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Rebellion in Chiapas: insurrection by Internet and public relations

Jerry W. Knudson

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The Internet was perhaps instrumental in spilling more ink than blood in the recent two-year uprising in Chiapas, Mexico which ended in February 1996 with the first successful round of peace talks. There was blood shed after guerrilla fighting broke out on New Year's Day 1994 in the most southern and impoverished Mexican state of Chiapas.

Before the Mexican government declared a unilateral truce on 12 January, some 196 persons lost their lives — a figure which includes a few victims on both sides in rare truce violations since then. By contrast, in the holocaust of the military phase of the Mexican Revolution which began in 1910, an estimated one million people died before revolutionary goals were codified in the Constitution of 1917. Did the Internet, with instantaneous communication and 'the whole world watching', short-circuit similar slaughter in Chiapas? Coupled with adroit public relations by Subcommander Marcos of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), it was as if the conflict was fought on symbolic rather than real terms, what Alma Guillermoprieto has aptly called 'the shadow war' (Guillermoprieto, 1995a).¹

Marcos fought this shadow war via the Internet, lacing humor with his communiqués demanding justice for the Maya Indians of Chiapas and the 9 million indigenous peoples of Mexico. Living in abject poverty and social neglect, they comprise one in ten of the country's population and speak 42 languages, each group with its own culture and customs (Fuentes, 1994). Appeals on the Internet by Marcos to the country's conscience resonated not only in the streets and salons of Mexico City but also captivated the foreign press.

Journalists in droves converged on Chiapas, and many came away dazzled by the showmanship and erudition of the guerrilla leader. In news columns, the *New York Times* heralded Marcos as 'Latin America's first post-cold-war guerrilla icon' (Golden, 1995), and the *Los Angeles Times* called him 'the overnight messiah of Mexico's hard-core political left' (Fineman, 1995a). Joel Simon in the *Columbia Journalism Review* offered perhaps the most balanced assessment: 'The mystery of Marcos helps continue to make him a good story, despite a lot of exposure; his secret identity allows him to be both elusive and accessible at the same time' (Simon, 1994). At any rate, Tod Robberson of the *Washington Post* observed,

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'They [the rebels] seem comfortable around reporters and are skilled at constructing "sound bites" for television' (Robberson, 1994).

Revolt by Internet

Yet it was the Internet which first catapulted Marcos to national fame. When his communiqués were widely printed in the Mexico City press, reportedly people in the capital would ask each other, with surprise and delight, 'Have you read Marcos today?' Subcommander Marcos — under the fiction that no one among the Zapatistas was *the* commander — famous for his black ski mask and ever-present pipe, waged his propaganda battle from the insurgents' neutral zone in the Escandón rainforest stipulated by the ceasefire and ringed by 12,000 federal troops. Through computers powered with portable generators — or relayed through sympathizers in nearby San Cristóbal de las Casas — the rebels flashed their grievances by Internet to officials in Mexico City and others around the world.

More conventional means of communication were essayed by the insurgents. During the initial fighting, they briefly occupied the radio station in Altamirano (Nelson, 1994) and launched a newspaper, *El Despertador Mexicano* (The Mexican Awakener), named for the patriot resistance organ during the struggle for independence from Spain, but it did not take hold (Oppenheimer, 1996). Nevertheless, the Internet communiqués were the most important element in influencing public opinion.² An early one, transmitted on 10 January 1994 after the rebels had briefly seized four towns and an army barracks, was somber, 'Here we are, the dead of all times, dying once again, but now with the objective of living' (Bardach, 1994). Significantly, the insurgents apparently never hoped for a military victory; as Marcos said later, 'We did not go to war on January 1 to kill or have them kill us. We went to make ourselves heard' (Simon, 1994).

Their voice was loud and clear. The EZLN manifesto of January 1994, faxed in Spanish and English to officials in Mexico City as well as to publications and wire agencies, was explicit. The government did not care, the document proclaimed, that 'people are dying of hunger and curable diseases, that we have nothing — neither a roof, land, jobs, health, food, education, nor any right to elect our own leaders without interference from outsiders' (Wilbanks, 1994).

