

REAL AND VIRTUAL CHIAPAS: MAGIC REALISM AND THE LEFT

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UNTIL THE UPRISING of 1 January 1994, Chiapas stood at the periphery of the periphery. It was a land marginal to both the Aztec and the Mayan empires and, at the time of independence from Spain, unclear as to whether it would become another miserably poor, nominally independent Central American country, the northernmost province of Guatemala, or the southernmost state – and, in effect, internal colony – of Mexico.

With just over three million people, Chiapas has now become the ‘navel of the world’ – as the Incas called their capital, Cuzco. It is the setting of events so moving and compelling that they can bring 50,000 Italian protesters into Piazza del Popolo, while the networks of Chiapas solidarity groups ring the world, dozens of websites are devoted to following the ins and outs of events in the Altos de Chiapas, a reported 5,000 foreigners have fanned out over these highlands to participate in one way or another in the drama as it unfolds, and by April 1998, representatives of 45 U.S.-based organizations convened in Washington D.C. to establish a Solidarity Network.¹ In sum, in countries around the globe there are energetic activists for whom a central political and social commitment is solidarity with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the EZLN. They consider Subcomandante Marcos and the EZLN to have articulated the most impressive challenge to neoliberalism and they see the Zapatistas as the foremost exponents of a revolutionary way of doing politics through electronic communication.

Why is the drama in Chiapas so compelling? What is the appeal that has led so many progressive people outside Mexico to make it the focus of their attention? In the early days the caustic observations, self-reflexive wit, and biting perception of Marcos held foreigners spellbound, and surprised and charmed

millions of Mexicans. But beyond the figure of Marcos – heroic, analytic, rebellious, amusing and solemn by turns – stands the appeal of the events as seen from a great distance. As Pierluigi Sullo, Nino Lisi and Marcello Vigli all note and debate in the pages of the Italian daily, *Il Manifesto*, the vast mobilization around Chiapas in Italy, the avalanche of signatures on the petitions of protest, and the massive participation in the national demonstrations protesting the massacre at Acteal ‘mean something important for the left.’²

But what, exactly, does it mean? What accounts for the European, Canadian and American left’s ferocious attachment, not to say obsession, with Chiapas? Is the appeal to those so far from Chiapas based only on the ease with which Marcos’s utterances can be interpreted and reshaped to cover every event, to speak to every personal and collective need? When Michael Lowy writes with enthusiasm, ‘It is a movement freighted with magic, with myths, utopias, poetry, romanticism, enthusiasms and wild hopes, with “mysticism” . . . and with faith. It is also full of insolence, humour, irony and self-irony.’, he has catalogued many of the elements of the appeal that the struggle of miserably poor, vulnerable people have for those whose circumstances are so different. As he himself notes, ‘This ability to reinvent the re-enchantment of the world is no doubt one of the reasons why Zapatism is so fascinating to people far beyond the mountains of Chiapas.’³

If the appeal to outsiders is not strictly a search for ‘re-enchantment’, by the disenchanting, is it perhaps an impulse similar to that of Sartre and de Beauvoir who, disheartened by the prospects for revolutionary change in their own society, embraced the cause of revolution in the third world? Is it a contemporary case of involvement with people’s struggles elsewhere in the place of participation and personal investment in the struggle at home?

Unquestionably much of the appeal to outsiders of the events in southern Mexico lies in the apparent extremity of the case. It appears as a direct confrontation between the powerless and the powerful, the pure and the impure, the honest and the corrupt. Given the elegant simplicity of these images in a world normally filled with ambiguities (or worse, post-modern relativism), it is not surprising that there are progressive people around the world who would do *anything* to support the struggle in Chiapas *except* learn the confusing details. In short, there is a great resistance on the part of many abroad to acknowledge and integrate into their analysis the immense complexity of the forces at play in Chiapas today.

In this essay I propose to examine a number of the complexities that make the situation at once so explosive and so resistant to resolution. In doing so I will identify the reductionism that produces a simplified version of events that is necessarily misleading. I will then analyse the very mixed role of electronic communication which has, on the one hand, saved countless lives by relaying information on military and paramilitary violence and human rights abuses around the world, but has also provided a remarkably ‘flattened’ picture of the actors and events in Chiapas. This picture constitutes a kind of ‘virtual’ Chiapas

that is instantly available to us on a computer screen,⁴ but which bears only a very partial resemblance to the ‘real’ Chiapas that Chiapanecans themselves or foreign activists, human rights workers, EZLN sympathizers, or even casual visitors would find on the ground in southern Mexico.

Finally, I will highlight the political perils of intense involvement with a virtual Chiapas. What harm, we might ask, is done if people thousands of miles away seize upon a set of images, symbols, and slogans that consolidate their sense that they form part of an international force that confronts neoliberalism? To be sure, there is no harm in much of this enthusiasm and, indeed, many foreign Zapatista solidarity groups are explicit on the need to support the effort in Chiapas by pursuing struggles closer to home. However, I will show that virtual Chiapas holds a seductive attraction for disenchanted and discouraged people on the left that is fundamentally different than the appeal of the struggles underway in the real Chiapas. Solidarity with the real people who inhabit the real Chiapas requires far greater political maturity and tolerance for ambiguity than the most passionately dedicated support for virtual Chiapas. It reflects a severe problem in the contemporary left’s politics that energetic solidarity for Chiapas often seems to require unambiguously downtrodden *indios* who are homogeneously good and pure, not multi-faceted, fully developed people with varied and divisive interests, not to mention complex individual personalities. Understandable as the urge to simplify may be, I will show that it is politically important to distinguish between the Chiapas on our computer screens and the actual situation on the ground.

POINTS OF AGREEMENT

There are, of course, some aspects of the case about which there is little or no controversy. For example, all reliable accounts of the background to the Zapatista uprising necessarily emphasize the ironic and tragic disparity of a land exceptionally rich in resources populated by the poorest people in what is still a country comprised, in the majority, of poor people.⁵ In this internal colony, a population that is substantially without proper shelter, adequate food, drinking water, or electricity, ‘exports’ timber, corn, beans, gas, oil, and hydroelectric power to the rest of Mexico.

Common as well to all serious analyses of the causes of the upheaval in Chiapas is a focus on the recent decades of rapid economic change stimulated by a mass of state-sponsored programmes that followed centuries of neglect by the central government in Mexico City. The populist programme of President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) required a vastly expanded state presence in Chiapas and precipitated a tenfold increase in public spending in this previously marginal corner of the republic. Within a very brief period, both the political economy and social structure of Chiapas were transformed by ambitious projects: investments in roads, dams, petroleum extraction, cultivation and commercialization of coffee, development of cattle and milk industries, and ‘colonization’ schemes to move landless peasants from other parts of Mexico

and other regions of the state of Chiapas into the Lancandon rainforest. These state policies pushed Chiapanecans into the world economy, even as the wars in Central America and the refugee flows they produced, altered the structure of employment throughout southern Mexico.

Naturally, these transformations touched different groups of indigenous people in different ways, further impoverishing some, while opening to others alternatives to subsistence farming and new sources of income in transport, construction, oil, cattle and dairy production. And soon the disequilibrium produced by these economic and social changes was intensified by the crash of the oil boom that had drawn so many indigenous people from the central highlands into wage labour on the gulf coast.⁶ Over the next decade, the social tensions produced by the oil boom and bust were deepened by a series of political and economic shocks: the debt crisis of 1982, the fall of coffee prices, and, finally, the neoliberal programme of President Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) which, for Chiapanecos, principally involved the elimination of price supports to corn and basic grain producers and the alteration of Article 27 of the Constitution, a concession to Mexico's NAFTA partners that spelled the end of the land distribution programme that had been the key element in maintaining social peace in the Mexican countryside.

