

Chapter I

National Security and its Challengers

In this chapter I will examine the prevailing interpretations of the EZLN as an emblematic “post-Communist” insurgent organisation. There are two limitations to this literature: its reluctance to account for the effects of the regime on insurgent identities, and a failure to grasp the impact of political conflict on the nature of the Mexican State. Besides, although the question of political identity has been rightly considered as a relational process, there is still a reluctance to recognise fluid interactions and consequently, fluid identities when dealing with either insurrectionary or regime actors. Moreover, in literature related to national security the “nation” and its “security” are presented as given facts. They are still thought of through the perspective of the regime, embodied by the PRI for more than seven decades. In this chapter I explain the reasons why I consider it inaccurate to talk about any “post-modern” insurgent identity. I advance an interpretative framework of analysis to explicate the interaction between insurgent and security actors, using categories such as *hegemony* and *political frontiers* to contest the essentialist conception of national security and insurgencies. To this end, I will argue that in Mexico it is possible to achieve a better understanding of political conflict between government agency, as embodiment of the state, and radical challengers.

1.1 Representing insurgent challengers. The literature on the EZLN.

There are two main tendencies in the literature on the EZLN, which has been the most significant and emblematic insurgent organisation in Mexico since the early 1990s. Firstly, there are analyses that dwell on both the structural causes of the rebellion and the democratic politics supposedly opened up by the EZLN. These pieces tend to focus on the allegedly positive and “democratic” aspects of the 1994 uprising. Secondly, there are studies that tend to emphasise the relevance of political agency, especially the relevance of the EZLN leadership and which include an explicit defence of the Salinas administration (1988-1994), in particular, and the PRI regime’s period of modernising stage, which lasted until 2000, in general. Although different in their focus, I think that both competing readings of the EZLN

uprising are rooted in the defence of the seemingly fading imaginary embodied within the PRI ideology.¹ In this, the tradition of the 1917 revolutionary movement has been maintained through inclusion of ideas represented by historic figures such as Emiliano Zapata. There is also a third reading of the EZLN, less important in terms of influence but still very significant which is a nuanced approach that prioritises the interaction between political subjectivity and structural elements. I will discuss the latter as well.

Before examining the literature on the EZLN, it is important to place this in a broader context, more specifically in relation to Mexican national security, understood as a legitimate space for redefining the meaning of democracy and national security when dealing with political conflict. The aim here is not simply to highlight an omission in the bulk of the literature on the EZLN but also to indicate a theme that has special significance in my own analysis.

I will develop an extremely brief review of the literature on national security in Mexico by commenting on certain tendencies. It will suffice to write that theories of national security and theories of revolutionary war have frequently been used to try to create space for redefining the “nation” and the “people” in Latin America.² These theories have accompanied the social and political construction and legitimisation of concrete governmental and insurgent interventions.

It is important to remember that during the last twenty years an increasingly solid body of literature on Mexican security has emphasised multiple problems. After the seminal work of Pellicer,³ in which the author claims that the emphasis on a security approach began

¹ Previous discussions about “ideology”, and more specifically, on the ideology of the *Mexican Revolution*, embodied by the PRI, would be complete if they assumed, as some post-modern authors do, that ideology can be seen as “a will to totality”. That is, as a space in which a particular set of demands is construed and provisionally accepted as a universal project. I will detail this understanding of the concept later. Alan Knight develops a fine discussion on the elements that integrated the Mexican Revolution ideology and he concludes, as others have done, that the novelty of the Mexican case is not the refinement of its ideological components but the ability to put them into practice. See his essay “The Ideology of the Mexican Revolution 1910-1940”, *E.I.A.L.*, Volume 8 Number 1 (January-June 1997) in http://www.tau.ac.il/eial/VIII_1/knight.htm.

² Samuel J. Fitch, *The armed forces and democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 107-129.

³ Olga Pellicer de Brody, *La seguridad nacional de México: Preocupaciones nuevas y nociones tradicionales* in *Las relaciones México-Estados Unidos*, by Carlos Tello and Clark Reynolds (Mexico:

during the Lopez Portillo administration (1976-1988), academic and military views on national security have become more widely available.⁴

For instance, before the emergence of the EZLN, Aguayo and Bagley edited in 1990 one of the most significant anthologies on the subject as part of an effort to open up the debate and democratise the institutions in charge of security. Their *Mexico in Search of Security* includes both a questioning of the traditional framework in which the notion of security was understood and an emphasis on the military and intelligence dimension before the political and ideological framing of security problems.⁵ In it Bagley, Aguayo and Stark develop a critique of traditional realism, in an epoch in which ideological struggles and the reorganisation of the world had transformed the situation.⁶ Aguayo warns of the risk of mistakenly equating national security with internal (or governmental) security and the consequence of prioritising “an implicit militarization of the concept”.⁷ He recognises that the notions of “internal” and “national” security have maintained a “tense coexistence” and remarks that this strain is a “symptom of Mexico’s unfinished transition”.⁸ I claim that in 2004 this is still the case, especially after the 1994 events in Chiapas, the 1996 emergence of the EPR, the 1999-2000 student movement and the 2001 *Zapatista March*.⁹

The work mentioned above and the current literature, as a segment of a wider corpus that includes an important group of scholars and commentators, was ground-breaking.¹⁰ These

Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981). See also her study *Política hacia Centroamérica e interés nacional de México* in *Centroamérica, crisis y política internacional* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1982).

⁴ Concerning military stances, two tendencies are illustrated by two generals’ works. First, that in which very traditional notions of military intelligence and military mobilisation are emphasised, such as in Mario Acosta Chaparro, *Movimiento Subversivo en Mexico* (Mexico: Author’s edition, 1990). Second, that in which the ambiguity of the concept and the need to share the construction of its meaning with society are accepted such as in the work of Gerardo Vega, *Seguridad Nacional, Concepto, Organización, Método* (Mexico: Author’s edition, 1988).

⁵ Michael Bagley B., and Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *Mexico in Search of Security* (Miami: University of Miami, 1993). The Mexican edition was published by Siglo XXI in 1990, after the controversial 1988 federal election.

⁶ Michael Bagley, M., Sergio Aguayo and Jeffrey Stark, *In Search of Security*, in *Mexico in Search*. 1-22.

⁷ Sergio Aguayo, *The Uses, Misuses and Challenges of Mexican National Security: 1946-1990*, in *Mexico in Search Of Security*. 103

⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹ Aguayo also notes that “the government’s reluctance to omit the possibility that the United States could threaten Mexico’s security is a significant weakness”. *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰ Among the most relevant works it may be mentioned some. By Sergio Aguayo, *En Busca de la Seguridad Perdida, Aproximaciones a la Seguridad Nacional Mexicana*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1990.

authors locate their intervention as part of a democratic impetus that should be incorporated in the debate and within the actual workings of security institutions. Despite the relevance of this literature, insurgencias are not considered to be constitutive of the central characteristics of Mexican security policy. Most of the authors to some extent still seem to share the remains of the “revolutionary” background loosely vindicated in the last two PRI administrations (1988-2000). After the 1994 revolt, individual and institutional contributions continued to enhance

See his article, “The Uses, Abuses, and Challenges of Mexican National Security: 1946-1990, in Mexico”, *In Search of Security*. New Brunswick: Nort-South Center, University of Miami, 1993. With John Bailey. *Las seguridades de México y Estados Unidos en un momento de transición*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1997. Interesting is also *Almanaque Mexicano*. Mexico: Proceso-Grijalbo, 2000. A contemporary discussion on issues involving public safety and the notion of national security is available, for instance, in John Bailey and Jorge Chabat, *Transnational Crime and Public Security*. La Jolla: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California San Diego, 2002. Illustrative of the attempts made by academics in dealing with changing applications of the national security analysis see, for instance, Raúl Benítez, “Chiapas: Politics or War?”, Washington, Conference at the Inter-American Council of Washington D.C. (10 September 1998); also his “Soberanía, política exterior y seguridad nacional en México: 1821-1990”, in *Seguridad Nacional*, México, INAP, (1998); with Stephen Wager, “National Security and Armed Forces in Mexico: Challenges and Scenarios at the End of the Century”, Latin American program Woodrow Wilson International center for Scholars, (October, 1998). Also recomendable are, by the same author, “Dilemas del ejército mexicano a fin de siglo”, FASOC, A-*La Seguridad de México o 14, No 1, (January-March, 1999)* and “Después del 11 de Septiembre”, downloaded on 18/05/2003 at <http://www.resdal.org.ar/lasa-raul.html>. Other interesting works have been produced by Leonardo Curzio, “La Seguridad Nacional en México: Balance y Perspectivas”, in *Seguridad Nacional* (Mexico: INAP, 1998); “Estado, soberanía y seguridad nacional”, in *Los Servicios de Inteligencia en el Nuevo Siglo* (Mexico: INAP, 2000) and “La gobernabilidad en el México contemporáneo”, (Mexico: Fundación CIDOB), <http://www.cidob.es/castellano/Publicaciones/Afers/40-41curzio.html>. Downloaded on 02/10/2002. See also Matthew Edel and Candance Kim, “Mexico’s Accumulation Crisis in Historical Perspective, in Mexico, *In Search of Security*” (New Brunswick: Nort-South Center, University of Miami, 1993). It is well known the work of Luis Herrera-Lasso, Luis and Guadalupe Gonzalez, “Reflections on the Use of the Concept of National Security in Mexico”, in *Mexico, In Search of Security*, New Brunswick, Nort-South Center, University of Miami, 1993. Close to the INAP are the works of Ricardo Márquez, Ricardo, “Esferas de Seguridad y Linderos del Corazon de las Tinieblas”, in *Seguridad Nacional* (Mexico: INAP, 1998). And “Estado, seguridad nacional y cooperacion internacional”, in *Los Servicios de Inteligencia en el Nuevo Siglo* (Mexico: INAP, 2000). Lorenzo Meyer has written an indispensable article in the “Prologue”, to *Mexico, In Search of Security* (New Brunswick: Nort-South Center, University of Miami, 1993). José Luis Piñeyro, “El narcotráfico y la seguridad nacional de México: cambios, críticas y propuestas”, in *Seguridad Nacional* (Mexico: INAP, 1998). A traditional view, generated as an iteration of the dominant United States paradigm is presented by Ana María Salazar, *Seguridad Nacional Hoy, el Reto de las Democracias*. Mexico: Nuevo Siglo-Aguilar, 2002. Mario, Santos Caamal, produced *La Esencia de la Seguridad Nacional*. Mexico: Centro de Estudios Navales, 1995 and as a consequence suggested, for instance, “La cartera de la seguridad interna”, in *Los Servicios de Inteligencia en el Nuevo Siglo* (Mexico: INAP, 2000). Jorge Luis Sierra, advisor of the PRD is author of non-partisan comments in “Las reformas pendientes, Algunas reflexiones sobre la renuncia de México al TIAR”, Manuscript (October 2002); “Mexico’s Military in the War on Drugs”, Washington, Washington Office on Latin America (April 2003), and in *El enemigo interno: contrainsurgencia y fuerzas armadas en México*. Mexico: Plaza y Valdés, 2003. General Gerardo Vega, secretary of Defence during Fox’s administration produced a relevant. *Seguridad Nacional, Concepto, Organizacion, Metodo*. México: Author’s Edition, 1988 in which the ambiguity of the concept is discussed.

the literature on security and understanding of its challengers, but insurgencies were still excluded from being *the* centre of the security activities.

At the end of the Cold War the political transition “towards democracy”, and the relativisation of the concept of sovereignty in a globalised world, had both come to be considered issues that were necessary to examine in order to better understand national security in Mexico. For instance, while Curzio notes in 1998 that the most influential “doctrines” in Mexico are those from military and foreign policy institutions, he insists that they ought to be modernised. For example, from the values crystallised in the military and foreign policy doctrines he derives the argument that intelligence services, as the operational core of the practice of security, must be ruled by legislation.¹¹

Benitez has also attempted to advance a Mexican conceptualisation of security. He argues that the concept is a historical product of the wider process of the development of the nation, from the end of the Independence War (1821) to the middle of the Salinas administration in 1990. Benitez also points to the centrality of the military doctrine and the values attached to Mexican foreign policy as cornerstones of the notion of national security and as axes of the PRI ideology after the Mexican Revolution.¹² As has been the case since the 1980s among scholars, the author underlines political democracy as the main basis for security.¹³ Marquez has contributed as well by introducing certain theoretical elements drawn from a highly interpretative framework that has certain contiguity with post-structuralist approaches. For instance, in referring to Luhmann’s definition of “contingency”, he considers it possible to understand security conflicts through the idea that the “reduction of the complexity of the social setting” is achievable by means of the “construction of frontiers”.¹⁴ Identity and hegemony, in the traditional Gramscian reading of the latter term, are recognised

¹¹ Leonardo Curzio, *La Seguridad Nacional en México: Balance y perspectivas* (Mexico: Revista de Administración Pública, INAP, 1998), 9-27.

¹² See Raúl Benítez, *Soberanía, política exterior y seguridad nacional en México: 1821-1990* in *Seguridad Nacional* (Mexico: INAP, Revista Mexicana de Administración Pública 98, 1998).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 57-78.

¹⁴ Ricardo Márquez, “Esferas de Seguridad y Linderos del Corazón de las Tinieblas”, in *Seguridad Nacional* by several authors (Mexico: INAP, 1998), 31-43.

as significant in the “social construction of security in Mexico”, but they are not seen in its reciprocal interaction and as mutually constitutive.¹⁵

In short, the literature on security and on insurgencies, has not focused on the interaction between insurgent and security actors; therefore the centrality of conflict between security and insurgent actors has been overlooked. Even though the literature on national security seems increasingly capable of shedding light on political conflict, it has not incorporated the centrality of insurgencies in its characterisation of the Mexican state. I also claim that insurgencies and how they are treated are as definitive of the state’s character as much as the political class’ attitude has been determinant in the reconstitution of the EZLN as an organisation seemingly deprived of insurrectionary threat.

