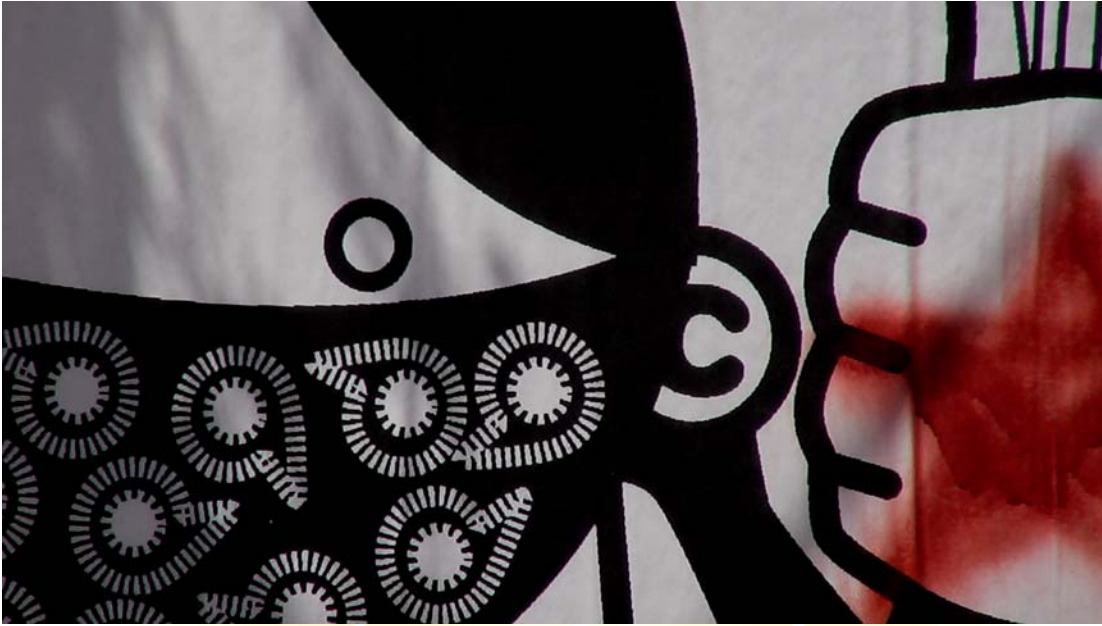


## Three Kingdoms

Mark Strong

*"The countless movements of man will perfectly interact for the purposes for which God has made them, and that purpose is progress."*

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*  
1746



Within hours of arriving at the small fishing village of El Mayor, in Northern Mexico, Oscar found me in the communal kitchen of the International Peace Camp. I was making tea.

**"Would you like to work security detail tonight?"** he asked.

**"Sure,"** I respond, knowing I would regret not doing it.

**"Bring your sleeping bag and your passport."**

Ten minutes later we are in a van with two other recruits and El Mayors head of security. There is some discussion as to what we might want to do should the *policia* or random men with guns emerge from the desert brush.

The van halts along the Cucupa River, in front of a newly built structure housing members of the Counsel for Indigenous Leaders (CNI). They have gathered here in anticipation of a visit from Zapatista Commandantes.

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The Mexican Liberation Army (EZLN) emerged in 1994; when a group of balaclava wearing Mayan farmers marched from their home in the southern province of Chiapas, to Mexico City - protesting the freshly signed NAFTA agreement.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) calls for privatization as the tool to building a free market economy which meant, for the Mayans who live and farm communally, that their land was seized and hawked to U.S. corn growers in a coup d'etat that seemed nostalgic of the banana republics.

This whoring off of land and resources continues to spark uprising, as was the case with Bolivia's water wars (of the last decade) which erupted after a permit was required to collect rainwater.

That basic human rights are denied in the name of creating a sustainable economy is, too often, the collateral damage of free markets. That we tolerate the aggravated suffering of innocents for monetary gain – and call it collateral damage, reveals the inhumanity at the heart of capitalist philosophy.

Under communism, Lenin outlawed private ownership. He promised to end the economic exploitation of man by man, but history remembers him as the one responsible for Russia's great depression, less than a decade before it caught up to America.

Neoliberalism has played in Mexico's backyard since the Spanish begun nicking treasures; only the rules have changed and a new terminology replaces the old – which conjures bad memories of slavery and exploitation. The new words convey the same meaning but in a more illusive way.