Thus, the framework for understanding the remote and immediate causes of the outbreak of armed conflict in Chiapas centres on this series of changes. The most useful analyses inevitably set this rapid penetration of capitalist relations and the hyper-involvement and subsequent withdrawal of the state against a background of racist oppression of the indigenous population that began with the Spanish Conquest and continues in most respects unabated to the present day. Moreover, such analyses emphasize the way that the landed oligarchy of Chiapas historically utilized both a racist discourse *and* control of the PRI, that is, the Institutional Revolutionary Party's apparatus in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital, to reinforce its economic, social, and political domination. Under the circumstances, the intervention of the federal government challenged the hegemony, but ultimately did not undermine the control, of the Chiapanecan oligarchies, while the social upheavals created by the economic transformations of the 1970s and 1980s stimulated a new militancy and consciousness among both indigenous and mestizo peasants. In virtually all accounts of the events, it is this heightened consciousness that provides the precondition for the Zapatista uprising in 1994.

This militancy found two forms of expression. The first grew out of the outreach activities of the Catholic diocese under the leadership of Bishop Samuel Ruíz.⁷ Their activities began in the 1960s with the training of catechists who fanned out across the highlands, presenting the Bible and sermons translated into indigenous languages and urging the people to talk about their oppression and to consider their rights.⁸ These grassroots efforts culminated in 1974 in the First Indigenous Congress which brought together 1,250 Indian delegates from more than 300 communities. Informed by the new concepts of

liberation theology, the congress was sponsored by the Mexican state, but appropriated by Bishop Samuel Ruíz and the catechists as a means to give voice to indigenous communities, encouraging them to select their own delegates and conceptualize their problems in their own words. As Collier notes, the congress ‘provided a model of bottom-up organizing upon which independent peasant organizations subsequently drew’, and offered the opportunity to give expression to the grievances of indigenous Chiapanecans in terms that precisely prefigured the discourse of the Zapatistas twenty years later.⁹

The second type of militancy took the form of peasant unions, often tied to radical national organizations. Organized in many cases by veterans of the urban student movement that had been savagely repressed in October 1968, these new formations of the left reflected the belief of so many former student activists that only through the long-term, painstaking development of mass movements of the poor in the countryside and in urban shanty towns would it be possible to challenge the hegemony of the political elite entrenched in Mexico City. These organizations appeared in Chiapas shortly after the First Indigenous Congress demonstrated so clearly the capacity of indigenous people to come together across ethnic and linguistic lines and to grasp and articulate their own grievances.¹⁰

The history of this organizational effort in the 1970s and 1980s is – not surprisingly – a history of alliances and schisms. It is a tale of collaboration and co-operation, but also of rivalry between and among Maoists, Communists, Trotskyists, independent *agrarias*, Catholic missionaries and catechists, and Evangelical Protestants – all set against the co-optive efforts of the Mexican state to sponsor its own competing peasant organizations.¹¹ The Zapatista movement is clearly an outgrowth of the activities of these predecessor organizations. It reflects the commitment of these precursors to the basic principle of stimulating indigenous leadership and organization from below. However, *zapatismo* also represents a reaction against the compromises with the system in which so many of these organizations eventually became involved.

Thus there is little disagreement about the origins of the Zapatista movement in these two earlier organizational efforts, religious and secular. Moreover, for all the different interpretations regarding the nature of *zapatismo*,¹² there is a clear consensus that a distinguishing characteristic of the movement is the way in which, over a period of more than a decade, it slowly constructed a wide and solid base of support among an assortment of ethnic groups in the highlands of Chiapas. Unlike the classic guerrilla *foco* that hopes to attract a following after revolutionary activity has been launched, the Zapatistas were firmly supported by thousands of adherents in villages throughout their zone of operations. To build this base, the EZLN organizers drew upon long-standing principles of Mexican nationalism and they ‘breathed new life into a revolutionary history of Mexico which, for decades had been appropriated by the ruling party’.¹³ Drawing on these traditional radical themes, they developed a discourse that spoke not only to the most downtrodden people in Chiapas, but to disadvan-

taged Mexicans throughout the republic. Eventually, in 1995, with the convocation of activists and supporters from around the globe, the Zapatistas came consciously to represent and to articulate internationally popular critiques of neoliberalism.¹⁴

It is similarly clear that a defining characteristic of the uprising has been the ambivalent response it has elicited from the Mexican state. While the Chiapanecan economic and political elites rallied quickly to pressure for some definitive action to dismantle the movement, neither Salinas nor his successor, Ernesto Zedillo, has managed to settle upon a policy of accommodation or repression, of negotiation or military action, but rather both have pursued all of these possible responses at different times. This lack of a consistent policy is, in turn, tied to the unprecedented circumstances created by the technology that allows people around the globe to follow events as they unfold and to weigh in as a force of international public opinion concerning an event that the Mexican state would prefer to define as a national or local affair. The revolution in electronic communication and the exceptionally effective communication skills of Marcos have fostered an international solidarity that has, in turn, promoted both the survival of the movement and the personal survival of its members.¹⁵

THE COMPLEXITIES

Thus we find very little disagreement among analysts about the political, social and economic conditions that gave rise to the rebellion, the largely incoherent response of the Mexican state, or the success of the Zapatistas in reaching beyond the immediate zone of conflict to incorporate other Mexicans and sympathizers from around the world into their broader movement. However, when we turn to the accounts available to this mobilized international community of supporters, we find that what is generally communicated about the situation in Chiapas is a highly simplified version of a complex reality. While this picture is not intentionally distorted, it is ultimately misleading in ways that leave those who sympathize with and support the struggle in Chiapas in a very weak position to understand and analyse the events as they unfold. At times, as I will show below, it even makes it difficult to support the struggle in meaningful ways.

What are some of the politically important complexities of the Chiapanecan situation that have been lost or ignored in transmission to outsiders?

Land tenure

Almost everyone concerned for the welfare of indigenous people and poor peasants in Chiapas has learned that 56% of the land is in private hands. This oft-repeated statistic is misleading because it usually presented in a way that suggests that the private holdings are all concentrated in the hands of a few large landlords. The corollary to this supposition is that these estates could be available for distribution to the landless in 'ejidos' under the agrarian reform law *if*

the political will existed to move forward with expropriation of large haciendas and the distribution of land to petitioning peasants.¹⁶

Unfortunately, this *agrarista* dream cannot come true in the conflict zone in Eastern Chiapas, that is, Los Altos and the Lancandon Selva where the Zapatista movement is based. In this region there is almost no 'distributable' land left in large haciendas.¹⁷ In eastern Chiapas, the *latifundios* and even *neolatifundios*,¹⁸ substantially disappeared in the course of the last three decades. Some land was given as ejido parcels in earlier agrarian reform distributions and in the 1980s, the federal government purchased 80,000 hectares of private land for distribution to 159 peasant settlements. Thus, with the relocation to eastern Chiapas of western Chiapanecans displaced by the construction of the hydroelectric dams from the 1950s onward, the settlement of landless peasants from fourteen other Mexican states and the Federal District in the 1970s and 1980s, and the land set aside for bioreserves (under pressure from the international environmental community and supporters of the Lancandon Maya), so much of the land in the region had been given away in small parcels that the *latifundistas* in the zone found it safer to sell off portions of their land to neighbouring peasants in small lots than to resist the tide of land invasions and expropriations.¹⁹

Given the enormous pressure of population on land resources throughout Chiapas, the vast preponderance of the 56 percent of all land that is privately held in fact consists of *minifundios* of 5 hectares or less in a region where the smallest ejido plot is set at 20 hectares.²⁰ Thus, where some outsiders are apt to see a traditional *lucha agrarista* taking shape in which they imagine that landless peasants would be pitted against landlords in rural class struggle, in reality, the '*luchas*' over land in Chiapas are no less bitter but, sadly, they most often constitute a 'war of the poor'. In these events, *ejidatarios* who are trying to expand their inadequate parcels, or younger sons and daughters of *ejidatarios* who cannot inherit the family holdings are locked in conflict with neighbouring *minifundistas* who are fighting to hold onto their pathetically small and poor subsistence plots.

