EMERGENCE OF THE ZAPATISTA NETWAR

The EZLN's Zapatistas are rural insurgents. But they are not ordinary ones, and they were quickly perceived by intellectuals (e.g., Mexico's Carlos Fuentes, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova) as representing the world's first postcommunist, "postmodern" insurgency:

> Many people with cloudy minds in Mexico responded to what happened in Chiapas by saying, "Here we go again, these rebels are part of the old Sandinista-Castroite-Marxist-Leninist legacy. Is this what we want for Mexico?" The rebels proved exactly the contrary: Rather than the last rebellion of that type, this was the first postcommunist rebellion in Latin America. (Fuentes, 1994, p. 56.)

This marvelous argument makes an important point; the EZLN insurgency was novel. Yet the features that make it so novel—notably the links to transnational and local NGOs that claim to represent civil society—move the topic largely out of an "insurgency" and into a "netwar" framework. Without the influx of NGO-based social activists, starting hours after the insurrection began, the situation in Chiapas would probably have deteriorated into a conventional insurgency and counterinsurgency, in which the small, poorly equipped EZLN might not have done well, and its efforts at "armed propaganda" would not have seemed out of the ordinary.

Transnational NGO activism attuned to the information age, not the nature of the EZLN insurgency per se, is what changed the framework. The EZLN was not a "wired" indigenous army. In Marcos, it had a superb media spokesman, but the guerrillas did not have their own laptop computers, Internet connections, fax machines, and

cellular telephones. These information-age capabilities were in the hands of most transnational and some Mexican NGOs—and they used them to great effect for conveying the EZLN's and their own views, for communicating and coordinating with each other, and for creating an extraordinary mobilization of support, as laid out in this and the next several chapters.

THREE LAYERS TO THE ZAPATISTA MOVEMENT

In retrospect, Mexico and Chiapas were ripe for social netwar in the early 1990s. Mexico as a whole—its state, economy, and society—was (and still is) in a deep, difficult transition. Traditional clannish and hierarchical patterns of behavior continued to rule the political system. But that system was beginning to open up. Presidents Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) had started to liberalize the economy and, to a much lesser degree, the polity. Mexico was beginning to adapt to modern market principles. And independent civil-society actors, including a range of NGOs, were beginning to gain strength and to challenge the government for lagging at democratization and for neglecting social welfare issues.[1]

Meanwhile, Chiapas, once an isolated backwater on Mexico's southern border, was becoming awash with outside forces. It was still characterized by tremendous, age-old gaps between the wealthy and impoverished—kept wide by privileged landowners who ran feudal fiefdoms with private armies, by dictatorial *caciques* (local bosses), and by the plight of poor *indigenas* (indigenous peoples) who wanted their lives improved and their cultures respected. Mexico's neo-liberal economic reforms, especially those instituted by the Salinas administration, made matters much worse for many *indigenas*, and that set the stage for the organization and rise of the EZLN.[2]

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[1]On civil society and the NGOs, see Fox (1994) and Fox and Hernandez (1992).

[2]Sources consulted include Collier (1994a, 1994b), Gossen (1994), Harvey (1994), Hernandez (1994a, 1994b), Nash (1995), and Ross (1995). Chiapas has a long history of rebelliousness over land issues and was viewed in Mexico City as being filled with truculent *indios*, according to a century-old but still interesting report by Stephens [1841] (1988).

Local economic and social conditions are important, but more to the point for this study is that Chiapas was increasingly subject to a plethora of transnational influences. During the 1980s, it became a crossroads for NGO activists, Roman Catholic liberation-theology priests, Protestant evangelists, Guatemalan refugees, guerrillas from Central America, and criminals trafficking in narcotics and weapons. These transnational forces were stronger and more distinctive in Chiapas than in two other nearby states—Oaxaca and Guerrero— that have been likely locales for guerrilla insurgencies. Transnational NGOs, notably those concerned with human-rights issues, were showing far more interest in conditions in Chiapas, and they had better connections there (mainly through the diocese and related Mexican NGOs in San Cristóbal de las Casas) than they did in Guerrero or Oaxaca.[3] This helps explain why Chiapas and not another state gave rise to an insurgency that became a netwar in 1994.

How, then, did network designs come to define the Zapatista movement? They evolved out of the movement's three layers, each of which is discussed below:

- At the social base of the EZLN are the *indigenas*—indigenous peoples—from several Mayan language and ethnic groups. This layer, the most "tribal," engages ideals and objectives that are very egalitarian, communitarian, and consultative.

- The next layer is found in the EZLN's leadership—those top leaders, mostly from educated middle-class *Ladino* backgrounds, who have little or no Indian ancestry and who infiltrated into Chiapas in order to create a guerrilla army. This was the most hierarchical layer—at least initially—in that the leadership aspired to organize hierarchical command structures for waging guerrilla warfare in and beyond Chiapas.

- The top layer—top from a netwar perspective—consists of the myriad local (Mexican) and transnational (mostly American and

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[3]In Guerrero and Oaxaca, the *indigena* cultures and structures were also not quite as strong, distinctive, and alienated from the Mexican government as they were in Chiapas.