The communiqués themselves were printed even in the most conservative newspapers in Mexico City, bridging the chasm between the metropolis and the countryside. This was a feat never accomplished by the ruling Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) since its founding in 1929 except during the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40). Two weeks after the fighting started in Chiapas, some 100,000 people marched on the Zócalo, the central plaza in Mexico City, in support of the Zapatistas and fueled by the Internet blitz (Bardach, 1994). Even when the military outlook was bleak, Marcos was not discouraged. He declared in mid-1994:

The war isn't over. We will take Mexico City, although not necessarily in physical terms. Weren't we there already [by Internet] by January 2nd? We were everywhere, on the lips of everyone — in the subway, on the radio. And our flag was in the Zócalo. How often does it happen that an armed group's declaration of war is read in public just a few feet from the National Palace . . . ? (Guillermoprieto, 1994)

As Tod Robberson of the *Washington Post* reported, word from Chiapas spread like wildfire via Internet bulletin boards like PeaceNet, Chiapas-List, Mexpax and

Mexico 94. The reporter noted, 'With help from peace activists and rebel support groups . . . the Zapatista message is spreading around the world, literally at lightning speed, thanks to telephone links to the Internet computer network' (Robberson, 1995). As the Mexican army threatened the rebels, these electronic messages included the fax numbers of President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León and powerful Interior Minister Estebán Moctezuma, whose offices were flooded with protests. 'I don't know how effective [this] campaign was', said Mariclaire Acosta, president of the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights. 'But I do know that Zedillo's fax machine broke or was eventually turned off. The Internet is the best vehicle we have to spread information around. Before, we used faxes and telephone, and it took forever. Now . . . the feedback is instantaneous' (Robberson, 1995).

When federal police raided alleged Zapatista hiding places in Mexico City and the state of Veracruz in January 1995, they found as many computer disks as bullets. At that time it was reported, 'If Marcos is equipped with a telephone modem and a cellular phone [he could] hook into the Internet [directly] even while on the run, as he is now.' One clearing-house in Chiapas itself was the Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Center, headed by the Rev. Pablo Romo, who declared, 'Our mission is strictly informative. We use the Internet to inform people abroad [not only] of what is happening here, but mainly to counter the government's disinformation' (Robberson, 1995).

Critics charged that the rebels were using the Internet to spread disinformation themselves. When fighting first broke out, for instance, word went out via the Internet that San Cristóbal de las Casas was menaced by tanks and armored cars — yet reporters found no tanks anywhere in Chiapas. And one Internet group sent out an erroneous report that aircraft were strafing and bombing mountain villages. They also sent assertions that federal soldiers were raping women and killing children. Again, reporters who visited the sites of these alleged atrocities interviewed scores of witnesses but were unable to confirm even one such incident (Robberson, 1995).³

The war of words

At first, Marcos directed his Internet communiqués to the sympathetic national newspaper *La Jornada* in Mexico City, *El Financiero*, also of the capital, and the local *El Tiempo* of San Cristóbal de las Casas. *La Jornada* in particular published dozens of interviews with Marcos and verbatim transcripts of his communiqués. Later, *El Proceso*, the liberal weekly news magazine founded by Julio Scherer García after his ouster as editor of *Excélsior*, once Mexico's leading newspaper, was added specifically to the electronic mailings. Marcos reportedly used the cigarette lighter in his pick-up truck as a power source for his laptop computer to write these messages, ostensibly emanating from the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee — General Command but unmistakably his work, also bearing his 'signature' postscripts. Later, rather than addressing the communiqués to the four publications above, Marcos became more grandiose and directed his messages 'To the people of Mexico: To the people and governments of the world: To the national and international press' (*Zapatistas!*, 1994: 76, 323).

Meanwhile, journalists continued to besiege Marcos and the Zapatista rebels. Reporters flocked to the Escandón rainforest where they were usually kept waiting for days to be hauled in trucks or vans for midnight interviews. Flooded with requests for exclusive interviews or prefaces for books, Marcos in a playful mood sent out a form-letter via Internet to all who requested such special treatment: 'I

received your request for a kind of prologue or introduction to the book that is being published by — (note: fill the empty space with the name of the large, medium-sized, small, marginal, pirate, buccaneer, etcetera publishing house which has asked for this exclusive [interview or] introduction . . .)' (Ross and Bardacke, 1995: 21).