Religion

In the virtual Chiapas with which most internet users are familiar, religious actors have a crucial role to play. The religious actors we encounter on the computer screen are Bishop Samuel Ruíz, the Diocese, the Catholic human rights activists of the San Bartolomé Centre for Human Rights, and perhaps a few Protestants in the form of the U.S.-based Pastors for Peace.

While religion does play a central role in the events unfolding in Chiapas today, the picture on the ground is far more complex than the version on the screen. To begin with, competition for hearts and minds and above all souls, between Catholic and other religious groups has been a key motivating force in all that has unfolded in Chiapas over the last forty years. The transformation of Bishop Samuel, himself, from a traditional conservative into a socially engaged activist was prompted in the late 1960s by his perception of the need

for the Catholic Church to become involved at the grass roots *in order to check* the advance of evangelical Protestants among the peasants.²¹ As everywhere in Latin America and particularly in Central America, a ferocious competition exists in Chiapas between the Catholic Church and evangelical missionaries for the attention, affection and adherence of the poor. But for all the courage and sincere efforts of the catechists, and the charisma and dedication of Bishop Samuel, today only a bare majority of all Chiapanecans are Catholic, a figure that represents the lowest proportion in any Mexican state.²²

We might almost say that the downtrodden in Chiapas have never been free to make political choices, but increasingly they have made religious choices. And a great assortment of Protestants, some progressive and some conservative, have attracted converts. Of the Protestant churches, the Presbyterians are the largest and longest established, followed by Pentecostals (Assembly of God, Charismatics, Elim and Eunecer), Seventh Day Adventists, Sabbaticants, and Jehovah's Witnesses. On the scene as well, but in smaller numbers, are Baptists, Lutherans, Church of Nazarene, the Christian Church or Followers of Christ, Church of God, Light of the World, Prince of Peace, the True Church of Christ, and the Central American Church among others.²³ Most recently Islamic and Mormon missionaries have drawn converts and, in a couple of new settlements composed of Protestants who were expelled from predominantly Catholic communities, Islam will soon become the numerically dominant religious group.²⁴ Thus the religious map of Chiapas resembles a crazy-quilt of different religious sects, some historically well rooted and others, brand new. And to complicate matters further, these religious affiliations sometimes coincide with and sometimes cut across political identifications with either the official party, that is, the PRI, or the centre-left party of opposition, PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party).

Thus while Bishop Samuel appears to be – other than Marcos himself – the central protagonist in the virtual accounts of Chiapas, and looms as a towering figure in the versions of events that circulate in France, Italy and Spain, he is not the only important religious actor on the stage. To ignore the other actors is to fail to recognize what many consider to be a low-intensity religious conflict that cross cuts ethnic politics.

The Political Actors

Just as religious players turn out to be more numerous and varied than in the picture we usually see on the computer screen, the panoply of political actors in the drama unfolding in Chiapas is also considerably more complex. While virtual Chiapas is characterized by quite clear categories of good and evil, the more complex reality on the ground features a much larger cast of characters and even some groups that can be more difficult to define and sort out.

In virtual Chiapas, the bad guys are the Zedillo regime, President Ernesto Zedillo himself, his Minister of the Interior, Francisco Labastida, his official negotiator, Emilio Rabasa (scion of an elite Chiapanecan family), the PRI

(perhaps disarticulated into branches: that is, ‘dinosaurs’ and ‘reformists’), the Mexican state, the Mexican armed forces, and the U.S. military counter-insurgency forces, or at least the Drug Enforcement Agency, acting in clandestine fashion as a counter-insurgency force. The good guys are understood to be the Zapatistas, indigenous people, a broader category generally referred to as peasants, plus their NGO supporters, and Bishop Samuel and the Diocese.

In reality, of course, there are more players and many different interests at stake. A more complete analysis of the situation requires us to consider the interests of the Chiapanecan State as distinct from the Mexican State and national strategic energy interests as distinguished from regional economic and political power holders within Chiapas. For that matter, we should think of both the PRI and the PRD in Chiapas as having concerns that are far from identical with their national affiliates. In addition to ethnic distinctions among indigenous people – an aspect of the situation that *does* find its way into the electronic version of events since the pluri-ethnic presence of Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, and Tojolabal is such a prominent feature of all Zapatista gatherings – we need to factor in important differences in land tenure that create different interests among poor cultivators as in the conflicts among *ejidatarios*, *minifundistas* and the landless that were discussed above. Moreover, a key group of people who receive only sporadic attention abroad are those referred to in Chiapas itself as the ‘army of the displaced’, that is, indigenous people who are not Zapatista supporters who have been dispersed as refugees from the highlands to as far away as Tapachula on the coast. These *desplazados* are Chiapanecans from the conflict zone who, in many cases, voted not to take up arms when consulted by the EZLN in late 1993, and who were subsequently expelled from their communities or chose to leave the region for fear of getting caught in the cross fire. Now numbering well over ten thousand, the *desplazados* take centre stage in internet communications when they become victims of violence at the hands of the Mexican army or the paramilitary troops comprised of indigenous men armed by the Mexican state. But the fact that many of the refugees from the conflict zone also reject *zapatismo* does not figure prominently in the internet accounts.

The internet does make constant generic reference to non-governmental organizations as ‘civil society’ and, indeed, a great deal of electronic communication is, at some point, filtered through NGOs. However the term, civil society, does not seem adequate to capture the variety and diversity of organizations on the ground where, in fact, more than 750 Mexican and international NGOs are operating.²⁵ For the most part, the NGOs appear on our screens as an undifferentiated mass of progressive foreigners and Mexicans who work more or less in concert to alleviate the pain of the conflict in Chiapas, to stand by the oppressed, and to transmit the truth about what is unfolding in this distant and isolated place. While the internet version of events is largely uncritical of both foreign and Mexican NGOs operating in Chiapas, this attitude is not always shared by the people on the scene. Although those who principally relate to Chiapas on their computers are understandably reluctant to criticize

anyone who has actually taken off for Mexico to participate in NGO activities there, NGO activists and others at work in Chiapas are not so reticent.

Interviews I conducted in 1998 among a wide range of NGO workers indicated that a great many of these people do not like, trust, or respect one another and, as a consequence, are not able to collaborate. Many of the Mexican NGO people are former government employees who were downsized when the state was 'streamlined', and some of them have brought to their NGO work the attitudes that informed their relations with poor people when they were part of the state – a tendency for which they are roundly criticized by other NGO workers. Competition for international attention among a very limited universe of donors, turf wars, as well as profound philosophical differences plague the relations between and among NGO workers. For example, Bishop Samuel and the Diocese – so widely admired abroad for their courage by progressive people in general and progressive Catholics in particular – evoke a very different response among NGO women working in Chiapas on women's problems. Many such activists note an ironic similarity between the courageous political stances taken by both Bishop Samuel and Pope John Paul II in contrast with the two leaders' conservative social positions on contraception and abortion and indeed even on women's rights.

