intention of destroying its military structure would not only have carried great risk, it would - more pertinently - have deprived the US of a reason persuasive enough to convince the Arab States that it was necessary for a strong US military force to remain in the area to 'protect' them from an Iraq that still posed a threat.

That they were, at the very least, playing a double-game in the lead-up to the invasion was confirmed by the release to the UN in October '90 of a confidential letter written by Brigadier al-Fahd (Director of the Kuwaiti State Security Dept.) in November '89 to his Minister of the Interior, concerning a secret week-long meeting in Langley, Va. that he had attended with William Webster (Director of the CIA), during which they had agreed, in general, to cooperate. The letter continued: "We agreed with the American side that it was important to take advantage of the deteriorating economic situation in Iraq in order to put pressure on that country's government to delineate our common border. The CIA gave us its view of appropriate means of pressure, saying that broad co-operation should be initiated between us, on condition that such activities are co-ordinated at a high level". (This at a time when American companies were concluding a number of deals in Iraq!) From this, it is now clear why Kuwait adopted their somewhat puzzling stance towards Iraq prior to the invasion. And to claim, as the Americans did immediately after the invasion, that they had been caught unawares, can only be described as duplicitous when seen in the context of the frequent involvement of its diplomatic and Intelligence services in the Mid-East in the post-WW2 period.

Any rational synthesis of the facts and events that led to this crisis - as laid out above - leads, inescapably to two main conclusions: (1) that the US is in the Gulf, in force, in order to reassert the hegemony of its oil interests in this most crucial of regions; and (2) America not only used the invasion of Kuwait as a pretext to achieve that aim, but also effectively manipulated the circumstances surrounding the Iraq/Kuwait confrontation - thus ensuring the inevitability of the invasion. In other words: a 'Sting'. As is well known, this is a mode of operation that plays a significant rôle within US government agencies: agencies, moreover, which function under the authority of an executive Presidency, a post then held by George Bush, who, as founder of the well-known oil drilling contractor, Zapata, was therefore both an ex-oilman - and ex-Director of the CIA.

Whatever doubts we may harbour over various aspects of the

crisis, one fact brooks no argument: the oil and arms industries were the main beneficiaries of that war. the evidence is there. In the case of oil, for instance, Bechtel Group, the prestigious petrochemical construction company co-founded by Stephen Davison Bechtel Snr. and John McCone (subsequently CIA Director under Kennedy and Johnson), and embellished by such potent executives as George Schultz and Caspar Weinberger, secured lucrative contracts for the reconstruction of Kuwait - before the war had even finished! It is pertinent to note here that in the late '70's, in order to win the lucrative Saudi contracts to build both the industrial town of Jubail (\$30 billion), and the Riyadh International Airport (\$3.4 billion), Bechtel had to cut Prince Mohammad ibn-Fahd al-Saud in on the deal - to the tune of a 10% interest in the Arabian Bechtel Co. Ltd.

As for arms: if nothing else, that war proved to be the most ubiquitous, persuasive sales pitch for hi-tech, murderously efficient weapons ever seen by the world's public- though it transpired later that most of these hi-tech, 'surgical' weapons fell far short of what had been claimed for them. Nevertheless, if this means that, as the custodian of such omnipotent weapons, the Americans may now be perceived as unchallengeable on the conventional battlefield, then the angry resentment, the frustration of the Arab fellaheen - exacerbated by the war - will both enhance the isolation of their autocratic Sheikhs/Emirs, and foment Khomeini-like revolts against those same Sheikhs/Emirs. In such a situation, mercenary forces such as the South Korean soldiers hired, under the guise of 'construction workers', by the Saudis in the late '70's to protect oil installations and the Saud Family (a contract brokered by the Americans), would prove inadequate. Herein lies the main reason the US is keen to maintain a military strike force in the Gulf, using Iraq's non-adherence to the UN's resolutions as an excuse: the oil corporations are closely intertwined with, and dependent upon the political stability enshrined within the rule of those same Sheiks and Emirs in the region, and until such time as oil reserves of similar magnitude can be developed elsewhere - as in the Falklands area of the South Atlantic - to replace those in the Gulf, then it is in America's interest to ensure that it maintains a high-profile military presence, CENTCOM, in the region with the primary aim of acting as a deterrent to any potential political threat to their surrogates. Indeed, there are many similarities between the rôle of CENTCOM in the Middle East, and NATO's rôle in Europe.

In conclusion: out of the myriad of words on this subject of the Gulf Crisis that have either been spoken or written by politicians, journalists and correspondents - over the past seven years - one depressing feature stands out: namely, the all-too-frequent omission of the one word that so concisely defines the crux of the matter - OIL.

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The Native in Us, the Earth We Belong To*

Mariarosa Dalla Costa

Educating the sentiments

The work I produced from the early 1970s and part of the 1980s is probably fairly well-known and readily available in print. The material emerged from a collective debate with other women focusing on the analysis of reproductive labour and the question of the struggle for wage/income, starting with wages for housework. These days, given the pervasiveness and destructiveness of this most recent phase of accumulation, I feel that a commitment revolving exclusively round the wage/income (1) and the reduction of labour time is inadequate unless it is pursued in step with a series of other issues which I will try to highlight.