It is at this point that I will introduce the notion of *internal security* as a vital element to locate the diversity of interactions between what might be generically called *security* and *insurgent actors*. So far most of the literature has overlooked *internal security*, particularly in the case of Mexican authors that still grant complete validity to the traditional and insufficiently discussed notion of “national security” and concede it an overwhelming explanatory power. This may be a consequence of a mindset and assumptions very much dependent on the defence of the ideological horizon constructed around the doctrines of foreign policy and the military as the true and ultimate representatives of the “nation” and “its project”. *Internal security*, in short, is both a space of material interaction between the main challengers of the internal status quo, these being, insurgent actors, and an abstract intermediate space of overlapping institutional interventions that is dedicated to “public” and “national” security policies. It refers to a blurred region in which the notions of “public safety” on one extreme, and “national security”, on the other, may be seen as representative of those attempts to institutionally grasp “threats” coming from organised criminality and common delinquency, for instance, and those engendered by the perception of extraterritorial threats, such as drug trafficking or “terrorism”. I consider that *internal security* is not one

¹⁵ James Rochlin, *Redefining Mexican “Security”* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 15, 177 and especially chapter 3 *The Indigenous and Mexican Security: Chiapas and Southern Mexico*, chapter

among other operations of the so called “national security” institutions but the central set of practices due to the amount of resources, budget, and intellectual efforts dedicated to neutralise “the threat of insurrection”¹⁶ and to defend the value of “political internal stability”, which seems to be vital to the reproduction of the national and international financial market. Also, it is in relation to *insurgencies* where the discussion of the limits of the polity is at its most detailed and intense. In general, I will use the notion of “national security” as an overarching concept that it has at its core its more relevant operation *internal security* and the neutralisation of those who may be constructed, as a part of the process of securitisation, as a “domestic threat”.

I will now discuss the main tendencies in studies of the EZLN.

1.1.1 Structural(ist) approaches to insurgencies and the case of the EZLN

Firstly, I will focus on analyses that emphasise the “structural” causes of the Chiapas revolt. I will mainly comment on Montemayor’s and Harvey’s work because they are regarded as some of the most authoritative academic sources on the Chiapas conflict by academics and political advisers on the left. Montemayor’s main argument is that the EZLN results from a long tradition of rebellious identities in Chiapas and forms part of a history of three decades of guerrilla organisation that preceded its emergence. He claims it constitutes the reaction to the social and institutional violence suffered by the most defenceless segments of society. Harvey’s main idea is that the EZLN uprising is a new episode in the continuous multiple struggles for land and citizen’s rights. For him, it demonstrates the state’s failure to fulfil its function as the constitutional guarantor of universal rights. He correctly sustains that these rights always need to be defined through popular mobilisations and political negotiations.

6, *The Mexican Armed Forces, the State, and Civil Society* and chapter 7, *An Analytical Conclusion*.

¹⁶ This connection between such a threat and the referred value is suggested in many texts. For instance in (Colonel) Rex Applegate, “Time Bomb on the US Border: Mexican Military Unable to Counter Insurgency”, downloaded on 15 December 2002 at <http://db.uwaterloo.ca/~alopez-o/politics/timebomb.html>. The author “lived in Mexico for 15 years, representing U.S. military and police equipment companies”. The function of the *internal security discourse* would then be the suppression of the risk of “internal war”, see, for instance, Paul W. Zagorski. *Democracy vs. National Security, Civil-Military Relations in Latin America* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, (1992) 123-45.

Montemayor locates the EZLN's emergence in the history of armed struggles in Mexico. He claims that over thirty years prior to its emergence, the disappearance of guerrillas, when unaccompanied by a decrease in poverty, merely preceded the emergence of new insurrectionary groups.¹⁷ He insists that peasant discontent has always been the root cause of rebellions.¹⁸ Montemayor regards the presidential interpretation of the EZLN's emergence in 1994 as representative of a rather typical perspective from the elite: even when structural causes were recognised, the government was unable to recognise "the EZLN's force" and political relevance. Besides this alleged analytical shortcoming, he affirms that in the Salinas administration (1988-1994), security institutions underwent their disarticulation. This process included internal changes in security institutions, an increased prominence of presidential advisers distant from the logics of those institutions, and a popular mobilisation in which the image of the army was questioned in a political tussle that could have affected its capacity to react in the face of the state's clandestine challengers. He affirms that the change in generation within these institutions and the decrease in the number of military intelligence agents within them created "a void".¹⁹

As a key central structural cause, Montemayor points to the fact that in Chiapas the concentration of land does not represent modernisation in terms of making farming more competitive, but is, rather, "a source of permanent social imbalance".²⁰ Popular uprisings, in his view, have a large period of incubation "that makes them resistant to a fulminating repression", and they are always "the tip of an iceberg".²¹ He affirms that the EZLN's appearance "initiated the process of crumbling Carlos Salinas' image and his regime".²² He notes the government's quick disposition to stop military hostilities with the EZLN - as early as 3 January 1994, according to some of Salinas officers comments²³ - as part of the process

¹⁷ Carlos Montemayor, *La rebelión indígena de México* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortíz, 1997), 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28. Wide evidence of the relevance of this factor is available in the literature. For instance, John Tutino, *De la Insurrección a la Revolución en México, Las Bases Sociales de la Violencia Agraria 1750/1940* (Mexico: Era, 1990).

¹⁹ Montemayor, C., *La rebelión*. 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²² *Ibid.*, 50.

²³ See *La Jornada*, 4-6 January 1994.

by which, on 12 January, the government declared a unilateral cease-fire after the new guerrilla group had become “a military force and a political one”.²⁴ Montemayor maintains that explanations that tend to belittle the uprising through stigmatisation, an exclusive focus on military calculus and the exclusion of socially and politically articulated claims, are spurious because they exclude significant elements.²⁵

Montemayor argues that the government underestimated the extent of the conflict in two ways. First, “it reduced it to the function of its armed nucleus and lost from sight the social dynamic of the indigenous regions that covered it, helped, and supported it during years. Second, it also reduced the appearance of the armed nucleus to its possible links with political or clergy groups and forgot again that the support of indigenous regions belonged clearly to another level of causality”.²⁶ This reductionism, he claims, “was the biggest mistake” since the social fence that protects and supports the EZLN is part of it, and the elimination of the EZLN would mean the “illusionary elimination” of an uprising that is social, indigenous and peasant.²⁷

It is precisely at this point that Montemayor infuses Salinas’ argument with his own assumptions. The author, for instance, recognises that the former President acknowledged the extreme poverty and marginalisation of Chiapas as causes of the revolt. “But he - Salinas - rejected them” as “sufficient causes for the armed uprising”, “hence”, claims Montemayor *non sequitur*, “if he did not recognise *any* of this social data as causes of the insurrection, only one was left: the manipulation of power groups with shady and turbid objectives pushing the destabilisation of his regime”.²⁸ Montemayor avoids addressing directly what not only Salinas, but also many specialised authors, across the world know about insurgencies²⁹ or any

²⁴ Montemayor, *Chiapas*. 58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

²⁹ The weight granted to the question of structure and political agency, and the interplay they may have, ranges from the voluntaristic drive in the theory of the revolutionary nucleus, to the overdetermination of “causes” and/or “conditions of possibility” in post-structuralist approaches in which “interpretation” and “political articulation” are crucial elements. Even measurement has been a focus of attention in a conceptualisation in which hard socioeconomic conditions may “explain” the success of a guerrilla movement, for example: neutrality from the United States, a weak electoral system and pre-modern

social phenomena: that there is a condition of “multicausality” or else an “overdetermination” of processes, including the crucial factor of political agency. The government, according to Montemayor himself, was not avoiding the recognition of “causality” or “structural causes”, but pointing out the relevance that political leadership had in the movement. I claim that Montemayor avoids the importance of political leadership in order to sustain his argument that the EZLN was a *consequence* of an unbearable situation in Chiapas. It also helps his broader claim, that what has taken place in Mexico is a continual insurrection accompanied by a low-intensity war between 1965 and 1996.

The strength of his analysis is to be found in the notion that there is a connection between the armed struggles and the identity of the nation. Guerrilla groups, he says, “warn us that we have to change or that we are not what we must be”.³⁰ Besides, early on he includes the EPR (The Popular Revolutionary Army, which emerged in 1996) in the picture of those guerrilla movements with some sort of social support,³¹ despite the stigmatisation of its perceived identity between 1996-2001. By doing so, he shows evidence of the connection between institutional violence and insurgent violence as being two sides of the same coin. The mere mention of the “other guerrilla group” used to be a rather marginalised practice even within the radical left.³² Montemayor discusses the cultural, social and political ambience in which the EZLN was also transformed through unarmed practices in which indigenous

armies losing moral battles against an insurgent elite with college educated cadres and impoverished peasants. For a sample of the literature, see for instance Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966). Ted R. Gurr, *Handbook of Political Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1980). Marta Harnecker, *Pueblos en Armas* (Mexico: Era, 1984). Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990). Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). David Sanders, *Patterns of Political Instability* (London: Macmillan, 1981). Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Timothy Wickham-Crowly, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

³⁰ Montemayor, *Chiapas*. 75.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

³² For instance, the affirmation “the *epperristas* - belonging to the EPR - are police killers” was uttered by some activists on the left as in the case of a current federal PRD Congressman from the social-left organisation Francisco Villa Popular Front (FPFV). The EPR was perceived as distinct from the EZLN, even when that adjective could have been equally applied to the EZLN. The EZLN had also effectively “killed” 24 policemen in the first two days of the uprising. My interview, 10 October 1997. The different currents within the radical left still debate where the boundaries of the acceptable are in matters of political violence. For a sample of the dominant view on the EPR see Salvador Guerrero, *EPR, Estigma y Silencio*, MPhil thesis, (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2000).

culture and clerical political work softened the military core of the organisation.³³ The result of the encounter between a modern leadership and a guerrilla-peasant-indigenous movement, he claims, is condensed in the figure of the leader, *Subcomandante Marcos*. Montemayor believes that the self-defence of a harassed community, as much as the struggle against the profoundly racist Mexican society, were enhanced by having *Marcos* as a spokesman. However, he also believes this did not displace the ultimate relevance of structural factors.³⁴

My critique concerns the fact that Montemayor does not see any wrong-doing in the EZLN's practices in relation to other organisations or to non-Zapatistas. I believe that this omission comes from the perspective that any analysis of the guerrillas' local and inner antagonisms could be seen as supportive of the government's position. Montemayor also avoids recognising the fact that Mexican society and the regime reacted with a multiplicity of moves that, first, revealed certain openness; and, second, showed the nationally hegemonic success of the general strategy as favouring the regime. He seems to neglect elements, such as the factors that may have allowed the organisation to construct its symbolic success, and their correlation with the political possibilities actually available within the general logics of a regime interested in its reproduction above the marginal defiance of an armed group. In other words, he denies the structurally-conditioned nature of the government reaction - the dialogue with an insurgent actor as part of a strategic vision - as much as he tries to underline "structural" causes in favour of the explanation and justification of the guerrilla group's existence.

In the same line of argument, and in open defence of the EZLN project, Harvey regards the revolt as the space of convergence for a multiplicity of "small acts of resistance" associated with the struggle for land and "the right to have rights" in a reactionary environment.³⁵ He vindicates a post-structuralist approach in which identity-formation is crucial and is associated with the general thrust of the argument that a non-essentialist view of

³³ Montemayor, *Chiapas*, and Yvon Le Bot, *Subcomandante Marcos, El sueño zapatista* (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1997), 68-78, emphasises this central aspect.

³⁴ Montemayor, *Chiapas*, 66-80, 134 and 169.

categories such as “indigenous, peasant, state, class” or “citizenship” must be defended because “no identity exists in isolation from other identities”.³⁶ He rejects, from the outset, any intention to explain a causal chain of events in relation to Chiapas, but nevertheless discusses all the structural elements related to it.³⁷ His work focuses on the political construction of citizenship, “from the fragments of multiple struggles against oppression”.³⁸

Harvey develops the idea that social movements, as explored by Foweraker,³⁹ embody the popular character of a community understood as the collective resistance against clientelistic and paternalistic patterns or the presidential authoritarianism allegedly predominant in Mexico. These factors may have contributed to the dismantling of the PRI’s regime during the preceding three decades.⁴⁰ Harvey’s account uses a rich vein of analysis as evidence by showing the variety of tools provided by historical, social and political categories. The meaning of democracy and citizenship, in his framework, is associated with the contingent values that such expressions may acquire in the struggle for defining the limits of the state and the level of insertion in the state’s priorities of challenging political actors. It is also understood here, that the political confrontation “may open or close spaces for political intervention”.⁴¹ This is a recognition - which I share - of the value of an understanding of the constructions of political identity as always defined through historical pressures and aspirations.

For Harvey, the re-emergence of *Zapatismo* in Chiapas indicates the always-open tension between the state and the peripheral regions in which the negotiation of rules takes place. It illustrates that “the structure of the state is only as permanent as the security of their

³⁵ Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion, The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Particularly relevant is the idea that social movements are defined “by their political practices rather than by their social composition”. Therefore, they are understood not as “social” movements, but as “popular movements,” in that they seek to establish the “people” as political actors. Harvey, *op. cit.*, 14. and Joe Foweraker and Craig Ann, *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), especially 3-22, 43-58 and 78-104.

