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**CULTURE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY:
UNDERSTANDING THE ZAPATISTA NATIONAL
LIBERATION ARMY**

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1993

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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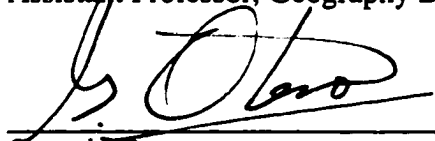
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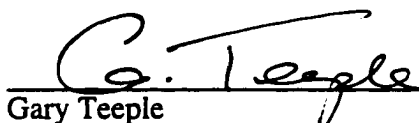


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Abstract

On January 1, 1994, thousands of Mayan peasants launched an armed uprising in Chiapas, Mexico. The insurgents called themselves the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and this was their first public act after having prepared underground for at least 10 years. While some analysts discarded the uprising as the last Central American revolution, it soon became apparent that the movement represented a significant departure from the history of guerrilla struggle in Latin America. This thesis presents the EZLN as a social movement that, instead of seeking inclusion into the system of formal politics, challenges traditional politics by offering new ways of organizing social life and of viewing the world.

Recent theorizing on social movements in Latin America has emphasized culture as an area that has been overlooked for too long. Social movement theorists have criticized the “structural bias” that has dominated interpretations of rebellion and protest. It is argued that culture provides an important link between socioeconomic structures and collective action. Furthermore, contemporary social movements are argued to represent a discontinuity with past movements and aim at creating new political spaces within civil society rather than petitioning the state directly through corporatist channels. The use of culture by these movements as a strategic weapon is preferred over operating within the political realm.

In contrast to contemporary social movement theorizing, much of the research on the Zapatista uprising has focused on the political and economic structures that provided the context for the movement’s emergence. This research thus focuses on the terrain of culture. It examines how cultural antagonisms, activist subcultures and master frameworks helped provide linkage from structure to action and how the EZLN has strategically carried out expressive actions on the level of culture to advance its project. I argue in this thesis that analyzing socioeconomic structures remains fundamental for understanding a movement’s emergence. Nevertheless, researching cultural contexts deepens this understanding and provides a linkage between socioeconomic structures and collective action.

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My relationship with Global Exchange allowed me to extend my stay in Mexico and achieve a deeper understanding of the situation, for that I am very grateful. Most importantly, by leading international delegations focused on human rights and fair trade, I was able inspire others to take an interest and become involved. Thanks also to Global Exchange for supporting my trip to Guadalajara to present a paper at the Latin American Studies Association conference. My appreciation goes to the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) for providing me with a generous research grant to work in the field and to the SFU Dean of Graduate Studies office for a travel award that allowed me to present my initial research ideas at the 1994 Conference of the Canadian Association of Mexican Studies in Calgary, Alberta.

Lastly, my deep gratitude goes to the many people of Chiapas, who took time out while making a revolution to speak personally to me about their hopes and beliefs, especially the EZLN members from Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar, "Sacamchen de los Pobres" and the community of El Prado Pacayal, Ocosingo. This thesis is dedicated to them and their struggle for democracy, justice and freedom.

Contents

1 The Zapatista Uprising: A Research Agenda	..... 1
With the Zapatistas	..... 5
The Initial Events	..... 8
Reactions to the EZLN Uprising	..... 14
A Theoretical Approach to Understanding the EZLN	..... 19
Structure of Thesis	..... 29
 2 The Struggle for Cultural Identity: A History of Resistance	 32
The Conquest and Construction of “the Other”	..... 34
Colonization and Resistance in Chiapas	..... 37
Independence, Revolution and Neo-Colonialism in Chiapas	..... 44
Exodus to the Promised Land	..... 49
The Ethnic Panorama	..... 55
 3 Activist Subcultures and Regional Organizing: Dialogical Influences	 60
Shifting Identities	..... 63
The Church and Consciousness Raising	..... 67
Indian-Peasant Organizing	..... 72
The Formation of the EZLN	..... 79
 4 Forming a Social Movement: Zapatista Expressions	 89
The EZLN as a Social Movement	..... 91
Winning Civil Society	..... 95
- Relations with Government: Peace Talks	..... 100
- Relations with Civil Society: Spectacle Events, Forums and Encounters	..... 104
- Relations with the Media: The War of Words	..... 112
Government Response: Low-Intensity Warfare	..... 113

5 Constructing Zapatismo: Master Protest Frames	.....	117
New Times	.....	118
Emiliano Zapata and Peasant Struggle	.....	122
Indigenous Resistance	.....	124
National Liberation Movements	.....	127
The Women's Struggle	.....	128
The Environment and Human Rights	.....	132
The EZLN and a New Internationalism	.....	135
6 Conclusions: Bringing in Culture	.....	139
Appendices		
Appendix 1: Photographs	.....	145
Appendix 2: Research Schedule	.....	148
Appendix 3: Chronology of the Chiapas Peace Process	.....	150
Appendix 4: EZLN - Government Peace Talk Agenda	.....	160
Appendix 5: Maps		
Chiapas in Mexico	.....	161
Important towns and EZLN centres of resistance in Chiapas	.....	162
Regions in Chiapas related to the conflict and the EZLN	.....	163
Bibliography	.....	164

The Zapatista Uprising: A Research Agenda

"Taking over San Cristóbal was a poem"
Subcomandante Marcos, EZLN

The Zapatista uprising is often thought of as a spontaneous event when hundreds of Mayan peasant rebels released decades of frustration with the rebel cry "*Ya Basta*" (Enough is enough!). This picture, however, does not capture the conscious preparation and long-term strategic organizing that preceded the decision to revolt. This thesis seeks to interpret the emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) over its full trajectory: from its incipient stages as a small group of mestizo intellectuals, constructing a guerrilla army in the eastern jungles of Chiapas, to its movement-building actions after 1994.

During the EZLN's initial years, organizers engaged in recruiting and training thousands of Indian peasants. EZLN membership grew slowly and was facilitated by the work of pre-movement organizations and activist subcultures, present in eastern Chiapas since at least the 1960s. By 1994, the EZLN's structure and original goals had profoundly changed due to the new post-Communist international context and through a syncretic mix of its original ideological principles with the culture of its Indian membership.

The EZLN began its formal transformation from a guerrilla army to a social movement when a cease-fire was called 12 days after the uprising. Having trained 10 years to fight as a rebel army, it soon found itself in peace negotiations with the Mexican government, putting its weapons to the side to become a highly creative and innovative social movement. The EZLN used the media as its weapon, expressing through its actions widely understood “master protest frames,” that included indigenous resistance, women’s rights and national liberation. This dissemination of shared meaning gave the movement’s demands a high degree cultural resonance. In the days following the uprising, a broad array of sympathetic citizens and organizations of civil society began to informally incorporate themselves into the Zapatista movement.

I went to Chiapas trying to understand, characterize and explain the EZLN uprising and the social movement that had developed around its demands. Much research had been published on the uprising before I arrived and continued to be produced while I was in the field. Yet none of the scholarship seemed to completely explain what I was experiencing as a close observer from April 1995 to July 1997.

As a social phenomenon, the Zapatista movement incorporated distinct historical traditions and was interpreted within various social science categories. The task of choosing my own theory and methodology was perplexing. The first studies of the EZLN uprising focused on the political and economic structures that provided the context for the movement’s emergence. Most importantly, these studies showed how the movement had arisen in response to such factors as heightened political repression, falling international coffee prices (the region’s chief export) and the displacement of subsistence production by the expansion of cattle grazing land (Harvey 1994; Otero, Scott, Gilbreth 1997).

My initial research also sought to determine the causes of the EZLN uprising. I found that little attention had been given to the realm of culture. By culture I mean both material objects and historically derived ideas and symbols that specifically relate to questions of identity construction and the building of social movements. How were thousands of Indian peasants inspired to rebel against the Mexican state, known for its ability to coopt protest? How were thousands of others inspired to identify themselves with the Zapatista struggle after the uprising? How did the uprising and the framing of the Zapatista movement help to shape new identities and forms of struggle? Examining cultural factors considered as both products of action and elements that condition further action, helps answer these questions.

The thesis examines the ways in which culture--the social construction of new collective identities--played a role in the emergence of the uprising, how a specific movement culture was developed after 1994 and how the movement impacted culture through its multiple forms of expression. I argue that interpreting these cultural factors contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the roots of the uprising and adds to political and economic analyses.

Examining the history of conquest and rebellion in Chiapas is necessary to understanding how the native inhabitants of the land became "the Other." Moreover, history helps to explain why many indigenous people in Chiapas are re-asserting their customs and traditions, especially as a response to modernizing reforms that threaten their ability to subsist.

The EZLN emerged within a rich context of liberation theology, independent peasant movements and Maoist organizing. In contrast to the literature on peasant

rebellions, I see external leadership not as unilateral but rather in a dialogical relationship where outside organizers were influenced mutually by their relationship with indigenous communities.

I specifically interpret the EZLN as a social movement within the literature that deals with questions of culture and identity. While there is a long tradition of scholarly theorizing about Latin American revolutions, peasant rebellions and the emergence of guerrilla armies, I argue that the EZLN is best understood as a social movement. By this I mean a group of individuals, bound by a collective identity, engaging in social action and the construction of meanings, within the context of an underlying project aimed at changing key relations of power in society. The purpose of this study is to see the Zapatista movement within the literature that analyzes social movements “not as a ‘thing’ or an integrated whole, nor the result of the characteristics of their social contexts, but as social processes that emerge and develop, though in periods with different degrees of visibility” (Laraña et al 1994: 217). Thus, within this conception the emergence of social movements is neither predetermined nor completely self-willed, and the role of culture is crucial, mediating between structures and collective action (Eyerman and Jamison 1989). Recent scholarship has made this interpretation of social movements a key focus for collective protest in the Latin American context (see Escobar and Alvarez eds. 1992).

The realm of culture is particularly important when examining how the EZLN adapted culturally resonant master protest frames in the construction of new collective and individual identities. The guiding ideas and principles behind these new identities are referred to in this thesis as *Zapatismo*. The EZLN in its public expressions used these frames to communicate the meaning of its struggle. In doing so they adapted international discourses to the movement, which had the effect of reshaping the movement cultures of

independent organizations throughout Chiapas. Movement and participant identities were transformed when connected to international networks that included discourses of human rights, women's rights, environmentalism, and indigenous resistance among others.

With the Zapatistas

This thesis is based on more than two years of field interviews and participant observation. While in Chiapas I worked as a journalist, member of the NGO (non-governmental organization) community and as an international human rights observer. My initial research approach was to attend EZLN events with the press corps and learn about the movement as a non-partisan outsider. Nevertheless, as an observer in the civilian peace camps I became more deeply attached to what I determined was a just struggle. In the Zapatista communities, I saw that the movement was truly grassroots-based and quite different from how it had sometimes been portrayed in the media. Subcomandante Marcos was, to the outside world, the most visible Zapatista figure, but once in Chiapas I saw that *Zapatismo* was the authentic expression of thousands of Mayan peasants. Most importantly, I learned that the EZLN substantially diverged from the model of the typical Latin American guerrilla army. As I explain in this thesis, its primary aim after 1994 was to create a broad-based non-violent movement that would seek democratization through peaceful means. Through my work with the San Francisco-based NGO, Global Exchange, I became committed to advocating on behalf of the struggle of Mexican "civil society" to bring the goals of the EZLN to light. I did this primarily through leading delegations of North Americans to meet with some of the central actors fighting for change in Chiapas, including cooperatives, local NGOs, human rights groups, political parties, church representatives and members of the EZLN.

The material presented herein serves as an introduction to understanding the roots of the Zapatista uprising and the EZLN as an organization. Attempting to understand a movement when it is only beginning to reveal itself to the public is a difficult task. The data from interviews with EZLN representatives regarding the internal organization of the movement, its problems and the process of its development cannot be taken as the last truth on the matter. Eventually when conditions of security exist, many more details will be known. The information given here can only be taken as the discourse projected by the movement between 1995 and 1997 as it entered the public arena in its search for new ways of making politics.

The experience I gained living in Chiapas, working with the press and international solidarity networks was central to my understanding of the uprising. I was able to interview members of the Zapatista movement at all levels, from top commanders to the militia bases. I focused on interviewing Indian leaders of the EZLN, rather than Subcomandante Marcos, in order to present the lesser heard side of the movement. The interviews and direct observations gave me first-hand knowledge of how the movement interpreted and responded to external events. Witnessing the trajectory of its actions over time gave me a unique perspective that formed the basis of my thesis.

I have drawn on numerous disciplines to carry out this work including sociology, anthropology and political science. Each chapter in itself could serve as a vast area for deeper focus. The difficulty of this type of research is separating what is relevant from what is not. There is also the problem of generalizing. In Chiapas, maybe even more so than other regions, it is difficult to speak on a general level about “indigenous people”, “the Church”, “liberation theology”, or “the peasant movement.” Each of these areas is a world in itself, full of nuances with vast regional and ideological differences. Dealing with these

subject areas on a general level means that many of the subtleties will be glossed over. This thesis attempts to present some of this diversity within the confines of time, space and intellectual capacity.

In March 1996 I began to work with Global Exchange which gave an added dimension to my research. I crossed the line from being an academic observer and journalist to actively taking part in promoting the defense of human rights and teaching international delegations about the relevance of the Zapatista struggle to their everyday lives. In November 1996, the human rights situation took a turn for the worse as violence struck the NGO community in San Cristobal. This situation made an “objective” analysis of the situation very difficult; suddenly things seemed very black and white as many of my colleagues received death threats and I became involved in human rights accompaniment work. Through this experience I came to understand that in the context I was working in, I could not stand aside as an “objective” observer for my own research purposes, but rather I would participate along side other groups seeking just solutions. As an outside observer, along with hundreds of other international solidarity activists, we could provide Mexican popular organizers and human rights workers with a level of security to continue their work. This was especially important in rural settings in the conflict zone where formal “Peace Camps” had been set up to deter military incursions.

It is hoped that this analysis of the EZLN will be useful to those seeking new ways of understanding rebellion and the emergence of social movements. Most importantly, I hope this research can be used by social movement actors themselves by providing examples of cultural action and its strategic importance. The EZLN has been highly successful on certain levels within the cultural terrain, but has failed to resonate both spatially and across social sectors throughout Mexico. In this age of “anti-politics” where

apathy regarding political systems seems to be a common attitude, new ways of practicing politics on the social level, within civil society, are being tried. This research presents the EZLN in its manifestation as a social movement, as a new experiment in the struggle for democracy.

The Initial Events

The EZLN made its explosive entrance into Mexico's contemporary history on January 1, 1994. Indigenous peasants from Chiapas's highland and lowland Mayan communities carried out a coordinated attack against government facilities in four major towns and several smaller communities as the country's political and economic elite was celebrating the official commencement of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Members of the Zapatista army took over and controlled San Cristóbal de las Casas (100,000 inhabitants), Ocosingo (12,000), Altamirano (8,000) and Las Margaritas (5,000). The Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican government and army, calling on citizens to join the ranks of the EZLN and march on the capital to overthrow the "illegitimate one-party system" upheld by the "dictator" President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and install a transitional multi-party coalition until fair elections could be held. Instead of justifying the uprising with a ready-made political ideology, the declaration asked the civilian population to participate decisively in support of the struggle for "jobs, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace" (Declaration of War, EZLN)

The most important town taken during the uprising was San Cristóbal de las Casas, the state's capital in the colonial period and considered the administrative centre of Chiapas's highlands. Approximately 900 Zapatista militia soldiers entered San Cristóbal

before the break of dawn on New Years Day, 1994, taking the town's local inhabitants and tourists by complete surprise. The Zapatista soldiers blocked the Pan-American Highway and the city's entrances and exits, then took over the municipal hall and captured the local police and security force's offices. By the time the local population woke up, the EZLN was in full control of the city. A communiqué containing the declaration of war and revolutionary laws was distributed among local journalists and faxed all over Mexico and throughout the world. According to later EZLN communiqués the San Cristóbal operation was led by Major Ana María. Nonetheless, the figure who attracted the most attention was a *ladino* (non-indigenous) spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, who strolled through San Cristóbal's central plaza speaking with a scrum of reporters and reassuring the local population that the EZLN would not harm them. Marcos said, "Any mess that we could have made here, we would have done at dawn, when you were sleeping" (*La Jornada*, January 19, 1994). Explaining the motivation behind the uprising, Marcos stated:

We hope that the people understand that the causes that have moved us to do this are just. The path that we have chosen is a just one but not the only one. It may not even be the best of all paths. We only think that it is the one that has to be taken and we invite all of the people to do the same; not to rise up in arms, but to struggle for a government in Mexico that is truly free and democratic and that can meet the aspirations of each and every person. We do not want a dictatorship of another kind, not anything out of this world, not international Communism or anything like that. We want justice where there is now not even minimum subsistence. (*La Jornada*, January 19, 1994)

The most violent confrontation took place in the municipal capital of Ocosingo, a provincial town serving as the centre for a broader region of cattle farmers and hundreds of recently settled communities in a rugged area of canyons and jungle. An estimated 500-700

EZLN troops took part in the attack. They gathered in San Miguel having commandeered vehicles to take them to Ocosingo over the previous days. The attack began at five in the morning (Tello Díaz 1995). The police surrendered after many hours of fighting and the municipal palace fell to the Zapatistas. The EZLN took over the local radio station and played a cassette of the declaration of war alternating with dance music (Ross 1994). Cattle ranchers would later claim that the voice they heard was Central American.

Zapatista troops were supposed to block the highway north of Ocosingo in order to protect their comrades' retreat from the city. When this did not happen and Mexican paratroopers began to block the exit leading to the canyons, the Zapatista troops found themselves trapped in the city (Tello Díaz 1995). Fierce fighting took place and it is believed that at least 50-60 Zapatista troops lost their lives. Five were found executed in the Ocosingo market with their hands tied behind their backs. The number of federal soldiers killed is unknown, as the bodies were removed before reporters were allowed to enter the city. In the Lacandon canyons peasants sing a *corrido* (a popular song that tells a story) that refers to 700 federal soldiers killed in Ocosingo, although the mainstream press refers to 153 deaths on both sides in the 12 days of fighting. Local NGOs put the number at 400 to 500 deaths.

The people of Altamirano had been warned for several days before the uprising that something was being planned. Public security forces had been sent in to defend the city. For several days Zapatista militia had been arriving in the community of Morelia in preparation for the attack. On New Year's Day, 400 Zapatista militia marched on Altamirano. The public security forces protecting the municipal hall were overcome in a short battle in which several were killed and many injured. The San Carlos hospital operated by nuns from the Saint Vincent de Paul order ministered to the injured. Once in

control of the city, the EZLN militia read the declaration of war and ransacked some homes and stores belonging to members of the local oligarchy.

The taking of Las Margaritas resulted in a significant number of casualties for the EZLN troops. The Zapatista militia united in the ejido Nuevo Momón for the march to Las Margaritas. At 1:00 a.m., 300-600 Zapatista troops arrived at the municipal centre of Las Margaritas. A short battle took place with the local security forces before the municipal hall was taken. The attack was led by a mestizo who called himself Pedro. He was to secure Las Margaritas before meeting with other troops to take the city of Comitán, the commercial centre for the region's cattle ranchers, but died in the shoot out in Las Margaritas. The attack on Comitán was called off (Tello Díaz 1995).

The Zapatistas also attacked and took over smaller towns and municipal capitals throughout Chiapas, including Chanal, Oxchuc, Chalam, Abasolo, San Andrés Larraínzar, Huixtán, Simojovel and Guadalupe Tepeyac. On January 2nd, they carried out an attack on the Rancho Nuevo military base just outside San Cristóbal. One unit commandeered a micro-bus in Oxchuc that was later intercepted on the way to join the attack on Rancho Nuevo. Twelve Zapatista troops were killed along with a civilian bus driver and his son. Their bodies were left on the side of the road for several days for reporters to photograph.

In the following days the federal army began a counter-offensive. Helicopters and Swiss-made Pilatus aircraft equipped with rockets began to bombard the villages and neighbourhoods surrounding San Cristóbal. There was widespread agreement of public opinion that the army's response was exaggerated. Images of aircraft firing rockets towards the south of San Cristóbal began to appear on national and international television. The local population could see the bombardments taking place from their rooftops. Journalists

were fired at on numerous occasions. Bishop Samuel Ruiz called for a truce, denouncing the summary execution of guerrillas caught by the army and trying to stop the counter-offensive from turning into a war of extermination. President Salinas called for a cease-fire on January 12.

According to the revolutionary laws included in the First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle and statements by EZLN spokespersons on January 1, 1994, the specific factors provoking the rebellion were changes in Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, dealing with land tenure reform, and the implementation of NAFTA. The main grievance was concern about reforms to the special category of land tenure known as the *ejido*, a product of the Mexican Revolution. The reforms meant that the land could be sold, mortgaged or leased for the first time. Furthermore, land reform had been declared finished, and a backlog of petitioners were told to give up their hopes for new lands and titles. These reforms were part of a broad dismantling of the state's support for the agricultural sector in the wake of the 1982 debt crisis (Gates 1993, 1996). In Chiapas the fall of international coffee prices in conjunction with the removal of state support for coffee farmers also had a devastating effect (Harvey 1994).

In addition to these economic factors, an examination of the declaration of war and subsequent early documents, reveals that the EZLN also chose to frame the rebellion in terms of ethnic identity. The opening line of the declaration of war states: "we are the product of 500 years of struggle." In a communiqué directed to the international press on January 6, 1994, the General Command of the EZLN provided its own self-definition:

The commanders and troops of the EZLN are mostly Indians from Chiapas. This is because the indigenous people of Mexico represent the poorest and most humiliated sector of Mexico, but also, as can be seen, the most

dignified. We are thousands of armed indigenous people and behind us are tens of thousands of our families. Therefore, there are tens of thousands of indigenous peoples in struggle. The government says that this is not an indigenous uprising, but we believe that if thousands of indigenous people rise up in arms, then yes, it is an indigenous uprising (Autonomea 1994: 80).

While Subcomandante Marcos was viewed as the chief spokesperson for the Zapatista Army, this was not to take away from the indigenous collective leadership called the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI). Marcos explains his role in relation to the CCRI in a communiqué dated January 20, 1994:

I have the honour of having as my superiors the best women and men of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, Mam, and Zoque ethnic groups. I have lived with them for more than 10 years and I am proud to obey them and serve them with my arms and my life [...] They are my commanders and I will follow them along whatever paths they choose. They are the collective and democratic leadership of the EZLN [...] (Autonomea 1994: 115).

Despite the EZLN's clear intent to emphasize ethnic identity, it also sought to mobilize diverse sectors of society outside the Indian communities. In the same communiqué Marcos wrote:

What the EZLN seeks for the indigenous inhabitants of Chiapas is the same thing that should be sought by all honest organizations in the whole country for all Mexicans. What the EZLN seeks with arms, should be sought by all honest organizations with different forms of struggle (Autonomea 1994: 115).

The EZLN's national strategy sought to mobilize the opposition forces within "civil society" rather than take over state power. By civil society I refer specifically to the use of

the term since it was evoked during the struggle for democracy against state socialism in Eastern Europe--as a space for social groups outside authoritarian structures (J. Hall 1995). This civil society strategy would be clearly pronounced in the Second Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle issued in April 1994 and later voiced during the National Democratic Convention held before the presidential elections in August 1994. The uprising was not a call to arms and violence; rather, it was a means of awakening the progressive forces of civil society to provide an impulse for democratic change.

It is this strategic factor that makes a cultural interpretation of the movement an important tool for understanding. The EZLN's public expressions since 1994 have provided a constant flow of new scenes, each laden with symbolism and meaning for external consumption. The movement's cultural impact was unprecedented. EZLN communiqués were translated into many languages and made accessible via the internet to an international audience. Examining the EZLN as a social movement highlights the uniqueness and originality of its actions.

Reactions to the EZLN Uprising

In response to the Chiapas uprising, thousands of protesters took to the streets in Mexico City, joining national and international human rights groups in denouncing the military's heavy-handed response. The international press criticized the Mexican government's use of the Air Force to strafe and rocket villages indiscriminately and for carrying out summary executions. The Mexican stock index fell 6.32% on January 10 (La Botz 1995:8). President Carlos Salinas found himself in a difficult situation --initially referring to the Zapatista insurgents as "professionals of violence" and "transgressors of the law," by January 12th he was calling for a cease-fire and negotiations. Days earlier he had fired

Interior Minister Patrocinio González Garrido, who was on leave from his elective post as Governor of Chiapas. Such immediate responses in Mexican politics sparked spectacular reactions. Roger Bartra, a noted intellectual of the left, stated: "The war in Chiapas has provoked the strongest political and cultural shakeup that the Mexican system has suffered in the last quarter century" (cited in Méndez and Cano 1996:11).

Internationally, the uprising was interpreted by many as a reaction to neoliberalism and globalization. While speaking to reporters in San Cristóbal's plaza on January 1st, Subcomandante Marcos said, "Today NAFTA begins, which is nothing more than a death sentence to the indigenous ethnic groups of Mexico, who are perfectly dispensable in the modernization program of Salinas de Gortari" (Autonomeia 1994:68). One graffiti slogan left by the Zapatistas in San Cristóbal said, "We don't want free trade. We want Freedom!" (Méndez and Cano 1996:22). Noam Chomsky wrote: "The forces that are taking command of the international economy are mounting a very serious threat to freedom, democracy and social justice, which calls for popular resistance on a global scale. The Zapatistas have provided an inspiring example of forms it might take" (Autonomeia 1994). Another observer wrote in a pamphlet, "Chiapas is the first armed battle against the Global Market and simultaneously [. . .] for Democracy" (Cooper 1994:2).

Nationally, the uprising shook the confidence that the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was taking into the 1994 election year. The PRI was facing a crisis of legitimacy that had reached its height in 1988 after it was widely accused of blatant fraud in the national elections that brought President Salinas to power with an official 50.7% of the vote (the lowest in the PRI's history). NAFTA was supposed to provide the PRI with a renewed legitimacy to take into the 1994 elections. The reforms that Salinas had carried out during his six-year term were profound, reversing decades of statist and

nationalistic policies in just a few years (Otero 1996). He privatized 252 state-run companies, including national banks and Telmex (Mexican Telephone Company). The privatizations netted about \$23 billion in state reserves and massively reduced government subsidies to hundreds of money-losing firms (Oppenheimer 1996:9). One Newsweek journalist observed that “Salinas has worked hard to convert Mexico’s socialist, nationalist economy into a capitalist, pro-American economy open to international trade” (Thomas 1993:10). A Forbes journalist wrote: “You can’t any longer think of Mexico as the Third World” (cited in Oppenheimer 1996:8). After the uprising, a harsh re-interpretation of Mexico’s socioeconomic reality began. One Mexican writer remarked, “Just when we were telling the world and ourselves that we were looking like the U.S., we turn out to be Guatemala.” Heberto Castillo, a noted member of Congress for the centre-left PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) declared: “Those who applauded our growing economy [...] olympically ignored that while the rich got richer, the nation got even poorer” (cited in Cooper 1994:2).

Locally, the Zapatista uprising was the culmination of more than 20 years of independent peasant struggle, and another manifestation of a long history of regional indigenous resistance. According to Carlos Montemayor (1997), armed revolutionary movements have existed without interruption in Mexico for at least 30 years. Recent changes in Article 27 of the Federal Constitution meant that land reform had come to an end and that outstanding land claims were no longer valid (Harvey 1996). For many Indian peasants this meant an end to their traditional way of life based on subsistence farming with corn as the staple crop. The Zapatista uprising was the indigenous response to centuries of subordination. After the Spanish conquest and colonization, the indigenous inhabitants of Chiapas suffered slavery and debt peonage and throughout the 20th century they continued

to serve as the maids and farm hands for the local ladino population. Comandante Hortencia said: "I became a Zapatista to struggle for my people, so that one day there will be justice and peace in Mexico" (interview with author March 1996).

To the local ladinos, the uprising represented the feared *indiada*, the rebellion of the "savage Indians" who would come to rob, rape and pillage. The towns of San Cristóbal, Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas are islands of mestizo populations surrounded by oceans of indigenous communities, most of them in conditions of extreme poverty. The ladinos see themselves as naturally superior to the indigenous people. One representative of the Family Development Agency (DIF), a resident of San Cristóbal with 20 years' experience working in indigenous communities, told an international delegation: "Before the uprising, there was a harmonious relationship between the indigenous people and the ladinos. They worked in our homes and we treated them like we would our children" (November 1996). EZLN Comandante Susana, a highland Tzotzil speaker said: "When we go into the big city they see us as nothing more than *indios* [...], they curse us for being indigenous people as if we were animals [...], we are not seen as equal to the mestizo women" (interview with author March 1996).

The uprising also set in motion a wave of land takeovers. In much of the region known as the conflict zone (the municipalities of Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas), lands were taken over by peasants in search of ways to improve their living standards. While peasants had been carrying out land takeovers since the 1970s, the uprising served to politicize them and escalate the struggle. Also, in many cases landlords simply abandoned their lands out of fear, given the conditions of uncertainty. Some of these lands remain abandoned although they have been looted of their livestock and work implements. In other cases, the lands have been taken over, or "recuperated" and new

communities have been built. A representative from the New Settlement Moisés-Gandhi, municipality of Ocosingo, explained:

This property belonged to our grandparents who spoke Tzeltal but could not communicate in Spanish. Because of this, they were cheated out of the land. The corn fields were converted into a large cattle ranch and our grandfathers were made to work as peons, eventually being forced to a small piece of land in the hills to work as their own. When our fathers were born there was not enough land. Many families had to seek work as peons on other plantations. We had to live in other communities. That is why we did not steal this land. When the owners left after the uprising, we recuperated it as our own. (Interview with author October 1996)

The Zapatista uprising thus inflamed the relations between the local Indian communities and the ladino populations. There was much resistance by ladinos to the idea that Indians would become full members of Mexican society in a place where a colonial mentality still exists. A cattle rancher who had abandoned his land located deep in Zapatista territory said:

The Indians do not want to work because they are lazy. Zapata was right when he said, "Land for those who work it" but he forgot to add "for those who want to work it" and "for those who know how to work it productively." (interview with author December 1996).

It was this attitude of arrogance that the EZLN sought to address by rebelling. Indian peasants became emboldened and land "recuperations" were carried out on a massive scale during 1994. The image of the rebel indigenous figure swept Chiapas. San Cristóbal's Tzotzil women street vendors adapted their artwork to the new era by sewing ski masks on the traditional dolls and carving wooden rifles to put in their hands. The new Zapatista dolls were an instant commercial success. The women and children who sell them

are very proud to explain which Zapatista commander is represented by each doll. Many highland communities became Zapatista sympathizers after 1994.

