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THE ZAPATISTA UPRISING

by

SIMON THIBAULT, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
July 14, 1998
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[Signature]
Professor Martin Rudner, Director
The Norman Paterson School
of International Affairs

[Signature]
Professor David Long, Supervisor
Abstract

This thesis provides a theoretical framework for explaining the Zapatista uprising. It suggests that native and peasant grievances over land, political autonomy and representation, economic rights and resource management, as well as social and cultural rights, highlight the underlying issues of the crisis in Chiapas. The framework also argues that members of the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas and other grassroots political activists created favorable conditions for the spread of the EZLN among several indigenous communities of the Selva Lacandona region (Chiapas). Finally, the theoretical framework suggests that a specific economic and political conjuncture in Chiapas radicalized the small peasantry and facilitated the EZLN's penetration into several native communities of the rainforest in the 1980s.
Acknowledgements

Writing a Master's thesis is a solitary journey that demands a certain measure of self-sacrifice. This particular adventure was greatly facilitated by the help and support of my professors, friends and family. First of all, I would like to warmly thank David Long and Maxwell Cameron, who supervised me throughout the writing of this thesis. Their insightful comments and welcome encouragement greatly aided and for this I am indebted to them. In the same vein, I wish to thank all the friends and colleagues who have helped with the correction of my texts. It is thanks to them that I can now express myself suitably in Shakespeare's tongue. I would also like to thank Edith Sanchez, who facilitated my field work in Mexico and encouraged me throughout the writing process. Last but not least, thanks to my parents for their unfailing support for my projects and dreams. This thesis is dedicated to them.

La production d'une thèse est un parcours solitaire qui demande une certaine abnégation. Ce parcours a été grandement facilité grâce à l'aide et au soutien de mes professeurs, de mes amis (entre autres, Mathieu, Steeve et Catherine) et de ma famille. Tout d'abord, je tiens à remercier chaleureusement David Long et Maxwell Cameron qui m'ont supervisé tout au long de cette thèse. Leurs remarques judicieuses et leurs encouragements m'ont grandement aidé et je leur en suis gré. De même, j'aimerais remercier tous ceux qui m'ont aidé pour la correction de mes textes. C'est grâce à eux si je peux maintenant m'exprimer convenablement dans la langue de Shakespeare. Je tiens également à remercier Edith Sanchez, qui a facilité mon travail de terrain au Mexique et qui m'a soutenu via Mexico lors de la rédaction. Merci enfin à mes parents pour leur appui indéfectible dans mes projets et mes rêves. Cette thèse leur est dédiée.
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Chapter I

The Zapatista Uprising
Introduction.

On January 1 1994, thousands of Zapatista\(^1\) rebels launched an insurrection in Chiapas and, surprisingly, captured several municipalities and important cities such as San Cristobal de Las Casas and Ocosingo, the capital of the state. The rebellion attracted significant international attention and received world-wide media coverage as it coincided with the implementation of the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). Concerned about its international image, the Salinas government was quick to describe the uprising as a marginal guerrilla movement manipulated by outside revolutionary elements. Today, however, most analysts agree that it was a people's uprising, involving a few thousands of indigenous peasants.\(^2\) As a well known specialist of Mexican guerrilla movements has argued, this wide participation demonstrates strong social support for the Zapatistas since it is estimated that each guerrillero receives assistance from approximately five members of his community.\(^3\)

The objective of this thesis is to provide a theoretical framework to explain the emergence of the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army). The Zapatista uprising, which is a complex movement involving a broad variety of actors, has captured growing attention among Latin American

\(^1\) The term "Zapatista" is used by the EZLN's members (Zapatista National Liberation Army) in memory of the Mexican revolutionary man, Emilio Zapata.

\(^2\) June Nash, "The Power of the Powerless in the New World Order: a view from Chiapas", Indigenous Affairs, January-February-March 1995, p. 26. Although estimations vary, most analysts accept that the uprising involved between two and four thousand Zapatista combatants who belong to the main indigenous groups in Chiapas such as the Tzotil, the Tzetal, the Tojolabal, the Man and the Zoques. See Leif Korsbaek, "The Indigenous Rebellion", Indigenous Affairs, January-February-March 1994, p. 12.

\(^3\) Carlos Montemayor, Chiapas: La rebellion indigena de Mexico, Mexico, Carlos A. Montemayor Aceves, 1996, p. 44. Montemayor also wrote extensively on guerrilla movements that emerged in the Mexican state of Guerrero in the 1960s and 1970s.
specialists since 1994. However, there is still a need to complement the existing literature. In fact, several works often neglect to provide detailed information about the role of actors such as the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal, who encouraged the rise of the guerrilla movement. The theoretical approach developed here aims to shed light on the many dimensions of the Zapatista movement. This approach explains the sources of the rebellion and its maturing: that is, it accounts for why the Zapatista movement emerged in the Selva Lacandona region and why the EZLN rapidly built grassroots support in the 1980s.

To understand the Zapatista insurrection, one must clarify the role played by certain religious and political actors in the Selva Lacandona in the past several years. This thesis suggests that the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas and other leftist grassroots activists created favorable conditions for the spread of the EZLN. This thesis also argues that a specific conjuncture conditioned the rapid expansion of the EZLN among several communities of the Selva Lacandona. This conjuncture was one of profound upheaval in rural sectors due to the launching of neo-liberal reforms by the de la Madrid and Salinas governments, combining with an

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4 The Selva Lacandona (or the rainforest) is a vast tropical region in Eastern Chiapas.
5 Some authors acknowledge the role of the diocese of San Cristobal and other leftist activists in facilitating the rise of the EZLN. See Carlos Tello Díaz, La rebelión de las Cañadas, México, Cal y Arena, 1995, pp. 86-85. See also Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, Sous-Commandant Marcos, La géniale imposture, Paris, Plon/Ifrane, 1998, p. 93.
6 Several authors such as George Collier, Neil Harvey, Yvan Le Bot, June Nash and Luis Hernandez Navarro, to name but a few, acknowledge that reforms in the rural sector and the repressive local environment in Chiapas radicalized the peasant movement. See, for example, Luis Hernandez Navarro, "The Chiapas Uprising", in Transformation of Rural Mexico, San Diego, Center for US Mexican Studies, No. 5, 1994, pp. 48-52; Neil Harvey, "Rebellion in Chiapas: Rural Reforms, Campesino Radicalism, and the Limits to Salinismo", in Transformation of Rural Mexico, Ibid., pp. 7-35. See also Yvon Le Bot, Le rêve zapatiste, Paris, Seuil, 1997, pp. 148-154.
increase in repression from state authorities and white guards (estate owners' private forces). These factors radicalized a growing number of leaders and indigenous peasants who ultimately joined the EZLN.\footnote{Navarro develops a similar point. See Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.}

The present chapter introduces the case and explains the theoretical framework and methodology. The chapter is divided in four sections. First, a brief background to the case demonstrates that the conflict in Chiapas is complex and ongoing. In the last months, the conflict has deteriorated into more general civil strife within indigenous communities between those in favour and those against the EZLN. Section one also briefly discusses background factors which conditioned the emergence of the Zapatista movement. Section two is theoretical. It presents Charles Tilly's approach on defensive mobilization developed in his book, \textit{From Mobilization to Revolution}. Using such an approach provide insight on the incentives for several indigenous communities to mobilize with the EZLN in the Selva Lacandona region. As will be explained, the indigenous communities that mobilized with the EZLN did so primarily in self-defense. This agenda contrasted with the one of their EZLN's \textit{ladino} (non-Indian) leaders, who aimed at establishing a socialist regime in Mexico.\footnote{A recent book written by Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico (two correspondents for the newspapers \textit{Le Monde}, France, and \textit{El País}, Spain) shed light on the origins of the EZLN and its links with the EZL (Frente Zapatista de Liberación). See Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}. For a similar view, see also Carlos Tello Diaz's excellent book, \textit{op. cit.}} Section three explains the theoretical framework and introduces the hypotheses developed in this thesis. Finally, section four discusses the methodology for the case study.
1) Background to the Case

Section one briefly describes the recent evolution of the Chiapas conflict which has deteriorated since late 1997. This background shows the complexity of the crisis and the several layers of complicity and involvement in the strife. Section one then discusses the historical, ideological and structural factors which represent the underlying forces at work in the emergence of the Zapatista movement in the Selva Lacandona region. In so doing, this background reveals the need to develop a more adequate framework for analysis to explain the rise of the EZLN.

The Continuation of Violence in Chiapas

The massacre of 41 Tzotil Indians in December 1997 by a paramilitary group in the village of Acteal revealed that the crisis, far from being resolved, is deteriorating. The conflict has shifted from a confrontation between the EZLN and the Mexican federal army to a struggle among indigenous peoples themselves. Pro- and anti-EZLN supporters are now torn by feuds between villages and communities, tribes and their respective leaders.

Since the beginning of the uprising, leaders of the EZLN have often emphasized that the rebellion is the product of 500 years of indigenous resistance. They claimed that native groups rose in arms to defend their rights and regain their dignity. Knowing that these fratricidal conflicts between indigenous peoples in the Zapatistas' zones of influence would discredit its discourse and actions, the EZLN has tried to diminish the importance of these communal strifes. Instead, the EZLN has repeatedly
accused the government of arming paramilitary groups in order to terrorize indigenous communities. However, the guerrilla movement shares responsibility in the bloodshed. As recent reports highlight, EZLN supporters have also resorted to killing their opponents and the movement is caught in a spiral of violence.\textsuperscript{9}

There is evidence, however, that state officials in Chiapas also play an active role in the polarization of the situation. Many observers (NGOs, journalists, human right observers) have noted that state PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) authorities have exacerbated inter-communal rivalries to serve their interests. The PRI gains from the resulting violence as it weakens the EZLN's influence and destabilizes its allies such as leftist groups close to the Catholic church.\textsuperscript{10} There are several indications that some state officials are involved in the funding and planning of paramilitary groups' activities. For example, after the massacre of pro-Zapatista supporters in Acteal by paramilitary gunmen, federal authorities arrested several state PRI officials, accusing them of orchestrating the bloodshed. There are also allegations that local policemen had prepared mass graves for the victims before the massacre took place.\textsuperscript{11}

There is no doubt that Chiapas is now being riven by fratricidal conflicts between supporters and opponents of the EZLN. Although the

\textsuperscript{9} For more details about the facts mentioned in this subsection, see the excellent article of Mary Beth Sheridan, "Pro-PRI Gang Breed Fear; Potential Chaos in Chiapas", Los Angeles Time, Sunday, January 25th, 1998. See also the weekly bulletin La Opinión, Chiapas, México, Published by CIACH (Center of Analysis and Study of Chiapas), No. 78, 1997, ciach@laneta.apc.org; and La Opinión, No. 79, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} See Mary Beth Sheridan, op. cit. See also the weekly bulletin La Opinión, No. 79, op. cit.
EZLN is minimizing the importance of these communal feuds and has accused the government of launching a campaign "destined at killing the Indian People of Mexico", the fact remains: the PRI has the resources necessary to confront the guerrilla movement. In this spiral of communal violence, each movement and their leaders seek to mobilize popular support in order to pursue their political and military objectives.

b) The socialization of the communities of the Selva Lacandona

The feuds between indigenous communities which have been polarized with the recent appearance of paramilitary groups are not a new phenomenon in Chiapas. Divisions among indigenous communities have been common in Chiapas' past. In fact, most of the native groups which form the grassroots support of the EZLN experienced these kind of inter-communal tensions (if not the present degree of violence) before colonizing the Selva Lacandona region over the past fifty years.

As a result of religious discord within the community, political conflicts with the caciques, difficult economic conditions in the coffee plantations and increasing tensions with estate owners, a growing number of indigenous groups broke with their traditional communities and left in search of land. Confronted with this exodus and yet unwilling to resolve

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12 Comments from a Zapatista leader interviewed after the Acteal massacre, in Le Devoir, December 29, 1997, A5. Personal translation from French: "Ces personnes (the paramilitary groups) ne sont que des pièces mineures dans une machine de guerre dirigée contre les peuples indiens du Mexique."

13 Many authors discuss the significance of these factors in triggering the colonization process. See Martine Dauzier, "Guerre indienne en terre promise", in Feu Maya, Ethnies, Vol. 9, No. 16-17, Automne 1994, pp. 9-40; Mario Humberto Ruiz, "La violence des anges", in Feu Maya, Ibid., pp. 274-302; and Yvan Le Bot, op. cit., p. 38-39.
problems of land distribution, the government encouraged the colonization of the Selva Lacandona. As a result, several indigenous groups colonized this deserted tropical forest. There, the Catholic diocese of San Cristóbal, with several hundred of indigenous catechists under the leadership of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, played an important role in the settling and organization of the communities. It is worth stressing that the colonization of the Selva Lacandona coincided with growing indigenous activism and the development of independent peasant organizations close to the Catholic diocese such as the Quipic (Aroc -Union de Uniones) and later the ARIC.

Fig. 1 The migration process of indigenous groups to the Selva Lacandona region between the 1950s and the 1980s. Source: Yvan Le Bot, Le rêve Zapatiste, with the collaboration of Yvan Breton.
The above historical and structural changes surely conditioned the emergence of a new culture of political activism among several native groups that colonized the Selva. It is important to note that the Zapatista movement did not mobilize "traditional" communities, but instead essentially spread among the Catholic communities of the Selva Lacandona region.\textsuperscript{14} The presence of the Catholic diocese, its progressive discourse and its well-structured organization gave a strong impetus to indigenous and peasant activism in this region.\textsuperscript{15} This was exemplified by the first National Indian Congress organized in 1974 by Bishop Ruiz's diocese and the ensuing rise of independent peasant organizations. The grassroots work of the Church also encouraged the growth of a new generation of indigenous and peasant leaders, many of which were catechists and deacons within the diocese.\textsuperscript{16} It is worth stressing that by the mid 1980s, several of these catechists and deacons became \textit{cuadros} (intermediaries) for the EZLN, thus allowing the \textit{guerrilla} movement to penetrate numerous communities in the Selva Lacandona.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 38 and 49. Some of the points developed in this subsection are derived from Le Bot's observations. See also Nell Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 28; Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{op. cit.}; Christine Marie Kovic, "Con Solo Un Corazón: the Catholic Church, Indigenous Identity and Human Rights in Chiapas", in \textit{The Explosion of Communities}, Copenhagen, IWGIA Document, No. 77, 1995, pp. 101-102; and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, "From Community to Women's State Convention", in \textit{The Explosion of Communities}, Copenhagen, IWGIA Document, No. 77, 1995, pp. 53-63.

\textsuperscript{15} For example, the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas (which comprises the Marists, the Dominicans and the Jesuits) played an important role in the creation of the Quipic and the ARIC (the main peasant organizations in the Selva Lacandona in the 1970s and the 1980s). On these matters, see Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 106-107. These issues will be discussed in the third chapter.

\textsuperscript{16} Yvan Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{17} See Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 102-103. See also Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 98-99 and 160-175.
Analysis of the above factors is crucial if one wishes to explain the genesis of the rebellion. Why did certain indigenous groups support, mobilize and finally rebel with the EZLN while others did not? This is an important question given that many peasant and Indian organizations in Chiapas (such as the ARIC and the COAECH) share similar claims and supported the EZLN during the negotiation process with the government. Despite corresponding interests, however, other indigenous groups did not opt for violent means to pursue their objectives as the EZLN grassroots did. There is therefore a need to adopt an approach which sheds light on the context in which certain indigenous communities decided to opt for armed struggle in the Selva Lacandona.

2) Theory: Charles Tilly's Approach and the Debates Within the Literature

The EZLN penetrated several communities in a specific context. Under the governorship of Absalón Castellanos Dominguez (1982-1988), there was increasing political repression of peasant organizations by state authorities and white guards (estate owners' private forces). In this repressive local environment, an increasing number of indigenous and peasant leaders expressed a willingness to resort to armed struggle in self-defense. Partly in an attempt to respond to this need, the diocese of San Cristobal created the Slop: an underground organization aimed notably at organizing an armed peasant group.\textsuperscript{18} But the Slop remained an embryonic project which stagnated for a few years because the Catholic diocese lacked weapons and military expertise.\textsuperscript{19} Nevertheless, the coming of FZLN\textsuperscript{20} Marxist

\textsuperscript{18} Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 167-168.
\textsuperscript{20} Frente Zapatista de Liberación.
revolutionaries in the rainforest in 1983 would provide this military expertise to peasants who wished to organize in self-defense

The Zapatista movement is a classic case of defensive mobilization. In his book, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Charles Tilly explains that groups usually mobilize either defensively or offensively. The author argues that this key distinction is important to understanding the general pattern of collective action and the context in which it happens. According to Tilly, offensive mobilization is usually a *top-down* phenomenon which involves rich and powerful actors. Contrary to popular belief, the rich do not mobilize sporadically and conservatively, but instead aggressively and constantly.\(^{21}\)

The rich also tend to mobilize in advance, using the variety of resources and contacts they have (including governmental structures and actors) in order to protect their interests against real or potential threats.\(^{22}\) The fact that the rich can rely upon a variety of resources and channels is a strong advantage in comparison with more marginalized and powerless sectors of society who do not have such possibilities.

