CIVIL CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN MEXICO:
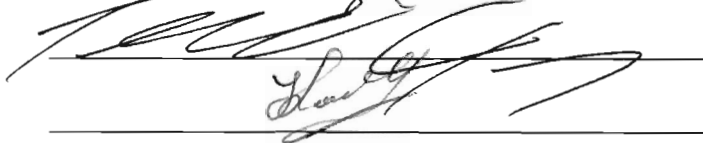## A COMPARATIVE AND INTEGRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE CASES

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of
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Civil Conflict in Southern Mexico:
A Comparative and Integrative Analysis of Three Cases

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at George Mason University

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APPO: Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the
    Peoples of Oaxaca)
EPR: Ejército Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Army)
EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National
    Liberation)
NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement
PAN: Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PRD: Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)
PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)

ABSTRACT

CIVIL CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN MEXICO:
A COMPARATIVE AND INTEGRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE CASES

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Since the early 1990s, southern Mexico has suffered several significant instances of civil unrest, protest and violent military/civilian clashes, which profoundly affect the lives of local peoples and threaten national and regional stability. This study examines three remarkable and ongoing episodes of low-intensity civil conflict in Mexico's southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero. It is concluded that the three states suffer from similarly high levels of structural violence, and that the militant groups under consideration share many grievances and goals. However, the three groups vary widely in terms of the contentious tactics they use, particularly their use of violence. It is argued that this variance is due in large part to a complex relationship between the political opportunities and constraints faced by each group and their unique social identities and ideologies. The implications of the study's analytical model for the nonviolent settlement of intrastate conflict in general are considered.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Conflict in Southern Mexico

Introduction

On the first day of January, 1994, the same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement formally went into effect, a formerly unknown rebel group called the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN) officially declared war on the Mexican government. The Zapatistas, taking their name from a hero of the Mexican Revolution, proclaimed their intense opposition to an array of federal policies that they believed were destroying the lives of the country's poor and indigenous people. Their immediate military objective was to march from their home in the southern state of Chiapas to Mexico City but, clearly outmanned and outgunned, the EZLN quickly changed its strategy from direct military confrontation to grass-roots socio-political mobilization. In the more than 14 years that have since passed, they have conducted a massive and continuous 'information war' against the Mexican government while continuing to suffer occasional casualties at the hands of federal forces and associated 'paramilitaries,' despite their primarily non-violent forms of resistance. While these tactics remain the EZLN's predominant tool, there is no doubt that, in the minds of both the Zapatistas and Mexican government, the two groups are still at war.

Two years after the birth of the EZLN, two states farther west in Guerrero, a coalition of several small and autonomous rebel organizations coalesced to form a larger

and more effective military force capable of facing the Mexican army. The resulting organization was christened the *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (Popular Revolutionary Army, or EPR). The group first publicly proclaimed its existence in 1996 at a memorial service for 17 citizens who had been killed by police in Guerrero. Since then, though their activities have waxed and waned, they have fought violently to overturn the Mexican government, which they have called 'anti-democratic' and which they have accused of colluding with foreign business interests to strip the Mexican people of the country's natural wealth ("Popular Revolutionary Army," 2007). Although smaller and less well known than the EZLN, the EPR has been much more aggressive and focused in its tactics, sporadically attacking police and military forces directly and, more recently, bombing pipelines of the national oil and gas company, PEMEX ("Pipeline Bombs," 2007). Renewed attacks by the rebel group beginning in 2006 have raised serious concerns about the security of Mexican infrastructure, and have put the group prominently in the crosshairs of the Mexican government.

In another recent and even more acute episode of unrest in southern Mexico, in 2006 the city of Oaxaca—one of the country's most beautiful and popular tourist destinations, and the heart of one of its poorest states—a city of great cultural and historical wealth, was gripped by a dramatic social and political crisis of its own. From early May until the end of the year, thousands of protestors faced off against local and federal police in a struggle that centered on questions of inequality, injustice, and political corruption. What began as a strike by local teachers soon grew from protests and demonstrations to violent confrontations, and ultimately to an eventual siege of the

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city by federal forces. A new organization, the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, or APPO) quickly emerged to spearhead the opposition (Reyes, 2006). Protestors, as well as an American video journalist, were killed in the city both by police and, in some cases, by shadowy 'paramilitary' forces. During the last and most tense days of the standoff, a series of bombings at banks and political headquarters in Mexico City—carried out, some suspect, by the EPR in solidarity with the Oaxacan people—punctuated the crisis ("Popular Revolutionary Army," 2007). Before the end of the year, however, an assault by thousands of federal police and soldiers violently and decisively expelled the protestors from the heart of the city, effectively ending—at least in the minds of many politicians— the conflict.

For many concerned observers, and particularly for conflict specialists, these striking events raise many questions. What is going on here? What has motivated the people of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero—neighboring states with similar socio-economic profiles—to organize themselves into distinctive groups in order to fight their government? What conditions have become so insupportable in their lives that they are willing to resort to force to change them? Why have they chosen particular tactics, including violence, in pursuit of their goals? Moreover, are the aforementioned episodes truly unrelated events, or are they instead symptoms of something more menacing, of an underlying tension throughout southern Mexico which threatens to erupt again without warning, this time perhaps more violently and with even more destructive force? These questions inevitably lead concerned people to ask whether or not something can be done

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to prevent such a violent eruption of conflict from taking place. The present research study aims to help answer all of these questions and to provide the foundation for designing an effective intervention in order to manage and transform the conflict which persists in the region.

Figure 1.1: Political Map of Mexico

Problem and Background

As just described, since the early 1990s southern Mexico has suffered several significant instances of civil unrest, protest and violent military/civilian clashes, which

profoundly affect the lives of local peoples and threaten national and regional stability. This is the problem which the present study aims to address. However, in order to understand the origin of the protests and rebellion seen in the last two decades in southern Mexico, it is first necessary to consider some of the history which has led to the current social and political climate in the country. A variety of economic, political and social shifts has transformed the country in recent years, and these changes have run headlong into cultural traditions and undeniable demographic facts.

Historical Antecedents

In order to gain insight into this environment of conflict, it is particularly important to understand 1) the immense impact of globalization (particularly neoliberal economic policies instituted in the 1990s), 2) the history of political exclusion and corruption in Mexico, 3) the prevalence of indigenous peoples in the south of the country, and 4) the growing problem of narco-violence and civil militarization throughout Mexico. This history has planted the seeds of conflict in the soil of southern Mexico. Let us consider each of these points in turn.

Globalization and Neoliberal Economics

Since at least the late 1980s political leaders in Mexico have been implementing a dramatic transformation of the nation's economic policies, moving ever further into the realm of what is called 'neoliberalism' and integrating the country more completely into the globalized market economy. Neoliberal policies include a wide variety of economic

practices including "privatizing state-owned enterprises, tariff reductions, eliminating

barriers to foreign investment, reducing social provision, currency devaluation,

decentralizing decision-making, and market orientation" (Vadi, 2001, p. 130). The

Mexican government's shift in this direction began in earnest with the election of

President Carlos Salinas de Gotari in the late 1980s who, according to analyst Jose M.

Vadi (2001, pp. 132-133),

> tore up what little remained of the social contract that was the legacy of the
> Mexican Revolution. He amended Article 27 of the Constitution to allow the
> selling of *ejidos* (communal lands). State-owned enterprises were sold to
> presidential cronies, and laws requiring 51 percent ownership by Mexicans in
> strategic industries were rescinded. Salinas then made his biggest decision: to
> make the Mexican economy an extension of the U.S. economy through the North
> American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

This agreement profoundly changed the Mexican economy as well as its relationship with

that of the United States.

It has been said that economic liberalization of this sort has been destructive to

Mexican society in at least three ways: by fostering economic inequality, by encouraging

political repression, and by gradually annihilating traditional customs and culture. The

implementation of NAFTA has frequently been linked to a number of alarming

developments in the country, including greater income disparity, the decimation of

indigenous economies, deteriorating working conditions, violence against female

maquiladora (factory) workers, as well as greater migration throughout the country. In

the results section of this study evidence is presented which suggests that all of these

dangerous developments are more advanced in the rural south than anywhere else in the

country. It is of little surprise, then, that mobilization for conflict against the government

which promulgated these neoliberal policies is greater in the south as well. Indeed, as will be described later on, economic neoliberalism has become perhaps *the* central theme in the struggle of the three insurgent groups analyzed in this study.

Political Exclusion, Repression and Corruption

Most of the history of post-revolutionary Mexico has been dominated by the political hegemony of a single party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI). Though victories for other parties since the 1990s have diminished the power of this party, it is important to understand the unrivaled authority wielded by the PRI for most of the 20th century, and the repression associated with it. "The PRI," writes foreign policy analyst Walter Russell Mead (2004), "operated one of the 20th century's most durable and, during most of the era of one-party rule, one of its most successful dictatorships." The corruption and nepotism which came with one-party rule alienated masses of poor Mexicans, and frequently led to protest. Throughout Mexican history, such protests have often been met with aggressive use of force by the government. The most infamous example of such violent repression in Mexico was the 1968 'Tlatelolco Massacre' in which masses of student protestors were confronted by military forces in the heart of Mexico City, ten days before it became the venue for the 1968 Summer Olympics, and were disbursed with live ammunition ("1968 Student Massacre," 2008). It is estimated that the massacre left as many as 400 protestors or bystanders dead. Seared into the collective Mexican consciousness, events like the

Tlatelolco Massacre, along with continued corruption of elected officials, have left a deep legacy of suspicion and fear among those seeking social change in the country.

Although the election in 2000 of Vicente Fox, the first president to come from an opposition party in nearly 70 years, led to optimism in some sectors of Mexican society, many observers question whether it signifies a genuine change. Anthropologist Lynn Stephen (1999), for example, characterizes the current political situation in Mexico as "militarization within a political opening" (p. 827) wherein the federal government is "permitting wider electoral opposition…yet maintaining economic and military control over those parts of the country that question fundamental economic and political power arrangements" (p. 825). Moreover, any reform and movement toward political openness has to a large extent bypassed the southern states under consideration in this study. As one analyst observes, "while the PRI, founded in 1929, has long dominated Mexican politics, its most secure control has been exercised in…the rural southern states" where its influence remains strong today (Foley, 1999, p. 2). In addition, many Mexicans continue to believe that the platforms of all three major parties (Fox's party the PAN, the leftist PRD and the former leader the PRI) are not truly distinct from one another: each, they say, favors rich elites and ignores the needs and rights of poor Mexicans, especially the indigenous population, a key group to whom we turn our attention in a later section. This history and continuing legacy of political exclusion, repression, and corruption plays an important role in creating conflict in southern Mexico, as is illustrated below in the analysis portion of this study.

Mexico's Indigenous Peoples

The history of indigenous peoples in Mexico is largely a history of discrimination and marginalization, reaching back to the time of Spanish colonization. The territory of what is now Mexico had been home to several great indigenous empires, including those of the Mayan and later the Aztec civilizations (the latter of which was decimated by the conquistador Hernán Cortés). Today, what remains of Mexico's indigenous population is highly concentrated in the southern states under consideration in this thesis. Though their numbers have declined, it is presently estimated that there are approximately 12 million indigenous people in Mexico, accounting for about 11 or 12 percent of the population ("Los pueblos indígenas de México," 2008). The last two to three decades have witnessed a dramatic rise in the outspokenness of indigenous groups which is partly owed to the ascent of a powerful international discourse, supported by organizations like the UN, on the rights of indigenous peoples. However, while this discourse has given indigenous peoples greater visibility and strength on an international level, it has also had the unfortunate side-effect of making them prime targets in the conflict over economic and political rights in Mexico.

Indigenous peoples in southern Mexico suffer both the ongoing indignities and discrimination of an unequal social system, as well as more acute forms of intolerance (including state-sponsored violence) resulting from their central role in this conflict. In their day-to-day lives, these groups face the same threats that other indigenous peoples do in the modern world. A recent report published by Oxfam America and the Ford Foundation (Smith, 2002, p. 21) mentions the following:

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1. Issues regarding access to, use of and control over territory and resources
2. Issues regarding household and community economy, in both a subsistence and a market mode
3. Issues regarding identity, culture and language
4. Issues regarding governance, political organizing and representation

In addition to these everyday challenges and forms of inequity, Mexico's indigenous peoples also face a growing threat of direct opposition from the country's military apparatus. This is due in part to the challenge they pose to the long-standing political order in the country. As anthropologist Lynn Stephen (1999) writes,

> the current militarization of indigenous regions of southern Mexico acknowledges the importance of regional cultural and political challenges to the legitimacy of the Mexican state. Oaxaca and Chiapas have become the centers of strong regional indigenous and peasant organizations…The heart of these movements is outside the formal political arena of electoral politics. In part because these movements offer new political forms that move the contestation for political power outside of the electoral arena, they have attracted and sustained the attention of the Mexican government (p. 838).

As the inequalities they suffer have multiplied (especially in the era of economic globalization), and as their voice and influence have grown stronger, the indigenous peoples of southern Mexico have found themselves in a progressively more contentious conflict with their government.

Narco-violence and Civil Militarization

The last several years have witnessed an incredible upsurge in drug-related violence in Mexico, with dramatic killings and brazen assaults on police becoming a near daily occurrence. Bold cartels are now engaging in shoot-outs with each other, and with heavily armed troops. President Felipe Calderón has deployed thousands of Mexican soldiers and 'Federal Preventive Police,' a highly-militarized force designed specifically

for counter-narcotics operations, in his battle against the cartels. In spite of this massive

show of force, brutal gangland killings continue apace, particularly in northern border

states, like Chihuahua and Baja California, where the transit of drugs into the United

States is a huge business. A June 2008 article in the Los Angeles Times reports that

> in the year and a half since Calderón launched a crackdown against drug gangs, about 4,100 people have died…At least 1,400 have been killed so far this year, including 170 in Tijuana, about 400 in Ciudad Juarez and 270 more in the western state of Sinaloa. Many of the dead were gang members killed by rivals or by the government. Others have been bystanders. But at least 450 police officers and soldiers also have been killed (Ellingwood, 2008).

The battle between federal forces and the drug cartels has become, by any

measure, at least a low-intensity war. In terms of its brutality, violence, and the potential

threat it poses to security in Mexico, this 'drug war' certainly eclipses the relatively less

extreme conflict taking place in the country's southern states (which is the subject of this

thesis). Nonetheless, these developments have a significant bearing on that conflict as

well. First of all, they have contributed to an increased state of militarization throughout

the entire country which, though often explained as having a counter-narcotics motive, is

also frequently employed against political dissidents and protestors. "The so-called war

on drugs," writes Stephen, "has provided the justification for the militarization of the

countryside" (1999, p. 826). For example, one of the first large-scale deployments of the

Mexican Federal Preventive Police was not in fact on a drug-related mission, but was

instead to quash mass protests in Oaxaca in late 2006, described later in this paper

(Stevenson, 2006a). The potential for use of force in this way should be of great concern

to the United States which, since the mid-90s, has "stepped up military aid and training

for Mexico's small armed forces under the rubric of assistance for that country's

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narcotics interdiction effort," while being careful to avoid "antagonizing the Mexican government over the growing list of human rights abuses attributed to the military and civilian security forces and the paramilitary groups associated with both" (Foley, 1999, p. 4). The brutality of the northern drug cartels is, in the minds of many, matched by the violence, duplicity and disregard for human rights demonstrated by the U.S.-backed federal forces; the Mexican army has been accused of disappearances, massacres, and of helping to foster a network of paramilitary groups which, particularly in the south, carry out much of this 'dirty work' at their behest. This is of particular consequence at a time when the U.S. Congress is considering giving Mexico a massive injection of funds (approximately $450 million), what is being called the 'Merida Initiative,' for the purpose of continuing their drug war (Garcia, 2008). Thus, it is easy to see how the battle against narco-violence in Mexico has very powerful, though indirect effects, upon the ongoing conflict between dissidents and the government in the country's southern states.

All of the historical conditions and recent changes described above have helped create a present situation in Mexico in which historically rooted injustices and grievances are encountering new social, economic and political challenges and opportunities. This combination has, unfortunately, created an environment in which both those who favor a change in Mexican society and those who favor and intend to protect the status quo are ready to fight. Having now a better understanding of this confluence of historical and current factors, let us take a closer look at the three militant groups previously described and the episodes of conflict they have recently confronted.

Chiapas: The Zapatista Army of National Liberation

The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) is a rebel group which proclaimed itself in revolt against the Mexican government on January 1, 1994, the same day that the NAFTA agreement went into effect. The Zapatistas, as they are called for short (named for the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata) have pursued a mostly nonviolent set of initiatives since their inception in the pursuit of greater rights and representation for the people of Chiapas, the southernmost state in Mexico, one of its poorest with a relatively high percentage of indigenous residents. Although initially anticipating a violent struggle, the group only engaged in armed maneuvers in the first month of its existence (Bob, 2001, p. 321). Since then the Zapatistas have actively engaged in many other forms of collective action, using every available media outlet, particularly the internet, to appeal for solidarity from like-minded groups all over the world. Their primary spokesperson, the enigmatic Subcomandante Marcos, has written prolifically about the goals and philosophy of the group, and has won the support of a huge variety of organizations and individuals around the world.

