The Zapatista Effect:
The Internet and the Rise of an
Alternative Political Fabric

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The primacy of the nation state is being challenged from both above and below. From above, after the Second World War, the growth in the power and scope of supranational institutions—from multinational corporations to the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund—have gradually usurped national sovereignty in both economic and political matters.[1] More recently, from below, the increasingly active role of regional and city governments in foreign trade, immigration and political issues have challenged national governments' constitutional monopoly over foreign affairs.[2] Simultaneously, there has been tremendous

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growth in cross-border networks among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the hundreds that mobilized against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Not only do such networks outflank national government policymakers; they often work directly against their policies.[3]

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[1] It is interesting to note that fears of the impingement of national sovereignty seem to have proliferated on the right of the political spectrum in the North (e.g., traditional conservative fears of a one-world government or contemporary anti-immigrant racism) and on the left in the South (e.g., anti-imperialist, "national" liberation movements or more recent anti-IMF campaigns during the international debt crisis).

[2] See Michael H. Shuman, "Dateline Mainstreet: Local Foreign Policies," *Foreign Policy*, 65 (Winter 1986-87).

[3] Cathryn L. Thorup, "The Politics of Free Trade and the Dynamics of Cross-border Coalitions in U.S.-Mexican Relations," *Columbia Journal of World Business*, XXVI,

In the last few years, governmental concern with the ability of NGO networks to mobilize opposition to the policies of national governments and to international agreements has grown—both during the period of policy formation and after those policies have been adopted or agreements signed. In part, this concern is derived from the growing strength that such networks gain from the use of international communications technologies. The rapid spread of the Internet around the world has suggested that such networks and their influence will only grow apace.

No catalyst for growth in electronic NGO networks has been more important than the 1994 indigenous Zapatista rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico. Computer networks supporting the rebellion have evolved from providing channels for the familiar, traditional work of solidarity—material aid and the defense of human rights against the policies of the Salinas and Zedillo administrations—into an electronic fabric of opposition to much wider policies. Whereas the anti-NAFTA coalition was merely North American in scope, the influence of the pro-Zapatista mobilization has reached across at least five continents. Moreover, it has inspired and stimulated a wide variety of grassroots political efforts in dozens of countries.[4]

Today these networks provide the nerve system for increasingly global organization in opposition to the dominant economic policies of the present period. In the process, these emerging networks are undermining the distinction between domestic and foreign policy—and challenging the constitution of the nation state.

For reasons outlined below, it is not exaggerated to speak of a "Zapatista Effect" reverberating through social movements around the world; an effect homologous to, but potentially much

no. 11 (Summer 1991) pp. 12-26; Thorup, "Redefining Governance in North America: The Impact of Cross-Border Networks and Coalitions on Mexican Immigration into the United States," *RAND, DRU-219-FF*, March 1993; Howard H. Frederick, "Computer Communications in Cross-Border Coalition-Building: North American NGO Networking Against NAFTA," *Gazette: The International Journal for Mass Communication Studies*, 50, nos. 2-3 (1992) pp. 217-241; Carlos A. Heredia, "NAFTA and Democratization in Mexico," *Journal of International Affairs*, 48, no. 1 (Summer 1994) pp. 13-38. For a recent assessment of the evolution of NGOs, see Ann Marie Clark, "Non-governmental Organizations and their Influence on International Society," *Journal of International Affairs*, 48, no. 2 (Winter 1995) pp. 507-525.

4   While it has become commonplace to discuss social movements and their activism in terms of NGOs or "civil society," such vocabulary is highly problematic and vague. These words are often used in the context of everything from multinational corporations to groups of villagers organized through Rockefeller and Ford Foundation

more threatening to the New World Order of neoliberalism than the "Tequila Effect" that rippled through emerging financial markets in the wake of the 1994 peso crisis. In the latter case, the danger was panic and the ensuing rapid withdrawal of hot money from speculative investments. In the case of social movements and the activism which is their hallmark, the danger lies in the impetus given to previously disparate groups to mobilize around the rejection of current policies, to rethink institutions and governance, and to develop alternatives to the status quo.

REPRESSION IN CHIAPAS

The voices of indigenous people in Mexico have been either passively ignored or brutally silenced for most of the last five hundred years. Indigenous lands and resources have been repeatedly stolen and the people themselves exploited under some of the worst labor conditions in Mexico. The official policies of the Mexican state have been largely oriented toward assimilation, with only lip service given to the value of the country's diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage.[5]

The result has been a long history of fierce resistance and recurrent rebellion, first to Spanish colonization and then to the dominant classes after independence. Since the consolidation of the modern Mexican "party state" controlled by the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), this resistance has been met with both the iron fist and the velvet glove. Overt rebellion has been crushed, while the Mexican state has distributed land to selected indigenous communities dating from the first land reforms of President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s.