In contrast, defensive mobilization comes from below. It is a *bottom-up* phenomenon essentially involving poor and marginalized actors. According to Tilly, this type of mobilization usually happens when an external threat imperils a group's security, weather economic or physical.\(^{23}\) However, in its defensive mobilization, a poor population can rely solely on

\(^{22}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76.
the limited human and material resources provided by its immediate environment. This obviously constrains the population's range of initiatives and actions in confronting this external danger. In Chiapas, a climate of confrontation with authorities and white guards convinced several indigenous communities to rely on armed struggle in self-defense. But the fact that the communities had limited financial resources and that their local environment did not provide recourse to human capital for such a project (the diocese did not have this expertise and the Maoist activists were favouring community building rather than armed struggle), they had to postpone it temporarily. However, with the arrival of the FZL in the Selva Lacandona, the communities had from that point on the military expertise they needed to deal with their local repressive environment.

Tilly's analysis also sheds light on another aspect of the Zapatista movement. Tilly argues that a group's network of interactions and the "extent of its shared interest" with other groups in its environment influence its level of mobilization. Building on Anthony Oberschall's work, Tilly explains that a community's organization remains important in the shaping of collective action. By organization, Tilly refers to a population's cohesion and internal networks which work as unifying structures within and between groups. In short, Tilly suggests that a well-

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24 Ibid., p. 75.  
26 Charles Tilly, op. cit., p. 81.  
27 Ibid., pp. 81-83.  
28 Ibid., pp. 63 and 84.
organized and cohesive poor population is more likely to mobilize that one with a weak internal structure.\textsuperscript{29}

In the Selva Lacandona, the diocese's agents, along with peasant leaders and leftist grassroots activists, fostered these networks of interaction and of communal solidarity to which Tilly refers. In fact, in the past several decades, the above religious and political actors built bridges of common understanding among several native communities that gathered together to pursue joint objectives, such as struggling against land evictions. Thus, when it arrived in the Selva Lacandona, the EZLN's task of building social support was facilitated as the guerrilla movement spread its influence by using existing organizational networks and contacts (such as catholic catechists and deacons who became cuadros in the EZLN).\textsuperscript{30} This is why Samuel Ruiz once said that EZLN leaders "... se vinieron a montar en un caballo ensillado".\textsuperscript{31}

Drawing on Durkheim, Tilly also points out the importance of social control between a group and its milieu.\textsuperscript{32} As Tilly suggests, a group that is challenging the existing social order exposes itself to some kind of reaction from authorities or other groups that are threatened by its mobilization. Collective action, in this sense, involves a cost, especially for the poor who are usually more penalized than the rich when mobilizing.\textsuperscript{33} The cost is

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pp. 81-84.  
\textsuperscript{30} Drawing on Oberschall, Tilly explains that a conflict group "reduces its organizing costs by building... on existing group structure." See Ibid., p. 81.  
\textsuperscript{31} Carlos Tello Díaz, op. cit., p. 127. Author's translation: "EZLN leaders mounted a horse already saddled."  
\textsuperscript{32} Charles Tilly, op. cit., p. 99.  
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 75 and 99.
determined by the level of repression to which a group is subjected.\textsuperscript{34} In the case of governmental repression, the objective is usually to neutralize the collective actor by "raising the costs" of its mobilization.\textsuperscript{35} In doing so, authorities can rely on a variety of repressive methods which range from punitive laws to using public forces to crush social dissidence. Authorities may also be selective in their repressive tactics as they can respond differently depending on the group and its affiliations.\textsuperscript{36}

In Chiapas, the state government of Absalón Castellano and Gonzales Garrido are well known to have been quite repressive of the regime's opponents and peasant activists, especially those from independent organizations (PRI authorities were \textit{selective} in their repression). If such a situation remains, the members of a repressed group tend to become more radical as they lack channels of participation and are strongly discouraged from persisting in the institutional path.\textsuperscript{37} In the Selva Lacandona, this repressive context, combined with increasing conflict with white guards, convinced a growing number of peasant leaders and activists to seek more radical ways to push forward their objectives. The EZLN spread its influence by channeling part of that popular resentment.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 99-100.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 100-101.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{37} In their comparative analysis between Bolivia, Mexico and Peru, Alison Brysk and Carol Wise argue that the lack of political channels for popular participation and state repression can trigger violent rebellion. See Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, "Economic Adjustment and Ethnic Conflict in Bolivia, Peru and Mexico", Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson Center, Working paper, No. 216, 1995, 39 pages.
Charles Tilly's work on defensive mobilization is useful as it provides a good theoretical background for understanding the context in which indigenous peasants started mobilizing with the EZLN in the Selva Lacandona. At this time, it would be interesting to briefly review the literature with regards to indigenous mobilization in order to shed light on the recent debates about the nature of the Zapatista movement. The EZLN has, in fact, the particularity of combining a ladino leadership pursuing a traditional Marxist revolutionary agenda and native grassroots support that did not necessarily mobilize for such an ambitious project, but rather for more concrete demands.

*Indigenous mobilization and the debates within the literature*

From the 1960s until the 1980s, the Marxist paradigm, which states that class is the essential factor of societal differences and of political mobilization was widely accepted even by liberal theorists.\(^{38}\) Many believed that particularisms such as ethnicity, gender or religion would be transcended by the proletarian revolution which would lead to the creation of an egalitarian society.\(^{39}\) Latin American Marxists, for instance, viewed indigenous communities as anarchist and suggested that they would mobilize on the basis of their peasant or proletarian interests.\(^ {40}\) It was argued that indigenous peoples would 'forget' their community based identity and think in terms of class solidarity to confront the *bourgeois* state. As Michael

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\(^{40}\) Michael Kearney, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
Kearney pointed out, "the same modernist attitude has also been held by nonmarxists."\(^{41}\)

With growing indigenous activism in the 1980s and 1990s which culminated with the Anti-Quincentenary protests in 1992, social scientists have showed increasing interest in ethnicity as a force shaping Indian political mobilization. They criticized the narrowness of Marxist structural theories which focused on class struggle to explain the dynamic of collective action. For them, to think that indigenous peoples would mobilize on the sole purpose of 'objective' material interest was incorrect. It greatly underestimated the importance of subjective factors that have shaped the rhetoric and actions of Indian movements of resistance in the last decades. Alison Brysk argues that "the reduced role of class-based activism by Indians in Latin America is also due to several issues historically problematic for Marxism that are central to Indian identity: land, language and religion."\(^{42}\)

Other theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein acknowledged that historical reality has not supported the view that community-based identities are inevitably transcended by class solidarity.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Alison Brysk, "Turning Weakness into Strength; The Internationalization of Indian Rights", *Latin American Perspective*, Vol. 89, No. 2, Spring 1996, pp. 41-42. Many authors writing on indigenous movements of resistance in Latin America held the same view.

\(^{43}\) Immanuel Wallerstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51. The goal here is not to re-open the debate whether or not class takes precedence over ethnicity in shaping indigenous mobilization, nor to do an in-depth analysis of the Marxist paradigm on this question. There is a broad and complex literature on those topics and it is not possible to make such an investigation here given the constraints of time and the length of this thesis. For references concerning the Marxist theory and the above debate (class versus ethnicity), see Ephraim Nimni, *Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of A Political Crisis*, London, Pluto Press, 1991. See also George Haupt, Michael Lowy and Clasie Weill, *Marxistes et la question nationale 1848-1914*, Paris, Francois Maspero, 1974. See also the case study of the Miskitus native and their struggle with the Sandinista regime; Martin Diskin, "Ethnic Discourse and the Challenge to
The debates within the literature over whether or not class takes precedence over ethnicity provide an interesting perspective on the dimensions of the Zapatista movement. This guerrilla movement is in fact the result of a peculiar combination of a Marxist revolutionary group (the FZL), aimed at establishing a socialist regime in Mexico, and of indigenous grassroots support that mobilized primarily in self-defense. One has to bear this fact in mind when the time comes for explaining the composition and evolution of the Zapatista movement.

*The EZLN: A Traditional Marxist Guerrilla?*

When Subcommandant Marcos wrote in January 1994 that the EZLN was the "product of five hundreds years of resistance" and adopted an "indianist" discourse, he proved himself somewhat opportunistic.\(^4\) Knowing that the EZLN would lose public support with a Marxist-Leninist discourse, Marcos started advocating the indigenous cause while proposing to engage in a dialogue with civil society in order to construct a democratic Mexico. For the EZLN's leadership (none are indigenous), this turn to "indigenismo" was unusual in the sense that it came after several years of activities oriented by a very traditionalist Marxist ideology. However, this indianist discourse expressed a concrete reality for the native communities supporting the EZLN. In fact, the claims put forward by the EZLN over land, social and economic rights, among others, were in line with native communities' demands that had already been expressed in Chiapas over the

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past several years, notably at the 1974 Indigenous Congress in San Cristobal and during the 1992 anti-Quincentenary demonstrations.\footnote{In the 1960s, the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal adopted an approach and discourse (inspired by Liberation theology) which aimed at building an "indigenous" church. This period coincided with the rise of a native discourse within the communities. On this matter, see George A. Collier, "Restructuring Ethnicity in Chiapas and the World", in The Explosion of Communities, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 17-18 and Yvan Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47-56.}

The above debate on the nature of the EZLN highlights the dual dimension of the guerrilla movement. The Zapatista movement in fact emerged from two different projects: that of the FZL (which created the EZLN in 1983 to pursue revolutionary activities in the Selva Lacandona), and that of reformist indigenous leaders and peasants who joined the organization but not necessarily for the same objectives.\footnote{Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 26.} As explained above, the EZLN penetrated several communities by providing military expertise to peasants who wanted to resort to armed struggle in self-defense. Bishop Ruiz, who was initially in favor of this project, allowed EZLN members to work within the diocese's zone of influence. By 1989, however, Bishop Ruiz stopped supporting the EZLN as a result of dissension with EZLN leaders and of growing divisions among the communities.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 165 and 173-175.} The EZLN project to launch a large-scale rebellion against the government caused, in fact, several divisions. Many opposed the EZLN leadership's objectives as they believed they were not compatible with those of the communities.\footnote{These divisions also spread within the diocese between those in favor and those against the project of the EZLN. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 163-167 and 169-170.}
The above divisions reveal the extent to which the EZLN leaders' project created controversy and tension among numerous native communities of the Selva Lacandona. It is important in this regard to make a distinction between the EZLN leadership (composed of FZL members) and the EZLN indigenous grassroots, in terms of their respective incentives for mobilizing. The FZL members, as mentioned above, pursued a very traditionalist Marxist-Leninist project aimed at instituting a "proletarian dictatorship" in Mexico. The creation of the EZLN in the Selva Lacandona in 1983 was part of that project. For the FZL leaders, the EZLN was another component of a broader organization which had operational units in several Mexican states. Militarily, the EZLN represented a force of approximately 300 hundred permanent guerrilleros who had been recruited by FZL members at a young age and separated from their native communities since then. 49 These guerrilleros, who live permanently in EZLN's camps, were the only ones who received an intense and continuous military and ideological training. As most of these guerrilleros had been indoctrinated since their early teenage years, they eventually developed a "proletarian identity" to which Henri Favre refers in one of his articles. 50

However, for the other several thousand indigenous peasants who formed the grassroots support of the movement and who did not receive such military and ideological formation, the incentives for their mobilization surely lay elsewhere. In fact, for the communities mobilizing

49 Ibid., p. 132. See also Henri Favre, "Le révélateur chiapanèque", in Le Mexique: de la réforme néolibérale à la contre-révolution, Edited by Henri Favre and Marie Lapointe, Paris/Montréal, L'Harmatan, 1997, p. 442.
50 Ibid.
with the EZLN, it appears that the objective was to capture the government's attention in order to achieve concrete objectives (a typical trend in defensive mobilization according to Tilly).\textsuperscript{51} As will be explained in the following chapter, several indigenous communities viewed the guerrilla movement primarily as a way to confront the white guards in self-defense. Then, the indigenous peasants who became radicalized and finally decided to rebel with the EZLN did so more in an attempt to press the government to address some of their concerns rather than establishing a proletarian dictatorship in Mexico.\textsuperscript{52}

Many of these concerns (over land, resource management, economic and cultural rights, etc.) were brought to the negotiating table during the peace talks in the village of San Andrés. It is worth stressing that when the EZLN and the government finally signed the San Andrés agreements in 1996, these accords received broad support among the social basis of the EZLN. Moreover, the fact that other important indigenous peasant organizations such as the ARIC (from which comes the EZLN's grassroots support) backed those accords is quite revealing. This broad support not only indicated a correspondence of demands, but also revealed the issues at stake for several indigenous communities - including the EZLN's grassroots - in the Selva Lacandona and in Chiapas more broadly.

\textsuperscript{51} Tilly in fact argues that contrary to rich peoples who try to "maximize" their interests when mobilizing, poor populations usually mobilize for concrete demands in order to preserve "the little they have". See Charles Tilly, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 75. See also Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 26 and 97.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.
The discussion of Charles Tilly's approach on defensive mobilization and of the debates within the literature shed some light on the context in which several native communities decided to mobilize with the EZLN. Some of the issues raised above will be addressed in more depth in the following chapters. At this point, it is now appropriate to introduce the theoretical framework which will clarify the organization of this paper.

3) *The Theoretical Framework*

This thesis provides a theoretical framework that explains the emergence of the Zapatista uprising. The research question can be stated as follows: what conditioned the EZLN's rebellion? In answering the research question, two hypotheses are developed and tested: (1) the work and initiatives of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal and of leftist grassroots activists created favorable conditions for the spread of the EZLN among several indigenous communities of the Selva Lacandona; and, (2) the launching of neo-liberal reforms in the rural sector by the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations, combined with a repressive local environment, radicalized a growing number of peasants who then joined the EZLN.

The theoretical framework is in two parts. The first part presents the issues underlying the conflict in Chiapas (i.e. the "substance" of the conflict). The second part presents the causes of the Zapatista uprising.
Fig. 2

The Theoretical Framework
(organization of the paper)

The issues underlying the conflict in Chiapas

(1) The land issue

(2) Issues of political autonomy and representation

(3) Issues of economic rights and resource management

(4) Issues of social and cultural rights

The causes of the uprising

Hyp. 1

Certain religious and political actors created favourable conditions for the spread of the EZLN

Hyp. 2

Neo-liberal reforms and a repressive local environment radicalized a growing number of peasants who then joined the EZLN

The general logic of the framework can be summarized as follows. It is suggested that the variables listed in the first part are the underlying issues of the crisis in Chiapas; i.e. the "substance" of the problem. However, these deep-set grievances, though they form the background to the conflict, cannot explain why certain indigenous groups joined the EZLN and rose in arms, while others did not. As will be illustrated in the second chapter, a large number of indigenous organizations supported the claims of the EZLN during the negotiation process and pressed the government to implement the accords. But despite a correspondence of claims, the large majority of indigenous groups and peasant organizations in Chiapas did not resort to violence to defend their objectives.
The explanation of the Zapatistas' mobilization lies elsewhere. The second part of the theoretical framework suggests that political and religious actors, such as the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal, created favourable conditions for the spread of the EZLN among several native communities of the Selva Lacandona. Moreover, it is also argued that the neo-liberal reforms of the de la Madrid and Salinas governments and increased repression from state authorities and the white guards radicalized a growing number of indigenous peasants who finally embraced armed struggle.

Although only the variables of the second part address the research question, it remains important to discuss the underlying issues of the conflict (listed in the first part) to put this discussion in the proper context. A review of the literature on the Chiapas uprising and the San Andrés agreements signed between the EZLN and the government in 1996 revealed that the Zapatista claims over land, political autonomy, political representation, and economic, social and cultural rights highlight the root causes of the conflict. Despite the fact that the EZLN's violent methods were contested and created significant divisions among native communities in the Selva Lacandona, the Zapatistas' demands regarding the above issues gathered broad support. Throughout the negotiation process, a large number

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53 Many authors who undertook field work in native communities of the Selva Lacandona underline the role of pastoral agents of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas in fostering popular organization among several native communities of this region. On this matter, see Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, *op. cit.*; Christine Marie Kovic, *op. cit.*; Yvon Le Bot, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-56; and Kathleen Sullivan, in *The Explosion of Communities, op. cit.*, pp. 65-87.

of Chiapas indigenous and peasant organizations, such as the ARIC, backed the claims of the EZLN and pressed the government to respect its signature. For a broad range of native groups, the implementation of the accords would not only pave the way to finding a peaceful solution to the Chiapas crisis, but would also address some of their crucial demands. Chapter two addresses these issues. The subsequent chapters three and four address hypotheses that answer the research question.

Chapter three addresses the first hypothesis that the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal and leftist activists created favourable conditions for the spread of the EZLN among several indigenous communities in the Selva Lacandona in the 1980s.

