

The Mayan tribes that inhabit the forests and secluded valleys of Chiapas have suffered without much relief since the Spanish Conquest 500 years ago, only the specifics of their misery have changed with the layers of history. Despite the rhetoric of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, the Indians were excluded from its benefits, however meager and stunted. For the most part they could not own land even when land reform laws were passed. They survived by subsistence farming, supplemented with a bit of cash from coffee, corn, and other agricultural commodities. And all the while they were brutally repressed by the "European" police, landlords, ranchers, and politicians of the dynastic PRI—the party that is revolutionary in name only and has ruled as a virtual dictatorship.

Things started going from bad to very bad for the peasants in the late 1980s when coffee prices slumped—not by an act of God or chance, but because President Bush orchestrated an end to the stable commodity markets to enforce his free-market ideology. Cappuccino drinkers in Seattle rejoiced, small coffee growers in Chiapas suffered.

About the same time, the Mexican government began speeding up its "modernization" program, which entailed across-the-board privatization of the economy and integration of the resulting structure into the US-led global system. In Chiapas, for instance, peasants could get ownership title or credit for their once-communal plots of land. Many took credit, but without a market for their surplus the land was soon foreclosed—and, with government and police help, wound up in the hands of big cattle ranchers. The Indians were pushed farther into the Chiapan rain forest, where they slashed and burned the land simply to survive for a few years—until that conveniently cleared land was grabbed by the ranchers. The Mayans inevitably have been forced to give up their life on the land (tiny Chiapas, with 3,000,000 inhabitants and thousands of refugees from the long war in Guatemala, has the highest indigenous population in the country) and join the city slum dwellers. Ultimately, the laws of population hydraulics push commensurate numbers of displaced and desperate people over the border to El Norte.

The passage of NAFTA provided the spark igniting the revolt, because its provisions so clearly imply the destruction of the Indian peasants' lives, culture, and history. Corn in the Mexican south cannot compete with the high-tech productivity in Bob Dole's Kansas or Tom Harkin's Iowa (both of whom voted for the treaty). The indigenous people are unequipped and ill-placed to become workers in export-oriented factories. The social services and land reforms brightly packaged by Mexican President Salinas as the

"solidarity" plan are inadequate and do not protect the Mayans, who continue to be exploited by ranchers, oil companies, forest clearers, landlords, and police. In fact, the horrendous abuses documented by international human rights agencies have increased with the new economic pressures of the past several years. Local Catholic priests and bishops provide the only aid and comfort, but they are also under attack from the hierarchy.

The timing of the Zapatista invasion of several towns to coincide with NAFTA implementation shows how well the processes of history are understood. Mo' better in San Cristóbal de las Casas, it seems, than in Washington or L.A. It's not that the treaty itself causes all the grievances the guerrillas list, but the ideological underpinnings and political effects of the new globalism have suddenly become real and clear. A small army of Mayans can't reverse those effects, but the battle of Chiapas allows unfold millions around the world to see that it's still possible to put up a fight.

ZAPATISTAS! THE PHOENIX RISES

PACO IGNACIO TAIBO II

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I

THEY'VE come out of nowhere. From its perennially censorious perspective, the television repeatedly displays without understanding the faces of the Zapatista rebels, hooded by ski masks or covered with quintessentially Mexican paliacates (the red, yellow, and black bandannas worn by Mexican campesinos).

What the hell is this? Paloma wakes me up in midmorning and puts me in front of the TV. The Zapatista guerrilla army has taken half a dozen cities in Chiapas, including the state's traditional capital, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

The first words delivered by the rebels to the TV cameras are enunciated in shaky Spanish with a peculiar syntax: *Vinimo de aquí porque no*

aguantamos, ¿qué?, el ejército que persigue a nosotros. Vinimo a la guerra. "We came here because we couldn't take it, see? The army is persecuting us. We came to the war."

Among the guerrillas are some officers, very few, whose speech gives away their urban origins; they could be members of a far left group, students who fled chronic unemployment to burrow into the jungle in what the language of the left called *trabajo de topo*, mole's work (teaching literacy classes, barefoot doctoring, organizing cooperatives), or schoolteachers who went through 20 years of ceaseless struggle in order to win the right to earn \$200 a month and, in a handful of regions, to elect union representatives. But the vast majority are indigenous. Tzeltales, Choles, Mijes, Tojolabales. From the tribal babel of Chiapas, where the lingua franca of almost 60 percent of the population is not Spanish but one of the indigenous dialects.

Their weapons are indigenous, too. The images show an AK-47 here and there, an assault rifle stolen from the Mexican Army, but the majority are carrying shotguns and .22-caliber hunting rifles, even machetes and stakes, or wooden guns with a nail in the tip of the barrel. A lot of them are women and children. They're uniformed: green baseball caps, green pants, homemade black vests, *paliacates* around their necks or covering their faces.

The country enters the year 1994 with an insurrection and no one except the rebels understands anything.

II

They call themselves Zapatistas.

History repeats itself. In Mexico it always repeats itself. Neanderthal Marxists never get tired of reiterating that it repeats itself as farce, but that has nothing to do with it. It repeats itself as vengeance. In Mexico, the past voyages, rides, walks among us. Zapata is the key image: stubbornness, the dream cut short but not sold out.

III

In the first confrontation, 24 policemen died. In the fight for control of the town halls, the insurgents clashed with the state police, known as *judiciales*, and with the municipal police forces. The nation sees images of their dead bodies lying in the plazas. A lot of hate is stored up there. The *judiciales* are traditionally the landowners' white guards; they go into communities and ransack, make arrests, torture. Overheard on the second day of January in

Zapatistas! The Phoenix Rise

the Mexico City metro: *Los judiciales no son gente; no son personas. "The judiciales aren't decent people; they aren't people."*

IV

Are they crazy? How many of them are there? Where did the Zapatista army come from? Do they really think they can face in open combat a modern army that has air power, helicopters, heavy weapons, artillery?

In the first wave of attacks they've taken control of the entrances to the Lacandón jungle, the road from Chiapas to Guatemala and the second largest city in the state. The following day, they keep their promise and attack the military zone where the Thirty-first Army Division is headquartered. Then they disappear, falling back into the shadows. A reserve force of Zapatistas remains in Altamirano, Las Margaritas, and Ocosingo, the towns that serve as gateways to the jungle.

They have announced that they took up arms against a government founded on an electoral fraud, that they have decreed a new agrarian reform, that they will no longer endure any abuses by the police, the army, and the *latifundios'* caciques, that the North American Free Trade Agreement is the final kick in the stomach to the indigenous communities.

V

A couple days later, the coordinator of the coffee cooperatives of Chiapas will tell me that this rebellion was announced in advance. The air was full of forewarnings that the government didn't want to hear. No one would admit to being in the know.

An anthropologist friend who knows the region tells me that at the end of last summer the communities voted not to sow their crops. This, for groups that live from the precarious economy of corn, is death. There's no going back. He tells me that the rebel organization's work began 10 years ago. Looking back over the newspapers from the past few months I find bits of news here and there of clashes between the army, the police, and the indigenous communities.

At the end of March last year, the *judiciales*, in pursuit of an armed group that had killed two soldiers in an ambush, entered San Isidro Ococtal: Indigenous men—old men and one minor—were arrested. Some were tortured. In May, the same story. There were rumors of a guerrilla force. Everyone denied them. Soon afterward, the *judiciales* entered Patate Viejo,

fining their guns. They assembled the residents of the small community in the basketball court, picked out eight at random, arrested them and took them to the penitentiary in Cerro Hueco. Mexico's Secretary of Gobernación (who is in charge of internal political affairs and police) acknowledged a few days after the fighting broke out that he knew of the existence of 15 guerrilla training centers.

VI

I haven't left the house in three days except to buy the newspaper. I talk on the phone, listen to the radio, watch television with the fascination of a blind man seeing an image for the first time.