For several decades prior to the 1994 uprising, local communities in Chiapas largely confined their efforts to legally recognized vehicles of protest, such as demonstrations and

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programs. In this essay, the term "grassroots" is used to refer to member-funded efforts at self-organization which remain autonomous of either the state or corporate sectors. Such organization often includes independent NGOs, but is more broadly inclusive of various informal networks of activists and community organizations. The grassroots movements catalyzed by the Zapatistas include a variety of actors, including human rights advocates, environmental NGOs, local community governments and loose networks of political, media and labor activists who have linked their movements to those of the Zapatistas.

[5]   On the struggles of the indigenous people to cope with such attempted assimilation see Guillermo Bonfil, *México Profundo: Una civilización negada* (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1994), also available in English as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

marches—sometimes as far as Mexico City—and petitions for access to confiscated lands. The Mexican state responded to such actions with limited patronage, creating local instruments of power and endless bureaucratic delays in issuing land petitions.

Under continuing pressure for land reform, but unwilling to undercut the power of local rural elites, the government opened uncultivated forests for colonization after the Second World War.[6] Immigrants from various parts of Chiapas and elsewhere carved new farmlands and new communities out of the forests. Ironically, it was often in these land-starved *campesino* populations, where the PRI was unable to install institutions of control, that peasant self-organization and sympathy for the Zapatista movement thrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[7]

Caught between acute poverty and a dearth of arable farming land and inputs on the one hand and oppressive exploitation in the agricultural labor market on the other, some peasants began to join the Zapatista National Liberation Army[8] (EZLN) in the mountains or participate in their work in the villages. Within the context of a highly patriarchal indigenous culture, young women also began to join the EZLN, encouraged by the Zapatista egalitarian ideology that allowed them greater control over their lives and provided them with an opportunity for public responsibility.[9] Gradually, over a period of years, a guerrilla army was formed and a new fabric of cooperation was woven among various ethnic groups.

THE ZAPATISTA REBELLION

Committed to a radical restructuring of the Mexican economy

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[6] The anthropologist George Collier provides a sketch—complete with maps—of the history of post-Second World War colonization in Chiapas in chapter two of his book *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1994).

[7] On these sources of Zapatista support see the study by Collier. On the indigenous sources of self-definition and cultural practices which have nourished the Zapatista movement, see Bonfil and Gustavo Esteva, *Crónica del Fin de una Era: El Secreto del EZLN* (Mexico: Editorial Posada, 1994).

[8] In Spanish, Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación National.

[9] These opportunities in the EZLN for young peasant women were partly achieved through their own efforts. Some of this remarkable evolution can be traced in Rosa Rojas, ed., *Chiapas,¿y las Mujeres Qué?*, vols. I and II (1994 and 1995). That the Zapatista communities became islands of relative liberation for women in the sea of Mexican machismo has been one important source of the movement's appeal among foreigners.

in order to attract foreign investment and secure the NAFTA, President Salinas abrogated the last meaningful guarantees of community integrity in Chiapas by altering Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution to allow for the privatization of communal land. In response, the Zapatista communities ordered their citizen army to take action as a last ditch effort to stave off what seemed like imminent annihilation. According to Zapatista spokespersons, preparations proceeded throughout 1993. The day on which NAFTA went into effect, 1 January 1994, was chosen as the moment of action.

The rebellion came to the world's attention on that day, when the units of the EZLN emerged from the jungle and took over a series of towns in Chiapas. The uprising was designed to make indigenous voices heard at the national level in Mexico and appeared primarily to be a challenge to Mexican domestic policies on land and indigenous affairs.[10]

The initial official response was to isolate the Zapatistas through a variety of policy levers. Militarily, the government sought to crush the rebellion and confine it to Chiapas. Ideologically, state control of the Mexican mass media was used to limit and distort news about the uprising. Overall, the government attempted to portray the Zapatista movement as a danger to the political integrity of the Mexican nation by conjuring the threat of a pan-Mayan movement embracing both Southern Mexico and much of Central America.[11] Evoking the horrors of the Balkans, the Mexican government equated indigenous autonomy with political secession and the implosion of the country.

Military clashes lasted only a few days, giving way to three years of on-and-off political negotiations that have catalyzed a much wider assault on the power of the ruling party. Grassroots movements have both attacked and withdrawn from the official institutions of the one-party state at the national and local levels. The PRI and the hitherto powerful presidency have come under unprecedented attack for human rights violations, media manipulation, corruption and lack of democracy.

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[10] While the EZLN did point to NAFTA as sounding the "death knell" for indigenous peoples, their main orientation was towards gaining recognition and standing within the Mexican nation.

[11] The government's first, and quickly aborted, effort to mobilize public sentiment against the Zapatista uprising was to portray it as the result of foreign subversive manipulation of the indigenous people. Once it was forced to recognize that the source of the uprising was located within the indigenous communities themselves, the government shifted its discourse to an argument that played on ignorance of the specificity of Zapatista demands—an ignorance which it did its best to maintain.