⁴⁰ Harvey, *The Chiapas*, 22-3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

political underpinnings”,⁴² which is an idea that I will re-phrase by saying that such a tension is the best place to analyse the interaction between insurgent and security actors. Thus, the EZLN is seen as “a novel attempt to articulate a new radical democratic imaginary within Mexican civil society”, and correctly situated, I think, as a feasible locus to address national problems.⁴³

His excellent account of the historical pattern of colonialism, state formation and resistance in Chiapas, and the “Zapatista opening” of the political field from 1994 on, nonetheless, shows several weaknesses. These flaws lead to his underlining argument in favour of the EZLN, and not necessarily to his stated attempt to account for the referential aspect of political identities as he initially claims.

For instance, even when the constitution of indigenous identities is associated with several historical events, no mention is made of the historical fact that other popular leaders who are enormously relevant to the construction of Mexican identity, such as José María Morelos, Benito Juárez and Emiliano Zapata in three foundational moments - the War of Independence, the War of Reform and the Mexican Revolution - did displace the constitution of indigenous identities. For them the crucial need for an image of a new nation required the construction of a new *national mestizo* identity. The necessary national unity has always been associated with a project that could overcome the limits of what the vindication of an indigenous identity may mean after Spanish colonialism, French intervention and the US’s shadow over the Revolution. Morelos and Zapata, for example, did not even espouse the priority for an indigenous subject in their proclamations. In short, Harvey’s argument that the peasant-indigenous constitution of a resistance identity might be a path to the enrichment of citizenship, as opposed to the recognition of its displacement as central to Mexican-*mestizo* identity, even when he considers the relevance of radical contestation for the definition of the contours of the state, shows important omissions. Particularly important is the fact that Harvey ignores the legitimacy of other historical developments in order to justify the

⁴² Ibid., 121.

⁴³ Ibid., 237.

originality of the EZLN approach, and isolate it from nationally accepted agreements that might bring into question the core of the EZLN's identity. Certainly, the *mestizo* national identity still faces an unresolved tension between the concepts of "assimilation" and "integration" of the indigenous, and there is no agreement on exactly who should be considered "indigenous".

In addition, he does not recognise the reciprocal effects that societal interventions and the government opening in the 1990s had on the EZLN's identity, for instance, during the first three months of the revolt,⁴⁴ even though he supports the relational character of identity. I will discuss this in chapter 2.

Besides, Harvey shows in his critique of other authors his legitimately ideological leanings. For example, he suggests that Tello's publishing of *La Rebelión de las Cañadas* in 1995 was part of a counter-insurgent move, at the moment in which president Zedillo launched "a new military offensive against the EZLN" on 9 February of that year.⁴⁵ He implies that there was involvement on the part of Tello in some sort of anti-EZLN conspiracy and omits the fact that the presidential offensive followed the discovery, by military intelligence agents, of EZLN safe houses in Veracruz and Mexico City, in the context of a legal agreement to stop the promotion of armed operations.⁴⁶ He suggests that Tello's book may have been published in an effort to discredit the EZLN and justify the armed offensive. If that was the case, he writes, "it failed dramatically". Tello's and Jorge Castañeda's suggestions, made in 1994, that the EZLN are "armed reformists" are attacked.⁴⁷ Harvey understands the EZLN's identity as a novelty among other leftist organisations, that is,

⁴⁴ Le Bot has suggested that the Zapatista "movement" is a result of the "military" failure of the EZLN. See Le Bot, 75.

⁴⁵ Harvey, *The Chiapas*, 10-11

⁴⁶ In early February 1995 and in 1997 the Presidency, the General Attorney Office (PGR) and the Governance Secretariat (Secretaría de Gobernación) documented this fact. The EZLN was relatively successful in presenting Zedillo's clumsy reaction to the EZLN's ongoing underground work as "Zedillo's betrayal", and thus tried to discredit him. Information related to this fact was rather marginalised, for instance, in *La Jornada*. My experience, when at the moment of presenting this argument - as stated by official sources, such as Pedro Joaquín Coldwell, former government's representative before the EZLN - it was marginalised from this publication in 1997 until its writing was nuanced, *La Jornada*, 25-27 November 1997. Consequently, the emphasis was put on the uselessness of the "military way out".

⁴⁷ Harvey, *The Chiapas*, 11.

amongst those that claim to be “revolutionary”. In other words, the EZLN was neither “revolutionary” nor “reformist”, but “rebellious”. His qualification of the EZLN’s identity entirely corresponds to the EZLN’s own self-portrayal over the past decade.

In the epilogue to the 1998 Mexican version of his book (absent in the English one), Harvey continues this persistent defence of the EZLN. Even when he claims he has been self-critical, and suggests that *caudillismo* within the EZLN may have been an unwelcome result of the dynamics of the movement, he criticises other authors such as La Grange and Rico, for having emphasised the role of the EZLN’s main leader in the conflict.⁴⁸ According to his logic, this emphasis is linked to the defence of the regime. In addressing Legorreta⁴⁹ who defends the idea that options other than taking up arms were possible in Chiapas, Harvey considers that she “tends to overestimate the real possibilities” of what she calls the “political road”. He claims that such an option was cancelled not by the *Zapatistas*, as Legorreta suggests, but by the government. Interestingly, Harvey points out that Legorreta’s view may be dependent on her political involvement with another organisation in Chiapas (ARIC, Rural Association of Collective Interest), which was at some point a rival of the EZLN. He uses this argument to problematise her critique. Nevertheless, the same rigour is dispensed with in his comments on other authors. He does not point out, for instance, the political allegiance of other authoritative analysts who are more supportive of the EZLN. Such is the case of Hernández, who is not just an EZLN advisor, but also the editorial co-ordinator of *La Jornada*, an important news-media publication in the construction of the bridge between the EZLN and “civil society”.

Even as Harvey recognises the “contingent” nature of social processes, he inconsistently affirms that “it was *the impossibility* of affecting change through legal channels that led to the decision to take arms”. By this sudden change of criteria, “contingency” is simply erased in one stroke, and a line of contestable causality substituted for it.⁵⁰ He seems

⁴⁸ Ibid., 249-51.

⁴⁹ María del Carmen Legorreta. *Religión, política y guerrilla en Las Cañadas de la Selva Lacandona* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1998).

⁵⁰ Harvey, *The Chiapas*, 229. My emphasis.

to claim that if change was “impossible” through legal channels, then it was “impossible” not to take up arms against the regime; furthermore, it seems this claim is made in order to defend the understanding of the EZLN as an unavoidable and direct result of an oppressive situation. These affirmations seem to defend the idea of the EZLN as an unavoidable historical result, a sense of historical determinism that Harvey originally appeared to deny. Besides this, he uncritically adopts the EZLN’s stances. For instance, he equates the “impunity” attributed to anti *Zapatista* forces - or “paramilitary” groupings - to the “impunity” of the Mexican Army, thus validating the critique advanced by pro-EZLN forces and authors, for whom the army and the “paramilitaries” are very much the same thing.⁵¹ He blindly accepts the EZLN’s claim that the rebellion was decided by combatants prepared to risk their lives and that it was “an attempt to be heard”. In so doing, he accepts the debatable thesis that the uprising was a political operation unconnected with a broader insurrectionary endeavour in which something other than the intention “to be heard” was at stake.⁵² However, his epilogue to the Mexican edition nevertheless exhibits a strength probably taken from a number of analysts insisting on the paradoxical nature of the EZLN’s symbolic success. Hence, he writes: “what makes possible *zapatismo* in a given moment is precisely what makes it impossible”. Le Bot and *Marcos* have explored this paradox.⁵³

Besides Montemayor and Harvey, other authors have analysed the relevance of the Chiapas revolt in Mexico as a new and defiant space for representation of democratic value. Amongst these other accounts, the politics of identity, ethnicity, trends in economic accumulation, culture, gender and human dignity⁵⁴ are all emphasised as the grounds upon

⁵¹ Ibid., 239.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Yvon Le Bot, *Subcomandante Marcos, El sueño zapatista*. (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1997).

⁵⁴ See for instance: George Collier, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland: Food First Books, 1994). Gilberto López, *Nación y Pueblos Indios en el Neoliberalismo* (Mexico: UIA-Plaza y Valdés, 1995). Yvon Le Bot, *Subcomandante Marcos, El sueño zapatista* (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1997). John Holloway and Eloina Pelaez, *Zapatista!, Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (London: Pluto Press, 1998). Luis Hernández, *Entre la memoria y el olvido: guerrillas, movimiento indígena y reformas legales en la hora del EZLN in Chiapas 4* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico-Era, 1997). Lynn Stephen, “The Zapatista Army of National Liberation and the National Democratic Convention”, in *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 87, Volume 22 Number 4 (Fall 1995), also his *¡Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

which an alternative imaginary could eventually emerge, and a new identity of the nation could become thinkable. In my opinion, the influence and effect that the hegemonic logic has had in the composition of the EZLN identity is underestimated because the main endeavour has been, legitimately, ideological and political, and has involved sympathy for the revolt as a space of contestation *contra* the dominant neo-liberal logic. Therefore, they tend to belittle the significance of government operations and omit discussion of the negative effects of the EZLN uprising. Even when some critiques entail a strong estrangement from the PRI, they also seem to defend one of the pillars of the PRI's hegemonic ideology. This is particularly the case in relation to the rural project of communitarian *Zapatismo* in the early 1910s, and its reiteration in Chiapas during the 1990s.

The ideology of the *Mexican Revolution* is still the backdrop to the defence of the radicalism represented by *Zapatismo* and *Neo-Zapatismo*, and in the representations of peasant and indigenous movements. As a consequence, it is fundamentally unquestioned by this literature. Next I will present some illustrative literature, which focuses on the role of the EZLN's leadership and its political agency.

1.1.2 Political agency and the critique of the EZLN

The authors in the second group, emphasising the question of political agency in what I regard as a more or less open attempt to defend aspects of the Salinas administration,⁵⁵ claim to be interested in “understanding” rather than “judging” the significance of the EZLN rebellion and political violence in general. Behind this perspective is the equally ideological objective of putting forward a comprehensive vision of the Chiapas conflict in order to diminish its historical significance. I select Tello's and La Grange & Rico's works because I consider them exemplary of the literature that emphasises the question of leadership, and to

⁵⁵ For a representative anthology of the discussion on the EZLN, see Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *Chiapas, la guerra de las ideas* (Mexico: Diana 1994). A contextualised account of key documents is presented by John Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas* (New York: The New York Press, 1999), and a rather openly pro-Salinista but still useful discussion as critique of the media is available in Marco Levario Turcott, *Chiapas, La guerra en el papel* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1999).

some extent, advocates the ideology of modernisation - as opposed to the populist project of the *Mexican Revolution* - deployed by the Salinas administration (1988-1994).

In 1995, for instance, Tello Díaz, published a text in which at least three arguments are clearly oriented in that direction. First, Tello recognises the indigenous as political actors basically divided within their communities, and the EZLN, in particular, as a complex consequence of political and socio-economic interactions resulting from this division and not from a political convergence.⁵⁶ The EZLN is understood as part of a broader process in which this armed organisation was not a sheer source of political resistance, but had an insurrectionary project before and beyond Chiapas.⁵⁷ Second, the reconnection between the EZLN and previous pro-Communist guerrilla movements is emphasised as an argument against the idea that its leaders are representative of an absolutely new type of insurrectionary organisation.⁵⁸ Third, he emphasises the geographical location of the revolt, and puts forward crucial elements - available in the press but enriched by military sources - to defend his view about the limits of the uprising.⁵⁹ He advances these views via several theses. One is that the revolt was an unavoidable political outcry against *local* political and economic subordination but had little chance of becoming a national movement.⁶⁰ This idea precedes his conclusion that the government reacted with an open-minded approach without which the EZLN could not have survived.⁶¹ There is also an incipient critique of the EZLN's rhetorical inconsistencies. Tello acknowledges that his main purpose is not to achieve a comprehensive study of the rebellion but instead to provide an account of how the rebellion was *generated*. However, his conclusion focuses on *the outcomes* of the EZLN's intervention as early as 1995; thus, consequences, rather than causes, are questioned.⁶² He underlines the fact that the EZLN took advantage of the political capital that many other organisations had already accumulated in Chiapas, during the decade prior to 1994, by outsmarting them with the vindication of a

⁵⁶ Carlos Tello Díaz, *La rebelión de las Cañadas* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1995), 51-162.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 127-62.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 82, 97, 115.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 203-9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 208

nationally unworkable “armed path”. Thus, the EZLN acquired a position of interlocution and representation above other radical groups opposed to the guerrilla project.⁶³

The authors of the first group, in which structural accounts are deployed, and those in which the question of “contingent articulations” is privileged, have identified Tello, as trying to domesticate the insurrectionary images and possibilities invoked by the EZLN. For them, Tello is one of the enemies of the EZLN’s sympathisers because of his attempt to demythologise the origins of the EZLN by partially revealing its internal logic, individual profiles and thus, allegedly, attempting to undermine its legitimacy.

Tello’s account emphasises the contradictory role of the EZLN’s political intervention in the midst of the 1995 debate - one year after the start of the uprising - over the benefits associated with the uprising by the left.

The uprising shook the consciousness of society; it put an end to the government’s triumphalism; it reopened the indigenous question; it unequivocally pushed the question of marginalization and poverty to the top of the country’s agenda; alongside other factors it contributed as well to putting pressure in favour of the transition to democracy. Nevertheless, at the same time, it divided everybody’s consciousness; it destabilised the markets; it increased violence; it sowed Mexicans’ distrust of their institutions. In the rest of the country the consequences were contradictory too. The uprising reactivated the flux of resources towards the communities; it sped up the resolution of peasant land problems; it revolutionised the normativity in the provision of justice; it propelled the changes required by electoral law in Chiapas. However, at the same time, it caused tens of deaths in just a few days; it separated families; it resulted in the expulsion of thousands of indigenous from their country towns; it left many poor ranchers without the means of subsistence; it accentuated the insecurity in the country-side; it entailed the militarization of Las Cañadas.⁶⁴

Tello’s journalistic-sociological account was successful in that it became, even when controversial, a point of reference in the dispute over the meaning of insurgency in Mexico in general, and the EZLN and the Chiapas revolt, in particular. Other authors such as Harvey and Montemayor have criticised his work because he resorted to intelligence information

⁶² Ibid., 206-9.