Moreover, some NGO workers expressed resentment at the pressure they experience to 'filter' their work, as they put it, through the Diocese, and the most important Mexican human rights organization in Chiapas, the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Centre, which was founded by Bishop Samuel, but operated as a secular, autonomous organization, was taken over by the Diocese after the 1994 uprising. Relations between the Zapatistas and the Church, as well as between Marcos and Bishop Samuel have had their ups and downs, to say the least, and local organizations in place and struggling for peasants' rights since the 1970s have been denounced by Marcos as '*tercerista*' ['third way-ers'] when their adhesion to the EZLN's appeals seemed insufficiently enthusiastic. As one long-time peasant leader said to me in an interview,

Marcos is always talking about 'civil society', but who does he think *we* are? He dismisses us as compromised by the relations we have had with the state [agencies] to get the things that peasants need. He appeals over the head of people here to civil society in the rest of Mexico and abroad, as if people farther away from Chiapas have not made their own compromises!

In short the 'civil society' that so many Chiapas solidarity activists see as the focus of their own hopes for solutions to the problems in Chiapas and more broadly in Mexico, turns out to be a more ideologically diverse and conflictive space than it might seem in the messages that circulate on the EZLN web sites and e-mail lists. When the array of actors and interests are examined close at hand, we find, not surprisingly, that there is a very large number of agendas both secular and religious, as well as radical, reformist, and conservative, that are being pursued in Chiapas today.

Indigenismo

The promotion of indigenous identity and the drive for indigenous autonomy seem very straightforward goals when they appear in internet communications. However, given the size of Mexico's indigenous population of 6.5 million,²⁶ and the centrality of the 'indigenous question' to the development of Mexico as a nation, the issue turns out to be, of course, far more controversial than the current, nearly unanimous international call for autonomous communities would suggest.

Under the circumstances, before weighing in with enthusiastic international support for autonomy, it would seem important to have at least some understanding of the concepts that emerged from the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) and the public policies to which those concepts gave rise. At a minimum, we would need to acknowledge the historical identification of Mexican nationalism with the indigenous past.²⁷ In the aftermath of the Revolution, the revival of interest and concern with the indigenous roots of the country, the recuperation of the figure of Cuauhtémoc, the nephew of Móctezuma who led the uprising against the Spanish, the celebration of indigenous history in post-revolutionary intellectual life – whether in the textbooks issued by the new revolutionary regime, or the works of the Mexican muralists like Diego Rivera, David Siquieros, or Jose Clemente Orozco – all provided the ideological foundation on which policy debates took place around the future of indigenous people in modern Mexico.²⁸

Unfortunately, however, these discussions took place not within indigenous communities, but rather among '*indigenistas*', that is, *mestizos* or whites who were usually quite unselfconscious about establishing policy on 'Indian affairs'. Not surprisingly, progressive Mexican intellectuals and policy makers have always been deeply divided on the subject. Cultural ecologists, integrationists, and Marxist *indigenistas* (who understood ethnicity as equivalent to class in relations between *indios* and *mestizos*) vied with incorporationist *indigenistas* for control of policy formation. This last group prevailed and implemented programmes for community development and the construction of schools, clinics and roads to bring disadvantaged indigenous people into full participation in the economic, political and social life of the nation. At the same time their vision required the 'preservation' of indigenous culture through the creation of dictionaries of indigenous languages, the stimulation of craft production, and similar programmes.

However, the same drive to incorporate indigenous people into the Mexican nation and market opened the door to their manipulation by the PRI, their gross exploitation by non-Indians, and their increasing dependency on the state. Under the circumstances, given the negative outcomes of integrationist policies, the development of a capacity for autonomous self-government became a principal goal of the Chiapanecan catechists in their missionary activities in the highlands in the 1970s. The composition of new pluri-ethnic communities comprised of indigenous people of various identities governed by

structures ‘designed to transcend rather than erase ethnic differences’ was at the heart of the catechists’ efforts in Los Altos. As Neil Harvey describes this movement, ‘Community cohesion was not based on native traditions, but rather on political militancy and religious belief. Ethnic identity was recreated as a basis for political unity.’²⁹

It is this concept of self-rule that underpins the proposals on indigenous autonomy put forward by the Zapatistas and embodied in the San Andrés Accords, signed by the representatives of the EZLN and the Mexican State in February 1996. The accords call for ‘the recognition of the right of indigenous people to self-determination within a context of autonomy, the expansion of their participation and political representation, the guarantee of their access to justice, and the promotion of their cultural, educational and economic activities.’³⁰

Inasmuch as the Zedillo regime signed the Accords but then failed to implement them, the EZLN broke off negotiations, and the call for the implementation of San Andrés quickly became the rallying point for Zapatista supporters everywhere. It has also become a mobilizing theme for indigenous people throughout Mexico. To read the accounts on the internet, it would seem that the entire world of progressive opinion is also solidly behind this model, or indeed, as Padre Gonzalo Iruarte, Vicar-General for Justice and Peace of the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas said to me in an interview in May 1998, ‘only profoundly paternalistic people who do not respect the capacity of indigenous people to govern themselves would be aligned against the principles embodied in this agreement.’

And yet, the idea has its critics. As has always been the case in the debates around the ‘indigenous question’ in Mexico, profound disagreement characterizes the positions held on the issue. In the interviews I conducted with Chiapanecan political activists and anthropologists involved with indigenous communities in the highlands, the lack of enthusiasm for autonomy was striking. It is notable that the climate of intolerance for alternative perspectives on autonomy was such that those based in Chiapas were very eager to express their views to me, but some were reluctant to speak for attribution. One explained:

This concept of autonomy is illusory because it suggests that *caciquismo*,³¹ the divisive forces of class, religion, political affiliation, and all the corrupt and violent people are external to indigenous communities and can be shut out once the communities gain autonomous control over their affairs. But these forces don’t lie *outside* of indigenous communities. They are already deeply rooted *inside* these communities, and autonomous administration will only reinforce the divisions and the dominance of the powerful over the weak, of rich over poor, of men over women.

Another told me:

Somehow this proposal has garnered great international support, but for

me autonomy is not an answer. I have heard a lot about the ‘Canadian model’ and it is usually posed as if, applied in Mexico, the indigenous people could close off their communities to outsiders and the vast natural riches of Chiapas will become theirs to exploit! The only problem is that the indigenous people of Los Altos are not sitting on top of the oil or gas or timber or hydroelectric power. These natural resources are in other parts of the state. The resource base in the highlands and the Selva is miserably poor.

What I think is needed is not autonomy but a serious redistributive policy. Autonomy would only mean that these impoverished people would be even more enclosed in their misery. What we should be demanding is that the poorest, disadvantaged regions receive a greater proportion of the national wealth. It’s little wonder that this proposal on autonomy is the only part of the San Andrés agreement that the Mexican state was willing to sign on to. It costs the state *nothing* if the indigenous people close in on themselves.³²

Another interviewee was more directly critical:

North Americans who participate in these discussions seem particularly enthusiastic about autonomous control but often they are bringing their own concepts to the discussion, concepts that pertain to a different reality. Do they think that the Tzotzil are going to set up casinos where well-to-do Mexicans are going fly in to drop millions of pesos at the gambling tables? Do they imagine that this is Canada where the dominant society copes with its guilt by channelling billions of dollars into the construction of a territorial capital for a new territory and supporting autonomous indigenous government at the rate of tens of thousands of dollars per capita?

The real question is not whether foreigners should be discussing the issue, or whether the experiences of indigenous struggles in other countries have bearing on Mexico. Rather it is a question of whether indigenous people in Chiapas are going to be better off with autonomy. Well perhaps they will. Or maybe they will end up no *worse* off than they are today. But in either case, it is not a discussion in which people with an essentialized notion of the *indio* should be participating.