An agrarianist friend explains to me that 15,000 indigenous people have died of hunger and easily curable diseases in Chiapas in the past few years. Without crop rotation, the fields are not very productive. The price of coffee has dropped, so the landowners have seized more land for cattle; they create conflicts between the communities and assassinate community leaders. Although the land cannot feed any more people, the population has been growing by 6 percent annually with the arrival of indigenous refugees from Guatemala and the internal migration of Indians whose land has been taken by the owners of the large haciendas. All this in a region where there is no electricity, 70 percent of the population is illiterate, most houses have no sewage systems or hookups for potable water, and the average monthly income of a family is less than \$130.

VIII

In *La Jornada*, I read a fascinating story. The night they took San Cristóbal, the Zapatistas burned the municipal archives, the financial records, the land titles. The director of the historical archive negotiated with them: "You aren't going to burn the historical archive. The papers there tell the history of the origin of this city. The history of the seventeenth-century campesino rebellions and the Tzeltal uprising are there." The Zapatista committee met. Not only did they not burn it, they posted someone to guard it.

VIII

In an amazing burst of lucidity, Toño García de León, one of our best anthropologists, foretold what was going to happen in a book he had

nine years ago, *Resistencia y Utopía*. García says, "The elements of the past are still here, as alive as phantoms and wandering souls. . . . The subsoil of Chiapas is full of murdered Indians, petrified forests, abandoned cities, and oceans of petroleum."

Chiapas lies at the asshole of the world, where Jesus Christ lost his serape and John Wayne lost his horse. After the nineteenth-century uprisings had ended, the governors had their pictures taken standing next to defeated midguts. The Mexican Revolution got here 20 years late, at a fraction of its original strength, leaving the large haciendas intact. The Lacandóns, a nearly extinct Indian tribe, buy electric lamps to put in rooms without electricity, towns without electricity, whole regions without electricity—in a state that has the country's largest hydroelectric dams. San Cristóbal, a gathering place for hippie tourists, has three Zen centers and hundreds of satellite dishes, and barefoot Indians walk through its streets unable to find work as bricklayers.

IX

A popular Mexican bandit of the 1920s, el Tigre de Santa Julia, died in a rather unseemly manner, trapped and pumped full of lead by the police while he was sitting on the toilet. When you're caught off guard, people say, "They got you like el Tigre de Santa Julia."

The Mexican state has been taken by surprise, like el Tigre de Santa Julia. Did they believe their own lies? Here are the results of the last few elections in Chiapas: According to official figures, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won in 1976 with 97.7 percent of the vote, in 1982 with 90.2 percent, in 1988 with 89.9 percent.

Were they so stupid that they believed the official figures? They must have been the only ones.

People say Salinas had information on what was being planned and preferred to ignore it so as not to cast a shadow over the celebration of the implementation of NAFTA.

But elections are coming up. The chief opposition again is the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. To confront it with a new electoral fraud while a civil war is brewing would throw gasoline on the flames.

I

In post-1968 Mexico, the forces of the new left opted to work for social organization among the masses. Thousands of students were mobilized by the union movement, the struggle in the slums, the slow work of assistance to campesino insurgent movements. A minority took up arms. There was never much sympathy between the two groups, who accused each other of being "ultras" and "reformists." The guerrillas, caught up in a crazed spiral of minor confrontations that led to new clashes until their final annihilation by the police, never took any interest in working with the people. They heated things up, and years of union or campesino work were often endangered by their sectarian adventures. In short, the majority of the Left was never attracted to the idea of armed struggle. But the Zapatista uprising generates a wave of sympathy.

"How could I not like them?" Ernesto, a university union organizer, tells me, "since I agree with their program for a new democracy, and since they're not some tiny group, they don't want to be anybody's vanguard, they don't impose their path, they're indigenous, they're an uprising of the masses and on top of that they've been screwed over even worse than I have."

XI

The army deployed 10,000 soldiers in the first days of the conflict, and the figure slowly rose to 17,000, one-third of the Mexican Army. Jeeps with machine guns, tanks, helicopters, German G-3 rifles, Saber planes.

XII

The dead will always be dead. The horror draws nearer. In the face of horror, political explanations are not moving. Reasons are harsh in wartime. I'm disturbed by the repeated sight of the bodies of campesinos, riddled with bullets, lying in ditches along the road. I see terrible images of a baby girl killed by a grenade fragment, her body lying in a cardboard box.

XIII

An enormous demonstration is held in Mexico City against the government's policy in Chiapas and for peace, with close to 150,000 attending. One of the chants: "First World, ha ha ha." Again we see the faces of the Old and New Left, but also of thousands of students joining the movement for the

The Zapatistas are not alone. Their program and the faces and motives of the indigenous rebels are greeted with a massive outpouring of sympathy that is reflected in the press. Something new, something different, is happening.

XIV

The Department of Gobernación has decided to invent an enemy phantom. The real phantoms, the Chiapan rebels, aren't of much use in the great propaganda war that is being launched—they're too likable. One of the ski-masked comandantes, the one who led the occupation of San Cristóbal de las Casas and who said his name was Marcos, is chosen. He is useful because he appears to be from the city; he isn't indigenous and might even be foreign. A verbal portrait is disseminated across the country. His vital statistics: six feet tall, blond hair, green eyes, speaks three languages (where the hell did they come up with that one? and why not four languages, or five?).

The newspaper-reading sector of the country laughs at the absurdity. People call you on the phone to tell you that Marcos is their cousin, that he's the milkman. The phantom is welcomed in a wave of affection. The newspaper magazine *Proceso* has just sanctified him by putting a close-up of him on the cover of its first issue on Chiapas. A Venezuelan biologist doing research on the endangered jaguars of the Lacandón jungle—and whose closest contact with a jaguar to date was the sight of some excrement—is arrested and beaten. The judiciales want him to confess to being the guerrilla commander in chief. Marcos himself laughs at his popularity in a joking letter to the media.

But does Commander Marcos really exist? Interviewed in the municipal palace of San Cristóbal at dawn on the first day of January, after the Zapatistas had made a clean sweep of the judiciales, the phantasmagoric Marcos avows that he is there to carry out the policies of a committee of indigenous campesinos; he is only a subcomandante, and he warns that the name "Marcos" is interchangeable—anyone can put on a ski mask and say "I am Marcos." He invites people to do so.

XV

"It's like Vietnam," says a soldier talking on the phone, overheard by an alert *La Jornada* reporter standing in line behind him. "They come out of the mist."

XVI

The jungle air is full of messages. At night, 150 short-wave radio stations saturate the ether over the ravines and footpaths with cryptic messages: "Six for Uruguay, do you copy?" "Truckloads of green cement passed in Paris." Zapatista bases identifying themselves as Two, Zero, and Thunder are the most important. The helicopters try to avoid the antennae that rise through the trees.

XVII

Bombs in the Distrito Federal of the capital. The war comes nearer to the monster city. The "bombers" aren't Zapatistas. A mini-sect of the extreme left, said to be fully infiltrated by the Department of Gobernación, is responsible. Even so, the feeling that the war is getting closer and could burst out of the TV screen and explode on the corner of your street sweeps the city for a week.

XVIII

The government tightens its grip. A general mobilization of the army has been ordered. Then, the armed resistance of the Zapatistas and the almost unanimous response of the intellectual community (with the lamentable exception of Octavio Paz, who weeps for a lost "modernity"), along with the demonstration in Mexico City, force the government to draw back. It changes its line, changes its personnel, dismisses the Secretary of Gobernación, the Attorney General, the governor of Chiapas. The soft line takes over. Manuel Camacho Solís, whom Salinas recently rejected as the PRI candidate for the presidency, is now Salinas's man once more and becomes a negotiator.

An amnesty is proclaimed.