The EZLN was founded primarily to struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples in the state of Chiapas, and the group retains this indigenous dimension as a key element of its collective identity. The core demands in this struggle are 'democracy, liberty and justice' (Zapatista Army, 2005, p. 11). The Zapatistas see neoliberal capitalism, and the politicians who support it, as their primary enemy. They oppose free trade agreements and privatization, believing them not only to destroy the economic potential of Mexico but also seeing them as handmaidens of the subjugation and, potentially, annihilation of

cultural minorities. All existing Mexican political parties, in the view of the EZLN, have lost their legitimacy by supporting neoliberal policies, and thus the Zapatistas seek a new national constitution and political system based on alternative economic practices and respect for the rights of all disenfranchised people.

In 2005 the EZLN released the "6th Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle" (Zapatista Army, 2005), a manifesto detailing its present goals, changes in group strategy, and an action plan for the near future. While reaffirming their commitment to a ceasefire, and to the use of nonviolent methods of struggle, the group's declaration also outlines a new process based on dialogue with organizations throughout Mexico and increasing inter-organizational cooperation with representatives of labor, small business, women, artists, teachers, and other dissatisfied constituencies in order to form a 'national campaign' to effect change. During 2006, after the release of this declaration, Subcomandante Marcos and other Zapatista spokespeople toured their country as part of what they called the 'Other Campaign,' a set of dialogues with the Mexican citizenry run parallel to the 2006 Mexican presidential campaign (Marcos, 2005). Today, more than 13 years after first surfacing, the EZLN continues to use manifold creative tactics to prosecute their 'war' against the Mexican government.

Guerrero: The Popular Revolutionary Army

In June 1995, a group of peasants were traveling through Guerrero on their way to attend a protest near Acapulco when they were accosted by a group of state police who, apparently without provocation, opened fire on the unarmed group, killing 17 of them. A

federal investigation later determined that high-level state politicians, including

Guerrero's governor, were complicit in planning what later came to be called the 'Aguas

Blancas Massacre' (Foley, 1999, p. 10). One year after this bloody event, at a memorial

service in honor of the slain *campesinos*, a new guerrilla group publicly proclaimed its

existence and a renewed movement of resistance against state and federal authorities.

This group christened itself the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR). Although

ostensibly an entirely new organization, it was in fact a conglomeration of several small

but long-standing armed guerilla movements that banded together at this moment in order

to strengthen their opposition to the Mexican government. For this reason, the EPR

sometimes describes itself as "the heir to the Mexican guerrilla movements of the 1970s"

(Sanchez, 2007).

Although it emerged at almost the same time and for many of the same reasons as

the EZLN, the EPR has been less visible and certainly less popular internationally. In

fact, as a U.S. Institute of Peace report on the subject mentions, "in contrast to Chiapas,

international attention has scarcely registered the conflict in Guerrero" (Foley, 1999, p.

11). This lack of interest may have more to do with the EPR's ideology and tactics, and

less with their grievances and goals, which are manifestly similar to those of the

Zapatistas. The organization repeatedly speaks of its struggle against neoliberalism in

Mexico, its desire for a more equitable distribution of land and resources, and the need

for a true democracy of the people. EPR leaders have also linked their militant actions to

demands for the release of 'political prisoners' and for recompense of some sort for

Mexico's rampant political corruption.

The EPR differs significantly with the Zapatistas, however (an important point explored in depth in this study), when it comes to the methods and tactics it has chosen in its struggle. Of the three organizations discussed in the present paper, the EPR is clearly the most violent. During the first several years of its existence, the EPR was notorious for carrying out dozens of strikes against police and military personnel which resulted in nearly 60 fatalities (Foley, 1999, p. 10). After a lull in activity during the early part of this decade, the EPR reemerged dramatically in 2006 and 2007, carrying out numerous bomb attacks. The first of these occurred in the wake of the Oaxaca crisis already mentioned, and detailed further in the next section. At this time, the EPR claimed responsibility for bombing several banks and political targets in Mexico City; subsequently, in September 2007, the group followed with a series of devastating attacks against oil and gas pipelines owned by the federal petroleum corporation, PEMEX ("Pipeline Bombs," 2007). These violent tactics, while dramatic, have alienated many who might have affiliated themselves with the EPR (including, interestingly, the Zapatistas themselves), and the group's hardcore Marxist-Leninist ideology, which seems anachronistic and extreme to many, has done nothing to earn them additional support. In short, the Ejército Popular Revolucionario, although less well known than the Zapatistas, plays an important role in the ongoing conflict in southern Mexico, and deserves attention for its unique identity and brutality.

Oaxaca: The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca

Throughout 2006 an ongoing crisis gripped the capital city of Oaxaca, the state located between Chiapas and Guerrero and one of Mexico's poorest. The conflict began in May when local teachers staged a strike to demand higher wages and more educational materials (Reyes, 2006). On June 14th the striking teachers were confronted by approximately 3,000 police sent by state governor Ulises Ruíz. The police failed to remove all the strikers, now joined by numerous other supporters, and the mass of protestors secured the entire center of the city and began building barricades. During the summer the protestors maintained control of the heart of Oaxaca, and Ruíz fled to Mexico City to consider his response.

During the next several months, sporadic clashes between protestors and what have been described as 'urban paramilitary' supporters of Ruíz´s PRI party resulted in several casualties, most notoriously the deaths of three individuals (including American journalist Bradley Will) on October 27th (Stevenson, 2006a). In the days immediately following these murders, President Vicente Fox ordered several thousand officers of the Federal Preventive Police into Oaxaca to disburse the protestors once and for all. While it successfully dislodged the protestors, this assault also seemed to harden their political position and their demands for the resignation of Ruíz. Although some commentators considered the Oaxaca crisis officially over after the assault and arrest of protest leader Flavio Sosa on December 4th, 2006, in Mexico City, many locals continue to warn that "simmering discontent about poverty, injustice and oppression could erupt into violence again at any time" (Stevenson, 2006b).

Though initially catalyzed by the strike by local teachers, the months of unrest in Oaxaca later took on a larger character, and the scope of both the protestors numbers and their demands grew. Shortly after the failed initial assault by state police, on June 17th, 2006, a new group emerged to lead the protests, and proclaimed itself the new 'governing body' for the municipality. This group is called the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO). In addition to the striking teachers, it represents the interests of many other sectors of society including other unions, farm workers, women's organizations and indigenous peoples (Reyes, 2006). The APPO continues to be at the forefront of the Oaxacan conflict, and is the primary mouthpiece through which the various discontented constituencies in the city and state make their grievances known.

The most concrete and immediate demand of the APPO is the resignation of Governor Ruíz. In their view, his corruption, which they claim includes election fraud and intimidation of opponents through violence, as well as misappropriation of funds, is the foremost impediment to further negotiations. To this demand they add the release of all detained APPO members, who they consider political prisoners. The APPO´s broader platform, however, includes many larger social and economic goals. These have been generally articulated as a desire for justice, full democracy, social peace and sustainable development. They want to pursue a new national constitution which would enshrine popular power. In sum, they propose "a profound and radical transformation of government-society relations, of institutions and of the manner in which power is exercised" (Popular Assembly, 2006).

In conclusion, the underlying social conflict in southern Mexico, which has made itself visible through manifestations of contention like the three described above, has important consequences for the region, the nation, and Mexico's neighbors. First and foremost, the conditions of conflict directly impact residents in these southern states in their daily lives. Broadening our scope, it is not difficult to see that the prospect of deepening dissatisfaction and widening protest in the region has profound implications for the security and stability of the Mexican state as a whole. Finally, when one considers the prospect of such dissatisfaction growing into a full scale civil war—a contingency which is not impossible to envision—immediately the consequences become clear for Mexico's neighbors, including the United States. For all of these reasons, understanding and addressing this conflict, in a proactive way, should be a high priority. The field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution has much to offer in this endeavor.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to analyze and better understand what is hypothesized to be an overarching, unitary social conflict in southern Mexico by comparing and contrasting, in detail, three distinct episodes of conflict in the region. It aims to illuminate the general causes and conditions which have led to conflict between citizens and the government in the area, as well as to uncover the variables which have produced differing tactics among the actors, including violence. This analysis is undertaken as a first step toward designing and implementing an effective program of

intervention strategies that would prevent the widening or escalation of the conflict, and to promote constructive conflict transformation and social change.

In describing the importance and potential benefits of this research project, one may consider its impact for two sets of people: most importantly, those people (locally, nationally, and regionally) affected directly by the conflict, and also the academic community, particularly in the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Let us consider each in turn.

Practical Significance

In describing the underlying dissatisfaction and unrest in Oaxaca, APPO leader Flavio Sosa was quoted as saying "Oaxaca was a time bomb waiting to go off…[Governor] Ruíz was just the detonator" (Grillo, 2006). In other words, the latent conflict experienced by the people of Oaxaca in the face of government corruption and oppression has been seething for some time, and all that was needed was some catalyst to lead it to explode. It is frightening to consider that this much pent up negative energy may be lying just beneath the surface of an otherwise seemingly functional society. The implications of the presence of such discontent on a wider scale could be potentially disastrous indeed, and it would be advantageous for all parties to the conflict to discover and address all underlying issues sooner rather than later.

Although on the surface Mexico appears to be a rather stable democracy, growing in many respects, protests such as these point to a simmering conflict which, if not articulated and resolved effectively, might become a significant threat to the nation's

security and stability. This study is one step toward understanding the scope of civil conflict in Mexico, and answering critical questions which will impact the future of the country. Is the impetus toward movements like those in Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas more prevalent than is obvious to the casual observer? Could similar sentiments in other parts of the country result in similar clashes? Could organizations like the APPO, EPR or EZLN be pushed to escalate to more contentious or violent tactics, posing a serious threat to the sovereignty of the state? If masses of frustrated Mexicans choose violent means of pursuing their objectives, what types of scenarios could emerge?

Answering questions such as these concerning the dimensions of this conflict, and the possible relationships among leading organizations and their motives and tactics, may allow us to begin addressing the situation at its foundation. If we are to have any hope of resolving latent issues before they become manifest in possibly violent ways, we first need to uncover facts about their nature. I propose that there is a need for intervention at the roots of civil conflict in Mexico and for efforts to address the systemic concerns of disadvantaged sectors of the population. The first step toward effective intervention in this case is to systematically analyze the grievances and goals of the principle actors, as well as additional structural and attitudinal factors, which may be affecting the tactics they have adopted in this conflict.

Academic/Theoretical Significance

In addition to providing great insights into particular cases, case study research can yield beneficial information relating to the theories and models used in an analysis,

and may also produce results which are generalizable to other, similar cases. There are at least three areas in which the present study may produce these kinds of effects in the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

In the social sciences, reliable theories and models emerge from and are continuously modified by a close analysis of many individual cases. Therefore, while theory can illuminate case studies, in a reciprocal way those case studies help to refine theory. This is no less true in the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, and it is my hope that this study will not only provide a useful, practical analysis of conflict in southern Mexico, but that it will also help test and enhance the analytical model which I am proposing to use (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

One difficulty in providing a thorough and 'complete' analysis of any conflict is in determining the boundaries, both in space and time, which define that particular conflict. What is viewed by one analyst as a distinct conflict may instead be seen, from a bird's eye view, as being imbedded in a larger geographical context and an extensive history of relational cycles among actors. For instance, each of the three cases examined in this study has been presented and analyzed almost entirely as a unique event. Frequently this type of micro-analysis is useful, and it is certainly a necessary component of a successful examination of a conflict. However, it is my view that these events are in actuality inextricably linked and are symptomatic of a larger unitary conflict driven by the same root causes (a hypothesis tested in this research). Thus, one dimension of this study's academic significance is its emphasis on taking a comparative *and* integrative

view in conflict analysis which focuses both on the micro-analysis of an individual

conflict episode and on other episodes which may be intimately related.

Another important theoretical dimension of this research study is the way in

which the dependent variable has been defined. In this study we are concerned with the

presence of what Dennis Sandole (1998, p. 1) has called *manifest conflict process*, or a

range of behavior sometimes referred to as *contentious tactics* (Pruitt & Kim, 2004, chap.

4). Conflict may be conceptually and operationally defined in numerous ways. Here we

are concerned with the behavioral aspect of conflict implemented in pursuit of some goal.

Very frequently these contentious tactics are injurious, with various forms of violence at

the extreme end of the continuum. Using this definition for the dependent variable in this

study is based in part on a belief that conflict analysts and interveners should not

precisely concern themselves with preventing conflict in all of its manifestations, which

may be constructive and necessary for positive social change, but instead should focus on

preventing the use of particularly injurious contentious tactics. Therefore, this study

focuses on identifying the specific variables which may lead to more aggressive forms of

contention in the hope that these findings may be generalizable to other civil conflicts.

This may allow conflict interveners to prevent such behaviors and instead encourage

more constructive forms of change-seeking tactics.

Nature of the Study

In the broadest terms, the research methodology applied in this study is qualitative

analysis of secondary (archival) sources. It is correlational in nature in that it

hypothesizes and tests for similarity among cases on several independent variables, while

hypothesizing and testing for variance on a set of secondary variables which may help

explain and predict variance on the dependent variable. The variables in this study are

both objective (for instance, measures of poverty and political exclusion) and subjective

(for instance, measures of frustration and social identity). Values for these variables are

gleaned from a combination of econometric data and content analysis of statements made

by and about the primary parties to the conflict. In Chapter 3 I provide a more elaborate

and precise description of the methods and procedures used in this study. First, however,

let's turn to a survey of the relevant conflict resolution concepts, theories, and models

which are utilized in the analysis.

Chapter 2: Relevant Theory

Explanations of Social Conflict (Literature Review)

A Three-Dimensional View of Conflict

Social conflict is frequently described by the number three. For instance, scholars have variously conceived of conflict as:

1. Coming in three basic forms,
2. Having three principle dimensions,
3. Going through three stages of development, and
4. Having three primary causes.

In all of these conceptions of conflict, each of the three aspects indicates a different *explanation* of the causes of conflict and suggests a different *response* or remedy. To make this clearer, let's look at these various tripartite views of conflict in order to see what they have in common which might help us as analysts of the phenomenon. Then, we can consider the numerous theories tied to each of the three fundamental dimensions of conflict, as well as the remedies and policy recommendations implied by each theory.

It may be useful to begin our exploration of social conflict by considering three prominent definitions of the concept. For Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall conflict is "the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups" (2005, p. 27). Alternatively, Dean Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim, working from a background in social psychology,

contend that conflict is a "perceived divergence of interest" (2004, pp. 7-8). Johan

Galtung (1969b), on the other hand, does not define conflict explicitly but prefers to give

the term meaning according to its opposition to *peace*. Peace is absent when *violence*

exists. This violence may be direct physical violence, or it may take the form of

structural violence, which is most basically "social injustice" (p. 171). Therefore,

Galtung would say that conflict exists when there is inequality in a social system.

(Importantly, this is the case whether or not people recognize or are aware of the

existence of this inequality.)

A different understanding of conflict holds that, instead of defining three separate

types of conflict, each definition captures an important *dimension* of the overall

phenomenon. This is the view proposed by Johan Galtung himself, as well as the view

adopted in this thesis. Returning to our three aforementioned definitions of conflict, we

may fairly characterize them as *behavioral, perceptual* and *structural*, respectively.

These definitions reflect and resonate with Galtung's popular triangular model of conflict

(1969a) which argues that *behaviour, attitude* (beliefs and perceptions), and *contradiction*

(underlying structural conflict) are the three dimensions of conflict and that "all three

components have to be present together in a full conflict" (Ramsbotham et al., p. 10).

This model, illustrated in Figure 2.1, is often called the ABC (attitude, behavior,

contradiction) model of conflict, and it serves as one important point of departure for the

analysis undertaken in this thesis.

Galtung's tripartite model is *static*; that is to say, it is a way of thinking about a

conflict at a given moment in time. Conflict analysts also make use of numerous

Johan Galtung's ABC Model of Conflict

Contradiction (latent or structural conflict)

• "The underlying conflict situation, which includes the actual or perceived incompatibility of goals."

Conflict

Attitude

• Perceptions of self, other, and the situation.

• "Includes emotive (feeling), cognitive (belief) and conative (will) elements."

Behavior

• Actions taken in pursuit of goals in a conflict.

• "Can include cooperation or coercion, gestures signifying conciliation or hostility."