It is this kind of essentialist notion of *el indio* that was expressed when, as in May 1998, 134 Italian would-be human rights observers turned up in Chiapas wearing neon green vests emblazoned with the words *somos todos indios del mundo*, ‘we are all Indians of the world’. In examining the international fascination with indigenous people, Alison Brysk writes,

The image of Indian as Other was read differently by Latin American policy makers and the international public. To their compatriots,

Indians' appearance made them threatening, subhuman, or simply invisible; to North Americans and Europeans, it made them fascinating, exotic and romantic.³³

Those who hold romanticized, essentialized notions of indigenous people in Chiapas necessarily have trouble thinking through the implications of autonomous communities in which minority rights are not guaranteed because, for them, *los indios* are all one undifferentiated mass of people. While these Italians may be familiar with a long history of intolerance, expulsions of minorities, and even ethnic cleansing in Europe, their 're-enchanted' image of *indios* did not admit the possibility of violence or intolerance within indigenous communities in Chiapas. But, in fact, the map of Chiapas is dotted with settlements formed by indigenous people who were expelled from their communities for religious or political reasons. It is remarkable how little appreciation of this problem is part of the discussion on the internet. In his writings, John Gledhill has expressed concern about the 'unresolved tension between constitutional individualism and indigenous communalism'.³⁴ But, for a great many Chiapas solidarity network members, the issue of minority rights within autonomous communities simply does not arise.

REVOLUTION BY INTERNET?

The relationship of electronic communication to the struggle in Chiapas raises two questions. One, as we discussed in the previous sections, is the way in which the information that circulates about events in Chiapas is simplified, flattened and sometimes, even distorted by its transmission and re-transmission on the internet. This problem, of course, is related to the question of how we learn things on the world wide web. What are the sources from which the information comes?

A separate question is how do we respond to the information that we receive electronically? How do we 'do politics' as an internet community? What does it mean when you can 'participate' in a movement without ever leaving the comfort of your room, without ever standing or marching in the rain?

Sources

Careful examination of the material that is translated, summarized and distributed through a variety of networks reveals that almost all of this material is drawn from the Mexican leftist daily, *La Jornada* which is published in Mexico City. *La Jornada* has had a special relationship to the Zapatistas from the start and the EZLN relies on this newspaper in a number of ways. Although there is a public perception that the Zapatistas are directly wired to the internet and tap out their messages on laptops in the Selva, in fact they count on *La Jornada* to relay their messages. As Lynn Stephen notes,

In reality, the EZLN is not directly connected to E-mail or to the internet. According to Justin Paulson, Webmaster for the web site

'EZLN.ORG,' EZLN communiqués are first faxed to several newspapers including *La Jornada* which publishes them. Different web sites then pick them off *La Jornada's* web sites. Because of the rapid publication of the EZLN's communiqués on the internet, they appear to come directly from the EZLN on to the net. In reality, often when I have visited Zapatista communities, I have brought news to them of what is going on in Chiapas – sometimes just 40 kilometres away.³⁵

Not only do the Zapatistas count on *La Jornada* to transmit their messages to the world, but, according to a number of people I interviewed in Chiapas, the newspaper has played a major role in providing feedback to the Zapatistas on how to craft a message that would be better understood beyond the borders of Chiapas or Mexico. Moreover, *La Jornada* has a particular relationship to the Zapatistas that some argue affects its coverage of the news. As one Chiapanecan activist told me in April 1998,

Here we jokingly refer to *La Jornada* as the '*Chiapas Gazette*' or the '*Ocoingo Times*' because it carries more news on Chiapas and the EZLN than on any other place in Mexico, sometimes even the capital! Of course it's convenient for us who live here and get to see two 'local papers'. But I read *La Jornada* and I don't recognize a lot of what I read. I'm not saying that they make things up. But they report things in a very partial way. If two Zapatista sympathizers are found dead in a gully, that's always reported. But if two peasants who were not EZLN supporters are found dead, sometimes it gets no mention at all.

Editorially *La Jornada* is close to some elements on the left and critical of others. And the newspaper's preference for the Zapatista position over other left positions has sometimes led to the exclusion of alternative views from the left. For example, regular contributors to the signed 'Opinion' sections of *La Jornada* have been bewildered to find that their columns were not run when they put forward views more sympathetic to the PRD position which called for fostering electoral participation in Chiapas than to the Zapatista position that elections were fraudulent and served reactionary interests and should not be a priority.

Having participated as an electoral observer in Chiapas in 1994, I would be the last to argue that fraud is not a problem in Chiapanecan elections.³⁶ Given the Chiapanecan elite's historical use of elections to reinforce its illegitimate hold on political power, it is easy to understand the EZLN's decision to sit out the elections of 1996, doing nothing to mobilize its supporters to vote. However, even if the question of the electoral road *vs.* extra parliamentary activity is a very old debate on the left, it would still seem to be a discussion that is worth having. By 1996 the Zapatistas had settled on a position of indifference to electoral activity at the same time that the Chiapanecan PRD thought it stood an excellent chance to take control of the Chamber of Deputies in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, if only people in the conflict zone would show

up at the polls to cast their ballots. In May 1998, I interviewed Gilberto Gómez Maza, head of the PRD in Chiapas who asserted,

The PRD is organized in all 111 municipalities in the state and if you count the seats we did win, plus the seats we could have gained had people voted in the regions controlled by the EZLN, we would have been able to form a majority in the Chamber of Deputies together with the opposition deputies from the PAN.

The son of two rural school teachers, Gómez Maza studied medicine at the National University and became the first, and for decades, the only pediatrician serving the indigenous people of the Chiapanecan highlands. His experience of the poverty and neglect in Los Altos, propelled him into political activity first as a follower of Heberto Castillo and the Mexican Workers Party (PMT), and later, when Castillo decided to support Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's bid for the presidency in 1988, in the PRD. 'What we are struggling for is to change the relations of power in this state,' he observed, 'and were it not for the anti-electoral stance of the EZLN,' he insisted, 'we could have gone a long way to accomplishing this goal.'

It seemed to me in speaking with Gómez Maza that foreign activists concerned with the future of Chiapas would at least want to think through and debate these assertions. But a full discussion among foreign Chiapas solidarity groups of the appropriateness of the electoral road would have been difficult based on the information available on most web sites because those speaking in favour of participation in elections generally did not make it into print,³⁷ or, when they did, theirs were not the features from *La Jornada* that were relayed around the world.

La Jornada's partiality on the subject would not be a problem if Chiapas solidarity groups outside of Mexico had other sources with which to cross check. But, careful examination of the material that is translated, summarized and distributed through a variety of networks reveals that most of the material available electronically is drawn from *La Jornada*. To be sure, this is a limitation not so much of *La Jornada*, which does provide broader coverage of the PRD, the unions and other struggles on the left, but of the way that material is selected and distributed and edited for internet distribution.

It is striking that many people who bring a sceptical attitude to anything they read in the 'bourgeois press' and who are capable of making the proper adjustment for sectarian perspectives when they read material generated by others on the left, accept what they read on the internet with no further critical thought – although this material is also filtered through the lens of particular political perspectives. In interviews with dozens of Chiapas solidarity activists that I carried out in Canada in 1996–1997, I found no one who could tell me who any of the webmasters are (other than their names), what are their politics or why one would feel comfortable with depending on a variety of sites, all of them monitored by just a handful of individuals. Like others around the world,

I feel respect for and gratitude to someone like Harry Cleaver at the University of Texas for the time and effort that he has put into keeping us all informed about Chiapas from the first day of the uprising. But it is nonetheless astonishing that there is so little awareness that most of what we read about Chiapas, and civil society in general in Mexico, has been selected and transmitted by Harry Cleaver or a couple of other people whose political outlook – other than a passionate belief in the power of the internet and its potential to build a ‘civil society in cyberspace’³⁸ – is completely unknown to most.