Finally, the uprising changed Chiapas's social and political landscape. Indigenous people were finally going to be listened to, whether the local population wanted to listen or not. But this brought thousands of federal troops and the construction of dozens of new military camps throughout the jungle and highlands. Indigenous rural communities would begin to live with a permanent military presence: constant foot and air patrols, harassment, prostitution, alcohol and drugs. Armored vehicles, tanks and troop transport trucks have taken over Chiapas's highways and constantly patrol Zapatista support base communities. Communities living in conditions of desperation were divided over whether to accept government handouts. The strategy of divide and conquer immediately polarized many communities disrupting the movement's momentum.

A Theoretical Approach to Understanding the EZLN

Neil Harvey (1994) and George Collier (1994) published some of the first studies of the Zapatista uprising, analyzing the historical, political and economic conditions from which the movement had emerged, based on their past research on Chiapas. The early interpretations by Mexican intellectuals (e.g. Luis Hernández, Antonio García de León) provided important counter-arguments to the government's simplistic analysis, which blamed the Church's pastoral work and external agents for manipulating the native population into rebellion. Research carried out by Carlos Tello Díaz (1995) focused on explaining the EZLN's emergence but was criticized for its "police investigation style" methodology, being more intent on uncovering the names of Zapatista leaders than trying to understand broader social processes. John Ross (1994) gave a detailed journalist's account

of the first six months of the uprising. Carlos Montemayor (1997) placed the EZLN within Mexico's history of guerrilla struggle and indigenous activism, while Yvonne Le Bot (1997), having participated in the "Intergalactic" Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, sought to capture the general discourse of Zapatismo.

A study of the political and economic conditions that provided the context for the EZLN's emergence is fundamental for understanding the movement. Nevertheless an equally important feature is the role of culture, which has not been fully treated in previous analyses of the uprising and has become an important theme for studies of social movements. McAdam argues that recent theorizing "has located the roots of social movements in some set of political, economic, or organizational factors". This "structural bias," however, ignores cultural factors "as important constraints or facilitators of collective action" (1994:37).

Antonio Gramsci was one of the most important theorists to study the role of culture and civil society in the success of a revolution. According to Marx, the socialist revolution was to occur in the most advanced capitalist societies; at the time he wrote, Britain was at the forefront of the industrial revolution. As industrialization became more advanced, Marx theorized that the gap between the owners of the means of production (bourgeoisie) and the workers in the factories (proletariat) would widen until the workers rose up to take over the state, creating new relations of production and a new revolutionary society. In the 1920s, when Gramsci was a member of the Italian Communist party and attempting to understand the situation, he used the 1917 Russian revolution as a case that contradicted Marx's original theory. Gramsci noted that the revolution had occurred in a largely rural and feudalistic state, rather than one with highly developed capitalist relations of production.

In order to explain this outcome, Gramsci theorized that in societies such as Czarist Russia, the state was everything. It ruled using repression instead of consent. In this case a small group of revolutionary insurgents were capable of overthrowing the state because it lacked legitimacy. In the case of advanced capitalist societies, Gramsci studied the relationship between the state and civil society, noting how the “bourgeois hegemony” had penetrated culture and civil society. The bourgeoisie had become a “hegemonic” class, because it ruled not only through repression, but also by consensus. He determined that, in order for revolution to succeed in such societies, a cultural strategy had to be employed that would convince civil society to support the revolution. An alternative hegemonic project to that of the bourgeoisie had to be advanced within civil society.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) took this conception further with a critique of the class reductionist bias within the Marxist tradition, arguing that the potential for change may come from a multiplicity of social actors within civil society. The critique of economic determinism is not new and has been debated throughout the 20th century. Many social scientists, however, continue to focus exclusively on the realm of economic and political structural conditions as the determining factors in the emergence of social movements and rebellions. Within U.S. social movement theories, there is a field that examines how emerging political opportunities prompt the emergence of a social movement.

While this approach is important it ignores the rich field of culture as an important factor. Theorists of Latin American (and other) social movements, however, have recently introduced the concept of culture to properly understand social movements (Slater 1985, Escobar 1992).

Diane Davies (1994: 377) critiques research within the “new social movement” theoretical paradigm for ignoring the seminal works on peasant rebellions and revolution which focus on the conditions under which such collective action emerges. The most important of these works by Barrington Moore, Eric Wolf, Jeffrey Paige and Theda Skocpol focus on the state, political parties, agrarian structures, the global economy and class structures (Skocpol 1982). This thesis seeks to compliment the literature on peasant rebellions by adding an analysis of the cultural dimension, particularly by focusing on the actors involved and the influences that shaped the movement.

The shortcoming of theories that focus on political and socio-economic structures alone is that there is rarely equilibrium within most of the world’s capitalist systems and the conditions that have the potential to produce social movements are relatively constant. In addition, critics have questioned grand theories that attempt to isolate class relations and economic factors across diverse cultural and historic contexts. Thus, by adding an interpretation of the cultural realm, the goal of this thesis is to understand how culture relates to a movement’s emergence, and contributes to a movement’s success and development of new collective identities.

Michael Kearney (1996) argues that the concept of “peasant” is a class category that no longer describes most rural people in Latin America, who increasingly rely on other sources of income beyond the subsistence farming that was the norm for the historical peasant. Contemporary rural “peasants” are part-time workers, artisans and migrants, and thus embody multiple identities. This is certainly the case in Chiapas. My usage of the term “peasant” in this thesis thus does not exclusively refer to the traditional subsistence farmer with pre-assigned “conservative” political interests as first discussed in Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire. “Peasant” in this thesis is a more generic term for small non-surplus producing

farmers, artisans and rural workers from the countryside, as conveyed by the Spanish term *campesino*.

Class analyses that assign *a priori* “political interests” to groups or individuals in relation to their position in the socioeconomic structure view people as homogeneous entities. An exclusive focus on class does not take into account the “multiple subject positions” that go into the formation of political interests, which may include gender, race, nationality and territoriality. Thus it is becoming increasingly clear that class analysis on its own has become “insufficient as a way of accounting for contemporary social conflicts” (Laclau 1985:29). Nevertheless, as David Slater (1994) points out, class analysis can certainly not be abandoned altogether. It is most usefully employed in conjunction with a study of other points of antagonism.

George Collier (1994) posited that the Zapatista uprising was “primarily a peasant rebellion”. Neil Harvey (1994:2) also came out with an initial interpretation that focused on how peasants had become radicalized in response to modernizing rural reforms. Harvey characterized the uprising as essentially “a rural rebellion” in reference to the long tradition of peasant protagonism in Mexico. Both studies argued that land issues were the most important elements for understanding the uprising and examined the position of rural populations in the highlands and eastern lowlands in the prevailing agrarian structures and within the context of changing agrarian policies, agricultural conditions and rural protest. Their findings showed that the overall impact of neoliberal policies was negative for the rural populations. Threats to peasants’ livelihoods were argued to be important causes of the rebellion. These analyses were based on evaluations of the historical and socioeconomic factors facing the rural population but also took into account part of the EZLN’s own definition of the situation it faced.

Culture was an important element in the construction of the EZLN's collective identity and in its conversion from a rebel army to a broad-based social movement through symbolic public expressions. According to recent interpretations of collective action (McAdam 1994, Selbin 1992), people's choices and the meanings they apply to their situations mediate in the space between structural conditions and action. The role of culture in the emergence of a social movement helps us understand why structural conditions may produce an armed rebellion in one case but not in another under similar conditions. Why did the Zapatista uprising occur in Chiapas and not another equally poor and repressed region of Latin America? We can understand these differences by focusing on cultural contexts.

Recent theorizing on the social movements that have arisen since the 1960s brings up many issues that help us understand the EZLN. These contemporary movements have been described as "new democratic struggles" (Mouffe 1988), employing new ways of doing politics. This theorizing reflects both a change in the general characteristics of the movements and in the way that researchers analyze them. The centrality of class has given way to a broader perspective that rejects the view of social agents as a "unified, homogenous entity" (Laclau 1985: 31). Following this view I argue that those who identify themselves as members of the EZLN are not a homogenous group. The reasons for rebelling are many and come from a multiplicity of "subject positions." Within the discourse of Zapatismo many points of antagonism can be discerned and it is precisely this diversity of struggle that has allowed the EZLN to capture the world's attention.

Contemporary social movements have also been interpreted as responses to political systems that are increasingly seen as narrow and exclusive. The myth of modern politics is that each individual can participate equally in decisions. According to the pluralist paradigm

(Dahl 1967), the political system plays the role of arbiter and provides channels for aggrieved groups to present their demands. In this context, early social movement theorists saw collective action outside political institutions as irrational behaviour and sought interpretations within the field of mass psychology for explanation (Gurr 1970). This way of seeing collective action has been carried over into recent notions of modern politics that argue that political systems have evolved to a level where only fine-tuning is required. Politics in the modern age is seen as being mostly concerned with governability and techniques of government as the only real spaces for contention and political struggle. Thus politics becomes an activity for professionals rather than for popular participation. Yet movements that participated outside conventional institutional channels were explained by referring to structural changes that cause a breakdown in the organs of social control or in the adequacy of normative integration (Cohen 1985: 671).

Many social theories have been exported south but it is important to realize that Latin America provides a very different context for modern politics where, authoritarianism, state repression and vast disparities in income create obstacles to the participation of broad social sectors. In Mexico the corporatist model has been the central feature of the political system. The system attempted to provide channels for workers' and peasants' participation through mass organizations that enjoyed direct access to the state. The corporatist system managed to create stability until the student massacre in 1968 ignited an explosion of independent grassroots struggles that brought about a crisis of legitimacy for the Mexican state.

In this context, social movements within the modernization paradigm are seen as seeking inclusion into narrow political systems that have in turn marginalized their voices. Of the Zapatistas, Tom Barry (1995: 159) writes: "the EZLN was not postmodernist but

espoused modernist goals that mirrored the traditional modernizing demands of most other campesino organizations for increased services, infrastructure, and inclusion in the country's economic advancement." This view can be sustained by referring to the EZLN's "11-point demands" for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace (EZLN Declaration of War).

In addition to these points, however, the EZLN also speaks of becoming part of the Mexican nation for the first time. Comprising mostly Indians, it seeks the same rights and privileges enjoyed by other non-Indian Mexicans. Moreover its demands reflect a much broader discourse, making a call for tolerance and a recognition of diversity. Barry (1995:146) also points out that what sets the EZLN apart from the peasant movement is its incorporation of demands for local and national democracy. In this sense, the EZLN represents much more than the "modernist goals" represented by the 11 points.

If the EZLN were limited to a modernist discourse, then it would settle for the liberal notion of "equality" for all before the law. Yet, the movement's public expressions since 1994 represent a broader discourse. One of the arguments in this thesis is that the EZLN's discourse reflects both modern and postmodern demands. The latter involve demands for the recognition and respect of ethnic, religious, and other cultural differences--not just equality before the law, but recognition of the right to autonomy and diversity. Comandante David, a leading indigenous spokesperson for the EZLN, explains it as follows:

The government fears that every time we speak of autonomy that what we want is to separate, to create a country within a country. The government does not understand that what we want is to create a nation where everyone fits; a country where everyone has a place and where each one has the same rights without regard to whether they are ladinos, members of an opposition

party or independent organization, or hold a different religion. We want to create a country where we all fit, where we see each other as brothers and sisters, and where the wealth of the country can be shared with everyone. This is what we want and in no way does it involve separating from the rest of the country. (interview with author March 1996)

This vision of the EZLN thus expresses the need for inclusion by actors who see themselves as left out and underrepresented by the conventional institutional channels. At the same time, something more fundamental seems to be at stake in the Zapatista movement. Following Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 149), “in that they represent challenges to established routines of ‘doing politics’ new social movements offer the possibility of new projects, new ways of viewing the world and of organizing social life, which is something more than inclusion.” Through its expressions as a social movement, convoking international “encounters,” discussion forums and counter-cultural celebration events, the EZLN has opened new democratic spaces outside traditional political ones. This strategy brings in an element of post-modern philosophy.

The demands of the EZLN and its strategy for achieving them make it stand out from previous armed national liberation movements. Its mix of master protest frames and historical traditions is not necessarily as new as it might first appear. Several guerrilla armies in Latin America have had large contingents of indigenous combatants such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru and the URNG in Guatemala. It is also not new that the EZLN would take the name of a historic revolutionary fighter like Emiliano Zapata, in the same way that Augusto Sandino and Farabundo Martí were used in Central America. The most original element of the EZLN, by comparison with other rebel armies, is its claiming of a radical interpretation of liberal democracy. The Zapatista Army does not aspire to take power using revolutionary violence, instead it seeks to expand democratic spaces within

civil society. During the initial uprising it called on Mexicans to overthrow the PRI government and install a pluralistic coalition that would oversee the holding of true democratic elections.

The EZLN seems to have taken up the call of Laclau and Mouffe (1985:176): “The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy.” This element makes the EZLN substantially different from other revolutionary armies in Latin America. Since the uprising, the EZLN has developed a clear vision for Mexico. Its focus is on mobilizing civil society (the uncoopted sectors of Mexican society) behind the demands for democracy, indigenous rights, autonomy and economic justice.

The ethnic demands within the movement have become an important element. This is seen when comparing the EZLN with a traditional independent campesino organization. The Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (OCEZ), for example, still carries on its campesino demands and militancy, while expressing sympathy and solidarity with the Zapatistas. Its self-identification with its Indian identity is an important characteristic of the EZLN. This became apparent to me after observing the dialogue process in 1995, participating in several indigenous forums sponsored by the EZLN and interviewing militia members and several central indigenous leaders, including Comandante David, a Tzotzil leader and the primary spokesperson for the EZLN negotiating team. Mayan peasants affiliated with the EZLN had important ethnic demands to put on the table.

The EZLN’s emergence can be seen in the continuity of an activist subculture of resistance. The roots of the movement can be dated as far back as the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán in 1521 and of Chiapas by Diego Mazariegos in 1528. The struggle by

indigenous people for dignity has been a constant ever since. The Zapatista army sees itself as a continuation of this history of struggle. This thesis presents a picture of the individuals who make up the Zapatista Army and support bases. Many EZLN interviews have been made public but this thesis tries to place such testimonies within a theoretical and interpretative framework, informed by first-hand observations of the movement's expressions and the reactions to them over a period of more than two years.

In order to generate a deeper understanding of the role of culture in the emergence and trajectory of the EZLN as a social movement, I have oriented the data around three general issues: first, how culture played a role in the emergence of the Zapatista uprising; second how the EZLN developed its movement culture after the 1994 uprising; and third, the cultural consequences of the movement.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two examines the historical and cultural issues that provided the context for the emergence of the EZLN. The history of conquest and colonization that displaced indigenous identity are essential features for understanding the uprising. Chapter Two also presents the broader question of identity subordination in the emergence of social movements. Beyond economic relations and class, identity can play an important catalytic role in explaining action. Following Mouffe (1989) and McAdam (1994), one of the cultural issues that can create conditions for the emergence of new collective identities is the contradiction between highly resonant cultural values and conventional social practices. I thus examine this phenomenon at various points in the regional history of Chiapas.

Chapter Three examines the role of the long-standing activist subcultures that were present in Chiapas since at least the 1960s. These organizing activities are presented as pre-

movements. The subcultures created by these movements served as “half-way houses” for the eventual emergence of the Zapatista uprising. The suppressed organizations served as antecedents to the birth of the new Zapatista movement. In particular, the autochthonous church and Indian-peasant organizing were important precursors.

Chapter Four studies the post-uprising conversion of the EZLN from a rebel army to a social movement. It examines both the elaboration of the strategic discourse of Zapatismo and how the EZLN has constructed its particular social movement culture through public expressions. These expressions are divided into three categories revolving around the EZLN’s relationship with the government through peace talks, its relationship with civil society supporters through encounters, forums, and counter-cultural events and, finally, its relationship with mainstream society through communiqués and media events.

Chapter Five examines the EZLN’s strategic use of “master protest frames” to align support behind common popular struggles. The EZLN has combined at least five different frames into its discourse as a social movement. The appropriation of the symbol of Zapata and the peasant struggle, 500 years of resistance and indigenous rights, the symbol of Che Guevara and the armed national liberation movement, women’s rights and finally ecology and human rights. The manipulation and strategic application of these discourses are essential features for explaining the widespread support received by the movement after its public life began on January 1, 1994.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis by tying the data together in an analysis of the overall role of culture in understanding the EZLN as a social movement. After summarizing how the data illuminate the first two central issues of the thesis, it addresses the final

question of how the social movement culture developed by the EZLN has influenced mainstream society.

The Struggle for Cultural Identity: A History of Resistance

"We are the product of 500 years of struggles."
Declaration of War -- EZLN

This chapter presents the historical background to the uprising and an introduction to the diversity and rich past of the people who make up the Zapatista movement. It draws on the regional history of Chiapas and in particular on moments of rebellion and discontent that represented a refusal to accept colonization and the spiritual conquest. Control over the direction of the Indian's identity was threatened by restrictions against indigenous languages, worldviews and religious rituals. Social historians have traditionally inferred the identity of historical actors "directly from the everyday organization of production and reproduction" (Tilly 1996: 4). Yet recent challenges from postmodern critics have inspired a new analysis focused on multiple identities - race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. In this case, I propose to examine the history of resistance by the original inhabitants in relation to ethnic identity as one component of a multiple identity.

When different cultural groups come into contact the process of acculturation can play out under a range of conditions. Cultural elements may be exchanged under conditions of mutual respect where all groups are enriched in the process or they can be imposed by violent means from a dominant culture, resulting in the impoverishment of one of the cultures. The case of the conquest of the Americas is one of negative acculturation (León-Portilla: 9). The Spanish colonizers imposed elements and institutions of their culture under conditions of violence, obliging the original inhabitants of the “New World” to fundamentally change their belief system in addition to surrendering their human and natural resources to the service of the Spanish empire. Thus resistance has become part of what may be described as “being Indian,” as indigenous peoples struggle to resist “social and cultural assimilation into the bottom-most economic strata of colonial and republican social orders” (Field 1990: 239).

In 18th-century Chiapas, after a widespread rebellion by Indian subjects was put down by colonial authorities, Father Ximénez wrote about the role of the Church in pacifying the subdued rebels:

The points upon which our sermons concentrated were [...] the hardness of their hearts, because 200 years of instruction in God’s law had not taken hold in their hearts; [...] how much better they lived under the rule of the King of Spain than in pagan times under Moctezuma; [...] and their origins, descended from the Jews whom God had punished for their idolatry and who later came to these lands by unknown routes [...] (Wasserstrom 1983:86).

This form of evangelism sought to negate indigenous religiosity by placing it within a Christian framework that rejected their culture as “heathen”. They became the “Jews” of the New Testament, and only worthy of forgiveness by surrendering before the Christian God.

They were told that their suffering was nothing “beside the agonies which Christ had suffered on their behalf” (Wasserstrom 1983:86). Finally, the Church’s version of history showed the Spanish colonial regime as benevolent compared to the dominant pre-Hispanic powers. This was the intellectual battle for the indigenous mind.

The idea of this chapter then is to portray the Zapatista rebellion within a trajectory of resistance to the ongoing threat to the reproduction of indigenous identities. The original inhabitants were not only struggling against the Spanish institutions that confiscated Indian territories and resources but also against the imposition of a new order that erased their distinctive identities from the construction of the nation. This chapter presents a historical narrative of conquest and the creation of “the Other,” followed by a brief look at the domination and resistance that occurred under colonial and republican regimes. Finally the chapter provides a description of the resulting diversity of contemporary Indian culture in Chiapas.

The Conquest and Construction of “the Other”

Until 1519 European explorers and conquistadors had only come across smaller bands of hunter-gatherer societies in the New World. In contrast, when Hernán Cortés approached the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, where modern Mexico City now lies, he discovered an agriculturally based society with a city equivalent in size to large European cities of its day. There was a highly developed social structure and specialization of activities, including artists, intellectuals, religious men, kings, architects, labourers and slaves. Vast trade networks extended as far south as Central America and north into what is today the southwest United States.

Two years later Tenochtitlán was seized by the Spanish empire. In less than a century this civilization would be reduced from a population of 12-15 million to just over 1 million (Berdan 1982:172) and its inhabitants would be relegated to the role of slave and peon to the Spanish colonizer. Thus massacre, disease, overwork and undernourishment resulted in millions of deaths. Along with the military conquest came an intellectual confrontation. Christianity supplanted native beliefs and forms of worship. Hundreds of books would be destroyed by inquisitional fires and the achievements of an entire civilization would be lost both to its creators and to the rest of the world.

The conquest of the Aztecs did not complete the subjugation of the lands of Mexico. The Spanish invaders were able to topple the Aztec ruling elite and place themselves as the beneficiaries of tribute and slave labour. Many regions, however, still remained outside their control. This was the case of the region known today as Chiapas. The Aztec trading network had extended as far south as the Central American isthmus, yet the empire only encompassed the coastal region of Chiapas known then and today as the Soconusco. Chiapas's central valleys, highlands and jungles were inhabited by other nations outside the control of the Aztec empire, most of them descendants of the Mayan civilization which had reached its cultural and political apogee in 600 to 900 AD before suddenly collapsing (Wolf 1958).

The Mayan people did not disappear with this "collapse" nor did they disappear with the conquest of Chiapas by Spanish invaders during the 16th century. The descendants of the Mayan civilization continue to practice non-Western traditions and continue to resist a system that relegates them culturally, politically and economically to the margins. Centuries of rebellions have been chronicled and certainly the Zapatista uprising can be seen as part of this history.

Most Indians in Chiapas live in miserable conditions. According to statistics from the National Indigenist Institute 83% of Indian-majority municipalities in Mexico are very poor or extremely poor (Barry 1994: 175). Being Indian in most cases means being illiterate, malnourished, without health care and facing poor housing conditions. With the Spanish invasion and imposition of colonial rule, the Indian's identity became that of "the Other," left out of a system that was never meant to include it.

It is important to not portray pre-Hispanic nations as "pure" harmonious cultures corrupted by the forced imposition of Christianity and institutions of the Spanish colonial empire. Warfare, slavery and human sacrifice were practiced within pre-Hispanic societies. Thus, what is today considered brutality was practiced perhaps as much in pre-Hispanic cultures as in the Iberian Peninsula under the Inquisition. The purpose then is not to make moral comparisons but rather to argue that indigenous identity was profoundly transformed by its confrontation with Western culture.

Pre-Hispanic religion and belief systems placed adherents at the centre of existence, providing a past, present and future for them. Under their own belief system, the original inhabitants of the Americas knew where they came from and to what gods they were going. The imposition of Christianity would displace this belief system and replace it with one that de-centred Indian identity, creating "the Other." At the time of the arrival of the first Spaniards, Chiapas was a land inhabited by distinct nations of people who enjoyed autonomy from the Aztec empire. The Spanish invasion largely erased this tradition. The original inhabitants of the "New World" went from being diverse nations of peoples to being "Indians" because of a geographical error. Along with the label "Indian" came a whole other set of ideological baggage. They were considered heathens, less than human, destined for slavery. When it was decided that they were worthy of the Christian religion

(unlike the African slaves who were not considered human), they were still made to be servants of the “master” European race.

Indians continue to be “the Other,” best romanticized as exotic folklore or “noble savages” who are “at one with nature.” At worst they are seen as vestiges of “backward” and “inferior” cultures. These images are so imbedded in Western popular culture that it is almost impossible to look freshly at the diversity of ways of being that contemporary Indian cultures represent. Part of the struggle of the EZLN and indigenous movements is to break out of these narrow perceptions. The EZLN speaks of becoming subjects instead of objects, and seeks dignity. The following history will help us understand why this is important.

Colonization and Resistance in Chiapas

“When we go into the big cities to sell our goods, the ladino women see us as animals. I am fighting for a dignified life, to be proud of being an indigenous woman.”
Tzeltal woman from Cuxuljá, Ocosingo - Municipality in Rebellion “Che Guevara”

During the pre-Hispanic period, most of the region known today as Chiapas was populated by descendants of the Mayan civilization. Anthropologists divide the Maya of this region into five main linguistic groups that continue to inhabit the region today, despite a tumultuous history that has regionally displaced some of these communities. At the time of first contact, however, the Choles inhabited the eastern jungle lowlands; the Mames the coastal and western mountains; the Tzotziles, Tzeltales and Tojolobales the highlands and plains; a sixth non-Mayan group, the Zoques, occupied the northwest region, being related to the Mixes of Oaxaca. (de Vos 1994).

Another group, now culturally extinct, was the Chiapanecas who dominated the region. They were linguistically and culturally distinct from the other six and believed to

have originally come from Teotihuacán in Mexico's central valley. Linguistic studies place them as far south as Nicaragua (de Vos 1985). When the Chiapanecas arrived in the region now known as Chiapas they took over and settled in the fertile Grijalva river basin between the coastal mountains and the central highlands, where the state capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez lies today. One of the conquerors, Bernal Díaz, said of them: "They were at that time the greatest warriors I had seen in all New Spain." Hernán Cortés considered the Chiapanecas the most important group in the region and thus called this new colonial province of the Spanish empire Chiapa, derived from the name of the Chiapaneca's capital city Chiapan. Bernal Díaz described the settlement as a city with 4,000 families, well-constructed houses and ordered streets. Spanish Chiapa included most of the region that now makes up the modern Mexican state of Chiapas, except for the Soconusco coast which became its own colonial province (de Vos 1994).

Looking at this ethnic panorama 450 years later, the situation has greatly changed. The Chiapaneca people no longer exist as a nation. Through conquest and acculturation with the Spanish colonizers, the Chiapanecas lost their cultural identity. The language is known only through some colonial writings composed by Dominican friars who lived with them during the colonial period. The only visible presence of the language today is seen in some family names and in the names of geographic sites in the region.

Concerning the other Mayan groups, the Chol people were hunted out of the jungle and have only recently begun to resettle it, along with thousands of Tzeltales in search of land and hope. The Tzotzil people remain in the land-squeezed central highlands of Chiapas, being forced to sell their labour on coastal coffee plantations and to act as the humble servants of the San Cristóbal mestizo population. The Zoques continue to be settled in northwest Chiapas but remain isolated and have not made public declarations of support

for the EZLN. Many Zoques were displaced by a volcanic eruption of the Chichonal in the early 1980s.

Besides these disruptions, migrations and major cultural changes, the Spanish invasion transformed Chiapas in many other ways. Imagine a region with uncontaminated rivers, pine covered mountains and lush tropical rainforest-filled lowlands. Agricultural production consisted mainly of corn, beans and squash, while commercial products such as cacao and cotton were grown where the climate permitted. Much of Chiapas is now devoted to grasslands and cattle raising. Commercial crops such as sugarcane have had a devastating effect on the land. Coffee has been introduced as well as sheep herding. Overpopulation means that lands are being overworked and the surrounding forests are being cut down to provide firewood for cooking and for heating in the cold highland mountains as well as to provide pasture land for the expanding cattle industry. The lowland jungles have given way to cattle grazing and slash and burn farming, and vast quantities of the precious mahogany that once dominated the jungles have been removed over the last 100 years (de Vos 1994).

The Spanish invasion thus affected the existing native populations in their relationship with nature, their relationship with the divine and their relationship with those living around them (de Vos 1994). The social structure would greatly change with the imposition of the first Spanish institutions on the region. The lasting presence from the first Spanish invasion was the *encomienda* (a land and labour endowment to Spanish colonizers called *encomenderos*). In theory this was supposed to be an appropriation of the surplus produced by the local native population. The Spanish colonizers did not settle in the region immediately after first contact, preferring to control the land from the distant port of Espiritu Santo. In practice, the people who were obliged to them through the *encomienda*

system became victims of raids and armed assaults. The initial phases of the *encomienda* system would primarily serve the slave trade. Historian Gudrun Lenkersdorf writes (1995):

They locked them in iron chains and took them to the port where they were traded on the market for horses, weapons and provisions. We do not know how many hundreds of inhabitants from the highlands of Chiapas were taken in this manner, destined to slave in the gold mines of Cuba.

The *reducción* was another Spanish institution imposed to pacify and subdue the native populations for economic purposes. This brought dispersed settlements of indigenous people into a single village settlement. Not only did it make the population easier to control, it also vacated vast tracts of lands which could then be claimed by the Spanish *encomenderos*. By the end of the 16th century, 120 colonial villages had been formed in relatively compact areas, each extensions of *ejido* (communal) lands legally assigned to each village. Beyond these limits were immense populated zones waiting to be monopolized by Spanish *hacienda* (farm estate) owners and mestizo ranchers (Lenkersdorf 1995).

With the disappearance of most of the *encomiendas* by the end of the 16th century, a new system of exploitation and a new agrarian structure was established with the emergence of the *hacienda* on one side and the indigenous community on the other. Both were part of the same colonial economy and society which brought together the republic of the Spaniards and the republic of the Indians. The establishment of this system of property and social relations of production was slow and marked by evictions, exploitation and by subjugation of Indians and their economy to the interests of the new landowners (Wolf 1958).

The removal from their ancestral lands drastically affected the Indian customs, modes of production, and conditions of work. Their products and services were monopolized by the colonial administrative centre Ciudad Real, later named San Cristóbal de las Casas. The original settlers of the highland city lived in isolation, surrounded by a sea of indigenous villages. The ladino residents held a profound disdain for the native population that continued through the colonial period and even into the late 20th century. Historian Jan de Vos calls this, “one of the shameful burdens of Chiapan society” (Vos 1994: 66-67).

In the initial stages of the local conflict, the local Indians refused to obey and rebelled against the Spanish settlement. These rebellions were defensive. Indians refused to respect the *encomienda* arrangements. Such rebellions became a constant throughout colonial and post-colonial history. An analysis of indigenous resistance to the Spanish attempts to subordinate the Indians gives an illustrative glimpse of the process of change throughout the colonial era and also gives a sense of historical continuity to the current Zapatista rebellion. It is against similar conditions that the local Indians have always rebelled. In this context it is easier to understand how mestizo intellectuals from urban Mexico were able to unite the many indigenous groups across ethnic lines to fight not only for local reforms but also for a new vision of the nation which would entail revolutionary changes.

According to historian Jan de Vos (1994: 68) three types of resistance have been practiced against Spanish domination: hidden resistance, negotiated resistance and open resistance. Hidden resistance took the form of practicing banned forms of religious worship outside the view of political and religious authorities. Such practices enabled the indigenous groups to blend their religion with the imposed Catholic practices in order to

achieve a mix of the two which was tolerated by ecclesiastical authorities and allowed the diverse Mayan communities to continue their traditions in rituals that remained meaningful to them. Such syncretic practices continue to exist among the different Mayan peoples in the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala.