⁶³ “These people (the EZLN) came to ride a saddled horse”, attributed to the bishop Samuel Ruíz. Ibid., 127.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 209.

from military sources.⁶⁵ It seems to me that this disqualification is more political than academic. Tello's insight offers organised evidence of crucial processes behind the constitution of the insurrectionary group. It may be said that criticisms directed at his book result from an ideological dispute that is not always recognised. In Mexico some authors consider it legitimate to resort to "secret" or "clandestine" information when it belongs to the armed left, but easily question anything attained from governmental sources regarded as the "enemy". Besides, information about the EZLN's constitution had been revealed as far back as January 1994,⁶⁶ but it was blurred by the fascination with the revolt and the loss of confidence in the government.

Tello touches on an important point, one which is often disregarded by the left when explaining why the revolt was dealt with in a democratic fashion, with the intervention of all political forces and by questioning the legitimacy of political violence: "the uprising had to be solved by dialogue. This distinction between the legitimacy and the viability of violence, between its moral validity and its political efficacy, lay behind the reaction of all those who, without condemning the resort to arms, participated in demonstrations in favour of peace".⁶⁷ Thus, the question of dialogue is exposed as a mutual legitimisation of the Salinas administration and of the EZLN's decision to engage in it. Contradictorily though, he tries to establish a legitimate standpoint from which he can make a political *judgement* even when he denies such a judgement to be purpose of his work.⁶⁸ Other works emphasising the weight granted to political agency followed Tello's.

Among other attempts to demystify the EZLN is *Marcos, la genial impostura* - *Marcos, the wonderful imposture*. In it, La Grange and Rico indicate that their interest is in

⁶⁵ "The nature of part of the information privileged by centres of intelligence become clear in two "historiographic" and "journalistic" works: *La rebelión de las Cañadas*, by Carlos Tello Díaz, and *Marcos: la genial impostura*, by Bertrand La Grange and Maite Rico. In both cases the information came from two sources very different at that moment: CISEN (Political Intelligence) and Military Intelligence", in Carlos Montemayor, *Las FARP y Seguridad Nacional*, in *La Jornada*, 25 August 2001. As it is also clear, Montemayor does not even grant that these works have "journalistic" character or show "historical" validity. By his expression "become clear" we may understand Tello's and La Grange's unwelcome critique of the EZLN and Montemayor's sympathy for the EZLN more than the definitive establishment of "the truth".

⁶⁶ See communiqués of the Governance Secretariat (Secretaría de Gobernación), 2 to 11 January 1994.

⁶⁷ Tello, *La rebelión*, 208.

“historically” locating the EZLN’s emergence. In a straightforward fashion the question of political agency is dealt with by illustrating the secretive political behaviour of the organisation and the personal profile of its main leaders.⁶⁹ Several operations are deployed in the search of the “true” meaning of the revolt by looking at the intentions attributed to its main spokesman. The authors intend to construe a standpoint from which the personal characteristics of Rafael Guillén (*Marcos’* civil identity) could be fused with the traits that may explain the allegedly deceitful success of the EZLN as a symbol of resistance.⁷⁰ However, by attempting to know the “real identity” and “what is essential”⁷¹ about Guillén’s or *Marcos’* life, the argument shows its strength and its weakness in the same operation. The analysis separates *Marcos* from the political process of his emergence by attributing the remarkable nature of the phenomenon centrally to his talents, and by presenting the EZLN, after 1994, as his ultimate masterpiece.⁷² The EZLN thus becomes an organisation that represents a rather traditional and authoritarian political thrust, symbolised by *Marcos’* “mentor”,⁷³ i.e. Fernando Yáñez or *Comandante Germán*. His role in the EZLN’s construction is second only to *Marcos’* and was, with good timing, hidden in the first thirteen months of the revolt.⁷⁴ In La Grange and Rico’s account, *Germán* becomes the representation of all that the EZLN has negated in the ideological construction of its 1994 image, in which it became viewed as a post-modern and post-Communist organisation.⁷⁵ *Comandante Germán* is regarded as an orthodox socialist and authoritarian character. He might have prepared himself during the previous two decades to confront the regime through violent means, and could be considered reluctant to recognise the political modifications that have taken place in Mexico and the world over the last thirty years, in terms of the displacement of socialist values. La Grange and Rico, as Tello had done before, emphasise that *Germán* founded the *National Liberation*

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.i-xii.

⁶⁹ Bertrand De La Grange and Maite Rico, *Marcos, la genial impostura* (México: Nuevo Siglo-Aguilar, 1997), 83-236

⁷⁰ Ibid., 21-41.

⁷¹ Ibid., 21.

⁷² Ibid., 339-62.

⁷³ The characterisation of “mentor and eldest brother” attributed to *Germán* has subsequently been recognised publicly by *Marcos* in 2003.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 145-55. Until his capture and subsequent release in 1995.

Forces (FLN) and the EZLN - as early as 1983 - as the FLN's armed wing led by *Marcos* since the early 1990s. They are, then, correctly considered as essential parts of a unity within the EZLN, which is not regularly seen or accepted as fundamental by EZLN sympathisers. For the public, they claim, *Marcos* is the symbol of a democratic guerrilla force. On the contrary, within the EZLN and its area of influence, *Germán* and some indigenous leaders who share the reproduction of non-democratic and violent methods of decision-making and exclusion are the norm.⁷⁶ To EZLN sympathisers, with the absence of any utopian vision after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of neo-liberal projects, the appearance of a well dressed guerrilla movement fighting for the indigenous people could not be more welcome. In consequence, La Grange and Rico perceive the EZLN to be an inauthentic as well as compellingly ambiguous project because it was "insurgent and military" but was also "democratic and open-minded". In short, it was "the only guerrilla group that gives more importance to words than to bullets".⁷⁷

The authors provide evidence of *Marcos*' personal interventions in order to dispute the idea that indigenous individuals have the ultimate word in the EZLN's decisions, including the vote for deciding on the uprising against a diversity of indicators that seemed to condemn it to military failure.⁷⁸ They show some consistent evidence of the contradictory character of the EZLN's leader, a politician with an open disposition towards the pro-EZLN media and a contrasting and exclusionary attitude towards his adversaries in other media spaces, his internal opposition, his adversaries and enemies within the left and the non-EZLN inhabitants of *Las Cañadas*; the conclusion being that *Marcos* is far from being the pure iconic representation of a universally-accepted character, whether in Chiapas, nationally or

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-124 and 389-406.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 203-310. As in the case of Tello, La Grange and Rico show the variety of political actors over whom *Marcos* had imposed himself, including the character known as *subcomandante Daniel*, whose hatred of *Marcos* led him to reveal to the army the names of the EZLN's leaders and the practices rather non-democratic dominant within the EZLN and its area of influence. The weight given to *subcomandante Daniel*'s testimony was not welcome by segments of the left. See for instance Jorge Luis Sierra, *El enemigo interno: contrainsurgencia y fuerzas armadas en México* (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés, 2003). A summary is available in *El Independiente*, 10 August 2003.

even within his own ideological current.⁷⁹ In my point of view, these highly feasible elements⁸⁰ may show the EZLN leadership's strength rather than its weakness.

They also emphasise the fatal EZLN military mistakes made during January 1994, and the seemingly planned "symbolic holocaust" foreseen by the EZLN's leadership, in contradiction to what was told to the indigenous people.⁸¹ A diversity of politically ambiguous positions taken by the EZLN, when dealing with the eve and the aftermath of the uprising are mentioned.⁸² *Marcos'* personal skills as communicator are interpreted as a *sine qua non* element in the relatively successful image portrayed through the media and by intellectuals all over the world. The romanticism of the EZLN's sympathisers and the idealistic component attributed to its leader correspond, according to La Grange and Rico, to the desire to have a space of identification in the deserted political field in which only market and neo-liberal ideology seemed to exist. However, they insist that the EZLN could not radically mobilise society, as it had originally wished.⁸³ Reclaiming Régis Debray's expression, La Grange and Rico claim that the EZLN's "military-literary insurrection" was the ground for the construction of *Marcos* as a sort of masked political performance they called the "wonderful imposture".⁸⁴ They show some evidence of the divided positions in Chiapas before and after the revolt and as a consequence of the EZLN's defence of the armed path. The discontent of ranchers and other indigenous people towards the EZLN is exposed.⁸⁵ The inexperienced and uncritical media, according to the authors, contributed to what they consider the EZLN's compelling falsity.⁸⁶ The relevance of the familiarity of the EZLN's

⁷⁹ De La Grange, *Subcomandante Marcos, La Genial*, 341-439.

⁸⁰ Many of their affirmations and evidence circulated not just in the non-Zapatista communities, but also in the more loyal ones according to my own interviews and observation in Chiapas. January-March 1994, December-January 1995 and August 1996.

⁸¹ La Grange, *Subcomandante*, 307. In Ocosingo, EZLN's members were killed by the Army in the absence of efficacious leadership. Zapatistas were told that society would support them in their "war" against the regime. The army was accused of human rights violations for some of the incidents.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 297-313.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 370, according to a well known EZLN's sympathiser quoted there, the EZLN was "the most imaginative movement of the millennium with the more stupid - *apendejada* - civil society of the millennium".

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 310 and 341-406.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 407-21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 379-83.

leadership with contemporary political philosophy, especially Althusser, Derrida and Foucault, is emphasised as constitutive of his guerrilla rhetoric.⁸⁷

Despite their comprehensive critique of Rafael Guillén, the authors are not able to satisfactorily explain why the “personal style” of *Marcos* and the EZLN’s survival were accepted or even promoted and legitimised, by relevant segments of society and by the state through means of a dialogue with the insurgents. Considering that this is an account presented as an attempt to fill-in a “historical” blank, the work is very much an excellent example of a partial history. It is still impressionistic and - validly - a journalistic construction of a single central argument: that *Marcos* is more relevant than the EZLN. In their view, he is the contemporary form of a rather anachronistic content. La Grange and Rico made their point: *Marcos*, the “guerrilla multimedia”, was the first representation of a guerrilla incapable of being a guerrilla: “he (*Marcos*) has changed the rules of the armed struggle that has become little by little a spectacle...”.⁸⁸ Although relevant, this point is insufficient to characterise him and the EZLN. Interestingly, in one single page the inability to locate the EZLN is explicitly exposed by the authors. The Chiapas guerrilla is simultaneously a “true guerrilla” and a “virtual guerrilla”.⁸⁹

The revolt is, then, very much, the result of the will and skill of its main leader. Without him the perception of the EZLN would certainly be far from what it is: the contemporary constitution of a political movement identified as a non-orthodox project. The image portrayed by *Comandante Germán* or by other *Comandantes* may be considerably different. On the other hand, this detailed exposition does not contribute much to the characterisation of the EZLN in a broader horizon, that of the characterisation of the Mexican state, or in relation to the interpretation of the support and sympathy generated in a variety of sectors. The book was predictably perceived by segments of the left as unacceptable and, to

⁸⁷ Ibid., 85-95.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 439

⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

some extent, even rejected as a result.⁹⁰ La Grange and Rico's work, however, is indispensable in evaluating the capabilities and limitations of an analysis that, from the start, has excluded the other, that is, the recognition of the construction of a project that ethically problematises their own assumptions and political leanings. They pretend to be disappointed with the allegedly non-revolutionary character of the EZLN because of their own preconception of an authenticity-revolutionary dichotomy, which was mobilised in their work. Their criticism of the PRI's "arrogance" and "authoritarianism" is matched by their intent to question *Marcos* and the EZLN. In conclusion, their inability to incorporate a wider framework of analysis lead to the failure of satisfactorily explaining the EZLN's success while their "unmasking" of the mechanisms and processes of the EZLN is only partial.

A similar disinclination to addressing crucial elements is shown by the pro-EZLN literature from authors such as Hernández, Montemayor, Le Bot, Harvey and Morton, among others. They do not engage, for instance, with the system's backbone. In my view, the regime's ability to reorganise and naturalise its system of security and launch the general strengthening of the electoral system. My claim is that this was widely facilitated, if not engendered, by the EZLN revolt in 1994, as a profound refusal to accept any sign of institutional or insurgent violence. These and other elements are also shadowed by focusing on the analysis of an allegedly new notion of power. Some authors have interpreted the latter as a universal contribution of the EZLN to a "post-modern" moral insurgency. In that interpretation, political power "as such", i.e. as an instrument of the state, has less relevance in the constitution of resistance identities than "power from below". This standpoint is enriched, it is claimed, by the EZLN's rejection of reaching national power and by its attempt to create a network of contestation and resistance.⁹¹ This input is then linked to the rescuing of the indigenous people as a starting point for a new politics of struggle against a "neo-

⁹⁰ In *La Jornada*, the main political paper in the 1990s, an internal authority decided that La Grange and Rico had become "totally un-interviewable", to put it very nicely. *La Jornada* newsroom, 1997.

⁹¹ EZLN's communiqués 1994-1998. See especially Antonio García de León, *Prologue to EZLN, Documentos y comunicados # 1* (Mexico: Editorial Era, 1994), 21.

liberal” model of global breadth, and for a humanistic enterprise giving new meanings to “revolution”.

