The War of Ink and Internet

The Zapatista Rebels and the Electronic Revolution

by

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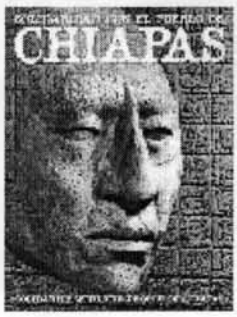
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Introduction
A Short History of the Internet and World Wide Web

Purpose

The Internet, the worldwide network of computer networks, has evolved in less than 5 years from a research tool for academics and a hang-out for nerds to a common medium of communication. Today, "the Net" is a huge shopping mall, a major news publishing house, a community center and a place for somewhat computer-savvy people and groups to disseminate information on everything from conspiracy theories and UFO abductions to AIDS education and political propaganda. One group that has received a significant amount of media attention for their presence on the World Wide Web (WWW) is the Zapatista Rebels in Chiapas, Mexico.

The EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) or Zapatista National Liberation Army has used the Internet to circumvent the traditional media in Mexico, which are controlled or at least censored by the government. More importantly, various individuals have taken up the cause of the Zapatistas and are actively disseminating Zapatista-related materials over the WWW. These sites provide both news accounts of the rebel activities, non-governmental eyewitness accounts of the living conditions in Chiapas and analyses of the situation by foreign observers, as well as writings, speeches, and communiqués by the Zapatistas themselves.

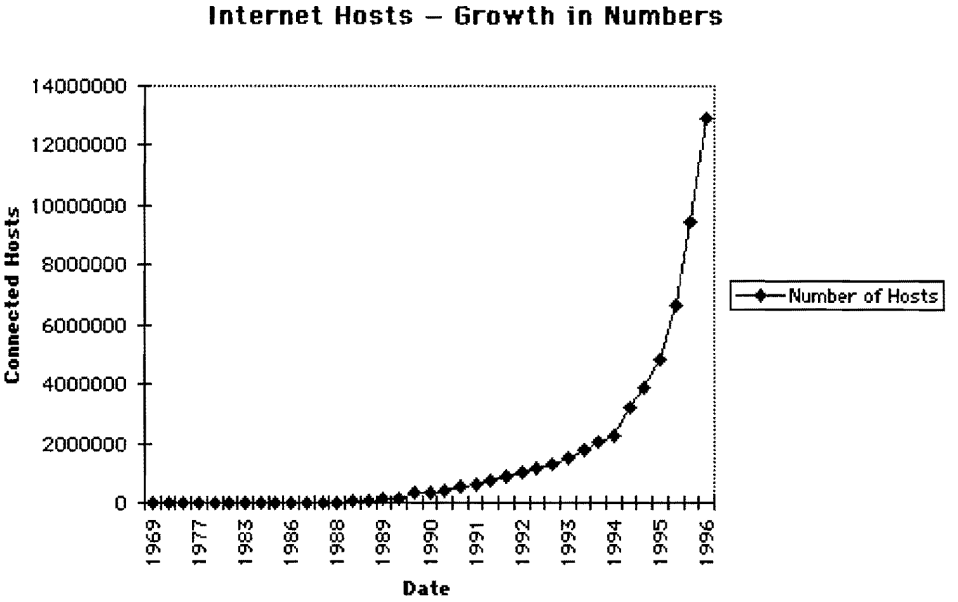
In this work I will discuss the use of the Internet by the Zapatistas and, more importantly, the dissemination of Zapatista information by their sympathizers outside of Mexico. Not only do these sites allow for dissident opinions to be heard over the objections of the government; they also provide an invaluable research tool for social and political scientists studying the rebellion and the conditions in present-day Mexico.

Early History

"The time for revolutions has not passed," writes Harry Cleaver in a book on the Zapatista Rebels.[1] One "revolution" that has been discussed *ad nauseam* in the mid-1990s is the appearance of "new media" -- a rather exaggerated term mainly applied to the Internet, the worldwide network of networks which used to be populated solely by researchers, college students, and the occasional hi-tech company.

The Internet has existed, in one form or another, since the days of the ARPAnet, a military computer network created by the United States Advanced Research Projects Agency in the Cold War days of 1969 with a handful of connected machines. Within the next few years, local research networks such as the University of Hawaii's ALOHAnet were connected to the ARPAnet, and as early as 1973, the first connections were made to overseas locations, specifically to the University College of London (England) and the Royal Radar Establishment (Norway). Naturally, in those days of infancy, very few individuals had

access to the machines running this rudimentary Internet, machines which were mostly running one of the rather cryptic early UNIX operating systems. Surprisingly, Queen Elizabeth II was one of the first persons outside the academic and military community to send an e-mail message. The real development of the actual Internet took place in the 1980s when the Net experienced its first true boom with most larger colleges and universities being connected to one of the larger sub-networks. In 1987, the number of "hosts" or connected machines broke 10,000, which seemed like an incredible growth from just fifteen hosts in early 1971. Yet only two years later, the number of machines on the Internet exceeded 100,000. The original ARPAnet, by the late 1980s merely a part or sub-network of the new Internet, ceased to exist in 1990, which also marked the beginning of the true commercial exploitation of the new medium.



source of data: Internet Timeline

More detailed information on the early history of the Internet can be found at the following sites:

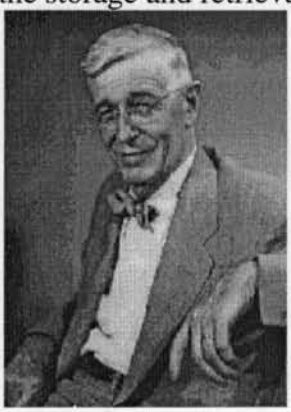
- The Internet Timeline -- A listing of the major developments in the history of the Internet from its infancy to the present day.
- A View from Internet Valley -- "A comprehensive and fascinating overview of the philosophy and history of the Internet." - Excite Reviews
- Community Memory -- An e-mail discussion list on the history of "cyberspace"

Most of the Internet development that took place before 1991 were of little concern to anybody outside the still rather small community of those with access to connected hosts. Most software used to access the Internet, such as e-mail programs or the programs that allowed access to the Usenet (the Internet's system of "newsgroups" or bulletin boards) ran on UNIX machines which were still difficult to use and much too expensive for the average individual. People who owned personal computers, purchased computer modems (expensive at that time), and also had the good fortune of being affiliated with a university or research organization could "log on" to the Internet from their homes. Access was text-only and still required knowledge of the rather cryptic system commands of the UNIX operating system. Today, people who were using the Internet regularly in the early 1990s often consider themselves pioneers of "cyberspace" even though the actual computer network is some twenty years older.

Enter the Web

If a revolution requires the participation of large parts of the general population, the true Internet revolution started in 1991 when the World Wide Web (WWW), a new method of accessing data over the Internet, became very popular. The WWW, sometimes just called the Web, was invented in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee, a British employee of CERN, the European High Energy Particle Physics Laboratory in Switzerland. Rather than distributing data solely as computer files or in a simple menu-driven form (Gopher), the WWW uses a method known as hypertext. In hypertext documents, certain words or phrases can have "live" or "hot" links to other documents. This very document is an example of hypertext; all words that are blue and underlined are links to other documents, containing further information related to the underlined phrase. These "hyperlinks" are the essence of documents on the World Wide Web, allowing a user to follow a customized, almost stream-of-consciousness way of reading a document.

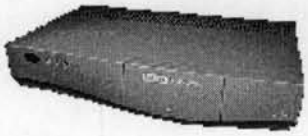
The idea of hypertext did not originate with the WWW but follows a tradition of theories on reorganizing the storage and retrieval methods of human knowledge. One of the most influential works in the development of hypertext is a 1945 essay by Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during WW2, called *As We May Think.* In it, Bush proposed new patterns of organization for the way information is stored, indexed and retrieved.[2] Dealing with the vast amounts of information created by the Manhattan Project, Bush reviewed the "generations-old" methods for accessing scientific research and found them inadequate for modern purposes. In a truly visionary fashion, Bush foresaw many of the late 20th century developments in data entry, storage, compression, and processing. More than that, Bush contended that these advancements would allow data to be organized in a fashion more similar to the way humans actually think, with connections and relations between subject matters:



"[The human mind] operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain. It has other characteristics, of course; trails that are not frequently followed are prone to fade, items are not fully permanent, memory is transitory. Yet the speed of action, the intricacy of trails, the detail of mental pictures, is awe-inspiring beyond all else in nature." (Bush, Section 6)

In a thought experiment, Bush created a device he dubbed the "memex," a desktop machine with vast information storage and an "associative index" where the touch of a button takes the user from one document to another related source of information. Today's World Wide Web is an almost direct implementation of Dr. Bush's memex, allowing users to "surf" through information following associative links between documents.