The problem of unequal access

This brings us to the problem of unequal access to progressive world opinion. The received wisdom about power and communication is, of course, that there is very unequal access to the means of communication. But this is usually proposed as a problem by which progressive opinion loses out to conservative or mainstream interests in media controlled by the rich and powerful. The internet, in most of these discussions, is posed as providing a levelling mechanism, a democratic or popular opportunity that opens the way for the poor and marginalized to communicate on the same terms as the rich and powerful. Through this means, we are told, it becomes possible for us to build links to other progressive actors and to construct a community in cyberspace. It provides, as Cleaver and others have asserted, the possibility to circumvent the censorship of the state, to chop down electronic barriers and to liberate information from corporate and state control.³⁹

While this is unquestionably an achievement of electronic communication, there is an argument to be made that progressive organizations within Mexico have very unequal electronic access to public opinion. The Zapatistas have been appropriately hailed as media savvy communications geniuses, but other movements of the left, indeed, other armed revolutionaries like the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) that is active in Puebla, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, not only lack an articulate spokesman like Marcos, they have not found their webmaster. And, as a consequence, their perspectives are not before us on our screens, and their activities are rarely reported.

In the case of the most important party of the left, PRD, one Mexican-based media expert explained, ‘the traditional left in Mexico is techno-phobic, and has few ideas how to make electronic communication work for them.’ Whatever the reason, indeed, the PRD has been very slow to make use of the internet and as a consequence, the party appears in electronic sources largely in terms of its deficiencies which are highlighted in communications from the EZLN. Because of this unequal representation on the internet, few sympathizers around the world are able to debate, based on statements from both sides, the relative merits of each position and the appropriateness of various tactics and strategies.

Vicarious participation

The excitement and satisfaction originally inspired by the opportunity to make political use of electronic communication to connect to a 'community' of fellow activists continues undiminished for many. The posting and reposting, the calls for signatures on petitions, adhesions to protest manifestos, the sharing of experiences of mobilization have all worked to create a sense of 'connectedness' among progressive people around the world and, in particular, among supporters of the Zapatistas. Indeed, nowhere does the sense of political accomplishment fostered by electronic communication seem keener than among EZLN solidarity activists.

However, much of this sense of connection is illusory because so much electronic communication takes place as a solitary act. When political participation consists of clicking a reply button that adds our name to a list, this act does not necessarily bring people together. Once support of a petition involved face-to-face encounter with another human being and perhaps a monetary contribution to underwrite the cost of a newspaper ad. Declining to sign-on also involved at least a few moments of debate with the person passing around the petition. Now the rejection of a political position can be accomplished in a stroke of the delete button. What is more, it could be argued that the extremely low level of engagement required to participate in this fashion produces a political effect that is equally modest. That is, 'sending a message' in this facile way may create an impression on power holders that is correspondingly reduced when compared to the same message communicated by thousands, or hundreds or even dozens of activists gathered in the same public space at the same time.

Moreover, as internet users we enter discussion groups and chat rooms with '*compañeros*' with whom we will never really need to work out our differences as we once had to do in political groups. We are no longer required to encounter each other, nor to work to persuade others of our position. We can just log off when we tire of the terms of debate on a particular list.⁴⁰ The anonymity that is provided to us in this form of political participation, the potential for instant withdrawal from the group, the small degree of effort that is required to express solidarity through these means constitute both the attraction and the limitation of internet activism. Electronic militancy offers a means to be part of a movement and to communicate to downtrodden people around the world that we have them in mind without actually having to bestir ourselves to climb out of our ergonomically correct computer chair to leave the house!

Lynn Stephen, a widely respected figure in the organization of solidarity activities around Chiapas, has noted another limitation of electronic communication and asks if it is not, in fact, 'a roadblock to grassroots activism'.

Every day, thousands of Americans receive updates from Chiapas, chat with others and feel that they are doing something. They are informed, but the kinds of actions elicited on the net are far from the tactics which often produce major political pressure. Feeling connected on the net

does not often inspire the kinds of high level, continual political pressure that can have a long-term impact on the United States Congress. . . . Meeting in a church basement to work on an information packet to distribute to local congressmen in visits is not the same as sending an attachment to a senator's aid about U.S. participation in the militarization of Chiapas.⁴¹

Stephen stresses that some types of activity co-ordinated through the internet can actually 'limit grassroots organizing efforts'.

Civil disobedience campaigns on the net, sending a fax, or voting on a Zapatista ballot by e-mail are important, but are not substitutes for face-to-face interaction and grassroots organizing. The fact that it took more than four years for a wide-ranging national meeting to be called of all groups involved in Mexico organizing with a strong basis in Chiapas suggests that the glut of information on the internet may have slowed down the urgency for creating a national network. People felt connected, but this did not result in long-term planning.⁴²

Even Harry Cleaver, one of the most enthusiastic proponents of electronic political movement, acknowledges some of the limitations of reliance on the internet:

The limits to [the power of the Net] lie both in the limits of the reach of the Net (as we have seen it does not connect everyone) and in the kinds of connections established. There is already an enormous amount of information in The Net about all sorts of struggle which have not yet been connected, not to the Zapatistas, not to each other. The availability of information and a vehicle of connection does not guarantee either that a connection will be made or that it will be effective in generating complementary action. Even political activists fully capable of tapping all the sources of information about social struggles available on the Net are regularly overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information. As The Net grows, and as the number of groups involved in struggle that are capable and willing to use it grows too, this problem will grow apace . . .⁴³

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that in a variety of different ways, Chiapas solidarity activists have come to depend on the internet to keep themselves informed and to guide their political activities. To a great extent, this new technology has facilitated the international effort to support courageous and highly vulnerable people who are struggling for their rights. However, rather than linking people in ways that strengthen their capacity to influence events, internet activism sometimes creates an illusion of connectedness and political effectiveness where little exists. The version of events that is transmitted and forwarded over and over may leave solidarity activists feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of material at the

same time that the information conveyed is often so partial as to be misleading. The highly simplified version of events communicated about Chiapas makes the decision to weigh in on the side of the oppressed relatively easy, but the question of how to proceed from there, or what is to be done, very difficult.

A remarkable number of people around the world are prepared to devote a great deal of their time to support the struggle in Chiapas. The question is whether they might better spend some of that time working to understand Chiapas in all its complexity, the way Chiapas fits into Mexico, and the way Mexico fits into the international order. The impulse to use the 'onrush of neoliberalism' and the 'popular struggle against neoliberalism' as organizing concepts by which to grasp the forces at play in the world is very strong. But these reductionist approaches are bound to lead to the same frustration and failure as the old reductionist models. What is unfolding in Chiapas today is not reducible to 'neoliberal predations' nor even to 'indigenous identity issues'. And we must be wary of approaches that claim this is the case.

Very basic appeals to respect human rights can be launched with no deeper understanding of the specifics of the situation. But any project that is more ambitious requires serious analysis. That a lack of awareness and preparation created by the constant circulation and repetition of a small number of superficial ideas about Chiapas has its costs, is illustrated in the backlash that has followed the expulsion from Mexico in May 1998 of 108 of 134 Italian solidarity activists. The contradictions of the Italians' *somos todos indios* approach quickly became apparent when they marched into Taniperla where they were anxious to express their concern and support for beleaguered *zapatista* women. The Italians were set upon, pushed and shoved by *indios* upon their appearance in the town. These were machete- and stick-wielding *indios* who, as PRI supporters, may fall outside of the all-embracing category that the *somos todos indios* construction proposes – but they were *indios* nonetheless.⁴⁴

For lack of knowledge and appreciation of the depth of post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism the Italians fell into a trap. In the end, the event was portrayed as a 'foreign invasion' in a country that has known foreign invasion, and it gave the Zedillo regime a nationalist card to play, reinforcing the xenophobia that has been the regime's only response to international concern for Chiapanecans.⁴⁵ This unfortunate outcome was the inevitable result of a kind of solidarity work that is based on a very partial and superficial knowledge of Mexico and Chiapas. It is the kind of solidarity work that comes out of acquaintance only with virtual Chiapas.