To explain the genesis of the Zapatista movement, one must understand the role of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal and the role of leftist grassroots activists in the Selva Lacandona. In fact, the ongoing work of leftist activists and catholic pastoral agents fostered the growth of important independent organizations such as the Quipic and the ARIC. These peasant organizations established important networks of interaction among several indigenous communities of the Selva Lacandona. It is worth stressing that the EZLN would use those networks as well as contacts within the diocese in order to penetrate native communities and spread its influence in the 1980s. An analysis of the above factors is thus required for an understanding of the context in which the EZLN recruited supporters in the Selva Lacandona.
Chapter four addresses the second hypothesis that the neo-liberal reforms pursued by the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations, combined with a repressive environment, radicalized several indigenous peasants who then mobilized with the EZLN.  

A specific conjuncture encouraged the radicalization of the peasant movement in the Selva Lacandona. This conjuncture was one of increased tension between independent peasant organizations and the authorities stemming from the launching of significant neo-liberal reforms by the de la Madrid and Salinas government in the rural sector. These reforms, which aimed to improve agricultural productivity and increase export-oriented industries, posed a threat to the small peasantry. In fact, the withdrawal of the state from critical sectors (Maize, Coffee) severely affected indigenous communities who practice semi-subsistence agriculture and heavily relied upon public subsidies and agricultural credits. The reforms engendered important social costs which polarized the situation in Chiapas. The tensions in the rural sector culminated with the constitutional modification of article 27 by the Salinas administration in 1992. This bill, which allowed the sale of communal land, brought important discontent among small peasants.

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55 See Luis Hernandez Navarro, op. cit., pp. 48-52; Neil Harvey, op. cit., pp. 7-35; Yvon Le Bot, op. cit., pp. 148-154; and June Nash, op. cit., pp. 21-38. The study by Alison Brysk and Carol Wise also helped to the building of this hypothesis. See Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, op. cit.

56 See, for instance, Jorge Vargas, "NAFTA, the Chiapas Rebellion, and the Emergence of Mexican Ethnic Law", Californian Western International Law Journal, Vol. 25, No. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 18-25. See also Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, op. cit., pp. 16-18.
The fact that these neo-liberal reforms coincided in Chiapas with an increase of political repression from state authorities (who adopted a hard-line tactic against independent peasant organizations) further polarized the situation. There were also growing confrontations between peasant groups and white guards. Confronted to this climate of violence and repression, several indigenous leaders established contacts with EZLN members in order to organize peasants in self-defense to confront the white guards. This difficult socio-economic context, combined with a repressive local environment, thus moved several native communities to mobilize defensively. As Charles Tilly points out, poor populations are more likely to mobilize when there is an important threat to their economic and physical well-being. The above conjuncture therefore has to be explained in order to shed light on the factors which radicalized a growing number of peasants who joined the EZLN.

4) Methodology for the Case Study

There are still some misunderstandings and even distrust about the reliability of case study analysis. It is often believed that scientific generalizations from a case study are difficult and lack rigour. But according to some authors, such criticisms are unwarranted as it is impossible to reproduce an ideal environment where the tested elements or

57 Some observers point out that the first task of the EZLN was to organize native communities in self-defense against white guards. See, for example, Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, op. cit., p. 110. See also Yvan Le Bot, op. cit., p. 54.
58 Charles Tilly, op. cit., p. 75.
variables are controlled when studying human affairs and events.\textsuperscript{60} For Robert K. Yin, it is possible to make scientific generalizations from case studies with the caveat that:

... case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical prepositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a "sample", and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalizations).\textsuperscript{61}

Some authors suggest that they can provide general theoretical explanations from a single or multiple case studies. For example, in his Minorities at Risk Project, Ted Robert Gurr developed a general theoretical model from numerous case studies which aims to explain the causes of ethnopoltical violence.\textsuperscript{62} In the same vein, but with a single case study, Graham Allison suggested that the conclusions from his study, \textit{Essence of Decision Making: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis}, may apply to other situations.\textsuperscript{63} However, other authors expressed doubt about the reliability of such generalizations, arguing that they remain risky and could be done to the detriment of the case itself.\textsuperscript{64}


\textsuperscript{61} Robert K. Yin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21.


\textsuperscript{63} Robert K. Yin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 16.

This thesis does not pretend to generate theoretical explanations applicable to other situations or countries. With regard to this research, this paper accepts the view of Robert E. Stakes who stated that "the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case". The Chiapas conflict is a recent and complex conflict which requires more attention from researchers. There is in fact a need to complement the existing literature, which often neglects providing detailed information about, for example, the itinerary of EZLN leaders and its links with other social and political actors in Chiapas. The objective of this thesis is thus to focus on the Chiapas case in order to shed more light on the many dimensions of the Zapatista uprising and perhaps provide a new perspective on a conflict which still makes the headlines.

One of the strengths of case study is that it allows the analyst to deal with a broad range of evidence. With regard to this research, evidence was drawn from three main sources: primary sources, scientific literature and interviews. Field work in Mexico allowed for the collection of primary documents that would not have been available otherwise. For instance, after an interview in Mexico City with a member of the Frente Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (FZLN), the political branch of the EZLN, I went to a political meeting at which I collected journals of which very few copies were printed. I also had the opportunity to gather data in the resource centres of some NGOs, such as Equipo Pueblo, in Mexico City, and the Coordination of NGOs for Peace (CONPAZ), in San Cristobal de Las Casas. Web sources and

65 Robert E. Stakes, op. cit., p. 245.
email lists were also useful for gathering information about recent political developments in Chiapas. The weekly reports from the Centre of Analysis and Study of Chiapas (CIACH) were particularly valuable.67

I conducted interviews in Mexico City and San Cristobal de Las Casas during the summer of 1997. Initially, I intended to interview ten people who have followed closely the evolution of the conflict through their work in Chiapas and/or their participation as observers or mediators during the peace talks in 1995 and 1996. Some of the interviewees were not available or difficult to reach and I was finally able to interview six of them.68 Most of the interviewees are civil actors and one is a municipal representative. The interviews allowed me to gather qualitative information about the sources of the rebellion, the nature of the Zapatista movement and the political context in which it evolved.69

According to the typology of Yin, the type of the interviews conducted were of an open-ended nature, "... in which an investigator can ask key

67 One can subscribe for the weekly bulletin of CIACH at: ciach@laneta.apc.org.
68 It must be stressed that some of the first contacts established with the interviewees were facilitated by Edith Sanchez, from Equipo Pueblo, whom I met previously in Mexico City in 1995 during a research contract. She helped me to get in touch with most of the interviewees and without her, I do not think I would have been able to arrange some important appointments such as the one with Miguel Gandara.
69 The interviews with Miguel Gandara and with Emilio Alvarez Icaza, from Cencos (Centre for Social Cooperation), were particularly valuable in this regard. Emilio Alvarez participated to the negotiation process as mediator and Miguel Gandara is the Special secretary of Bishop Samuel Ruiz. I also went to San Cristobal de Las Casas, the second city of Chiapas, to get a sense of the region where the conflict erupted and to interview a few civil actors working with indigenous communities in the Selva Lacandona or involved in the peace process. I was unable to interview Bishop Samuel Ruiz as I intended. Fortunately, I was able to meet his special secretary Miguel Gandara in Mexico City subsequently. I was able to interview two other civil actors in San Cristobal. Ricardo Hernandez, Municipal Secretary of Ocosingo, and Hugo Trujillo, of CONPAZ (Coordination of NGOs for Peace).
respondent for the facts of a matter as well as for the respondent's opinions about events", and were achieved in a conversational manner.\textsuperscript{70} I had established a set of questions as a guideline for interview, but I remained flexible. When I felt that I could get some interesting information by letting the conversation shift to other topics, I did so. I never got the sense that the interviewees felt constrained about expressing their opinions on political matters and discussions were frank and informal. My meetings with interviewees were held in private. Generally, interviews lasted between forty five minutes and an hour. In all, four interviews were conducted in Mexico City and two in San Cristobal de Las Casas in Chiapas. All the interviews and the informal discussions in meetings and conferences were held in Spanish.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also attended some conferences such as the one presented by the Movement for Peace (Movimiento Por la Paz), a coalition of NGOs and civil organizations. This coalition promotes a peaceful settlement to the Chiapas crisis and pressed the government to implement fully the San Andrés agreements. These opportunities allowed me to gather qualitative information through informal meetings with people involved in the milieu.\textsuperscript{71}

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\textsuperscript{70} Robert K. Yin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{71} Another interesting source of information was found in informal discussion with members of the political section of the Canadian embassy and with the former ambassador, Marc Perron. These discussions provided some insights about the political context in Chiapas and the personality of the leaders involved.
\end{flushright}
Conclusion

The following chapters address the arguments and hypotheses developed in the theoretical framework. Chapter two examines the issues underlying the conflict in Chiapas, thus providing an understanding of its context. The subsequent chapters three and four address the research question. Chapter three examines the events, actors and institutions which created the conditions facilitating the diffusion of the EZLN. Chapter four describes the political conjuncture which allowed the EZLN to build important grassroots support in the late 1980s.
Chapter II

The Issues Underlying the Conflict in Chiapas
Introduction

This chapter discusses the underlying issues of the crisis in Chiapas. It suggests that the Zapatista\textsuperscript{72} claims on land, political autonomy, political representation, resource management, and social and cultural rights highlight the root causes of the conflict. It is worth stressing that these claims were embodied in the San Andrés agreements signed between the EZLN and the Mexican authorities delegates in the village of San Andrés in February 1996. Since then, a broad range of indigenous and peasant organizations in Chiapas and Mexico supported the content of the accords and pressed the government to fulfill them.

In order to have a better understanding of the significance of the above issues, one should first briefly discuss the broad support for the San Andrés agreements. This large support reveals that many of the EZLN's claims (for political autonomy, for example) are shared by several native peasant organizations in Chiapas and Mexico.

The Support for the San Andrés Agreements and the Correspondence of Demands

In October 1997, six coalitions of indigenous and peasant organizations formed the Coordination of Autonomous Organizations of the state of Chiapas (COAECH).\textsuperscript{73} The COAECH grouped numerous organizations active in several municipalities of the state. The first objective of the coalition was to press the government to implement the San Andrés agreements which

\textsuperscript{72} In this chapter, the term Zapatistas refers to the EZLN's followers and the grassroots support of the EZLN in general.

\textsuperscript{73} For more information about the composition and the activities of the COAECH, see the weekly bulletin \textit{La Opinión}, Mexico, Chiapas, Published by CIACH, No. 76, ciach@laneta.apc.org.
were negotiated with the EZLN in 1996. Two months later, two other important indigenous peasants organizations from Chiapas, ARI-C-Independiente and Quiptic, joined together after years of division in an attempt to resolve the growing tensions between the communities of the Selva and the northern regions.\footnote{See the Bulletin La Palabra, Mexico, Chiapas, CIACH, No. 29, ciach@laneta.apc.org} In one of their first public declarations, these groups urged the government to fulfill the San Andrés accords.

According to Laura Ruiz Mondagráñ, the Zapatista uprising and the following negotiation process brought the issue of indigenous rights to the top of the national debate and created the momentum for indigenous activism throughout the country.\footnote{See Laura Ruiz Mondragón, “Pueblos Indígenas y Participación Política”, Ce-Acatl, No. 87, Junio-Julio de 1997, p. 22. See also the special report from Ce-Acatl on the issue of indigenous rights, “Derechos Indígenas”, Ce-Acatl, No. 86, May 1997, p. 18.} This activism culminated with the organization of the National Indigenous Congress in Mexico City in October 1996. This was a important and symbolic event as it marked the first time that such a Congress had been organized since the one in San Cristobal in 1974. There, more than 350 organizations representing 36 indigenous groups from 17 Mexican states pressed President Zedillo to fully implement the accords as they were originally negotiated with the EZLN.\footnote{For further information, consult the Website of the CNI: http://www.laneta.apc.org/CNI/mh.htm. Since the Web site is under construction, one can communicate to the following Email address for further information: ceacatl@laneta.apc.org}

The broad acceptance of the San Andrés accords by the EZLN's grassroots and several other native and peasant organizations in Chiapas and Mexico reveal the issues at stake for many indigenous groups. Despite that most of these organizations disagree with the EZLN's violent tactics, the
Zapatista claims embodied in the accords gathered broad popular support. Even the ARIC, which represents many of the Selva Lacandona's native communities who refused to mobilize with the EZLN, pressed the government to fulfill the accords. Like other indigenous and peasant organizations in Chiapas, the ARIC believes that the implementation of the accords will pave the way to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict because the accords address some crucial demands of native communities. This correspondence of demands is quite revealing. In fact, it highlights issues that need to be addressed in order to ease the social climate in Chiapas. At this point, the review of the underlying causes of the Chiapas conflict can be made.

The Issues Underlying the Conflict in Chiapas

The analysis of the Zapatista claims over land, political autonomy, political representation, and economic, social and cultural rights is important to understand the issues underlying the conflict in Chiapas. When reviewing the literature and the San Andrés agreements, the primary sources of the problem are identified as the lack of available land and the intense segregation of indigenous peoples (whether social, economic, political or cultural).

The Land Issue

Indigenous peoples often stress the special relationship they share with their land and habitat. They do not conceive it solely in a functional way, but also spiritually. As the UN Special Rapporteur José Martinez Cobo underlines, it is of paramount importance for non-indigenous populations
to understand the special relationship of native people with "Mother Earth", as it shapes their beliefs, culture and conception of the world. For indigenous communities, land, far from being regarded only as a material possession, is considered a sacred part of their culture, identity and way of life.

The emphasis on the close relationship between the land, the culture and the identity of indigenous peoples also seems to permeate the discourse of native communities supporting the EZLN. For example, a Catalan journalist conducted numerous interviews in pro-Zapatista villages after the rebellion. The testimonies revealed that great importance is attached to the land and its traditional meanings. According to these testimonies, working the land is a way to connect to their past and pay tribute to their ancestors. Their discourse is shaped by Mayan metaphors which emphasize that the community, the lands, the habitat and the cosmos form a whole which is inseparable.

The EZLN's and government's delegates discussed the issues of land and culture at San Andrés. As a result, the accords recognize the intimate relationship between the indigenous communities, their land and natural habitat. The agreements state that this principle should guide Mexican legislators when the time comes to discuss the constitutional and

79 On this matter, see also Martine Dauzier, op. cit., pp. 38.
institutional reforms to giving more political autonomy to Mexican indigenous communities:

Se propone al Congreso de la unión y a las legislaturas de los estados de la República reconocer y establecer las características de libre determinación y los niveles y modalidades de autonomía, tomando en cuenta que ésta implica... (que) todo pueblo indígena se asienta en un territorio que cubre la totalidad del hábitat que los pueblos indígenas ocupan o utilizan de alguna manera. *El territorio es la base material de su reproducción como pueblo y expresa la unidad indisoluble hombretierra-naturaleza.*

The accords also specify that the federal government should compensate indigenous communities whose habitat and culture are imperiled by commercial and industrial activities promoted by the state. This is an issue frequently stressed by indigenous movements in Mexico and Latin America which argue that the development model of modern states is antithetical to their needs and threatens the integrity of their communities.

Moreover, most of the authors who write about the Zapatista rebellion note that the unequal distribution of lands is probably the most acute problem in Chiapas. Land reform, embodied in the Mexican revolution of 1917 which aimed to grant pieces of communal lands (*ejidos*) to landless peasants, was never fully implemented in Chiapas. Most of the time, the *ladino* oligarchy involved in coffee and commercial beef production, convinced the authorities against such reform. The resulting

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80 *Nunca más sin nosotros: Acuerdos de San Andrés, México, Juan Pablos Editor, 1996, p. 41*

Author’s translation: “This (accord) proposes that the Mexican Congress and all State legislatures recognize indigenous autonomy and self-determination and implement changes at all institutional levels, taking into account that ... indigenous peoples live on a territory that covers the entire environment that is occupied and can be used by indigenous peoples in any way. The territory is the material base of the indigenous culture: it allows its reproduction and expresses the intrinsic relationship of man, earth, and the environment.”

81 *Ibid*, pp. 41 and 52.

land concentration is significant. According to a study made by Neil Harvey, it is estimated that over 200,000 ejido owners and their family members depend on less than four hectares of land to make their living and that only 40.8% of the land is considered as fertile. In the conflict zone, the Selva and Los Altos regions, the situation is particularly acute. According to another study, less than 0.01% of the population (667 private owners) control more than 15% of the land (often the most fertile) while tens of thousands of indigenous peasants share the remaining territory.

The competition for land fuels ongoing conflict between native peasant organizations and estate owners, and among the communities themselves. Most of the time, the local or federal authorities have failed to address the problem adequately. On the contrary, their initiatives often contributed to the polarization of the situation and to the escalation of tensions. As these topics will be discussed at length in chapter four, it is sufficient here to mention the reform of article 27 undertaken by the Salinas administration in 1992. This reform permits the sale of communal land to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. Several observers pointed out that this reform remained a key event in radicalizing several indigenous peasants who finally joined the EZLN. For these peasants, this reform confirmed that, once again, the state encouraged export-oriented industries to the detriment of small plot cultivation, practiced by most indigenous communities. In this regard, the pursuit of neo-liberal reforms

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85 See, for instance, Yvan Le Bot, op. cit., p. 150.
in the rural sector and the failure to adequately address the need for land created the conditions for the ensuing radicalization of many indigenous peasants.