Figure 2.1: The ABC Model of Conflict (from Galtung, 1969a; presented in Ramsbotham et al., 2005, pp. 9-10).

dynamic or developmental models which aim to explain and predict how conflict grows, escalates, and changes over time. One prominent example is the *progression of conflict* model created by Quaker peacebuilder Adam Curle (1971; Lederach, 1997, p. 65), illustrated in Fig.2.2. According to this model, conflict progresses from a state of latent tension and unbalanced power in society, through a period of what he calls *conscientization* when people become aware of and experience frustration at existing

```
UNPEACEFUL ◄──────── Relations ────────► PEACEFUL
```

		STATIC	UNSTABLE	DYNAMIC
POWER	**BALANCED**		3. Negotiation	4. Sustainable Peace
	UNBALANCED	1. Education	2. Confrontation	
		Latent conflict	Overt conflict	

```
LOW ◄──────────────────► HIGH
AWARENESS   OF   CONFLICT
```
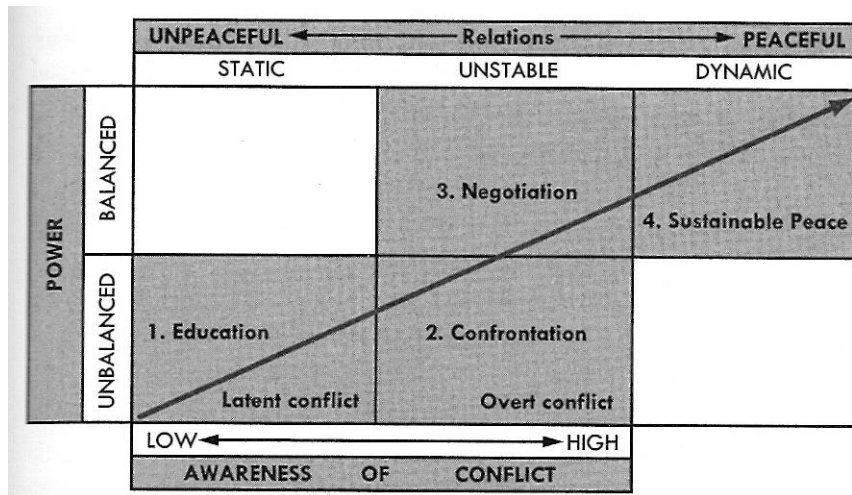
Figure 2.2: The Progression of Conflict (from Curle, 1971; presented in Lederach, 1995, p. 6).

social inequalities, and finally ending with a confrontation (and, hopefully, a subsequent peaceful resolution). Here again the number three emerges, in this case three phases of conflict development. What is most interesting, however, is what we see if we attempt to look at this progression as a corollary to Galtung's ABC model. What I propose is that the ABC model can be transformed into a linear developmental model beginning with structural violence or inequality (contradiction) provoking negative perceptions and feelings (attitude) and finally resulting in contentious action (behavior). This thesis will use Galtung's ABC model, including this developmental variant of it, as well as Curle's corresponding model of conflict escalation, as jumping-off points for the creation of a new, more comprehensive framework for the analysis of civil conflict in general (described later in this chapter).

The last three-dimensional take on conflict which I would like to discuss here relates to the *causes* of conflict, particularly civil conflict or intrastate conflict. Ramsbotham et al. (2005) describe what they believe are the three structural sources of conflict at the state level. These are: economic sources (like a poor resource base or relative deprivation), political sources (like a partisan government or regime illegitimacy) and social sources (such as cultural divisions or ethnic imbalance) (p. 97, pp. 100-102). This list of structural sources of civil conflict is mirrored precisely by one created by Richard Rubenstein (2003, pp. 59-63). Although he does not focus on a state of inequality as the source of conflict, and instead examines forms of change or *transformation*, Rubenstein nevertheless highlights three social sources of conflict: socio-economic, political, and cultural, which parallel those described by Ramsbotham et al. almost exactly. Throughout this study I will refer back to these three sources as potential root causes of the conflict in southern Mexico.

This brings us to the next point: many prominent theories of social conflict fix the presumed 'cause' of conflict to just one of the three dimensions (contradiction/structure, attitude, or behavior) we have discussed, instead of taking a more holistic view that the causes of conflict may be manifold and related to all of these dimensions. It may be helpful now to examine a series of the most prominent theoretical explanations of conflict, organizing them according to the dimension of conflict which they attribute as its root cause.

Structure

The first set of conflict theories I will examine in this review can be called *structural* theories, those which attempt to explain conflict as resulting from structural variables. In short, these theories tend to say that 'the nature of our society causes conflict.' These theories would fall under the heading 'contradiction' within Galtung's ABC model and describe factors which exist at the beginning or latent stage of Curle's developmental framework.

Basic Human Needs Theory

Perhaps the most prominent and fundamental theory of social conflict centers on what are called *basic human needs*. Throughout the last century, psychologists such as Abraham Maslow (1943) have frequently described certain imperative human 'needs' which we are all driven to pursue and fulfill. John W. Burton, who pioneered the use of human needs concepts in conflict analysis, asserted the existence of "certain human needs that are universal in the sense that they are a systemic requirement of the individual" (1979, p. 58). When these needs are met, the individual and society at large can function optimally. On the other hand, according to Johan Galtung, "when a basic human need is not satisfied...some kind of fundamental disintegration will take place" (1990, p. 304). Such a 'disintegration' may manifest as an unhealthy individual or, often, as a society in conflict. As Burton tells us, "the individual in society—any society—*will* engage in deviant behaviour," including violent conflict, "despite the possible consequences, if needs and desires can be satisfied only by these means" (1979, p. 76). Therefore,

according to basic human needs theory, conflict arises due to a mismatch between a drive to meet imperative human needs and a social structure which prevents certain segments of society from achieving those needs for themselves. Through the work of these pioneering scholars, the field of conflict analysis has come to view the fulfillment of basic human needs as fundamental to conflict resolution, and needs deprivation as a root condition allowing for conflict to grow.

Structural Violence and Dependency Theory

The notion of basic human needs deprivation is encapsulated in another key concept of the field, *structural violence*. As already mentioned, Galtung's (1969b) typology of violence distinguishes between *direct* or physical violence and *structural* violence, with structural violence being basically synonymous with social injustice. In more detail, it is violence, "here defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual" (p. 168) which is "built into the [social] structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (p. 171). Therefore, to link two essential concepts of our field, it would be fair to say that structural violence exists when one portion of society suffers basic human needs deprivation while another has its needs fully met. Under these circumstances, Galtung would contend, conflict already exists – although it may be in a latent form, absent physical violence – because there is competition and violence of an equally insidious kind. Peace (in the form of what Galtung (1969b, p. 183) calls *positive peace,* the absence of both direct and structural violence, has yet to be achieved.

With the increasing trend toward economic globalization, a related theory has developed – also influenced by the scholarship of Johan Galtung (1971) – called *dependency theory*. In brief, dependency theory holds that certain neoliberal economic practices lead "to the exploitation of local human and natural resources, and to a transfer of profit back to the imperial centers. This process results in impoverishment, inequality and injustice" (Gissinger & Gleditsch, 1999, p. 334). The contention embedded within dependency theory – that neoliberal economic practices produce structural violence in those countries which adopt them – is echoed stridently by the militant groups being considered in this thesis, and therefore is a very relevant piece of academic theory.

Basic human needs deprivation and structural violence are frequently considered root conditions for social conflict, and are thus analyzed as primary independent variables in the present study. Another important structural theory of conflict, the theory of *political opportunities and constraints* – which I discuss next – on the other hand, describes structural conditions which attenuate and shape the behavior of those segments of society already primed for conflict. Thus, in this study, political opportunities and constraints are considered intervening variables.

Political Opportunities and Constraints

There are few who study conflict who would argue that basic human needs deprivation and social injustice are *not* factors that help produce conflict. They clearly are conditions which predispose people to fight in order to improve their lives. However, there are those (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1998) who believe additional variables are necessary

to explain the outbreak of manifest conflict, or contentious action. As Sidney Tarrow, a

renowned expert on social movements and contentious politics, argues, conditions of

suffering, injustice and deprivation are prevalent in many places, and yet conflict does

not necessarily break out. "What does vary widely from time to time and place to place,"

on the other hand,

> are the levels and types of opportunities people experience, the constraints on
> their freedom of action, and the threats they perceive to their interests and
> values…I argue that contention is more closely related to opportunities for – and
> limited by constraints upon – collective action than by the persistent social or
> economic factors that people experience (1998, p. 71).

This is the theory of *political opportunities and constraints*: that the structures in

society which either facilitate or prevent contentious action will determine, to a far

greater extent than mere structural violence or basic human needs deprivation, whether or

not conflict will indeed become manifest. Moreover, not only do they determine *if*

conflict will happen, they also determine *how*. The other father of this theory, Charles

Tilly, wrote frequently about the interplay between the kinds of opportunities/constraints

facing those in conflict and the choices they make with respect to their tactics and forms

of contention (see Tilly, 1978). He called the varied choices available *repertoires of

contention*; we will return to these tactics (including violence) later on when analyzing

those chosen by the rebel groups which are the subject of this thesis.

The theory of political opportunities and constraints helps to explain a frequently

observed phenomenon in conflict studies: specifically, that both full democracies and

repressive authoritarian regimes have fewer manifest outbursts of conflict than countries

that fall somewhere in between in terms of their system of governance (Hegre et al.,

2001). At each extreme of the political continuum civil peace appears to be maintained, but this occurs for dramatically different reasons in each case. In a democracy, the government provides regulated, legitimate channels for the airing of grievances and for nonviolent conflict resolution. Riots, intercommunal violence, and civil war rarely occur under such regimes because other *opportunities* for peaceful resolution exist. This doesn't necessarily mean that democracies truly experience less conflict; the United States, for example, is one of the most litigious countries in the world as well as being one of its most democratic. This example illustrates how, in a democracy, institutionalized forms of conflict settlement often take the place of manifest civil conflict. Authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, feel free to use violence to suppress dissent, which becomes too costly for less powerful actors to demonstrate. The *constraints* on contentious action are simply too strong in this kind of society to allow for mass protest or organized rebellion. However, lest one think that either alternative is equally helpful from a conflict resolution point of view, the latter (authoritarian) approach can best be thought of as an attempt to force the lid to stay on a pressure cooker: eventually, no strength will be great enough to prevent the society (heated from below by structural violence) from exploding.

Attitude

The next group of conflict theories I will consider may all fairly be called *attitudinal* – or perceptual or affective – theories. These theories attribute social conflict to various subjective experiences: perceptions (of self, other, and the situation), feelings,

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and attitudes. In general they say that 'the ways we perceive and feel about situations and people cause conflict.' These theories would, naturally, fall under the heading 'attitude' within Galtung's ABC model, and they are also represented by the process of *conscientization* in Curle's framework.

Grievances and Goals

Merriam-Webster online ("Grievance," 2008) defines a *grievance* as a "cause of distress…felt to afford reason for complaint or resistance." It may be thought of, in the simplest way, as what people fight against (as opposed to a *goal* which is something people fight for.) It is implicit in the majority of conflict theories that grievances motivate people to contend with others. Louis Kriesberg writes that

> the component that receives most analytic and popular attention as the origin of a conflict is the grievance felt by one or more adversaries. This is understandable, since contending groups usually account for their entering a conflict by reference to the injustice of their circumstances. Undoubtedly, an increase in feeling aggrieved contributes to the emergence of a conflict (2003, p. 64).

One important aspect of the definition offered above is the word *felt*, indicating that a grievance is based in large part on the perception and subjective experience of some kind of injustice or deprivation and not necessarily on the objective fact of its existence. For this reason it belongs under the heading of attitudinal sources of conflict. In any case, grievance is certainly a key concept when it comes to understanding conflict, and it informs all the theories described in this section.

In defining the attitude component of Galtung's ABC model, Ramsbotham et al. mention that it "includes emotive (feeling), cognitive (belief) and conative (will)

elements" (2005, p. 10). The 'will' element is a motivation to create change in one's situation or, in other words, a goal. As already mentioned, a goal is something one fights to achieve. It is therefore common sense that goals in some ways motivate conflict. It is beneficial in conflict analysis to consider any contender's grievances and goals; this is a key part of the analysis presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Frustration-Aggression and Threat-Aggression Hypotheses

In addition to the concept of basic human needs, another essential conflict analysis concept given to us by the field of psychology, particularly through the work of John Dollard and his associates (1939), is the *frustration-aggression hypothesis*. This hypothesis holds that when humans experience frustration in attempting to meet their goals (or needs), they are much more likely to resort to aggressive behavior. "Undoubtedly," say Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (2001), "the frustrations of human beings form an important part of the total matrix out of which social conflict arises" (p. 241). "Most psychologists today," they continue, "trace individual aggression to some form of frustration" (p. 238), frustration being "an interference with goal-directed behavior" (Gurr, 1970, p. 30). In other words, if an individual or group is consistently prevented from achieving their goals (or meeting their needs), when their usual strategies fail them, they will likely use aggression as a last resort to overcome their frustration and accomplish their goal. One disturbing feature of this phenomenon is that, while initially instrumental in nature, aggressive tactics later become self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating, regardless of whether or not they achieve results.

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Many modifications, additions, and qualifications have subsequently been made to the basic frustration-aggression hypothesis proposed by Dollard and his colleagues. Perhaps the most important is the caveat that not all aggression can be tied to frustration, and frustration does not always produce aggression. In attempting to account for this discrepancy, legendary social psychologist Abraham Maslow (1941) hypothesized that the experience of *threat* is more important than frustration, per se, in predicting aggression. Deprivation of what Maslow calls a 'goal object' may always be defined as frustrating (in the sense that it is an interference with goal-directed behavior), but it is not necessarily always *threatening*. Maslow draws a

> distinction between a deprivation which is unimportant to the organism (easily substituted for, with few serious after-effects), and, on the other hand, a deprivation which is at the same time, a threat…to the life goals of the individual, to his defensive system, to his self-esteem or to his feeling of security" (1941).

He summarizes that "perhaps frustration as a single concept is less useful than the two concepts which cross-cut it, (1) deprivation, and (2) threat to the personality. Deprivation implies much less than is ordinarily implied by the concept of frustration; threat implies much more" (1941). While the true extent to which both frustration and threat produce aggression remains uncertain, since the development of these two hypotheses they have both been considered vital predictors of the occurrence of aggression.

It bears mentioning here that, in their original forms, these hypotheses were intended to help explain *aggression*, defined as an act intended to hurt someone, and not precisely the phenomenon of *conflict*. However, as aggression/violence is a common (and extremely concerning) tactic used in conflict, these hypotheses have value in helping to explain that facet of conflict.

Relative Deprivation Theory and Rank Disequilibrium

The concept of *relative deprivation*, developed principally by conflict theorist Ted Robert Gurr, is very closely tied to notions of frustration and aggression. "'Relative deprivation' (RD) is the term used…to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction, and that disposes men to violence" (1970, p. 23). This tension is basically a sense of frustration at having expectations which are not fulfilled by the existing situation. Gurr uses the term 'values' to denote such expectations: "In psychological terms," he says, "values are the goal objects of human motivation"(p. 25). Such values clearly include both unfulfilled basic human needs (for which a gap between 'ought' and 'is' may mean the difference between human functioning or paralysis), but also include less tangible goals and desires, such as status relative to others, or relative to a prior or hoped-for social standing. Thus the term relative deprivation indicates a feeling of being deprived relative to some standard.

A very important corollary to this theory, developed again by Galtung (1964), is that of *rank disequilibrium*. While Galtung approves of the theories of Dollard and James C. Davies (1962) – one of the original proponents of relative deprivation theory – he argues that they are lacking an important feature. "However good these theories…are in predicting when, they do not predict or explain where in the social structure the revolutions or other activities of aggression are likely to arise" (Galtung, 1964, p. 98). To help fill this gap in predictive power, Galtung offers the rank disequilibrium hypothesis: that those segments of society which enjoy high positions on some social dimensions but

unfavorable positions on others (thus suffering 'rank disequilibrium) are the most prone

to aggress in order to change their position and move into an 'equilibrated' state. For

example, a minority group may enjoy economic wealth but still be discriminated against

in social situations; this position of disequilibrium appears unjust and becomes

psychologically unbearable, provoking an aggressive response in order to change the

situation.

Identity Based Theories of Conflict

Social identity, here defined as the "representation of the self as an integral part of

a more inclusive social group or social category" including an "emotional attachment to

ingroup membership" (Brewer, 2003, p. 132), is often thought of in both academic and

popular circles as an important cause of social conflict. In fact, it is given such

prominence that many believe in the existence of a distinct class of conflicts, 'identity

conflicts,' caused by this variable. "The prevalent view of identity conflicts," writes

Karina Korostelina (2007), one of the foremost experts on the subject, "stresses the

difference between conflicts of interest and those of identity" (p. 145), even though "the

differences between identity and interest conflicts are not precise and cannot be clearly

defined" (p. 146). Because this distinction is conceptually and operationally problematic,

some conflict scholars today, including Korostelina, prefer the view that so-called

'identity-based conflicts' are not truly distinct, but are instead interest-based or

distributive conflicts which have come to be exacerbated by matters of social identity and

intergroup differentiation.

The relationship between social identity and conflict is further complicated by questions about whether identity provokes conflict or, alternatively, if conflict helps to create identity groups by distinguishing between people and solidifying their differences. Korostelina, however, supports the alternative "idea that social identities should be understood neither as sources nor as consequences of conflict but as a form of consciousness that entirely changes the dynamic and structure of conflict" (2007, p. 147). For that reason, social identity (and its corollary, ideology) are analyzed as intervening instead of primary variables in this study.

Although numerous theories of identity's role in conflict exist, I will present here Korostelina's because it is state-of-the-art, integrative, straightforward and complete. Her model is called the *Four C Model* of Identity-Based Conflict because it identifies four stages in the development of conflict, each beginning with the letter C: comparison, competition, confrontation and counteraction (2007, p. 147). Let's explore each phase in sequence.