1.1.3 Dynamic Structure-Agency Accounts

Other commentators emphasise the dynamic interaction between structure and agency when analysing the EZLN and other organisations.⁹² For instance, Leyva has incorporated collective identity-formation, innovative social practices and contributions to alternative visions of development as crucial elements in the analysis of the EZLN. She correctly claims that it was able to reconstitute a “sense of community” and an “imagined community”, to which I will refer in chapter 2 as part of what could be called the *Zapatista myth*.⁹³ She recognises the “unresolved tension” between “constitutional individualism” and “indigenous communalism” as one axis of the Chiapas conflict. This tension will be addressed in my thesis as part of the dichotomy constructed around discourses of order and discourses of emancipation. I consider her insistence on the plurality of organisations existing in Chiapas and their multiple and varied effects as a central contribution to the understanding of the complexity of the 1994 events. However, even when she stresses the singularity of what she calls the New Zapatista Movement (NZM) she cannot help but imply that without the EZLN as its core, this “NZM” probably could not survive. She dismisses other effects at the national level, such as the security implications of the uprising and the local reorganisation of predominant forces, to be represented by what she calls the “*finquero* ideology” of the owners

⁹² Among others, Federico Anaya, “Revolucion y Democracia: Disyuntivas y Oportunidades o Los Desencuentros Zapatistas”, Mexico, manuscript, (23 June 2002). Yvon Le Bot, *Subcomandante Marcos, El sueño zapatista*. (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1997) and his article “La Autonomía Según los Zapatistas”, in *La Jornada, Masiosare* (29 March 1998). Xochitl Leyva, “The New Zapatista Movement: Political levels, Actors and Political Discourse in Contemporary Mexico”, in *Power, Identity and Mobility in Mexican Society*, by Valentina Napolitano and Xochitl Leyva (London: University of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998) and “Regional, Communal, and organizational Transformations in Las Cañadas”, in *The Indigenous People of Chiapas and the State in the Time of Zapatismo: Remaking Culture, Renegotiating Power*, California, Issue 117, Volume 28, Number 2 (March 2001). María del Carmen Legorreta. *Religión, política y guerrilla en Las Cañadas de la Selva Lacandona* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1998). Juan Ramírez, *Nunca más sin Rostros! Evolución histórica del proyecto del EZLN* (Mexico: Eon-El Cotidiano, 2002).

⁹³ See Leyva, “Regional Communal, and Organizational Transformation in Las Cañadas”, in *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 117, Volume 28, Number 2 (March 2001), 20-44.

of *fincas*, and conservative forces who cannot think in more than, at best, a “paternal attitude” towards the indigenous people.⁹⁴

Legorreta presents a comprehensive reconstruction of historical events prior to the EZLN’s uprising, including a panoramic description of Chiapas and provides a wide perspective on what the “enemy” of “the people” - or the government -, is like, analysing the conception of it as an “adversary” and as a legitimate interlocutor.⁹⁵ Ethnic, cultural and military dimensions are incorporated in the context of the popular struggles of the period 1973-1994.

Whilst she acknowledges structural and historical factors behind the social and political turmoil in Chiapas, she clearly indicates that they cannot be understood as a source of legitimisation for the EZLN’s armed path, because other options were effectively available. In fact she criticises the “radicalism” and “intolerance” that emerged among political actors within the EZLN and other organisations.⁹⁶

Legorreta’s argument is that similar conditions may have different outcomes according to the variety of available political articulations. She claims that the rise of the EZLN was basically the result of a subjective valorisation of the EZLN leadership in a hegemonic dispute. In it this organisation emerged as public winner in a context where all the other organisations had rejected the armed path.⁹⁷ Hence, the EZLN cannot legitimately deny that there were no other forms of backing up the empowerment of indigenous people and peasants and nor could it, either, present such conditions as the “causes” of its emergence because they were in fact politically articulated in many other forms.⁹⁸ By emphasising that the same socio-economic conditions were differently interpreted by other organisations with long traditions of struggle and massive popular support, she defends the idea that the EZLN’s initiative overmanoeuvred other projects that had been effective in promoting social change,

⁹⁴ See Leyva, “De las Cañadas a Europa: niveles actores y discursos del Nuevo Movimiento Zapatista (NMZ) (1994-1997)”, in *Desacatos: Revista de Antropología Spocial* 1 (Spring), 56-87.

⁹⁵ María del Carmen Legorreta Díaz, *Religión, política y guerrilla en Las Cañadas de la Selva Lacandona* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1998).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-80.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 211-42.

mainly the peasant movement.⁹⁹ She shows that the EZLN overtly harassed its main adversary, the ARIC, and others, after they decided not to back the “war” against the Mexican state.¹⁰⁰

Legorreta’s consideration of contingency in the outcomes that many authors tend to consider unavoidable represents an important contribution. For her, the EZLN’s decision to begin an armed insurgency is debatable. She suggests that the EZLN leaders were fighting for the survival of their organisation in a context in which dropouts and wide critique could be overcome only by an uprising that threw the EZLN into the spotlight as “true” representative of the indigenous people. The 1994 event was then more a result of a voluntaristic and hegemonic goal than an unavoidable war of resistance.

The (EZLN’s) critique of the political struggle method practised by the indigenous social movement in Las Cañadas by the ARIC Union de Uniones, came from promises and expectations of deep and radical changes offered (as well) by the revolutionary method of the guerrilla, which presented itself as more proper than the long reformist road. Nevertheless, the results that today can be appreciated from the Zapatista movement, once the triumphalism has passed, seems to prove that not everything is reducible to saying *enough is enough*¹⁰¹ and show that the solution of social problems inevitably goes through the construction of new practices and social relations more than violent processes oriented to destruction.¹⁰²

Legorreta presents a systematic reconstruction of the offer presented by the EZLN’s leaders to the peasants and indigenous people as their justification to wage a war against the Mexican State.¹⁰³ Briefly, her account suggests the level of sophisticated and strategic manipulation that the EZLN leadership deployed to persuade the indigenous people to become involved in the armed path, and the tensions created concerning other options and organisations opposed to it.

Legorreta’s work involves a political and intellectual commitment to an organisation that was an alternative to the EZLN, and, as such, was as valid as the commitment defended

⁹⁸ Ibid., 202-11.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 294 and 315.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 294-301.

¹⁰¹ This in reference to the motto that was attached to the EZLN’s *Declaracion de la Selva Lacandona* on 1 January 1994. My emphasis.

¹⁰² Legorreta, *Religión*, 317-8.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 264-86.

by pro-EZLN and pro-regime authors and analysts. She offers compelling evidence to contest a homogenous and uncritical understanding of the EZLN's intervention. However, her main weakness, in my point of view, is the attempt to persuade the reader that political subjectivity can be developed without elements of symbolic representation and the constitution of an imaginary horizon. Her introduction, for instance, shows the privileging of rationality, as opposed to any utopia, and insists on the need to obtain what she considers, in quoting another author, an indispensable resignation to the "easy temptation of looking for new utopias" if social change is to be produced.¹⁰⁴ This negation highlights the proximity between her work and that of La Grange.

1.2 Insurgency: post-modern or hegemonic?

The EZLN was considered by writers such as Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel Zaid as "post-modern", a category through which they were located in the post-Cold War scenario and distanced from pro-Socialist projects that involved the generalised use of political violence. I consider this perspective to be more representative of a rather impressionistic point of view than the result of more detailed knowledge of the EZLN's status and identity. Some scholars have tried to offer an alternative and post-modern reading of insurgent identities. However, they do not improve upon some traditional definitions. For instance, insurgent conflicts in the early 1990's were referred to in some literature as *post-modern*, well before the public emergence of the EZLN in Mexico. The reason was the emergence of allegedly new circumstances in the post-Soviet context and the availability of new theoretical tools, through which, supposedly, insurgent actors might be better understood.¹⁰⁵

"Post-modern" insurgencies are considered in recent commentaries (Munck and Purnaka, 2000) to include: 1) non-formal armies among a plurality of irregular formations; 2) few constraints for "insurgents who can afford to fight a long war"; 3) an operation that works

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the meaning of post-modern in relation to the EZLN see Michael Pelaez, *The EZLN: 21st Century Radicals*, in http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/reports/pomo_ezln.html and Daniel Nugent, *Northern Intellectuals and the EZLN*, on the same web page.

“below the level of sophistication of the state’s weapons systems”; and 4) are not “focused on territory”.¹⁰⁶ These characteristics, understood as an effort to define and make sense of the link between political conflict and political identities, are still insufficient for defining such “post-modern insurgencies”.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the first three attributes have been present in any guerrilla war. The fourth element ignores the fact that in Colombia or Nepal, for instance, there are “post-modern” insurgencies that do not necessarily fit the classification made by these authors to the extent that they are very much interested in either token or considerable amount of territorial control. The same has happened in Mexico, with the EZLN regarded by some writers as “post-modern” even when it is also in *de facto* control of a small area in Chiapas. The authors, assume a general insurgent tendency to launch a protracted war to be valid, even though that is not necessarily found in all countries with guerrilla conflicts, and neither in Mexico, where what supposedly would characterise the “post-modern” nature of the EZLN is precisely the absence of military engagement.

The proposed “post-modern” understanding of insurgencies, even though it intends to break with traditional views, has omitted the salience of the media intervention - the indispensable means of propaganda in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries - in which the meaning of any identity is actually negotiated.¹⁰⁸

I claim, at the same time, that the media is indispensable to insurgencies and the insurgents’ need to universalise their particular demands by means of constructing a space of inscription is matched only by their keenness to hide its radical and violent origin and its actual project. Instead, they portray its history in a positive light, presenting an imagined space of well-being for the whole community. In relation to the question of power, for example, there is great similarity between the public relations techniques deployed by the leader of the Cuban revolution and the EZLN’s, especially when faced with their negated

¹⁰⁶ Martin L. Van Creveld, *On Future War* (London: Brassey’s, 1991) and Ronaldo Munck, *Deconstructing Terror: Insurgency, Repression and Peace*, in *Postmodern Insurgencies, Political Violence, Identity Formation, Peacekeeping in Comparative Perspective* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000) by Ronald Munck and Purnaka L. de Silva.

¹⁰⁷ Ronald M. and De Silva, *Postmodern*, Specially Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

aspiration from obtaining national power. In the late 1950s, Fidel Castro repeatedly claimed that he was not interested in power, when interviewed by the *New York Times* before his takeover of Cuba.¹⁰⁹ The same has been said by *Subcomandante Marcos*, who has insistently maintained that the social movement led by him “is not interested in state power”, but in the positioning of civil society as a permanent site of rebellious contestation.

Beyond contextual differences, the intention to appear non-violent before public opinion is crucial, and remarkably similar to Castro’s successful manoeuvre. As traditional approaches have noted, propaganda (and in more recent decades, the media) intervention is as central in the constitution of an insurgent movement as it is in security actors’ interventions.¹¹⁰ My point is simply that propaganda becomes part of a broader ideological

¹⁰⁸ An initial advancement of this understanding is presented by Jacob Torfin, *New Theories of Discourse, Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek* (Brighton: Blackwell, 1999), especially Part V.

¹⁰⁹ See Wickham-Crowley, T., op.cit., *Guerrillas and Revolution...* Especially the passage referring to *Mass media and moderate messages*, 174-8.

¹¹⁰ Paul Rich and Richard Stubbs, *The Counter-Insurgent State, Guerrilla Warfare and State Building in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), 8. The authors remember that T.E. Lawrence, Mao Zedong and *Che* Guevara emphasised “that successful insurgent wars can only be fought if the general population is sympathetic and co-operative”. We may add that in the Mexican case successful survival of armed organisations is possible only with a media oriented campaign addressed to conquer public opinion. Propaganda may be thought as the core of the always present crux of the insurgent challenge in its legal or political stage. See Andrew Scott, Donald Clark, Bruce Ehrman et. al., *Insurgency* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 7-11. Propaganda and media intervention is also central if we consider that the mere concept of national security may be seen as “a symbol” without “its supposed content” which is given meaning in public disputes. See R.D. McLaurin, *Managing National Security: The American Experience and Lessons for the Third World*, in, *National Security in the Third World, The Management of Internal and External Threats* by Edward Azar and Chung-in Moon (Cambridge: Center for International Development and Conflict Management University of Maryland, 1988), 251-73. Propaganda and media struggle have been considered as key endeavours for insurgent and counterinsurgent interventions, for instance when the logic of “civic action” is mobilised, see Williard F. Barber and Neale Ronning, *Internal Security and Military Power* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1966), 179-211. Propaganda, doctrine, ideology and media are part of the attempt to give content to the notions of “threat” and “liberation”, see references to it in Samuel Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 107-129. “Partisan propaganda” and forms of “modern warfare” began to be widely analysed five decades ago, see Samuel P. Huntington *Introduction to Modern guerrilla warfare*, by Franklin Mark Osanka (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), xv-xxii. The Leninist notion of “partisan propaganda” is dealt with in the same book, 65-79. Terrorism, in traditional American framing is in itself “propaganda”, see as an example, Ian Beckett, *Encyclopaedia of Guerrilla Warfare* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 231. The actual master of the use of media and propaganda in Latin America was Fidel Castro in the late 1950s; see Timothy Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America, A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 174-9.

framework of particular groups that see themselves as representative of a wider community competing for imposing meaning to the idea of popular sovereignty. This occurs, centrally, in and through the mass media, including the internet.

Above all, I claim that the main element that a contemporary characterisation of insurgencies should take into account is the leadership's awareness of the absence of a unique political centre - e.g. the proletariat, the peasants, or the indigenous, - in the constitution of radical organisations and political subjectivity. That would be tantamount to simply acknowledge the dynamics of any revolution in the last century. A post-structuralist understanding does certainly emphasise the exclusion of the privileging of a "historically" predetermined actor, or a set of pre-constituted ideas, which Lyotard has described as metanarratives in *The postmodern condition* (1985).