*Political Autonomy, Political Representation and the Issue of Justice*

The most important issue raised by the EZLN delegates at San Andrés was that of self-determination and political autonomy for indigenous communities. It was the first time that the government showed willingness to discuss such topics and the accords propose ambitious reforms. First, the agreements provide for recognition of the constitutional right to self-determination for Mexican indigenous peoples. In concrete terms, this means that native peoples could choose their own form of governance and elect representatives at the local level according to their customs and traditions.\(^{86}\) The accords also propose granting a legal status to native communities that wished to gather together to form new municipalities. In this case, funds and responsibilities would be transferred from the state legislatures to this new legislative body so that the communities could administer public funds for their own purposes.\(^{87}\)

The recognition of the indigenous right to self-determination and political autonomy represented a major step for the national independent indigenous movement. The implementation of the accords would have required significant modifications to the Mexican constitution and to the structure of the political regime. However, faced with the range of the

\(^{86}\) On this topic, see *Acuerdos de San Andrés* in “Derechos Indígenas”, *Ce-Acatl*, op. cit., p. 62.

\(^{87}\) *Ibid.*
changes, the Zedillo government finally refused to endorse the document without a re-negotiation of the aspect of indigenous autonomy. Some observers believe that the government refused to comply with the accords as it would have compromised resource exploitation projects undertaken by state owned enterprises such as PEMEX (oil company).\textsuperscript{88}

Another important issue stressed during the negotiation was native political representation. As in most Latin American countries, the indigenous peoples of Mexico have suffered from political exclusion. For instance, although they form more than 12% of the population, they are virtually excluded from the national political scene. It is crucial for them to regain these political spaces. In this spirit, the accords recommend the undertaking of measures to enhance the representation of indigenous deputies in the local and national Congresses.\textsuperscript{89}

Finally, the EZLN delegates called for the abolition of the Chiapas penal code which has been broadly denounced by indigenous communities as it is considered to be one of the most repressive in Mexico and, perhaps, Latin America.\textsuperscript{90} The justice issue is especially salient in Chiapas, as more than 90% of prisoners are indigenous peoples even thought they represent only 30% of the total population.\textsuperscript{91} Most of the native prisoners are accused of ecological damage (slash burn agriculture, wood cutting).\textsuperscript{92} According to a

\textsuperscript{88} See June Nash, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{89} Acuerdos de San Andrés, in "Derechos Indígenas", \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47. See also Nunca más sin nosotros, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{90} Jorge Vargas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{91} Guiomar Rovira, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid.}. 
study carried out by André Aubry, the prison in Chiapas is a tool used by big land owners and cattle ranchers to recuperate communal lands.93 Usually, the tactics are as follows: private owners prosecute the peasants for the offenses mentioned above. Since the penal code in Chiapas is extremely severe for such offenses, the sentences are generally heavy. As a result, estate owners often take over the land of the imprisoned peasant as he cannot cultivate it.94

The implementation of the Veda law under the governance of Gonzales Garrido (1988-1993) further polarized the debate over Chiapas justice system.95 As this law forbids any kind of wood cutting, the authorities prosecuted a growing number of indigenous peoples for ecological damage. This had a disastrous effect on indigenous communities since less than 15% of the population in the Selva Lacandona uses gas for cooking.96 This partly explains why the Zapatistas called for the recognition of their own justice system since they argued that the penal code of Chiapas serves the interests of the ladino oligarchy which controls the economy and political institutions.

Although the agreements do not propound the implementation of a distinct justice system for native communities (as requested by the Zapatistas and several other indigenous movements), they propose a few

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94 In Chiapas, the laws stipulates that if the land is not cultivated, the ejido owner loses the title and the land may be sold.
96 See the report Para Entender Chiapas, México, CIACH, CONPAZ and SIPRO, 1997, p. 138.
constitutional reforms. For example, the accords mention that the judicial power shall take into account the cultural, social and economic situation of native defendants and privilege non-imprisonment sentences.\footnote{Ibid, p. 68.} Moreover, the text emphasizes the necessity to provide translation services throughout judicial procedure for defendants whose native tongue is not Spanish.\footnote{Acuerdos de San Andrés, in Nunca más sin nosotros, Mexico, Juan Pablos Editor, 1996, pp. 63-64.} Native peoples in Chiapas often complain that they rarely get public services in their native language.

\textit{Economic Rights and Resource Management}

Many observers point to the tremendous gaps between native communities and the rest of the population as a cause of social polarization in Chiapas. Most native communities in fact lack basic services such as electricity, running water, drainage, and road infrastructure as well as funding for schools, hospital and lodgings.\footnote{See also Jorge A. Vargas, op. cit., p. 7-8} The state of Chiapas presents among the highest levels of poverty in Mexico and the percentage of homes lacking electricity, drinking water, and sewage facilities ranges between 38.5 and 75\% in municipalities with a high indigenous population such as Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas.\footnote{INEGI statistics (1992), cited in Neil Harvey, op. cit., p. 48.} The statistics for health and education are also desperate for Chiapas. The Selva Lacandona and Los Altos, two regions with a high percentage of native populations, have the lowest percentage of literate peoples (below 56.5\%) of the state and the lowest proportion of children that go to elementary school (below 63.5\%).\footnote{For the statistics and facts mentioned in this paragraph, see the report Para Entender Chiapas, op. cit., pp. 30-31-125 and 126.}
state of Chiapas also occupies the first place in Mexico for infant mortality, mainly caused by malnutrition and tuberculosis, and rural areas lack medical staff and basic facilities. These indices of poverty and marginalization are especially high in the Selva Lacandona - the conflict zone - (see Tables 1 and 2). In the accords, the government recognized the problem and promised that public programs would be implemented to fight indigence among native communities.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indices of Poverty in Chiapas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of homes without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiapas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocosingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altamirano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Margaritas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: see Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática or INEGI (National Institute of Statistics) (1992) for data on Mexico and Chiapas. See the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) for data on Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas. Quoted in Neil Harvey, op. cit., p. 19.
Table 2

Socio-economic Conditions in the Conflict Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>OCOSINGO</th>
<th>ALTAMIRANO</th>
<th>LAS MARGARITAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>121,012</td>
<td>17,026</td>
<td>86,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>61,631</td>
<td>8,613</td>
<td>43,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>59,381</td>
<td>8,413</td>
<td>43,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Rural population</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population centers</td>
<td>1,117</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--with 1-99 inhabitants</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Illiteracy</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of yrs. in school</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Population earning less than one minimum wage</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of EAP in agricultural work</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Migration</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Land ownership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--- Ejidal</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--- Communal</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--- Private</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Housing units</td>
<td>21,019</td>
<td>2,952</td>
<td>14,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Owners of their homes</td>
<td>20,990</td>
<td>2,943</td>
<td>14,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Occupants per housing unit</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>6.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes paid in 1993 in new pesos</td>
<td>5,209.9</td>
<td>2,003.6</td>
<td>3,030.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the Zapatista delegates did not only ask for government subsidies to improve the situation and reduce the gaps. They also called for a fair share of the profits made by state-owned enterprises that are engaged in oil prospecting, timber exploitation or hydro-electricity activities on communal lands. Over the past few years, large scale development initiatives pursued by the state have forced the displacement of many indigenous communities in the Selva region. With political autonomy, the Zapatistas would like to gain control of those development projects to benefit their communities. This claim has frequently been emphasized by indigenous organizations in Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, at a forum organized in March 1990 by the Mexican Council of 500 Hundred Years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance, delegates insisted that native peoples should control the production and management of their natural resources. This is a major issue considering the tremendous amount of money involved in regions such as the Selva Lacandona where important timbering and oil exploration activities are underway.

The San Andrés agreements propose constitutional recognition of the right of indigenous communities to gain control over their territory and benefit collectively from the exploitation of its natural resources. If the government had complied with the agreements, this would have been a large concession to the EZLN's grassroots and, more generally, to all Mexican indigenous communities which would have benefited from such reform.

103 See the final report from the Consejo Mexicano 500 Años de Resistencia Indian y Popular, *Raíces Indias*, México, No. 1, Septiembre de 1990, pp. 3-6.
105 See *Acuerdos de San Andrés*, in "Derechos Indígenas", *Ce-Acatl*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
However, as some observers point out, such a change is not "... acceptable in a country where (the) eminent domain of the state, operating through state-owned companies such as PEMEX, has created some of the richest men of the nation..."\textsuperscript{106} One may well suspect that this was part of the reason why Zedillo refused to comply to the San Andrés agreements. In fact, in its counter-proposal to the constitutional reforms advanced by the COCOPA\textsuperscript{107} and the National Indigenous Congress (NIC), the government ignored the issue.

\textit{Social and Cultural Rights}

As in most Latin American countries, Mexican native populations have suffered cultural segregation and assimilation. Until the late 1970s, the Mexican state promoted assimilation policies aimed at incorporating native peoples into the dominant society.\textsuperscript{108} However, with growing indigenous activism in the 1980s and 1990s, the Mexican state has made small steps towards the recognition of native rights.\textsuperscript{109} In 1992, for instance, President Salinas modified article four of the constitution and acknowledged the multi-ethnic composition of the Mexican society. Nevertheless, native groups want more than the symbolic recognition of their status. They called for policies, funds and programs that will ensure the development of their languages, cultures, customs and traditions as outlined by the demands

\textsuperscript{106} June Nash, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{107} Commission of Agreement and Peacemaking; a mediation committee gathering representatives from the main political parties in Mexico.
\textsuperscript{108} Jorge Vargas, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 45-46.
\textsuperscript{109} Jorge Vargas suggests that this indigenous activism pressed President Salinas to recognize the pluriethnic composition of the Mexican society. See \textit{Ibid.}, p. 44.
made by the National Indigenous Forum (NIF) and the NIC in their 1996 meetings.

The EZLN delegates raised the issue of social and cultural rights to the negotiations at San Andrés. They stressed the necessity of implementing bilingual and inter-cultural programs that would promote indigenous history, culture, customs, and traditions.\textsuperscript{110} They also requested that they be involved in the creation of education programs to adapt these to the regional cultural characteristics of native populations. As the conclusions from the reports of the Mexican Council of 500 Years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance highlight, measures of control over education programs by the communities is also a very salient issue for other indigenous movements in Mexico.\textsuperscript{111} After many years of assimilation through public education, this is viewed as a guarantee that indigenous cultural heritage will be transmitted to younger generations and therefore perpetuated.

Another important claim regarded the diffusion of native culture and language through the media. The media and culture issue is acute for many other indigenous groups. For example, the NIF stressed the importance of gaining these spaces of communication to fight against ignorance which nurtures prejudices and racism.\textsuperscript{112} Government subsidies and quotas for indigenous TV and radio programs are considered vital means for

\textsuperscript{110} For the points regarding the accord in the two following paragraphs, please refer to the San Andrés agreements in \textit{Nunca más sin nosotros}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 48-50, 66 and 73-75.

\textsuperscript{111} See the report of the Mexican Council of 500 Years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{112} The NIF stressed this issue in its final report in January 1996, see \textit{Congreso Nacional Indígena}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6. The EZLN also emphasized the importance of implementing quotas for indigenous radio or TV programs in a communiqué to the NIF in February 1996. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
indigenous communities to reach outside audiences and reduce cultural misunderstandings. In this regard, the agreements acknowledge that native communities need modern communication tools, such as radio stations, to enhance the diffusion of their culture and language and promote dialogue with the rest of the society. To this end, the accords propose, for example, the transfer of communication infrastructures from the government to the communities.

Conclusion

Many independent native peasant coalitions (such as COAECCH, ARIC-Independiente and the NIC) have reminded the government that the conflict will not be resolved through co-optation or division, but rather through dialogue and compliance with the San Andrés agreements. The broad support for the San Andrés agreements indicates that it is the path to follow for the government if it wants to address the issues underlying the crisis in Chiapas and, to a larger extent, to address some of the major concerns of a broad range of Mexican indigenous groups. However, as suggested above, these issues, though they form the background to the conflict, cannot explain why some communities rebelled while others did not. To answer the question why some communities supported and mobilized with the EZLN in January 1994, one must understand the socialization process of the settlers of the Selva Lacandona region and the conjuncture in which the EZLN built grassroots support. The third and fourth chapters address this issue.
Chapter III

The Actors Creating Favourable Conditions for the Spread of the EZLN
Introduction

This chapter addresses the first hypothesis of the theoretical framework. It aims to clarify the role of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal and of leftist grassroots activists in creating favourable conditions for the spread of the EZLN in the Selva Lacandona. Over the past several years, these religious and political actors built social cohesion among several indigenous communities of the rainforest.\textsuperscript{113} In fact, the grassroots activism of Catholic pastoral agents and leftist activists fostered the growth of important independent peasant organizations such as the UE Quiptic and later the ARIC. These organizations, which remained close to the Catholic diocese, created important networks of interaction among numerous communities of the Selva Lacandona.\textsuperscript{114}

What is worth stressing is that the EZLN used these networks of interaction in order to spread its influence, all with the support of Catholic pastoral agents. Since Bishop Ruiz initially supported the idea to organize peasants in self-defense, several indigenous catechists and deacons facilitated the EZLN’s penetration within the diocese’s zone of influence. The diocese of Bishop Ruiz, in this regard, played a central role in the diffusion of the EZLN. It is thus important to clarify its role, along with that of other political

\textsuperscript{113} Several authors discuss the importance of historical events such as the Indigenous Congress of 1974 and of the role of the Catholic Church and other grassroots activists in building communication networks in the Selva Lacandona. See, for example, Georges Collier, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 17-18; Kathleen Sullivan, "Rural-Urban Restructuring Among the Chamula People in the Highlands of Chiapas," in \textit{The Explosion of Communities}, Copenhagen, IWGIA Document, No. 77, 1995, pp. 65-87; Christine Marie Kovic, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 101-110; and Yvan Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 38-56.

\textsuperscript{114} In this text, the terms "Selva Lacandona", "rainforest" and "Cañadas" should be understood as synonyms.
actors, in order to explain the rapid expansion of the EZLN in the Selva Lacandona in the 1980s.

In order to address the above issues, this chapter is divided into three sections. First, it provides some information regarding the origins of the EZLN, its structure and social basis. Secondly, it analyzes the colonization of the Selva Lacandona to provide some background about the socialization process of indigenous settlers. Finally, it discusses the role of the Catholic Church and of leftist grassroots activists in creating favorable conditions for the spread of the EZLN among several native communities of this region.

*The EZLN: Its Origins, Structure and Social Basis*

On January 1, 1994, the EZLN captured several municipalities with high percentages of indigenous populations such as Ocósingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Ochuc, Chanal, Huixtán and San Cristóbal de Las Casas (see map 1). Though many of these municipalities are situated outside the Selva Lacandona, most observers stressed that the social basis of the EZLN comes from this region. In 1998, the EZLN is still controlling certain areas of the rainforest, but the federal army is now isolating the movement (see maps 2-3).

The EZLN was created in 1983 in the Selva Lacandona by FZL members in order to undertake revolutionary activities in Chiapas. The FZL is an underground revolutionary organization. It was founded in 1969 in Monterrey by a few university students and former members of the Mexican

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115 See, for example, *La Opinión*, No. 78, *op. cit.*
Insurgent Army (EMI). Since its origins, the FZL's discourse and activities have been oriented by a very traditionalist Marxist-Leninist ideology. The organization's internal documents in fact clearly show that the goal of the FZL is to destroy the Mexican state in order to establish a "proletarian regime" in Mexico.

In 1972, FZL members attempted to implement the organization in the Selva Lacandona. But the project failed as a result of police crackdowns in 1974, which dismantled most FZL units throughout Mexico. However, a few FZL members who survived the repression (such as German, the current leader of the FZL), re-built the organization. In 1983, for the second time, FZL members tried to establish the organization in the Selva Lacandona and were this time successful. The objective of the FZL in creating the EZLN in Chiapas was to broaden the scale of the organization in order to eventually launch a revolution that would institute a socialist regime in Mexico.

In 1983, however, the EZLN remained a marginal organization regrouping a few ladinos and indigenous revolutionaries. As it will be explained, it is only with the consent of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal that the organization was able to build important grassroots support in the Cañadas. Many of the diocese's pastoral agents became intermediate staff (or cuadros) for the EZLN and facilitated its penetration among native

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116 For the facts regarding the origins of the FZL discussed here, see Henri Favre, *op. cit.*, pp. 439-442. See also Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-77; and Yvon Le Bot, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
117 On this matter, see Henri Favre, *op. cit.*, p. 442.
communities within the diocese's zones of influence.\textsuperscript{118} However, despite the fact that certain indigenous catechists and deacons played a central role as cuadros for the EZLN, they never occupied top positions within the guerrilla movement.\textsuperscript{119} The EZLN's key leadership positions have always been controlled by ladino leaders such as Marcos, Daniel and Pedro. Within the hierarchy of the movement, indigenous guerrilleros could only aspire to lower positions such as captain or major.