Canadian) NGOs who rallied to the Zapatista cause. This is the most networked layer from an information-age perspective.[4]

These are very diverse layers, involving actors from disparate cultures who have different values, goals, and strategic priorities. This is far from a monolithic or uniform set of actors. No single, formalized organizational design or doctrine characterizes it—or could be imposed on it for long. The shape and dynamics of the Zapatista movement unfolded in quite an ad hoc manner.

The social netwar qualities of the Zapatista movement depend mainly on the top layer, that of the NGOs. Without it, the EZLN would probably have settled into a mode of organization and behavior more like a classic insurgency or ethnic conflict. Indeed, the capacity of the EZLN and of the overall Zapatista movement to mount information operations, an essential feature of social netwar, depended heavily on the attraction of the NGOs to the EZLN's cause, and on the NGOs' ability to impress the media and use faxes, e-mail, and other telecommunications systems for spreading the word. But the nature of the base layer, the *indigenas*, also drove the EZLN in network directions, as discussed below. These distinctions about the layers are significant for sorting out which aspects of the Zapatista movement correspond to netwar, and which do not.

THE *INDIGENAS*: GROWING DESPERATION AND POLITICIZATION

Chiapas is among Mexico's poorest, most marginalized states.[5] By most measures of misery, it scores far worse than the Mexican average.[6] The EZLN's local agenda—for better education and medical

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[4]Not much is done in this study with the point that tribal, hierarchical, and networked forms of organization have coexisted within the Zapatista movement. But for an explanation as to why this point may be significant, and a hint that more might be done with the point, see Ronfeldt (1996).

[5]Sources consulted include Arizpe (1996), Collier (1994a, 1994b), Gonzalez Casanova (1996), Orozco (1995), Pazos (1994), Tello (1995), Trejo (1994), and Villafuerte and Garcia (1994).

[6]For example, the portion of people in Chiapas who live in homes with dirt floors is 51 percent; the national figure is 21 percent. The figure for people earning more than the minimum wage is 41 percent in Chiapas, and 73 percent for Mexico at large. Even

services, electricity, paved roads, etc.—resonated with the *indigenas* because of the awful poverty and desperation in the region.

The EZLN's social base consists mostly of *indigenas* from Mayan language groups and communities known as Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, and Chole. There are other Mayan groups, but these were the ones whose migration into the eastern lowlands and whose historical presence in the central highlands meant they ended up squarely in the EZLN's recruiting zone.

The paragraphs that follow appear to emphasize the effects of adverse economic factors and policies on the *indigenas*. But it is important to realize that the key economic factor—land—is not really about economics from an indigenous viewpoint. As one of our interviewees (Donna Lee Van Cott) explained, land matters intensely to Indians because it is the physical basis for community—for having a sense of community and for being able to endure as a community. Without land, an indigenous people cannot dwell together; their community is culturally dead. Outsiders (including Marxists) often view the Indian struggle for land in economic class terms, evoking images of "landless peasants." But for Indians, the truly important dimensions of the land issue are about community and culture. Thus, in Chiapas, the *indigenas* who migrated ever deeper into the jungle were striving not only to earn a living, but also to find a way to preserve community.[7]

Against this background, a multifaceted economic crisis in the 1980s prompted many *indigenas* to embrace the EZLN. This crisis attacked the indigenous population in all areas vital to their survival. First, continuing migration from other regions inside and outside Chiapas aggravated existing land pressures. Except for the fertile valleys in the western and southwestern parts, much of Chiapas is unsuited for farming; it is either mountainous highlands or heavily forested jungle that does not remain fertile after deforestation. Migration into the

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these figures mask the high percentage of the population lacking basic services in the poorest areas. In nearly 15 percent of Chiapas's 111 municipalities, over 70 percent of the population lack electricity, drainage, or toilets. One index of marginalization shows that 85 percent of the state lives in a desperate condition. In a five-tiered ranking system of low to very high marginalization, 38 municipalities rank very high and 56 high.

[7]Also see Van Cott (1996), p. 70.

eastern portion of the state began in the 1950s as *indigenas* from the highlands moved hopefully (even inspired by Catholic priests to believe they were taking part in a modern Exodus) into the Lacandón jungle in search of land. But their situation was soon aggravated by large flows of people from other states. Then, in 1968, a decree from Mexico City appeased peasant protesters elsewhere in Mexico by granting them land in Chiapas. In 1972, another decree granted a huge tract of land to a local non-Mayan tribe, the Lacandones, precisely where the Mayan migrants had settled. In 1978, yet another decree authorized the creation of a biosphere reserve in the area. All this exacerbated land pressures, and land disputes, for the Mayan populace.[8]

The *indigenas* suffered still another major setback when the Salinas administration amended Article 27 of Mexico's constitution in a way that stripped peasants of their hope for the future. For decades, Article 27 had provided for land reform and redistribution, and as anthropologist George Collier (1994b, p. 30) notes, redistributive policies were a major factor in maintaining peace in a region where so many other factors favored rebellion:

> It is difficult to overstate the power of land reform in winning peasants to the side of the State. Even when land reforms were agonizingly slow in coming—and they often were—the federal government was able to hold out the promise of land reform as a way of retaining peasant loyalty.