This very conundrum promoted me to come to Mexico. If the Zapatistas are fighting against these phantom slurs, maybe they can tell me what the hell globalization means.

Fifteen years after their inauguration onto the world's political hit list, the EZLN are on their way to El Mayor to listen and respond to the concerns of local villagers who have lost the right to fish in the receding waters of the Cucupa. The Mexican government claims this decision has been made for environmental reasons, yet wealthy farmers - with permits, water their fields with what remains of the depleting river, dammed on the U.S. side of the border. Unlike the Mayans, the Cucupa people of El Mayor don't have a jungle to recede into when the violence begins. This raises the stakes of autonomy and they have wisely chosen, following the example of the EZLN, the greatest weapon at their disposal: the internet.



Online blogging has revolutionized journalism and how the global population receives its news. You can now read direct correspondence from those fighting on the front lines of solidarity struggles around the world. This means **you** have a **choice** to accept a biased and filtered media – one based on a first world understanding of events - or look elsewhere.

Old world muscle has been retired, as no government wants to see their goons on youtube rounding up dissidents and purging the opposition. It doesn't make for good politics to show the sheep the tactics of the shepherd. In their wake comes homeland security and Guantanamo Bay.

Donning his Balaclava, snipers cap and tobacco pipe, Subcomandante Marcos may be the moral high ground of marginalized people the world over. His charisma has elevated him to the iconic status of Che Guevara.

While the banking elite called for Marcos' head on a platter, United Colors of Benetton offered him a modeling contract in a vain attempt to trademark his likeness. He refused. Either they didn't understand his politics or simply took their cue from a bitter Satan tempting the young Christ.

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My greatest challenge that night was keeping the fire from burning out. I took this job seriously. The flames of my paranoia were stoked in the wind as coyotes sang to an inaudible rhythm which always permeates the call to revolution.

*What am I doing out here in the desert defending the ones losing hope from the ones finding it?*

I don't think I have the right to judge anyone who lives in this world. The bottom line for any man is self preservation – no matter what your ethics or politics. When hope for change is all you think you have and the only one who can help you is yourself - because no one else seems to be listening **and** you're truly convinced that you've nothing more to lose, perhaps the fine line separating good from evil and morality from inhumanity, becomes even more blurred.

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*It is our impulse towards self preservation which causes men to rationalize the suffering of others for their gain.*

*Kill Will, Explorative Fascism Today  
Raphael Yangon*





*In the capitalistic system... economic inequality is acceptable. It's the engine of production. The political organizations and the state have to quartette this inequality because, theoretically, inequality brings richness*  
Fabrizio Eva

I am thinking of these things three months later while drinking tea, outside a flat, in the Shankill community of Belfast, Northern Ireland. About thirty feet away, standing in front of the last remaining wall of division in Europe, rages a large bonfire – one of hundreds in the streets tonight.



Every year on July 11<sup>th</sup>, loyalist areas of Northern Ireland celebrate by lighting bonfires to commemorate the protestant liberation of Ireland from the grasp of the absolutist Roman Catholic King James II and his Jacobite army by protestant William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne in 1690.

The Protestant Shankill and Catholic Falls Road – on the other side of the wall, are ground zero of Northern Ireland's "troubles." This is not the first time I have come here and I am getting more comfortable on these streets. When people call you out by name - from their cars as they drive past, it lets everyone else know that you are *supposed* to be here.

My guide for the annual celebrations is a former member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). In his younger days - after a stint in prison, Shuie completed a program called Higher Force Challenge. The program takes kids from the Protestant Shankill and Catholic Ardoyne and brings them together for activities.

Shuie now works as an activity instructor for the same program, trying to steer the young people away from making the same choices he did.

I had the opportunity to spend a few days with Shuie and some young people enrolled in the program, in the weeks following the bonfires. We went hiking in the Black Hills that surround Belfast. These hills are about two kilometers from their neighboring communities, yet off the twelve boys present, only two had ever climbed the hills before - and they had done so to start fires.

**"The boys are often shocked when they discover those from the other side don't have a tail and horns, and maybe they like the same music or have the same pair of trainers."**



I am told that when locals vacation abroad, they can visit loyalist or republican friendly destinations throughout Europe.