Disillusionment with the prospects for meaningful Mexican electoral reform has also led many communities in Chiapas to withdraw entirely from the electoral process. These communities have burned ballot boxes, overthrown fraudulently elected officials and created municipal governing bodies through a variety of means that may or may not have included a popular vote.[12]

Political stalemate, negative public reaction to events in Chiapas and the Mexican peso crisis prompted the Mexican government to launch a new military offensive in February 1995.[13] Such politics "by other means" caused the Zapatistas to withdraw from occupied positions into the mountains. Massive protests in both Mexico and abroad, however, forced a halt to the offensive. Instead, the Mexican government has continued its search for a forceful solution by conducting a covert, low-intensity war that employs the military, various police forces and even paramilitary terrorists.[14]

The Zapatista movement supports autonomy within, not against, Mexican society—a point dramatically symbolized by the flying of the Mexican flag at virtually all Zapatista gatherings. But if the Zapatista-led reform efforts do not threaten the integrity of the Mexican nation, they certainly threaten the integrity of the Mexican state under one-party control. The demands for autonomy involve a devolution of both authority and resources to local levels. The search for wider citizen participation in public policy-making involves not only more direct democracy but also the liberation of Mexican politics from the grip of rigid electoral rules.

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[12]   Small communities organize themselves collectively through endless discussion and consensus; and "leaders" are those accorded responsibility informally because they have proved themselves competent through performance. Thus, decisions may be democratic in the sense that everyone has a voice and everyone's concerns are taken seriously into account.

[13]   A report on investment opportunities in Mexico signed by former Chase Manhattan specialist Riordan Roett calling for the Zedillo government to restore investor confidence by "eliminating the Zapatistas" was leaked to the press and subsequently publicized in the United States and Mexico. This memorandum not only led to protests at Chase offices from coast to coast, but convinced many to interpret the military offensive not only as a betrayal of the negotiations but also as an offering to Wall Street to staunch the flight of hot money from the Mexican market in the wake of the peso crisis. The text of the report and postings on the subsequent protests and reactions is available online at http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/chiapas95.html.

[14]   Although this policy of low-intensity warfare (the current euphemism for counterinsurgency) has been repeatedly denied by the Mexican government, it has been well-chronicled on the Internet in dozens of field reports from local and

Importantly, such reforms have been widely perceived as a threat in all corners of the mainstream political arena in Mexico. The PRI fears for its fading hegemony. The opposition, for its part, believes the demands of the rebels will imperil its own chances to share power with the dominant party.[15] As a result, the voices of reform energized by the Zapatista rebellion have plunged the Mexican political system into a profound crisis.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET: FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER

The role of the Internet in the international circulation of information on the indigenous rebellion in Chiapas developed quickly and has continued to evolve. Early on, the Internet provided a means for the rapid dissemination of information and organization through preexisting circuits, such as those which had been created as part of the struggle to block the NAFTA, or those concerned with Latin American and indigenous issues. These networks existed primarily at an international level, mostly in computer-rich North American and Western European countries.

News reports on radio and television were complemented by first-hand reports in cyberspace from a record number of observers who flooded into Chiapas with hitherto unseen alacrity, as well as from more analytical commentators who could voice their opinions and enter into debates more quickly and easily in cyberspace. These few circuits were rapidly complemented by the creation of specialized lists, conferences and web pages devoted

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international observers. Just recently, in the wake of the massacre of 45 men, women and children in Acteal, Chiapas, by such paramilitaries, documentation of these plans have come to public light. See Carlos Marín, "Plan de Ejercito en Chiapas, desde 1994: crear bandas paramilitares, desplazar a la poblacion, destruir las bases de apoyo del EZLN," *Proceso*, 1105, 4 January 1998. One result has been the repeated protests by well known international human rights NGOs like Amnesty International over the abuses to which Chiapanecan peasants and activists have been subjected. See the archives of the Internet lists Chiapas 95 and chiapas-l at http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html.

15   There is a long history of rejection of the subordination of indigenous struggles to political parties that predates the Zapatista movement. See Charlene Floyd's description of the 1978 Representative Assembly of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas in which offers of an alliance with the government were rejected (Floyd, "A Theology of Insurrection? Religion and Politics in Mexico," *Journal of International Affairs*, 50, no. 1 (Summer 1996) pp. 159-160). In response to widespread rank and file enthusiasm for the Zapatista rebellion, the left-of-center Partido de la Revolución Democrótica (PRD) originally sought at least informal ties with the EZLN. But during a visit to Chiapas, one of the party's leaders, Cuauhtémoc

specifically to Chiapas and the struggle for democracy in Mexico. The breadth of participation in these discussions and the posting of multiple sources of information has made possible an unprecedented degree of verification in the history of the media. Questionable information can be quickly checked and counter-information posted with a speed unknown in either print, radio or television. Instead of days or weeks, the norm for posting objections or corrections is minutes or hours.