As part of broader policies to liberalize the national economy, the amendment ended policies and programs that had ensured communal grants to peasant groups in Chiapas. The termination of land reform by this amendment further increased the attractiveness of the EZLN insurgency.

Finally, Mexico's economic liberalization policies of the 1980s and early 1990s created an agricultural crisis for the peasants, for it brought the termination of subsidies and credits and eliminated agencies regulating agricultural policies. Price supports ended, and

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[8]Although the state's population is only 4 percent of the national total, 25 percent of all land disputes in Mexico are in Chiapas; and 30 percent of all petitions for land presented to the federal government come from Chiapas (Burguete, 1995, p. 9).

the region's most important products—wood, coffee, and cattle—earned far less income. The rural poor suffered from these changes, losing the few programs that had helped them subsist. During the 1980s, the adult working population receiving less than the minimum wage grew by 83 percent (Villafuerte and García, 1994, p. 90). Meanwhile, a sharp fall in coffee prices in international markets, from $180 per hundred pounds in 1986 to $60 in 1992, further aggravated conditions.

As their economic and thus their cultural and social woes mounted from the 1970s onward, the restless *indigenas* formed new peasant organizations that were independent of the federal and state governments and of the ruling political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). A vibrant set of indigenous organizations emerged, the most important being the Unión de Ejidos-Quiptic Ta Lecubtesel, the Unión de Uniones, and a series of organizations best known by their acronyms: ANCIEZ, ARIC (a splinter of the Unión de Uniones), CIOAC, and OCEZ. Their activities ranged from training and education programs, to forming credit unions, to filing petitions and lodging complaints with the authorities, to seizing disputed lands and defiantly trying to hold onto them. Of these organizations, ARIC and ANCIEZ eventually became important recruiting grounds and strongholds of the EZLN and served as cover for some of its activities. However, not all members were pro-EZLN. For example, ARIC, despite a Maoist orientation, was basically reformist and peaceable and would end up losing many members to the EZLN. Indeed, "even as the EZLN was nourished by the movements mentioned above, the great majority of the activists and organizations in the state decided not to actively participate in the armed uprising" (Burguete, 1995, p. 11).

Meanwhile, from the 1970s onward, radical elements of the Catholic Church stationed in Chiapas gained a powerful presence among the *indigenas*. The Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the central highlands, headed by Samuel Ruíz (known in some circles as the "Red Bishop"), became a key player in the mobilization and politicization of the *indigenas*, notably with the organization of the landmark Indigenous Encounter in 1974 that stirred many Mayans to engage in the kinds of organizing noted above. Moreover, the preaching of liberation theology by many (but not all) Dominican, Marist, and to a lesser extent, Jesuit priests would eventually encourage re-

bellion. Ruíz and some other priests favored church teachings about helping poor people regain their dignity and rights (termed the "option for the poor"), and some also preached liberation theology (which went beyond the "option for the poor" to allow the "just use" of force by the oppressed). Ruíz would describe Salinas-style neo-liberalism and the poverty it spawned as being "totally contrary to the will of God." While his diocese denies having ever funded the EZLN, it acknowledges the justice of its cause. Indeed, the EZLN's founders (as well as organizers of the Unión del Pueblo, another armed movement) were able to penetrate the closed, suspicious indigenous communities and organizations by first approaching them with the assistance of sympathetic priests. The commitment of Ruíz and his followers in the San Cristóbal diocese to the "option for the poor," if not to liberation theology, set them apart from other dioceses in the area where this theology was not as strong nor the priests as committed.

Finally, although the *indigenas* had long suffered from repression, a particularly terrible wave hit them during the 1980s, instituted by then-governor General Absalón Castellanos, who was a very wealthy cattle rancher and leader of an extended family that amounted to one of the most powerful political clans in the state. His ascendance to the governorship and his security policies were partly a result of concerns in Mexico City that guerrilla warfare would spread northward from Central America, and that Chiapas needed to be made militarily secure.

These decades of desperation, politicization, and organization among the *indigenas* led to an increasing pool of people ready to opt for armed struggle. At the turn of the decade, repression eased a bit, and the Salinas administration poured resources into Chiapas by way of its welfare-oriented National Solidarity Program. Moreover, the revolutionary trend in Central America abated, the Sandinista regime lost power in Nicaragua, and the Soviet Union collapsed—all leading to a spread of assumptions that socialism was dead or dying. None of this was good for the EZLN or for its relations with ARIC or the diocese, the two major forces for radical reform in the area. Many communities were divided, or undecided, as to whether to opt for armed struggle or to stick with pressing for peaceful change (Womack, 1997, p. 46). But by then a hard core had developed in and around the EZLN, and it was still attracting and retaining widespread

indigenous support, especially among the youngest of the disaffected and among women.[9] By its own count, the EZLN figured its forces numbered 12, 000 at the beginning of 1993, on the eve of deciding to go to war.