The social basis of the EZLN comes mainly from ARIC's bases of support, the main peasant organization in the Selva Lacandona since the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{120} Recently, the president of the ARIC acknowledged that about 40\% of its members left the organization in order to join the EZLN.\textsuperscript{121} This reveals the extent to which the ARIC became caught in internal strife in the late 1980s. There were, in fact, significant divisions between those who supported the EZLN and those who disagreed with its violent tactics. In a way, the ARIC and the EZLN represent the two sides of the Chiapas conflict. On one hand, the ARIC represents indigenous leaders and peasants who, despite difficulties, persisted in the institutional path.\textsuperscript{122} On the other hand, the EZLN personifies indigenous leaders and groups who were radicalized as a result of unpopular institutional reforms and growing local repression (a subject that will be discussed in chapter four).\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{118} See Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 102-103. See also Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 98-99 and 160-175.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{120} Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{Chiapas: La Guerra y La Paz}, México, D.F., ADN Editores, 1995, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{122} Luis Hernandez Navarro, "The Chiapas Uprising", \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{123} Navarro comes to a similar conclusion. \textit{Ibid.}
Before more deeply clarifying the role of the above actors and institutions in the spread of the EZLN, it is important to explain the context in which thousands of indigenous groups colonized the Selva Lacandona in the past several decades. By doing so, one can better understand the socialization process of several indigenous communities that settled this region, many of which would later support the EZLN.

MAP 1  Municipalities seized by the EZLN on January 1st 1994

MAP 2

CHIAPAS

Zone under EZLN control

Source: Ibid.
MAP 3

CHIAPAS

Military cordon of the Mexican army

Source: Ibid.
Causes Leading to the Colonization of the Selva Lacandona Region

The Selva Lacandona is a vast rainforest of hundreds of thousands of hectares situated in north-eastern Chiapas, close to the Guatemalan border. This region is one of the nine administrative districts of Chiapas.

MAP 4\(^{124}\) (Map of Chiapas)

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\(^{124}\) Source: State of Chiapas, quoted in Para Entender Chiapas, op. cit., p.111.
The colonization of the Selva Lacandona began in the 1930s, intensified in the 1960s and lasted until the late 1980s. Most migrants were indigenous peasants in search of land. They came mainly from other parts of Chiapas and some border states. Authorities encouraged the migration to the Cañadas. Yet unwilling to fully implement the agrarian reform embodied in the 1917 Constitution, they viewed the colonization of the rainforest as a good solution to avoid land redistribution. In the short run, it eased growing conflicts between peasant organizations and estate owners who strongly opposed agrarian reform in other parts of Chiapas.\textsuperscript{125} This was, however, a short-sighted policy. In fact, the usual conflicts over land would soon become part of the political reality in the Selva Lacandona.

Nevertheless, in a country where the agrarian reform is constantly delayed due to political pressure made by private owners, the tropical forest attracted flows of landless peasants. One should note that more than 30% of the unresolved land petitions for ejidos (piece of land granted by the State according to the Mexican constitution) are concentrated in Chiapas.\textsuperscript{126} Hence, for many peasant families that had been waiting years for their ejidos, the rainforest became a promised land. It was viewed as a way to alleviate the uninterrupted struggle for land and to provide them with a new life, stemming from the state "commitment" that they would get their ejidos.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125} Neil Harvey, "Rebellion in Chiapas: Rural Reforms, Campesino Radicalism, and the Limits to Salinism", in \textit{Transformation of Rural Mexico}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 28. See also Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49. Some of the facts mentioned in this section regarding the colonization of the Selva Lacandona are drawn from Harvey's and Navarro's articles.


\textsuperscript{127} Lands have in fact been redistributed by the authorities. For instance, according to Neil Harvey "between 1930 and 1991 over 1.3 millions of hectares were redistributed among 25 000 peasants in Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas." See Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 28.
The exodus to the Selva Lacandona shaped the political consciousness of thousands of indigenous migrants. These landless peasants did not choose to migrate to this far and unknown tropical forest. They were forced to do so as they could not get land in their region of origin. As Hernandez Navarro underlines, "The settlers that came to the forest (...) arrived as the losers of the agrarian struggle, as people who had been unable to recover land from large landowners in a country where agrarian reform was a living myth."\textsuperscript{128} This original trauma forged an emerging political awareness among the communities of the rainforest who would have to pursue the ongoing struggle for land in their new social milieu.

The colonization of the Selva Lacandona was also driven by economic factors. In Chiapas, many indigenous peasants have to work in coffee plantations and cattle ranches as they cannot make their living solely with their crops. As many were caught in a cycle of debt which ultimately had to be assumed by their children, some envisaged the colonization of the rainforest.\textsuperscript{129} A large number of settlers thus migrated to this region to escape the difficult working conditions and minimal wages of the coffee plantations. In the Selva Lacandona, these peasants shared their experience with fellows in misfortune. This sharpened their awareness of the economic oppression of indigenous peoples.

Many indigenous settlers also colonized the rainforest as they had been expelled from their traditional communities for religious motives.

\textsuperscript{128} Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{The Chiapas Uprising}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{129} For testimonies about the working conditions of coffee plantations and the economic motives for colonizing the Selva, see Martine Dauzier, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 16-18.
Most expulsions targeted those who converted to Protestantism or other evangelist sects which spread in Chiapas in the 1940 and 1950s. These new converts disturbed the former social and religious order. For instance, they refused to pay the cargo-system, which is a special tax imposed by the caciques (indigenous leader linked to the PRI), notably for religious celebrations.\textsuperscript{130} It is through the control of these taxes (on local products or transportation) that many caciques have gained wealth and power within indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{131} Thus, as they contested the authority of the caciques and imperiled their hegemony, the religious "deviants" were expelled and many colonized the Selva Lacandona.

The expulsions also affected those who followed the precepts of Liberation theology. Like the Protestants, the followers of liberation theology refused to conform to the traditional customs, raised doubts about the Shaman's powers and opposed the caciques. Hence, they were rejected as they disrupted the existing social order. The caciques also expelled political dissidents, using the pretext of religious dissension.\textsuperscript{132} Overall, the expulsion process aimed to purge the community from social disturbing elements and "harmful" outside influences. For the families expelled, it was a very traumatic experience as they lost their material possessions to undertake a long exodus.

\textsuperscript{130} Kathleen Sullivan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{131} For more information on the facts and observations discussed here regarding the role of the caciques, the cargo-system and the expulsion process, see \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 67-70. For more information about caciquismo, see June Nash, "Community, Ethnicity and the Mexican State", in \textit{The Explosion of Communities}, Copenhagen, IWGIA Document, No. 77, 1995, pp. 23-27.
\textsuperscript{132} Wasserstron (1976 and 1990) and Enrique (1990), quoted by Kathleen Sullivan, \textit{op. cit.}. 
The migrants that left their community to move to the Selva Lacandona went through a crucial sociological experience. As some observers point out, these peoples emancipated themselves from a rigid social and political order personified by the caciques, the Shamans, the cargo-system, alcohol and archaic customs.\(^{133}\) They also rejected the theology of resignation practised in their former community, a theology which remains passive and discourages any social or politically progressive initiatives.\(^{134}\) As opposed to this theology of resignation, an important proportion of settlers of the rainforest adhered to a theology of liberation. In this conversion process, the ongoing grassroots activism of thousands of indigenous catechists and deacons of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal remained a key factor. As will be explained in the following section, this grassroots activism developed and maintained the Catholic diocese's influence in most regions of the Selva Lacandona despite the important growth of Protestantism in Chiapas.

\textit{The Catholic Diocese, the Maoists and the Spread of the EZLN}

\textit{The Catholic Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas}

The settlers who colonized the Selva Lacandona encountered difficult conditions. They were confronted with a hostile environment (tropical forest) which they had to clear for cultivation. Moreover, many settled in far and remote areas and thereby found themselves isolated. Most of the time, the only assistance they received came from the local Catholic diocese and from other Protestant churches. Government institutions and such as the National Indian Institute (INI) and pro-PRI organizations like the National

\(^{133}\) Yvon Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 39.

\(^{134}\) Mario Humberto Ruz, "La violence des anges", in \textit{Feu Maya, op. cit.}, p. 289.
Peasant Confederation (CNF) were absent from the tropical forest.\textsuperscript{135} The Catholic diocese of San Cristobal, in an attempt to spread its influence and to counter the growth of Protestantism, aimed at evangelizing the indigenous settlers.\textsuperscript{136} As a result, thousands of priests, indigenous catechists and deacons established contact with the communities and facilitated their settling and organization.\textsuperscript{137}

Through the ongoing activism of its pastoral agents, the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal developed networks of interaction among indigenous settlers. For example, for several indigenous communities, the Catholic religious services became a "critical meeting place".\textsuperscript{138} It was one of the few locations where the community leaders, the catechists and the settlers could gather together and have a dialogue about their situation, the difficulties they faced and the potential solutions to resolve their problems. Desirous to penetrate effectively the communities, the local catholic diocese adopted a discourse which valorized and defended the grievances of indigenous peoples. The birth of this discourse coincided with the rise of the Liberation theology throughout Latin America in the 1960s, a doctrine which proposes a renewed faith in solidarity of the poor and the oppressed.

\textsuperscript{135} Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{137} More than 8000 catechists and 500 deacons supported the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas in its evangelizing efforts in the Selva Lacandona. This is an impressive number of pastoral agents for a population of about 90,000 peoples (in the 1990s). See Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{138} Christine Marie Kovic, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 103.
It was under the leadership of Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas since 1960, that the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas started promoting Liberation theology. Though Bishop Ruiz has generally avoided direct reference to Liberation theology, his discourse and actions are in line with this theological doctrine. Indeed, Samuel Ruiz was actively involved in the 1968 Medellín meeting in Colombia where numerous Latin American Bishops advocated this new radical theological alternative. Many of them viewed Liberation theology as a response to spreading problems of poverty and marginalization in Latin America, but more importantly as a way to counter the growth of Protestantism.

Liberation theology proposes a strong criticism of capitalism. It borrows from both Marxist and Dependency theories in its analysis of the global economy. It denounces, for example, the macro-economic and political factors which engendered a situation of dependence between the core economies (developed countries) and the peripheries (developing countries). It also stresses the significance of class struggle, underlying the "structural deficiencies" at both the national and international levels which produced injustice and institutionalized violence. However, though

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139 For more information about the Medellín meeting, see Paul E. Sigmund, Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?, New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 28-39.
140 Medellín Documents (1968), Paragraph 16, quoted in Paul E. Sigmund, op. cit., p. 30. The diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas also acknowledges the importance of structural economic factors in the impoverishment of small agricultural producers. For instance, Samuel Ruiz has denounced several times the impact of neo-liberal policies and free trade agreements such as the NAFTA. According to him, these initiatives imperil the survival of hundreds of thousands of peasants as they cannot compete with external markets. See Bishop Samuel Ruiz, En Esta Hora de Gracia; Carta Pastoral, Mexico, D.F., Ediciones Dabar, 1993, p. 8. The former Canadian ambassador Marc Perron (with whom I had informal meetings at the Canadian embassy in July 1996) met Bishop Ruiz and acknowledged Samuel Ruiz’s virulent opposition to the NAFTA.
Liberation theology recognizes the importance of the above theories to understand the mechanisms of subjugation, it refutes any common roots with those theoretical propositions. As Leonardo Boff stresses, Liberation theologians maintain a "critical stance with Marxism" since central concepts of this paradigm (materialism, atheism, revolutionary violence) contradicts the fundamental principles of Catholicism.\textsuperscript{141}

Liberation theology also proposes a renewed partnership between the peoples and the Church. It aims at "building a living Church", one that listens to the needs and grievances of its followers and then serves them.\textsuperscript{142} In Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz encouraged this shift. The Bishop wanted to redirect the evangelizing process in order to integrate the customs, traditions and beliefs of the indigenous communities. Bishop Ruiz writes:

... (es) nuestra aspiración eclesial de avanzar hasta el surgimiento de una Iglesia autóctona que dé cuenta de su historia salvífica, que se exprese en su cultura, que se enrique con su valores, que acoja sus sufrimientos, sus luchas y aspiraciones; que con la fuerza del Evangelico transforme y libere su cultura.\textsuperscript{143} (see translation below)

Hence, for the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas, it was not a "matter of transplanting the Church deductively, but of implanting the Church inductively."\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{142} Leonardo Boff, \textit{Ecclesiogenesis; The Basic Church Communities Reinvent the Church}, New York, Orbis Books, 1986, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{143} Samuel Ruiz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 19. Author's translation: "It is our goal to foster the birth of an indigenous Church, a church which takes into account the history of native peoples, expresses their culture, integrates their customs and values, and acknowledges their sufferings, struggles and aspirations; a church that transforms and liberates native peoples' culture with the message of God."
\textsuperscript{144} Leonardo Boff, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 23.
With the help of thousands of indigenous catechists and deacons, the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal spread its influence in the Selva Lacandona in the past several decades. Though Protestant churches (such as the Pentecostals, the Evangelists and the Presbyterians) grew in influence in other parts of Chiapas (especially in Los Altos), their presence was less significant in the rainforest.\textsuperscript{145} Indeed, except in the municipality of Las Margaritas where they were strongly established, Protestant churches remained weak in other parts of the region.\textsuperscript{146} In 1990, Protestants represented 25\% of the Selva Lacandona's population and were present mainly in Las Margaritas.\textsuperscript{147} What is worth noting is that the EZLN was unable to built support in the Protestant zones of influence and instead spread in the zones of the diocese of San Cristobal.\textsuperscript{148}

The Catholic diocese was thus able to develop and maintain its influence among several native communities of the rainforest despite the challenge posed by Protestantism. One has to be reminded, however, that the diocese received the support of external advisers in fostering popular organization among settlers (thereby increasing the audience of the Catholic church). These external advisers in fact played a central role in community building and in the creation of the Unión de Ejidos Quiptic (UE Quitic), the main peasant organization in the rainforest in the 1980s. But in order to

\textsuperscript{145}See Carlos Tello Díaz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 107. Although estimations vary, most observers acknowledge that between 30\% and 40\% of the Chiapas' population identified itself Protestants or Evangelists in the 1990s. For such statistics, see Henri Favre, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 425. See also George Collier, \textit{op. cit.}, p.18.


\textsuperscript{147} Ascencio Franco and Leyva Solano (1992), quoted in Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29. See also Carlos Tello Díaz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Ibid.}
clarify the context in which these political actors arrived in the Cañadas, one must discuss the impact of the 1974 Indigenous Congress.

The 1974 Indigenous Congress, the Maoists Advisers and the Quiptic

The Indigenous Congress was held in San Cristobal de Las Casas in October 1974 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Fray Bartholomé de Las Casas. It gathered more than a thousand delegates representing hundreds of communities from the four main ethnic groups of Chiapas (Chol, Tzetal, Tzotil and Tojolabal). During the three days that the Congress lasted, indigenous delegates expounded the claims of their communities. They denounced, among others things, the unequal distribution of land, their difficult economic conditions, the abusive treatment of landowners and the repression by authorities. For the delegates present in San Cristobal, the Congress was an important experience in political learning. Realizing their common context of struggle, the delegates emphasized the need for collaboration to defend their claims. The Congress, in this sense, not only created bridges of common understanding, but also conditioned the emergence of a new generation of indigenous leaders. It is this new generation of leaders that played an active role in the growth of the independent peasant organization UE Quiptic in the rainforest.

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150 Neil Harvey, op. cit., p. 30.
151 A discourse emphasizing native rights emerged during the Congress. For example, the final agreement stated that "the communal lands which were taken from our fathers (should) be returned to us" (Agreement, Indigenous Congress of 1974; quoted in Christine Marie Kovic, op. cit., p. 105.). The Congress announced in this sense the rise of a native movement. A movement that would grow in the following two decades, culminating with the AntiQuincentenary protests that took place throughout Mexico in 1992.
The Catholic Church played an important role in the preparation of the Indigenous Congress which lasted for about a year. Catholic catechists and pastoral workers in fact organized permanent workshops in several native communities which elected the delegate that would represent them at the Congress.\textsuperscript{153} In doing so, Catholic pastoral workers received the support of political advisers from Union del Pueblo (UP): a Maoist organization invited by the Church to organize the Congress. During the training sessions, the Maoists advisers developed ties with indigenous catechists and deacons of the Diocese of San Cristobal. This new partnership turned out to be successful. In fact, the collaboration between Maoists and Catholic pastoral agents (many of which were trained during the Congress) resulted in the creation in 1975 of the UE "Quiptic Ta Lecubtecel" (which means Liberated by our Strength, in Tzetal).

The leaders of the UE Quiptic were indigenous catechists, but Maoists advisers remained very influential within the organization.\textsuperscript{154} The Quiptic regrouped eighteen communities of Catholic obedience from the Selva Lacandona. The peasant organization played an important role of popular

\textsuperscript{153} Many analysts stress the importance of the 1974 Indigenous Congress in shaping popular organization among indigenous communities in Chiapas, and more particularly in the Selva Lacandona. For more information on the Indigenous Congress and on the role of the Catholic Church see Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.} pp. 29-32; Christine Marie Kovic, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 101-110; and George Collier, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{154} As the Zapatista movement is a relatively new phenomenon, a few authors explained in detail the role of independent peasant organizations in the genesis of the conflict. Hence, some of the facts or observations developed in this third section regarding the Quiptic, the role of Maoist activists, the Union de Uniones, the ARIC, the ANCIEZ and the independent peasant movement in general are drawn mainly from the work of the following authors: Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 68-85, Henri Favre, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 438-441, Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 28-35, Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 49-51. See also these authors for the relation between the Church and the EZLN in the emergence of the Zapatista movement. All of these authors (except Favre) spent several months doing field research in Chiapas in the past few years.
organization in this region. Its main activities aimed at gaining better conditions for the commercialization of agricultural products for small producers and struggling against land evictions. For example, the Quiptic fought fiercely against a governmental decree which granted more than 600,000 hectares to a few Lacandones families in order to protect the rainforest. The enforcement of the decree threatened to evict several communities who had already settled the area.