Keeping people isolated while demonizing the enemy are two important strategies of propaganda. As more people begin venturing out of their communities – and out from under the traditions of intolerance, perhaps they will also discover that the world is not quite how they assumed it to be.

My first trip to Northern Ireland taught me that the “troubles” are not really about religion. Religion is the smokescreen by which either side can market their cause and gain sympathy from an international community still intent on fighting holy wars. The root issue is one of classic colonialism; Protestant loyalty to the Queen vs. Catholic devotion to home rule.

**“My family has been living in Northern Ireland longer than yours has been living in Canada,”** one protestant told me in response to the ever so simple and not well thought out solution that the Brits could simply leave.

In Montreal, Quebec, I met with a Mohawk Elder who told me they were demanding that Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, return the city of Montreal to the Mohawk Nation. That seems unlikely.

There is something to be said for knowing there are no easy answers; something more to be said for knowing which battles can't be won. If we started giving land back – the world over, who will inherit it? It *always* belonged to someone else first. Should the entire UK become self governed by clans, as well? Yet by ignoring the voices that think it should, we risk alienating people who - when they become disillusioned with a system they expect more from, may take matters into their own hands; things like restraint and morality find room to maneuver.

**“How many other countries allow convicted terrorists to become politicians?”**

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As the battle for Northern Ireland moves from the streets to parliament, the old face of paramilitarism has had to evolve. A police presence during the July 11<sup>th</sup> bonfires would only incite a riot, so the job falls to a local paramilitary.

Some would say the awarding of security contracts to these organizations is merely a payoff for good behavior while their political arms try to negotiate a delicate peace.

Most residents were reluctant to admit their communities *are* safer because of these vigilante mafias. One Catholic added,

**“That may be true, but we also have more to fear, now, from our *own* side of the wall.”**



There is no warning at the airport when you fly into Addis Ababa, no cartoon giraffe cautioning pregnant mothers - or anyone below the height of the giraffe's neck, to stay off the roads. There should be.

A few hours south of the capital city, little doubt remains as to why the only vehicles you see are land rovers and the large Isuzu trucks.



Africa is a wonderful, mythical, world which formerly resided somewhere between the North Pole and Neverland in my mind. Now that I am here, everything has changed. It's not that my assumptions were wrong, only I didn't have enough of them.

Ethiopia was the easiest foreign country I have ever entered. The officers at both customs and in the visa office seemed genuinely grateful that I would want to visit their country. I wondered if it would be as easy to get out.

Aside from a brief occupation by Italy, Ethiopia has never been colonized. The lack of infrastructure supports this.

One of my first experiences in the country was visiting the market in Addis – about twelve square blocks that felt like twelve miles, and realizing I stood out like a tattooed Santa amidst the herded livestock and quarreling bargainers. I got the impression that people felt as if I owed them something for being *forengi* (a foreigner).

**“You are with me so we *should* be fine,”** Hanok – my local guide, tells me. This was not comforting. **“But you no want to come here by yourself.”**

Perhaps I should be cursing the International Monetary Fund for screwing these people out of a sustainable future, offering money on the condition of inheriting their resources - should they default on the payments; but it's hard to know who to blame. What I do know is that there is a time to pull your camera out and take pictures, and when you are lost and claustrophobic within *1200 miles* of resentment, it is not the time.



I came to Ethiopia to write some compelling stories for a handful of Canadian NGOs; *inspiring a new generation to care about Africa* was how they sold it to each other. Only, the longer I am here, the more complex that task becomes.



Jinka is a day and a half's drive south of Addis Ababa. It is here that I have taken in with a group of anthropologists at the South Omo Research Center. They seem relieved when I tell them I don't know much about Ethiopia other than famine infomercials and the Rasta connection.

**"It is good. You will be more objective, then."**

SORC was established more than fifteen years ago by pioneering German anthropologist, Ivo Strecker, who started out his career living with the Hamar people.

The strategic location of SORC, places it within close proximity to some of the most remote, ancient, and little known groups on the African Continent.

I have hit the jackpot, coming to Africa with connections like this. They are established, well known and - most importantly, well liked.