It is important to note that the EZLN has played no direct role in the proliferation of the use of the Internet. Rather, these efforts were initiated by others to weave a network of support for the Zapatista movement. Although there is a myth that Zapatista spokesman Subcommandante Marcos sits in the jungle uploading EZLN communiqués from his laptop, the reality is that the EZLN and its communities have had a mediated relationship to the Internet. The Zapatista communities are indigenous, poor and often cut-off not only from computer communications but also from the necessary electricity and telephone systems. Under these conditions, EZLN materials were initially prepared as written communiqués for the mass media and were handed to reporters or to friends to give to reporters. Such material then had to be typed or scanned into electronic format for distribution on the Internet.

Today, there are dozens of web pages with detailed information on the situation in Chiapas specifically and the state of democracy in Mexico more generally. Several widely used news and discussion lists devoted to the daily circulation of information and its assessment are available. These various interventions operate from many countries and in many languages, and they are all the result of work by those sympathetic to the rights of indigenous peoples and to the plight of the Zapatistas.

Some of these efforts were launched in Mexico. For example, the "chiapas-l" list is run through computers at the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City. The Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN)[16] operates both a list ("fzln-l") and a series of voluminous multi-lingual web pages carrying news and documents regarding the negotiation process in Chiapas and more general discussions in Mexico. Other sites have originated

Cárdenas, was lectured by the Zapatistas on the undemocratic character of the party and its own lack of interest in electoral politics. Since then, hostility between the PRD leadership and the EZLN has increased. The latter refused to support the PRD's electoral candidates in the elections in Chiapas.

[16] In Spanish, the *Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*.

outside of Mexico. The first unofficial FZLN webpage, for example, was implemented through the Swarthmore College web server in Pennsylvania.[17]

More recently, the Zapatistas have begun to craft their missives and adapt their public interventions as they have grown to better understand the effectiveness of the Internet in making their voices heard, communicating with supporters and forging new alliances. Today, through the intermediation of the FZLN or other friendly groups and individuals, Marcos and the EZLN regularly send messages to others around the world, including, for example, messages to a European-wide demonstration in Amsterdam against Maastricht and unemployment, to an Italian gathering in Venice against regional separatism or to a conference of media activists in New York. In these communications they make their position on various issues known and seek to create or strengthen ties with far away groups.

The Internet is also playing an increasingly central role in particular organizing efforts initiated by the EZLN. While its role was limited in the formation of the meetings of the National Democratic Convention in 1994 and 1995, which drew together a wide variety of groups from all over Mexico, the Internet was employed to a greater extent in the subsequent national and international plebiscites. The Zapatistas used the Internet in those cases to seek feedback from their supporters regarding the direction their political struggle should take.[18] During the plebiscites, most participants in Mexico voted at booths set up throughout the

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[17]　A report surveying and describing this network of Internet resources is available online. See "Zapatistas in Cyberspace: A Guide to Analysis & Resources" at http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html.

[18]　The plebiscite asked the following six questions (author's notes are included in parenthesis): 1. "Do you agree that the principal demands of the Mexican people are land, housing, jobs, food, health, education, culture, information, independence, democracy, liberty, justice, peace, security, combat of corruption and defense of the environment?" (These are the demands put forward by the Zapatistas.); 2. "Should the different democratizing forces (in Mexico) unite in a citizen broad-based political and social opposition front and struggle for the 16 principal demands (listed above)?"; 3. "Should Mexicans carry out a profound political reform which would guarantee democracy?" (respect for the vote; reliable voter registration; impartial and autonomous electoral organizations; guaranteed citizen participation, including for those not members of political parties and nongovernmental organizations; and recognition of all political forces, be they national, regional or local); 4. "Should the EZLN convert itself into a new and independent political force, without joining other political organizations?"; 5. "Should the EZLN join with other organizations and together form a new political organization?"; 6. "Should the presence and equal participation of women be guaranteed in all positions of representation and responsibility in civil organizations and in the government?"

country by Alianza Cívica, a well-respected pro-democracy Mexican NGO. In addition, some 81,000 foreigners from 47 countries took part, mostly via the Internet.[19] According to Alianza Cívica, total participation in Mexico was over one million persons.[20]

The most dramatic organizational efforts in which the Internet has played a central role are the joint cooperative efforts between the Zapatistas and other social movements linked to them. These efforts have included the organization of large-scale meetings in response to the January 1996 Zapatista call for continental and intercontinental "encounters" to discuss, among other things, contemporary global neoliberal (capitalist) policies, methods of elaborating a global network of opposition to those policies and formulas for interconnecting various projects for elaborating alternatives. The result of these organizing efforts included: a series of continental meetings in the spring of 1996;[21] an intercontinental meeting in Chiapas in the summer of 1996; and a second intercontinental meeting in Spain in the summer of 1997. Through extensive E-mails and a small number of intermittent, face-to-face meetings, possible approaches to the organization of discussion were debated, agendas were hammered out and logistical arrangements were made. The results were stunning. Thousands came to the continental meetings—3,000 to the intercontinental meeting in Chiapas and 4,000 to the intercontinental reunion in Spain. Grassroots activists from over 40 countries and five continents attended both intercontinental meetings.

