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Fierce Care

Politics of Care in the Zapatista Conjuncture

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Immediately following the killing of Colby Friday last August (2016) in Stockton, California by Stockton Police officer David Wells, Dion Smith went to the spot where Colby had been slain, and with several others refused to leave —watching over the spot and protecting the makeshift community memorial for two weeks until Colby's body was laid to rest. Of her own action, Dion says: "We wanted to show the community that we care. They can't just kill us." Dion's own son, James Rivera Jr. had been killed by two Stockton Police officers and a San Joaquin Sheriff Deputy six years earlier. Colby's mother, Denise Friday, who lives two hours away in Hayward, returns to the spot regularly, to sit and engage neighbors, refusing erasure and the fear that comes when police attempt to impose narratives and silence. These acts of vigil occurred alongside other community gatherings and speak-outs, spaces where mothers come together to seek and define justice. These are the quiet moments of care beneath the defiant clamor of protests and the arrests. They are visible reminders of a community of struggle that refuses the criminalization imposed on it.

When school let out across California in early June of this year (2017) and the distribution of school lunches was discontinued for

summer break, these same mothers began gathering once a week making dozens and dozens of brown bag lunches and handing them out to local school children in Stockton to help bridge the hunger of children during summer months when the schools shut down. When there were extra lunches, they distributed them to the houseless community gathered under the highway overpass, or, in another instance, delivering lunches and cold water and juices to people displaced from their apartments by fire earlier that day. They returned several times to the temporary shelter over the following days and weeks with food and water until everyone was safely placed in temporary housing. During a heat wave, later in June they brought cold water and juice to the houseless community as well. As August and the one year anniversary of the killing of Colby Friday approached, these mothers were furiously raising funds for a back-to-school backpack drive. Colby's two school age daughters dreamed the project together: the August prior, their father had been killed on the eve they were to get their back-to-school supplies as a family. In response a year later, their act of organizing supplies both exposed and remembered the stolen life of their father Colby, and reached out to other children and families to share necessary supplies for school. These are the heart of the struggles from Stockton, where mothers whose children have been killed by the state now "officially" organize as Stockton's Mobile Response Team weave a complex fabric of refusal and care.

We retell these stories and we are reminded of another story from Oaxaca —in Oaxaca, comrades tell us, "when we hear bullets being fired, we don't run away, we run to the sound of the bullets to find each other and together discover a way to stop them."

The storm is upon us as our comrades in Oaxaca remind us. These interconnected acts mark a commitment to create a space to fulfill everyday moments of care and at the same time to confront forces

of violence to protect family and community from within this storm. Not only are we able to recognize and remain committed to care; we find at times it can be fierce. What distinguishes care — that is the everyday efforts to nurture and be nurtured by the people around us— with other practices we are beginning to come to understand as fierce care? Against capitalism's individualizing technologies and competitive conditions, against the institutionalization that dismantles and then privatizes grassroots systems of care, against the spectacle and against neoliberal austerity, we refuse to abandon what we generally think of as care. We expect people to be thoughtful, to worry about each other, to find ways to support, nurture, and heal those around us. But, more than that, there is a growing awareness of the necessity to directly confront dominant forces and increasingly militarized systems of violence that intentionally target specific groups with the goal of disrupting, dispossessing, and disposing of particular communities. More and more, there is an organized effort to confront projects that seek to dismantle the social infrastructure of community and unweave the social fabric. There is a refusal by people who appear to be obstructions to capitalist development, especially and including those that are in the path of capitalist extraction and exploitation.