**"Anthropologists observe,"** a local explains to me, **"unlike the missionaries and NGOs who tell us what we are doing wrong."**

Once trust has been established, the anthropologists are able to carefully introduce education, medical knowledge and sustainability options.

My association with SORC gives me instant credibility and a reason for being here. It's as helpful as walking the Shankill with a brigadier.



One of the more depressing things about Ethiopia is the extent at which people will humiliate themselves for money. Never mind the brothels, everywhere I go locals follow me with their palms out and cry, “**you you.**”

At first, it was hard not to blame them – a white person symbolizes wealth and opportunity, but eventually, this becomes hard not to resent.

**“Many tourists come here with bags of one dollar *bir*. They want to relieve their conscience, but they are responsible for creating this beggars mentality,”**

Instead of attending school, many children choose to sit on the roadside hoping a fat tourist will pass by handing out money from a big red sack.





What I had not thought to anticipate was the moral code of Africa. Women have no rights, and local men are as in awe that I would not beat my spouse as I am at their ability to rationalize doing so.

I met a young teenage girl who was withdrawn from school when her parents found an older, blind, man for her to marry. Less than a week later, he was dead and I was visiting her in jail.

Enforcing first world standards on a society without the moral infrastructure to support them, amounts to handing over a loaded gun and telling them no bullets are inside. Despite good intentions, I am not sure that offering workshops to African woman on equal rights is the proper way to invoke change; it seems more likely to incite increasing acts of violence *against* woman by a society who continues to tell men their behavior is okay. But workshops sound good. They appeal to our conscience and our funders' charity dollars, so we go on pulling threads out of the African fabric and watching it unwind like a cheap sweater.

Instead of confronting why issues exist (poverty and domestic abuse exist, etc.), we settle with quick fix solutions. Are we enabling Africa to continue the way it is or empowering the people to change? Do we even want them to change? It feels like we are a bunch of lifeguards refusing to teach them how to swim so we don't lose our jobs.



The dichotomy of progress is no less stark then it is in South Omo. Walking along the gutted out streets of Jinka, I am assaulted by our cultural imprinting upon this third world - from cell phones to a poster of Britney Spears; yet within hours of Jinka, the people of Merci and Hamar still live much the same as they did when their world began – absent the imported Kalashnikovs.



What has progress done to Africa? What has the first world done to Africa, in the name of progress?

Our track record is not exactly stellar. From the exportation of slaves and resources; from testing birth control products to sanctioned genocide, we have crippled Africa's ability to sustain itself by manufacturing dependence and meddling in its politics for the sake of enterprise.



*"We could 'save' a million people here or there and still not really make any difference to the truth in Africa."*

*Elizabeth Pisani, UNAIDS  
The Wisdom of Whores*

Poverty in Africa will not end with a quick fix solution. Sponsoring a NGO is a reflection of our fast-food, first-world mentality; designed to relieve our conscience quickly, thinking nothing of sustainable change.

I asked a German professor, from Addis University – an eight year veteran of Ethiopia, what she thought people could do who really wanted to participate in creating a sustainable Africa.

**"I don't know the answer. Maybe that is why I am still here."**

I think her response *was* the answer. If you want to make a difference, *go* - or find someone who will – not a phantom organization with large overhead and no accountability. You wouldn't bank with an institution as careless with your money.

The cycle of poverty in Africa will only end when we want it to; when we place the resources of the continent back into the financial hands of its people so they can sustain themselves without the billions of dollars sanctioned by *our* governments to be paid from *our* tax dollars, meant to make up for the exploitation of Africa by *our* corporations - corporations who share the same incestuous marriage bed with *our* governments.

A holy man of the Ari people told me a story about a group of first-worlders who came to their village. They saw the children being schooled outside, under a large tree, and said it was not proper. So the first worlders chopped down the large tree and used it as the foundation for what became a dark and smelly little room, void of light, ventilation and absent a cool breeze. The first-worlders went home with their standards and left a useless gesture of good intention. The absence of the great tree serves as a reminder to the entire village that the *forengi* are not always aware, or even interested, in the best interests of the Ari.

Stories like this were repeated often, among every people group I visited.