To be sure, some may argue that the circulation of a highly simplified or flattened version of events is necessary to avoid the airing of differences while war is being waged on defenceless people. To some extent they may fear that open discussion of differences on the internet may be exploited by the Mexican state to dismiss progressive pressure from abroad, just as many on the left of earlier generations feared that airing differences over the USSR or China would be misused. This old problem for the left is exacerbated in so far as solidarity

activists actually believe that if we do not speak of the conflicts and cleavages among forces on the left, or within indigenous communities, or among NGOs in Chiapas, the Mexican state will not learn of these disagreements and will not have the opening to exploit resentments and schisms in its effort to control the situation and disarm the movement.

In weighing this argument, we must consider that the chief architect of Zedillo's counter-mobilization/counter-insurgency strategy in Chiapas is Adolfo Orive Berlinguer. Through the 1970s Orive was perhaps the single most important figure in the political mobilizations in the highlands and in the co-ordination between the conscientization activities of the catechists and the organizational efforts of maoists. Having studied with Charles Bettelheim in Paris, Orive returned to Mexico and became the leader first of the Popular Politics tendency and later the maoist Proletarian Line – the same movement in which Marcos was formed. Orive came to Chiapas at the behest of Bishop Samuel himself, to organize a peasant-based movement that would bring together maoists, radical school teachers, liberation theologians and labour organizers.⁴⁶

By the end of the 1980s, however, Orive was working for Carlos Salinas and, based on his detailed knowledge of the physical and political geography of the conflict zone, was recruited by Zedillo in 1994 to direct the counter-insurgency in Chiapas. Given Orive's knowledge of every schism, historical or current, it is unconvincing to argue that if we do not discuss frankly and openly among ourselves the differences in perspective among assorted actors in Chiapas, then these disagreements will remain a secret from the regime.

In the end international solidarity is crucial to the survival of the thousands of people who are risking their lives to demand justice. But support is most effectively given by outsiders who grasp the situation at hand, not by those for whom Chiapas is a trope, or those who content themselves with a virtual rendering of events and actors that oversimplifies reality to the point that it bears only a very vague resemblance to the situation on the ground. International concern about Chiapas has, unquestionably, worked to restrain and contain aggression against the Zapatistas and their supporters, undoubtedly saving many lives. But effective human rights work requires, among other things, good and reliable information. In the end we might want to think less about our own 're-enchancement' and more about what is really happening in southern Mexico – even if some of the gritty details are less than enchanting. To do otherwise compromises the crucial role that foreigners can play in protecting the human rights of people at risk.

NOTES

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1. See Lynn Stephen, 'In the Wake of the Zapatistas: US. Solidarity Work Focused on Militarization, Human Rights, and Democratization in Chiapas', Paper presented at a conference titled, 'Lessons from Mexico–U.S. Bi-National Civil Society Coalitions', 9–11 July 1998, University of California, Santa Cruz.
2. *Il Manifesto*, 28 March 1998. The debates appeared in this issue and in *Il Manifesto*, 10 February 1998, and 1 March 1998.
3. Michael Lowy, 'Sources and Resources of Zapatism', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 49, No. 10, March 1998, pp. 1–2.
4. Throughout this article, I am using the term 'internet' to refer to the most commonly-accessible sites that people interested in Chiapas would be most likely to find while surfing the world wide web. For example, using 'Chiapas' as a keyword on various search engines provided in the most common web browsers (e.g., Excite, Infoseek, Lycos, or Yahoo), I found that a semi-systematic survey of the materials available tends to produce the same sites – and links – over and over. Therefore, the material to which I refer throughout this analysis, would be found on the following sites, or by following the links provided in them:

Accion Zapatista

<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html#AccionZapatista>

AMDH Bulletin

<http://www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/news/arc/amdh/1995/0000.html>

Chiapas 95 <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/chiapas95.html>

Chiapas 1997 <http://mac.theramp.net/Domcentral/justice/chiapas.htm>

Chiapas Index <http://www.ifconews.org/chorgndx.html>

Chiapas Menu <http://www.indians.org/chiapas/>

FZLN <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html#FrenteZapatista>

Mexico Solidarity Network <http://www.mexicosolidarity.org/index.html>

SIPAZ Servicio Internacional para la Paz

<http://www.nonviolence.org/sipaz/sipazf.htm>

¡YA BASTA! <http://www.ezln.org/>

Zapatistas in Cyberspace <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html>

5. Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, A Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); and George A. Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quarantiello, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, CA: Food First, 1994), pp. 16–7; Neil Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas: Rural Reforms, Campesino Radicalism and the Limits to Salinismo* (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1994); and Adolfo Gilly, *Chiapas: la razón ardiente* (México, D.F.: Ediciones ERA, 1997).
6. Harvey, pp. 10–14; John Womack Jr, *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader* (New York: The New Press, 1999), pp. 20–9; John M. Whitmeyer and Rosemary L. Hopcroft, 'Community, Capitalism and Rebellion in Chiapas', *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 517–38, pp. 528–33; and Richard Stahler-Sholk, *Neoliberalism and Democratic Transition: Looking for Autonomy in the*

- Jungles of Chiapas*, paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 23–25 April 1998, p. 1.
7. Womack, pp. 29–43; Carlos Fazio, *Samuel Ruíz: El Caminante* (México, D.F.: Espasa Calpe Mexicana, 1994), pp. 101–113. Xochitl Leyva Solano, ‘The New Zapatista Movement: Political Levels, Actors and Political Discourse in Contemporary Mexico’, in Valentina Napolitano and Xochitl Leyva Solano (eds), *Encuentros Antropológicos: Power, Identity and Mobility in Mexican Society* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998), pp. 41–2.
 8. Collier, pp. 62–3; Womack, p. 39.
 9. Collier (p 63) juxtaposes the demands presented by Chol, Tojobal, Tzeltal and Tzotzil delegates to the 1974 Congress with the EZLN’s Thirty-Four Point Agenda for negotiation proposed in 1994 and shows that they are almost identical. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.
 10. Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 86–88.
 11. La Botz, pp. 26–38 provides an especially clear and useful summary of this extraordinary period of organizational activity. A particularly useful aspect is his explanation for the great enthusiasm for Maoism among radical Mexican leftists.
 12. See the debate around the ‘post-modern’ nature of the movement, especially Roger Burbach, ‘Roots of the Post-modern Rebellion in Chiapas’, *New Left Review*, 205, 1994, pp. 113–24; and Daniel Nugent’s critique of Burbach, ‘Northern Intellectuals and the EZLN’, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 47, No. 3, July–August 1995, pp. 124–38. Also see Sergio Zermeño, ‘State Society, and Dependent Neoliberalism in Mexico: the Case of the Chiapas Uprising’, in William C. Smith and Patricio Korzeniewicz, eds., *Politics, Social Change and Economic Restructuring in Latin America* (Miami: University of Miami, North–South Center Press, 1997) pp. 123–49; Whitmeyer and Hopcroft, Lowy, and Susan Street’, *La palabra verdadera del zapatismo chiapaneco*, *Chiapas*, Vol. 2, 1996, pp. 75–94.
 13. Lynn Stephen, ‘Mexico’s New Zapatismo: A Culturally and Historically Embedded Critique of Neoliberalism’, Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Philadelphia, 2–6 December 1998, p. 3.
 14. See EZLN, *Crónicas intergalácticas: Primer encuentro intercontinental por la humanidad y contra el neoliberalismo* (Chiapas: Planeta Tierra, 1996).
 15. See Harry Cleaver, ‘The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle’, in John Holloway, ed, *The Chiapas Uprising and the Future of Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, html version from Chiapas95 web page, 1996; María Elena Martínez Torres, ‘The Internet: post-modern struggle by the dispossessed of modernity’, Paper prepared for the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Guadalajara, 17–19 April 1997; and Manuel Castells’s section titled ‘Mexico’s Zapatistas: the First Informational Guerrilla Movement’ in his book, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 80–1.
 16. Under the provisions of the agrarian law in place until 1993, this land would have been distributed to landless petitioners in the form of ‘ejido parcels’ that they would be free to cultivate and pass along to one of their offspring, but that would not be available to rent, sell or mortgage.
 17. Until the reform of Article 27 of the Constitution in 1993, a landholding was only