Such good-natured twitting of the press seemed designed to prepare the journalists for the serious messages to come. The Internet was relatively new on the international scene and its full potential had not yet been realized. Every detail about the EZLN subcommander snared the attention of the press, which could not decide if the eyes above the ski mask were green or hazel. One reporter found that some communiqués were 'patently false — for example, allegations of widespread summary executions and brutal torture by the army. These reports sped around the world to universities and human rights groups on the Internet before the Mexican government had even heard them' (Fineman, 1995b).

In July 1994 Marcos, riding high on the media's fascination with him, put out a communiqué titled, 'Everything You Wanted to Know about El Sup [Marcos's nickname] but Were Afraid to Ask'. He obligingly gave multiple choices for journalists to write ready-made stories:

At last we arrived at (a valley/ a forest/ a clearing/ a bar/ a Metro station/ a pressroom). . . . There we found (El Sup/ a transgressor of the law/ a ski mask with a pronounced nose/ a professional of violence). His eyes are (black/ coffee/ green/ blue/ red/ honey-colored/ oatmeal colored/ yogurt-colored/ granola-colored). He lit his pipe while he sat on a (rocking chair/ swivel chair/ throne . . .). (Simon, 1994)

The historic Emiliano Zapata

Here indeed was an astute man to be reckoned with. For the Zapatistas, it was revolt not only by Internet, but also by public relations. First of all, they appropriated the most famous historical name in modern Mexico for their cause — Emiliano Zapata, who between 1910 and 1919 fought against every ruling faction in Mexico City during the Mexican Revolution in his unyielding quest for land for his people. Eventually, after Zapata was betrayed and murdered at the hacienda of San Juan de Chinameca on 10 April 1919, he passed into martyrdom, but his *campesino* followers refused to believe he was dead. As John Womack Jr, the foremost biographer of Emiliano Zapata, has written, 'The belief that he had not died was a consolation, both for shame at not fighting any more and for anguish at having charged him with an impossible responsibility, having trusted him to death' (Womack, 1969: 330).⁴

Incidentally, the surviving children of Emiliano Zapata reportedly do not like having their father's name bandied about and exploited. Only one newspaper in the USA published two articles on this while the rest of the American press paid scant attention to the historic Zapata. Paul B. Carroll of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote about Mateo Zapata, now 77, the youngest son, 'Despite his distaste for the government, Mr [Mateo] Zapata says that the sort of violence going on in Chiapas belongs to another era and that Zapatismo has turned away from bloodshed' (Carroll, 1994).

In the other story, headlined 'New *Zapatistas* Sully Memory of Their Name-sake', the *Wall Street Journal*, perhaps anxious to protect American interests in Mexico, quoted Mateo Zapata as saying about the insurgents in Chiapas: 'I don't

think they are truly Zapatistas. People of Mexico and of the world think the name Zapata is synonymous with violence, but it's not. What he stood for was the protection of rights of common people' (Krauze, 1994; DePalma, 1994).

Second, from a public relations standpoint, why the ski masks for Subcommander Marcos and others in the EZLN movement? If it was simply an attempt to disguise their identity, foreign readers or viewers might take them as common bank robbers. Some said it was to hide the fact that they were not Maya and therefore easily could be dismissed by the authorities as 'outside agitators'. However, their tall height gave that away among the short Maya people, who usually are no taller than 5 feet due to centuries of malnutrition. No, the ski masks became an emblem, a trademark easily recognizable, as the *barbudos* (bearded ones) of Fidel Castro's followers who vowed not to shave until the dictator Fulgencio Batista was deposed in 1959. The symbolism of the ski masks became apparent as Marcos declared early on:

We could show our faces, but the big difference is that Marcos has always known his real face, and the civil society is just awakening from the long and lazy dream of 'Modernity' imposed at all cost to all. Subcommander Marcos is ready to take off his mask. Is Mexican civil society ready to lift its mask? (Scott, 1994)