1.2.1 A post-modern approach for a "post-modern" insurgency

Following the post-Gramscian radicalisation of the concept of civil society and hegemony, I claim that insurgent actors and insurgencies constitute themselves in relation to hegemonic forces and hegemonic projects, either by identifying themselves with them or by challenging them. Hegemony is understood by Gramsci as a relation "not of domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organisation of consent".¹¹¹ For Lenin, hegemony was a strategy, and for Gramsci it becomes a concept that indicates how a hegemonic class or part of a hegemonic class "is one which gains the consent of other classes and social forces through creating and maintaining a system of alliances by means of political and ideological struggle".¹¹² In that sense, a political force aiming to become hegemonic needs "to make compromises, in order to become the national

¹¹¹ Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 21.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 22-3.

representative of a broad bloc of social forces” in a “national-popular” project.¹¹³ The “strategy of building up a broad bloc of varied social forces” is called by Gramsci a “war of position”. The ideological struggle that accompanies it is described as “intellectual and moral reform”.¹¹⁴ The set of social relations and the institutions that constitute this reform - churches, political parties, trade unions, mass media, cultural and voluntary associations -, are in general differentiated from the state that has a monopoly of coercive forces. They are also distinguished from economic relations of production. Gramsci refers to them in their totality as “civil society”.¹¹⁵ Hence, civil society is “the sphere of class struggles and of popular democratic struggles...it is the sphere where hegemony is exercised”.¹¹⁶

Laclau and Mouffe radicalise these notions. For them, the main contribution from Gramsci is his recognition of the *relational character* of social elements achieved through “articulatory practices” entailed in the hegemonic struggle to constitute “the people”. Laclau and Mouffe claim, however, that there is still “an inner essentialist core” in Gramsci’s texts that limits “the deconstructive logic of hegemony”. This is found in his retaining the idea that “class” can be the “*single* hegemonic principle in every hegemonic formation”.¹¹⁷ In short, as for Lenin, the working class is considered the political leader in a class alliance; in Gramsci, the proletariat is likewise regarded as the ultimate “articulatory core of a historical bloc”.¹¹⁸ From a post-Gramscian perspective, as in Laclau and Mouffe’s work, the role of leadership does not necessarily correspond to any specific political actor. I consider that because of the radicalisation of hegemony, as a strategy and as a concept, we can argue that the attempt to strengthen the state or to challenge it may come from any segment of society capable of invoking a project in which the construction of “the nation” or “the people” is present. This unavoidably touches upon security matters, if we consider that all security institutions claim to protect the popular and national sovereignty represented by the government, while

¹¹³ Ibid., 23-4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 26.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 26

¹¹⁷ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1999), 69. Emphasis in the original.

insurgent actors claim to advocate the representation of a radical collective will that sees itself as a source of a “true” sovereignty.¹¹⁹

Therefore, an insurrectionary community openly engaging in moral and ideological debate, even without using armed tactics, can construct a source of legitimacy and become the foundation of what Gramsci called “a popular religion”. Even when it does not openly recognise the hegemonic character of its struggle, it must insist that it is not attempting the closure of political representation once and for all. That is, it must appear as vested with a pluralistic impetus. Castro did this in Cuba in the late 1950s, but *Marcos* failed in his attempt to do so in Mexico in the 1990s.

The indispensable understanding of the relation between security and insurgent actors still remains fuzzy in most analyses. Since it is vital for a radical force to be seen as credible when speaking on behalf of a political community is only through associating its demands with the representation of the values attributed to the “nation” and, specifically, by advocating a “true” popular sovereignty that this credibility is generated. Whether imposed by radical organisations or guarded through means of political violence by the state, defining the “real” source of popular sovereignty is a strategic task.

From my perspective, the hegemonic character and identity of any insurgent struggle raises at least three questions that should be answered when analysing an insurgent actor:

1) How the relation to the internal opposition is constituted – e.g. who is the leader and by what means?

2) How the relation to other organisations competing to represent “the people” is positioned – i.e. what organisation leads the people against its enemy and how does it do so?
and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁹ An alternative discussion of the association between the concepts of security and sovereignty can be found in Christopher Schneider, *Neoliberalism, Indigenous Security, and the Chiapas Uprising: A Gramscian Analysis*, available at http://www.stratnet.ucalgary.ca/research/pubs_schneider.html. It could be correct to suggest that the presentation of the notion of *popular security* is valid. However, the argument fails to insist in the warning made by Gramsci to movements that are unable to deliver the “revolutionary” promises they seem to advocate because they decide to emerge *too early* or, if we were allowed to add, *too late*. Moreover, he presents a simplistic notion of the Mexican state as unable to

3) How and why the relation to the regime is established and what the trade-offs and effects are, in relation to 1) and 2), and with reference to the perception of the actor in the immediate environs and beyond - including who confronts whom and how political violence is presented, that is as *threat of use* or as *actual use* of violence. All these elements point to detail how successful is an organisation in becoming *universal* through the vindication of something *particular*.

I will summarise my idea in relation to the insufficiency of attributing the concept of “post-modern” to insurgencies. Neither the acceptance of the primacy of a cross-class alliance, nor the promotion of a democratic opening or the use of the media in the ideological battle for political leadership within the field of civil society suffices to characterise an armed organisation as “post-modern”. It is naive to assume that those elements are not strategic moves directed to persuade society. My conclusion is that there is no such thing as a “post modern” insurgency, but insurgents merely using the vocabulary and strategies derived from the available post-modern political theories: they are less a new political epic than a new political rhetoric.

1.3 A framework of analysis

I will now introduce some additional theoretical elements to justify the framework in which I will develop the argument that a new internal security boundary has been in place since 1994. This argument supports the centrality of the notion of hegemony, regardless of the EZLN’s rhetorical claims, or those of any other radical grouping that does not recognise it as the kernel of political intervention, especially when it involves a radical confrontation with an “enemy”.

I believe that the basis of a broader horizon for the reconstitution of security institutions, and the grounds for more insurrectionary operations, have been put in place in Mexico in a paradoxical manner through a unique interaction between two seemingly

deploy persuasion, and demonstrates ignorance of Mexican politics by describing the *Televisa* TV network as state-owned.

antagonistic forces and ideologies. These forces represent hegemonic attempts to give meaning to what the nation could become and what its priorities should be.

In grounding the affirmation that politics unavoidably involves conflict, restless negotiation and a subversion of boundaries among political actors, I share the belief that “there is only politics where there are frontiers”.¹²⁰ Therefore any political identity, in order to be constituted, must locate itself as the source of a dynamics of separation, distinction and differentiation.¹²¹

In the constitution of identities, *political frontiers* and political conflict are correlated. If there is meaningful conflict that is nationally significant in any country, it is that which includes a discussion of the nature and identity of “the nation” and “the people”. The line of confrontation, between security actors operating on behalf of the nation and insurgent organisations operating on behalf of the people, is the boundary around which an antagonistic tension is created between discourses of order and discourses of emancipation. A continuous interaction among contentious collective actors, institutions, rhetorical manoeuvres and practices is thus at the core of the process of delimiting political boundaries. I will concentrate in the thesis on the construction of the line separating the operation of national security institutions and insurgent organisations.

Identities, institutions, political and rhetorical manoeuvres are understood in the following pages and in the whole of this study as a discursive totality, as a *discourse*.¹²² *Discourse* is not conceived here as a set of textual or other utterances, but as the interplay of social reality and the interpretative process of making sense of such a reality. In particular, a discourse-analytical approach, as undertaken in my research, aims to identify the ideological impetus around which political identities are constructed and the effects of identity-formation engendered by this. Ideology is not understood here as “false consciousness” or a “mindset” held by a given group or social strata. It will be conceptualised here as a “drive to totality” –

¹²⁰ Laclau, *New reflections*, 160. See also Geoffrey Bennington in *The politics of Deconstruction*. London: Verso, 1994, 262

¹²¹ Aletta Norval, “*Frontiers in Question*”, in *Acta Philosophica*, 2:51-76.

i.e. as the hegemonic attempt and pretension to represent “truth” and/or the universe of “social reality” and “forms of continuity”, such as those practices assumed as legitimate by insurgent or security actors, to which the meaning of democracy, for instance, is enclosed in a given form.¹²³

Identities are not assumed to be constituted “in themselves” but only in relation to other identities.¹²⁴ Moreover, this “other”, frequently understood as an “adversary” or “enemy”, is characterised as not just referential but also “constitutive” of the identity in which its characterisation takes place.¹²⁵ This relational character is both the source and the result of the process of drawing frontiers. The relevance of confrontation, in the process of establishing identities and drawing boundaries, is that identities and frontiers are two elements of the same process. The interaction between insurgent and security actors will be seen as central to defining identities and political frontiers. In Mexico, such an interaction has *produced* and *intensified* the contemporary *internal security state*.

Here I will defend the idea that it is essential to think of the interaction between national security and insurgencies as the result of the constitution of a political boundary between security and insurgent actors. In order to do so, I will briefly advance the idea that the notion of sovereignty is crucial to the characterisation of these actors, to the extent that they respectively represent a “national” sovereignty - which invokes its institutional sites, including the Congress and the Executive branch (*Poder Ejecutivo*); and a “popular” sovereignty that refers to the instances of decision “from below” and in opposition to the institutional discourse. I will offer a general overview of the dominant notion of security found in governmental sources, and I will insist on the pertinence of hegemony as a useful

¹²² For an introductory view see David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

¹²³ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2000), 25, and Laclau, *Hegemony*, especially Chapter 3.

¹²⁴ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference, Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), especially Introduction and Chapter 7.

¹²⁵ For a discussion on the notion of enmity as constitutive of identity and on the definition of the limit of society, drawn from Carl Schmitt, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, Verso, 2000).

Laclau, E., during the International Political Conference, University of Essex, 10 May 2003.

category for understanding the formation of identities that are constituted on both sides of the security-insurgency divide.

1.3.1 The Mexican (national) *internal security/insurgency* frontier

If there is for Mexico a core meaning of national security, then it is “internal security”. While the concept of “national security” is still disputed, its operations have been constituted around the political construction of threats posed by domestic enemies of the dominant political coalition, which was institutionalised around the PRI. The salience of the operations deployed by security actors has increased over the last three decades and, in fact, have given it its core meaning. However, traces of this can be found as far back as the government war against Catholic dissent (1926-1929), subsequent to the Mexican Revolution’s intense armed phase in 1917. Despite historical evidence, some authors have mistakenly recognised the primacy of internal conflict as basically a *recent* feature.¹²⁶

In the dominant approach to events that are referred to as “matters of national security” and “insurgencies”, specifically in the Mexican context, the significance of an analysis of insurgent actors in their dynamic antagonistic relations with the state has generally been ignored. National security is centrally defined by the relation to other countries and by overrating the fight against drug trafficking as defining feature, very much as a consequence of the priorities of the US government. It is convenient to expose the limits of the security actors’ current definitions and of the general vocabulary from which they are drawn.

As a consequence of the centrality of insurgent challengers being excluded from the official rhetoric used in the “doctrine” of national security, despite the effective practices that took place during the PRI regime (1929-2000) to contain any insurgent project, it is indispensable to rethink insurgent and security activities. It is possible to recognise their exclusion from the basic definition of “national security”. Based on the premise of the

¹²⁶ Roderic Camp, for example, maintains that “the military supports the redefinition of national security concerns related to internal conflict, and believes, on the basis of future training demands, that it is a long-term mission”. See his *Militarizing Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Center for International and Strategic Studies, CISS, 1999).

referential character of hegemonic struggles, insurgent actors are crucial referents for the production of the meaning of “national” security institutions. They should be perceived as its main “external other”. In the case with insurgents, their “external other”¹²⁷ is the regime itself. The system of practices of security institutions has been constituted through a number of exclusions, as has been the case within the insurgent organisations when designing inclusive and exclusive political practices. *The* formal omission that inhabits the notion “national security” is the fact that the actual and unnamed main reference in the constitution of society has been the attempt to neutralise and overcome the social and political defiance engendered by radical actors. There is historical evidence of the system of *internal security* characteristic of the regime, and effectively located as the basis for its operations and re-accommodations.

The same avoidance can be found in the exclusionary operations practised by insurgent actors against other organisations and the regime as a whole. Security and insurgent actors paradoxically need their “other” as a constitutive element in the process of defining their identities. For instance, the EZLN began to have serious identity problems at the moment when the PRI’s regime, construed as its “enemy”, was displaced in 2000. In 2001, the EZLN insisted then that the 1994 uprising had been not against the PRI but against the general system of inequalities and in favour of indigenous autonomy: by emphasising the universal value allegedly attributable to its struggle the EZLN attempted to escape the deterioration of the particular obstacle that was initially constructed as the source - “the clique” represented in the PRI’s *Salinismo* - and justification of its endeavour.

This indispensable antagonistic condition for the existence of insurgent and security actors is the core of a democratic paradox, in which the response given to an insurgent actor will simultaneously strengthen and dismantle segments of the system. The insurgent’s construction of the regime as an enemy may also allow insurgencies, such as the EZLN, to

¹²⁷ Here I am alluding to the distinction Derrida made between “outside” and “inside”. In short, every system of signification and human practice may be thought of as a unity only after excluding what supposedly does not belong to it. By that operation, “the outside” becomes a main reference justifying the identity of what is excluding its “other”, therefore “the other” may be seen as a “constitutive outside”. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997),

survive and unwittingly contribute to the strengthening of the democratic system by partially neutralising its subversive character and transforming itself into a contribution to the democratic credentials of the regime.