THE EZLN: MIXTURE OF VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL DESIGNS

The origins of the EZLN remain unclear. From what is known (mostly from Tello (1995) and Womack (1997)),[10] the movement began in the 1980s as a very different kind of organization from what emerged in 1994. Its initial, hierarchical design was remolded by its contacts with the *indigenas* and later the NGOs.

The EZLN is evidently mainly an offspring of the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN), a little-known clandestine group founded by young intellectual radicals from Northern Mexico who had been preparing, with little success, for armed struggle in Mexico. Members of two lesser revolutionary groups, the Unión del Pueblo[11] and the Linea Proletaria faction of Política Popular,[12] played secondary roles in the creation of the EZLN. Like many other armed groups of the time, the FLN formed in reaction to the government's massacre of students in Tlatelolco in 1968. Initially, it had ties with other armed groups, but these were severed as the FLN eschewed their

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[9]The material on indigenous organizing and on liberation theology is largely from Tello (1995), but also see Burguete (1995), Gonzalez Casanova (1996), Guillermoprieto (1995), Van Cott (1996), Womack (1997), and other sources. On the role of women and women's issues, see Stephen (1996).

[10]Some activists we interviewed criticized Tello (1995) for reputedly relying partly on Mexican intelligence materials and for not using with complete accuracy some of the field interviews he conducted. Yet this work remains the single most impressive, professional, and informative source to date. Also see Womack (1997).

[11]The role of the Unión del Pueblo (People's Union) reappears later in the story with the emergence of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR). The EPR is partly an offspring of the Clandestine Workers Revolutionary Party "People's Union" (PROCUP), which still exists and which is itself an outgrowth of the original Unión del Pueblo. See the discussion later in this report.

[12]Leaders of Linea Proletaria, who favored peaceful over armed change, would be coopted by the Salinas administration, and they would gain considerable influence in ARIC as well as in the government's National Solidarity Program, which dispensed resources in the region.

hasty recruitment practices, assaults, and kidnappings. The FLN favored a low profile and a long gestation, with careful recruiting and a slow development of support among the peasantry—a Maoist approach.

In the mid-1970s, the FLN began training in the Chiapas jungles (initially without contact with the *indigenas* or radical priests there). However, the police and army dealt a severe blow to the FLN in 1974, necessitating a slow rebuilding over the next decade. When the FLN reemerged, at its head were guerrillas who would become key players in the EZLN, notably Germán, Marcos, and Elisa. The reconstituted FLN, which had cells in various parts of Mexico, defined its goal as socialism, to be achieved by combining proletarian battles with those of the peasants and the *indigenas*. Its 1983 statutes called for creating the EZLN by name; that year, key FLN leaders moved into the Chiapas jungle to accomplish this, at a time when liberation theology was vibrant, some tiny cadres associated with other guerrilla groups already existed, hopes were rising that revolution would triumph in Central America and spread into Mexico via Chiapas, and peasant organizations like ARIC existed that might be infiltrated. The FLN leadership aimed to establish a powerful center of operations in Chiapas, while also creating a nationwide infrastructure of armed cells.

The founders had a hierarchical design in mind for creating the EZLN as a key *foco* and linking (if not subordinating) it to a national directorate under the command of the FLN. But their ideological and organizational frameworks had little meaning or relevance to the *indigenas* they encountered and aimed to recruit. Consequently, as the EZLN interacted with the *indigenas* and their organizations, as well as with the local priests—indeed, people associated with the EZLN, ARIC, and the diocese all became quite well known to each other—the EZLN began to adopt some of the characteristics of indigenous social organizations.

The *indigenas* disapproved of hierarchical command structures. They wanted flat, decentralized designs that emphasized consultation at the community level. Indeed, their key social concepts are about community and harmony—the community is supposed to be the center of all social activity, and its institutions are supposed to maintain harmony among family members, residents of the village,

and the spiritual and material worlds. Decisionmaking is essentially communal, and the key positions of power in a village belong to a larger council, under the notion that many people make better decisions than just one (see Maurer, 1995).

> [I]n general, the indigenas did not consider themselves to be sovereign individuals in a society but organic members of a community. They argued for hours and hours, entire nights, for months and months, before arriving at what they called *the agreement.* On reaching the agreement, those who were against it had no option; either they followed along with the rest, or they left the community.[13]

In this design, the purpose of power and authority is to serve the community, not to command it—so one who does not know how to serve cannot know how to govern. Marcos would learn this and later point out that he could not give an order—his order would simply not exist—if it had not been authorized by an assembly or a committee representing the *indigenas.* While elements of hierarchy are found in these indigenous structures, the Mexican federal and state structures in the region are terribly hierarchical by comparison and are thus viewed as alien impositions.