In terms of name recognition, Marcos was a marketer's dream. Zapatista buttons, T-shirts, key rings and even condoms appeared everywhere. The Italian clothing firm of Benetton reportedly offered Marcos a lucrative modeling contract, which he turned down (Oppenheimer, 1996). In an opinion poll of February 1994, less than two months after the outbreak of fighting, 70 percent recognized Marcos as head of the Zapatista guerrillas, whereas a similar poll a year earlier had shown that the mayor of Mexico City — a high profile position — elicited only 45 percent for name recognition (Scott, 1994). More importantly Market Opinion Research International in Mexico City showed support for the Chiapas rebellion rose from 61 percent on 7 January 1994 to 75 percent on 18 February (Golden, 1994). Juanita Darling of the *Los Angeles Times* declared, 'the Zapatistas have demonstrated a mastery of symbolism and image-making worthy of Madison Avenue' (Darling, 1994).

Octavio Paz, Mexican winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 1970, had a somewhat different view: 'The media spectacle so well perfected by our neighbors to the North [the United States] has finally come to Mexico.' Expressing dismay, Paz explained, 'Beginning with their first public appearance on New Year's Day [the rebels] revealed a noteworthy control over an art that the modern media have evolved to a dangerous perfection: public relations.' Paz added, 'Television simultaneously brings the spectacle near and then draws away, the hooded characters close-up and yet remote, a hallucinatory museum of wax figures.' This was perhaps inevitable, he concluded, since 'politics borders on the one side with theater and on the other with religion' (Paz, 1994a).

Marcos and the working press

Yet it was on the Internet that Marcos made his biggest splash, feeding information and opinion to national and foreign reporters who quickly channeled it into print, radio and television. By February 1994, the EZLN was conducting almost daily interviews with Mexican and foreign journalists. Mark Fineman of the *Los Angeles*

Times reported, ‘Marcos joked, rambled and cajoled so frequently that most journalists and many residents in Chiapas nicknamed him “Subcomedian Marcos”’ (Fineman, 1995b). And his introductions or postscripts to the Internet communiqués were at times so florid that others dubbed him ‘Subpoet Marcos’. Yet they were biting, sardonic words crafted to suit the occasion. When, after a response to a joke by Marcos, it was rumored that the guerrilla leader was homosexual, he replied:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco . . . black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel . . . a pacifist in Bosnia, a housewife alone on a Saturday night in any neighborhood in any city in Mexico. (Simon, 1994)

For the most part, Marcos maintained good relations with the working press. Early in the conflict, he let it be known that he would welcome any news coverage when the peace talks began. In a communiqué of 29 January 1994 he declared, ‘There is an open-door policy for all news media that, in our opinion, carry out their jobs objectively, without taking part on one side or the other’ (*Zapatistas!*, 1994: 120). Marcos did veto the presence of Televisa, the largest television network in Mexico, formerly owned by the government and which downplayed the rebellion, as the nine days of peace talks ended in the first week of March 1994. Together with the government, Televisa had branded the rebel leaders as ‘transgressors of the law’ and ‘professionals of violence’. Marcos quipped, ‘Televisa doesn’t have to be there because they invent the news anyway’ (Ross, 1995: 183). He also accused the network of offering money to his men for interviews (Robberson, 1994). The rebel ban on Televisa, along with one other network, gratified other reporters who resented ‘the haughty privilege that the network usually flaunts’ (Darling, 1994).

One media event fell flat on its face, however. Despite Herculean efforts to prepare a meeting site for a so-called National Democratic Convention in 1995, few people actually attended and they were drenched in a downpour. The reason for the meeting? One man put it simply, ‘We want the government to take us into account’ (Guillermiprieto, 1995b). To this end, other public relations or propaganda images abounded. An aide to Manuel Camacho Solís, the government’s first negotiator, maintained, ‘They [the Zapatistas] know exactly how to get their message across. For Mexico, they send out these scary photos of guerrillas with rifles and ski masks. At the same time, they’re sending out photos to Europe of dead Zapatistas clutching sticks carved to look like rifles’ (Robberson, 1994). But Octavio Paz had the final word, ‘Thanks to his rhetoric and undeniable theatrical talent, Subcommandant Marcos has won the opinion battle’ (Paz, 1994b).