Negotiated resistance allowed the native populations at least some say in the way they would be integrated into the system and how the vast cultural changes would be developed. While under the colonial order traditions would never evolve in a free and natural way, indigenous groups took advantage of opportunities to negotiate how these changes would be implemented.

Open resistance against the Spanish invasion has been part of Chiapas's regional history since the arrival of the first Spanish expeditionary forces. The Chiapanecas put up fierce resistance: according to the legend during one intense battle many Chiapaneca combatants chose to throw themselves from the canyon walls rather than be captured and enslaved by the Spaniards. The jungle region east of Ocosingo, now known as the conflict zone, put up a great resistance to Spanish invaders who captured and enslaved many prisoners. After 200 years of battles with the original Lacandon nation, the Spaniards forced them to abandon an island fortress. The last members of this group were found in a Guatemalan coastal community. Their disappearance erased a cultural line that traced back to builders of the temples of Palenque.

The Spaniards were unable to achieve total control over this region and it remained a natural refuge for all those Indians who refused to be subjugated by the colonial regime (Lenkersdorf 1995: 83). Maya-Yucatec speakers replaced the original Lacandones and continued to exist as one of the groups least influenced by European culture into the 20th century. Other than these isolated clans, the jungle remained more or less uninhabited until

a massive migration in the 1950s. The Spanish colonists referred to it as “the desert of loneliness” (de Vos 1990).

One of the most remembered organized rebellions to take place against the Spanish colonial regime occurred in 1712. This rebellion, and the phenomena that were responsible for bringing it about, give some insight into indigenous identity and the level of cultural penetration and ideological domination achieved by the Spanish colonizers who at that time made up about 2% of the population (Viqueira 1996: 106). The rebellion manifested itself in a radical reversal of the imposed order. It was an attempt by the indigenous population to re-centre itself and once again become the masters of their destiny. They attempted to create an Indian-ruled kingdom where they would become the dominators and the Spanish would be converted into “Indian” servants and peons. In one of the first offensives the colonial town of Chilon was attacked. The Spaniards who were not killed were made to work in the homes of the Indians as peons (Wasserstrom 1983). The rebels attempted to recreate an “Indian Republic” as an alternative to the exploitive colonial regime.

The rebellion demonstrated that despite the enormous cultural changes lived by the Indians, the Spanish colonial regime was never able to achieve a complete spiritual integration of the Indian population into the Catholic colonial order. The 1712 rebellion led to an easing of the colonial grip over indigenous communities; nevertheless conditions only became worse. The resistance never ceased. However, it was not until after Independence, and the power vacuum it left, that a renewed effort to subdue the local indigenous communities again created the conditions for another open rebellion and attempt to re-create an indigenous order.

Independence, Revolution and Neo-Colonialism in Chiapas

Throughout the colonial period Chiapas remained under the jurisdiction of the Guatemalan Spanish Audiencia. When the movement for independence began, the colonial province had to decide whether to join Guatemala or Mexico. Chiapas was caught in the middle of two distinct histories. In many ways Chiapas belonged more to Central America than to the Mexican lands to its north. Historically it had looked south to the colonial administrative centres in Guatemala. It was also separated from Mexico geographically. The straight of Tehuantepec is the narrowest point in Mexico, and separates it from the rest of Central America. From the lowlands of Tabasco, and deserts of Oaxaca, rise the highland mountains that make Chiapas the geographical gateway to Central America. Culturally, Chiapas's Mayan languages share a common history with Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Chiapas's pre-Hispanic kingdoms of Palenque and Bonampak were important northern centres during the height of the classic period (200AD-900AD) when the Mayan civilization achieved its artistic and intellectual peak.

The decision to unite Chiapas with Mexico was not made democratically. According to a report written by General Vicente Filisola to the Mexican government, of the approximately 130,000 inhabitants of Chiapas only 4,000 were Spaniards. It was only this 3% of the population that would have had a say in the region's future. The indigenous people were "treated with much contempt, and they have been forced always into a very humiliating submission." Filisola also commented on the contrast between the natural wealth of the region and the extreme poverty of its inhabitants (Benjamin 1996: 5). The province of Chiapas was a neglected province in a minor region of Spanish America. It had largely been ignored by the colonial administration in Guatemala.

The Chiapas elite chose to join Mexico for several reasons. First, it had not prospered under Guatemalan rule and thought they would do better under Mexico. Second, it already had established trade ties with Mexico that they wished to expand. Third, the local political elite expected that it would be able to operate with more autonomy under Mexico due to the greater distance of its administrative centre. Fourth, conservatives favoured Mexico's monarchical government over rumours of republicanism in Guatemala. Fifth, the Chiapan elite believed that Mexico could and would defend the province better in case of popular insurrection (Benjamin 1996).

Independence from Spain set off a new movement for regional control of Chiapas's natural wealth. The landowners from the Grijalva river valley (where Tuxtla Gutiérrez now lies) united into a liberal faction while the oligarchy from the highlands became the conservative forces. These factions fought over the control of land and indigenous labour. The Agrarian Laws passed from 1826-1832 defined the maximum extension of common lands based on a village's population. This opened up vast tracts of land (*terrenos baldíos*) surrounding indigenous communities. The land was purchased by the ladino elite who in turn used the indigenous people in the surrounding villages to work the land. By the 1850s virtually all the indigenous communities had their "vacant" communal lands taken away (Benjamin 1996:14). The following quote is taken from a contemporary Mayan peasant describing his perception of this period. It is an example of "history from within" (López-Portillo: 233) as an indigenous man describes how the lands were taken away:

The plunder of indigenous communities is an old story. . . Between 1824 and 1909 the governments of Mexico and Chiapas made agrarian laws and the reform laws that permitted anyone to buy *tierras baldías* ["excess" lands]. Our grandfathers told us how they would use laws to buy lands that did not have owners, even though they were the lands of the grandfathers of our grandfathers who had them in fallow. When the *Caxlanes* (non-

indigenous people) saw these lands they went to the government to buy them as *tierras baldías*. Since these old people did not have title documents it was easy to grab the land from them. The people simply said, "Let's see where is it written that this is your land?"...Since the indigenous people didn't know how to read or write, the rich people did what they wanted. (García et al 1994: 35)

The issue of labour resources put the regional elite into two different camps. The Grijalva valley landowners were in desperate need of labour. In the central lowlands only 7% of the population was indigenous while in the highlands the number was 54% (Rus 1995: 148). A Servitude Law was passed in 1827 making anyone over the age of 18 subject to the municipal authorities decision to be placed in the military or obliged to work for employers needing labour. The problem faced by the Grijalva valley elite was that the bulk of indigenous labour was controlled by the highland landowners and parish priests based in San Cristóbal. The lowland elite thus became naturally inclined to the liberal current which at that time advocated the separation of Church and state and the privatization of communal indigenous lands. They also stood against the system of *baldiaje* (legal servitude in exchange for rent).

The intra-elite conflicts that were fought out during the first decades of Chiapas's independence escalated. The competition for land and indigenous labour worsened the conditions in highland communities. Indigenous communities were slowly stripped of their lands and forced to become labourers on haciendas and plantations. In 1846 the Larraínzar family managed to confiscate three-quarters of the lands of Chamula and parts of other communities. In total, their holdings added up to 47,600 hectares (Rus 1983).

The outcome of this was the so-called Caste War of 1869. Popular history has it that the highland indigenous people converged on San Cristóbal to take out revenge on their

ladino exploiters. This version has been put forth since the 19th century in an attempt to show the danger of leaving the indigenous people to rule themselves (Rus 1983). The real war, however, took place between the two ladino factions and the Mayan peasants were used to fight the battles. While San Cristobalenses would later exalt the bravery of the ladinos and the barbarity of the Indians, the death statistics told another story with 47 Ladinos dying, some by their own artillery fire, compared to over 1,000 indigenous people, including women and children (Rus 1983).

At the same time authentic manifestations of cultural resistance were seen during the war. Indian rebels attempted to invert the dominant order and recreate an autochthonous history. The increasing impoverishment of the indigenous economy led to a search for alternatives. Indigenous communities began to look for new, less exploitive, ways of relating to the ladinos. They created new forms of religiosity and alternative economic centres. They sacrificed a child prophesying he would return as an "Indian Christ." Their leader Pedro Cuscat became the highest authority over the ruling post-colonial order. The uprising attempted to re-centre the Indian identity that was being more and more relegated to the margins in the context of intra-elite battles over land and labour. There was an attempt to re-assert a self-directed way of being Indian. The response was massacre as hundreds of Indian peasants would die.

Liberal reforms were implemented across Mexico in the 1860s with the intent of deepening capitalist relations of production. Nonetheless, by the second half of the 19th century the practice of debt servitude had become institutionalized in Chiapas (Benjamin 1996: 22). It served the interests of both factions of the Chiapan elite. Near the end of the century there were attempts to end this practice, but it was not until the Revolution that it would be formally abolished. By the late 19th century capitalist landowners began to

modernize Chiapan agriculture and integrate it with the national and international economy. Communal lands that had been used by indigenous communities for generations were privatized. The *baldiaje* system persisted, requiring peasants to exchange their labour for a parcel of land.

You work one week for nothing and then you rest for two weeks. When the two weeks are finished then you give another week of labour, but for nothing, you are not paid for it. (Gómez Hernández and Humberto Ruz 1988: 63)

Peasants carried out work as porters, personal servants and farm hands in the boss's fields and stables. As "vacant" lands were privatized, backward labour relations would persist.

The Mexican revolution interrupted this process in certain parts of the nation but it by no means fundamentally altered it. Within Chiapas the revolution did not take hold--it was "a revolution from without". Instead of representing a break from the modernizing reforms initiated under the Porfiriato (1876-1910), the revolution momentarily interrupted the process before it could be continued in the 1920s. The economic elite retained control of the state government, using it to direct a program of modernization. The minor rebellions which took place during the revolution were elite-led, seeking to advance local objectives. One rebellion took place amongst highland landowners in San Cristóbal who resented the shift of state power to Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Later, the Mapache rebellion resisted the occupying Carrancista army and the abolition of indebted servitude. The Mapaches sought to ensure that peasants would not consider the example of land reform undertaken by the original Zapatistas in Morelos (Nigh 1994:9). Essentially, the Mapache counter-rebellion was successful; the revolution did little to touch existing power relations in Chiapas. It would not be until under the Cárdenas administration (1934-40) that agrarian reform would take

place, though landowners would still be protected by unalienability status that protected their large landholdings.

By the 1940s tensions were mounting in the highlands of Chiapas due to population growth and the increasing scarcity of land. From 1920-1950 landless campesinos and agricultural workers began to organize. The land reform spelled out in the 1917 Constitution was implemented under Cárdenas in the 1930s so that by the 1950s the Chiapan ruling class was challenged by popular mobilization. In order to address the explosive situation, the uninhabited eastern lowlands became a social safety valve for land hungry indigenous peasants. This policy defused widespread discontent for two more decades. By the 1970s, the eastern lowlands began to reach their demographic limits and agrarian rebellion broke out again. An agrarian movement seeking independence from PRI structures surged, and peasants began invading lands and carrying out demonstrations throughout Chiapas.

Exodus to the Promised Land

Beginning in the 1940s agrarian policy focused on opening up new national lands for colonization. Instead of redistributing lands and affecting the political and economic power of the landholding class, the eastern lowlands of Chiapas were opened to farmers who wanted to create new communities (Reyes Ramos 1992:32). These new communities would later become the heart of the EZLN rebel territory known as the "conflict zone." Migrant farmers came to these lands with a deep desire to improve their lives. As Ross (1994) points out, the names given to many of the communities reflected this hope: Nueva Estrella, Nueva Esperanza, Nuevo Jerusalem, Tierra y Libertad, El Eden, El Paraíso, etc.

The settlement of the eastern lowlands was an opportunity to become self-sufficient and creators of their own existence. A new generation of farmers who had faced serious problems of land scarcity in the highlands and feudal-like labour conditions on the large plantations fought the hardships of the hostile jungles to begin new communities.

The following interview takes place in Roberto Barrios, municipality of Palenque. This community declared itself in rebellion in May 1996 with the inauguration of an EZLN “Aguascalientes” centre of resistance. The community is situated on a river where the Mexican armed forces have constructed a large base on the opposite shore. This interview takes place with some of the community’s original founders, who arrived in the early 1960s to create a new community for their families from Petalcingo.

We left Petalcingo because we did not have land and we suffered from poverty and need. We decided to look for a new place to live where there was still enough land. So a group of us came and saw this land [...] and returned to Petalcingo. We held a meeting and discussed what to do. We decided to move here and make a life where there is land. So that’s how we arrived [...]

(Son of one of the elders): When our parents arrived here the biggest problem they faced was that in their birth lands they had no work, nothing to eat and no way to earn money. The problem they faced upon arriving to these lands was that they came without money [...] and had no place to work. This land was mountains and covered in jungle [...] so they had to leave to find work. All they had was a bit of *pozol* [a drink made of corn meal and water] that they took to the places where they worked because the *patrón* [boss] would not give them anything to eat. Often they weren’t even given a roof to sleep under and they were forced to sleep in the rain if the *patrón* was a mean bastard. They had to put up with this because they couldn’t return to their families without money. They weren’t even assured they would be paid because sometimes they would work and not be paid.

They'd return with nothing. And in this time they still didn't have a large corn crop or more lands to cultivate. They would have to walk all the way to Palenque to find work. They would walk for 12 hours to arrive.

Other elder: We arrived by foot walking all day. Sometimes 4 or 5 days walking for the *patrón* because there were no cars or roads. That's how we suffered and we still continue to suffer today.

[...] We spent thirty years struggling and petitioning the municipal government and the state governor but they never paid any attention to us. They only built us a dirt road after the 1994 uprising occurred. [...] But for thirty years we had no road. When someone was sick we had to carry them on our backs to Palenque and at times they didn't make it and they would die on the trail to the hospital. Those were the problems we faced in our community.[...]

The customs that we practiced have been lost but we now have it in our heads to renew them and bring them back. The customs that we now practice do not come from our traditions. We used to wear another type of clothing and we practiced different types of fiestas. What you saw here was what we used to do during the carnival[...] The older men would like to teach the youth who no longer remember. So that is why we think we should return to our traditions.

[...] They are important because we have lost them and had other ideas put into our heads that do not come from us.

[...] When we have time to go and visit our families [in Petalcingo] we have aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews, even some people have their parents there still. Some people go and visit their families and they exchange things, for example things that we grow here that they can't grow there.

[...] One of the other problems we had upon arriving was that many people died from the bite of the Nahuac snake. Many people died because we

didn't have medicine and they didn't know the traditional herbal medicines[...] Now we know how to cure the snakebites with plants. Before we didn't and at times men would have to go into the mountains and have bad luck and be bit and die. They would leave their families behind with nothing.

Son: I was born in Petalcingo. I left when I was two years old. They have told me all the stories about coming here. The elders are the original witnesses to the founding of this community.

(interview with author, July 1996)

In Chiapas, the Lacandon jungle is popularly thought of as the region of tropical rainforest inhabited by the Lacandon Indians filled with exotic wild animals such as jaguars, monkeys, parrots and the feared *nayuac* snake. However, a more general definition based on the pattern of cultural and commercial ties that create a distinct dynamic in the region of the eastern lowlands of Chiapas is that by Xochitl Leyva and Gabriel Eusencio (1996). It defines a common pattern of social, cultural and economic relations in the region in the municipalities of Palenque, Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas. This geographically diverse region contains mountains as high as 2,450 metres and vast lowland jungle regions at 50 metres. It is criss-crossed with rivers and canyons, part of the basin and tributary system of the Usumacinta river. The area under study does not encompass all of these municipalities. The northern lowlands of Palenque are more tied to the gulf plains of Tabasco. Ocosingo, the largest municipality in Mexico, encompasses several distinctly different geographic regions. The communities that lie near the Pan-American Highway are not connected to the jungle region, while the canyons and jungle east of the municipal capital do. Altamirano is divided between the highlands and the lowlands. The western part of Las Margaritas is connected to Comitán, while the eastern canyons are included in the region of study.

Leyva and Ascencio (1996) identify the patterns of communication and interrelation on three levels: macro-regional, sub-regional and micro-regional. The Lacandon canyons have a macro-regional tie to the cities of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, San Cristóbal de las Casas and Villahermosa. In these cities the state powers and religious, financial and federal agencies can be found. It is in these arenas where the interests of campesinos, private industry and the federal government meet. Subregional centres are the towns and municipal capitals such as Ocosingo, Palenque, Altamirano, Comitán and Las Margaritas. Here one finds the local campesino and rancher associations, cattle and coffee intermediaries and the local parish centres. These centres also provide the main source of markets and goods for the outlying communities. Finally, on the micro-regional level there are communities and neighbourhoods within the jungle that serve as local centres providing basic services such as primary education, small stores with limited inventories, perhaps a basic health clinic, an airstrip and access to the main road. This is where local face-to-face interaction takes place and individuals and families know each other and local histories join communities together through fiestas and inter-community marriages.

The base of the Zapatista army inhabits the canyons and tropical rain forests of the region of the Lacandon jungle. When the Spaniards arrived in Chiapas this region was inhabited by Mayans, part of the Chol-speaking family. In 1714 the last descendants of this group were pacified and deported from the region to Guatemala. A new group of Maya-Yucatec speakers would shortly take their place and later adopt their name: the Lacandones. But the original inhabitants of the Lacandon jungle, descendants of the same culture that developed a high civilization during the Maya classic period, would disappear just as in the case of the Chiapanecas. The last remnants of their language would be recorded in Guatemala in the 18th century.

The region remained largely uninhabited until the 19th century, with the exception of the subsistence farmer-hunter Maya-Yucatecs, the new Lacandones. The second conquest of the Lacandon jungle began with the arrival of loggers after Mexico's independence in the 1820s. The main activities to dominate the region until well into the 20th century were extractive industries. The region was inhabited by a mobile labour force, consisting mostly of highland Indians who had been contracted or swindled into labour camps. The jungle novels of Bruno Traven, written during the 1930s, explain the process in painstaking detail.

The first agricultural communities would not be founded until the 1930s when colonizing indigenous groups from the highlands began to arrive to carve new communities out of the rough wilderness. Ironically, some of the Chol people—descendants of those who were hunted out of the jungle in the 16th century and forced to live in the *reducciones* and provide labour and tribute to the Spaniards—would be some of the same groups returning to the jungle to their ancestral homelands. The majority of the new colonists, however, would be Tzeltal Indians moving into the canyons of Ocosingo to escape the lack of land in the highlands and miserable labour conditions as peons on haciendas.

The first groups that arrived in the jungle were involved in extractive activities and came in search of employment. They left the haciendas in the highlands where they had worked as peons under a system of debt servitude. They went in search of the possibility of obtaining work cutting mahogany or in the rubber-tapping industry. In the 1930s a new type of migrant came to the Lacandon canyons. Cattle ranching colonists began to arrive and establish permanent communities. They colonized national lands and the lands of large *fincas* (plantations) where they could prove the finca had tracts of land in excess of the

agrarian reform laws. The first communities to be colonized were in the canyon of Patihuitz, municipality of Ocosingo, and in Las Margaritas.

Many of these first colonies, such as Guadalupe Tepeyac and Patihuitz, would later become the heartland of the Zapatista movement. It is therefore necessary to understand the organizing that took place in these communities from their founding to the eventual uprising on January 1st, 1994. The role of the church and independent campesino organizations were both important. Consciousness raising was essential as campesinos began to identify with the nation over the community. They found new ways of interpreting their reality.

The Ethnic Panorama

It is inaccurate to speak of the Indians of Chiapas as if they were one homogeneous group. While Mayan peasants increasingly identify across broader organizational networks (Mayan writers, weaving cooperatives, autonomy movements, the EZLN), most indigenous people in Chiapas identify with language and community. Divisions already existed in the Pre-Hispanic period but they were sharpened and intensified under the colonial regime. This lack of unity was used to create strategic alliances strengthening Spanish rule. Divisions were also reinforced by the *reducción* (reduction), which were new townships created by colonial authorities. Costumes that identified each person with his or her village made political control easier.

The highlands of Chiapas provide an illustrative example of the diversity of cultural identity. Tzotzil is the common language, yet there is as much difference among the municipalities as similarities, and they maintain limited contact with each other. The indigenous inhabitants can identify the community origins of others by their particular dress and form of speaking, as accents and vocabularies vary within Tzotzil across a relatively

small geographical space. Within the communities there are also divisions along religious lines. The Protestant/traditional split is now prevalent throughout Chiapas.

These examples show the difficulty of speaking of the indigenous people of Chiapas as representative of a single set of interests, given the diversity of ethnic identities. It also demonstrates how remarkable it is that EZLN organizers were able to unite representatives from diverse communities across previously impregnable barriers. We cannot say it is simply an uprising of the indigenous people of Chiapas. Even though representatives of the EZLN speak in the first-person plural as “we, the indigenous people of Chiapas,” it is still most accurately described as an uprising by a section of indigenous people in Chiapas that cross ethnic lines and share a common history.

In addition, the uprising divided indigenous communities both within and across ethnic lines, according to political affiliation. The PRD/PRI split and the growth of other political options such as the EZLN, FZLN, autonomy movements and many official and independent campesino organizations have created a wide diversity throughout rural Chiapas. As yet these new options have not been accompanied by a generalized tolerance. In several regions including the northern Chol-speaking zone, the municipality of Chilon and the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, paramilitary groups composed of Indian peasants have been formed with the complicity of PRI politicians and state security forces to use violence against the new independent organizations (see Chiapas: donde la justicia no tiene lugar).

The uprising did unite some highland communities with others in the Lacandon canyons, raising awareness of the similarity of conditions across indigenous communities in Chiapas. This point was made clear to me when I talked with a woman who operated a popular culture centre in San Cristóbal that lent Zapatista videos to representatives from

indigenous communities. The videos showed rallies, protests and counter-cultural celebrations that took place in different communities throughout the highlands and lowlands. The reaction to the videos was revealing as many people laughed and joked at the different ways of being indigenous, from traditional dances to forms of dress. Clearly, many of the people in more remote villages were not aware of the extent of the diversity among them, yet they are committed to struggling for a common agenda. This willingness to recognize differences has become a central feature of Zapatismo and when reflected on the world it might explain the emphasis within the movement's discourse on tolerance, diversity and the creation of *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* (one world where many worlds fit).

Another interesting point about the unity across ethnic lines among members of the EZLN is that they are willing to forgo the chance of receiving immediate improvements in their local living conditions in order to struggle for broader national changes. They have united without self-interest in mind: *para todos para todo para nosotros nada* (everything for everyone, nothing for us). While many communities support the Mexican armed forces and government for the immediate benefits they brings, the EZLN has created an ideologically disciplined movement that is willing to forgo short-term gains for long-term national change. Comandante David told me candidly that this is a movement that may have to continue for generations and when he dies his children will continue on.

The history recounted in this chapter helps us understand why members of the EZLN would be willing to make such a sacrifice. The arrival of European explorers, fortune hunters, missionaries and settlers on the shores of the lands now known as the Americas set in motion a violent process that subjugated entire nations of people to outside powers. The colonization was carried out through force of arms and the imposition of a

new world view which placed Europeans on a higher scale than the native peoples. Indigenous customs were seen as inventions of the devil and entire cultures were negated under the new order. In addition, foreign diseases decimated the population, serving to speed up the process of pacification.

The conditions of marginalization and exploitation that gave rise to the Zapatista rebellion are a product of this history. The original inhabitants were enslaved through the imposition of colonial institutions and their lands were taken away. Two forms of living would co-exist: the hacienda and indigenous community. The unfolding of events that began in 1492 set the stage for colonialism and the development of capitalism. To this day we are all still directly impacted by these events. In Chiapas, debt servitude and peonage continued into the 20th century, so that by the 1950s land-squeezed highland Indians, former peons from feudal-like plantations and peasants from other states began to move into Chiapas's previously uninhabited tropical eastern lowlands—the Lacandon canyons. The new colonizers sought freedom from exploitation on the plantations and the conditions of scarcity in the highlands by constructing new frontier communities. Once in the tropical lowlands and abandoned by the state, they began to organize against centuries of oppression by making demands not just for their local communities but with global implications.

The irony is that for many indigenous people their world lies in their communities. They struggle for national changes in a nation that they do not even fully understand. When shown a globe of the world some young Zapatista militia members asked where is Patihuitz, where is San Miguel, where is Ocosingo. How with such a limited knowledge of the broader world can these support bases develop a national plan for struggle? The answer lies in the consciousness raising that resulted from migration to the eastern lowlands, and

the work of the church and political organizers which permitted a broader identity to develop.

Activist Subcultures and Regional Organizing: Dialogical Influences

“Before the EZLN, there already existed organizations [...]”
Comandante David

The last chapter focused on the history of Indian resistance to conquest, colonialism and republican governments. In conferences organized around the “500 years of resistance” campaign many leaders have asserted that the Indians were never conquered. Resistance continues to flow through the historical imagination, allowing Indian communities to resist and adapt despite the levels of control achieved by colonial and republican regimes.

The EZLN uprising built on earlier organizational efforts that left behind a subculture of activism. Resistance has always been present on varying levels but in the 1970s a wave of non-affiliated movements emerged in Chiapas outside official corporatist channels. These organizations acted as intermediary bodies, creating the cultural conditions for a new struggle. The continuity of this activism served as a seed for the Zapatista movement. In this chapter, I examine the pre-movements that provided the context for the

conversion of thousands of Indian peasants into new political subjects, and the eventual emergence of the EZLN.

The EZLN has existed since at least 1983 and, as the interview material presented in this chapter confirms, its recruitment was done through community-level organizations and existing political groups. Beginning in the 1970s, there was a flourishing of new organizational networks in Chiapas, focusing on agrarian issues, religion and ethnicity. The EZLN not only capitalized on these existing forms of organization to gain new recruits but also negotiated and competed with them for popular support. George Collier wrote:

The Zapatistas [...] are placing themselves in opposition to the tactics used by other peasant groups and are fighting to be the voice of the oppressed. The Zapatista consciousness was formed not just by the backbreaking toil of colonizing the Lacandon jungle, but also by dialogue and dissension within and between other peasant organizations. (1994:55)

In this context the Zapatista's armed option was a rejection of the peaceful tactics used by other organizations. At the same time it carried on the momentum generated by the activist subcultures of earlier movements. In this way, the original EZLN organizers would not have to start from the beginning by creating "new movement frames from whole cloth" (McAdam 1994:43). The work done by these pre-existing organizational efforts, including the church, peasant groups, the 1974 Indigenous Congress, Maoist organizers and earlier guerrilla movements created important preconditions that, following McAdam, "function as repositories of cultural materials into which succeeding generations of activists can dip to fashion ideologically similar, but chronologically separate, movements" (1994:43).

In particular this chapter deals with four lines of movement. First, new political identities were generated by migration to the eastern lowlands of Chiapas. Indian peasants

began to see themselves for the first time as members of the nation and developed an awareness of shared problems across regional and ethnic lines. Second, the state had abandoned the migrant farmers once in their new communities and the church then became the dominant organization in the region. Its work with the new communities is essential to understanding the formation of new identities. Third, the creation of independent agrarian organizations provided an alternative channel for Indian peasants to present their demands before the state. These new organizations provided “schools for political education [...] that developed at the margins of the political system” (Harvey 1990: 196). Finally, when this path of struggle was met with repression a sector became radicalized, and chose to counteract state violence by joining the EZLN.

These four lines can be considered pre-movements to the 1994 uprising. The earlier organizational efforts generated an activist subculture and established networks the EZLN could build on for recruitment. Most importantly, the relationship between these external influences and the organized Indian campesinos was dialogical. Bishop Ruiz tells how he came to Chiapas to convert the Indians and instead was himself converted by them. The same process occurred when the original EZLN organizers entered into contact with Indian communities for the first time. In addition to the literature on peasant rebellions which often sees the influence of urban university-educated organizers as decisive (see Skocpol 1982: 361-367, Wickham-Crowley 1992: 23-25), the case of Chiapas demonstrates that the relationship was not unilateral. Both sides were mutually influenced by the encounter in a dialogical relationship.

The final section on the formation of the EZLN discusses how the movement emerged in the highlands and the northern zone. The first interpretations of the uprising referred exclusively to the eastern lowlands of Chiapas as rebel territory. It soon became

evident, however, that the EZLN existed in other regions and was a growing force. The final section thus documents the expansion of the movement into these regions.

Shifting Identities

The Indian peasants who created new agricultural colonies in the eastern Lacandon lowlands of Chiapas viewed the migration as an “exodus.” The colonists sought not only land but also a new life. The Catholic Church played an important role in this area. The following message by Father Iribarren, a Dominican priest, is an example of the interpretation that the church presented to the new communities:

We are part of a People that walks toward liberation, ever since the day this path began when you left the finca and began the struggle for land. We are a people chosen by God, just like the Israelites who put their hope in God to prepare them for the dangers of the unknown and the desert. (Iribarren 1992: 42)

The new colonists came to the east from all over Chiapas; most were displaced families and ex-peons from the highlands. In Ocosingo approximately 7% of the colonists were from outside Chiapas (Leyva and Ascencio 1996). The dominant language was Tzeltal but over decades of settlement a new “cultural mosaic” was created. Intermarriage and the constant presence of *caxlanes* (non-Indian people) combined to make identity a particularly prominent subject. In comparison to the more tightly bound Indian municipalities of the highlands, identity in the “Lacandonia Babilonia” became a matter of contention and constant renegotiation. Leyva and Ascencio write:

Social reality [...] shows the phenomenon of identity as a permanent unfinished process in constant search for definition. Seen like this, the identity of the jungle colonist is neither univocal nor stable; it is not

something given or acquired all at once and forever; instead it is something relative that manifests itself according to its means; it is in constant reformulation. The indigenous cultures that co-exist in the Lacandon jungle have shown dynamism and a capacity to respond to unprecedented situations. (1996: 103)

Collier writes that the colonists “shucked ethnic origin for more generic peasant identities” (1994b: 15). This position was echoed in one of the initial interviews I had with a colonist from the Lacandon canyons. “Lorenzo,” an *EZLN responsable* from El Prado Pacayal in the Patihuitz canyon framed his grievances in a class-based analysis, in terms of rich versus poor and peasant struggle:

I understand that we are exploited. We live in the most simple way often without the most basic luxuries such as sugar. We are poor and marginalized, living in slave-like conditions in order just to survive. From my point of view I believe that as long as one rich man exists with a huge amount of land and animals it is necessary to continue the struggle [...] The government does not listen to our words. It has its own army and when we challenge the government with a protest for just demands it chases us down with its army. The government has its own army who is our enemy and now the campesinos have their own army as well. We are conscious that it is necessary to become better prepared so that in any moment we will have a stronger army as well. The Zapatista support bases at this point are willing to convert themselves into an army, if it is necessary, because we are not going to give up what has been started, we will struggle as it should be. We have now analyzed clearly who is the enemy and the enemy is supported by its army. There is nothing left for campesinos to do except create their own power by taking up arms and forming their own army. (interview with author July 1995)

This interview took place in July 1995 just four months after soldiers of the Mexican armed forces had carried out an offensive in eastern Chiapas in search of the EZLN leadership.