afectable or available for expropriation and distribution to petitioning peasants when it exceeded a maximum size established in accordance with the type of agricultural production pursued on that parcel.

18. That is, illegally large landholding created out of the concentration of holdings that fall within the legal maximum. Typically, a *neolatifundio* is comprised of a number of holdings that have been put into various family members' names, although in the commercial export agricultural zones of Mexico it has also been common for individuals to pay trusted *prestenombres*, or namelenders, to act as the owner of record for a 'neighboring farm' that is, in fact worked as part of a single large estate. Salinas's alteration of Article 27 of the Constitution made this kind of subterfuge unnecessary, to the great delight and relief of large landowners everywhere in Mexico. See Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexican Lives* (New York: The New Press, 1994), pp. 139–41.
19. Collier, p. 48–50.
20. The minimum size of an ejido parcel differs from place to place in Mexico according to the quality, fertility and access to water of the land that is distributed. On the subdivision of land parcels into ever smaller holdings under pressure of population growth, see María del Carmen García A. and Daniel Villafuerte Solís, 'Economía y sociedad en Chiapas', in María Tarrío and Luciano Concheiro, eds., *La sociedad frente al mercado* (México, D.F.: Ediciones La Jornada, 1998), p. 352.
21. Collier writes, 'Before 1974, the Catholic Church had already begun extensive grass roots evangelizing in eastern Chiapas, in part to ward off the advance of Protestantism' p. 62. Also see Womack, pp. 36–43 on this Catholic response to the spread of Protestant conversions.
22. INEGI, *Censos Generales de Población y Vivienda, 1990*, cited in García A and Villafuerte Solís, p. 364.
23. *Ibid*, p. 365.
24. In interviews conducted in May 1998, the explanation offered to me for the increase in Mormon and Islamic conversions was the appeal to men of religions that – as interpreted in the Chiapanecan contest – not only tolerate, but sanctify polygamous relationships. Now, instead of having an official wife, married in church plus a second *mujer*, and her children 'on the side' in the classic *casa chica*, men can have all their wives and children living with them under one roof.
25. María del Carmen García A, 'Las organizaciones no gubernamentales en Chiapas: algunas reflexiones en torno a su actuación política', in Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, *Anuario 1997* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 1998), p. 50.
26. The National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics, INEGI reports only 6.5 million because the standard they use is that a person must speak an indigenous language to be counted as an indigenous person. Meanwhile, the National Indigenous Institute, INI, which has good reasons to avoid undercounting indigenous people, estimates 10 million. See INEGI, *XI Censo general de población y vivienda*, México, D.F.: INEGI, 1992.
27. Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, *Anthropological Perspectives on Mexico*, London: Routledge, 1984), p. 53.
28. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); and Luis Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México*, tercera edición (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

29. Neil Harvey, 'La autonomía indígena y ciudadanía étnica en Chiapas', paper presented at the XX Meetings of the Latin American Studies Association, Guadalajara, Mexico, 17–19 April, 1997, p. 10.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 18. Héctor Díaz-Polanco, *La rebelión zapatista y la autonomía* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1997); Luis Hernández, 'Ciudadanos iguales, ciudadanos diferentes: la nueva lucha india', *Este País*, febrero, pp. 38–39; Marco Rascón, 'Autonomía para la integración', *La Jornada*, 16 febrero, 1998, pp. xiii–xvi; Gilberto López y Rivas, 'Los significados de San Andrés', *La Jornada*, 16 febrero, 1998, p. xii; Carmen Lloréns Fabregat and Rosa Albina Garavito Elías, 'Esencia de los acuerdos de San Andrés', *Coyuntura* 84, enero–febrero, 1998, pp. 33–40.
31. The rule of strong men or *caciques*.
32. This quote is drawn from an interview with Juan Pedro Viqueira, one of the few analysts who spoke for attribution He later elaborated these views in 'Los peligros del Chiapas imaginario', *Letras Libres*, enero 1999, pp. 20–8; 96–7.
33. Alison Brysk, 'Turning Weakness into Strength: The Internationalization of Indian Rights', *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 89, spring 1996, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 46.
34. John Gledhill, 'Liberalism, Socio-Economic Rights and the Politics of Identity: From Moral Economy to Indigenous Rights', in Richard Wilson, ed, *Human Rights, Culture, and Context: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), summarized in Xochitl Leyva Solano, p. 50.
35. Lynn Stephen, 'Mexico's New Zapatismo', pp. 6–7.
36. Judith Adler Hellman, 'The Mexican Elections: Rush to Judgement', *Globe & Mail*, Toronto, 2 September 1994, p. 8; On the 1994 elections, see Silvia Gómez Tagle and Ma. Eugenia Valdéz Vega 'Chiapas', in Gómez Tagle, ed., *1994: Elecciones en los estados* (México, D.F.: La Jornada Editores, 1997), pp. 179–209.
37. It is ironic that on the subject of elections in Guerrero State, *La Jornada's* position is quite different and the view that the electoral road might be usefully pursued at the same time as armed struggle has gained the approval not only of the Popular Revolutionary Army, that is, the guerrillas themselves, but also of *La Jornada*. See Blanche Petrich's interview with Arnaldo Bartra, 'En Guerrero, armas y urnas no se excluyen', Sunday 13 February 1999, p. 8.
38. See Cleaver, and Martínez Torres.
39. *Ibid.* Also see Castells, pp. 72–83.
40. A similar point was made by Benjamin Barber with regard to democratic participation in US. politics in 'Internet: A Place for Commerce or a Place for Us?', a presentation to the Columbia University Seminar on the Political Economy of War and Peace, 28 January, 1999.
41. Stephen, 'In the Wake of the Zapatistas', pp. 14–15.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
43. Cleaver, p. 19.
44. In the detailed coverage given to the event in the pages of the Italian daily, see Giani Proietti, 'L'esercito minaccia', *Il Manifesto*, 7 May 1998. Indigenous people who support the PRI and oppose the Zapatistas are always referred to as *priistas*, that is, 'PRI supporters', and even as '*squadrace priiste*.' This second term is best translated as 'organized squads of thugs' and is usually used in Italy to refer, literally, to fascist gangs.
45. Almost a year later I found Mexican human rights specialists divided on the ques-

tion of the utility of an approach that appears to challenge Mexican sovereignty at the same time that it tests the constitutionality of restrictions on foreigners' activities in Mexico and the rights of free association of Mexicans.

46. La Botz, pp. 32–34. Of Orive, Womack, p. 221, writes, 'The one constant in the movement had been the pre-eminence of its primary intellect and "ideological director", arguably the most remarkable organizer of his generation, Adolfo Orive.'