Without the Internet, this turnout would never have been possible. It is only recently that such encounters have become regular features on the margins of meetings organized by supranational institutions like the United Nations. It has usually been governments, not poor villages of indigenous peoples, that have had the means to organize such gatherings. The Zapatistas, however, successfully organized these encounters on a scale that

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[19]   The final tabulation of votes can be found at gopher://mundo.eco.utexas.edu:70/ 0R578176-598387-/mailing/chiapas95.archive/Chiapas95/20Archives/201995/ 1995.10/20/28October/29. The countries with the largest participation were the United States and Italy.

[20]   Alianza Cívica's final tabulation of the results of La Consulta Nacional por la Paz y la Democracia can be found in the 12 September, 1995, folder of the Chiapas95 Archives at gopher://mundo.eco.utexas.edu:70/1m/mailing/chiapas95.archive/ Chiapas95/20Archives/201995/1995.09/20/28September/29.

[21]   The European meeting was held in Berlin, the American encounter in Chiapas and the Oceania gathering in Melbourne. An African encounter was supposed to have occurred in Nairobi, but no documentation is available.

far exceeded anyone's expectations, and this fact alone warrants close attention by those interested in the evolution of international politics.

BEYOND SOLIDARITY: THE INTERLINKING OF AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENTS AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM

These manifestations of an historically new organizational capability were moments in the rapid crystallization of networks of discussion and debate that range far beyond the Zapatistas and Mexican politics. While the continental meeting of North America was organized by the Zapatistas themselves and held in Chiapanecan villages, the others were organized by a wide array of individuals and groups whose primary concerns lay not in Mexico but in local opposition to global policies. The Zapatista Call to discuss neoliberalism—the pro-market economic policies currently embraced by corporations, investors, governments, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—and possible global responses evoked a resonance within hundreds of diverse grassroots groups which had previously been unable to find common points of reference or vehicles for collaboration.

Today, the global capacity for action that labor and social movements have sought for over a century is becoming a more concrete possibility. In the 1996 European continental meeting in Berlin, for example, activists discussed at length whether and to what degree Latin American "Neoliberalism" finds its counterpart not only in the "Thatcherization" of the economy but in the move toward greater European integration embodied in the Maastricht Treaty, the Schengen Agreement and the plans for a common European currency. In the April 1996 American continental meeting, the connections, similarities and differences between Latin American austerity and structural adjustment programs and U.S.-Canadian experiences with Reaganomic supply-side economics (the attack on the welfare state and the deregulation of business investment) and central bank tight money policies were similarly evaluated. The result of such deliberations was a commitment to collective and coordinated opposition to what is perceived as increasingly homogeneous global contemporary policy.[22]

Because of the emergence of such a commitment, these meetings

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[22]   This consensus has had an impact on language. It is now increasingly commonplace within the grassroots networks in Europe and the United States for contemporary economic and political policies to be referred to as elements of neoliberalism.

have turned out to be more than singular, isolated events. They can already be seen as generative moments in the coalescence of a growing number of tightly knit global circuits of cyberspace communication and organization that threaten traditional top-down monopolies of such activity. Two examples, related to the pro-Zapatista circuits but autonomous from them, can illustrate this wider phenomenon. The first is at the level of the nation-state; the second is at the level of the private sector.

An essential ingredient of the Maastricht Treaty and Schengen Agreement is the coordination of police forces within a Europe of fading borders and increasingly mobile populations.[23] To facilitate both the control of the resident population and restrictions on immigration from outside of Europe, police coordination has been organized—in part through interlinked computer networks (the Schengen Information System).[24] Yet, anti-Maastricht marches and an Alternative Summit in Amsterdam were organized and coordinated in June 1997 by grassroots groups from all over Europe using the Internet as one important means of collaboration.[25] Moreover, the takeover by Italian protesters of two trains for free transportation to Amsterdam led to dramatic confrontations with Swiss, German and Dutch police forces in a way that suggested a degree of grassroots communication and organization that equaled, if not outstripped, arrangements among the governments involved.[26] Reports of events reached the Internet via minute-by-minute communications from the protesters using cellular phones within the trains. Their reports and analysis of the unfolding conflict were relayed through the Italian "free" radio stations to the European Counter Network (of computer communications) and were distributed more broadly via the Internet, using, among other things, the lists and conference

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[23] The Maastricht Treaty is now available online at http://www.altairiv.demon.co.uk/maastricht/top.html.

[24] The 1990 Convention to implement the Schengen Agreement, which includes a description of the planned Information System, can be found at http://www.altairiv.demon.co.uk/maastricht/schengen/index.html.

[25] Much of this effort can be traced in the online newsletter *The Other Voices*, published by the International Coalition for a Different Europe, accessible at http://www.stud.uni-hanover.de/archiv/euromail/maillist.html#00049.