The soldiers had destroyed homes and stolen food and livestock and El Prado Pacayal was one of the communities most damaged. While in refuge many community members became sick and several deaths resulted. This explains the particularly angry tone of the interview.

While this man did not see the uprising in terms of ethnicity there was at the same time a clear indigenous people's discourse being constructed throughout Chiapas. In 1992 thousands of Indians marched on San Cristóbal and tore down the statue of the conquistador Diego Mazariegos. Since the 1974 Indigenous Congress, ethnic identity had become an important issue in Chiapas. The 1991/92 Catechist training manual for the Tzeltal team included reference to "500 years: What does it mean to you?" It goes on saying:

We will protest the humiliation suffered by the indigenous peoples, denounce the past abuses, the theft of lands, the destruction of culture, the genocide of so many people [...] Furthermore the communities will announce an alternative project, a project of the poor. (see *Curso de Catequistas*)

In the notes taken by Father Pablo Iribarren during a pastoral visit to La Soledad in 1992 he explained the meaning of 500 years. The colonists in this meeting had come to the canyons during the 1950s, having been indentured workers on a finca that they left to escape the "suffering and caprices of the patron," said one woman (Iribarren 1992: 40). The following was Father Iribarren's speech:

The world that surrounds and envelopes us has tried to destroy and humiliate the People, but here it is stronger than ever, resisting victoriously for more than 500 years. What has happened is that we are destroying ourselves with drink, division, individualism, forgetting our customs and traditions, forgetting who we are and assimilating ways and forms of the

Western world that do not help us; sometimes we have confrontations among us that weaken us, we leave behind our religious practices, Sunday celebrations and festivals. (Iribarren 1992: 41)

This concern for cultural traditions was repeated to me by Tzeltal and Chol EZLN comandantes in Roberto Barrios, Palenque:

Comandante Salvador: Yes, it is important to recover our traditions, because they are what identify us as Tzeltales and Choles. We identify ourselves through our dress and our culture and these are being lost [...] especially the language. It is very important to rescue the indigenous culture because if we don't we will no longer be able to differentiate between who is Chol or who is Tzeltal.

Comandante Pedro: Also, I believe the best way to go about recovering our traditions is through becoming autonomous. For this reason the Zapatista struggle includes the demand for autonomy. Only in this way can we rescue what has been lost and promote the culture that we have.

Comandante María: [answers in Tzeltal--translated by Comandante Pedro] I have been working to rescue our culture as indigenous people [...] to try to understand the situation we live in and organize as women. We can no longer remain quiet so we have to organize ourselves as indigenous women. (interview with author May 1996)

The identity shift that resulted from migration was thus multifaceted. It involved an expanding awareness of the self in a diverse world and the creation of a political identity centred around both questions of class and ethnicity. This process was affected by diverse influences, the most important being the church, peasant organizing and the EZLN.

The Church and Consciousness Raising

Immediately after the 1994 rebellion, the church in Chiapas faced a barrage of criticisms accusing it of instigating the uprising. The government put the blame on Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the diocese's "option for the poor," claiming that it had preached "Marxism and armed rebellion" to the Indians of Chiapas. Many of the accusations that appeared in the media in the first month after the uprising were simply untrue and part of a campaign of disinformation. There was a misunderstanding about the role of the church and the work that it had carried out in Chiapas since the early 1960s. With the arrival of Bishop Ruiz in 1959 a movement began for the construction of an autochthonous Indian Church. Bishop Ruiz put his effort toward supporting the liberation of the Mayan peasants of Chiapas.

The Catholic Church in Chiapas was one of the first to authentically work on the side of poor Indian peasants during the colonial period. In 1542 Bartolomé de las Casas was named Bishop of Chiapas and arrived in Ciudad Real to implement the New Laws of Barcelona which restricted the use of Indian labour on the encomiendas and prohibited slavery. The encomenderos threatened by Bishop de las Casas greeted his arrival with aggression, forcing him to live his first month in Chiapa de los Indios. Bishop de las Casas and his Dominican brothers managed to reduce the power and control of the encomenderos and initiated a debate that sought to see the Indians as humans (Rand Parish 1985). A little more than 400 years later Samuel Ruiz came to Chiapas as the new bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. He was conservative, having studied in the Vatican, nevertheless, after exposure to the conditions experienced by the Indians in Chiapas, he was converted into a fighter for the rights of the poor and oppressed. He was inspired by Liberation Theology and was one of the youngest bishops to attend the 1968 Bishop's conference in Medellín

Colombia, where the Latin American Church declared its option for the poor (Maciel and Mendivil 1985).

Bishop Ruiz became a hero to the local Indians over the three decades he worked in Chiapas and earned the name of respect and endearment "Tatic," which means grandfather. He also became the enemy to others. Bishop Ruiz began to recruit progressive priests to operate in the local parishes and workers within the Jesuit order also became active in indigenous communities (Fazio 1994). Father Carlos from the Jesuit Mission of Bachajón told me how he arrived in the 1960s and worked with anthropologists and linguists, learning the Tzeltal language and working to understand the local Indians. He said one day they invited some of the local followers into the church and asked what would happen if the Bishop sent a plane asking the priests to leave quickly for a meeting in San Cristóbal, and the plane went down and they all perished? What would happen to the Indian Church? The Tzeltal peasants answered that it would disappear. This is how the Jesuit Mission demonstrated the importance of creating a Church made by the Indians, for the Indians. Over the last 30 years the creation of an autochthonous church has been the central aim of Bishop Ruiz and the San Cristóbal diocese.

The Diocese of San Cristóbal headed by Bishop Samuel Ruiz was the only institution working with the new colonists who had little contact with state agencies. The church devoted its energies to training indigenous catechists and creating a church oriented towards the needs of the new Indian communities. The evangelization interpreted the Bible in a way that created awareness and raised consciousness. The Bible was discussed with an orientation toward liberation, enabling the new colonists to see their reality within a broader context:

Moses says that we must make a community that will enable us to find the promised land and our salvation [...] We are searching for this tradition because the Spaniards took it away from us and imposed their traditions. [...] God has a New Plan that will forcibly change the law of the exploiters [...] God tells us to search for a new life in the community (Iribarren 1988: 26).

The Dominican order re-established its presence in Chiapas in 1963 with the creation of the Ocosingo-Altamirano mission. There were many communities that only practiced the Eucharist once every two or three years. Because of the lack of human resources the Church could not be present throughout the far corners of the jungle region. At this same time, Bishop Ruiz, inspired by the Vatican II, the Bishops' conference in Medellín, and many other experiences of religious reflection in Latin America, decided to promote the creation of Indian catechists and *tuhuneles* (pre-deacons). Soon there would be thousands, working in their own communities. The pre-deacons were permitted to perform two of the sacraments: baptism and marriage. The Eucharist was also given with tortillas and *pozol* (a corn drink), replacing bread and wine. The new pre-deacons and catechists were able to perform their duties in their native language—in Ocosingo this was Tzeltal. This ecclesiastical novelty helped to inspire and enrich the communities' culture by respecting and promoting their traditions and enabled the Indian communities to interpret the Christian faith in a way that made them subjects of their own history.

The Tzeltal manual for the Ocosingo parish gives a view of the type of evangelizing that took place as part of the new "Church of the Poor". Indians in their religious reflection groups analyzed the conditions that they faced such as lack of land, markets, and access to credit, and would then look at the structural causes of these conditions: skewed land distribution, continuance of colonial attitudes, etc. (*Curso de Catequistas* 1991/2). These

reflections were often put within a reading of religious scriptures. Experiences from the Bible were used to illustrate these positions. Through these reflections a process of consciousness raising took place. One sister from the Palenque Parish explained to me how she taught that the Zapatista uprising was like “a liberation, a messianic coming of freedom” (interview with author March 1996).

In this way new political subjects were created. Indians could look beyond their local contexts to the broader socio-economic structures that blocked them from attaining justice. They were taught that everybody was equal under God whether landowners or Indians—something that in the context of Indian/ladino relations in Chiapas was revolutionary. Through the evangelical work of the church, Indians came to realize that it was not natural to suffer and be exploited and that they could change this by taking history into their own hands.

The church was instrumental in organizing the first indigenous conference in San Cristóbal in 1974, which became an important watershed for bringing together Mayan peasants across community lines. Out of the contacts made in this conference new alliances were created and a strong independent Indian peasant movement arose to take on the demands of the newly awakened “subjects.” The church clearly played a role in creating a new political consciousness in Indian communities in Chiapas. The later decision to take up arms, however, came from a different source unrelated to the church.

To those working in eastern Chiapas before 1994 the existence of an armed movement was something well known by all. Subcomandante Marcos argues that this information was suppressed while Mexico negotiated the NAFTA agreement with Canada and the United States. One source who worked in Las Margaritas with the diocese said that everybody talked of the “M.A.” (*movimiento armado* or armed movement). Nevertheless

he confirmed that Bishop Ruiz was not in agreement with the decision to take up arms. He recalled a sermon by Bishop Ruiz in a community in Las Margaritas several years before the uprising when the Bishop told the people “when you choose arms you leave behind the path to God” (interview with author May 1997).

According to the vicar of the San Cristóbal diocese, Father Gustavo, after the 1994 uprising the church decided not to abandon the rebels even though they had used violence. Father Gustavo explained the church's position on the uprising:

Our first reaction was fear. We thought it was wrong; that they had made the wrong choice. It seemed anachronistic in light of the Central American experience and we thought it would only lead to more violence. The church has never encouraged armed uprising. Nevertheless, we did not condemn the uprising because we understand the suffering and repression of the indigenous people who have followed a path of liberation [...] The church's position has always been to seek dialogue and social transformation. The Zapatista cause is thus that of the church. This path has cost us dearly, but the highest cost has been paid by the people. I have seen catechists unjustly imprisoned. They held peaceful demonstrations for potable water, schools and roads and the government response was always violent. Sometimes there were major arrests of up to 300 people. The Catholic Church has thus been one of the leading promoters of the path of peace and dialogue. (interview with author March 1997)

Father Raymundo, the parish priest in Ocosingo, explained the repression that was faced in the wake of the EZLN uprising:

In 1994 the church suffered three break-ins. The police accused the priests and nuns of being arms suppliers to the Zapatista army. They came into the parish and searched for weapons. The local elite [in Ocosingo] believes that all of the church is Zapatista. For that reason we have suffered many aggressions. They have attacked us verbally and in the media and in 1995

there was physical violence committed against some of the sisters. We have not suffered as much as other sectors of the church but we live in a constant state of tension. (interview with author March 1997)

Thus, since the 1960s large steps have been made in the creation of an autochthonous church. The 1974 Indigenous Conference brought together representatives from across Chiapas to discuss shared problems and joint actions to resolve them. Hundreds of Indians are now working in the communities, not only in matters of evangelization but also in health, women's issues and human rights. The Diocese continues to be a key figure in the defense of human rights in Chiapas, having created the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre and several parish-level human rights organizations. The work of Bishop Samuel Ruiz as the coordinator of the National Mediation Commission (CONAI) has been central to the peace process in Chiapas. Bishop Ruiz has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for several consecutive years.

Indian-Peasant Organizing

Before the decision was made to take up armed struggle we tried other channels. The indigenous people asked the government to help with machinery and with credit but it never did [...] instead they sent police and soldiers and many campesinos were killed.
EZLN community leader (Ocosingo)

There was an explosion of new organizing throughout Chiapas in the 1970s (Benjamin 1996: 235). This political movement was part of a flourishing of independent peasant organizing inspired by frustration with the official National Peasant Committee (CNC). Organizing on the basis of ethnic identity also became important during the 1970s. Many new organizations emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and as Harvey (1990) concluded, the result was the “formation of new political subjects and the spread of a new political culture.” The peasant movement was sparked by an agrarian impulse initiated

during the Echeverría administration. In the wake of the 1968 student massacre the state sought to once again bring the dissident left under its folds. Its rural policy thus became centered on agrarianism and land redistribution as a form of cooptation (Otero 1989). New local and regional peasant organizations emerged that were not associated with the government or political parties. The centralization of peasant organizing under the CNC began to break down.

The 1974 State Indigenous Conference commemorating the 500th anniversary of the birth of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas became a watershed moment for the Indian peasant struggle in Chiapas. Most of the new organizations that would emerge resulted from the networks established in this Congress. Araceli Burguete (1989) chronicled the human rights violations against the new movement from 1974–1988. She characterized the wave of independent organizing as an “ethno-peasant” movement; the majority of its participants were Indians who had organized around peasant/agrarian demands.

The new independent organizing was prevalent in three regions; first in the eastern lowlands of Chiapas, particularly in Ocosingo and Las Margaritas, in the region known today as the conflict zone; second, in the northern central highlands in the municipalities of Simojovel, Huitiupán and Sabanilla. Finally, a new wave of organizing began in the central valley, particularly in Venustiano Carranza.

In the Lacandon canyons in eastern Chiapas, three Ejido Unions joined together to form the *Union de Uniones* (UU) in Ocosingo and Las Margaritas. The UU was controlled by people who had attended the 1974 Indigenous Congress and was influenced by catechists and intellectuals of northern Mexico from *Línea Proletaria* (Proletarian Line, LP), a Maoist organization. The need for an organization was born out of the increasing insecurity of the land. A government decree in 1972 had granted more than 614,321

hectares to 76 Lacandon families, denying the rights of the 4,000 Chol and Tzeltal families that also occupied the land (Tello Díaz 1995: 59). In addition, many communities were declared to hold invalid claims to land and were forcibly evicted by the military. Thus the UU struggled to seek a solution to this problem by negotiating with government agencies (Benjamin 1996: 236). The UU worked closely with catechists and members of the LP, sharing ideas about organizational strategy.

Like many other radical independent organizations, the LP was formed in the wake of the 1968 massacre of students in Mexico City. It was composed of students and intellectuals from northern Mexico who sought to give ideological leadership to peasant organizations, rural communities and urban squatter settlements. They came to Chiapas in the mid-1970s and were closely associated with the diocese of San Cristóbal, having permission from Bishop Ruiz (Tello Díaz 1995:74). The *orientadores* (those who gave orientation) would live in rural communities and offer technical support as well as teach bottom-up organizing methods. The LP wanted to initiate a new movement where the people would make their own decisions. They opposed top-down hierarchical structures as they outlined in a pamphlet called What is the Proletarian Line? (1977):

Social Democratic orientation consists of giving ideas and opinions from above; as if the ideas come from someone who knows more than us, who acts as if he were our father. The ideas they give might be good but they do not teach us how to arrive at them ourselves [...] Social Democratic leaders want us to always depend on them. (Renard 1997: 99)

This orientation is similar to the decision-making methods within the civilian ranks of the EZLN. It was this earlier ideological formation that helped shape the context that was in place when the first EZLN organizers arrived with Leninist concepts that did not work.

Throughout the 1980s the UU focused on credit, increasing production and markets. A credit union was formed in 1982 in an attempt to achieve independence from the government. Eventually, divisions forced two of the ejido unions to leave the credit union because of differences with the LP. These two groups joined the Rural Association of Collective Interest (ARIC) in 1988 and developed organic coffee farming methods that sought export markets in Europe (Benjamin 1996:239). Eventually the ARIC would become the organization most closely affiliated with EZLN base supporters. In fact, until the late 1980s the ARIC provided a cover for the EZLN (Tello Díaz 1995). It was at this time that some of the organization's work with the government began to pay off and a split formed in the ARIC. By 1990 two clear factions had appeared, divided over support for the EZLN (Tello Díaz 1995: 123). These factions would become known as *ARIC-oficial* and *ARIC-independiente*, and would be the source of sharp divisions throughout the Lacandon canyons after 1994.

In the northern coffee-growing municipalities of Simojovel, Huitiupán, Sabanilla, and El Bosque, youth who took part in an INI-inspired development program were sent to Mexico City to attend a course on agrarian rights. Upon returning they encouraged their communities to begin organizing in *La Organización*. At this time, large plantations persisted in the region, using the local Indians as peons. The organization was run collectively in a conscious effort to avoid the *caudillismo* (the pursuit of personal power) that had debilitated other independent movements. It organized mainly around issues of land tenancy. In some cases, parts of ejido lands were controlled by local plantation owners and in other cases peasants had been waiting years for legal titles to their lands or for petitions for land extensions to be recognized.

The first action by *La Organización* was a land recuperation in 1976. A coffee field that had belonged to the ejido Lázaro Cárdenas was taken over and farmed collectively by the community. A year later when the owner attempted to retake the land by force, he provoked a confrontation. The peasants were eventually given title to the land and other occupied lands were recognized by the government at this time. The government's resolution stimulated an even larger wave of land takeovers, as peasants sought new lands and titles. This time the government's response was repression, and many peasants were arrested as the military and judicial police came to occupy the zone of Simojovel. The leaders of *La Organización* sought the legal assistance of the CIOAC (Independent Agricultural Workers and Peasants Central). The CIOAC negotiated on behalf of the Indian peasants and accepted the transfer of many of them to other regions to work in the sugar fields or on newly colonized lands. This was accepted without the permission of the leaders of *La Organización*, and they eventually turned to the LP for support.

The CIOAC would again arrive in Simojovel in 1980, based on a strategy of organizing rural workers to act as a link between the peasantry and urban workers. The workers were formed into unions, such as the cane cutters union formed in the Pujilic region by CIOAC. In Simojovel, the resident peons on the large coffee plantations organized. They demanded payment of the debt owed to them by the plantation owner arguing that they had worked for years from dawn to dusk for a wage that was one-tenth of the minimum salary for the region (Renard 1997: 105).

Eventually the movement broke up after there were divisions over whether to accept government land buyouts. Some communities went over to the CNC, others stayed with CIOAC and still others joined the struggle initiated by the *Casa del Pueblo* in Venustiano Carranza. In 1982 the movement united struggles in Venustiano Carranza with groups in

Simojovel and Las Margaritas. The Emiliano Zapata Campesino Organization (OCEZ) has been the most independent of the other three movements. The CIOAC was connected with the Mexican Communist Party and the UU negotiated with the government. The OCEZ has survived a long history of repression against its leaders and attempts at cooptation. Nevertheless, it continues to be a strong force in Chiapas. As part of the National Coordination Plan de Ayala (CNPA), its strategy differs from the EZLN's, in that along with the struggle for land it also seeks state power. Perhaps this explains its closer affiliation with the Broad Front for the Construction of a National Liberation Movement (FAC-MLN) since its emergence in 1995, an organization that has suspected ties with the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), a traditional guerrilla organization that has operated throughout southern Mexico since 1996. Nevertheless, the OCEZ continued to sympathize with the EZLN uprising. In fact, the uprising brought a unification of rural and popular movements in Chiapas. One leader of OCEZ explained it:

The OCEZ-CNPA has about 15 years of struggling. In this time we have been meeting with many other campesino groups such as the MOCRI [Independent Regional Peasant Movement], and CIOAC. We made many attempts to form fronts. We have attempted to unify the struggles. In 1994 with the appearance of the Zapatista Army it became much easier to unite rapidly. That is when we formed the CEOIC. The unity included a women's convention, the PRD and civil society. These forces eventually got together and formed what we call AEDPCH [State Democratic Assembly of the Chiapan People]. (interview with author March 1996)

Gaspar Morquecho a longtime activist in Chiapas and director of Chiltak (a non-governmental organization that works on agrarian issues) explained to me:

In the 1970s the indigenous question was ignored as the campesinos were seen first as peasant farmers. But in the 1980s this began to change. Since 1982 they have been discussing the indigenous question on an international

level and this culminated in the 1992 protests in San Cristóbal. (interview with author April 1995)

By the late 1980s a group called ACIEZ formed, which encompassed most of the areas that are now strong Zapatista supporters in eastern Chiapas, the northern zone and the central highlands. This movement incorporated ethnicity and a reassertion of indigenous identity into its struggle, a point that many of the earlier agrarian organizations influenced by Marxism and Maoism had ignored. Ethnicity in the traditional view of the left was considered “false consciousness” and most rural organizing focused on class. Ethnicity was viewed by the left as “an ideal image in the mind of the dominant classes that functions as an aid in the exploitation of the dominated classes” (Bartra 1993: 188).

This group mobilized in 1992 to protest the 500-year anniversary of the European invasion of the Americas. Calling themselves ANCIEZ, and claiming representation on the national level, their group marched on San Cristóbal and torn down the statue of the Conqueror Diego de Mazariegos (Harvey 1996). Tello Díaz (1995) noted that the Zapatista insurgents used the same route when they marched on San Cristóbal, further supporting a claim that this organization went underground to train for the insurrection. Protests of this sort reflected the growing indigenous identity and the sentiment of many Indians that their culture should be respected as equal with any other.

Another organization that would emerge in the Palenque region during the 1990s was Xi’Nich (“ants” in Chol). It organized around both indigenous issues and agrarian demands and made its most public demonstration by marching to Mexico City in 1991. The MOCRI formed in the Marqués de Comilla region of Ocosingo. A representative of MOCRI described the mobilization and political action that the uprising sparked within the peasant movement:

After the Zapatista uprising we saw the unification of many social movements. One of the most important actions became civil resistance, beginning in September 1994. In this stage we refused to recognize the legitimacy of the government. We began to carry out various acts of resistance in the communities and in popular urban zones. We stopped paying for electricity. We haven't paid taxes on the ejido lands. We repossessed government vehicles and trucks for the use of our campesino organization. We began highway blockades, seizing municipal halls and taking over radio stations to spread our views on civilian resistance. (interview with author March 1995).

Thus a diversity of ideas and struggles flowed throughout rural Chiapas in the years preceding and following the EZLN uprising. The EZLN entered the zone in 1983 and provided another option for the indigenous peasants who no longer believed that change could be achieved by peaceful or legal means.

The Formation of the EZLN

"We were left with no other path"
EZLN Comandante Guillermo

Major Mario affirmed that the EZLN was related to the National Liberation Forces (FLN) neutralized in Ocosingo by the Mexican Armed Forces in 1974. "Yes we're from them," he states. "The examples remain, but there's no one here who was there then" (Autonomedia 1994: 96). According to Tello Díaz (1995) the FLN was founded in 1968 by students and intellectuals from northern Mexico. The organization had safe houses in Monterrey and Mexico City, and began operating out of a ranch in Ocosingo in the early 1970s. When the military learned of the presence of the group, the ranch was raided, several people were killed, others arrested, and a few escaped. One would later be known as Comandante

Germán, arrested in September 1995 under accusation of being one of the leaders of the EZLN.

The FLN published a 40-page document in 1980 entitled *Estatutos* (Statutes). In the document, the organization outlined a classical Marxist-Leninist program. The long-term goal was to “politically and militarily overthrow the bourgeoisie” in order to “install a socialist system that by socializing the means of production would overcome the exploitation of the workers.” In the short term, the goal was to “integrate the struggle of the urban proletariat with the struggle of the peasants and Indians in the most exploited zones of our country.” This would be done by “forming the Zapatista National Liberation Army” which would remain under the orders of the National Direction, “the highest political-military organism of the FLN” (cited in Tello Díaz 1995: 97).

When the founders of the EZLN arrived in the Lacandon jungle this was the formation that they brought with them. Subcomandante Marcos confirmed that “the EZLN was born having as points of reference the political-military organizations of the guerrilla movements in Latin America during the 60s and 70s” (Autonomeia 1994: 290). Thus the original intention upon arriving in Chiapas was to connect the rural struggle with the urban workers’ movement. Reality, however, proved to require something different. Reflecting back, Subcomandante Marcos said:

I believe there are many theories in crisis. Who would have thought that it would be the indigenous peoples who would provoke all of this? Not even in the Leninist conception of the weakest link was it thought that it might be the indigenous people, right? I told you that there was a learning process at the beginning of our work here, albeit a forced one [...] We were closed minded, like any other orthodox leftist, like any other theoretician who believes that he knows the truth. (Autonomeia 1994:290)

During the first years in the jungle, EZLN organizers came to realize that organizing would not be as they had thought. Each community had developed a strong system of collective democracy, a decision-making method that clashed with the Leninist concept of a revolutionary vanguard. Moreover, most of the Zapatista recruits were Indian peasants who spoke Spanish as a second language and differed vastly from the outside organizers.

The Zapatista army included indigenous peasants from throughout the central highlands and eastern lowlands of Chiapas. Most of the research that came out in 1994 focused on the eastern lowlands of Chiapas when it was clear that hundreds of the EZLN militia that took San Cristóbal on January 1, 1994, were Tzotzil speaking peasants from the highland villages surrounding San Cristóbal. On January 1, 1996, with the inauguration of the New Aguascalientes in Oventic, in the municipality of San Andrés Larraínzar, the EZLN made public what many had suspected: the Zapatistas were not only based in the recently settled eastern lowland communities, but also throughout the highlands. Events held at Oventic, such as the inauguration of the New Aguascalientes and the Intercontinental Forum for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism were attended by hundreds of EZLN members from highland communities, including Chamulas and Zinacantecos, who were thought to be 100% PRI supporters. A ladino school teacher from San Andrés Larraínzar, explained to me that it was “well known that most of the Indians from Larraínzar were Zapatistas, and they were the ones who took over San Cristóbal on January 1, 1994, along with an elite group of insurgents from the jungle.” (interview with author May 1995)

Most analyses stress the importance of organizing in the eastern lowlands and the new consciousness that was generated through the search for “salvation” in the eastern jungles. An identity shift occurred as highland Maya left their traditional local communities

and mixed with other peasants throughout Chiapas and other states and began to see the common plight of the indigenous peasant. This obviously had a reverse effect on highland members as well. Through continued contact and communication, Indians in the highlands were also influenced by what was happening in the eastern lowlands. Comandante David explained in an interview:

Between the indigenous communities there remains communication even though this has been influenced by the government and its party. The government has been able to isolate indigenous communities so that each municipality is put in its place and there remains no reason to organize and communicate with other municipalities. Nevertheless, within the indigenous culture we have not completely lost the tradition of communicating among different municipalities. The jungle is a great distance from here [the central highlands] but there are many people from the highlands who due to serious land problems have had to go to the jungle in search of land and work. So, there has been a continued communication between the two regions as people come and go. Many people from the highlands have created communities and new colonies there. There has been a process of looking for work and creating communities. This facilitated communication between the two regions because of the great need for work and land. This communication between the two regions also made us aware that all of the indigenous communities in the jungle and the highlands have the same needs and problems. (interview with author January 1996)

The culture of the central highlands retains a strong sense of indigenous identity. Also, through colonization, communities developed localized identities that were often controlled by local caciques. Chiapas's most renowned ethno-historian, Jan de Vos, explained the differences of culture and how they mixed in the eastern lowlands:

It is very important to distinguish between the traditional system that exists in the highlands within the most ancient communities and the new communities that were founded in the Lacandon jungle. There is a very

different tradition in each of these regions. In the highlands the ancient communities are organized in a pyramid-like manner with *cargos* and *oficios*. The community members who are most apt gain respect and prestige little by little until they are elders and become capable of making decisions. On the other hand, in the new communities there was a large influence by leftist movements, above all Maoists, who played a large role in politicizing the indigenous populations. There was also a large influence by the Catholic Church with the formation of Christian communities where spirituality was put to the service of the brothers and sisters. This influenced the recent settlers in the new communities by redefining each member as a democratic subject. The result is that there was a mixing of new influences with traditional influences in the jungle communities. . . The traditional and the new combined to form the current democratic practices. (interview with author January 1996)

The church was also present in the highlands and consciousness raising also took place, though not on the same level as in the Lacandon lowlands. In the highlands, Catholicism is not the uniting factor for Zapatista membership. In San Juan Chamula, where a strict adherence to the traditional religious structures is necessary to remain part of the community, an evangelical Protestant movement has sprung up over the last 30 years. Chamulan Tzotziles who embraced evangelism were soon expelled from their communities. Many of these expelled people now inhabit the miserable shantytowns that encircle San Cristóbal and have taken over the steep slopes on the north side of the Jovel Valley. These communities have become highly organized and openly expressed their sympathy with the demands of the Zapatista uprising. Many of the evangelicals are now Zapatista supporters.

The highlands also have a history of rebellion. The most recent was the uprising in 1974 by the indigenous inhabitants of San Andrés Larraínzar. During this time, most of the ladino landowners were forced to leave the municipality and the Indians reclaimed their

lands. A number of ladino landowners were killed as Indians attempted to evict them from the lands of Larraínzar. That the centre of highland support for the Zapatista army would be in Larraínzar is thus not surprising.

According to Comandante David, before 1994, most communities in the central highlands were unaware that Indians were organizing and that an uprising would take place. A large army from the highlands had obviously been training but it was kept a secret. After the uprising, many more communities in the central highlands joined the Zapatista Army. Comandante David explained:

Before the Zapatista Army existed, there was already [...] a web of organizations articulated throughout various communities. So it was through these broader organizational forms that communication was facilitated. People were not migrating only for necessity but also to carry out organizational work with clear objectives that gave people the possibility to unite. In this way the organizing began to pick up speed, as representatives went from community to community and many places that had been isolated before. The movement grew, so that once this seed of organization had been planted the unification of the different regions by the EZLN was easy. This process was strongest in the jungle. [But in the highlands] because of the distance and limited communication there were many people who still did not know about the struggle and the Zapatista Army. These people never thought there would be an armed uprising until it happened on January 1. I am talking mainly about municipalities in the northern zone and in the highlands. However, once they saw and heard about the uprising, they were surprised at first, but a growing number of people began to understand the causes of the uprising and we soon had many more sympathizers [...] Many more people and municipalities have joined the movement since the 1994 uprising [...] It's easy [to join the EZLN]. Truthfully, it's very easy because in each community there is an organization and there are authentic leaders of the indigenous people. These leaders do not just remain in their communities, they have to communicate with other *compañeros*. They

communicate and articulate with other groups, including at the level of inter-municipal assemblies. In this way, then, it is done through agreements, meetings, communications and group projects. It hasn't been a problem. (interview with author January 1996)

Clearly then, the Zapatista movement was not solely a movement that arose from the particular conditions in the eastern lowland jungle region of Chiapas. Many of the new communities remained in contact with their places of birth and thus organizing was taking place throughout Chiapas. The uprising served to speed up the process and make it easier.