In a desperate quest to end the conflict, economic support plans rapidly succeed one another, institutions are created to protect the indigenous people (from whom? from themselves?) and the official discourse adopts the critiques of the left and incorporates them, chameleoniclike. The jaguar is a Mexican species. The Venezuelan biologist should have known that.

A cease-fire is declared—a tense cease-fire.

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XIX

On TV there are images of soldiers vaccinating children and distributing food. The women standing in line for food in Ocosingo's plaza don't get any the second day if they don't bring their husbands. The soldiers distributing food are there to identify Zapatistas.

XX

Rumors again. Phone calls from journalist friends, low-voiced conversations during a Cárdenas rally on the esplanade of the Insurgentes metro station. Provocations are expected. There will be armed clashes. Does the army want to avenge the affront? The country grows uneasy once more. In Quintana Roo, only four kilometers from the Disneyland with real sharks known as Cancún, the judiciales arrest campesino leaders supposedly because they were armed. A secretary photographs a judiciaire taking AK-47 bullets out of his sock and putting them inside a roll of toilet paper in the offices of the campesino union: This will be the proof. The judiciales unleash an enormous operation in the state of Guerrero. During the meeting of a powerful organization of agrarian unions on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca, many voices are heard protesting against the pacifism of the leaders: "If we'd rebelled, people wouldn't have died from the epidemic, there would be a hospital by now and the fraud would have fallen flat on its ass." The states of Tabasco and Michoacán are worried. The Cárdenas-led opposition won the elections there, and a spectacular fraud was carried out. During the past two years, campesino community leaders who were members of the PRD have been assassinated.

XXI

The Zapatistas aren't in any hurry. They're waging a masterful media war, keeping up the pressure while dissidents across the country go on the alert and mobilize. The pressure must be kept up in order to establish non-fraudulent conditions for the next elections.

A space for the social movements opens. Some of the townships that were occupied in the coastal region of Chiapas throw out mayors accused of fraud; indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Michoacán and Puebla mobilize; 10,000 teachers in Chiapas march to demand a 100 percent increase in salary. During this impasse, Zapatismo acquires social legitimacy through T-shirts, posters, continuous declarations of allegiance.

The electoral campaign of the left and center left, a broad front led by Cárdenas, is growing and has adopted the Zapatistas' program as its own. A ring is forming around the PRI that will make it difficult for the party to stage more fraudulent elections in August.

Are we nearing the end of the oldest dictatorship in the world? From 1920 to 1994 they have governed this country in the name of modernity and a betrayed revolution. Has their moment passed?

XXII

For now we're walking on shadows, disturbed and filled with hope. We are waking up with the distinct feeling that we slept among phantoms.

THE MEDIA SPECTACLE COMES TO MEXICO

OCTAVIO PAZ

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MEXICO CITY—The media spectacle so well perfected by our neighbors to the North has finally come to Mexico. During the months of crisis in Chiapas, television has involuntarily revealed to us a curious spectacle which combines religious liturgy with civic ceremony. The enchantment of certain images—in the original and powerful sense of the word enchantment: magical spell—is intensified because it reminds us of the romanticism of those scenes in novels and films in which masked conspirators appear gathered together in a catacomb around an altar (in this case, the domes of a cathedral). To all this one must add the illusion of seeing an historical deed "live." Which is, in fact, true: we have seen it, but staged and with makeup.

It is true that politics borders on the one side with theater and on the other with religion. Symbols are a central element in these rites. Like the theatrical scene or the mass, the political act is a representation. That is why the principal initiation to politics is not through the treatises of our political

theorists but through Shakespeare's theater. Therefore, what sets apart our era from the preceding ones is the double preeminence of news and the image over reality. Through the image, time loses continuity and consistency to the benefit of the instantaneous sensation; through news, the true reality is always something else; it is over there. I see it but I don't touch it; nor do I think it; unutterable, it disappears in a wink.

For more than 30 years we have lived in what a French writer has called "a society of spectacles." In the world of spectacles, things occur as they do in the real world and at the same time, they occur in another way, in the magical space and time of representation. They are here and they are there.

It is not arbitrary for me to use a language reminiscent of that of the clergy; the ancients had visions, we have television.

But the civilization of the spectacle is cruel. The spectators have no memory—because of that they also lack remorse and true conscience. They live tied to what is new, and it doesn't matter what it is so long as it is new.

They quickly forget and scarcely blink at the scenes of death and destruction of the Persian Gulf War or at the curves, contortions, and tremors of Madonna and of Michael Jackson. Commandants and bishops are condemned to suffer the same fate: they also await the Great Yawn, anonymous and universal, which is the Apocalypse and Final judgement of the society of spectacle.

We are condemned to this new version of hell; those who appear on the screen and those of us who watch. Is there an escape? I don't know. One must seek it.

In order to attempt it, we must turn off the television, close the newspaper or the magazine, and go out for a walk. But walk where? Outside or within? It doesn't matter if it is through the streets of our city, populated with phantoms like ourselves, or through the imaginary plazas of dreams explored with eyes closed, unconscious in the cold light of dawn.

The point is to walk inward or outward among known specters or among strangers with whom we converse every day, losing ourselves in the city or in our thoughts, touching the hand of a neighbor, questioning the child entombed within; to stop being images, to become again what we are, men and women, blood and time.

CHIAPAS: THE WORDS AND THE GESTURES

It is not pointless with regard to the negotiations of San Cristóbal to dedicate a brief commentary to another aspect of the Chiapas conflict. I refer

to its influence on the attitudes of many of our intellectuals and above all on public opinion in Mexico City.

I begin with an obvious observation; the conflict has been the cause of little spilt blood but much flowing of ink. The seas of ink which darken our newspapers at first produced an intellectual tickle: Now they provoke an invincible yawn. But tedium cannot and should not justify our silence in view of certain heedless opinions.

For example, one of the more unscrupulous Latin American intellectuals was inspired to say that the Chiapas Movement "was the first post-communist revolution of the twenty-first century." Now a half dozen parrots are imperceptibly repeating this absurdity.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the Chiapas matter is not a revolution either by its proportions—it involves four districts—or by its doctrine or ideology. The rebels are not proposing to change the world, the distinctive sign of all true revolutions—even less, our country. Their program does not advocate change in the social or economic system. Nor is the movement "postmodern," as others have stated. Their demands, many of them justified, are directed toward mending traditional abuses and injustices against the indigenous communities and asking for the establishment of an authentic democracy. This last point is an aspiration as old as the Revolution of 1910. With this "historical" criteria, Madero would be Mexico's "first postmodern revolutionary."

Nevertheless, the Chiapas rebels are indeed decidedly ultramodern in the most precise sense: through their style. It is a question of an aesthetic definition more than a political one. Beginning with their first public appearance on the first day of January, they revealed a noteworthy control over an art that the modern media has evolved to a dangerous perfection: public relations. Later, during the discussions and negotiations in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal, each one of their presentations has had the solemnity of a ritual and the seduction of a spectacle. Beginning with their attire—the black and blue knit masks, the colored neck scarves and their master of the use of symbols like the national flag and religious images—they offer the spectacle of hooded characters that television simultaneously brings close and and then draws away on the screen; close up and yet remote, a hallucinatory museum of wax figures.

The spokesperson for the rebels, Marcos, stands out as well through an art forgotten by our politicians and ideologues: rhetoric. The language of the leaders of the PRG is a language of bureaucrats: phrases constructed of cardboard and plastic; that of Subcomandante Marcos—although

The Unmasking

uneven and full of ups and downs like a roller coaster, is imaginative and lively. His pastiches of evangelical language and more frequently, of indigentious eloquence with its recurring formulas, its metaphors and mytomy, are almost always fortunate. Sometimes he is artless and coarse; other times brilliant and eloquent; others, satirical and realistic; again, brutal and sentimental. A stylized prose; cadenced and uneven. His strength is not reason but emotion and unction: the pulpit and the rally.