What has made the World Wide Web popular in recent years is not only its ease of use and its amazing associative indexing, but especially the character of its content. There is virtually no subject matter which does not get addressed on the Web. Internet "search engines" such as Yahoo or Altavista allow the Internet user to track down sources on any topic imaginable. Naturally, when the business community became aware of the growing number of Web users, it latched onto this new opportunity for advertising and sales. The Internet has truly become a "global village," a place where national boundaries cease to be of importance. A hypertext document at the University of Tennessee can transfer a user with one click to another document, or a multimedia file of pictures, sounds, or moving images, at Vanderbilt University across the state, or just as easily to a document in Kuala Lumpur or Mexico City. It has become impossible to estimate the number of WWW users worldwide since many of the connected hosts, such as computers at libraries, universities, Internet cafés, etc., are used by a large, undetermined number of people. Without a doubt, millions of people use the WWW regularly in the United States and tens of millions use it worldwide.



Web-TV set-top box [3]

It has become a stated priority for the US Government to expand the availability of the World Wide Web -- a term which is synonymous with "Internet" for many -- to all educational institutions and into many more homes and businesses (see the National Information Infrastructure Virtual Library for more information). Many other nations have proclaimed similar goals, and there are optimists who predict that in a very few years Internet connection may become as wide-spread as cable television or even telephone access is today. The advent of WWW-capable TVs (such as those recently introduced by Phillips-Magnavox) and the new breed of "web-computers" (such as SUN Microsystems' JavaStation) make this idea sound less and less utopian.



Sun's JavaStation [4]

Without a doubt, the Internet, through the development of the World Wide Web, has become a new mass medium. While not nearly as widespread as TV or traditional print media, the Internet has become an arena of news gathering, of serious research, and of recreation. In recent years, the Internet has also become something more: a tool for propaganda, a medium for gathering support for political and social causes, and a virtually censorship-free forum for the exchange of unorthodox and dissident information. Various groups, from political parties to non-governmental organizations, from churches to rebels and freedom fighters, use the World Wide Web to publizise their causes to the world, bypassing the often reluctant or censored traditional media and speaking, in essence, directly and unedited to their target audiences. When the ARPAnet was created, its designers built in an important capability, the ability to route around problems such as downed hosts or destroyed connections. This "routing" was instituted to allow the military network to survive after a limited nuclear attack. This intrinsic feature has survived in today's Internet -- an important characteristic in a network of over 12 million computers. Another, unintended, side-effect of this ability is the fact that the Internet routes around censorship in much the same way it would do in case of actual physical damage. No government can completely control the flow of information on the net without completely destroying it. There can be no effective censorship of the World Wide Web's content, since information need not be stored under the same jurisdiction as that of the intended consumer (as with traditional media). For example, WWW information about political repression in Mexico can be *stored* on computers in free countries (such as the US), yet be *accessed* on an on-demand basis by people in Mexico (or other countries in the world) who have computer access to the WWW, because the repressive officials in Mexico have no control over the information storage locations in the US. Certainly governments will try to regulate the flow of information, such as in the decency provisions of the recent Telecommunications Act. Apart from a public outcry, a protracted court battle and a number of feature stories in news magazines, these provisions have not reduced the amount of obscene material available on the Internet; they have merely made content providers somewhat more cautious in protecting their sites from access by minors or caused them to move to other countries with less restrictive laws.

In the following section we will see how the Zapatista National Liberation Army is represented on the World Wide Web. It is certainly interesting to note that this project itself joins the number of web sites which have the Zapatistas as their subject.

Definitions of Terms Used in this Paper

In this paper, a number of technical terms will be used when talking about the Internet and the World Wide Web. For ease of use, some definitions are provided:

Internet Terms	Explanation
FTP	**File Transfer Protocol** A simple method (protocol) for transmitting computer files from one Internet host to another. FTP allows basic access to another computer's file system and, after proper authorization, allows a user with access privileges on both machines to transfer files back and forth. **Anonymous FTP** A special form of FTP in which any user with access to the Internet can download (and sometimes upload) files from a host computer without having to be an approved user of that host, one of the early methods of distributing information on-line.
Gopher	A set of software developed at the University of Minnesota which allowed menu-driven networked distribution of information. Not hypertext, but a direct precursor to the World Wide Web. There are a number of gopher servers still in operation today and they form an easy-to-set-up alternative to the WWW. Most WWW browser software can access gopher information.

URL	**Uniform Resource Locator**
	A kind of address specifying the location and access method for a source of information (a computer file) on the Internet. The next four lines are examples of URLs:
	`http://www.yahoo.com`
	`http://www.cs.utk.edu/~miturria/`
	`ftp://ftp.uu.net/tmp/somefile.zip`
	`gopher://gopher.micro.umn.edu/`
	The first part of a URL specifies the access method, such as `http` for the World Wide Web, or `ftp`, etc. This is followed by the name of the host and the location of the document on that host.
	In a hypertext document, text or images can be associated with a URL (such as this text which is pointing at my project's title page), thus creating the "hyperlinks" that make up the World Wide Web.

HTML	**Hypertext Markup Language** This is the language in which WWW pages are written. HTML is read and interpreted by the user's web browser and then rendered onto the screen, displaying text and embedded graphics, and making the hyperlinks "active."
HTTP	**Hypertext Transfer Protocol** This is the software protocol (a protocol is a set of rules by which computers can communicate with each other) by which hypertext is transferred on the WWW. Other protocols include FTP (see above), the gopher protocol, SMTP (for e-mail), and NNTP (for Usenet newsgroups).

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[1] See *Zapatistas!*, Harry Cleaver ed.

[2] The links in this document will take the you directly to the on-line version of the essay. See the bibliography for a reference on the printed version.

[3] Picture taken from Web-TV Homepage.

[4] Picture taken from Sun JavaStation Homepage.

Emiliano Zapata
Father of the Zapatista Movement



The Mexican Revolution

Born on August 8, 1879, in the village of Anenecuilco, Morelos (Mexico), Emiliano Zapata was of mestizo heritage and the son of a peasant *medier,* (a sharecropper or owner of a small plot of land).[1]. From the age of eighteen, after the death of his father, he had to support his mother and three sisters and managed to do so very successfully. The little farm prospered enough to allow Zapata to augment the already respectable status he had in his native village. In September of 1909, the residents of Anenecuilco elected Emiliano Zapata president of the village's "defense committee," an age-old group charged with defending the community's interests. In this position, it was Zapata's duty to represent his village's rights before the president-dictator of Mexico, Porfirio Díaz, and the governor of Morelos, Pablo Escandón. During the 1880s, Mexico had experienced a boom in sugar cane production, a development that led to the acquisition of more and more land by the *hacienderos* or plantation owners. Their plantations grew while whole villages disappeared and more and more *medieros* and other peasants lost their livelihoods or were forced to work on the *haciendas.* It was under these conditions that a plantation called *El Hospital* neighboring Zapata's village began encroaching more and more upon the small farmers' lands. This was the first conflict in which Emiliano Zapata established his reputation as a fighter and leader. He led various peaceful occupations and re-divisions of land, increasing his status and his fame to give him regional recognition.

In 1910, Francisco Madero, a son of wealthy plantation owners, instigated a revolution against the government of president Díaz. Even though most of his motives were political (institute effective suffrage and disallow reelections of presidents), Madero's revolutionary plan included provisions for returning seized lands to peasant farmers. The latter became a rallying cry for the peasantry and Zapata began organizing locals into revolutionary bands, riding from village to village, tearing down *hacienda* fences and opposing the landed elite's encroachment into their villages. On November 18, the federal government began rounding up *Maderistas* (the followers of Francisco Madero), and only forty-eight hours later, the first shots of the Mexican Revolution were fired. While the government was confident that the revolution would be crushed in a matter of days, the Maderista Movement kept gaining in strength and by the end of November, Emiliano Zapata had fully joined its ranks. Zapata, a rather cautious, soft-spoken man, had become a revolutionary.

During the first weeks of 1911, Zapata continued to build his organization in Morelos, training and equipping his men and consolidating his authority as their leader. Soon, Zapata's band of revolutionaries, poised to change their tactics and take the offensive, were known as *Zapatistas.* On February 14, Francisco Madero, who had escaped the authorities to New Orleans, returned to Mexico, knowing that it was time to restart his revolution with an all-out offensive. Less than a month later, on March 11, 1911, "a hot, sticky Saturday night,"[2], the bloody phase of the Mexican Revolution began at Villa de Ayala. There was no resistance from the villagers, who were mostly sympathetic to the revolution, being sharecroppers or

hacienda workers themselves, and the local police were disarmed quickly. Not all battles that followed were this quick, however. The revolution took its bloody course with the legendary Pancho Villa fighting in the northern part of Mexico, while Zapata remained mainly south of Mexico City. On May 19, after a week of extremely fierce fighting with government troops, the Zapatistas took the town of Cuautla. Only forty-eight hours later, Francisco Madero and the Mexican government signed the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez, which ended the presidency of Porfirio Díaz and named Francisco León de la Barra, former ambassador to Washington, as interim president.