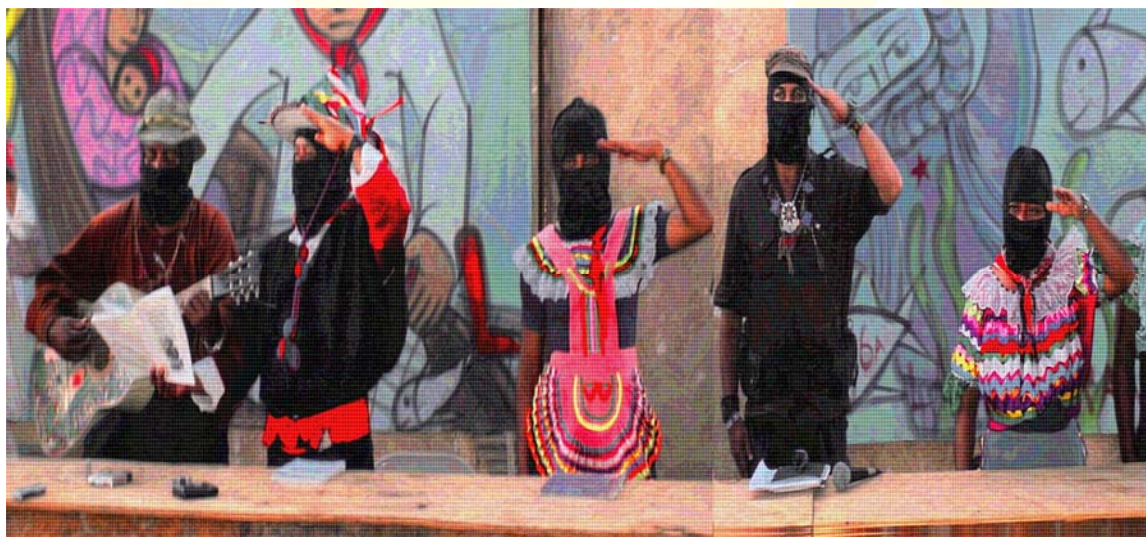
There is never one circumstance that drives a man to become a different person; to change who he is and what he believes. It takes a succession of events.

As we walked into El Mayor the next morning, Oscar told me the EZLN would be arriving before mid day. It was April 10<sup>th</sup> – a significant day for the Mexican people. On this day, in 1910, Emiliano Zapata - former revolutionary from whom the Zapatistas have adopted their namesake, was assassinated.

It was surreal to sit among those who felt so helpless, listening to the hopeful. The decision to declare autonomy from the Mexican government lingered on everyone's mind; it procured this visit.

The morning was spent listening to the concerns of the people; the afternoon, dedicated to honoring the memory of Zapata - with commemorative speeches and nostalgic pleas for equality in the face of overwhelming injustice.

Perhaps corruption is merely the byproduct of capitalism - indulgence of mans selfishness and the essence of self preservation. I can't help wondering if we judge evil simply on the merit of that which we have been denied.





When the surge of riotous joy had availed - in a quieter moment, I asked one of the collective if she thinks they are making a difference. I wanted to know if this is a battle she believes can be won or if they are simply graceful martyrs against capitalism and progress.

Without even hesitating, she replied,

**"I wouldn't be fighting if I didn't think that was possible."**



It was a lesson in the cost of idealism, and I felt like I was losing. Less than a week after crossing the border back into the first world - with my pledges of revolution and renewal, my neo-con friend suggested we stop at the drive through of a popular corporate giant. As we did, I looked over my shoulder to see if my conscience was watching.

The bottom line of that decision was money. *How much am I spending?* The bottom line was *not*: who is this choice affecting? Why? Because money not only symbolizes power, it represents survival, and the *fittest* will be the ones with the most.

From fast food to discount shopping, the trenches of the next Great War will not be dug in geographic landscapes but in our philosophies of consumerism. Conviction speaks a monetary language and, in this, our loyalties will be divulged.

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In 1746, a Scot named Adam Smith, in his book [The Wealth of Nations](#) (a capitalist manifesto for every modern economy) suggested that the best thing government can do is get out of the way and allow the invisible hand of the market to do its work.

Optimistic about the happiness of material life, he questioned if the accumulation of private riches were a force for self betterment.

Smiths' mantle was carried into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by prominent Austrian economist, Ludwig von Mises – who argued that markets needed to be free; that wages and prices were like traffic lights that kept the economy functioning and avoided the chaos of inflation. According to Mises, the market could not survive the regulation of equality imposed by a socialist or communist government.