Although the political texts of the rebels are principally destined for the masses, they seem well thought out and written to seduce or irritate an elite—that middle class that flocks to literary cafes, reads cultural supplements, goes to exhibitions and lectures, loves rock and Mozart, takes part in avant-garde spectacles and attends marches. Thanks to his rhetoric and undeniable theatrical talent, Subcomandante Marcos has won the opinion battle. In this, not in a supposed "postmodernity," rests the secret of his popularity among intellectuals and among the vast sectors of the middle class in Mexico City.

THE UNMASKING

ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO

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ON the evening of February 9, at a press conference in Mexico City that had been announced less than two hours before, an aide to the attorney general played a strange game of peekaboo with photographers and a crowd of sweating, jostling reporters. In his right hand the aide held an oversized black-and-white slide of a ski mask and a pair of large, dark eyes, and in his left a black-and-white photograph of a Milquetoasty-looking young man with a beard and large, dark eyes. After we were allowed to study the two for a few seconds, the aide slipped the slide over the photograph. Voilà! Subcomandante Marcos, the dashing leader of an Indian peasant revolt in

southeastern Mexico, the hero of a thousand fervent letters addressed to the Mexican nation, the postmodern revolutionary who has contributed mightily to what in this turbulent year, with its hemorrhaging economy and political murder scandals, looks like the steady crumbling of a 66-year-old regime—the masked idol is a Clark Kent. His name, the attorney general announced, is Rafael Sebastián Guillén, and he is a philosophy graduate and former university professor. The aide continued imposing the slide of Marcos on the photograph of Guillén and flipping them apart again—now we saw him, now we didn't—until the storm of camera flashes subsided, and then we left.

The revelation of Marcos's identity was part of a two-pronged strategy by President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León to break the stalemate that has existed in the state of Chiapas since the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN—a ragtag army of Mayan peasants led by Subcomandante Marcos—rose up in revolt there, on January 1, 1994. Even as we watched the slide show, Army troops were preparing to move into the mountainous and overwhelmingly rural southeastern part of Chiapas—almost on the border with Guatemala—where the Zapatistas had maintained their unofficially recognized *territorio liberado* for 13 months. Villages were being retaken without a fight, and their inhabitants, including the Zapatista fighters among them, were fleeing into the ravines and the jungle-covered mountains. President Zedillo said that the Army was going into the area only to provide backing for the federal agents who would attempt to serve Marcos with an arrest warrant, but this was a transparent excuse, for thousands of troops swarmed in, and have continued to take positions farther and farther inside the territory.

Before the offensive began, the stalemate between the Zapatistas and the government had lasted so long that it seemed permanent. All actual fighting ended barely twelve days after the New Year's Day rebellion got under way last year, in the lovely town of San Cristóbal de las Casas. The peasant army had vowed in its declaration of war that it would march to Mexico City and overthrow the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, but, instead, it suffered significant losses and scored no military victories. It did, however, capture Mexicans' imagination: televised interviews of Mayan peasants in makeshift uniforms, who said that they were fighting not only for a change in their own desperate circumstances but to rid the nation of a corrupt and slothful regime, brought thousands of demonstrators out into the streets all over Mexico during the first days of January, demanding an end to what threatened to turn into an Army slaughter of the armed Zapatistas and their families.

The Unmasking

Faced with the politically volatile option of turning the Army against its own people, Salinas, on January 12, called for a ceasefire. Thereafter, and through the transfer of power in December from Salinas to Ernesto Zedillo, following the Presidential elections last August, talks and attempts at talks promoted by both sides led to no fruitful agreement, but they at least kept the ceasefire from breaking down. Even in December, when the Zapatistas pushed beyond their control zone to protest the stalemate and what they saw as massive fraud in the elections for governor of Chiapas, the rebels and the government troops managed to come within a few hundred feet of each other without a shot being fired.

The Army's offensive certainly appears to have taken Marcos completely by surprise. Much of the anxious speculation about what will happen next in Chiapas centers on his personality and his aims—on what he believes in and to what lengths he is willing to take the war. Will he negotiate to keep his peasant troops from suffering further? Does he really want nothing less than the overthrow of the government? And is he in fact the man in the photograph?

AS FAR AS I could tell on the night of the attorney general's press conference, as I tried to make the 10-year-old ID shot of a bland Rafael Guillén jibe with my recollection of the masked man I had talked with last April, the ski-masked slide we were being shown could have been slipped just as persuasively over a photograph of Richard Nixon. The Marcos whom I and other journalists interviewed in the Zapatista control zone was a mesmerizing personality—self-possessed, considerate, ironic, and theatrical. He liked to make journalists spend hours, or days, waiting for him, and then he would appear in the dead of night and talk endlessly, puffing on a pipe, tugging at the uncomfortable ski mask, and asking as many questions as he answered—uncannily well informed about the intellectual and media world beyond Chiapas. When I said that it was delusory to think that the Zapatistas could really take Mexico City, he answered, "Weren't we there already by January second? We were everywhere, on the lips of everyone—in the subway, on the radio. And our flag was in the Zócalo"—the central plaza.

While the resemblance between Guillén's eyes and Marcos's—the only part of his physiognomy we are all acquainted with—is not conclusive (Marcos's are a hazel-brown, for one, and the photograph is black-and-white), the account of the EZLN's history and Marcos's role in it which the Attorney General's office has been leaking to the press does coincide with much that has been said privately about Marcos in Chiapas for some time.

According to what can be pieced together from these accounts, the EZLN has its roots in the Latin American guerrilla movements that sprang up in Mexico beginning in the tumultuous 1960s. In the early 1970s, one of those guerrilla groups, the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional, or FLN, had a training camp in Chiapas, near Ocosingo, a town that sits on the edge of what later became the Zapatista control zone. In 1974, the Army raided that camp, arrested several of the guerrillas, and "appeared" three others, including a woman whose first name was Elisa. People here have speculated that one of the guerrillas who survived—the brother of one of the disappeared men—took refuge in the north of México for a few years and then returned to Chiapas, using the code name Comandante Germán. He was either accompanied by, or eventually joined by a dozen others, among them a second-year woman medical student, who had been captured in a raid on another FLN camp. After spending a few months in jail, she had been granted a presidential amnesty. In Chiapas, she took the code name Elisa—presumably in honor of the disappeared guerrilla from the Ocosingo camp. Sometime around 1984, a year after the EZLN's official founding, a young, bright philosophy graduate who was known first as Zacarías and then, much more recently, as Marcos, linked up with these comrades in Chiapas. The government claims that Subcomandante Marcos—that is, Rafael Guillén—is the son of a prosperous furniture retailer from Tampico, and was a leftist activist student and a teacher at a Mexico City university before he left for Chiapas. It also claims that, although Comandante Germán is still at large, Comandante Elisa was captured two days before the February 10 offensive.

At the university, a fairly radical enclave called the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, which was founded in 1973, people certainly remember Guillén. In the early 1980s, a friend of mine who taught there recalls, the faculty saw social activism as part of its mandate. "We wanted to put the emphasis as much on practice as on theory, and we understood that it was our duty to give back to the community what we received from it," he says. "We were all radicals, particularly those of us in the Design Science and Arts Division. But no one was more radical than a group of young, brilliant, serious, and hardworking teachers in the Department of Theory and Analysis, Guillén and Silvia"—Silvia Hernández, an EZLN founding member—"were in the middle of that group. I thought we were perhaps too sectarian, but they beat us. They kept strictly to themselves, like a little family. But they came up with very original, very creative projects. They were big on Althusser"—Louis Althusser, the French philosopher

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theories of ideology and communication, and on something they called *gráfica monumental*. Before they left the school, they did a wonderful mural for the auditorium—it's still there today."