[26] The Italian activists expressed explicitly that their demand for free public transportation to this European event included a democratic protest against the obstacle of high transportation costs to grassroots participation in Europe-wide political "discussions." The conceding of two trains by the Italian government to meet that demand must have immensely annoyed the governments of Switzerland, Germany and The Netherlands, which subsequently did all they could to confine and isolate the protesters during their transit to and from the event.

contacts managed by those who had participated in the Zapatista encounters. The steady flow of reports on the confrontations, arrests and police data gathering led to the immediate organization of protests, including, for example, demonstrations at embassies and consulates while the events were still unfolding. This capacity for complementary action at the international level undermined government efforts to isolate and repress the Italian protesters. Indeed, the comprehensive reports on Dutch police repression have led to continuing protests, from the grassroots level to the parliaments of several European Union member states.[27]

It has traditionally been recognized that multinational corporate communications are superior to those of international worker organizations. This superiority, however, is increasingly being challenged. In general, it has been extremely difficult for workers to coordinate multinational actions against common or interconnected employers. While there have been movements of solidarity via boycotts, such as that which supported workers opposed to apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s, there have been few effective international strikes. One example worth studying is the current internationalization of the struggles by Mersey dock workers in Liverpool, England, to ports throughout the world. Coordinated strike actions have been undertaken in dozens of ports not only in symbolic solidarity, but directly against ships carrying cargo to and from port facilities operated by Mersey Docks & Harbor Co. The sudden emergence of picket lines on ship arrivals has come in response to a very self-conscious effort on the part of dock workers to build a global system of Internet communication. The support generated for the dock workers is closely linked, once again, to the emerging coalition of anti-neoliberal Internet operations which has proliferated in the wake of the intercontinental meetings mentioned above.[28] Although the dock worker actions appear as fairly traditional private sector conflicts, the arguments put forth via Internet about the urgency of a global response clearly situate this multinational strike within the broader framework of opposition to "neoliberalism." Both examples, therefore, must be understood as moments of a crystallizing network of opposition to such policies.

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[27] On the events and the subsequent protests see Nicholas Busch and Tord Bjoerk, *The Other Voices*, 7 October 1997, as well as the special "extra" edition devoted to the issue at http://www.stud.uni-hannover.de/archiv/eurosmail/.

[28] See the Mersey Dock workers' webpage "The World is Our Picket Line!" at http://www.gn.apc.org/labournet/docks/.

Beyond Solidarity: The Interlinking of Autonomous Movements for Alternatives

Just as opposition to current institutions and policies has been increasingly interconnected, so too has discussion about the development of alternative approaches to public policy and social organization. As critiques of the dominant ideology have been followed by reconceptualizations and experimentation with alternatives, including fair trade and citizen rights for immigrants, the sharing of these new experiences via the Internet has accelerated their proliferation and development. Ultimately, as alternatives which are not only more attractive but also prove workable are generated, opposition to current policies and calls for their replacement will grow faster.

Indigenous Networks

The coexistence and interconnections between the opposition to current policies and the attempt to elaborate alternatives via the Internet was obvious at the Zapatista-called meetings and continues to be discussed in cyberspace. Important in these discussions have been the experiences of indigenous peoples in seeking alternative ways to organize democratic spheres of political interaction among the diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic communities, without dissolving their differences through the formulation of universal rules codified in the kind of nation state constitutions common since the Enlightenment.

These indigenous experiences have had wide influence not only because the Zapatistas have brought them to the forefront of international attention, but also because these efforts have actually been successful at building networks among a diverse array of indigenous peoples. There is nothing like success to attract attention. The agreements reached by representatives of the Mexican government and the Zapatistas at San Andrés Sacam Ch'en in February 1996, spelled out the basic vision and principles of a reorganization of democracy and the kinds of constitutional changes that are required to meet demands for local autonomy. Despite the government's subsequent failure to implement the agreements, those principles are currently the object of widespread debate not only among indigenous populations but also among many other groups, including the newly elected Mexican Congress, which, for the first time in history, is no longer controlled by the

PRI.[29] Outside of Mexico, indigenous demands for autonomy have resonated within a wide variety of ethnic and linguistic communities.

The Zapatista call for the "democratization of democracy," based on its critique of the one-party system in Mexico and its demands for electoral reforms, has struck sympathetic chords in other parts of the world. This has been especially true at the regional and national levels where electoral politics have come to be seen as formalistic spectacles—arenas of professional politicians whose campaigns and policies are perceived as being bought by the highest bidders. Stories about the various forms of direct democracy reputedly practiced in Zapatista communities have stimulated many jaded social critics to abandon their cynicism and attempt instead to explore how real democracy and meaningful pluralism can be crafted.

In this reevaluation of democratic institution-building, the role of the Internet is significant. The Internet offers tremendous potential to widen participation not only in policy discussions but also in the sphere of direct democracy, through plebiscites and legally binding referendums. Today, there are a several groups dedicated to the exploration and evaluation of such possibilities.[30] While most of this discussion has been focused on local or national political processes, the emergence of the kinds of global networks I have been describing will necessarily lead to a similar discussion at the international level.

ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORKS

Another highly elaborated sphere in cyberspace for the sharing of innovative alternatives to current practices has emerged out of the communications linking environmental movements around the world.[31] Those movements have not only protested current

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[29] The San Andrés Accords are available in Spanish online at http://spin.com.mx/
~floresu/FZLN/dialogo/home.html; and, in English, in the Chiapas95 archives.
[30] One access point to such groups is the Teledemocracy Action News & Network
webpage at http://www.auburn.edu/tann/.
[31] There are even dedicated computer networks such as EcoNet, one part of the
Association for Progressive Communications. A description and access to EcoNet
can be found at http://www.lcv.org/lcv94/econet_info.html. The Association for
Progressive Communications, a consortium of some 25 linked networks, maintains
a web site at http://www.apc.org/. For an analytical description, see Howard Frederick,
"Computer Networks and the Emergence of Global Civil Society," in Linda M.
Harasim, ed., *Global Networks: Computers and International Communications*
(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

practices and policies concerning such issues as pollution and global warming, but they have also generated a wide variety of alternative approaches to everything from energy generation (a shift to renewable resources) and conservation (solar architecture, for instance) to garbage and waste management (including less packaging and more recycling). At the same time, serious attempts to rethink the interconnections between human beings and their environment have led to considerable overlap with an array of non-Western cultural experiences and philosophies. Many of the traditions and beliefs of a variety of indigenous populations have received considerable attention and a surprising degree of acceptance. As a result, a web of interconnections between environmental networks of communication and indigenous and pro-indigenous networks has developed. Environmental activist groups like Greenpeace have, for example, intervened in the conflicts in Chiapas.[32]

WOMEN'S NETWORKS

A third realm of international discussion that has sought to elaborate positive alternatives to contemporary policy rests in the diverse array of women's movements. In the days when the Internet first began to be widely used, many critics expressed their concern that computers were proving to be "toys for boys" and cyberspace a "men's only" club. Subsequent developments have shown, however, that women and women's groups have been quick to capitalize on the opportunities that the Internet makes available for enhanced self-organization. As is well known, the "women's movement" has gone far beyond preoccupation with what have traditionally been described as "women's issues" to incorporate virtually every sphere of public policy. Women's lists, conferences and web pages represent a substantial portion of political cyberspace and are linked to many other domains.[33]

The existence of a "Revolutionary Women's Law" in the Zapatista movement—conceived, designed and drafted by indigenous women within the context of a highly patriarchal culture—attracted the attention of women activists outside

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[32]   A series of articles on the Greenpeace delegation to Chiapas in March 1995 can be found in the Chiapas95 archives at gopher://mundo.eco.utexas.edu:70/1m/mailing/chiapas95.archive/Chiapas95/20Archives/201995/1995.03/20/28March/29.

[33]   For example, see the directories of women's resources available through the webpage for WomensNet at http://www.igc.org/igc/womensnet/index.html. Like EcoNet, WomensNet is a component of the Association for Progressive Communications.

Chiapas early on. As a result, women's cyberspace networks have established connections directly with indigenous women in Chiapas and have played an active role in circulating information about the Zapatista movement. In addition, such networks provide a means to circulate discussions among women in Chiapas regarding the revision of patriarchal traditions and its implications for democratic constitutional reforms. Such revisions and reforms were incorporated into the San Andrés accords mentioned above.

Examples such as those discussed above regarding the spheres of social activism and cyberspace activity that are involved in the autonomous contesting of public policy could easily be multiplied. The implications are only beginning to be perceived.

AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL FABRIC?

The Zapatista effect suggests that the fabric of politics—the public sphere where differences interact and are negotiated—is being rewoven. This is particularly important because these new forms of cooperation go to the heart of the existing political, social and economic order.

At the grassroots level, the Internet is being used to promote international discussion and connections that link struggles challenging dominant policy and ideology in ways that often bypass the nation state. However, it is important to note that, while there is no doubt that the grassroots use of the Internet and electronic communications across borders has in some instances constrained the ability of nation states, international organizations and multinational corporations to pursue their own goals, it is not clear how significant these constraints really are and whether they are likely to proliferate.

In debates on the future of the nation state and the conduct of foreign policy, consideration of such questions often appears muddled within the burgeoning literature on "information warfare" and is sometimes barely separated from musings on criminal, military and "terrorist" use of the Internet. In a recent article on cyberspace terrorism, for example, former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Deutch labeled the Zapatistas as "insurgents," arguing that "drawing the line between terrorism and insurgency can be difficult."[34] More interesting efforts by public policy analysts to reconceptualize the potential political ramifications of grassroots challenges to the nation-state

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[34]   John Deutch, "Terrorism," *Foreign Policy*, 108 (Fall 1997) p. 14.

via cyberspace include the work of RAND scholar David Ronfeldt and his co-author John Arquilla of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, who have elaborated the concept of "netwar." In their view, the Zapatista use of the Internet and similar phenomena represent not only a threat but an organizational innovation to which the nation-state must respond if it is to avoid increasingly frequent defeat. In addition, Ronfeldt and Arquilla call for the recasting of the organization of the nation state from its traditional hierarchical lines to those of networks, thus adopting and adapting to the forces arrayed against it.[35]