Under different circumstances, this could have meant the end of the Mexican Revolution. Madero's most important demands had been met, Díaz was out of office, and regular elections were to be held to determine his successor. León de la Barra, however, was not a president to Zapata's liking. While of great personal integrity, his political skills were lacking. The new president could not assuage the peasants, especially since his allegiance was clearly with the rich planters who were trying to regain control of Mexico, aided by the conditions of the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez. Even though Zapata had been ordered to cease all hostilities, he and 5,000 men entered and captured Cuernavaca, the capital of his native state of Morelos.



In 1911, Madero was elected president of Mexico, and Zapata met with him to discuss the demands of the peasantry. The meeting was fruitless and the former allies parted in anger. The only joy those days held for the thirty-one-year-old Zapata was his marriage to his bride Josefa, only six days after the ill-fated meeting with the president. Officially, the Zapatistas were disbanded and Zapata himself was in retirement. The police forces, in disarray after fighting the revolutionary forces, were no match for the new wave of bandits that were now roaming the land. The situation in Mexico deteriorated, assassination plots against the new president surfaced, renewed fighting between government and revolutionary forces ensued, and the smell of revolution was once again hanging over the cities of Mexico. In the "Plan of Ayala" (the city of his forced retirement), Zapata declared Madero incapable of fulfilling the goals of the revolution and promised to appoint another provisional president, once his revolution succeeded, until elections could be held. As part of his plan, a third of all land owned by the *hacienderos* was to be confiscated, with compensation, and redistributed to the peasantry. Any plantation owner who refused to cede his land would have it taken from him without compensation. The revolution was once again in full swing, and it was in these days that Zapata first used his now famous slogan of *Tierra y Libertad* or Land and Liberty.[3]

It was in February of 1913, after almost three years of violent struggle, that the formerly loyal federal General Victoriano Huerta murdered Madero, and the Zapatistas reached the outskirts of Mexico City. Huerta offered to unite his and Zapata's troops in a combined assault on the city, but Zapata declined. Even though Huerta eventually was declared the new president, after a sham of an election, he was forced to abandon the country in 1914, after yet another revolutionary faction, under "constitutionalist" Venustiano Carranza, forced his ouster. At this point there were three major revolutionary powers in Mexico, the army of Pancho Villa to the north (the Villistas), the "Constitutionalist Army" of Carranza, and the Zapatistas to the south.[4] In an attempt to consolidate these forces and become their supreme commander, Carranza arranged a meeting, which was held at Aguascalientes, in which the Zapatistas and the Villistas -- a majority at the meeting -- agreed to a new provisional president, a choice which Carranza rejected. War broke out between Carranza's moderates and the more radical Zapatistas and Villistas.

On November 24, Emiliano Zapata ordered the Liberation Army of the South (the new name for his fighting force of over 25,000 men) to occupy Mexico City. Eventually, Villa and Zapata held a meeting at the national palace and agreed to install a civilian in the presidency. The war had not ceased, however, and Carranza, whose government operated from Veracruz, held a constitutional convention, naturally without inviting Zapata or Villa. After the convention, Carranza's forces managed to defeat Pancho Villa and

isolate Zapata in Morelos. "Zapata ruled Morelos; but Carranza ruled Mexico. Morelos could never survive indefinitely alone..."[5] The federal powers under Carranza (a government now officially recognized by the Wilson Administration) and the Zapatistas in Morelos seemed at a permanent stalemate. Carranza knew that he could never fully take Mexico while Zapata was still alive and in charge of his army. To rid himself of his enemy, Carranza devised a trap. A letter had been intercepted in which Zapata invited a colonel of the Mexican army who had shown leanings toward his cause to meet and join forces. This colonel, Jesús Guajardo, under the threat of being executed as a traitor, pretended to agree to meet Zapata and defect to his side. On Thursday, April 10, 1919, Zapata walked into Carranza's trap as he met with Guajardo in the town of Chinameca. There, at 2:10 PM, Zapata was shot and killed by federal soldiers, and as the man Zapata hit the ground, dead instantly, the legend of Zapata reached its climax. Carranza did not achieve his goal by killing Zapata. On the contrary, in May of 1920, Álvaro Obregón, one of Zapata's right-hand men, entered the capital with a large fighting force of Zapatistas, and after Carranza had fled, formed the seventy-third government in Mexico's history of independence. In this government, the Zapatistas played an important role, especially in the Department of Agriculture. Mexico was finally at peace.

Zapata's Ideology

Zapata's revolution was first and foremost an agrarian one. It would in no way be fair to call Zapata a communist, even though his revolution fits into nearly the same time frame as that in Russia. Nevertheless, all throughout Zapata's speeches and writings, a few socialist themes keep recurring, such as agrarian reform in favor of giving some of the lands of the *haciendas* to the peasants. One of the more "socialist" ideas in Zapata's ideology is the re-establishment of *ejidas* or communally owned lands with shared use rights -- a system common among the Mexican *indios.* This was, however, not a contradiction to private property. One might choose to argue that even that attitude was not truly socialist, since Zapata was fighting for the restoration of titles that had been usurped by the planters and not necessarily a full, sweeping redistribution of all *hacienda* lands. One of the best documents describing Zapata's positions, which have been described as "bourgeois-democratic and anti-imperialist as well as ... anti-feudal"[6], is the 1917 Manifesto of the People. The revolutionary Zapata sounds very conciliatory in this statement of principles:

> *To unite Mexicans by means of a generous and broad political policy which will give guarantees to the peasant and to the worker as well as to the merchant, the industrialist and the businessman; to grant facilities to all who wish to improve their future and open wider horizons for those who today lack it; to promote the establishment of new industries, of great centers of production, of powerful manufacturies [sic] which will emancipate the country from the economic domination of the foreigner...* [7]

Zapata's main goal was the political and economic emancipation of Mexico's peasantry. Land reform was not an end in itself but a means to achieve this popular independence. Doubtlessly, Zapata argued for the destruction of the reigning feudal system which kept the sharecroppers and small-time farmers in perpetual poverty. Nonetheless, Zapata was, as always, cautious and prudent in not arguing for the dismantling of all *haciendas* but rather for a kind of coexistence between an empowered peasant population and a number of larger plantation owners. Throughout Zapata's writings, terms such as "economic liberty" and even "growth and prosperity" point out that a Marxist interpretation of the original Zapatista movement would be out of place.

As mentioned before, Zapata's ideology can be described with such inventive terms as "liberal-bourgeois," a very conservative-sounding ideology indeed. According to biographer and political scientist Robert Millon, such a liberal-bourgeois society would be a democracy in which small property owners hold the

majority of land, and the government is responsible for preventing foreign imperialism (in the sense of imposition of economic or political control)[8]. The anti-imperialist stance, seen before in Zapata's Manifesto when he proclaimed that the revolution must "emancipate the country from the economic domination of the foreigner," allows for a more modern interpretation of Zapata's ideology, that of the dependency theorists. Simplified, dependency theory states that a nation cannot fully develop economically and socially as long as it remains dependent on or under the control of the "First World" -- in Mexico's case under the influence of its big brother north of the border.

In a chapter called "Misconceptions Concerning *Zapatista* Ideology," the aforementioned author, Robert Millon, debunks some of the myths surrounding Zapata's beliefs and those of his followers. Many biographers of Zapata as well as chroniclers of the Mexican Revolution explain the Zapatista ideology as "Indianist," socialist, or even anarchist. As mentioned before, there are socialist elements, but they are by no means predominant. As far as "Indianist" ideology is concerned, it would be hard to argue that Zapata, a mestizo who always donned the garb of a small-time farmer and not the traditional white breeches of the Indians, was a racial purist. On the contrary, Zapata's ideology was quite inclusionary, trying to create a feeling of local and national identity among all racial groups. Zapata was, if nothing else, a realist. He certainly read and studied much about communism, calling it a "good and humane" ideology, but ultimately turned away from it, regarding Marxism as "impractical."[9].