Identity is often cited as a source of conflict because it automatically creates a distinction between groups. This is the *comparison* phase of Korostelina's model. According to *social categorization* theory (Brewer, 2003, pp. 4-5), comparison of this kind is a natural phenomenon resulting from the human need to make sense of our world by categorizing objects (and people) into meaningful groupings. Humans naturally try (usually unconsciously) to classify those around them according to whatever criteria seem accessible and relevant: skin color, language spoken, etc. Unfortunately, this process has some unintended perceptual, cognitive and affective consequences. Among

these is the *ultimate attribution error*, a tendency to ascribe positive outcomes for one's ingroup to positive internal characteristics and negative outcomes to bad luck, while making the exact opposite attribution for outgroups (Brewer, 2003, p. 11). Essentially, we tend to view our own groups as intrinsically more worthy of success. This is an apparently natural cognitive bias that takes hold once an identity boundary has been established between 'us' and 'them.' A related psychological process is called *ethnocentrism*, a tendency to feel much more positively toward members of our ingroups than those of outgroups (Brewer, 2003, p. 21).

While these biases may be problematic in many ways, it's important to note that the existence of comparison does not in itself mean the existence of conflict. On the contrary, "members of counterpoised interactive communities" may have "peacefully coexisted for centuries" despite an acknowledgement of their different characteristics (Korostelina, 2007, p. 148). However, while conflict as such may not yet exist between these distinct groups, "even in peaceful and cooperative communities, ingroup members have some negative perceptions of outgroup members" (p. 148). This is due to the ultimate attribution error and ethnocentrism, as already mentioned. Thus the Four C Model argues that categorization of ourselves and a favorable comparison between our ingroup and other outgroups is a natural human process which neither immediately nor necessarily leads to social conflict. A further step, the introduction of some conflict of interest or distributional conflict over scarce resources – what Korostelina calls *competition* – must also be taken in order for violent conflict to develop. This

competition often arises under the conditions of inequality (structural violence) described in the preceding section.

Once competition has been introduced between two counterpoised identity groups, relations can deteriorate rapidly and the distinction between the two groups can be used to inflame the situation even further. In Korostelina's third phase, *confrontation*, conflicts of interest are transformed in the minds of the combatants into "moral confrontations between the virtuous Us and the demonized Other" (2007, p. 147). This happens through the development of several more attitudinal changes, including: distrust between groups, outgroup hostility and enemy images (Gross Stein, 1996), and increased ingroup solidarity and cohesiveness (Pruitt & Kim, 2004, p. 117). Once this dangerous corner has been turned, conflict is no longer just about who has more or less. The goal shifts from securing greater justice and equality to destroying the enemy. This type of aggressive attitude and behavior provokes the same from the opposition, and the fourth C, *counteraction*, occurs.

Whatever theory of identity and conflict one examines, perhaps the most important point to keep in mind is that social identity and the distinction between 'us' and 'them' which accompanies it is purely perceptual (a point I stress in a following section on social constructionism). It is for this reason that I am including identity in the *attitudinal* category of explanations of conflict; how we think and feel about our own groups and our adversaries is an important determinant in the outcome of conflict.

Ideology

Another attitudinal element which plays a role in conflict, and which is intimately tied to identity, is *ideology*. By ideology I mean the values, beliefs and perceptions a given identity group holds. Beliefs and perceptions are maintained about all elements of the world 'out there,' including other groups. Therefore, the attitudes and opinions a given group holds about its 'friends' and 'enemies' are part of its ideology, along with its beliefs about how the world does – and should – function. To the extent that this ideology is seen as inviolable and exclusively 'right' it will exert a great influence over a group's behavior, including the tactics it will use in conflict. It may, for instance, allow for, or even demand, violence against the enemy. Ideology plays an additional role in generating conflict as well. As prominent conflict scholar Dennis Sandole explains, ideologies are "embedded in a complex interplay of *cognitive [belief], evaluative [value], and affective [emotion] images*, such that a threat to the [worldview] is an assault on the person" or group (2002, p. 14). There is an unconscious formula which equates ideology with identity. For this reason, when a group's ideology is challenged, it may feel vulnerable and defensive, and react in a contentious way.

A Note on Social Constructionism and Conflict Entrepreneurs

Identity and ideology, when they are believed to be primordial and inflexible, can predetermine for people what actions are appropriate for them to take in conflict. This may lead them either toward or away from the use of violence, for instance, depending on whether or not the identity group in question sees itself as a violent or nonviolent force,

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whether it sees its opponent as human or as an inhuman enemy worthy of destruction,

whether or not it believes that violence is an efficacious tactic, etc. Among the 'true

believers' in a group, the ideological norm for behavior in conflict will most likely be

adopted without question.

Alternatively, instead of constraining behavior, identity and ideology can be *used*

as powerful resources in conflict, attracting potential supporters to one's cause. This,

however, requires recognition of the socially constructed, malleable nature of identity and

ideology. A savvy group leader with this awareness can mold and manipulate his group's

social identity in order to attract the most and best support. Referring back to the Four C

Model already discussed, we can imagine a 'conflict entrepreneur' of this sort working to

affect the attitudinal processes at work at each stage: defining the boundary between 'us'

and 'them,' promoting a self-serving and ethnocentric bias, and utilizing the highly

emphasized intergroup distinction to promote cohesiveness and solidarity among his own

group. The goal in this case would be to use identity as a tool in order to drum up

support for one's own cause and gain cooperation in one's struggle. Thus, while identity

may not be the root cause of social conflict, it often is an important intervening variable

helping to determine how conflict will manifest itself, and who will gain the upper hand.

Behavior

In conflict analysis, behavior is most frequently considered the 'dependent

variable' of conflict, the outcome we would like to predict or change (particularly if that

behavior is violent). The present study takes this approach, measuring various behavioral

tactics as the dependent variable. However, behavior is also sometimes thought of as a source of conflict; there are escalatory models of conflict which argue that the course and ultimate outcome of conflict depend upon the behaviors of each party and how they are responded to by the other. A 'behavior-based' theory of conflict like this would basically say that 'how we treat each other leads to conflict.' Although these theories are critically important to our field, I will not consider them here, and instead will look at concepts and models from the field which consider behavior (in its many forms) as a response to or outcome of conflict.

Latent vs. Manifest Conflict

Action, behaving contentiously in pursuit of one's goals, characterizes conflict in the minds of many; recall, for instance, Ramsbotham et al.'s definition of conflict as "the *pursuit* of incompatible goals by different groups" (2005, p. 27, emphasis added.) Thus, for many people no conflict exists in the absence of conflictual behavior. However, most conflict analysts recognize the importance of the concept of *latent conflict*, or conflict which has the potential to erupt into contentious action but which so far has not. A state of latent conflict is not peace. When Galtung (1969b) describes *negative peace* – the absence of direct violence in the continuing presence of structural violence – this is the point he wishes to underscore. Curle also has this in mind in his developmental framework (Fig.2.2): "In Quadrant 1 in his matrix," explains John Paul Lederach, "conflict is latent or 'hidden,' because people are unaware of the imbalances of power and injustices that affect their lives" (1997, p. 64). However, that injustice, that structural

violence, is still there, and thus – at least according to the likes of Galtung and Curle – so is conflict.

However, as Curle's process of *conscientization* takes place, and people become increasingly aware of (and frustrated by) the social injustice they face, some form of contentious behavior is not far behind. Here a distinction made by Sandole (1998) may be instructive. He identifies three forms, or stages, of conflict: latent or *pre-manifest conflict process*, *manifest conflict process* (MCP), and finally *aggressive manifest conflict process* (AMCP). He defines an MCP as

> a situation in which at least two parties, or their representatives, try to pursue their *perceptions* of mutually incompatible goals by *undermining*, directly or indirectly, each other's goal-seeking capability (p. 1).

By extension, an AMCP is defined as a special case of this type in which such an effort is undertaken by

> physically damaging or destroying the property and high-value symbols of one another…and/or psychologically or physically injuring, destroying, or otherwise forcibly eliminating one another (p.1).

The fundamental difference between these two forms of conflict is the use of *violence*. As I discuss in the next section, manifest conflict can be pursued using numerous tactics, some of which are violent and some of which are not. What leads people to choose one over the other is a key question in this study.

Understanding and Classifying Forms of Contention

When they find themselves in conflict, "people do not simply 'act collectively,'" writes Sidney Tarrow. "They petition, assemble, strike, march, occupy premises,

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obstruct traffic, set fires, and attack others with intent to do bodily harm" (1998, p. 20).

In other words, they choose different tactics, for a variety of reasons, as their means of pursuing their goals and remedying their grievances. Dean Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim (2004, chap. 4) call this variety of specific approaches *contentious tactics*, while another seminal writer on the subject, Charles Tilly, writes of *repertoires of contention* which he defines as "the ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests" (1995, p. 41).

In the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution we are particularly concerned with these tactics; in fact, many of us (including myself) see our role not precisely as preventing or resolving conflict – which is a natural and sometimes constructive social phenomenon – but instead as preventing and transforming *violent* conflict. Violence is just one form of contention, just one type (or class) of tactic that can be employed in conflict. If we can encourage the use of less contentious and more constructive tactics among those who find themselves in conflict, I would consider this a great success.

I will use two different schemes to classify the tactics used by the groups being considered in this study. The first scheme is the aforementioned one developed by Pruitt and Kim (2004, chap. 4) which ranks tactics from least to most contentious in the following order:

- *Ingratiation*: Making yourself appear more attractive to the adversary in order to win their support.
- *Promises*: Announcing an intention to reward the adversary if they comply with your wishes.
- *Persuasive Argumentation*: Using logical appeals in order to convince the adversary to change their position.
- *Shaming*: Condemning the adversary in order to make them experience the feeling of shame and change their conduct.
- *Tit-For-Tat*: Rewarding the adversary when they cooperate and punishing them whenever they do not.

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- *Threats*: Announcing an intention to punish the adversary if they do not comply with your wishes.
- *Coercive Commitments*: Announcing an intension to continue punishing the adversary until they comply with your wishes.
- *Violence*: Physically injuring the adversary or damaging an object they value.

Pruitt and Kim also discuss another class of tactic: *nonviolent resistance*. They do not go into much detail with respect to the varieties of tactics possible under this heading, and refer instead to the work of legendary nonviolent strategist Gene Sharp (1970) who has catalogued nearly 200 methods of nonviolent action. All of these fall into one of three primary categories: *nonviolent protest and persuasion* (e.g., speeches, picketing, marches, walk-outs), *nonviolent noncooperation* (e.g., strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience), and *nonviolent intervention* (e.g., hunger strikes, sit-ins, physical obstruction).

Why individuals and groups in conflict make the tactical choices they do – particularly the destructive choice to pursue violent tactics – is perhaps the most important question for the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution to answer. This study attempts to uncover at least some of the factors which have led groups in southern Mexico to choose the tactics they have, some violent, and some nonviolent.

A More Integrated Framework for Conflict Analysis

Clearly, all of the explanations of conflict just explored have merit; each one offers a piece to the puzzle. However, none of these theories alone is sufficient to explain the complex phenomenon of social conflict, especially its manifold behavioral manifestations. An integrated theory of social conflict would include all of the explanations described above and find meaningful ways to connect them in a causal

model. With his ABC model Galtung provided a framework which includes all of the key elements, but I would like to advance a more sequential, developmental model which may help us track conflict over time. (For this purpose I am also using Curle's model as a guide.) I turn next to explaining the structure of this new model, which I call a Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict (Fig. 2.3), and which will be the primary analytical lens used in the Results and Analysis portion of this thesis. I then complete this chapter with a brief consideration of the implications it has for conflict resolution strategies.

A Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict

Independent Variables

Primary Variables *Intervening Variables*

Dependent Variables

Contradiction

| Structural Violence and *Unmet BHNs* | *Political Opportunities and Constraints* |

•*Civil Conflict* (Manifest Conflict Process)

Attitude

| Grievances
▪ *Frustration*
▪ *Threat*
▪ *Relative Deprivation*
▪ *Rank Disequilibrium*
Goals |

Social Identity and *Ideology*

• *Contentious Tactics* (Violent and Nonviolent)

Behavior

Figure 2.3: A Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict

The Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict includes all of the components of conflict considered important in the theories we have already discussed. It analyzes them as variables contributing to the ultimate emergence of manifest conflict through a developmental process. This model maintains the attitude, behavior, contradiction distinction from Galtung's ABC model, and locates all the relevant variables under those headings.

According to the theory illustrated here, the roots of social conflict lie in conditions of *structural violence*. The first proposition of this theory is that a drive exists in the human organism to meet *basic human needs*. This is an imperative task for the survival of the individual and for that person's meaningful existence and that of the society of which he or she is a component. Conflict is created, in a latent form, when this drive is confronted with an unresponsive social system (structural violence or *contradiction*) which fulfills the needs of only one segment of society. Latent conflict of this kind may exist for an unforeseeable amount of time, until the process of *conscientization* begins and the disadvantaged elements of the society become aware of the inequality they face and the suffering it is visiting upon them.

From here in our model we move from box 1 (upper left) to box 2 (lower left) which illustrates the formation of grievances and goals. As they become aware of the consequences and social sources of their deprivation, the attitudes of disadvantaged groups begin to change. The discrepancy between their actual human needs and their low levels of satisfaction (*relative deprivation*), as well as potential perceptions of *rank disequilibrium*, produce feelings of frustration, anger, fear, and hostility which, as

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discussed above, help prime the community for an aggressive response. An action potential now exists among those suffering from structural violence; the only question is when, how and in what form, this action will manifest itself.

This is determined in large part by two sets of intervening variables. With the development of negative and hostile attitudes, we move from box 2 into the center column of Fig. 2.3 which illustrates these: *political opportunities and constraints* and the attitudinal variables *social identity* and *ideology*. As illustrated by the double-headed arrow linking them, these variables interact with one another in various ways to help determine the forms that collective action may take in conflict. I argue that the choice of contentious tactics in a conflict, and therefore the potential for violence, are moderated and ultimately determined by a complex relationship between the political opportunities and constraints faced by the disadvantaged groups and their identities and ideologies. This argument will be explored in much greater detail in the last section of Chapter 4; for now let me offer just one example.

Imagine a militant group which subscribes to a radical socio-political ideology, for instance, Marxist-Leninist thought. Its social identity is as an armed revolutionary group. In a state where there are few political opportunities for institutionalized redress of their grievances (such as fair elections or the courts), the group is quite likely to use violence in its struggle. In fact, depending on how strictly and inflexibly group members hold to their identity/ideology, they may undertake violent revolution even if these political opportunities exist. However, imagine now a prominent leader of that group working to reform its identity; perhaps he leads the group to think of itself more as a

political party, or even as an organization compatible with international civil society. Suddenly this shift in identity/ideology is capable of creating new political opportunities (support from international NGOs, for instance, who will exert pressure on the insurgents' state of origin, making violence less necessary). This is a very brief example, but it highlights some of the many ways in which these intervening variables interact to help determine the tactics used in civil conflict.

The first dependent variable which this model attempts to predict is simply the emergence of *manifest conflict process*. This is a dichotomous variable: either conflict is manifest in some form, or it remains latent. Explaining the emergence of conflict is important, but even more important (and certainly more complex) is explaining the emergence of particular *contentious tactics*, especially what factors help determine when disadvantaged groups will choose violent forms of contention over nonviolent ones. This is the second dependent variable analyzed in this model. Predicting and preventing violent forms of contention is not only a worthy goal in and of itself; escalatory models of conflict argue that highly contentious tactics used by one party tend to provoke equally or more contentious tactics from their adversary (see Pruitt & Kim, 2004, chaps. 5-6). In short, "violence begets violence," and thus preventing it from breaking out to begin with is a vital task for conflict resolution experts.

This is the theoretical model which I will employ in my analysis of the ongoing conflict in southern Mexico. Before turning to that analysis in the next chapter, I will first briefly consider what this model suggests in terms of approaches to conflict resolution and public policy.

<u>A Note on Resolution Strategies</u>

The numerous theories presented in this chapter all point toward different remedies and policy recommendations. Although mostly complementary, in some instances they would suggest contradictory conflict resolution strategies. Clearly this is a problem if our intent is to translate theory into effective policies and action. I offer below a more integrated approach to conflict resolution based on the model just presented.

Ramsbotham et al. (2005, p. 10) propose useful connections between each of Galtung's three dimensions of conflict and three distinct approaches to peace that are detailed in a seminal report drafted in 1992 by then-UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Titled "An Agenda for Peace," the report (Boutros-Ghali, 1992) defines various forms of intervention, all aimed at producing peace. The relationships Ramsbotham et al. (2005, p. 30) see are the following:

- They associate *peacekeeping*, the interposition of outside forces to contain violent conflict, with conflict resolution on the level of *behavior*,
- They associate *peacemaking*, the process of moving protagonists toward a settlement and inducing them to reach an agreement by changing their attitudes, with conflict resolution on the level of *attitude,* and
- They associate *peacebuilding*, the work of "addressing structural issues and the long-term relationships between conflictants," with conflict resolution on the level of *contradiction*.

Considering these approaches in this order we see a movement from the most urgent and immediate forms of conflict resolution to deeper, and more long-term methods. Each method is valid and necessary because each addresses a dimension of Galtung's ABC model; together they provide an integrated prescription for creating peace.