This contradictory nature of insurgent and state actors' identity must be thoroughly analysed. Insurgent and state actors find legitimacy in confronting the "threatening" presence of their "enemy".¹²⁸ The maximum representation of *order* is visible through the explicit use of institutional power to displace the "cause" of "disorder" in the *internal security* discourse. By the same token, insurgent intervention is evident by means of its frequent *emancipatory* claims and operation as representative of a political community that locates itself as a source of popular sovereignty *contra* the regime's sovereignty and its values. On one side we might have "law and order", but on the other, "emancipation and resistance". The reciprocal effects of this analytical dichotomy have a centrality that has gone unrecognised by most authors.

1.3.2 Sovereignty and the revitalisation of the "national" security discourse

The current official understanding of national security is concentrated on the values "of the nation", as a complex result of institutional and social definitions of democracy, stability, inclusiveness, economic development and social harmony.¹²⁹ For instance, national security is currently understood in Mexican politics as "the essential condition for the country's integral development", and is based on "the preservation of national sovereignty, independence, the maintenance of constitutional order, protection of its inhabitants' rights and the defence of the territory", according to the Investigation and National Security Centre (CISEN), which provides analyses and "intelligence" to the President, the Secretariat of Governance and shares it eventually with the army, among other government branches.¹³⁰ National security

especially 30-64. The concept is emphasised by Henry Staten in *Wittgenstein and Derrida*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, 17.

¹²⁸ See the discussion of the relevance of "the other" in Connolly, op, cit, especially *The Problem of Evil*, 1-16

¹²⁹ CISEN's director general address at the presentation of issue 101 of the journal INAP, 23 August 2000.

¹³⁰ CISEN, <http://www.cisen.gob.mx> downloaded on 13th October 2000 and without changes up to October 2003 at least.

“doctrine” incorporates principles similar to those held by any developed democracy.¹³¹ This institution combined until 1998 research tasks, analysis, “collection of intelligence” and “operations”. After 2000, it focused on political investigations that is, on its more domestic, internal role of collecting intelligence and was no longer engaged in “direct operations”.¹³²

As “national security” institutions the more relevant are the CISEN, the army, the navy (which in 2003 reactivated its functions when dealing with terrorist “threats”, strategic defence and rescue operations in the seaside through the constitution of Specials Forces of the Golf, *Fesgo, Fuerzas Especiales del Golfo*) and the Secretariat of Governance; there are also the General Attorney’s Office (PGR, *Procuraduría General de la República*) and the Federal preventive Police (PFP, *Policía Federal Preventiva*), among others.

A seemingly new awareness of a broader sense of national security, in which the military element was apparently situated at the margin of the definition and the actual practice, was already in place during the Zedillo administration. For instance, “national security” was erased from Zedillo’s global programme (1994-2000). In his seemingly nuanced approach, what was omitted from the programme’s text nevertheless appeared in the daily operations of the army in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veracruz and Mexico City, and in the general reconstitution of “security” and “public safety” institutions.

Until 1998, when the Preventive Federal Police (PFP) force was constituted, to respond to the increasing demand of both better public safety and more specialised counterinsurgent “operations”, the four main official sources for the national security discourse were the Presidency - and the Secretariat of Governance-; the army; the CISEN;

¹³¹ “A national security doctrine is a set of principles that define what a country considers as crucial factors for its existence and development. Mexico's national security doctrine is composed of the following principles: **Democracy**: government accountable to citizens represented by legitimately elected authorities. **Sovereignty**: effective governance and self-determination of the country. **National unity**: plural and as supportive community among citizens. **Integrity of national assets**: preservation of the territory and proper use of national resources. **Rule of law**: fulfilment of legal obligations. **Development**: improvement in aspects of national life. **Social peace**: harmonious coexistence and absence of violent conflicts” Ibid., emphasis in the original.

¹³² The CISEN’s web page began in October 2000. It was an indicator of a new epoch in which its mission and guiding principles included a certain openness, unknown until then, which was a sign of the new CISEN administration’s disposition to change. It occurred two years after the institution was allegedly separated from the direct involvement in intelligence operations, duties that were taken over

and the PGR (the Attorney General's Office). Emerging after the appearance of the EPR in 1996, the PFP can be understood as a bridge between the military and the civilian intelligence operations formerly deployed by the army and by the CISEN. An additional dimension of public safety was added to the new institution which was reorganised in 2000. I will briefly address the dominant conception of security in the first three institutions, by referring to some significant variations in the reiteration of the concept.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the systematic interplay of the co-optation/repression dichotomy, which was widely used by the PRI regime "on behalf of the nation" as well as the existence of guerrilla politics, were almost unknown to the wider public because of strict official controls and media self-censorship. In other words, a homogenous political environment, ensured by an almost complete control of politics, was prevalent. The various guerrilla groups had been crushed and almost exterminated since 1965, without immediate public knowledge.

Along with the amnesties of the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s, operations of neutralisation or even the sporadic execution of insurgents, the military certainly has engaged in a conceptual review of Mexican security since the 1980s. For instance, the current Secretary of Defence (Vega, 1988), himself a postgraduate of the Defence College (founded in 1981), is the first head of the military to have gained experience purely in the changing environment of the two decades (1980s and 1990s) that witnessed the electoral and civilian insurgencies that reshaped the Mexican regime. Prior to becoming the first defence minister in the post-PRI era, he had exposed the competing definitions of national security, which equated to recognising the ambiguous political objects that the definition tries to contain ("nation" and "security"). Also, he has made the remarkable claim that the practice of security cannot any longer be exclusively defined by the government.¹³³

by the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) and distributed through the reorganisation of the national security cabinet.

¹³³ Vega, *Seguridad Nacional*, 5.

Aguayo,¹³⁴ quoting General Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, has shown that notions such as “order” and “national security” were expected by the president and the army, for instance, to be the perfectly legitimate aims of government interventions. However, Aguayo claims, the practices actually authorised and deployed for those actors might have instead pushed many youngsters towards the ultra-left: repression was not a solution but a stimulus to guerrilla organisations, which was construed as justification of their existence due to the authoritarian system.

In an overt defence of the conservative Díaz Ordaz’s administration (1964-1970, during which the 1968 student massacre occurred), general Gutiérrez, in charge of the military, described thus the concept that was being advocated: “the government cannot, must not, run the risk of failure - in containing the “threat” represented by students or insurgent actors -, error or lack of guts may put the nation at risk”. Aguayo argues that the concept of national security appeared for first time in 1973, “at the peak of the virtually unknown dirty war” against Lucio Cabañas’ guerrilla groups in Guerrero, in a secret document of the Federal Security Directorate (DFS). However, it was not defined until the 1980s as a concept of open public policy. At this time it meant “an essential function of the armed forces”, and represented the need to “reaffirm and consolidate Mexico’s viability as an independent country”.¹³⁵

Within the conceptual vision proper to Mexican conditions, defence of integrity, independence and sovereignty of the nation are translated as the keeping of the constitutional normativity and the strengthening of Mexico’s political institutions.¹³⁶

In the next issue of the presidential Global Plan for Development, for the period 1983-1988, national security became the key notion that contributed to the differentiation from the previous militarily-driven approach, and represented an intention to rhetorically

¹³⁴ See his “The Uses, Abuses, and Challenges of Mexican National Security: 1946-1990, in Mexico”, *In Search of Security*. New Brunswick: Nort-South Center, University of Miami, 1993, 105.

¹³⁵ Bagley and Aguayo, *México*, see especially under the sub-heading *Mexican Literature and practice*, 104-17.

distance the Mexican understanding of the concept from the dominant American one. President De la Madrid's administration emphasised the idea of national security as a "tool to keep the condition of freedom, peace and social justice within the constitutional frame". Mexican security was located within the reiteration of international law. It rejected the idea that a nation's security depended on the affirmation of power against other nations.¹³⁷ There was a claim for making it the point of convergence of the values of peace, self-determination and a staunch rejection of "bloc politics" and "hegemonies".¹³⁸

The Global Plan for Development, during the period 1989-1994 appealed to both the international law and to the *internal political equilibrium*. At the same time, the notion of sovereignty was highlighted as part of the justification for attaching a crucial sense of authority attached to the state's declared priority of achieving an "absolute respect for the law". In this context, national security was "the indispensable condition for the maintenance of the sovereign order" and "the permanent condition of peace, freedom and justice that, within the rule of law, are sought by people and government. Its preservation entails the dynamic equilibrium of the diverse sectors' interests".¹³⁹

Notwithstanding this, the distance from the United States' approach of the 1980s was discretely diminished after the trade agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994, when it began to be reconstituted and simultaneously omitted from the key presidential documents and renamed under the Fox administration as part of a discourse of "order and respect" (2000-2006).

Interestingly enough, the presidential Global Plan for Development of 1995-2000, which was issued 20 months after the emergence of the EZLN in Chiapas, neither addresses the element of "insurgencies" nor considers internal armed conflict as a relevant issue of national security. Despite the omission, however, even when the elements that could constitute "a threat" were enumerated and classified merely as elements of an external and

¹³⁶ Plan Global de Desarrollo 1980-1983 (Mexico: Presidencia de la República).

¹³⁷ See Benítez, *Soberanía*, 57-78.

¹³⁸ Plan Global de Desarrollo 1983-1988 (Mexico: Presidencia de la República).

¹³⁹ Plan Global de Desarrollo 1989-1994 (Mexico: Presidencia de la República).

domestic agenda, a certain tension was observable in the presence and conceptual location of “terrorism”.¹⁴⁰

“Terrorism” was the only notion that was assumed to belong to both the “internal” and “external” agenda in the so-called “shared agenda”, in which international and national “threats” are mentioned.¹⁴¹ Hence “terrorism” was construed as an internal and external source of “threat”, and as a specific point where the security operations might be called upon. For example, in 1996 the government mobilised this conception and its security institutions against the EPR.

In this conceptualisation of national security, the general notion was presented as a result of the process of widening the political space and the awareness of it. In my view these rhetorical moves were encouraged by the 1994 revolt, the core of the institutional reorganisation of security institutions, and by the interpretations supported by a diversity of academics and security actors.

The Chiapas conflict made visible what had been a historical development. Since there had not been a hemispheric international threat after 1917, the primacy of the *internal* dimension in the definition of “threats” gained absolute centrality, particularly in the six decades after the World War II. This characteristic became apparent in 1994. The assumption that the constitution and the location of an “enemy within” did not occur in Mexico, as had happened in South America, must then be seen as a relative, and not an absolute difference. This is the case because the aim of the security institutions has been for decades the neutralisation of “internal” enemies, mainly guerrilla fighters, who were from either right or left. On the other hand, as opposed to generalised discourses derived from the National Security Doctrine, in Mexico the political elite combined very selective operations with co-

¹⁴⁰ Forming part of the external agenda were “new regional conflicts”, “terrorism”, “re-emergence of old intolerance” - racism and cultural exclusion -, intervention of NGOs “opposed to the national interest”, “economic globalization” and “technological transformation”. The components of the internal agenda that were put forward are: (violation of) “human rights”, “drug trafficking”, “terrorism”, “ecological deterioration” and “promotion of democracy”. Plan Global de Desarrollo 1995-2000 (Mexico: Presidencia de la República).

¹⁴¹ *Prologue and comments on Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1995-2000* (Mexico: CISEN).

optation tactics and an electoral system that, by definition, privileges institutional incentives as rewards from elite negotiation.

However, even after the Chiapas events took place, the PRI regime insisted on an ideology of national security that only in official speeches and programmes moved on from the operations which, I claim still to be at its core: *the control of internal security*.¹⁴²

Sovereignty is still at the centre of the concept of national security. It is the overarching notion in the current conceptualisation. It must be remembered that the notion has an external component, which refers to the sovereignty of the Mexican State in relation to other States; and an internal dimension in relation to the sources of internal sovereignty. Since there has not been any external hemispheric threat to “national” security since the 1920s, the actual core of the notion is in fact “internal” security. In other words, the main value protected by the notion of “national security” is *internal sovereignty*, which implies the defence of the legitimacy of an *internal space of authority*.

Historically speaking, during the last half of the twentieth century, sovereignty had been highlighted, alongside the explicit military mobilisation during the so-called “dirty war” against the guerrillas in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴³ It was mobilised during the 1990s every time the use of military force was required to confront an internal adversary considered to be an “enemy” of the constitutional pact and the political elite, headed by the President. The validity of this constitutional pact, as a source of legitimacy for the security discourse, is

¹⁴² Tello Peón, former Under-Secretary of Governance, insists that a “new” security approach practically took off after 1994 based on the available workings initiated in the Colegio de la Defensa Nacional, the Federal Army and the academic contributions of, among others, a deceased author close to the security institutions, Jose Thiago Cintra. There is an ambiguous interpretation of the history of security in his comments because security institutions were formed and reformed “even before 1994” but reorganised and operationalised with a new approach “after 1994”. My interview, 18 March 2003.

¹⁴³ The Mexican state was still sharing the effects of the Cold War climate and its interpretation by traditional hard-liner rightist forces. The notion alludes to the illegal detention and victimisation of any number of activists ranging from 300 to 500. The alleged guerrilla members were caught, illegally processed, killed “in combat”, or executed in operations similar to those practised during the same decade in South and Central America, but the proportion of that practice and the context in which took place was different. There was not a generalised control of the state apparatus by the army and the scale of the counterinsurgent operations seems to be dwarfed by the events in El Salvador, Argentina or Chile. Major responsibility of the civilian government in those operations as much as a less developed public opinion and a minor diversity of political forces seem to be implied in the Mexican case.

currently accepted by many analysts.¹⁴⁴ I claim that without parliamentary supervision and societal involvement, this principle is tantamount to a defence of an outdated and restrictive interpretation of the “nation”.