Overall, it would be incorrect to state that Zapata had no socialist or communist leanings and did not attempt to implement any of the goals of those ideologies. It would, however, be an equally specious and rather tendentious description of Zapata to paint him as a communist, bent on destroying private property and seeking supremacy for those of pure Indian blood. The Mexican Revolution was in no way a communist one, unlike the Russian revolution that occurred almost simultaneously. Emiliano Zapata was a highly intelligent, rational leader, trying to lead the people of southern Mexico out of extreme poverty. He was a realist who knew when to fight and when to play politics. His legacy lives on today in the contemporary Zapatista Rebels of Chiapas. Their view of Zapata is decidedly different from the one presented here and their ideology differs significantly from that of Zapata himself. Nevertheless, they are attempting to achieve the same goal as Zapata, to lead their people out of despair and into a fair, equal future, free from oppression.

The Myth of Zapata

Throughout history, political and revolutionary leaders have been glorified by their followers in life as well as in death. Few in modern history, however, have experienced the apotheosis that has been bestowed upon Emiliano Zapata. It is no exaggeration to equate the veneration of Zapata with that of a religious figure. Naturally, there is a multitude of poems and songs written about the Mexican Revolution, some dealing with the swashbuckling and ruggedly romantic Pancho Villa, but many more commemorating the heroic life of martyr Emiliano Zapata. Marlon Brando portrayed him on the silver screen in *Viva Zapata!,* less than forty years after his death. Many revolutionary songs speak of Zapata and of his death (see *La Muerte de Zapata* from Alberto Mesta's page on *Corridos Mexicanos* or Mexican Folk Songs).

Even during his lifetime, Zapata was portrayed as a rather bloodthirsty, ham-fisted, and undereducated peasant, hell-bent on finishing his revolution, no matter what the cost. As so often happens, fiction and fact do not correlate very well. The popular image of Zapata, most likely propagated by his enemies, is far from the truth. Zapata led his men into battle only when it was the logical military choice and when he realistically foresaw a victory. When Zapata's forces occupied Mexico City, the infamy that had preceded him caused many of the city's inhabitants to quake with fear, fully expecting to be brutalized or killed by the savage peasants from the south. Many were surprised (and indubitably very relieved) when Zapatista

peasants went door to door, merely asking for some food to aid the under-supplied and under-fed forces.

The deification of Zapata is a more recent phenomenon than that of his vilification. It is not at all unusual to find contemporary poetry and literature, especially among the new Zapatistas, that elevate Zapata to a Christ-like state.

> From "The Story of the Questions -- The Real Story of Zapata:"
> *"That Zapata appeared here in the mountains. He wasn't born, they say. He just appeared just like that. They say he is Ik'al and Votan who came all the way over here in their long journey, and so as not to frighten good people, they became one. Because after being together for so long Ik'al and Votan learned they were the same and could become Zapata. And Zapata said he had finally learned where the long road went and that at times it would be light and at times darkness but that it was the same, Votan Zapata, and Ik'al Zapata, the black Zapata and the white Zapata. They were both the same road for the true men and women."*
> From current Zapatista writing: *"The man who assassinated Zapata, Colonel Guajardo, was promoted to General and given a reward of 52,000 pesos for his act, instead of being tried and convicted. After being shot, Zapata was loaded onto a mule and taken to Cuautla, where he was dumped on the street. To prove that he was really dead, flashlights were shown on his face and photographs taken. This didn't destroy the myth of his death, because Zapata could not and would not die! Like Commandante Marcos, he was too smart to be killed in an ambush. Hadn't Zapata's white horse been seen on top of the mountain? Every single person in the valley of Morelos still believes to this day that Zapata is still alive. Perhaps they are right."*[10]

As is evident in these words, there is a cult of personality that lives on after Zapata's physical death. Emiliano Zapata has certainly become a messianic figure for Mexico. The modern Zapatistas draw strength from this myth, and they claim to be the true heirs to the tradition started by a peasant revolutionary with a vision of social justice.

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[1] Sources for the account of Zapata's life, the Mexican Revolution, and the Zapatista ideology areMillon, Parkinson, and Womack, and from the on-line edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica. Photograph of Zapata on this page taken from Womack.

[2] Parkinson, page 51.

[3] Painting of Emiliano Zapata taken from: Emiliano Zapata y el Plan de Ayala, available on Mexico's PixelNet.

[4] A map of Mexico is available.

[5] Parkinson, p. 227.

[6] Millon, p. 78

[7] quoted in ibid., p. 78f

[8] ibid., p. 63

[9] ibid., p. 94

[10] Both citations from "Emiliano Zapata" a web page maintained by Glenn Welker.

The Zapatista Rebels

"The Electronic Fabric of Struggle"

The sub-title of this section of my paper was borrowed from a chapter written by Harry Cleaver for an upcoming book entitled *The Chiapas Uprising and the Future of Revolution in the Twenty-First Century,* edited by John Holloway. In this chapter, Cleaver, a professor of economics at the University of Texas at Austin and undoubtedly one of the authorities on the Chiapas rebellion, analyzes how "The Net" has aided the Zapatistas in bringing their message out into the world. The chapter provides an excellent history of the proliferation of Zapatista materials on the Internet, an overview of the effect this "appropriation of cyberspace" has had on public opinion and an examination of what Cleaver calls "capitalist counterattacks" on this appropriation[1]. Fortunately, the focus of Cleaver's article is sufficiently different from the one I wish to pursue so as to avoid excessive duplication of effort. Nevertheless, his chapter had served as one of the main sources for this subdivision of my paper.

Who Are The Rebels?[2]



On New Years Day, 1994, a virtually unheard-of revolutionary group calling itself the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or EZLN) took over a number of villages and cities in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. The group proceeded to battle government troops until a fragile cease-fire was arranged at the end of the month. What did these rebels fight for? To understand that question, one must have a general idea of the economic and social conditions in Chiapas. According to George Collier, Chiapas "lags behind the rest of Mexico in almost every way."[3] Only about 11% of the working population earn "moderate incomes" of at least $3,450 per year. Running water is a luxury, and television can be found in less than 15% of the households. At the same time, with only 3 percent of the Mexican population, Chiapas produces 13% of the country's corn and over 50% of the hydroelectric power. Given these numbers, it is easy to understand that most of the money funneled into the state by the federal Mexican government is used to build roads and other infrastructure aiding the transportation of goods from the province to the rest of the country. The large production of corn and other foodstuffs notwithstanding, hunger and disease run rampant among the mostly-Indian population of Chiapas, making it one of the more dismal places in Mexico. The slogan that the Zapatista Rebels have written on their banner is *Basta ya!* or "Enough is Enough!" In their first communiqué, issued on the first day of their uprising, the EZLN states:

> *But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this*

> *struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70 year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups.*[4]

The mentioned "clique of traitors" refers to none other than the Mexican government, led by the PRI or Party of Institutionalized Revolution, a group that has ruled Mexico since shortly after the 1910 revolution. Calling the PRI "traitors" might not be an exaggeration on the part of the Zapatista propaganda. As recently as 1992, the Mexican government changed Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, a document written after the Revolution in 1917 and realizing many of the ideas and ideals of Emiliano Zapata and others. The change to Article 27 repealed a land reform and thus "robbed many peasants not just of the possibility of gaining a piece of land, but, quite simply, of hope."[5] (A Spanish copy of the Mexican constitution is available on-line; Article 27 is part of Chapter I) The PRI, calling itself the heir to the Mexican Revolution, has long since forsaken the true principles Zapata, Villa and others fought for. As we have examined before, Emiliano Zapata cannot be called a communist revolutionary. The modern Zapatistas also have been regarded by many as communists. It is, however, very hard to box the EZLN's ideology into a traditional category. Some statements regarding their alleged communism:

In a January 19, 1994, interview with Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos:

> *We do not want a dictatorship of another kind, nor anything out of this world, not international Communism and all that. We want justice where there is now not even minimum subsistence.*[6]

In an Interview with the "Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee" -- the Zapatistas' leadership council:

> ***Question:*** *In this sense, the Zapatista movement and the Zapatista revolution have been called the first post-modernist revolution. Now, let's analyze the fact that many current theories of the new left, of an anti-authoritarian left with a definite tendency toward libertarian communism, break with the blueprint that sees the working class as the vanguard of the social revolution. Many of these new theories even see the working class as a class in decline, a class that does not recognize itself as a class, a class that less and less wants to be considered the working class. Is this conception of the working class one that you have adopted during your experiences?*
> ***Marcos:*** *No, definitely not. Those idols against which we were fighting were different. The idea that armed struggle was possible in all places except Mexico was so omnipresent that we were obligated to confront it first and leave the rest for later. Beyond this, in historical or theoretical terms, who would have speculated before December 31, 1993 that it wasn't going to be the proletariat leading the revolution? Then who? Who was it going to be? They could have speculated that it would be the teachers, they could have speculated that it would be the unemployed, they could have speculated that it would be the students or some sector of the middle class, they could have speculated that it would be leftist or democratic factions within the Federal Army or within the supposedly democratic faction of the PRI. They could have speculated many things, including that the United States would become socialist and then they would invade us and make us socialists [laughter]. This was the reasoning then. Even in the university this idea had taken root.*[7]

Harry Cleaver points out that to be called "communist" in the traditional sense is offensive to the Zapatistas. According to his introduction to *Zapatistas!* the EZLN "explicitly rejected the traditional Leninist objectives of 'taking power,' 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' 'international communism' and 'all that.''"[8] Nevertheless, the question of whether one can call these rebels communists or maybe neo-communists might never be settled.