During the 1980s, a whole variety of factors—the economic crisis noted above; the wave of repression inflicted by the governor, the landlords, and their paramilitary forces; the liberationist preachings of Catholic priests; and the difficulties of gaining relief through existing peasant organizations—all led to recruiting and organizing opportunities for the EZLN's founders. At first, this was done in the name of self-defense, a goal that resonated well with the *indigenas* and priests; only later did the goal become liberation and revolution. As recruitment and organization advanced—and to assure they kept advancing—the EZLN's founders adapted their principles to those of the *indigenas.*[14] The EZLN did not copy their organizational forms, but it did begin to resemble them. This must not have been an easy

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[13]Tello (1995), p. 184, translation. Some communities were indeed divided over whether to support the looming insurgency, and some families were expelled and their belongings redistributed after the pro-EZLN vote won.

[14]Sources include Maurer (1995), Ross (1995), Tello (1995), Van Cott (1996), Womack (1997), and an interview with Jose Arellano, Mexico City, March 5, 1996.

transition for all the EZLN's leaders to make. As late as its first major manifesto calling people to arms, "El Despertador Mexicano" (The Mexican Awakening), issued December 1, 1993, the EZLN describes itself as having a hierarchical, centralized command structure (Van Cott, 1996, p. 75). However, Marcos soon clarified that
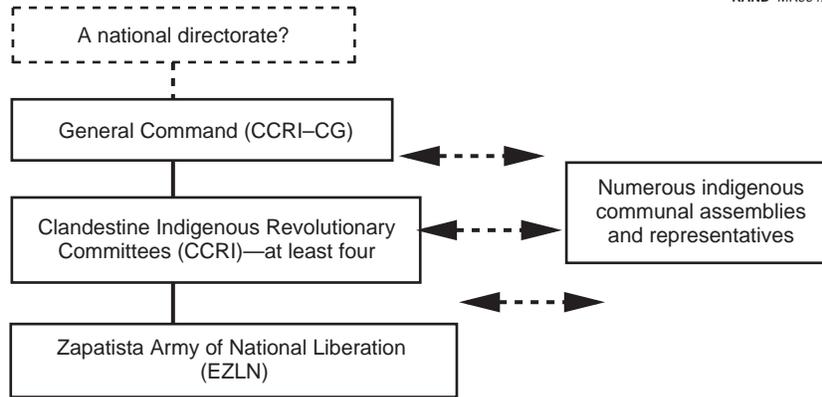
> Armed struggle has to take place where the people are, and we faced the choice of continuing with a traditional guerrilla structure, or *masificando* and putting the strategic leadership in the hands of the people. Our army became scandalously Indian, and there was a certain amount of clashing while we made the adjustment from our orthodox way of seeing the world in terms of "bourgeois and proletarians" to the community's collective democratic conceptions, and their world view. (Quoted by Guillermoprieto, 1995, p. 39.)

This shows up in the appearance of the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees (CCRIs) in the midst of the EZLN command structure—see Figure 2—and in the CCRIs' dependence on consultations with community assemblies outside that structure. In January 1993, the FLN/EZLN leadership gathered to vote on when to go to war. One position held that the time was still not ripe—the FLN had too few forces in northern and central Mexico, the army was capable of focusing just on Chiapas, and thus it was advisable to keep organizing and preparing for even another ten years. The position that Marcos favored was to go on the offensive as soon as possible, before local reformist organizations receiving government monies could attract the EZLN's following away, before the army went on the attack based on its growing intelligence about the EZLN, and so that the EZLN could take advantage of 1994 being a year for national elections. This latter position won out. Marcos then proposed that a CCRI be created for the purpose of consulting with community assemblies about supporting the EZLN's decision to go to war. Soon, the (often split) votes taken in assemblies in March 1993 rendered the authority that the EZLN was looking for.[15] The CCRIs, which grew in number, were not part of the EZLN's original design. It was supposed to be headed by the General Command; but, according to

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[15]From Tello (1995) and Womack (1997), who talk about a vote in January 1993. Other sources, including Marcos, refer to a vote in 1992.

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│   A national directorate?   │
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│ General Command (CCRI–CG) │   ┌─────────────────────────┐
└─────────────────────────────┘ ◄ - - - - ►   │ Numerous indigenous   │
                                                    │ communal assemblies   │
┌─────────────────────────────┐   │ and representatives   │
│ Clandestine Indigenous   │ ◄ - - - - ►   └─────────────────────────┘
│ Revolutionary Committees   │
│ (CCRI)—at least four   │   ◄ - - - - ►
└─────────────────────────────┘

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│ Zapatista Army of National │
│ Liberation (EZLN)   │
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Figure 2—EZLN Organization

Marcos and others, its authority was soon subordinated to the approval of the CCRIs.

Thus, one Zapatista noted, the movement was not born democratic, but "the form and organization of the indigenous communities permeated and dominated our movement and we had to democratize the Indian way." It might be added that the EZLN and the broader Zapatista movement also ended up having to democratize the NGO way.