We know from the Zapatistas: this is the Fourth World War.1 For some time now Raul Zibechi has also reminded us of how in this context "superpowers" worry about the expanding urban periphery, the zones of non-being both on the edges of major metropolitan centers and in the periphery more generally.2 Zibechi analyzes the extractivist model as a new form of neoliberalism: "extractivism creates a dramatic situation —you might call it a *campo* without *campesinos*— because one part of the population is rendered useless by no longer being involved in production, by no longer being

necessary to produce commodities." For Zibechi, "the extractivist model tends to generate a society without subjects. This is because there cannot be subjects within a scorched-earth model such as extractivism. There can only be objects."[3] What does care look like at the end of capitalism? When we are no longer bound by the relations of a commodity society?[4]

Disposability as a technology and extractivism as an operation are imbricated in the entire system and proceed in violent unison as capitalism enters a new phase. Disposability revives settler colonialism's "drive to elimination…[a] system of winner-take-all;" extractivism follows its own mandate of total depletion of all resources, also a system of grabbing everything.[5] Is disposability a condition of capitalism in its final stage or simply becoming more visible in a new racial regime? "Disposability manifests," Martha Biondi reminds us, "in our larger society's apparent acceptance of high rates of premature death of young African Americans and Latinos." It is not only the school to prison pipeline, structural unemployment, and "high rates of shooting deaths" that produce disposability.[6] It is also the way we think about water, health, and collective ways of being. More recently, Lorenzo Veracini has taken up Patrick Wolfe's intervention around race and settler colonialism and asserted that both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous are now being treated roughly the same —that is as disposable people. "Working poor are growing in number almost everywhere," warns Veracini. "Like Indigenous peoples facing a settler colonial onslaught, the 'expelled' are marked as worthless. The 'systemic transformation' produces modalities of domination that look like setter colonialism." In other words, more and more people are treated as disposable and the system would prefer to eliminate them rather than convert them into exploitable labor.[7]

Read genealogically, the present focus on disposability presents as simply another justification for a greater commitment to invest in counterinsurgency and low intensity conflict strategies against civilian populations in regions of the world that still have strategic interests for the U.S. More to the point, these strategies and practices in social control economies increasingly directed at historically under-represented, marginalized populations in the U.S., are designed to dismantle systems, networks, and practices of care work. Locally, the increasingly visible militarization of urban police departments reflects a growing investment in low intensity war as a strategy to control urban populations deemed a threat. What we witness is more than simply an increase in the introduction of sophisticated new armaments filtered, for example, back into police departments from the military. As families with deep roots in communities such as Oakland are displaced to outlying zones such as Vallejo and Stockton, paramilitary-like formations and low intensity conflict strategies ratchet up violence that targets specific individuals, invades homes in particular neighborhoods, and disrupts family relations of marginal communities.8 More and more state violence strikes in broad daylight as young people of color are gunned down walking to the store or, in some instances, chased off roads by multi-agency task forces, as in the cases of Colby Friday (8-16-2016) and James Earle Rivera Jr. (7-22-2010) in Stockton.

Similarly, in other moments we witness the privatization and militarization of care as in the case of Kayla Moore. A transgender Black woman living with schizophrenia, Kayla was killed by Berkeley Police in her own home in 2013 when police arrived as first responders to a mental crisis call.9 Increasingly, it is the police who respond to calls for assistance for loved ones in crisis, calls often placed by distraught family members. What we witness is the

dismantling of New Deal institutions that themselves disrupted vernacular practices and networks of care by creating “needs.”10 Thus, dismantling of the Welfare State now gives way to privatization and militarization as those same institutions recede. Yet, a vernacular network of fierce care persists. It stretches across the Bay Area and the state as families respond to those killed while in need of care: Idriss Stelley (San Francisco); Peter Stewart (Eureka); Yanira Serrano (Half Moon Bay); Errol Chang (Pacifica); Jesus De Geney (Santa Clara); Anthony Nunez (San Jose). These names and the many names we repeat collectively on streets, on sidewalks, in parks and community spaces are reverberations of struggle. They respond to the basic needs of the community while also confronting the excess of the state and capital.