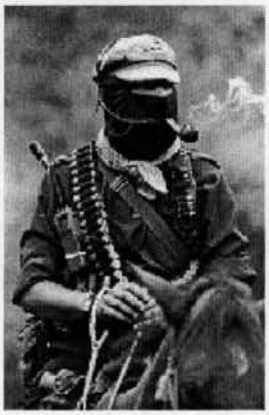
An even more interesting question might be whether these rebels truly are "Zapatistas," i.e. followers of

Emiliano Zapata. There are countless references to Zapata in EZLN writings, especially to the Plan of Ayala, Zapata's redistribution plan for some of the*hacienda* properties and his conditions for laying down arms. When asked to explain the foundation of Zapatista ideology and the structural basis of the movement, Subcomandante Marcos explains that the roots of the organization lie with the Latin American guerrilla movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The EZLN began as a grass-roots organization of indigenous Indians who were disillusioned because nonviolent and non-revolutionary struggle would not lead to a betterment of their living situation. Thus, Marcos says, they arrived at the conclusion that armed struggle was necessary. Interestingly, when Zapatista supporters first began mentioning the need for a revolution, much of the Mexican left disagreed, according to Marcos, and held that revolution "wasn't Mexico's role,"[9] that any change could only be brought about by peaceful methods, partially because of the proximity to the United States.

Marcos uses the metaphor of a "wall" between the cities of Mexico and the jungle, with the wall representing the mountains of southern Mexico. It is this wall that has kept indigenous Mexicans from political power; but it is also the same wall that allowed the modern Zapatista movement to grow clandestinely and gain strength without the Mexican authorities realizing it. While the Zapatistas approached the struggle from a more ideological standpoint, the native population saw things in a more practical light. Says Marcos: "Then, we found each other and we began to speak in two different languages, but in this common point of necessity of armed struggle a relationship began to develop. They needed military instruction, and we needed the support of a social base. And we thus tried to convince them of the necessity of a broader political project."[10] This mixing of a guerrilla army and an indigenous population led to a new ideology and new vision of government. Marcos calls it a "democratic collective," a form of government where positions are filled by community appointment -- one must assume this means a form of election -- and are of indefinite term. The community has the right to remove a person from a position at any time. Leaders would have a chance to defend their actions before the community and the majority would eventually decide whether a person remains in that position or not. Marcos likens this to student assemblies, a horizontal rather than vertical structure of assigning power or positions. One could debate for a long time whether the EZLN is a communist guerrilla army or not. They are certainly not a worker movement, and nowhere in their writings would one find the idea of a supreme proletariat. There is no doubt that they are an "Indianist" movement, fighting mainly for the indigenous people of southern Mexico. This represents a break from the tradition of Zapata, who was less concerned with race and more concerned with class.

The Zapatistas in Brief	
Demands	The Eleven Points (a list of demands often repeated in Zapatista writings): Work Land Shelter Food Health Education Autonomy Freedom Democracy Justice Peace More specifically, demands include a transition to a true democracy in Mexico, an agrarian reform, curbing the wealth and power of large landholders, assistance for the indigenous population, an end to discrimination against Indians, etc.
Ideology	"Post-Modern," i.e. rejecting the claim of exclusiveness of any specific ideology or belief system. Elements of socialism and Marxism, but also "Indianist" and traditional guerrilla elements
Leadership	Apparently lead by "Subcomandante Marcos" and a leadership council known as the "Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee -- General Command"

Since the second anniversary of the uprising was celebrated in 1996, the EZLN has become much more conciliatory, forming a political wing that will challenge the government with nonviolent means. "'The struggle we launched the first of January of 1994 is entering a new phase,' he [Marcos] said. 'The EZLN (the rebel group) will not disappear, but its most important struggles will be waged in the political arena.'"[11] The government, however, has not reciprocated this dealing and has continued to pursue the Zapatistas with military force as recently as February of 1996.



No discussion of the Zapatistas would be complete without a short sketch of Subcomandante Marcos, their military leader. Appearing in public only behind a skimask, Marcos is surrounded by almost as much mystique as Emiliano Zapata. While the Mexican government claims they have identified him, the Zapatistas argue that, whatever his former identity may have been, it is of no relevance now. It must come as a surprise that Marcos is not an indigenous Mexican but rather either a mestizo or a man of Spanish decent. While he does not sit in the "Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee" it is not at all clear if he merely follows their orders or makes policy.

It is apparent from Marcos' writings that he is a very well-educated and well-read individual. His sarcasm is biting, his wit is sharp, and his knowledge of Mexican history, world affairs, and ideologies begs the conclusion that he is university-educated. Recently, Marcos has been quoted as wanting to change the EZLN from a rebel movement to a political force in Mexico. When a group calling itself the "Popular Revolutionary Army" appeared on the Mexican political scene in July of 1996, Marcos distanced himself and his organization from the new group, which is calling for violence against the government.

Has the Mexican government succeeded in silencing and co-opting the Zapatistas? It appears doubtful to me, but I am certain the Zapatista situation in Mexico will remain interesting for some time to come.

[Note: For more information on the events surrounding the Zapatista rebellion in 1994, see the Zapatista Timeline.]

The Media Hype

The Zapatista rebellion has been called "post-modern" because of its lack of a clear traditional ideological direction. While it was fought at times with comparatively primitive weapons such as WW2 rifles, the Zapatista uprising is the first major political upheaval that has been extensively covered, commented on, and reported on the Internet. Further than that, the Zapatistas and their supporters have used and continue to use the Internet to broadcast their version of what is happening in Chiapas, bypassing the national Mexican media, largely controlled by the PRI government. This essentially new form of distributing revolutionary material caught the eye of many journalists who promptly reported on this "cyberspace war." A Mexican newspaper, *La Jornada,*


When Words Are the Best Weapon

Mexican Rebels Using A High-Tech Weapon

Internet Helps Rally Support

Marcos on the Internet

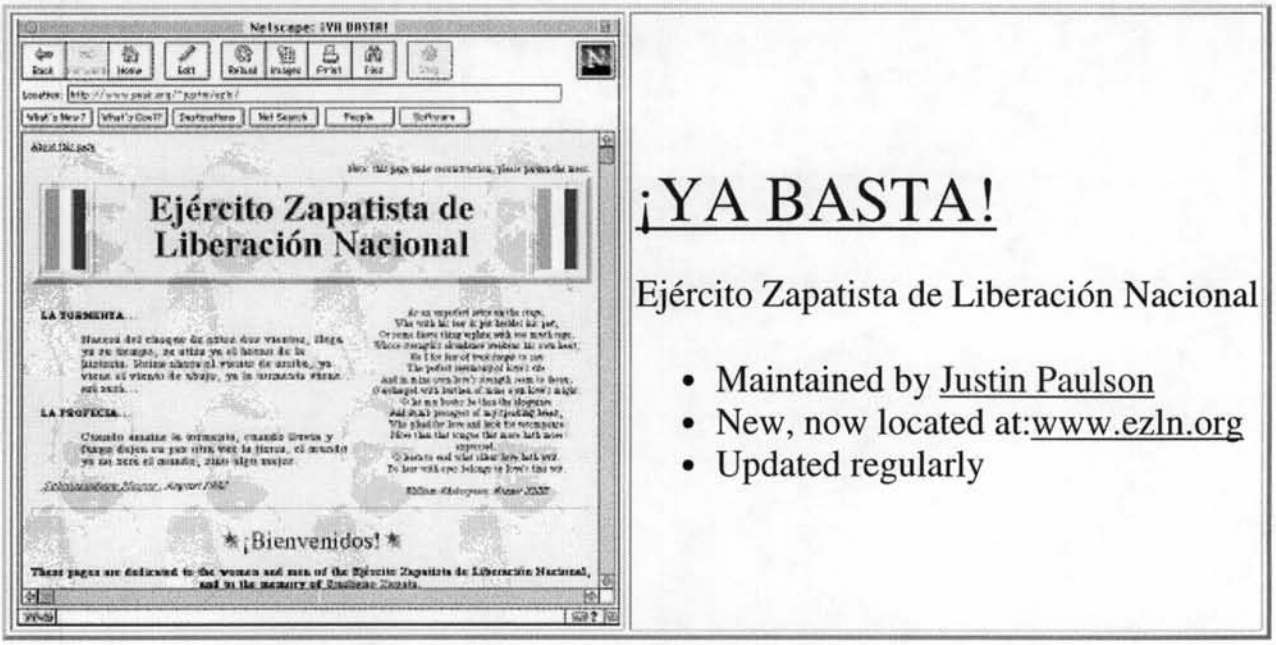
reports that Mexican officials have begun referring to the uprising as *la guerra de tinta e Internet* or the War of Ink and Internet.