In 1977, other political advisers of the Maoist group Política Popular (PP) joined the Quiptic UE. Coming from Torreon (near Mexico City), these activists had been invited by Bishop Ruiz to help the diocese's pastoral members in their grassroots organizing in the Selva Lacandona. In 1978, the PP dissolved and some of its members regrouped in Línea Proletaria (LP), another Maoist organization which included Union del Pueblo. In the following years, members of Línea Proletaria continued their collaboration with the diocese of Bishop Ruiz. It is important to note that they did not promote armed struggle, but rather focused on community building with a perspective that emphasizes the mobilization of the masses.155

Overall, the collaboration between the diocese of San Cristobal and Maoist advisers, though not always easy, remained fruitful. As Carlos Tello Díaz states, this partnership revealed to be very effective in fostering popular organization in several communities of the Selva Lacandona.156 Through their ongoing work, Maoist and pastoral agents encouraged grassroots

156 Carlos Tello Díaz, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
activism among settlers. This community building created important networks of interaction among communities and enlarged the social basis of the Quiptic.\textsuperscript{157} It also trained a growing number of peasant leaders and militants more eager to challenge authorities.\textsuperscript{158} It is in this environment and upon these networks that the EZLN would later build social support.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the UE Quiptic developed ties with other independent peasant organizations and formed the Union de Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas (UU). However, this alliance lasted only a few years. Due to internal dissension, the coalition collapsed in 1983. The Maoists advisers, divided among themselves and increasingly contested by local leaders, finally left the state of Chiapas after a decade of political activism in the rainforest. Their departure coincided with the arrival of FZL members in the Cañadas. As with the Maoists, Bishop Ruiz welcomed the coming of these political actors though they promoted armed struggle and were more radical in their approach.

\textit{The Spread of the EZLN}

When FZL members created the EZLN in 1983, they were a few isolated Marxist revolutionaries with no social basis. However, in a few years, the EZLN built important grassroots support in the Cañadas. The guerrilla movement was able to do so for two main reasons: the political conjuncture in which it arrived in the rainforest and the support it got from authorities of the diocese of San Cristóbal.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{ibid.}, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{158} See also Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 29-32; and Yvon Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 44-51.
FZL members arrived in Chiapas at a particular conjuncture (an issue that will be addressed in chapter four). This conjuncture was characterized, among other things, by increasing repression of the peasant movement by authorities and white guards. In this repressive local environment, a growing number of indigenous and peasant leaders expressed a willingness to resort to armed struggle in self-defense. Some members of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal were also considering the issue. In fact, along with a few close advisers, Bishop Ruiz created the Slop at the beginning of the 1980s. The Slop was an underground organization aimed notably at organizing peasants in self-defense. But in order to pursue such an activity, the Slop needed military expertise. The coming of FZL members in 1983 would provide precisely that expertise. It is in this context that the diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas decided to cooperate with the EZLN.

The collaboration between the diocese and the EZLN remained secret, partly in order to avoid aggravating divisions among members of the diocese. The diocese of San Cristobal, as explained above, comprised three orders: the Dominicans in Ocosingo, the Marists in Comitán and the Jesuits in Bachajón. The Marists and the Dominicans were generally more in favour of armed struggle than the Jesuits, who strongly opposed it. The Jesuits believed it would inevitably divided the population and be done at the expense of communities. Conversely, Bishop Ruiz, along with some

159 For more information regarding the creation of the Slop, see Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, op. cit., p. 167-168.
160 Carlos Tello Díaz, op. cit., p. 93.
161 Ibid., p. 102.
162 Ibid., p. 106.
164 Ibid.
Marist and Dominican members, though that it was necessary to organize peasants in self-defense to confront a repressive local environment. This is why the latter were initially inclined to work with the EZLN.

It is thus within the zones of influence of the Marists and the Dominicans that the EZLN contacted indigenous catechists and deacons in order to spread its influence. A key contact for the EZLN was Lázaro Hernández. Hernández, a former leader of the UE Quiptic, was in charge of indigenous deacons in his region, a key position within the diocese. The fact that Hernández became a cuadro for the EZLN quickly broadened the scope of the guerrilla movement. Indeed, Hernández was an influential figure among several communities of the Cañadas. As Carmen Legorreta states, when Hernández joined the EZLN, people interpreted this as a sign that the diocese approved the presence and activities of the guerrilla movement.\(^\text{165}\)

Following Hernández’s example, several other native deacons, catechists as well as peasant leaders, became cuadros for the EZLN and facilitated its penetration within their respective zone of influence.

The EZLN extended its social basis in the following years. But while the organization became stronger and that EZLN leaders started imposing their own agenda (launching a rebellion), divisions within the communities increased.\(^\text{166}\) There were growing tensions between those who supported the guerrilla movement and those who opposed it. These tensions were quite

\(^{165}\) Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, *op. cit.*, p. 163. Carmen Legorreta is a sociologist that has been working among native communities of the Selva Lacandona over the past several years.

intense within the ARIC: a peasant organization created in 1988 by former 
UE Quiptic leaders and representing more than six thousands families from 
130 communities.\textsuperscript{167} It is in this climate of confrontation that Bishop Ruiz 
decided in 1989 to stop cooperating with the EZLN. Realizing that EZLN 
leaders pursued their own revolutionary agenda and threatened the 
diocese's influence and power within the communities, Ruiz requested his 
pastoral agents to stop collaborating with the EZLN.\textsuperscript{168}

The partnership between the diocese and the EZLN thus lasted less 
than 6 years (1983-1989), but it was enough for the EZLN to built important 
grassroots support in the Selva Lacandona. In the following years, the 
Church succeeded in re-gaining some of its popular bases. Some believed 
this was one of the reasons why the EZLN leadership hurried to launch the 
rebellion since the guerrilla movement was losing popular support due to 
growing divisions among communities.\textsuperscript{169}

By the beginning of the 1990s, leaders of the ARIC succeeded in 
evicting pro-EZLN elements from the organization. These in turn formed in 
1991 the ANCIEZ, the political branch of the EZLN. The creation of the 
ANCIEZ marked an important date. The frontiers between moderates and 
radicals were now more clearly delimited: the ARIC and the Church on one 
hand and the ANCIEZ and the EZLN on the other. Tensions and conflicts 
increased between the two camps in the following months. This climate of 
violence came to a head in late 1993 when EZLN bases of support, who

\textsuperscript{167} Xochilt Leyva and Gabriel Ascensio, Quoted in Yvan Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{168} Henri Favre, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 441.
\textsuperscript{169} Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 123 and 165-166.
prepared the insurrection, expelled their opponents from the Cañadas. As a result, a massive flow of about 25,000 people fled the rainforest according to the International Red Cross.\textsuperscript{170} This impressive number of refugees (one third of the Cañadas' population) revealed the extent to which the EZLN's project brought intense communal strife. This massive "political cleansing" was in fact the prelude to the uprising.

\textit{Conclusion}

After its arrival in the Cañadas in 1983, the EZLN built important popular support over a few years. The EZLN was able to do so as it used the networks of interaction and contacts established by Maoist and Catholic pastoral members among native communities in the 1960s and 1970s. This is why Carmen Legorreta suggests that the previous political work of Maoist and Catholic activists eased the mobilizing task of the EZLN.\textsuperscript{171} In fact, as Charles Tilly points out, a conflicting group can reduce its "organizing costs" by building on "existing group structure" fostered by communal solidarity over the years.\textsuperscript{172} This is exactly what the EZLN did when it spread its influence by using networks of popular organization and contacts such as catechists and peasant leaders that became \textit{cuadros} for the \textit{guerrilla} movement.

However, Bishop Ruiz's support of the EZLN was also crucial in allowing the \textit{guerrilla} movement to penetrate several communities.

\textsuperscript{170} International Committee of the Red Cross, \textit{Annual Report 1994}, at: http://www.icrc.org/unics/icrcnews.nsf...47f540d7c412561e10004ba1a7?OpenDocument
See also Henri Favre, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 441.
\textsuperscript{171} See Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{172} Charles Tilly, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.
Without that support, EZLN members would have had difficulties in integrating native communities within the Catholic diocese's zones of influence (especially those of the Dominicans and the Marists). In a way, the diocese of San Cristóbal, and especially Bishop Ruiz, are to be held accountable for the ensuing climate of violence and division that started to prevail in the Cañadas when the EZLN undertook its revolutionary activities. Bishop Ruiz's ambivalence regarding the issue of armed struggle opened the door to this climate of violence which grew within several communities until the launching of the uprising.\textsuperscript{173} It remains, however, that a specific political conjuncture facilitated the EZLN's task in building social support. As chapter four shows, the difficult social and economic context, combined with a local oppressive environment, radicalized several peasant and indigenous leaders who then joined the EZLN.

\textsuperscript{173} Some Catholic Church representatives in fact blamed Bishop Ruiz to have played a dangerous game with the EZLN. See Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 170-172.
Chapter IV

The Conjuncture in which the EZLN Built Grassroots Support
Introduction

The EZLN built social support in a specific economic and political conjuncture. This conjuncture was one of increased tension between peasants and authorities stemming from the launching of significant structural reforms within the agricultural sector. These reforms, which severely affected the small peasantry, caused growing popular discontent. Confronted by local authorities who refused to address their concerns but instead resorted to repression, several peasants searched for a different alternative to defend their interests. Moreover, the fact that there were growing conflicts between peasants groups and the white guards further polarized the situation in Chiapas. This climate of confrontation convinced several indigenous peasants and leaders to rely on armed struggle in order to confront their repressive local environment. This in turn facilitated the EZLN’s task in penetrating many indigenous communities in order to organize peasants in self-defense (with the diocese’s consent). The militarization of the peasant movement, in this sense, opened the door to ensuing hostilities.

The third hypothesis of the theoretical framework suggests that the neo-liberal reforms pursued by the de la Madrid and Salinas governments, combined with an increase in repression from local authorities and white guards, radicalized several peasants who then joined the EZLN.\textsuperscript{174} Since the beginning of the 1980s, authorities enforced a number of policies which polarized the debate over land and engendered increasing tensions with

\textsuperscript{174} Luis Hernandez Navarro develops a similar view. See Navarro, The Chiapas Uprising, \textit{op. cit.}, p 50.
peasant organizations. These policies lay within the scope of a neo-liberal agenda aimed at modernizing an agricultural sector viewed as uncompetitive. However, this neo-liberal shift, coupled with a repressive local environment and spreading conflicts between white guards and peasants, facilitated the task of the EZLN in building social support.\textsuperscript{175}

To address the above hypothesis, the structure of the chapter is divided in three sections. Section one describes the government's initiatives concerning land redistribution in Chiapas before the 1980s. This brief historical background gives a sense of the social and political context prior to the neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s. Section two discusses the adjustments programs pursued by the de la Madrid and Salinas governments between 1982 and 1994. These reforms brought important popular resentment as they affected indigenous peasant communities who practice semi-subsistence agriculture. It is suggested that these reforms radicalized an important number of indigenous peasants and leaders, several of whom would support the EZLN in the rainforest. Finally, section three analyzes the initiatives of local PRI authorities towards independent peasant groups and the growing conflicts between peasants groups and white guards. It is argued that the hard-line tactics of PRI state authorities and the repressive tactics of white guards against peasant activists and leaders convinced several of the latter to organize in self-defense, with the support of the EZLN.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{175} Several authors acknowledge the importance of these factors in the worsening of the situation in Chiapas. See, for example, Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{The Chiapas Uprising}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{176} Alison Brysk and Carol Wise make an interesting comparative analysis between Bolivia, Mexico and Peru in which they argue that the lack of channels to express political protest can trigger violent rebellion. Their conclusions helped to build the before-stated hypothesis. See Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 1-4.
The Government's Initiatives in Chiapas Prior to the Neo-Liberal Shift in the 1980s: A Brief Historical Background

The agrarian reform, embodied in article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, was one of the core themes of the 1917 Revolution. It was in fact the main motive for Emiliano Zapata and thousands of peasant followers to launch their rebellion and march in Mexico City. However, in the following years, the Mexican government failed to implement such agrarian reform. It was only under the presidency of President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s that the State started to grant significant amounts of ejidos to numerous landless peasants. According to André Aubry, the government of Cárdenas distributed more than 18 millions hectares throughout Mexico of which 300,000 hectares were in Chiapas.\(^\text{177}\) President Cárdenas wanted to achieve the objectives of the 1917 Mexican Revolution and made important efforts to respond to peasant demands. This made him quite popular among the peasantry who perceived Cárdenas as one of the few presidents who understood and addressed their concerns.

Though less zealous than the Cárdenas government, subsequent administrations continued to redistribute lands in the following decades. For example, in Eastern Chiapas, the State redistributed over 1.3 million hectares between 1930 and 1991 among 25,000 peasants essentially in the Municipalities of Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas.\(^\text{178}\) Nevertheless, the authorities often delayed or interrupted land redistribution due to political pressure made by cattle ranchers and large landowners. Petitions for ejidos remained frequently unanswered and it became commonplace for

\(^{177}\) André Aubry, in Guiomar Rovira, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
\(^{178}\) Ascencio Franco and Leyva Solano, Quoted in Neil Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
peasants to wait years to get their *ejidos*. This situation was especially acute in Chiapas. Approximately one third of all un-resolved petitions for land is concentrated in this southern state.\textsuperscript{179}

Generally unwilling to fully implement the agrarian reform in order to avoid criticisms from large landowners, the government often sought other alternatives. In Chiapas, it encouraged the colonization of the Selva Lacandona region hoping to put off land redistribution in other parts of the state.\textsuperscript{180} But the government's initiatives remained inconsistent and often in contradiction with one another. For instance, the administration of President Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970) granted several *ejidos* to indigenous communities that had settled the Selva Lacandona. However, the subsequent President, Luis Echeverria, adopted a decree in 1972 which nullified Diaz's policy. The decree aimed to protect the tropical forest imperiled by the colonization process and it envisaged the re-location of thousands of indigenous families from the Selva Lacandona. In 1979, President Lopez Portillo enacted a similar bill which also threatened to evict thousands of indigenous colonizers.\textsuperscript{181} In reality, most of these policies aimed at expelling established settlers to allow state owned enterprises and private companies to exploit oil and timber resources in the rainforest. This

\textsuperscript{180} Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{181} For more information about the successive presidential decrees discussed above, see Martine Dauzier, "Guerre indienne en terre promise", \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 16-20. See also Carlos Montemayor, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 97-100.
caused great political tension in the region as native communities strongly resisted land evictions.\footnote{According to Navarro, it is not until 1989 that the government addressed the issue and compensated the communities. See Luis Hernandez Navarro, "The Chiapas Uprising", \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.}

The above laws enforced by authorities over the past several decades increased land pressure in the Selva Lacandona and engendered uninterrupted conflicts between independent peasant organizations and authorities. One of the main tasks of the UE Quiptic was in fact to fight against land evictions which were creating a lot of tensions. It is in this political context that the President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) launched new adjustments programs. This neo-liberal shift embraced by President Salinas de Gortari in 1988 was a turning point for the PRI. This shift created growing struggles within the regime between "dinosaurs" and neo-liberal technocrats. With the support of the US, PRI technocrats aimed at modernizing Mexico through free trade initiatives, privatization and democratic reforms.\footnote{Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 27-28.} However, this ambitious agenda threatened economic and political interests of PRI dinosaurs who, for example, could suffer from potential privatization of state-owned enterprises.

The pursuit of neo-liberal policies reduced the role of the state while weakening PRI mechanisms of social control. However, the breakdown of PRI "clientelist lines of control" was not really an issue in the Selva Lacandona as governmental institutions were not present in this region.\footnote{Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.} In fact, "priista" organizations such as the CNC (Confederación Nacional
Campesina: the official peasant organization) were absent from the rainforest.\textsuperscript{185} The Selva Lacandona was the stronghold of independent peasant organizations (not affiliated with the PRI) such as the UE Quiptic and later the ARIC. Only a few agents from the INI (National Indian Institute; a federal agency) were active in this remote area in order to help settler communities. However, as it will be demonstrated, INI's initiatives were countered in the 1980s by local state authorities that opposed any help or subsidies granted to peasant organizations not affiliated with the PRI.

It is important to analyze neo-liberal policies of the de la Madrid and Salinas governments in order to understand the context of growing social and political instability in the rural sector in the 1980s. Though the de la Madrid and Salinas implemented programs such as PROCAMPO and PRONASOL\textsuperscript{186} in order to reduce the impact of neo-liberal policies, their agenda provoked significant popular discontent. It is in fact during this period that several peasant and indigenous leaders became radicalized in response to unpopular restructuring reforms and a repressive local environment.