MY FRIEND COULD not say for certain, at twelve years' remove, whether the man he remembered as Rafael Guillén would prove to be Marcos. Most reporters who have interviewed Marcos have no opinion on his likeness to Guillén's mug shot, but none of us could fail to notice how much Marcos talks like one of Guillén's brothers—Alfonso Guillén, a university professor in Baja California Sur, who was shown on television on February 9 being hounded by reporters as he tried to explain, with much of Marcos's striking calmness and courtesy, why he had not seen his brother Rafael in several years. There were other clues as well: before the Army incursion, the "capital" of the Zapatistas' *territorio liberado* was an impressively large performance space built out of nothing in a clearing in the jungle and presided over by an amphitheater whose benches covered the entire face of a steep triangular hill and whose rostrum was fronted with socialist-realist paintings—surrealist, in their jungle surroundings—that recalled the mural at the university.

Marcos's preoccupation with symbolic language is certainly worthy of a student of Althusser. He has created his own dazzling image as a masked *mito genial*—his term, meaning an inspired act of mythmaking. He has staged a very real, threatening war on the Mexican state based on almost no firepower and a brilliant use of Mexicans' most resonant images: the Revolution, the peasants' unending struggle for dignity and recognition, the betrayed Emiliano Zapata. And he has used his writing: "What we know about Marcos is mostly what he has written about himself. "How do you manage to write so much?" he asked me enviously when he showed up at last on the night we talked, in a hamlet in the Zapatista control zone in April. I pointed out that writing was what I did for a living, whereas he had a revolution to run and nevertheless managed to produce reams of copy. (Rather more than my output, in fact. The collected letters and commentaries he published in the Mexican press in the first eight months of last year alone have just been turned into a good-sized book.) It had not dawned on me then that the most visible and critical part of the Zapatistas' revolution was the letters that the Mexican press publishes regularly—particularly the long, sometimes poetic, sometimes irreverent, personified postscripts that are the subcomandante's contribution to epistolary art. Now swaggering, now full of righteous fury, now impudent and hip, the Marcos of the

postscripts is at all times both elusive and intimate, and this seductive has allowed him to become a faceless stand-in for all the oppressed, an anonymous vessel for all fantasies from the sexual to the bellicose.

Marcos's letters exhibit an intense, self-involved romanticism, and Rafael Cuillé's senior thesis at the university, which was ostensibly Althusser and really about himself. Cuillé wrote, "One thing is certain: the philosopher is 'different'; he belongs to a strange lineage of 'sentinels' that keep themselves at a prudent distance from the trite; he can relate with a brilliant phrase that will eventually pass into posterity on the death of an ant squashed as it tries to cross a busy street at 8 p.m. . . . His hair is disorderly and his beard unkempt, his gaze is continually ecstatic, as in orgasm not yet achieved, cigarettes and coffee are part of his persona." Marcos, too, likes to come up with little fables about ants and rather personal things about sex. ("The anchor's long chain . . . groans when it is detached from its moist bed like our sex from the feminine belly," he wrote last August.)

WHEN MARCOS ARRIVED in Chiapas to join his friends—lugging too many books through the jungle, by his own account—he found fertile ground for a rebellion. The southeastern part of the state, where the revolt first took hold, and where the Zapatistas eventually set up their control zone, is one of the most backward in all Mexico, but it is also an area whose inhabitants were already familiar with and eager for ideological debate. The region is known as Las Cañadas, or the Canyons. It has no paved roads, no phones, little electricity, hardly any working schools, and a soaring population-growth rate. It was settled by campesino migrants from other parts of the state and from the rest of Mexico, most of them Mayan Indians who speak Tojolabal, Tzeltal, and Tzotzil, and little Spanish, and came to what used to be the nearly uninhabited Lacandón jungle in search of land where they could grow their corn and raise their families in peace. For years, the Bishop of San Cristóbal, Samuel Ruíz, had preached Indian rights and egalitarianism in the hamlets of Las Cañadas, and also for years radical activists had done organizing work in the communities—sometimes in agreement with Bishop Ruíz's network of priests and deacons, sometimes at odds with them.

The radicals' work was increasingly successful as the land ran out and once cleared of its jungle covering, turned stony. Government repression helped, and so did private attacks. Chiapas is an actively racist state, its cattle ranchers enlisted moonlighting policemen, soldiers, and ranch hands

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terrorize—and, fairly often, to murder—the Indian peasants who, with Bishop Ruíz's encouragement, were daring to organize themselves. People from Chiapas who know Las Cañadas well say that Marcos, Germán, and Elisa usurped the Church's existing network of priests and deacons to promote "self-defense brigades," and gained credibility among the population by offering health services. (Whether the demure dark-haired former medical student who was presented to the press as Elisa, and is married to a freelance television producer—also under arrest—is really the EZLN com- andante is uncertain. She has disavowed her initial confession, saying that government agents blindfolded her and threatened the life of her two-year-old son to make her sign it, but, as far as I know, she has not specifically denied that she is Elisa.)

According to several accounts, the guerrillas' work added to the divisions in the by-now radicalized communities. Some of Bishop Ruíz's most deeply committed followers abandoned him to join the EZLN. So did many of the campesinos initially organized by the radicals, whose leaders had by the late 1980s embarked on a series of close alliances with the government. On the other hand, many campesinos who had opted for the guerrillas' self-defense courses were offended by their theories of dialectical materialism and by their denial of the existence of God. (In the process of becoming "Indianized," Marcos told me, "there was a certain amount of clashing while we made the adjustment between our orthodox way of seeing the world in terms of bourgeois and proletarians to the community's worldview," and I assume that he was referring to the clash over religion.)

Sometime around 1993, the guerrillas themselves appear to have suffered, if not a split, at least a serious difference of opinion. People say they have heard stories that Marcos, on the basis of his organizing work, was convinced that Las Cañadas was ripe for an insurrection that would set off a revolutionary spark throughout Mexico. Apparently, neither Germán nor Elisa felt this to be the case, and they left the zone.

IT SEEMS UNLIKELY that the government found out what we now know about the EZLN from Elisa and the other guerrillas captured the day before the attorney general's press conference. For all the mystery surrounding the Zapatistas, the rebels had plenty of connections to both the Salinas and the Zedillo administrations, and it makes more sense to guess that information gathered from these sources had been known and kept for use at the moment when the government might decide that further attempts to reach a negotiated settlement with the Zapatistas would be fruitless. One

former radical who has joined the establishment is Adolfo Oribe, a former of Política Popular, the radical movement that first organized the poor peasants in Las Cañadas; he is now Zedillo's chief adviser on rural affairs. Another is a ruling-party *diputado*, or member of the House of Representatives, who for years was part of the EZLN's high command, and is now known to the Zapatistas as a traitor. And then there is Raúl Salinas de Gortari, the "troublesome brother" of the former President, as the *newsworld* *Proceso* called him in a prescient cover story last year. Raúl Salinas is a very wealthy man, an engineer with a postgraduate degree from a French university, a sometime litterateur. He has also, of course, just been indicted on charges of conspiring to murder his former brother-in-law José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, the secretary-general of the ruling party, who was assassinated last September. And he is a former Maoist who, together with Oribe and, apparently, Comandante Germán, was active in Política Popular nearly two decades ago.

The warrant for the arrest of Rafael Guillén announced on February 6 has allowed the Zedillo administration to leak much of its hoarded information and rumor, but the government has not succeeded in what appears to have been its primary goal. The plan to disillusion Marcos's admirers with the revelation that the daring guerrilla is a sappy-looking academic full of old-line Marxist dogma worked for about 72 hours. A young acquaintance of mine who used to swoon at Marcos's name took one look at Guillén's photograph and said "Guácala!" — "Yuck!" That was on a Thursday. The following Sunday, the Mexico City papers received the first communiqué from Marcos since he, his troops, and his campesino followers retreated from their villages into the hills. It had three of his trademark addendums, in which the postscript itself becomes a character in a drama, and a signoff:

P. S. that rabidly applauds this new "success" of the government police: I heard they've found another "Marcos," and that he's from Tampico. That doesn't sound bad, the port is nice. I remember when I used to work as a bouncer in a brothel in Ciudad Madero [near Tampico], in the days when [a corrupt oilworkers-union leader] used to do the same thing to the regional economy that Salinas did with the stock market; inject money into it to hide poverty. . . .