His greatest sparing partner was Friedrich von Hayek who, alternately, dreamed of government policy determined by fairness, equity, and concerns for the poor. As they debated, the War Reparations were devastating the already bankrupt economies of Austria and Germany.

Britain's war time economic consultant - John Maynard Keynes, was so disgusted at the Allies decision to have Germany pay the outrageous costs of the war that he resigned. That same year he wrote:

*If we take the view that Germany must be kept impoverished and her children starved and crippled, vengeance, I dare predict, will not limp. Nothing can delay that final war that will destroy the civilization and progress of our generation.*

*The Economic Consequences of the Peace*  
John Maynard Keynes



*Keynes felt the reparations were out of all proportion to what any economy could really take and would have very destructive social, political and economic consequences.*

*Geoffrey Harcourt*

Germany's answer to the War Reparations was printing more money; a decision which pillaged the savings of her citizens and sparked inflation.

When the great depression arrived in America, it was Keynes who rescued both capitalism and democracy in his *General Theory*, published in 1936. Keynes invents macroeconomics – the idea that a market is like a machine which can be manipulated; showing governments how to manage their economies by regulating industry and job creation, investing money when the economy was weak, saving when it was strong.

One has to wonder if Keynes was inspired by the prospering economy of Stalin's central planning system, one in which the communist party managed every aspect of the economy. Stalin's success was winning the hearts and minds of people to socialism and communism while a nation of bankrupt Germans were eager to embrace the hope of economic and cultural revitalization that an impassioned Adolf Hitler spoke of.

Franklin Roosevelt was a disciple of Keynes new gospel and WWII was an opportunity to put *General Theory* into practice. Meanwhile, Friedrich von Hayek - now teaching at the London school of economics, saw central planning as the first step towards totalitarianism.

Following the war, and not wanting to recreate inflation, the allied governments created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as tools by which they hoped to stabilize the world economy.

Post war Britain replaced Churchill's conservative money grubbers in favor of the labor government, which introduced national health care and government controlled industry. Socialist values were on the rise; the red army on the march.



*We have an economic model that thinks like a crack addict.  
Naomi Klein*

Germany rebuilt its economy by introducing a free market, but it was more than forty years before Britain and The United States – under Margret Thatcher and Ronald Regan, would abandon a Keynesian social market economy and embrace deregulation and free markets. Interestingly, Thatcher would cite Hayek as an inspiration, which seems to add insult to injury. Today, thanks to deregulation and the privatization of essential services and industry, individuals have the power that governments once did. Democracy may allow us to vote for who is in government but we don't vote for who runs the corporations that wield the real power over our day to day lives. We are closer to totalitarianism and the fascist state than Hayek could have imagined.

In Mexico, tortillas sell for cheaper at large American wholesale stores, which mean local businesses are closing. In the fine print of the import/export globalization rules, it states that the ones with the most money control the market and they can put the stranglehold on the little guys until they have a monopoly. It's business; everyone can't be on top.

The bottom line is survival. When it becomes an issue of how many meals you can give your children, all bets are off and my receding idealism takes a nose dive because I can't relate nor can I presume to impose my first world standards when they have no infrastructure to support them. I try not to pay attention to their embrace of products by companies responsible for exploiting their own land and people. Some battles can't be won, and besides - I get to leave, which means I have options. I feel like I maybe I have no right to voice opinions, here.



Sometimes, all you have left is the hope you give yourself – the reward for staying human. I would not steal that from anyone, especially the ones without options. If I take issue, it will be with the sloths of first world consumerism who won't even consider their opinions fallible and their truths short of absolute. This kind of arrogance keeps them ignorant. They turn a blind eye to the privatization of our own basic human rights. How long before we become the marginalized; just another casualty of the class war?

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Perhaps one of the most disturbing things I witnessed in Africa was the natural childbirth of a Hamar baby. The young pregnant mother burst into tears when her water broke - she knew what was coming. The father retreated to an opposite corner of the compound where he sat with a piece of wood.