Starting from our different interwoven oppositions, we recognize the consistent struggle over care and the emergence of fierce care. Precarias a la Deriva alert us that women in Madrid's urban periphery have been creatively responding to the system's efforts to dismantle practices and systems of care. They warn that precarity results from four trajectories: the dismantling of the Welfare State towards a shift to strategies of "containment of subjects of risk;" the dismantling of community spaces and expansion of commercial spaces, paralleled by the "hegemony of the car;" the dismantling of systems and skills to grow and share food, produce clothing and other necessities, a process that works hand in hand with the rise of fast and prepared food; and the invasion aimed at time, resources, recognition, and desire for caring for children, elderly, and infirmed.11 Thus, precarity, as the current strategy of capitalism is often designated by some of its opponents, is not only a situation of inconsistent, underpaid, vulnerable labor conditions, it also results when areas of care in our everyday lives are privatized and no longer in our collective control. But despite this reality,

people, especially women and those most often with the fewest resources, refuse to abandon or relinquish the obligations of care. We also witness folks who are not content to respond with only the basics of care. Despite the impositions and restrictions of capitalism that manifest as austerity and competition, there are those who refuse to limit practices of care to immediate networks, e.g. family, but rather insist on care as a commitment and practice that continues to suture community beyond just one extended family.

For us the notion of "fierce care" is a concept that evokes the number of strategies that emerge in and through the “social factory” in opposition to the multiple, intersecting violences of capitalism in its late phase where extractivism seems to dominate. With Universidad de la Tierra Califas, we approach the social factory as a category through which we can see “capital’s efforts to displace the cost of reproducing the worker onto the community, household, and women.” The concept provides a way to “recognize ‘the community’ as a principal site of struggle with women as key agents undermining capital’s efforts to impose capitalist social relations, as well as generating new forms of reproducing the community that is dignified and autonomous.”12 Autonomous feminists from earlier *Operaismo* struggles situate the family as a “formidable cell of organization and social order” structured by capital.13 The social factory of the home and the family is not only a site for consumption, the production of value, and the exploitation/invisibilization of labor masked by the absence of a wage, it is a site of stability for capital and state across a number of vectors. It is a set of relations that reproduce a white social order. It is in this context also a site of “differential inclusion,” or “differential stability.” In the U.S., as Indigenous and Black populations are being abandoned by capital and converted into

disposable populations, and Brown communities and migrants are regrouping to create new networks of stability and reinventing "family" to manage their exploitation and abuse, the state cannot afford to abandon these groups; there must be a constant interruption of the stability that a family and home as carved out by capital would offer. The manufacturing and interruption of stability and the disruption of relations is organized in the present as a low intensity war.[14]

Our goal is to make more visible how capital and the state privatize and militarize care by focusing on the many kinds and multiple moments of resistances to the varied violences of late capitalism. In this especially violent context (where violence is structural, material, symbolic, everyday, lived, and survived), "fierce care" not only exposes the privatized and militarized violence of capitalism, it reveals the convivial practices and related tools of care that are outside of the rhythms of capitalist reproduction. In this instance, we rely on "fierce care" and the "social factory" as strategic concepts that help us to collectively build an analysis of the conditions of the present.[15] As strategic concepts, the "social factory" and "fierce care" emerged in relation to struggles for community safety in the Bay Area against the onslaught of the Fourth World War. This is what determines the Zapatista conjuncture: a collective naming of the violence we collectively face so that we can confront it collectively through a practice of "civic pedagogy" that highlights the role of shared learning and collaborative knowledge production as central to our struggles in that learning and research are essential to how we organize ourselves in the present. We must, as the Zapatistas warn, "learn a new way of doing politics."[16]

We see fierce care as a refusal, a response, a survival strategy, and a commitment to nurture and affirm life. Through the category of fierce care, we hope to learn for example, from the efforts by