In fact, I think that, from various viewpoints, the problem of human reproduction is indissolubly linked to issues – above all, land – raised by the indigenous movements. Women continue to be primarily responsible for human reproduction in all regions of the planet, and the problem of their condition cannot ignore the horizons that these issues outline, whether in families of the advanced areas or the village communities of the 'developing' countries.

Before discussing this, however, I must say something about my personal research in the 1980s, a decade of political repression and the 'normalisation' of a movement which, in the 1970s, produced powerful struggles for which the feminist movement I belonged to – Lotta Femminista, or the Wages for Housework area – paid a price in terms of repression, but, also and as usually happens, of the erasure of its history and work. In the 1970s, we carried out and published some studies (2) and, in the 1980s, with great effort, given the circumstances, we completed others. They

* This piece was produced for the conference, *For Another Europe, a Europe of Movements and Class Autonomy*, in Turin on March 30, 1996 and was updated in December of the same year.

included (3) Leopoldina Fortunati's *The Arcane of Reproduction* (1981) and *Il grande Calibano*, published by Fortunati and Silvia Federici in 1984, two books conceived as part of a larger project which remains uncompleted. I am certain I am right in saying that circulation of these works was actively hindered.

The climate was unfavourable, not least because of Marxism's 'hibernation' when it went out of fashion. And since my own and my comrades' approach was undoubtedly rooted in Marxist analysis, it was difficult for me to find talking partners, of either sex. Our efforts were directed to using a Marxian analysis integrated with our whole approach to housework. We reformulated the concept of class to include women as unwaged workers in that their main job was the production and reproduction of labour-power.

It was just as difficult to find anyone with whom to give explicit expression to a certain number of rather irksome misgivings I always felt in the Marxist ambit from which I set out. The first and major irritation was over the idea that *capitalist development* seemed to be seen as *ineluctable*. However powerful the struggles were, a new leap and a new level were just round the corner, creating a tunnel vision in which the tunnel's end was never in sight. The leap to a new level of technology obliged the struggle onto a new terrain which then became the only significant portent for liberation.

The second irritation I felt was because of the apparent cynicism with which each new level of development was awaited and greeted, and the fact that little research was devoted to the ways in which new possibilities of liberation opened up by development frequently turned into their opposite.

The debate dealt fundamentally with the advanced areas of the globe and gave little attention to Third World struggles; the assumption was in any case that the best way of supporting the latter was to struggle forcefully in the former. But this link is not as automatic as it looks; it needs a few more steps, which I shall try to illustrate. The decisions involved require that one should know what Third World struggles are going on and what they are, with a real knowledge of the factors they are moving against. This also requires knowing the relationship these factors have with the new leaps in technology at the most 'advanced' points of development, as well as with the re-stratification of labour at the world level. The most detailed knowledge possible is also required of the direction in which the actors in the struggles would like to see them move.

The idea that capitalist development could be *ineluctable* chilled me to the bone and froze my imagination. I wondered how many people would in fact survive to be liberated in the famous final stage of development since the fate of an increasingly large proportion of mankind seemed to be death by massacre, and I wondered what sense there would be in the liberation of the

surviving few if most had perished. Again, I wondered whether there was any sense in being liberated in a world where no blade of grass would be seen and the population consisted of monsters produced in laboratories. I knew my questions were not original, but they ate at me like woodworm eating wood.

In this debate, the focal points were labour and capital. However all-embracing they may be, I missed any reference to nature. By this, I mean nothing more than plants, the sea, rivers, animals. I lived in a kind of schizophrenia in which I only re-discovered my sensations, imagination, and life in nature, but nature found no place in the debate. I was unable to transfer the life it gave me to the political discourse I was involved with, and I felt unable to indicate nature as a source of life for others, except as a private and confidential observation. As women, we had brought our labour to the surface, but a black hole remained: the still submerged role of nature.

Beyond any possibility or impossibility of a theoretical debate on the problem, I took a simple decision to try and communicate with those who spoke the same language because they shared what I felt. Finding the present level of development intolerable, I had no intention of appealing to the next level.

In this rather solitary research, I had two fundamental meetings; with the *movement of the indigenous peoples*; and with what *ecologists* were saying, especially the *ecofeminists*.

My first encounter with the indigenous peoples' movement was Rigoberta Menchù's work *My Name is Rigoberta Menchù*, in the Italian edition by Burgos in 1991. I urge everyone to read it. It speaks of the condition of Guatemala's indigenous peoples. It consists of three books. Book One describes Mayan civilisation, and the great discovery for me was that it is a living civilisation, not a dead one. I learned about the traditions, rites, and other ways in which the Mayans hand down their secrets in their villages, or when they are no longer sure they will return there because they are going into the mountains to become guerillas. I also learned that this civilisation still keeps some of its secrets.