\textit{The Neo-Liberal Policies of the de la Madrid and Salinas Governments}

The 1982 debt crisis shook most Latin American economies. The crisis caused important problems of insolvency and forced many Latin American governments to launch restructuring programs to service their debt. These adjustment policies in turn engendered severe internal economic crises and

\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{186} PROCAMPO means the Programa Nacional de Apoyos Directos al Campo. PRONASOL means the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad.
growing problems of impoverishment and marginalization throughout Central and South America. This crisis is among the reasons why this period is often described as being the "Latin America's Lost Decade". Indeed, prospects for economic growth were almost non-existent for several years.

The 1982 debt shock severely hit the Mexican economy. As George Collier points out, the drop in world petroleum prices put Mexico in a very precarious situation as the country could not pay off its foreign debts.\textsuperscript{187} This situation forced President de la Madrid to adopt a "stabilizing plan" to reassure international borrowers and allow Mexico to recover economic stability. In accordance with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), de la Madrid implemented a series of adjustment policies. The strategy aimed at reducing the role of the state in the economy and letting the private sector promote growth. Concretely, this meant significant cuts in welfare programs and subsidies, the privatizing of hundreds of state owned enterprises, and the removal of protectionist barriers to encourage foreign investments.\textsuperscript{188} As one analyst points out, Mexico shifted in a few years from one of the most protectionist countries to one most opened into the international trading system.\textsuperscript{189}


\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{189} \textit{Ibid}.
As in most Latin American countries, these neo-liberal reforms caused important problems and imperiled the social fabric in Mexico. In the rural sector, the small peasantry suffered important social and economic costs. The state's objective to promote commercial agriculture to the detriment of small plot cultivation, practised by most native communities, seriously affected *ejidatorios* (*ejido* owners). With the progressive withdrawal of the state, a growing number of peasants were unable to find financial and technical assistance and many were caught in a vicious cycle of debts. As a result, flows of impoverished peasants abandoned their lands and material possessions to search for employment in the cities.\footnote{190}

*The Reform in the Maize Sector*

During this difficult period, the de la Madrid administration undertook the reform of the maize sector. Chiapas has the largest maize production in Mexico. In 1990, more than 91\% of its *ejidatorios* were involved in that sector.\footnote{191} The majority of maize producers practice small plot cultivation. Most of them depend heavily on the state which provides credits, subsidies and buys maize producers' surplus crops at fixed rates. However, faced with a severe debt crisis, the de la Madrid government reduced its subsidies to this sector an average of 13\% a year.\footnote{192} Such a decrease severely affected small peasants who became caught in debt in order to access credits.

\footnote{190}{For more details about the points developed above regarding the impact of restructuring policies in the rural sector, see George Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 23.}

\footnote{191}{Neil Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.11 and 16. Some of the points mentioned in this section (regarding the Maize reform) are derived from Harvey's observations. See Neil Harvey, *Ibid*, pp. 11-17.}

The Salinas government (1988-1994) pursued the reforms undertaken by Miguel de la Madrid. President Salinas wanted to modernize the agricultural sector in order to increase productivity, exports and foreign investment. But in this context of trade liberalization, he viewed small plot cultivation (practised by most maize producers) as backward and uncompetitive. As Mexico would soon accede to the NAFTA, the country had to promote and support large scale producers and other export-oriented industries which could compete with American and Canadian producers. However, "regressive" subsidies which allowed small maize producers to sell their surplus at a guaranteed price had to be eventually eliminated as they were deemed contradictory to the spirit of free trade.

With the launching of the Programa Nacional de Apoyos Directos al Campo (PROCAMPO) in 1993, Salinas moved towards the above objective. Though PROCAMPO aimed in the short run at easing the effects of the state's withdrawal from direct subsidies to small producers, its final goal was to abolish guaranteed prices in order to let international prices determine the demand for Mexico's maize production by 2008.¹⁹³ This eventual elimination of fixed prices posed a threat to the small peasantry as it meant a complete laissez-faire policy in the maize sector. In this context, it would be difficult for hundreds of thousands of Mexican peasants to compete with foreign markets that would essentially provide maize at a cheaper rate.¹⁹⁴ As Harvey and Calva point out,

Average yields in Mexico are 1.7 tons per hectares, compared to 6.9 tons in the United States. Disparities in terms of technological development, ... infrastructure, and climatological factors also place Mexican producers at a great disadvantage.  

Nevertheless, PROCAMPO subsidies were generally positively received by small peasants as they could make interesting gains in the short term. Since the Salinas administration launched PROCAMPO a year before the 1994 presidential election, some observers suggested this program was part of a strategy to gain votes for the PRI. It appears that this strategy was successful in some rural areas. According to field research conducted by Lynn Stephen in a few ejidos of the state of Oaxaca, most peasants welcomed these direct subsidies and stated that they would vote for the PRI, even though many knew that PROCAMPO was part of an electoral strategy. However, such an electoral strategy was perhaps less effective in a region like the Cañadas where the presence of the PRI remained weak at the local level in the past several decades.

The decision of Presidents de la Madrid and Salinas to carry on with their privatization and liberalization agenda in the maize sector brought instability and significant popular discontent. Small maize producers were in fact seriously hit by the reduction of state subsidies and were often left on their own. Though programs such as PROCAMPO eased restructuring reforms in the short run by directly subsidizing small producers, these were

195 Calva (1992), Quoted in Neil Harvey, Ibid.
196 See Neil Harvey, op. cit., p. 16
197 Ibid, p. 17
temporary measures. In reality, the economic context remained precarious and a growing number of small maize producers saw the forecoming of a deterioration in their situation and an uncertain future. 199

The Reform in the Coffee Sector

The restructuring of the coffee sector was another important reform adopted by the Salinas government. This reform lay within the scope of the neo-liberal program pursued by the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations. It aimed at reducing the role of the state that had supported the commercialization of coffee in previous decades. But as was the case with maize, this adjustment policy engendered significant social costs among the small peasantry and thereby increased tensions and protest in the rural sector.

Chiapas has the highest production of coffee in Mexico. As with the maize sector, most coffee producers practice small plot cultivation. In fact, 91% of the 73,742 producers of the state (16,939 in the conflict zone) possess less than five hectares and depend on state assistance to market and export their production. 200 In the past decades, the government developed programs to facilitate the commercialization of coffee among the small peasantry. For example, in 1958, it created the National Mexican Coffee Institute (INMECAFE). The mission of INMECAFE was to support the marketing and export of coffee by providing credits, subsidies and technical

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199 Navarro suggests that this context eased the EZLN's recruiting process. See Luis Hernandez Navarro, op. cit., pp. 50-51.
200 Luis Hernandez Navarro, Chiapas: la guerra y la paz, op. cit., p. 49. For more information regarding the restructuring of the coffee sector and about the facts discussed in this subsection, see Navarro, Ibid, pp. 49-51.
assistance.\textsuperscript{201} For small producers, this governmental assistance remained vital in order to sell their products.

Nonetheless, the Salinas administration, following its neo-liberal doctrine, began the privatization of INMECAFE in 1989. Though INMECAFE's funds remained essential for the great majority of coffee producers in order to cover their costs of marketing, the government withdrew its support. Moreover, the significant drop of international coffee prices in 1989 worsened the already precarious situation of Mexican coffee producers. Contrary to most countries exporting coffee, the Mexican government refused to assist its own producers who were severely hit by the crisis.\textsuperscript{202} As a result, between 1989 and 1993, the incomes of coffee producers decreased by 65% and the production of coffee dropped by 35% in Mexico.\textsuperscript{203}

This reform of the coffee sector, like other reforms already taken, was in line with the assumption that small plot cultivation for coffee production was uncompetitive as it required significant ongoing state support. According to this view, the export-oriented sectors which bring foreign capital at home were not the small maize and coffee enterprises (practised on a semi-subsistence basis with state assistance) but rather large timber and cattle industries.\textsuperscript{204} Overall, the reform of the coffee sector created significant popular resentment towards the authorities as it left small producers on

\textsuperscript{201} June Nash, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 391.
\textsuperscript{202} Luis Hernandez Navarro, \textit{Chiapas: la guerra y la paz, op. cit.}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{204} Andrew Reding develops a similar point of view in the following article: Andrew Reding, "Chiapas is Mexico; The Imperative of Political Reform", \textit{World Policy Journal}, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1994, p. 15.
their own with the prospect of greater impoverishment. Indeed, the withdrawal of INMECAFE and the ensuing world drop in coffee prices forced coffee producers to absorb significant increases in their expenses. In the Selva Lacandona, the EZLN channeled part of that resentment and despair in convincing many peasants affected by the above changes to join the movement.205

The Modification of Article 27

Of all the adjustment policies pursued by the Salinas administration, it is surely the modification of article 27 which brought the most hostility against the government in the rural sector. In fact, by modifying article 27, the Salinas government not only adopted an important bill affecting ejido owners, but also attacked one of the greatest myths in Mexico: Emilio Zapata and the struggle for agrarian reform.

As mentioned in the first section, one of the fundamental gains of the 1917 Mexican revolution was the agrarian reform. The 1917 Constitution enacted the "Land Reform Act" which specifies that ejidos had to be redistributed and exploited on a communal base; i.e. they cannot be sold and are constitutionally protected from such a practice.206 For many indigenous communities, the granting of ejidos remained vital as it was often the only way to access a piece of land to practice small plot cultivation.207 However, the authorities often delayed or interrupted land redistribution due to

205 According to Luis Hernandez Navarro, the institutional reform affecting the coffee sector was one of the main causes of the insurrection. See Navarro, op. cit. p. 49.
206 Martine Dauzier, "L'article 27 de la Constitution de 1997", in Feu Maya, Ethnies, Vol. 9, No. 16-17, Automne 1994, p. 302. See also June Nash, op. cit., p. 311.
207 Martine Dauzier, op. cit.
political pressure made by private owners. In 1989, for example, there were still more than 2 millions peasants petitioning for an ejido while another 4 millions peasants were landless.\textsuperscript{208}

It is in this context that the Salinas administration modified article 27 to permit the sale of communal land. The reform established that the ejido was no longer a communal property, but rather an individual one which could be sold to a third party.\textsuperscript{209} For numerous peasants in debt, there was a great temptation to sell their ejidos to estate owners or private companies seeking land for timber or oil development projects (especially in the Selva Lacandona). In the long run, this reform could further increase land concentration among a few privileged, which is precisely the opposite objective of the agrarian reform.

Moreover, the amendment of article 27 announced the termination of agrarian reform. For numerous peasants that had been waiting for an ejido for years, this put an end to any future hope of land redistribution. The agrarian reform, repeatedly delayed and only partially implemented, was now over.\textsuperscript{210} For the small peasantry, the reforms pursued by the Salinas government, whether for the maize and coffee sectors or the ejido use, sent an unequivocal message. Many believed that the government's policies aimed at encouraging export-oriented industries to the detriment of semi-subsistence agriculture. This radicalized an increasing number of peasants who became convinced that authorities were more interested in the

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Martine Dauzier, "Guerre indienne en terre promise", op. cit., p. 25.
imperatives of free trade than the concerns of Mexican peasants. In the Selva Lacandona, EZLN leaders surely capitalized on these very unpopular reforms in order to convince their grassroots to launch an insurrection in a near future.

The National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL)

In order to ease the program of privatization and economic liberalization in the rural sector and to fight against growing marginalization in Mexico, the Salinas administration launched the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL).\textsuperscript{211} The program aimed at redistributing public funds in education, health and infrastructure projects in the regions having high levels of poverty, such as the state of Chiapas (especially among indigenous populations). According to the estimates of PRI technocrats, from 1989 to 1993, the Mexican government spent about $11.9 billion through PRONASOL to promote social development.\textsuperscript{212}

Some analysts underline the fact that PRONASOL did not achieve the objectives it originally set out to pursue. Though the above amount of public investment looks impressive, these analysts argue that PRI governors, local authorities and corrupt bureaucrats used some of these funds for their own purposes and partisan objectives.\textsuperscript{213} There is in fact a long-standing political tradition in Mexico of the PRI using public funds to ensure and promote ruling party interests.

\textsuperscript{211} Martine Dauzier, "Crise du Chiapas, crise du Pronasol?", in \textit{Feu Maya, Ethnies}, Vol. 9, No. 16-17, Automne 1994, p. 306.
\textsuperscript{212} Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Ibid}. See also Martine Dauzier, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 306-309 and Yvon Le Bot, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 59.
The pursuit of development projects through PRONASOL often revealed a spirit of improvisation. For example, in Guadalupe Tepeya, a remote village in the rainforest, authorities built a huge modern hospital which remained empty after its inauguration as it lacked employees and equipment.214 Some noted that the hospital of Guadalupe Tepeya is only one of many examples of the lack of coordination by the state government in managing PRONASOL funds.215 In the same vein, many stated that the PRONASOL experience revealed the unwillingness of local authorities to enforce a progressive program for the benefit of the most marginalized, instead being used for partisan goals. This was especially the case in Chiapas during the governorship of Patrocinio Gonzales Garrido (1988-1994) who created a "state-level fund" under his control and granted subsidies to municipal presidents or organizations loyal to the PRI such as the CNC.216

Nevertheless, despite corruption and a lack of coordination, PRONASOL funds reached several native communities, including those of the Selva Lacandona. What is worth stressing is that the EZLN grassroots support used some of these funds in order to buy weapons and finance the guerrilla movement's infrastructure and activities.217 It is quite ironic that a solidarity program originally set up to alleviate poverty (while promoting support for the PRI) was ultimately used to arm a movement that launched a full scale rebellion against the Mexican government.

214 Yvan Le Bot, op. cit., p. 59.
215 Ibid.
216 Neil Harvey, op. cit., p. 20.
217 Henri Favré, op. cit., p. 440.
Overall, the neo-liberal reforms of the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations had important social costs which exacerbated political tensions in the rural sector. Within peasant organizations such as the ARIC, there were increasing conflicts between moderates who wanted to persist in the institutional path and radicals who promoted armed struggle while recruiting for the EZLN.\(^{218}\) For the radicals, the pursuit of neo-liberal reforms revealed to what extent the government was disconnected from peasants' needs. They argued that in this context the only remaining path was that of armed struggle.

The difficult economic conjuncture engendered by the de la Madrid and Salinas' restructuring reforms surely eased the task of the EZLN in recruiting supporters. In this radicalization process, however, the increased repression of peasant organizations and native communities remained a key factor. As will be demonstrated in the following pages, the favouring of a hard-line strategy by local PRI authorities and the climate of confrontation between peasant communities and white guards facilitated the spread of the EZLN in the Selva Lacandona.\(^{219}\)

*The Growth of Political Repression and the Escalation of Violence*  

The failure of authorities to provide political space for protest and to rely instead on coopting and repressive methods can influence the incidence of violence.\(^{220}\) While the adjustment policies implemented by the de la

\(^{218}\) See Luis Hernandez Navarro, *op. cit.*, p. 50.  
\(^{219}\) Navarro, like several other observers such as Neil Harvey, June Nash and Yvan Le Bot, also suggests that the repressive tactics of local PRI authorities and the white guards radicalized several peasants. See *Ibid.*  
\(^{220}\) Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-4.
Madrid and the Salinas administrations imperiled the social fabric of the Mexican rural sector, in Chiapas, independent peasant organizations such as the Quipic, and later the ARIC, protested against these reforms. But they often confronted local authorities who refused to address their demands. In fact, under the leadership of the PRI governors Absalón Castellanos Domínguez (1982-1988) and Patrocinio Gonzales Garrido (1988-1994), the state government frequently resorted to repressive methods against the independent peasant movement to discourage any kind of protest or activism.

Moreover, spreading conflicts between peasant groups and white guards were a key factor in the polarization of the situation. Confronted by white guards and their violent tactics, an increasing number of indigenous and peasant leaders expressed a willingness to rely on armed struggle in order to confront their repressive environment. As a result, the EZLN penetrated several native communities in the rainforest in order to organize them in self-defense (initially with Bishop Ruiz's consent). An analysis of this local repressive climate is thus required to understand the context in which the EZLN built social support.


Before being appointed as state governor of Chiapas in 1982, General Absalón made the headlines in Mexico. As commander of the 31st military zone, he violently repressed a peaceful occupation of a ranch by Tzetal

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221 Some observers pointed out that the first task of the EZLN was to organize native communities in self-defense in response to a context of intense repression. See Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, *op. cit.*, p. 110. See also Yvon Le Bot, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
Indians who denounced land concentration. The troops commanded by Absalón killed several Indians. General Absalón, himself a cattle rancher possessing several estates, strongly advocated a hard-line tactic against indigenous groups struggling for land redistribution. He maintained this attitude during his tenure as the governor of Chiapas between 1982 and 1988.