mothers and families to end police violence as well as the militarized policing and the carceral apparatus currently directed at historically, marginalized communities throughout the Americas. Indigenous struggles and the Black and Brown working class are and have been refusing disposability. This can be heard in the adamant battle cry proclaiming, Black lives matter! and also in the stands taken across the globe by Indigenous people and their supporters to protect mother earth. More and more we are reminded that Indigenous communities are on the front lines of struggle. They are often the first line of defense against the rapacious and destructive extractive industries. It is this battle line that also signals that the U.S. is a settler colonial nation and as such has been and remains committed to erasing Indigenous people. The most recent persecution against the Standing Rock Sioux and others at the Dakota Access Pipeline has made sacred site water protectors into targets of the most advanced militarized police repression, deploying sophisticated weaponry, infiltration, and surveillance while also criminalizing sacred-site water protectors in the mainstream media. Can we learn from these struggles, including ways of understanding how space, including urban space, can be defended and reclaimed through collective action? Against this onslaught, it is the practices of care, the nurturing that makes survival possible, that poses the greatest threat by communities sheltering in "sheet-metal forests" or even those sub-terranean networks of care that are almost entirely invisible in the "concrete canyons" of smart cities. If the rebel army has always relied on care and strong bonds with the community to survive, perhaps it is these networks that define the resistance in the present moment, more than ideology and identification, flags and formations.

It is in this context of struggle that a growing commitment to spaces of learning appear to be increasingly a central part of mobilizations, a political process we have begun calling vernacularization. We have argued that many of the most dynamic and provocative political mobilizations, e.g. Zapatistas, have put "insurgent learning" and "convivial research" at the center of their political process.17 Specifically, this has meant incorporating spaces of learning as an essential part of struggle, making learning the articulation of the future in the present. In the Zapatista case they have convened spaces of learning and research as a key way to gather people and sustain a visible solidarity effort, collectively incorporate new strategies to confront capitalism, share new and long-standing knowledges about community regeneration outside of capital and the state, compare different localized practices of locally rooted community life, and imagine together the emergence of a collective subject as a key new political agent. As part of this insurgent learning and convivial research we have begun to note how many of these efforts result from and strive to reclaim vernacular wisdoms, knowledges, and practices –locally based collective ways of being that produce or reclaim convivial tools that make community regeneration vibrant. There are several issues and an equal number of trajectories that make an autonomous space of convivial knowledge production in this conjuncture urgent. Several political mobilizations responding to different kinds and levels of increased militarized police violence from Brazil to Canada raise important questions about how we might regenerate community without the state and capital. Similarly, the opposition to extractivism, primarily by Indigenous communities across the Americas, invites new theorizations about the role of culture, work, and land as essential elements articulated through reciprocity and obligation to a collective life outside of the violence of post-neoliberalism. The current struggles at the Unist'ot'en Camp and

at the Dakota Access pipeline as well as of the Lenca People of Honduras are prominent in the present moment.

We place these struggles and stories at the center of the Fierce Care Ateneo, an open autonomous space of reflection and action convened in the late summer of 2016 and facilitated by Universidad de la Tierra Califas.18 Over the past year, comrades claiming various resistances connected to spaces and projects across the Bay Area and beyond gathered monthly in Oakland to explore and elaborate "fierce care" as a strategic concept and a convivial tool. In naming it a convivial tool, we draw on Ivan Illich as a way to recognize something we produce together to collectively regenerate our communities.19 How could "fierce care" allow us to reflect on our struggles in new ways? Could it illuminate the often quiet incessant militancy that refuses capture and the spectacle? Can we use it to understand Indigenous struggles against extractivism and the struggles of mothers and families to find justice for their children while keeping their communities safe? Could it help us to understand the non-profit industrial complex as a site of counterinsurgency and to reflect on the current conjuncture of capital? Could we use it to better understand how to rupture our relation to capital? Could it be a prefigurative prism on the present? As our comrades in Universidad de la Tierra Oaxaca recently reflected: "we must come together and listen, recognizing that we must learn from each other as an act of sharing and care — rather than one seeking to crush the other."20 In this statement of generosity and refusal, we find that this too is fierce care.

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1 For more on the Zapatista designation of the Fourth World War, see El Kilombo Intergaláctico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything, An Interview with Subcomandante Marcos* (Durham: PaperBoat Press, 2007); *Critical Thought in the Face of the Capitalist Hydra I: Contributions by the Sixth Commission of the EZLN* (Durham: PaperBoat Press, 2016).