Let's consider, for a moment, the sequencing of these intervention activities. If we accept developmental models of conflict like Curle's or the Model of the Emergence

of Civil Conflict just presented, we may also accept the following proposition: if variables contribute to the creation of conflict in a particular sequence, an effective resolution strategy should address those variables in the reverse order. I call this a *reverse development* approach to conflict resolution. Briefly summarized, following the logic of my model, it would take this form: before addressing the root issues and needs involved in the conflict (contradiction) – using mediation, negotiation, etc. – it is first necessary to 1) stop violence (behavior) and 2) transform enemy images, anger, frustration, and damaged relationships (attitude). In this way we can work backwards from the manifestations of conflict to its very roots, planted in inequitable social structures. This is the approach I will propose for the conflict being waged currently in southern Mexico.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Observation of discontent and mobilization in southern Mexico and a tentative review of statements made by the EZLN, EPR and APPO led to several research questions I would like the present study to answer. These include: Are there similar socio-economic and political circumstances shared by all these groups which may be a common root cause for their uprisings? Do these groups share common grievances and goals which are motivating their independent actions? And finally, if these episodes are truly motivated by similar structural conditions and attitudes—in effect making them parts of a larger unitary conflict—what has led these three groups to use different tactics, in particular different amounts of violence, in the pursuit of their goals? In order to provide an analysis which may adequately answer these questions it is necessary to have a strong analytical framework (already discussed) as well as a strong research methodology and set of procedures for collecting and analyzing data. This chapter will describe in detail the procedures utilized in this study.

Hypotheses

The answers I anticipate finding to the questions just enumerated constitute the hypotheses guiding this inquiry. They are as follows:

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H_1: Objective measures of structural violence and basic human needs deprivation will be similar (positively correlated) among all three cases.

H_2: Subjective measures of grievances (expressed as feelings of frustration, threat, relative deprivation and rank disequilibrium) and goals will also be similar (positively correlated) among all three cases.

H_3: The use of contentious tactics (including violence) – the dependent variable in this study – will vary among the three cases.

H_4: The use of contentious tactics will vary according to the political opportunities and constraints faced by each group, their social identity (self-perceptions and attitudes) and ideology (perceptions and attitudes about their circumstances and other groups), and the interplay among these variables.

Therefore, in sum, I anticipate finding a common substrate of structural violence and unmet basic human needs across all cases, creating a largely shared set of grievances and goals. This finding would support the notion that all three episodes are truly part of a larger, over-arching conflict. However, I also anticipate (as preliminary findings suggest) that the contentious tactics employed by the militant groups being studied will vary considerably, particularly in terms of their level of violence. I suspect that this variance can be explained in large part by political opportunities and constraints (which create costs or rewards for particular tactical behaviors) and by identities and ideologies (which also encourage or discourage certain tactics). I believe that this relationship is made more complex by the interplay between these variables (e.g., a group's decision to modify its identity in order to open up new political opportunities). These findings would

help us understand to a greater extent why violence or other highly contentious tactics become the tools of some contenders in civil conflict and not of others.

Variables and Definition of Terms

In order to be able to test the hypotheses just described effectively it is first necessary for us to define the concepts which represent the relevant variables in this study. This can be done best by offering 1) a *conceptual definition* of each variable which attempts to explain in common language what the variable is and 2) an *operational definition* which attempts to describe the procedures necessary for measuring that variable. The variables being measured in this study have already been discussed conceptually in Chapter 2. I would like now briefly to offer some operational descriptions of each which describe the procedures and types of data used to measure them in this study.

Primary Variables

Structural violence will be measured in the form of inequality along three dimensions: economic, political, and socio-cultural. *Basic human needs deprivation* is a corollary to structural violence, measured in much the same way. For instance, data indicating extreme poverty in a region illustrate the deprivation of many key human needs, such as need for food, while data describing high illiteracy rates would illustrate deprivation of the need for education. Therefore, objective data showing the levels of

development on these indicators (economic, political and socio-cultural) in southern
Mexico, and relative to the rest of the country, will be considered.

Grievances here are defined as conditions which a group wants to alter, diminish
or reverse; they are unwanted circumstances which provoke feelings of *frustration, threat,
relative deprivation*, and *rank disequilibrium*. Therefore, statements made by the
revolutionary groups themselves which describe such conditions and feelings will be the
primary data with respect to grievances. *Goals*, which are ideal conditions to be reached,
can be measured in the same way.

Intervening Variables

Political opportunities and constraints, being structural conditions, should be
objectively verifiable. The difficulty, however, is determining what will be considered an
opportunity or constraint relative to a group's particular goals. For the purposes of this
study we are particularly interested in 1) the amount of opposition or cooperation
(demonstrated in willingness to use elections, courts, negotiations, and other formalized
means to resolve differences) on the part of government actors and 2) the amount of
political support available to militant groups from other nongovernmental actors.

"*Social identities*," writes Marilynn Brewer, "refer to conceptualizations of the
self that derive from membership in emotionally significant social categories or groups"
(2003, p. 22). Therefore, these can best be measured by evaluating statements made by
group members about themselves; attention must be paid to beliefs about the group,

feelings and emotions toward the group, and desires and goals for the group. The same

applies to *ideology*, which is a conceptualization of the world and of others.

Dependent Variable

While strategies, which are overarching plans of action, may be difficult to

measure since they are conceived of in the human mind, tactics are much more easily

measured: they are specific actions or behaviors which can be observed. In this study

data about the groups' *contentious tactics* will be taken from the writings of journalists,

analysts and other observers, and then compiled and classified according the schemes

discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

Data Sources (Subjects) and Data Gathering

The data collected and analyzed for this research study will consist of several

different types, primarily qualitative in nature, coming from a variety of sources. They

include:

Aggregate Statistical and Econometric Data

In order to demonstrate the existence of structural violence and basic human

needs deprivation as defined in the previous section, objective data presenting the degree

or amount of economic inequality, political under-representation or oppression, and

social discrimination experienced by the groups being considered will be analyzed. Also,

some similar measures exist which quantify the general degree of political opportunity or constraint experienced within a certain community.

Statements Made by Participants in the Conflict

Statements made by the leaders and members of the insurgent groups themselves will be particularly useful in deriving conclusions regarding their feelings, beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, measures of grievance (including feelings of frustration, threat, relative deprivation and rank disequilibrium), stated goals, and other perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (such as those pertaining to identity and ideology) will best be assessed through analysis of these data sources.

Statements Made by Journalists, Analysts, and Other Observers

Carefully selected third-party observations may be the best way to glean relatively objective data concerning the types and prevalence of political opportunities and constraints facing each group, as well as the contentious tactics (specific, goal directed behaviors in conflict) adopted and used by each group. These data will come primarily from *archival records*, or secondary data sources, published and released in a variety of media. Whenever possible, all efforts will be made to locate and analyze sources in their original language (frequently Spanish) instead of in translation. When it is necessary to translate citations from Spanish, these translations will be done by the author.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data just described will require the use of more than one method. The primary tool used in this study will be *content analysis* which will allow for the identification of similar and contrasting themes in an array of narrative sources. However, simple comparisons of quantitative data (means, totals, etc.) will also be necessary.

Content analysis will be used to analyze statements made by the insurgent groups themselves. In analyzing these data, we will be looking for statements of grievances and goals, as well as statements of beliefs about and attitudes toward a) their own group b) their stated 'enemy' and c) their situation and the world in general. Such statements will have a valence (positive or negative) as well as an intensity. In general, the aim here is to uncover, by analyzing each group's own words, information about the nature and intensity of their grievances, goals, social identity and ideology.

Statements made by third parties (such as journalists and analysts) will be analyzed in a similar way, though with other themes under scrutiny. Here we will be looking for statements concerning the state of affairs facing each group as well as their behaviors. Thus, information concerning the existence of political opportunities and constraints (circumstances or events either constraining or facilitating the groups' collective action) as well as descriptions of the groups' tactical behaviors (e.g. hunger strike, public demonstration, pipeline bombing) will be relevant.

These combined methods will provide a good understanding of the variables considered key in understanding these cases and their relationships to one another. Let us turn now to the data itself and a thorough analysis of this study's results.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

In this chapter I attempt to analyze a wide variety of data pertaining to the four hypotheses guiding this thesis. The aim, as mentioned before, is to provide the best answers possible to the following questions: Are there similar socio-economic and political circumstances shared by the three militant groups in southern Mexico which may be a common root cause for their uprisings? Do these groups share common grievances and goals which are motivating their independent actions? And finally, if these episodes are truly motivated by similar structural conditions and attitudes—in effect making them parts of a larger unitary conflict—what has led these three groups to use different tactics, in particular different amounts of violence, in the pursuit of their goals? My analysis and responses to each of these questions are presented next.

Structural Conditions Across Cases

This portion of my data analysis examines evidence with respect to my first hypothesis, that objective measures of structural violence and basic human needs deprivation will be similar (positively correlated) among all three cases under consideration. Structural violence and needs deprivation are here operationalized as inequality in three realms of human existence: the economic, the political, and the socio-

cultural. (You may recall that these three dimensions were discussed earlier in the segment on relevant theory as possible sources of social conflict.) The presumption of the importance of inequality along these three dimensions as a key factor provoking the conflict in southern Mexico is corroborated by the following analysis offered in a report published by the United States Institute of Peace: "Lying behind the rebellions in Chiapas and other southern states," argues the report, "is a potent combination of explosive electoral issues," or political inequalities, "growing misery," resulting from economic inequalities, "and long-standing resentments at the indignities to which the indigenous population has traditionally been subject," or discrimination and inequality based on socio-cultural differences (Foley, 1999, p. 6).

The following data indeed demonstrate inequality on all of these dimensions between the residents of other regions of Mexico and the poor residents of the three southernmost states. Recalling the Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict described in Chapter 2 (Fig. 2.3), this inequality is seen as the root of civil conflict in the region, as the primary variable leading to conflict.

Poverty and Economic Inequality

When discussing economic inequality (the concentration of a great deal of wealth within a small percentage of society), it is first critical to note that Mexico consistently ranks among the worst offenders when it comes to this disparity. One report from the late 1990s maintained that Mexico was "among the 15 countries with the worst concentration of income in the world" (Reveles & Terán, 2001, p. 130). While mal-

distribution of this kind is frequently dispersed geographically within a nation, in the case

of Mexico there is a very sharp urban/rural as well as north/south divide. In Figure 4.1, a

map which illustrates the per capita income of each Mexican state relative to the national

mean in the year 2000, it is strikingly evident that the three states which fell into the

STATE PER CAPITA INCOME RELATIVE TO THE MEAN, 2000

State per capita income
divided by the national mean

0.42 - 0.52
0.52 - 0.74
0.74 - 1.08
1.08 - 1.76
1.76 - 2.58

Code	State	Code	State
01	Aguascalientes	17	Morelos
02	Baja California Norte	18	Nayarit
03	Baja California Sur	19	Nuevo León
04	Campeche	20	Oaxaca
05	Chiapas	21	Puebla
06	Chihuahua	22	Querétaro
07	Coahuila	23	Quintana Roo
08	Colima	24	San Luis Potosí
09	Distrito Federal	25	Sinaloa
10	Durango	26	Sonora
11	Guanajuato	27	Tabasco
12	Guerrero	28	Tamaulipas
13	Hidalgo	29	Tlaxcala
14	Jalisco	30	Veracruz
15	México	31	Yucatán
16	Michoacán	32	Zacatecas

Figure 4.1: Map of Mexico – State Per Capita Income Relative to the Mean, 2000 (Rivas, 2007, p. 548).

lowest category (those with the lowest per capita income in the country) were Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas (Rivas, 2007, p. 548).

Thus it is easy to see that those who suffer the most due to Mexico's dramatic economic inequality are those living in the three states under consideration in this study, the three states where rebellion and protest have been manifest since at least the early 1990s. One more piece of data is very telling in this respect, and highlights the potential connection between economic inequality and this conflict. "The highest level of income concentration in two decades," writes a pair of Mexican social researchers, "was reached in 1994," the year NAFTA went into effect as well as the moment of the first uprising discussed in this paper, that of the Zapatistas (Reveles & Terán, 2001, p. 130).

As will be seen in the next section of this paper, which analyzes the insurgent groups' statements of their own grievances, many believe that this profound economic inequality and the suffering it has created are largely the result of neoliberal economic practices, like NAFTA. This belief is not only held by the rebels. In a striking statement in 2001, Mexico's Secretary of the Economy, Luis Ernesto Derbez, admitted during the World Economic Forum in Cancun that NAFTA had in fact "brought Mexico an unequal growth: wealth in the North and poverty in the South…[I]n the last decade the rate of growth in the North was 5.9%, compared with 0.4% in the South" (Reveles & Terán, 2001, p. 131). Although there is still debate on this point, there is ample evidence that neoliberal reforms like NAFTA have increased economic inequality in Mexico and primed the south for civil conflict. Even the World Bank, one of the most prominent and powerful institutions promoting global economic integration, recently recognized this fact.

In a report titled "Development Strategies for the Mexican Southern States" – specifically focused on Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas – the World Bank argues that "policy alternatives [should] be adopted at the federal and state levels in order to accelerate the fight against poverty in those states, home to 25 percent of all Mexicans living in extreme poverty." The report adds that "Mexico must reduce poverty in its southern states to keep deeply-rooted inequalities from blocking prospects for consolidating prosperity nationwide. Without effective development policies that improve living conditions in this region, it will continue to lag behind" (World Bank, 2008).

From a conflict-analytical point of view, dramatic economic inequality like this is dangerous because it is a key variable in provoking civil conflict. Such inequality certainly falls under the heading of what Galtung calls structural violence, and it deprives those on the losing side of numerous basic human needs. Specifically, analyzing it using Galtung's working typology of four classes of needs (1990, p. 309), economic inequality can be seen to create deprivation of *welfare needs,* including needs for nutrition, education, protection from diseases, etc. As already discussed in Chapter 2, people will *inevitably* struggle to fulfill their basic human needs, no matter the cost, because they are vital for a meaningful existence. Residents of southern Mexico currently find themselves facing this kind of deprivation. Reveles and Terán write that, according to data describing the "inadequate services in healthcare, housing, water, sewage and electricity" suffered by many Mexicans, "practically all the welfare indicators worsened in the southern states" (2001, p. 130). Viewing this data in light of the aforementioned Model

of the Emergence of Civil Conflict, it is easy to see that the seeds of conflict (structural

violence and basic human needs deprivation) are planted deeply in southern Mexico.

Political Exclusion, Repression, and Corruption

The report mentioned in the previous section published by USIP about conflict in

southern Mexico finds at its source "a discontent fueled by both economic crisis *and*

political exclusion" (Foley, 1999, p. 10, emphasis added). Political inequality is the

second form of social disparity analyzed in this thesis which distinguishes Mexico's

southern states from the rest of the country. There is evidence that the PRI party – which,

despite many reforms elsewhere, still dominates politics in the south – has consistently

manipulated elections there to exclude or repress its opponents in order to maintain its

highly profitable grip on power in the last remaining region under its unquestioned

influence.

Three examples of data which highlight the variance in election processes

between the south and the rest of the country illustrate this clearly. First, in their article

"Local Context and Democratization in Southern Mexico," Hiskey and Bowler cite Latin

American expert Jonathan Fox's conclusion that

> the 1994 federal elections [in Mexico] were in fact 'two distinct election-day
> processes, one 'modern' and relatively clean, the other filled with irregularities,
> including widespread violation of ballot secrecy and direct pressures by local
> bosses on voters'(2005, p. 59).

Describing later elections held in 1997, Foley writes that, while they

> were widely regarded as 'free and fair' and largely unmarred by violence, the
> picture is rather different in the heavily populated rural regions that make up some
> of the last strongholds of the traditional PRI…The Federal Electoral Institute

found a much higher percentage of electoral irregularities in the southern part of the country (16.5 percent of election sites surveyed) than in the north, Mexico City, and the surrounding State of Mexico (9 percent) (1999, p. 6).

Hiskey and Bowler also point out that

the election monitoring organization, Alianza Civica, found over twice as many incidents of voter intimidation in the 2000 elections in southern Mexico (with violations found in 23% of observed polling sites) as in the more industrialized north (where violations occurred in 10% of polling sites).

The authors add that "these patterns are consistent with [the] contention that, even on the eve of historic elections, Mexicans were living under distinct subnational electoral regimes" (2005, p. 59). In sum, in numerous elections throughout the last two decades "there is evidence that [Mexican] citizens experienced quite distinct processes of political change," (Hiskey & Bowler, 2005, p. 59) with those in the southern states facing significantly more fraud, voter intimidation and repression, more exclusion from political decision-making, and less openness to the introduction of parties other than the historically dominant PRI.

This evidence illuminates the fierce struggle for political power being waged in southern Mexico not only by citizens and insurgent groups, but also by the PRI party itself. The southern states have always been the most secure for the PRI and, as the party has seen its grip loosen throughout the rest of the country in recent years, "political elites in these regions are fiercely defending their traditional control of local politics" since maintaining control there in "the rural fiefdoms of the south appears more than ever essential to the party's survival" (Foley, 1999, p. 2).