NAFTA levels its guns

This victory was all the more remarkable because the Zapatistas faced a formidable opposition propaganda machine. In October 1990 Mexico hired Burson-Marsteller, the largest public relations firm in the world with 62 offices in 29 countries, to promote Mexican acceptance of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), eventually paying the firm \$8 million (Nelson, 1994). NAFTA — which created a free-trade ‘dollar zone’ among Canada, the United States and Mexico — went into effect the same day that fighting broke out in Chiapas. Campesinos there had high stakes in the matter. In an attempt to ‘modernize’ Mexican agriculture,

NAFTA enabling legislation vitiated land reforms of the revered Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917, including doing away with the *ejidos* or communal Indian lands (Nelson, 1994). Chase Manhattan Bank, representing Rockefeller interests, issued in January 1995 a 'political update' declaring that Mexican President Zedillo 'will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and security policy'. Later, the Bank changed its wording to 'the *threat* of the Zapatistas' (Colby and Dennett, 1995), but the meaning was clear and echoes the days of Emiliano Zapata himself when the *New York Times* demanded in an editorial of early 1919 'the utter downfall, the permanent absence, or the extinction of Zapata' (Knudson, 1974).

There was much more to lament within the state of Chiapas itself, grist for the effective Zapatista Internet. In his first communiqué of August 1992, after the rebels had established themselves in Chiapas in 1983, Marcos recited a litany of wrongs. Half of the 3.2 million inhabitants of the state do not have potable water and two-thirds have no sewage system. Some 55 percent of national hydroelectric energy comes from Chiapas, yet only a third of the homes there have electricity. Some 1.5 million people have no medical services, mainly the 1 million indigenous people, including the 300,000 Tzotziles, 120,000 Choles, 90,000 Zoques and 70,000 Tojolabales (Ross and Bardacke, 1995: 31–51). More than 30 percent of the state's inhabitants are illiterate and 32 percent speak only their Indian language. Schools, where they exist, are ramshackle buildings with untrained teachers and few instructional materials. They offer education only to the third grade, and 72 percent of the children do not complete first grade (Conger, 1994).

Subcommander Marcos unmasked

A decisive turn of events came on 9 February 1995 when the Mexican government identified the elusive Subcommander Marcos as Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, son of a well-to-do furniture retailer in Tampico. As one official said, 'The moment that Marcos was identified and his photo was shown and everyone saw who he was, much of his importance as a symbol vanished. Whether he is captured [now] or not is incidental' (Golden, 1995).

Marcos was said to have been born on 19 June 1957. Educated by the Jesuits, he earned a graduate degree and became associate professor of graphic communication design at the Autonomous Metropolitan University near Mexico City, where he resigned after a year and reportedly taught briefly at the University of Nicaragua. According to a classmate, Marcos was influenced by the work of Louis Althusser, the French philosopher on theories of ideology and communication. The young Marcos also was entranced by another French writer cited by Octavio Paz as saying for the past 30 years we have lived in 'a society of spectacles' (Paz, 1994b). This led him to create his own *gráfica monumental* in the Lacondón rainforest of Chiapas (Guillermoprieto, 1995b).

The background of Marcos must have punctured the balloons of many armchair revolutionaries around the world who wanted to believe that the Indian uprising in Chiapas was 'rebellion from the roots' (Ross, 1995). A photograph of the man identified as Marcos even appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*, along with a photograph of the ski-masked guerrilla leader (Golden, 1995). Could it be that the image of their hero was tarnished by his middle-class, non-Indian and intellectual roots? As reporter Mark Fineman of the *Los Angeles Times* noted, 'It was certainly a background that the man identifying himself as Subcommander Marcos, in dozens of interviews during the last year, never suggested' (Fineman, 1995b).