Squatting in front of a fence post - hands stretched out, clutching the weathered wood – her screams were muffled by an aging midwife standing directly behind. As the birthing process began, the old woman's knee dug itself into the young girls back; a gesture which seemed to suggest that she was preventing the baby from climbing back up into the its mothers womb once it discovered what kind of a world it was being born into. A second and third girl held down the squatter; the mother-in-law sat waiting to catch the falling child.



In Africa, I lived without the comforts of the first world. What I did not surrender willingly was taken from me, and let me tell you, there is a big difference between voluntarily giving something up and having it taken.

I felt like a sponge soaking in the realities of the third world; no headphones to drown out the sounds and only black market bottles of Hedges & Butler to distract me from the fear. In the silence of that reality, the resounding hymn revealed that idealism was nothing but an expectation before disappointment; a worn out brand name of the first world. Maybe that's all progress really is – a succession of fear and disappointment.

The absence of first world distraction left me feeling reborn and enslaved - like a butterfly safely out of its cocoon into the mouth of a predator; and while it did change my perspective, not to the extent that I would have chosen to stay in the wasteland, even if I had secured my position as a Kurtz-like demigod until the end of time.

Propaganda appeals most to the people who are afraid of feeling guilty or who are guilty of being afraid. It is intentional rhetoric; the government sponsored marketing of ideas wrapped in packages that look like neat gifts to be delivered by a mythical Santa on his return trip from dropping one dollar *bir* into the hands of juvenile beggars. Propaganda keeps us from confronting the truth and indoctrinates us with hate for those who are not like us; it assures us that black and white answers exist and that by forcing our standards of living onto the rest of the world, that we are spreading democracy and making their life better. It allows us to forget that our own capitalist model demands that for us to grow in prosperity, they will exponentially suffer.

The beggars' mentality testifies to our mental colonization of Africa. No amount of sending wool sweaters and high heeled shoes is helping to improve the quality of life for Ethiopians (as reported to me from a civil servant in Jinka) or giving them dignity back. If Africa has a hope, it will come from empowerment; real sustainable change.



As global population inflates beyond the sustainability of natural resources, and more people discover that privatization is threatening *their* basic human rights, *more of us* will respond through uprising and revolution.

For many, it has already begun; they are the ones with nothing more to lose because all they had was taken from them while no one listened.

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On our way back to Jinka, we stop to have our palms read by a Hamar holy man. Sitting outside his little hut, surrounded by fields of corn, he tells me I will be extremely wealthy one day, but horde the money all to myself. I turn to my translator and say, **“That sounds about right.”**



Perhaps I am losing my own war. The idealism I lost in Mexico has been buried in Africa. In its stead comes something else that I don't yet understand. I've revised my strategy too many times for more meaningless gestures and battles that can not be won.

If I had nothing to lose and everything to gain, perhaps I would allow myself to be compelled to force change upon a world that has left me marginalized but, for now, I am on the winning side. I get to leave. Their lack of options haunts me, as does the nightmare of being trapped here; once the money dried up, so would the advantages of being white in a colored world, and I would become just another sinner trying to survive these many shades of hell.

I am looking forward to missing Africa; when I will be able to process the changes that are taking place inside me. It often takes hindsight to appreciate hardship and for the pieces of a fragmented life to fall into place.

When I return to the first world, I suspect I will return a little wiser. What I have learned here is that once idealism is dead and buried, what survives is excess and a receding value for human life. It is the propaganda of survival. Attempting to reconcile the soul is a progress made daily with the choice to accept personal responsibility for our actions. It means we are not a sociopath, and perhaps, this is what it means to be human.

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Globalization is a new “it” word for colonization. The smokescreen of democracy pretends to sing the anthem of global civil liberties but the tune is all wrong if we make decisions based on “economic and strategic value.”

Have we not learned our lesson yet? When people are denied their basic human rights, they begin to demand *extra* human rights.



The “troubles” in Northern Ireland existed long before its colonization by Brittan. The British may be responsible for uniting Ireland - giving centuries worth of foreign invaders who had settled on the green isle, a common enemy; a reason to put their differences aside and fight for independence. People will always fight when it is the only option they have left.

I asked a young Hamar man – one of five of his entire people to have completed university, if he thought globalization was a good thing.