The role of political inequality in generating civil conflict is similar to that of economic inequality; both are forms of structural violence and both prevent a certain

segment of society from achieving all of their basic human needs, thus setting in motion a contentious self-defensive drive. "Current rebellions in southern Mexico," acknowledges Foley, "spring from citizen outrage at the abuse of power by the PRI, particularly at the local level" (1999, p. 1). Within the typology defined by Galtung (1990), we would find basic human needs affected by political inequality primarily within the category called *freedom needs*. Taken together, Galtung explains, this category reflects the need "to avoid repression" and it includes politically oriented needs including choice in mobilization and choice of way of life (p. 309).

Faced with political marginalization, citizens of Mexico's southern states have sought alternative means to influence government and regain some of these freedom needs. "All evidence suggests that openness to the EPR insurgents," and their aggressive anti-government tactics, writes Foley, "in [Guerrero] and parts of neighboring Oaxaca stem from the bitter electoral disputes of the past few years, disputes in which the local PRI machine has largely come out the winner" (1999, p. 2). Likewise, facing similar alienation and lack of voice in traditional politics "the Zapatistas began setting up 'autonomous' municipal governments in protest of an electoral process they saw as hopelessly corrupt" (1999, p. 2). Whatever tactic each group has chosen (a decision discussed in detail later in this thesis), the experience of and struggle to end political inequality is common to all the groups in rebellion in southern Mexico.

Social and Cultural Discrimination

Discrimination – defined here as when people are treated differently on the basis of their group membership alone (Brewer, 2003, p. 45) – is a much more difficult form of inequality to measure than either economic disparity or political exclusion. It is more diffuse, but no less harmful, and therefore perhaps more insidious than the other two forms already discussed. Discrimination includes any kind of behavior which favors one group over another based on some distinguishing social or cultural characteristic, and thus it can take as many forms as can be imagined.

Evidence certainly exists that the people of Mexico's southern states suffer a higher level of discrimination than those elsewhere. This is due, in the largest measure, to the fact that those states have, as discussed in Chapter 1, overwhelmingly indigenous populations relative to the rest of the country. The highest proportion of indigenous residents in Mexico is found in this southern region, and indigenous groups still struggle to maintain their own customs and ways of life here. It is no surprise, then, that racist discrimination manifests itself in the south more than anywhere else in Mexico.

Discrimination against the south's indigenous peoples results in numerous destructive effects which have, in my view, provoked them into engaging in civil conflict. First of all, overt discrimination intensifies the forms of inequality we have already discussed. As sociologist Marco Tavanti (2003) explains, "economic inequalities…are not the only explanation of poverty among indigenous communities. Racism goes hand in hand with poverty." The indigenous peoples of Mexico, he says, have "realized how both their social conditions of poverty and their ethnic identity as indigenous contributed to

their marginalization and exclusion…Their marginalized conditions are not caused [only] by lack of economic resources," but instead are "produced by unjust political and social structures based on the exploitation of land and the exclusion of indigenous people" on the basis of their race (pp. 3-4).

The issue of land exploitation is of particular concern for indigenous peoples; they typically survive based on forms of subsistence in which they cultivate their own food, and their traditional belief systems also frequently derive necessary spiritual sustenance from the land as well. Nevertheless, indigenous communities in southern Mexico continue to be deprived of this land in order to benefit wealthy landowners who are typically of European descent. This discriminatory practice was given the government's official support in 1992 with the amendment of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution which, "eliminated the inalienable guarantee of communal property for *ejidos*," or sections of communal land for indigenous groups, "allowing them to be sold, rented or mortgaged" (Tavanti, 2003, p. 3). This egregious discriminatory policy, according to EZLN spokesman Subcomandante Marcos, was the last straw, "the ultimate act of betrayal that pushed the Zapatistas to bear arms" (Tavanti, 2003, p. 3).

Discrimination against the indigenous people of Mexico's south affects more than their land, it is also damaging an even more important possession: their culture. As a 'western,' globalized culture becomes the favored mode of existence in Mexico, traditional customs and beliefs are rapidly deteriorating. The upper echelons of Mexican society, particularly those of European descent, favor the whole package of globalization, both economically and culturally, and thus support, in a manner consistent with other

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forms of discrimination, the marginalization and eventual disappearance of indigenous modes of existence. Although this threat is faced by indigenous peoples in many nations, it has become significant in motivating conflict in southern Mexico.

Perhaps the clearest and most immediately injurious result of discrimination against indigenous peoples in Mexico is the violence and human rights abuses it seems to validate. In her compelling article "The Construction of Indigenous Suspects: Militarization and the Gendered and Ethnic Dynamics of Human Rights Abuses in Southern Mexico," anthropologist Lynn Stephen (1999) argues that historically prominent discriminatory beliefs about indigenous peoples in the country today help the government and paramilitaries to rationalize and validate violence perpetrated against them. They have become 'suspects' whose very existence is thought to pose a threat, and therefore invites physical suppression. "In Mexico," she writes, "the targeting of specific indigenous populations by militaries and paramilitaries signals a crisis of representation at the state's margins in the south" (1999, p. 822), adding that "the primary targets of these strategies of militarization are indigenous communities in Chiapas and Oaxaca" (1999, p. 830). In a brief from 2000 titled "Freedom from Racial Discrimination: Mexico" which focused specifically on Oaxaca, Amnesty International reported that "indigenous people are often denied their rights in practice. There have been persistent reports of the security forces perpetrating human rights violations, mainly against members of the indigenous population." According to Stephen, indigenous peoples 'invite' such violence in two seemingly counterintuitive but related ways: they are perceived as a threat (which needs to be countered), but are also perceived as weak and,

as Stephen asserts, "those groups of people who are gauged as the most vulnerable and least likely to be able to defend themselves are often the first and most intensive targets of political violence" (1999, p. 823).

The role that this discrimination plays in the conflict in southern Mexico is the same as that of the other forms of inequality already described: it deprives a segment of society (in this case the indigenous communities of the south) of essential human needs for which they will feel compelled to fight. In fact, the forms of discrimination just discussed produce basic human needs deprivation in all four of the categories conceived of by Galtung (1990, p. 309): security needs (against individual violence), welfare needs (for nutrition, for protection against climate), identity needs (for roots, belongingness, support, esteem), and freedom needs (for choice in way of life).

Grievances and Goals Across Cases

Referring back to Figure 2.3, the Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict, the reader will see that we have finished discussing the first component, the structural primary variables (structural violence and unmet basic human needs) which have played a role in this conflict. We move now to the next box, the attitudinal primary variables which include various manifestations of feelings of grievance, as well as goals, among the rebel groups. Data presented and analyzed in this section pertain to this study's second hypothesis, that subjective measures of grievances (expressed as feelings of frustration, threat, relative deprivation and rank disequilibrium) and goals will be similar (positively correlated) among all three cases.

As we have just seen, the residents of southern Mexico face pronounced forms of inequality relative to the rest of their country. The peoples of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca are disadvantaged economically, politically, and socio-culturally. It is no surprise, therefore, that an analysis of their statements finds that they articulate numerous grievances precisely in terms of those forms of deprivation and inequality. Also, as is illustrated below, it is unsurprising that the rebel groups that have led mass movements in each of these three states have far more grievances and goals in common than they have which differ.

For the analysis presented in this section, several key statements released by the militant groups (three for the EPR and two each for the APPO and EZLN) were content analyzed.[1] Words and phrases representing grievances and goals were located, counted, and catalogued. The resulting lists were then compared across the three cases to identify commonalities. A summary of this analysis is presented in Table 4.1, Grievances, and Table 4.2, Goals. Both Grievances and Goals are sub-categorized into related groupings. The numbers in parentheses indicate how often the grievance or goal was mentioned. Identical terms or cognates are highlighted in bold text to show the reader those specific grievances and goals which were shared by two or more of the groups. A quick glance at these tables confirms significant areas of common concern among the insurgents. Let us now turn to an overview of the grievances identified in the groups' statements, followed

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[1] The statements included in this analysis are: "Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona" (Zapatista Army, 2005), "Convoca el Ejército Zapatista a una movilización mundial por Oaxaca" (Zapatista Army, 2006), "Declaración Política de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca" (Popular Assembly, 2006a), "Saludamos con alegría la iniciativa del EZLN" (Popular Assembly, 2006b), "Manifiesto de Aguas Blancas" (Popular Revolutionary Army, 1996), "La verdad sobre las explosiones" (Popular Revolutionary Army, 2007), as well as an interview conducted with EPR soldiers (Petrich, 1997).

by a survey of goals, in order to see just how much is shared among the militants of southern Mexico.

Grievances

As explained earlier in Chapter 2, a grievance is fundamentally a feeling that one is suffering some form of injustice or deprivation relative to some standard, the most important of which is the undeniable standard of basic human needs. Put another way, grievance is when a group or individual experiences the perception that they are enduring some form of violence. Many times this takes the form of structural violence, and the previous section describes amply the kinds of structural violence experienced by the people of southern Mexico. In addition, however, physical violence can clearly provoke the generation of grievances as well. I will begin my look at the grievances proclaimed by the EZLN, EPR, and APPO with this most basic form of injustice, and then follow with a look at the economic, political, and socio-cultural forms of deprivation they frequently name as reasons for their uprisings.

Statements made by all three groups indicate that various forms of physical violence are among their grievances. Denouncements of *murder, torture, disappearances*, and *imprisonment* appear with frequency in all of the statements analyzed. The EPR and EZLN each refer to *massacres* as emblematic of this government-sponsored violence: the Zapatistas describe the 1997 murder of 45 indigenous people in Acteal, Chiapas, which they attribute to government-sanctioned paramilitaries, while the EPR's founding statement describes "the massacre of Aguas Blancas, perpetrated by the repressive bodies

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Physical Violence		
EZLN	*Murder* (4), *Imprisonment* (3), *Massacres* – Acteal, *Disappearances*	
EPR	*Disappearances* (7), *Imprisonment* (4), *Massacres* – Aguas Blancas (4), *Murder* (3), *Torture* (3)	
APPO	*Torture* (3), *Disappearances* (2), Militarization (2)	
Lack of Basic Human Needs/Physical Deprivation		
EPR	Hunger (3), Misery (2), Poor Working Conditions (2), *Sickness*	
APPO	Lack of Education (2), Lack of Basic Services, *Poor Health*, Insecurity	
Poverty and Economic Inequality		
EZLN	Exploitation (9), Domination/Conquest (5), Wealth of Foreigners (5), Neoliberal Capitalism (4), *Theft* (4), *Theft* of Land (4), "The Rich" (3), Low Wages (3), NAFTA	
EPR	*Robbery* by Big Capital (4), Economic Injustice (2), *Imperialism* (2)	
APPO	Poverty (3), Unemployment (2), Income Gap (2), *Imperialism*, *Robbery* by Foreigners, Foreign Debt	
Political Exclusion, Repression, and Corruption		
EZLN	Dishonesty and Deception (8), "Bad Government" (7), *Repression* (3), Bad Political Parties (2), Lack of Respect for Agreements	
EPR	*Repression* (9), Oppression (4), Lack of Political Participation (3), *Corruption*, Illegitimate Government	
APPO	Ulises Ruíz as Governor (6), *Repression* (3), *Corruption* (2), PRI Rule (2), Outdated Party System, Electoral Fraud	
Social and Cultural Discrimination		
EZLN	*Injustice* (3), *Injustice against Indigenous Peoples* (3), *Persecution*	
EPR	*Injustice* (5), Lack of Rights, *Persecution*	
APPO	*Persecution* (2), Human Rights Violations, *Injustice against Indigenous Peoples*	

Table 4.1: Grievances – Results of a Content Analysis of Rebel Group Statements

of the oligarchy and the anti-popular government against 17 defenseless peasant farmers from the mountains of Guerrero" (Popular Revolutionary Army, 1996) as the catalytic event leading to the creation of the rebel army. Outrage at extrajudicial 'disappearances' is manifest in statements by both groups, as well as by the APPO, and allegations of torture on the part of police and the military are likewise in evidence.

Although it is not technically a form of *direct violence* because it is often not deliberate, physical deprivation in the form of sickness, exposure, and starvation lies close to that pole on the spectrum of violence. This type of concrete basic human needs deprivation is also frequently mentioned as a grievance among the EZLN, EPR, and APPO. The EPR argue that they are representatives of "those in each home who resent the lack of bread and work" (Popular Revolutionary Army, 1996). The APPO includes among these fundamental privations a *lack of education*, which is not surprising given the group's roots in the public school teachers' union. In sum, *hunger, sickness*, and the general physical *insecurity* which results from poverty are a uniting grievance among the groups analyzed in this study.

And it is very clear in their statements that these three groups identify poverty and economic inequality as the root cause of their suffering and, furthermore, argue that this inequality is the responsibility of neoliberal globalization and those who support it in Mexico. *Poverty, unemployment, low wages*, and overall *economic injustice* are grievances touched on throughout the analyzed statements. Perhaps the most frequent grievance themes found throughout the communiqués of the EZLN are *exploitation, domination,* and *conquest* by capital, that of both foreigners and rich Mexicans. The term

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imperialism is applied liberally by the EPR and APPO to describe this situation, and the notion of *theft* or *robbery* of Mexico's human and natural resources is evident throughout the remarks of all groups. As the Zapatistas put it, they are engaged in a struggle to "save our Patria (fatherland) from the great thefts and destruction" occasioned by neoliberalism (Zapatista Army, 2005).

Many of the other manifest grievances felt by these groups lie not in the realm of economics, but rather in the realm of political participation (or the lack thereof.) Given the climate of electoral tampering, PRI party hegemony and authoritarian policies in the southern states, it is unsurprising to find that political *repression* and *corruption* are mentioned a vast number of times in statements made by the EZLN, EPR, and APPO. To these primary grievances the EZLN in particular adds *dishonesty and deception* on the part of government representatives; given their experiences with failed negotiations and the federal government's ultimate unwillingness to put into practice the San Andrés Accords, this, too, is an unsurprising grievance. All three groups refer in different ways to the *illegitimacy* of the governments to whom they are opposed. The APPO, however, specifically directs its dissatisfaction toward *Oaxaca's Governor Ulises Ruíz*, with repeated cries of "Fuera Ulises de Oaxaca!" or "Get Ulises out of Oaxaca!"

The last set of key thematic grievances revealed in the statements analyzed includes ideas of *injustice, persecution*, and *lack of respect for rights* (particularly when it comes to indigenous peoples). All three of these themes find multiple echoes in the communiqués of the EZLN, EPR and APPO alike. "Let us fight," says one statement of the EPR (Popular Revolutionary Army, 1996) "against oppression and injustice, against

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humiliation and deprivation." To this the EZLN adds that "we have seen the great injustices and massacres that neoliberal globalization causes throughout the world" (Zapatista Army, 2005). The lack of procedural justice, the lack of the people's ability to claim and defend their rights, is clearly a grievance which unites all three of the groups analyzed in this thesis.

Goals

The rebel groups of southern Mexico, like many rebel groups, often proclaim their goals in sweeping terms of dramatic systemic reform. One strikingly consistent formulation of the fundamental goals of the EZLN, EPR and APPO – which is found repeatedly in identical form throughout the statements of the two former groups – is their desire for "liberty, justice, and democracy." It is hard to know where this phrase originated, or if one group has copied the other's language, but what is certain is that this slogan is used frequently to encapsulate the principal goals of these groups. The terminology also resonates with a similar demand for "justice, democracy and peace" found more than once in the APPO's statements. Another major thematic goal manifested in several of the statements analyzed is that of *transformation of society*. In one of its earliest proclamations declaring its goals and objectives, the APPO placed first among these "a profound and radical transformation of the relations between government and society, of institutions and of the way in which power is exercised" (Popular Assembly, 2006a).

Overarching Values and Goals	
EZLN	***Liberty, Justice and Democracy*** (9)
EPR	***Liberty, Justice and Democracy*** (2), Democratic Revolutionary ***Transformation*** (2), ***Profound Transformation of Society***, Construction of a New Mexican Fatherland
APPO	***Justice, Democracy***, and Peace (2), ***Profound Transformation of Society***
Economic Goals	
EZLN	Defense of ***National Resources*** and Sovereignty (3); Improved Health, Education, Housing and Nutrition (2); Access to Land (2)
EPR	Overthrow of Big Money (2), Recuperation of ***National Resources***, Immediate Needs of the People
Political Goals	
EZLN	***New Constitution*** (3), "Another way of doing politics" (2), Self Governance
EPR	***Popular Sovereignty*** (4), ***New Constitution*** (3), Overthrow of Government (2), New Government
APPO	Power in the Hands of the People (3), Formation of ***Popular Assemblies*** (2), Great National Unity (2), New Political Regimen (2), ***New Constitution,*** New Society-Government Relationship, Dialogue with Diverse Sectors, Exit of Governor Ulises Ruíz
Claims to Rights and Justice	
EZLN	Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Culture (5), ***Return of Detainees Alive***, ***Punishment of those Responsible for Injustice***
EPR	***Return of Detainees Alive*** (2), ***Punishment of those Responsible for Injustice*** (2), Reestablishment of the State of Right (2)

Table 4.2: Goals – Results of a Content Analysis of Rebel Group Statements

Though they seem at times to be given to broad generalizations like those just described, all three of the groups being analyzed here also proclaim more specific goals in their statements. Many of these are economic in nature, and indicate a desire to have more control over and reap more benefits from Mexico's plentiful resources. The Zapatistas and the EPR both speak of the need to *recuperate and defend national resources*, and to find ways to channel them directly into fulfilling the *immediate needs of the people*, which include *improved health, education, housing, and nutrition*. In order for this to become possible, however, these resources must be recovered from the hands of those who would like to continue exploiting them, and therefore, as the EPR states, many poor people in southern Mexico have "decided to exchange our work tools for rifles…that will be able to combat and contribute to the overthrow of big money" (Popular Revolutionary Army, 1996). This desire to take back the economic resources essential to a meaningful life from the grip of rich oppressors is a unifying goal among the EZLN, EPR, and APPO.