Most articles written in the US have focused on the novelty of having a revolutionary group in a country that some consider to be "Third World" or at least "developing" using the most talked-about new technology of the late 20th century. In a somewhat conceited manner, some reporters -- who must have expected the Zapatistas to fight with sticks and stones and smoke signals -- demonstrated their surprise at this appropriation of the Internet. Not all reporters abstained from romanticizing and probably exaggerating the extent and manner in which the rebels themselves have accessed the Internet. A *Christian Science Monitor* editorial reports that "Marcos, it turns out, is on-line. Punching out communiqués on a lap-top computer powered from the cigarette lighter in his car, and then passing them along via modem and cellular phone"[12]. It seems rather doubtful that Marcos actually accesses the Internet personally to upload the newest communiqués or maybe to check on the latest world news about his army. Harry Cleaver, who certainly speaks with some authority, asserts that "Subcomandante Marcos is not sitting in some jungle camp uploading EZLN communiqués via mobile telephone modem directly to the Internet. Zapatista messages have to be hand-carried through the lines of military encirclement and uploaded by others to the networks of solidarity."[13] Nonetheless, the information is getting out and various supporters around the world have put up WWW sites to distribute EZLN information, out of the reach of the Mexican government censors.

The German writer Goethe mocks in his masterwork *Faust,* "Because what one has down in black and white / It is a comfort to take home at night." Unfortunately, in a world where anybody can publish "authoritative" materials on the Internet, one must be careful not to take all that information at face value. In an article called "Mexican Rebels Using A High-Tech Weapon," Tod Robberson of the Washington Post points out that some of the material distributed on the Internet, allegedly by the Zapatistas, does not reflect the true situation in Chiapas. "One user group here sent out a report that airborne bombardments were underway in several named mountain villages and urged an international protest. They passed on rebel assertions that women were being raped and children killed. But reporters who visited those areas and interviewed scores of witnesses said they were unable to confirm even one such incident."[14] Nevertheless, most of the information on-line appears to be genuine.

The Sites

What is actually out there? It would be impossible to list every Internet site that mentions the Zapatista Rebels. An AltaVista Web search for "zapatista*" (which returns all documents that contain words beginning with "zapatista" -- this allows catching the singular and plural of the word) returned over 3000 pages. In the following section, I will examine a select number of Web sites dealing exclusively with the Zapatistas, as well as some sites that mention their cause or are otherwise related to the subject.

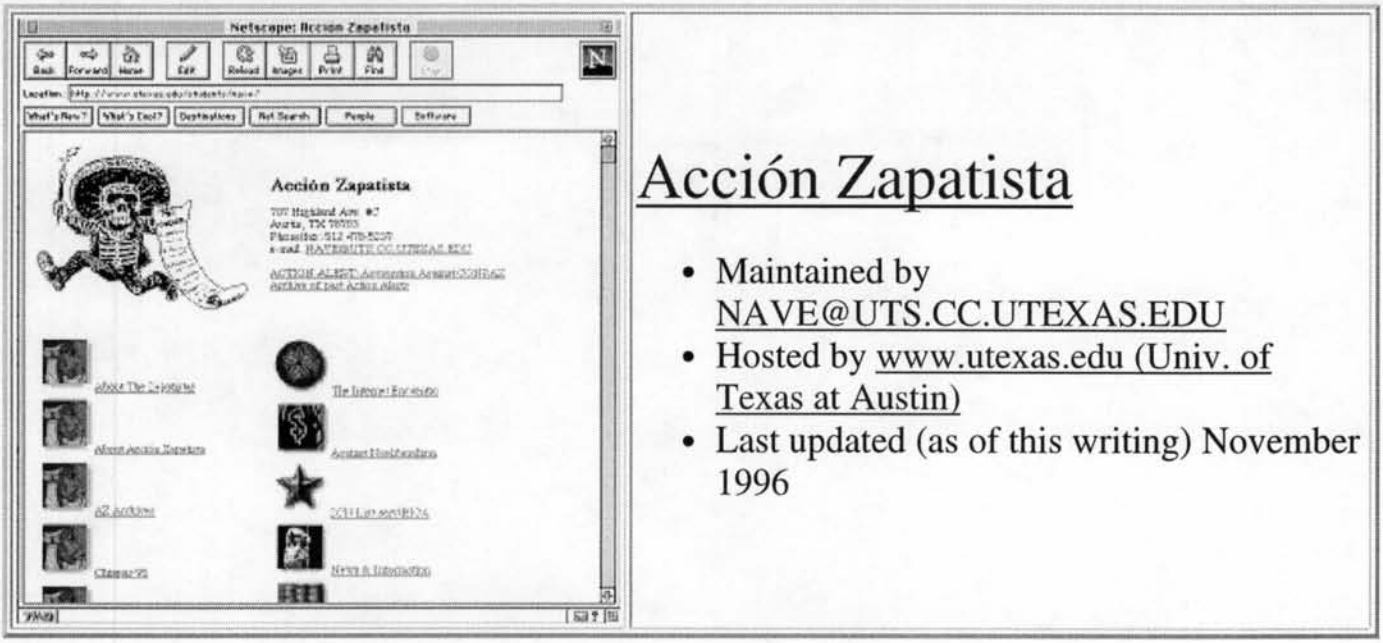


The most complete page on the Zapatista movement to date, *¡Ya Basta!* is deservedly one of Lycos Web Point's top 5% of WWW sites. It contains a regularly updated archive of the communiqués of the EZLN, many of which have been translated into English, some even into other languages such as German. While that list is not complete, all communiqués are HTML-formatted and easy to read or print. A more complete archive, albeit a text-only one, can be found as part of the Chiapas95 mailing list archives. The site provides an invaluable research tool for all who are interested in the Zapatista Rebels. Students who wish to research this topic can find a plethora of primary source information which would otherwise be impossible to track down. Apart from original Zapatista writings, there is a large number of news stories and related information chronicling the rebellion, government responses, and negotiations.

This site is by no means nonpartisan. On the contrary, Paulson clearly supports the Zapatistas and wants his site to "serve as a mouthpiece for the Zapatistas in cyberspace." There is a section titled "How you can help" which lists various ways for those who are interested in activism to get involved in helping the Zapatistas and the people of Chiapas. Possibilities range from writing letters to Mexican officials and lobbying US congressmen to participating in a "peace encampment" in Chiapas or simply helping out with the maintenance of the web page. Naturally, any kind of partisanship will find its detractors and Web Point's reviewer did not take kindly to the lack of even-handedness in Paulson's page:

> *This unofficial page of the Mexican guerrilla movement (by Swarthmore student Justin Paulson) certainly means well. And there's nothing amusing about war. Yet the page conjures images of Woody Allen's movie classic* Bananas *by simultaneously condemning and condoning violence: "The Zapatistas... have made every possible move to minimize violence while not compromising their position." ... Info's in English and Spanish, and there are official EZLN communiqués and black and white photos of the leaders in full black-ski-mask regalia.*[15]

The mentioned photos, which are hard to find among the various pages, include the image of Subcomandante Marcos which I have included in this page. While the criticism of Paulson's page may be valid, it still provides one of the most useful research tool on the Zapatistas, on or off the WWW. The amount of non-original propaganda written by people other than the rebels is at a minimum, and Paulson reports that his site receives a large number of "hits" (Internet-slang for times accessed) from within Mexico, proving that it is allowing Mexicans with Internet access to circumvent the censorship in their media and receive first-hand Zapatista writings and information.