P. S. that despite the circumstances does not abandon its narcissism: So . . . Is this new Subcomandante Marcos good-looking? Because lately they've been assigning me really ugly ones and my feminine correspondence gets ruined.

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P. S. that counts time and ammunition: I have 300 bullets, so try to bring 299 soldiers and police to get me. (Legend has it that I don't miss a shot, would you like to find out if it's true?) Why 299, if there's 300 bullets? Well, because the last one is for yours truly. It turns out that one gets fond of things like this, and a bullet seems to be the only consolation for this solitary heart. Vale again. Salud, and can it be that there will be a little spot for me in her heart?

[signed] The Sup [Subcomandante], rearranging his ski mask with macabre flirtatiousness.

In five short paragraphs, the Sup reestablished his credentials as an outlaw hero, brought sex into the issue, and, yanking back the mask his pursuers had torn off, donned it once more. Two demonstrations were called by solidarity committees in Mexico City to protest the military attack on the Zapatistas and the arrest warrants on the EZLN leadership; according to press reports, tens of thousands of people showed up.

THERE WAS A very real sense in which, during the past 13 months, Marcos fought the Zapatista war singlehanded. It was, after all, a public-relations war, and the Indian fighters—most of whom spoke little Spanish, and for whom the government had provided, at most, a few years of elementary schooling—were not equipped for the sophisticated exchanges with the government and the Mexican public which such a war required. It was Marcos who wrote the letters, and also the communiqués signed by something called the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee—General Command, which is supposedly the highest authority within the EZLN. (It is more likely the body, consisting of village authorities, that makes the real decisions affecting daily life in the Zapatista zone, while Marcos himself seems to have decisive influence, if not absolute power, in questions having to do with war and relations with the central government.) It was Marcos who granted the vast majority of the interviews—or, at least, the ones that got quoted. It was he who drew up the list of accredited "war correspondents," and signed our laminated mint-green credentials. It was he who stage-managed the moving EZLN events at which glamorous visitors from Mexico City and abroad watched Indian peasants parade in homemade uniforms, carrying hunting rifles and other guns and—in the absence of real weapons—carved wood imitations of guns. And it was his adroit manipulation of this array of symbolic weapons that mobilized public opinion in favor of the EZLN and kept the war the Zapatistas had invited at bay.

Marcos, however, cannot fight a real war by himself, and, on the Army's stunning advance over the last three weeks, it seems the attempt by the EZLN troops to take on the Mexican Army can end only in tragedy. The total number of dead that reporters have reliably been able to come up with for the offensive is fewer than 10, and this is because, rather than fight, the Zapatistas and their families fled by the thousand into the jagged, ravine-crossed mountains that stand between their homes and the former control zone, and what remains of the Lacandón jungle.

Just about a year ago, the government, desperate to appease the rebels, Las Cañadas, offered a settlement involving a *comucopia* of social projects—health clinics and roads and electrification programs—and insurgent peasants proudly turned down the offer, declaring that they wanted democracy as well. Less than a month ago, they were a defeated force, the improbable vanguard of a leftist movement that had finally managed to pose a real challenge to Zedillo's decrepit ruling party. Now the Zapatistas are terrified, sick with fear and hunger and in awe of the displacement of tanks and cannon the Army has ostentatiously deployed throughout the former control zone. Marcos continues to produce communiqués, but they are days late in arriving, evidently because an excellent communication network that included faxes and a satellite phone is no longer in place. A he did throughout the 13 months of ceasefire, he continues to warn that although the Zapatistas want peace, and have therefore refrained from war, they can be pushed only so far.

But it is hard to see how much farther the rebels can be pushed without calling it defeat. Those of us who watched the repeated Zapatista military parades last year, and saw the carved wood weapons, assumed that the 400 or so troops who used to march were representative of thousands of others, and that the wooden weapons could, on the day of reckoning, be turned in for something to fight with. Perhaps we were wrong. "The EZLN is not willing to hold a dialogue in humiliating conditions," a recent communiqué stated. In other words, the EZLN has been humiliated. An amnesty law sent to Congress by Zedillo will most likely be approved. An amnesty law sent disguised as a dialogue offer, and there is a good chance that the Zapatistas will sign it, significant numbers of their supporters are already starting to return to the villages.

THE NEW PROMINENCE of the military establishment is only one of the worrying aspects of the Chiapas conflict. In the space of two weeks, the evening news led off with three different military ceremonies attended by

Zedillo. Although the Zapatistas' support network in the United States pumped up the Internet with reports of widespread killing by the Army, reporters could find no trace of these events, and it appears instead that the military has behaved with remarkable restraint by Latin-American standards. By these standards, restraint means that many peasants who did not flee have been arbitrarily detained in their villages, and are being threatened, beaten, asphyxiated, or deprived of food, so that they will denounce the Zapatistas among them. Essentially, the remilitarization of the Chiapas conflict means that the Mexican Army has been turned into an occupying force.

Then, there is the economic disaster that it has been Zedillo's lot to preside over. The best that can be expected is that the Mexican economy will remain in recession for at least a year, and it is not clear how money can be found to buy stability in Chiapas, where the economy has collapsed. Who will pay the taxes to pay for the public works demanded not only by the Zapatistas but now by virtually all of Chiapas's impoverished peasant population? And where is the land that can satisfy the campesinos' hunger, now that so much of the Lacandón jungle has been deforested and settled?

There was a phrase one heard everywhere last year, stated sometimes fearfully, sometimes with joy: "Los indios perdieron el miedo." "The Indians are no longer afraid." Made fearless by the armed Zapatistas, *los indios* invaded some 2,000 cattle ranches and coffee farms. The owners are threatening to take up arms in defense of their land. *Los indios* also did fierce, bloody battle with each other over issues of religion and politics, which always had their roots in land disputes. Even if the Zapatistas are brought to their knees, these conflicts remain unresolved.

THERE IS A dreamlike quality about the speed with which the world that the Zapatistas created in their stronghold is being dismantled. Their pride, their monument, the capital of their *territorio liberado*—a ceremonial space baptized Aguascalientes, in honor of the site of the constitutional convention that was called by the revolutionaries of 1914, and in which Emiliano Zapata played a preponderant role—is gone. The Zapatistas built Aguascalientes last July in preparation for a National Democratic Convention called by Marcos, which was attended by thousands of Mexican delegates and hundreds of reporters from all over the world. Mexicans are lavish hosts, and the impoverished Indians of Las Cañadas were no exception. They cleared the jungle to build guesthouses, a kitchen, parking lots, even a library with makeshift bookshelves, so that their literate guests could feel

at home. And they built the amphitheater, with a primitive *trostrum* to hold the one in the national Congress, in Mexico City, and gave it as a backdrop to two enormous Mexican flags, just like the ones in Congress. In front of the *trostrum*, there was a parade space for the marching troops. For the audience, an entire hillside was covered with benches made out of split logs. There was a gigantic effort, worthy of the importance that the campesinos of Cuernavaca felt they had attained, and it took Army troops less than a week to demantle the entire compound, log by log.

When I arrived at the site last week, government soldiers were planting the last of several hundred saplings in the holes where Y-posts had once held the benches of the amphitheater on the hill. I asked the colonel in charge of the operation why the government had felt that it was necessary to return Aguascalientes to the jungle. "I think that in Mexico the era called for more wooded spaces," he said, explaining the issue ecologically. "The problem is that anyone can think of cutting down a tree, but no one thinks of planting one back."