The three are further united by a set of political goals which also aim at the recovery of power over their own existence. Generally all three groups articulate a strong desire for some new form of government which would allow the poor people of southern Mexico a far greater ability to control decisions which affect them. The most common form this desire take is as a demand for a *new constitution*. The Zapatistas put it most clearly, stating

> we are also going to go about raising a struggle in order to demand that we make a new Constitution, new laws which take into account the demands of the Mexican people, which are: housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace. A new

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Constitution which recognizes the rights and liberties of the people, and which defends the weak in the face of the powerful (Zapatista Army, 2005).

Many of the groups' political remarks have an even more expansive nature, calling for an entirely *new government or political regimen* which would put *power in the hands of the people*. How this is to be accomplished is a point of divergence among the groups. The EPR, consonant with its revolutionary Marxist-Leninist posture, calls more than once for an actual *overthrow* of the government by military means. The Zapatistas speak more frequently of *self governance*, while the APPO seeks the formation of *popular assemblies* which may supplant in fact, though not by force, existing governing structures.

Embedded in, or perhaps surrounding, all of these economic and political goals are fundamental claims for greater justice and respect for human and civil rights. This set of goals mirrors the set of grievances already discussed related to injustice and lack of rights in practice. Some of these goals are limited in scope, for example the repeated fervent demands by all parties, particularly the EPR, for the "presentación con vida" of their detained comrades, their return alive and well. The EZLN stakes broader claims, demanding far greater recognition of a whole spectrum of *rights for indigenous peoples*. There is also insistence that those who have been responsible for years of injustice and social inequality be brought to justice and be punished in some fashion. Thus we can see how the three prominent militant groups fighting the government in southern Mexico are bound together by a common cause, by numerous shared goals, motivated by a shared set of grievances.

Tactics Across Cases

Looking again at Figure 2.3, the Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict, one will now note that we have so far discussed data pertaining to the far-left column, this study's primary variables (both structural and attitudinal). Before discussing the intervening variables illustrated in the model, I first turn to describing the outcome, or dependent variable, namely the manifestation of different contentious tactics in the conflict in southern Mexico. This segment of my analysis examines data related to my third hypothesis, that the use of contentious tactics (including violence) – the dependent variable in this study – will vary among the three cases under scrutiny.

Among the three militant groups considered in this thesis, as the following data will show, there is a wide variation in the tactics they employ, particularly when it comes to the extent to which they choose violence. The EZLN has most frequently employed a variety of creative nonviolent tactics, while the EPR has been extremely aggressive. The APPO, during its short existence, has teetered on the brink between violence and nonviolence, seemingly unsure of which path is best suited to its goals. This variation is one of the key phenomena explored in the current study. In order to classify and distinguish among the tactics used by the EZLN, EPR and APPO, I will refer back to the classificatory schemes of Pruitt and Kim (2004) and Gene Sharp (1970) discussed in Chapter 2. Let us look now at the tactics of each of these groups in more detail.

EZLN

The EZLN is considered today to be one of the most innovative rebel groups in history in terms of its creative use of nonviolent techniques during its nearly 15-year struggle. However, it must be noted that, at the very inception of its battle, the group did briefly resort to violence. The Zapatistas launched themselves onto front pages all around the world when, on January 1, 1994, they seized by force of arms four towns in their home state of Chiapas, at the same time gaining control of one of the state's most important cities, San Cristóbal (Bob, 2001, p. 321). However, within two weeks the federal government, feeling pressure from both within and outside the country, declared a cease-fire. The EZLN honored this fully and

> the peace remained unbroken until February 1995, when the Mexican Army, at the command of newly elected President Ernesto Zedillo, moved to retake areas under Zapatista control. One soldier was killed in what the army described as a firefight, but otherwise the Zapatistas maintained their cease-fire (Foley, 1999, p. 7).

A similar exchange took place in 1998 for much the same reasons (Foley, 1999, p. 3) but, unless they have been assaulted directly by the army in their own communities, the Zapatistas have shown themselves to be committed to nonviolent forms of struggle.

One of the tactics for which the EZLN has grown most famous is its effective use of what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) call the *boomerang effect*, namely circumnavigating direct confrontation with their nation's government and instead reaching out to international actors (such as NGOs, IGOs and foreign governments) and appealing for them to exert pressure on the Mexican state from the outside. (The reasons they have been successful at this, such as their vocal opposition to NAFTA and their

indigenous identity, will be explored in more detail in the next section). What is important to note here is that the EZLN has "sought active participation from domestic and global civil society" (Bob, 2001, p. 325) as one of its principle tactics in this conflict, a technique that Sharp (1970) would classify as a form of *nonviolent persuasion*.

When first given the opportunity, the EZLN was very open to participating in direct negotiations with the Mexican government. Negotiations are primarily a venue for the contentious tactic Pruitt and Kim call *persuasive argumentation* (2004, pp. 68-69). The Zapatista negotiators were quite effective at this task, but their insistence that all decisions be made by consensus among the entire Zapatista community slowed the process and proved frustrating to the government representatives. Nevertheless, two years of sporadic negotiations resulted in the 1996 'San Andrés Accords' on indigenous rights which, much to the dismay of the EZLN, was neither approved nor implemented by the government until the election of Vicente Fox in 2000, and even then in a much diluted form (Speed, 2007, pp. 167-169).

Perhaps one of the most unique tactics employed by the EZLN throughout this conflict has been their establishment of structures of autonomous governance which parallel the institutions of the officially recognized municipal governments in the regions where they live. The Zapatista government, referred to as the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* or the 'Good Governance Councils,' are organized by and govern over communities where the Zapatistas live; they exist without state recognition and make and effect policy decisions of their own (Speed, 2007, pp. 163-164). "We the Zapatistas," declared EZLN spokesman Subcomandante Marcos, "want to *exercise power*, not take it." This radical

tactic, thus, involves not the overthrow of existing political institutions, but rather the construction of new, parallel ones that can better serve the needs of the poor and indigenous people of Chiapas. The EZLN took matters into its own hands and challenged the government "by unilaterally exercising their right to autonomy and self-determination – expressed as the capacity to control and affect their daily lives" (Speed, 2007, pp. 183). This form of autonomous governance is civil disobedience, a form of *nonviolent noncooperation*, taken to a degree rarely seen before. It has helped make the Zapatistas role models for a new generation of rebels everywhere.

EPR

In stark contrast to the EZLN, the EPR's tactics have been almost exclusively violent, and remarkably so. In 1996, Mexican Attorney General Eduardo Medina was quoted describing the EPR as "a relatively small group, but certainly with a violent attitude" (Sanchez, 2007). In the first few years of its existence, beginning with its self-proclamation in 1996, the EPR favored low-intensity guerilla warfare, particularly strategic assaults on police and military installations. One estimate of the groups' attacks, published in 1999, said that "to date, the EPR has carried out at least 44 attacks in seven states and Mexico City, with an official tally of 57 soldiers and police killed and twice that number wounded" (Foley, 1999, p. 10).

During the late 1990s and until about 2005, the EPR kept a relatively low profile and suspended most of its armed activities. However, the group reemerged dramatically during the 2006 Oaxaca crisis, this time using bombs as its preferred weapon. Since then

the group has targeted a variety of economic and political targets in Guerrero and elsewhere, including banks, political headquarters, department stores, and most notably, gas and oil pipelines. The first of these attacks occurred in November 2006, in Mexico City, and it had a very high profile target: the headquarters of the PRI party (Sanchez, 2007). Several banks were also bombed (Pipeline Bombs, 2007). Then, in mid-2007, an even larger wave of bombings occurred. In July, the EPR struck the national petroleum company, PEMEX, for the first time by bombing pipelines in the center of the country (Reyes, 2007a). In August a department store was bombed in Oaxaca and immediately authorities pointed their fingers at the EPR (Reyes, 2007c). Finally, on September 10th, no fewer than six PEMEX natural gas pipelines were bombed simultaneously in and around the state of Veracruz (Pipeline Bombs, 2007). Surprisingly, no fatalities were reported in any of these attacks, but the economic impact of the pipeline bombings was immense, affecting hundreds of businesses. Moreover, a more recent attack on police headquarters in Mexico City (which may or may not have been the work of the EPR) left one person dead (Martinez & Freebairn, 2008).

These assaults and bombings, which have become the trademarks of the Ejército Popular Revolucionario, would, without a doubt, be classified under any rubric as violent tactics. In between delivering blows like these, the EPR continues to use threats of new attacks (another type of contentious tactic described by Pruitt and Kim) in attempts to get government officials to meet their demands. It is beyond question that the EPR is the most violent group profiled in this study.

APPO

The 2006 Oaxaca crisis began in May with a rather ordinary strike by section 22 of Mexico's National Union of Education Workers. Public school teachers were striking both for higher pay and for an increase in resources for students, such as school lunches, uniforms, and school materials (Reyes, 2006). A strike like this had been an annual occurrence for 25 years in Oaxaca, and it normally ended peacefully with some concessions to the teachers. This time, however, the situation exploded when Oaxaca's governor Ulises Ruíz sent police in to forcefully break up the strike in the city's central square, allegedly resulting in as many as four deaths (Roig-Franza, 2006). This decision caused an escalation in the conflict, the amassing of immense popular support behind the teachers, the establishment of the APPO, and ultimately the decision to move from a strike (an established form of *nonviolent noncooperation*) to other contentious tactics.

The APPO, which quickly absorbed representatives of not only the teachers' union but also indigenous groups, peasant farmers, women's organizations and other labor unions (Reyes, 2006), had so much popular support after the aggressive breakup of the teachers' strike that they were capable of mounting numerous 'mega-marches' or mass protests in the city. These marches, a form of *nonviolent protest* according to Sharp's (1970) tactical scheme, had a very high profile owing to the hundreds of thousands of participants (Reyes, 2006). The mega-march became one of the APPO's most popular tactics throughout 2006 and 2007.

Perhaps even more popular, however, were the group's various forms of what Sharp calls *nonviolent intervention*, particularly forms of physical obstruction and

occupation. For example, the APPO became well known for blockading key public buildings and, more aggressive still, for seizing and occupying radio stations from which they transmitted messages to their supporters (Reyes, 2006). One of the most prominent images of the Oaxaca crisis were the barricades that protestors built along streets and in corners of the city which they had occupied, including the Zócalo, or central square. These served both to protect them and to keep other possible occupants, like city authorities, out.

Such physical forms of obstruction and occupation may be considered by some to be forms of violence; at the very least they verge on violence. However, in its long-running confrontation with state and federal forces, the APPO did resort to direct violence often enough. The group lost sympathy from many supporters when it damaged property in the historic city, spray-painting messages like "the governor is a murderer" on pristine buildings (Grillo, 2006), and burning cars and even buildings (Romero, 2006). When confronted directly by police, the APPO also frequently moved from nonviolence to violence quickly, fighting back with poles, rocks, and even Molotov cocktails (Stevenson, 2006a; Reyes, 2007b). Although this physical violence was usually defensive, it was violence nonetheless.

Why these three groups, facing similar inequalities and carrying similar grievances, have used such radically different tactics in their struggles is the key puzzle of this study. I turn next to an attempt to explain some of that variation.

Intervening Variables: Political Opportunities and Constraints, Identity and Ideology

Referring once more to Figure 2.3, the Model of the Emergence of Civil Conflict, let us turn next to the middle section, the boxes that fall under the heading 'intervening variables.' This segment of the model is meant to illustrate a complex interaction among two sets of variables: 1) political opportunities and constraints and 2) social identity and ideology. I turn now to discussing the mechanics of this interaction in its variety of forms before describing and analyzing how this interaction affected the outcome, particularly forms of contention and levels of violence, in each of the three cases we are considering.

Framing, Pitching and Matching: Creating Opportunity by Modifying Identity

Perhaps the strongest argument I will make in this thesis is that the choice of contentious tactics in this conflict, and therefore the potential for violence – while rooted in the common structural violence, inequality, and basic human needs deprivation experienced by all the militants of southern Mexico – is moderated and ultimately determined by a complex relationship between the *political opportunities and constraints* faced by each group and their unique *social identity and ideology*.

Both structural dimensions (political opportunities and constraints) and attitudinal dimensions (identities and ideologies) of a conflict can, independently, either encourage or discourage particular forms of contention, including violence. Johan Galtung (1964) describes clearly how each of these variables can provoke violence. Violence is, he argues, "unlikely to occur unless 1) other means of equilibration towards a complete

topdog configuration have been tried" by a militant group, meaning that they have

attempted other less aggressive forms of contention – with a more equitable society as the

goal – to no effect "and 2) the culture [of the group] has some practice in violent

aggression" (p. 99). In this formulation Galtung is essentially saying that both 1) lack of

political opportunities for redress of grievances and 2) an identity and ideology that

typically value violence as an effective tool are conditions that encourage a group to use

violence. It would serve reason, then, that the opposite of these propositions will also

hold true, and that either a more responsive social structure or an identity/ideology that

values nonviolence would facilitate the use of nonviolent tactics.

Thus, Galtung's observation points us toward two main arguments relating these

variables to the use of violence:

1. Political opportunities and constraints can discourage or encourage violence
   according to the options for contentious action they promote or foreclose.
2. A group's own identity and ideology can make their use of violence more or less
   likely depending upon whether or not they place a high value on violence or
   include a strong belief in its efficacy as a tactic in conflict.

Determining from these propositions the best place to put one's effort in order to

deter violence is not simple. Shaping political opportunities and constraints, unless you

are the state, is no easy matter. It requires control over the alteration of social structures

which, most often, is what militant groups desire to begin with. If they had it already to

use in pursuit of such a goal their struggle would be unnecessary. Therefore, if altering

the political opportunity structure directly is not an available option, it is identity and

ideology which must be made to bend if violence is to be prevented. Fortunately, this is

possible. While social structure may be difficult to alter, identities and ideologies are

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flexible because they are socially constructed. A consciousness of this fact allows group leaders to proactively shape, mold, and create modified or entirely new identities. This can create new political opportunities in the form of new or additional support from outside sources other than the government which an insurgent group opposes, providing in turn new tactical alternatives to violence.

This is the third main argument that can be made about the effects of these variables on the production or prevention of violence:

3. If rebel leadership operates in an instrumental, social-constructivist mode – recognizing the inherent flexibility of their group's identity and ideology – these can be shaped according to existing opportunities and constraints in order to take the most advantage of conditions as they stand.

Several renowned scholars describe, in independent but parallel ways, this process of altering social identities and ideologies and using them instrumentally in order to win support for a group's cause, creating new opportunities and new avenues for nonviolent tactics in their struggle. Sidney Tarrow (1998), for instance, calls the process *framing contention* and describes it as a necessary task in the construction of effective collective action and social movements. "'Natural,' or inherited, identities are often the basis of aggregation in social movements," Tarrow writes, "but movements struggle to change the meaning of these identities" and *frame* them in ways which are meaningful to and resonant with the identity group to whom they are appealing for help (1998, p. 119). According to Tarrow, in order to generate greater support for their cause, "movements do passionate 'framing work'" (p. 21) which involves identifying and using *symbols*. "Out of a cultural reservoir of possible symbols," he adds, "movement entrepreneurs choose those that they hope will mediate among the cultural understandings of the groups they

wish to appeal to, their own beliefs and aspirations, and their situations of struggle" (p. 109).

This description of how challenger groups modify and present their identity to gain support is mirrored by that of Stuart J. Kaufman who brings what he calls a *symbolic politics* approach to understanding conflict, particularly ethnic wars. Symbolic politics is the process of using potent symbols to attract support from others who may also find them meaningful. The important point that Kaufman (2001) emphasizes is that this process of framing one's identity in terms of certain attractive symbolic attributes works because it affects the *emotions* of potential supporters instead of simply appealing to cold calculations of interest. "For some kinds of decisions," he argues, "people are most likely to base their decisions on emotion. The core assumption of symbolic choice theory is therefore: *people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked*" (p. 28). Therefore, identifying one's own group with the most attractive and affecting symbols will determine the level of support it receives.

Clifford Bob also discusses the important impact of modifying identity and ideology in creating new political opportunities in the form of third-party support. In his seminal article "Marketing Rebellion: Insurgent Groups, International Media, and NGO Support" (2001), Bob illuminates the intricacies of a particular type of political opportunity, Keck and Sikkink's (1998) 'boomerang effect' which we described in the previous section. He is interested in how and why transnational NGOs decide to put their support behind certain 'contender groups' and not others. "While the pursuit of transnational support is common," he writes, "gaining it is neither easy nor automatic" (p.