ACTIVIST NGOs: GLOBAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL NETWORKS

To understand why a social netwar emerged in Mexico—and why an insurgency mutated into a social netwar—the analyst must look at trends outside Mexico involving activist NGOs.[16] Such NGOs, most of which play both service and advocacy roles, are not a new phe-

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[16]Here, the term NGO includes many nonprofit organizations (NPOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs), and grass-roots organizations (GROs). It does not include international governmental organizations (IGOs), and what are sometimes referred to as government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), government-inspired NGOs (GINGOs), and quasi-NGOs (QUANGOs).

nomenon. But their numbers, diversity, and strength have increased dramatically around the world since the 1970s. And mainly since the 1980s, they have developed information-age organizational and technological networks for connecting and coordinating with each other.[17] Thus, the NGOs' ability to swarm into Mexico in response to the EZLN's insurrection was no anomaly; it stemmed from a confluence of network-building efforts spread over a decade or two at global, regional, and local levels. [18]

Some of the activist NGOs were more radical and militant than others, and some were more affected by old ideologies than others. But, altogether, most were in basic agreement that they were not interested in seeking political power or in helping other actors seek power. Rather, they wanted to foster a form of democracy in which civil-society actors would be strong enough to counterbalance state and market actors and could play central roles in making public-policy decisions that affect civil society (see Frederick, 1993a). This relatively new ideological stance, a by-product of the information revolution, was barely emerging on the eve of the EZLN insurrection, but we surmise that it had enough momentum among activists to help give coherence to the swarm that would rush into Mexico, seeking to help pacify as well as protect the EZLN.

Two story lines about issue-oriented NGOs are significant here. One is about the growth of issue-networks[19] that focus on *specific* issues, like human rights. The other is about the rise of issue-networks that engage *multiple* issues, as in efforts to oppose U.S. policy in Central America in the 1980s. The two story lines converge, but we discuss them separately here for presentational ease. Undergirding and paralleling both story lines about issue-oriented NGOs is another story about the growth of infrastructure-building NGOs; what matters to them is building the organizational and technological links for networking among activist NGOs, almost regardless of what specific issue concerns each one. The remainder of this chapter

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[17]Ronfeldt (1996) cites documentation for this general phenomenon. Mathews (1997) and Slaughter (1997) are significant additions to the literature.

[18]Our background comes in part from Frederick (1993b) and other chapters in Ronfeldt, Thorup, Aguayo, and Frederick (1993).

[19]Term from Sikkink (1993), as discussed above.

considers the status of all these types of NGOs on the eve of the EZLN insurrection.[20] The next chapter discusses their ensuing actions.

The growth of two specific issue-networks—the human-rights and indigenous-rights networks—is particularly important for explaining the Zapatista netwar. As Kathryn Sikkink (1993) shows, the human-rights network was growing at global and regional levels by the mid-1980s, when it began to focus on conditions in Mexico. At the time, Mexico's own human-rights network was in a fledgling state; but partly because of its becoming connected to the transnational network, it quickly expanded. About four human-rights NGOs existed in Mexico in 1984, sixty in 1991, and "by 1993 there were over two hundred independent human-rights monitoring and advocacy NGOs."[21]

Meanwhile, the indigenous-rights network was also expanding up and down the Americas (particularly in Canada). While "the indigenous nations of the Americas have a strong tradition of building communication and media networks to support their self-determination goals" since the 19th century (O'Donnell and Delgado, 1995), a surge in transnational networking gained momentum following the First Continental Encounter of Indigenous Peoples in 1990 in Ecuador, and after the formation of the Continental Coordinating Commission of Indigenous Nations and Organizations (CONIC) at a meeting in 1991 in Panama. Although pan-Mayan aspirations figure little in the EZLN's goals, a pan-Mayan movement was emerging in parts of Central America and Southern Mexico without regard for national boundaries. It reflected the diffuse nonhierarchical structures of the network and was "linked by radio broadcasting, publications, telephone calls and faxes and, increasingly by Internet e-mail" (O'Donnell and Delgado, 1995).[22]

Overall, these indigenous-rights networks seek to promote self-determination and autonomy as their goals, but they often adjust

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[20]Cleaver (1994a, 1995c) provides an illuminating discussion of how the Zapatista networking drew its strength from the earlier types of networking discussed in this chapter, and his writings are part of the basis for our discussion.

[21]An accounting by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) holds that the number of human-rights NGOs in Mexico grew from 191 in November 1993 to 376 in May 1996.

[22]Also see Van Cott (1996).

their issue orientation to fit the priorities of their audiences. At times, this has meant emphasizing human rights, at other times environmental issues. Thus, Alison Brysk (1994, p. 36) finds that

> The Indian rights movement consciously repositioned itself in response to these differences in regime responsiveness. As a representative of the flagship advocacy group Cultural Survival noted, "We see ourselves as a human rights organization in the broadest sense, and that was certainly our first track of contact with indigenous rights. But we've moved more into ecology . . . clearly it works better."[23]

This flexibility, which appears in many issue-oriented networks, would make it easy for transnational indigenous-rights NGOs to swarm into Chiapas in sympathy with other single-issue NGOs and to mesh with the local indigenous networks and organizations (also see Cleaver, 1994b, 1995c).