When Marcos was unmasked by federal authorities on 9 February 1995, warrants were issued for the arrest of him and four other Zapatista leaders. These were subsequently cancelled as a goodwill gesture to facilitate renewed peace talks. Indeed, when Marcos attended, unarmed, a forum on indigenous Mexicans at San Cristóbal de las Casas in early 1996, Jaime Martínez, a federal legislator and delegate to the forum, called the rebel leader's appearance 'a dazzling show that gives us real hope of building peace' (Fineman, 1996).

Negotiations for peace and reform

Peace talks between the rebels and the Mexican government resumed in April 1995 and bore fruit in early 1996. Thus, this first round of peace accords had required nearly 10 months of negotiation. Among other things, the indigenous peoples wanted legal notices to be printed not only in Spanish but also in the appropriate Indian language. Most strikingly, they wanted self-rule with demands ranging from autonomous regions to Indian quotas in the national congress (DePalma, 1996). Yet perhaps the most controversial issue on the peace agenda was the stipulation that the government protect Indian lands and give up claims to oil and mineral deposits under them. Considering the time required for the first accords, many observers believe that further peace talks dealing with these claims could drag on for years (Moore, 1996).

Instrumental in bringing the two sides together was Bishop Samuel Ruiz of San Cristóbal de las Casas, who had long championed Indian rights and mediated the peace talks. The rebels claimed that 'dozens of thousands' of Indians had been consulted on this first peace accord and 96 percent approved it. A consensus or near unanimity, including the votes of children, was required.

'It's the first time we can definitely say that the war is moving towards its end', said the Rev. Pablo Romo, a Dominican priest in Chiapas who participated in the talks (Preston, 1996). The accord concludes only one of six rounds of negotiations under way between the Zapatistas and the government. Nevertheless, Tacho, one of the EZLN subcommanders, called the first agreement 'a triumph for a new form of dialogue and negotiation that no one has ever done before' in Mexico (Preston, 1996).

But what had the Indians gained, despite the millions of words spewed forth on the Internet and in interviews with visiting journalists? Carlos Fuentes, one of Mexico's foremost writers, noted, 'The effect of Chiapas has been to show us as a nation that our problems can be solved through negotiation rather than force' (Fuentes, 1994). Julia Preston of the *New York Times*, enumerated the advances made by the first round of peace talks, noting that for the first time the voiceless Indians of Mexico had a voice:

1. Recognition for the first time of the 'autonomy' of Mexican Indians, eventually including the right to adopt their own forms of government in their communities according to their customs.
2. Right to 'multicultural' education, taught in their own languages.
3. Move towards 'adequate' representation in state and national congresses.
4. Exemption of Chiapas Indians from the requirement that they must be members of the monolithic Institutional Revolutionary Party to stand for election.
5. Overhaul of the local courts and district attorney's office in Chiapas to give Indians greater representation.
6. Creation of a special Indian human rights office and an office for resolving Indian land disputes.

But how real are these gains? As Jorge Fernández Souza, a lawyer who took part in the negotiations, stated, 'To bring this down to earth, the powers that Indian communities will have still have to be defined. But it is a much broader recognition of Mexico's cultural and political pluralism' (Preston, 1996). In a videotaped statement early in 1996, Marcos announced his plans to form a new political opposition in Mexico — peaceful and nonmilitary — but not a political party which would seek power (*New York Times*, 1996). Were Marcos's political plans a desperate bid to regain recognition after his unmasking? The cover headline in *Proceso* in January 1996 was 'The Sunset of Marcos', and the newspapers of Mexico City, which had been printing his communiqués at the rate of one a day, turned to other matters.

The media and Chiapas: wider implications

In addition to reaching an increasingly wider audience — and the opinion-makers at that — the Internet conveys its messages with a speed now taken for granted. But the rapid transfer of information is a relatively recent world phenomenon. Every American schoolchild, for example, knows that in the War of 1812 Andrew Jackson fought the battle of New Orleans three weeks *after* the peace Treaty of Ghent had been signed on 24 December 1814 because word had not reached him. The Internet, on the other hand, brought the whole world to the doorstep of Chiapas. Perhaps the greatest value of the Internet during periods of social strife is its ability to mobilize public opinion and bring pressure to bear on authorities to act cautiously.