Similar arguments have been advanced by a variety of scholars. Bruce Berkowitz, a former CIA analyst, applied this logic to the reorganization of US intelligence.[36] On the basis of case study analysis, Jessica Mathews, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, has pointed to a variety of instances in which governments and intergovernmental institutions have gained some of the flexibility and responsiveness of networks by working closely with NGOs in the international arena.[37] Anne-Marie Slaughter, professor of International Law at Harvard University, has argued that this kind of fundamental reorganization has already begun. She has pointed to instances in which the constituent parts of states—for example, central bankers, jurists and regulatory agencies—are disaggregating and forming international networks in an increasingly effective new form of "transgovernmentalism."[38] Although Slaughter does not cite it specifically, the Schengen Agreement and multinational collaboration among police agencies also fit her model.

All of this suggests that the state, both at the national and supranational level, is responding to the challenges from grassroots networks not merely by resisting their influences, but also by adopting similar forms of organization in two fundamental ways: either by mutating its own structures or by co-opting and annexing

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[35]   See John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Cyberwar is Coming!," *Comparative Strategy*, 12, no. 2 (1993) pp. 141-165; Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar* (RAND's National Defense Research Institute, 1996); and Arquilla and Ronfeldt, eds., *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (RAND, 1997), available on-line at http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR880/index.html.

[36]   Bruce D. Berkowitz, "Information Age Intelligence," *Foreign Policy*, 103 (Summer 1996) pp. 35-50. For an analysis of the latter see Harry Cleaver, "Reforming the CIA in the Image of the Zapatistas?," at http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/hmconberk.html.

[37]   Jessica T. Mathews, "Power Shift," *Foreign Affairs*, 76, no. 1 (January/February 1997).

[38]   Anne-Marie Slaughter, "The Real New World Order," *Foreign Affairs*, 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997) pp. 183-197.

those which challenge it.

In Mexico, this struggle is being played out primarily between the Zapatistas and their grassroots supporters on the one hand and the political parties on the other. While the PRI-dominated executive wing of the government has responded to the rebellion in a rigid and repressive manner, the congressional opposition and political reformers have sought to draw the Zapatistas into the system. In response to the Zapatistas' demand to recast Mexican political institutions, these forces have urged the Zapatistas to enter politics in the traditional manner, by becoming a political party. Thus far, the movement's leadership has refused. At the September 1997 founding convention of the Zapatista "Front" for National Liberation in Mexico City, the Zapatistas and their supporters reiterated their call for new forms of politics rather than adaptation to the current model. The conflict continues.

At the international level, some governments and multilateral organizations like the World Bank are indeed developing methods of "incorporating" NGOs into consultative processes, giving them voices at the table in exchange for less voice in the street. Yet, against the backdrop of a long history of co-optation and de-politization, many grassroots groups have refused to collaborate and continue to organize and act autonomously from the state and the private sector. At the same time, they continue to elaborate networks of cooperation among like-minded organizations to broaden their capabilities for research, reflection, consultation and action. Cooperation at the local level is constant, while the kind of large-scale, cross-movement gatherings embodied in the Zapatista-led encounters and the Amsterdam counter-summit seem to be proliferating.

While the capacity of such grassroots groups for collective protest action has been clearly demonstrated, their potential for taking over or usurping the functions of the nation state and intergovernmental organizations will depend on their capacity to elaborate and implement alternative modes of decision-making and collective or complementary action to solve common problems. In some instances, such as the defense of human rights, environmental protection or the formulation of new constitutional frameworks for the protection of indigenous rights, this potential is being realized.[39] So far, grassroots alternatives have demonstrated that imagination, creativity and insight can

[39] Mathews, "Power Shift," *Foreign Affairs*, 76, no. 1 (January/February 1997) p. 53. Mathews quotes Ibrahima Fall, head of the U.N. Center for Human Rights: "We have less money and fewer resources than Amnesty International, and we are the

generate different approaches and new solutions to solving widespread problems. To the extent that such new solutions continue to proliferate and are perceived as being effective, the possibilities of replacing state functions with non-state collaboration will expand.

At the same time, because such an expansion threatens the established interests of states and those who benefit from their support, government-led efforts to repress or co-opt such alternatives will continue. The degree to which the autonomy of grassroots efforts will be maintained is not a question of imagination or organizational ability alone, but also of the political power of independent groups to resist such efforts and displace governmental hegemony. Thus, the scope for the positive elaboration of grassroots initiatives at the local and global levels will depend entirely on their power to challenge existing policies and force concessions. In this drama we are but at the opening act. ⚓

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arm of the U.N. for human rights. This is ridiculous." Mr. Fall is wrong; it is not ridiculous. It suggests that if grassroots groups demonstrate the capacity to research and take effective action on global problems, there is no a priori reason why they should not supplant intergovernmental organizations.