By the end of 1996 parallel governments existed in highland communities such as Chenalhó and Pantelhó. One side was the PRI-elected government and on the other were autonomous governments that had been popularly elected or elected using traditional customs. These groups referred to themselves as the organized opposition. In an interview with members of the autonomous government of Pantelhó after their offices were burned and they had been forcibly expelled from the municipal centre, they explained to me:

Let's face it. We are Zapatistas. All of us here form part of a Zapatista support base. We want our brothers in Pantelhó to know that we are not against them. We are fighting for broader changes and don't want to be caught up in small local conflicts. Our struggle is not about fighting with our indigenous brothers. We want them to know that we would like to return peacefully. We don't want to confront them because we are fighting on another level. (interview with author January 1997)

Many of the divisions became apparent after the October 1995 municipal elections in Chiapas when an order was given that Zapatista sympathizers should not vote. The decision was partly based on the fact that municipal elections, especially in Chiapas's indigenous communities, have been notoriously corrupt. This explains why in the 1988 election Chiapas was the state with the highest support for the PRI. Yet six years later they

were the first to rebel against it. My experience observing the elections in several hamlets of the municipality of Mitontic confirmed the electoral corruption. I traveled with a PRI *cacique* (strongman) who went to several hamlets, gave a speech, passed out Coca Cola, and then oversaw the voting. The balloting took place in the open air of the local plazas and anyone was free to look over the voters' shoulders and see who they were voting for. Not surprisingly, in this case the PRI won over 90% of the vote. Given these conditions it would be logical that the opposition would make the decision to not take part in a game that was stacked against it. Nevertheless, Marcos later stated that everyone was free to vote, but in many municipalities where the opposition held the majority, the PRI took power. Ongoing disputes were the result.

In San Andrés Larraínzar, a PRD government would not permit the PRI to take power, arguing that through traditional practices the PRD had won in an earlier election. Both governments set up office in San Andrés and an ongoing dispute between them resulted. This pattern was reflected throughout many communities but it became most polarized in the northern zone of Chiapas, in the Chol region of Sabanilla, Tila, Tumbala, Salto de Agua, and Palenque.

Comandante Pedro announced in May 1996 that "it was not just Roberto Barrios that declared itself Zapatista, but many other communities in the northern zone." At the inauguration of the EZLN site he told me: "This Aguascalientes site is a centre of civil resistance for all of the Zapatista communities in the northern zone" (interview with author May 1996). In this region the opposition held the majority yet the PRI took power. In Sabanilla, the PRD opposition and the EZLN protested by taking over and holding the municipal hall for several months. In response to the growing drift toward Zapatista support, the government and its security forces went on the counter-offensive. A

paramilitary group called *Paz y Justicia* was formed, composed of PRI members. They were armed and organized into groups that used violence as a form of intimidation. Soon the region was polarized and an undeclared civil war broke out. In many communities of the northern zone, hundreds of families opposed to the government were forcibly evicted from their homes. While in refuge PRI supporters burned down their homes and stole everything they owned. Since 1995 a series of violent confrontations have occurred, usually carried out by *Paz y Justicia* against opposition families, supporters of Bishop Ruiz and the Catholic Church and human rights workers trying to reconcile the two sides. The origins of the paramilitary group are in an official teachers union supported by PRI state deputy Samuel Sánchez (see *Ni Paz Ni Justicia*).

Violence has been carried out by both sides but the vast majority of the cases are carried out by the PRI groups. The public security forces turn a blind eye to their abuses. Clearly, the policy is part of the government's broader counter-insurgency strategy. They have armed one side of the Chols in order to demobilize the other side that is sympathetic to the EZLN and seeks social change. The inauguration of a New Aguascalientes in Roberto Barrios, Palenque was attended by Chols from all the northern region openly declaring their integration into the Zapatista support bases.

The EZLN thus developed within a rich growing context of activist cultures. Culture then is relevant in this case in that "culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action" (Krober and Kluckhohn 1963 cited in Lofland 1996: 191). Access to these earlier organizational efforts provided a resource base the EZLN could exploit. In addition it helped shape the development of its own movement culture. There was a constant process of mutual influence between organizers and the organized. This dialogical relationship

helped create the novel movement culture of Zapatismo. The following chapter explores the EZLN and its public expressions as a social movement.

Forming a Social Movement: Zapatista Expressions

“What do we do with the people who detained the war? Did they only detain it or were they willing to do something more?”
Subcomandante Marcos (Le Bot 1997: 250)

After twelve days of fighting, the EZLN transformed from a rebel army to the Zapatista movement that includes thousands of supporters from national and international “civil society”. Under the conditions of an armed stand-off, the movement has become more sophisticated and experienced in its actions. In more than three years of public existence, the EZLN has developed a unique strategy for convoking broad sectors of Mexican civil society and international solidarity. The peace talks with the government were the EZLN’s most visible expression, providing an important forum for the development of the movement. Its public actions, however, extend well beyond this sphere. The EZLN has convoked international encounters to discuss the effects of neoliberal economic policies worldwide and forums dealing with indigenous rights and state reform in Mexico. In

addition, it has held numerous counter-celebrations and spectacle events that allow the movement and its sympathizers to express themselves by reinterpreting official versions of Mexico's political and historical reality.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring these Zapatista expressions into closer focus in order to deepen understanding of how the Zapatista uprising is using the mobilization of organized groups and individuals in civil society and international solidarity to create a broad social movement that supports its demands. My emphasis in Chiapas, observing the development of the movement for more than two years, informs much of the following description and analysis. I attempt to capture the novelty of the movement and argue that it represents a new direction for the left, which is floundering in the wake of the fall of socialism as practiced in the Eastern bloc.

I argue that the EZLN is better understood through its manifestation as social movement rather than through its initial acts as a rebel army. Since the uprising, the EZLN's military component has played a minor role in the movement's overall strategy, existing only for self-defense and symbolic expressions. On the other hand, the EZLN has managed to mobilize large sectors of national and international support. The EZLN converted its earlier political-military strategy of capturing state power into a social strategy aimed at harnessing the dynamic force of civil society to build power instead of take it.

To the outside observer, the Zapatista movement functions in both clandestine and public dimensions. The movement's day-to-day operations are carried out in covert spaces by networks of small groups involved in organizational planning and decision making. For larger decisions, affecting the movement's base communities, democratic consultations are held. Of the clandestine dimension, little information can be gathered at this point. The

public expressions of the EZLN, however, give us good material for a deeper understanding of the movement.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I argue that since the cease-fire the EZLN is best understood in its manifestation as a social movement. Second, I examine the Zapatista strategy based on its definition of civil society. This strategy has been employed through the EZLN's relationships with the government, its supporters and the public at large. In the third section, I deal with Zapatista expressions. I have divided the EZLN's visible expressions into three types: first, its relations with the government in the context of peace dialogues; second, its relations with supporters, from national and international civil society, in public forums, encounters and counter-commemorative and spectacle events; and third, its relations with the public at large, using the media and a strategy of timely communiqués. In the fourth section, I discuss the state's response to Zapatismo and the military effort to contain the movement and its support bases. I thus portray the EZLN in its functions as a social movement in motion, its expressions as a social force and the counter-forces it faces.

The EZLN as a Social Movement

It is difficult to describe the Zapatista movement, using antecedents in Latin American history. It is different from the classic Latin American guerrilla movement; the EZLN described its military component as a conventional people's army. Rather than functioning as a *foco* unit carrying out lightning-strike actions to gain support, it waited until it had recruited a full army before its first operation. It attacked military installations and briefly held four major towns in Chiapas on January 1, 1994. Since the cease-fire was declared on January 12, however, the two sides have remained at an armed stand-off. The Zapatista

movement has operated with both proactive expressions and with reactive defense movements. It has had to constantly read and interpret the government's double discourse of peace and dialogue on one hand and militarization and repression on the other.

The federal government broke the cease-fire on February 9, 1995, by launching a military offensive, under the cover of a police action. Thousands of troops and armoured vehicles entered Zapatista-held territory with arrest warrants for the movement's leaders. Instead of fighting, Zapatista soldiers evacuated the people in its support communities and then fled themselves. When the federal troops entered the empty communities, they ransacked homes and destroyed health clinics, potable water systems and power supplies. Eventually, national and international human rights observers accompanied the people back to their villages. In many communities "civilian peace camps" were created, providing the villagers with a permanent presence of outside observers to discourage further open aggression.

Thus, even under attack, the EZLN has chosen to maintain its military component as a self-defense organization to protect its base communities. The EZLN has put its troops on red alert on several occasions and threatened that if the federal army made another military offensive into the communities of the conflict zone the Zapatista Army would not retreat. To date, however, that has been the extent of the EZLN's military activities. The characteristics of guerrilla warfare are, thus, not present. Latin America's most renowned guerrilla commander, Che Guevara, wrote in his essay *Guerrilla Warfare: A Method*, that "guerrilla warfare is not passive self-defense; it is defense with attack" (Guevara 1985: 189). The EZLN rejects the model of guerrilla warfare, instead seeing itself as a growing social force.

The military situation since February 1995 emphasizes this point. The federal army penetrated the conflict zone with heavy weaponry and continues to occupy eastern Chiapas in military encampments. Human rights groups estimate that there are as many as 60,000 federal troops in the zone (almost one soldier for every three inhabitants). The EZLN constructed five “Aguascalientes” sites—cultural spaces and centres of resistance that symbolized the rebel movement’s right to exist in disagreement with the government. The EZLN’s peace talk delegates were transferred from these points when dialogues were in session. The EZLN thus existed openly with the federal army’s acknowledgment of where its leaders could be found. This situation hardly conforms to the strategic operations of a guerrilla *foco*, that relies on clandestine strongholds to retreat to after lightning attack. The Aguascalientes sites are open declarations of the EZLN’s existence. They are used for political and counter-cultural meetings and the ongoing construction of a broad-based social movement. By means of the “Dialogue Law” signed in the ejido San Miguel in March 1995, the EZLN has been able to push forward its social strategy. The law gives amnesty to members of the Zapatista Army as long as the peace dialogues are in process. The EZLN continues to test the law’s boundaries in its attempt to establish direct contact with civil society.

Instead of thinking of the EZLN as a guerrilla organization or military organization, it is better described as a social movement in constant motion searching for new ways to pick up momentum, depending on the changing political climate. As stated, it does not seek the conquest of political power through violence as its final goal, instead it holds arms as a form of self-defense. The strategy is to unite Mexican civil society, creating a diverse collection of groups to demand democracy and the end of the world’s oldest one-party system, once described by Mario Vargas Llosa as the “perfect dictatorship.” On the international level, the EZLN calls on sympathetic sectors from across the globe to

denounce neoliberal international trade policies that put countries like Mexico in direct competition with the world's industrial powers—a policy that hits workers, peasants and indigenous people the hardest.

The social protest mobilized by the EZLN uprising has had a visible impact on Mexico's political system. The EZLN's spectacular entrance into contemporary history on January 1 prompted a new democratic impulse questioning Mexico's narrow, entrenched political system. Several important changes have come about as direct and indirect results of the Zapatista rebellion. In the initial days of the uprising, Mexico's Interior minister was forced to resign, an important pact was signed between the country's leading parties, and the EZLN-sponsored National Democratic Convention (CND) brought the most important national forces of centre-left opposition together. In Chiapas, campesinos united and took over lands at an unprecedented rate, new popular and non-governmental organizations formed, the PRD's popularity in the state soared to unprecedented levels, and a shadow government was created as a protest against the electoral irregularities that occurred during the 1994 national elections. Eventually, Chiapas's newly-elected PRI governor was forced to step down. On the national level, important reforms were made to the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) in 1994 and 1997, culminating in the PRI losing its absolute majority in the national Congress for the first time in Mexican history. This impulse can be at least indirectly attributed to the pressure for democratic change led by the Zapatistas.

Through negotiations the EZLN has opened important political spaces. Agreements signed in September, 1995 gave the EZLN a place in discussions of state reform and set in motion a formal procedure for negotiating the movement's demands (see appendix 4). The first accord on indigenous rights and culture signed in San Andrés (February 1996) obliges the state to seriously reform its relationship with Mexico's indigenous people. The EZLN

has been able to do this with a strategy based on deferring authority to civil society—what it calls *mandar obedeciendo* (to rule by obeying).

Its strategies are novel in the history of Latin American popular and armed movements. In the context of the post-Cold War political junction and the post-modern critique of universalizing “grand narratives,” the EZLN is a step forward that gives new direction to the Latin American left. While many of the concepts of the old left have fallen into disrepute, the need for profound change continues. This is especially true in Latin America under the New World Order dominated by neoliberal economics and the globalization of the cultural values of individualism and consumption. The EZLN represents a new force for change in a left that was searching for alternatives to what many perceived as old and stagnant programs.

Winning Civil Society

The term civil society has a long tradition in political theory, being used by Locke, Rousseau, Marx and Gramsci, to name a few. In Mexico the term has taken on a specific meaning referring to the movement of individuals as citizens and organizations that rose to deal with the catastrophe brought about by the 1985 earthquake. Carlos Monsivais chronicled the movement of citizens and declared that the earthquake gave birth to an active socio-political force called civil society. The EZLN’s definition is quite specific. Comandante Moisés described civil society as follows:

Civil society is made up of many independent organizations that are against the government. These organizations have shown that if the government does not comply with its commitments the people will be on the side of the Zapatista Army because they see that our struggle is just, that our struggle is a struggle for everyone. Civil society does not want to see only signed

papers. They want real change and our struggle will continue until we have this change. (interview with author May 1996)

The emergence of the people in the modern democratic sense can be seen in the French Revolution. The people rose up to man the barricades and overthrow the monarchical order. The republic was invented and the rule of the people was established, at least in theory, by rights and constitutions. In Mexico this process was initiated by independence as a republican constitution was established, although it was largely carried out by creole elites. Despite the Mexican Revolution and the overthrow of the old order, independent organizations thereafter remained marginal until the student movement in the late 1960s sparked the emergence of new organizations that rose against the repressive state. In Chiapas, the Mexican Revolution did not even bring a momentary autonomy, it was orchestrated from above. It was not until the 1920s that civil society began to emerge as an organized entity, and it was mobilized only as a means for elite control (Benjamin 1989). True independent mobilization did not occur until the 1970s, and it was in this movement that the EZLN would form its organizational roots.

In order to understand the EZLN as a social movement one must explore its use of the notion "civil society." It is the cornerstone of the EZLN's political strategy. In the EZLN's second packet of communiqués to the press, it began to discuss Mexican civil society. The General Command of the Revolutionary Clandestine Indigenous Committee (CCRI-CG) stated, in a communiqué dated January 20, 1994, that the EZLN did not see itself as the "true historic vanguard" of Mexico's popular struggle. The communiqué recognized the legitimacy of many "honest" organizations that used different methods but had goals similar to those of the EZLN. In the following communiqué the General Command recognized the importance of civil society:

The EZLN has received the sympathy of diverse people, organizations and sectors of the Mexican and international civil society. The honourable and decided action by these progressive forces has truly opened the possibility for a just political solution to the conflict [...] Neither the political will of the federal executive nor the glorious military actions of our combatants have been as decisive for this turn in the conflict as have been the public protests [...] by the many honest and independent individuals and organizations that form part of what is called Mexican civil society. (Autonomea 1994)

Media coverage of the uprising sparked mass protests in Mexico City and at Mexican embassies around the world. President Salinas's decision to bomb, strafe and rocket-fire the fleeing rebels was perceived as unnecessary and heavy-handed. The worldwide reaction to the military counter-offensive eventually brought on the cease-fire and negotiations. In the first post-declaration-of-war communiqué there is a call on all sympathetic individuals and organizations to unite, not under the EZLN's banner, but for the movement's broad goals of freedom, justice and democracy. This was the beginning of the EZLN's civil society strategy.

The EZLN uses communiqués in the form of "declarations" to define its broad strategies. The First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle was the initial declaration of war made public on January 1, 1994. The Second Declaration was released on June 12, 1994, in conjunction with a refusal of the government's offer to meet 32 of the EZLN's 34 proposals after the first round of peace talks. In the Second Declaration, the EZLN clearly defines and elaborates on its political strategy with civil society.

We will continue to respect the cease-fire in order to permit civil society to organize in whatever forms it considers pertinent towards the goal of achieving a transition to democracy in our country [...] We call upon civil society to retake the protagonist's role that it first took in order to stop the

military phase of the war. We call upon civil society to organize itself in order to direct peaceful efforts towards democracy, freedom and justice. (Autonomea 1994)

The EZLN does not seek to become part of the formal political system. The movement believes that the issues it raises cannot be mediated fully within the limitations of Mexico's political decision-making process. Within this system, notorious for its ability to coopt and neutralize opposition, the EZLN has managed to sustain a dialogue with the government without sacrificing its independence.

A final revelation of the Zapatistas' strategy is in a communiqué written by Subcomandante Marcos addressed to the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR). This army made its first peaceful public appearance on June 28, 1996, before unleashing coordinated guerrilla-style attacks on five federal army bases in Guerrero, Oaxaca and the Federal District two months later on August 28th. The EPR appears to be a classic guerrilla organization with a vanguardist organizational structure and the goal of overthrowing the state through violence. In response to the EPR's offer of support, Subcomandante Marcos writes:

We do not want your help [...] We take pride in not owing anything to any national or international political organization. The support that we want, look for and need is from national and international civil society [...] What we look for, need and want, is that all those people without a party or organization come to an agreement regarding what they do and don't want, and that they organize in order to achieve it (preferably using peaceful and legal means), not in order to take power but to exercise it. (*La Jornada* p.9 September 3, 1996)

This, then, is the strategy which motivates the actions of the EZLN. Its attempt to win civil society is through its operations in the visible dimension of its existence.

There have been at least three attempts by the EZLN to organize civil society in a form that could be capable of gathering enough support to effect change in the system. The first attempt came out of the creation of the National Democratic Convention (CND) announced in the Second Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle. This brought together close to 6,000 Mexican intellectuals, opposition politicians and grassroots supporters before the national elections in 1994. The idea was to create a show of opposition that would inspire Mexicans to vote for any other party but the PRI. Nevertheless, when the PRI took power yet again the CND lost momentum and two more meetings led nowhere.

The second attempt to organize civil society was presented in the third declaration from the Lacandon Jungle, announced on January 1, 1995. In this document the EZLN called for the creation of a civilian National Liberation Movement (MLN). Before this could get anywhere, the military unleashed an offensive against Zapatista support communities and several alleged EZLN safe houses throughout Mexico. This offensive completely changed the dynamic of the movement and put the MLN on the back burner as renewed peace talks and the withdrawal of Subcomandante Marcos from the central spotlight became the new concern.

The third and the latest attempt to organize civil society was announced in the Fourth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle on January 1, 1996, with the creation of the Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN). This was the result of a "Grand Consultation" organized as a survey of the opinions of EZLN supporters within civil society. More than one million people participated, the majority asking that the EZLN become a political force. The proposal of the FZLN is to set up local chapters for discussing national themes and coming to conclusions regarding actions. It is a form of both political education and action.

Promoters work throughout the country organizing committees to eventually form the base of a nation-wide opposition front.

Relations with Government: Peace Talks

In concordance with the EZLN's policy of following the will of civil society, it has sought from the beginning to achieve its demands on the government through a peace process based on dialogue, negotiation and mediation. After three years, the negotiations have come to be only one part of the movement's broad-based strategy. The first dialogue in San Cristobal's Cathedral resulted in the government agreeing to 32 of the EZLN's 34 proposals. The government proposal was tempting as it spoke to improving the basic living conditions of indigenous communities in Chiapas, but it was not willing to deal with the issue of the North American Free Trade Agreement or land reform dealing with Article 27. Gaspar Morquecho, Chiltak director explained the refusal in this way:

The government will only address material demands but is not willing to put democracy, liberty or justice on the table. What it offers EZLN communities is akin to the lives of chickens being fattened on a poultry farm. The chicken has a house, food, perhaps medical attention but it certainly does not have democracy. This is not what the Zapatistas want! (Interview March 1995)

After consulting with its base communities, the EZLN refused the government's offer, opting instead to mobilize its supporters in the CND. It took another year before the two sides met again, this time in the context of the February 1995 federal army offensive that included new arrest warrants for several EZLN commanders. A new "Dialogue Law" was passed in March 1995, designed to protect EZLN negotiators. Two mediating bodies were created: the CONAI (National Intermediary Commission) headed by Bishop Samuel

Ruiz and made up of intellectuals and clergy, and the COCOPA (Peace and Conciliation Commission) made up of legislators from Mexico's main political parties.

The first six months of talks focused mainly on organizing a military withdrawal from the conflict zone. Communities such as Guadalupe Tepeyac remained abandoned (and continued so more than two years after the February offensive) because of military bases at the community's entrance and exit. Talks on de-militarization did not progress. In fact, human rights groups documented a heavy increase of troops and base camps in the conflict zone since the peace talks were re-initiated.

The other theme that occupied the first six negotiation sessions between the government and the EZLN was the question of what they should be negotiating and how they would go about it. Finally, on September 12, 1995, in the sixth round of peace talks, a new dialogue schedule was agreed upon (see appendix 4). The new structure for peace talks was organized around specific themes; first, Indigenous Rights and Culture; second, Democracy and Justice; third, Economics and Social Welfare; and finally Women's Rights. Each theme was to be discussed in work sessions divided into three phases. The first phase puts all the issue on the table. The second phase includes invitees on both sides with the goal of reaching agreements about what issues stay on the table and what issues remain. The third session is when a final proposal is drawn up and then taken to the EZLN base communities for their approval. Once accords have been signed under these four themes there will be three more rounds of talks, dealing with reconciliation between the distinct sectors of Chiapan society, political and social participation of the EZLN and finally an integral de-militarization and disarmament. (interview by author with Onécimo Hidalgo, CONPAZ, October 1996)

The first accord between the government and the EZLN was signed February 16, 1996. The EZLN called it a minimal accord because it did not include some of the more serious demands such as reforms in agrarian policy and autonomy for indigenous nations. Nevertheless, it was perceived as a step forward and allowed the EZLN to postpone the accord's shortcomings with respect to other topics.

The next theme was Democracy and Justice. These discussions have been stalled several times due to the government's sentencing of presumed Zapatistas and again due to the government's lack of seriousness, continued state-sponsored violence in northern Chiapas and the holding of 16 presumed Zapatistas in jail. Comandante Moisés expressed his concern about the peace talk process in an interview in March 1996:

Speaking in relation to the dialogue, we see it at this time as something very difficult. Like we have said from the very beginning we do not see true will from the government. The first phase of this second session on Justice and Democracy has been difficult because the government has demonstrated as always its belief that the dialogue is not the solution to the problems. This is a clear demonstration because the government didn't even bring any invited guests, just a few advisors who we don't know. So this is a clear demonstration that the government does not want to dialogue. We have said clearly that we do not have confidence in the dialogue. Mexican civil society has told us, since January 1994 when we rose up in arms, to seek a dialogue. So, we put our arms to the side so that we can talk with the government. In this way we have accepted the voice of the Mexican civil society and our brothers throughout the world. So we are complying with our word and continuing the dialogue. We will continue because we didn't rise up in arms to kill people but instead we did it to defend our rights because the government for so many years has been deaf. With hundreds of thousands of people shouting for land, solutions to their problems and for their rights, the government did not hear. But after we rose up in 1994, and the government saw that the war was difficult, the people also asked the

government that they dialogue with words not guns because with arms there is no solution. The people asked for a solution through dialogues and peaceful measures. We, the Zapatistas, rose up in arms because the government made it necessary. We are trying to push the dialogues forward until the government says it no longer wants to. We will continue complying with our word and with what the Mexican civil society asks for. We didn't want to make war; it was the only option left open to us.

The government has not even begun implementing the points agreed to in the first accord concerning indigenous rights, provoking the EZLN to suspend the peace talks on September 3, 1996. In candid conversations, Zapatista spokesperson Comandante David made clear that the EZLN does not expect much to come from the peace talks. Its hope lies in the mobilization of civil society. The EZLN believes that without the support of civil society the agreements will remain pieces of paper. The EZLN has converted the dialogue into a forum for addressing the problems that its communities and all of Mexico face. By suspending the dialogue the EZLN pushes forward its demand that the government comply with the San Andrés accords and also bring to light injustices which previously went ignored, such as thousands of displaced EZLN supporters in the northern zone and dozens of political prisoners in Cerro Hueco.

The EZLN converted the dialogues into a forum for keeping their demands in the public sphere, while opening the political space and time frame to carry out political organizing with civil society. On the other hand, it suits the government's interest to continue negotiating with the EZLN. They project an image of having the situation under control, which is important to international investors, Mexico's financial stability and the prolongation of the "perfect dictatorship".

Relations with Civil Society: Spectacle Events, Forums and Encounters

Beyond the peace talks the EZLN has been highly creative in finding new ways of uniting its ideas with diverse sectors of national and international civil society. There are two types of EZLN public forums. The first type is dedicated to celebration, speech making, commemoration and symbolic resistance. These events I call public spectacles. The second type is more involved in discussing, debating and the creation of proposals and strategies to push the movement forward. These events are referred to as Forums and Encounters. They are working events rather than celebration events.

The EZLN uses public spectacles to maintain its momentum. The inauguration of several “Aguascalientes” centres of resistance, the well-publicized visits of world renowned intellectuals, celebrities and political figures, and counter-commemorative events that serve as alternatives to the government “truths” and symbolically act as forms of resistance and rebellion while staying within the discourse of the nation, all fall under the category of spectacle events. Such events subvert the governments portrayal of nationhood by contradicting and de-legitimizing it and giving it a radical Zapatista interpretation. The symbolic discourse achieved through such events boldly positions the EZLN and its supporters as the true inheritors of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution.

The history of the Aguascalientes centres refers to the EZLN’s first meeting with civil society at the National Democratic Convention (CND) held weeks before the national elections in August 1994. The site, built by the EZLN with cooperative labour on the outskirts of the community of Guadalupe Tepeyac, in the municipality of Las Margaritas, was named Aguascalientes to evoke the Sovereign Revolutionary Convention held in the state of Aguascalientes in December, 1914. This important meeting brought together the Zapatistas, Villistas and Carranzistas to set up elections and decide what direction the

government would take in the wake of the overthrow of General Huerta. The convention has been described as “the most democratic moment of the Mexican Revolution,” one in which the two peasant armies of Villa and Zapata had the upper hand (Rajchenberg and Héau-Lambert 1996: 43). In the Second Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle, Subcomandante Marcos prefaces the communiqué with a quote from a Zapatista delegate who attended the 1914 convention.

The symbolic power of the first Aguascalientes was not overlooked by the government when it invaded the region in February 1995. Troops have occupied Guadalupe Tepeyac ever since. The Aguascalientes site was razed to the ground and a military base now occupies the site. This was a blow to the movement. During the discussions of de-militarization, the government made it clear that Guadalupe Tepeyac was not debatable. The Zapatistas responded by saying they would then build many more Aguascalientes. The government did not take them seriously.

Six months later the EZLN announced upcoming celebrations for what would be the inauguration of four New Aguascalientes coinciding with celebrations of the second anniversary of the Zapatista uprising. At the site in Oventic, municipality of San Andrés Larraínzar, less than one-hour from San Cristóbal, Comandante Moisés spoke of the significance of the New Aguascalientes:

The new Aguascalientes has much meaning. It symbolizes the unity of the people, the organization of the people, the collective nature of the people, the hope of the people: the marginalized people, the indigenous people of Mexico and the world. We feel that the [various] new Aguascalientes signify an alliance and a unity of organizations in search of democracy, liberty and justice. That is what we are trying to achieve [...] The government cannot get rid of us. If the government tries to destroy part of us [referring to the destruction of the first Aguascalientes site], we will

make sure many more replace it. If the government tries to isolate or divide us, we will always come back stronger. (interview with author December 1995)

The inauguration of four Aguascalientes in Oventic, municipality of San Andrés Larraínzar; La Garrucha, municipality of Ocosingo; La Realidad, municipality of Las Margaritas; and Morelia, municipality of Altamirano, took place from December 27, 1995 to January 1, 1996. Participants included the press, national and international civil society and thousands of indigenous people from surrounding communities and respective organizations. There were speeches, cultural events, art workshops for children and information centres. Each evening the participants would unite in front of the main stage and dance to the popular *corridos*. On New Year's Eve the EZLN comandante arrived to greet the crowd. The EZLN used the forum to present the Fourth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle.

These inaugurations serve as celebration events. They are also part of the broader campaign by the movement called *rompiendo el cerco*—breaking the enclosure. The meaning of the barrier has changed over time. First the barrier was the military roadblock that surrounded the EZLN in what before February 1995 was known as Zapatista territory or the liberated zone. The army had confined the EZLN militarily to this region. Nevertheless through their media strategy they were capable of making their voice heard outside the zone. The EZLN, however, continually insisted that it had support beyond this region and suggested that parts of its armed forces existed outside the region as well. The first effort to break the barrier came in December 1994 when EZLN troops in a combined military and media event began to take positions outside the military lines in 38 municipalities, simultaneously sending faxes to the press with chronological accounts of each action. They blocked roads, took over municipal halls and carried out symbolic acts such as raising the

EZLN flag. As this was done the Zapatistas began to rename each municipality, using revolutionary symbolism. The new municipalities were given rebel names such as Che Guevara, First of January, Labour, etc. While there was minimal confrontation, the propaganda effects were enormous. The next day Mexico's peso fell dramatically. The idea that the EZLN was breaking out beyond the barrier gave international investors the jitters. The event became the straw that broke the camel's back. It coincided with the realization that ex-president Carlos Salinas had manipulated Mexico's financial condition and that the economy was being propped up artificially. Soon Mexico was facing its worse financial situation since the 1982 debt crisis.

The EZLN's main medium for communicating with civil society has been through forums and encounters that have been allowed to take place under the conditions of dialogue. The forums have inspired meaningful discussions among Mexico's diverse indigenous populations, opposition political groups, most factions of Mexico's left and international groups and individuals who face similar conditions in their respective countries or sympathize with the Zapatista movement on political grounds.

In order to demonstrate the diversity of the EZLN's struggle, I wish to give two examples of back-to-back forums that I attended, both organized by the EZLN but each very different in its orientation. The two events were the American Continental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism (3-8 April 1996 in La Realidad, Chiapas) and the First Meeting of the Permanent National Indigenous Forum (10-12 April 1996 in Oventic, Chiapas). Both meetings were part of the EZLN's efforts to work with national and international civil society in developing common strategies and points of resistance.