Acción Zapatista takes a somewhat different approach to the presentation of the Zapatista rebellion. While Justin Paulson's page contains a fair amount of propaganda, this WWW site is composed of little else. The creators, who only identify themselves as *Acción Zapatista de Austin* (with included e-mail and traditional mail addresses), do not hide their partisanship. In their self-description they write:

> *Acción Zapatista is an organization that gathers and redistributes information about the Zapatistas and the struggle for democracy in Mexico. We protest US support of the Mexican government, and support local struggles that challenge neoliberal policies and institutions. Because events in different regions are related by the brutal logic of global capital, we invite your input in developing new strategies of organizing and an ongoing understanding of the interconnections between local and international struggles.*
>
> *Acción Zapatista maintains a communications network designed to link local struggles. The AZ network allows individuals and organizations to collaborate with us via the Internet in order to participate in debate, post important information, request relevant data, present opinions and insights and be informed of upcoming events or actions in the Austin area.*[16]

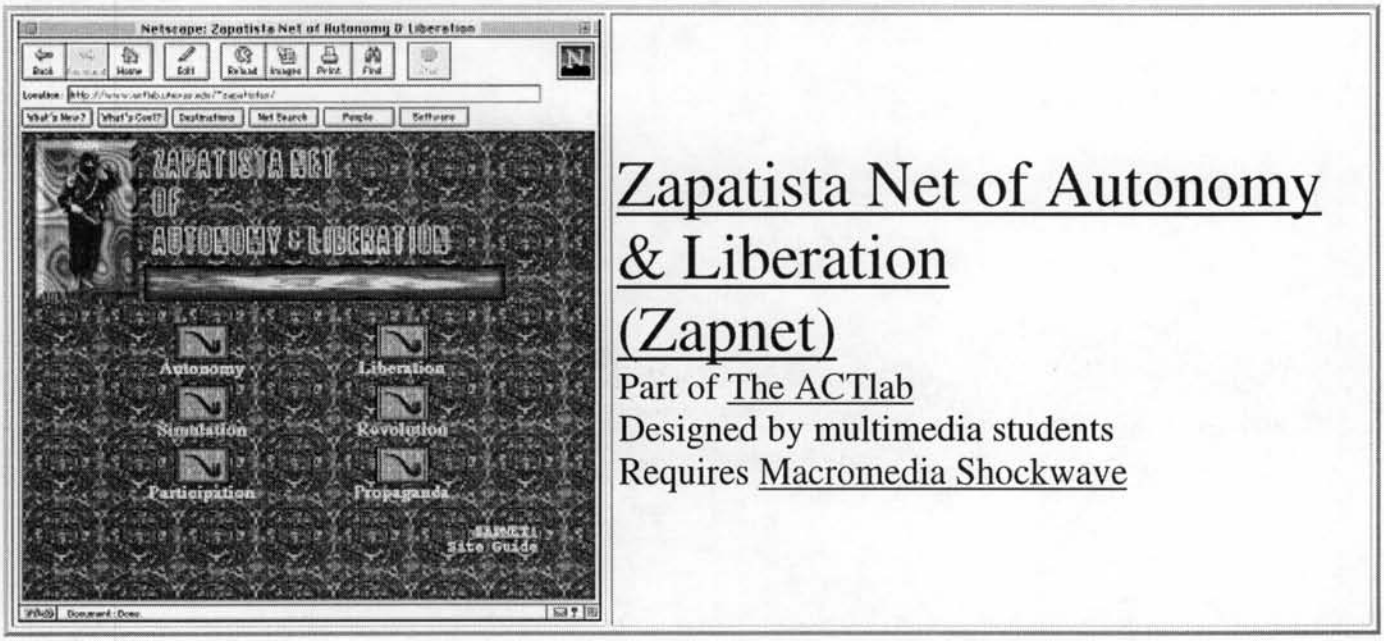


Some of the features of this WWW site that are not included in *¡Ya Basta!* include a short history of the Zapatista movement (albeit not a neutral one) and *El Paliacate,* an electronic newsletter which includes yet more copies of the Zapatistas' communiqués in addition to analysis and commentary written by supporters. One of the most interesting aspects to this page is an essay called "Exposing Neoliberalism" which is available in both English and Spanish. The well-laid-out essay argues against the resurgence of neoliberalism a restoration of classical liberalism which is the foundation of capitalism, according to the author. Or, According to Don Durito (Subcomandante Marcos' pet beetle) neoliberalism is "the chaotic theory of economic chaos, the stupid exaltation of social stupidity, and the catastrophic political management of catastrophe." Durito is a vehicle Marcos uses to explain the Zapatista goal of fighting this perceived "neoliberalism" and conversations with the beetle are a frequent part of the Zapatista communiqués. Incidentally, Don Durito has his own WWW page which includes HTML versions of his stories and a number of original illustrations. Another collection of essays and articles on neoliberalism can be found at "Initiatives against

Neoliberalism," an extensive archive of writings in English, Spanish and German, located on a WWW server in Berlin, Germany.

Acción Zapatista is also the home for the "Zapatismo Communications Network," an Internet e-mail list linking supporters of the Zapatistas together and allowing the exchange of information via electronic mail. One of the main concerns of this list is the *Red Intercontinental de Comunicación Alternativa* (Intercontinental Network of Alternative Communication) or RICA. This proposed network would link together WWW sites, mailing lists, and other on-line elements and unite them in the struggle against neoliberalism. It will be interesting to see if RICA ever goes beyond the planning stage and, if so, what form it will eventually take. Once established, such a network would certainly have to be included in any discussion of the Zapatista presence on the Internet.

Overall, *Acción Zapatista* is a WWW site calling for action and support, such as a drive for food and money donations, for the Zapatista rebels. One of the most valuable services provided is a list of links to other Zapatista and social activism sites.





Zapnet follows a somewhat different approach to bringing the Zapatista message to the users of the Internet. This site is part of the "The Advanced Communication Technologies Laboratory" or ACTlab, once again at the University of Texas. The "About the ACTlab" page describes this endeavor, a venture of the Department of Radio, Television and Film like this: "We are a freewheeling research facility for advanced work at the boundaries where technology, art, and culture collide." Zapnet was designed by a group of multimedia students and its emphasis clearly lies less with the distribution of Zapatista material but with the stylish and "cyberspacial" presentation of the material. This is a rather large site, with various sections presenting different aspects of the struggle. To fully appreciate the multimedia aspects of Zapnet, one must use a frames-capable WWW browser and have the Macromedia Shockwave Plug-In.

It is hard to describe this site without using somewhat pejorative terms such as "artsy" or "pretentious," but

all parts of this project clearly show that their parentage lies with art or multimedia students (a well-designed overview of the available material is provided in the Zapnet Site Guide). There is a plethora of images and animations, including some rather colorful ones about Subcomandante Marcos in a section called "The Revolution Will Be Digitised." Other multimedia aspects include sounds and quick-time movies, mainly video clips taken from commercially available materials on the Zapatistas. Without a doubt, Zapnet is the most colorful WWW-page on the Zapatistas and one of the most multimedia-intensive non-commercial sites on Internet. Zapnet is most likely not a very rich research tool for traditional investigators, but for those looking for non-text-based information Zapnet, with its emphasis on technology and "cyberspace", has a lot to offer.

One of the most noteworthy features of the Zapnet is its "Wall of Autonomy," a page where visitors to the site can leave comments or suggestions readable by all. This allows for a degree of user interaction not seen on other sites. It is often worth the time, just to stop by and check for new contributions.

Other sites

As mentioned before, the number of sites dealing with or mentioning the Zapatistas and their cause is large and constantly growing. To provide a better tool for those researching the EZLN, I have picked a number of other Internet sites which are useful and/or simply interesting in relation to the Zapatistas but which have not been directly mentioned in my writing. Some of these sites may not mention the Zapatistas directly, but they provide useful background material to understand the situation in Chiapas, Mexico, or the developing world as a whole.

- The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico, USA -- According to their WWW site, this is the "structure recognized by the EZLN for coordinating support in the United States." There is a link to a gopher-based archive of NCDM writings as well as membership information.
- Homepage of the PRI -- This site is a minor orgy of self-promotion for the Mexican ruling party, the PRI. A "must" for all interested in Mexico and the Mexican political and electoral processes. This Web site contains an extensive history of the party from 1929 to the present as well as interviews with party and government officials, policy statements, and party platform papers.
- Chiapas 95 Homepage -- Harry Cleaver's page for the Chiapas 95 mailing list contains links to the list archives as well as various articles written by him and other contributors.
- Centro Bilingue de Chiapas -- A language school located in San Cristóbal de las Casas, incidentally the first city to be taken by the Zapatistas during their rebellion. This might be a good way to get to know the region and its people -- traveling or studying in a state with an active guerrilla movement is, however, not recommended for the faint-hearted.
- Rage Against the Machine -- The alternative rock band has written the names of number of causes on their banner, including the EZLN. This site is a good example on how pop culture on the Internet has appropriated political causes. Nothing is safe from merchandising; as an example, see one of the Rage Against the Machine T-shirts.

Note: Citations from the main Zapatista Internet sites discussed in the project are cited in-line with the main text; hyperlinks point directly at the sources. There are also bibliography entries for these sites.

[1] see Cleaver, Harry. *The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle*.