I asked him why the troops seemed so relaxed, as if they had no fear of an enemy attack. "You're the one who says there are Zapatistas," he answered. "I've been stationed in the region eight months and I haven't seen one yet."

It took an hour to travel about 10 miles down a gutted road from the nearest town to another village in the region. The campesinos there had taken to the hills when they heard of the Army's approach, abandoning their yams, animals and their supplies of corn, but days later, figuring that if they didn't reclaim their homes the Army would take them over, they had returned. Since then, they had not dared to leave the village to work their fields. Yet the radical fury of their discourse, their innocence of the world, their stubborn hope that the Zapatistas might yet manage to terrify the government into giving them a place in the world, was startling. "We don't know what the government looks like, where it sits, or what its palace is like," a woman said, in broken Spanish. She was choking with rage. "We are ignorant, but what I want to know is this: Do the bourgeois, the rich people's children, sleep on the floor, the way ours do? Do helicopters come and terrify them?"

"Let the government take its helicopters, tanks, and cars out of here," a man said, "because everyone knows that the Zapatistas aren't just a handful, so if it doesn't they will take revenge. Is it a crime to want what they want? We want justice, liberty, and democracy." And he added, with no apparent sense that one wish was infinitely smaller than the other, "We want the government to take us into account."

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I told him that Aguascalientes was no more, and other villagers came close to hear the news.

"They didn't have to carry the logs to build it," the man said quietly. "Was it so much in their way that they had to destroy it?"

THE MARCOS MYSTERY: A CHAT WITH THE SUBCOMMANDER OF SPIN

JOEL SIMON

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In the July issue of *Vanity Fair*, Subcommander Marcos, the masked leader of Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation, describes himself as a "brilliant myth." Despite the volume of ink that has been spilled about him, that's exactly what he remains. No journalist has figured out who Marcos is, really, and until someone does, he will continue to invent and reinvent the image of himself that he disseminates to visiting journalists. 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.

By the time I set out to interview Marcos this past March, three to five carloads of journalists were arriving every day at the Zapatista checkpoint heading into the Lacandón jungle. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, I had teamed up with Susan Ferriss of the *San Francisco Examiner* and photographer Ricardo Sandoval. At the Zapatista checkpoint, Bill Weinberg of *High Times* magazine and WBAL radio in New York joined our group. After two days of waiting, a Zapatista militiaman came to tell us that we would be permitted through the checkpoint.

The decision about who gets through is made by Marcos himself and those denied access are never explicitly told they will not be let in. Mexican journalists grumble that the foreign press gets preferential treatment. I'm not sure how Marcos decides whom to let in and whom to exclude, but he certainly has a remarkable knowledge of the US press. He asked Ferriss

of the Hearst-owned *Examiner* what had ever become of Patty Hearst when he met Weinberg he blurted out the correct frequency for WFLX 99.5.

Inside the Zapatista camps, Marcos likes to make everyone wait for an interview, and in fact he seems to show up only after a journalist has tantrum or starts packing up to get ready to leave. In our case that was almost a week. Through a courier, we sent a letter to Marcos letting him know that we had a flight the next morning and couldn't wait any longer. Late that night, he pushed open the door of the shack where we were staying, climbed into an empty bed, and lay there smoking a pipe until he noticed him. When he inhaled, the glowing tobacco illuminated a prominent nose, which was barely contained by his ski mask; a pair of tired-looking greenish eyes; and a weatherbeaten, gray military cap adorned with the plastic stars. He spoke mostly in Spanish, occasionally lapsing into fluent accented English.

It took me a while to make the transition from sleep and unfortunately our colleague Bill Weinberg was unable to do it. He woke up briefly while Marcos came in, and then went back to sleep convinced that the cracking guy joking about his sex life couldn't possibly be a guerrilla commander, even if he did have a bandolier of red shotgun cartridges strung across his chest. But Marcos has a conscience; he gave Weinberg an exclusive interview the next morning.

Part of the explanation for the theatrics—long waits, dramatic midnight appearances—may be a legitimate security concern. The nocturnal visit can also be explained by Marcos's reported insomnia. But his antics also seem calculated to make for good copy. He tells different stories about his past during each interview.

For example, Marcos told us that during the *Vanity Fair* interview the week before he had invented stories about his early years. "I told them that I became a revolutionary because my parents had a bad divorce," he joked. "I told them a whole bunch of lies that I don't remember right now." (In fact he told them just the opposite—that he had a normal childhood and home life in northern Mexico.)

Marcos has said that he learned military strategy by reading CIA manuals, but he is less forthcoming about how he mastered the fine art of media relations. What is clear is that he began cultivating favorable press the moment the Zapatista uprising began. After the Zapatistas marched the *San Cristóbal*, virtually unopposed, on January 1, Marcos called out to Mexican journalists by name and invited them to take his picture (how he

recognized them after supposedly spending a decade in the jungle remains a mystery). Within the first two months, he had granted extensive interviews to a number of publications, including the Mexican dailies *La Jornada* and *El Financiero*, and *The New York Times*. "We did not go to war on January 1 to kill or have them kill us," Marcos was quoted in the *Times* as saying. "We went to make ourselves heard."

In July, Marcos sent a facetious communique in which he both mocked journalists and revealed his knowledge of their trade. "Everything You Wanted to Know About El Sup [Marcos's nickname] but Were Afraid to Ask." It supplies reporters with a format and multiple choices for their pieces on the subcommander. "At last we arrived at (a valley/a forest/a clearing/a bar/a Metro station/a pressroom)," the communique says at one point. "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. . . .)"

But while Marcos pretends to be tired of the ceaseless interviews, he also seems to accept that entertaining journalists is part of his job. Every positive story written about Marcos or the Zapatistas raises the political cost of a Mexican army assault on the ragtag rebels. Good press—in Mexico and in the US—is the Zapatistas' strongest defense.

Marcos's decidedly informal approach to interviews has occasionally gotten him in trouble. When he joked with a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter that he had been fired from a restaurant in San Francisco for being gay, the Mexican press ran headlines claiming that Marcos had "admitted" that he was homosexual. (While the *Chronicle* article suggested that Marcos was joking, its pull quote did not.)

Marcos's response was interesting. The story could not be literally true, he asserted, because he was not a real person, but a myth. "Marcos is gay in San Francisco," noted a communique the subcommander penned in response to the controversy. "[He is] black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Palestinian in Israel. . . . a pacifist in Bosnia, a housewife alone on a Saturday night in any neighborhood in any city in Mexico. . . . a single woman on the Metro at 10:00 P.M."

"Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed minorities, resisting and saying, 'Enough,'" the communique concluded.

various states of the Republic but mainly the troops that are here are Chiapanecos and mainly Indigenous. We are not requiring the reaching of an accord as a condition for leaving San Cristóbal. We may leave even though there is no accord, according to orders that may tell us to leave and attack another place. We would have to march to other places. In this case Tuxtla, since if the order is that we have to go there, we have nothing to do here. What I want you to understand is our situation here. We have not prohibited any commerce, not the gas stations, not the bus stations, not the mini-buses, not that, nor have we prohibited the radio stations. The only thing we have prohibited is leaving the city because we cannot guarantee that the federal troops will respect you. As for the rest, we have not done anything but get things a bit dirty. That we have done, but we will try to fix that as well, very soon. So we advise with this, then, to the small and medium businesses, that they will not be touched, only the business that is of the federal and state government.

[Marcos is speaking again.]

M: Let me finish.

Q: Wait a minute.

M: Of course, finish.

Q: Compañeros of Chiapas, Indians, permit me a minute, if you were brought tortillas, water, pozolito, would you accept it?