The Encounter was a meeting of activists and academics from throughout the western hemisphere in preparation for the Intercontinental Encounter which took place at

the end of July, 1996. The meeting brought together sectors of Mexican and international civil society. The groups were divided into discussion tables concerned with various aspects of how one lives under neoliberalism: economically, politically, socially, culturally and the problems faced by the Indian peoples of the Americas. At the table of indigenous peoples there were representatives from Michoacan, Oaxaca, the Chiapan highlands, Veracruz, Guatemala, from the American Indian Movement in the United States and also a Chicano representative. There were also non-indigenous activists who had worked in support of indigenous rights in the United States and Mexico.

In opening statements, the EZLN made clear that solutions to the Zapatistas' main demands could only come through the full participation of all sectors of Mexican civil society. Neoliberalism was the new economic and political order that put the free mobility of global capital over the needs of communities and smaller localities. Individual rights superseded community rights. Social programs set up to guarantee minimal living standards were considered to be inefficient. For the indigenous person, neoliberalism was part of a broader campaign of globalization. The cultural values and technologies of the most financially well off nations were spreading at an alarming rate. In the meeting, people talked about the loss of community values.

A Zapotec man from Oaxaca spoke about the loss of traditional values in his community. He said that before if the bread-winner in the family passed away, the community would support his family by sharing its harvests or helping to work in the family's fields. It was a system of mutual support, something similar to a functioning welfare state but on the community level. Now, he said the culture of money is taking over the communities. He believed that neoliberalism was imposing a form of life that did not belong to the indigenous people. This indigenous representative, however, did not call for

more aid from the government. He instead called for free determination. He said, "If we need a road, we will build it. If we need a clinic, we will construct it ourselves. The concept of self-government is built within the indigenous traditions. We don't need the state." A Tzotzil representative from the highlands of Chiapas spoke about the importance of language. In Tzotzil the often seen suffix "tic" means "ours". He said that the concept of individualism does not exist in indigenous communities.

Beyond these discussions, the Encounter also served as an important means of producing images for outside consumption. There was a lot of showmanship as armed EZLN comandantes would ride into the Aguascalientes site on horseback in processions that could not have been improved by a stage director. Beyond discussing the serious problems that many groups were facing under neoliberalism, it was a celebration of Zapatismo that included dancing, music and a festive environment. Food was served in the *Arbolito Rojo Cafe*, Zapatista posters and red handkerchiefs were sold. There was a shared feeling that each participant was experiencing the rebellion. Low flying military aircraft that buzzed the site gave each person a shared identity that they were together in a struggle against an identifiable foe.

This sense of sharing in the struggle had been reinforced earlier by the trip to the site in La Realidad where foreigners passed through an immigration roadblock and each person in a caravan of 10 buses had their name taken down by immigration officials as well as all the data regarding their entrances and exits from Mexico and how many times their visas had been renewed. While this was taking place, it was discovered that another official from the Interior Ministry was covertly videotaping the whole scene from inside a pick-up truck. This provoked many of the Mexican activists to converge on the truck and relieve the

man of the video cassette, and then publicly humiliate him, calling him a disgrace to Mexico.

The intercontinental encounter continued the same tradition with important public figures such as Danielle Mitterrand, Eduardo Galeano and Daniel Viglietti (Uruguayan father of the *nueva canción*) visiting the site in La Realidad. Thus the important point about the encounters is that they are international events that open spaces for alternative analysis as much as a celebration of what the EZLN is trying to create. The second intercontinental occurred in Spain, bringing together several thousand international supporters and two official representatives of the EZLN.

The Permanent National Indigenous Forum met in Oventic, the EZLN Aguascalientes site in the central highlands in April 1996. This forum took place just days after the American Continental Encounter had finished. The tone was also one of celebration but much more focused on organizational work. The participants were for the most part Indians, from all over Mexico. There were only a dozen or so foreigners acting as observers who were allowed to attend the sessions but could not participate. The purpose of the meeting was to formalize the creation of the Permanent Indigenous Forum as a product of the EZLN-sponsored National Indigenous Forum that had taken place in January, 1996. Independent indigenous organizations met at the site for three days to discuss the creation of a national network. The National Indigenous Congress created on October 12, 1996 would eventually be the result.

The group of several hundred participants split up into five groups to discuss strategies for promoting and disseminating the resolutions that had come out of the first National Indigenous Forum, dealing with autonomy and the right of the indigenous peoples to a new relationship with the state, the rights of indigenous women and issues

surrounding land and territoriality. At the table I attended there were representatives from Tabasco, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Nayarit, Jalisco and the Federal District. The participants discussed the idea of setting up regional promotion commissions that would act as “bridges” bringing the ideas of the Forum to indigenous communities across Mexico.

One Chol-speaking man from Tabasco spoke of the difficulty of discussing their ideas about the Forum in his community, where the PRI was powerful. He told the group: “There is sympathy but many have fear that when we talk about the EZ they think the war will begin again” (April 10, 1996). A woman from Jalisco talked about how the Zapatista uprising created momentum for the agenda of indigenous rights:

Since the Zapatista uprising many people are discovering their indigenous roots, they are struggling with pride. Both the Huicholes and Nahuas have been quiet for a long time and there is still a lot of confusion in the villages. Many still believe in the propaganda of the INI. They still believe it offers something for the people.

The groups discussed the idea of creating information “nodes” across the country that would operate as community-based information centres to pass on the information discussed in the forums. There was concern about distances and remaining in contact and there was a proposal to initiate a computer project to link the offices via the Internet.

In this meeting the Zapatista movement was operating on another level. It was different from the imagery-laden encounter, instead focusing on building ties and carrying out grassroots organizational work. The theme of the meeting was *estamos pasando ya a los hechos* (we are now moving on to action).

Relations with the Media: The War of Words

The Zapatistas have also used communications and spectacle as an important strategy for staying in the public mind and using symbolic discourses to show the contradictions within the government's position and to publicize their agenda. The main media for this strategy have been the communiqués put out by the movement's eloquent non-Indian figurehead, Subcomandante Marcos. Le Bot states that Subcomandante Marcos's communiqués serve as a mirror to the rest of Mexican society and the world. They provoke deep reactions as people look inward and judge themselves. In the post-Cold War era, Subcomandante Marcos learned that symbols and communication were weapons more powerful than conventional arms. Régis Debray has called him the best writer in Latin America and Octavio Paz, despite having opposite political views, has praised some of Marcos's communiqués, calling them moving.

The following quotation is from a personal letter to Gaspar Morquecho, the director of Chiltak and a reporter for the San Cristóbal newspaper *El Tiempo*, from Subcomandante Marcos. The letter was published in *La Jornada* on February 7, 1994, and came in the context of accusations against the NGO community and opposition press of being Zapatista members:

When the police and inquisitors come to intimidate you, tell them the truth, Mr. Morquecho. Tell them that you simply raised your voice to warn everyone that if changes were not made in the unjust relations of daily oppression, the Indians were going to rise up [...] Tell them that you, with other honest professionals [...] searched for support wherever it was in order to force economic, educational, and cultural projects that would relieve the death that was being sewn in the indigenous communities. Tell them the truth, Mr. Morquecho. Tell them you searched for a peaceful, just, dignified and true way. Tell them the truth, Mr. Morquecho. But please,

Mr. Morquecho, don't tell them that which you and I know happened, don't tell them that which wants to leave your lips when you talk and hands when you write, don't tell them the thought that keeps growing, first in the breast, and keeps on rising gradually to the head as soon as the year passes and advances its pace through mountains and ravines, don't tell them what you now want to shout: "I am not a Zapatista! But after this first of January... I would like to be one!"

Government Response: Low Intensity Warfare

Since the February 1995 offensive, the government has contained the conflict zone in eastern Chiapas through a steady build-up of troops. Communities have had to become accustomed to living with a "permanent" presence of soldiers. The soldiers enter the communities, threaten campesino farmers and harass women when they leave the villages to wash clothes, collect water and cut firewood. Recently, tracking dogs have been brought to the military base in Guadalupe Tepeyac, just one hour from La Realidad where important EZLN commanders are based, including Marcos (*La Jornada* p. 4 January 25, 1997).

The presence of thousands of soldiers has brought inflation of prices for basic necessities such as soap, sugar, salt, oil, etc. Because of the poor roads there is only a limited supply of these goods and the growing demand brought by the military presence has pushed prices well beyond those in the cities. This inflation has been accompanied by a decrease in production, meaning that people are suffering from conditions of extreme poverty. In some cases young indigenous women have been forced out of necessity to work as prostitutes for the federal soldiers. They also offer their labour washing soldier's uniforms and making tortillas. While this may provide the women with a small income, it carries with it a stigma so that they are shunned by their communities for cooperating with the enemy.

The military also uses campesinos as informants to learn about the local political dynamics. The army supports pro-government factions in the region, capitalizing on political differences to create divisions, so that in some communities one side no longer talks to the other. Through rumor mongering and demonizing the opposition, the government sharpens divisions, creating conditions for intra-community violence. This strategy has been employed particularly in the northern Chol-speaking zone of Chiapas, principally in the municipalities of Sabanilla, Tila, Tumbalá and Salto de Agua. The war on the surface appears to be a local conflict between pro-government campesino groups and opposition groups. Campesinos are taking over lands and municipal halls in post-electoral disputes. In response, paramilitary groups attack and assassinate members of opposition groups and violently evict communities that oppose the government.

There are several reasons why this region is receiving special attention from the government. In the recent construction of a fifth "New Aguascalientes" site in Roberto Barrios, Palenque, campesinos from throughout the northern zone took part in voluntary work crews. During the inauguration, these campesinos showed their sympathy with the EZLN by taking part in the celebrations. They hung banners denouncing the lack of solutions to the problems in Tila. Sympathy for the EZLN was seen in the indigenous groups that took over the municipal hall in Sabanilla and thousands that participated in a march for peace when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas visited Tila in 1996. In response, the military has incorporated the Northern Zone into its counter-insurgency war. There is a concerted and deliberate program to stop the spread of Zapatismo in the northern region of Chiapas. What appears to be a local conflict is then really the continuation of the war between the government and the EZLN brought down to the fundamental level. PRI politicians and elements of the military offer campesinos arms, training and organization. The appearance of the paramilitary group *Paz y Justicia* in 1995 is the government's weapon against

growing sympathy for the Zapatista Army. Bishop Samuel Ruiz condemned this as a strategy for creating a state of ungovernability so that the government has a pretext to justify its increased militarization of the region.

The government agreed to limit its troops in the conflict zone as part of the Law for Peace and Reconciliation under which the dialogues are regulated. Article 129 of the Federal Constitution also prohibits soldiers from patrolling outside their bases in times of peace. The military, however, uses pretexts such as the war against drug trafficking to put military bases where it wants. The Zapatistas have received thousands of campesino sympathizers since the initial uprising. Many of these new support bases exist outside the region denominated as the conflict zone and are part of the political strategy defined by the EZLN as “rompiendo el cerco” or breaking out of the military encirclement. The northern zone of Chiapas is thus part of the same conflict. The military is using the same strategies of low-intensity conflict to undermine support for the Zapatista movement. Recent human rights reports by the Coordination of Non-governmental Organizations for Peace (CONPAZ) and the Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Centre show that since the 1994 uprising, levels of militarization have increased alarmingly.

On a special human rights brigade organized in June 1996, participants from national and international human rights groups took a tour of the most conflict-torn regions in Chiapas. In community after community campesinos denounced the military presence. Later, in November 1996, increased repression hit the NGO community in San Cristóbal with a wave of firebombings, telephone death threats and the kidnapping of CONPAZ's accountant and his family. They were held for 48 hours and physically and psychologically tortured before being released.

This is part of the government's two-faced approach to the EZLN uprising. Government representatives talk of peace and their willingness to seek solutions to the socio-economic demands that gave rise to the EZLN. Yet, at the same time, the military continues to carry out acts of violence to contain the EZLN's attempt to win over civil society. While the EZLN has respected the cease-fire and sought to promote a peaceful strategy of cultural resistance, the government has responded with repression on all levels.

Constructing Zapatismo: Master Protest Frames

“Zapatismo is not an ideology but instead an imaginative and poetic project in constant construction.”
(Crónicas Intergalácticas, 1996, p. 138)

In this chapter I introduce the concept of “framing” to an analysis of the EZLN. Framing is a concept used in social movement theorizing by David Snow, defined as “conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (cited in McAdam et al 1996: 6). As the title of this chapter suggests, I wish to examine how the movement's guiding ideas were constructed by its use of protest frames. In other words, how the movement employed widely recognized cultural images of struggle in its fight for social change. In this way the movement became ‘something for everyone,’ by appealing to a diverse array of points of struggle.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the regional activist subcultures that served as precursors to the formation of the EZLN, including emerging democratic practices in peasant movements. External activists from the church and peasant and political organizations both influenced and were shaped by their organizing experiences in rural Chiapas through dialogical relationships with Indian communities. In Chapter 4, I showed how the EZLN created a broad-based “Zapatista movement” that united diverse positions of struggle after the 1994 uprising. This chapter explores the broader ideational frameworks employed by the EZLN in the creation of the movement culture called *Zapatismo*. The EZLN revived historical struggles, making them relevant again under new conditions. Moreover, in its expression as a social movement, the EZLN adapted highly resonant cultural traditions of struggle to the creation of its own social movement culture.

Before discussing the master protest frames adapted by the EZLN, I will first discuss the political-historical juncture in which they emerged.

New Times

The EZLN made its first public appearance at a time when the left was widely proclaimed to be in deep crisis. In 1994, one author described philosophies of the left as “a soul of values, emotions and traditions that is now wandering restlessly in search of new bodies, new forms and structures” (Mulgan 1994: 2). In the wake of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union many declared the capitalist free market as the winner and ideas of the left were considered history. Western Marxists criticized this claim, arguing that communism never really existed and called for democratic socialism. Both interpretations seemed to over-simplify the significance of the left’s decline. Clearly, the left continued to be relevant yet it would not be business as usual. The dramatic events that

occurred in the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Union put in motion a search for new alternatives. Many analysts while recognizing the importance of the left in the reconstruction of Western capitalist societies and the “third world,” called for a fundamental transformation of its values and strategies (Derber et al 1994, Castañeda 1993).

For people who had identified with the left, the EZLN represented a new experiment, a step forward, an alternative. The EZLN has offered itself as a body for the soul of the left that was wandering after the events of the late 1980s. One of the most important aspects of the EZLN's 1994 emergence was its success in connecting its struggle to other struggles occurring throughout the world. The EZLN framed its struggle as one that incorporated diverse movements for change and successfully attracted world-wide attention to itself for doing so. Not only did it adopt struggles that were very current such as women's rights, environmental issues, human rights and Indian resistance, it also managed to revive long-standing traditions of struggle. The EZLN names itself after Emiliano Zapata, the hero of the Mexican revolution and an important icon for the legitimation of the state. The EZLN also declared itself an army of national liberation in the tradition of Latin American guerrilla struggle epitomized by the Cuban revolution and the image of Che Guevara. This was at a time when Central American guerrilla armies had already opted for negotiation over armed struggle. The EZLN's strategy successfully adapted these popular Latin American images to the context of a new revolutionary 1990s struggle.

The Zapatistas used “master protest frames” to unite individuals with the social movement surrounding the demands of the EZLN. This process described by Snow and Bedford (1988) as “frame alignment” has the task of both legitimating and motivating protest activity. Frameworks with a high degree of cultural resonance are most likely to

garner widespread support (McAdam 1994: 37). The EZLN's use of the frames described above has been successful both in tapping into struggles that are currently part of the popular imaginary and by appropriating long-standing cultural symbols of resistance, making them relevant in the cultural context of the 1990s. This allowed the movement to employ popular ideational strains, both in mainstream society and within particular subcultures as a means of galvanizing activism.

After more than three years of Zapatista expressions, the movement also successfully created an international following that gave body to the wandering soul of the left. This was most important in demonstrating that the struggle of the Indians of Chiapas against globalization and neoliberalism was the same struggle being fought throughout the world. Neoliberalism in Latin America has been called neo-conservatism in Canada, Reaganism in the United States; it is also termed structural adjustment, corporate downsizing and the "Washington consensus." In a recent book by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello (1994), two labour intellectuals, they see the Zapatista uprising as one point on a diverse matrix of local struggles against globalization. By internationalizing its struggle the EZLN is at the forefront of a new "globalization-from-below."

During the first few days of the EZLN's uprising, many authors looked critically upon the uprising as an anachronistic throwback to the early 1980s. In light of the Central American peace process, the option of armed struggle appeared out of place and doomed to failure. But the EZLN would not be the "last Central American revolution." Subcomandante Marcos wrote on January 13, 1994, referring to the massive presence of the Mexican armed forces, "They forget that war is not a matter of weapons or a large number of armed men, but of politics." After the cease-fire, the Zapatista strategy began to adapt to the new conditions. When Marcos was asked whether the EZLN had failed in the

uprising by not making it to Mexico City, he said: “Weren’t we there already by January 2nd? We were everywhere, on the lips of everyone--in the subway, on the radio. And our flag was in the Zócalo [central plaza]” (Guillermoprieto 1995: 41).

By January 20th the EZLN discourse was evolving into one that matched its circumstances. It directly addressed other independent organizations in civil society, assuring them of the importance of diverse voices and that the EZLN would accept all forms of struggle:

Our form of struggle is not the only one. Perhaps it may not even be an adequate one. There are many other valuable forms of struggle. Our organization is not unique; for many it may not even be a desirable one. There are other honest, progressive, independent organizations of great value. The EZLN has never pretended that our way of struggle is the only legitimate one. In fact, it is the only one we have been left with. The EZLN welcomes the honest and consistent development of all forms of struggle that take us along the path of freedom, democracy, and justice. The EZLN has never pretended to be the only true, honest, and revolutionary organization in Mexico or Chiapas. (Autonomeia 1994: 111)

It was this humility that helped the EZLN capture the nation’s attention by setting it apart from the vanguardist rhetoric of traditional Marxist-oriented guerrilla armies. In this way the EZLN’s discourse had a distinctly postmodernist strain. It was not claiming to be the privileged holder of the “Truth” but instead was asking to be listened to and was willing to accept all struggles as equally legitimate as its own.

In the following sections, I examine six ideational streams that have been adapted by the EZLN as master protest frames in the construction of Zapatismo: campesino struggle, Indian resistance, national liberation through armed struggle, women’s rights and environmental issues and the human rights movement. These last two issues have not

appeared as much in the EZLN's public statements and expressions, but are important elements in the production of Zapatismo. The final section presents the EZLN as a leading proponent of a new internationalism against neoliberalism and globalization.

Emiliano Zapata and Peasant Struggle

The uprising took the name of Emiliano Zapata, reclaiming the long tradition of 20th century campesino struggle in Mexico that came out of the Revolution (1910-1920). The Constitution of 1917 protected under law the communal lands known in Mexico as ejidos. The right to land for the campesino subsistence farmer became a part of Mexico's revolutionary heritage. Comandante David spoke of the importance of Emiliano Zapata to the EZLN's struggle:

Emiliano Zapata represents our symbolic leader. He was a great man who was a campesino and a Mexican who fought in his time for the good of the campesinos. He fought for land and freedom for the campesinos and most importantly for the indigenous people. The majority of the people who fought under Zapata were indigenous people and Zapata put out his heart and eventually his life for the indigenous people. For this reason he represents someone very important for us, that is why we took his name. We see ourselves as Zapata's followers and his children. He represents to us the most important person of consequence in Mexico's history. Just as we say in our slogan "Zapata Lives." For, yes, he still lives, he lives with us, and if they kill us he will continue to live because there will always be more Zapatistas. If they kill some, more will rise up; if they kill many, new ones will be born. The Zapatistas will not disappear. So he is very important to us, we carry his name and his ideas. The Zapatistas of today have taken his ideas and even added more. He fought for land and freedom. We want land and freedom too but beyond that we are also fighting for democracy and for justice for everyone. Our form of Zapatismo has now become much broader than the original version. Our proposals are not just

for the indigenous people but for all of Mexico and for the rest of the countries of the world. Who does not want democracy? Every country in the world wants to see a true democracy. Every country also wants to see freedom and justice, so what we are proposing is very wide sweeping. So, yes, the figure of Zapata is always present and very important to us. (interview with author March 1996).

At the Oventic Aguascalientes site on April 10, 1996, the date that commemorates the assassination of Emiliano Zapata, during the opening ceremonies of the National Permanent Indigenous Forum, an EZLN representative made the following speech:

They thought they killed Emiliano Zapata but they were wrong. The Zapatistas continue. They will never be able to kill all of us because we are thousands and we exist in all parts and sectors of the country. It is impossible to kill revolutionary ideas.

The EZLN Revolutionary Agrarian Law states:

The poor campesinos' movement in Mexico demands the return of the land to those who work it and in the tradition of Emiliano Zapata and in opposition to the reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, the EZLN again takes up the just struggle of rural Mexico for land and freedom. (Autonomeia 1994: 55)

The use of the symbol of Zapata is important because it is an image that has been used to give legitimacy to the ruling PRI. Each year the president pays his respect to Zapata to commemorate his death. Former President Carlos Salinas even named his son Emiliano in honour of the Mexican hero. The EZLN is appropriating this symbol and giving it a radical reinterpretation, framing its struggle within a national discourse that all Mexicans can relate to. In this way the EZLN opens new terrain on the symbolic level, battling over the role of the true heirs of Zapata.

Indigenous Resistance

Indians in Mexico have been working together as a national force demanding indigenous rights since the 1940s. In 1974, an important conference took place in Chiapas uniting indigenous groups across ethnic lines. In 1992 a march of thousands of indigenous participants took place in San Cristóbal. Being predominately indigenous, the EZLN was a continuation of this movement. The importance of ethnicity to the movement was seen in the National Indigenous Forum it sponsored in San Cristóbal in January 1996 and by the fact that Indigenous Rights and Culture was the first item on the negotiating table between the government and the EZLN during the peace talks.

The roots of the Zapatista uprising can be clearly found in the crisis in subsistence agriculture and by the state's abandonment of small farmers involved in export production such as coffee (Harvey 1994, 1996). Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that the position of the small farmer in Chiapas within the global economy has profound effects on culture. The EZLN's first demands were centred on material living conditions yet, at the same time, the movement framed the uprising as a "product of 500 years of struggle". This helped to empower and mobilize Indians across Mexico. As George Collier (1994) emphasized in his book, land issues were central to understanding the uprising. Land is important as a means of subsistence and as a historical-cultural space for Indian communities. For many highland communities in Chiapas, the geographic setting tells a story that has been maintained over generations. Thus the threat that these communities were experiencing was not just one of subsistence but of a way of life and the issue of who would control the destiny of a culture.

Mexico's growing Indian movement was empowered by the Zapatista uprising and mobilized into a national movement at an unprecedented rate. The resurgence of ethnic

identity as a space for political mobilization became more relevant after the Zapatista uprising implanted political and cultural rights as a fundamental part of the Indian's struggle. In 1995 the EZLN introduced the topic of ethnic identity to the talks with government negotiators. EZLN negotiators criticized the government's condescending attitude and language. The EZLN made it clear that they would only continue negotiating if the government showed respect for indigenous culture. In fact when the EZLN suspended the peace talks in September 1996, one of the reasons was the lack of respect shown by the government for indigenous practices. In January 1996 the EZLN convoked a National Indigenous Forum. Ethno-historian Jan De Vos described the forum as follows:

This is the first national forum of its type for the indigenous people in Mexico. It has been an excellent way to demonstrate to the government that the indigenous people in Chiapas are not just making local demands. Their demands are being echoed here by a large number of indigenous cultures and organizations from across the country [...] The forum will demonstrate the national character of indigenous demands. (interview with author January 1996)

Thirty-five different Indian nations from across Mexico took part in the forum discussing shared experiences and problems from January 3 to 8, 1996. A final document was produced which then became the basis for agreements on Indigenous Rights and Culture signed by the government and the EZLN in February 1996.

The conference created a permanent forum on Indigenous Rights and Culture that met two more times in Oventic, Chiapas. This forum planned the creation of the National Indigenous Council that met in Mexico City and was attended by Comandante Ramona for the EZLN in October 1996. Since then the council has played an important role as a

sounding board criticizing the government's failure to move forward in putting the San Andrés Accords into practice.

In Mexico, the central ideology mediating the state's relationship with indigenous peoples has been *indigenismo*. The post-revolutionary mythology has been the glorification of the Indian heritage but the present day Indian culture has been put to the side. As one person put it, "Everybody exalts the Mayan ruins but nobody is interested in the ruined Mayas." On one hand *indigenismo* sought to promote increased production and better services in Indian communities, yet on the other it was part of a broader modernizing policy that saw Indian cultures as obstacles to development. Thus, the policies promoted acculturation and integration of Indian communities into the national and global economy. The INI (National Indigenous Institute) was the government's administrative instrument for carrying out its policies in Indian communities. By the 1980s, little advancement had been made and many communities were expressing the demand for plurality. The goal of assimilation went by the wayside (Barry 1995: 177-8).

Article 4 of the constitution was changed in 1992, recognizing the rights of Indians to practice their customs and traditions. Mexico was recognized as a pluri-cultural nation and indigenous culture was to be put on equal grounding with mestizo culture. The realm of culture has been an area of antagonism to which the EZLN has responded. In one document that came out of the National Indigenous Forum a list of violations against indigenous culture was compiled representing diverse urban and rural regions. Mexico's diverse Indian nations are thus increasingly uniting under a common banner and identifying with the struggle of the EZLN and other groups in resistance throughout the Americas.

National Liberation Movements

The EZLN is a “National Liberation Army,” putting it in the same category as Latin American guerrilla movements given their impulse by the Cuban Revolution and the struggles of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. The EZLN uses the symbols of revolutionary struggle in Latin America: a black flag with a red star and the icon of Che Guevara. There is also a long history of Mexican guerrilla struggle. Carlos Montemayor, who has followed the trajectory of armed movements in Mexico since the 1960s, wrote: “the country has experienced, perhaps without the majority of Mexicans knowing it, an almost uninterrupted guerrilla struggle over a period of at least 30 years” (1996: 15).

The Zapatistas were also influenced by guerrilla struggle in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. They demonstrated a familiarity with the Central American peace process. Comandante David said:

When the EZLN was born we didn’t think that in such a short time we would be seated at a table, talking with the federal government. We saw that, from the experience of other countries, it took many years of struggle before they were able to sit at the negotiating table with the government. We were clear that the struggle was going to be long and difficult and that it wasn’t going to end soon. (press conference June 1995)

When asked about what the EZLN would do to avoid what happened in El Salvador, where the rebel forces put down their arms after the accords were signed, but before any real changes were made, Comandante Tacho replied:

We have been trying to bring in other sectors of Mexican society to participate at the dialogue table [...] in this way the government’s commitment to make real change will be in the presence of many citizens. We are not trying to achieve just a nice package of documents, but instead

real change. For example, if we talk about health issues, we want to really see the health care system improve. We don't want documents, we want real actions. For this reason, we ask that the changes that must be made in Mexico and Chiapas come from the roots. It is true that the dialogue is taking a long time, there are proposals that we have put forward that haven't been responded to by the government. The amount of time this takes is not the most important thing to us, more important is a change from the roots, from the very bottom, to resolve the proposals we have made to the government. (press conference June 1995)

The Women's Struggle

The struggle for women's rights has been present in the EZLN discourse from the moment it made its declaration of war. Estimates of the number of women participating in the EZLN were as high as one-third, and as the movement began its public life, women often occupied leadership positions. Comandante Ramona was an important symbol as a woman wearing the traditional dress of San Andrés Larraínzar. Later, Comandante Trini an elderly Indian woman with long gray braids attended the first San Andrés talks. These women were not only important as symbols of Indian women participating directly with the government. By tapping into the discourse of women's struggles, the uprising sparked the imagination of women's rights advocates all over the world. Women have participated in guerrilla struggles throughout Latin America, yet there has been criticism of the lack of women's participation in leadership positions. For example, the Sandinistas were criticized for never having a woman representative on the National Directorate. In the case of the EZLN, Comandante Hortencia recognized:

We hold many positions within the EZLN. We hold positions as local and regional coordinators, as well as representation on the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee. So we play a very important role in

the organization although we are still lacking many things that we haven't been able to achieve. (interview with author May 1997)

As much as one-third of the EZLN is made up of women. Hundreds of Indian women took part in the uprising, and several women have participated as EZLN negotiators. In the documents that were included in the declaration of war issued on January 1, 1994, there were a series of revolutionary laws. One section dealt exclusively with women:

- 1) Women, regardless of their race, creed, colour or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in a way determined by their desire and capacity.
- 2) Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.
- 3) Women have the right to decide the number of children they will have and care for in a family.
- 4) Women have the right to participate in the affairs of the community and hold positions of authority if they are freely and democratically elected.
- 5) Women and their children have the right to primary attention in matters of health and nutrition.
- 6) Women have the right to education.
- 7) Women have the right to choose their partner, and are not to be forced into marriage.
- 8) Women shall not be beaten or physically mistreated by their family members or by strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.
- 9) Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
- 10) Women will have all the rights and obligations elaborated in the Revolutionary Laws and Regulations. (Autonomeia 1994: 52-3)

More than three years after the Zapatista uprising the laws remain more of a goal than a living reality. Since January 1994, however, much organizing has taken place

around women's issues. The EZLN has convoked discussion tables on women's issues in the context of democratization and indigenous rights and culture. In these discussions, women have discussed new forms of participation, health issues and the tension between traditional culture and individual rights as women.

Yet in the zones dominated by EZLN support communities there is still a clearly dominating patriarchal ideology. While the image of Comandante Ana María reading the Fourth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle in the midst of the wind and cold of Oventic is powerful, it does not compensate for the fact that spokespeople for the EZLN are almost always men. Women representatives will usually only address issues dealing specifically with gender. Often when asked more general questions they refer the interviewer to the male comandante.