This encouraged me to see capitalism's apparent omnipotence, as something that destroys everything or re-shapes it to its own purposes, in more relative terms; there *are* things that capitalism doesn't know. But I also re-discovered myself in the natives described by Rigoberta, in their respect and love for the land and all living things. In the importance they give to their relationship with animals, I re-discovered a piece of my history and my identity, and I also re-discovered my research:

Above all at sowing time, the animals came and searched through the seeds, so we took it in turns to guard the *milpa*... We took it in turns, but we were happy because we stayed out and slept under the trees. We had fun laying

traps...and when we heard the poor animal crying out, we would run to see. But since our parents forbade us to kill animals, we let them go. We just shouted at them, and they never came back...(Burgos 1991 p. 67).

When we girls were together...when we already had our pet animals and we carried them around with us, we talked about our dreams and what we wanted to do with the animals we had. We talked about life a bit, but only in very general terms. (Burgos 1991 p.102).

They killed our animals. They killed many dogs. For us natives, killing an animal is like killing a person. Every being in nature comes high in our consideration (Burgos 1991 p.132).

Book One, then, is a book about love and respect for the earth and its inhabitants, about communication and the society of all living beings.

Book Two which I would describe as a book of horrors, concerns capitalist development i.e. the conditions under which the Maya are obliged to work in the *fincas*, the large landowners' plantations where export crops are grown and how the Maya are killed. It is not just the story of how the land is expropriated, but also how the landowners and the army leave the natives no more than a small plot of land, the *milpa*, which is so small and unfertile that they are in any case obliged to work in the *fincas*. There, the conditions are inhuman not only because the pay is so low that a day's wage leaves the day-labourers hungry. There is also the security guards' terrorism, and even the most elementary hygienic facilities are lacking; the plantation workers have nowhere to wash and no latrines. The tale I tell here is a tale of what death looks like when it comes to you at your place of work.

Rigoberta's family work on the banana plantation. Her mother knows that Rigoberta's two-year-old brother is dying of hunger and she can do nothing to feed him because she earns too little. He dies and is left unburied for several days because she doesn't have the money to rent a square meter of land in the plantation for his grave. In the end, overcoming a number of difficulties, among them, the difficulties of communication between the different ethnic minorities with different languages, the labour-ers manage to collect enough money to bury the child.

One of Rigoberta's friends, Donna Petrona Chona, resists the sexual advances of the owner's son and is hacked to pieces by the owner's body guard with a machete, her baby son in her arms. Her body is cut into 25 pieces and is left to rot. No-one in authority comes to investigate so the workers decided to break regulations and gather her remains in a basket to bury her.

Another of Rigoberta's little brothers and a friend are allowed to stay in an area where the cotton is being fumigated, and they die of the poison they absorb.

Book Three concerns political organisation and repression, the latter making it in this respect another book of horrors. But in what is said about political organisation, which means guerilla warfare for some and the Peasant Unity Committee for others, I was struck by one thing. Rigoberta, who teaches the people of her *aldea* (4), and later others as well, how to defend themselves from the soldiers' attacks, is particularly good at setting traps, the same traps as five centuries earlier the natives used when they defended themselves from the *conquistadores*: a heritage of knowledge handed down and preserved. The other origins of capital, unlike those of the advanced Great Britain, differently to what happens in the First World, are very evident here in what has been handed down, as a remembered presence of what happened, of what has been suffered and what defences have been used. But another striking thing is the *concern* the Maya show for the animals, which they *avoid killing* if it is not necessary, and also their concern for talking to the soldiers when they capture them. It is striking how, in defending themselves, they have preserved the memory of the *same weapons*, using them to organise effective forms of resistance today. Conquest and capital; a question that remains open. A weapon has remained close to hand to throw the invader into the sea, no longer a destiny interiorised as ineluctable, but rather a 500-year wait, but then you are ready for when the hidden weapons must be disinterred, to build a new future.

The repression, as I noted, is another book of horrors. Rigoberta's third brother, 16, is captured as a reprisal. He and the other prisoners are tortured and then brought to the square of a village. Here the villagers, among whom is the (hidden) family of Rigoberta, are then forced to gather round and listen as the soldiers, pointing to the wounds inflicted on each prisoner's naked body, explain which torture each wound corresponds to. They are then burned alive, in front of the villagers.

Rigoberta's father also died by fire, probably burned alive by a phosphorus bomb thrown into the Spanish Embassy in Ciudad de Guatemala after he had led a march of farm workers and peasants inside the building. The mother was captured, tortured to death and her body left to the wild animals. And the soldiers stood on guard to stop the natives from burying remains.

I don't know how high development had reached in the advanced countries in the 1970s and 1980s, but I do know that this was the underdevelopment it provoked and on which it rested. The Maya American natives paid, and continue to pay, just as they did at the origins of capital, with torture, death, forced labour, hunger and the expropriation of the land and the resources to be found in that land. They pay for the continually renewed globalisation of