Through electronic communication, Marcos rapidly became a cult hero, poet of the dispossessed, and even sex symbol. 'It has become a compulsion for me to put out everything that I have inside me', he once declared (Bardach, 1994). With an almost inexorable driving force, Marcos laid bare the many dislocations in rural Mexican life through the Internet. He cajoled, wheedled and joshed middle-class Mexico — and many beyond its borders — into taking a good, hard look at his country.

It is erroneous to assert, as Tom Barry does, that 'the Chiapas rebellion was largely homegrown' (Barry, 1995: 162). Certainly its leadership was not, considering Marcos' middle-class intellectual background. The same fate befell university professor Abimael Guzmán whose followers terrified Peruvian campesinos with his Maoist 'Shining Path' in the 1980s, and Che Guevara, who met with utter peasant indifference in his Bolivian venture of the 1960s. Many campesinos throughout Latin America are tradition-bound and conservative, not wanting any change in their lives which might push them over their marginal edge, and they also distrust outsiders.

In this view, perhaps the initial 12 days of violence were intended only to grab the world's attention followed by a masterful use of the Internet and videotapes which kept the Mexican military at bay. With the 'whole world watching', Marcos courted national and international reporters who flocked to the scene, partly as insurance against reprisals by the authorities. And the burning issue, as in the days of Emiliano Zapata, was always land (Collier with Quaratiello, 1994). It should also be emphasized that the Internet has changed for ever the age of conducting diplomacy behind closed doors. By making their voices heard through the Internet, the people have moved into the decision-making arena that affects their daily lives.

In this regard, it has become fashionable to challenge Marshall McLuhan's concept of a 'global village', where everyone participates and there are no secrets. Columnist Georgie Anne Geyer, for example, and others maintain that mass

communications have been centrifugal on the world stage, causing national and ethnic conflict and fragmentation, such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the partition of Czechoslovakia, and the agony of Bosnia (Geyer, 1996). On the other hand, however, one can point to the centripetal force of world opinion which finally ended apartheid in South Africa, deposed Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines in a bloodless coup, stopped genocide in Argentina and caused Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to honor elections.

Much the same process occurred in Chiapas, a corner of Mexico few had even heard of before the appearance of Marcos on the scene. One would hope that the spotlight of publicity does not fade as journalists hopscotch to another crisis before the promises obtained at the Chiapas peace talks become reality. By all accounts, however, the Internet was pivotal as the most vital link which brought the peace talks into being.

Further reform talks were cancelled for April 1997, however, because Zapatista negotiators feared for their safety. The massacre of 45 campesinos at Acteal on 22 December 1997 further dimmed hopes for resuming the peace talks.

Notes

1. This article is based mainly on the results of a computer search of major US newspapers on the Chiapas rebellion between 1994 and 1996. The National Newspaper Index turned up hundreds of entries on this topic. The author of this article read them all, using qualitative (historical) methodology rather than quantitative (content analysis) techniques. There are advantages in both approaches. See Knudson (1993). Newspapers selected for the present study are the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*. Also consulted were all the entries on Chiapas in *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*.

2. Early collections of the communiqués include *Zapatistas! Documents of the New Mexican Revolution (December 31, 1993–June 12, 1994)* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1994) and *Shadows of Tender Fury, The Letters and Communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation*, translated by Frank Bardacke, Leslie López, and the Watsonville, California Human Rights Committee, introduction by John Ross, afterword by Frank Bardacke (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995).

3. Opposite views may be found in Human Rights Watch/Americas, 'Human Rights and the Chiapas Rebellion', *Current History* (March 1994): 121–3. This consists of excerpts from the testimony of Juan E. Méndez, executive director of Human Rights Watch/Americas, before the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs on 2 February 1994.

4. Other recent biographies of Zapata include Roger Parkinson, *Zapata: A Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975) and Peter E. Newell, *Zapata of Mexico* (Sommerville, MA: Black Thorn Books, 1979). The author of this article interviewed original surviving Zapatistas in the state of Morelos, Mexico in 1962.

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