M: Yes, of course. That is what we are eating. That is the situation. What has to continue is our advance to Mexico City. We started this very day. Today the North American Free Trade Agreement begins, which is nothing more than a death sentence to the Indigenous ethnicities of Mexico, who are perfectly dispensable in the modernization program of Salinas de Gortari. Then the *pañeros* decided to rise up on that same day to respond to the decree of death that the Free Trade Agreement gives them, with the decree of life that is given by rising up in arms to demand liberty and democracy, which will take them to the solution to their problems. This is the reason that we have risen up today. Any other questions, because they are going to cut me off?

Q: We don't want free trade. What is happening?

M: What I know is nothing more than you know. There were displays of adherence and sympathy in four or five states of the Republic, among them Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla and another state in the North that I can't remember. Our organization will also speak on

a national level. A column was lost as they entered and then they went in there, they left to look, but we are not going to enter any civilian house. We did not do it when you were sleeping [applause], and won't now that you are awake. I think we did well, because you did not awaken until very late. [applause]

FIRST DECLARATION FROM THE LACANDÓN JUNGLE

EZLN's Declaration of War
"Today we say 'enough is enough!' (Ya Basta!)"

THIS is the declaration of war read by the EZLN commandantes from the balcony of the Palacio Municipal on the morning of January 1, 1994, the first day of NAFTA.

The declaration is terse and intense, fitting the purpose of going to war. It locates itself within the long struggle of Mexican history, making no reference to other revolutionary traditions. It claims the authority of the Mexican Constitution, Article 39 of which declares an "inalienable right to alter" the form of government when it becomes repressive. Its focus is on the particular Mexican problem of having a "dictatorship" of a single party (the PRI) in charge of both the state and the Army. The declaration therefore calls on "other branches of the nation's government" to depose Carlos de Gortari Salinas and "restore the legality and the stability of the nation." It declares belligerent status for the EZLN and calls for international monitoring of the Geneva conventions on warfare. And finally, it summarizes its platform in a series of historic code words of Mexican revolutionaries: work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice, and peace.

The Zapatistas thus break quickly from calls for socialism or vanguard notions of replacing the state with a "dictatorship of the proletariat" or any other new apparatus. They are careful to tailor their demands to restructure the state consistently with the Constitution. The declaration is a mixture of armed struggle and reformism.

The declaration also proposes to advance on Mexico City while "conquering the Mexican federal Army," a concept that seems hopelessly out of touch with reality.

THE ZAPATISTA READER

What did the Zapatistas mean? Marcos later described a plan to seize the hydroelectric facilities near the Chiapas capital, which provides 45 percent of the gap between the declaration's military rhetoric and the reality of EZLN uprisings in only five towns reinforced the official Mexican line that the rebellion was merely a local one marginal to the country's overall security.

The scholar John Womack makes the important point that the declaration includes no mention of Indians. Did the Zapatista emphasis on the indigenous only grow as they realized the limits on their national liberation project? It is unclear. The declaration itself begins with the words, "we are a product of 500 years of struggle," an unmistakable though indirect reference to the Conquest of the Indigenous. Marcos's interviews on January 1 made explicit reference to the indigenous character of the uprising and the army's composition. Later, Marcos claimed that the declaration's drafting committee, including indigenous members, chose intentionally to focus on the national issue. If that is so, the emphasis on the Indian roots of the struggle, on the Indian as the repressed soul and constituency of Mexico, became explicit and primary only later.

TO THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO: MEXICAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil. Later the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled; leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged; poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads—no land, no work, no health care, no food, no education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives. Nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace or justice for ourselves and our children.

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

First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle

They are the same ones that opposed most conservative and sellout groups. They are the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the "scientific" Porfirista dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones that today take everything from us, absolutely everything.

To prevent the continuation of the above and as our last hope, after having tried to utilize all legal means based on our Constitution, we apply Article 39 of our Constitution which says:

National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government.

Therefore, according to our constitution, we declare the following to the Mexican federal Army, the pillar of the Mexican dictatorship that we suffer from, monopolized by a one-party system and led by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the maximum and illegitimate federal executive that today holds power. According to this declaration of war, we ask that other powers of the nation advocate to restore the legitimacy and the stability of the nation by overthrowing the dictator.

We also ask that international organizations and the International Red Cross watch over and regulate our battles, so that our efforts are carried out while still protecting our civilian population. We declare now and always that we are subject to the Geneva Accord, with the EZLN as the fighting arm of our liberation struggle. We have the Mexican people on our side, and we have the beloved tri-colored flag. We use black and red in our uniforms as a symbol of our working people on strike. Our flag carries the letters EZLN, for Zapatista National Liberation Army, and we always carry our flag into combat.

Before we begin, we refuse any effort to disgrace our just cause by accusing us of being drug traffickers, drug guerrillas, thieves, or other names that might be used by our enemies. Our struggle follows the Constitution, which is held high by its call for justice and equality.

Therefore, according to this declaration of war, we give our military forces, the EZLN, the following orders:

First: Advance to the capital of the country, overcoming the Mexican federal Army, protecting during your advance the Mexican population, and permitting the people in liberated area the right to freely and democratically elect their own administrative authorities.

Second: Respect the lives of prisoners and turn over all wounded to the International Red Cross.

Third: Initiate summary judgments against all soldiers of the Mexican federal Army and the political police that have received training or have been paid by foreigners, accused of being traitors to our country, and against all those who have repressed the civil population and robbed or stolen from or attempted crimes against the good of the people.

Fourth: Form new troops with all those Mexicans who show their interest in joining our struggle, including enemy soldiers who turn themselves in without having fought against us, and who promise to take orders from the General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Fifth: We ask for the unconditional surrender of the enemy's headquarters before we begin any combat to avoid any loss of lives.

Sixth: Suspend the robbery of our natural resources in the areas controlled by the EZLN.

TO THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO:

We, the men and women of the EZLN, full and free, are conscious that the war that we have declared is a last resort, but also a just one. The dictators have been applying an undeclared genocidal war against our people for many years. Therefore we ask for your participation in and support of this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and democratic.

JOIN THE INSURGENT FORCES OF THE
ZAPATISTA NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY.

General Command of the EZLN
1993

SECOND DECLARATION FROM THE LACANDON JUNGLE

"Today we say: We will not surrender!"

THIS declaration was issued six months after the January 1994 uprising.

The 12-day shooting war ended in Chiapas on January 12. Guerrillas did not rise in other parts of Mexico. But "civil society" awakened, with thousands of protestors in Mexico City and elsewhere. Their opposition to Salinas's military offensive was effective. The Zapatistas took careful note of civil society's other demand: to give peace a chance, to negotiate, to build a nonviolent alternative to another round of violence. The shadow of violence then darkened the land as the PRI's presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was assassinated by a "lone gunman" at point blank range. Meanwhile, peace negotiations between the Indians of the EZLN and the Salinas government began in San Cristobal in February, but soon collapsed. The Second Declaration credited civil society for preventing an all-out military offensive by the Salinas regime. It accepted a cease-fire to permit civil society to organize further, to create a nonviolent alternative. It expressed a vision of civil society as the birthplace of a new political culture which eventually might give rise to "political parties of a new type," but in the meantime served as "the waiting room of the new Mexico." Finally, it called for a coming together of Mexicans of all backgrounds in a "democratic, national convention"—which occurred in August, when thousands trekked to the jungle for a weeklong dialogue.

Womack notes that the Second Declaration lacks any reference to Indians, but he misses the clear emergence of an Indian consciousness, mythic symbols, and language. The dead of the mountains have spoken to the people of corn, asking that they "organize the dignity that resists and does not sell itself." Here for the first time is the Zapatista slogan, "For everyone, everything, for ourselves, nothing." On one level, this represents an affirmation that the EZLN does not seek power, is not a new caste of caudillos. But it appears here not as a slogan (like *Basta Ya!*) but in an Indian cadence: "The drums sounded, and in the voice of the land our pain spoke, and our history spoke our pain and our history spoke. For everyone, everything, our dead say. So long as this is not so, there will be nothing for us."