“**Sure,**” he replied. “**How else would we have enough food?**”

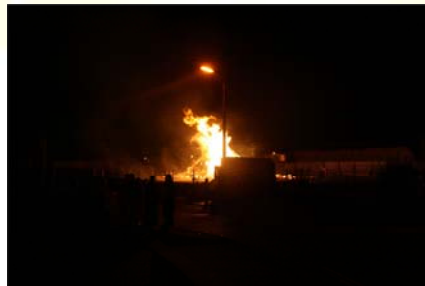
As we ate our corn, I wondered if his response would be different if the corn we were eating came from Mexico, in a package labeled Bob Doles Kansas Corn – grown on land seized from Mayan farmers.

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The first world is the minority. Our pop culture propaganda keeps spreading her legs before the nations of the world like a kubukicho whore, and we continue to pretend that our affluence does not come with a cost; that - if anything, we are somehow enriching those we take so much from, with our standards and rhetoric; with our gospels and conversion. If we set out to convert the world into being exactly like us, we do so on the back of that high horse - like the crusaders before us, galloping our way into Jihad behind a shield of self righteousness, swinging a sword of intolerance.

Every revolution is sparked, every war burns, with the same marginalized fervor: *Trying to inspire change will only lead to disillusionment as long as you expect people to listen. We must make them hear our voice.*





The countries easily entered always turn out to be the hardest to leave. I lamented this while exhaling my last Nyala. After checking in my luggage and waiting in line to have my visa inspected, I was admiring the militant atmosphere around me when I was approached by an airport official. There was a problem with my luggage and I was to follow him. We were met at the stairs by an armed escort.

I knew the only contraband I had was the Ethiopian Federal Police belt - carefully rolled up in the bottom of one of my bags, but a thousand possible horror stories crossed my mind - the urban legends of guerilla travel, and they all end up inside a third world prison cell for the next twenty years.

My well rehearsed excuses for how I came into possession of the belt were not needed. As it turns out, they thought I had a bomb. Our trigger happy escort would have taken me out, without hesitation, at any moment if he had thought I was going for the detonator. He assures me of this fifteen minutes later, when I am buying him a 'near death' roulette at the bar.

He was just as relieved as the remaining bug-eyed Ethiopians who had not run for cover when the "bomb" turned out to be my noisy electric razor which somehow got turned on. The lesson here, take the batteries out first.

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When I returned to Canada, my fourteen year old niece was arriving home from Costa Rica. I asked her if she had been afraid, during her trip. She said she had not, and I felt a little ripped off, for her. Isn't that the point of international travel? Or shouldn't it be?

Fear takes you places; it takes you out of the bubble we first worlders live inside. But fear is a double edged sword because not all the places it takes you are good, but all of them are important. Fear it is the primer that sets paranoia ablaze. As a political tool, it shapes what has become patriotic propaganda. It is amazing how many freedoms we will surrender to feel safer.

The last shred of idealism I have left is fighting to remain an enemy of consumerism. I don't know if this is because I understand that the next step of mans d-evolution is living in excess, or simply that I don't have the means.

It is entirely possible that my attacks on capitalism are but a response to coping with a system that wants to marginalize *me*.

I am overwhelmed when I see third world immigrants embrace the excess of first world consumption. It makes me wonder so many things, like my own potential to jump through hoops and abandon my idealism when given the chance to be *comfortable*. It makes sense that I would be overwhelmed; we tend to resent others when they show us something about ourselves we did not want to see; maybe because it becomes harder to deny.



You see, there are no black and white answers and no absolutes. Everything begins to look subjective when you entertain all possibilities, and when you start arguing with yourself, the whole point of having an opinion seems redundant and futile.

Religion, like politics, has taught me that masochism as a means to enlightenment is irrelevant and silly. It is one thing to have an opinion, it is another to voice it and expect others to want to change because of it. Perhaps that is the real problem.

It is likely that my war on spending will end with an increased disregard for the value of human life. The fact is, everyone can't be on top. Sustaining a poor working class is essential to commerce. There is no way we will ever give Africa the resources they need to fight the cycle of poverty because we need them poor, and we need their resources to replace our own depleting ones.

Utopia may be the impulse to dream but globalization is the means to give men the power of governments. The rules of progress have changed - and a new terminology replaces the old, but survival remains the mantra by which we all live: sustaining quality of life for ourselves and those we love. But what do I know? I am a card carrying member of the Bilderburg Group. My world will always stay the same.