International Women's Day March 8, 1996 was an important watershed for EZLN women. Comandante Susana explained why more than the 8,000 mostly Indian women marched in San Cristóbal:

We, the women of the communities, don't want the Mexican soldiers in our villages. That is why we went on March 8th to tell the government to get rid of its army from our communities. The tanks and guns cause fear among the women. So, on March 8th we went to shout at the government that the military is frightening us and our children, we want to be free to go where we like. With the presence of the federal soldiers we are restricted. It's very difficult to go out anywhere. That's why we organized the march, to demonstrate the force and the strength of women, to shout and speak about our rights. (interview with author March 1996)

Comandante Hortencia gives a sense of how life changed within the communities for Zapatistas and what challenges remain:

Since January 1, 1994, things have changed. Women realized that they were capable of participating in the political struggle, just like the men. This opened our eyes and we began to see just how difficult the path was [....] Before, we were never recognized. We never went to meetings and we never participated. We couldn't do anything. Now, however, there are compañeras, women Zapatistas, who have positions of authority and rank. We participate in meetings and speak, but not as much as we should. There are still many women who don't understand the meetings [....] Also, there are men who won't let their wives participate. There are many reasons for this. The man says, 'No I will not let you go because I am the man and your work is to be in the house taking care of the children.' Some men still speak like this, there are women who cannot participate because it makes their husband angry. We realize that this is not correct and that we must continue to fight and defend our rights. If we don't defend our rights nothing will change and those men will continue to act as they do. (interview with author March 1996)

Comandante David also expressed concern for the lack of women's advancement and his hope for change:

The problems faced by women in the communities is something very serious. It is a challenge but we truly believe that it is possible to increase women's participation. Nevertheless, it still requires a lot more work. I'll be sincere in telling you that we have not achieved what we would like. We have women in the leadership but many others have not felt encouraged. But we are trying to encourage them especially with the work of the women that are already part of the leadership. We are trying to support them and do everything to encourage their advancement.

Throughout history women have been brought up to think that they must be submissive, that they must just obey the men and the authorities without a word or any opinion. It has been very hard for women to overcome this. They have said, 'I can't change, I don't want to.' There are many justifications, but little by little it is necessary to change this way of thinking

so that they can see that it is necessary to change so that they know that as women they can do many things. They can do everything a man can do. We do understand that many women are physically weaker than men, but we have also seen that they can perform equally with men. This was demonstrated by the women combatants. (interview with author Marco 1996)

The women's revolutionary laws also inspired organized women throughout Chiapas and Mexico. Of particular importance to Indian women was the change in Article 4. In this case Indian customs and traditions were preserved and Mexico recognized as a pluri-ethnic nation. For women in the Indian communities this proved a point of contention. In cultures where women are "traditionally" relegated to the home and do not have the right to participate in traditional positions of authority, the entrenchment of indigenous customs and traditions is exclusive. Women are demanding that in their individual rights should be above the community or collective rights.

The Environment and Human Rights

Environmental activism and human rights issues are master protest frames that cross borders and have a high degree of cultural resonance internationally. The EZLN included ecological demands in its declaration of war. There was specific mention of forest conservation in Article 13 of the Revolutionary Agrarian Laws: "Zones of virgin jungle forest will be preserved. There will be reforestation campaigns in principal areas." (Autonomea 1994: 56).

When I asked Comandante Salvador in the community of Roberto in the municipality of Palenque, to explain to me the importance of the conservation of the environment by the EZLN, he told me:

We have always tried to conserve and take care of the land because it is our mother. We are farmers and we know how to respect the land. But what happens is that the companies and the wood buyers arrive and they begin to cut down the forest and sometimes out of necessity campesinos sell wood to them. The forests and nature are being destroyed. Thousands of metres of wood have been taken from here and all of it leaves the region. Nothing remains here and we become poorer and poorer. We do know how to respect nature and the forests, but at times because of necessity we are forced to sell wood for miserable prices. (interview with author May 1996)

In addition to ecological concerns, a grassroots human rights movement exploded in Chiapas as a direct byproduct of the EZLN uprising. Both national and international groups have flourished and have been present monitoring the situation since the uprising. Americas Watch and Amnesty International have followed the events in Chiapas and virtually every NGO in San Cristóbal created a human rights section to give workshops in rural communities. The diocese of San Cristóbal has been one of the most important advocates, actively involved in defending and promoting human rights in the communities. More importantly this work is increasingly being put into the hands of the Indian peasants themselves as new committees have been formed with indigenous human rights “promoters” working at the community level, teaching about law and human rights and taking testimonies of abuses in order to make denunciations.

Highly organized communities like Roberto Barrios now make their own denunciations and send them to local and international human rights groups in Chiapas. The following is an excerpt from a communiqué sent to the office of Global Exchange by the human rights committee of the community Roberto Barrios:

We denounce the perpetual harassment and intimidation that the federal army is forcing us to live with since we constructed an Aguascalientes

[center of political and cultural resistance] on December 12, 1995. Some of this harassment has already been denounced, without results, since the federal army continues violating the norms of the community and is contaminating the river that is on ejido property. From the river we have collected military clothing, dead dogs, food scraps, soft drink cans, etc. Soldiers also bring prostitutes to bathe in the waterfalls and use the area around the waterfalls for military training as if the ejido lands were their own. (March 31, 1997)

The moral and political framing of human rights bring nations to account when state authorities become identified as violators. This fundamentally alters the relationship between the state and the citizen. Indian peasants in Chiapas are increasingly experiencing the transnationalization of their concerns as they link their struggles to international human rights and environmental networks. According to Michael Kearney (1996: 183) these networks exist “largely outside the confines of nation-states and [have] political goals that are in part beyond the economic, political and cultural hegemony of nation-states”. Kearney further argues that, in the Mixtec communities he has studied, environmental concerns and human rights “are growing and merging [...] such that to a considerable extent the former centrality of the agrarian and proletarian issues has been folded into a new politics of human rights and environmentalism” (1996: 183).

The EZLN has embraced the growing concern for human rights particularly as its supporters have been the victims of intimidation, torture, disappearances, and assassinations. Community members throughout the conflict zone and other regions of strong EZLN support are increasingly being trained to understand their rights in relation to international human rights law. Spanish journalist Guiomar Rovira interviewed women attending a human rights workshop in a community in the Lacandon jungle. Some of the women did not speak Spanish and most of them could not read or write, having no

experience with formal education. They ranged in age from 14 to 24 years old. Many had travelled for several hours to get to the community and they all came with interest in taking a course on human rights, even though some did not even understand what the words meant (Rovira 1996: 243).

My meetings with representatives from indigenous communities while leading human rights delegations throughout Chiapas confirmed Kearney's observations of the Mixtec people (Kearney 1996). Indian and peasant organizations across Chiapas increasingly framed their grievances within the discourse of human rights. The reasons were obvious given that these once isolated communities were living in the midst of a massive presence of the Mexican armed forces. I heard testimonies regarding threats, intimidation and violence committed by soldiers, police and paramilitary groups that enjoy impunity. These denunciations came from Indian peasants organized in artisan cooperatives, independent peasant organizations and EZLN communities in resistance.

The EZLN and a New Internationalism

The discourse of internationalism as a master protest frame has been a growing theme in Zapatista expressions. In its declaration of war the EZLN made no references to extending its struggle beyond the borders of Mexico, although the rebels did mention NAFTA as an instigating factor. The EZLN has, nevertheless, become more and more sophisticated in its framing of the global forces that affect Indians in Chiapas. In a press conference during the peace talks in San Andrés Larraínzar in 1995, Comandante Tacho made this comment about the EZLN's relation with "the rest of the world":

The relationship between the Zapatista struggle and the rest of the world is very important because in other countries they also haven't been able to

rescue the dignity of indigenous and non-indigenous people and above all of the most poor and those most isolated from possibilities. For this reason, we believe that the Zapatista struggle should include other international countries that are poor and that suffer misery and contempt. In many other countries people suffer racism and there is no freedom, justice or democracy. Therefore, we believe there is an important connection between the Zapatista struggle in Mexico and other countries of the world. (press conference June 1995)

The EZLN began building on this theme and included the opinions of international participants in the “Grand National Consultation” survey held at the end of August regarding the direction of the EZLN. Over 20,000 international participants answered the survey ballots. By 1996 the EZLN was hosting international conferences to discuss different experiences of living under neoliberalism. There was also a sophistication of the movement’s analysis of larger global forces. Comandante David said in the inaugural speech of the Intercontinental Encounter in Oventic, San Andrés Larráinzar:

Poverty, hunger and misery reigns in our villages [...] and more than ever with the new neoliberal project, which is a project of destruction and death for the poor of the world. Because with this project they will try to finish destroying and sacking the wealth from our peoples. (Crónicas Intergalácticas 1996: 16)

Comandante Ana María told the crowd:

Within what is know as “neoliberalism,” we do not count, we do not produce, we do not compare, we could not be sold. We are an insignificant number in the bank account of grand capital. (Crónicas Intergalácticas 1996: 23)

The Zapatista movement has captured the support and sympathy of broad sectors of international civil society. For many, neo-Zapatismo has become a new ideology for a left

that was at a crossroads looking for direction. The strategy of the EZLN responds to criticisms of socialism as it existed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and to the shortcomings of the revolutionary and populist left in Latin America. The concept of “rule by obeying” and organizing horizontally by listening instead of “preaching the truth” has had wide appeal. This has been the format of the forums and encounters that the EZLN has held with citizens and organizations of national and international civil society. In this context, the EZLN uprising symbolized a new hope for a fledgling left, inspiring economist Harry Cleaver to write, “The time of the revolution has not passed” (Autonomea 1994: 11).

The movement has expanded its appeal to non-Indian and international citizens and organizations of civil society by proposing various initiatives for the creation of a broad-based social movement in support of its demands. At the Intercontinental Encounter in July 1996 participants from across all continents called for the creation of a “big new world identity against neoliberalism and for humanity.” At the table on Identity and Diversity in La Garrucha, Ocosingo the participants proclaimed: “If in this world there is room for many worlds, then in this Zapatista identity there is room for many identities, hopes and destinies” (Crónicas Intergalácticas 1996).

The Zapatistas have expanded their movement to the international level to include broad multi-class and multi-national movements that oppose globalization from different subject positions. In this sense the movement’s discourse coincides with post-Marxist theorizing that seeks to move beyond economic reductionism by including the cultural sphere and broad points of struggle. The EZLN is attempting a strategy that remains open and tolerant so that, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 31) write, “the proliferation of points of antagonism permits the multiplication of democratic struggles.” Instead of attempting to

unify diverse forms of protest within a single ideological framework, the EZLN remains inclusive so that all antagonism to unified global power can fit within the category of Zapatismo.

It has been this way of thinking that has captured support and sympathy from people throughout Latin America, Europe and North America. Students from Argentina, squatters from Barcelona, anarchists from Italy and France, U.S. human rights activists, Turkish opposition leaders, Canadian church workers, and Basque and Quebecois nationalists all identify with the discourse of the Zapatista movement. The recent meeting of the Second Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism held in July 1997, attended by representatives from the EZLN and hundreds of participant from dozens of nationalities, shows that the movement has continued its momentum outside the borders of Mexico. During August 1997 a Chicano/EZLN cultural encounter was held in Oventic, San Andrés Larráinzar. The Third Intercontinental Encounter is scheduled for Brazil in 1998.

Conclusions: Bringing in Culture

“Construiremos un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos”
Subcomandante Marcos

The introductory chapter outlined the reactions that the Zapatista uprising generated throughout Chiapas, Mexico and the world. In this chapter I wish to make some assessments of the EZLN's successes and failures in its cultural action and some general conclusion regarding what has been presented in the preceding chapters.

Zapatismo has presented itself as an alternative for the left. The idea of a *frente amplio opositor* (broad opposition front) is similar to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conception of radical democracy and multiple points of antagonism. The EZLN is attempting to unite a proliferation of new social agents by creating new political spaces for struggle. Zapatismo provides an identity and reference point for a social energy that searches for channels of expression to construct a new order (Hernández, *La Jornada*

December 19, 1995). The EZLN can do this because it was not born solely from economic conditions and ideology, but also from an expanding identity as political subjects. The importance of respecting others' points of views and including them in a broader project is an important element of Zapatismo.

As I have outlined in this thesis, the EZLN does not want to "turn the tables" by offering another project which would put them at the top and exclude others. Its motto is "Everything for Everyone." While there have always been tensions between local level demands and the national level, the EZLN recognizes that local problems will not be solved until there is a broader national democratization that permits local groups to be heard and gives them the power and capacity to solve their problems. The EZLN serves as the hard line; a launching pad for a proliferation of struggles; a tool to be used by others within civil society to make real changes.

In addition to the EZLN's use of popular master protest frames, there are many other aspects of Zapatismo that make it unique. *Todo para todos, mandar obedeciendo*, these are slogans that also incorporate elements of postmodernism: the idea of creating new spaces outside of politics instead of simply seeking inclusion. Also there is a recognition of Foucault's principle that power exists on the micro-level and must be resisted and confronted at all levels. Foucault believed that power did not rest in the sole domain of institutions, rather it was diffused throughout society and affected people in a multitude of situations. In *Power/Knowledge* (1972) he wrote that, in order to understand power:

One must [...] conduct an ascending analysis [...] starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been -- and continue to be -- invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc. by

ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (cited in Field 1988: 144)

There has been a debate over the supposed “postmodernity” of the movement. While very few analysts have made in-depth arguments either way, several have come out to say that it was a postmodern movement while others have focused on the movement’s modernist demands (see Burbach 1995, Nugent 1995). I argue that both elements can be seen within the Zapatista movement, and more importantly the ideology of Zapatismo itself seems to contain a postmodern/post-structural influence. The movement is not trying to create new recipes or “meta-narratives” that attempt to provide teleological visions about where we came from, where we are, and where we are going (although such methods have been used by liberation theologians in raising the consciousness of indigenous people throughout Chiapas). This has been both advantageous to the movement and part of its struggle to have more impact throughout Mexico. The EZLN has produced, from the standpoint of social theory, a new and original attempt at implementing revolutionary change.

Subcomandante Marcos’s constant politics of aesthetics proved to be both its *forte* and its weakness. At times the “postmodern” strategy of tolerance and horizontal decision making did not provide a clear direction and seemed to only be understood by those intellectuals that celebrated the new non-authoritarian strategy. At the international forums and encounters people often seemed confused, wanting to be given a plan of action instead of having to discuss it. Mexicans who did not follow the movement often asked, “But what do they want?”

The EZLN's cultural impact was impressive. The masked rebel became a new heroic icon in Mexico. Indigenous people were proud to see leaders in traditional dress negotiating with the government. In contrast, the movement did not take hold within mainstream Mexican society. Several factors account for the extent of a social movement's cultural impact. According to McAdam there are at least four: first the breadth of a movement's goals; second the degree of political and economic success achieved by the social movement; third the level of new contact between two or more previously segregated groups; and fourth the ties that the social movement has established with cultural elites. Using this framework we can evaluate the Zapatista movement's impact.

An important impact was the transnationalization of Indian peasant identities and demands. Through the work of the Church, peasant organizations and EZLN organizers, Indian peasants have greatly raised their awareness of the national and international factors that block their struggle for "democracy, freedom and justice." The proliferation of international solidarity and human rights education in rural communities has allowed many rural people to connect their struggles to other global movements. There is a continual dialogical relationship of mutual influence that has continued in Chiapas. As international delegates attend EZLN-sponsored forums and encounters they both influence the direction of Zapatismo and at the same time are influenced by these experiences.

This thesis demonstrates that there is a rich area of culture that has not been explored in the emergence of social movements, particularly in the field of analysis of peasant rebellion and revolution. An analysis of structural conditions alone is not sufficient to determine why movements emerge. In the case of the rise of the EZLN, there has been little comprehensive analysis of the cultural side. Thus in the preceding chapters I have attempted to draw together the many cultural elements that led to the uprising, how the

Zapatistas used culture to build a new social movement culture and create a broader international Zapatista movement.

I hope to have contributed to an understanding of the EZLN uprising by expanding on earlier analyses. After three years of public expressions, more information has come out. We know now that the movement was not just present in eastern Chiapas. The highlands formed an important region for its emergence as well as the northern zone. Also, we know that ethnic and cultural identity was a central theme in its demands. Earlier analyses attempted to limit the movement to the peasant sector, when it became apparent from self-definitions and the priorities set up for the peace talks that indigenous rights and culture were core demands for the EZLN. Thus the movement's demands have been diverse, encompassing the political, economic and cultural realm.

It is clear that what was started on January 1, 1994, is something that cannot disappear overnight, no matter what level of military force is employed against it. Comandante David told me they will not put their arms down until all of the accords have been signed and are operating. In other words not until the peace accords have been put into practice will the EZLN begin to demobilize. He said, "Our children have learned that they have rights, they are the new generation. I may not see change in my lifetime but I know that the new generation will continue to struggle." That evening I returned to the peace camp where I was staying in the icy cold mountains of Chiapas's central highlands in January. As I lay half asleep in the hammock I was deeply moved by what David had told me. The following day several children crossed the road to visit me at the peace camp. One month before, 40 tanks from the Mexican armed forces had passed by to intimidate hundreds of men, women and children constructing the Aguascalientes site. At the peace camp, the children played a wrestling game called *Zapatista versus soldado* (soldier). The

winner would earn the title *Zapatista* and the loser would be shamed with the title *soldado*. They were the future generation that would continue to push forward the *Zapatista*'s demands.

Appendix 1: Figures

Photo #1

An interview with Comandante David, Guillermo and Rafael at the Aguascalientes site in Oventic, San Andrés Larráinzar, "Sacamchen de los Pobres" on January 27, 1996.



Photo #2

Comandante David speaks at the opening ceremonies of the Indigenous Rights Forum in San Cristóbal de las Casas on January 3, 1996.



Photo #3

"Women fighting and the world changing" -- An EZLN banner promoting women's participation in the Zapatista Army.

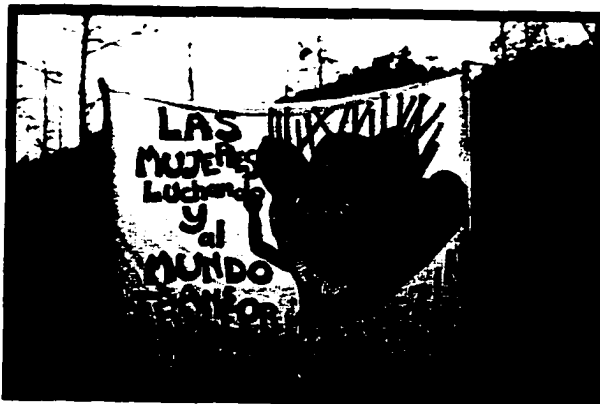


Photo #4

EZLN negotiators give a private press conference at the peace talk site in San Andrés Larráinzar. Comandante Tacho in centre, Comandante Trini (left) and Comandante Hortencia (right).



Photo #5

Author at the Peace Camp in Oventic, with other international human rights observers from Japan and Basque Country, Spain.

**Photo #6**

EZLN medical clinic at the Aguascalientes site in Oventic. Mural shows the movement's most important revolutionary icons: Che Guevara and Emiliano Zapata.

**Photo #7**

Subcomandante Marcos with Comandantes Tacho and Moisés speaking at the Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in La Realidad, Chiapas (July 1996).

**Photo #8**

Sign welcomes international participants to the Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in La Realidad, Chiapas (July 1996).

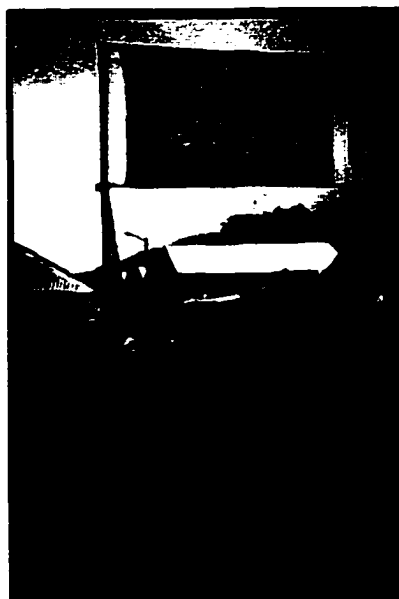


Photo #9

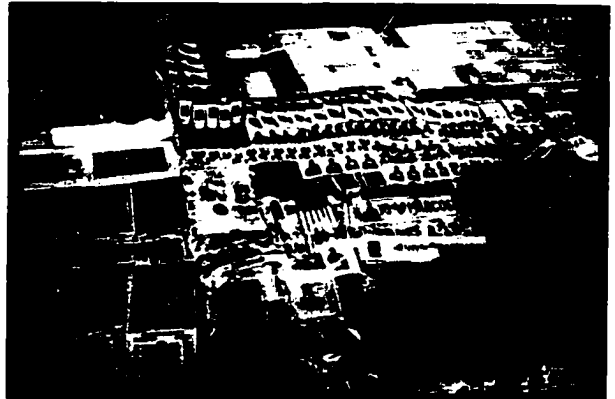
Zapatista militia members perform a traditional ceremony overlooking the inauguration of the Aguascalientes site in Oventic, Chiapas.

**Photo #10**

Author at the peace talk site in San Andrés Larrainzar, Chiapas. This was the third of the summer 1995 meetings between the government and the EZLN on June 7.

**Photo #11**

"Marcos-mania" was manifested through the proliferation of souvenirs sold to tourists in San Cristóbal. Marcos's image was used to sell pens, ash trays, calendars, stickers, buttons, lighters, socks, etc.

**Photo #12**

Local Zapatista sympathizers read about the history of the EZLN through the use of photos and captions, during celebrations for the 13th anniversary of the organization in November 1996.



Appendix 2: RESEARCH SCHEDULE (March 31, 1995 to July 8, 1997)

1995

April 20-23: Attended press conferences at Peace Talks I in the township of San Andrés Larraínzar.

May 12-14: Attended press conferences at Peace Talks II in the township of San Andrés Larraínzar.

June 7-10: Attended press conferences at Peace Talks III in the township of San Andrés Larraínzar. Interviewed EZLN Comandantes Tacho and David.

June 22-July 1: Participated as a civilian peace camp observer in El Prado Pacayal, municipality of Ocosingo. Interviewed EZLN militia members.

July 4-7: Attended press conferences at Peace Talks IV in the township of San Andrés Larraínzar. Interviewed EZLN Comandantes Trini, David and Tacho.

July 13-22: Participated as a civilian peace camp observer in El Prado Pacayal, municipality of Ocosingo. Interviewed the EZLN *responsable*.

July 24-27: Attended press conferences at Peace Talks V in the township of San Andrés Larraínzar.

October 18: Attended press conference at the first round of talks between the government and EZLN on Indigenous Rights and Culture.

1996

December 29 - January 1: Inauguration of the New Aguascalientes Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar. Interviewed Comandante Moisés.

January 3-8: National Indigenous Forum in San Cristóbal de las Casas. Attended table 5 on the promotion of indigenous culture. Interviewed indigenous participant from Guerrero, Dr. Jan De Vos and PRD Congress representative Carlota Botey. Attended press conference given by Subcomandante Marcos.

January 19-28: Participated as a civilian peace camp observer in Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar. Interviewed Comandantes David, Guillermo and Rafael.

March 18: Interviewed "alleged Zapatistas" Javier Elorreaga and Sebastian Entzin in Cerro Hueco Prison, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

March 22: Visited the community of Roberto Barrios, municipality of Palenque. Interviewed community leaders.

March 31: Interviewed Comandantes David, Moisés, Susana and Hortencia at EZLN Aguascalientes site in Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar.

April 3-8: American Intercontinental Encounter against Neoliberalism and for Humanity in La Realidad, municipality of Las Margaritas. Attended the table on indigenous rights and culture.

April 10-13: Participant-observer at the EZLN-sponsored First Meeting of the National Permanent Indigenous Forum in Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar.

April 25: Attended the first Meeting of the FZLN in San Cristobal.

May 5: Inauguration of EZLN Aguascalientes site in Roberto Barrios, municipality of Palenque. Interviewed Comandantes Pedro, Salvador, Leticia, Isias and Andrés.

May 7: Interviewed Comandantes Hortencia and David at EZLN Aguascalientes site in Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar.

June 1-2: Participant on a CONPAZ-sponsored human rights fact-finding mission. Interviewed community members in Ocosingo, Chilon, Bachajon and Sabanilla about the effects of militarization.

June 30-July 6: Observer at EZLN Special Forum on State Reform in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

July 19: Interviewed community members at EZLN Aguascalientes site in La Garrucha, municipality of Ocosingo.

July 27-August 3: International Encounter against Neoliberalism and for Humanity. Visited Oventic, Roberto Barrios and La Realidad. Interviewed community members in Roberto Barrios. Attended discussion tables in La Realidad.

October 29: Visited EZLN community Moisés-Gandhi, municipality of Ocosingo. Interviewed the founding members of the community.

1997

January 1: Interviewed Comandante David at EZLN Aguascalientes site in Oventic, San Andrés Larraínzar.

January 15: Interviewed EZLN supporters displaced from the township of Pantelhó.

January 23: Interviewed EZLN militia members in the municipality of Chenalhó

March 19: Interviewed Comandantes Rafael, Daniel and Galindo at EZLN Aguascalientes site in Oventic, municipality of San Andrés Larraínzar.

July 3-7: Interviewed Mexican electoral officials, members of the Alianza Cívica and coordinated a delegation of international election observers during mid-term Congressional elections.

Appendix 3: Chronology of Chiapas Peace Process

1994

Jan 1: The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) takes over municipal capitals in Ocosingo, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, San Cristobal, Chanal and Oxchuc. Estimated that 3,000 indigenous rebels participate.

***First EZLN Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle** calls on all Mexicans to join the rebel army, march on Mexico City, overthrow the government, and replace it with a transitional coalition until fair elections can be held.

Jan 2: Zapatista soldiers wait in Ocosingo for transport to retreat to their communities. Mexican forces are called in from Campeche and parachutists block the exit to the canyons. Many Zapatistas trapped in the city. Fierce gun battle takes place. At least 50 Zapatistas killed in battle and others executed. Unknown number of Mexican soldiers killed. EZLN attacks Rancho Nuevo military base outside of San Cristobal.

Jan 3: Military counter-offensive continues. Reports of airplane rocket attacks in the hills surrounding San Cristobal and in communities of the eastern canyons. Over the next week thousands of displaced indigenous campesinos begin entering urban centers, seeking refuge from bombings, army interrogations and torture.

Jan 12: President Salinas announces a cease-fire. Zapatistas in control of the canyons east of Las Margaritas, Altamirano and Ocosingo. Territory becomes known as "tierra liberada"—liberated zone. Must pass through EZLN checkpoints to enter the zone.

Jan 25: President Salinas visits Tuxtla, promises dialogue, names Bishop Samuel Ruiz as mediator and Manuel Camacho as government peace commissioner.

Feb 16: Zapatistas release ex-governor General Absalon Castellanos to Commissioner Camacho and Bishop Ruiz at Guadalupe Tepeyac.

Feb 27-Mar 2: Peace talks in the Cathedral, San Cristobal: Marcos and EZLN comandantes meet with Camacho. Bishop Ruiz mediates. Government responds to 32 of 34 EZLN demands. Zapatistas take the proposal back to their communities for democratic consultations.

Mar 23: PRI presidential candidate Donald Colosio assassinated in Tijuana.

Mar 24: Zapatista troops put on red alert in the liberated zone. Consultations suspended.

May 4: Commissioner Camacho and Bishop Ruiz meet EZLN representatives in the jungle. Consultations re-initiated.

Jun 12: EZLN in a public announcement rejects government proposals.

***Second EZLN Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle** calls for a National Democratic Convention (CND) to precede the national elections in August.

Jun 16: Commissioner Camacho resigns.

Jun 23: Jorge Madrazo named as the new peace commissioner.

Aug 6-9: First CND held at a site called Aguascalientes (commemorating an important constitutional convention that took place during the Mexican Revolution) in the jungle near Guadalupe Tepeyac. Meeting mobilizes Mexico's independent political forces in an attempt to break the PRI's 65-year hold on power.

Aug 21: National Elections: PRI takes 50.3% of the votes. PRI governor in Chiapas. Electoral irregularities.

Sep 28 : Head of the PRI, Ruiz Massieu, assassinated in Mexico City.

Oct 10: EZLN breaks dialogue and announces preparations for war in response to PRI electoral fraud.

Oct 12: March by CEOIC "502 years of indigenous resistance." Creation of nine autonomous pluri-ethnic regions/municipalities.

Nov 3-6: Second CND held in Tuxtla Gutierrez calls for mobilizations to prevent PRI governor-elect Eduardo Robledo Rincon from taking power in Chiapas.

Dec 1: Ernesto Zedillo sworn in as President of the Republic.

Dec 7: Robledo Rincon assumes governor's office in Tuxtla. EZLN announces the end of the cease-fire. In San Cristobal, PRD candidate Amado Avendaño named as Governor in Rebellion.

Dec 19: Bishop Ruiz announces a Fast for Peace in response to government's attempt to remove him from his role as mediator of the conflict. He calls for international support.

Dec 20: EZLN breaks military lines and peacefully takes positions in 38 municipalities outside of the liberated zone in Chiapas.

Dec 21: Peso devaluation - government blames Zapatista offensive but news comes about government economic mismanagement and Salinas's attempt to conceal the true state of the economy.

Dec 26: Global Exchange delegation responds to Bishop Ruiz's call for international support by sending an emergency committee to Chiapas. Three members of the delegation join the Bishop on his hunger strike.

1995

Jan 1: ***Third EZLN Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle** calls for the creation of the National Liberation Movement (MLN).

Jan 15: Interior Minister Esteban Moctezuma meets with Marcos, Tacho and Moises in the jungle. Bishop Ruiz present to mediate. They discuss measures to ease the stand-off and re-initiate negotiations.

Jan 17: The EZLN announces that it will not take any military actions and that it again stands by the cease-fire announced Jan 12, 1994.

Feb 3: Third CND in Queretaro - begin discussing the formation of the broad opposition front (MLN).

Feb 9: Zapatista safe houses stormed by police in Veracruz and Mexico City. Zedillo produces arrest orders for Zapatista leadership and claims to have unmasked Marcos. Military invades Zapatista communities in the liberated zone. Thousands of villagers flee into the mountains and jungle. Military destroys property and infrastructure in many villages. Aguascalientes destroyed. Dozens of presumed Zapatistas arrested. During February, many protests in Mexican embassies and consulates throughout North America and Europe.

Feb 14: PRI Governor of Chiapas, Robledo Rincon, steps-down and is replaced by another PRI member, Julio Cesar Ruiz Ferro.

Feb 16: Global Exchange human rights delegation arrives. Decision is made to found a permanent "Peace House" in order to monitor the human rights situation and work towards facilitating peaceful strategies for local grassroots change.

Mar 11: Mexican Congress approves a "Law for Dialogue, Conciliation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas". Refugees begin returning to villages destroyed by army. Peace Camps, with national and international observers, are formed in communities as a safety measure against future military harassment. Military remains in the former liberated zone (now called conflict zone) and continues its low-intensity war aimed at dividing and conquering Zapatista support base communities.

Apr 9: Meeting in the Ejido San Miguel, Ocosingo: EZLN, Government, COCOPA (legislators), CONAI (Bishop Ruiz's mediation team of intellectuals and church representatives). They approve the "Law for Dialogue" and set stage for the re-initiation of peace talks. San Andres Larraínzar chosen as the site for the talks.