2 Zibechi, Raúl, "Subterranean Echoes: Resistance and Politics '*desde el sótano,*'" *Socialism and Democracy* 19:3 (March 5, 2011). http://sdonline.org/39/volume-19-no-3/subterranean-echos-resistance-and-politics-desde-el-sotano1/ accessed September 17, 2017.

3 Raúl Zibechi, "'Extractivism creates a society without subjects': Raúl Zibechi on Latin American Social Movements," translated by Seth Kershner. *Upside Down World*, July 30, 2015. http://upsidedownworld.org/archives/international/extractivism-creates-a-society-without-subjects-raul-zibechi-on-latin-american-social-movements/ , accessed September 17, 2017.

4 According to Anselm Jappe the Critique of Value school argues we must be emancipated from the subject-form all together. Anselm Jappe, *The Writing on the Wall: On the Decomposition of Capitalism and its Critics* (Washington: Zero Books, 2017): 19.

5 J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism Then and Now: A Conversation between J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe," *Politica e Società*, 2:2 (June 2012): 235–258.

6 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation,* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017): 16.

7 Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonialism's Return," unpublished manuscript, May 2017.

8 Kristian Williams, "The Other Side of the COIN: Counterinsurgency and Community Policing," *Interface* 3:1 (May 2011): 81-117.

9 Berkeley Copwatch, "People's Investigation: In-custody Death of Kayla Moore," (October 2013).

10 For a discussion of the production of "needs," see Ivan Illich, "Disabling Professions," in Ivan Illich, et. al., *Disabling Professions* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977): 11-40; Ivan Illich, *Toward a History of Needs* (Berkely: Heyday Books, 1977).

11 Precarias a la Deriva, "A Very Careful Strike—Four Hypotheses," *The Commoner*, no. 11 (2006): 33–45.

12 Center for Convivial Research and Autonomy, Convivial Research and Insurgent Learning, "Social Factory," Accessed September 17, 2017, http://ccra.mitotedigital.org/ateneo/social_factory.

13 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Family, Welfare, and the State*, (Brooklyn: Common Notions Press, 2015): 25.

14 For more on the social factory as a target of low intensity war, see Annie Paradise, *Militarized Policing and Resistance in the Social Factory: The Battle for Community Safety in the Silicon Valley*, PhD. dissertation, California Institute for Integral Studies, 2015.

15 Manuel Callahan defines a strategic concept in four key ways: 1) it is a site of contestation that can serve as an analytical category to acknowledge and celebrate oppositions; 2) it opens space for reflection and dialogue in order to promote efforts to change existing conditions of inequality; 3) it reveals a praxis, comprised of political commitments and related practice that are shaped by the

theoretical insights generated through spaces of collective "reflection and action;" and 4) it produces new knowledge about existing conditions and efforts and approaches underway to change those conditions, while recognizing resistance and claiming space(s) as
a way of engaging this praxis. Manuel Callahan, "Rebel Dignity," *Kalfou* 3:2 (2016): 259 – 277.

16 Manuel Callahan, "Zapatista Civic Pedagogy," unpublished manuscript, August, 2017.

17 Manuel Callahan, "In Defense of Conviviality and the Collective Subject," *Polis*, no. 33 (2012): 1–22; Manuel Callahan, "Repairing the Community: UT Califas and Convivial Tools of the Commons," *Ephemera*, forthcoming.

18 Universidad de la Tierra, Califas convenes two *ateneos*. For more information on Universidad de la Tierra, Califas and the *ateneos* see http://ggg.vostan.net/ccra/#18. See, also Callahan, "In Defense of Conviviality," op. cit. and "Insurgent Learning and Convivial Research: Universidad de la Tierra Califas," http://artseverywhere.ca/2017/01/26/insurgent-learning-convivial-research-universidad-de-la-tierra-califas/.

19 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Marion Boyars, 1973).

20 Universidad de la Tierra, Oaxaca http://unitierraoax.org/.