The recent re-conceptualisation of Mexican security during Fox’s administration - the broadening of the values defended through the inclusion of a notion a national well-being and development, public visibility of certain rules, information on their activities, courses open to a wider public, the attempt to separate the traditional image of security institutions as merely repressive from its legitimate tasks as contributors to the stability of “the national project”, etcetera - has occurred as part of institutional and political accommodations registered during the previous three decades in dealing with insurgent actors. These have represented discontinuities and multiple accommodations. I regard the attempt to institutionalise a deeper sense of legality and legitimacy as its main feature after the displacement of the PRI in 2000. The new framework involves the confirmation of a previous notion of a concept of national security in which a diversity of secretariats were represented (Governance, National Defence, Navy, Public Education, Finances, Administrative Development), emphasises the CISEN as the Executive organism and details norms, functions, evaluations, values and institutional internal reorganisation.¹⁴⁵

While the emphasis on the military has been marginalized in public programmes, especially during the Zedillo (1994-2000) and Fox (2000-2006) administrations, as was the phrase “national security”, *internal sovereignty* has reigned as the actual axis of the discourse of national security. Military involvement in security matters is basically carried out through internal operations by *Section II - Sección Segunda* - as part of the central programme DN-II, which is related to internal security. This presence became more subtle after the constitution of the PFP. My point is that the priority of security forces, especially their function in *internal security*, is hidden from the public but still enacted daily in the states in which nearly 20 relatively well-organised and small guerrilla cells have emerged. In 1998, when the PFP was

¹⁴⁴ See *Seguridad Nacional* (Mexico: INAP, 1988), and *Los Servicios de Inteligencia en el Nuevo Siglo*, (Mexico: INAP, 2000).

created, internal security functions become more *publicly* central and emphasised their role as the backbone of the state.

As a consequence of a naturalised prioritisation of domestic danger, for instance, the military never addresses its daily activities relating to the insurgents in its communiqués, as it happens with its anti-narcotics struggle.¹⁴⁶ Nor does the government name any “threat” associated to any foreign power in relation to formal issues of Mexican security.

Even in the constitution of the “risks agenda”, central to the daily life of security institutions, insurgencies seem to lack the centrality and definitive weight that they actually have.¹⁴⁷ For example, the main intelligence institution keeps trying to persuade us that a *rhetorically* balanced interweaving of internal and external notions equals the *material* balance given to those aspects. The subtle vindication of *internal sovereignty* and *security* is worded as follows:

The Agenda of national security is presented in a co-ordinated fashion with foreign policy. If it were possible to isolate national security policy from foreign policy, the fundamental element comes to be the strengthening of the state’s capacity to strengthen sovereignty. Such capacities...have to do with the preservation of national territorial integrity, the rule of the law, human rights and cultural elements to support the appraisal of our culture. At an organisational level, the strategy stresses the updating of the armed forces’ strategic planning and their modernisation. Co-ordination of different public bodies [is needed] in facing the threats to national security as well as an updating of the law under which intelligence activity is ruled.¹⁴⁸

Despite the stated awareness of the foreign agenda, even the enormously significant weight of the US in the formulation of Mexican policy has never been mentioned as a potential threat to Mexican sovereignty.

At the core of the reorganisation of the army, the PFP and the CISEN, as part of the general reordering of the whole system of security, is the reconceptualisation of the

¹⁴⁵ *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 2 April 2003.

¹⁴⁶ National Defence Secretariat, (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional), communiqués January 2000-December 2003.

¹⁴⁷ See *Hacia una Ley de inteligencia para la seguridad nacional* by Alejandro Alegre, last CISEN general director before PAN took over, in *Los Servicios de Inteligencia en el Nuevo Siglo* (Mexico: INAP, 2000) also José Calderón Arozqueta and Enrique Salgado, *El estudio de la seguridad nacional y la inteligencia en México*, Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ CISEN, *ibid.*

“doctrine” of national security which has involved the strengthening of the internal dimensions as opposed to the vacuous reiteration of external ones.

Despite the modernisation experienced in the last decade, the political elite still thinks that society is unable to deal with national security frameworks and the actors responsible for it. So far, it has refused to formalise and incorporate the changes occurring in society and in the political culture of the new generations in relation to security issues. For instance, an attempt made by Arturo Núñez, the leader of the PRI in the Chamber of Deputies in the period 1997-2000, to legislate on the matter was regarded inappropriate and rebuffed before a public discussion took place, because of “societal fears” that the bill was thought to exacerbate.¹⁴⁹ Expectations of facing a complex electoral environment influenced the rejection.¹⁵⁰ Commentators from CISEN and instructors in the INAP (National Institute of Public Administration) have considered Zedillo’s programme, the last one generated by a PRI administration, to be a novelty for incorporating “the mentioning of the intelligence activity” for the first time. It was “maybe the newest and most significant part of the plan”.¹⁵¹ The legal status of many security activities, despite the PAN’s last modernising attempt, seems still ambiguous: there is a corpus of rules and justification for its origin. However, there is not any supervisory institution that allows the wider public and not even congressmen to know about them.¹⁵² Conceptual innovations seem to stop there. It seems that reconceptualisation and institutional reorganisation has been focussed on the support of the security community more than the stated interest to gain the involvement of society in its design.

¹⁴⁹ My interview with Arturo Núñez, Mexico City, 10 March 2003. About the suggestion of unfulfilled offers to regulate the security community see *Fox will present security and intelligence projects in La Jornada*, 7 May 2001.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ CISEN, *Ibid.*

¹⁵² To review the pre-PAN intentions to legally justify the security institutions existence see, for instance, CISEN (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional), *Principios Constitucionales de la Seguridad Nacional*. Mexico: CISEN, 1996. There is a specific budget for the CISEN, for example, but there is no a major organizational and formalised change that might “create”, as the *1947 National Security Act* did in the United States the “permanent peacetime defence establishment”. See Donald M. Snow. *National Security, Defence Policy in a Changed International Order* (New York: San Martin’s Press, 1998) 73 and a detailed overview is presented by Michael J. Hogan, Michael. *A Cross of Iron, Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State 1945-1954*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

In the latest approach, during the first non-PRI administration (2000-2006), in which the tension between the Presidency and the Congress produced a new political ambience, the primacy of sovereignty was kept at the core of the concept of national security. The intensification of the internal security moves has not just continued, but has become naturalised, as has the defence of this notion, without being formally recognised in law.

In that period, for instance, the role of Congress (for instance in the period 2000-2003) was dismissed. Neither political parties nor parliamentarians have engaged with the dilemmas of making explicit the limits of what the Mexican polity, as a whole, accepts in facing internal armed challenges. How to account for intelligence and security institutions is also ignored. The Fox's administration has broadened the conceptual framework and consolidated the changes that began in the previous decade but the congress' intervention - or, better, the formalisation of popular sovereignty's interventions as understood by the Constitution in Articles 39 and 41- is still absent despite suggestions made in 2001 in order to introduce an externally-valuated regulatory scheme.

A better understanding of the *internal securitisation* of the Mexican state after 1994 (and especially after 2004 when the discussion on the "dirty war" against guerrillas during the 1970s was intensified by the detention of former DFS director Miguel Nazar Haro in February) might be increased by new information associated with the accommodation that has taken place within groups defending traditional and contemporary notions on national security. Every effort should be made to recognise the fact that neither security actors nor the regime should be understood as homogenous or monolithic categories.

The government has formally avoided the issue of naming who are acceptable as members of "the nation". This reluctance is based upon a political calculus not exempt of an interpretation of democratic openness and on the exclusion of the participation of those who are theoretically the representatives "of the people", that is, the parliamentarians: in security matters the representative of popular sovereignty is *only* the President, supported by the security actors. Currently the Executive branch, specifically the president, makes the ultimate

discretionary decision about which insurgent identities constitute a threat to the regime, for instance who is to be regarded as “terrorist” (EPR) or as “nonconformist” (EZLN).

A danger emerges from this situation. The president, by concentrating in his hands the para-legal powers of security resources, may become the first political victim of the insertion of rebellious identities. They may easily place him as their “other”, as their relevant competitor in the struggle for giving meaning to the notions of *national sovereignty* and *popular sovereignty*.

Thus, the changes of the last 20 years seem directed to the strengthening of the security community, the ultimate defence of the presidential authority, more than to the strengthening of “the nation” and the Congress, in whose “sovereignty” and name they have been deployed.

In summary, I seek to incorporate the notion of hegemony as an inescapable condition in the constitution of any political subjectivity; to understand the definition of political frontiers as a result of constant confrontation between political identities; and to recognise the historical fact that Mexico has been *fundamentally an internal security state*. Only this will make it possible to think about the interaction between insurgent and security actors as characteristically mutually-interdependent, in a ceaseless process of defining the boundaries of the regime and the internal definition of the limits of tolerance and security intervention. I claim that analysing the logic of the interaction between discourses of security and discourses of insurgencies may shed some light on the seemingly contradictory behaviour of the state when dealing with insurgencies and the nature and status of insurgent groupings.

Conclusion

The ideology of the PRI regime, based on the imaginary of the *Mexican Revolution* - including its penultimate “modernising” impetus, the Salinas administration - is shared by the main literature on the Chiapas conflict. Authors who concentrate on “structural causes”, “political agency” and even “identity” seem to oppose or reject the main EZLN assumptions and government operations related to it. However, they do it from the same ideological

horizon and should be regarded as defenders of the same political field shaped by both the dominant PRI regime and its traditional enemies from the social and radical left. In that horizon, the relevance and critique of internal political violence and the dispute over the source of sovereignty seems diminished by it. Beyond that imaginary they seem unable to characterise the relevance of political violence and the validity of radical and security discourses, as those embodied by the original *Zapatismo* being updated by the EZLN and by liberal reading - Salinas - of it and its defence by security institutions. Radical *Zapatismo* has been largely naturalised as constitutive of the most radical tendency within the *Mexican Revolution*. A similar operation of naturalisation and sedimentation is deployed through the invocation of “national security” as an unquestioned referential notion and practice. It is presented as equally foundational, to the extent that is also thought as a result of an ideology embodied by the PRI and transformed into a doctrine within the army and foreign policy institutions. In this horizon, internal security operations and political violence have tended to be seen as respected operations when they have emerged in the “institutional” context, to the extent that they are part of a foundational history - *the Revolution*. Similarly, when carried out by insurgent actors, political violence has been openly promoted and tolerated as an ultimate and “democratic” tool. “Rebellious” resistances such as that represented by the EZLN - the self-posed embodiment of the revolution *to come* - have required the invocation of “the people” to be able to deploy political violence in the name of its sovereignty and as part of a future society.

Political struggle in relation to security and insurrectionary matters are present in the literature as well as in material reality. Full recognition is needed of the seriousness of radical political identities and the legitimacy of the politics of national security. A delimitation of the place reserved for “the people” through Congress has been significant.

Among some of the authors’ strengths when dealing with the EZLN, and insurgencies in general, is the incomplete acknowledgement of the unavoidably multiple interaction between security and insurgent actors that are part of ideological projects. The introduction of the central and traditional notion of hegemony and the careful but incomplete

contextualisation of central issues in the formation of the Mexican State and its security forces, is also a valuable contribution. However, the central significance of the insurgents has been ignored or misconstrued as a feature that would be useful in understanding the state.

Analyses tend to miss a central distinction. If Mexican national security can be seen as the actual set of practices and conceptualisations deployed on behalf of “the nation” aimed at achieving its “sovereignty”, national security can be seen mainly as *internal security*. Since the construction of internal dangers and domestic threats has been predominant for 80 years in the absence of named external threats, what actually has been produced and reproduced is an “internal security” state. Internal security may then be the set of practices and notions by which the sovereignty of the regime is guarded and given meaning when dealing with insurgent challengers. Since information on institutional activity regarding the treatment of insurgencies used to be minimised, and the way in which the latter are interpreted is still given secondary status, the characterisation of the state’s identity as a result of its interaction with insurgent groups has been ignored or minimised. This oversight may be the basis for authoritarian responses to insurgencies, of the inability to democratically characterise major threats, and the basis for the absence of accountability of security practices.

My main argument is that in Mexico there is an outdated and essentialist account of the meaning of national security and of insurgent activity. By essentialist I mean the absence of a referential dimension in which “the other”, and the context in which any activity takes place, are not just references but indispensable factors in the constitution and interpretation of their changing conditions and identities. In this thesis, the existence of insurgencies is as relevant to the state as the state’s features are significant for the insurgent actors regardless their willingness to accept it. In short, the limits of their identities are definitive in the constitution of themselves as counterparts of “the other”.

The assumptions from the contestable practices of the PRI regime are still present in the first PAN administration, especially elements of unnecessary secrecy and the unaccountable presidential predominance on matters of security. Certain elements of openness, as opposed to traditional American and South American approaches to security, are

also visible. If the remnants of the PRI-dominated logics have become an obstacle to political analysis and more importantly, for the democratic and institutional reorganisation of the state, also the singular resourceful response to the 1994 crisis has contributed to the legitimisation of the dominant pact. Furthermore, this prevailing conceptualisation of security issues covers up the importance of the internal security dimension by ignoring its central significance and the relevance that insurgencies may have had in defining the identity of the state and the nation. It also tends to hide the uniqueness of the Mexican case when dealing with insurgencies, mostly after 1994.

The most unfortunate result of this essentialist understanding is, in my view, the upholding of the hidden principle that the boundaries of Mexico's "national security" - through the definition of the security agenda - *must* ultimately be determined by the Executive branch, and, more precisely, by the President. The definition of the sovereign as the embodiment of "the people" is nullified by this ongoing hidden principle, in which certain arbitrariness survived the last stage of the PRI as a hegemonic force. I claim that this is still the case, albeit softened in the PAN administration headed by Fox (2000-2006). In the following chapter I will address the moves that created the central political frontier between insurgencies and regime actors after the 1994 revolt, and how they are indispensable in contemporary characterisations of the state, especially because the source of popular sovereignty is disputed.