Apr 20-23: Dialogue I San Andrés—thousands of indigenous pro-Zapatista marchers converge on the negotiation site. Hundreds of international supporters. Government demands that indigenous supporters leave the site. Talks begin.

May 12-15: Dialogue II San Andres—discussions about disarmament and military withdrawal from the conflict zone.

Jun 7-10: Dialogue III San Andres—discussions of Zapatista demands. Government only recognizes local problems while EZLN emphasizes the national dimensions of the crisis in Chiapas.

Jun 24: Expulsion of three foreign priests in Chiapas

Jul 4-6: Dialogue IV San Andres—EZLN denounces military provocation and harassment in the conflict zone. EZLN presents documents to set the agenda for future discussions to address demands.

Jul 24-26: Dialogue V San Andres—plagued with insults from both sides. Government accuses EZLN of trying to buy time in order to pursue hidden agenda. EZLN delegates accuse government of not taking them seriously and denounce the government's lack of cultural sensitivity.

Aug 27: Gran Consulta Nacional: EZLN supporters set up polling booths across Mexico and internationally. More than one million people participate answering six questions about the future direction of the EZLN. Results show more than 90% of participants agree with movement's basic demands and strategy. Divided opinion over whether the movement should unite with other forces.

Sep 5: Dialogue VI San Andres—first advance made as a peace talk agenda is agreed upon (see appendix I). Agree to begin discussions on Indigenous rights in October.

Oct 15: Chiapas municipal elections—PRD supporters abstain in many municipalities. PRI takes majority of the municipal presidencies. Notable exceptions: PAN in Tuxtla and PRD in Altamirano. No voting in Ocosingo. Ongoing disputes in San Andrés Larraínzar, Oxchuc and many other municipalities.

Oct 18-22: Table 1 Indigenous Culture and Rights, San Cristobal and San Andres: 496 participants of which 308 are Zapatistas, their invited guests and advisers. Discussed constitutional reforms necessary to strengthen indigenous rights and create a new relationship between indigenous people and the State.

Oct 21: Fernando Yañez Muñoz arrested in Mexico City and accused of being Zapatista Comandante German.

Oct 27: Fernando Yañez released due to popular pressure and by amnesty of the Dialogue Law signed in San Miguel (April '95) by the government and EZLN.

Nov 13-18: Table 1 Indigenous Culture and Rights, San Andres—talks continue.

Dec: Heightened military provocation in conflict zone. Forty tanks threaten highland community, Oventic. Chiapas immigration officials initiate "Operation Rainbow" designed to remove international presence from the peace camps in the conflict zone.

Dec 28-Jan 1: Aguascalientes II celebrating second anniversary of EZLN uprising. Cultural events at newly constructed sites in La Realidad, Oventic, Morelia and La Garrucha.

1996

Jan 1: ***Fourth EZLN Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle** calls for the creation of the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN): a broad social movement of opposition forces that does not seek state power or to become part of the formal political system. Change to come from within civil society.

Jan 3-8: National Indigenous Forum: conference sponsored by the EZLN brings together indigenous representatives from across Mexico. Indigenous issues divided into six working sessions: political participation, justice, autonomy, women, culture, access to media. Twenty-five indigenous EZLN comandantes attend (four women). Later,

Subcomandante Marcos arrives to San Cristobal, the first time in almost two years. Resolutions from Forum to be brought to National Legislature.

Jan 10-19: Table 1–Indigenous Rights, San Andres: Final Documents produced on the issue of indigenous rights. The EZLN brings the proposals back to the communities for consultations.

Jan 30: In accordance with the Fourth Declaration, the EZLN announces an Intercontinental Encounter Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity. Assemblies to be held during April in Berlin, La Realidad, Tokyo, Africa, Sidney. Results to be presented at International meeting in La Realidad, Chiapas, Jul 27-Aug3.

Feb 15: Table 1–Indigenous Rights, San Andres: EZLN announces that communities voted 96% to accept the “minimal” accord, despite strong reservations about the lack of advances on the issues of autonomy and the reform of Article 27 (land rights). First peace agreement signed between government and EZLN, known as the San Andres Accord on Indigenous Rights and Culture.

Mar 5-11: Table 2–Democracy and Justice in San Andrés. Agreement to allow EZLN to have a voice in multi-party talks discussing national political reform. Agreement on working sessions for next meeting.

Mar 8: International Women’s Day March: 5,000 Zapatista women and men march through San Cristobal with ski masks and handkerchiefs covering their faces, denouncing violence against women. Placards promote the new FZLN.

Mar 20-24: Table 2 talks continue in San Cristóbal and San Andrés divided into seven working sessions. Oliver Stone arrives in show of support for Zapatistas. State offensive to forcibly remove campesinos from reclaimed lands. Deaths in Nicolas Ruiz and Pichucalco.

Mar 25: Marcos meets Oliver Stone in La Realidad on the day of the Oscars–Stone is nominated for four awards. Marcos gives him a balaclava and a pipe and they ride away on horseback to a private meeting.

Apr 3-8: American Continental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. Delegates from throughout North America and Latin America meet for five days in the Zapatista Aguascalientes site in La Realidad to discuss the social, political, economic and cultural effects of neoliberalism throughout the hemisphere. A special table was set up to deal with its effects on indigenous people.

Apr 10-12: Meeting of the Permanent National Indigenous Forum in Zapatista Aguascalientes site in Oventic, San Andres. Indigenous representatives from many different Mexican states discuss strategies for promotion of the resolutions of the Indigenous Forum in January. EZLN members attend discussion tables.

Apr 14: French theoretician Regis Debray visits Marcos in La Realidad. Marcos states that the visits of celebrities reduce pressure by the military and government.

Apr 21: Former first lady of France, Danielle Mitterand, visits Subcomandante Marcos in his jungle hideout near La Realidad. She speaks out against the widespread poverty in the region. She also visits peace talks in San Andrés.

May 2: Alleged Zapatista members Sebastian Entzin and Javier Elorreaga sentenced to 6 and 13 years respectively for terrorism, sedition and rebellion.

May 5: Inauguration of a fifth Zapatista Aguascalientes site in Roberto Barrios, Palenque, outside the “conflict zone”. Cultural events and denunciations of military provocation. As many as 1,000 soldiers present in the neighbouring federal military base. Also 13 armoured vehicles on red alert line the road on the way to the community. On the same day conflicts in Bachajon lead to several deaths, massive displacements and homes burned down.

Jun 5: Dialogue on Justice and Liberty canceled because the Zapatista delegation refuses to negotiate with the government while there are alleged Zapatistas in prison accused of terrorism, sedition and rebellion.

Jun 6: Appeal court decision frees two alleged Zapatistas: Sebastian Entzin and Javier Elorreaga. Sixteen prisoners remain on different charges.

Jun 28: The one-year commemoration of the massacre of 17 campesinos in Aguas Blancas, Guerrero, is interrupted by an armed group calling itself the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR). Their manifesto calls for the overthrow of the Mexican government by arms and the institution of an “appropriate” government.

Jun 30-Jul 6: Forum on Mexican State Reform. Subcomandante Marcos arrives in San Cristobal and begins a week of discussions on democratization, human rights and the future direction of the Zapatista organization. Marcos meets with important Mexican opposition leaders. Marcos declares that the EPR is not tied to the EZLN.

Jul 8-12: Discussions for new procedural rules and a new format for the peace talks. Modification of the peace accord made in San Miguel April ‘95. The Zapatistas are now defined as “a group of Mexican citizens, mostly indigenous, that dissented”. They cannot be classified as terrorists and arrest orders for Zapatista leaders can no longer be issued while the peace talks continues. The decision to break the peace talks can only be made by the COCOPA and the CONAI mediating bodies.

Jul 16-17: EZLN and government meet to discuss the bases for the new negotiations on “Democracy and Justice” scheduled for August 6th.

Jul 27-Aug 3: International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism held at all five Aguascalientes sites in Chiapas. Five thousand participants from across the globe.

Aug 6-14: Peace talks resume in San Andres Larraínzar. No advances made. Scheduled to meet again on September 3rd. The EZLN calls for the replacement of the current government negotiating team.

Aug 28: The EPR carries out armed actions in Oaxaca, Guerrero and the Federal District—at least 15 deaths and 16 injuries. Non-violent actions carried out in Chiapas and Tabasco.

Sep 3: The EZLN suspends the dialogues in response to Zedillo's address to the nation, chronic violence in the northern zone of Chiapas, the 16 alleged Zapatista political prisoners still being held and the lack of progress in implementing the San Andres Accords. The EZLN declares a red alert in the communities. Marcos publishes a communiqué addressed to the EPR, criticizing it for carrying out actions in Chiapas, stating that the indigenous people will be the ones who pay. He also refuses the EPR's offer of support.

Sep 7: The Interior Ministry publishes a response to Marcos' communiqué and the suspension of the peace talks, denying EZLN's accusation that government is not taking the peace negotiations seriously.

Sep 8: Marcos publishes a "Ja!" (ha!) in response to the government's communiqué. EZLN declares that it will not retreat in the face of a renewed military offensive. Zapatista troops remain on red alert.

Oct 10-12: National Indigenous Conference (CNI) held in Mexico City. Comandante Ramona attends, representing the EZLN. The first official Zapatista appearance outside Chiapas.

Oct 15-21: First Tripartite Meeting: Subcomandante Marcos and 16 other EZLN comandantes meet with members of the CONAI and COCOPA in San Cristobal to talk about creating the conditions for renewed peace talks. Marcos walks from the city theatre to the dialogue site six blocks away, passing in front of San Cristobal's municipal palace.

Nov 5-10: Second Tripartite Meeting: EZLN delegates arrive in San Cristóbal for the installation of the Follow-up Commission that will oversee the implementation of the accord signed in February on Indigenous Rights and Culture. CONPAZ offices are firebombed, their accountant and his family are abducted and held for two days and NGO workers from various organizations in San Cristobal receive death threats. Three indigenous campesinos are killed during a forced eviction by the public security and Mexican armed forces in Laja Tendida, Venustiano Carranza.

Nov 26-Dec 10: Third Tripartite Meeting: The EZLN meets with the CONAI and COCOPA in San Cristobal. On Nov. 29, the COCOPA presents a comprehensive proposal for constitutional changes that match the spirit of the document signed on Indigenous Rights and Culture. The EZLN accepts the proposal and the COCOPA sends it to President Zedillo for approval. The COCOPA states that if it is not accepted they will dissolve as a mediating body. The EZLN states that they will only accept a Yes or No from the government—they are not willing to make changes. Zedillo asks for 15 days to consider the document.

Dec 5: A delegation from the Estación Norte is detained for three hours in Miguel Alemán, Tila, by 200 members of the paramilitary group Paz y Justicia armed with machetes. The group was verbally threatened and robbed of several tons of food aid, cameras and personal belongings while the Public Security police watched from a hill and the army passed by twice in a convoy.

1997

Jan 11: During the last part of December, the government offers the EZLN a counter-proposal instead of directly replying to the COCOPA initiative. After examining the

counter-proposal with its advisors, the EZLN rejects it. Marcos vanishes from public view and the level of tension increases throughout Chiapas.

Jan 15: Intracommunity violence in the township of Pantelhó. PRI supporters burn down the offices of the autonomous government and more than 100 families are expelled, mostly EZLN supporters.

Jan 19: Intracommunity violence in El Paraiso, Sabanilla. The Public Security Police arrive on Jan. 20. Members of the opposition side protest that they were forced to flee when the police shot tear gas into their homes and dropped grenades from helicopters. Opposition flees into the mountains, Public Security police and PRI members remain in the community.

Feb 1: In San Cristobal de las Casas 9,000 indigenous members of the EZLN and FZLN march demanding that the COCOPA not allow itself to be intimidated by the government in its work to implement the San Andrés Accords. They also demanded that the military and police cease their continual harassment of indigenous communities.

Feb 5: PRI members attack EZLN supporters in Aguas Blancas, Palenque. More than 30 families displaced and 4 people injured.

Feb 11: Fourth attempt since November to set fire to the offices of CONPAZ.

Feb 15: Estacion Norte human rights team is ambushed by armed men from the PRI paramilitary group Paz y Justicia in El Paraiso, Sabanilla, while attempting to listen to the PRI's version of the events surrounding the violence in January. Two vehicles were shot at and one man injured. The national and international observers were held at gun point before the Public Security police arrived.

Feb 19-20: Indigenous forum takes place in Patihuitz, Ocosingo. Discussions of the situation of the San Andres Accords, justice, human rights, democracy, the situation of women and the problem of the electricity cuts.

Feb 21-22: State Encounter for Peace and National Dialogue. Forty-two organizations meet in San Cristobal. Proposals made, concerning the creation of a national dialogue and the definition of what these organizations should do in the immediate future to promote the peace process.

Mar 7: Campesinos from Emiliano Zapata and Plan de Ayala are evicted by Public Security police in Palenque. More than 350 families are forced to leave their homes and cornfields. The front page of La Jornada shows soldiers destroying the community's school to "ensure that the indigenous people won't return". Land belongs to local cacique Manuel Huerta but the campesinos have a written agreement giving them the right to use the land. Public Security police are ambushed as they return to their base, resulting in the death of two policemen.

Mar 8: Two Jesuit priests and two campesino leaders from the organization Xi'Nich are kidnapped by police and later charged with inciting violence. While in custody the priests are beaten and tortured. They are accused of being the intellectual leaders of the ambush. Over the next few days the public security police officers carry out acts of intimidation

against the Palenque parish and the offices of Xi'Nich. Hundreds of uniformed police carrying coffins march on the parish with banners saying "Priest Assassins". They attempt to break down the doors of the offices of Xi'Nich using the coffins as battering rams. Also on this day there is a march in Larraínzar for International Women's Day.

Mar 12: Xi'Nich leaders and Jesuit Priests are released from the Cerro Hueco jail because of lack of evidence. Police enjoy impunity from the charges of kidnapping, torture and false arrest.

Mar 14: Inter-community violence in San Pedro Nixtalucum, municipality of El Bosque. EZLN sympathizers and PRI members attempt to resolve internal dispute. Public Security police arrive and detain six campesinos from the EZLN side. As the police transport the six prisoners toward Tuxtla they are attacked with sticks a road block. The police and a helicopter fires on the protesters killing four and injuring six. In total 27 campesinos, all EZLN sympathizers, are detained and held in the Cerro Hueco penitentiary in Tuxtla Gutierrez. More than 90 families (400 persons) from the EZLN displaced from San Pedro Nixtalucum.

Mar 14-16: First National Encounter for Peace takes place in Mexico City, responding to the EZLN's call for a national dialogue in the search for a just and dignified peace. A total of 264 organizations from civil society respond.

Apr 8-10: Second State Encounter for Peace and National Dialogue in San Cristobal. Forty organizations discussed the problems of militarization, the impasse in the peace process and violence in the communities. The Second Encounter ended with a march in San Cristobal commemorating the 78th anniversary of the assassination of Emiliano Zapata.

Apr 13: "Pilgrimage for Peace" 20,000 parishioners from the northern zone march to Tila where the Mexican Episcopal Council (CEM) and church representatives call for reconciliation and peace in the northern zone.

Apr 24-28: Wejil March—150 representatives of the displaced people from the northern zone marched from Tila to Tuxtla, stopping in several towns along the way to demand the release of political prisoners and a solution to the crisis in the north. They begin a sit-in protest in front of the state government building. Twelve international observers are expelled from Mexico for accompanying the marchers.

Apr 26: Pedro Joaquin Coldwell named as the new government representative in the negotiations for peace in Chiapas. Coldwell is the former governor of Quintana Roo and representative of the Mexican High Commission on Refugees (COMAR).

May 5-6: U.S. President Bill Clinton visits Mexico. Meets with President Zedillo and opposition leaders, but does not raise the issue of the human rights situation in Chiapas and other conflict-torn areas of Mexico.

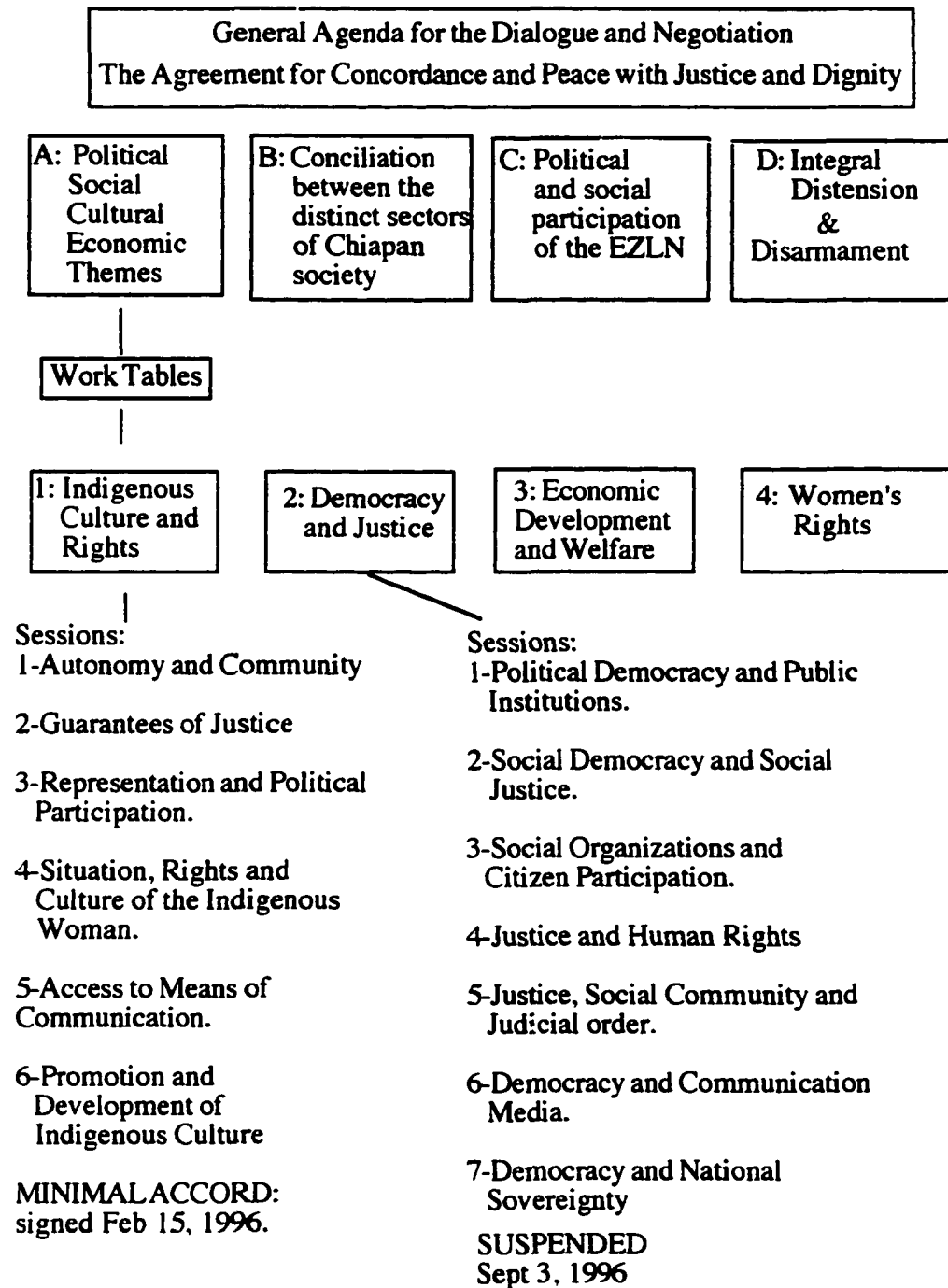
May 17-18: The Encounter for Peace and Reconciliation in Tuxtla Gutierrez brings together 40 organizations from diverse social sectors to discuss solutions to the violence in Chiapas. Encounter is organized by the Support Commission for Community Unity and Reconciliation (CORECO), a coalition of church and human rights groups.

May 23: The first 11 of the 27 prisoners from the conflict in San Pedro Nixtalucum, El Bosque are released from Cerro Hueco penitentiary in Tuxtla Gutierrez.

May 28: The rest of the prisoners from San Pedro Nixtalucum are released from Cerro Hueco after sustained negotiations between the state government and members of the San Cristóbal Diocese.

Jul 6: Mid-term congressional elections in Mexico. EZLN supporters boycott the electoral process. Ballot boxes burned in San Andrés Larraínzar and sabotaged in Ocosingo. The PRI loses its absolute majority in the Congress for the first time in history. Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas of the PRD is elected to the new post of Mexico City mayor.

Appendix 4: EZLN - Government Peace Talk Agenda

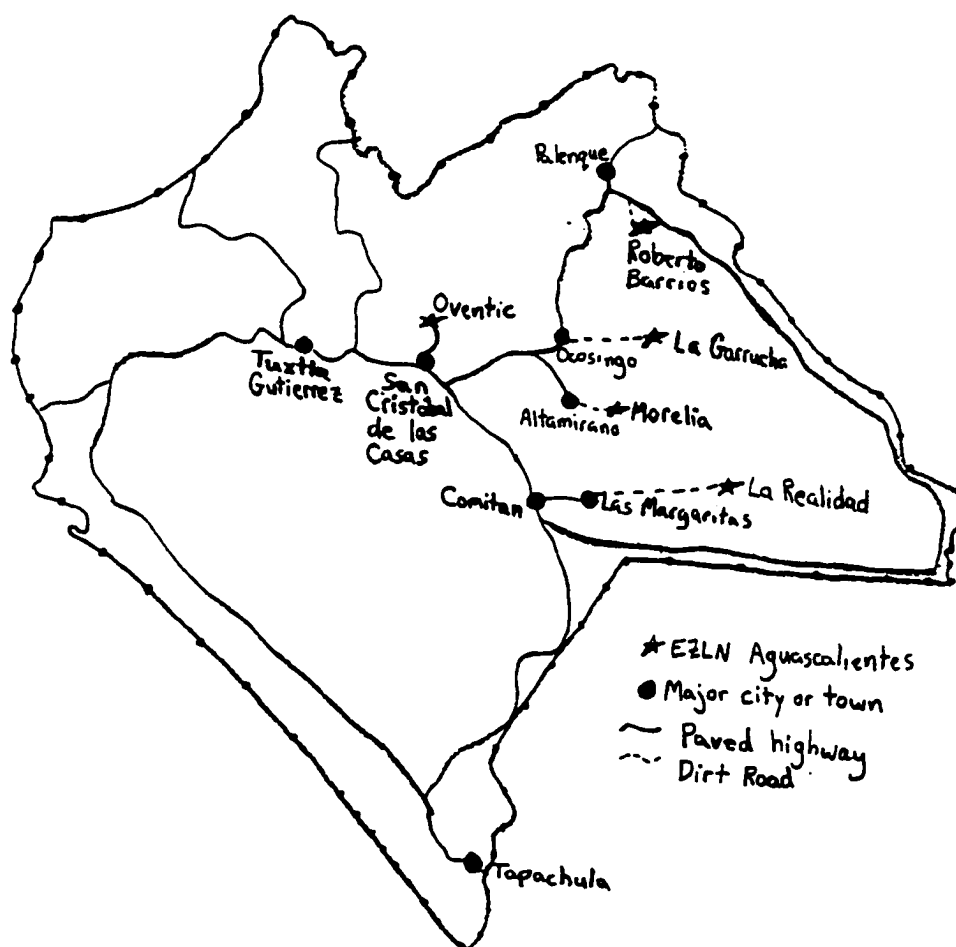


Appendix 5: MAPS

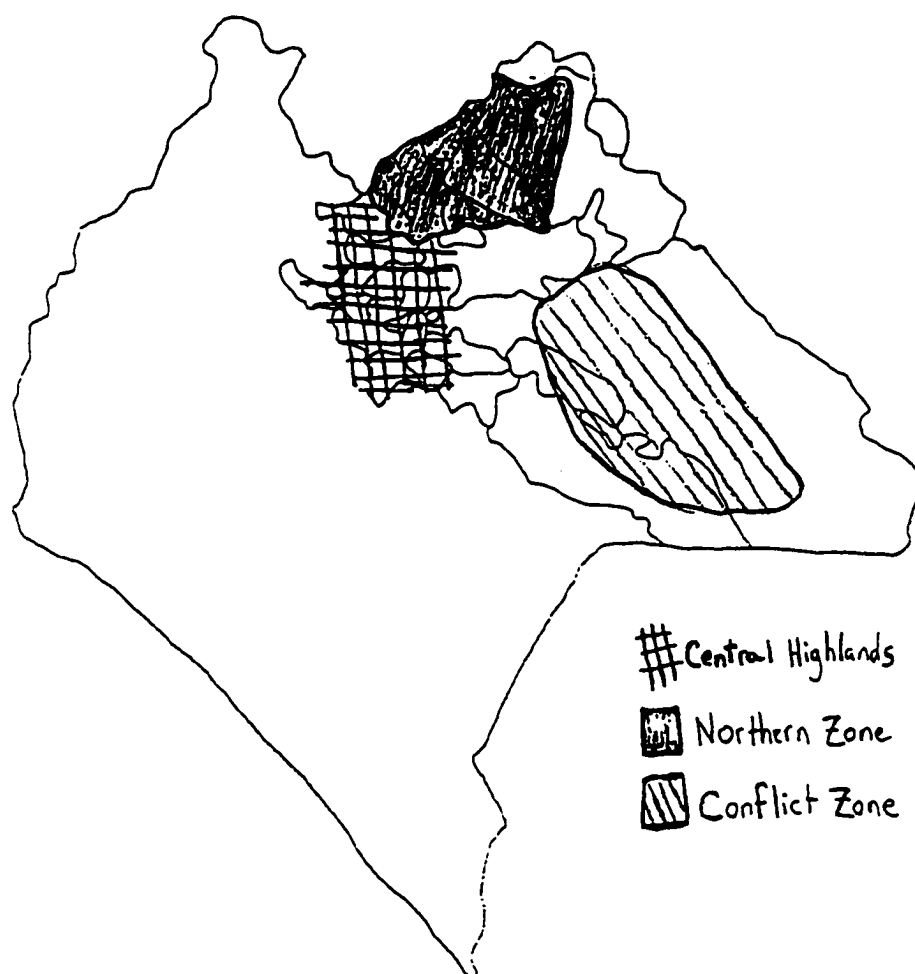
1. Chiapas in Mexico



2. Important towns and EZLN centres of resistance in Chiapas



3. Regions in Chiapas related to the conflict and the EZLN



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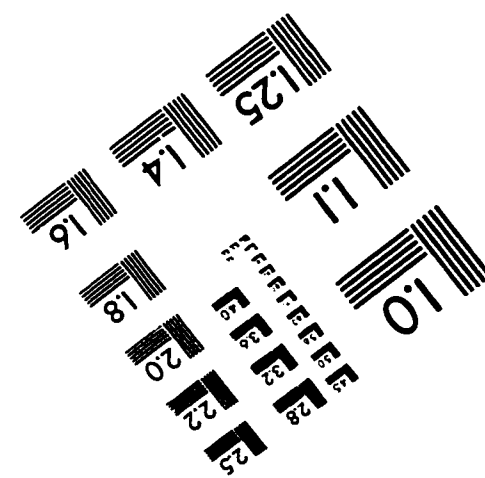
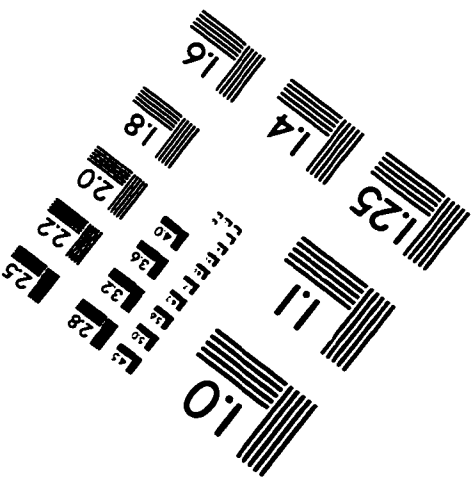
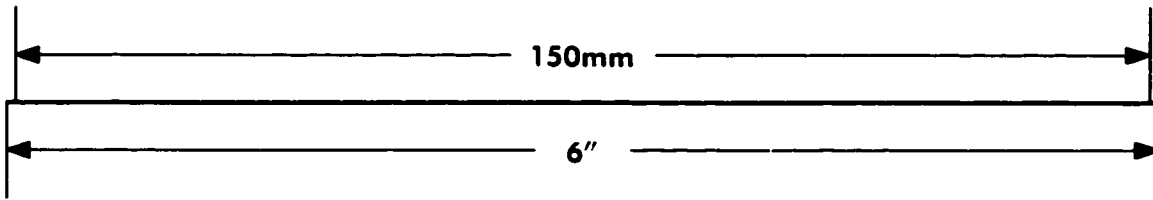
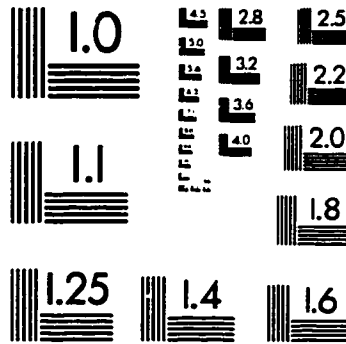
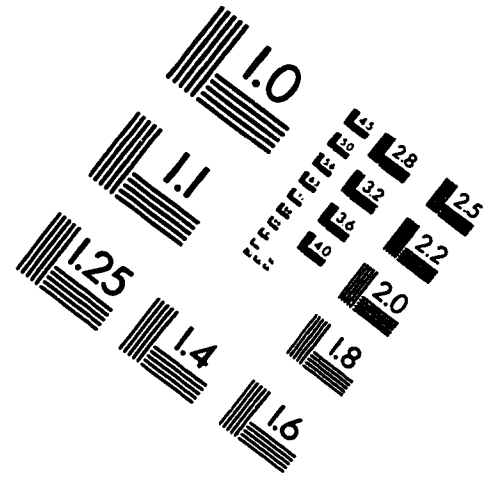
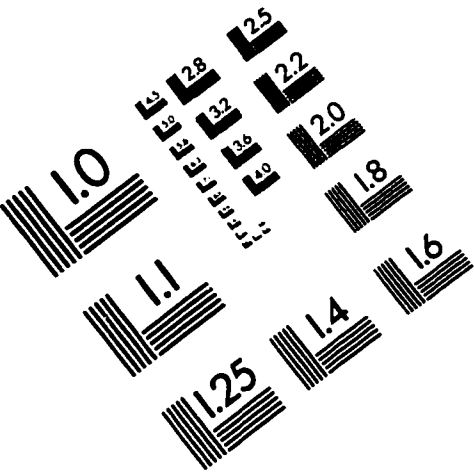
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