

The Chiapas Media Project: videos bring powerful stories of indigenous peoples in Mexico to campus

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By Clemencia Rodriguez
Associate Professor
Department of Communication
FVS Faculty Member

Alex Halkin from the Chiapas Media Project showed two videos, "Zapata's Garden" and "Song of the Earth," Dec. 5, both of which allowed the campus community to learn about the political and social situation in the Mexican state of Chiapas without intermediaries.

Approximately 200 students and faculty from film and video studies, communication, Spanish and other departments attended the screening and discussion.

The Chiapas Media Project emerged from a political and historical context in which processes of globalization clashed with indigenous communities, Halkin said.

In 1994, a few days before the approval of one of the major free trade agreements among the United States, Mexico, and

Canada, the Zapatista movement took the world's center stage.

The Zapatistas, a resistance movement of southern Mexico's indigenous communities, use the Internet, video and e-mail to spread their message that they completely disagree with the agreement, that free trade has only brought more poverty to

indigenous communities, Spanish is a second language; they did not know the history; they did not understand the situation; and they did not have the time to inform themselves.

Typically, foreign reporters have to go in and out of a site in a matter of hours; they interview a couple of English speakers, take

some photos and produce the news story.

The indigenous people realized they needed to tell their story to the whole world in their own terms, and since then, they have made a great effort to master different information and communication technologies.

In service of that goal, Halkin has since 1995 provided video technology and training to indigenous communities in Chiapas. Indigenous video makers have produced dozens of videos about their lifestyle, their culture, their music and their dreams for the future of their communities.



Indigenous Mexican women taping for their self-produced videos about lifestyle and culture.

their indigenous communities and that not everyone in Mexico is interested in pursuing the American dream of consumerism.

Hundreds of international media and foreign reporters descended on Chiapas to get the story. But they did not speak the languages, given that for Mexican