312) and in fact requires that the contender group fashion an identity and ideology which will be acceptable and attractive to the target audience of transnational NGOs. This requires what Bob calls *pitching* (p. 313), or raising awareness of the group's cause, as well as *matching*, or finding ways to make the group's issues, goals, and tactics match up with those of their potential supporters (pp. 314-315). This is the same process of *framing* described by Tarrow, but with a different name. In short, "local movements enhance their likelihood of gaining transnational support," Bob argues, "by conforming their conflicts, goals, and identities to a limited set of internationally understandable conflict frames" (p. 328). This is how identity and ideology, if flexibly modified and used, can help create new political opportunities.

Success in conflict, as Michael Lipsky puts it, requires "activating third parties whose involvement in a conflict can change the balance of power between the main contestants" (Lipsky, 1968, p. 1153), and in order to do this one must use frames that resonate with those third parties. One must find ways to transform his group's identity and ideology so that they are consistent with and attractive to those potential supporters. In short, one must 'pitch and match' their worldview, goals, values and *tactics* to those of likely outside adherents in order to take advantage of the great political opportunity their support presents. Less violent tactics may be demanded by these supporters, but in any case additional political opportunities open up additional avenues for contention and additional alternatives to that most escalated form of contentious tactic, violence.

Let us look now at our three cases of conflict in southern Mexico in order to see how this interaction between political opportunities and constraints and the militant

groups' own identities and ideologies influenced, in very distinct ways, the production of lesser or greater levels of violence.

Chiapas: The Zapatista Army of National Liberation

As described in the previous section of this chapter, the Zapatistas launched their campaign against the Mexican government in a violent way, taking over several municipalities by force of arms. Violent tactics like this made sense for the EZLN at the time because they were in line with their identity as an *ejército* (army). Armed action is characteristic of almost all revolutionary groups. However, soon the Zapatistas found themselves facing a very tangible political constraint: the overwhelming military might of the Mexican army. This constraint made continued direct engagement infeasible or, at the very least, highly costly, and the EZLN was forced to look for other alternatives.

These alternatives came primarily in the form of support from a transnational community of NGOs and civil society groups sympathetic to other key features of the Zapatistas' identity and ideology. As described by Bob (2001), they found that political opportunities existed for them outside of their country of origin, and began working on generating a 'boomerang effect,' securing the support of IGOs and NGOs outside of Mexico. They noted that they were particularly attractive to two groups. First, they saw that framing themselves "as a movement of Mexico's oppressed Indians…had great international resonance" among advocates of indigenous rights who pictured them as the vanguard of a powerful local indigenous movement (Bob, 2001, p. 325). Second, their crusade against NAFTA was resonant with a growing number of people the world over

concerned about economic globalization. "The Zapatistas' decision to attack on NAFTA's implementation date," writes Bob, "provided an international link for what might otherwise have been seen as a local or at most national conflict" (2001, p. 324). In brief, at the same time that it saw it was no match for the weapons of the Mexican army, the EZLN realized that it could take advantage of a countervailing political opportunity: the support of transnational organizations. This, however, required reframing its identity and ideology. Therefore, in order to maximize their opportunity, the Zapatistas emphasized the appealing features of their identity just mentioned and downplayed their military side.

A critical part of the Zapatista's 'matching' to the IGO/NGO world was to use nonviolence. Once they decided to avail themselves of the political opportunity presented by support from these organizations, the notion of continuing to use violence as a tactic became unthinkable for the EZLN because it would have been distasteful to their new and vital source of support. As Bob writes, once the shooting stopped and international support began to pour in for them, "with the ceasefire and continuing stalemate in Chiapas, the Zapatistas recognized the advantage of maintaining a nonviolent stance relative to the government" (2001, p. 326). Instead of using force they pursued a perfectly acceptable alternative tactic which was made possible by the next emerging political opportunity, a call on the part of the government for negotiations. When those broke down and it became more evident that the Mexican government didn't intend to make good on what it promised in the process, the Zapatistas moved on to constructing their 'good governance councils,' another nonviolent form of resistance, but

they refused to go back to violence, knowing full well it would cost them the international support they thrive upon. The Zapatista 'Army' of National Liberation now bears the identity of a nonviolent rebel group, primarily because this framing has opened up powerful opportunities for them.

In a further metamorphosis that deserves a brief mention here, recently the EZLN seems to be altering its identity once again as part of its 'Other Campaign', beginning to resemble more and more something akin to a political party. It can be speculated that, perhaps, this new modulation of identity may be in order to take advantage of a current political opportunity, the growing consolidation of a true multi-party political system in Mexico. In this structural environment having at least some of the features of a political party may be useful for the EZLN, and again we see how opportunities affect identity, and vice versa, as well as how they encourage some contentious tactics (participation in elections) while discouraging others (violence.)

Guerrero: The Popular Revolutionary Army

With its violent tactics, the EPR is a stunning counterpoint to the EZLN. One of the most immediately recognizable features of the EPR is its hardcore Marxist-Leninist ideology and identity, which has been strong since its inception. This is primarily due to its growth out of a network of older and more established Communist rebel groups. This 'base identity,' if you will, helped to immediately determine the group's tactics, validating some (including violence) while eliminating others. Armed struggle and revolution are viewed in traditional Marxist-Leninist thought as obligatory tasks in the

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movement toward a more just and equitable society. It is no surprise, then, that, being cast in this mold, the EPR's basic understanding of violence was as the best and most immediate path toward the redress of grievances. Clearly their identity and ideology helped determine their tactics.

It must be noted here, however, that, no matter what kind of fundamentalist ideology a group ascribes to, it does not inevitably bind that group hard and fast to a certain set of contentious tactics prescribed by their worldview. Any social identity or worldview can be transformed. The key variables determining whether such a transformation will take place are 1) whether the group assumes a primordialist or a constructivist view of their identity and 2) whether or not there are leaders present to help define the new limits of the group's identity and ideology. In sum, transformation depends upon a willingness and a capacity for change.

However, sometimes even if a group is *willing* to modify its identity to make itself more attractive to outside support, it may make mistakes which alienate potential supporters early on and which thus foreclose political opportunities. Under these circumstances attempting a transformation seems futile. In the case of the EPR, for example, attempts to take advantage of opportunities which might have made nonviolent tactics more feasible repeatedly failed. In particular, the group took some steps that alienated important potential supporters.

For instance, when the EPR first announced its existence, it did so by *disrupting* a memorial service for 17 slain Guerrero campesinos which was not planned by them – it was planned by the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), the only major left-leaning

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political party in the country. With this act "the EPR alienated Mexico's left-wing opposition party…whose leader, Cauhetemoc Cárdenas, had presided over the march. After, Cárdenas condemned the EPR as a 'grotesque pantomime'" (Bob, 2001, p. 324.) The EPR similarly alienated the group that should have been their closest counterpart, the EZLN, principally be insisting on violent tactics. Although the two groups shared grievances and goals, the EZLN wisely determined that by associating with the EPR they might come to be seen as violent by extension. This would have seriously undermined their aforementioned attempts to connect with international civil society.

The support of these groups, had the EPR been successful in winning it, might have been a political opportunity that could have opened up the possibility of using different, less violent tactics. However, the EPR was not successful in its bid to link with outside supporters, and they continued to use violence. Ironically, it was their initial use of violence which provoked some of their alienation, leading to an increased dependence on violent tactics.

One additional point of interest should be discussed here, namely the EPR's resurgence during the 2006 Oaxaca crisis. As already mentioned, the EPR went into a period of near dormancy during the late 1990s and early part of the 2000s. However, the instability and popular displeasure with the government which erupted in Oaxaca in 2006 seemed to provide a new political opportunity for the EPR to gain supporters. They attempted to do this with high profile violent acts, including bombing the PRI headquarters as detailed in the previous section. Their strategy was to present themselves as the vanguard of the emerging movement in Oaxaca, a pre-established organization

with similar ideals and capable of spectacular acts. The impact of this attempt to 'pitch and match' to the dissatisfied people of Oaxaca was inconclusive. Some constituents of the newly formed APPO seemed to welcome the EPR's violent support, while others found it distasteful. This fact points out an interesting lack of cohesiveness on the part of the APPO (which I discuss more in the next segment.) What is worth noting here, however, is how a new political opportunity encouraged renewed collective action on the part of the EPR.

Oaxaca: The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca

The Oaxaca conflict began innocently enough with a *strike* by the local teachers' union. This tactic made perfect sense for the teachers since a strike is a common and accepted tactic practiced by unions and part of their known repertoire of contention. In fact, as mentioned in the previous section, strikes had been used by the group every year for 25 years, and they had always been at least partially successful in helping the teachers to achieve some of their goals nonviolently. Therefore, as we have also seen in the last two cases, the contending group's 'base identity' – in this case as a union – determined to a great extent the tactics it chose in the earliest phase of its struggle.

However, in 2006 this tactic was met by uncharacteristically and alarmingly aggressive political constraints. State police violently broke the strike up, injuring people, and refusing to negotiate. Once the shock of this response dissipated, it was evident to those involved that the political opportunity structure in Oaxaca had changed and

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therefore different tactics would need to be employed if the teachers, and others with grievances, were to have any success in confronting the government.

At the same time that they were impacting tactics, the constraints in this case were also contributing to the generation of a new identity. The particularly harsh repression undertaken by the government created great sympathy for the teachers, and numerous other sectors of society (including other unions, indigenous groups, women's groups, youth, anarchists, etc.) began backing them. Eventually all of these coalesced into a new group with a different identity, the APPO, which effectively supplanted the teacher's union as the primary contender in the conflict. Thus, political constraints in this case helped define a new identity group.

However, during the crisis period in mid and late 2006 the APPO never seemed to fully integrate its constituent parts and consolidate a fully unified identity. This had consequences for the tactics the group used. Each component group brought different repertoires of contention into play and, thus, the tactical approach of the APPO was varied and, to a large extent, incoherent. People built barricades and did nonviolent occupation of buildings, while at the same time meeting police on the streets with weapons in hand. They attempted to reach out, as the EZLN had done, to international organizations while defacing invaluable historic buildings with rhetoric in the form of graffiti. In short, an incoherent identity led to the use of an incoherent set of contentious tactics in the case of the APPO in Oaxaca, and it remains to be seen whether or not the organization will commit fully to either a violent or a nonviolent path.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions: What was learned?

In the final analysis, the evidence presented in this thesis gives strong support to the four hypotheses tested. First of all, the data demonstrates that there is a shared set of structural inequalities facing the residents of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero in the economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres. In all of these areas the inhabitants of southern Mexico are disadvantaged with respect to the rest of the country. Due to this common experience of deprivation, the militant groups which have formed to struggle on behalf of this population share a set of grievances and goals related to these structural inequalities. Although they pursue these goals, and redress of their grievances, in different ways – particularly when it comes to the amount of violence they have chosen to use – the fact that they are all fighting for the same things means that they are, fundamentally speaking, all part of the same conflict. This is important because, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the resistance of the EZLN in Chiapas, the APPO in Oaxaca, and the EPR in Guerrero have until now typically been analyzed as distinct phenomena. This study shows that there is value in re-conceptualizing all of these uprisings as episodes or manifestations of one overarching conflict, instead of as unrelated events. This reconsideration may offer us an opportunity to imagine and design more holistic responses to the conflict at large.

On the other hand, the findings of this thesis also make it evident that three militant groups emerging from the same social milieu and conflict situation can take on radically different identities and adopt very different tactics. This study asked the question: if groups live with the same structural violence and grievances, what additional factors help determine which tactics (violent or nonviolent) they will use? The tentative response offered here has been that tactics are determined in large part by complex interactions between the identities and ideologies of those groups and the shifting landscape of political opportunities and constraints that faces them. It should be noted that the evidence presented in each of the three cases under scrutiny in this study is anecdotal, and that much work remains in order to fine tune methodologies which will allow us to further unravel and articulate the interplay among these variables. Only with this additional theorizing and research can the middle portion of Figure 2.3, be developed into less of a theoretical 'black box' and more of a predictive tool.

Recommendations: Paths toward Conflict Resolution

When envisioning the steps which can be taken in order to resolve and transform the conflict being suffered in southern Mexico, it may be useful to consider what can be done by three principle sets of actors. These are:

1. the three contender groups (the EZLN, EPR, and APPO),
2. the Mexican government, and
3. third parties, including
   a. conflict resolution professionals
   b. non-governmental organizations
   c. inter-governmental organizations, and
   d. foreign governments, particularly the United States.

The following recommendations focus on the last of these three sets of actors because they are the most likely audience for a study like this one, and because they also have the potential to influence the warring parties within Mexico to adopt more constructive forms of behavior. The suggestions offered below can roughly be divided into two groups. The first three have to do with the empowerment of contender groups and providing them with alternatives to violence. The last three concern efforts to address the profound structural violence which exists in the region. My recommendations for paths toward conflict resolution in southern Mexico are as follows:

1. *Proactively encourage links with nonviolent civil society*

The three groups profiled in this study are seeking social change, and have chosen contentious forms of interaction because they do not have existing channels or sufficient power to effectively appeal for redress of their grievances. As the experience of the Zapatistas illustrates, international civil society organizations can be potent alternative sources of power and influence, but typically they support values of nonviolence (though not necessarily non-confrontation.) If organizations like this offer help and support, with the condition of the use of nonviolent tactics, rebel groups may prove very willing to give up aggression in exchange for such valuable assistance.

2. *Promote the use of international human rights mechanisms*

While individual states (e.g. Mexico) may be lacking in effective institutions for the protection of human rights, several major international organizations provide legal channels through which individuals or groups from member nations may file reports or claims concerning human rights violations. These organizations include the Organization

of American States and the International Labor Organization, both of which include Mexico as a party to their agreements. Encouraging the contender groups of southern Mexico to go this route – if encouragement is paired with legal advice and training – would make possible an additional form of nonviolent contention.

3. *Provide direct training in conflict resolution, diplomacy, and negotiation*

If we hope for a substantive nonviolent resolution to this conflict, it seems clear that at some point a new agreement or contract between the Mexican government and the south's militant groups – whether it be in the form of a new constitutions or less ambitious documents – will need to be negotiated. In order for such a process to work properly and have a fair outcome, the more disadvantaged players in the conflict may need specialized training on how to negotiate diplomatically, and on how to sit down with their enemies in a cooperative rather than an adversarial spirit. Conflict resolution specialists could play a significant role in this process by providing formal training directly to these groups.

4. *Rethink neoliberal economic policies*

When an agreement like the one just mentioned is finally hammered out, it is obvious that certain economic, political, and social realities will need to change in order to provide for the basic human needs of all Mexicans. As they are currently implemented, NAFTA and associated neoliberal policies manifestly have numerous deleterious effects in southern Mexico. While I am not suggesting that it is necessary to jettison NAFTA completely – clearly it would be a political impossibility – it does seem necessary to rethink and perhaps modify economic policies in order to make them more sensitive to

human needs, and to ameliorate suffering. By making human security a priority in developing economic policy, national security will also be bolstered.

5. *Insist on comprehensive political reform*

However, while significant economic reform may go a long way toward providing relief and equality to the residents of southern Mexico, it will not be sufficient by itself to create peace. As was amply illustrated in Chapter 4 of this thesis, people in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero are fed-up with corrupt politics and want an opportunity to have a real voice in the politics which affects their daily lives. A new constitution may not be drafted, and the fundamental institutions of the state may not be overhauled, but one thing is clear: the transition from the PRI-centric one-party dictatorship of last century to a true multi-party democracy is incomplete, and needs to be moved forward in order to create positive peace in Mexico.

6. *Reconsider the Merida Initiative*

One of the greatest threats to the development of peaceful intra-state relations in Mexico today is narco-trafficking and, perhaps even worse, the federal government's heavy-handed military strategy for fighting it. As discussed at several points in this thesis, the militarization of Mexico in order to prosecute a 'war on drugs' is a potential Pandora's box of human rights abuses. Already the PFP, created to fight drug trafficking, has been applied to put down domestic protests. A massive influx of U.S. money and material, as proposed in the *Merida Initiative* recently passed by the U.S. congress, could easily lead to a dramatic escalation of conflict in Mexico. The U.S. government should think twice about whether or not we want to 'invest' in a battle like this which could

easily result in a significant loss of civil liberties in the country, and turn our neighbor into another Colombia.

In sum, concerned third parties – whether they are politicians, conflict resolution specialists, international civil servants, or ordinary citizens – should encourage the parties to this ongoing conflict to adopt a deeper, more sophisticated, and longer-term view of conflict resolution in Mexico. Conflict resolution cannot take place on the level of the intervening variables discussed in this study, through processes of strategically outmaneuvering one's adversaries in terms of political opportunities and constraints. Instead, any successful conflict resolution initiative must go back to the roots of the problem, ultimately addressing the structural primary variables of social inequality and basic human needs deprivation. This requires all parties involved to engage with one another, to think creatively about what a new society – which could provide for the needs of all its members – would look like. It is my sincere hope that, together, concerned people around the world can help encourage such a movement toward peace in southern Mexico.

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