Indeed, the repression against peasant leaders and indigenous activists increased tremendously under his administration. According to a study conducted by CIACH, Chiapas held the record of human right abuses in Mexico during Absalón's regime. It is worth stressing that 72% of these human rights violations targeted peasant activists. This reveals the extent of the repression against the independent peasant movement. Generally, the army, the local police and the white guards were suspected of most of the abuses. In Chiapas, public and private security forces usually serve the interest of the ladino oligarchy that possesses considerable economic and political power. In fact, this oligarchy of estate owners, timber barons and big merchants is very close to PRI political leaders, including the governor himself. These actors in turn control regional politics through municipal presidents while using the police, the army or the white guards to effectively shut down any kind of political opposition.

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223 Ibid.
224 Para Entender Chiapas, op. cit., p. 49.
225 Ibid.
226 Luis Hernández Navarro, op. cit., p. 53.
227 Navarro makes a good analysis of the networks of alliances in Chiapas' politics. Ibid.
The use of the white guards by large landowners to protect their domain has been a common practice in Chiapas over the last several decades. It was in fact a decree made by governor Samuel Leon Brindis in 1961 that legalized the existence of these private security forces.\(^{228}\) Since then, numerous violent confrontations occurred between peasant organizations that denounced land concentration and white guards who protected estate owners' property. In the past few years, several reports have highlighted the human right violations (assassinations, kidnapping torture, and so on) committed by white guards against peasant leaders and their followers.\(^{229}\) But despite this climate of terror and confrontation, General Absalón, and especially his successor, Patrocínio Gonzales Garrido, did not discourage the recourse to these private forces and did nothing to prevent these conflicts. On the contrary, the fact that human rights violations increased during their governorship reveals that white guards often acted with impunity.

*The Administration of Patrocínio Gonzales Garrido (1988-1994)*

The governorship of Patrocínio Gonzales Garrido continued the Absalón administration's policies and tactics. On the one hand, Gonzales pursued the cooptation tactics of his PRI predecessors, manipulating peasants leaders through special subsidies, individual land titles or political favours.\(^{230}\) On the other hand, Gonzales opted for a hard-line strategy against

\(^{228}\) See *La Opinión*, No. 79, *op. cit.*


\(^{230}\) Alison Brysk and Carol Wise described some of the cooptation methods pursued by PRI state authorities in Mexico over the past several decades. See Carol Wise and Alison Brysk, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
independent peasant organizations petitioning for lands or calling for political changes and state accountability. On several occasions, state authorities sent in the army and the police to repress protests and invasions of estate owners' lands. For example, in July 1991, the police violently broke up a peaceful indigenous demonstration in the Selva Lacandona.\textsuperscript{231} Local police also harassed independent peasant groups' leaders and activists, often conducting illegal arrests and detentions.

Perhaps as an attempt to prevent the growth of indigenous and peasant activism in Chiapas, the Gonzales Garrido government undertook a reform of the state's Penal Code. This controversial initiative caused much resentment within the independent peasant movement. According to Vargas, the new criminal code is probably one of the most repressive in Latin America.\textsuperscript{232} For example, it holds severe penalties for people gathering together in a public protest. For this offence, one may be accused of rebellion and receive from 2 to 10 years in prison. Moreover, the Code defines a riot as a crime "when a group of individuals are gathered in large numbers to disrupt the public order"... and resist "seriously" public servants in the exercise of their function.\textsuperscript{233} For such an offence, one may be imprisoned from 2 to 4 years.

With such vague definitions subject to all kinds of interpretation, authorities could arrest and imprison anybody participating in a peaceful

\textsuperscript{231} Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{232} Jorge A Vargas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 23.
protest that denounced the government. According to the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights,

The new criminal code of the state of Chiapas has been notoriously used by the government to oppress its citizenry. The code provides for a variety of vaguely defined political offenses that state government official may selectively enforce against dissidents or political opponents to maintain its tight control over the state population. The code's provisions may be interpreted to criminalize nearly every gathering of people who assemble publicly to protest governmental conduct or inaction. The State's enforcement of those provisions - against even peaceful protesters - has filled overcrowded prisons with political prisoners.\textsuperscript{234}

This can be witnessed by the nearly three thousand indigenous peasants imprisoned during the Gonzales governorship.\textsuperscript{235} Among them, a large number are political prisoners.

In addition to restraining space for popular participation, the Gonzales government also prevented federal public institutions from subsidizing peasant organizations and indigenous communities not affiliated with the PRI. For example, in 1990, the state government pressed the regional director of the National Indian Institute (INI) to resign as he was collaborating with independent peasant organizations.\textsuperscript{236} In 1992, three important INI officials were arrested for the same reason, but authorities finally released them. These facts revealed the extent to which the Gonzales Garrido government remained against any kind of project which could benefit independent peasant organizations, even though these initiatives came from the INI, a "priista" federal agency. The danger with such a hard-line attitude is to be


\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Para Entender Chiapas}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{236} Neil Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.
felt in the mid- or long-run: it creates an explosive social context which may degenerate into political violence.

In this explosive social context, conflicts between peasant groups and white guards, which proliferated under Absalón and Gonzales' administrations, were a key factor in radicalizing native communities. Confronted with the repressive tactics of estate owners' security forces (assassinations, kidnappings, death threats), several peasants and native leaders decided to resort to armed struggle in self-defense. The diocese of San Cristobal was the key contact between these peasant leaders and the EZLN. It is in fact with the assistance of the diocese's pastoral agents that EZLN members penetrated native communities in order to organize peasants into self-defense units.\textsuperscript{237} Diocese members, in this sense, acted as crucial intermediaries between the guerrilla movement and the communities. Without that support, the EZLN would not have been able to spread so easily. In the following years, the EZLN rapidly built important grassroots bases within the Catholic diocese zones of influence (especially those of the Dominicans and the Marists).\textsuperscript{238}

The climate of confrontation with the white guards thus facilitated the EZLN's diffusion within several communities of the Selva Lacandona. Once in the communities, the EZLN was able to position itself and expand. With the support of Catholic deacons and catechists (who became cuadros for the guerrilla movement), the EZLN penetrated the ARIC, the main

\textsuperscript{237} Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{238} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 106-107.
peasant organization in the rainforest in the late 1980s. EZLN's _cuadros_ were quite successful in recruiting supporters within the ARIC. According to the president of the ARIC, about 40% of its members started supporting the guerrilla movement in the late 1980s. The ARIC was in fact gravely divided due to intense internal struggles between moderates and radicals. Moderates finally expelled EZLN supporters from the ARIC by the beginning of the 1990s. The latter in turn created the ANCIEZ in 1991.

Some analysts suggest that the modification of article 27 in 1992 was the triggering event for the launching of the uprising. According to this view, the reform created such popular discontent that it convinced the EZLN's bases of support to rebel. Other observers point out, that though the _ejido_ reform caused significant resentment, the EZLN grassroots remained divided with regards to the uprising project. In fact, it appears that EZLN leaders (Marcos in particular) manipulated the results of the consultations held within pro-EZLN villages in order to convince the FZL leadership that an overwhelming majority of communities were in favor of the rebellion. But though these facts may be true, it remains that several communities were disposed to uprise in 1992. In this regards, the reform of article 27 certainly further radicalized a growing number of EZLN supporters who became convinced that the only option remaining was to mobilize against the government in order to stop the implementation of such restructuring policies and push forward their demands.

239 See Luis Hernandez Navarro, _Chiapas: la guerra y la paz_, op. cit., p. 120.
240 See, for exemple, Yvon Le Bot, _op. cit._, p. 62.
241 _Ibid._, pp. 62 and 150.
242 Bertrand de la Grange, _op. cit._, pp. 128 and 166.
243 _Ibid._, p. 128.
Conclusion

A specific political conjuncture facilitated the spread of the EZLN among several indigenous communities of the Selva Lacandona. As chapter four emphasized, this context is one of profound upheaval in the rural sector and of increased repression of independent peasant organizations by local authorities. By launching their structural adjustment programs, the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations provoked an acute social crisis. Though federal authorities implemented programs such as PROCAMPO and PRONASOL to ease restructuring reforms, the withdrawal of state support from critical sectors (maize, coffee) caused significant popular discontent in the rural sector. Indeed, these adjustment reforms had important social costs and engendered growing protest from autonomous peasant organizations. Moreover, the fact that the Absalón and Garrido governments relied on repressive methods against autonomous peasant organization further polarized the situation. In reality, Chiapas lacked spaces for political participation and protest. This remains essential in a context of social polarization.

In the worsening of the situation, the violent conflicts opposing peasants with the white guards were a determining factor. Confronted with increasing repression, a growing number of peasant leaders and activists wanted to rely on armed struggle in self-defense. At this point, the role of the diocese of San Cristobal remained crucial in facilitating the integration of the EZLN within several native communities of the Cañadas. Hence, the climate of violence and confrontation with white guards acted as a catalyst
for the militarization of the Selva Lacandona. This climate ultimately set up the conditions for the escalation of violence and the ensuing uprising.
Conclusion
During peace talks in the village of San Andrés, EZLN and government delegates discussed issues of land, political representation, resource management and economic and cultural rights for Mexican native communities. After several months of discussion, the two parties signed the San Andrés agreements. These accords describe the guiding principles Mexican government must follow in order to implement political and institutional changes that would address the above issues. What is worth stressing is that the San Andrés accords gathered broad support among several peasant and native movements in Chiapas. For example, coalitions such as the COAECCH, which regroups many important peasant and indigenous organizations in Chiapas, strongly supported the accords. In the same vein, the ARIC, which is the main peasant organization in the Selva Lacandona, welcomed the accords and pressed the government to fulfill them.

The broad consensus for the San Andrés agreements reveals that this settlement represented a promising path towards the resolution of the crisis in Chiapas. The accords in fact highlight native and peasant grievances that need to be addressed in order to ease the climate of social polarization in this region. However, though these grievances shed light on background factors fueling the Chiapas crisis, they do not explain why certain native communities mobilized with the EZLN while others did not. In order to understand the genesis of the Zapatista movement, one has to acknowledge the role of some political and religious actors as well as the context in which the EZLN built grassroots support.
In the 1960s and 1970s, members of the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas, along with Maoist political advisers, played a central role of community building in the Selva Lacandona. Through their ongoing activism, these actors fostered networks of interaction and communal solidarity within several communities of the rainforest. As most observers point out, this ongoing grassroots activism encouraged the growth of powerful autonomous peasant organizations such as the Quiptic and later the ARIC. These organizations in turn further strengthened organizational networks among native communities of the Selva Lacandona.

What is worth stressing is that the EZLN used the above networks in order to spread its influence in the rainforest in the 1980s. In doing so, the EZLN got the support of the diocese of San Cristobal. Since Bishop Ruiz and some of his colleagues had already considered the issue of armed struggle (through the Slop), they welcomed the coming of EZLN members as an opportunity to organize self-defense units within the communities.\textsuperscript{244} The initial support of the Church remained crucial for the EZLN. In fact, the \textit{guerrilla} movement rapidly spread within the diocese's zones of influence. With the assistance of several catechists and deacons who became \textit{cuadros} for the guerrilla movement, the EZLN quickly expanded in a few years (mainly within the Marist and the Dominican zones of control).\textsuperscript{245} From a marginal guerrilla involving a few Marxist revolutionaries, the EZLN thus quickly became a movement with important popular support. The EZLN, in

\textsuperscript{244} Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 167-168. See also, Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 106-107.
\textsuperscript{245} For more information on the role of the EZLN\textit{cuadros}, see Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 160-175. See also Carlos Tello Diaz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 102-103.
this sense, reduced its mobilizing cost by building on the "existing group structure" and networks of solidarity to which Charles Tilly refers.\textsuperscript{246} In other words, the EZLN recruited supporters by capitalizing on organizational networks that had been fostered by the Church and Maoist activist in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{247}

One has also to take into account the difficult economic and political conjuncture that prevailed in Chiapas in the 1980s to understand the rapid expansion of the EZLN. This conjuncture, as explained, was one of profound upheaval in the rural sector due to the neo-liberal reforms pursued by the Salinas and de la Madrid governments. Though authorities launched programs such as PROCAMPO and PRONASOL to ease the impact of restructuring policies, their neo-liberal agenda created significant popular discontent and radicalized a growing number of peasants that would join the EZLN. Moreover, the fact that the local PRI state government failed to allow spaces for political protest and instead relied on repressive tactics (sending the army or the police to silence peasant protests) further polarized the situation. In this oppressive local environment, the growing conflicts between white guards and peasants activists were a determining factor in radicalizing peasants.\textsuperscript{248} Confronted with a repressive local environment, several peasant and indigenous leaders decided to rely on armed struggle in self-defense. This climate of confrontation thus facilitated the EZLN's

\textsuperscript{246} Charles Tilly, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{247} Carmen Legorreta suggests that the previous work of the Church and the Maoist activists facilitated the mobilizing task of the EZLN. See Bertrand de la Grange and Maite Rico, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{248} Most observers acknowledge the importance of conflicts between the white guards and peasant organizations in polarizing the situation in Chiapas.
integration into several indigenous communities, which would become the
group's operations and support bases. The militarization of the peasant
movement was in this regard a prelude to the coming uprising.

On January 1, 1994, the EZLN launched its rebellion and captured
several municipalities as well as some important cities in Chiapas. After a
few days of intense fighting, the Salinas government declared unilateral
cease-fire and proposed to engage in a dialogue with the Zapatistas. Some
observers suggested that Salinas moved towards dialogue in order to
preserve Mexico's image within the context of NAFTA. Mexico had in fact
been under great international scrutiny through intense media coverage and
there were growing struggles within the PRI regime between hard-liners and
those in favour of a negotiated solution.

Salinas finally opted for negotiations. The peace talks between the
government and the Zapatistas began in February 1994 at the Cathedral of
San Cristobal with Bishop Ruiz as mediator. Both the government and the
Zapatistas accepted the participation of Bishop Ruiz. But one may question
the federal government's motives for accepting Ruiz's presence since he
initially played an active role in the growth of the guerrilla movement
before breaking with EZLN leaders in 1989. In many ways, Ruiz could not be
a neutral mediator. This observation contradicts the comments made by
Miguel Alvaro Gandara, who is Bishop Ruiz's Special Secretary. In an
interview, Gandara praised Ruiz's capacity to act as a credible mediator since
the latter has great moral credibility among indigenous communities in
Chiapas.\textsuperscript{249} However, Ruiz could not be a neutral intermediary since he was obviously in a position of conflict of interest. In fact, Ruiz's hidden relationship with the EZLN clearly compromised his neutrality. Moreover, Ruiz did not have such strong moral authority in the Selva Lacandona as was claimed. Proof of this is the fact that he was contested within his own diocese and among native communities as a result of his ambivalence towards the EZLN and the issue of armed struggle in general.\textsuperscript{250}

Despite these troubling facts, important progress was made in the following months to bring the conflicting parties to a compromise. The government and the Zapatistas finally signed the San Andrés agreements in February 1996. The accords were broadly received in Mexico as an encouraging step towards the resolution of the crisis in Chiapas. But after a detailed analysis of the accords, the federal government refused to comply with them without re-negotiation. Authorities feared having conceded too much to the Zapatistas and, to a larger extent, the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Zedillo often mentioned that compliance with the San Andrés agreements would result in the balkanization of the country. In reality, many suggest that the government feared that state and private development projects would be compromised in regions having high percentages of indigenous populations.\textsuperscript{251} Indeed, the accords made provisions for important constitutional changes granting political autonomy to indigenous communities and allowing them to manage their territory's

\textsuperscript{249} Interview with Miguel Gandara, Mexico City, 17/07/1997.
\textsuperscript{250} Some in fact criticized Ruiz's conduct with regards to subversive elements such as the EZLN. See Bertrand de la Grange, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 170-172.
\textsuperscript{251} On these matters, see the \textit{Chiapas Study Report}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 5-6. See also June Nash, "The Power of the Powerless...", \textit{op. cit.}, p. 25.
resources. These issues represent tremendous amounts of money in regions such as in the Selva Lacandona (which has important natural resources). In this regard, those involved in resource exploitation projects (many of whom are within or close to the ruling party) surely put important pressure on the Zedillo administration so that authorities would not comply with the accords.\textsuperscript{252}

The government’s refusal to comply with the accords compromised the negotiation process. The EZLN in fact refused to pursue dialogue until the full implementation of the agreements. Since then, the EZLN and the government mutually blamed each other of sabotaging the negotiation process, all the while hardening their respective position. This tense climate may be a prelude to an escalation of violence in Chiapas. The only way of avoiding such a situation lies in a renewal of negotiation towards a political pact with indigenous peoples in Mexico. The San Andrés agreements provided this path to change. In this regard, the challenge for the Mexican government is to convince elements within the regime that a solution to the Chiapas issue lies in the undertaking of important reforms which may affect the structure of the political regime.

In the same vein, another challenge is to establish a climate of transparency into the negotiations. In this regard, the presence of \textit{neutral} and credible mediators is obligatory. Moreover, the involvement of other actors, such as representatives from peasant and native organizations in Chiapas (for example, the ARIC or the COAECH), might be a good way to

\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Ibid.}
broaden the negotiation process and thereby give it some credibility. After all, the EZLN does not speak as a transparent voice for Chiapas native communities. However, one has to be aware that the conditions named above may be difficult to achieve. The reality remains that peace talks always require money, time, resources, and more importantly, a political commitment from all parties involved.
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