Meanwhile, thousands of NGOs were also involved in another current of activity focused on specific issues at the global level: a series of UN-sponsored conferences and parallel NGO forums on global issues. This too strengthened the activists' networks in the 1990s, albeit indirectly with regard to Chiapas. In particular, the UN-sponsored Conference on the Environment and Development—the "Earth Summit"—in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 put NGOs on the map as global activists. Though the conference mainly assembled government officials and representatives of international governmental organizations (IGOs), one to two thousand NGO representatives were invited, and more showed up. The key event for them was less the official conference than the NGO Global Forum that was organized parallel to the conference to enable NGOs to debate issues and adopt policy positions independently of governments (Preston, 1992; Spiro, 1995).[24] Against this background, the U.S. Undersecretary of

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[23]Also see Brysk (1996).

[24]The political implications of information technology were a key theme. Results included affirming a Communications, Information, and Networking Treaty to declare communication a basic human right (Preston, 1992). An UNCED Information Strategy Project was also approved to build an international electronic information exchange system for NGOs and other users. It is unclear what happened to these proposals.

State for Global Affairs, Timothy Wirth, observed that governments were awakening to the growing influence of the NGOs:

> [T]he heroes, the heroines of Rio were not government leaders, they weren't bureaucrats leading delegations, but they were this vast array of NGOs who would effectively define the issues and were working very hard to get governments to recognize those issues and recognize what the solutions ought to be.[25]

This experience was repeated next at the UN-sponsored Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, and then the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. Cairo's NGO Forum proved larger than Rio's, and at times gained more media coverage than the official conference did. The progression continued with the Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, followed by the Conference on Women and Development in Beijing in 1995.

During these conferences, one infrastructure-building NGO proved particularly crucial: the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). It, along with its affiliates (e.g., Peacenet in the United States, Alternex in Brazil) operates the set of Internet-linked computer networks most used by activists, and thus it played growing roles in facilitating communications by e-mail and fax among the NGOs, and in enabling them to send reports and press releases to officials, journalists, other interested parties, and publics around the world (Preston, 1992; Whaley, 1995).

The second, overlapping story line is about the growth of *multiple* issue-networks that focus on a generally urgent policy matter. Around Mexico, the development of two multiple issue-networks—one dealing with Central America, the other with NAFTA—is most relevant to accounting for the advent of a social netwar in Mexico.

The first developed in the 1970s–1980s, when numerous, small, mainly leftist and center-leftist NGOs got involved in the conflicts in Central America. Their activities varied from providing humanitarian relief and monitoring human-rights abuses, to providing alterna-

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[25]From "Global Affairs Workshop with Timothy Wirth, Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs," State Department, Washington D.C., June 23, 1994, as reported by Reuters Transcripts, CQ's Washington Alert.

tive sources of news to the media and opposing U.S. policy. The key umbrella networking organization was the innovative, multilayered Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), which spanned a range of peace, human-rights, and church organizations.[26] Activists who had access to the insurgents in El Salvador could sometimes get news of a human-rights abuse into the media faster than U.S. officials could learn of it from their own sources. Indeed, fax machines and e-mail systems enabled the NGOs to move news out of El Salvador and into the media, to inundate U.S. government inboxes with protests and petitions, and to counter what the activists regarded as disinformation and deception campaigns by officials in the Central American region. CISPES was a relatively weak but nonetheless seminal effort to build a transnational network for social netwar.[27]

After the Central American conflicts receded as a front-burner issue and CISPES was becoming less active, the proposal for NAFTA arose. This reanimated the activists' networks and catalyzed a new round of network building. Besides holding face-to-face conferences, NGOs across North America—mainly Canadian and American, but also with nascent Mexican participation[28]—convened conferences and communicated with increasing ease via faxes and computer systems (notably Peacenet) to strategize about their opposition to NAFTA. The participants included activists who had supported CISPES, but participation broadened to include moderates concerned with North American labor and environmental issues. The NGOs' positions varied from opposing the agreement entirely, to proposing the inclusion of a European-style social charter, to seeking influence over specific issues and insisting that issues like labor and the environment be included for the negotiating process to be acceptable. In the end, this diverse array of views and participants coalesced around one key objective: to oppose fast-track approval of NAFTA by the

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[26]Background appears in Diane Green, "The CISPES Solidarity Model," as posted electronically to Peacenet conferences on May 19–20, 1994, and then circulated on the Internet.

[27]Perhaps in emulation, a Committee in Solidarity with the People of Mexico was recently formed, but it appears to be quite weak.

[28]A leading example of Mexican participation is the Mexican Network Against Free Trade (Red Mexicana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio—RMALC), which is a co-ordinating center for a number of individual NGOs.

U.S. Congress, but not to explicitly oppose the agreement itself (Thorup, 1991, 1995).

It is difficult to say how influential the NGOs were; they affected some public debates and congressional views, especially on environmental issues, but did not prevent fast-track approval of NAFTA in late 1993. Still, the activists' trinational pan-issue networks got better organized than ever before. This laid a foundation for the rapid NGO mobilization that followed the EZLN insurrection in January 1994, just months after the NAFTA-related activities subsided. The infrastructure was sitting there, with more potential than ever, waiting to be reactivated.