[2] Factual information about the Chiapas uprising taken from Cleaver, Collier, and Paulson as well as the various Zapatista documents made available on the Internet (see in-line citations). Image of Subcomandante Marcos from ¡Ya Basta! Map of Chiapas source: Collier.

[3] Collier, p. 16.

[4] see First declaration from the Lacandon jungle by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

[5] Collier, p. 45.

[6] from Cleaver this section on-line at: gopher://lanic.utexas.edu:70/00/la/Mexico/Zapatistas/01

[7] ibid. this section on-line at: gopher://lanic.utexas.edu:70/0R0-113502-/la/Mexico/Zapatista s/11.TXT

[8] ibid. this introduction on-line at: gopher://lanic.utexas.edu:70/0R0-43346 -/la/Mexico/Zapatistas/INTRO.TXT

[9] see footnote [7]

[10] ibid.

[11] from a report by CNN's Lucia Newman

[12] from Christian Science Monitor, "Marcos on the Internet"

[13] see footnote [1].

[14] Robberson.

[15] Web Point, Review of *¡Ya Basta!*

Conclusion

When I set out to research the topic of the Zapatista Internet presence, little did I know how many WWW sites were dedicated to the EZLN and their cause and how many more merely mentioned it. I quickly found out, however, that only a select few of these sites do merit closer attention, some because of the sheer amount of content, such as *¡Ya Basta!,* others because of the novel approach they take to the Zapatista struggle, such as Zapnet. The Internet is in a constant state of flux; sites are being created and destroyed every day. Most WWW sites now sport "under construction" signs on a permanent basis, signifying that a Web page is more of a stream-of-consciousness work rather than a fixed and finite piece of writing. Naturally, new sites on the Zapatistas will begin to appear and this project will be inaccurate shortly after it is published, but I believe there is a lasting quality that will endure as long as anybody cares enough about a cause to publicize it on the Net.

Another thing I realized very quickly was that the media hype regarding Subcomandante Marcos' alleged laptop Internet connection was vastly exaggerated. I have found no evidence to support any claim that any of the major Zapatista leaders personally access the Internet on a regular basis and participate in discussion groups or even merely upload their communiqués. It is rather people or groups that have an interest in the Zapatista rebellion or are in some way connected to it that publish these materials on the WWW. These sites do, however, go beyond mere publication or popularization of the cause. Most of them contain "action alerts" or similar pages which are designed to motivate the reader to donate time, food or money to the people of Chiapas and support the mission of the EZLN. Whether these activities be peace encampments or food shipments, they are traditional activism and nothing new to the WWW.

Nevertheless, there is much that is new to this form of "propaganda," a word that has many negative though sometimes unjustified connotations. The major innovations brought about by the publishing of information on the WWW can be listed as such:

A new audience can be reached. Those who would normally hear about the Zapatistas on CNN and forget about them a few minutes later might be intrigued by a WWW site they run across as they "Web-surf" and decide to read a little about this political cause. Others, those already interested in the Zapatistas, who do not have access to first-hand information or specialized sources such as political science journals, can instantly access EZLN communiqués as well as analyses, commentaries, and brief historical sketches on Chiapas or the rebels.

Censorship is circumvented. Maybe the most important aspect of making information available on the WWW is its virtual invulnerability. The Mexican government has no jurisdiction over WWW sites in the US where freedom of speech allows even groups that are deemed terrorists by some to publish their writings, be it in print, on television, or now on the World Wide Web. As long as a country stays connected to the Internet, it is impossible to restrict or even monitor the flow of information into and out of the nation. As mentioned before, the Internet "routes around censorship" a lofty yet accurate description. As Justin Paulson points out, he was unaware for a long time of the large number of "hits" his site had received from Mexico itself. Apparently, he has created a research and information tool for those who cannot get the whole story from the national media (see Internet Censorship News for more information).



One of the more commonly heard implications of this is related to the publication of obscene material on the Net. What is considered obscene in the US might be rather tame fare in some European countries. Similarly, what is considered politically "dangerous" in Mexico is covered by the first amendment in the United States. For example, China recently attempted to censor some of the Internet information flowing into that state, as well as control e-mailed reports coming out of the country. The fact that the Internet is not as easily censored as traditional media or even as conveniently monitored as traditional telephone lines has been irksome to the Chinese government, especially since the Tiananmen Square Massacre. So far, China has been spectacularly unsuccessful in damming the stream of data going in either direction (see CNN article for more information on Chinese censorship attempts). Because of the growing importance of the Internet as a tool for the newly created and somewhat more private businesses as well as the educational institutions, the government has been unwilling to shut down all Internet connection to the rest of the world. In an age of satellite telephony and fiber-optic cabling it is doubtful whether any such attempt would be wholly successful.[1]

New forms of expression are found. A third effect of the publication of political material on-line is the creation of entirely new forms of expression. While traditional media are confined to one or two forms of communication, such as newspapers having text and pictures or TV having mostly moving images and sound, the WWW offers all possible channels of information distribution. While some sites, such as mine, focus on text and images, others include moving pictures, animated graphics, and sounds. The most important new form of expression, however, is "interactivity," a buzzword of the 1990s. WWW pages are not static as is the text of a newspaper or even the most "hip" television or radio call-in show. Every user has control over which elements he or she wishes to access and which should be ignored. No newspaper, magazine, or television show can mimic the greatest power of hypertext, its ability to transfer the user to a related object (such as another WWW site) which may be created by a different author in another country. Other forms of interaction go even further. The WWW user can send e-mail to the creator of a page, a much more instant form of communication than a letter to the editor. Some pages, such as *Acción Zapatista,* are set up to automatically include commentary and suggestions left by readers. With the advent of "Java" and "Javascript," two new programming languages for the World Wide Web, there are no imaginable restrictions on the degree to which the creators and the users of a web page might interact with each other or with the computer (such as with databases or intelligent "information agents").

Instead of studying the Zapatistas, I could have chosen a variety of other political causes and reached the same conclusions. By publishing a cause on the Internet, a medium that is projected to reach a majority of households in the US in a few years, political activists can reach a new audience, provide censorship-free information to their supporters, and create new forms for presenting that information to the recipient.

The new medium of the Internet, however, is not a panacea for problems relating to the distribution of political material. Certain hurdles remain. One of them is availability of on-line storage. Currently, large amounts of WWW space are still rather expensive, making it costly for underfunded political or revolutionary organizations to spread their messages on the Net. As with the Zapatistas, most groups rely on the kindness or philanthropy of others in helping them bring their writings and publications onto the WWW. Another even more difficult problem involves the intended audience of political information. It would be impossible for the Zapatistas to organize their revolutionary activities over the Internet or even rally much support in Chiapas via on-line distribution of communiqués. The peasant Maya Indians in Chiapas largely do not have running water or electricity. Computers, modems, and Internet connections are virtually unheard-of. Harry Cleaver, once again a good source for information on this subject, especially stresses this problematic aspect of distributing political information. Until the Internet becomes more

accessible to the poorer populations of the world, it can only be one leg in any large-scale propaganda or information campaign. It remains dubious whether the rather rosy predictions of Internet access to the masses will come through, especially since the now almost ancient technologies of telephony and television sitll do not reach a majority of the world's population.

What and how information is placed on the WWW will continue to be a topic of much discussion and research. Will there ever be a "global village" of free-flowing information? Nobody can say for sure, but it is clear already that among those with access to the net, an unprecedented revolution has taken place. People who would never have found each other via traditional channels of communication are exchanging e-mail on a daily basis. Information such as revolutionary manifestos that used to be distributed on hand bills or mouth-to-mouth is now accessible by people all over the world. Even though it might replace some of these outdated methods of rallying support, there are no technological guarantees on the Internet. Some nay-sayers have predicted an imminent Internet infarction, a collapse of the networks because of the sheer volume of traffic that is flowing over lines and connections originally designed to handle occasional traffic. One metaphor I have cautiously avoided comes in handy at this point, the now-trite image of the Information Superhighway. Just as the Interstate Highway System will survive because it is providing a now-essential service to the community, the Internet will survive the increase in traffic. There may be a period of slow-downs -- we're already experiencing some of those -- but new bypasses and multi-lane highways are being built at this moment. Thanks to a curious happenstance of history, a US military network designed to distribute vital information in times of war has become a peacetime vehicle for anti-government groups and organizations. The Internet continues to grow in an organic fashion, bringing diverse groups of people together. Apart from what some journalists would like us to believe, it is not merely a haven for pornography and make-money-fast schemes. The Internet is as diverse as its users and it will continue to broadcast dissident information within countries and across national boundaries. In this sense, the Net is a new global medium, an uncontrollable yet self-regulating entity which will occupy the minds of its users, the press, those groups or individuals with a message, and researchers like me for a long time to come.

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[1] image from Tiananmen-1989.

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