Meanwhile, in Mexico the number, variety, and influence of local NGOs and related organizations had been growing rapidly since the mid-1980s, including in Chiapas, where the Catholic Church played a vital role in the creation and survival of many local NGOs.[29] The rise of Mexican human-rights and indigenous-rights NGOs was briefly discussed above. In addition, pro-democracy NGOs and networks also began to take shape in this period. In their case too, the dynamics of transnational networking is evident. According to Denise Dresser,

> the Mexican pro-democracy movement has developed a two-pronged strategy that combines political theater in Mexico (which mobilizes domestic and international awareness), with lobbying in the United States and collaboration with international organizations. . . . International actors and forces are an integral part of this network, whose power and influence continues to evolve. External pressure has proven to be most effective when it intersects with domestic actors pushing for political change. (Dresser, 1994, pp. 26, 35.)

As parts of the Mexican political system slowly opened up, it became vulnerable to civil-society activism. Even though the state remained undemocratic in many areas, it was increasingly the case that "social

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[29]We do not say much about the rise of Mexican NGOs, partly to keep a focus on the transnational NGOs. For background on Mexican NGOs, see Fox and Hernandez (1992) and Barry (1992). On pro-democracy networking, see Dresser (1994). As noted, Sikkink (1993) covers human-rights NGOs. Writings in preparation by Sergio Aguayo will add to this literature.

movements can gnaw at small cracks in the system and try and open them further" (Fox, 1994, p. 183). Once a crack is opened up, NGOs can move in to exploit it.

Thus, by the time of the EZLN's insurrection, the transnational NGOs that had been building global and regional networks, notably those concerned with human rights, indigenous rights, and ecumenical and pro-democracy issues, had counterparts to link with in Mexico City, San Cristóbal de las Casas, and other locales. Then, as NGO representatives swarmed into Chiapas in early 1994, new Mexican NGOs were created to assist with communication and coordination among the NGOs—most importantly, the Coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace (CONPAZ), based at the diocese in San Cristóbal.[30] (An NGO named the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico was established in the United States, but it was basically a public-relations arm for the EZLN.)

Were the EZLN's leaders aware of this potential? Did they foresee that numerous NGOs would swarm to support them? We have no evidence of this. Yet conditions in Chiapas were well known to activists. Amnesty International and Americas Watch had each published a similar report of human-rights violations in the area, the former in 1986, the latter in 1991. Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights and the World Policy Institute published a joint report in August 1993 about soldiers beating and torturing a group of *indigenas* in May 1993. And the Jesuit Refugee Service, long active in the area to deal with Guatemalan refugee issues, became alarmed about the treatment of the *indigenas* in Chiapas and issued an "Urgent Call to the International Community" in August 1993. The Jesuits' demands are nearly identical to those voiced a few months later by many Mexican and transnational NGOs in January 1994.

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[30]CONPAZ was formed by fourteen Mexican human-rights groups that were active in Chiapas before January. They came together because they were troubled by the outbreak of war, wanted to promote peace, knew they would be more influential if they united, and lacked funding to operate well independently. CONPAZ's aims included coordinating the delivery of emergency supplies and services in the conflict zone, monitoring and denouncing human-rights violations, keeping communication with affected communities, and generating international visibility for NGO activities.

ON THE EVE OF WAR

What we see, then, is the emergence of a movement comprising several layers. The *indigenas* and the NGOs preferred nonhierarchical, network forms of organization and action, while the EZLN was drawn in this direction despite tendencies, as in any traditional Marxist armed movement, to want a hierarchy at its core. This overall bias in favor of nonhierarchical designs made for affinities—and uneasy alliances—that would facilitate the mobilization of the NGOs on behalf of the EZLN and the *indigenas* and contribute to the solidarity of the movement once mobilized. Moreover, by the end of 1993, strong organizational and technological networks were in place to sustain a multilayered mobilization.

The insurrection on New Year's Day, 1994, was so surprising that most observers presumed there had been an intelligence failure on the part of the government and the army, even though the army had inklings of the EZLN's existence during 1993. Was it a failure of detection? Of analysis? Or of not getting the analysis into the right hands in Mexico City? How could the army not know? In 1997, two generals revealed in press interviews[31] that the army and the Salinas government, at least at the cabinet level, had known of the EZLN's existence for eight months in 1993. As is often the pattern in Mexican history (see Radu, 1997), the government maneuvered to talk with the EZLN's leadership, using archbishop Ruíz as an interlocutor, in order to prevent an armed rebellion and seek a peaceful outcome. The army was instructed to avoid combat and to collect and provide information to top officials about conditions in Chiapas. Meanwhile, cabinet officials began visiting Chiapas, and a large-scale social and economic assistance program was begun—the very one that Marcos had worried would attract adherents away from the EZLN if it did not start its war soon.

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[31]The key source is the newspaper article by Francisco Arroyo, "Duraron ocho meses las platicas, revela Godinez," *El Universal*, July 21, 1997—as circulated on the Internet.